

LAND AT FORMER HEMDEAN
HOUSE SCHOOL, CAVERSHAM,
READING

HERITAGE STATEMENT

PLANNING ISSUES

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Site

Land at Former Hemdean House School, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7SD

Report

Heritage Statement

Site Centred

SU 71299 75210

Planning Authority

Reading Borough Council

Client

Planning Issues

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HAPRO Ltd was commissioned by Planning Issues Ltd in December 2025 to prepare an Heritage Statement to inform a planning application for the development of land and conversion of buildings at the former Hemdean House School, Caversham in Reading Borough Council (hereafter referred to as ‘the Site’). The proposal is for the construction of retirement living apartments with the retention and conversion of the historic school buildings. This assessment has been commissioned to focus solely on the proposals with regards to built heritage. It has been undertaken in accordance with Reading Borough Council’s Local Plan Policy EN1 and is considered to be proportionate to the heritage significance of the non-designated heritage asset. It does not discuss the archaeological potential of the Site. This has been provided in a separate archaeological desk-based assessment produced as part of the planning application by HAPRO Ltd (HAPRO Ref. 0022.01).

The Site comprises of buildings and land associated with the former Hemdean House School. This includes the late 19th century school building and lodge house, the latter now converted to a pre-school nursery, along with additional late 20th century school buildings and playing fields.

The proposal will result in views that are achieved seasonally toward the school house being obscured from part of Hemdean Road directly outside of the Site. This is considered to result in a low degree of harm to the experience and appreciation of the non-designated heritage asset. However the scheme ensures that key views along the drive between the lodge and school are preserved and to some degree enhanced by the removal of buildings as well as preserving the appreciation of the heritage significance of the school house in longer distance views across the valley from Balmore Walk. The scheme takes the opportunity to enhance the immediate setting of the lodge, whilst the proposed conversion and appropriate re-use of both of the buildings to residential accommodation presents a heritage benefit through the long-term management and occupation of the buildings. The scheme has been designed to complement the streetscape and not to compete with the prominence and dominance of the school house. As such, as an internal heritage balance, the extent of no harm to elements of heritage significance along with the heritage benefits of the scheme balances out the low level of harm identified from obscuring the view from part of Hemdean Road.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.1.1 HAPRO Ltd was commissioned by Planning Issues Ltd in December 2025 to prepare a heritage statement to inform a planning application for the conversion of, and development of land at, the former Hemdean House School, Caversham in Reading Borough Council (hereafter referred to as 'the Site'). The Site is centred on National Grid reference SU 71299 75210. The proposal is for the construction of retirement living apartments with the retention and conversion of the historic school buildings.

1.1.2 This assessment has been commissioned to focus solely on the proposals with regards to built heritage. It does not discuss the buried archaeological potential of the Site. This has been provided in a separate archaeological desk-based assessment (ADBA) produced as part of the planning application by HAPRO Ltd (HAPRO Ref. 0022).

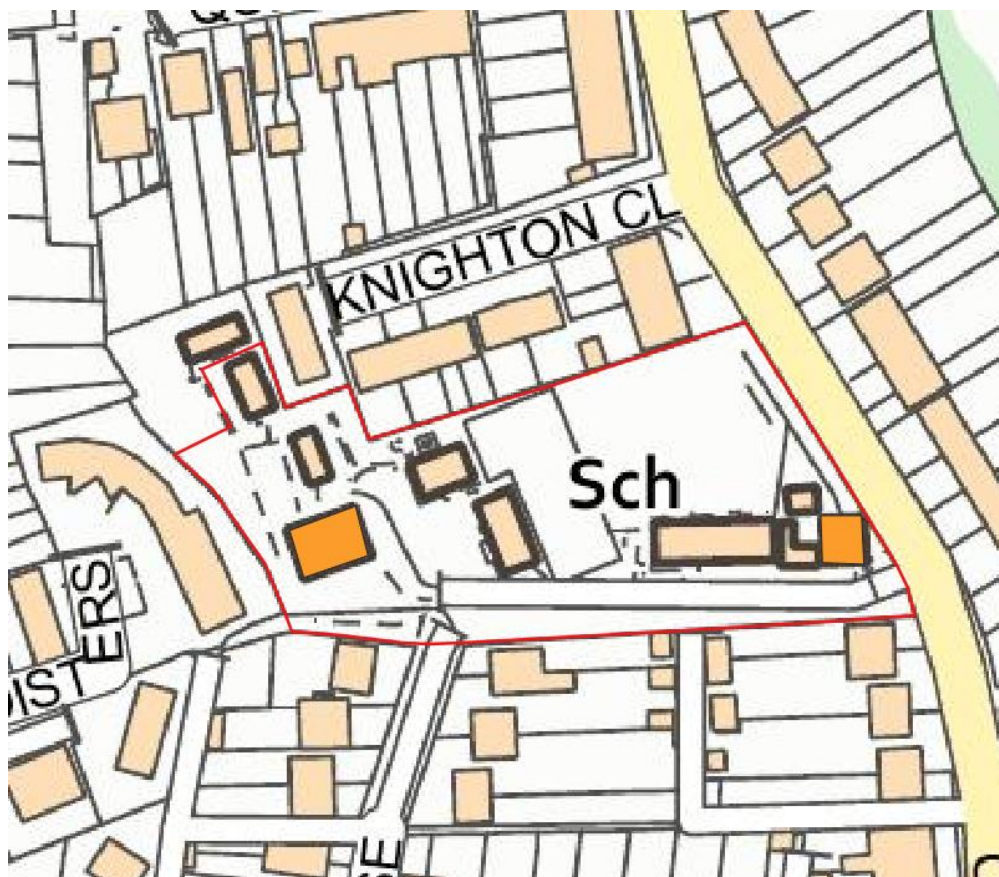


Figure 1: The Site boundary in red and non-designated heritage asset demarcated in dark orange

1.2 THE SITE

- 1.2.1 The Site comprises of buildings and land associated with the former Hemdean House School. This includes the late 19th century school building and lodge house, the latter of which is converted to a pre-school nursery, along with additional late 20th century school buildings and playing fields. The red-line boundary of the Site covers an area of 0.88 hectares but the proposed development is limited to the area of the former playing fields nearest to Hemdean Road.
- 1.2.2 The eastern half of the Site, nearest Hemdean Road, is relatively flat at 40m aOD, before rising steeply to approximately 50 m aOD around the school house building. The Site is a mixture of buildings, hardstanding netball court, grass playing field and extensive, mature tree cover. The Site sits in a valley aligned broadly north-south with higher ground to the west, now defined by Caversham Heights, and to the east by the housing development of Balmore Park.
- 1.2.3 The underlying bedrock geology is Seaford and Newhaven Chalk Formation. Along Hemdean Road, to the east of the Site, superficial geology comprise of Quaternary head deposits of poorly sorted clay, silts and gravels. To the higher ground beyond the western boundary of the Site are Hoxian-Wolstonian Boyn Hill gravel formation deposits, which overlie the chalk bedrock (BGS GeoIndex Onshore, 1:50,000).

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 1.3.1 The purpose of this heritage statement is to determine, as far as is reasonably possible from existing records and observations, an understanding of the heritage significance of the existing buildings in order to formulate:
- An assessment of significance of the building considering its archaeological, historic, architectural and artistic interests;
 - An appraisal of the impact of proposed development on the significance of those identified heritage assets; and
 - A consideration of how the re-development can take references from the

heritage significance of the existing building to provide a harmonious scheme.

1.4 REGULATORY AND POLICY CONTEXT

1.4.1 There is national legislation and guidance relating to the protection of, and development on, or near, important archaeological sites or historical buildings within planning regulations as defined under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In addition, local authorities are responsible for the protection of the historic environment within the planning system. Further detail of the relevant legislation, national policy and guidance and is provided in Appendix 1.

1.4.2 In May 2025 the Hemdean House School and Lodge buildings were added to the List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures as LL29. The Planning Applications Committee report comprising the nomination form and assessment is included in Appendix 2. The inclusion of the building as a locally listed heritage assets means that the structure can be considered to be a non-designated heritage asset under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 STANDARDS

2.1.1 This assessment is undertaken in accordance with:

- Historic England’s Historic Environment Good Practice Advice (GPA) in Planning Notes:
 - *The Historic Environment in Local Plans* (2015a);
 - *Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* (2015b);
- Historic England’s Advice Notes:
 - *12: Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage* (2019a).
- *Historic Environment Planning Policy Guidance* (revised July 2019), published by the Ministry Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), providing advice on enhancing and conserving the historic environment;
- The *Chartered* Institute for Archaeologists’ *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2019); and
- The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists’ *Standard and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment* (2020).

2.2 SCOPE OF ASSESSMENT

2.2.1 The following sources were consulted to inform the presence of heritage assets within the study area, and to form a baseline for the assessment of their significance:

- Reading Historic Environment Record (HER);
- Royal Berkshire Archives;
- National heritage datasets including The National Heritage List for England (NHLE) and Historic England Research Records;

- Archaeology Data Service (ADS) Grey Literature Library;
- National Monuments Record (NMR);
- National Newspaper Archive;
- Historic mapping available online;
- Aerial photography available online at Britain from Above, Cambridgeshire Aerial Photographic collection online and National Collection of Aerial Photography (NCAP) and Historic England;
- Relevant primary and secondary sources including published and publicly available unpublished documents and reports; and
- A site visit undertaken in January 2026.

