

# YEOMANRY HOUSE



## Heritage and Planning Statement 18 March 2019



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## 1 Summary

- 1.1 The site is located on the southern side of Castle Hill at the Russell Street junction and currently contains a Grade II listed Georgian property within a plot of approximately 0.44 hectares. There is provision for car parking to the north and south of the site with access from Coley Avenue. The site is currently vacant but was used until recently as the Council's Registration and Bereavement Service and prior to that the site was occupied by various units of the Territorial Army. The building sits adjacent the Berkshire Record Office which was erected in the 2000's following demolition of the Army's drill hall.



1.2 The applicant is in the process of purchasing the site from Reading Borough Council with a view to using the building and associated land as a children's day nursery and who have identified a need for such a facility close to the town centre. The use does require some internal and external alterations to the building in order to meet current standards and appropriate advice and meetings have been sought from Council Officers as to the appropriateness of the necessary works as they relate to the existing building.

1.3 With regard to the above a pre-application process has been undertaken over the past few months together with meetings with the Council Officers when deemed appropriate with both parties.

## **2. The Site**

2.1. The property occupies a prominent position on the south side of Castle Hill at the junction with Bath Road and Russell Street. The site is located within the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area, approximately 700 metres to the west of the town centre and within close proximity to bus routes, shops, schools and amenity facilities.

2.2 Yeomanry House is a large early 19<sup>th</sup> century house that was taken over by the Berkshire Yeomanry in about 1906. Shortly afterwards an indoor Riding School was built that subsequently became the drill hall that was demolished in the 1990's, giving way to construction of what is now the Berkshire Record Office to the west side of Yeomanry House.



Figure 2: Front elevation



Figure 3: Rear elevation

2.3 As noted, the building is listed at Grade II with the list description stating:

*Known as Castle Hill house. Early C19 with modern extensions and adjoining buildings. Original front 2 storeys, stucco with moulded cornice and balustrade carried right across. Slate roof. Wide central 6 panel door flanked by rusticated side panels, in recessed arch with key pattern ornament to door head; wide radiating fanlight. Glazing bar sash windows, 1 over door, flanking full height segmental bows with 3 windows each. Wing to left hand 2 storeys, 3 windows, ground floor windows in arched recesses. 3 storey later (late C19) wing to right.*

2.4 An Outline Development Framework was prepared for the site by RBC and it has been allocated in the draft new Local Plan for potential residential, office or restaurant use. The development framework highlighted the main points to be addressed by any development:

- Avoid detrimental effects on the significance of the listed building and the Conservation Area;
- Address noise impacts on residential use;
- Address air quality impacts on residential use; and
- Avoid adverse effects on the wooded frontage to Castle Hill.

- 2.5 Within the Framework document it sets out that the interior within the east building “includes many features of architectural and historic interest including stairs, cornicing, ceiling roses, fire places, doors and architraves, windows and window shutters and skirting boards, basement doors and flooring, pus an attic level”.
- 2.6 The site contains a number of mature trees mainly located to the north of the site on the Castle Hill frontage and within an area of open lawn and we understand that preparations are being made to ensure their long-term protection through Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's).
- 2.7 There are clearly a number of constraints associated with the redevelopment of this site but also a number of opportunities. The Outline Development Framework strongly recommended pre-application advice was sought, which has now been undertaken.

### **3 Planning history**

- 3.1 960875/LBC (96/00968/LBC) – Demolition of east block in order to eradicate dry rot, remove asbestos tiles and clear a disused building in a poor state of repair – Observations sent 20 March 1997.
- 970911/FUL (97/00926/FUL) – New record office building for the Royal County of Berkshire and associated staff / public car parking following extensive demolitions within grounds – Granted 10 March 1998.
- 970912/LBC (97/00927/LBC) – Alterations and demolition of rear extensions to Yeomanry House. Demolition of redundant buildings in grounds – Granted by Secretary of State 17 February 1998.
- 090637/LBC (09/01019/LBC – Provision of replacement rear door, new handrail and widening of footpath – Granted by Secretary of State 30 October 2009.
- 3.2 There do not appear to be many historic photographic records of the building but the image below is a photograph of a photograph found in the basement in an initial walk through the property and which shows substantial built form to the rear of the building.



Figure 4; Photograph found in basement, Circa possibly early to mid 1990's

#### **4 Proposals**

- 4.1 The application proposes to use of the site as a day nursery under Class D1 but which will require some external and internal alterations to the building. The submission is accompanied by Day Tanner drawing numbers: 3556/101, 3556/102, 3556/201c, 3556/202c, 3556/203c, 3556/204 and Pattern Associates Structural Report. A topographical survey drawing by Developers Land Surveys and a full tree assessment carried out by Arbeco Ltd.
- 4.2 It is not entirely clear that the scheme involves a change of use where the existing use as the Council's Registration and Bereavement Service would arguably fall with the D1 Use Class, which includes in the list of Non-Residential Institutions, museums, public libraries and public halls. Certainly the existing use doesn't appear to fall comfortably within any other use class, including those considered Sui Generis.
- 4.3 Notwithstanding that, whilst the site is ideally located for the proposed use and the surrounding grounds would provide enriching outdoor amenity space, the internal dimensions are not adequate to meet the necessary space standards for the use. In that regard, OFSTED requirements are for 3.5m<sup>2</sup> for each child 0 – 2 years, 2.5m<sup>2</sup> per

child 2 – 3 years and 2.3m<sup>2</sup> per child 3 – 5 years. There is also the requirement that toilet cubicles are not isolated from the teaching/play rooms to allow proper supervision and to provide an appropriate environment and space for staff and children to interact.

