

48 RUSSELL STREET, READING, BERKSHIRE

HERITAGE STATEMENT



JPHERITAGE

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PROJECT: 48 Russell Street, Reading Berkshire

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

28 RUSSELL STREET, READING - HERITAGE STATEMENT**1.0 INTRODUCTION****1.1 Project background**

- 1.1.1 This Heritage Statement has been prepared by JP Heritage on behalf of Neil Georgeson to inform and in support of a listed building consent application for alterations and a first floor extension.
- 1.1.2 This document provides an outline description of the historic development and significance of the Grade II listed building and an assessment of impact of the proposed alterations. This has been undertaken to meet the requirements of the LPA in accordance with paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, March 2012). The report was produced using the guidance contained within the Historic England document entitled *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (2008).

2.0 POLICY CONTEXT**2.1 NPPF**

- 2.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 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).
- 2.1.2 Annex 2 of the NPPF defines a Heritage Asset as being *'a building, monument, site, place area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions.'* Heritage assets are the valued components of the historic environment. They include designated heritage assets and non-designated heritage assets.
- 2.1.3 In determining planning applications, the NPPF advises that local planning authorities should take account of (paragraph 131):
- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
 - The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
 - The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- 2.1.4 Specific guidance on the treatment of designated heritage assets (listed buildings) 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’.

2.2 Draft Reading Borough Local Plan (2017)

2.2.1 The Reading Borough Local Plan was issued as a draft in May 2017. The relevant historic environment policy for the proposed development is as follows:

- Policy EN1 Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment

3.0 UNDERSTANDING THE HERITAGE

3.1 Heritage Designations

3.1.1 48 Russell Street, Reading was added to the statutory *List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest* at Grade II on 14th December 1978. The list description reads as follows:

Nos 48 and 50. Circa 1840. 2 storeys, attic and basement, Bath stone pair with channelled ground floor, wide flat bracketed eaves cornice, hipped slate roof. 4 bays, round headed glazing bar sash window in architrave surrounds with raised arched panels on band between on first floor; French casements on ground floor opening onto balcony with contemporary cast iron railings. 2 panel doors, set in 2 storey recessed square bays, have plain bracketed pediment hood with antifixae. No. 48 has inscription ‘Bath Villa’ in Gothic script and a hand and wreath knocker, and retains some arrow-head rails. 2 storey 3 window bow of red brick headers at rear of No. 48.

3.1.2 48 Russell Street is located within the Castle Hill/Russell Street Conservation Area.

3.2 Historical background

3.2.1 Russell Street and Baker Street formed part of the expansion of Reading in the later 18th and 19th centuries. Local builder William Pratt Swallow first developed Russell Street from the 1820s. Pevsner’s *Buildings of England* edition for Berkshire comments on Russell Street: ‘Here a good run of c. 1820-34 on the W side, rising to 3 storeys and culminating in big singles and pairs at Nos 38-50’. 48 Russell Street appears to have been built in the late 1830s to early 1840s.

3.2.2 The Ordnance Survey Town Plan for Reading (1879) provides details of the footprint of 48 and 50 Russell Street. This shows the rising steps of the principal access to the building. To the side (north) there is an enclosure which was the servants’ access to the basement. Steps are clearly shown in a similar position at No. 50. There is a clear boundary separating the front garden from the private garden to the rear.

3.2.3 Details for the rear elevation include steps at the northern end which provided access from the ground floor to the private garden. To the south of the steps there are two small areas which have been outlined. These are interpreted as a ground floor balcony and the light-well or ‘area’ in front of the openings in the basement. There is no indication of any steps into this light-well.



Figure 1: Ordnance Survey Town Map (1879) showing the footprint of 48 and 50 Russell Street

- 3.2.4 Subsequent Ordnance Survey maps (1900, 1912, 1934 and 1958) do not show any alterations to the footprint of either 48 or 50 Russell Street.
- 3.2.5 Sale Particulars dating from 1921 do, however, does provide an insight into the use and layout of rooms at this time. The description reads as follows:

BATH VILLA,

No. 48 Russell Street, Reading.