Assumptions and Limitations

- 2.2.2 This report is compiled using secondary information derived from a variety of sources. The assumption is made that this data as well as that derived from other secondary sources, is reasonably accurate. There may be other material held in private collections, local repositories, and the National Archives, which was not possible to view these as part of the assessment.
- 2.2.3 This report is compiled using secondary information derived from a variety of sources, only some have been directly examined. The assumption is made that this data as well as that derived from other secondary sources, is reasonably accurate.
- 2.2.4 Archival material relating to the Site was consulted on-line and at The Royal Berkshire Archives. All non-copyright Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping was reviewed.
- 2.2.5 There may be other material held in private collections, local repositories, and the National Archives, which was not possible to view these as part of the assessment.

2.3 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

2.3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2025) recommends that, in determining applications, local planning authorities should require applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting (NPPF, 207).

2.3.2 The significance of heritage assets is defined in terms of their value to this and future generations because of their heritage interest, deriving not only from their physical presence, but also from their setting. This interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic (NPPF):

- **Archaeological interest:** As defined in the Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework, 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 skill, 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.

(MHCLG 2019, Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 18a-006-20190723)

3. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 This section described the heritage significance and contribution setting makes to the non-designated heritage assets. No designated heritage assets would be affected by the proposals.

3.2 HISTORIC BACKGROUND

- 3.2.1 A review of historic mapping shows the Site was not developed until the second half of the 19th Century. The founding of the school is attributed was founded in 1859 by Francis Knighton (1803-1883), proprietor of Caversham House Academy, a small boarding school for boys which had been in existence since at least 1826. The academy was originally in Reading but from 1849 had been at Caversham House, which subsequently closed in the early 1920s. The new girls' school was run by Mr Knighton's daughters, Rosa and Matilda, initially at Caversham House Lodge, which was known at that time as Verona Lodge.
- 3.2.2 An advert that was published from 17 November 1860 through to 12 January 1861 in the Berkshire Chronicle and Reading Mercury states that *'Mr & Mrs Knighton beg respectfully to inform their Friends and the Public that they intend opening on 9th January 1861 a school for Young Ladies.'* The advert went on to state teaching would be undertaken by Misses R & M Knighton.
- 3.2.3 The construction of Hemdean House is attributed to 1862. The Reading Mercury of 21 June 1862 carries an advert for Mr Knighton's Caversham House Academy which notes *'a ladies school in the same village by the Misses Knighton'*, with the schools re-opening on 14 July. It is not until 9 January 1864 that there is the first mention of 'Hemdean House' within the newspaper archive and that *'The Misses Knighton also beg to announce the re-assembling of their Young Ladies at Hemdean House on the 14th'*.
- 3.2.4 In the Reading Mercury of 19 March 1864 the school is described as having a *'situation'* that is *'highly salubrious'* but was not (at that time) open to day boarders; whilst on 10 September 1864 an advert states that *'the premises are situate on an eminence, in a*

most healthy and pleasant locality ...;

- 3.2.5 The 1882 OS map this shows the school house and lodge, for the caretaker of the school, with tree-planted grounds fronting onto Hemdean Road (Plate 1). There was very little change within the Site until the late 20th Century when additional school buildings were added (Plates 2 and 5).

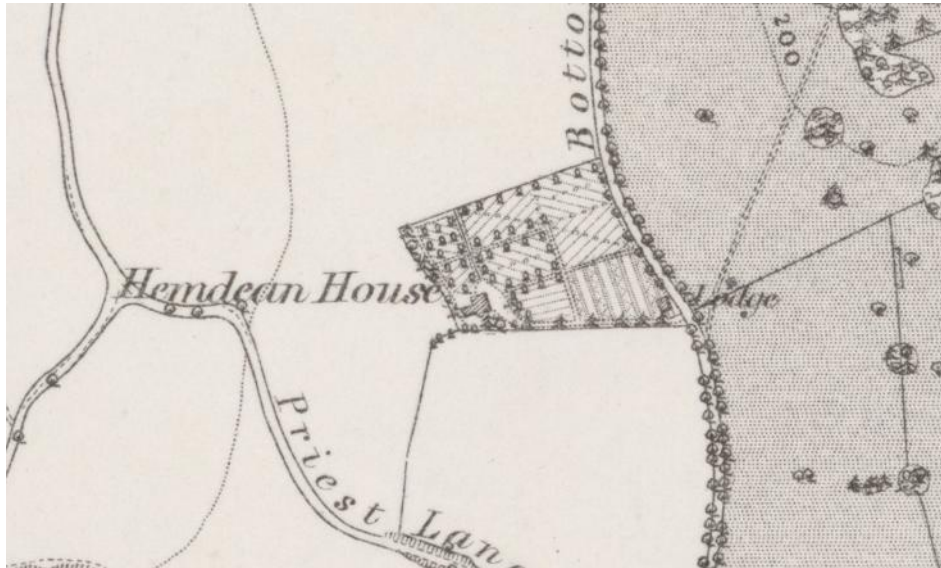


Plate 1: 1882 OS six-inch map



Plate 2: 1900 OS six-inch map



Plate 3: 1947 RAF Aerial Photograph of the Site



Plate 4: 1961 RAF Aerial Photograph of the Site

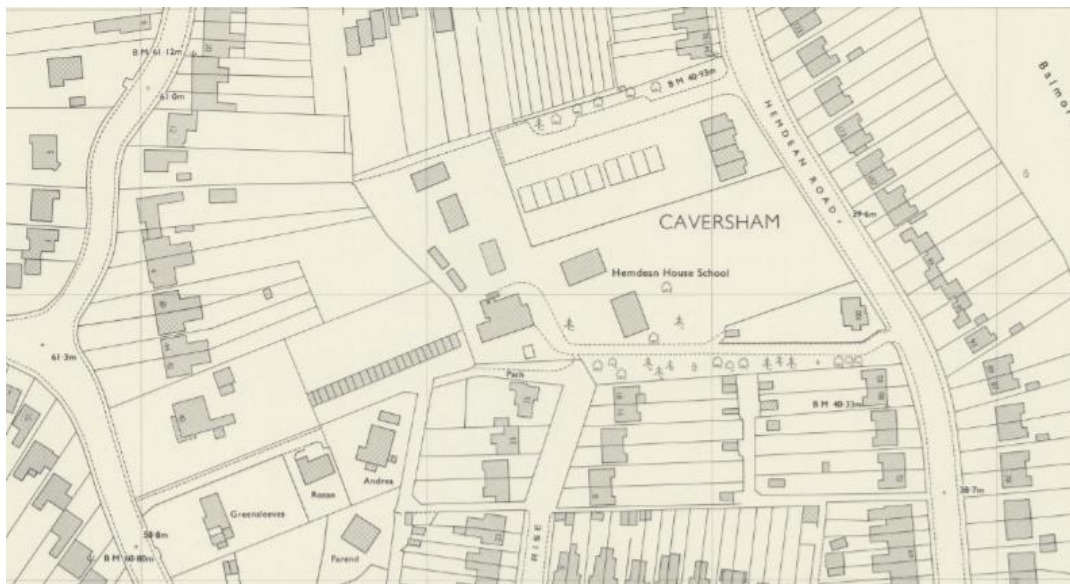


Plate 5: 1974 OS 1:2500 map

3.2.6 Prior to the additional school buildings and asphalt court being added aerial photographs from the mid- 20th Century show how densely wooded the grounds were with mature trees to the front of the school house and lining the drive from the lodge (Plates 3 and 4) . By the early 1970s the northern part of the grounds had been sold off with the 1974 OS map showing Knighton Close beginning constructed. An additional area of grounds at the western end of Knighton Close was developed for housing in the early 2000's.

3.3 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

3.3.1 Hemdean House School and Lodge were added to the List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures in 2024. The nomination form and subsequent local list text is provided in Appendix 2. Therefore the heritage significance of each building is summarised here.

Hemdean House School

3.3.2 Built in the early 1860s the school holds historic interest. This significance relates to women's education history and education acts in Britain. In the 19th Century, there was growing awareness of the importance of educating women beyond the basic level. The

Education Act of 1870 established the foundation for elementary education for children, leading to academically oriented education for girls rather than only domestic skills. As such, Hemdean House School, being one of the first girls' schools in Reading, represents the transition of national education aims for girls, and prior to the 1870 Education Act.

- 3.3.3 The school holds local historic interest with the relationship of the Knighton family, particularly Francis Knighton who was active in the Reading and Caversham area for child education, and his daughters, Rosa and Matildia, who were the first teachers at Hemdean House School. As it was a very small, independent (private) school the local list assessment considers the asset was not a focal point or had a key social role that features an important local interest, and therefore it has a limited social historic value.
- 3.3.4 It also holds historical significance through its alumni, including Elsie Smith MBE, a missionary and nurse; Lizbeth Webb, a renowned soprano; and Babita Sharma, a former BBC News presenter and author, further underscoring the institution's lasting impact on the community and beyond.



Plate 6: Front eastern elevation

3.3.5 In architectural terms the buildings is austere and relatively plain in terms of embellishment which lends itself to being an institutional building, although it still presents itself as being of domestic scale. However the building is not without fine detailing. The presence of arched windows along with segmental arched window headers, shallow pitched roof, dentile brick detailing and off-centred gables hints at an Italianate-style which became popular from the 1850s following the construction of Osborne House on the Isle of Wight for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The building was originally square in plan form but had an extension built on the southern elevation in the first 20 years and another extension on the rear before 1900 (Plates 7 and 8).



