



Professional Heritage Consultancy



HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

GROVELANDS CHURCH, 553 OXFORD ROAD, READING

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1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1. Heritage Planning Services Limited has been commissioned by The Trustees of 'The Gate' (formerly Reading Community Church¹) to prepare a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) for Grovelands Chapel (also known as The Gate Oxford Road Centre) 553 Oxford Road, Reading, RG30 1HJ (hereafter referred to as the Project Site).
- 1.2. Planning permission is being sought for the demolition of Grovelands Chapel and Church Hall to make way for a new three storey development with community space at ground floor level and residential units above. The proposals include provision for a nursery, community cafe and managed flexible community hall space available for hire. The first and second floors will each provide five flats, making a total of ten new residential units.
- 1.3. This assessment has been undertaken following a request from the developer, due to the historic environment implications of redeveloping the site.
- 1.4. The objective of this assessment was to identify the nature, extent and significance of the Project Site and to assess the impact that any development might have upon the heritage asset.
- 1.5. This document was compiled by Sam Driscoll BA (Hons), MA, MCIfA, Director, Heritage Planning Services Limited and completed under HPS Project Reference HPS-291/19.

Planning History

- 1.6. In 2013 planning consent was granted for the demolition of Grovelands Church and Church Hall, to make way for the construction of a new three storey building to accommodate worship/meeting rooms, office space, community café, retail units and residential accommodation (Planning Ref: 12/01577/FUL). Following this, The Gate carried out a strategic review of the performance of their buildings across other sites. The decision was taken to establish a new core worship facility at its Meadway site, 2km to the west of Grovelands church, optimising the potential of the Project Site to be redeveloped to provide a modern community hub and residential units.

¹ Reading Community Church was formed in 2005 from The Tilehurst Free Church and Grovelands Christian Fellowship.

- 1.7. A planning application was submitted in July 2017 (ref: 171086/FUL) for the demolition of the existing church buildings and redevelopment of the site to provide a four storey mixed use development comprised of community halls and ancillary accommodation at ground floor level, car parking and flats at the upper floor levels. This application was refused at committee in February 2018. However, it was agreed that the loss of the historic building could be justified provided that the replacement met an agreed set of criteria.

The Project Site and Study Area

- 1.8. The Project Site is located c. 1.6km west of Reading town centre and situated on the corner of Oxford Road (A329) and Wilson Road. The local area is defined by a mix of residential buildings, commercial premises and religious buildings, mainly dating from the late 19th to 20th century and modern period. The site is occupied by the late 19th century Grovelands Church (also known as The Gate Oxford Road Centre) and separate Church Hall to the southeast of the plot.



Figure 1 Project Site location with Grovelands Church and grounds outlined in red. Reproduced with kind permission from The Trustees of 'The Gate'

- 1.9. The Gate Oxford Road Centre is currently used as a hub for hosting church groups.

1.10. Geologically the site is defined by Cretaceous Period Seaford Chalk Formation and Newhaven Chalk Formation overlain by Quaternary Period Taplow Gravel Member, Sand and Gravel. The course of the River Thames runs 1.3km to the north of the site and the plot is situated c. 42m aOD.

1.11. The site is described as follows in English Heritage's advice letter with regards to an application to list the main building, December 2009-

"The site comprises two buildings: the main chapel of 1899 at the corner of Oxford Road and Wilson Road, and a smaller hall to the south, probably built as a Sunday school. The chapel is built of red brown brick with terracotta dressings, in an Arts and Crafts-influenced Free Renaissance style. A steep gabled roof of red tile covers the main worship space. The east gable end adjoins a neighbouring house, while on the exposed west gable, above a range of four small two-light windows, is a 'Venetian window' motif composed of a three-light mullion-and-transom window flanked by single transomed lights and surmounted by a blind semi-circular tympanum with a moulded keystone. A projecting transept-like wing on the north front displays a similar motif, this time comprising three cross-windows beneath an egg-and-dart cornice, above which is a semi-circular window resembling a fanlight. Also, on this elevation is the round-arched entrance porch, with battered upper walls and a swept parapet, within which a datestone records the foundation of the new church in 1899. To the right of this is a low square tower, its upper stage similar to that of the porch but topped by a lead-covered timber cupola. The south elevation is extremely plain, having a row of square two-light windows above and a pair of small lean to blocks below.