Built of stone with slated roof and occupying a pleasant situation on the upper part of Russell Street, and within easy access to the centre of Town and Stations.

The accommodation comprises:

On the Ground floor – Spacious Entrance Hall with door communicating to Garden, and off which is a W.C. and Cupboard.

Large Dining Room, 19ft 6ins by 15ft 6ins, fitted grate and folding doors communicating with –

Drawing Room, 13ft 4ins by 12ft 4ins, with French casement doors opening on to Garden.

On the First Floor – Two Good Bedrooms, each fitted grates and one with hanging cupboard.

On the Second Floor – Two Good Bedrooms, each fitted grates and one with hanging cupboard and bath.

In the Basement – Kitchen, fitted range dresser and cupboard; ***Scullery***, with range and sink; ***China Cupboard***; ***Larder*** and ***Coalhouse***.

Large Garden, including Lawn

And few fruit trees. Side Entrance.

- 3.2.6 This description confirms that there were two main entrances, one at the front and another providing access to the private garden to the rear, and a secondary entrance on the side of the building which clearly provided access to the basement and the service area of the house.
- 3.2.7 Of interest is the listing description which mentions a 2-storey bow of brick construction in header bond. There is no clear evidence for this in the fabric of the rear elevation, perhaps the modern first floor addition replaced the earlier bow.

4.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE



Figure 2: Front elevation of 48 Russell Street

- 4.1 48 Russell Street forms part of a fine semi-detached villa of Italianate design and dating from the later 1830s to early 1840s. The Italian Villa style of the building is most clearly expressed by the front elevation which includes a low pitched roof, projecting eaves with prominent brackets, round headed windows, tall ground floor windows, balconies with wrought iron railings and pedimented front door. The symmetrical composition of these elements is also most clearly expressed on the front elevation. The rear elevation, as to be expected, is plainer and does not follow the regular rhythms of the façade. This is also where the greatest level of change has taken place and, as a result, the original design of the building is not as coherent.



Figure 3: Rear elevation of 48 Russell Street

- 4.2 The use of Bath stone is an important element of the building's character and sets it apart from the other contemporary buildings along Russell Street. These are of brick construction which is a strong characteristic of Reading buildings of this period and later. Nos. 48 and 50 Russell Street therefore create a strong contrast in the street scene and this contributes positively to the character and appearance of the Castle Hill/Russell Street Conservation Area.
- 4.3 The floor plan of the building basically comprises a large front room and a smaller room to the rear, each served by a fireplace. This remains highly legible on the ground and first floors as well as the basement. There has been some sub-division on the second floor but this is minimal. Smaller spaces for utility and bathroom/WC use are housed in the side entrance, much as was the case in 1921. The dog-leg stairs with slender square section balusters are an important element of the original design of the interior. The floor plan and associated features are therefore highly intact and legible in the building today.

