

PD11689/CB/HH/JL

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13 June 2019

Planning Department
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

**BY PLANNING PORTAL
REF: PP-07527034**

Dear Sir/Madam

JOHN LEWIS & PARTNERS, BROAD STREET, READING, RG1 2BB: CONSERVATION AREA STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF APPLICATION FOR CONSENT TO DISPLAY ADVERTISEMENT

On behalf of our client, John Lewis & Partners, we submitted an application ("the Application") for consent to display advertisements at their department store at Broad Street, Reading, RG1 2BB ("the Site"). This Application was submitted on 30 May 2019 via the Planning Portal (ref: PP-07527034).

Further to a request on 6 June 2019 from Sarah Burr, Planning Policy Officer, we hereby write to provide a Conservation Area Appraisal in support of the Application previously submitted.

The Proposals

The proposals comprise the installation of replacement shopfront signage to the John Lewis & Partners department store, in line with the company's recent rebranding.

The Application seeks advertisement consent for a total of 13 replacement signs, of which 4 (refs: CH-0029-EH-B1-07, CH-0029-EH-H1-06, CH-0029-EH-B1-12 and CH-0029-EH-A1-05) are located within the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area.

Planning and Heritage Assessment

The Site falls partially within the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area ("the CA"). At the CA's designation in 1972, the Site was occupied by the Grade II listed Reading Dispensary Building, which has since been demolished. The Site was redeveloped between 1979-85 and now forms part of the John Lewis & Partners department store. It comprises a five-storey block in the Modern style.

The inclusion of this part of the Site within the CA is therefore the legacy of the quality of the townscape at the CA's original designation and does not reflect the changes of the 20th century. This is recognised in the CA appraisal, published in March 2008, which suggests the re-drawing of the boundary to exclude the redeveloped Site as *"the historic, architectural and group value of the former Dispensary Building to the Conservation area has been lost"*.

The suggested boundary change has not yet been implemented by the Council, and the proposals are therefore subject to separate and special statutory provision – **Section 72(1)** of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires the decision maker to have special regard to preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the area.

The Site also lies within the setting of nearby listed buildings. **Section 66(1)** of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990 is also engaged.

Policy CS7 (Design and the Public Realm) of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework (2008) requires developments to respond *"positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm"*.

With regard to the historic environment, **Policy CS33** (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) makes clear that *"Planning permission will only be granted where development has no adverse impact on historic assets and their settings. All proposals will be expected to protect and where appropriate enhance the character and appearance of the area in which they are located."*

Development proposals should also have regard to the Local Plan's Sites and Detailed Policies (October 2012) document. **Policy DM23** (Shopfronts and Cash Machines) states that *"shopfronts, individual features of shopfronts and cash machines will respect the character of the building on which they are located and their surroundings, as well as the wider street, in terms of design, colours, materials, lighting, and location"*.

The Character and Appearance of the Conservation Area

In summary, the character and appearance of the CA is derived from its classical late-C18 and C19 commercial properties, and the landmark church and open churchyard, which reflect the development of the locality as the historic and religious core of Reading.

The street pattern around the Site was laid out in the medieval period, with the flint and ashlar St Mary's Church a C16 redevelopment of an earlier Saxon church. Developed because of its location near to the original river crossing, a number of roads converged in the locality meaning it became an area for trade. This commercial character was carried through to the late-C18 and C19. As such, the Gun Street and St Mary's Butts thoroughfares are largely characterised by classical terraced buildings of two and three storeys with ground floor shopfronts – these buildings face the distinctive chequered church and its churchyard.

Buildings within the locality display a variety of materials and varying degrees of decoration. Typically constructed from red brick with timber shopfronts, many of the historic properties have sash windows, straight brick arches and classical fenestration details. Roofs are general pitched and tiled, although several are hidden behind parapets. At the eastern end of Gun Street there are several classically-inspired modern developments, which are sympathetic to the surrounding context.

Contribution of the Application Site to the Character and Appearance of the CA

Notwithstanding the acknowledgement within the CA Appraisal that the Site should be excluded from the CA, the western façade of the Site is currently within its boundary. The building forms part of the busy commercial centre of Reading, and is surrounded by shopfronts along Chain Street, Gun Street and Minster Street that display a variety of signage, including both fascia and projecting blade signs.

Faced in red brick at the first and second floor levels, this part of the building has a pitched, slate-tiled roof of three stages at the top three floors. It also has large glazed windows, projecting balconies, and dormer-like roof projections. It contrasts with the prevailing character and appearance of the CA by virtue of its incongruous massing, scale, and architectural expression. The west and south elevations do not retain group value with the neighbouring heritage assets and historic structures, and do not contribute to an appreciation of the area's historic function and development. For this reason the elevations do not contribute to the character and appearance of the CA or the special interest and setting of nearby heritage assets.

The west elevation orients towards the Grade I listed Reading Minster and its open churchyard within the CA, along with a number of other heritage assets, such as St Mary's Church House, gravestones and monuments. The elevation is however entirely screened from view by the church and vegetation in key local views from the St Mary's Butts and Castle Street thoroughfares identified in the adopted CA appraisal. Visibility towards the Site from key points in the CA is therefore limited. Where it is seen within the CA, existing signage is consistent with its character as a commercial building within the town centre.

Impact of the Proposals on Designated Heritage Assets

As described above, the proposed signage will be materially similar to the existing and takes its precedent from signage present on surrounding buildings. The proposals relate only to areas where signage is already extant on the John Lewis & Partners department store and do not, therefore, introduce new areas or increase the extent of façade coverage. In size, colour and materials, the replacement signs will be unobtrusive additions appropriate to the building's commercial character.

Most relevant to this assessment is the replacement of the signs to the southern corner of the building. Here, the replacement signage comprises a discreet upgrade to the branding. Where noticeable, they will be neutral additions consistent with the building's commercial character. The impact on the character and appearance of the CA as a whole will be negligible.

In our view, therefore, the proposals will preserve the character and appearance of the CA, and the contribution the Site makes to an appreciation of the special interest of nearby listed buildings will be unchanged. Accordingly, the proposals accord with relevant statutory provisions in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, national policy and the relevant policies of the local plan.

We trust this information is sufficient for you to validate the application, however if require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Harriet Humphrey (020 7312 7541 / harriet.humphrey@montagu-evans.co.uk) or James Leuenberger (020 39626458 / james.leuenberger@montagu-evans.co.uk) at this office.

Yours faithfully



MONTAGU EVANS LLP

Enc.