

Heritage Assessment

17-27 Victoria Street, Reading



Pepa Holdings Ltd

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	1.0 Introduction	1
	2.0 Legislative and Planning Policy Framework	
	2.1 National Planning Legislation and Guidance	2
	2.2 Local Planning Policy and Guidance	3
	3.0 Background	
Approved by:	3.1 Historic development of Reading	4
	3.2 Historic map regression	5
	4.0 The Site	
	4.1 Introduction and Description	8
	4.2 Significance	9
Report Status: Pre-application Draft	5.0 Proposals	
	5.1 Description	10
	6.0 Impact Assessment	11
Issue Date: February 2017	7.0 Conclusion	12

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1.0 17-23 VICTORIA STREET, READING

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by CgMs Consulting Ltd, on behalf of Pepa Holdings Ltd. The report was requested in order to assess the impacts of proposed development, on the historic built environment, in particular on the significance of Nos 17-27 Queen Victoria Street, as part of the Grade II listed 1-31 Queen Victoria Street. Site visits were conducted by Simon Roper-Pressdee during October and November 2015, when inspections of the existing buildings, together with the surrounding area were undertaken.

Other documents have been referred to in the writing of this report and should also form important background reading for the report. These include (but not exclusively) the Listing Descriptions for the 1-31 Queen Victoria Street and both national and local government policy and guidance.

The Site is centred at approximately SO71512 73527. It is sited near the centre of Reading (Figures 1, 2 and 3), and as will be discussed later on, forms one part of a wider set of buildings, all (unusually) included in one listing. As such, this report will consider the Site in its

own right, whilst recognising that it forms an integral part of the listed buildings of Queen Victoria Street. The surroundings are heavily urban in character, with Friar Street sitting directly to the north, and Broad Street to the south.

All drawings and photographs used in this report are for indicative purposes only and are not to be referred to for technical detail. Reference should be made to the accompanying plans submitted as part of the planning application.

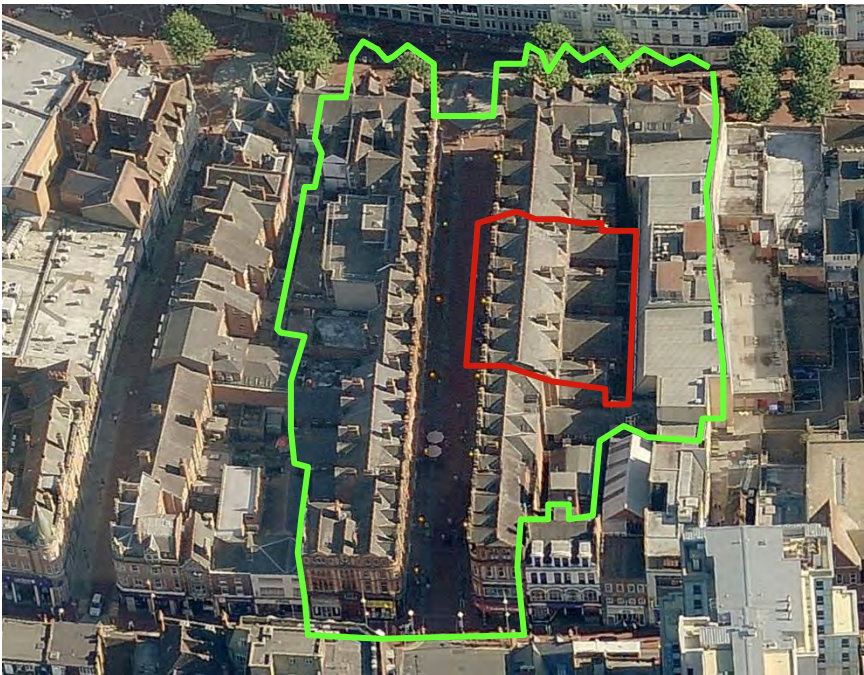


Figure 4: Satellite imagery of the listed building (in green) and the Site (in red) (courtesy Bing maps)

