

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Abbey

App Ref: PL/24/0951/LBC

Address: Almshouses, Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7SS

Proposals: Works to repair sash boxes and replace existing single glazed sliding sashes with slimline double glazed sliding sashes with added draughtproofing strips to thermally upgrade sash windows on the Castle Street and Front (facing Lane) elevations of both the east and west wings of almshouses and the erection of a small mobility scooter shed on the site

Case Officer: Sian Hickey

Applicant: Mrs Annabel Nichol

Date received (valid from): 26/07/2024

Decision date (ext): 30/10/2024

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The proposal site consists of two terraced rows on Castle Street. 1-12 and 17-32 Almshouses are a group of Grade II Listed Buildings (List Entry Number: 1154678). The Listed Building description for Vachel Almshouses, 1-32, Castle Street is as follows:

“CASTLE STREET 1. 5128 (South Side) Vachel Almshouses Nos 1 to 32 (consec) SU 7173 SW 2/420 II GV 2. Founded by Sir Thomas Vachel in 1634 and then moved to this site. See plaques. Rebuilt 1864-67, architect William Henry Woodman. 2 storey cottages in 2 reflecting rows, stepped down to Holybrook in groups of 4. Vernacular style. Red brick with grey brick bands and decoration and with stone dressings. Tiled roofs with crested ridges; red brick ridge chimneys with grey decoration and cogged bands. Nos 5 to 16 and 21 to 32 : 5 windows, 2 being canted dormered bays flanking central entrance and 2 light windows with chamfered mullions. Pointed doorways with shouldered lintels and tumbled brick in arches, strap hinges. Nos 1 to 4 and 17 to 20: also 5 bays but in 3 staggered planes. 1st plane has corbelled 1st floor window to street and a bay to front. 2nd plane now has tower porch with encorbelled parapet, pointed entrance and trefoil headed side window. This part formerly (till 1957) had a turret over. 3rd plane has gabled bay. Low screen wall to street with cast and wrought iron rails and gates.”

The proposal site is within the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area. Local associations within the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation area include Sir Thomas Vachel, after whom the Almshouses in Castle Street are named (he founded the original Almshouses at St Mary's Church in 1634). The open space between the Almshouses is highlighted as a quieter area of the Conservation Area, as opposed to the extremely busy St Mary's Butts and the Gun Street/Castle Street junction (St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal (March 2008)).

Site visit date: 07/08/2024

Photos:



2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Listed building consent was granted on 22nd December 2022 Ref:221578 for the following development: Re-glaze, draughtproof and overhaul all existing sash windows to improve thermal performance and restore functionality. Replace windows to c1960 built extensions to east wing with thermally broken and double glazed steel windows to match existing in appearance. Replace windows to c2000 built extensions to west wing with modern timber framed double glazed casements to match existing in appearance.

The agent has advised that following the consent, the sample works undertaken at first floor level, which repaired the windows and improved the draughtproofing, have delivered no notable improvement to the thermal comfort of occupants according to the residents of those flats. Therefore, continuing to implement what have proved to be ineffective thermal improvements in line with Listed Building Consent Ref:221578 was not considered an economic or sensible proposition for the Applicant as it would not achieve the desired outcomes of this project. The sample works undertaken at first floor uncovered that the sliding sashes were in much poorer condition once the paint was stripped than was obvious from an initial visual inspection. Sliding sashes in very poor condition had been filled and encapsulated in layers of paint during regular maintenance, and appeared to be in an acceptable condition. However, in reality the windows had deteriorated much further. It is considered likely that many of the other sash windows will be discovered to be in worse condition than anticipated in 2022. The level of repair required for the sample works was far beyond what was anticipated – whole rails of the sliding sashes needed replacement. The windows were found to be in a condition similar to the windows at Flat 8 & 10, a condition in which the previous officer agreed was uneconomic to repair and for which he agreed replacement was the better solution.

