



Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee
15 November 2024

Dear Marcie Rejwerska

OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION 241353 7 BLAGRAVE STREET

SUMMARY

- We support the proposal to build a boutique hotel whilst retaining the façade of the existing building but consider that the additional three floors proposed cause harm to this building of townscape merit and the conservation area in which it is situated.
- The heritage statement overlooks important details in the history of the building and the surrounding context.
- Whilst recognising the changes that have been made to the fenestration of the new building, we consider that improvements could still be made.
- No details of works to the façade and protection during demolition of the existing building and construction of the new building have been provided.
- We have concerns about number of units of accommodation to be provided and their configuration.

1. HERITAGE

1.1 7 Blagrove Street is a Building of Townscape Merit within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and also lies on the north western edge of [The Abbey Quarter](#). The latter is not mentioned in the heritage statement but is of significance particularly in relation to the development and archaeology of the area.

1.2 The heritage statement is out of date in relation to the listing details for the Town Hall and Museum complex. As of 9 May 2023, the whole of the Town Hall is Grade II* listed ([1113400](#)). This increases the heritage significance of any impact that the proposal will have on the setting of the Town Hall beyond that recognised within the heritage statement paras 5.4 – 5.10.

1.3 7 History of Blagrove Street

1.3.1 The property dates from 1884 and was built to house the Billiard Room of The Wheatsheaf Hotel on Friar Street designed by prominent, prolific local architects, Brown and Albury. They were responsible for many other buildings on the west side of Blagrove Street in the 1880s as well as alterations to The Wheatsheaf Hotel in the 1870s¹.

1.3.2 The building of the billiard room on Blagrove Street should be appreciated first in the context of its relationship with the Wheatsheaf Hotel (circled on the 1870s OS map below) and the network of accesses to the rear that are still to a certain extent in place today.

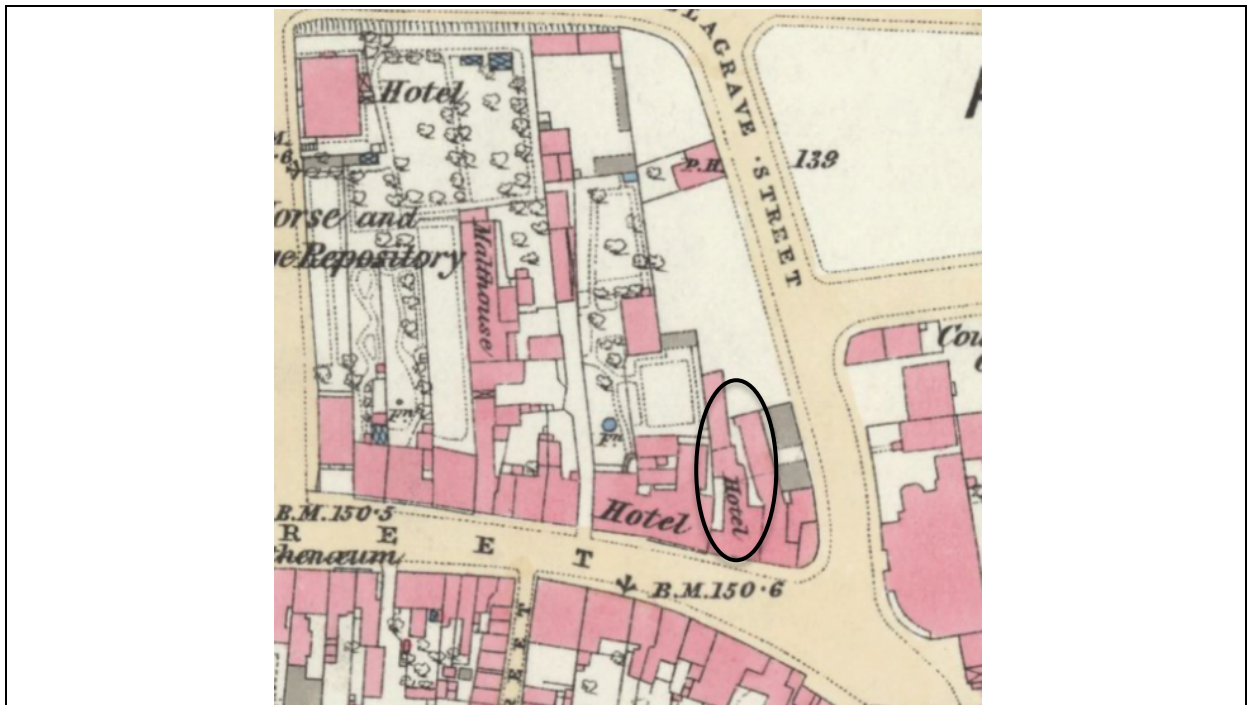


Figure 1 Extract from OS map 1879, surveyed 1875-77, National Library of Scotland

1.3.3 By the end of the century extensive development of the street to the north had taken place including the billiard room (both circled on the 1900 OS map below).