Plate 7: Northern double gabled elevation and rear elevation showing later extension

3.3.6 Hemdean House School does not have the noticeably patterned brickwork that is common in Reading. Constructed of red brick the building has simple single courses of cream coloured brick at window cill and header heights on all floors which wrap around the building, providing unity to the composition. Between the first and second floor is a projecting dentile brick course which helps to articulate the elevations.

3.3.7 Each window has a stone sill with a carved stone header comprising a large carved keystone. Much of the glazing retains single marginal-pane sashes. The front door is

set within a rectangular two storey projecting bay. Above the door is a stone cornice rain hood. The southern elevation has a canted bay of similar design to the rest of the fenestration and reflects the intention and unity of the architectural composition of the building.



Plate 8: Western side elevation showing canted bay window and later two storey extension

The Lodge

- 3.3.8 The lodge set at the entrance on Hemdean lane at the bottom of the drive to the school house was constructed at the same time as the main building. However the local list description fails to note that the building has been subject to three separate phases of development. The original building comprised of the central projecting sentry porch, flanked on either side by single depth and single bay wide rooms (Plate 9).
- 3.3.9 The design copies design features of the main building, comprising of mainly red brick, slate roof, segmental arch window headers with keystone detail, decorative brick-dentile course at eaves level and single cream brick courses at window cill and header level. The gable of the central door has decorative barge boards and an arrow silt ventilator surrounded with cream brick detailing. The original design can be seen in Plate 11, which clearly shows the rear wing did not exist before 1882. It is possible that

at the same time as the extensions to the main house the lodge was also extended.



Plate 9: Southern front elevation of the lodge



Plate 10: Different phases of construction on the lodge

3.3.10 A rear cross wing incorporating a first floor was subsequently added to the lodge. The same motifs that exist on the main building is copied through onto this later extension, primarily the arched window at first floor level, although the window detailing is simplified on the lodge. The glazing comprises of gothic arched glazing bars. Further decorative bargeboards are included on the later gables.

3.3.11 The final phase is a flat roof extension nearest to Hemdean Road which was probably added in the mid-20th Century. This pays homage to the original design of the lodge with the cream brick courses and the projecting dentile brick detailing being extended around the building to unify the building as a whole.

Setting Assessment

3.3.12 The setting of the lodge and Hemdean House School building is intricately linked to one another, as the lodge was the school caretaker's accommodation and both were constructed as set pieces to promote the ladies school and this provides a formal design and hierarchy to the buildings. From the gates next to the lodge an access track curves up to the main building. The existing routeway follows the

3.3.13 The topography of the Site plays a key role in contributing to the heritage significance to the school. The building is elevated above the road which contributes to its appreciation as a private, independent school, of a higher status and reinforces its austere appearance. Set into the hill slope, the eastern elevation presents itself to the Hemdean Bottom valley and it can be seen from Balmore Walk on the higher ground on other side of the valley; from which the status of the building can be appreciated again. The buildings sit within their own plot of land, and when first constructed was isolated from other development.

3.3.14 The Site is now surrounded by residential development that ranges in date from late Victorian through to the 21st Century. This now provides a back drop to the school with housing located on the surrounding slopes which has reduced the sense of isolation. This is a mixture of terraced, semi-detached and detached properties comprising of two storey and two storey with further accommodation in the roofspace, such as along Knighton Close and Hemsdean Road opposite and next to the Site. This surrounding development does not make a meaningful (neutral) contribution to the heritage significance of the heritage asset. Knighton Close was constructed in the 1970s and

was built on the original extent of land associated with the school.



Plate 11: Undated photo, but pre1882 (top) and similar location in 2026 (bottom)

3.3.15 The grounds in which the lodge and school are located have been significantly modified over time. The grounds were planted with trees as part of the original design as shown on the 1882 OS map. Up until the mid-late 20th Century these trees matured and screened the school house from immediate areas, as shown on the historic aerial photographs. The vast majority of trees have been lost with the slope in front of the school being terraced and reshaped with single storey classrooms, and an asphalt

court with tall fencing erected (Plate 12). Remaining trees that are located nearer to the school house The sports field to the front of the school provides a degree of separation and privacy and was once a hay meadow that was annually cut by pupils.



Plate 12: Terraced slope, modern school buildings and asphalt court

3.3.16 The heritage interest of the lodge is currently difficult to appreciate due to the paraphernalia and wooden fencing which surrounds the daycare nursery that occupies the lodge. The building next to the lodge detracts by blocking views towards the lodge when travelling along the drive from the school and the spatial relationship between the two has been compromised (Plate 13).

3.3.17 Although there are elements within the Site that detract from the setting of the heritage assets, the Site overall makes a positive contribution to the heritage significance of the school and lodge.



Plate 13: Relationship of lodge to school blocked by later building



Plate 14: Winter-time view towards the school house from Hemdean Road

4. STATEMENT OF IMPACT

4.1 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1.1 The current character of the site is the sports field of the former Hemdean School. The footprint of the proposed development covers the amenity grass of the sports field, asphalt pitches.

Redevelopment Proposals

4.1.2 The proposed redevelopment of the Site comprises:

- Demolition of the modern buildings and associated infrastructure, whilst retaining the original school house and lodge;
- Retention and conversion back to residential function of the lodge;
- Retention and conversion to multiple residential occupancy of the school house with a new bay window added to the ground floor
- Construction of a retirement development a single building with T-shaped footprint aligned onto the road but set back behind roadside trees and respecting the adjacent building line along the road;
- Creation of new site entrance and car parking to the front of the proposed building; and
- Landscaping surrounding the buildings.

4.2 ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS

School House and Lodge

4.2.1 The proposals include the conversion of the historic school house and lodge into residential properties. This will require limited internal re-configuration but will not the external appearance of the property. The ground level on the southern elevation of the school house will be reduced and re-profiled to expose the existing canted wall beneath the current bay window. New windows will be inserted into the ground floor bay to match the existing windows on the first floor, providing an unified finish to the

elevation.

Setting of the Heritage Assets

- 4.2.2 The proposed retirement apartments will be set down on the flat topography of the former sports field and cut back into the slope at the western end. It will retain a degree of separation from both assets and will be located further away than the buildings that are currently on the Site. The set down position will ensure that the school house will remain prominent and dominant in the skyline, rising above the proposed building.
- 4.2.3 Although the proposed building will restrict existing winter-time views towards the school house from directly outside the Site along Hemdean Road, which will affect how the school house is experienced and appreciated in this location the key views specifically from the lodge entrance towards the school house (Plate 11) and across the valley to the school house from Balmore Walk (and vice versa) will be preserved and the heritage significance of the school house will still be appreciable.
- 4.2.4 The proposals will enhance the current setting of the lodge by removing the current high wooden panel fencing and replacing it with 1.2m metal railings, the removal of the various paraphernalia associated with the day care nursery and nearby modern building that obscures views to the lodge from the historically associated drive.
- 4.2.5 The proposed building will comprise of three floors. Although this is an additional floor higher than immediate houses along Hemsdean Road it is comparable in height to the three storey houses on Knighton Close so is considered to be in keeping in terms of scale. The design reflects those buildings directly opposite the Site and to the south of the Site as a series of post-war buildings. This assist in the scheme fitting into and completing the streetscape with the building line of the proposed building set behind the existing building line.
- 4.2.6 The elevation will comprise of bi-colour brick reflecting the design of neighbouring properties with brick ground floors and white/ pale coloured upper storey. The proposed elevations include a projecting dentile brick course between ground and first floors, which takes it reference from not only the school house and lodge but the surrounding later houses as well. The design also ensures that the proposed scheme does not compete with the locally listed buildings through detailing and reinforces a

hierarchy to the architecture within the Site and along the streetscape.

- 4.2.7 The proposed building will be constructed on a currently open area of ground that is historically associated with the former school. However the grounds have been subject to much change over the past 165 years most noticeably the construction of Knighton Close to the north of the Site, new school buildings within the grounds and the extensive loss of tree cover. The change to this element of setting will not affect the architectural or historic interests of the buildings which will remain and be appreciated. The historic association of the grounds will still be legible and can be understood through historic documents such as maps and photographs.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 This heritage statement has utilised a range of sources, in line with industry guidance and best practice to establish the heritage significance of the non-designated heritage asset of Hemdean School House and Lodge. It has been undertaken in accordance with Reading Borough Council's Local Plan Policy EN1 and is considered to be proportionate to the heritage significance of the non-designated heritage asset.
- 5.1.2 The proposal will result in views that are achieved seasonally toward the school house being obscured from part of Hemdean Road directly outside of the Site. This is considered to result in a low degree of harm to the experience and appreciation of the non-designated heritage asset. However the scheme ensures that key views along the drive between the lodge and school are preserved and to some degree enhanced by the removal of buildings as well as preserving the appreciation of the heritage significance of the school house in longer distance views across the valley from Balmore Walk.
- 5.1.3 The scheme takes the opportunity to enhance the immediate setting of the lodge, whilst the proposed conversion and appropriate re-use of both of the buildings to residential accommodation presents a heritage benefit, through the long-term management and occupation of the buildings. The scheme has been designed to complement the streetscape and not to compete with the prominence and dominance of the school house. As such as an internal heritage balance, the extent of no harm to heritage significance and the heritage benefits of the scheme balances out the low level of harm identified from obscuring the view from part of Hemdean Road.

