

Design & Access Statement

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Heritage Statement

Retrospective application for

Internal and external alterations

25-26 Market Place, Reading RG1 2DG

July 2025



Front Elevation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.01 This retrospective application is for internal alterations and cosmetic external alterations to create a leisure attraction comprising escape rooms.
- 2.02 The building is currently commercial use Class E and is Grade II listed (Historic England List Entry No. 1113536).
- 2.03 The proposed alterations are to deliver a viable new use (within the current Use Class E) which is consistent with the active commercial frontage of Market Place and entails no harmful interventions to the historic fabric. There is no proposed extension.

2.0 LOCATION

- 2.04 25–26 Market Place forms the southern end of a terrace of three Grade II listed early-19th-century properties with a distinctive convex rendered façade and classical detailing.
- 2.05 The terrace sits prominently within Reading's Market Place/London Street Conservation Area, and opposite the Grade I Listed Church of St Laurence.
- 2.06 The site is located within the central area of Reading with strong public transport links and an established mix of retail, commercial, leisure and cultural uses.

3.0 EXISTING BUILDING

- 3.01 The property comprises 4 storeys with a basement and a central shared staircase serving all floors.
- 3.02 Current use is commercial Class E, the property is vacant and was previously an estate agency. It has a modern ground floor shopfront and largely cellular layouts divided into distinct, enclosed spaces on the upper floors.
- 3.03 It's main architectural value is the front façade. The staircase and general plan form retain some heritage value, although many internal features have been altered or replaced during previous 20th-century commercial uses.
- 3.04 Much of the upper floor interior comprises later partitions and fittings of limited historic interest.

INTERIOR IMAGES- AS EXISTING:



Image 01



Image 02



Image 03



Image 04

4.0 PROPOSED USE

- 4.01 The proposed escape rooms fall under the current Use Class E (Commercial, Business and Service).
- 4.02 Small groups of people (including tourists and corporates) will visit the building to solve puzzles in an immersive environment.
An escape room is a crystal maze style form of entertainment whereby teams solve puzzles and complete a given quest through a series of clues.
- 4.03 Four themed game rooms will be installed:
- Basement – “Catacombs” (horror-themed)
 - Ground Floor – “Secret Garden”
 - Second Floor – “Sci-Fi/Space”
 - Third Floor – TBC
- 4.04 The first floor will accommodate the staff office and a party room for larger group bookings.
- 4.05 Each room will host 2–6 players per session, with a maximum of 24 players and 5 staff on site at any time.
- 4.06 Rooms will remain unlocked at all times and be freely exit-able in accordance with fire safety guidance.

5.0 OPERATION

- 5.01 Opening hours: 0900–2030 daily, with the final session ending at 21:30.
- 5.02 Bookings are pre-arranged only; walk-ins are not accepted.
- 5.03 Primary trading times will be evenings and weekends, with occasional weekday corporate bookings.
- 5.04 The business will initially open with two rooms (Ground Floor and Second Floor).
- 5.05 Employment: Total staff will not exceed 10 employees over all shifts

6.0 CAR PARKING

- 5.06 There will be no parking on site.
Customers will be advised to arrive by bus or train or park in numerous nearby town centre car parks around Reading town centre.

7.0 SCHEDULE OF INTERVENTION

In order to achieve the escape room leisure attraction, the following alterations/ interventions will be required, all proposed works are reversible and avoid loss of historic fabric:

- 7.01 External works consist of re-decorating the shop front window frame and plinth below in black matt to match the proposed new signage. A new sign board and window film will be subject to a separate Advertisement consent application.
- 7.02 New timber doors and stud walls formed of timber framing with fire-rated plasterboard to create room separation.
- 7.03 Set dressing (e.g. “cave” environments) will use a substructure of 13 mm wire mesh over timber, finished in Modroc, sealed with fire-retardant paint.
- 7.04 New suspended ceilings below the existing suspended ceiling system
- 7.05 New WC in basement to replace the current kitchen
- 7.06 New floor coverings over the existing.
- 7.07 Fabrics and finishes used throughout will meet appropriate fire safety ratings.
- 7.08 Lighting and electrical systems will be low-voltage and surface-mounted or routed through existing service voids.
- 7.09 All fixtures and fittings will be fully demountable, and any fixings into historic fabric will be made into mortar joints only, using non-ferrous fixings.
- 7.10 No external walls will be penetrated or altered.

IMAGES OF WORKS ALREADY UNDERWAY:



Image 01

New stud walls in basement



Image 02

New stud walls and suspended ceiling frame on the ground floor



Image 03

New wall and floor finishes, new suspended ceiling framework on the ground floor



Image 04

Close up image of fixing detail of new suspended timber frame ceiling fixed to walls.



