

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT - Application No: 181197/LBC

Address: 149-150 Friar Street and 2-4 Queen Victoria Street, Reading

Proposal: Various internal and associated external works associated with the continued office use at basement, part ground and upper floors, including various removal of partitions, restoration of staircase and landing arrangement, replacement of roof linings, provision of rooflights on inward facing roofslopes and incorporation of new WCs, kitchens and services

Case officer: Jonathan Markwell

Expiry Date: Originally 03/09/18; Extension of time agreed until 18/10/18 (as access to the building was not possible until 02/10/18)

Site Description and Surrounding Area: The application relates to a four storey building (plus basement) located on the south east corner of Friar Street; front facing Friar Street and flanking to Queen Victoria Street. It is a grade II listed building, with this corner element serving retail units at ground floor with vacant offices above. The shops do not form part of this application proposal. The property has been vacant since at least July 2015.

The Listing for the properties is as follows:

1-31 Queen Victoria Street is Grade II Listed Building, built as a circa 1894 commercial street with returns to Broad and Friar Streets. Probably designed by Joseph Morris. It has Dutch gabled free Baroque style. 3 1/2 storeys, yellow brick and terracotta with dividing Ionic pilasters. Dentil cornice. Pilasters to dormers, broken pediments above. An elongated pattern of shallow bays to 1st and 2nd floors of 4:2:1:1:1:1:3. Mullion and transom window to bays, sashes with architraves (and pediments on 1st floor) to rest. Modern shopfronts, retaining cornice to fascia and scroll brackets to pilasters, only one shop retains pre-war shopfront. Large returns to Broad Street. The return to east (No 28 Broad Street) supported by No 26 (dated 1894, grey brick with red terracotta dressings) and by No 24 (an early C20 Bank with -large shaped pediment doorway on corner to Cross Street; red brick with stone dressings and stone fret patterns to gables).

The surrounding buildings are predominantly in town centre uses, particularly at ground/street level but there are examples of residential accommodation to the upper floors of nearby buildings. Planning Permission has been granted at 155 Friar Street (151500) and Prior Approval has been given for change of use from office to residential at No's 156-158 Friar Street (130814), 136-137 Friar Street (150068) and 159 Friar Street (151392).

The site is located within Reading Central Core Area, Primary Shopping Area, Office Core, within an Active Frontage and within an Air Quality Management Area.

Proposal: The application seeks listed building consent for various internal and associated external works associated with the continued office use at basement, part ground and upper floors, including

various removal of partitions, restoration of staircase and landing arrangement, replacement of roof linings, provision of rooflights on inward facing roofslopes and incorporation of new WCs, kitchens and services (See Historic Building Consultants comments below for more details).

Plans & Documents Considered:

PL-0100 A Location Site Plan
PL-0010 A Existing Basement Plan
PL-0011 A Existing Ground Floor Plan
PL-0012 A Existing First Floor Plan
PL-0013 A Existing Second Floor Plan
PL-0014 A Existing Third Floor Plan
PL-0015 A Existing Roof Plan
PL-0110 A Proposed Basement Plan
PL-0111 A Proposed Ground Floor Plan
PL-0112 A Proposed First Floor Plan
PL-0113 A Proposed Second Floor Plan
PL-0114 A Proposed Third Floor Plan
PL-0115 A Proposed Roof Plan
PL-0510 A Demolition Basement Plan
PL-0511 A Demolition Ground Floor Plan
PL-0512 A Demolition First Floor Plan
PL-0513 A Demolition Second Floor Plan
PL-0514 A Demolition Third Floor Plan
PL-0515 A Demolition Roof Plan
PL-1150 A Typical Stair Landing Glazed Partition
PL-1151 A Typical Opening
PL-1152 A Typical Glazed Partition
PL-1220 A Typical Floor Details
PL-1224 A Typical Roof Details
PL-1322 A Internal Partition Details
As all received on 09/07/2018

office refurbishment/alterations 149/150 friar street and 2/4 queen victoria street, reading design and access statement (including brief planning statement and heritage statement) Issue 01 dated 9 July 2018, as received 09/07/18

149/150 friar street and 2/4 queen victoria street reading photographic record by Ferguson Mann Architects, dated 26/06/18, as received 09/07/18

Relevant Planning History:

170210/FUL - Proposed conversion of vacant office accommodation at first, second and third floor levels to create 7 x 2 bed residential units with part of ground floor and basement for ancillary storage space. Granted 28/04/17.

170211/LBC - Alterations associated with conversion of vacant office accommodation at first, second and third floor levels to create 7 x 2 bed residential units with part of ground floor and basement for ancillary storage space. Granted 28/04/17.

