

Ref: P24-2539
17 January 2025



Planning Department
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 2LU

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Dear Sir/Madam

Full application with advertisement consent: 1no. replacement fascia sign, 1no. replacement projecting sign and 1no. new roof level sign, alterations to fenestration and associated alterations to front and rear elevations

Site Address: 153 Friar Street, Reading, RG1 1HE

Planning Portal Reference: PP- 13526315

Vail Williams LLP have been instructed by Hickie and Hickie Ltd. to submit this cover letter to support the application for 1no. replacement fascia sign, 1no. replacement projecting sign and 1no. new roof level sign, alterations to fenestration and associated alterations to front and rear elevations at 153 Friar Street, Reading. The application is supported by the following information:

- Application Form
- CIL Form
- This cover letter / Planning Statement
- Location Block Plan: 2846-302 Rev-P3
- Existing and Proposed Floor Plans and Elevations (including detailed advertisement plans): 2846-301 Rev-P6

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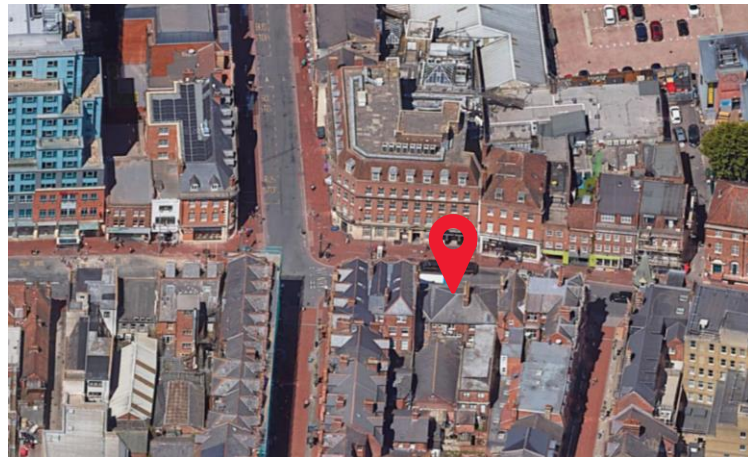


Site Context

The site is located within Reading Town Centre and is surrounded by a range of retail, commercial and residential uses and has a mixed-use character to the area. 153 Friar Street is located on the southern side of Friar Street, and comprises a three-storey flat-roofed building within a terrace of buildings. The site at 153 Friar Street, Reading is an existing commercial building (Class E) with an operational retail use at the ground floor frontage. The retail floor space is occupied by Hickies Music shop which has been operational since 1864 on Friar Street so should be considered an important occupier on Friar Street. The entrances to the ground floor and commercial floorspace above take access from separate recessed wooden doors. Existing signage includes 2no. projecting signs and 1no. fascia sign.

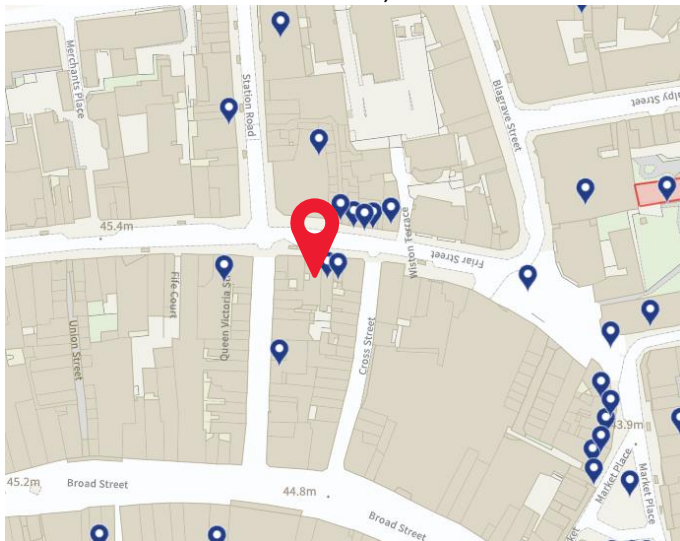


Photograph taken 10th Jan 2025



Google Satellite Image

Whilst 153 Friar Street is not a statutory listed building, multiple adjacent buildings (Nos. 1 to 31 Queen Street, 154 and 155 Friar Street) are Grade II listed. In addition, adjacent to 153 to the east and 147 Friar Street to the west, are Grade II listed buildings.