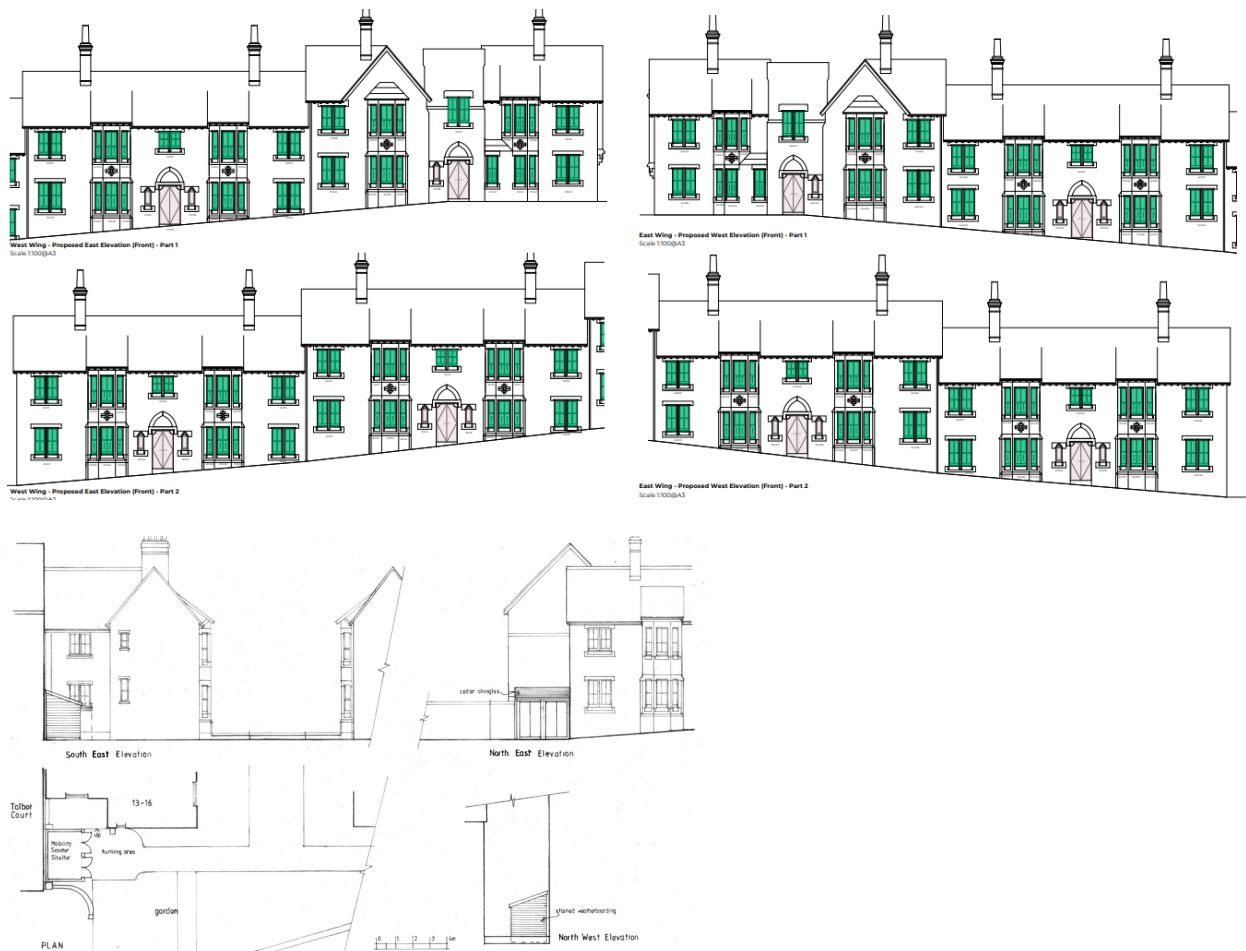
Therefore, the current application seeks Listed Building Consent for the replacement of all existing upper and lower sliding sashes in both the east and west wings of the almshouses with new upper and lower sliding sashes that incorporate slimline double glazing.

In addition, the proposal also includes a self-contained wooden storage unit to store two mobility scooters. The measurements of the scooter store would be 1919mm (depth) 3160mm (width) 2085mm (height). The store would be located at the bottom of the site between the end of the western block and the Holybrook.

