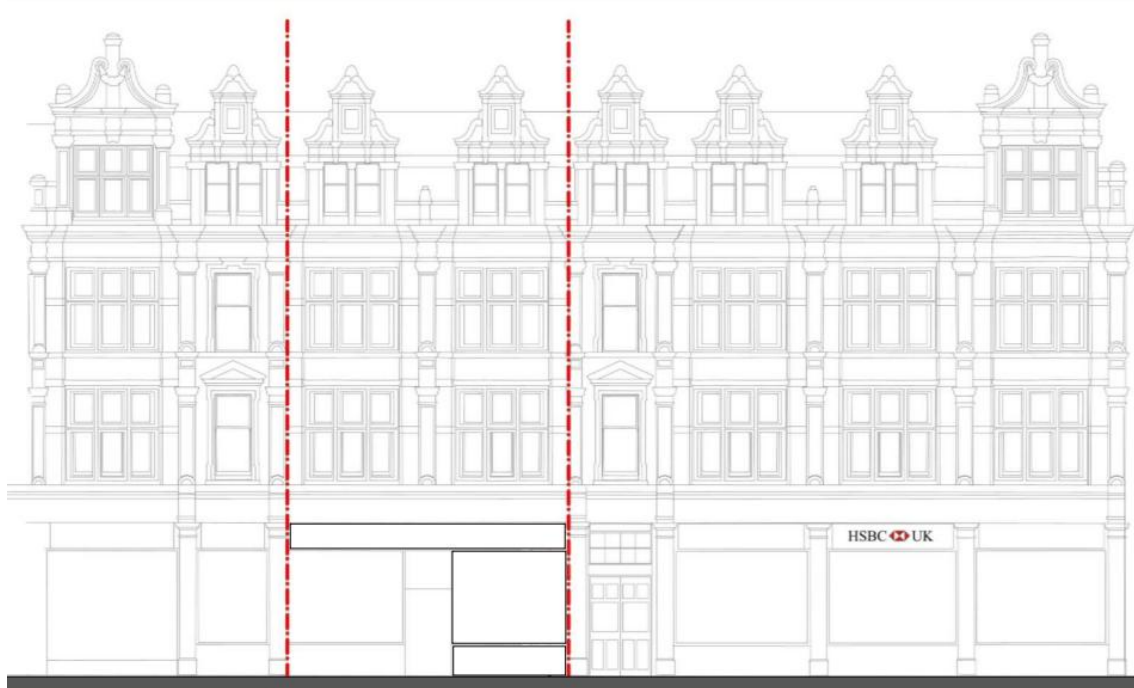


Statement of Significance
&
Impact Assessment
relating to proposed works
30 Queen Victoria Street
Reading
RG1 1TG



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Kevin Morris Heritage Planning Ltd. has been appointed to prepare a brief statement of significance to help assess proposed works on heritage significance of the building and its conversion from a bank to retail on the ground floor and three residential flats above.
- 1.2 This subsequent document is divided into two principal sections. The first, provides a brief historical context to the site together with a generic statement of significance and images. The second provides commentary on the proposals and their impacts on significance.

The Site

- 1.3 The application premises forms part of a continuous terrace of retail units dating from the early 20th Century with basement, retail ground floor space and three floors of accommodation above (although no staircase exists to provide access). The terrace is situated on the eastern side of Queen Victoria Street (continuing into Broad Street) near to the junction with Broad Street and within the commercial centre of Reading. The following figures and images provide an understanding of the building and its context:



Fig. 1. An extract from the submitted application illustrating the site location relative to its surroundings.
Source: Ian Benbow