The main interior consists of a single large space beneath a modern suspended ceiling. With the exception of a number of ventilation ducts and two pairs of double doors in the north and south walls, the latter containing simple Art Nouveau stained glass, no original fittings survive. To the north is a small vestibule, which in turn gives access to the entrance porch and the space beneath the tower. To the south, within the lean-to blocks, are toilets, a kitchen and a vestry.

The smaller hall is a simple rectangular building, built like the church of red brick with a steep tiled roof, with two segment-headed doorways and four-light timber casement windows with glazing bars. The single-cell interior, now stripped down and modern, contains no features of note."

1.12. In 2009 Grovelands was subject to an application to add the church to the national list of buildings of special and architectural interest. Following the inspection of the church, Historic England recommended that the request for listing be declined, stating that the church “*falls short of the threshold of national importance and should not be designated*”. This was in part due to the removal of significant period features from the interior in the late 20th century. The following summary was given to support the recommendation-

"The quality of the exterior is in stark contrast to the denuded state of the interior. Virtually all the original fittings – which would typically have included fixed pews, a communion table and a large central pulpit- have been removed, and the tiled baptistery mentioned in contemporary accounts has been either floored over or filled in completely. The arrangement of windows at the west end suggests that there may have been a gallery here; if so, this too has been removed, perhaps at the same time that the open roof was filled in with the present suspended ceiling, which transforms the proportions of the space and conceals the large gable windows. Aside from the latter and the internal lobby doors, the original stained glass has all been removed.

The simple, hall-like interiors of Nonconformist churches tend, much more than their Anglican equivalents, to rely for their interest on the completeness of their fixtures and fittings. Here, that interest has been almost completely lost. The quality of the chapel's exterior and the local standing of its architect give it considerable significance in the Reading context, but the interior is now much too altered to be of special interest at national level.” (English Heritage 2009).

1.13. The church was added to Reading Borough Council’s List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures on the 23rd November 2018 under reference LL12. Whilst not considered to be of national significance the external appearance of the structure and historical significance was considered of local importance. Reading Borough Council concluded that the church meets the adopted criteria for adding buildings to the list for the following reasons:

- *Has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person (s) or event;*
- *Has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Reading’s communities;*
- *Has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials;*
- *Is the work of a notable local/national architect/engineer/builder;*
- *Shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering;*

- *Has prominence and landmark quality that is fundamental to the sense of place of the locality.²*

1.14. Reading's Civic Society noted that the Arts and Crafts style appeared to owe more to the Glasgow School of design than other notable contemporary buildings in the town and that it may be a unique example. It was further suggested that the lack of exposed timber around the glazing may provide protection for the window frames, resulting in an economic design reducing the need for painting and replacement (Historic England 2009). However, issues with damp incursion due to the inefficiency of the single glazing has since been identified.

1.15. The Project Site does not lie within any of Reading's Conservation Areas. The nearest Conservation Area appears to be Downshire Square located 950m to the southeast of Grovelands Church.

1.16. There are 16 listed buildings within a 1km radius of the Project Site. Of these, seven relate to the 19th century Brock Barracks just 70m to the west of the Church and one to Elm Lodge, both of which have a direct relationship to the Project Site. The plot of land that was to be developed by the Church once formed part of the landscaped gardens belonging to Elm Lodge. The Barracks are significant in that the original mission hall was built to provide a place of worship for the troops. Grovelands represents the legacy of the success of this mission, which saw the need for a larger church, leading to the development of the current site. Of the remaining eight, two are located close to and within sight of the Project Site. Number 450 Oxford Road (c. 18th century dwelling) and West Branch Library (1907) are located c. 180m east of Grovelands Church.

1.17. There is only one other locally listed site within a 1km radius of the Project Site. As this is located 900m to the southeast, it is not considered significant to this report.

2. Planning Policy & Development Framework

2.1. With regards to the relevant policy and development framework, the following are considered the most appropriate to the current proposal:

- Reading *Borough Local Development Framework, Site and Detailed Policies Document, Adopted October 2012*. With alteration adopted January 2015.
- *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2018*.

² Reading Borough Council, Planning and Development Advice Letter Nov 2018 To The Baptist Union Corporation Ltd.

