

THE FERNERY AT THE ACACIAS,
LONDON ROAD, READING
DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT
ISSUE 01: JULY 2025

DRAFT



On behalf of Purcell ®
104 Gloucester Green, Oxford OX1 2BU
info@purcelluk.com
www.purcelluk.com

Name	Position and Qualifications	Role
Will Holborow	Associate, Head of Surveying	Author
Graphics Team		Report Design

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THE FERNERY AT THE ACACIAS: DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

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SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Application

This statement is submitted in support of a Planning and Listed Building Consent application for repairs and alterations to the derelict Fernery attached to the rear of the Acacias, a Grade II listed building situated within the London Road Campus of the University of Reading.

Purcell carried out a condition survey and heritage assessment of the University of Reading's Acacias building in August 2023 which found that the Fernery was in critical condition. The University commissioned further work based on the findings of the 2023 condition survey. This further work included ecology and structural surveys, as well as an options study by Purcell. This report provides an explanation for the current proposals which have been subject to a meeting with the Council's Planning and Conservation Officers, and their written advice dated 25th May 2025 – see Appendix B.

1.2 Location

The location of the Fernery is shown below:



© Google Earth

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.3 General Description of the Building

1.3.1 Setting

The Fernery is located to the south of the Acacias building, which is positioned on the northeast corner of the London Road Campus of the University of Reading. To the east of the Fernery is an open area of lawn extending to the trees and bushes which grow along the eastern boundary of the Campus, and to the south is a patio.

1.3.2 Description

The Fernery as it stands today is the remaining part of a larger range of Victorian conservatories. The main section of the building is single-storey and L-shaped in plan, wrapping around the flat-roofed entrance corridor to the Acacias building, with a narrow corridor leading from the south of the main section which would previously have formed a link to other conservatories. To the west of the Fernery is a narrow service alley which divides it from the adjacent buildings.

The structure is primarily brick masonry with render on the exterior and a built up Pulhamite rockwork finish on the interior which would have formed crevices for planting and pools of water.

Walls on the east elevation are masonry at low level with timber framed glazing above, which remains in situ (but boarded up) on the main section of the building but has been lost around the corridor. The full-height west walls of the Fernery partially form the boundary of the narrow alley to the west and the roof is a glazed, pitched timber frame stiffened with decorative cast iron brackets, which remain in place, both at the haunches where the rafter feet meet the principal vertical framing members, as well as at the ridge where the opposing rafters meet. These are marked with the manufacturer's name 'Wm Wood & Son Ltd, Taplow, Bucks'. William Wood & Son were well-known horticultural suppliers who moved their premises to Taplow in 1924.

The timber framing to the windows and glazing bars to the roof are all relatively simple sections. The timber framing to the roof is not believed to be original as it does not match the appearance of early photographs which show a raised lantern at the centre of the roof. The cast-iron brackets are likely to be no earlier than 1924 given that William Wood & Son relocated to Taplow in that year. The roof originally had hinged opening lights adjacent to the ridge which are no longer in situ. However the iron winding mechanism which allowed these lights to be opened has survived.

Pulhamite

Pulhamite is a technique of artificial rockwork, patented by James Pulham. It is essentially a masonry core of overburnt bricks, waste stone, slag or other cheap, locally available filling material, amassed and modelled in mortar or concrete to replicate natural contours. Quality bricks and stone were also used where structural strength was important. The Pulhams also added overhangs created from slate or sandstone slabs, and often incorporated plant pockets into their designs. All of these structural forms were then finished with two coats of render, each typically 6 to 15mm thick. The base coat commonly consisted of a cement, and the finish coat a proprietary compound such as Pulham's Stone Cement, providing the trademark natural finish. Further information is contained in the English Heritage publication *Durability Guaranteed: Pulhamite rockwork – its conservation and repair* (2008).

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.3.3 Photos

The following photos were taken in July 2025, before dismantling of the roof structure for safety reasons.



