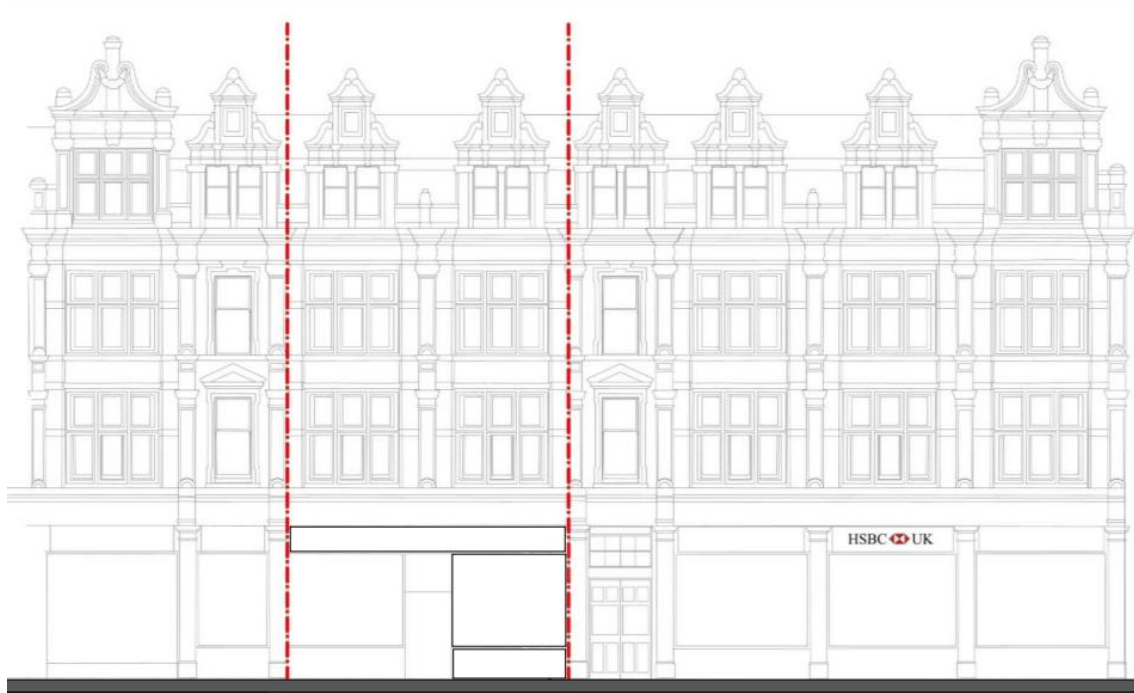


Heritage Commentary
New Shop Front
30 Queen Victoria Street
Reading
RG1 1TG



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Kevin Morris Heritage Planning Ltd. has been appointed to prepare a brief statement to accompany revised proposals for a new shopfront following the approval of recent proposals for conversion of the former bank building to retail on the ground floor and residential use above (see Council's on-line planning history for details).
- 1.2 This subsequent document has been prepared to accompany the updated proposals relating to the approved works of alteration and conversion and specifically the shopfront and entrances.

The Site

- 1.3 As a reminder, 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 previous/"existing" shopfront. Source: Ian Benbow