- 4.4 It was agreed during meetings with the Council that the east wing of the building is the most suitable for providing the nursery rooms and ancillary space as this is the least intrusive into the fabric of the Georgian building and retains the existing plan form and therefore the legibility of the Georgian building. Equally the walls on the north/south axis are retained to maintain the integrity of the massive chimneys.
- 4.5 During discussions it was agreed that a new glass corridor would be the least disruptive to maintain the internal circulation space and enable staff movements between the various spaces without the need to move through the childrens' teaching play spaces and causing disruption.
- 4.6 This structure would be of hollow steel sections creating a goal post frame with the connection to the existing building being at high level where metal flashing gutter would be inserted into the nearest horizontal bed joint., The structure is designed to be effectively free standing to avoid any damage to the structure or finishes of the building with the large section glazing ensuring that existing fenestration detail is clearly visible beyond.
- 4.7 The conservation officer was concerned about solar gain in the glass corridor but technical research has revealed that modern glazing solutions for this type of situation such as those by 'Saint-Gobain' will reduce solar gain by up to 70%.
- 4.8 This structure is necessary to enable the use of the building in the manner proposed and is considered to maintain the integrity of the listed building where it could be removed in the future but is of such a lightweight nature that, as seen from the elevation detail, existing fabric and openings are not diminished or obscured by the system.
- 4.9 It has been agreed that the west wing which is a later addition and which lacks the formality of room layouts (unlike the east wing) lends itself more successfully to use for subsidiary functions such as offices, kitchens and service areas as well as toilets which are already located in this wing.

- 4.10 The scheme allows for a significant area of outdoor amenity space which is substantially screened from adjacent properties and suitably distant from those properties so as to reduce any significant impacts on residential amenity in terms of noise or disturbance. A raised area to the rear to enable disabled access would be replaced with some car parking spaces and a new ramp provided.
- 4.11 It is considered that the site is well located for access to and from by means other than the private motor car being a short walk from the town centre and with bus stops serving frequent bus services close to the entrance. However, there is also ample car parking on site for those parents or carers who do need to travel by car and there is an area for drop-off/pick-up on the north side of the building with provision for 16 parking spaces in that area and 10 spaces to the south side, rear of the building including 2 disabled space.

## **5. Development Plan Context**

- 5.1 For the purposes of this application and having regard to local plan policies, it is considered that the use would fall within a definition of community facilities and, in this regard, a review of the development plan context for the area would indicate the following policies are relevant:

### **5.2 National Policy Guidance**

- 5.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also sets out national planning policy relating to the conservation of the historic environment. It advises that in determining planning applications “*local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made to their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance*” (paragraph 128).
- 5.2.2 Specific guidance in the NPPF on the treatment of designated heritage assets emphasises the need to understand the significance of a heritage asset in order to determine impacts on the historic environment (paragraph 132). It advises that “*when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. The more*

*important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm should require clear and convincing justification’.*

### **5.3 Local Plan**

- 5.3.1 The main Development Plan documents relevant to this proposal are considered to be the Core Strategy (CS) document adopted in January 2008 and Sites and Detailed Policies Document (SDPD), adopted in 2012 and altered in 2015. The following policies from those documents are considered relevant to this proposal:
- 5.3.2 In general compliance with the NPPF, CS Policy CS33 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) states that historic features and areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings, will be protected and where appropriate enhanced.
- 5.3.3 CS Policy CS7 (Design and the Public Realm) is also of relevance where it sets out that all development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located.
- 5.3.4 CS Policy CS31 (Additional and Existing Community Facilities) is of some relevance where it is recognised that the provision of sufficient good quality community facilities is crucial to ensuring that Reading is a place in which people want to live and to continue living. Among other things, this policy advises that community facilities should be located where there is a choice of means of travel (including walking and cycling), and in existing centres where possible.
- 5.3.5 CS Policy CS24: Car/Cycle Parking, refers to maximum standards as set out in the adopted SPD: Parking Standards and Design (2009) referenced above. That document sets out the following standards for a D1 day nursery use in Zone 2: Flexible pick-up/drop-off times, 1 space per 3 FTE staff, 1 drop-off space per 10 pupils, Fixed pick-up/drop-off times, 1 space per 3 FTE staff, 1 drop-off space per 5 pupils

5.3.6 CS Policy CS4: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development, states that the scale and density of development within the Borough will be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities. Sites will be assessed in terms of their level of accessibility to a defined district or local centre with a good range of facilities by pedestrian routes, and to a bus stop served by a strategic bus service.

