

Heritage Statement

In respect of;
The WWII ARP Bunker at the old Whitley Library,
215 Northumberland Avenue,
South Reading, RG2 7PX.



For Al-Majid Welfare Trust (Al-Majid Centre)

Report produced based on previously submitted
heritage report

Maskan Architectural
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27.01.202

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Heritage Statement has been produced in collaboration with Michael Foley AssocRICS, PDD (Building Cons) of Standard Heritage Ltd accompany and moderated by Dr Walid Omeir for planning application for the change of use; from former library to Community Centre and place of worship. The Heritage Statement aims to articulate the significance of a concrete WWII bunker (The Bunker) situated in the curtilage of the property.
- 1.2 Michael Foley AssocRICS, PDD (Building Cons) is an associate member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, a Supporter and committee member (South East branch) of the IHBC (Institute of Historic Building Conservation). He has the Professional Development Diploma in Historic Building Conservation & Repair; PDD (Building Cons); the diploma was developed by English Heritage and is officially recognised by Historic England as it adheres to their guidelines and standards aimed at improving conservation practice. He is a committee member on a panel of the Ramsgate Heritage and Design Forum, which is a official consultee to the Local Authority planning department (Thanet District Council) that compromises of local experts who review planning applications on listed buildings, in Conservation Areas and wider planning applications that affect the design code of the local area (Ramsgate). He is also a long-standing personal member of the SPAB (Society for the Protection of Historic Buildings).
- 1.3 Michael has experience with working with wide range of heritage assets, designated and undesignated, including Grade I, II*, II listed buildings, surveying Conservation Areas (for Historic England), and registering buildings on the Historic England 'at risk' register.
- 1.4 Michael runs an RICS regulated Building Surveying practice that operates exclusively in the historic built environment.
- 1.5 Michael was a Carpenter and Joiner for 25 years before re-training as a surveyor. He holds the City& Guilds Craft and Advanced Craft certificates in Carpentry and Joinery and has experience with 'formwork'; formwork is a temporary structure, sometimes pre-fabricated, used to contain concrete and mould it to specified dimensions until the concrete is able to support itself before 'striking' the form (removing it). This is relevant to understanding the construction of The Bunker
- 1.6 This report uses information supplied by the Al-Majid Centre, Oxford City Council Libraries, Reading Borough Council, Museum of Oxford and on-line sources and assess The Bunkers significance against the materials listed in the the following report section;
2.0 Relevant Planning Policy, Principles ,Standards, Charters and Guidance.

2.0 Relevant Planning Policy, Principles ,Standards, Charters and Guidance

- 2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
 - 2.1.1 The NPPF identifies the Governments planning policies and how they should be applied in practice. It is used by Local Planning Authorities when preparing their development plans and is a material consideration in determining planning applications. Section 16 of the NPPF provides guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment and the decision-making process in relation to heritage assets.
- 2.2 Locally Listed Buildings; Reading Borough Council
 - 2.2.1 Reading Borough Council has placed the bunker on their register of Locally Listed Buildings; LL11 – Whitley Library, 205 Northumberland Avenue
 - 2.2.2 *'The Council has established and maintains a List of Locally Important Buildings. Local listing is a way of recognising the buildings and structures which do not meet the criteria for national listing, but are nonetheless significant to the heritage of the local area'*;
<https://www.reading.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/heritage-and-conservation/conservation-areas-listed-buildings/locally-listed-buildings/>
- 2.3 British Standard 7913; Guide to the conservation of buildings (BS: 7913).
 - 2.3.1 Section 4 of BS:7913; Heritage values and significance sets out guidance that helps to assess and understand the significance of a building or place, (designated or non designated) and its contribution to the wider historic environment.
- 2.4 ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites); The Burra Charter
 - 2.4.1 The Burra Charter recognises the previous ICOMAS charter (Venice Charter, 1964) but introduced a new analytical methodology for assessing heritage places. The charter recognises cultural heritage beyond the tangible and physical forms and introduced the concept of 'sense of place' being of importance. The charter has been/ is internationally influential.
- 2.5 Historic England; Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance
 - 2.5.1 *'The primary aim of the Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance is to support the quality of decision-making, with the ultimate objective of creating a management regime for all aspects of the historic environment that is clear and transparent in its purpose and sustainable in its application'*(Historic England 2024);
<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-principles-sustainable-management-historic-environment/>