- 2.2. It is noted that Reading Borough Council's Policy on the Historic Environment is detailed in Chapter 11 of the *Reading Borough Local Development Framework, Core Strategy, Adopted 2008* (Policy CS33). The associated guidance references National Planning Policy Guidance Notes PPG15³ and PPG16, which were replaced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012. As such it is considered that *Reading Borough Local Development Framework, Site and Detailed Policies Document, Adopted October 2012* is more relevant here and the guidance contained within is transcribed below.
- 2.3. Relevant planning policy transcribed from Reading Borough Local Development Framework, Site and Detailed Policies Document, Adopted October 2012. With alteration adopted January 2015. Chapter 9. Built and Natural Environment:

2.3..1.Paragraph 9.1.6: *"Current national planning policy sets out a new approach as to how planning should consider the historic environment compared to the approach of past national planning policy guidance notes. National planning policy now sets out specific mechanisms by which to consider and assess heritage assets, whether they are designated or not."*

2.3..2.Paragraph 9.1.9: *"National planning policy provides an appropriate framework for considering proposals for development that affects historic assets in Reading and it is not considered necessary to have specific detailed policies within this document. Additionally, the historic environment is addressed strategically by policy CS33 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) in the Core Strategy."*

- 2.4. Relevant planning policy transcribed from the National Planning Policy Framework, 2018.

Paragraph 189: *"In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by 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. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning*

³ PPG 15 was a statement of Government policies for the identification and protection of historic buildings, conservation areas, and other elements of the historic environment (September 1994). It complements the guidance given in PPG 16 - Archaeology and Planning.

authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.”

2.4..1.Paragraph 197. *The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.*

2.4..2.Paragraph 198. *"Local planning authorities should not permit the loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred."*

2.4..3.Paragraph 199: *"Local planning authorities should require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible⁴. However, the ability to record evidence of our past should not be a factor in deciding whether such loss should be permitted."*

3. Baseline Survey

Preamble

3.1. The baseline survey was informed by a visit to the Project Site and to Berkshire Record Office in order to consult historic maps and records pertaining to the development of Grovelands Church. The following repositories were also consulted:

- Berkshire Historic Environment Record;
- National Heritage List for England (NHLE);
- Geological Maps;
- Ordnance Survey maps of the site and its environs;
- Appropriate archaeological and historical journals and books;

⁴ Copies of evidence should be deposited with the relevant historic environment record, and any archives with a local museum or other public depository.

- Unpublished research reports and archives, including those held by relevant museums and local societies.

Site Visit Grovelands Chapel

Exterior

- 3.2. A visit to the site was made on 2nd January 2019 in order to view and photograph the exterior and interior of Grovelands Chapel, the grounds and the exterior of the Church Hall, in order to assess any significant changes to the condition of the site since the 2009 survey carried out by English Heritage. Conditions on the day of the visit were dry and overcast.
- 3.3. The exterior of the church has changed little since it was surveyed in 2009. Notable features which are preserved include the Venetian window motif on the west gable and similar on the north projecting wing. Also of note is the round arched entrance porch with battered walls and parapet. The date stone recording the foundation of the building is set behind a decorative iron gated entrance. The tower to the west and connecting vestibule continues the overall design motif, with cornice and parapet. The tower is topped by a lead covered timber cupola.
- 3.4. A commemorative stone marking the foundation of the church is located on the rear wall of the Oxford Street entrance. The plaque reads-

*This Stone was laid by
Arthur W Sutton Esq.
March 7th 1899
I Peter II.6.
Behold, I lay in Zion a chief
corner stone, elect, precious: and
he that believeth on him
shall not be confounded.*



Photo 1 Foundation stone commemorating the building of Grovelands Chapel.



Photo 2 Southwest facing view of Oxford Road elevation (north).



Photo 3 Southeast facing view of west gable.

The south elevation is comparatively plain, with four two light windows at the west end. Two sets of doors allow entrance to the west and east of the building are housed in two single storey lean-to brick extensions.



Photo 4 Northeast facing view of rear elevation (south).

3.5. The east gable adjoins 551 Oxford Road.

Interior

3.6. The interior comprises a large meeting hall with dais at the east end. The vestibule to the north gives access from Oxford Road to both the base of the tower and to an original set of double doors which lead into the hall. Against the south wall of the hall, a set of double doors lead to a porch with two toilets and wash basins to the right and left, housed within a single storey lean-to. A single door towards the southeast end of the hall leads to a larger single storey lean-to, which houses an additional toilet and small kitchen area to the west and a small meeting room/office to the east.



Photo 5 Southwest facing view of double doors within southern wall.



