

The Courtyard, Edinburgh Road, Reading Berkshire RG30 2UA

Planning Statement on behalf of

ECO MARKET

At Russell House, 117-119 Russell House Oxford Road, RG1 7UH

Project Ref: 9438 – 25

Date: November 2025

Proposal: Retrospective installation of aluminium fascia signage (non-illuminated)



Front Elevation – Fascia Design

1. Introduction

This Planning Statement supports a revised retrospective application for fascia signage at 117–119 Oxford Road. The original application (ref. PL/25/0556) was refused despite the signage

meeting all measurable policy requirements under the Reading Borough Local Plan and the Shopfront Design SPD (2022).

The design has been carefully reviewed and refined in direct response to the Conservation Officer's previous comments. Specifically:

- The external trough lighting is proposed to be removed or modified.
- The fascia has been confirmed to sit comfortably in relation to the existing stone banding on the building, and the new awnings have been placed below the sign.

These revisions ensure the advertisement preserves and enhances the appearance of the building and the surround Castle Hill / Russell Street / Oxford Road Conservation Area and fully complies with the Advertisement Regulations 2007.

2. Site and Surrounding Context

The site occupies the ground floor commercial unit of Russell House, a late 20th-century building making a neutral contribution to the Castle Hill / Russell Street / Oxford Road Conservation Area. The building does not contain a traditional shopfront and its frontage prior to installation was architecturally plain and visually inactive.

The surrounding section of Oxford Road is varied, comprising commercial frontages with a mixture of modern and older signage styles. The Conservation Area Appraisal highlights negative features such as inconsistent signage, unsympathetic modern fascias, and poor-quality materials. Against this backdrop, the proposed fascia—simple, matte-finished, and unlit—offers a restraint that aligns with the area's mixed character and improves the existing frontage.

3. Planning History & Engagement with the Council

Between April and June 2025, the agent, acting for the applicant, engaged in detailed correspondence with the Case Officer. This included:

Initial Officer Feedback

Concerns were raised regarding:

- the scale and extent of lettering,
- proposed trough lighting,
- fascia position relative to stone banding,
- material choice.

Agent's Response

The agent provided:

- precise measurements showing lettering within SPD guidance,
- justification based on SPD 4.17,

- contextual observation that similar signage exists along Oxford Road,
- clarification that the lighting was discreet, downward-facing and low-lumen.

Further Officer Feedback

The Case Officer:

- accepted aluminium as appropriate,
- acknowledged the building is not a traditional historic shopfront,
- accepted the fascia in principle, but maintained concerns regarding lighting, secondary text, and fascia alignment.

Agent's Further Rebuttal

The agent then offered:

- the possibility of dimmable or controlled lighting,
- cooperation with CCTV requirements,
- clarification on fascia height and future awning needs,
- further measurements and SPD compliance evidence.

Conservation Officer's Comments & Rebuttal

3.1 Comment: "Modern retail signage... loud and unsympathetic colours and lighting create an uneven grain and jarring appearance along Oxford Road."

Rebuttal

The installed signage uses matte black as the background, with matte green and white 2D cut letters. This is markedly subdued, non-reflective, and contrasts sharply with the genuinely "loud" signage referred to in the appraisal (e.g., acrylic lightboxes, bright orange/blue LED fascias, etc.).

No gloss, no reflective metal, no internal lighting, and no bright corporate colours are used.

In fact, the applicant's fascia is significantly more restrained than multiple modern fascias in the vicinity (evidence shown in this section).

3.2 Comment: "The surrounding context of modern advertisements does not support the introduction of more modern advertising."

Rebuttal

The Conservation Area Appraisal predates several modern shopfronts now present along Oxford Road, including:

- Acrylic internally lit fascia at 109B Oxford Road (approved 2024)
- Illuminated fascia at Richer Sounds
- Multiple bright box fascias at convenience stores and takeaways

Accordingly, the context *does* contain modern signage, and the applicant's modest fascia is not inconsistent with (and is in fact less obtrusive than) the prevailing character of the street.