3.0 Methodology and Materials

- 3.1 This Heritage Statement uses BS:7913, section 4 Heritage values and significance as its primary guidance. The section has four subsections which delivers detailed guidance that is appropriate to all buildings in the historic environment including The Bunker:
- 3.1.1 4.1 Use of significance in the management of the historic
'Significance represents a public interest, and the planning system, and the policy and legislation which support it reflect this'
 - 3.1.2 4.2 Values contributing to significance
'Heritage has cultural, social, economic and environmental values'
 - 3.1.3 4.3 The assessment of significance
'A wide range of factors can contribute to the significance of a historic building. As well as physical components ,significance includes factors such as immediate and wider setting, use and associations (e.g. with a particular event, family, community, or artist and those involved in design and construction). The relative importance of these varies'.
 - 3.1.4 4.4 Understanding heritage assets, historic buildings, values and significance
'Understanding the contribution of a particular historic building to the wider historic environment allows significance to be taken in to account when making decisions. How the significance of a historic building should be conserved is site specific. Those responsible for the curation of a historic building can affect its continued benefit through actions to conserve or manage any changes. A thorough understanding of the significance of the historic building is important prior to reconciling work proposals with the existing built fabric and archaeological resource. This should be done by the avoidance of harm where possible. Where harm is unavoidable, a record of what was once there should be created'.
- 3.2 The Bunkers significance will be also be assessed using:
- 3.2.1 Reading Borough Councils criteria for locally listing buildings; Reading Borough Local Plan- Adopted November 2019. (See Appendix A; *Reading Borough Councils criteria for locally listing buildings*) and Historic England's Conservation Principles.
- 3.3 Additional materials to the ones listed in section 2 of this report were used to gain an understanding of The Bunkers significance; the list is in appendix B; *References*. This included a consultation with an expert archaeologist with a specialism in below ground WWII structures.