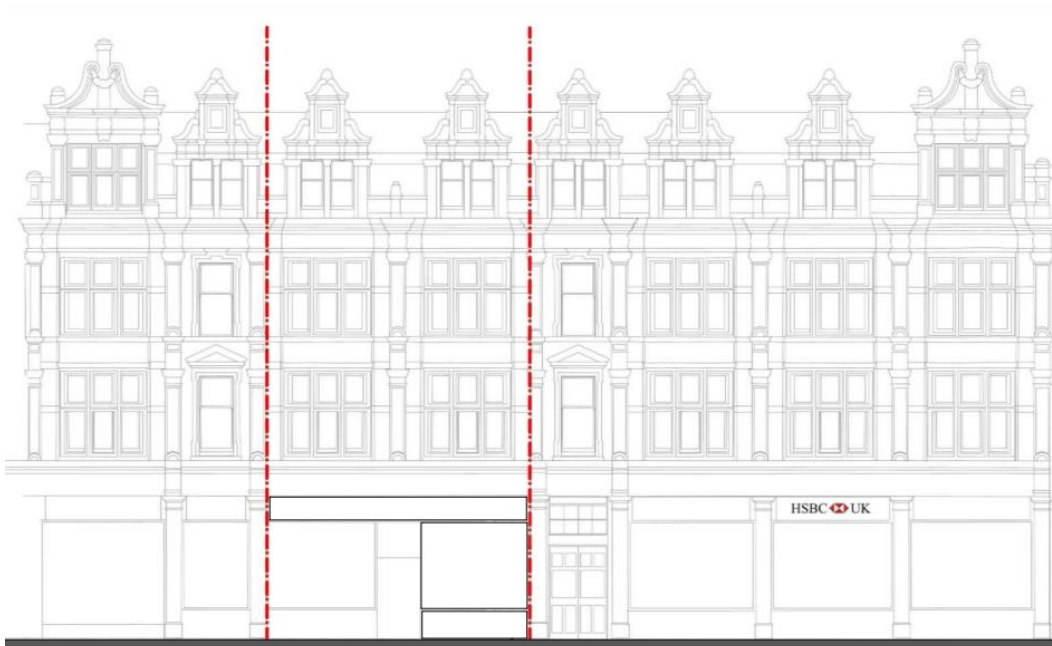


Fig. 2. The front elevation in context. Source: Ian Benbow



Plate 1. A Google image of the roofscape of the application building and its context.
Source: Ian Benbow



Fig. 3. The existing shopfront. Source: Ian Benbow

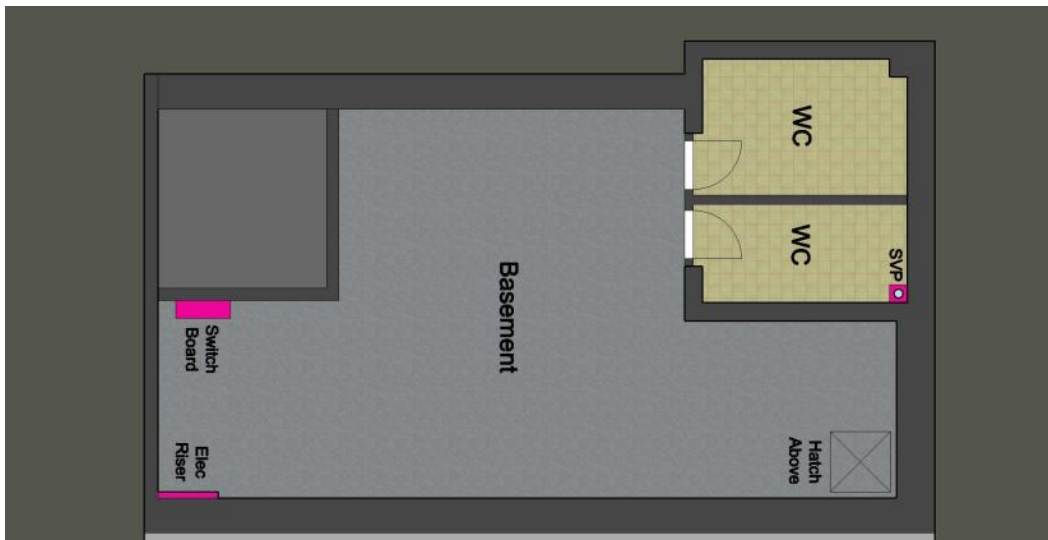


Fig. 4. The existing basement arrangement. Source: Ian Benbow



Fig. 5. The existing ground floor plan. Source: Ian Benbow



Fig. 6. The existing first floor plan. Note there is no staircase to provide access between floors.
Source: Ian Benbow