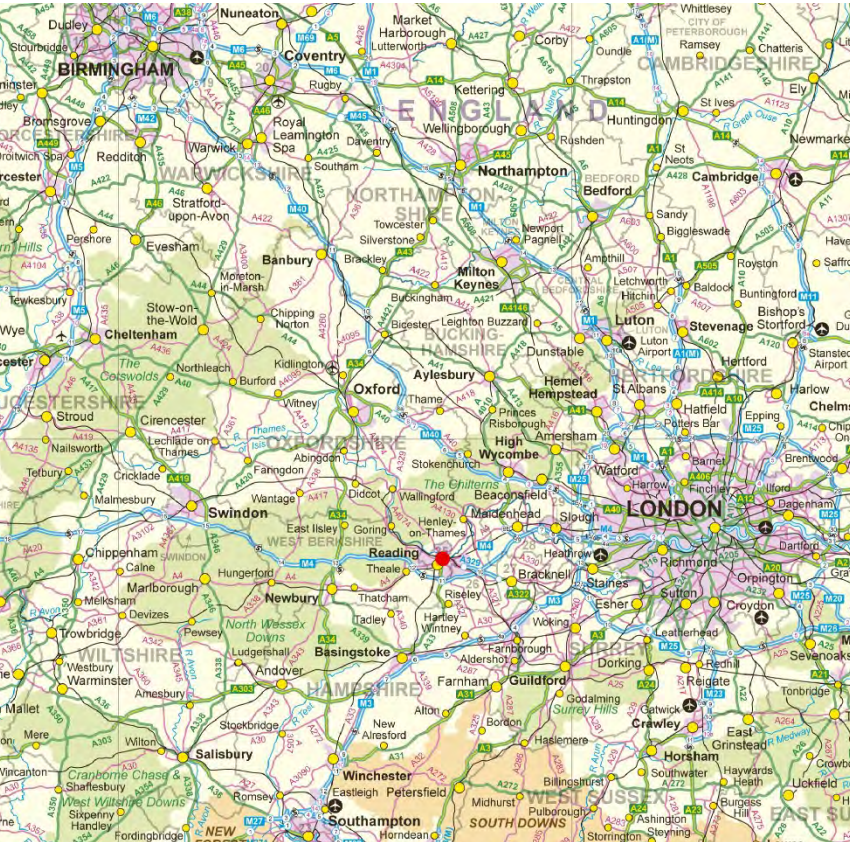


Figure 1: Site location, national context

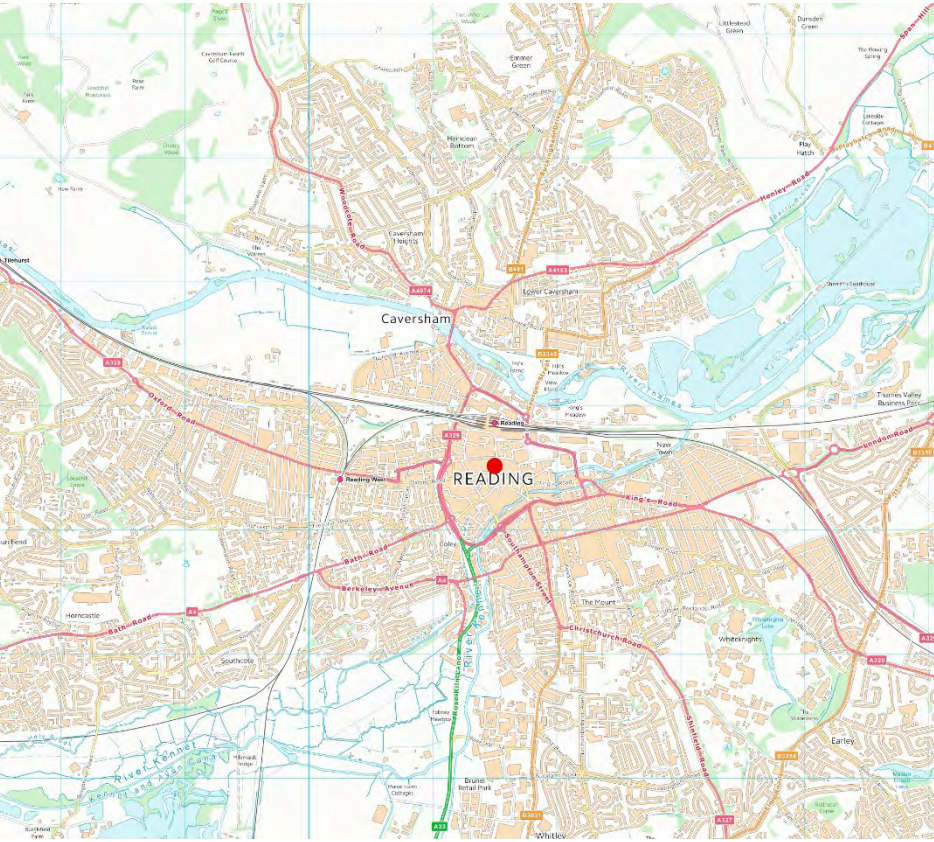


Figure 2: Site location, regional context

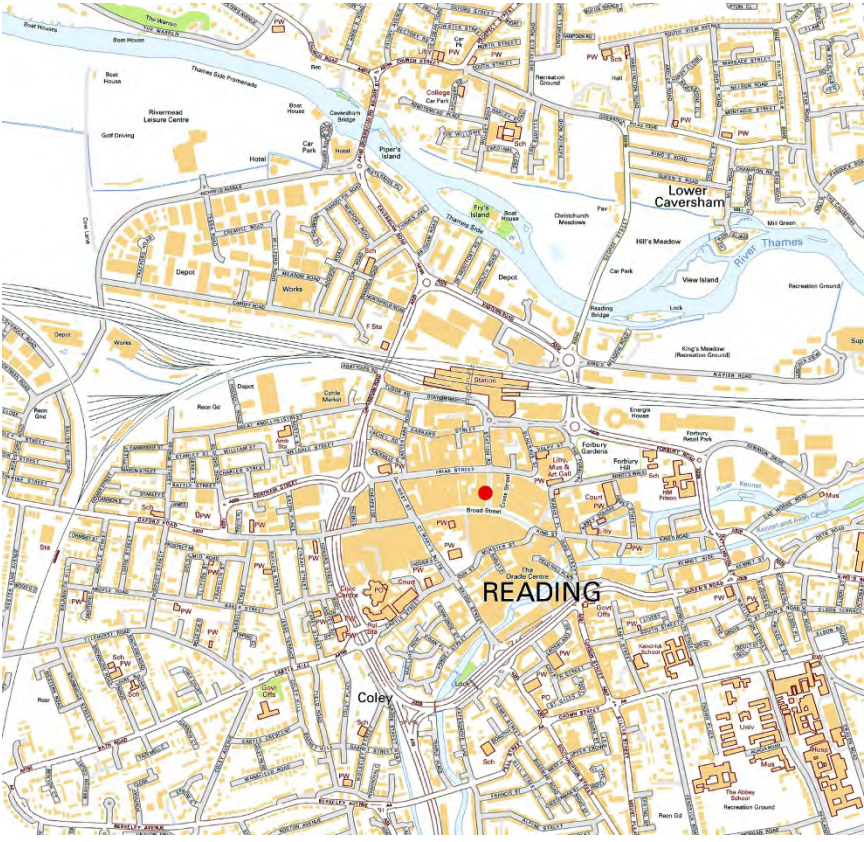


Figure 3: Site location, local context

2.0 LEGISLATIVE AND PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

2.1 LEGISLATION

Legislation regarding buildings and areas of special architectural and historic interest is contained within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The relevant legislation in this case extends from Section 66 and Section 72 of the 1990 Act. Section 66 states that special regard must be given by the planning authority in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing listed buildings and their settings, while Section 72 refers to the special regard to be given to the preservation and/or enhancement of conservation areas.

The meaning and effect of these duties have been considered by the courts in recent cases, including the Court of Appeal's decision in relation to Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Ltd v East Northamptonshire District Council [2014] EWCA Civ 137.

The Court agreed within the High Court's judgement that Parliament's intention in enacting Section 66 (1) was that decision-makers should give 'considerable importance and weight' to the desirability of preserving (i.e. keeping from harm) the setting of listed buildings.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (*March 2012*)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. When determining Planning Applications the NPPF directs LPAs to apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development; the 'golden thread' which is expected to run through the plan-making and decision-taking activities. This encourages LPAs to approve development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay.

Where a development plan is absent, silent or out-of-date, permission should be granted except where adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh those benefits, when assessed against NPPF policies as a whole; or where specific policies contained within the NPPF (including those with regard to designated heritage assets) indicate that development should be restricted to some degree.

Section 7 of the NPPF, 'Requiring Good Design' (Paragraphs 56 to 68), reinforces the importance of good design in achieving sustainable development by ensuring the creation of inclusive and high quality places. Paragraph 58 states that new design should respond to local character and history.

Section 12, 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment' (Paragraphs 126-141) relates to developments that have an effect upon the historic environment. This is the guidance to which

local authorities need to refer when setting out a strategy in their Local Plans for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. This should be a positive strategy where heritage assets should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. For clarification, the NPPF provides definitions of terms relating to the historic environment in a glossary in Annex 2.

Of particular relevance to this report are Paragraphs 132-135 which are concerned with the potential impacts of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset. Paragraph 132 states that where a development is proposed, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation and that the greater an asset's significance, the greater this weight should be. Paragraph 134 emphasises that where a proposed development will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of an asset, this should be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme, bearing in mind the great weight highlighted in Paragraph 132.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (*March 2014*)

National planning guidance has subsequently been adopted in order to guide the application of the NPPF. It reiterates that conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance is a core planning principle.

Key elements of the guidance relate to assessing harm. It states that substantial harm is a high bar that may not arise in many cases and that while the level of harm will be at the discretion of the decision maker, generally the degree of substantial harm will only be at a level where a development seriously affects a key element of an asset's special interest. It is the degree of harm, rather than the scale of development that is to be assessed.

Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (*English Heritage, 2008*)

Conservation Principles outlines Historic England's approach to the sustainable management of the historic environment. While primarily intended to ensure consistency in Historic England's own advice and guidance, the document is recommended to LPAs to ensure that all decisions about change affecting the historic environment are informed and sustainable.

The guidance describes a range of heritage values which enables the significance of assets to be established systematically, with the four main 'heritage values' being:

Evidential value: which derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.

Historical value: which derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.

Aesthetic value: which derives from the ways in which people draw sensory

and intellectual stimulation from a place.

Communal value: which derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

Overview: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning

The PPS5 Practice Guide was withdrawn in March 2015 and replaced with three Good Practice Advice in Planning Notes (GPAs) published by English Heritage (now Historic England). *GPA1: The Historic Environment in Local Plans* provides guidance to local planning authorities to help them make well informed and effective local plans. *GPA2: Managing Significance in Decision-Making* includes technical advice on the repair and restoration of historic buildings and alterations to heritage assets to guide local planning authorities, owners, practitioners and other interested parties. *GPA 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets* replaces guidance published in 2011.

At present there are some gaps in guidance, formerly provided by PPS5 Practice Guide. It is hoped that these gaps will be filled by the emerging GPA 4: Enabling Development and Heritage Assets, and the two Historic Environment Advice Notes entitled Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (HEA 1) and Making Changes to Heritage Assets (HEA 2), for which the consultation process finished on 17 April 2015.

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: Note 1 (GPA1): The Historic Environment in Local Plans

This advice note focuses on the importance of identifying heritage policies within Local Plans. The advice echoes the NPPF by stressing the importance of formulating Local Plans based on up-to-date and relevant evidence on economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area, including the historic environment.

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: Note 2 (GPA2): Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment

This document provides advice on numerous ways in which decision making in the historic environment could be undertaken, emphasising that the first step for all applicants is to understand the significance of any affected heritage asset and the contribution of its setting to that significance. In line with the NPPF and PPG, the document states that early engagement and expert advice in considering and assessing the

2.0 LEGISLATIVE AND PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

2.2 PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE –NATIONAL

significance of heritage assets is encouraged. The advice suggests a structured, staged approach to the assembly and analysis of relevant information:

- 1) Understand the significance of the affected assets;
- 2) Understand the impact of the proposal on that significance;
- 3) Avoid, minimise and mitigate impact in a way that meets the objectives of the NPPF;
- 4) Look for opportunities to better reveal or enhance significance;
- 5) Justify any harmful impacts in terms of the sustainable development objective of conserving significance balanced with the need for change; and
- 6) Offset negative impacts to significance by enhancing others through recording, disseminating and archiving archaeological and historical interest of the important elements of the heritage assets affected.

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: Note 3 (GPA3): The Setting of Heritage Assets

This advice note focuses on the management of change within the setting of heritage assets. This guidance updates that previously published by English Heritage (The Setting of Heritage Assets 2011) in order to ensure that it is fully compliant with the NPPF and is largely a continuation of the philosophy and approach of the 2011 document. It does not present a divergence in either the definition of setting or the way in which it should be assessed.

Setting is defined as 'the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve'. The guidance emphasises that setting is not a heritage asset or a heritage designation and that its importance lies in what it contributes to the significance of the heritage asset itself. Elements of setting may make a positive, negative or neutral contribution to the significance of a heritage asset.

While setting is largely a visual concept, with views considered to be an important consideration in any assessment of the contribution that setting makes to the significance of an asset, setting, and thus the way in which an asset is experienced, can also be affected by other environmental factors, including historic associations.

This document states that the protection of the setting of a heritage asset need not prevent change and that decisions relating to such issues need to be based on the nature, extent and level of the

significance of a heritage asset. It is further stated that the contribution made to an asset's significance by their setting will vary depending on the nature of the asset and its setting. Different heritage assets have the capacity to accommodate change differently within their settings, possibly without harming the significance of the asset (or even enhancing its significance) and, therefore, setting should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Although not prescriptive in setting out how this assessment should be carried out, Historic England recommend using a '5-step process' to assess any effects of a proposed development on the setting and significance of a heritage asset:

- 1) Identifying the heritage assets affected and their settings;
- 2) Assessing whether, how and to what degree these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s);
- 3) Assessing the effect of the proposed development on the significance of the asset(s);
- 4) Maximising enhancement and minimising harm; and
- 5) Making and documenting the decision and monitoring outcomes.

