



Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee  
29 October 2024

Dear Tom Bradfield

We are aware that we are submitting this objection after the consultation deadline but hope that you are able to take our comments into account in making your decision.

**OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION 241155 JOHN LEWIS DEPOT**

**SUMMARY**

We object to this application because:

- The proposal does not enhance the special heritage and architectural interest of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and the listed buildings within it. Harm is caused to the setting of buildings particularly in some of the views included in the Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment and so the proposal does not comply with policies EN1 and EN3
- The site merits a more innovative and exceptional design and does not comply with policy EN6
- The proposal fails to recognize the harm caused by this proposal to the communal value of the site and surrounding area.

Members of CAAC attended the public consultation event at South Street Arts Centre and were invited to other events with Reading Civic Society, but did not attend due to repeated changing of dates. We note that improvements have been made to the original plans and layout of the apartments within the complex as a result of public and other consultations and the pre-application process.

**1. HERITAGE**

1.1 The site of the former John Lewis Depot is adjacent to London Street and Church Street within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area (CA). This is an area of predominantly low rise historic residential and commercial buildings, S Giles Church and the Friends Meeting House. The area bounded by Mill Lane, London Street, Southampton Street and Crown Street was until the 1970s/80s a mix of residential and industrial uses as shown in the (roughly merged) OS map

extracts below. The site of the former John Lewis Customer Collection depot is approximately marked by 'Clothing Factory'.