6. REFERENCES

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1761 John Rocque's A Topographical Survey of the County of Berks

1809 Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing Reading OSD 126

1845 Tithe Map of Caversham

1882 OS six-inch to mile Oxfordshire LVI

1900 OS six-inch to mile Oxfordshire LVI.SE

1913 OS 25 inch to mile Berkshire XXIX.15

1914 OS six-inch to mile Berkshire XXIX. SE

1934 OS 25 inch to mile Berkshire XXIX.15

1935 OS six-inch to mile Berkshire XXIX. SE

1945 OS six-inch to mile Berkshire XXIX. SE

1956 OS 1:1250 SU7175SW-A

1957 OS 1:2500 SU7175SW-A

1961 OS 1:10,560 SU77NW-A

1961 OS 1:2500 SU7075- SU7175-AA

1973 OS 1:10,000 SU77NW-A

1974 OS 1:1250 SU7175SW-B

AP raf_cpe_uk_2270_vp2_5231 29 August 1947

AP raf_58_4646_f43_0441 28 August 1961

APPENDIX 1: REGULATORY AND POLICY CONTEXT

Introduction

There is national legislation and guidance relating to the protection of, and development on, or near, important archaeological sites or historical buildings within planning regulations as defined under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In addition, local authorities are responsible for the protection of the historic environment within the planning system. The following policies are considered to be of relevance to the Site and the proposed scheme.

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

Scheduled Monuments and Areas of Archaeological Interest are afforded statutory protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as Amended) and the consent of the Secretary of State (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport), as advised by Historic England, is required for any works.

National Planning Policy Framework

Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's current planning policy in relation to conserving and enhancing the historic environment. The key requirements are summarised below.

207. In 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. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

208. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

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

210. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

(a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;

(b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and

(c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

212. 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.

213. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

(a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;

(b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional ⁷⁵.

214. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and

b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and

c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and

d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

215. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

216. The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

217. Local planning authorities should not permit the loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred.

219. Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.

220. Not all elements of a Conservation Area or World Heritage Site will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial

harm under [paragraph 214](#) or less than substantial harm under [paragraph 215](#), as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole.

Local Plan

The Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted on 4th November 2019. This document sets out our planning policies for development in Reading up to 2036, and is the main consideration in deciding planning applications. Those policies of relevance include:

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.

EN4: LOCALLY IMPORTANT HERITAGE ASSETS

Development proposals that affect locally important heritage assets will demonstrate that development conserves architectural, archaeological or historical significance which may include the appearance, character and setting of the asset.

Planning permission may be granted in cases where a proposal could result in harm to or loss of a locally important heritage asset only where it can be demonstrated that the benefits of the development significantly outweigh the asset's significance. Where it is accepted by the Local Planning Authority that retention is not important, recording of the heritage asset should be undertaken and submitted alongside development proposals. Replacement buildings should draw upon heritage elements of the previous design, incorporating historical qualities that made the previous building significant. This may include appearance, scale and architectural quality.

EN6: NEW DEVELOPMENT IN A HISTORIC CONTEXT

In areas characterised by heritage assets, the historic environment will inform and shape new development. New development will make a contribution to the historic character of the area by respecting and enhancing its architectural and visual qualities and considering how heritage considerations can influence the design of new development. When determining planning applications for new development, the following factors will be taken into consideration:

- a. The positive contribution of the development to the existing historic townscape (scale, height, mass, proportion, plot size, street form, materials, significant vistas and views, and open space);
- b. Sensitivity to historic context;
- c. Reflection of borough-wide major heritage themes that contribute to local distinctiveness (e.g. patterned brickwork or former worker terraced housing);
- d. Whether development promotes and/or improves access to previously undiscovered or neglected historic significance

APPENDIX 2: LOCAL LIST NOMINATION FORM AND DESCRIPTION

Planning Applications Committee

02 April 2024



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	LOCAL LISTING REPORT - Hemdean House School and Lodge
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Burcu Can Cetin, Conservation Officer
Lead Councillor	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Ward	Caversham
Address	Hemdean House School and Lodge, Hemdean Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 7SD
Recommendations	To agree that Hemdean House School and Lodge be added to the List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. To report on a proposal to add Hemdean House School to the List of Locally-Important Buildings and Structures. The report identifies the building as being of local historical and architectural importance and makes an assessment based on the Council's published Local List criteria for inclusion to the list.

2. Policy context

- 2.1. Reading Borough Council maintains a List of Locally-Important Buildings and Structures ('the Local List'). Its purpose is to recognise the buildings and structures which do not meet the criteria for national listing, but are nonetheless significant to the heritage of the local area. It was agreed by Planning Applications Committee on 2nd December 2020 that decisions on additions to the Local List should be made at PAC.
- 2.2. The criteria for considering additions to the Local List are set out in Appendix 2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019).

3. The proposal

- 3.1. A nomination was received on 17/07/2024 to add Hemdean House School and Lodge to the Local List. Consultations have been carried out in accordance with the agreed process, and this report sets out the recommended action.
- 3.2. Hemdean House School is a purpose-built school for girls constructed in 1862 together with a lodge located in the field of Hem Dean in Caversham Village, which was later commemorated in the street name. After serving as a school for 165 years, Hemdean House School was closed in 2024. On a prominent position, the three-and-a-half-storey large, detached school building is constructed of red brick and a design that includes classical details, while the 'old English style' lodge is situated at the entrance to the school grounds to the west of Hemdean Road.
- 3.3. The nomination form received for the building identifies the significance of the building as follows:

- 3.4. **Principle for Selection for the Local List - (b) 1840 - 1913: any building, structure or group of buildings that is/are substantially complete and unaltered and of definite significance:**

In 1859 a new girls' school was formed in Verona Lodge, Church Street, Caversham on a site now occupied by the extension to the telephone exchange. After purchase of agricultural land on the bank of the Hemdean Botton dry chalk valley, the purpose-built school for girls opened in 1862, renamed Hemdean House School with both boarding and day places. It remained in continuous use for education until 2024 and the original school buildings with fine architectural details are largely unaltered. As shown in the period images, the Lodge was part of the original construction and was occupied by the caretaker of the school.

Historic Interest –

(a). Historical Association

i. The building or structure has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person(s) or event.

The founding of a girls' school that went beyond primary education is of national significance, and Francis Knighton and his daughters took the lead in this. Knighton is a figure of considerable local interest (see below).

The fact that the architect was almost certainly Horace Jones of London is also of national importance, as Jones was the architect of Tower Bridge and the rebuilt Caversham Park after a fire of 1850 for industrialist William Crawshay. Crawshay and Knighton worshipped at St Peter's Church in Caversham and are both buried in the churchyard there. It seems highly plausible that Horace Jones would have been recommended to Knighton by Crawshay.

ii. The building or structure has a prolonged and direct association with figures or events of local interest.

Mr Francis Knighton (1803-1883) opened a school for boys in Reading ca 1826 in Gun Street, moving ca 1835 to Gun Street and then by 1841 to 23 Church Street where Charles Havell had previously run a boys academy. Ca 1849, Mr Knighton purchased Caversham House on Church Street with 2 acres of land. Previous occupants were Sir Rufane Donkin, founder of Port Elizabeth in South Africa and Sir Nathaniel Clissold. Caversham House Academy had properties on either side of Church Street with a connecting tunnel where pedestrian crossing is now. The school playground is now the site of Caversham Library and the classrooms, the New Testament Church of God and the Working Men's Club. The school continued until 1921. The garden at the front of Caversham House was sold to Reading Corporation to widen Church Street in preparation for the new Caversham Bridge. The building was demolished in 1965 but one of the Holm Oaks from the gardens remains in St Martins Precinct. A memorial window in St Peter's Church commemorates the Knighton family.

Mr Knighton had 4 daughters and started the girls's school to be run by his two youngest daughters. Matilda Knighton retired as Principal in 1926. Rosa Knighton married Ferdinand Charles Dermott, and was co-principal until the 1890s. Alice Olivey, a pupil at school from 1902, was principal of the school from 1926 until 1972, when the Knighton family finally relinquished their interest.

Hemdean House School has alumni of national significance:

Elsie Smith MBE (1881-1968) Missionary and nurse. She spent 33 years working with Maori people on the Whanganui River. Cited in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography; awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 1955

Lizbeth Webb – Born Elizabeth Sandra Horton (1926-2013) First heard on the BBC aged 16, the 'Champagne Soprano' became a star of stage and radio. Bless The Bride was composed for her, she starred in Guys and Dolls, and featured on the Goon Show.

*Babita Sharma (1977-) Former BBC News presenter, documentary maker and author. Having grown up in corner shops in Reading and Caversham, her book *The Corner Shop: Shopkeepers, the Sharmas, and the Making of Modern Britain* was published in 2019.*

(b) Social Importance: The building or structure has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Reading's communities:

The small school, which has remained largely unaltered, served Caversham and Reading from an era pre-dating the 1870 and 1880 Education Acts. Archived information relating to the school documents the Knighton's vision for girls' education from the mid-19th century within the school building.

The British Newspaper Archive provides evidence of the importance of both the building and what was provided: 'Terms which are moderate' provided for 'superior English education in all its branches. Modern languages, music, drawing, dancing...' The house and its hilly location, were stressed: 'The Premises stand on an eminence, are detached and very healthy...'

Academic work was entered for public exams by the College of Preceptors, with teaching provided by 'qualified staff and visiting Professors'.