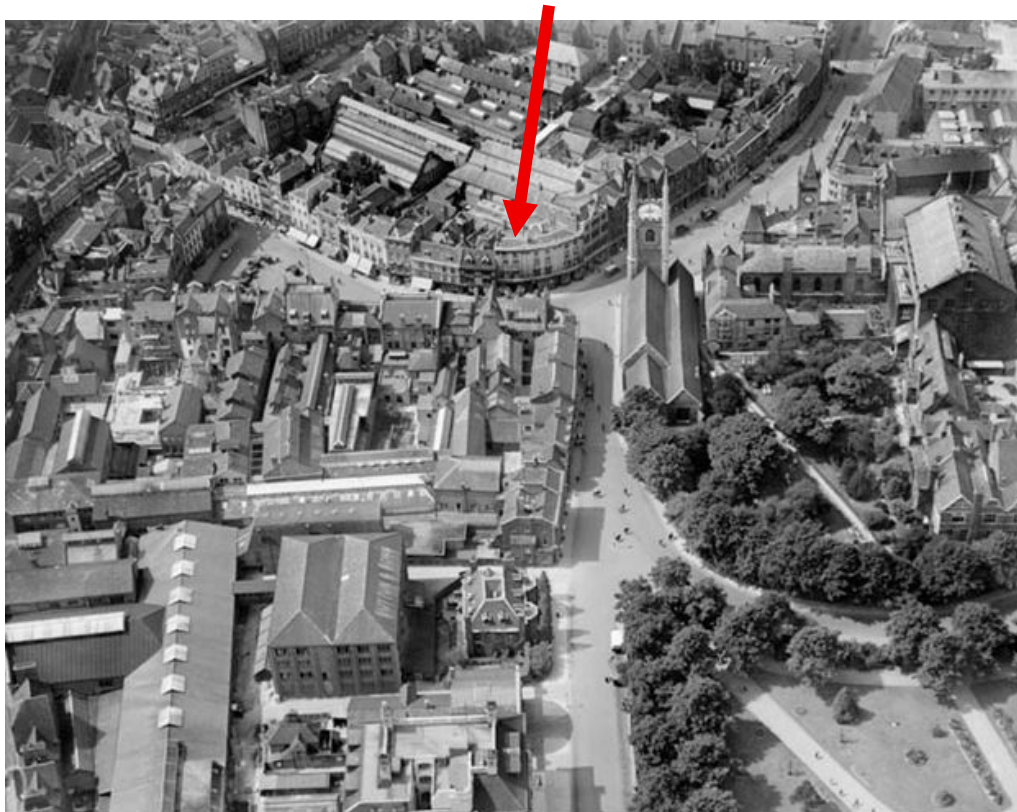
Image 05
New suspended ceiling frame on ground floor



Image 06
Front shop window frame and plinth below have been painted black matt.
The existing signage lights will remain.
A new sign board and window film will be applied for under a separate Advertisement consent application.

8.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 8.01 25–26 Market Place is a Grade II listed early 19th-century commercial building, part of a distinctive curved terrace within Reading's historic Market Place. The building is listed under List Entry No. 1113536, and is noted for its classical convex façade with Doric pilasters, timber sash windows, and corniced parapet. It sits prominently within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and opposite the Grade I Listed Church of St Laurence.
- 8.02 The surrounding buildings differ in both style and age, with ground floors primarily occupied by commercial uses, and a mix of office and residential spaces above. The site is situated within the central or primary shopping area of Reading.
- 8.03 The primary significance of the building lies in its:
- **Architectural value** – particularly the formal, classical façade which contributes positively to the townscape;
 - **Historic value** – as part of Reading's 19th-century commercial and civic expansion
 - **Group value** – forming part of a well-preserved terrace facing the historic market square
 - **Internally**, the staircase and general plan form retain some heritage value, although many internal features have been altered or replaced during previous 20th-century commercial uses. Much of the upper floor interior comprises later partitions and fittings of limited historic interest.



Historic England Archive: EPW022684

9.0 IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT

- 9.01 No changes are proposed to the building's historic external structure, key architectural features, or circulation routes.
- 9.02 The proposed scheme has been developed with a strong commitment to conservation principles, ensuring the character and special interest of the listed building are preserved and enhanced.
- 9.03 **No loss of original fabric will occur, as all internal interventions are designed to be fully reversible.**
- 9.04 Stud walls and scenic installations will avoid significant fixtures into masonry and will use mortar joints only where required.
- 9.05 The introduction of escape rooms as a use will promote active and sustainable reoccupation of upper floors that may otherwise remain underused.
- 9.06 External signage has been designed to be discreet and reversible, with no visual harm to the listed building or conservation area.
- 9.07 The scheme enhances the building's public-facing function, providing an appropriate and vibrant use that complements the setting within Market Place.
- 9.08 As such, the proposal results in no harm to the significance of the listed building or the wider historic environment and delivers clear public benefit through the sustained use and occupation of a heritage asset.

10.0 CONCLUSION

The proposal secures a high-quality, low-impact commercial leisure use that supports the economic vitality of Reading town centre.

The internal alterations are fully reversible and carefully designed to preserve the listed building's character. External alterations are minimal and sympathetic to the host building and conservation area.



Existing view of 25-26 Market Place