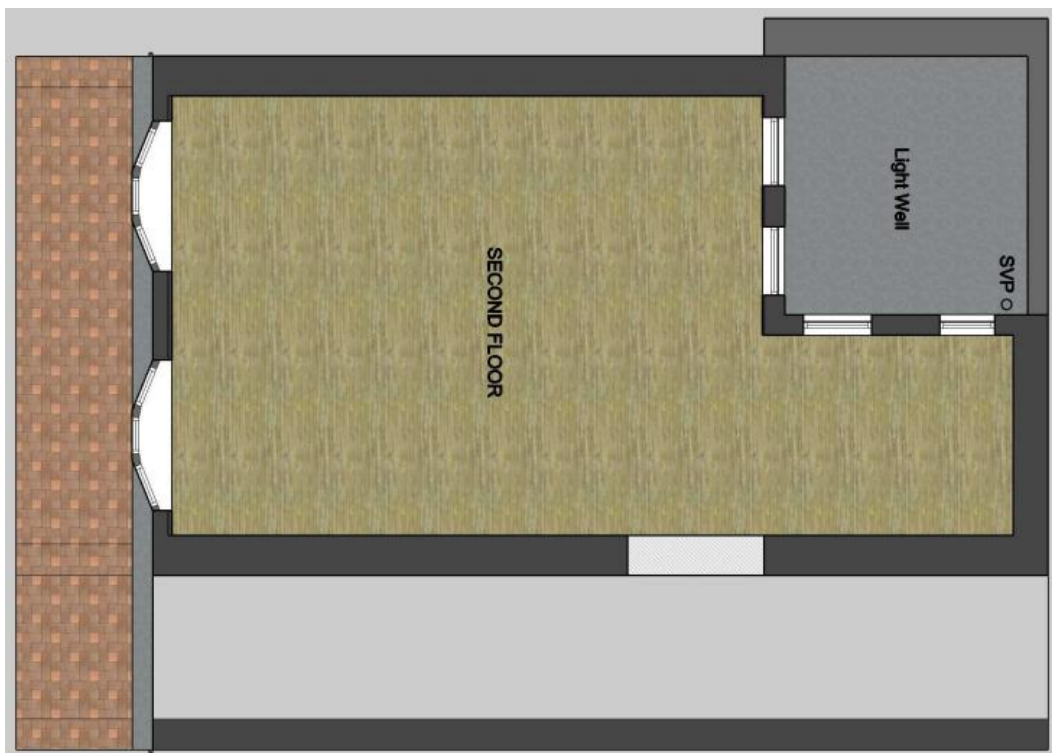


Fig. 7. The existing second floor plan. Source: Ian Benbow

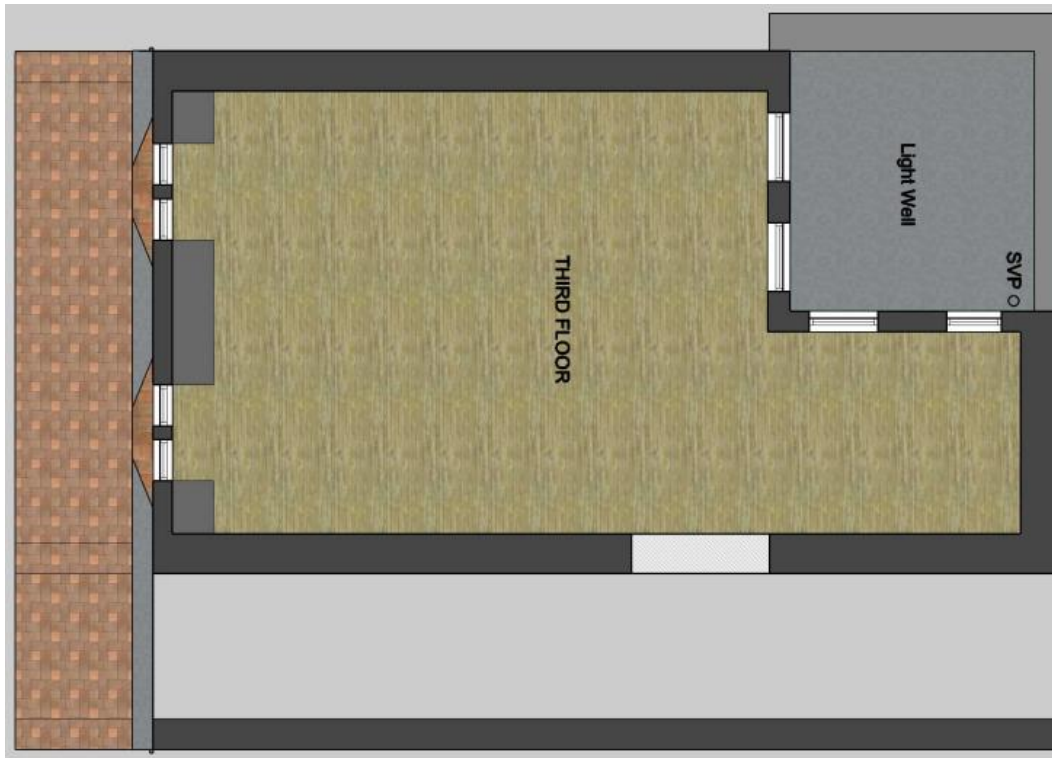


Fig. 8. The existing third floor plan.



Plate 2. The existing shopfront, of poor quality relative to the age and architectural language used for the building above, illustrating a relatively modern insertion with fascia, sub-fascia and pilasters. The stallriser is evident (in contrast to that adjacent) although clad in modern materials. The historic entrance to the upper floors is evident to the right of the image.



Plates 3 and 4. The upper floors and street view.