Historic England Map

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Proposals

The proposals seek:

Full planning for 1no. replacement fascia sign, 1no. replacement projecting sign and 1no. new roof level sign, alterations to fenestration and associated alterations to front and rear elevations.

The proposed development seeks to remove the recess, bringing both access doors forward creating a flat elevation along the street and enhancing the level of active street frontage to the building. To accommodate the changes to the frontage, the ground floor retail area will increase by 4sqm, but its existing retail use will be retained and continued to be operational.

A full list of the proposals is as follows:

- Existing fascia sign to be removed and replaced (signage details included on plan ref 2846-301-P6)
- Existing projecting sign to be removed and replaced (signage details included on plan ref 2846-301-P6)
- New illuminated metal signage at roof level (to match the historic photo below – signage details included on plan 2846-301-P6)
- More traditional fenestration at front first and second floors (existing steel windows to be removed and replaced with cream aluminium windows) on north and south elevations
- More traditional shop front (taking cues from historic photograph) flat elevation along the street, replace existing hardwood windows and door with cream aluminium
- Residential entrance directly onto street, no recess, replace existing hardwood door with cream aluminium
- Render finish at first and second floors south elevation replaced with EWI rendered white
- Extraction and electrical units to be removed from south elevation
- New vents on the south elevation
- Rainwater downpipe and SVP removed from south elevation and reinstated over EWI render
- Lamp to be removed from north elevation

The proposals seek to alter the front facade through changes to the existing fenestration and signage to create a higher-quality, more traditional shop frontage (taking inspiration from historic photo below). The works do not propose any changes to the use of the site but instead seeks alterations to enhance the existing building.

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Historic Image of site

Planning History

The site's planning history is limited. The most recent application on the site received permission for the conversion of the upper floors from office to residential. Historic applications are summarized in the table below:

Reference	Description	Decision
221906	Change of use from Commercial, Business and Service (Use Class E), or betting office or pay day loan shop to mixed use for two flats (Use Class C3) under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) - Schedule 2, Part 3, Class G	Permitted 02/03/2024
221340	Application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed Change of use from Commercial, Business and Service (Use Class E), or betting office or pay day loan shop to mixed use including up to two flats (Use Class C3). Conversion of 1st and 2nd floor to 2no 1 bedroom flats under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) - Schedule 2, Part 3, Class G	Withdrawn 31/10/2022

National Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It sets out that planning law requires that applications for

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planning permission should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework was revised in response to the Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the Planning system consultation on 12 December 2024 and sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Below are the most relevant paragraphs from the current NPPF (December 2024) which relate to design and assessment of development in relation to heritage assets.

Section 8 (promoting healthy and safe communities) emphasises that planning policies and decisions should achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

- Promote social interaction through strong neighbourhood centres and active street frontages;
- Are safe and accessible with high quality public spaces;
- Enable and support health and wellbeing through provision of local shops;
- Plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, such as local shops, and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities; and
- Ensure that established shops are able to develop and modernise and are retained for the benefit of the community.

Paragraph 131 highlights the importance of good design stating *"The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities."*

Paragraph 135 goes further in respect to design stating that decisions and policies should ensure development *"functions well and add to the overall quality of the area"*, is *"visually attractive"* and *"sympathetic to local character and history"* as well as *"creating places that are safe inclusive and accessible."*

Paragraph 207 gives the assessment criteria for development impacting on heritage assets and requires that LPA's *"should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance."*

Paragraph 212 goes further stating *"When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be)."*

Local Plan

The Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted on 4th November 2019. It sets out the planning policies and proposals for Reading up to 2036 and is the main consideration when deciding planning applications. Reading Borough Council is at the first stage of consultation upon a Partial Update of the plan to cover a selected group of policies. The Regulation 18 Consultation on Scope and Content