Roof seen from rear of the Acacias



Entrance porch



Junction of Fernery roof with porch roof



Interior of the porch



East side of the Fernery

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION



Return bay on east side of Fernery



Exterior of south end of Fernery



Interior looking south



Mechanism for opening roof light



Ridge line of the roof



Cast iron bracket below the ridge

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION



Cast iron bracket at eaves level



Winding mechanism



Crack in Pulhamite at south end of Fernery



Pulhamite rockwork at south end of Fernery



SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.4 Summary of Condition

An initial assessment of the Fernery was made in July 2023 from the surrounding grounds and upper floor windows of the Acacias building as there was no access to the interior of the structure due to safety hazards. The roof was observed to have extensive decay to structural members and glazing bars, with much of the glazing either missing or precariously attached to the timber. Rainwater goods were also universally in poor condition, with decay evident to gutter boards internally and heavy vegetation growth and debris present in gutters and on the adjacent flat roof.

The Fernery was inspected again on 2nd July 2025, including an inspection of the interior. There had been no significant changes to the condition observed in July 2023, however some cracking in the Pulhamite was observed at the south end of the Fernery. Given the dangerous condition of the roof, permission has been obtained from the Conservation Officer to carefully dismantle the decayed timber roof structure, retaining any salvageable elements, including cast-iron brackets and other iron fittings.

The masonry walls of the structure were also observed to have cracks, some with loose areas of render and pointing, and a plinth wall at the south end of the building has been significantly damaged by an adjacent tree. This section has been broken up and the sections are leaning heavily to one side.

Doors were generally inoperable and windows, where remaining, were boarded up and severely decayed, especially at cill level.

1.5 Further Investigations

The following further works and investigations have been carried out since the initial inspection in 2023 to develop and support options for the future of the Fernery:

- Urgent works to enable safe access;
- Preparation of a measured survey;
- Pre-application consultation with Reading Borough Council; see their advice at Appendix B dated 15th May 2025;
- Structural engineer's report; see para 2.4;
- Ecology survey in case there are bats or nesting birds; see para 2.5,
- Arboricultural report; see para 2.6;
- Preparation of a feasibility study to explore options for its repair.

1.6 Designated Heritage Assets

The Acacias is a Grade II listed building (NHLE 1113511), first listed in 1978. The Fernery is also protected by its attachment to the Acacias and is mentioned in the list description as a "Good conservatory at rear with an extensive rockery". The list description is reproduced in Appendix A and can be accessed at the following link:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1113511?section=official-list-entry>

The building is located within the Kendrick Conservation Area.

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.7 History of the Heritage Asset

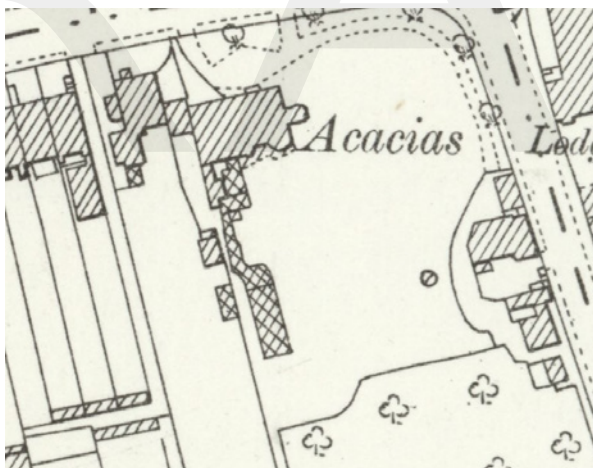
In 1865, George Palmer and his wife moved into the Acacias, where he lived until his death in 1894. Palmer commissioned the construction of the Fernery which extended from the rear elevation of the property, leading via a curved lean-to corridor and then into a conservatory block. In the late 20th century, Sally Festing of the Garden History Society argued that the Fernery was likely designed by James Pulham. This was on account of its 'typical horizontally gouged cement layers, and the strategically placed specimen island rock bearing a large palm at the angle of the 'L'. This conclusion has been upheld in subsequent analyses. There is no conclusive construction date for the Fernery, though it must post-date 1875 when the OS map does not show it, and pre-date 1898 when it does appear on the next edition of the OS map. Recent analysis of the Fernery has posited a similar date of about 1891.