Local Planning Policy

The local planning policy context for the Borough is set out within the *Core Strategy (adopted July 2008; amended and updated January 2015)* as the current core policy document. Although Reading Borough Council are currently starting to prepare a new Local Plan, this is still at a very early stage, with the Issues and Options Consultation being undertaken in November 2015. Therefore, until such a time as this is complete and adopted, the Policies within the Core Strategy remain as material considerations within the planning process. The single policy that is considered relevant to this report states :

Policy CS33: Protections and enhancement of the Historic Environment

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.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 READING

The first mention of Reading is in AD871 within the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, with the Saxon settlement *Reada ingas*. Its early history was dominated by the invading Danes, who captured the settlement at the end of the Ninth century, although they appear to have razed the settlement in c.1006. It is mentioned in the Domesday book as being held by the King, rather than an overlord. From the outset, the settlement was recognised as a strategic settlement, being positioned on the route between London and settlements in the south-west such as Bath and Bristol. A timber fort is known to have been present during the early years following the Norman Invasion, although this was later replaced by a motte and bailey castle in c.1140—however, this was subsequently demolished in 1152-1153. An abbey was also built by Henry 1, between 1121 and 1125, following which the Abbot became the landowner of Reading and its surroundings.

The principal industry of Reading during the Medieval period was centred on cloth and wool, with evidence of watermills around the area. Other industries, such as boat building, leather and gold-smithing, are also noted in the area, helping to identify Reading as a focal settlement for the region. The moving of the county gaol from Wallingford to Reading during the fourteenth century further helps show the growing importance of the town during this period.

The Reformation, as with many parts of the country, saw a drastic alteration in the running of the town, with the closure of the Abbey in 1538-40 together with the Grey Friars and the St John the Baptist Hospital. The Abbot was hanged outside the Abbey gates for continuing to refute Henry VIII's claims to the leadership and head of the Church. Soon after the closure of the Abbey, the town was granted independence, with the formation of a town council and the right to elect a mayor.

The seventeenth century saw the local wool and cloth industry suffer, in particular from competition both from the continent, as well as from areas of England such as the Cotswolds. By the eighteenth century, the collapse of the wool and cloth trade was complete, and was no longer a major industry in the town, although the increase in other industries, such as pin-making nail-making and gun-smithing ensured that the industrial heart of the town continued. Other industries, such as brick and tile -making helped to allow Reading to continue as the principal town in Berkshire.

The Civil Wars, between 1642 and 1651, saw a division in loyalties between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians, a situation common in many parts of the country. Whilst in the first months of the First Civil War, Reading was occupied by the Parliamentary troops, the Royalist army overthrew the Parliamentarians without a fight, following which fortifications were built around the town, and over three thousand

troops were stationed in and around Reading. By 1643, the Royalist army abandoned Reading as it was too far behind enemy lines to hold and Reading remained in Parliamentary hands until the end of the war in 1646.

1688 saw the deposing of James II who fled abroad. Parliament invited William of Orange to replace him, who marched inland to Newbury. However, Irish troops loyal to James II remained stationed in Reading, and helped to secure the throne for Mary II, who was made Queen in 1689.

In common with many areas of the country, the eighteenth century saw much of Reading rebuilt and redesigned. The national concern over public hygiene also saw other improvements in Reading at this time, including the creation of the Improvement Commissioners. This period saw the rapid expansion of Reading, and together with the development of the canal system, such as Brindley's Grand Cross, and more locally the opening of the Kennet and Avon canal in 1810, the industry of Reading was again secured. The development of the railways, and their rapid replacement of the canal system c. 1840, saw Reading being linked directly with London, with travel times and costs, both for the public and for industry, considerably reduced.

The nineteenth and twentieth century, as with much of the country, has seen

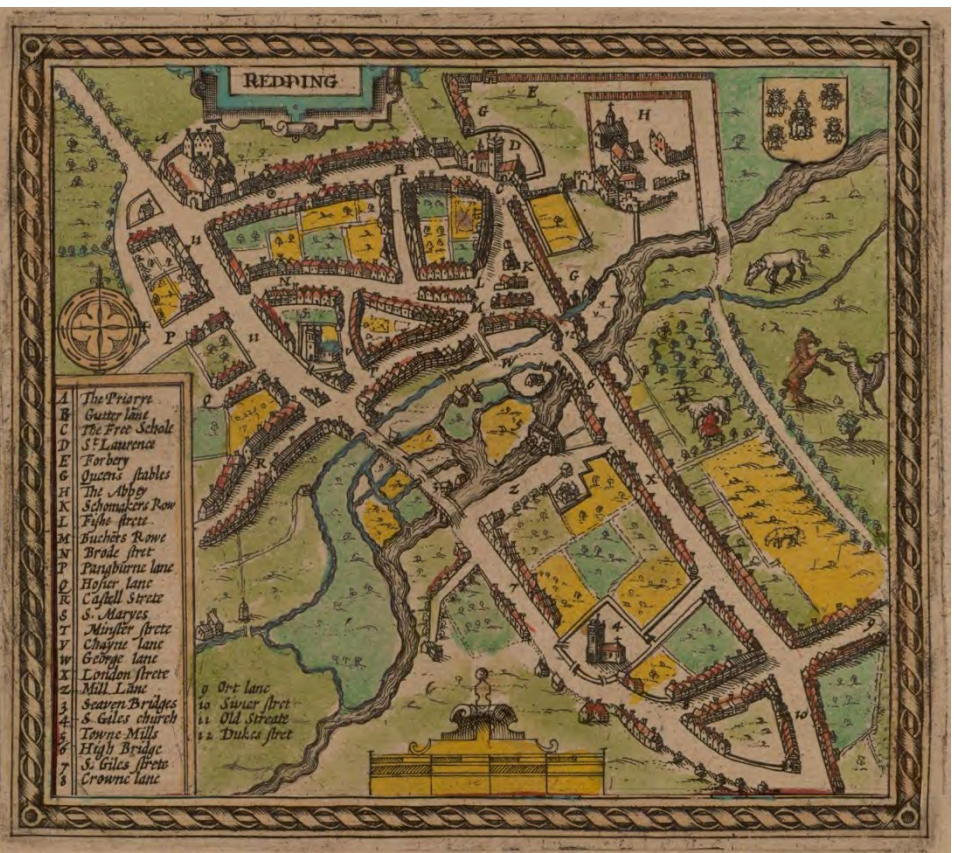


Figure 5: John Speed's map of Reading, 1611



Plate 1: Early photograph of Queen Victoria Street c.1901



Plate 2: Photograph of Queen Victoria Street, 1973

considerable expansion of the town, partially as a result of an increasing population, but also in part due to other factors, including the continuing development of the University, and the proximity of the town to the capital city.

3.0 THE SITE

3.2 HISTORIC MAP REGRESSION

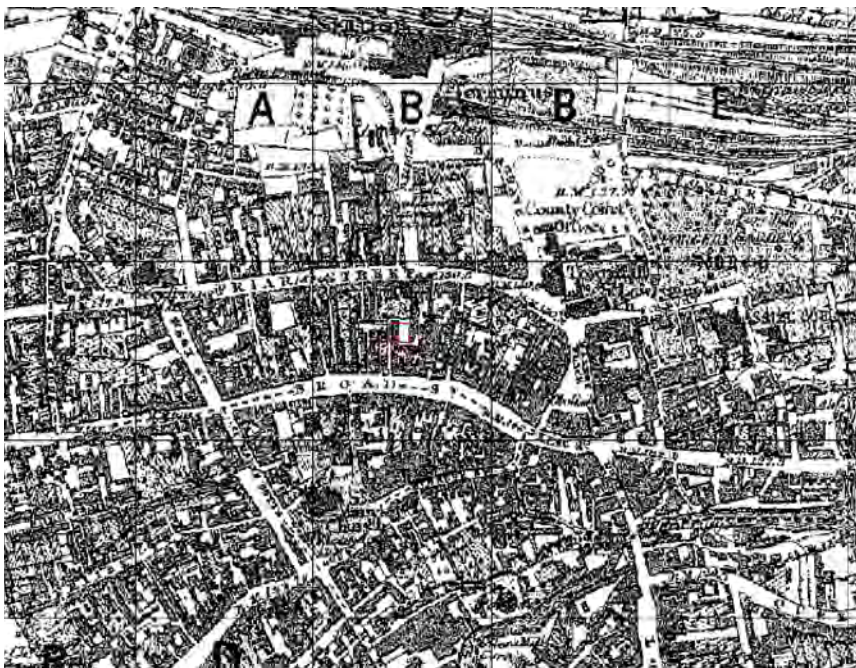


Figure 6: Ordnance Survey, 1883 (1:10,000)

