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9 Castle Street
Reading
RG1 7SB

Heritage Impact Assessment – Interim Report

September 2019



Report to: **Walker Stuart Land & Planning Ltd.**
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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 M-Arc Heritage Ltd. was commissioned in September to prepare a Heritage Impact Assessment for 9 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7SB (hereafter, 'the Property'). The report was prepared by Dr. Mark Grahame BA, PhD, MCIfA of M-Arc Heritage Ltd.

1.2 The Proposal

- 1.2.1 The proposal is to convert the Property into 3 x 1 bed and 2 x 2 bed apartments. The Property is a Grade II Listed Building (NHLE: 1154642). It is also in the St. Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area.

1.3 Scope of the Project

- 1.3.1 A photographic survey of the Property was undertaken by M-Arc Heritage Ltd. on 13th September 2019. The purpose of the survey was to make observations of the Property and photograph the areas likely to be affected by the proposals.
- 1.3.2 At a meeting after the photographic survey, the client requested an interim report (hereafter, 'the Report') to provide a brief overview of the likely impacts of the proposals on the heritage interests of the Property in advance of the full Heritage Impact Assessment.
- 1.3.3 This Report offers a provisional assessment of the heritage interests of the Property and the likely impacts of the proposals on its special architectural or historic interest. Any conclusions offered in this Report will be subject to review in the Heritage Impact Assessment.

2. The Property

2.1 Listing Information

- 2.1.1 The Property is described by the Listing Information held by Historic England as:

"Mid-late C18. 3 storeys and basement. Silver grey brick with red dressings, and plain parapet. Old tile roof. 2 windows with red brick flat arches, oriel bays with glazing bar sashes and segmental relieving arches. Central 6 panel door with plain surround, pilasters and open pediment on scroll brackets. Radiating fanlight. Modern shop windows on ground floor."

- 2.1.2 The date of listing is 14th December 1978. The Property has not been inspected since Listing.

2.2 Summary Description

Exterior

- 2.2.1 The description in the Listing Information is confined to the front elevation of the Property. Observations taken during the photographic survey suggest that the description is correct, apart from the ground floor shop windows, which have been replaced with bays.
- 2.2.2 The rear of the Property is largely concealed by a two-storey, red brick extension under a flat roof with a partially submerged basement. The brick is laid in stretcher bond. Ordnance Survey maps suggest that the extension had assumed its current footprint by 1988, but it is likely that it was modified prior to listing in 1978.
- 2.2.3 Historic maps show that there has been an extension attached to the rear of the Property since the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1879, but it appears to have undergone more than one phase of modification. The current extension appears to be the product of a development during the 1970s, but the existing extension may incorporate earlier fabric. Further research is necessary to resolve the phasing of the extension.

Interior

- 2.2.4 The interior of the Property has been converted into offices. Modern studwork walls have erased the original Georgian floorplan and sections of the rear wall have been removed to provide access to the extension. The décor throughout is modern with painted render walls and ceilings. The ceilings have plain coving and modern lighting. The rooms have been fitted with modern office equipment and modern toilet and kitchen facilities have been installed. All historic features, such as fireplaces, original doors and decorative mouldings have been removed.
- 2.2.5 The only feature to survive from the Georgian period is the staircase to the first and second floors. The carved drop handrail characteristic of Georgian staircases survives along with the plain kickboards, newels and spindles. Paint has built up on the rail, newels and spindles, but it could be removed, and the staircase restored. There is a fanlight at the top of the staircase, on the second floor, which is an attractive feature and worth preserving.

2.3 Summary of Significance

- 2.3.1 The preliminary observations taken on the Property suggest that much of its significance resides in its outward appearance and in its front elevation most of all. The extension at the rear is a product of 20th century modifications. It may incorporate Victorian fabric, but none of its fabric is likely to date to the Georgian period.

- 2.3.2 Internally, the only features that contribute meaningfully to the heritage interests of the Property are the staircase and fanlight.

3. Preliminary Impact Assessment

3.1 Basement and Ground Floor

- 3.1.1 The proposal for the basement is to convert the existing store in the basement and the meeting room on the ground floor into a two-bedroom apartment. The bedrooms would be created in the existing store by installing new partition walls. A staircase would rise from the store into the meeting room, which would be partitioned into two rooms. A small window would be inserted into the west exterior wall of the meeting room.
- 3.1.2 A second apartment would be created at the front of the Property on the ground floor. This would be achieved by reconfiguring the existing male and female toilets.
- 3.1.3 The preliminary assessment of these proposals is that only the installation of the west window is likely to disturb any historic fabric. Even so, that fabric is unlikely to date to the earliest phase of the Property because it is in the rear extension. While the phasing of the extension needs resolving, the installation of the window would only necessitate the removal of a small amount of fabric, which is unlikely to harm the heritage interests of the Property.
- 3.1.4 The ceiling in the store is modern board and a removal of a section of it for the staircase would not result in any harm. It may, however, conceal earlier fabric, but given the wholesale modernisation of the interior, this Report considers it probable that any earlier fabric has already been removed.
- 3.1.5 The remaining alterations require either the installation of new studwork or the reconfiguration of existing studwork and would not result in any harm to the heritage interests of the Property.

3.2 First Floor

- 3.2.1 The proposal for the first floor is to create two apartments, one at the front of the Property and one at the rear. The creation of the apartment would mostly involve the reconfiguration of the studwork for the existing male and female toilets or the installation of new studwork, which is not predicted to harm the heritage interests of the Property.
- 3.2.2 The installation of two windows in the west exterior wall of the existing meeting room is proposed. The window at the rear is in the extension and its installation is unlikely to result in any harm to the heritage interests of the Property. That to the rear could be within the Georgian footprint of the Property and, if so, the removal of

Georgian fabric is likely to require justification. Nevertheless, the amount of wall fabric which is likely to be removed would be small.

3.3 Second Floor

- 3.3.1 The proposal is to create a single apartment. This would be achieved by reconfiguring the existing studwork and inserting new partition walls. The proposal is unlikely to harm or require the removal of any historic fabric.
- 3.3.2 The proposal would, however, require the installation of a window in the west exterior wall. This window could be within the Georgian footprint of the Property and, if so, the removal of Georgian fabric is likely to require justification. Nevertheless, the amount of wall fabric which is likely to be removed would be small.

3.4 St. Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area

- 3.4.1 None of the proposals would change how the Property is experienced from Castle Street. The proposed windows would be in the west wall, which is largely concealed by the adjacent building and would not be visible. Consequently, this Report does not anticipate any impacts on the special interest of the Conservation Area.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1.1 The conclusion of this Report is that most of the proposals are unlikely to harm the heritage interests of the Property because they only affect modern fabric. Since the historic floorplan of the Property has been erased, the installation of new partitions should not have an adverse effect.
- 4.1.2 The only concern is that windows on the first and second floors within the Georgian footprint could result in the loss of early historic fabric. If this were to be confirmed, the proposals would require justification.
- 4.1.3 This Report believes that the proposals could be justified because the quantity of fabric lost would be small, the windows are not in a critical wall and would not be visible from the exterior and the windows are necessary to the scheme. Nevertheless, this Report advises that this element of the scheme could be of concern.