The existing Fernery structure is the only remaining part of what was once a much larger range of conservatory structures, as shown in the OS map of 1898 adjacent.

The historic images adjacent show that the original roof of the Fernery had a raised central lantern. The current roof structure therefore post-dates the later image, dated 1944.



OS map showing detached conservatory to the south of the present-day Fernery, Berkshire XXXVII.3. Surveyed 1875. Published 1879. National Library of Scotland.



The Ordnance Survey of 1898 shows the late-19th century Fernery extending from the south elevation of the Acacias to connect with an earlier glasshouse. Berkshire XXXVII.3. Revised: 1898. Published: 1900. National Library of Scotland.



A photograph taken from inside the fernery to the south of the Acacias, late 19th or early 20th century. Source: University of Reading Special Collections, MS 5305 A/7



The rear extension of the Acacias in 1944. Source: Berkshire Record Office, D/EX1028/254/S24-D/EX1028/254/S29.

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.8 Significance of the Heritage Asset

As explained above, the Fernery dates from the ownership of the Acacias by George Palmer, a significant figure in the history of Reading. Palmer lived in the property from 1865 until his death in 1897. He was Mayor of Reading between 1857-1858 and MP for Reading from 1878-1885. Palmer also co-founded Huntley & Palmers biscuit manufacturers in 1841 alongside his cousin Thomas Huntley.

The Victorian interest in collecting and exhibiting ferns is well documented, beginning in the 1830s and reaching its height of popularity between the 1850s and the 1890s. 'Pteridomania' or fern fever is the subject of a number of publications⁰¹. James Pulham was the author of a promotional booklet *Picturesque Ferneries and Rock Garden Scenery* – published in about 1877, before the construction of the Fernery at the Acacias. This is available online from the Pulham Legacy website⁰². It includes a long list of aristocratic and well-to-do clients.

The rockwork in the Fernery is characteristic of the popular Pulhamite method of constructing an artificial setting for ferns and is one of numerous such examples in Britain, as listed in the gazetteer in the English Heritage publication *Durability Guaranteed* (2008) and in the publication *The Pulham Legacy* (2011)⁰³. The Fernery is therefore of significant heritage interest. Although the timber superstructure is not original, it is important to reinstate it to provide a protective cover to the Pulhamite rockwork and to maintain an internal environment which allows suitable planting to be reinstated.

⁰¹ Whittingham, Sarah (2012). *Fern Fever: The Story of Pteridomania*. London: Frances Lincoln.

⁰² <https://pulham.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/picturesque-ferneries-and-rock-garden-scenery.pdf>

⁰³ Claude Hitching, *The Versatility of James Pulham, in The Pulham Legacy, Rock Gardens, Ferneries, Follies, Grottoes and Fountains*, 2011. <https://pulham.org.uk/portfolio/2-2011-12/1-james-pulham-in-wales-2/4-the-versatility-of-james-pulham/>.

SECTION 2.0: SURVEYS

2.1 Preparatory Work

Initial site clearance was carried out by Watson & Co, who opened up the blocked and inoperable external doors, removed hazardous loose glazing from the roof, cleared away the extensive build-up of leaves and debris inside the structure, and re-secured the entrance.

The below images were taken following clearance on the 15th of December 2024:



Interior of the main section of the building.



Entrance porch and door into the Acacias.



South end of the main section of the building.



View of the corridor.