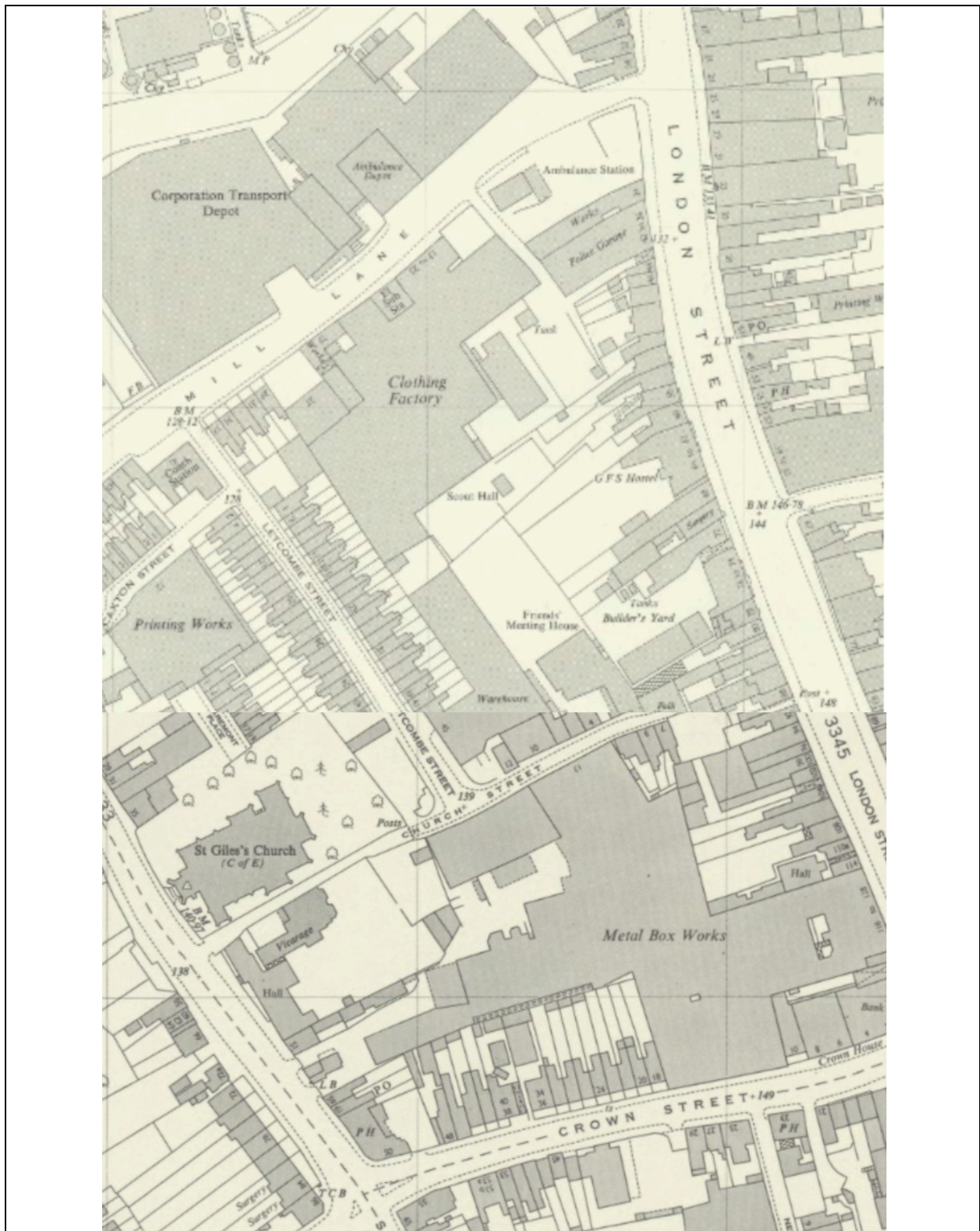


Figure 1 Area between Mill Lane, Southampton Street, London Street and Church Street in the late 1960s. Top extract from OS map 1967 published 1968 and bottom extract from OS map 1968 published 1971 courtesy National Library of Scotland

**1.2 Proposal site.** The northerly edge of the site sits between the Premier Inn on Letcombe Street (not in the CA) and the former Central Club on London Street (within the CA), both of which occupy prominent corner sites.

1.2.1 The Premier Inn rises to seven floors at its highest point but tapers down to four floors towards Letcombe Street blending with the height of the surrounding modern residential properties on Letcombe Street, Church Street and St Giles Close. Although a striking modern hotel it is a good neighbour in this respect.

1.2.2 Planning permission has been granted, subject to legal agreement, to convert the former Central Club to residential and community use with two floors above the existing building. Importantly the Black History Mural will be retained. The mural is the most striking feature of the stretch of Mill Lane, the IDR and its junction with London Street.

Although the proposal steps down in height towards London Street the applicant fails to respect the significance of the Black History Mural in the streetscape and the affection of local residents. It is worthy of special consideration in the discussion of the impact of the proposal on the streetscape of Mill Lane but is not mentioned.

### 1.3 View from Queens Road



*Figure 2 View from Queens Road (junction of London Street with the IDR) - cumulative*

The view from Queens Road at the junction with London Street is an important view of the site and its context. The proposed building does not sit well in this context and nor does it strike an innovative or interesting pose. It appears as a succession of blocks sitting solidly on their foundations with nothing to offer the view.

This is a view that many pedestrians will be aware of as they wait for the lights to change to cross from north to south of the IDR. It is not one that is glanced at fleetingly in passing. The view is also one that drivers waiting for the lights to change will be aware of even as they concentrate on the traffic.

The proposal causes harm to the context and setting of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area in this view.

#### **1.4 View from S Giles Churchyard**



*Figure 3 View from S Giles churchyard – cumulative*

Were it not for the trees in the churchyard this view would be considerably worse. The proposal causes harm to the context and setting of the Grade II listed S Giles Church in the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

This quiet and tranquil churchyard contains the graves and memorials of many notable residents of the local area of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

## 1.5 view from the Friends Meeting House



*Figure 4 View from the burial ground of the Friends Meeting House - cumulative*

The view of the proposed building from the burial ground of the Grade II listed Friends Meeting House replaces that of the Oracle car park but because of the proximity of the new development it cannot be avoided. It causes harm to the quiet appreciation of the burial ground which, like S Giles churchyard contains the graves and memorials of many notable residents of the local area of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

## 1.6 The IDR and Reading's one-way traffic system

1.6.1 The applicant is of course right to point out that the proposal site sits in an area immediately south of the town centre that is negatively impacted by the IDR and two one-way north-south routes to and from the town centre.

1.6.2 The 1970s/early 1980s were a period of great change in Reading with major industries of Reading moving away from the town centre or away from Reading. They included Huntley & Palmers, Huntley, Boorne & Stevens (on London Street and Crown Street), Suttons Seeds and Courage (formerly H & G Simonds).