There are strong local memories of the family which founded the school and its particular ethos. As testimony by contemporary teachers and pupils reveals, local people who attended the school as children frequently sent their own children to the school, through multiple generations. The size of the classrooms, as built for Francis Knighton, were an important factor in the school ethos. Hemdean House provided 'a school environment which was very happy for staff and pupils alike. (Anna Greaves, Senior School teacher, report in Caversham Bridge Community Newspaper June 2024)

Hemdean House maintained strong links with St Peter's Church (where Francis Knighton is buried), and a small side gate opens onto Hemdean Rise, making an easy walk to the church via the Mount and across Church Road. The school developed links with local businesses and charities, supporting Caversham traders by opening the annual Christmas Late Night Shopping in St Martin's Precinct with festive music and carols.

Architectural Interest –

(a). Sense of place - i. The building or structure is representative of a style that is characteristic of Reading..

The style of Hemdean School illustrates the prevalence of superior polychromatic brickwork with stone mouldings in and around central Caversham, where terraces of Victorian houses and 'villas' spread out from the centre. In Hemdean Hill and Hemdean Rise, for example, where such housing survives in a great state of completeness, these polychromatic brick terraces form the southern border of the school's site.

Additionally, the school and its lodge have been carefully sited in their hilly location, and this chimes with the careful siting of the polychromatic brick terraces in Caversham, which move up and down the hills and are contoured around the curve of principal roads such as Gosbrook Road.

(b). Innovation and Virtuosity - i. The building or structure has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials.

The architectural details of Hemdean House are very fine, with horizontal courses of cream brick against a red brick ground that visually tie into the stone detailing of the windows and doors. Above the windows, which survive mostly intact with their original configurations and even glass, are prominent keystones, illustrated in the appended photographs. A variant of Flemish bond brickwork has been used throughout the exterior of the original building.

There is a combination of individual windows with arched tops, a triple bay on the front façade, and a fashionable polygonal bay window to the south side overlooking the site of the formerly large conservatory, whose plinth remains in the ground. The sites of the original toilets, and in one instance an original water closet attached to the north side of the building, attest to the remarkable completeness of the school building. The block which originally housed music rooms survives, despite an unattractive 20th-century addition.

There are two significant fireplaces which remain inside the building along with several boarded-up fireplaces of simple design. The interior panelling and shuttering remain around the principal windows, and there is a very fine staircase of several levels as well as original floor tiles and panelled oak door with what is likely to be the original brass knob at the front. Finally, there are artefacts from the school's history and archival materials which survive, as well as paintings and prints documenting the school at various moments in its history.

(b). Innovation and Virtuosity - ii. The building or structure is the work of a notable local/national architect/engineer/builder.

The Reading Mercury reported on 18 August 1860 that the school was designed by H Jones. London. Horace Jones was active in Caversham at that time. He designed the School and the Parish School, which became the Caversham Centre for Adult Education, now Caversham Health Club. All the evidence points towards Horace Jones being the architect of Hemdean House.

Sir Horace Jones PPRIBA (20 May 1819 – 21 May 1887) was an English architect particularly noted for his work as architect and surveyor to the City of London from 1864 until his death. He served as president of the Royal Institute of British Architects from 1882 until 1884, and was knighted in 1886. His most recognised work, Tower Bridge, was completed posthumously.

(b). Innovation and Virtuosity - iii. The building or structure shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering.

The school's architecture is certainly progressive for a date of the later 1850s, as it displays the polychromy that was coming into fashion during this decade in part due to the architectural writer John Ruskin and the Oxford Style – for example, the Natural History Museum in Oxford by Benjamin Woodward and Thomas Deane (1855-59). Instead of the gothic style so popular in Oxford, however, Hemdean House displays classical features that were to reappear during the emergent Arts and Crafts Movement, which it anticipates in some ways.

It appears as though the brief of the school's architect was to build in a progressive style that was absolutely up-to-date for 1850s Britain, while working to a budget and keeping features simple. The major decorative features are subtle ones, such as the prominent keystones above the windows.

(c). Group Value - i. The buildings/structures form a group which as a whole has a unified architectural or historic value to the local area.

The significance of the girls' school for 165 years, from 1859 to 2024, and its integral link to Caversham House Academy in the heart of Caversham Village has significant historic value to Caversham.

The link of the polychromatic brickwork of Hemdean House to the slightly later terraced housing surrounding it has previously been noted.

Final Comments: *Hemdean House School, which is visible from Hemdean Road and from Balmore Walk, is a striking building of architectural importance. The site with the Lodge at the bottom of the hill still evokes the school built for girls in 1862. The emphasis on the importance of girls' education was ahead of its time, and 165 years is a remarkable period for a school to provide continuous education. It leaves an important legacy. The legacy of the Knighton family who occupied Caversham House, Church*

Street for almost 100 years remains important. Their lengthy contribution to education at both Caversham House Academy and Hemdean House School deserves full recognition.

4. Consultations

4.1. The following were consulted on the proposed addition to the Local List:

- Multimedix Holdings Limited(landowner);
- Caversham ward councillors;
- Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee;
- Reading Civic Society; and
- Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA) and Caversham GLOBE (local community groups).

4.2. Responses were received from:

4.3. **Stephen Hodgson on behalf of Multimedix Holdings Limited**

"Thank you for your letter dated 11th February 2025 regarding the proposal to add Hemdean House School to the List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures of Local Heritage Significance. We acknowledge receipt of the letter. Please find our responses to specific questions as requested, in blue, in the document attached.

The main School House and the Nursery building (Lodge) have been part of the history of Caversham for 160 years. I truly appreciate the effort that must have gone into the historical research of Hemdean House School and buildings. My family and I have had a personal connection the school for nearly 50 years, yet much of the information was new to us, in particular the possibility that the architect may be Sir Horace Jones. Can I suggest that a transcript is forwarded to the Berkshire Archives, to further enrich the historical records it holds regarding Hemdean House.

We will endeavour to preserve the buildings discussed throughout the document: that being, the House and Lodge as stated in the document. Please can site map be updated with annotations of the buildings of interest only: there are several wooden buildings and prefabricated structures on-site that have little to no heritage significance are not mentioned in the proposal. I have provided an amended site plan for ease.

*I hope this proposal forms the start of further applications regarding significant buildings of historical interest in the area such as **St Anne's Well** or other schools such as the **Queen Anne's site in Caversham** or the **Abbey in Reading***

In the meantime, as custodians of the site, I would appreciate more information on what the what is expected from the site should the application be successful. I would also like to know if I am expected to attend the meeting where the application is discussed. My email address is provided above for ease and speed of communication."

(Comments of the landlord on the nomination form are attached as Appendix 2)

4.4. **Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee**

"Reading CAAC support the local listing nomination for Hemdean House School and are pleased to see the whole site including the original school building and lodge are part of the nomination."

4.5. **Reading Civic Society**

"In summer 2023 I was taken around the site and the historic building by some of the children at the school. It was certainly interesting.

Based on the case put forward – we judge is worthy of being adopted as a Locally listed Building.”

5. Assessment

The proposal to add a building or structure to the Local List should be considered against the criteria in Appendix 2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019).

5.1. Exclusions

- 5.1.1. The Local Plan specifies that a building should not be considered for the Local List where it is already part of a conservation area, scheduled monument or subject to an Article 4 direction relating to historic or architectural interest. Hemdean House School and Lodge is not within any of these existing designations and can therefore be considered against the other criteria.

5.2. General principles

- 5.2.1. Hemdean House School and Lodge dates from 1862 and therefore needs to be considered against the following general principle:

b. 1840 - 1913: Any building, structure or group of buildings that is/are of clearly-defined significance in the local context and where elements that contribute to its/ their heritage significance remain substantially complete.

- 5.2.2. The research on the history of Hemdean House School opening in 1862, the school and lodge's presence on the Ordnance Survey Map dating back to 1877, and the architectural characteristics of the building indicate that it was built between the 1850s and 1870s. There have been no serious alterations that undermine the main school buildings and the lodge's character.



Figure 1. The OS Map dating 1877

5.3. Significance

- 5.3.1. To be added to the Local List, a building or structure must fulfil at least one of the defined significance criteria, which fall into two categories – historic interest and architectural interest. These are assessed below.

Historic Interest

a. Historical Association

i. The building or structure has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person(s) or event.

ii. The building or structure has a prolonged and direct association with figures or events of local interest.

- 5.3.2. The foundation of Hemdean House School could be directly associated with women's education history and related acts in Britain. In the 19th century, there was growing awareness of the importance of educating women beyond the basic level. The Education Act of 1870 established the foundation for elementary education for children, leading to academically oriented education for girls rather than only domestic skills. As

such, Hemdean House School, being one of the first girls' schools in Reading, represents the transition of national education aims for girls.