SECTION 2.0: SURVEYS

2.2 Measured Survey

A measured survey has been used to detail repairs/alterations for the listed building consent. The measured survey was carried out by SOVA Surveys on the 8th of January 2024 and their drawings are submitted with the planning and LBC applications.

2.3 Investigation of Historic Heating Flues/Water Supply/Drainage

Clearance of the debris present in the building revealed a series of drain covers in the floor of the fernery which, upon inspection, allow access to a pair of pipes which are routed through the building and presumed to have provided the source of heating. These would have maintained the required environment for ferns and tropical plants.

Further consideration of the likely future options for the Fernery revealed that reinstatement of the heating to the building is unlikely, so detailed assessment is not necessary.

2.4 Structural Survey

The structural survey was carried out by Mike Wilford BEng CEng MSc MStructE of Mike Wilford Associates. The report details the condition of all elements of the structure and makes recommendations for repair.

2.5 Arboricultural Advice

The very large London plane tree to the south of the main section of the building is protected by a TPO, meaning that any work to the tree will require consent from Reading Borough Council.

The tree constraints plan and survey were produced by David Challice Dip. Arb.(RFS), F.Arbor.A, MICFor of Challice Consulting, who inspected the tree on the 31st of January 2024.

The tree survey schedule and constraints plan identify the tree as a mature London plane of high quality and value, in good structural condition and with a life expectancy of at least another 40 years. The advice was that the remaining lifespan of the tree could be in excess of 100 years and that the stem of the tree could be expected to grow 5-10mm radially per year.

The current applications do not include any excavation work around the tree, as it has been decided against rebuilding the low wall adjoining it. This work would have disturbed the Pulhamite rockwork along the inner face of the corridor, and the further growth of the tree is likely to be an ongoing cause of structural disturbance to the wall.

2.6 Ecology Survey

As a unique external space which has been largely undisturbed for some time, the Fernery has potential to be a significant habitat for wildlife. The gardens of the Acacias are also implied to be a notable habitat and it is connected to adjacent green areas in Reading Borough Council's Local Plan Green Link Policy.

An ecological assessment was carried out by Yasmine Garland and Stephanie Benden of Abricon on the 4th of March 2024.

SECTION 3.0: PROPOSALS

3.1 Description of Proposal

The proposal is to return the Fernery to an enclosed structure, closely matching its appearance before it became derelict. The proposals are shown on the following drawings submitted with the application:

As existing:

242925-PUR-ZZ-00-DR-A-0100 Existing Ground Floor Plan

242925-PUR-ZZ-01-DR-A-0101 Existing Roof Plan

242925-PUR-ZZ-XX-DR-A-0110 Existing East Elevation

242925-PUR-ZZ-XX-DR-A-0120 Existing Sections

As proposed:

242925-PUR-ZZ-00-DR-A-0200 Proposed Ground Floor Plan

242925-PUR-ZZ-01-DR-A-0201 Proposed Roof Plan

242925-PUR-ZZ-XX-DR-A-0210 Proposed East Elevation

242925-PUR-ZZ-XX-DR-A-0220 Proposed sections

In summary, the proposals comprise the following alterations:

- Decayed timbers of existing hipped roof removed and replaced with a new roof matching the existing layout, pitch, joinery profiles and metal brackets, but raised by about 150mm in relation to the existing roof height and incorporating opening lights; leadwork flashings to be incorporated to ridge, hips and eaves;
- New timber windows to be installed to match the design and profiles of the existing decayed windows, incorporating opening lights; these will be either hinged at the top or hinged at the side;
- Rainwater goods (gutters and downpipes) to be renewed in metal to match existing profiles;
- Existing porch structure including paired entrance doors between the Fernery and the Acacias to be repaired as existing, except for a revised form of lantern light above
- New lead-lined gutter to be formed between porch roof and Fernery roof, discharging to a new cast-iron hopper and downpipe;
- New masonry upstand at junction of Fernery and flat roofs to prevent future decay to wall plate by provision of lead flashings chased into masonry and dressed onto the adjacent flat roof.