Plans/documents considered:

Drawing No. 0203 P01 – Existing West Elevation
 Drawing No. 2003 P01 – Proposed West Elevation (East Wing)
 Drawing No. 302 P01 – Existing Sash Window Double
 Drawing No. 2001 P01 – Proposed East Elevation (West Wing)
 Drawing No. 3002 P01 – Proposed Sash Window Double
 Drawing No. RAC1 – Elevation Plans Existing

Drawing No. RAC2 – Elevation Plans Proposed (scooter store)
 Drawing No. 0102 P01 – Existing First Floor Plan (West Wing)
 Drawing No. 0104 P01 – Existing First Floor Plan (East Wing)
 Drawing No. 1004 P01 – Proposed First Floor Plan (East Wing)
 Drawing No. 0101 P01 – Proposed Ground Floor Plan (West Wing)
 Drawing No. 1002 P01 – Proposed First Floor Plan (West Wing)
 Drawing No. 1003 P01 – Proposed Ground Floor Plan (East Wing)
 Drawing No. 1001 P01 – Proposed Ground Floor Plan (West Wing)
 Drawing No. 0301 P01 – Existing Sash Window - Bay
 Drawing No. 0201 P01 – Existing East Elevation (West Wing)
 Drawing No. 0001 P02 – Location Plan and Site Plan
 Drawing No. 0101 P01 – Existing Ground Floor Plan (West Wing)
 Drawing No. 3001 P01 – Proposed Sash Window – Bay
 Drawing No. RAC3 – Location Plan and Block Plan
 Covering letter
 Scope of works
 Photographs and photomontages
 Design and Access Statement
 Trial works explanation



3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Applications registered to 1 Almshouses, Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7SS

900935/FUL - Removal of existing boundary wall; renewal of wall to new boundary in new brickwork. – Application Permitted on 16/08/1990

940337/LBC - Erection of handrail beside path. – Application Permitted on 17/06/1994

990020/LBC - Proposed demolition of rear extensions of No: 1-16 and rebuilding to provide improved kitchen/bathroom facilities. Conversion of No 18 to meeting room, laundry and guest room. Insertion of new door and two storey extension at No 21. – Application Permitted on 22/08/2000

990613/FUL - Proposed demolition of rear extensions of No: 1-16 and rebuilding to provide improved kitchen/bathroom facilities. Conversion of No 18 to meeting room, laundry and guest room. Insertion of new door and two storey extension at No 21. – Application Permitted on 22/08/2000

060492/LBC - Replacing flat roofs of rear extensions to the East Wing with traditional carcassed timber roofs. – Application Permitted on 05/05/2006

060296/FUL - Construction of pitched roofs to match existing on 3 No. 20th Century rear extensions - East wing – Application Permitted on 05/05/2006

080676/LBC - New television aerial and satellite dish to west wing of Almshouses – Application Permitted on 24/06/2008

221578/LBC - Re-glaze, draughtproof and overhaul all existing sash windows to improve thermal performance and restore functionality. Replace windows to c1960 built extensions to east wing with thermally broken and double glazed steel windows to match existing in appearance. Replace windows to c2000 built extensions to west wing with modern timber framed double glazed casements to match existing in appearance. Permitted on 22/12/2022

4. CONSULTATIONS

Reading Borough Council, Conservation Officer – Response received on 18/10/2024
Generally, there are no objections to the listed building application as the original windows are beyond repair and the repaired ones have problems with opening and providing insulation. It is recommended for Approval, subject to the following condition:

All new external and internal works and finishes, and any works of making good, shall match the existing original fabric in respect of using materials of a matching form, composition and consistency, detailed execution and finished appearance, except where indicated otherwise on the drawings hereby approved. The timber framed windows shall have white space bars and shall be painted with oil-based paints, with colours of the finished windows to match the existing fabric.

REASON: In order that the special architectural and historic interest of this Listed Building is safeguarded in accordance with Policy EN1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee – No response received.

The site notice was displayed from Wednesday 7th August 2024, expiring on Wednesday 28th August 2024. A press notice was published on Thursday 15th August 2024.

Three letters of representation have been received with regards to the location of the scooter store with concerns relating to its accessibility for residents.