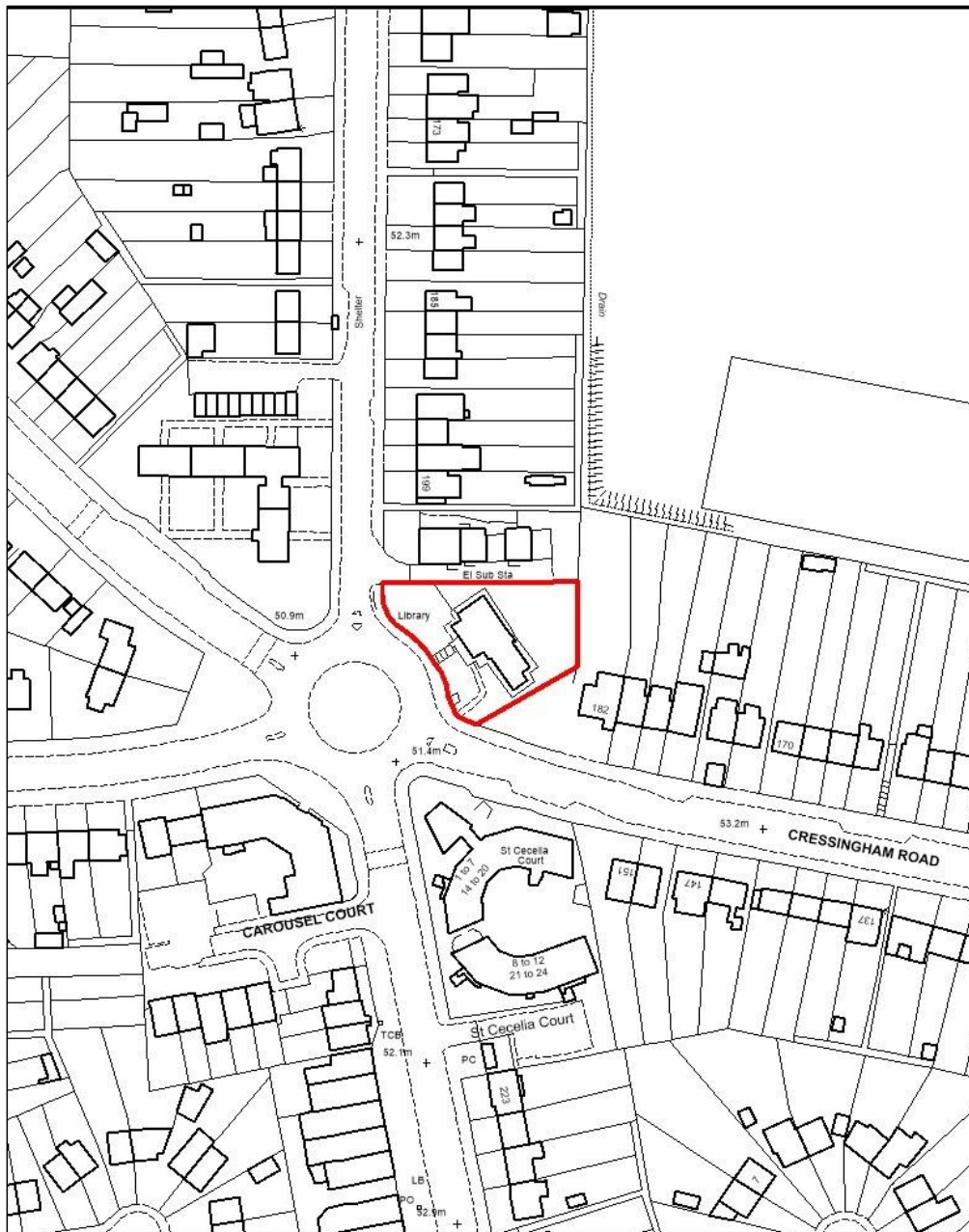
4.0 History of The Site and Context

- 4.1 The history of The Bunker site will be limited to the date of the construction of the library in 1935.
 - 4.1.1 The Bunker was constructed with concrete using pre-formed shuttering in a 'Cut and Cover' site; Cut and Cover describes the excavation of the ground for the construction of air-raid shelters, and the re-covering after.
 - 4.1.2 It is not known when The Bunker was constructed, it may or may not have been built as part of the country's wartime preparations or it may have been built as a response to a bombing raid of Reading in 1943, when, very sadly 41 lives were lost, two in Whitley (reportedly), many people were injured and a number of buildings were destroyed.
 - 4.1.3 The Bunker is identified as an ARP (Air Raid Precautions) Bunker, and has been described as an ARP HQ (Head Quarters).
- 4.2 The significance of the Huntley and Palmer association with Reading will not be explored in this heritage statement, however its history and association with the area has been researched in the preparation of the document.
- 4.3 Extracts from Reading Borough Council Locally Listed Buildings sets out the history and context of the site and includes the bunker in the following sections 4.3.4 & 4.3.6:
 - 4.3.1 LL11 – Whitley Library, 205 Northumberland Avenue
 - 4.3.2 Date added to local list: 13 September 2018
 - 4.3.3 South Branch Library (now Whitley Library) was opened on Tuesday 2 April 1935 by the Mayor Dr G.H.R Holden. It was the first purpose built community building in the centre of Whitley. It is a significant building in the development of the community of South Reading and was in place before many of the houses around it had been built. It pre-dates the nearby community centre opened in the 1940s and which now houses Whitley Library which has now vacated the original building.
 - 4.3.4 The building has a distinctive frontage, which has a round plaque inserted in the triangular construction above the entrance door with 'LIBRARY' embossed on it and a wreath surrounding the letters. The building has been extended to the south but that has not detracted from the look and shape of the original building façade. Behind the library is a Second World War ARP post or shelter. It is marked on a map of ARP posts in Reading Museum's collection and its position is clearly visible on the ground. Before any change in use of the site takes place this should be fully documented and investigated in terms of its heritage significance.
 - 4.3.5 This whole library site is a significant local landmark of considerable community significance. The library building that has served the community for over 80 years since it opened in 1935.