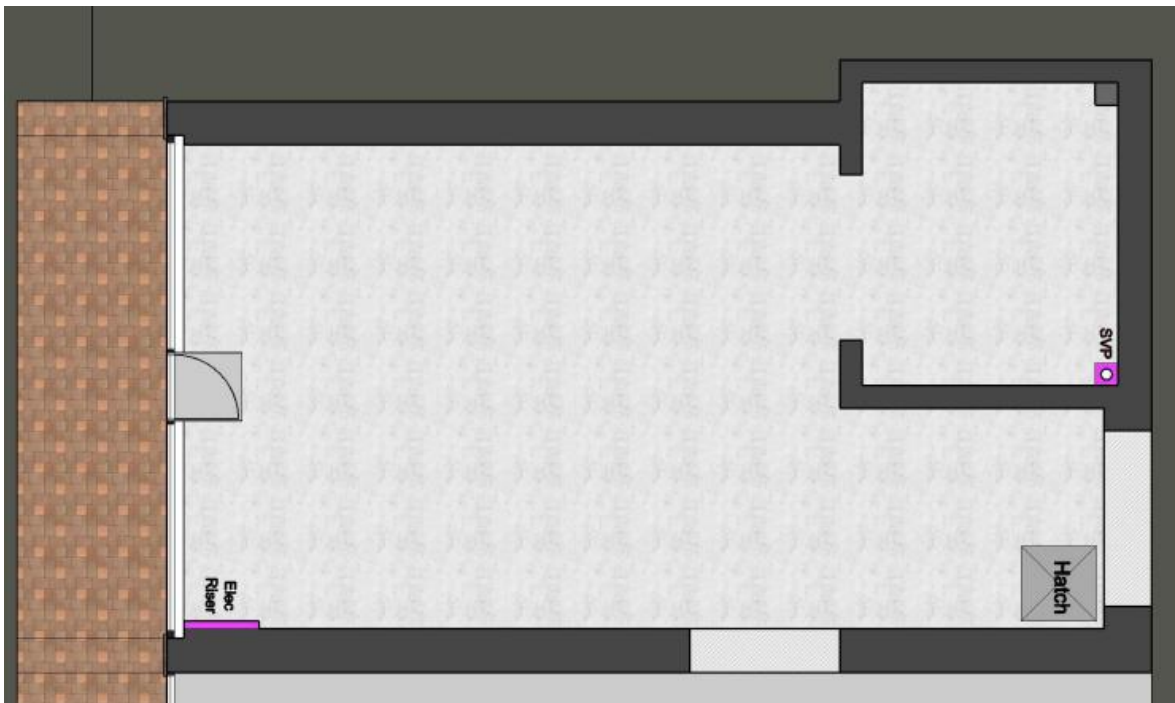


Fig. 4. The existing ground floor plan. Source: Ian Benbow



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.

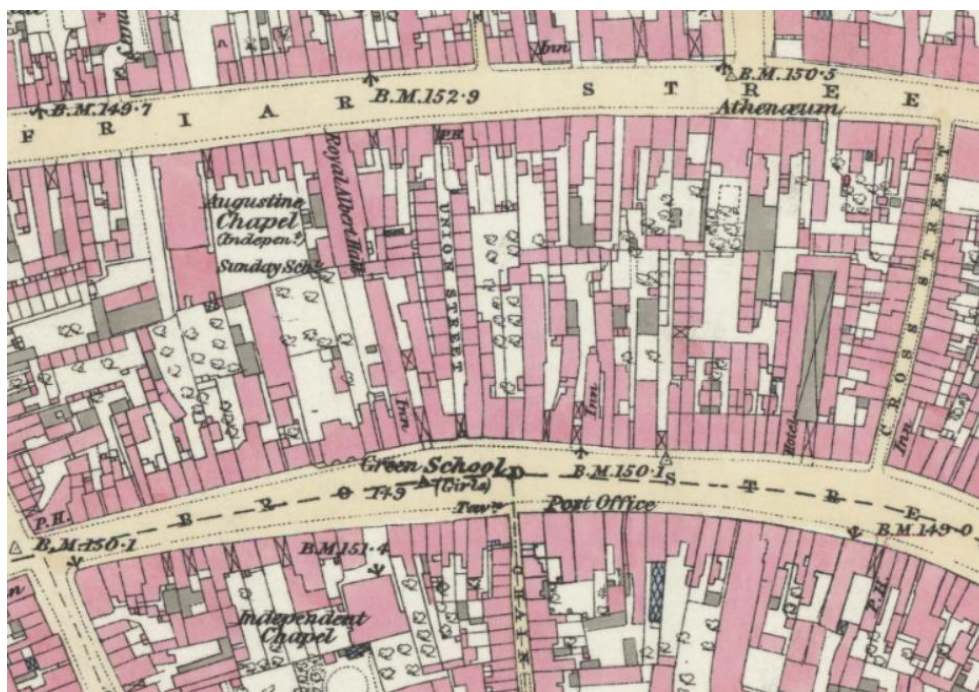


Fig. 5. A 25" OS map from 1884 which provides understanding of the layout and grain of the town centre before the formation of Queen Victoria Street.