5.3.7 SDPD Policy DM4 (Safeguarding Amenity) seeks to ensure that development does not cause a significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing or new residential properties.

#### **5.4 Policy appraisal**

5.4.1 It is acknowledged that the significance of a heritage asset can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting, but the works proposed here can be considered as ‘enabling’ development to ensure the long term viability of the building.

5.4.2 Certainly it is the case that the Council are active participants in the redevelopment of this site and have put forward potential changes of use of the building to residential, offices or restaurant uses. In that regard, it is considered reasonable to suggest that any of those uses would require enabling development to facilitate the use and it is not at all certain that such development would not be more intensive than that proposed here.

5.4.4 As it is, the proposal does require the limited loss of some internal historic fabric but a sensitive approach would be adopted and significant features would be retained such that the grandeur of the existing rooms would be maintained with the retention of nibs to provide evidence of removed walls and the legibility of the original floor plan and circulation maintained.

5.4.5 Externally, no development would occur to the north of the site where it is acknowledged that this space makes an important contribution to the setting of the listed building and the conservation area. That setting is also informed by the adjacent Records Office which is a relatively contemporary building predominantly of glass sections but which does appear to sit quite comfortably next to the older listed building.

- 5.4.6 The proposed external corridor takes cues from the Records Office building and would be a lightweight, almost free-standing structure that allows existing fenestration and detailing along the south elevation to be clearly visible beyond.



Figure 8: Rear, north elevation, adjacent contemporary Records Office building

- 5.4.7 Having regard to CS Policy CS31 it is noted that the site lies within Zone 2 of the 4-zone system adopted in the car parking standards SPD where it is acknowledged that this zone directly surrounds the Central Core Area and extends to a walking distances of 2 kilometres from the centre of Reading. Typically this zone is well served by public transport, with buses continuing either into or out of the Central Core Area via this zone. Much of this area is within acceptable walking distance (400m) of either the main railway station or Reading West railway station. Walking and cycling in this area tends to be encouraged through the provision of wide and safe footways, with some dedicated or shared cycle ways. The areas within Zone 2 also typically have smaller local centres, providing day-to-day access to retail and some commercial facilities.
- 5.4.8 In this regard, it is considered reasonable to suggest that this area is wholly suitable for a community facility such as that now proposed.
- 5.4.10 As noted previously in this statement the property contains a large car parking area and with the level of staffing and pupil numbers set out in paragraph 4.9 of this

statement it is clear that such provision is in accordance with the Council's car parking standards. In this regard, based on fixed drop-off/pick-up times the use would require 20 car parking spaces for the 100 pupils and 30 staff members although in reality there would in fact be a split of some 70/30 fixed over flexible drop-offs. Cycle parking and buggy parking can also be provided.

5.4.11 In terms of Policy CS4 it has already been noted in this statement that the site is located with Zone 2 of the 4-zone system adopted in the car parking standards SPD and it is therefore considered that the location of the site makes it accessible to a range of services and facilities by walking, cycling and public transport.

5.4.12 SDPD Policy DM4 seeks to ensure that the amenities of neighbouring occupiers are not significantly harmed by new development and it is acknowledged that there are residential properties to the east of the proposed play area that could be affected. However, any noise associated with the use is limited to daytime hours and only small groups of children would use that area at any one time where outside play times are staggered. It is also the case that all play times are well supervised, and the level of noise kept to a minimum. It would be difficult to assess the 'supposed' creation of noise levels prior to the commencement of the nursery, however a past report, for the same client (PBA, 39254/3001/TN001) from a previous nursery surrounded by residential dwellings, did recommend a noise mitigation barrier be erected (no higher than 2 metres because of planning constraints) in which to protect the gardens of the residents nearby. Further recommendations suggested that the number of children in the play area is staggered, that supervision will restrict noise levels and the hours of use limited. Furthermore, Yeomanry House is close to three major roads (Castle Hill, Coley Hill and Coley Avenue) and noise levels from these roads may attenuate the noise from the playground.

5.4.13 In order to alleviate the noise from kitchen extraction, the new design will house a kitchen in a central location within the building. However, until the internal kitchen design is undertaken it would be unclear as to the location and type of extractor fan in use

5.1.14 Noise generated from deliveries will be kept to a minimum and encouraged during the normal opening hours in order to not disrupt the surrounding residents. Furthermore, waste collection will be arranged with the least disruption to residents.

5.4.15 This is a good location for a facility such as that proposed with good access from the public highway and sufficient space for adequate car and cycle parking and with generous provision of amenity space. Clearly there are constraints, including the listed status of the building, its location within a conservation area and significant trees to the north side.

5.4.16 Having regard to those constraints, together with the Council's strong encouragement that pre-application advice should be sought prior to submission of detailed planning applications, we are hopeful that this application can be well received.

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