Public Consultation:

A site notice was displayed on 26/07/18, expiring on 16/08/18. A press notice published on 02/08/18, expiring on 23/08/18. Reading Civic Society and Reading CAAC has been formally consulted.

One response has been received, from Reading Civic Society, supporting the proposals as follows:

Having reviewed the D+AS for this proposal, and the images of the current condition, we support this proposal fully. It is fascinating that so much original historic fabric; staircase, fireplace surrounds etc, remains in place. The analysis of the existing condition, and the issues faced in carrying out the restoration, seem to be very thorough. The plan to continue to use the building as offices, its original use, is thoroughly endorsed. This is a far better solution than converting the building to flats which undoubtedly would have resulted in rooms being carved up extensively. The project will undoubtedly be very, very expensive. It is pleasing to note that the owner has the vision and the commitment to carry out what seems to be a thorough top down programme of works which will restore the heritage building for the long term, working within the constraints of the building being listed to ensure its use in the modern era. Thoroughly supported.

Consultation Responses:

Heritage Officer:

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines conservation areas as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' and local planning authorities have the statutory duty to identify and designate such areas.

Section 72(1) provides that 'with respect of any building or other land in a conservation area... special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.'

Recent case law has clarified how this statutory duty to have 'special regard' or attention should be applied in balancing of competing material considerations. Following on from the Barnwell Manor Windfarm case regarding the setting of a Listed Building, the High Court went further in the case of Forge Field, Kent and held that the finding of harm to the setting of a Listed Building or harm to a Conservation Area gave rise to a 'strong presumption' against planning permission being granted. The High Court stressed that this harm, although it may be limited, was not merely another material consideration to be weighed against others in the normal way.

National Planning Policy Framework

In July 2018, the Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which replaced the 2012 NPPF and prior to that the National Planning Policy Statements (PPS) and Planning Policy Guidance (PPG). The NPPF recognises the historic environment as comprising all aspects of the environment which have resulted from the interaction between people and places through time. The elements of the historic environment that are considered to hold significance are called heritage assets. Significance is defined by the NPPF as ‘the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest’. This significance or value may be related to a heritage asset’s archaeological, architectural and artistic or historic elements and can derive not only from its physical presence but also from its setting (NPPF 2018, page 71).

Planning Practice Guide

Guidance on the implementation of the 2012 NPPF is provided in the revised Planning Practice Guide (PPG) (DCLG et al, 2014). The PPG states that heritage assets may be affected by direct physical change or by change in their setting. Being able to properly assess the nature, extent and value of a heritage asset, and the contribution of its setting, is very important to understanding the potential impact and acceptability of development proposals (DCLG et al, 2014, para. 9).

PPG states that local planning authorities may identify non-designated heritage assets and in some areas, these heritage assets may be identified as ‘locally listed’ (DCLG et al, 2014, para. 39). These identified heritage assets may include buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes which have a degree of value meriting consideration in planning decisions but which are not formally designated heritage assets (DCLG et al, 2014, para. 39).

Buildings that warrant local designation in a Conservation Area in Reading are awarded a ‘Buildings of Townscape Merit’ designation. For the purposes of the NPPF, Buildings of Townscape Merit will be considered to warrant conservation and where appropriate enhancement in accordance with the NPPF

Historic England Good Practice Advice

Historic England has produced guidance on the interpretation and implementation of the NPPF and PPG with regard to the historic environment in the form of:

- Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (Historic England, 2016).
- Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015a);
- Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2015b).
- Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 4: Tall Buildings (Historic England, 2015c).

Reading Borough Council Planning Policy

Reading Borough Council Core Strategy CS33: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment states:

Historic features and areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings, will be protected and where appropriate enhanced. This will include:

- Listed Buildings;
- Conservation Areas;
- Other features with local or national designation, such as sites and features of archaeological importance, and historic parks and gardens.

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 and for the purpose of ensuring that work is appropriate to the special architectural or historic interest of the listed building.

Within para. 11.8 of the Core Strategy it also specifies that:

The Borough Council is committed to protecting and where appropriate, enhancing the Borough's historic environment. This includes ensuring that buildings and features of Local architectural and historic interest (which are not necessarily recognised components of the historic environment) are taken fully into account and safeguarded..."

Local planning policy RC5 also reiterates that local heritage assets should be safeguarded and development must not only take account of them, but ensure it has "no adverse Impact" on them.

Listed Building Description

Number 149 Friar Street is listed as Queen Victoria Street Nos 1 to 31 (odd) Nos 2 to 32 (even) including Nos 148 and 149 Friar Street and Nos 24 to 28 and 35 to 37 (consecutive) Broad Street.

