

**PROPOSED SIGNAGE TO THE RISING SUN INN,
CASTLE STREET, READING**

Heritage Statement

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Sun Inn is a Grade II listed building located on the north side of Castle Street, Reading (Figures 1 and 2). The building is within the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area. Forum Heritage Services was previously commissioned to undertake an assessment of the heritage significance of the listed building in relation to a proposed refurbishment of the public house (230709 & 230710), and the potential impact of the proposals upon that significance, and to prepare a Heritage Statement in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.2 Applications to revise the external signage of the public house have recently been approved (231734 & 231735), but these proposals were amended due to conservation objections to the proposed sign written name on the front elevation which was described as 'making the front elevation looking more 'cluttered'' (email from the case officer dated 5 February 2024).
- 1.3 The owner of the property is now seeking consent for the signage to the front elevation and has commissioned Forum Heritage Services to prepare a heritage statement that considers the significance of the external appearance of the building and the potential impact of the proposed signage on that significance.

2.0 Description

- 2.1 The Sun Inn was added to the *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* at Grade II in 1957 although the description is likely to date from the 1980s. The building is described in the *List* as:

C17 and older foundations and cellars, altered and modernized. 2 storeys and attic. Stucco over timber-framing. Tiled roof. A picturesque inn with half hipped gable to right of centre. 5 glazing bar sashes on 1st floor (2 in gable which has one small attic window). Ground floor has modern square bay bar window to left with balustraded balcony over; architrave surround and flat hood to plank door with wreath knocker, one 3-light window in gable and small door and 1 window to right (No 14). Two 2 storey extensions to rear. Interior: a

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considerable amount of exposed timber-framing. A small stone arch in yard called "Norman Arch" and cellars reputed to be remains of Reading Old Gaol.

- 2.2 The research and presented in the previous heritage statement indicates that this description is erroneous in several respects including the reference to the "Norman arch" which was not part of this building but a now demolished structure to the rear of the inn.
- 2.3 The Sun Inn has rendered elevations with some faux-framing to the projecting bay to the right of centre. The gable ends both have painted signage, the signage to the front elevation being on a board to the parapet of the single-storey addition to the left part of the elevation, the board continuing across the projecting bay. There is also a metal bracket for a traditional hanging sign but no sign. There are also two coach lamps attached to the projecting gable and a further coach light at the west end of the elevation. At ground floor level there are three boards, all on the projecting element.



Figure 1 Front and east elevations.

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Figure 2 West elevation.

- 2.4 Historic photographs (Figures 3 and 4) show that The Sun Inn has had various painted signage to the front and east gable elevation over time, and several different forms of projecting signs. Both of these images show the building before the faux-framing was added to the projecting gable and, alongside the name of the public house, the signage included elements such as the brewery or proprietor's name, and services offered including livery, stabling and garaging. There were also projecting and hanging signs to the front elevation. The west gable elevation was concealed by an attached building until the mid-20th century, and so not available for signage, whilst the upper part of the front elevation west of the projecting bay above the single-storey addition was partly obscured by a balustrade.



Figure 3 The Sun Inn c.1900.

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Figure 4 The Sun Inn, early 20th century.

3.0 Significance

- 3.1 The Sun Inn is one of a relatively small number of buildings within the town centre which clearly convey its timber-framed origins through its general form even though there is no exposed timber-framing, the building reflecting some of the character of medieval Reading. The architectural form of the building makes an important contribution to the character of the town centre and is of relatively high architectural interest.
- 3.2 It is claimed by some sources that the Sun Inn is one of the oldest inns in Reading but, to date, the earliest reference appears to date from the 17th century. There is nothing in the form of the building to suggest it was constructed as a purpose-built inn but seems to have the character of a domestic scale house. The building has a high level of historic interest through its use and character as a public house.
- 3.3 The present signage is of later 20th century date and is not of architectural or historic interest in terms of its present form and design. The amount of signage is clearly less than has been the case historically, and it is considered that the present level of signage and appearance of the front elevation does not contribute to the special interest of the listed building.