The applicant's left unlit fascia is the **least modern** and **least intrusive** example among nearby contemporary shopfronts.

3.3 Comment: "Excessive size, scale, and cluttered design... overly visually prominent feature."

Rebuttal

This assessment is not supported by the measured drawings or SPD requirements.

- Fascia height = 800 mm
 - Letter height = 380 mm (well under 50% of fascia height)
 - Lettering width = proportionate
 - Projection = 0.1 m (flush, not a box sign)
 - Base height above pavement = 2.8 m, within normal fascia zone
- SPD 4.17 explicitly permits this arrangement.

The amount of service text (three short lines) is typical for Oxford Road parade signage and is visually modest, using small-scale lettering placed at the fascia edge.

Photographic evidence demonstrates that the applicant's sign is distinctly *less prominent* than numerous illuminated fascias already present on the street.

3.4 Comment: "Materials should be hardwood, brick, tile; plastics and metal are usually not appropriate."

Rebuttal

SPD 4.34 states a preference, not a requirement.

It discourages:

- Glossy plastics
- Reflective metals

The applicant's fascia uses matte composite aluminium, which is:

- Non-reflective
- Non-gloss
- Visually recessive
- Equivalent in appearance to painted timber but more durable

The case officer already accepted aluminium use in writing.

Furthermore, multiple modern fascias in the area use acrylic panels, gloss vinyl, and internal LED lighting — considerably less sympathetic than the applicant’s matte finish.

3.5 Comment (Sketch): fascia should be moved below the stone band.

Rebuttal

This point has been addressed:

- The fascia is aligned above the windows and door, consistent with commercial frontage convention.
- The awning now sits below, ensuring the fascia does not conflict with stonework.
- Lowering the fascia would compress the sign into the window heads, disrupting proportions and contradicting SPD advice on alignment with structural elements.

The current placement best respects the building’s proportions and avoids architectural conflict.

3.6 Comment: wording describing goods is “unnecessary” and “clutters the fascia.”

Rebuttal

This is a subjective assessment and not grounded in any SPD numerical or qualitative rule.

SPD 4.17 and 4.18 regulate scale, proportion, logo size, and text coverage, none of which prohibit descriptive wording.

Along Oxford Road, nearly all retail fascias include descriptors of goods or services. This is long-standing and assists legibility in a busy urban corridor.

The three short descriptive lines here are:

- Small-scale
- Right-aligned
- Well-spaced
- Within SPD limits
- No more prominent than other shops locally

There is no basis within policy to require their removal.

3.7 Comment: “Illumination should not be used.”

Rebuttal

The SPD states illumination is “not usually needed” — this is advisory wording, not a prohibition.

However, to fully address concerns:

- All illumination has now been removed
- The revised application is non-illuminated
- Applicant is willing to accept a condition preventing illumination

Given that many nearby fascias remain internally-lit or brightly-lit, the applicant's unlit fascia is more conservative and entirely appropriate.

3.8 Examples of Local Signage

The following images demonstrate that the prevailing commercial frontage of Oxford Road includes a significant number of modern, illuminated, and acrylic fascias, several of which have a greater visual presence than the application proposal.

These examples include:

- Internally illuminated acrylic lightboxes
- Externally illuminated trough-lit fascias
- Large-scale, bold corporate signage
- Brightly coloured fascias
- Multiple examples of LED or halo-lit signage
- Recently approved modern signage, including at 109B Oxford Road (2024 consent)



Image 1: Example within the local area



Image 2: 109B Oxford Road (2024 consent)



Image 3: Example of similar design and lighting within the local area.



Image 4: Example near local area.

The photographic evidence demonstrates that Oxford Road already contains numerous modern, brightly lit, and visually prominent signs, some significantly more impactful than the applicant's original fascia.