- 1.4 Both the application property and those adjacent are statutory listed buildings but do not (according the Council's website) lie within a designated conservation area. The statutory list descriptions are as follows:

QUEEN VICTORIA STREET 1. 5128 Nos 1 to 31 (odd) Nos 2 to 32 (even) SU 7173 NE 1/558 SU 7173 SW 2/558 SU 7173 SE 3/558 SU 7173 12/558 II

2. Including Nos 148 and 149 Friar Street and Nos 24 to 28 and 35 to 37 (consec) Broad Street. A circa 1894 commercial street with returns to Broad and Friar Streets. Probably by Joseph Morris. Dutch gabled free Baroque style. 3 1/2 storeys, yellow brick and terracotta with dividing Ionic pilasters. Dentil cornice. Pilasters to dormers, broken pediments above. An elongated pattern of shallow bays to 1st and 2nd floors 4:2:1:1:1:1:3. Mullion and transom window to bays, sashes with architraves (and pediments on 1st floor) to rest. Modern shopfronts, retaining cornice to fascia and scroll brackets to pilasters, only one shop retains prewar shopfront. Large returns to Broad Street. The return to east (No 28 Broad Street) supported by No 26 (dated 1894, grey brick with red terracotta dressings) and by No 24 (an early C20 Bank with - large shaped pediment doorway on corner to Cross Street; red brick with stone dressings and stone fret patterns to gables).

Listing NGR: SU7152373529

Map Regression and Brief History

- 1.5 Review of historic maps reflects the relatively late construction and formation of Queen Victoria Street in the early 20th Century.

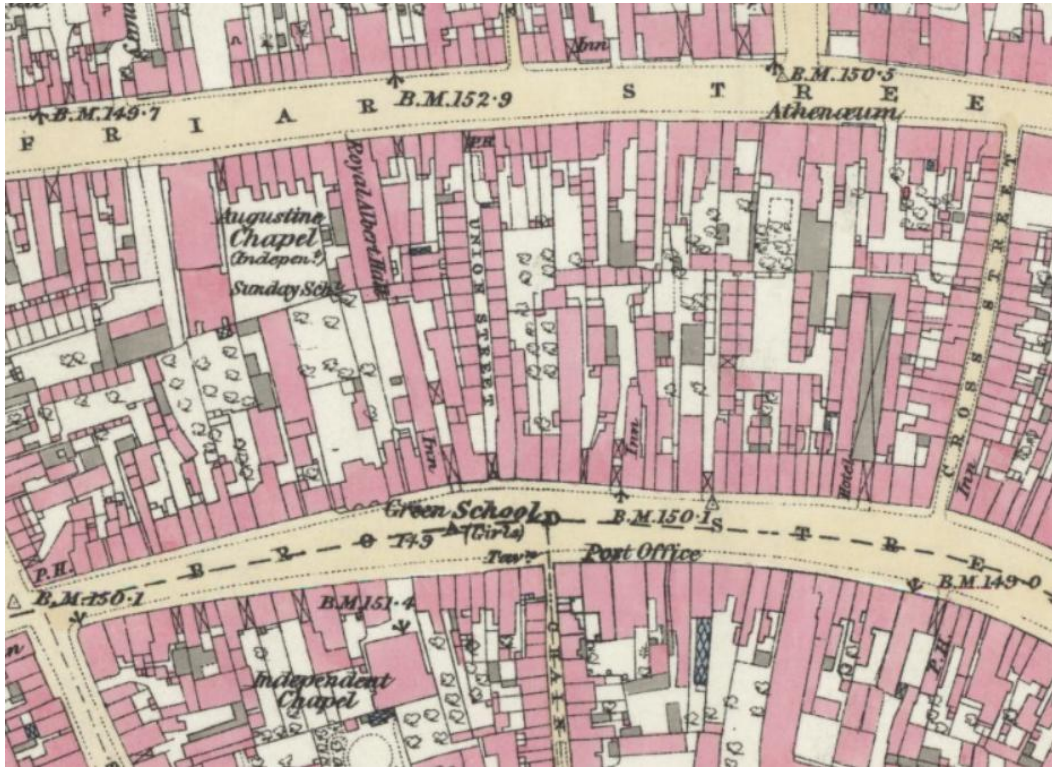


Fig. 9. A 25" OS map from 1884 which provides understanding of the layout and grain of the town centre before the formation of Queen Victoria Street.



Fig. 10. A 25" OS from 1931 showing the recently constructed street and naming in recognition of the former queen.

- 1.6 Review of the Reading Museum website enables understanding of the history of Reading. In terms of the application site, it makes reference to Reading becoming an important centre for trade and business between 1700 and the 1800s when it developed into a prosperous market town. Its three most important business became known as the three Bs – standing for beer, bulbs and biscuits. The beer was made by Simonds Brewery (opened in 1785), the bulbs were grown by Sutton's Seeds (established in 1837), and the biscuits were baked by Huntley & Palmers (started in 1822). The museum state the following:

Reading expanded thanks to the development of its transport links. Improvements along the River Kennet from Reading to Newbury (completed in 1723) made the journey quicker and easier for boats transporting goods. When the Kennet and Avon Canal opened in 1810, agricultural produce and manufactured goods from Reading could be shipped directly to Bristol and London and then to markets overseas. There were also new fast coach services connecting the town to London, Oxford, Bath and Bristol.

By the 18th century, Reading was a thriving market town, a regional centre for business. Britain was prospering from growing international trade and Reading merchants, like sailcloth maker Musgrave, were profiting from these global connections.