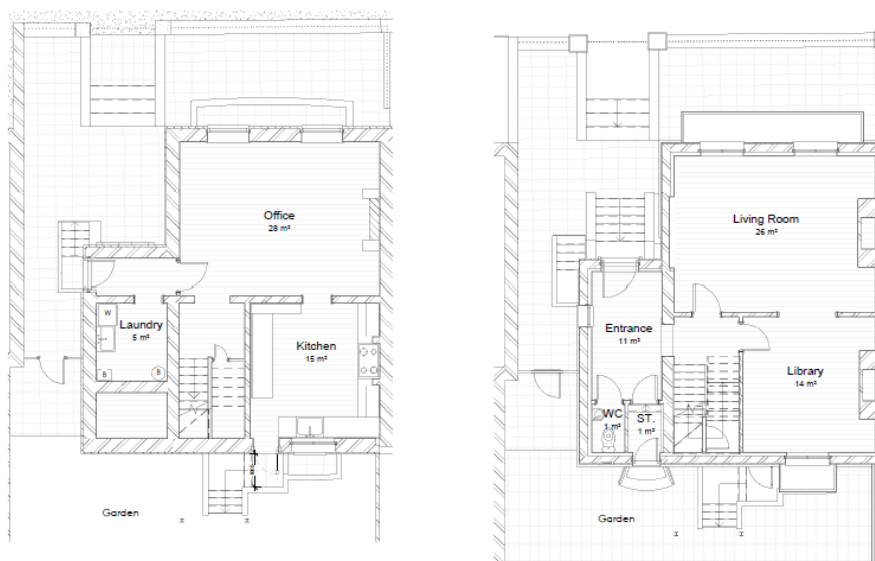


Figure 4: As existing plans of the ground and first floors of 48 Russell Street

- 4.4 The above demonstrates the architectural interest of the listed building. It is also, however, of local historical interest. 48 and 50 Russell Street form part of an important group of buildings along Russell Street which reflect the historic development of this part of Reading from the 1820s to the 1840s. The builder, William Pratt Swallow, was a local property developer and was the 'founder' of Russell Street.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Proposals

- 5.1.1 The proposals include the following:

- First floor extension to the side entrance;
- Insertion of bi-fold doors on the rear elevation;
- Removal of a partition in the basement;
- Replacement of floor finishes in the basement.

5.2 First floor extension

- 5.2.1 A first floor extension has already been added to the side entrance of No. 50. This involved the removal of the parapet on the front elevation but the form has been replicated. A similar approach is proposed for No. 48, re-using the salvaged masonry from the existing parapet. The pitched roof over the first floor extension at No. 50 does, however, have an uncomfortable junction with the eaves of the existing building. It is therefore proposed to replicate the existing parapet with a concealed shallow pitched roof finished with slates. The highest point of the parapet would sit below the projecting eaves of the main part of the house and the addition would therefore remain subservient. Viewed from the street, the addition would mirror the addition at No. 50 and reinstate balance and symmetry to the façade, in keeping with the original design rationale.



Figure 5: First floor extension at No. 50 Russell Street



Figure 6: Shallow pitched roof and parapet of the existing side entrance

- 5.2.2 A small amount of historic fabric would be removed to create a single door width opening to the first floor extension. As the fabric in this location is plain ashlar walling, the impacts on significance will be minimal. No internal features of interest will be impacted by the proposed breach. Salvaged Bath stone can be kept to one side for repairs to the building as required.

5.3 Alterations to the rear basement wall

- 5.3.1 Proposals to the rear includes excavation to increase the size of the existing light-well and the removal of a section of wall to insert bi-folding doors. The enlargement of the light-well would not result in loss of historic fabric. The current steps and revetment wall are modern.

- 5.3.2 The rear elevation of No. 48 has been much altered, as follows:

- The original steps to the door leading from the ground floor to the garden have been replaced with concrete steps and modern railings;
- Addition of a first floor extension supported on steel posts which is out of keeping with the character of the building;
- Replacement of a sash window at first floor level with a large pane with top hung casements over;
- Insertion of a concrete balcony at a slightly higher level than the original;
- Removal of a window opening to create a door from the basement to the garden;
- Partial infilling of a window opening to the basement.

- 5.3.3 These changes have diminished the original character of the rear elevation. There is therefore some potential for enhancement, e.g. replacement sash at first floor level, replacement rear extension. These are both areas that the applicant is keen to address.



Figure 7: Modern steps and door opening to the basement from the rear garden

- 5.3.4 The proposed opening for bi-fold doors would result in the loss of what appears to be an historic window opening. However, this area of the building has been much altered. Comparison with the same part of the building at No. 50 demonstrates the original form and pattern of openings on the rear wall of the basement. This includes an opening with casements and a stone sill and a smaller window with iron bars. Whether the presence of two windows reflects some internal sub-division is unclear. Inspection of the walls and ceiling joists in the rear room of the basement at No. 48 did not suggest so. The rear room of the basement would have been quite dark and so two windows would make sense.