¹ Sidney Gold, A Biographical Dictionary of Architects at Reading pp29-31.

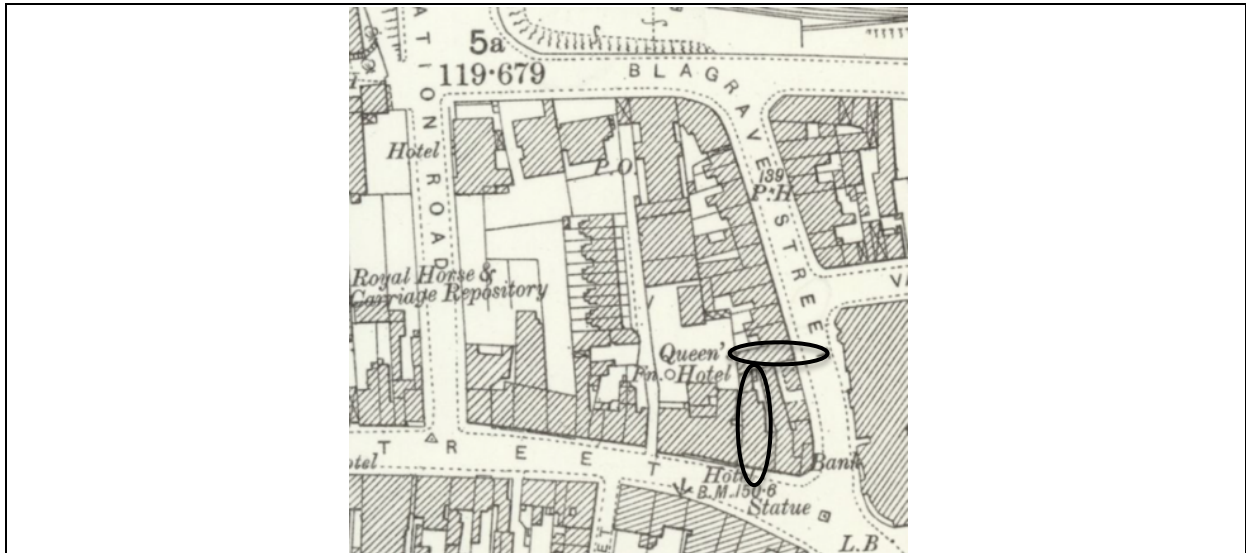


Figure 2 Extract from OS map 1900, revised 1898. National Library of Scotland

1.3.4 In 1901 when the lease of The Wheatsheaf was advertised for auction it was described as 'with a return frontage to Blagrove Street' and a billiard room with a 'separate approach from Blagrove Street'².

1.3.5 The Goad Insurance map for 1895 is a more detailed snapshot of the street around that time. 7 Blagrove Street is shown as a two-storey building with a glass roof which would have been ideally suited to its purpose of a billiard room as would the oriel window on the first floor. The description states 'Stable with Billiard Room over'. North of the site are 'Town Hall Chambers' a 3½ storey building the façade of which remains as 'Forbury View'. The height difference between the site and the façade of its northern neighbour remain today.



Figure 3 Extract from Goad Insurance map 1895 via Wikimedia Commons

1.3.6 This corner of Blagrove Street and Friar Street can be seen in the image below (7 Blagrove Street circled in white) before significant redevelopment took place in the inter-war years. The first was the new post office, now the Slug and Lettuce, on Friar Street and then immediately to the south of 7 Blagrove Street, Somerset House, now O'Neill's. The foundation stone for

² Reading Mercury 8 June 1901, p5.

Somerset House was laid by Lady Edward Somerset on 20 August 1929 and the architect was F G Sainsbury.



Figure 4 Corner of Blagrove Street and Friar Street 4 August 1915. 7 Blagrove Street can be seen in the background. Courtesy Reading Library Local Studies

1.3.7 By 1930 the diminutive and exquisitely designed billiard room of The Wheatsheaf was flanked by taller buildings of 3-4 storeys however it has managed to survive with many heritage features preserved for almost another 100 years. This, despite the facadism of 'Forbury View' to the north. Consequently any redevelopment on the site must be of the highest design quality which goes beyond the retention of the façade in order to comply with policy EN6 Development in a Historic Context.

2. DESIGN

2.1 The height of the new building will be five stories and even though set back, but only very slightly, from the existing façade, this is a disproportionate increase in height to match, and to the south surpass, the height of the neighbouring properties. The Planning Statement (para 5.14) states that the levels are to be progressively stepped back but we can see no evidence of this from the plans for floors 3-5.