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.

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 recent planning and listed building consent applications. The works see the replacement shopfront connected with the proposed use of the ground and basement floors for retail use with residential above.
- 5.2 When the initial planning application was 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 initial wishes of the conservation officer and subsequent discussion with officers. 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. 7. A sketch proposal and guidance provided by the conservation officer.

5.3 The approved shopfront is as follows:



Fig. 8. The approved design shopfront with timber frame, clerestory lights, chamfered entrance to the shop and separate access to the flats above. Source: Ian Benbow

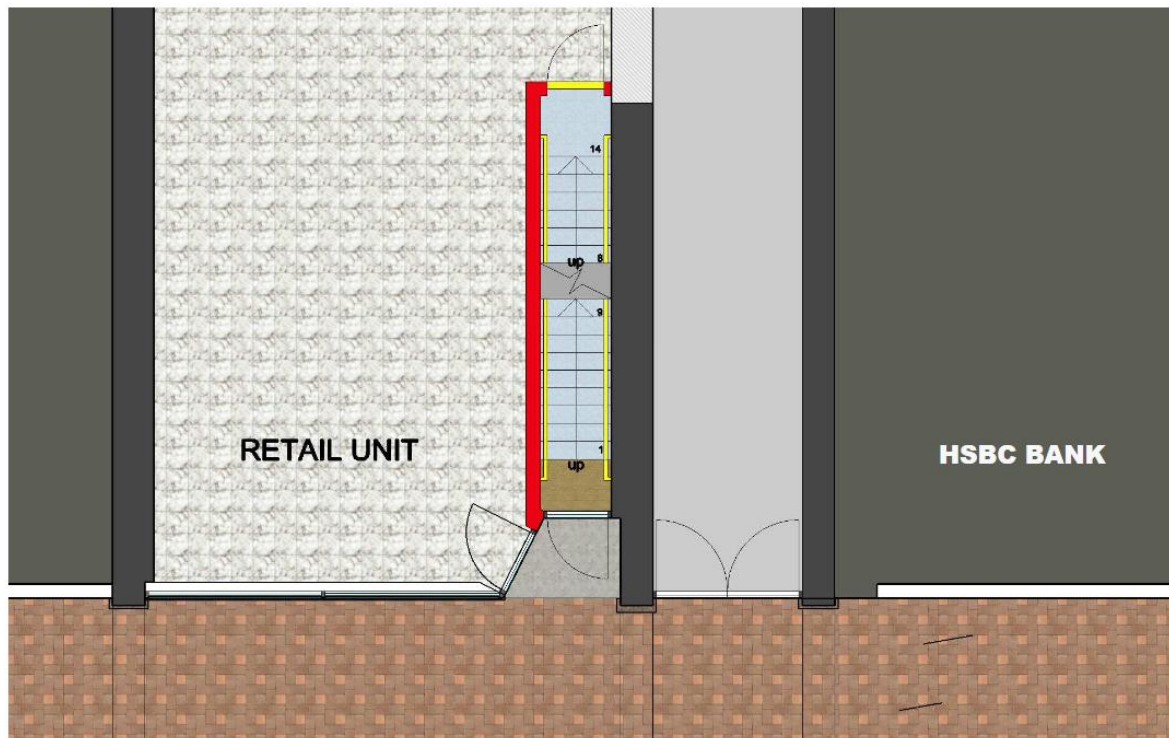


Fig. 9. The approved ground floor plan with shared recessed lobby to service the shopfront and flats above.
Source: Ian Benbow

- 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. The approved shopfront would make 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.
- 5.5 The further revised shopfront is as follows:



Fig. 10. The revised shopfront design. Source: Ian Benbow

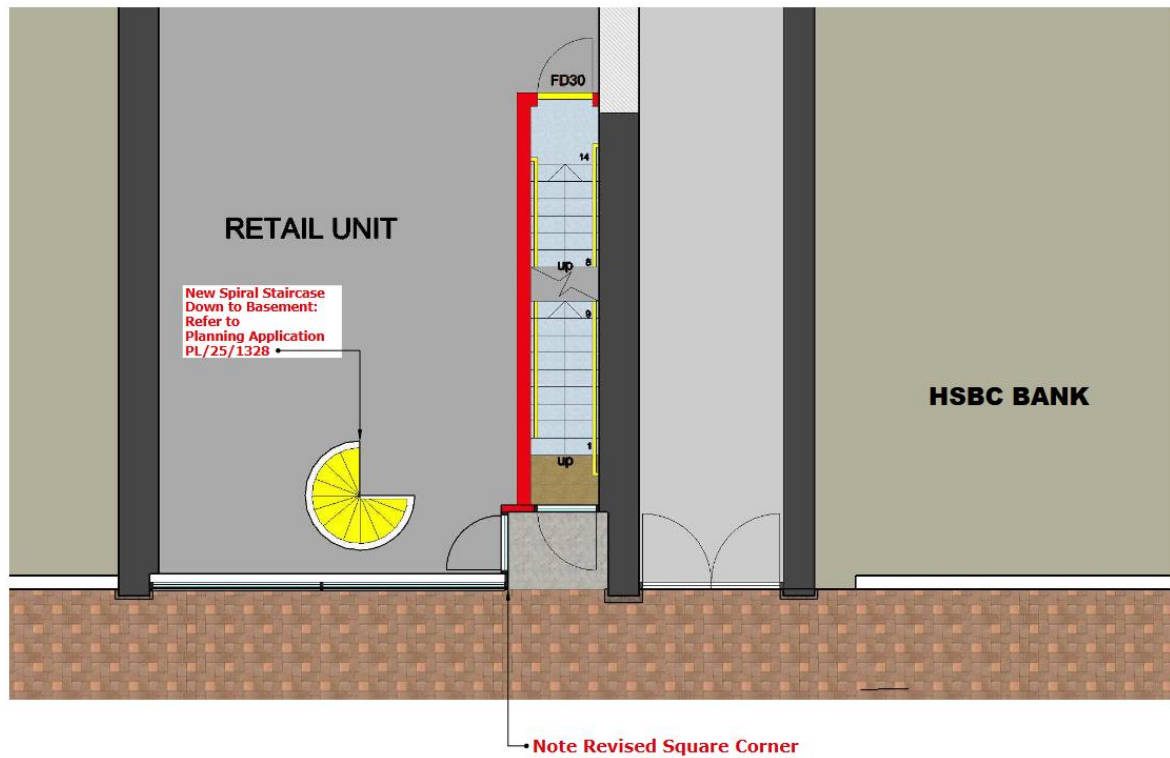
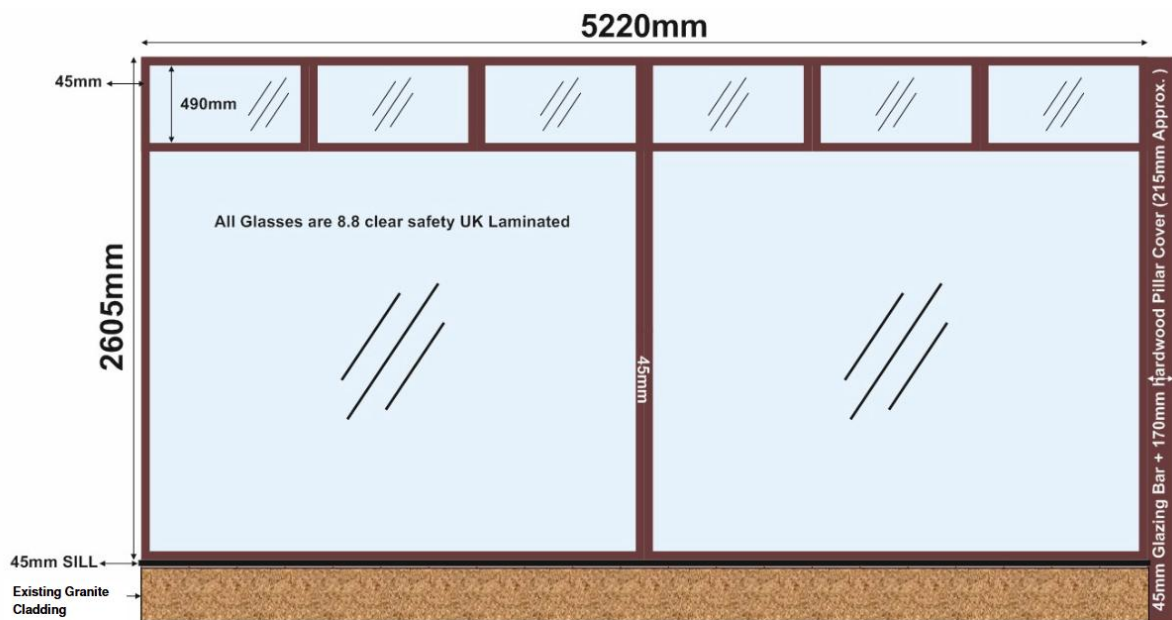