1.6.3 For many years, the route of the IDR in this area remained undecided and works were suspended at the flyover at the foot of Southampton Street. The route and the junction at the foot of London Street was finally decided on after many years of proposals and discussions with Reading Civic Society and London Street businesses. The creation of the Market Place/London Street CA in 1972 was a significant step towards the recognition of the importance of Reading's heritage in those early days of the conservation movement.

1.6.4 The area is still challenged by the negative impact of the road but we continually look to improve the area and new developments must contribute to this. We do not feel that the current proposal contributes to enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area. It is not a good neighbour to the CA.

## 1.7 Heritage of the site

1.7.1 The site was occupied by Burberrys from 1914 until 1982<sup>1</sup> and had had a presence on London Street since 1889. The HTVIA does not mention this at all.

Burberry was a well known employer within living memory in Reading and one of the industries lost to Reading in the 1970s/early 1980s. The potential that the premises would be impacted by the IDR was recognised in the 1970s<sup>2</sup> but a press report of its closure and loss of 200 jobs in 1981 cited the recession<sup>3</sup>.

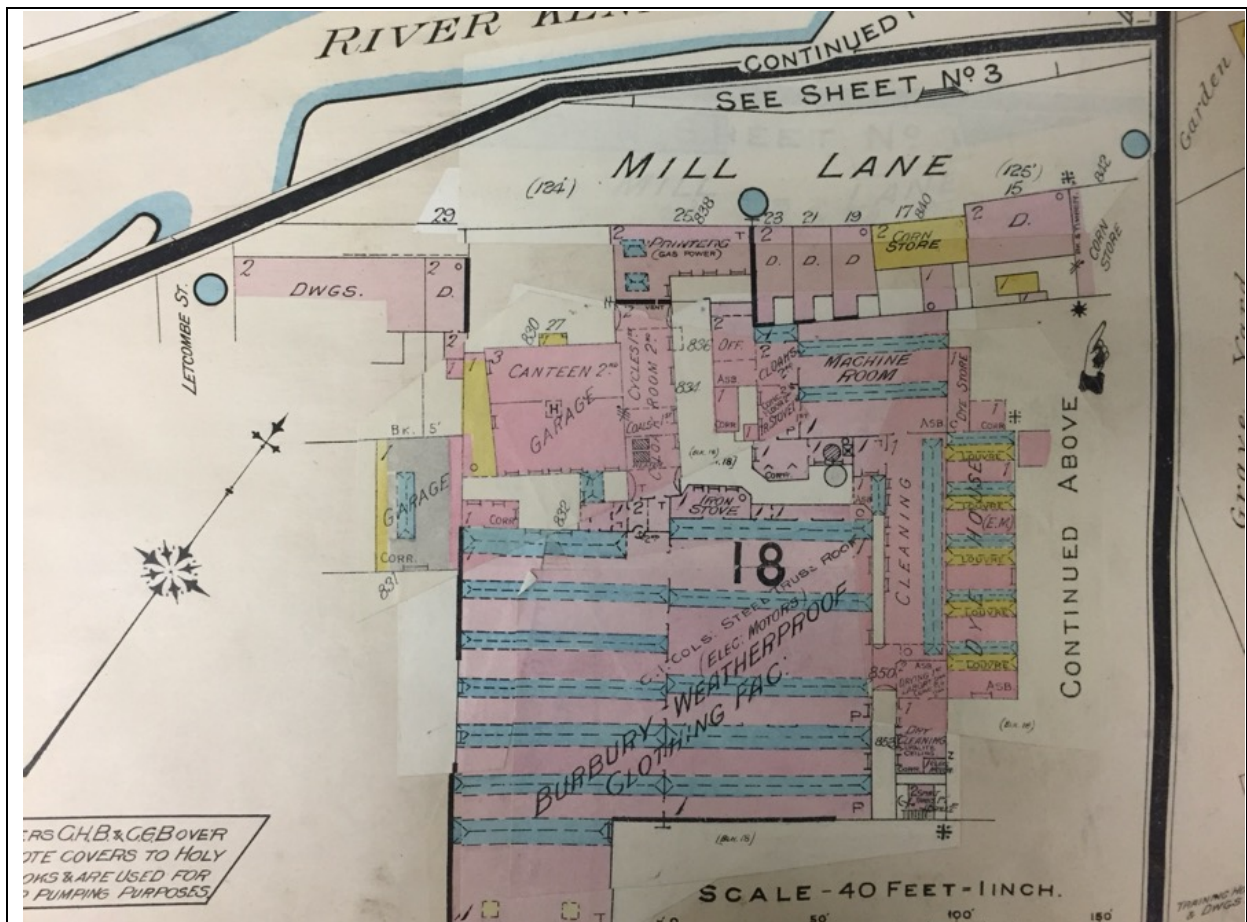


Figure 5 Extract from Goad Insurance map 1929 Showing Burberry's factory

1.7.3 The low rise offices on the site were built by McCarthy & Fitt in 1936 in the style of the time.

1.7.4 The company was also important in the history of industrial relations in Reading. The 1911 and 1916 strikes of Huntley & Palmers biscuit factory staff are well known<sup>4</sup>. At Burberry in 1917 there was an industrial dispute between the workforce of mainly female workers over recognition of the United Garment Workers' Union. Staff who had joined the union were locked

<sup>1</sup> Reading Evening Post 7 October 1999 p2 – Burberry advert recalling the factory in Reading

<sup>2</sup> Reading Evening Post 12 May 1971 p1

<sup>3</sup> Reading Evening Post 30 December 1981 p11

<sup>4</sup> Reading Museum website accessed 25 October 2024 <https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/online-exhibitions/huntley-palmers-history/6-people/strikes-and-grievances>

out of the factory<sup>5</sup>. The high-profile dispute continued until March when the union was recognised. However, staff were only re-instated if a vacancy existed<sup>6</sup>.

### **1.8 Assessment of impact of the proposal on the Communal Value of the area**

1.8.1 The applicant has failed to demonstrate that the proposal does not cause harm to the communal value of the site and surrounding area:

- Impact on the adjacent Central Club and Black History Mural
- Failure to recognise the importance of the site as the former location of a Burberry factory
- Failure to recognise the importance of the junction of the IDR and London Street in the birth of the conservation movement in Reading

1.8.2 Harm to the communal value of the area should have been assessed alongside the harm to the historical value of the area.

1.8.3 This omission can be rectified by:

- Taking the proximity to the Black History Mural into account and not challenging its significance and importance in the streetscape in the provision of any public art on the site.
- Consider the possibility of some reference to the use of the site by Burberry within the building and/or its furnishings.
- Provide an innovative and exceptional design for the buildings on this site.

## **2. DESIGN**

2.1 The design proposed is for 'anywhere apartments' and Reading deserves better than bricks to prove that the local context and palette has been considered.

2.2 Reading is the third of three sites, the others being Ealing and Bromley, where John Lewis is undertaking residential development and inevitably there will be comparisons between the three. It was thought that Reading would be the first plans to come forward but that did not happen.

2.3 For this site, south of the IDR and the surrounding mixed commercial and residential context, we feel that mid-rise apartments 4-5 storeys high would be a more successful solution.

2.4 It also is hoped John Lewis in Reading (previously Heelas) can make a better contribution to the town by a more interesting design in this challenging location. There are very few examples of interesting modern apartment design in Reading but we would point to the Verto building on Kings Road as one example, albeit a tall building.

## **3. OTHER VIEWS – DEANS GATE ROAD AND SAXON COURT**

3.1 The Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment categorises the impact on categories of users of the locations impacted by the development. In relation to road users we would like to mention that although the driver of a vehicle may be unable to appreciate the surroundings

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<sup>5</sup> Reading Observer 13 January 1917

<sup>6</sup> Reading Observer 24 March 1917

when navigating the traffic along the IDR and other roads, that the visual impact on passengers would be greater and we disagree with the assessment in paragraph 7.19 that the visual amenity value is low.

3.2 The view east along Deansgate Road is assessed for its impact on road users but the route north and south using Southampton Street is also used by pedestrians and there will be a significant negative impact on the view as appreciated by pedestrians.