The building dates from circa 1894 as a commercial street with returns to Broad and Friar Streets. Probably built by Joseph Morris. It has a Dutch gable in a free Baroque style. It stands to 3 1/2 storeys, built in yellow brick and terracotta with dividing Ionic pilasters, a dentil cornice, pilasters to the dormers, and broken pediments above. An elongated pattern of shallow bays to 1st and 2nd floors 4:2:1:1:1:1:3. Mullion and transom window to bays, sashes with architraves (and pediments on 1st floor) to rest. Modern shopfronts, retaining cornice to fascia and scroll brackets to pilasters, only one shop retains pre-war shopfront. Large returns to Broad Street. The return to east (No 28 Broad Street) supported by No 26 (dated 1894, grey brick with red terracotta dressings) and by No 24 (an early C20 Bank with -large shaped pediment doorway on corner to Cross Street; red brick with stone dressings and stone fret patterns to gables).

The ground floor is used as a shop. The offices above have a separate central entrance with large timber double doors and large ornate (possibly mahogany) stairs. The building retains original sash windows and internally a large number of original features including fireplaces, stairs, ceiling cornices and picture rails, dado rails and wainscoting, door surrounds and decorative corbels, a large stair light with leaded obscured glazing, lath-and-plaster ceilings and timber floorboards.

It appears the Queen Victoria Street development commissioned by Joseph Charles Fiddler (1848-1903), a local businessman and councillor, creating a new link between Friar Street with Broad Street; the architect was probably Spencer Slingsby Stallwood. The property bears the date 1894 possibly in a phased development.

Proposals

The main changes would be:

- re-configuration of the layout with removal of partition walls
- sound-deadening and insulation to the floors between each storey from lifting floorboards, installing the insulation and re-fixing
- changes confined to interior of the basement floor, ground floor, first floor, second floor and third floor;
- creation of new walls to change the layout and circulation of the rooms; and
- infilling of door openings, widening of door openings and new doors
- moving of fireplaces
- exposing roof trusses to upper floor
- addition of rooflights

The following detailed alterations are proposed:

- Basement - Conversion to ancillary use for showers, bikes etc.
- Ground floor- No substantial changes apart from removal of internal, modern glass lobby screens. Replace services in more discreet area. Installation of lift platform for disabled access to first floor.
- First floor - Flexible office space. Restore the landing area. Remove a number of partition walls beneath downstands. Install glazed screens. Fireplace in small room to be moved to third floor. Create WCs and partitions
- Second floor - Traditional office space. Remove a number of partition walls with downstands preserved. Install glazed screens. Fireplace in small room to be moved to third floor. Replace collapsed ceilings in plasterboard. Create WCs and partitions.
- Third floor - Open plan offices. Remove a number of partition walls with downstands preserved. Some partitions, especially the toilet area obscure windows. No fireplaces removed but re-located fireplaces from first and second floors (F04 & S05) here. Creation of partitions for WCs. Install

internal guttering within the internal open wooden gutter running along the inside of the wall line, which currently has a poor flow; new glazed screens (including timber surrounds) to internal office entrances, new glazed partitions to meeting rooms, new toilet, store and tea point partitioning,

- General - Floor boards to be refurbished and insulation inserted. Cornices and ceilings to be repaired. Window repairs. Door repairs.
- Roof - replace lead flat roof linings. Remove the 3rd floor ceiling (already partially removed) to expose the impressive King post roof truss. Repair and renew the roof and install insulation and insert plaster boarding under the rafters. Introduce new rooflights.

Discussion

The interior although weathertight is in a poor state of repair and many ceilings and walls have been partially removed/opened-up as part of investigations into the structure. However, many features of architectural and historic interest remain including, dado rails, ceiling cornices, skirting boards, floorboards and ornamentation, ornate marble fireplaces, staircases, sash windows, stairwell windows, main doorway, ornate radiators, decorative roof trusses, decorative corbels to hallways landings.

Whilst the first and second floors have spacious cellular offices the third-floor is simpler with lesser architectural quality and lower ceiling heights, simpler mouldings and cast-iron fireplaces. The basement is utilitarian, with functional brick floors and exposed wall finishes and a slate shelved safe with metal door.

The submitted plans which require re-configuration of the building but many of the demolition proposals would involve removal of later partition walls which detract from the character of the building or ceilings which obscure features such as the decorative king post roof. No proposals for alterations to the fenestration are included in the application and there are no proposals to alter the original staircases. There are many beneficial proposals including rationalisation of services, repairs and refurbishment of the original architectural features. However, where original lath-and-plaster walls would be lost, the downstands including the cornices should be retained. The loss of these walls and partial loss of the original layout could be accepted on balance to ensure a sensitive sustainable use which reflects the original function of the building as offices.