- 4.3.6 During the Second World War the library was an ARP group headquarters and there is still an underground post or air raid shelter on the site behind the library.
- 4.3.7 The building was socially important as the local library which as well as providing books also held activities for the local community.
- 4.3.8 Most early Whitley community buildings no longer exist in their original form.
- 4.3.9 Architectural Interest a) Sense of Place
- 4.3.10 The style is characteristic of municipal and institutional developments in Reading at that time. Very few examples of this style remain and this one is particularly distinctive because of its façade and 'LIBRARY' in bronze letters in a cartouche over the entrance. It has been referred to as 'the architecture of hope'.
- 4.3.11 When the library was opened in April 1935 the construction was described as brick, faced with two inch bricks. The architect (at this point) is unknown. Although understated, the building exhibits the use of non-standard materials of high quality with particular attention to detailing. The main symmetrical façade consists of a large projecting, single storey, gabled entrance porch of brick with stone detailing. Behind the projecting porch entrance is a two storey height, symmetrical brick gable with stone parapet and two flanking, flat roofed 'wings'. The gable has a central stone plaque with surrounding wreath and the word "Library" in bronze in typical Art Deco style font.
- 4.3.12 The brickwork is all well-built in Scottish bond (5 courses of stretchers and 1 course of burnt headers) and built in thin, 2 inch bricks with light mortar with sharp inclusions.
- 4.3.13 The porch consists of brickwork with an arched entrance built of sandstone ashlar with moulding and recessed doorway; the porch has stone surrounds around two flanking windows of sandstone with decorative squares in relief at the corners; the stone parapet the front gable is slightly concaved and continues around building. The interior is largely 'institutionalised' with the only surviving features being some original doors. Original cast iron hoppers and down pipes exist. Windows have been replaced in uPVC throughout. The rear of the main building is constructed in the same materials but is devoid of architectural detailing. To the right is a flat roofed extension in matching style (but thicker) brick in stretcher bond; the extension is not of architectural or historic interest.