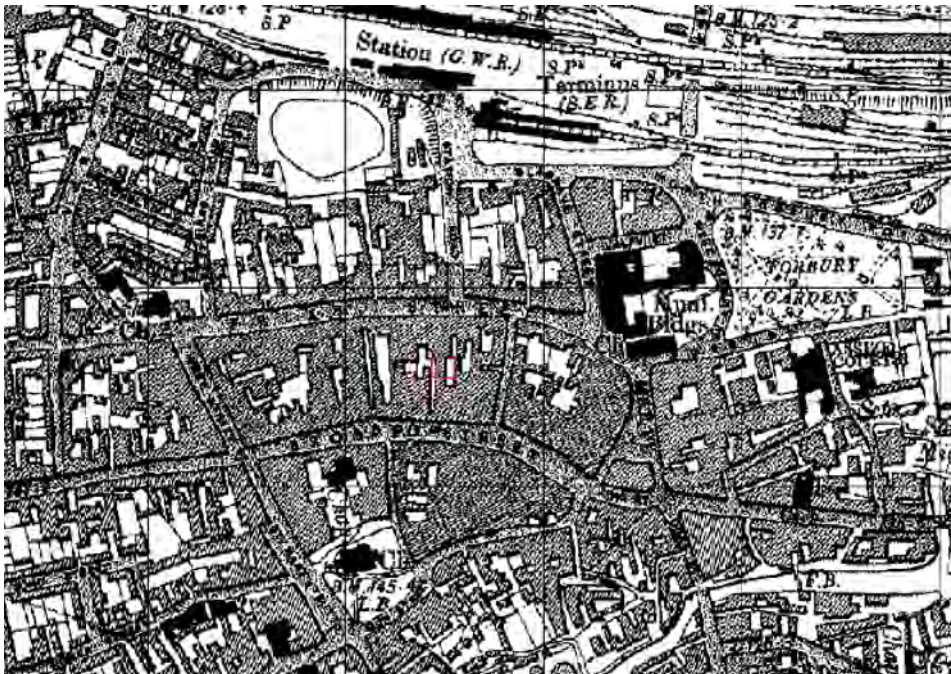


Figure 7: Ordnance Survey, 1900 (1:10,000)

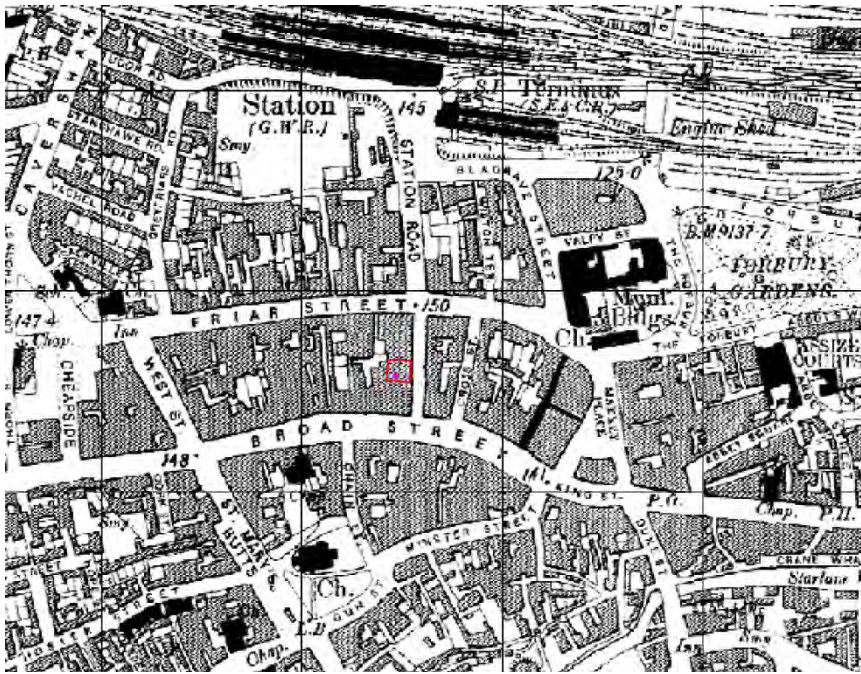


Figure 8: Ordnance Survey, 1954 (1:10,000)

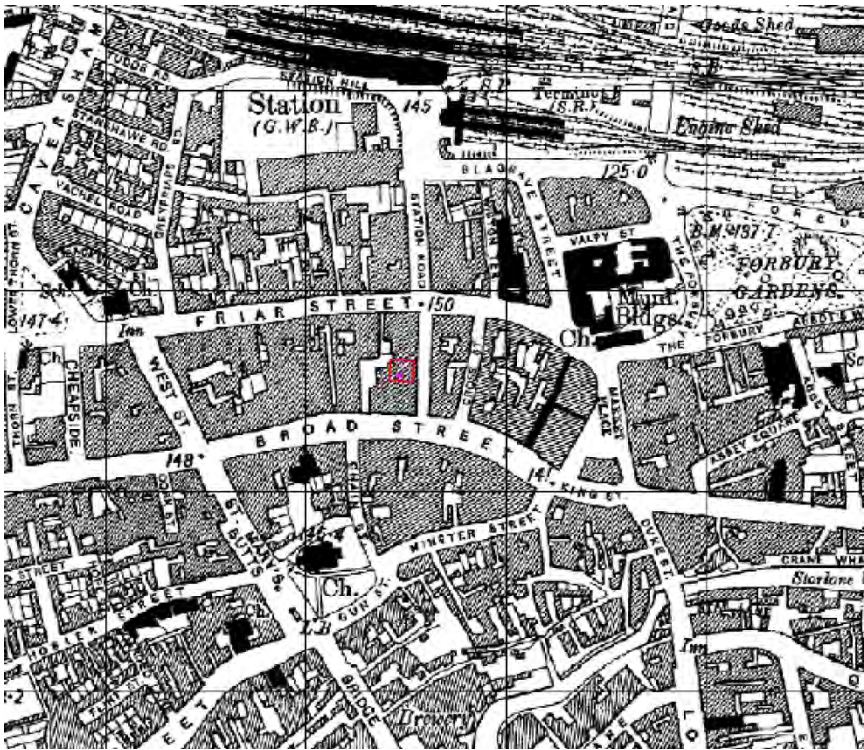


Figure 9: Ordnance Survey, 2006 (1:10,000)

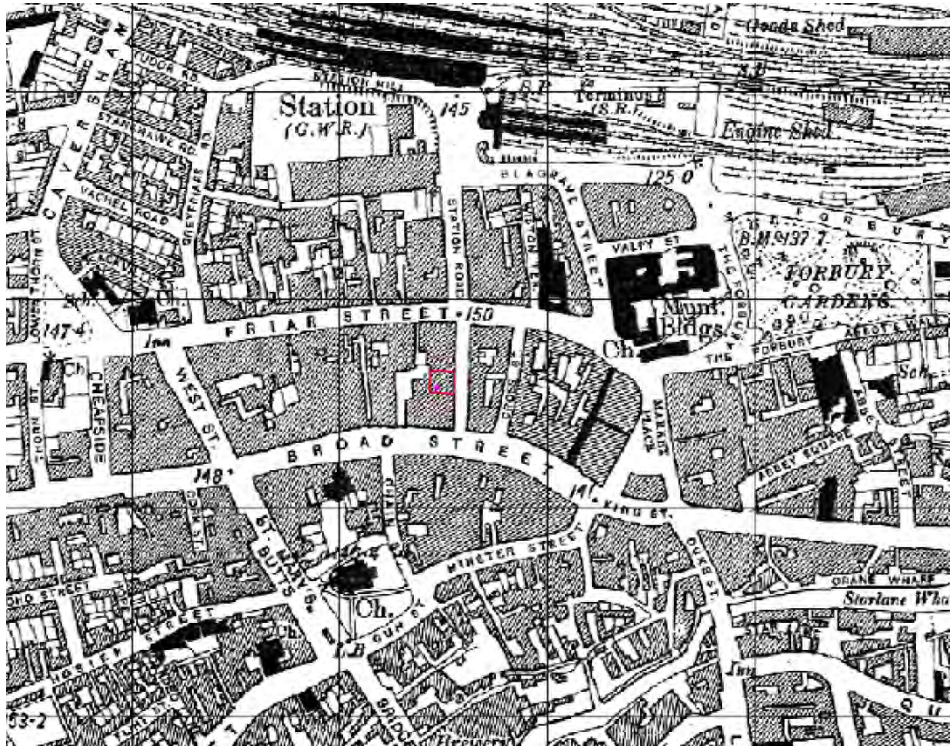


Figure 10: Ordnance Survey, 2006 (1:10,000)