Photo 6 Southwest facing view from interior of small meeting room / office housed in the lean-to to the southeast of Grovelands Church.



Photo 7 Southwest facing view of washbasin housed in the lean-to to the southwest of Grovelands Church.

- 3.7. A 20th century suspended ceiling covers the original timber frame roof structure, which was observed in part at the time of the site visit. The lower tie beams of the original timber roof truss were viewed and photographed through a gap in the modern panelling. Only the lower portion was visible due to a black painted ceiling concealing the upper timbers. The visible portion is painted cream/ white. The central timbers are finished with decorative finials and the two visible tie beams are divided with vertical beams. The ornate finish demonstrates that this part of the structure was designed to be visible to the congregation.



Photo 8 Northwest facing view of Grovelands Church interior.



Photo 9 Southeast facing view of interior with dais in the background.



Photo 10 Restricted view of original timber frame roof structure, now concealed by 20th century suspended ceiling.

- 3.8. Two original pairs of double doors against the north and south walls survive. The northern example preserves the original Art Nouveau stained glass lights.



Photo 11 Art Nouveau stained glass lights.

The current church building was observed to be in a poor state of repair, resulting in an unsafe space with poor energy efficiency. Damp has caused the plasterwork to deteriorate and the front vestibule roof is collapsing.



Photo 12 Northeast facing view of damage to vestibule roof caused by damp.

Church Hall / Sunday School

- 3.9. Entrance was not gained to the smaller Church Hall at the time of the site visit, however the exterior was viewed and photographed. The exterior has not changed significantly from the time of the site visit in 2009, however the hedging along the west elevation obscures a clear view. At the time of the survey carried out by Historic England it was noted that the interior had been stripped and contained no features of note.

The Grounds

- 3.10. To the south (rear) of the Project Site there is a small tarmac parking area accessed via a metal gate from Wilson Street. The west the boundary is defined by iron railings which join the gate to the north. To the south a section has been removed and replaced with a low timber fence panel. The remainder of the plot to the west is enclosed by a low reinforced concrete post and mesh fence. Historic images of the site show that the plot boundary was originally marked by a continuous metal railing around the north and west of the church and yard. No evidence of the original railing was identified at the time of the site visit.



Figure 2 Photograph of Grovelands Church showing original railing. Early 20th century. Berkshire Record Office Reference D/EX1638/63/1-60.

3.11. At the time of the site visit the rear carpark was seen to be littered and it was clear that the vacant space is attracting antisocial behaviour and fly-tipping.



Photo 13 Fly-tipping observed to the rear of the Project Site.

4. Historic Development of the Project Site

4.1. The earliest available cartographic resource is the Tilehurst Parish Map (1811-1817)⁵ which shows that the plot belonging to the modern day Project Site was enclosed by this time. The land is shown belonging to a J.E.L. (possibly John E. Liebenrood).

⁵ A Map of the Parish of Tilehurst in the County of Berks as referred to by the annexed award by William Church, Abingdon 1811-17.



Figure 3 St Mary's Parish Tithe Map 1838. Reproduced by kind permission of the Berkshire Record Office. Project Site outlined in red.

- 4.2. The tithe map surveyed 1838⁶ shows that the Project Site is in fact in the adjacent Parish of St Mary's to the west of Tilehurst, with Grovelands Road (now Wilson Road) making the Parish Boundary. Grovelands taking the name of the farm located to the south of the Project Site. The map shows that the Project Site was located on plot number 56, belonging to and occupied by George Higgs. The land is recorded as *The Lawn* and under pasture. The name is interpreted as possibly simply relating to grass ground, although it is suggested in *Field* that this can be related to arable strips in some areas (Field, 123). With regards to the latter interpretation, this would likely relate to land use prior to enclosure.
- 4.3. The first edition Ordnance Survey Map, surveyed 1872- 1877 (published 1883) shows that the Project Site had been incorporated into landscaped gardens belonging to Elm Lodge (c. 200m southeast of Grovelands Chapel). The map indicates the location of a small lodge in the region of the Project Site. Brock Barracks⁷ built c. 1877 are depicted 200m to the WNW of the Project Site and mark one of the earliest developments at the western end of Oxford Road.

⁶ Plan of the Parish of Saint Mary Reading In The County of Berks Surveyed by Hawkes & Son Reading 1838.

⁷ One of a large number of Army Barracks established under the Registration of the Forces Act of 1871.