In the 19th century, Reading's largest companies used Britain's colonial expansion to source ingredients and raw materials and to reach new markets for their products. Huntley & Palmers both exploited Reading's global links and created new ones

On 30 March 1840, the Great Western Railway's first-ever passenger train departed from Reading to London. Between 1840 and 1945, Reading became an industrial town. Steam powered the railways and new factories emerged, turning out huge numbers of machine-made goods. Reading's appearance was transformed through the arrival of factories, ornate public buildings (including the Town Hall and Museum), and new homes for workers, all made from the distinctive local red brick.

Reading expanded, new services were established including gas and electricity supplies, sewers, public transport, schools, parks, a prison and a hospital. In 1869, the town was confirmed as the county town for Berkshire and the extent of the borough was increased to the south (Whitley) in 1887 and again in 1911 to the north (Caversham) and west (Tilehurst).

- 1.7 This rapid growth brought great prosperity to the town and the formation of Queen Victoria Street formed part of this modernization and recognition of the town's commercial importance and status including banks. The recent planning history shows occupation of the application building by not only by HSBC but previous financial institutions and use not only at ground level but also on the upper floors, with evident alterations to the plan and fabric to meet their needs at the time. Existence of the historic entrance doors to the south of the application site (within the terrace) suggest

separate access to the upper floors (previous residential use?) and it may be that the central stair and landings served flats to either side on each floor which makes sense of the lack of a stair within the application premises. Unfortunately access to the historic stair and landings are not within the ownership of the applicants and as such have made the upper floors inaccessible with evident need to intervention to create a stair serving the proposed flats.

2. Legislative and Policy Framework

- 2.1 Any proposals which are likely to affect the special interest of a heritage asset will be considered against policies and guidance at both national and local level. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires decision makers, the local planning authority, to have 'special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'. The following referenced provide a brief resume of the policies and guidelines that will be used to assess any proposed works.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.2 The Government's policy guidance places significance as one of the guiding principles running through its historic environment section. It defines significance as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest'. Such interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic' and it may derive 'not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting'. It makes clear that significance is what conservation sustains, and where appropriate enhances, in managing change to heritage assets.
- 2.3 Given the significance of the building as a heritage asset, a review will need to be taken of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as revised. It makes clear that when determining applications, local planning authorities 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. It also states that 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). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

Local Planning Policies

- 2.4 The extant local plan includes the following policies aimed at safeguarding heritage significance:

EN1: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Historic features, areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings will be protected and where possible enhanced. This will include:

- *Listed Buildings;*
- *Conservation Areas;*
- *Scheduled Monuments;*
- *Historic parks and gardens; and*
- *Other features with local or national significance, such as sites and features of archaeological importance, and assets on the Local List.*

All proposals will be expected to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. 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.

Applications which affect Historic Parks and Gardens will safeguard features which form an integral part of the special character or appearance of the park or garden. Development will not detract from the enjoyment, layout, design, character, appearance, features or setting of the park or garden, key views out from the park, or prejudice its future restoration.

Applications which affect, or have the potential to affect, the significant features of heritage assets should be justified by a Heritage Statement.

The Council will monitor buildings and other heritage assets at risk through neglect, decay or other threats, proactively seeking solutions for assets at risk including consideration of appropriate development schemes that will ensure the repair and maintenance of the asset, and, as a last resort, using its statutory powers.

Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect or of damage to a heritage asset, the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision.

3. Historic England Guidance

Conservation Principles and Policies

- 3.1 Historic England's Conservation Principles and Policies document seeks to update and enable increased understanding of adopted policies and principles used to safeguard the historic environment and is referenced when determining applications affecting heritage assets. Historic England state the following:

Archaeological Interest:

There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

Architectural and artistic interest:

These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skills, like sculpture.

Historic Interest:

An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 2

- 3.2 The purpose of this Historic England Good Practice Advice note is to provide information to assist local authorities, planning and other consultants, owners, applicants and other interested parties in implementing historic environment policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the related guidance given in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). These include; assessing the significance of heritage assets, using appropriate expertise, historic environment records, recording and furthering understanding, neglect and unauthorised works, marketing and design and distinctiveness. The document also goes on to provide helpful definitions to help interpret NPPF guidelines and expectations.

The Setting of Heritage Assets

- 3.3 Given the proposed works relate to a listed building which is adjacent to other designated heritage assets (it forms part of a listed terrace), assessment should make reference to Historic England's setting guidance which provide a staged approach to any assessment and potential impact of development upon heritage assets.

4. Significance

- 4.1 The application building is statutory listed and as such, of significance. That significance is formed primarily but its architectural and historic interest. In architectural terms its external envelope and principal elevation in particular (the rest is functional) reflects its period of construction and free Baroque style using materials (yellow brick and terracotta) to emphasise the adopted style and language, aimed at impressing and securing primacy within the urban centre. That also reflects its historic interest and

development of the town centre with formation of the street and its enclosing buildings as illustration of the wealth and importance of the town at the end of the 19th Century.