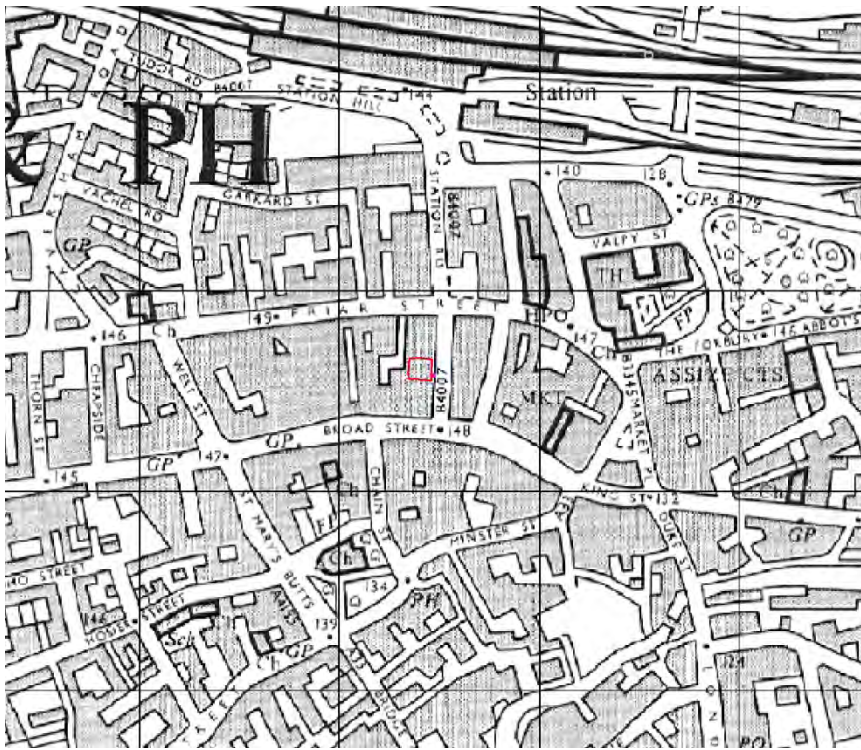


Figure 11: Ordnance Survey, 2015 (1:10,000)

3.0 THE SITE

3.2 HISTORIC MAP REGRESSION

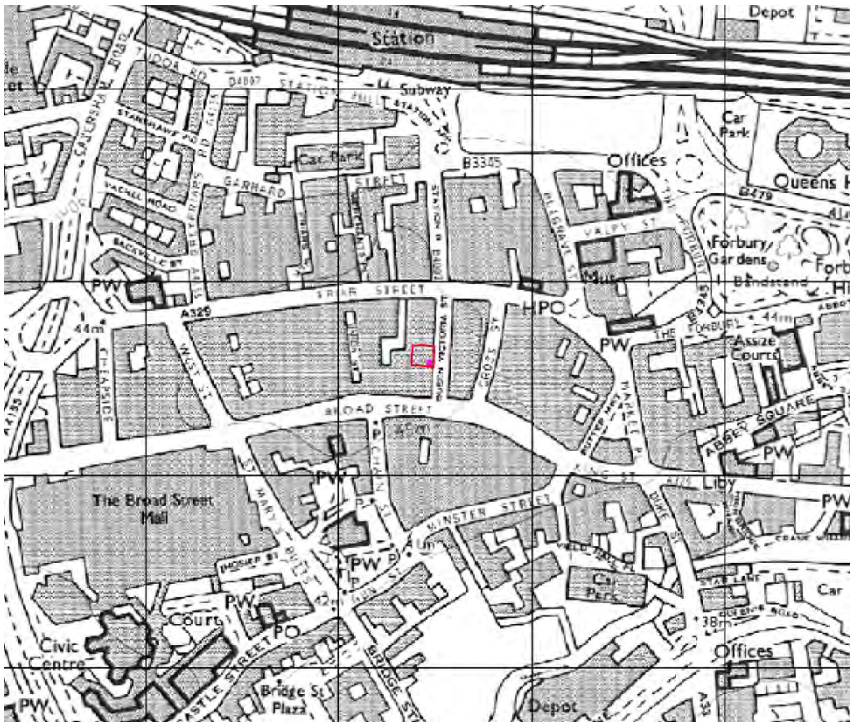


Figure 12: Ordnance Survey, 1884 (1:10,000)

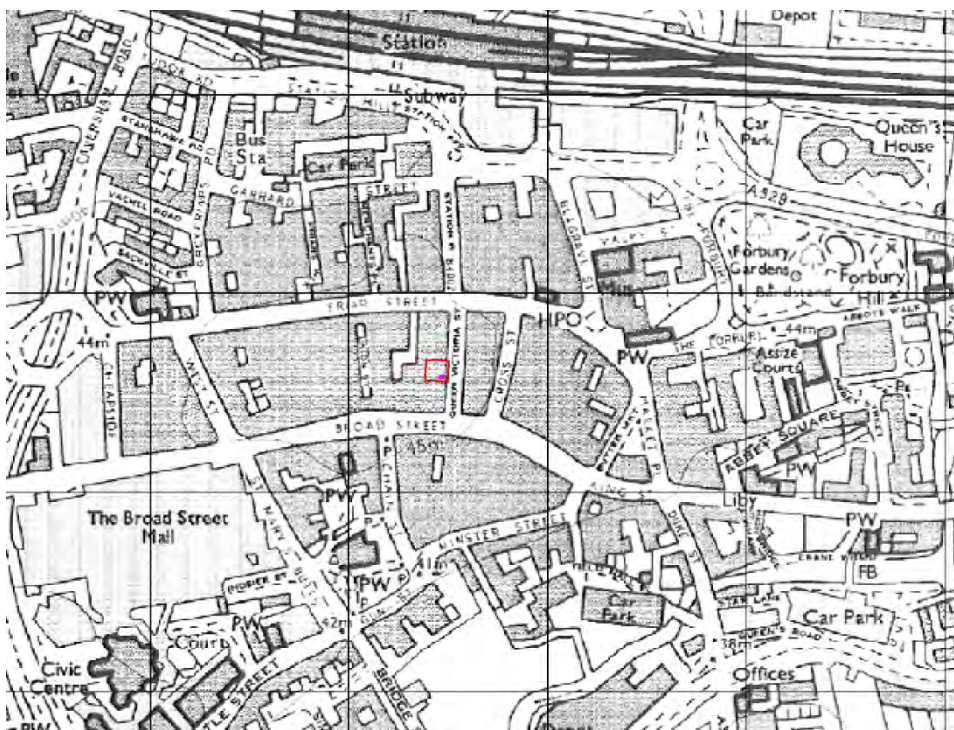


Figure 13: Ordnance Survey, 1905 (1:10,000)

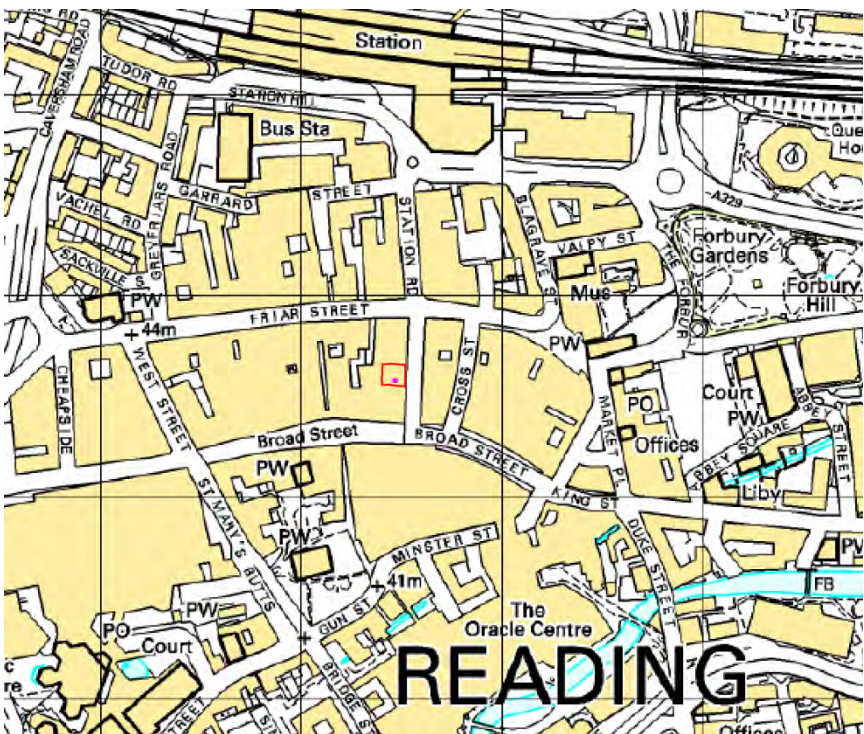


Figure 13: Ordnance Survey, 2006 (1:10,000)