Figure 4 Excerpt of Berkshire XXXVII (includes Burghfield - Reading- Shinfield) Surveyed 1872 to 1877 Published 1883. Project Site outlined in red.

- 4.4. In 1879 brothers and business partners Arthur Warwick Sutton and Martin John Sutton⁸ purchased a plot of land adjacent to the Project Site in order to build an Anglican mission hall for the resident soldiers. This operation was taken over by Reading's Baptist Community a few years later (Historic England, 2012). Owing to Reading's rapid expansion in 1896 the congregation had outgrown the original corrugated-iron hall and a new site was required. As a result, the Project Site was acquired and a permanent building suitable for 450 worshippers was funded by donations from Reading's five leading Baptist congregations with help from other Christian denominations (Historic England, 2009 3). Local architect William Roland Howell (a partner in Cooper⁹ and Howell) was commissioned to design the building. Howell was a notable figure, serving on Reading Council from 1911 to 1930 and taking the role as Mayor from 1921 -1922 (Reading Borough Council, Local List).
- 4.5. By 1898¹⁰ a small building is shown occupying the northwest corner of the Project Site. A letter from J Omer Cooper¹¹ to the Rev C. A. Davies, dated May 1893 makes reference to a cottage on the

⁸ Arthur Warwick and Martin John Sutton were partners in Reading based Sutton Seeds.

⁹ J Omer Cooper.

¹⁰ Revised Ordnance Survey, published 1900.

¹¹ J Omer Cooper is acting here for J Omer Cooper and son Auctioneers, Surveyors, Valuers, Land & House Agents (Source Berkshire Record Office D/N2/13/4/9/4).

corner plot, which would eventually be demolished for the new Grovelands Chapel. It is possible that the building depicted on the 1900 Ordnance Survey map represents the single dwelling. The area to the north and south of Oxford Road has started to be developed with terraced housing lining the route and new roads established running off Oxford Road, also developed with terraced housing. Wilson Street, then called Grovelands Road East also shows signs of piecemeal development.



Figure 5 Excerpt from Berkshire XXXVII.NW (includes Burghfield; Reading Theale Tilehurst.) Revised 1898 Published 1900. Project Site outlined in red.

- 4.6. In March 1899 A. W. Sutton laid the foundation stone for the new church (now Grovelands Chapel) and by October the church was open¹². The building is reported to have cost around £2,700.00 to complete. Fittings included a tiled baptistry and the building may have been constructed from local materials from Colliers brickworks, who had relocated to Grovelands¹³.

¹² Reading Mercury - Saturday 18 March 1899.

¹³ William Lansbury and John Lawson Forfeitt were Sutton employees who became Baptist missionaries in the Congo. In 1893 Forfeitt married Anne Maria Collier, daughter of Samuel J Collier or Colliers brickworks. The brickworks moved to Grovelands in 1870.

- 4.7. By 1910 the maps show that the site was fully developed with additional building completed in the southeast corner of the plot. By this time, Grovelands Road East had been renamed Wilson Road.



Figure 6 Excerpt from Berkshire XXXVII.2 (Reading) Revised 1910 Published 1911.



Figure 7 Grovelands Church c. 1900. (Source Historic England 2009)

- 4.8. In the late 20th century the interior was stripped of its original fittings and the open timber roof was covered by a suspended ceiling (Historic England 2009, 3).

5. Historic Impact Assessment

Preamble

- 5.1. In-line with current planning policy guidelines, a statement outlining the known heritage assets of the Project Site, together with an assessment of the likely impact upon them of the proposed development, is necessary.
- 5.2. The following assessment criteria and impact assessment methodology has been devised in accordance with the following guidance:

- *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*, 2018;
- *Design Manual for Road and Bridges*, HA208/07;
- Historic England. 2015. *Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment*.

Proposed Redevelopment

- 5.3. The proposal is to demolish the existing Grovelands Church and associated hall in order to redevelop the plot to provide a modern sustainable three storey building with improved accessibility. The

ground floor will comprise a community space which retains the same gross internal floor area as the existing church. Sliding internal folding partitions will enable flexibility of use, enabling up to three hall spaces. The community hub entrance / foyer will include a café area served by a kitchen.

