

ATLAS

PLANNING GROUP

HERITAGE STATEMENT

Mulberry House, 1A Eldon Road, Reading, RG1 4DJ

JANUARY 2020

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INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The site is located within Eldon Square Conservation Area (ESCA) and as such, the design of the proposed development has been carefully shaped to ensure that it does not impact the significance of the setting of the heritage assets and preserves and enhances what is important about the character and appearance of the ESCA, in accordance with Policies EN1 'Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment' and EN3 'Enhancement of Conservation Areas' of the Local Plan (2019).
- 1.2 It is a necessary requirement of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of any listed buildings and to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservations Areas affected by development proposals.
- 1.3 This is reinforced by the NPPF (2019) at Section 16, which emphasises the importance of conserving and enhancing the historic environment, though it also points out the desirability of putting heritage assets to their "*optimum viable use*". The NPPF further emphasises the aim of "*requiring good design*" (Section 12) and it points out the importance of creating an attractive streetscape and maintaining the overall quality of the area. As such, this statement examines the historical context of the site in relation to the Conservation Area, along with the impact of the proposed development on heritage assets.



Figure 1: Eldon Road Conservation Area

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.4 As outlined within the Conservation Area Appraisal, Eldon Square was designated in 1972 and is set within a wholly urban location, comprising of a dense network of streets and roads of terrace, detached and semi-detached buildings.
- 1.5 Eldon Road is considered the north-south 'spine' of the Conservation Area and is a major route linking King's Road and London Road. A row of Grade II Listed buildings lies on the west side of Eldon Road, whilst the east side is less intensively developed and contains both large brick and stucco 19th century buildings.
- 1.6 Historically, the application site formed the grounds of one of the many high-class houses built along King's Road, when much of the land that once belonged to the Abbey was taken over by the King's (Crown) estate. This large house named Swiss Villa can be seen within the historical map dating back to the 1870's (Figure 2). Swiss Villa was in fact built in 1839 for one of the town's most successful characters, William Silver Dater, a Councillor, Magistrate and Mayor (1850-52) of Reading. The building was designed by Henry Briant, architect of the Royal Berkshire Hospital.



Figure 2: 1870 OS Map of the application site

- 1.7 In the mid-20th century, however, the centre of Reading was redeveloped by demolishing parts of the historic core of the town to provide offices and shopping precincts. It seems likely that this situation could account for the demolition of Swiss Villa, with evidence demonstrated in the 1970 OS map that the property was replaced by a substantial office building (Hanover House) and extensive car parking (Figure 3).
- 1.8 The redevelopment of the site also encompassed the erection of Mulberry House, along with the demolition of several other historic terraces and semi-detached properties along King's Road and Eldon Terrace.
- 1.9 Owing to the demolition of this historic building in the 20th century and the redevelopment of its grounds to accommodate the large office building and car parking, the historic setting of the application site has largely been lost.
- 1.10 More recently, following approval of 171521 and 180591, Mulberry House has been demolished and the site remains cleared from built development.



Figure 3: 1890 OS Map (left) of Swiss Villa & the 1970 OS Map (right) demonstrating Swiss Villa's demolition & the erection of Hanover House & Mulberry House

DESCRIPTION

- 1.11 Prior to its demolition, Mulberry House was a small detached building. Whilst the historic garden space of Swiss Villa was redeveloped in the 1960's to accommodate Hanover House, a clearly defined open space to the front of Mulberry House's former location has remained, with a number of trees situated on the southern boundary with nos. 1/3 Eldon Road.
- 1.12 The application site is bounded to the north by the extensive car parking area for Hanover House and to the east, the driveway to Hanover House separates the site from a row of terraced houses at Town Place. These terraces are heavily screened on this boundary by mature foliage.
- 1.13 The open green space from the public realm is the most prominent aspect of the site which is visible from the Conservation Area and positively contributes to the significance of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 1.14 Set back from Eldon Road, the rear of the site (including the former location of Mulberry House), is not visible when approaching Eldon Road from the north or south. Hanover House blocks any views of the building from the north, whilst the mature foliage screens views from the south (Figure 4).
- 1.15 Indeed, the application site is located at the end of Eldon Road, near the junction of King's Road, where modern development is located.



Figure 4: Views of the site from Eldon Road, when approached from the north and south.

IMPACT OF APPLICATION PROPOSALS

1.16 The application scheme proposes to erect a 3 to 5-storey building with a semi-open basement to accommodate 11 residential units. The proposed development is extremely similar in nature to the approved scheme (App Ref: 180591).



Figure 5: Proposed site plan extract

1.17 As aforementioned, some of the garden area of Swiss Villa has been preserved in the form of the open space in front of the former location of Mulberry House. This space will remain undeveloped as part of the new proposals, but landscaping will enhance this insipid open area to bring this space back into life as a landscaped garden area. Access from Eldon Road to the new building will be preserved.

1.18 Given the similarities between the approved and proposed scheme, it is relevant to consider how Reading Borough Council supported the approved design and considered it to preserve and enhance the Conservation Area and nearby heritage assets. The Officer's Committee Report states,

“The proposal has been carefully and cleverly designed to preserve and enhance the setting of surrounding heritage assets, whilst also enhancing the character and appearance of the wider conservation area. Together with the proposed landscaping being secured via condition, both the RBC Heritage Consultant and member of the DRP consider that the proposals are acceptable in this regard. Hence, in summary officers fully support the design approach taken, with this being considered a planning benefit in the overall planning balance for the scheme”.

1.19 The key significant heritage assets affected by the proposed development is the Conservation Area and the Listed Buildings situated opposite the site. The important elements which contribute to the setting of the Conservation is the row of historic buildings fronting Eldon Road which lead from London Road to King’s Road, along with the mature vegetation on the boundary with nos. 1/3 Eldon Road.

1.20 Hanover House, a 20th century tower block, is a prominent post war building within the Conservation Area which negatively impacts the Conservation Area, whilst Nos 1-3 Eldon Road are 19th century semi-detached houses, which make a positive contribution. Indeed, there is a harsh conflict between the brutalist architecture of Hanover House and the characterful architecture of the historic buildings that surround it. This conflict is made worse by the sudden change in scale from 8 storeys to 2.5 storeys and therefore, as established by the approved scheme, the character of the area would be benefitted if this sudden change in scale is addressed.

1.21 Overall, the proposed building is no taller than the approved scheme for which the Officer’s Committee Report specifically states,

“Despite the modern idiom of the building, the proposed mass and height of the replacement building at part five and part 3 storey block is considered an acceptable height. This height would act as a transition between the overly dominant part five/seven storey Hanover House and the more domestic scale of Nos 1 to 3 Eldon Road.

1.22 Set well back in its plot, there is unlikely to be any visibility of the proposal when entering Eldon Road from King’s Road or on approach to the site from the south. The site will continue to be screened by Hanover House and the vegetation located on the southern boundary will be well preserved and therefore will block any views. However, the improvements proposed to front boundary wall with Eldon Road, along with high quality landscaping, will provide visible enhancement to the Conservation Area.

1.23 Considering the scale of Hanover house and the existing lack of visual interaction between the Listed Buildings and this part of the application site, we do not consider this would result in 'harm' to the setting of the listed buildings opposite. The proposal would not appear out of place in relation to the prevailing heights and detailing of the surrounding buildings and owing to its distinct and high-quality design and choice of materials, would certainly not add to the negative cumulative impact that Hanover House has on the Conservation Area.

1.24 As such, it is considered that the design of the proposal will have no impact upon the character and appearance of the area, thus meeting the statutory requirement of Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.