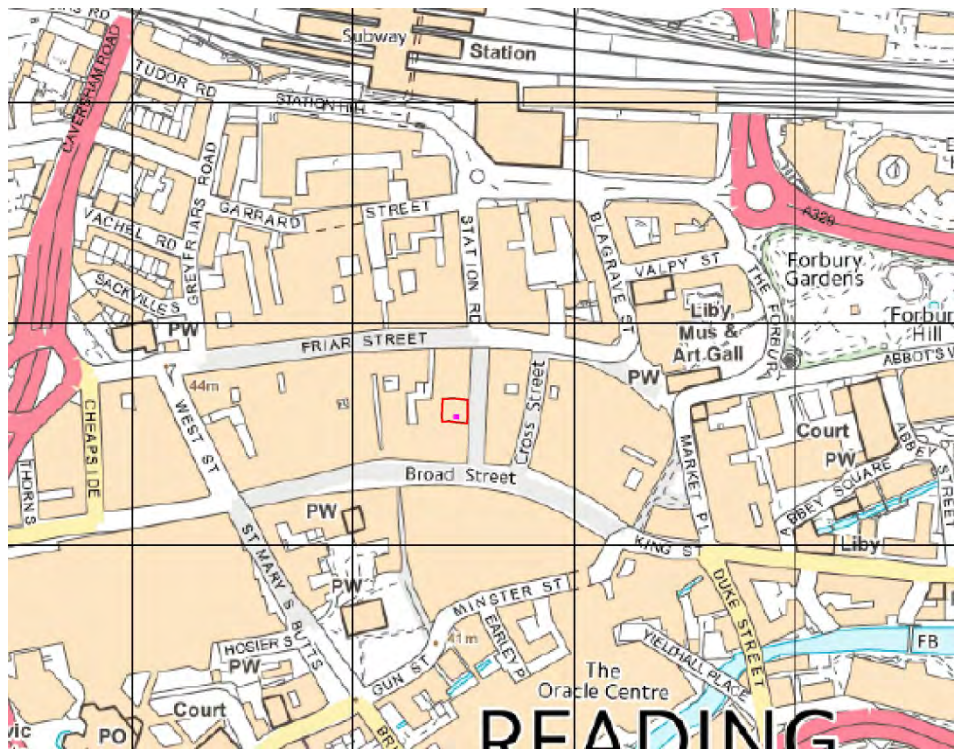


Figure 14: Ordnance Survey, 2006 (1:10,000)

3.0 THE SITE

3.2 HISTORIC MAP REGRESSION



Figure 15: Ordnance Survey 1879 (1:2500)

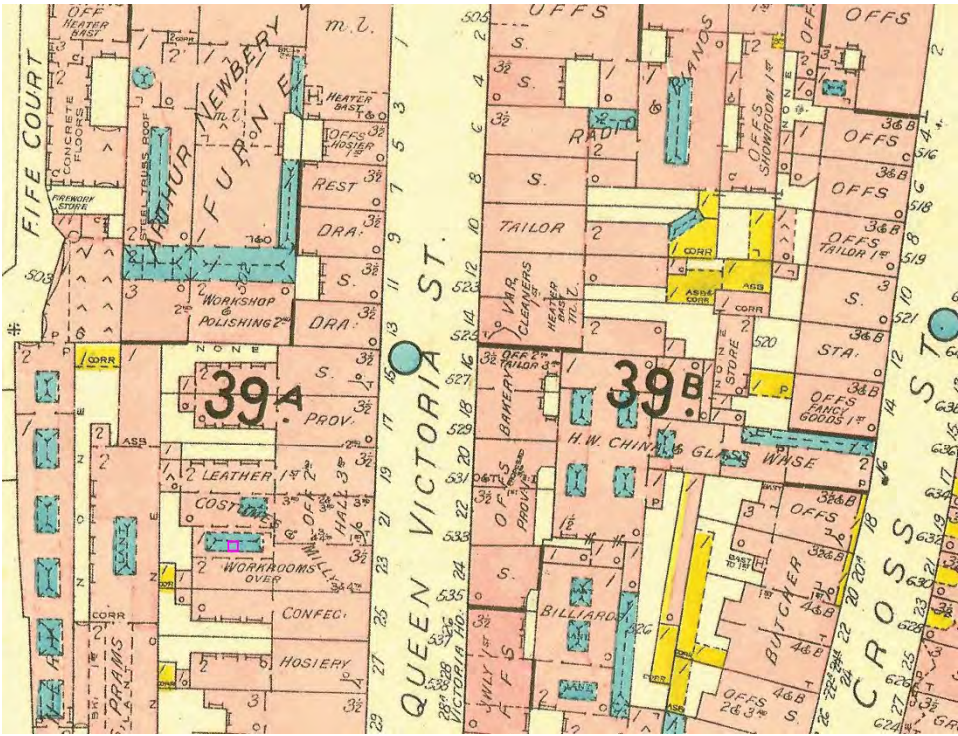


Figure 16: Extract from Goads Insurance Plan, 1897



Figure 17: Ordnance Survey, 1912 (1:2,500)



Figure 18: Ordnance Survey, 1931 (1:2,500)

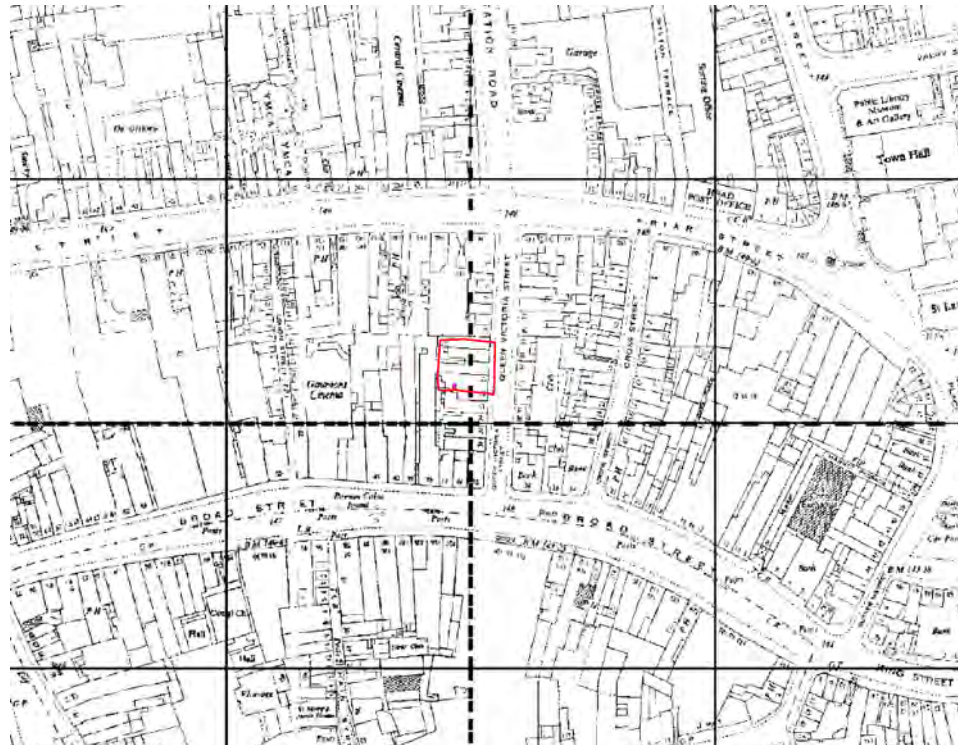


Figure 19: Ordnance Survey, 1957 (1:2,500)

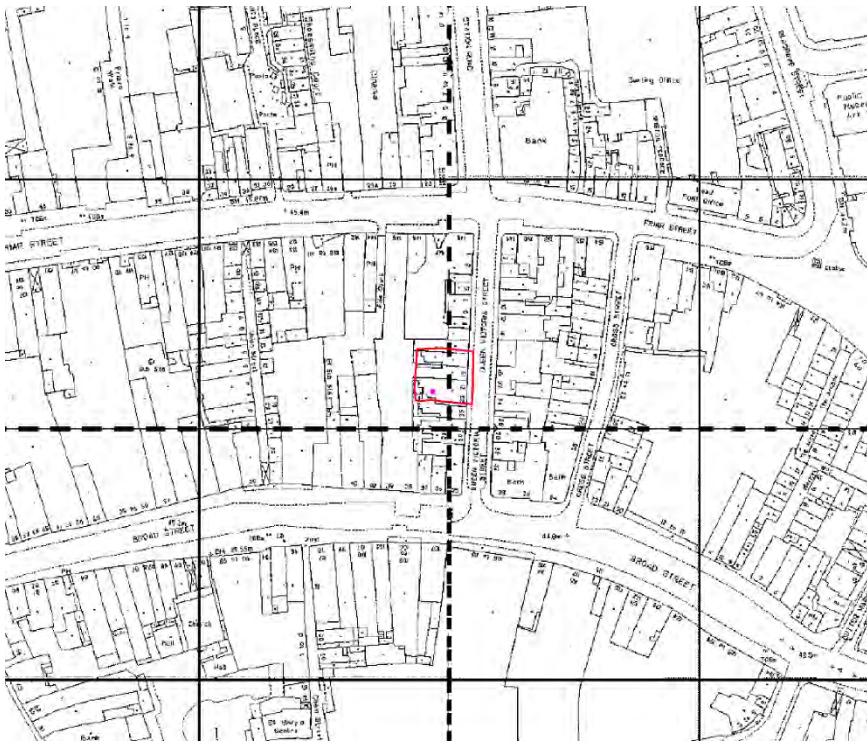


Figure 20 Ordnance Survey, 1993 (1:2,500)

4.0 THE SITE

4.1 INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION



The listed building consists of a set of buildings built in c.1894 and designed by Joseph Morris (the Berkshire County architect between 1872 and 1905). It is likely that the scheme was probably in response to the late nineteenth-century rejuvenation of the city centre. The buildings were designed to combine retail units, workshops and residences to provide for the various cottage industries developing within the area. The Site consists of a section of Queen Victoria Street, the whole of which is listed under one citation, recognising the value of the set of buildings forming both the southern and northern sides of the street. (Plate 3). It is clear from satellite imagery (Fig 4) that other areas of the listed building have been substantially altered, in particular to the rear elevations and to the upper floors, with various sections of the building having been subject to differing treatments, due to historic ownerships and varying levels of occupancy.