- 4.2 Review of the Council's planning history illustrates numerous applications for planning permission, listed building consent and advertisement consent which have impacted upon the building's fabric. Significant was the incorporation of the building into the adjacent banking use at all floor levels. It is this attachment that in all probability led to the removal of any internal staircases within number 30 and opening up of the party walls between the building and the adjacent bank. It is also evident from examination of the available plans that the interior reflected a modern office type layout in contrast to a historic interior. Extracts from the planning history and examination of the attached plans where available, illustrate this point. Relevant applications which involved alterations to fabric are as follows:

Reference	PL/92/0739	Application type	Listed building consent (Alt/Ext)
Site address	28-30 Queen Victoria Street Reading RG1 1TG	Description	Internal modification of existing premises. New timber and glass shop front.
Status	Decision Made	Decision	
Received Date	03/6/1992	Decision Date	08/8/1992
Reference	PL/01/0283	Application type	Listed building consent (Alt/Ext)
Site address	28-30 Queen Victoria Street Reading RG1 1TG	Description	Refurbishment of ground floor and banking hall at 26 Broad Street and incorporation of 30 Queen Victoria Street into the HSBC bank
Status	Decision Made	Decision	Approve
Received Date	12/1/2001	Decision Date	09/3/2001
Reference	PL/01/1494	Application type	Full planning permission
Site address	30 Queen Victoria Street And 26-28 Broad Street Reading	Description	Refurbishment of ground floor and banking hall at 26 Broad Street and incorporation of 30 Queen Victoria Street into the HSBC branch
Status	Decision Made	Decision	Approve
Received Date	12/1/2001	Decision Date	09/3/2001
Reference	PL/12/0699	Application type	Listed building consent (Alt/Ext)
Site address	26-28 Broad Street Reading RG1 2BU	Description	Internal alterations to second floor to include the division of an existing room within the second floor of 30 Queen Victoria Street into four smaller rooms and minor alterations to openings. Installation of new air conditioning unit.
Status	Decision Made	Decision	Approve
Received Date	06/7/2012	Decision Date	22/8/2012

Reference	PL/17/1228	Application type	Listed building consent (Alt/Ext)
Site address	28-30 Queen Victoria Street Reading RG1 1TG	Description	Internal refurbishment of existing Building Society branch. Redecoration of the existing timber shop front and metal louvers. Replacement of existing timber glazed shop front door.
Status	Decision Made	Decision	Approve
Received Date	21/7/2017	Decision Date	15/9/2017

- 4.2 Internally the floor plan reflects the commercial use of the building in recent times with much of an assumed historic fabric stripped out with modern finishes. There is for example no staircase within the application property allowing access to the upper floor, perhaps a result of its former dependence upon a shared stair and landing serving the properties to each side (with evidence of former openings on the southern party wall having been blocked). The following images (provided by the architect) illustrate how much the interior no longer contains significance as an example of late 19th Century commercial development but more so as a modern commercial premises stripped and lined with little regard to fabric or decoration:

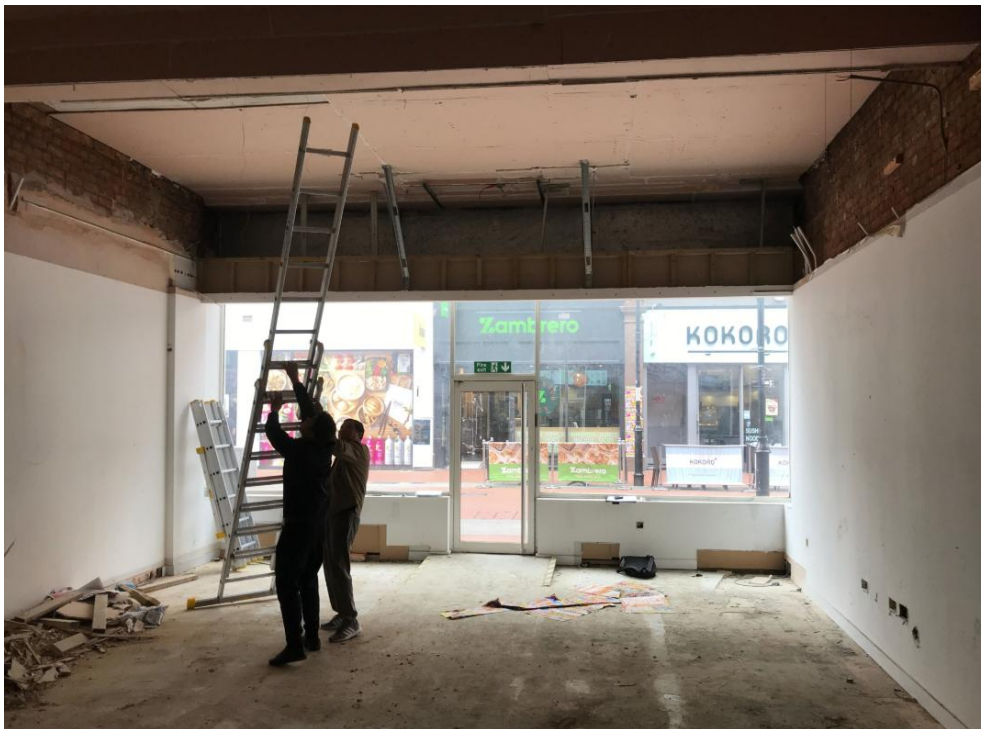


Plate 5. The ground floor and as illustrated devoid of any historic surfaces.



Plate 6. A detail of the modern finishes (plasterboard, blockwork and gypsum).



Plate 7. The rear of the ground floor. This is typical of the inherited finish on all floors.



Plate 8. Plasterboard ceilings and encased beams. Any decorative cornices or other plasterwork is no longer present. The image shows the line of the previously suspended ceiling.



Plate 9. A hole formed to gain access to the upper floors (no stair exists).



Plate 10. The first-floor front windows and evidence of over boarding of the 19th Century floor boards. The ceilings however reflect those of the ground floor.



Plate 11. More evidence of previous stripping out and lining at the rear of the building. Again, no stair exists to provide access to the upper floor (note blocked former opening to the historic stair now within the adjacent property) and evidence of the suspended ceilings.



Plate 12. Looking into the rear lightwell.

5. The Proposals and their Impacts

- 5.1 Proposals have, as a result of an examination of existing fabric and discussion with the local planning authority including their conservation officer, been amended from the original submission of the planning application. The works still see the replacement shopfront, use of the ground floor (and basement) for retail purposes with a separate access being formed to provide self-contained access to the new flats above following separation from the historic shared stair between properties.
- 5.2 When the planning application was first submitted, proposals raised concern with regard to the design of the shopfront (the rest of the elevation remains as existing). As the current proposals illustrate, the architect has redesigned the shopfront to reflect the wishes of the conservation officer. An extract from the submission is as follows:

The Conservation Officers Comments on the submitted proposed design:

- Please lower the stall raiser to its original height (as seen in historical photographs),
- remove transoms (or change their proportions as in the 1972 photo),
- consider two windows and one glazing bar for the shopfront for larger glazing.
- Please try to make an angled wall between the two entrances so that the wall would not distract.
- Provide the material specification and design for the proposed doors and shopfront.
- Traditional materials should be used on historic buildings.
- The proposed dark colour is acceptable.



Fig. 11. A sketch proposal and guidance provided by the conservation officer.

5.3 The revised proposal is as follows:



Fig. 12. The revised shopfront with timber frame, clerestory lights, chamfered entrance to the shop and separate access to the flats above. Source: Ian Benbow



Fig. 13. A proposed street view of the new shopfront making a positive contribution towards the street scene and significance of the asset, in contrast to the HSBC shopfront adjacent. Source: Ian Benbow

- 5.4 It is evident from site evaluation that the original shopfronts have been mostly lost to modern interpretation and commercial need with little thought given to the form, appearance and proportions of traditional shopfronts. This proposal, with assistance from the conservation officer makes a contribution towards re-establishing a legible shopfront that sits more easily within the framework of the historic building and basic components of the original design. As such it is clear that no harm would result from the proposed shopfront works and it can be argued an enhancement is secured.
- 5.5 With regard to the internal works, it is reported that when the property was vacated in 2018 by the adjacent bank, all internal fittings were stripped out leaving open and much altered spaces to each floor. There is no evidence of decorative cornices or other ornate plaster work one would normally expect to see in a building of this date and status (the decoration simplified as one rises within the building). Nor are there any historic partitions, doors or other feature that would have once contributed towards significance.
- 5.6 The following extracts have been taken from the original and subsequently amended submission to help illustrate the conversion works and general plan form as follows:

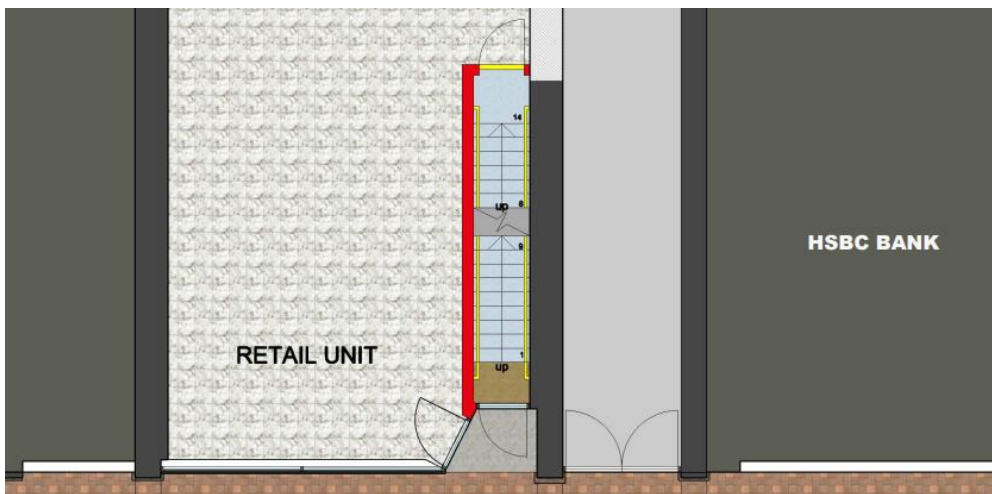
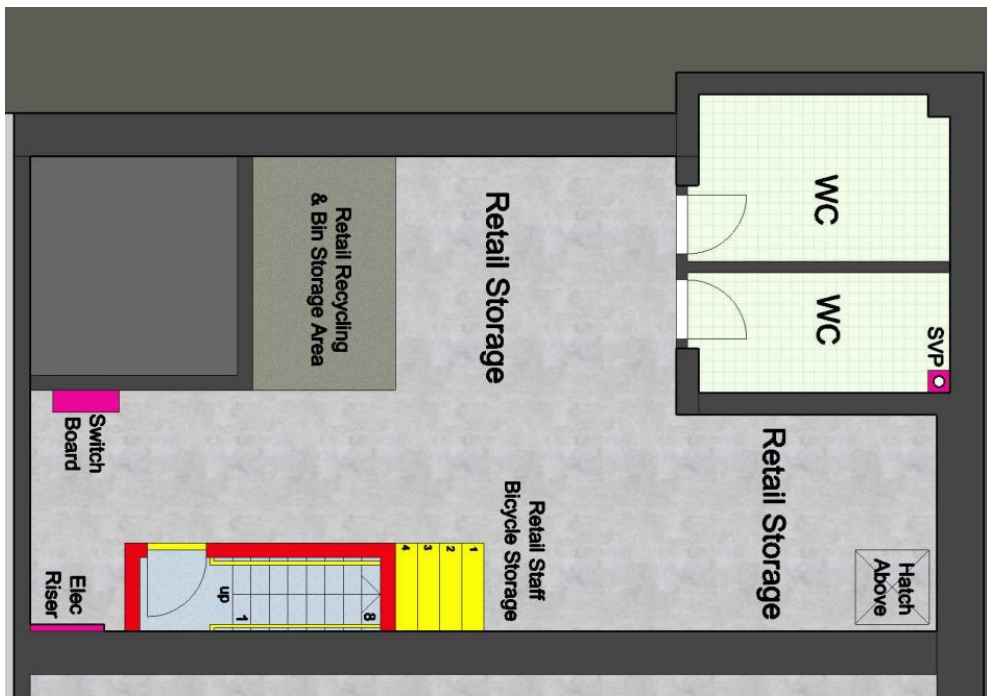


Fig. 14. The basement plan and revised shop entrance with location of the new stair to the upper floors from street level. Source: Ian Benbow



Fig. 15. The suggested plans for the upper floors (first, second and third) to enable their use for residential purposes. Source: Ian Benbow

- 5.7 It is evident from site analysis that the terrace was designed to accommodate retail or commercial uses at ground floor. The precise use of the upper floors originally is unclear, although separate access was provided to those areas as illustrated by the decorative entrance doors and fanlights and was probably residential, as previously stated, serviced by a shared stair and landings. However, over time the upper floors have seen conversion into various commercial uses and in the case of number 30, complete stripping out with the loss of any partitions, doors or other features (e.g. fireplaces – now blocked and staircases) assumed to have been present when first built. This is regrettable in heritage terms as those works have seen the significance of the building reduced, despite the strong visual presence externally. However, what amounts to what is tantamount to a blank canvas, the inherited condition of basement, ground and upper floors facilitates conversion to form the retail unit and flats and enables the formation of partitions, staircases and services without the fear of loss of historic fabric or features including floor plans. Any stair should reflect its insertion and be of simple form so as to be understood as a contemporary intervention.
- 5.8 In undertaking future works, care will need to be taken to safeguard any remaining historic fabric if indeed any is found, and the detail of proposed finishes and materials will need to be agreed with the local planning authority. Subject to agreement of new work, e.g. details of the stair and doors, partitions and other decorative features such as skirtings and architraves (which could be designed to reinforce understanding and appreciation of the asset) it is very clear that the proposal would not cause harm to the heritage significance of the asset; indeed securing a beneficial use will result in heritage benefits (subject to agreement of detail) and as such would be policy compliant and provide a valuable contribution to the viability and vitality of this part of the town centre.