- 5.3.3. The founder of the school is Mr Francis Knighton, who opened schools for boys in many locations within the Reading Town Centre and in Caversham, was the schoolmaster of Caversham House Academy for years. It was not only Mr Knighton himself but also his family who managed these schools. Hemdean House School was run by his daughters Matilda and Rosa. Being an organist at one time at Caversham Church and playing and worshipping at St Peter's Church, Mr Knighton was a well-known person. Today, a memorial window in St. Peter's Church honours the Knighton family.
- 5.3.4. The submitted nomination file discusses Horace Jones of London, the designer of Tower Bridge of national importance, as the possible architect of Hemdean House School. However, none of the studies on Horace Jones's buildings clearly indicate or mention the nominated asset. This aspect is discussed under the assessment of the architectural interest of Hemdean House School and Lodge.
- 5.3.5. However, as listed on the file for the subject asset, Hemdean House School has alumni of national significance:
- Elsie Smith MBE (1881 - 1968) Missionary and nurse. She spent 33 years working with Maori people on the Whanganui River. Cited in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography; awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 1955
 - Lizbeth Webb - Born Elizabeth Sandra Horton (1926 - 2013) First heard on the BBC aged 16, the 'Champagne Soprano' became a star of stage and radio. Bless The Bride was composed for her, she starred in Guys and Dolls, and featured on the Goon Show.
 - Babita Sharma (1977-) Former BBC News presenter, documentary maker and author. Having grown up in corner shops in Reading and Caversham, her book The Corner Shop: Shopkeepers, the Sharmas, and the Making of Modern Britain was published in 2019.

b. Social Importance

The building or structure has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Reading's communities. Such buildings/structures may include places of worship, schools, community buildings, places of employment, public houses and memorials which formed a focal point or played a key social role.

- 5.3.6. Hemdean House School is an independent school, and there is no evidence of its clear influential role in Caversham or Reading's development. The school is hardly mentioned in the historical development of the village or social life, not having a particular significance compared to any other school.
- 5.3.7. It is known that after 1850, Caversham, Lower Caversham, and Emmer Green continued to attract wealthy newcomers, including businessmen, professionals, and retired military officers, who settled on the parish's south-facing slopes. They occupied large homes and more modest villas, resulting in a considerable increase of affluent private residents from 40 in 1876 to 94 in 1895 and 199 by 1907. The development pattern in the vicinity of Hemdean School House constitutes typical Victorian terraces, very different from the highly rural character of Hemdean House School grounds, which hosted boarding and day school within a pleasant open green site.
- 5.3.8. Although the nomination file includes the school's links to the school's education quality, local memory of the Knighton family, local businesses and charities, festive music and carols and some spatial/physical connections to St Peter's Church, it is considered the asset was not a focal point or had a key social role that features an important local interest, it has a limited social value.

c. Industrial Importance

The building or structure clearly relates to traditional or historic industrial processes or important businesses or the products of such industrial processes or businesses in the history of Reading or are intact industrial structures, for example bridges.

5.3.9. Hemdean House School and Lodge is not considered to fulfil this criterion.

Architectural Interest

a. Sense of place

i. The building or structure is representative of a style that is characteristic of Reading.

5.3.10. Hemdean House School and Lodge do not have the noticeably patterned brickwork that is common in Reading. However, the brickwork of the buildings comprises both Flemish and English bonding of red brick, contrasting cream-coloured single-brick stripes, the distinctive feature of the mid-1850s to late 1870s, adding unique characteristics to the local architecture. As such, the nominated asset is especially noteworthy for adding value to the Caversham and Reading styles.



Figures 2 and 3. Details of brick bonding: Flemish bond on the principal façade (left), the mixture of Flemish and English Bond on the southern façade (right) (photographs are from an appendix of the nomination file)

b. Innovation and virtuosity

i. The building or structure has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials.

ii. The building or structure is the work of a notable local/national architect/engineer/builder.

iii. The building or structure shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering.

5.3.11. The following text is from Reading Mercury dated 18 August 1860:

*“Caversham New Schools.—On Tuesday last the foundation stone of a new school room was laid at Caversham. **The Caversham school has for some time been under a somewhat heavy rental, and it was resolved by the committee of management that building should be raised, and a subscription opened for that purpose. Liberal subscriptions were received, plans for schools and a master's residence were procured from Mr. H. Jones, architect, London, and approved of, but the funds at the disposal of the committee did not justify them in***

carrying out the whole of the design. They have therefore determined to build only one school room and the master's house, the contract for which will involve an expenditure of about £600, a large portion of which has been already subscribed.

*At four o'clock the children of the school, headed by the Caversham Academy Band, under the direction of **Mr. Knighton**, marched to the spot where the new building is about to be erected, bearing number of banners with mottoes, Success to the new schools," " Search the scriptures," " Train up a child in the way should go," &c.*

*The Rev. J. Bennett was the officiating minister. On arriving at the ground, the choir sang psalm, and prayer was then offered up, and after the customary service was gone through, Mrs. John Stephens proceeded to perform the ceremony of laying the foundation stone. In the name of Mrs. Stephens, Mr. Worthington said he begged to express the great pleasure she had had in laying the foundation stone of that new school, and she trusted that the poor children of this and future generations would be brought up in that school and receive a good sound Christian education, and learn their duty towards God and man. The children were then re-formed into a procession and were again led by the band and marched to the orchard belonging to Mrs Monck, where, under a tent, tea and cake were provided for them. Besides other gentlemen present we noticed Captain Coffin, Captain Harrison, and those mentioned above. During the afternoon the band played several airs, and the children left highly delighted with their treat. **The contract for the erection of the schools has been taken by Mr. B. Dunn, jun., builder, Southampton-Street.**"*

- 5.3.12. The nomination file states Horace Jones, a nationally important architect, might have designed Hemdean House School and Lodge, and the above paragraph from the local newspaper refers to plans being procured from his practice. However, there is no other evidence confirming this, therefore the Council cannot confirm that Horace Jones was the Architect and worked on the nominated asset. However, it is clear that that Hemdean House School and Lodge design is influenced by the widespread national styles of the period of 1850s to 1870s: mid-Victorian classic together with Italianate and Victorian gothic details, displaying local workmanship and techniques.
- 5.3.13. The main architectural feature of the main schoolhouse is its unusual domestic appearance, which blends formal education use with the flexibility of the Victorian classical style. To the front elevation, the asymmetrical design of three bays is composed of an end gable of a shallow pitched roof supported on brackets with dentil detail and carved bargeboards, a central bay defined by double-storey projection with front door under the bracketed hood and round-headed windows on upper floors, and a left bay displaying main bay organisation centred and vertically aligned segmented arched marginal glazed timber sash windows under large stone segmental arches with prominent keystones, and pronounced stone corniches and cream horizontal bandings.
- 5.3.14. The southern side elevation of the building has a similar gable with a bay window on the ground floor but a two-storey, two-bay element to the left, as appears in the photographs below. It is noted that both the front and side elevations, due to the prominent position and height of the building, have been the most visible faces of Hemdean House School, although historic photographs reveal the loss of some decorative elements such as original bargeboards, stone cornice eaves, and parapets. It is noted that there are also some surviving elements of the interior: staircase, floor tiles, shutters and fireplaces.



Figures 4 and 5. Historic photograph of the school building (date not known) (left) and existing front elevation of the building (right) (from appendices of the nomination file)

5.3.15. The Lodge of Hemdean House School displays the impressive architecture of the main school building on a modest scale of more 'old English style' housing. The materials used include facing red brick in Flemish Bond under two gabled stone tiled roofs with original decorative bargeboards, ridge tiles and ornamental chimneys intact. The main elements of interest are the central projecting gable of the main entrance with fine architectural detailing featuring an arrow slit ventilator with decorative cream brickwork and a dentil horizontal band. The order and design of the bays are the same as the main building, while the right gable of its street-facing side elevation has a distinctive gothic window design.



Figures 6 and 7. Historic photograph of Hemdean House School and Lodge (date not known) (left) and the front elevation of the lodge (right) (from the social media account of the school)

c. Group value

- i. The buildings/structures form a group which as a whole has a unified architectural or historic value to the local area.*
- ii. The buildings/structures are an example of deliberate town planning from before 1947.*

5.3.16. Whilst the design of the buildings does not relate particularly closely to that of any of its immediate neighbouring terraces, the main school building, lodge and some other partially remained buildings such as music room have group value within the boundaries of the school ground.

5.4. Conclusion of assessment

5.4.1 Hemdean House School and Lodge qualifies for addition to the Local List because it:

- Is not within a conservation area, scheduled monument or area subject to an Article 4 direction relating to historic or architectural interest

- Dates from between 1840 and 1913 and is of clearly-defined significance in the local context and elements that contribute to its heritage significance remain substantially complete;
 - Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its historical association;
 - Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its sense of place;
 - Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its innovation and virtuosity;
 - Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its group value.
- 5.4.2 A description of the significance of the building for inclusion in the Local List is included in Appendix 3.

6. Contribution to strategic aims

- 6.1. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
- Healthy Environment
 - Thriving Communities
 - Inclusive Economy
- 6.2. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:
- People first
 - Digital transformation
 - Building self-reliance
 - Getting the best value
 - Collaborating with others
- 6.3. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.
- 6.4. Local listing of buildings and structures helps to achieve the Healthy Environment theme of the Corporate Plan, by helping to retain those buildings that contribute towards making Reading a more attractive place to live and connect Reading's residents to the town's past.

7. Environmental and climate implications

- 7.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 7.2. Local listing of buildings and structures, where it leads to the retention of those buildings or structures, can help to address the climate emergency by negating the need for demolition and new development, which are processes that use significant amounts of energy and result in emissions. However, in the long-term, it can be more difficult to achieve high levels of energy performance in older buildings than in new builds. There are therefore potentially either positive or negative effects, and schemes will need to be assessed at the application stage in terms of their compliance with the Council's policies.

8. Community engagement

- 8.1. Details of the consultation carried out are set out in section 4 of this report. The scope of consultation to be carried out on proposals for addition to the Local List was part of the local listing process agreed by Planning Applications Committee on 2nd December 2020 (Minute 56 refers).