There will be no change to the Pulhamite walls apart from like-for-like repair, should this be needed. Temporary protection will be necessary to ensure that no damage occurs during the proposed works.

There will be no changes (including structural repairs) to the corridor attached to the south side of the Fernery. This will be left in its current decayed condition.

SECTION 4.0: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Proposed Alteration	Impact	Justification
Decayed timbers of existing hipped roof removed and replaced with a new roof matching the existing layout, pitch, joinery profiles and metal brackets, but raised by about 150mm in relation to the existing roof height and incorporating opening lights	The appearance of the roof will be unchanged, apart from the small increase in height. This will not have any negative impact. Opening lights adjacent to the ridge will be reinstated, incorporating the salvaged opening mechanism that remain in situ.	Decay has affected almost all of the principal timber components including the principal frames and wall plates. The existing joinery is not original (post-1944) and complete replacement will ensure a more durable and consistent structure.
New timber windows to be installed to match the design and profiles of the existing decayed windows, incorporating opening lights	The appearance of the windows will be unchanged, other than a minor dimensional difference owing to the increase in roof height. The opening lights will be either top hung or side hung. Removal of the existing boarding will allow the Fernery to be exposed and appreciated from within the grounds of the Acacias.	Decay has affected almost all of the principal timber components including the principal frames and wall plates.
Rainwater goods (gutters and downpipes) to be renewed in metal to match existing profiles	The iron eaves gutter is in poor condition and will be replaced to match the existing profile. There are two mismatched hoppers and downpipes attached to the garden side of the Fernery. Replacing these with painted aluminium or cast iron will enhance the Fernery's appearance.	The appearance of the Fernery will be improved by having consistent design of hoppers and downpipes.
New hopper and rainwater downpipe adjacent to the entrance to the Fernery	This is required to drain water from the new lead-lined gutter. This will be at a slightly lower level than the new gutters to the Fernery roof.	This downpipe will be in the recess adjacent to the double doors. It will have a minimal visual impact and is needed to discharge rainwater effectively.
Existing porch roof between the Fernery and the Acacias to be re-designed to allow improved drainage and access to adjacent flat roof	The existing porch roof is not original and is unsafe due to the risk of falling glass. Its replacement with a slightly shorter glazed roof will allow a lead-lined gutter to be introduced between the two roofs.	Apart from its awkward appearance, the current glazed roof has some practical disadvantages. The existing narrow gutter between the Porch roof and the Fernery roof is not discharging rainwater effectively. This has led to extensive timber decay in the structure below. Furthermore, the Porch roof prevents access to maintain the adjacent flat roof. A slightly shorter glazed roof of the same pitch and height as the existing roof will have minimal visual impact.
New timber entrance doors to be installed at the north end of the Fernery, to match the existing entrance doors	The existing porch has a pair of timber entrance doors with solid lower panels and glazed upper panels.	The impact of renewing these doors will be neutral.

SECTION 4.0: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Proposed Alteration	Impact	Justification
New masonry upstand at junction of Fernery and flat roofs to prevent future decay to wall plate by provision of lead flashings chased into masonry and dressed onto the adjacent flat roof	The existing brick wall at the rear of the Pulhamite rockwork will be raised to ensure a minimum of 150mm in height between the adjacent flat roof and the eaves of the Fernery.	The junction with the flat roof is difficult to see from surrounding areas. Improving rainwater disposal at this junction will help to ensure the sustainability of the Fernery.
The Pulhamite rockwork in the Fernery will remain as existing.	The preliminary condition survey did not identify any significant defects in the rockwork and it appears to be stable, although some cracks are evident towards the south end of the Fernery. Temporary protection will be necessary to ensure that no damage occurs during the proposed works. If any conservation works are found to be necessary in the course of works, these will follow the guidance in the English Heritage publication <i>Durability Guaranteed: Pulhamite rockwork – Its conservation and repair</i> (2008).	No impact.