Fig. 11. The revised ground floor plan. Source: Ian Benbow

5.6 The manufacturer has provided the following details:



Manufacturers Shop Drawing: Front Elevation :

Fig. 12. The manufacturer's drawing. Source: Ian Benbow

5.7 The following details have also been provided by the manufacturer:

Manufacturers Shop Drawings & Specification:

Materials & Design:

- All glazing bars and related sections will be constructed using **hardwood (Meranti)**.
- Timber Painted – Matt Black:
- All glazing will be **8.8mm laminated safety glass**.
- The agreed door style will follow the reference photo of the original door (attached).
- The new shopfront will be installed onto the brick wall to be prepared by the builders.
- Finish Existing Granite Cladding.

Installation Details:

1. **Left Side:** The shopfront will be bolted securely into the left side wall (when viewed from outside).
2. **Right Side:** The shopfront will extend until it meets the internal wooden partition wall, which divides the shop floor space from the staircase of the flats. This right side of the shopfront will be bolted onto the partition wall, creating a corner and leaving the necessary access space for the shop flat entrance door.
 - The shop door will be positioned approximately **460mm from the corner**.
 - The corner section will be finished with **hardwood cladding**, matching the material and appearance of the shopfront.
3. **Door Security:** The door will be fitted with **one deadlock**, including an **internal thumb-turn option**.
4. **Door Handle:** A **600mm offset stainless steel pole handle** will be installed.
5. **Letter Plate:** The door will include a **stainless steel letter plate cover**.
6. **Closing Mechanism:** The door will be fitted with a **self-soft-closing overhead mechanism**.



Manufacturers Shop Drawing: Shop Unit Door Manufacturers Shop Drawing: Residential Front Door

- 5.8 No sections or larger details have been provided and it is evident that the drawings are illustrative. However, it is possible to compare the approved design with that currently proposed and as described above. The changes relate to the entrance details with redesigned shopfront. The shop entrance door would have a reduced number of horizontal glazing bars together with the introduction of a solid four panelled door to the flat entrance as illustrated by the revised elevations and details.
- 5.9 On the basis of the information provided, the introduction of a painted solid timber, four-panelled door would appear less ornate or elaborate than the larger entrance doors adjacent and as such, is unlikely to compete with those historic entrance doors in visual terms and thus unlikely to undermine their heritage significance. The reduced number of glazing bars within the shop entrance more closely reflects the transom light arrangement (albeit a fanlight exists above) of the main shopfront and the revised design would not again, result in harm to heritage significance. In light of these changes, which are relatively de minimis, no harm is likely to be caused and as such the proposals are policy compliant.