9. Equality impact assessment

- 9.1. It is not expected that there will be any significant adverse impacts on specific groups due to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religious belief as a result of the recommendations of this report.

10. Other relevant considerations

- 10.1 None of this report.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1. Addition to the Local List is not a statutory process, and there are no legal implications of the recommendations of this report.

12. Financial implications

- 12.1. Consideration of this nomination and any resulting amendments to the Local List will be accommodated within existing budgets.

13. Timetable for implementation

- 13.1. Not applicable.

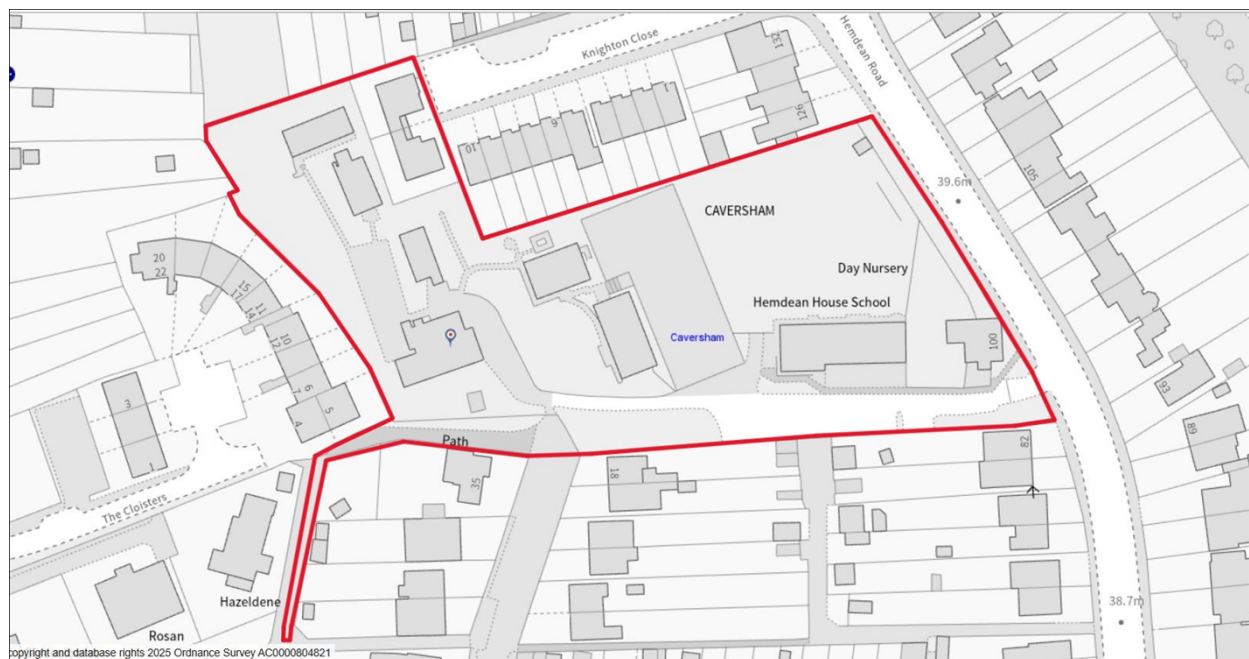
14. Background papers

- 14.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. Location map
2. Nomination form (with landlord's comments on it)
3. Proposed local list text

Appendix 1: Location plan



Appendix 2: Nomination Form with landlord's response on it

Your reference number is FS-Case-630939026.

(Additional information provided by the Landlord)

Thank you for submitting Nominate a building or structure for adding to the Local List. You can download a PDF copy of your nomination at the bottom of this page.

Address of building/structure: Hemdean House School and Lodge, Hemdean Road, Caversham, Reading

Postcode of building/structure: RG4 7SD

Owner of building (if known): Hemdean House School Ltd, [Multi-Medix Holdings Ltd owns the building](#)

Age of building: (b) 1840 - 1913: any building, structure or group of buildings that is/are substantially complete and unaltered and of definite significance.

Please provide comments or further explanation of above: In 1859 a new girls' school was formed in Verona Lodge, Church Street, Caversham on a site now occupied by the extension to the telephone exchange. After purchase of agricultural land on the bank of the Hemdean Bottom dry chalk valley, the new purpose-built school for girls opened in 1862, renamed Hemdean House School with both boarding and day places. It remained in continuous use for education until 2024 and the original school buildings with fine architectural details are largely unaltered. As shown in period images, the Lodge was part of the original construction and was occupied by the caretaker of the school.

[The above statement we believe to be true.](#)

The building or structure has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person(s) or event:
Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The founding of a girls' school that went beyond primary education is of national significance, and Francis Knighton and his daughters took the lead in this. Knighton is a figure of considerable local interest (see below).

[Frances Buss opened the first girls school in North London \(collegiate\) in 1850 and was the first to coin the term "Headmistress". We believe the first ever ladies school in reading was the Abbey, but it may also be Amersham Hall in 1861, our school was probably the third girls school, we think after the education act of 1870. Nevertheless significant achievement.](#)

The fact that the architect was almost certainly Horace Jones of London is also of national importance, as Jones was the architect of Tower Bridge and the rebuilt Caversham Park after a fire of 1850 for the industrialist William Crawshay. Crawshay and Knighton worshipped at St Peter's Church in Caversham and are both buried in the churchyard there. It seems highly plausible that Horace Jones would have been recommended to Knighton by Crawshay.

Horace Jones has been the subject of a new biography: Horace Jones, Architect of Tower Bridge by David Lascelles (Cornwall: Profile Books, 2024)

<https://www.towerbridge.org.uk/discover/people/sir-horace-jones>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Jones_\(architect\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Jones_(architect))

[To the best of our knowledge there is no evidence that Horace Jones ever visited Hemdean House or indeed designed it.](#)

The building or structure has a prolonged and direct association with figures or events of local interest:
Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: Mr Francis Knighton (1803 - 1883) opened a school for boys in Reading ca 1826 in Gun Street, moving ca 1835 to Gun Street and then by 1841 to 23 Church Street where Charles Havell had previously run a boys academy. Ca 1849, Mr Knighton purchased Caversham House on Church Street with 2 acres of land. Previous occupants were Sir Rufane Donkin, founder of Port Elizabeth in South Africa and Sir Nathaniel Clissold. Caversham House Academy had properties on either side of Church Street with a connecting tunnel where the pedestrian crossing is now. The school playground is now the site of Caversham Library and the classrooms, the New Testament Church of God and the Working Men's Club. The school continued until 1921. The garden at the front of Caversham House was sold to Reading Corporation to widen Church Street in preparation for the new Caversham Bridge. The building was demolished in 1965 but one of the Holm Oaks from the gardens remains in St Martins Precinct. A memorial window in St Peter's Church commemorates the Knighton family.

[We believe this to be correct](#)

Mr Knighton had 4 daughters and started the girls' school to be run by his two youngest daughters. Matilda Knighton retired as Principal in 1926. Rosa Knighton married Ferdinand Charles Dermott, and was co-principal until the 1890s. Alice Olivey, a pupil at the school from 1902, was principal of the school from 1926 until 1972, when the Knighton family finally relinquished their interest.

We believe this to be correct

Hemdean House School has alumni of national significance:

Elsie Smith MBE (1881 - 1968) Missionary and nurse. She spent 33 years working with Maori people on the Whanganui River. Cited in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography; awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 1955

Lizbeth Webb - Born Elizabeth Sandra Horton (1926 - 2013) First heard on the BBC aged 16, the 'Champagne Soprano' became a star of stage and radio. 'Bless The Bride' was composed for her, she starred in 'Guys and Dolls', and featured on the Goon Show.

Babita Sharma (1977-) Former BBC News presenter, documentary maker and author. Having grown up in corner shops in Reading and Caversham, her book 'The Corner Shop: Shopkeepers, the Sharmas, and the Making of Modern Britain' was published in 2019.

We believe this to be correct

The building or structure has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Reading's communities: Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The small school, which has remained largely unaltered, served Caversham and Reading from an era pre-dating the 1870 and 1880 Education Acts. Archived information relating to the school documents the Knighton's vision for girls' education from the mid-19th century within the school building. The British Newspaper Archive provides evidence of the importance of both the building and what was provided: 'Terms which are moderate' provided for 'superior English education in all its branches. Modern languages, music, drawing, dancing... The house and its hilly location, were stressed: 'The Premises stand on an eminence, are detached and very healthy...'

Academic work was entered for public exams by the College of Preceptors, with teaching provided by 'qualified staff and visiting Professors'.

There are strong local memories of the family which founded the school and its particular ethos. As testimony by contemporary teachers and pupils reveals, local people who attended the school as children frequently sent their own children to the school, through multiple generations. The size of the classrooms, as built for Francis Knighton, were an important factor in the school ethos. Hemdean House provided 'a school environment which was very happy for staff and pupils alike. (Anna Greaves, Senior School teacher, report in Caversham Bridge Community Newspaper June 2024) |

Though, it has been in existence for circ 160 years, it has not played an influential role in the development of the area or the life of one of Reading's communities simply by the nature of the fact it has always been a very small, private school and the current site proposed of historical interest is situated away from Caversham's centre.

Hemdean House maintained strong links with St Peter's Church (where Francis Knighton is buried), and a small side gate opens on to Hemdean Rise, making an easy walk to the church via the Mount and across Church Road. The school developed links with local businesses and charities, supporting Caversham traders by opening the annual Christmas Late Night Shopping in St Martin's Precinct with festive music and carols.