SECTION 5.0: CONCLUSION

As confirmed in the Council's pre-application advice:

Given the current deteriorating condition of the Fernery, as highlighted in the 2023 condition survey of the Acacias Building and its associated structures, the proposed works are considered both necessary and appropriate in order to safeguard the long-term future of this important historic asset and so are acceptable in principle. The Fernery is currently in a significant state of disrepair, with advanced decay evident in key elements of its structure, most notably the roof. Without timely and carefully considered intervention, there is a very real risk of continued deterioration, which could ultimately result in the loss of historic fabric and the building's contribution to the character and setting of the wider London Road Campus.

The proposed repair scheme is sensitive to the building's historic significance whilst also addressing the practical challenges posed by its current condition.

This application confirms the design, details and materials of the proposed roof structure. The slight increase in the height of the main Fernery roof and the slightly amended design of the glazed porch roof are both justified on practical grounds, thus increasing the longevity of the retained structure without harm to its heritage significance.

The application is thus compliant with NPPF Chapter 16 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment', in particular paras 208 – 210, and para 212 and the policies in the Reading Borough Local Plan which apply to listed buildings (Policy EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) and Conservation Areas (Policy EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas).

APPENDIX A: LIST DESCRIPTION

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1113511

Date first listed: 14-Dec-1978

List Entry Name: NO 44 (THE ACACIAS) AND RAILINGS TO STREET THE ACACIAS

Statutory Address 1: NO 44 (THE ACACIAS) AND RAILINGS TO STREET, 44, LONDON ROAD

Statutory Address 2: THE ACACIAS, 44, LONDON ROAD

District: Reading (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference: SU 72281 72958

Details

LONDON ROAD 1. 5128 (South Side) No 44 (The Acacias) and Railings to street SU 7272 9/162 II GV 2. Before 1840 (shewn on Weller map). A detached 2 storey and basement villa of Bath stone with hipped slate roof. Moulded eaves cornice. 3 windows 1st floor, 2 on ground floor, glazing bar sashes with flanking full height pilaster strips. Central door with segmental patterned fanlight. Plain Greek Doric porch on stone steps. East return has 2 ground floor bows which have been attributed to Waterhouse as alterations for William Isaac Palmer (of Huntley and Palmers) who lived there – one has stairs to basement. Good conservatory at rear with an extensive rockery. Linked to Greenbank by 3+3 window 3 storey extension with 2 storey pavilion to right. The interior has a number of reeded features (front door surround, ground floor back room fireplace etc). Excellent contemporary ironwork to street – spearhead railings box panel standards and double gates.

Listing NGR: SU7228172958

APPENDIX B: PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE



Jessica Gregory
UNIVERSITY OF READING,
LONDON ROAD,
READING,
RG1 5AQ

Emma Gee
Acting Executive Director for
Economic Growth and
Neighbourhood Services

Civic Offices,
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

☎ 0118 9373787

Our Ref: PL/25/0390

Direct: ☎

15/05/2025

Your contact is: **Mishga Marshall, Planning**

Dear Jessica Gregory,

PRE PLANNING APPLICATION ENQUIRY RESPONSE

Pre Application Number: PL/25/0390

Location: UNIVERSITY OF READING, LONDON ROAD, READING, RG1 5AQ

Proposal: Repairs to the Fernery to the rear of the Acacias building.

Dear Jessica,

Thank you for your enquiry. Further to our recent correspondence, my apologies for the delay in submitting this written pre application response.

I would like to start by highlighting a couple of matters which have been the key considerations for my advice provided below. As you are aware, listed buildings play a vital role in preserving the architectural, historical, and cultural identity of an area. While their protection is essential, it is equally important that these buildings remain in active, sustainable use to secure their future. The works proposed as part of this pre application have been carefully considered and are believed to maintain the significance of the listed building, the council would be supportive of proposals that both preserve its historic character and promote its ongoing use in a manner appropriate to its setting, subject to the formal planning permission and listed building consent applications.