Officer note: explored in more depth below

Equality Act 2010:

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

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

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

Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
CC2 Sustainable Design and Construction
CC3 Adaption to Climate Change
CC7 Design and the Public Realm
EN1 Protection and Enhancement of The Historic Environment
EN3 Enhancement of Conservation Areas
CR2 Design in the Centre

SPD

St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal (March 2008)

6. APPRAISAL**Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment**

In accordance with policy EN1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, all proposals will be expected to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. Any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits. In addition, applications affecting Listed Buildings will not have an adverse impact on those elements which contribute to their special architectural or historic interest including, where appropriate, their setting.

In accordance with Policy EN3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, development proposed within a Conservation Area will; “make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Positive consideration will be given to proposals which take opportunities to enhance the character of conservation areas.”

As per section 16 of the NPPF (2021) proposals affecting heritage assets such as Grade II Listed Buildings, Local Planning Authorities will assess the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimize any conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal. The principle of replacing windows and doors to a Grade II Listed Building, and the erection of a small store for mobility scooters is acceptable providing development complies with the Policies outlined in the Reading Borough Local Plan and NPPF.

With regards to windows, the proposal relates to all of the existing upper and lower sliding sashes in the front elevations (facing the lane) and the castle street elevations of both the east and west wings of the almshouses. The proposal includes for the upper and lower sliding sashes to be replaced and with ones that incorporate slimline double glazing. The condition of the original sash windows are worse than originally anticipated and are considered beyond repair. Single glazed sash windows would be retained to the common areas (entrance lobbies, stairs and first floor landings). Labelled plans including section drawings have been prepared that detail the proposals for the sashboxes, sashes, glazing and paint. The slimline double glazing is considered suitable. The windows would be like for like in terms of materials and design and the finishes would match the existing, therefore, it is not considered that these changes would affect the significance of the Listed Building or cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the Listed Building.

With regards to the proposed mobility scooter store, the fire regulations now require mobility scooters with electric charging capabilities to be stored outside residential buildings in a self-contained unit. The applicant considered there were only two possible locations within the site where such a scooter store could be located. One option was just inside the front gates onto Castle Street, however, given the size and type of building and its inevitably close location to the existing buildings the applicant considered this would have an unacceptable visual impact on the character and appearance of the Almshouses. Officers agree that this would not be an acceptable location with respect to the impact on the Listed Building nor the overall character and appearance of the site.

The alternative location selected is at the bottom of the site between the end of the western block and the Holybrook, close to the communal amenity space. In terms of its impact on the listed building and wider area, this location is considered more suitable, it will not be materially visible from any public vantage point. Neighbour consultations have raised concern that this location would be detrimental with regard to ease of accessibility. However, officers consider that either near to Castle Street or the location further from it would involve having to either walk uphill or downhill to access the store. The store needs to be located outside in a separate building, and due to the layout of the site the only feasible option, which would also not have a significant detrimental impact on the Listed Building, would be the location as selected.

The proposed colour and finish of the proposed mobility scooter store will be traditional ship lap larch boarding, finished with Sadolins Extra, colour Redwood. The structure is considered suitable with respect to overall design, materials and scale, and this is confirmed by the conservation officer. The structure would be minimal and subservient to the listed building, any harm is considered to be outweighed by the benefits of providing accessibility scooter housing.

Overall, the proposals are not considered to cause any significant harm to the notable features of the sites listing and would not cause any significant harm to the character and appearance of the area or the building itself. The development is therefore considered in accordance with Policies EN1 and EN3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

Residential Amenity

Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan states that; *“Development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of:*

- *Privacy and overlooking;*
- *Access to sunlight and daylight;*
- *Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;*
- *Harm to outlook;*
- *Noise and disturbance;*
- *Artificial lighting;*
- *Vibration;*
- *Dust and fumes;*
- *Smell;*
- *Crime and safety;..”*

Due to the scale and nature of the proposed development, it is not considered that undue harm would be caused to neighbouring residents. The proposed development is, therefore, considered in accordance with Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

7. CONCLUSION

The development has been assessed and the works are considered to be in accordance with the above relevant policies and Listed Building Consent can be granted.

8. RECOMMENDATION - GRANT

Recommended Conditions:

Time limit (LBC)
Approved Plans
Materials