Early links with St Peter's church were strong and Hemdean has always maintained links to the local community. But again, due to the nature of its size, its influence would have been limited. At the most, the School would have had 150 children, significantly smaller than Caversham Primary School or Thameside the schools that would have educated more children in the area.

The building or structure clearly relates to traditional or historic industrial processes or important businesses or the products of such industrial processes or businesses in the history of Reading or are intact industrial structures, for example bridges: No

Please provide further comments or explanation:

The building or structure is representative of a style that is characteristic of Reading: Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The style of Hemdean School illustrates the prevalence of superior polychromatic brickwork with stone mouldings in and around central Caversham, where terraces of Victorian houses and 'villas' spread out from the centre. In Hemdean Hill and Hemdean Rise, for example, where such housing survives in a great state of completeness, these polychromatic brick terraces form the southern border of the school's site.

Additionally, the school and its lodge have been carefully sited in their hilly location, and this chimes with the careful siting of the polychromatic brick terraces in Caversham, which move up and down the hills and are contoured around the curve of principal roads such as Gosbrook Road.

We can confirm that the school is made with the same brickwork as the rest of Victorian Caversham.

The building or structure has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials: Yes.

Please provide further comments or explanation: The architectural details of Hemdean House are very fine, with horizontal courses of cream brick against a red brick ground that visually tie into the stone detailing of the windows and doors. Above the windows, which survive mostly intact with their original configurations and even glass, are prominent keystones which are illustrated in the appended photographs. A variant of Flemish bond brickwork has been used throughout the exterior of the original building. There is a combination of individual windows with arched tops, a triple bay on the front façade, and a fashionable polygonal bay window to the south side overlooking the site of the formerly large conservatory, whose plinth remains in the ground.

The windows are similar to those found on priest hill, the conservatory was a wonderful feature, but sadly we only can see it in pictures. The footprint of this has been replaced with a yew tree.

The sites of the original toilets, and in one instance an original water closet attached to the north side of the building, attest to the remarkable completeness of the school building.

The toilets were demolished in the 80s and I believe these were not original

The block which originally housed music rooms survives, despite an unattractive 20th-century addition.

The buildings on the site are terrapins, installed in eighties these were not replacing music rooms but additions to the school as part of modernising the school.

There are two significant fireplaces which remain inside the building along with several boarded-up fireplaces of simple design. The interior panelling and shuttering remain around the principal windows, and there is a very fine staircase of several levels as well as original floor tiles and a panelled oak door with what is likely to be the original brass knob at the front. Finally, there are artefacts from the school's history and archival materials which survive, as well as paintings and prints documenting the school at various moments in its history.

There are several Victorian fireplaces in the building, but nothing worthy of any significance, they are plain in their design and made of cast iron as per the fireplaces of the day. The door is not original nor is the door Knob. Sadly there is no Victorian coloured glass in the building, some of the windows are of traditional sash. The plaster is not original on the walls or ceilings due to modernising it for daily school use.

The building or structure is the work of a notable local or national architect/engineer/builder: Yes.

Please provide further comments or explanation: The Reading Mercury reported on 18 August 1860 that the school was designed by H Jones, London. Horace Jones was active in Caversham at that time. He designed the steel framed Caversham Park for William Crawshay following a major fire in 1850; and also St Anne's Primary School and the Parish School, which became the Caversham Centre for Adult Education, now Caversham Health Club. All the evidence points towards Horace Jones being the architect for Hemdean House. Sir Horace Jones PPRIBA (20 May 1819 - 21 May 1887) was an English architect particularly noted for his work as architect and surveyor to the City of London from 1864 until his death. He served as president of the Royal Institute of British Architects from 1882 until 1884, and was knighted in 1886. His most recognised work, Tower Bridge, was completed posthumously.
<https://www.towerbridge.org.uk/discover/people/sir-horace-jones>
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Jones_\(architect\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Jones_(architect))
Horace Jones has been the subject of a new biography: Horace Jones, Architect of Tower Bridge by David Lascelles (Cornwall: Profile Books, 2024)

Firm confirmation of this would be welcomed.

The building or structure shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering: Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The school's architecture is certainly progressive for a date of the later 1850s, as it displays the polychromy that was coming into fashion during this decade in part due to the architectural writer John Ruskin and the Oxford style -- for example, the Natural History Museum in Oxford by Benjamin Woodward and Thomas Deane (1855-59). Instead of the gothic style so popular in Oxford, however, Hemdean House displays classical features that were to reappear during the emergent Arts and Crafts Movement, which it anticipates in some ways.

It appears as though the brief of the school's architect was to build in a progressive style that was absolutely up-to-date for 1850s Britain, while working to a budget and keeping features simple. The major decorative features are subtle ones, such as the prominent keystones above the windows.

We can confirm the keystones are attractive and the simplicity of the design, appealing,

The buildings/structures form a group which as a whole has a unified architectural or historic value to the local area: Yes.

Please provide further comments or explanation: The significance of the girls' school for 165 years, from 1859 to 2024, and its integral link to Caversham House Academy in the heart of Caversham Village has significant historic value to Caversham.

The link of the polychromatic brickwork of Hemdean House to the slightly later terraced housing surrounding it has previously been noted.

The building does not form part of a group of structures though it does have a similar style of other Victorian buildings in the area. While it does hold a historical connection to Caversham village centre, the original school site no longer exists to provide the connection. Though, it no doubt adds to the patchwork of rich history in Caversham village, its significance is limited in comparison to role Caversham Bridge or St Anne's Well played in the development of the village.

The buildings/structures are an example of deliberate town planning from before 1947: No

Please provide further comments or explanation:

Please upload any evidence you have assembled that help to make the case as to why the building or structure fulfils the above criteria: Hemdean House School testimonies.docx, CB.Jun-p10_17.05.24.pdf, CB.Jun-p11_17.05.24.pdf

Please briefly describe the relevance of the evidence you have attached: 2 PowerPoints have been emailed to the Conservation Officer:

1. Architecture
2. Period Images

Uploaded files include testimonies from former teachers and pupils and a recent article about the school in the Caversham Bridge newspaper.

Please provide any additional comments that you would like to make in support of adding this building or structure to the Local List: Hemdean House School, which is visible from Hemdean Road and from Balmore Walk, is a striking building of architectural importance. The site with the Lodge at the bottom of the hill still evokes the school built for girls in 1862. The emphasis on the importance of girls' education was ahead of its time, and 165 years is a remarkable period for a school to provide continuous education. It leaves an important legacy.

The legacy of the Knighton family who occupied Caversham House, Church Street for almost 100 years remains important. Their lengthy contribution to education at both Caversham House Academy and Hemdean House School deserves full recognition.

It would be nice if the Knighton contribution to education is recognised, we appreciate that they were not the first to do this and that beliefs and attitudes towards womens education was changing and they were part of this change.

Name: Helen Lambert, CADRA Chair

Email address:

Date of nomination: 17/07/2024

Appendix 3: Proposed local list text

Founded by Mr. Francis Knighton, an important educator in Reading and Caversham, Hemdean House School is one of the earliest girls' schools in the region. It played a pivotal role in the development of academic education for women, reflecting the broader social changes initiated by the Education Act of 1870. The school remained operational for 165 years, providing education to generations of girls until its closure in 2024. It also holds historical significance through its alumni, including Elsie Smith MBE, a missionary and nurse; Lizbeth Webb, a renowned soprano; and Babita Sharma, a former BBC News presenter and author, further underscoring the institution's lasting impact on the community and beyond.

Together, Hemdean House School and Lodge represent an important example of mid- Victorian architecture, notable for their fine detailing and their contribution to the architectural landscape of Caversham and Reading. Constructed in 1862, the buildings exemplify a distinctive mid-19th-century architectural style, combining elements of Victorian classical design with local building traditions. Unlike the typical patterned brickwork seen in Reading, the brickwork of Hemdean House School and Lodge features a mix of Flemish and English bonding with red brick, contrasted by cream-coloured single-brick stripes. This characteristic detailing is emblematic of the mid-1850s to late 1870s, adding a unique dimension to the local architectural vernacular and enhancing the architectural significance of the area.

The main school building occupies a prominent position and is distinguished by an unusual domestic appearance integrating formal educational use with the flexibility of Victorian design principles with Italianate influences. The asymmetrical principal elevation includes three bays, with a shallow-pitched roof supported by dentil-bracketed eaves and carved bargeboards. The central bay features a double-storey projection, a front door beneath a stone bracketed hood, and round-headed windows on the upper floors. The typical bay design is visible on the left, defined by vertically aligned marginal glazed windows with stone segmental arches, prominent keystones, and stone cornices. The southern side elevation consistently mirrors these features, incorporating a ground-floor Victorian bay window and a two-storey, two-bay left element. Built on a more modest scale, the Lodge reflects the main school building's design with a more 'old English style'. Constructed from red brick in Flemish bond, the building has two gable design under stone-tiled roofs, surviving original features of bargeboards, ridge tiles, and ornamental chimneys. The central entrance features a noticeable small projecting gable with an arrowslit ventilator surrounded by patterned cream brickwork. The Lodge's design closely follows that of the main building, with a distinctive gothic window on the right gable of its street-facing elevation. Hemdean House School and Lodge, with their architectural and cultural significance, constitute a group and remain important markers in the history of education and the built heritage of Caversham and Reading.



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