Figure 8: Arrangement of windows along the rear wall of the basement at No. 50 Russell Street

- 5.3.5 Returning to the rear wall of No. 48, it is clear that the door opening is a modern addition. There is a large area of cast concrete on the left hand side of the opening which is not sympathetic to the established character of the building. Analysis of historic documents and the evidence of the layout of the building demonstrates that the servants' entrance was on

the northern side of the house, below the main entrance. This would have been the only route in and out of the basement externally.



Figure 9: Servants' entrance to the basement along the north elevation

- 5.3.6 The window opening to the right of the modern door opening on the rear elevation has been partly infilled and the window itself is modern. The proportions of the window have been compromised. There is a Bath stone lintel over this window but this has been subject to some poor mortar repairs and contrasts with fine stonework on the rest of the building. Above the lintel is a large area of cement patch repair which appears to be associated with the insertion of a concrete balcony at a higher level than the original (compare with the balcony in figure 8). The jamb on the left hand side has been subject to a poorly executed mortar repair. Generally, the external appearance of this window opening is poor and in its present state does not make a positive contribution to the character of the building.



Figure 10: Modified window opening to the basement with large area of mortar infill over the lintel



Figure 11: Poor quality repairs to the jamb and lintel of the window and infilling to the lower half

5.3.7 Given the level of change to openings along the rear wall of the basement and the poor quality, modern interventions, it is considered that the window opening makes only a very limited contribution to the significance of the listed building. The original pattern and proportions of openings to the rear basement has been fundamentally altered. The proposed bi-folds would mark a departure from the existing pattern of openings but it would be an honest change which would reflect contemporary ideas on domestic architecture and the shifting relationship of the basement to the rear garden. Given that there are already two openings in this location, the proposed intervention would only require a minimal amount of loss of historic fabric. This element of the proposals presents an opportunity to remove unsightly cement repairs and refurbish this part of the building with quality materials and design, reflecting the changing use of the basement.

5.3.7 It is recognised that this element of the proposals would involve the loss of the traces of an original window opening, as described by a lintel and vertical ashlar forming the jamb on one side. Therefore appropriate mitigation of the loss could include historic building recording once the area of excavation to create the enlarged light-well has been completed.

5.4 Internal alterations

5.4.1 Internal alterations include the replacement of the existing floor in the basement and the removal of a dividing wall. The existing floors are all modern and therefore replacement of these will not impact on historic fabric. As detailed in the 1921 Sale Particulars, the principal rooms in the basement were the Kitchen and Scullery. It is most likely that the larger room at the front with larger fireplace served as the Kitchen, while the room to the rear was the Scullery. The Larder would probably have been on the northern side of the basement as would, probably, coal storage.

5.4.2 The removal of the partition between the current Office and Kitchen would result in some loss of historic fabric and some loss of definition between the two spaces. However, by keeping nibs the former arrangement of the floor plan will remain legible. This will be reinforced by the presence of two fireplaces/chimney breasts which clearly demonstrate two different spaces. The rest of the basement floor plan will remain unaltered.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The proposed alterations have been designed to create a larger open space and increased natural light in the basement. The first floor extension provides improved accommodation for bedrooms. There would be some impacts on historic fabric and plan form. These are, however, considered to have been mitigated through the retention of nibs in the basement, improvements to the state of repair and materials around the proposed bi-fold doors, building recording and the application of appropriate detailing/re-use of salvaged materials for the first floor extension. These changes do not adversely affect the significance of the building as identified in the statement at Section 4. As such, it is considered that the proposed development would not have an adverse impact on the overall significance of the listed building in accordance with paragraph 132 of the NPPF and the Reading Borough Local Plan Policy EN1.

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