*Figure 6 View east down Deansgate Road - cumulative*

3.3 The view above shows Saxon Court opposite the flats. Saxon Court was built in 1987 as a warehouse and offices for Milwards Shoes. The design shows a certain amount of attention to detail and innovation and fitted well in the context of the low-rise residential development of the area to the south when Huntley, Boorne & Stevens tin factory moved away from Reading. It replaced their Victorian premises on the same site. Milwards had their headquarters in Reading from 1901 and on this site since 1913. When the company was taken over by Clark's in 1984 the premises were taken over for other uses and are now student accommodation. Opposite Saxon Court the starter homes were built as part of the 1987 development<sup>7</sup>.

The Milwards development was important enough to merit a mention in *Buildings of England, Berkshire* (Pevsner) 2010 where the comment is 'Red brick, mostly domestic motifs, but with a monumental entrance with glazed wall and atrium. By the Hives Partnership, 1985-7, likewise the starter home terrace facing'<sup>8</sup>. The buildings won an environmental award for their design<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Reading's Lost Businesses Vol3 pp18-23 Milwards Shoes by Dennis Wood

<sup>8</sup> *Buildings of England, Berkshire* (2010), Geoffrey Tyack, Simon Bradley, Niklaus Pevsner pp473-4

<sup>9</sup> Reading's Lost Businesses Vol3 pp18-23 Milwards Shoes by Dennis Wood



*Figure 7 Milwards 1987 Headquarters and warehouse*

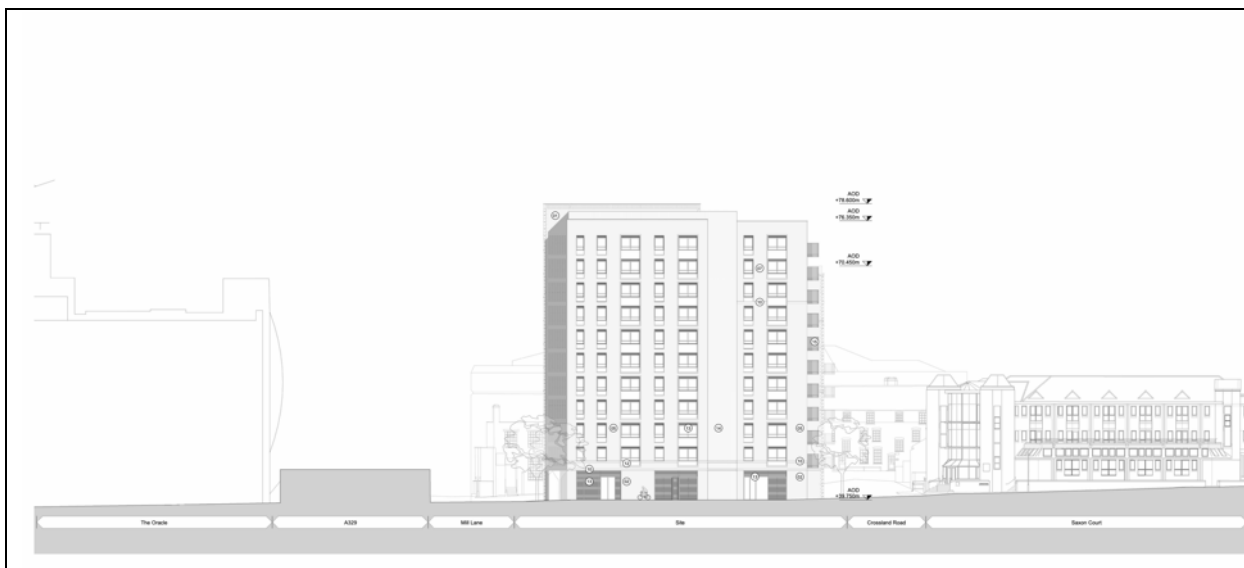


*Figure 8 Western elevation in context of the Oracle, Mill Lane and Saxon Court*

The proposed development dominates and overshadows Saxon Court by its excessive scale and height.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This application should be rejected for the reasons stated.

Evelyn Williams  
 Chair Reading CAAC  
 On behalf of Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee  
 43 Milman Road  
 Reading  
 RG2 0AZ