Externally, the two buildings rise over four storeys, and sit over twenty-two bays forming both the eastern and western elevations of Queen Victoria Street, and turn each corner to Friar Street and Broad Street. Modern shop-fronts are present along the whole road. At both first and second floor, the windows are pairs of stone-mullioned bay windows separated by a third bay containing a pair of sash windows (pedimented to the first floor), of which the Site occupies two sets of such bays on the western side of the street. The third floor is set within the attic space, with ornate Dutch gables containing windows for each bay. However, the units directly to the south of the Site have been recently altered, to include the removal of the original first floor windows, and their replacement with stark white shop-windows. The elevations are dressed in buff brickwork and deep red terracotta detailing.

Due to access limitations for the majority of the listed building, only the rear elevation of the Site has been inspected, and this reveals a more utilitarian elevation than that of the front. Faced in plain brickwork with simple brick arches for window openings, and simple Dutch gables at attic level, the rear elevation also has a series of two-storey rear wings, with courtyards in between and access to the rear. The roofs are generally pitched and covered in slate. To the rear of these lies the brick and steel wall for the WH Smith extension, which is attached to the listed building at Broad Street and forms the dominating backdrop for the rest of the listed building along the western side of the road.

Plate 3: View south along Queen Victoria Street (top left)
Plate 4: Front elevation of 17-27 Queen Victoria Street (middle left)
Plate 5: Rear elevation of 17-27 Queen Victoria Street, Reading (bottom left)
Plate 6: View of rear wings from second floor, and rear wing of WH Smiths (top right)
Plate 7: Flat roof extension to rear (middle right)
Plate 8: Single storey flat roof extension adjacent to rear wing of WH Smiths (bottom)



4.0 THE SITE

4.1 INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION



Whilst the main blocks to the rear are predominantly pitched, areas of the courtyards have been roofed over, resulting in flat roofs joining the rear wings at ground floor. This infilling has also resulted in a reconfiguration of elements such as soil & vent pipes and rainwater goods, with these now spread across the rear elevations and across windows. Furthermore, in particular at ground floor level, there have been several window blocked up, and other elements such as air-conditioning units and flues have been placed haphazardly across the rear elevations.

Internally, although the internal spaces have been heavily modified, amalgamating the units into two properties, the Site still retains much of the simplicity of the historic planform, which together with the presence of other internal features, allows the historic layout to be still largely legible. The front rooms at first floor were clearly the main domestic living room, facing the street, and each lit with large windows, and often with details such as decorative fire surrounds and hearths, deep skirting-boards, dado rails and coving. However, in some rooms, the party wall adjacent to the fireplace has been pierced, allowing direct access through to the adjacent property and room, and in others, the rear walls have been moved, and stud partitions sub-divide the rooms.

To the rear of these front rooms, are the hallways and staircases to second floor, although half of these have been removed—those that remain retain their turned balusters and timber handrails and newel posts, and often the tongue-and-groove boarding to their sides. Internal windows are largely present throughout, allowing borrowed light to the staircases. In some areas, the wall between the front room and the staircase has either been completely removed, or removed and replaced with modern stud partitions. The rear domestic rooms have also had a variety of treatments, with some retaining their features, and others either amalgamated into the front room through complete loss of walls, or have been subject to sub-division into smaller rooms, and doorways blocked up.

Suspended ceilings are present, although the original ceilings appear to be retained above. Door-frames and doors throughout the Site are a mix of historic, detailed frames and panelled doors, with the majority having been replaced with modern fire-doors and self-closers.

Plate 9: Fireplace and surround, together with modern piercing in wall (top left)
Plate 10: Bow window to front elevation (middle left)
Plate 11: Inserted stud partition, showing existing down-stand from previous original wall (bottom left)
Plate 12: Existing fireplace and surround to secondary rear room (top right)
Plate 11: Existing stairway to second floor? (middle right)



4.0 THE SITE

4.2 SIGNIFICANCE

This section initially assesses the significance of the listed building as a whole, considering both sides of the street as one list entry, although a full assessment and analysis of each element of the building was not possible, due to access restrictions and differing ownerships. This is followed by a more detailed assessment of the Site, and its contribution to the overall significance of the listed building.

1-31 Victoria Street

As already discussed, the listed building was built in c.1894 and was designed by Joseph Morris, in his capacity as the Berkshire County architect between 1872 and 1905.

The set of buildings covered by the single listing citation has considerable external aesthetic values, in particular through the use of Baroque design and style, and the use of contrasting materials, such as buff brickwork and red terracotta detailing. The aesthetic impact of these front elevations is considerably strengthened by the uniformity of the elevation, although this impact is heavily marred by the first floor architecture on the south-western section of the building, where large plate-glass windows are present, as opposed to the rhythmic terracotta bays. At ground floor, whilst continuing in retail use throughout the street, there are few historic shop-fronts, retaining all their original detailing, still present, with the majority having been subject to some degree of replacement or alteration—however, this concentration of retail units at ground floor level retains the general aesthetic character of the street, and of the buildings as a whole.

The rear of the listed building could not be inspected to any degree, due to ownership and access issues, but examining aerial photography it is clear that the buildings on both sides of the street have been subject to a variety of different treatments, with extensions, demolition, and considerable alteration. Whilst these elevations would have most likely been inferior in quality and detail to that of the front, due to the degree of alterations visible from aerial photography, it is clear there is little historic aesthetic value retained in the rear elevations. However, the rears of the Site were inspected, and these can be seen as having some degree of aesthetic and illustrative value, through their simplicity reflecting both the lack of importance afforded visually to the rear elevation, and the semi-industrial nature of the rear wings, which were intended to house workshops for the local “cottage” industries.

There is a considerable degree of historic value remaining within the listed building: it assists in illustrating the development and growth of eighteenth century industry within the local area, and the implications of such development on town planning, in particular considering the already relatively heavily-developed urban environment, and the combination of retail units, workshops and residences, providing for the various cottage-industries developing within the surrounding area. There is also some degree of associative value through the designs of Joseph Morris. However, as Morris is not recognised as being important beyond a regional level, and then only through his being the County architect, such values are limited in their contribution to the overall significance of the listed building.

There is some communal value in the buildings, in particular through their creation of an architecturally-unified shopping street, although this has little input to the overall heritage significance of the listed building.

17-23 Victoria Street

As part of the listed building, the Site continues to make a contribution to the aesthetic values of the listed building, in particular through its continuation of the Baroque design, and the terracotta and buff brickwork to the front elevation.

The rear elevation, again, makes a contribution to the overall significance of the listed building, through the relative intact simplicity of the elevation, and the presence of the rear wings, which, externally at least, have changed little. This aspect of the Site, however, is dominated by the steel shed built for WH Smiths, which has a considerable negative visual and dominating impact on the listed building. As many of these rear wings throughout the listed building appear to have been substantially altered or in some cases removed, the existing rear wings of the Site can be seen as having some degree of historic and aesthetic value.

Internally, the heritage values of the Site have suffered from a variety of different changes, some of which have already been mentioned. For example, the removal or replacement of partitions walls, and the knocking-through of what would have been party walls between individual properties, to create larger and more integrated spaces within the Site, has largely removed the experience of small, integrated workshop-cum-residence principal of the original design of the buildings. Whilst architectural details remain throughout the Site, such as stair-cases and fireplaces, many of these have previously been removed, which together with the alterations to the spatial layout of the Site, has resulted in a deterioration of the contribution of the Site to the overall significance of the listed building.



Plate 15: Front façade of 17 Queen Victoria Street



Plate 16: The rear wing of WH Smiths

There are also different degrees of retention of internal historic fabric and character throughout the Site, with some areas largely retaining their spaces unaltered (and with coving, dado rails and fireplaces still in place), whilst other areas have been subject to considerable alteration, with the introduction of suspended ceilings, the removal of fire surrounds, and the insertion of new partitions to create new spaces. This has led to a reduction in the degree to which the historic character and usage of the buildings, as individual properties and workshops, can be experienced, although the general character of the Site, as a mix of residential (albeit at the lower end of quality accommodation) and retail, is largely retained.

5.0 PROPOSALS

5.1 DESCRIPTION

The proposals seek the change of use of the upper floors of 17-27 Victoria Street to 19 no. of residential units. No alterations are proposed to the front elevation, and the retail units at ground floor will also be retained.

To accommodate the proposed residential use of the upper floors, various internal and external alterations are proposed, as follows:

External alterations

- The re-opening of one window to the rear wing of No.27; and
- the lowering of the opening currently for a window, to allow for a door/ balcony access, within the rear wing of No.25.