- 5.4. The community use will allow for various activities, including a new nursery for up to 24 two–four year olds, with secure outdoor soft play area, toddler groups and afterschool clubs.
- 5.5. The residential space will be divided across the first and second floor, providing ten modern sustainable new homes.
- 5.6. The proposed development is shorter in height than the existing Grovelands Church. A tower has been included in the design and will be topped with the original cupola. The location of the tower (the northwest of the development) and the design will be indicative of the current tower, preserving the essence of the historic building with regards to visual impact. The proposed appearance will be contemporary, with the use of brickwork and dressings to compliment the street scene and continue the theme of the existing church. The roof is proposed to be clad in standing seam zinc, creating a grey appearance considered typical of a traditional chapel building.
- 5.7. It is proposed to reuse the date stone, incorporating it into the new external wall near the main entrance of the new building. It is also proposed to salvage existing brickwork window elements such as the sills, header, jambs and mullions for incorporation into the new tower windows, subject to them being of suitable condition and quantity as to be used in a non-piecemeal manner. The existing stain glass windows will be reused internally.

Significance Criteria

- 5.8. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) stresses the importance of retaining the heritage asset, rather than retaining a documentary record of it (NPPF 2018, 54-57). In the following scheme therefore, preservation by record of any part of the resource is viewed as an adverse impact where preservation *in situ* cannot be achieved.

Table 1: Significance Criteria

Significance Criteria	Description of Criteria
Substantial beneficial	The cultural heritage resource is retained with: a) enhanced protection and monitoring, b) the removal of identified threats, c) the non-intrusive recording of the resource against unspecified future threat, d) improved accessibility of sites and information to the general public
Moderate beneficial	The cultural heritage resource is retained, with 2-3 of the following: a) enhanced protection and monitoring, b) the removal of identified threats, c) the non-intrusive recording of the resource against unspecified future threat, d) improved accessibility of sites and information to the general public
Minor beneficial	The cultural heritage resource is retained, with 1 of the following: a) enhanced protection and monitoring, b) the removal of identified threats, c) the non-intrusive recording of the resource against unspecified future threat, d) improved accessibility of sites and information to the general public
Negligible	The cultural heritage resource is retained
Minor adverse	The majority of the cultural heritage resource is retained, only peripheral elements cannot be preserved.
Moderate adverse	Some core elements of the cultural heritage resource cannot be retained, but a substantial proportion remain.
Substantial adverse	All or a significant majority of the core cultural heritage resource cannot be retained.

Statement of Significance

- 5.9. The Project Site derives its significance from three main routes. Firstly historic, as the site preserves an early permanent place of worship for the Baptist Community, marking the success of the early mission hall which sought to offer a place of worship to the resident troops at Brock Barracks. The continuity of activities of Grovelands Church has allowed both the congregation to connect with the site's past through current social groups and worship. In addition, the value is linked to the association of the building with William Roland Howell (187-1940), a local architect responsible for designing several significant buildings in Reading, also a local councillor and elected Mayor.
- 5.10. Secondly spiritual, drawing the community together in a setting that evokes a direct link to the foundation of the church through historic fabric and character of the site. The history of the church evokes a sense of the longstanding legacy of worship in the community.

5.11. Thirdly, the aesthetic value of the building has been intrinsic to the significance of the site, prompting an application to add the church to the national list of historic buildings and resulting in the inclusion of the site on Reading Borough Council's List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures. The site is noteworthy for its Arts and Craft style which lends itself to the Glasgow School of design, which it is thought may be unique, or at least atypical for the area.

5.12. This combination of values has earned Grovelands Church the status as a local landmark.

Impact Assessment

Table 2: Development Proposal Impact Assessment

Zone	Predicted Impact
Areas within the application site where no construction is proposed	Negligible
Areas where demolition is proposed	Substantial adverse to the built heritage within the Project Site.
Broader Area	Minor impact to heritage assets resulting from the risks generated by passing construction traffic. Moderate adverse impact on views from, to and across the study area during construction. Mostly relating to Brock Barracks that shares a history with the development of the church in its original incarnation. However, it is considered that the proposed new building will maintain a link through sympathetic design and materials.

5.13. The long-term impact on the cultural resource is partly defined by the short-term impact. If a resource has been destroyed or modified during the construction phase then it is no longer available in its original form at a later date, i.e. the resource is finite.

Table 3: Operational Phase Impact Assessment

Zone	Predicted Impact on the Heritage Resource
Areas within the application site where no construction or modification is proposed.	Negligible.