Figure 5 Street view of 1-15 Blagrove Street (proposed) from Design and Access Statement

2.2 Were the facadism of 7 Blagrove Street to match that of 9-15 Blagrove Street then only one additional storey would be added. Two additional stories would be acceptable but not three. The upward extension appears top heavy. This causes harm to this building of townscape merit and does not comply with policies EN1 Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment and EN3 Enhancement of Conservation Areas.

2.3 The arrangement of panes in the new windows should be symmetrical but the narrow pane on the right of each window destroys the harmony of the façade.

2.4 We note that there is a design constraint (DAS para 4.9) on the ground floor because of a right of way from 5-6 Blagrove Street through the building, red line below. A café access is also proposed, blue route below. Aside from the indication that the ground floor entrances/shopfront will be 'grey metal' there is nothing on the plans to show whether the entrances will open inwards or outwards or slide.

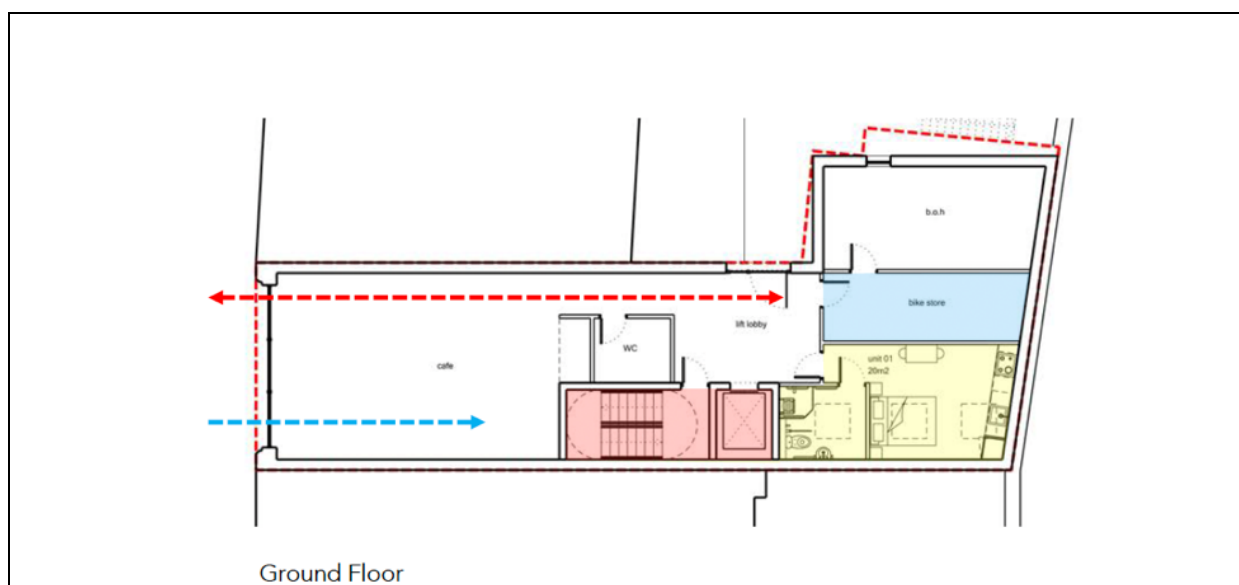


Figure 6 Ground floor access routes (DAS para 4.0)

3. FAÇADE RETENTION

3.1 There are no details as to any repairs and refurbishment to the façade. We would expect that as a minimum painting and redecoration would be required and for the comfort of guests and energy efficiency that double glazing would be required to the front first floor room. This work should be specified by the applicant before a decision is made on this application.

3.2 There are no details as to how the façade is to be supported during demolition works and construction of the new building behind. This work should be specified by the applicant before a decision is made on this application.

4. OTHER MATTERS

4.1 The configuration on the ground floor includes a café which it appears would still be available for the public (DAS section 4) but the fitting out of the café e.g. kitchen and storage, and security for hotel users is not specified.

4.2 The accessible room on the ground floor does not seem to have any windows and users of the room are likely to be subject to excessive noise disturbance from hotel guests accessing the lift and bike store as well as users of the bin store, ground floor w.c. and café.

4.3 Although the application is for 15 rooms we cannot find room 5 on any of the floors. The applicant should confirm the room numbering and total.

4.4 The majority of room sizes are very small – 10 rooms are only 14-15 square metres, 1 20 square metres, 2 24 square metres and one is 44 square metres. Despite this, the rooms have a kitchenette and en-suite bathroom and seem more like bed-sits than hotel rooms.

4.5 Management arrangements for the hotel and café including opening hours, access arrangements for guests and limitations on length of stay have not been specified in any of the documents submitted.

4.6 We assume that signage will be subject to a separate advertising consent.

5. 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