Internal alterations—First Floor

- No.17—insertion of new partition to front room; removal of staircase between first and second floors; repositioning of wall to corridor; new opening next to chimney stack providing access to No. 19; removal of internal walls and partitions to rear wing.
- No.19—removal of stud partitions to front room and erection of new wall in location of original wall; widening of existing doorway to staircase in No. 21; new doorway to existing partition to rear room of front wing; insertion of new stud partition to rear room of front wing; new partitions to rear wing.
- No.21— blocking up of doorway in rear room of front wing between Nos. 21 and 23, and creation of new doorway to other side of chimney; removal of existing modern stud partitions to rear wing and erection of new partitions.
- No. 23—creation of new doorway to modern partition in front room and rear rooms of main wing; removal of partition wall to corridor to rear wing and blocking up of doorway; blocking up of doorway to side of chimney in rear room of front wing (between Nos. 21 and 23) and creation of new doorway on other side of chimney; blocking off of staircase within rear wing; removal of stud partition to rear room of rear wing.
- No. 25—blocking up of existing doorway to rear room of main wing; re-alignment of walls to corridor; creation of two

new doorways between rear wings of Nos. 19 and 21.

- No.27—repositioning of staircase to rear elevation and blocking up of existing opening; blocking up of existing opening from main corridor and erection of new stud partitions to allow cupboard space; re-opening window to side elevation of rear wing.

Internal alterations—Second Floor

- No.17—removal of partitions to front of building, most of which are modern stud partitions; removal of staircase between first and third floors; removal of partition for wc to rear of unit; insertion of new partition wall forming cross-wall central to the unit.
- No.19—this area is already open-plan, and thus the alterations are limited to the insertion of a new cross-wall central to the unit; and the creation of a new access between Nos. 19 and 21.
- No.21—removal of lobby to front room; creation of new opening between Nos. 19 and 21; creation of new access between Nos. 21 and 23; removal of modern partitions to rear.
- No.23—As with No.19, this unit is largely open plan at second floor, with the alterations limited to the removal of modern partition; the insertion of new cross-wall; and insertion of new stud partitions with new piercing between Nos.21 and 23.
- No.25—removal of modern partition to front room; re-hanging of door to central hallway; removal of modern stud partitions for existing wc's to rear room.
- No. 27—insertion of new wall to front room; creation of new cross wall; insertion of new partition to rear room; removal of existing partitions; creation of new opening between front rooms of Nos. 25 and 27.

Internal alterations—Third Floor

- No.17— removal of partition to staircase in front room; removal of staircase to second floor; removal of partition to rear room; creation of 2 no. new openings to No.19; insertion of new cross-wall and partitions.
- No.19—blocking up of existing opening between Nos. 19 and 21; removal of lobby to rear part of open-plan room; creation of new opening to staircase in No.21; new partitions and lobby area to staircase.

- No.21—widening of existing doorways to staircase; removal of lobby to staircase; removal of partitions to rear room currently for wc's; creation of new opening to No.19 to facilitate circulation.
- No.23—insertion of new partitions and cross-wall; removal of existing cupboard; removal of existing modern partition between front rooms of Nos.23 and 25.
- No.25—removal of existing modern partition between Nos. 23 and 25; increased walling to doorway adjacent to chimney breast leading to front room of No.25; removal of lobby to staircase; removal of partitions to rear room currently creating wc's.
- No.27—increased walling to doorway between Nos. 25 and 27; removal of partitions between corridors, front and rear rooms; new partitions and cross-wall.

6.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This section will assess the impact of the proposed development on the significance of 17-27 Victoria Street, recognising that the Site is only one element of a wider set of buildings included under the one listing citation.

The external alterations to the building are limited to two small alterations to the rear elevations, namely the unblocking of a staircase window to the side elevation of the rear wing for No. 17 (or Unit 2) and the enlargement of an existing opening to create a doorway to the flat roof of No. 25 (or Unit 11). As such, the rear wings will remain largely intact, experienced as subservient elements to the Baroque architecture which dominates the front elevation, itself which is recognised within this assessment as providing the dominant aesthetic values of the building. These elements of the proposed scheme will not result in any harm, but will preserve the historic and architectural detail of the listed building.

Internally, the scheme proposes various alterations to allow for the re-arrangement and re-introduction of residential units. Some of the alteration includes the removal of modern partitions, some of which can only be described (such as those within the first floor front room of No.19) as unsympathetic. In such areas, the reinstatement of walls along their original line will assist in recreating some of the spatial qualities of the building.

Other elements proposed for removal include two no. staircases—one to No.17 and one to the rear wing of No.23. The removal of these elements, together with their adjacent walls and internal lights/windows, will inevitably create some harm through the removal of historic fabric, although the harm arising from the removal of the staircase to No.17 is partially negated due to elements of this already having been lost (in particular the ground to first floor rise).

The proposals seek the removal of small elements of walls between some of the units, generally to the side of chimney stacks, whilst other, existing, openings are to be blocked up. Again, this will result in the loss of minimal historic fabric, whilst the act of closing the existing openings partially mitigates this harm.

With regard to the proposed removal of internal partitions, many of these are modern in their date, and their loss will not either affect the historic or architectural significance of the listed building. In some cases, such as within the rear wing of No. 19, the re-insertion of partitions to what is currently an open plan area of the building,

reinstates some of this detailing, and can only be seen as a positive attribute of the scheme.

Examining the scheme as a whole, although on plan there appears to be considerable removal of fabric, some of this is modern insertions, whilst other elements seek the reinstatement of details, including the blocking-up of some existing and non-original openings. These elements will all preserve the special interest of the building.

However, there will be some harm to the significance of the listed building, through the removal of some historic elements and fabric, in particular through the removal of two staircases and the creation of new openings in what were originally party-walls between residences. This harm has to be considered in view of the extent of listing, rather than in relation to the individual or group of units forming the application site. As covered at the start of this assessment, the “listed building” encompasses all units to each side of the street, as one cohesive development. In assessing the significance of the listed building, this report has identified that the site forms only a small element of this listed building, and that the significance of the designated heritage asset predominantly lies in its architectural appearance, in particular that to the street frontage, as well as having some historic illustrative value as a planned development as part of the renewal of Reading during the end nineteenth century. As the identified harm results from limited internal alterations to one part of this larger designated heritage asset, and does not affect the principal heritage values of the building, this harm can only be identified as lying at the lowest end of the spectrum of less than substantial harm. This harm arises through the minimal removal of historic fabric, and the marginal re-ordering of the internal planform of this element of the listed building, with the rest of the listed building being unaffected by the proposed development. The key heritage values, such as the aesthetics and the general historic purpose of the wider development as a development aimed at revitalising the town centre as well as providing suitable locations for the burgeoning cottage industries which were developing at the time, will all be preserved. As such, it is purely the impact of removal of these small elements of the listed building which result in the lowest degree of less than substantial harm. As such, the proposals will be subject to the decision-making process set out at paragraph 134 of the NPPF.

Against this, there are considerable benefits which should be considered in any decision-making, which are covered in more detail within the Planning Statement and the DAS. Such benefits include the re-introduction of residential units to the upper floors of the listed building, in line with its original and most appropriate use (and also retaining the retail units at ground floor); the

creation of further residential units to assist in the 5YHLS of the Council; the repair and maintaining of the rear elevations, which currently being back-of-house for the retail units, have little architectural merit, although they retain their historic relationship to the main body of the building—the repair and increased maintenance and upkeep of these areas, as a result of the increased residential usage, will further preserve the character and appearance of the listed building.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This report has assessed the existing significance of the Site as part of the listed building, formed by 17-27 Queen Victoria Street. The report has identified that the Site forms only a part of the wider listed building, which forms both sides of the street. The assessment has therefore considered both the Site in its own right, but also as part of the wider listed building.

The listed building, and the Site as part of such, was originally constructed and designed to house workers and craftsmen, providing them with a combination of retail space, workshops and residences, all under one roof. During the twentieth century, this relationship has been gradually eroded, with the ground floors becoming separate entities from the upper floors. With regards to the Site, the upper floors have also previously been converted in to a mix of HMOs and office space, resulting in considerable alteration to the layout and architectural detail of the internal spaces.

The proposals seek the return of the upper floors to purely residential, with the retention of the ground floors as retail. The proposed works include some minor internal alterations, including the re-ordering of residential units, and the removal of minimal quantities of historic fabric.

The assessment has identified that the character and appearance of the Site, and importantly of the listed building as a whole, will see some considerable improvement, whilst also seeing some minor level of harm (equitable to the lowest level of less than substantial harm, in terms of the NPPF), through alteration to some elements of historic fabric. However, the scheme has been designed to take into account and respect the intrinsic heritage values of the listed building which are recognised as providing the principal values of the wider listed building. As such, this report identifies that there is a need to balance the very low level of less than substantial harm to the significance of this Grade II listed building, against the considerable public benefits arising from the scheme.

In considering such a balance, it is argued that the public benefits of the scheme and of the alterations should be seen as outweighing the very low level of harm arising from their impact on the significance of the listed building as a whole.

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