It is therefore clear that:

- The street has not retained a traditional signage character
- The Conservation Area at this location functions as a busy commercial corridor
- Modern illuminated signage has been present for years
- The Council has approved modern illuminated signage as recently as 2024

In this context, the applicant's fascia— matte, and modestly proportioned and whose lighting is proposed to be removed or conditioned,—cannot reasonably be described as harmful or out of character. The refusal of the earlier application therefore appears inconsistent when assessed against the wider street scene and the authority's own previous decisions.

4. Description of the Revised Proposal

The proposal is for a flat, matte-finished aluminium fascia panel with applied lettering.

Measured Dimensions (Drawing 9438 PL-04.05):

- Fascia height: 800 mm
- Projection: 50 mm
- Height of fascia base above ground level: 3,110 mm
- Width: 8,160 mm

Lettering:

- Maximum individual letter height: 437 mm (43.7 cm)
- Secondary text height: 175–180 mm
- Lighting is proposed to be removed or conditioned.

Existing Awning

An awning has since been installed beneath the fascia in the traditional awning zone, directly above the shopfront windows and entrance door. The fascia was intentionally positioned at its current height during the original design stage to ensure adequate clearance for a future awning, as was clearly explained by the agent during the previous application process. The Case Officer was made aware at the time that a future awning was being considered, and the fascia placement reflected this design intention. As a result, the presence of the awning does not conflict with the fascia; the two elements remain visually separate and correctly ordered within the shopfront hierarchy.

5. Compliance with the Reading Shopfront Design SPD (2022)

SPD 4.17 – Lettering Proportion

- Fascia height: 800 mm
- Max letter height: 437 mm
- Ratio: 54.6%

The SPD provides guidance, not a strict limit. The lettering is balanced, proportionate, and was previously accepted by the Case Officer.

SPD 4.18 – Additional Text

Secondary text is limited, clearly subordinate, and visually modest.

SPD 4.34 – Materials

Powder-coated aluminium is acceptable where respectful of context. This was confirmed by the Case Officer.

SPD 4.68 – Lighting

The illumination is to be removed, or modified.

SPD 4.14–4.16 – Fascia Siting

The fascia sits in the traditional fascia zone, positioned **above the existing awning** and below the stone banding. The fascia does not obscure details and does not create clutter.

The fascia is situated entirely within the appropriate fascia zone as defined in SPD paragraphs 4.14–4.16. Its position was deliberately selected to maintain clear separation from the horizontal stone band above while allowing functional and visual space for an awning below — a point expressly communicated to the Case Officer during the previous application. The later installation of the awning therefore aligns with and reinforces the original design rationale. The fascia does not overlap, obstruct, or visually compete with the awning, ensuring full compliance with SPD siting principles.

6. Local Plan Policy Compliance (EN3, EN6, OU4)

EN3 – Historic Environment

The matte, proportionate fascia preserves the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

EN6 – Advertisements

The advertisement:

- is proportionate,
- uses high-quality materials,

- poses no safety risks,
- is visually appropriate.

OU4 – Oxford Road

Policy OU4 supports improvements to shopfront quality.

The revised fascia greatly improves an inactive, modern frontage.

7. Consistency, Proportionality & Willingness to Accept Conditions

The agent notes the presence of illuminated fascias elsewhere along the Oxford Road, some of which are larger or more visually prominent than the previously proposed modest trough light. Given this context, the agent would welcome discussion with the Local Planning Authority regarding consistency of approach in applying signage and heritage policy.

Notwithstanding this observation, illumination is proposed to be removed from this application to progress matters positively. Should the LPA wish to retain control over any future illumination, the applicant is willing to accept a condition requiring:

- Submission of lighting specifications
- Downward-only, low-lumen fittings
- Luminance restrictions
- And demonstration of CCTV compatibility

This reflects a constructive and cooperative approach.

8. Advertisement Regulations (2007)

Amenity

The fascia is unlit, proportionate, matte-finished, and visually contained.

Public Safety

The fascia projects only 50 mm and sits 3.11 m above ground level.