Conclusions

The works would lead to the retention of the building in an economic use which should not harm its special interest and there would therefore be no objection in principle to the works subject to conditions regarding:

- Retention of wall downstands
- Details of disabled access to stairs.
- Repairs to floorboards
- New rooflights

- Repair of plasterwork
- Removal and re-location of fireplaces
- Protection of internal features during construction
- New doors

Transport: No objection.

Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).

In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Development Framework (LDF) (Core Strategy and Sites and Detailed Policies Document) according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

Reading Borough LDF Core Strategy (RCS) (Adopted January 2008 - amended 2015)

CS7 Design and the Public Realm

CS24 Car/Cycle Parking

CS33 Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment

Sites and Detailed Policies Document (SDPD) (2012, altered 2015)

DM4 Safeguarding Amenity

Reading Central Area Action Plan (RCAAP) (2009, altered 2015)

RC5 Design in the Centre

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Supplementary Planning Documents:

- Parking Standards and Design (Supplementary Planning Document).

Appraisal

The main issues are:

- a) Principle
- b) Design, Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area and Impact on the Listed Building
- c) Amenity
- d) Transport Issues

a) Principle

Although an extant permission is in place for the conversion of the building to residential units, the ownership of the site has since changed and the new owner wishes to retain the existing lawful use. Given the residential permission has not been implemented there is no 'loss' of residential accommodation and, as no change of use is sought by this permission, there are no land use basis for resisting the proposals. Moreover, in heritage terms, the retention of the long-time lawful use is considered preferable.

b) Design, Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area and Impact on the Listed Building

As per the Historic Building Consultant's comments above, the proposals are considered in overall terms to be appropriate. More specifically, the works would lead to the retention of the building in an economic use which should not harm its special interest and there would therefore be no objection in principle to the works subject to various conditions (largely seeking further details of various elements, and also ensuring the retention of wall downstands). Thus, in overall terms, it is not considered that the proposal would harm the historic character of the grade II listed building and is considered to be in accordance with Policy CS33.

c) Amenity

In light of the nature of the works, it is not considered that the works would result in any loss of amenity (in terms of Policy DM4 elements). Furthermore, the various internal alterations would enable a suitable standard of office accommodation to be provided for various future potential occupiers.

d) Transport Issues

The proposal includes cycle storage at basement floor level, which transport officers raise no objection to.

CONCLUSION:

The proposed works are considered to be appropriate in the context of national and local planning policy and other material considerations as set out in this report. As such, Listed Building Consent is recommended for approval, subject to the recommended conditions.

RECOMMENDATION:

GRANT Listed Building Consent.

Conditions

1. The works to which this consent relate shall be begun not later than the expiration of three years from the date of this consent.

Reason: in accordance with Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The consent relates only to the following plans/drawings/documents, and the works hereby approved shall be carried out in all respects in accordance with the submitted application and accompanying drawings:

PL-0100 A Location Site Plan
PL-0010 A Existing Basement Plan
PL-0011 A Existing Ground Floor Plan
PL-0012 A Existing First Floor Plan
PL-0013 A Existing Second Floor Plan
PL-0014 A Existing Third Floor Plan
PL-0015 A Existing Roof Plan
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office refurbishment/alterations 149/150 friar street and 2/4 queen victoria street, reading
design and access statement (including brief planning statement and heritage statement) Issue
01 dated 9 July 2018, as received 09/07/18

Reason: This is to ensure that the works carried out are fully in accordance with the approved drawings and details in order to protect the special historic and architectural character of the listed building, in accordance with Policy CS33 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008 (Altered 2015).

3. Unless such work is clearly and specifically referred to on drawings or other documents approved, no wall downstands shall be removed without the written approval of the local planning authority.

Reason: In order to safeguard the special architectural and historic interest of the building in accordance with the requirements of Policy CS33 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008 (Altered 2015).

4. Prior to commencement of the relevant part of the works, details of the following shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Council:
 - a) Details of disabled access to stairs.
 - b) Repairs to floorboards
 - c) New rooflights
 - d) Repair of plasterwork
 - e) Removal and re-location of fireplaces

- f) Protection of internal features during construction
- g) New doors

The works shall not be carried out other than in full accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In order to safeguard the special architectural and historic interest of the building in accordance with the requirements of Policy CS33 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008 (Altered 2015).

Informatives

1. Officers have worked positively and proactively to provide a recommendation for approval to be made within the agreed time period.
2. For the avoidance of doubt, no other works are approved except those as authorised by this Consent. Any other works required to the Listed Building may require a separate application for Listed Building Consent and/or an application for Permitted Works to a Listed Building.