That being said, please see below my pre application advice for your proposal.

Site Description and Proposal

The Fernery is situated to the south of the Acacias Building, located on the northeast corner of the University of Reading's London Road Campus. The building is currently decaying and in need of intervention, the proposal involves the replacement of the existing roof structure in its current form but with enhanced detailing to improve durability and secure the long-term preservation of the building. In addition, essential stabilisation works are proposed to the adjoining corridor area to address structural vulnerabilities and ensure the ongoing safety and integrity of the structure.

Significance of Heritage Asset(s)

The application relates to the greenhouse/fernery of Grade II listed No 44 (The Acacias) and Railings to Street, 44 London Road which is also within Kendrick Road Conservation Area. The official listing of the Acacias reads as follows:

"LONDON ROAD 1. 5128 (South Side) No 44 (The Acacias) and Railings to street SU 7272 9/162 II GV 2. Before 1840 (shewn on Weller map). A detached 2 storey and basement villa of Bath stone with hipped slate roof. Moulded eaves cornice. 3 windows 1st floor, 2 on ground floor, glazing bar sashes with flanking full height pilaster strips. Central door with segmental patterned fanlight. Plain Greek Doric porch on stone steps. East return has 2 ground floor bows which have been attributed to Waterhouse as alterations for William Isaac Palmer (of Huntley and Palmers) who lived there - one has stairs to basement. Good conservatory at rear with an extensive rockery. Linked to Greenbank by 3+3 window 3 storey extension with 2 storey pavilion to right. The interior has a number of reeded features (front door surround, ground floor back room fireplace etc). Excellent contemporary ironwork to street - spearhead railings box panel standards and double gates. Listing NGR: SU7228172958"

The Kendrick Conservation Area Appraisal notes that the subject fernery/greenhouse constitutes an important part of the diversity of the area's architecture, notable exemplars of housing from the late 18th century to the early 20th century, as well as the early 20th century planned campus of the University of Reading and historic associations with the Palmer family of Huntley and Palmer.

Relevant Planning History

N/A

Officer Pre-Application Advice

Relevant Planning Policies

Any planning application at the site would be considered within the context of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019. RBC Supplementary Planning Documents would also be applied where relevant, together with national guidance (the NPPF). Please use this link to view the local policies at your convenience: <https://www.reading.gov.uk/planningpolicy>

Design and Character (and Heritage Considerations)

As above, the property is a Listed Building and sits within the Kendrick Conservation Area. Any decisions must address the statutory considerations of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (see in particular sections 16, 66 and 72) as well as satisfying

APPENDIX B: PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

the relevant policies within the National Planning Policy Framework and the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Given the current deteriorating condition of the Fernery, as highlighted in the 2023 condition survey of the Acacias Building and its associated structures, the proposed works are considered both necessary and appropriate in order to safeguard the long-term future of this important historic asset and so are acceptable in principle. The Fernery is currently in a significant state of disrepair, with advanced decay evident in key elements of its structure, most notably the roof. Without timely and carefully considered intervention, there is a very real risk of continued deterioration, which could ultimately result in the loss of historic fabric and the building's contribution to the character and setting of the wider London Road Campus.

The proposed repair scheme is sensitive to the building's historic significance whilst also addressing the practical challenges posed by its current condition. A new roof structure is necessary and, therefore, would be acceptable depending on its design, details and materials. The most important matter is defining the existing original/surviving elements, retaining them via conservation principles and incorporating them into proposed works. For instance, there are some iron elements which should be preserved. It should not be forgotten that the building may have historic layers of its evolution, so careful consideration should be given to its period details. The new roof structure should not dominate.

Repairs to the walls including wall plate and windows would likely be considered beneficial and acceptable.