9A. Reiteration that the previous scheme was Policy Compliant, Including the context of other Illuminated Fascias

For completeness, the agent maintains that the scheme previously submitted under application ref. PL/25/0556 **was fully compliant** with the Reading Shopfront Design SPD (2022) and Local Plan Policies EN3, EN6 and OU4. Detailed measurements provided at the time demonstrated that the fascia lettering remained within the proportional parameters of SPD paragraph 4.17, the materials were appropriate, and the overall design presented a restrained and well-balanced appearance.

Deliberate and Policy-Compliant Fascia Positioning (Awning Allowance)

During the earlier application, the agent explicitly confirmed to the Case Officer that the fascia had been intentionally positioned at its current height to allow functional and visual space for a **future awning**. This design rationale was communicated clearly in correspondence, and the Local Planning Authority was aware at the time that the fascia's position was selected to maintain proper shopfront hierarchy and avoid conflict with potential awning installation. The fascia therefore complied with SPD siting principles independently of, and prior to, the awning later being installed beneath it. The subsequent installation of the awning is wholly consistent with that original and policy-aligned design intent.

Compliance of the Previously Proposed Illumination

The illumination formerly proposed comprised a single, discreet, downward-facing trough light of low luminance and limited operational need. It was designed to avoid glare, prevent light spill, and support legibility only during darker winter months. Such illumination is commonly accepted within Conservation Areas where modest and well-controlled.

Crucially, the surrounding section of Oxford Road already contains numerous illuminated fascias, some of which include internally lit panels, halo-lit lettering, or brighter external lighting than was ever proposed at the application site. These illuminated advertisements form part of the established commercial character and night-time appearance of this stretch of the Conservation Area. In this context, the modest illumination previously proposed at the application site would not have introduced any new or discordant element.

Consistency and Proportionality in Decision-Making

Given the presence of multiple illuminated fascias nearby—some larger, brighter or more visually prominent—the refusal of illumination in the earlier scheme risks an **inconsistent application of policy**, contrary to the principles of proportionality and fairness embedded in Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and reinforced by case law. The agent therefore maintains that the earlier proposal sat comfortably within the baseline visual environment and respected both the heritage sensitivity and the commercial function of the area.

Without Prejudice to Applicant's Position

The present resubmission removes illumination entirely in order to progress the matter constructively. However, this should not be interpreted as an acceptance that the previous proposal was non-compliant. The agent's professional position remains that the earlier design:

- complied with the Reading Shopfront Design SPD,
- accorded with all relevant Local Plan policies,
- preserved the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and
- was proportionate and in keeping with the established streetscape.

The revised unlit proposal therefore represents a further reduction in impact compared to a scheme that was, in the agent's view, already acceptable in planning terms.

9. Conclusion

This revised proposal represents a modest, high-quality and proportionate fascia advertisement that fully respects the character and appearance of the Castle Hill / Russell Street / Oxford Road Conservation Area. The fascia is unlit, matte-finished, and correctly positioned within the fascia zone, maintaining clear separation from the stone banding above and the awning now installed below. It's scale lettering proportions, materials and siting all accord with the design principles set out in the Reading Shopfront Design SPD (2022).

The proposal also complies with Policies EN3, EN6 and OU4 of the Reading Local Plan and with the Advertisement Regulations 2007. It will not result in any harm to amenity or public safety, nor will it detract from the significance of the Conservation Area. Instead, it enhances a previously plain frontage and contributes positively to the visual quality of this part of Oxford Road.

For the avoidance of doubt, the agent maintains that the earlier version of the scheme—including modest downward-facing illumination—was itself policy compliant and compatible with the established presence of illuminated fascias within the surrounding commercial context. However, illumination is proposed to be removed from this revised submission without prejudice to that position in order to progress the matter constructively; the applicant is open to illumination being conditioned.

The advertisement now submitted represents a further reduction in impact relative to a proposal that was already acceptable in design, heritage and amenity terms. It constitutes an appropriate and respectful addition to the streetscape and preserves the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Advertisement consent is therefore respectfully requested.