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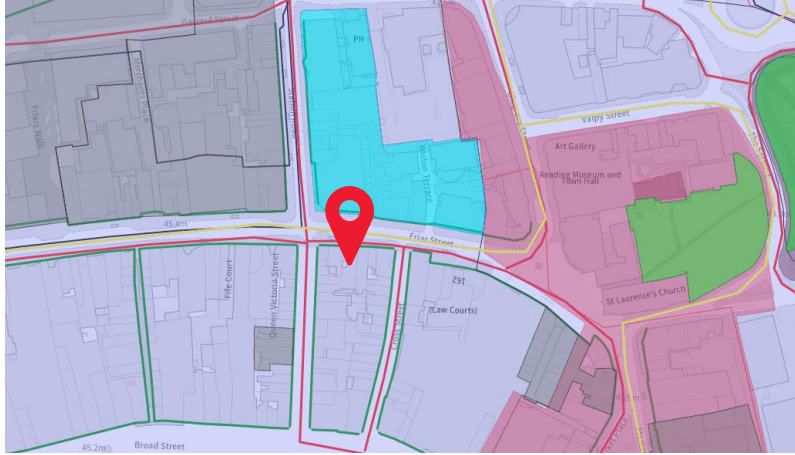
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of the Reading Borough Local Plan Partial Update was published in November 2023. According to the Reading Borough Council Local Development Scheme (June 2024), the Local Plan Partial Update is anticipated to be adopted in Autumn 2025.



Reading Borough Council Local Plan Interactive Proposal Map

The site has the following Reading Borough Local Plan policy designations, sourced from the Reading Borough Council's interactive proposal map;

- Reading Central Area
- Primary Shopping Area
- Primary Shopping Frontage (Green Line)
- Air Quality Management Area
- Office Core
- Central Core
- Area of Archaeological Potential
- Cycle Route (Red Line)
- Classified Highway Network (Yellow Line)

Additionally, the site is adjacent to the following policy designations:

- North of Friar Street and East of Station Road policy CR16 (Blue Area)
- Major Opportunity Area (Black Line Area)
- Allocated Development Sites (Grey Areas)
- Conservation Area (Pink Area)
- Schedule Ancient Monument (Darker Pink Area)

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- Local Green Space and Public Open Space (Green Area)
- Historic Park or Garden (Darker Green Area)

Policy CC1: Presumption In Favour of Sustainable Development echoes the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development, highlighting that decisions should be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations dictate otherwise.

Policy CC7: Design and The Public Realm requires that all development is of a high-quality design and maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area. It highlights the following list of objectives against which development will be assessed;

- Character - a place with its own identity and sense of place
- Continuity and enclosure
- Quality of the public realm and provision of green infrastructure and landscaping
- Ease of movement and permeability
- Legibility - clear image and easy to understand
- Adaptability – capable of adaptation over time
- Diversity – meets a wide range of needs.

The policy continues to set out that developments should ensure they “Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm” amongst other things.

Policy EN1: Protection and Enhancement of The Historic Environment aims to preserve or enhance heritage assets including listed buildings. It states that “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. Applications which affect Listed Buildings will not have an adverse impact on those elements which contribute to their special architectural or historic interest including, where appropriate, their settings.”

Policy EN6: New Development in a Historic Context emphasizes that in areas with heritage assets, the historic environment should guide and influence new development. The policy requires new developments to respect and enhance the architectural and visual qualities of the area, contributing positively to its historic character. When reviewing planning applications, the following factors are considered:

- The development's contribution to the historic townscape, including scale, height, materials, and views.
- Sensitivity to the surrounding historic context.
- Reflection of heritage themes that define the local area's character.

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- Whether the development improves access to or promotes previously neglected historic significance

Policy RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres defines a network of centres across Reading, which are shown on the Proposals Map. The policy aims to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of these centres. The site is located within the Regional Centre of Reading. “Central Reading will see the greatest levels of development and change.”