The alternative of a patent glazing system could also be acceptable; depending on its heritage impacts and design. This could be an opportunity to add contemporary value to the heritage asset; however, it should be less harmful than the original option/should be the best option that would protect the surviving original elements. Strong justification would be needed.

Likewise, the proposed remove of the existing porch and repositioning of the entrance, could be acceptable if the relationship of the greenhouse with the main building – being attached – causes harm to the historic fabric. However, as apparent on the historic OS Maps there is a continuous/existing physical relationship between the two. As such this would also need further investigation and a strong justification.

The proposed works should strike a careful balance between preserving the Fernery's special interest and securing its long-term future. It is advised that at application stage, the significance description of this listed building should be widened to include existing unique pulhamite rockwork landscaping in the greenhouse and alterations to this ancillary building affected by the past planning permissions. The principles for the conservation of the pulhamite finish should be listed. There is a guide, 'Durability Guaranteed Pulhamite rockwork – Its conservation and repair' 2008, from English Heritage, which can help with this. The submitted Pre-application Report could be improved via further historical analysis and images. Submission of the original Structural Survey is also required for the formal application(s).

Ecology / Trees

It is noted that there is a London plane tree to the south of the main section of the building which is protected by a TPO. In accordance with the relevant planning policies and best practice guidance, any formal planning application would need to be supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) prepared in accordance with BS 5837:2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations. This should include a

tree survey, tree constraints plan, and tree protection measures. It is recommended in this specific case that the tree survey includes a climbing inspection of the Plane tree due to concerns about the potential presence of Massaria disease (*Splanchnonema platani*) and associated branch failure.

Depending on the nature and extent of any proposed works, further ecological assessment may also be required to determine the presence of any protected species or habitats, particularly if any trees or vegetation are to be removed or affected by the development.

It is advised that any identified mitigation or enhancement measures should be clearly set out within the application submission.

Additional documentation required at Formal Planning Application Stage:

Given the sensitive location of the site, it is advised that the following documentations be provided, in full detail, at the formal planning application stage;

1. In relation to heritage assets, a Heritage Statement, Heritage Impact Assessment and the original Structural Survey would be a validation requirement of any future formal full planning application and listed building consent.
2. Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) prepared in accordance with BS 5837:2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction. As well as the original Arboricultural Survey.
3. Ecological Assessment
4. In addition to this, additional details and further research as above should be considered as part of any future application.

Amenity

Policy CC8 requires development to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of: Privacy and overlooking; Access to sunlight and daylight; Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development; Harm to outlook; Noise and disturbance; Artificial lighting; Vibration; Dust and fumes; Smell; Crime and safety.

It is not considered the proposed development and associated works would have undue impact upon neighbouring amenities, given the nature of the proposal. However, this can only be fully established at application stage.

Other Matters

This response addresses the main considerations, based on the information submitted. There may be other considerations and policy requirements not discussed above if detailed proposals were to be submitted.

Conclusion

The proposals are likely to be acceptable in design/heritage terms subject to the detail and further research as discussed above. A heritage impact assessment should be made with justifications of the proposed alternative. Natural Environment (trees, landscaping, ecology) matters will need to be carefully considered.

It is hoped that the information included within this report is of assistance to you. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that other various matters of detail as above should be carefully considered in advance of any future submission, and it should be noted that any planning application which is submitted will be assessed on its own planning merits.

APPENDIX B: PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

Please note that the advice contained within this pre application response, represents the advice of an officer of Reading Borough Council based on the information submitted in March 2025. The advice is given in good faith without prejudice to the decision/ outcome of any subsequent planning application. In addition, it does not take into consideration any other factors that may come to light during the assessment of a formal application which may well be submitted in due course. Any application which is submitted will be assessed on its own planning merits.

Yours sincerely,
Mishga Marshall
Planning Officer
EH

DRAFT

DRAFT

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