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4.0 Proposal & Assessment of Impact

Proposals

- 4.1 It is proposed to add a new sign written name sign to the area between the first-floor windows to the western part of the elevation (Figure 5).



Figure 5 The proposed signage to the front elevation, the sign of the same form to the west gable and the hanging sign is previously consented.

- 4.2 The local authority has previously objected to the painted signage to the front elevation on the grounds that it would 'clutter' the front elevation.
- 4.3 Whilst the position of the proposed lettering is in a new position where there is no evidence for there having been a sign before, the historic photographs show that there was painted signage of various forms on the front elevation previously. The positions of much of the historic signage is not now possible due to the later faux-framing, hence the proposed location. So, the key questions to address regarding the impact on the significance of the listed building are:
- Is the principle of painted signage on the front elevation acceptable?
 - Is there a reason why signage on the western part of the elevation specifically would represent harm to the significance of the listed building?

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Principle of a sign on the front elevation

- 4.4 Clearly, as with many historic public houses, The Sun Inn had painted signage on its front elevation, this signage not only carrying the name of the inn but other information too including the name of the brewery or proprietor and aspects of the services that were provided. The historic photographs show that the extent of signage created a relatively busy appearance, the painted signage being accompanied at one time by two projecting signs as shown in Figure 4.
- 4.5 If one considers the appearance of the majority of historic public houses, regardless of their architectural form, one feature is almost always present on the front elevation – the name of the public house. The consistency of the presence of a name sign, whether painted, applied lettering or a name board on the principal elevation, may be considered to be a characteristic feature of public houses.
- 4.6 Therefore, it is considered that the principle of painted name sign on the front elevation is acceptable for the listed building.

Will the proposed sign cause harm to the significance of the listed building?

- 4.7 Whilst the proposed position of the painted signage is different to that shown in historic photographs, there is no evident reason why the proposed position would be regarded as harmful in comparison to the projecting gabled element of the front elevation. Both sections of wall are white painted render, and there is no architectural detailing that will be impacted by the proposal. The front elevation of The Sun Inn is not symmetrical and so the position of the proposed sign, to the left part of the elevation, does not unbalance appearance of the building.
- 4.8 The objection to the proposal is that the proposed sign would make the elevation appear 'cluttered'. This is a very subjective opinion which is best described as a preference rather than representing any justifiable conservation argument. Rather, it appears to represent a view that it is necessary to maintain the status quo, as was the demand to retain the rather small size of the hanging sign which was accepted by the applicant in the previous application.
- 4.9 The objection to a name sign on the front elevation goes against the historic character of this building specifically, and the typical character of public houses nationally. The painted signage, as shown in Figure 5, is of a traditional form which will emphasise the function of the building as a public house, and is comparable to numerous other historic public houses seen across the country. When the appearance of historic public houses is considered more widely, an aspect of their character is often a 'busy' appearance, various signs (sometimes with the name repeated as at The Griffin in Reading) can be combined with features such as hanging baskets, usually attempting to make the building visually attractive and drawing attention to the business. This is the character of historic public houses that may be seen across England and the proposed sign will not harm the character of the listed building or its aesthetic qualities.

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5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The proposed painted signage for the front elevation of the Rising Sun Inn is traditional in its character is appropriate in its design and detail.
- 5.2 The painted signage to front elevation follows historic precedent, reflecting the long-standing character of this historic public house, the proposal being supported by the historic photographs. The change in the position makes no material difference to the impact of the sign on the significance of the listed building.
- 5.3 When the traditional character of public houses generally, and the frequency of the provision of the name of the public house on the front elevation is considered, it is clear that there is no reasonable conservation argument to support a refusal to this traditional form of signage on this listed building.
- 5.4 The proposed signage will not harm the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 5.5 Accordingly, I can find no conflict in the proposed development with the statutory duty in Sections 66 or 72 of the Act, National Policy in the NPPF or Policies EN1 Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment, EN2 Areas of Archaeological Significance, EN3 Enhancement of Conservation Areas of the Reading Borough Council Adopted Local Plan 2019 and conclude that the application should be allowed.

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