Policy OU4: Advertisements outlines that advertisements must complement the building or structure they are placed on and their surroundings in terms of size, design, materials, colour, and illumination. They should not “obstruct windows, any other sign already located on the building, or cut across significant architectural features such as historic fascias, windows, pilasters, cornices or scrolls.” Additionally, “Illumination should not detract from the amenity of the area or pose a safety hazard to users of the highway”.

Policy OU5: Shopfronts and Cash Machines emphasizes that shopfronts should complement the character of the building, its surroundings, and the wider street through appropriate design, materials, colours, and lighting. Key features that contribute to the character of the area should be retained or restored, while safety and security must also be upheld.

Specific criteria for shopfronts include:

- Fascia boards should be lower than any first floor windows, and reflect the predominant height of historic fascia boards on surrounding buildings;
- Shopfronts should present an active frontage to the street at all times.

Policy CR1: Definition of Central Reading establishes the boundaries and key areas for development within Reading's Central Area. As outlined on the Proposals Map, the site is within the Primary Shopping Area, Central Core policy and Office Core. These designations guide where different types of developments should take place in the town centre:

- Retail development will take place in the Primary Shopping Area;
- Major office development of over 1,000 sq m will take place in the Office Core; and
- Other main town centre uses will take place in the Central Core.

Policy CR2: Design in Central Reading requires development in Central Reading to be of a high quality of design respecting the local context and not to prejudice the neighbouring sites.

Policy CR7: Primary Frontages in Central Reading states that “frontages should be of a high visual quality. Any frontages that have the potential to hinder movement or cause unnecessary safety risk will not be permitted.”

Supplementary Planning Documents

The Design Guide to Shopfronts is a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) adopted in January 2022. The SPD provides guidance on works to improve shopfronts and signage throughout the Borough, seeking to strike a balance between high-quality shopfronts and successful businesses. The

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SPD is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications applying to all shopfronts within Reading Borough.

Section 4 of the SPD sets out general design principles. Proposals for new or replacement shopfronts or alterations to an existing shopfront are expected to:

1. Respect or enhance key features of any historic interest, aiming to enhance and improve upon any original features through repair in the first instance, rather than replacement;.
2. Respect the character of the building and the wider area in terms of design, colours, materials, lighting and location;
3. Employ signage that enhances the street scene and does not detract;
4. Provide safe and inclusive access for all;
5. In the case of conversions from shopfront to residential or non-retail uses, retain original shopfront features to the greatest extent possible; and
6. Present an active frontage to the street at all times and minimise any opaque coverings that obscure the shop window.

Key Planning Considerations and Conclusions

This proposal improves design of the shopfront and contributes positively to the character of the area, including the setting of the Market Place Conservation Area. The proposed signage and changes to fenestration are traditional and therefore enhances the site's contribution to local heritage assets and the general character of Friar Street and wider historic context of Reading's High Street. The traditional shopfront design respects the rich history of Hickies, taking design influences from its historic signage, noting that Hickie's have occupied 153 Friar Street since 1864 so as an occupier can be considered to contribute towards the history of Friar Street. The proposals will assist in providing a high quality shop frontage to encourage customers into the store.

The proposal has wider benefits in helping RBC deliver a vibrant town centre through making Friar Street a more attractive place to visit. Furthermore, the proposals align with policy regarding the site's location within the primary shopping area and its associated primary shopping frontage, through prioritising high-quality design.

Whilst the site is within an AQMA, the proposals are seeking to undertake improvements, and refurbishment works to an existing building and do not introduce new sensitive uses to the site. Given the nature and minor scale of the proposed works, it is not considered the proposals will impact on air quality.

The site is also within an Area of Archaeological Potential. However, since the works do not involve the disturbance of ground as they relate to façade changes to an existing building, no Archaeological Assessment is required as part of this application.

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In relation to biodiversity net gain, the site is above 25sqm, there is no habitat area on the site since it is entirely hardstanding. The proposals therefore achieve the 'de minimus' exemption (less than 25sqm habitat) from biodiversity net gain requirements.

Overall, the proposals are considered to comply with national and local planning policy requirements and will improve the overall appearance of the existing building and its contribution to the character of the surrounding area.

I trust you have all the information needed to consider this application, however if you need anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Sophia Piatto BSc (Hons)
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