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5.0 Maps of The Site



LL11: Whitley Library, 205 Northumberland Avenue Scale 1:1250

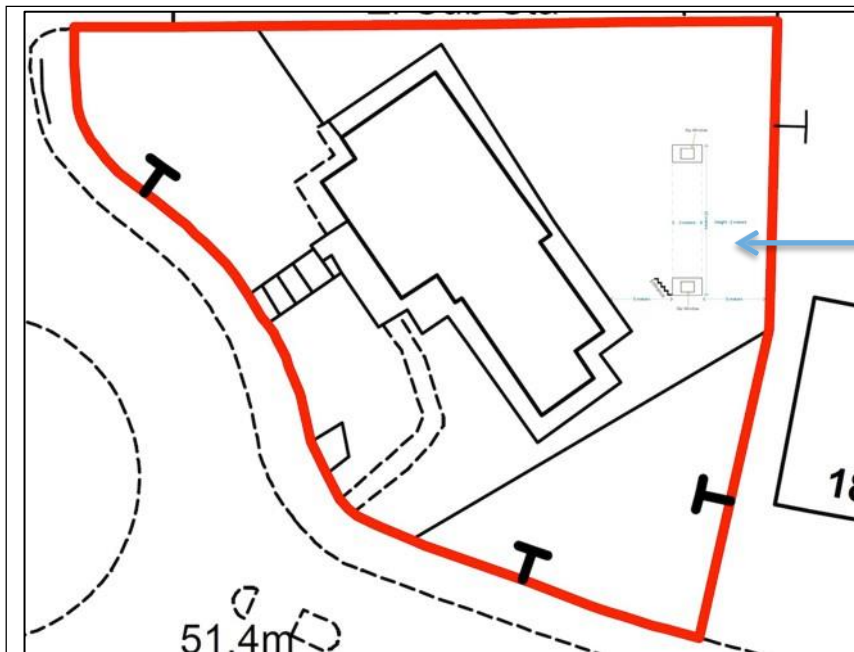
Added to local list 13th September 2018



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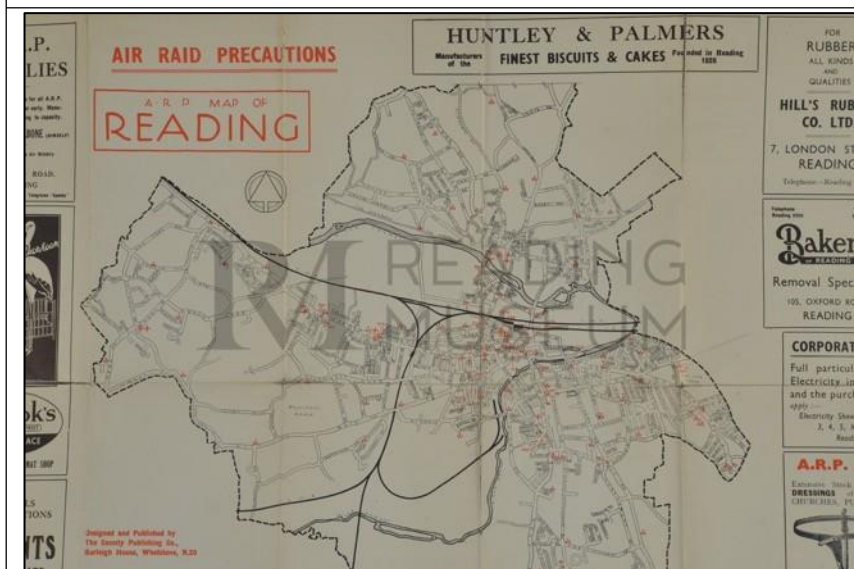
LIST OF LOCALLY IMPORTANT BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

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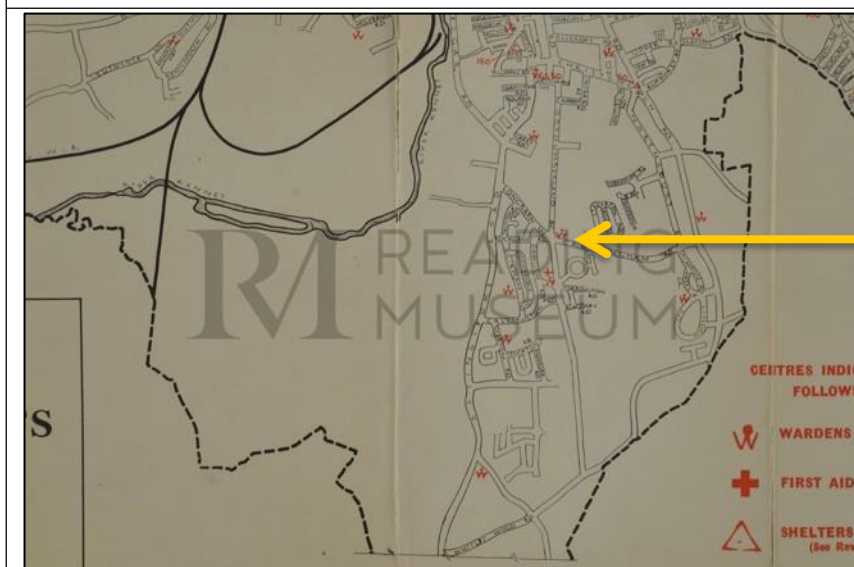


Site map showing the position of The Bunker

Image; Reading Borough Council



Historic map of ARP sites in Reading



Close up of South Reading and the site of the Bunker

The site

Maps courtesy of Reading Borough Council

6.0 Review of the Existing Site

- 6.1 The site maps when compared to the historic ARP maps show the boundary of the property to be unchanged even though Whitley has been developed.
- 6.2 The design of the original library and its fabric are largely intact apart from the replacement u-PVC windows and the addition of an extension.
- 6.3 The Bunker is in a neglected state and appears to have been closed up from some time after WWII and have developed some openings causing water leak in the bunker during the rain
- 6.4 The site was visited and photographed by IK Architecture for the purpose of this report. The photographs show the concrete structure to be intact internally and the externally with some weathering.

		The Bunker entry and sky light 28th November 2023 The bunker entry
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Heritage Statement; The WWII Bunker at the old Whitley Library



The skylight

		Inside The Bunker 28th November 2023
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- 6.5 The lighting in the photographs highlights the indentations of the formwork/ shutters that would have been used to pour the concrete on, forming the shape of the bunker before being 'struck'; struck is the term used to describe the removal of the formwork/ shutters. The indentations indicate that pre-fabricated metal formers were used in the construction rather than it being an Anderson Shelter as suggested by some sources. It also rules out the use of a Nissan Hut.
- 6.6 The lighting in the photographs by IK Architecture shows the internal fabric to be of plain concrete, some moss growing on the bunker entry with damaged side vertical slabs on entrance stairs.

