



Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee
9 September 2023

Dear David Brett

OBSERVATIONS ON PLANNING APPLICATION 231139 - 185A OXFORD ROAD

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

We considered objecting to this application as it does not enhance the character and appearance of the Russell Street/Castle Hill/Oxford Road Conservation Area (CA). However, the change of use in itself has minimal external impact on the property. We feel that as this is a CA at risk and Reading's High Streets Heritage Action Zone that this is a lost opportunity.

- We would like to see improvements to the property at the front and rear to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of listed buildings in the area to comply with Policy EN1 Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment and EN3 Enhancement of Conservation Areas.
- The amenity of occupiers would be improved by the provision of an area of outdoor space to the rear in accordance with Policy H10 Private and Communal Outdoor Space and Policy CC8 Safeguarding Amenity.

2. HERITAGE IMPACT OF PROPOSAL

2.1 185a Oxford Road is sited in the immediate area of many listed properties. It is almost opposite listed Grade II 120-122 and 124 Oxford Road (1302871 and 1321913) to the north, to the east of listed Grade II residential properties at 187-203 Oxford Road (1302906, 1321911 and 1113547) and to the west 149-169 Oxford Road and 171-177 Oxford Road (1113546 and 1156337). This proposal does nothing to improve their setting and so fails to comply with policy EN1.

2.2 It lies within Russell Street/Castle Hill/Oxford Road Conservation Area within a parade of shops flanked by mainly residential properties. It is not Listed or noted as a Building of Townscape Merit in the Russell Street/Castle Hill/Oxford Road Conservation Area Appraisal. This proposal does nothing to enhance the conservation area, which is a conservation area at risk, and so fails to comply with policy EN3.

2.3 Reading CAAC research (see Appendix - History of 185a Oxford Road below) indicates that around the middle of the twentieth century 183 & 185 Oxford Road were subdivided and altered resulting in four separate properties 183, 183a, 185 and 185a. They were originally built as a pair of semi-detached houses, 21 and 22 Sydney Terrace, with large gardens at the rear. In the main those gardens have become areas for parking and storage. In order to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area as well as amenity for occupiers (see below) consideration should have been given to a small landscaped area for occupants.

3. OBSERVATIONS

3.1 The street facing facade of the property would benefit from re-decoration and improvements to the forecourt area where it is planned to place cycle racks and the bin store. The proposed bike and bin stores will not enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area or the streetscene.

3.2 The application is silent on any changes are to be made to the windows and front door of the property. If any are to take place, then the materials used should be secured by condition.

3.3 The building has three storeys but the application is silent on any impact that this proposal will have on the second floor of the property and its current use.

3.4 The rear facing façade is visible from Prospect Mews and does not enhance the character and appearance of the CA. Because of the conversion of this group of properties from original residential to largely commercial use long ago the spacious rear gardens facing Prospect Mews, are nowadays rough gravel carparks or have been otherwise crudely metalled for car parking with no element of amenity green space for residents. This fails to comply with policy EN3, enhancement of Conservation Areas and also H10, Private and Communal Outdoor Space and CC8, Residential Amenity.

4. OTHER MATTERS

4.1 The statutory planning application notice is not being displayed at the property. Unless they have been directly consulted, neighbours will not have the opportunity to comment before the end of the consultation deadline.

4.2 We are not sure if this conversion would be breach the threshold guidance for HMO/flat conversions as set out the Residential Conversions SPD adopted in March 2023.

4.3 The CA was last appraised in 2020 not 2006 as stated in the Planning and Heritage Statement.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 We hope that you are able to take our suggested improvements into account when making a decision.

Yours sincerely

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

History of 185a Oxford Road

2.5 Properties between Russell Street and Prospect Street mainly date from the end of the Georgian era. There have been additions and infill properties as on either side of what is now 183a and 185 Oxford Road date from later periods. It is thought that the original architect was probably William Pratt Swallow¹ responsible for much of the development of this part of Reading.

2.6 This section of the south side of Oxford Road was originally known as Sydney Terrace and was consecutively number 1-31. Not all the properties are identical. Some are terraced but there are two pairs of semi-detached properties 21 & 22 Sydney Terrace and 19 & 20.



*Red Carpet hair salon (183a Oxford Road) 29 January 2023 and Euro Deli at 185 Oxford Road
Extensions built to the left of 183a and to the right of 185 absorb the access steps to be seen in the Board of Health map below.*



*Extract from OS map surveyed 1877 published 1879
– 183a & 185 (then 183 & 185) Oxford Road circled
Next door (east) were 179 & 181 Oxford Road
Courtesy National Library of Scotland*



*Extract from OS map surveyed 1909 published 1911
– 183a & 185 (then 183 & 185) Oxford Road circled
Next door (east) were 179 & 181 Oxford Road
Courtesy National Library of Scotland*

¹ A Biographical Dictionary of Architects at Reading, Sidney M Gold (1999).



*Extract from 1853 Board of Health Maps – 21 & 22 Sydney Terrace Oxford Road (now the site of nos 183, 183a, 185a & 185) circled. On the left, to the right (east) 19 & 20 Sydney Terrace
It will be seen that access to the properties were by steps to one side of the houses. Courtesy of Berkshire Record Office R/AS 2/4/17 & 18*

2.7 Unlike most other properties in the terrace the steps leading up to the raised entrance to the house were level with the building line. We were unable to find any original photographs of 183a and 185 before they became shops.

2.8 The character of the terrace as now was primarily residential but by 1842 No 1 Sydney Terrace, now part of the site of Lifespring Church, was a school and the architect Nathaniel Briant also worked from 25 Sydney Terrace. At that time Mrs Oakes lived at No 21 and Thomas Goldney at No 22; both were of independent means.

2.9 Today 185a forms part of a small parade of shops and businesses. J W Francis & Co was a long established insurance brokers at 183a until at least 2009 and is now incorporated into Academy Insurance at 185a, providing some continuity of businesses in the area.