Broader area	Moderate adverse impact on views from, to and across the study area. Mostly relating to Brock Barracks that shares a history with the development of the church in its original incarnation. However, it is considered that the proposed new building will maintain a link through sympathetic design and materials.
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6. Summary

- 6.1. The Project Site comprises the late 19th century locally listed Grovelands Chapel and Church Hall. The church is a red brick building with steep pitched roof and terracotta dressings, which preserves a rare Arts and Craft style exterior. The interior was stripped in the 20th century, leaving little trace of the original fixtures and fittings, save for a set of Art Nouveau stained glass lights displayed in a set of original double doors leading to the vestibule. The original roof truss is also preserved, concealed behind a modern suspended ceiling. The baptistry has been filled and floored, leaving no trace.
- 6.2. An application to add the church to the list of nationally significant buildings in Britain was turned down by Historic England who stated that the church “*falls short of the threshold of national importance and should not be designated*”. The Church was subsequently added to Reading Borough Council’s List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures on the 23rd November 2018, following a recommendation from Reading’s Civic Society who commented that the building may be a unique example of type within the area.
- 6.3. The state of the current church has led to it being considered unsafe for community use. As such the activity of the resource is limited to weekly fellowship and prayer groups.
- 6.4. For the members of the church the Project Site has significant historic and spiritual value. The value of the church is shared by the wider community who identify with the history of the local asset and by the congregation and wider community alike who value the contribution that the Arts and Craft style contributes to the street scene.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. It is the conclusion of this report, that Grovelands Church is significant to the congregation and community groups who have in the past benefitted and who continue to benefit from the facilities that the site provides. It is also acknowledged that as a local landmark, the church is significant to the local community who appreciate the aesthetic and historic value of the church. However, the current building is no longer considered fit for purpose and therefore the role of the church within the community has slowly diminished.
- 7.2. The benefit of the proposal will be the provision a significant community asset at the Oxford Road site, allowing the church to continue to have a presence in the area as intended with the establishment of the original mission hut 1879.
- 7.3. The proposed new building will respect Grovelands Church in scale and design, with significant fixtures and fittings reused in the new build.
- 7.4. With regards to the impact on the significance of the Project Site, it is concluded that whilst the proposals will cause substantial harm to the heritage asset, when weighed against the public benefit of providing a modern flexible community hub and ten sustainable new homes, it is considered that the proposals should be acceptable in heritage terms.
- 7.5. In the event that the application is successful, the following mitigation is recommended:
 - Pre-commencement Level 2/3 Building Recording of the interior and exterior of Grovelands Church;
 - Provision for a watching brief during any stripping of the church interior to record concealed historic features that may be revealed during the works.

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Listed Buildings within a 1km Radius of the Project Site

NHLE ID	Name	Description	Date	Grade
1113552	450, OXFORD ROAD	Dwelling	c. 18 th	II
1375592	ANSON BARRACK, BROCK BARRACKS	Army Barracks	1877	II
1393919	BATTLE PRIMARY SCHOOL	School	1891-3	II
1443796	CHURCH OF ST GEORGE	Church	1885-6	II
1392034	CHURCH OF ST MARK	Church	1904-5	II
1456862	CHURCH OF THE ENGLISH MARTYRS	Church	1925-1926	II
1113616	ELM LODGE	Dwelling	c. 19 th	II
1375593	FORMER HOSPITAL, BROCK BARRACKS	Army Hospital	1877	II
1375594	FORMER MARRIED QUARTERS, BROCK BARRACKS	Army Barracks	1877	II
1375595	FORMER SERGEANTS QUARTERS, BROCK BARRACKS	Army Barracks	1877	II
1156392	KEEP AND ATTACHED WALLS AND GATEWAY, BROCK BARRACKS	Army Barracks	1877	II
1375596	OFFICERS QUARTERS AND MESS, BROCK BARRACKS	Military	1877	II
1321912	THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT CENOTAPH	Monument	1921	II*
1409246	TILEHURST ROAD BRIDGE	Bridge	1845-7	II
1375597	TOFREK BARRACK, BROCK BARRACKS	Army Barracks	1877	II
1302878	WEST BRANCH LIBRARY	Library	c. 1907	II

Appendix 2: Locally Listed Buildings within a 1km Radius of the Project Site

PreRef	Name	Description	Date
DRM2847	24 and 24A Southcote Road, Reading	Dwelling	1865
DRM2856	Grovelands Church, 553 Oxford Road, Reading, RG30 1HJ	Church	1899



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