7.0 Assessment of Significance

- 7.1 The assessment of The Bunker's significance was made based on the individual heritage values outlined in *BS7913 4.2 Values contributing to significance*. While these values help understand its potential significance, many of them do not apply in a substantial way to The Bunker. The following values are referenced to The Bunker:
- 1) Architectural, technological or built fabric value;
 - 3) Spatial characteristics;
 - 7) Educational value;
 - 9) Social or communal value;
 - 15) Commemorative value;
 - 17) Identity or belonging;
 - 18) National pride;
 - 19) Symbolic or iconic value.
- 7.2 The significance of The Bunker can be assessed against Reading Borough Councils criteria for locally listing buildings. The relevant sections include:
- 7.2.1 Principles
 - 7.2.1.1 4. post-1939: Any building, structure or group of buildings where the elements that contribute to its/ their exceptional heritage significance in the local context are wholly complete and unaffected by inappropriate changes.
 - 7.2.2 Historical Association
 - 7.2.2.1 i. The building or structure has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person(s) or event.
 - 7.2.3 Sense of place
 - 7.2.3.1 iii. The building or structure shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering.
- 7.3 Historic England's Conservation Principles can also be used but the tests are not as specific as BS7913, they are:
- 7.3.1 Evidential value: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.
 - 7.3.2 Historical value: the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present - it tends to be illustrative or associative.
 - 7.3.3 Aesthetic value: the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.
 - 7.3.4 Communal value: the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

8.0 Summary/Conclusion

- 8.1 The Bunker is mostly below the ground with only the bunker entry and skylight hardly visible from above ground. Although The Bunker is a reminder of the wartime past, it does not possess the level of historical, architectural, or social significance that would justify it being an important heritage landmark. Its design is typical of wartime shelters, and it does not have a distinctive or iconic quality that would make it a noteworthy part of local or national heritage.
- 8.2 Sense of Place
- *Curiosity and Visibility:* The Bunker's entry and skylight may spark curiosity, but its presence in the landscape is not prominent enough to create a strong sense of place. Its role as an object of historical interest is minimal, and it is largely overlooked by the community.
 - *Internal Experience:* The interior of The Bunker may offer some sense of the past, but it does not provide a significant or immersive historical experience. Compared to better-preserved examples of wartime shelters, it lacks interpretative value.
 - *Innovation in Design:* The Bunker's design is basic and functional. It does not demonstrate innovation in materials, techniques, or architecture, making it of limited interest from a historical or architectural perspective.
- 8.3 The Bunker does not have the same level of significance as other wartime structures or community landmarks in the area. While it offers some potential for educational use, it does not stand out as a key part of the local heritage. Given its functional and unremarkable design, along with its lack of wider recognition in the community, there is limited justification for preserving The Bunker on a long-term basis.
- 8.4 After reviewing all the available information about and in relation to The Bunker, it is the findings of this report that The Bunker, while a historically relevant structure, does not have sufficient significance to be marked as an important heritage landmark. Its architectural, historical, and communal value are minimal, and its contribution to the local heritage narrative is very limited.

End of report.

References

<https://museumofoxford.org/oxford-at-war-in-the-20th-century>

<https://www.reading.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/heritage-and-conservation/conservation-areas-listed-buildings/locally-listed-buildings/#LL11>

<https://www.gdrc.org/heritage/sense-of-place/index.html>

IHBC- Conservation of distinctive local identity helps to maintain a sense of place and foster local pride. Historic buildings are used by local voluntary groups;

<https://ihbc.org.uk/Conservation-Professional-Practice-Principles/>

<https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/online-exhibitions/history-huntley-palmers>

<https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/blog/day-reading-was-bombed-people's-pantry-75-years-on>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/constructive-conservation/conservation-principles/>

Thanks to Emma Boast , General Manager at the Ramsgate Tunnels;

<https://www.ramsgatetunnels.org>

Materials supplied by Emma;

<http://www.pillbox-study-group.org.uk/other-wwii-defensive-structures/air-raid-shelters/>

<https://www.grimsbytelegraph.co.uk/whats-on/family-kids/historic-wwii-air-raid-shelter-1977522>