



Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee
17 March 2024

Dear Matthew Burns

COMMENTS ON APPLICATION PL/24/1694 – FORMER WHITLEY LIBRARY 215 NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE AND ADJACENT LAND

Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee commented extensively on the previous application PL/21/0537 which was withdrawn on 19 April 2023.

In advance of that application, we were able to visit the exterior of the proposed community centre and meet the applicant in August 2021. This was facilitated by Councillor Mohammed Ayub. Works had already started by that time and Reading CAAC had been contacted as there were concerns that there might be damage to the locally listed building and underground ARP warden's post at the rear which is also included in the listing.

We present some additional comments and images below which are followed by our original comments on application PL/21/0537 which are still valid.

1. HERITAGE

1.1 We note and welcome that this application includes a heritage statement assessing the significance of the bunker at the rear of the property.

1.2 The bunker was built c1939 when such structures were planned and built all over Reading.

1.3 We disagree with the conclusion (para 8.1) that the bunker '*... does not have a distinctive or iconic quality that would make it a noteworthy part of local or national heritage...*'. The bunker is included within the local listing of the library (LL18 13 September 2018) and so clearly it has already been judged that it is a structure of local interest. The library was a group headquarters and the bunker was associated with that. Local interest includes historical association and social importance both of which are relevant to the ARP post. There will be people still living in Whitley who, if they do not remember the ARP post themselves, will remember their parents or grand-parents talking about it if not using it; therefore it has significant community value.

1.4 The statement also says (para 8.3) that '*...there is limited justification for preserving The Bunker on a long term basis.*' The plans and other documents within the application suggest that the area above the bunker could be impacted by this proposal which would impact its structural integrity. This should be clarified with the plan on page 8 of the heritage statement superimposed on the proposed site layout. We would expect that the bunker would be maintained and any future development of the site

including those that would or would not impact the bunker would require planning consent. The bunker has educational potential as demonstrated by the Clifford Road tunnels in Ipswich (<https://cliffordroadtunnels.co.uk/about-us/>)

1.5 Changes which are visible from the street have taken place to the site between the two applications.

- A low wall has replaced the fence adjacent to the car parking area. The wall is of low quality brickwork which does not match the brickwork elsewhere on the site.



Wall replacing the fence adjacent to the car park (February 2025)

- A low fence has been added at the front of the property



Fence at the front of the property (February 2025)

1.6 A tree was removed from the edge of the car park before the end of 2021. The replacement of this tree in another suitable location on the site should be considered as part of the decision on this application.

1.7 We note the comments from Thames Valley Police re: security arrangements at the site and request that any modification of the plans that might be required take into the account the current security measures in arriving at a solution. The anti-climb barriers which might have been appropriate when the building was vacant are very unsightly and should be removed.

COMMENTS MADE ON APPLICATION PL/21/0537

1. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

1.1 We support the proposed F2 (b) community use of the former library.

1.2 We are concerned about the delay in consultation on this application, originally submitted on 7 April 2021 and that works started in advance of a decision.

1.3 A considerable amount of damage has been done to the fabric around the windows and entrance porch of the library by the security shutters that were placed there by Reading Borough Council. The anti-climb security fencing around the roof remains. It is unsightly and we would prefer to see it removed.

1.4 The condition of the ARP wardens post should be inspected, documented and secured from unauthorised access. This underground shelter could have a future use for educational visits.

1.5 A tree has been removed from the left hand edge of the car park.

2. HERITAGE

2.1 The building was locally listed (LL11) on 13 September 2018. To the listing summary we should add that the architect was the Borough Housing Architect and the builder was T.F. Aberly, 3 Norcot Road Tilehurst [minutes of the Public Libraries Committee 8 May 1934].

2.2 We support the proposed community use of the former library. We are concerned that works commenced before the application was decided which could have resulted in damage to the building. When we visited we noticed that one of the cast iron hoppers and drain pipes had been removed and asked for it to be restored.



Cast iron hopper and drainpipe August 2021

2.3 The fixing of security shutters, while the property was vacant, has damaged the fabric of the building. There are holes in the stone work around the windows and the porch. Whilst we cannot comment on the necessity for these measures we would like to be assured that the damage will be made good.



Damage from fixings around the porch and window August 2021



Damage from fixings around a window on the south side of the building August 2021

2.4 The anti-climb security fencing is unsightly. We request that the need for this assessed as it detracts from the appearance of the building and is not mentioned in the application. Should this fencing be removed then the damage caused by the fixings should be made good.



Security fencing around the roof August 2021

2.5 A condition of approval of the application should be that the structural condition of the underground warden's post is assessed and documented with photographs. The underground shelter was linked with the use of the library as an ARP group headquarters during the Second World War. As such it is a rare survival and we feel that its preservation with a view to its potential for future educational visits would be beneficial to the community.

(Link to an example in Ipswich in the grounds of a school <https://cliffordroadtunnels.co.uk/about-us/>.)
[NB - updated link]

2.6 A condition of approval of the application should be that the underground warden's post is secured to prevent unauthorised access and danger to the public.

3. CAR PARK

3.1 A tree had been removed by August 2021 on the left hand side of the car park entrance. This removal is not mentioned or justified in the application.

3.2 We do not feel competent to comment on the car parking and access arrangements for the community centre.



Tree removed from the car park area August 2021



Car park entrance on Cressingham Road August 2021

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Subject to our comments above we support this application for a change of use from a library to a community centre.

Yours sincerely

Evelyn Williams

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