

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT
2 Bedford Road, Reading, RG1 7HS

1.1 This Heritage Assessment aims to satisfy the requirements of Paragraphs 128 and 129 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which requires that applicants describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by development proposals, including any contribution made by their setting, and that Local Planning Authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal, taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise.

1.2 There is also a statutory duty, under Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 for local planning authorities, in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. The statutory duty conveys the need to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting.

1.3 Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Paragraphs 126 – 141) sets out the policies for conservation of the historic environment.

1.4 The application site is outside the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area and therefore development is not required to meet the statutory test under Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which states that special attention should be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas. A conservation area is, however, a designated heritage asset and the NPPF states under Paragraph 132 that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. This proposal is within the setting of the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area.

1.5 The relevant Development Plan policies relating to the Historic Environment are Policy CS33 of the Reading Core Strategy (2008), and Policies EN1 and EN6 of the Draft Reading Borough Local Plan (March 2018, which are explored in more detail in attached Section 5 of

the Planning Statement.

1.6 'The Setting of Heritage Assets – Historic Environment Good Practice Advice Planning Note 3 (Second Edition)' (Historic England, December 2017) advises a staged approach to proportionate decision taking and recommends a series of steps when considering development proposals in the setting of a heritage asset. These steps are outlined below:

- Step 1: Identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected.
- Step 2: Assess the degree to which these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset.
- Step 3: Assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful, on that significance.
- Step 4: Explore ways to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm.

1.7 This stepped approach will be utilised in this assessment of the impact of the mixed use retail and residential development on the setting of the heritage assets listed below.

The application site and the proposed development

1.8 The application site is the former Royal Public House which is located on the corner of Bedford Road and Oxford Road. Whilst the public house represents the historical development of the area, as a mid-19th century building, it is not a fine example of its type and has no special architectural detailing. It is also currently vacant and deteriorating in condition, making a negative contribution to the street scene and detracting from the settings of the heritage assets.

1.9 Located to the north and north-west of the public house is modern residential development which is a mixture of three and four-storey flats constructed from red brick. Directly to the west of the public house is the wide road junction and carriageway of the Bedford Road and to the east is the existing 118 Oxford Road "Richer Sounds" building which is a modern, glass fronted, three-storey cube. The proposed new building addresses the corner plot, maintaining the existing building line onto Oxford Road and is a mixture of four-storey and three-storey with a traditional mansard roof with dormers. The ground floor has been designated for retail use, with residential on the remaining storeys. It will be constructed from red brick to match the existing context with a natural blue slate roof, which matches the buildings in the immediate vicinity. Large glazed openings at ground floor form the retail element of the scheme.

1.10 In terms of scale, form, detailing and materials, the proposed development would be in keeping with the surrounding built context. The proposed fenestration reflects the vertical emphasis, rhythm and proportions of the windows of the listed terraces opposite and is therefore sympathetic to local character and distinctiveness of the area.

Step 1: Identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected.

The following heritage assets are in the vicinity of the proposed development at 2 Bedford Road:

North Side of Oxford Road

118 Oxford Road - Grade II listed
124 Oxford Road - Grade II listed
120/122 Oxford Road - Grade II listed
Church of the Holy Trinity - Grade II listed
South side of Oxford Road
171-177 Oxford Road - Grade II listed terrace
149-169 Oxford Road - Grade II listed
139 – 141 Oxford Road - Grade II listed
The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

1.11 It is considered that given, the intervening 20th century development, distance and intervisibility between the heritage assets and the application site, only the following heritage assets have the potential to be affected by the proposal:

- 149-169 Oxford Road - Grade II listed
- 171-177 Oxford Road - Grade II listed terrace
- 120/122 Oxford Road - Grade II listed
- 124 Oxford Road - Grade II listed
- The setting of the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area.

Significance

1.12 The NPPF defines significance as: “The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence but also from its setting.” (NPPF – Annex2: Glossary).

Setting

1.13 The NPPF makes it clear that the setting of a heritage asset is the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral. (NPPF – Annex 2: Glossary).

1.14 The significance of the Grade II listed 149-169 Oxford Road, 171-177 Oxford Road, 120/122 Oxford Road and 124 Oxford Road mainly relates to the age of the buildings, the quality of the traditional materials and their use, the architectural details and their historic role in the historic development of the area. The setting of these buildings is the Oxford Road which contributes little to significance.

1.15 The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area was designated in 1974 and an appraisal was produced by The Conservation Studio in April 2004. The Conservation Area Appraisal defines the following features as important to the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area:

- The Conservation Area is the product of late 18th and 19th century development.
- Castle Hill is the principal street, notable for its varying width, hilly topography, and substantial Georgian buildings which lie on either side.
- Front gardens and mature trees make a major contribution to views along Castle Hill.
- Residential suburbs to south contain listed terraces of early 19th century terraced houses (Coley Hill) and detached or semi-detached late 19th century houses (Castle Crescent) in leafy gardens.
- Residential suburbs to the north are more urban in character, with continuous terraces of early- to late-19th century houses, set on the back of the pavement.
- Grid pattern of streets with Baker Street (which predates the early 19th century development of this area) cutting across this pattern.
- Oxford Road is more varied with more commercial uses and the best quality listed terraces to the west.

1.16 The proposed development will have no impact on the special character of the Conservation Area, as defined above, nor will it impact on any important viewpoints highlighted in the appraisal.

Step 2: Assess the degree to which settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset.

1.17 Oxford Road forms the immediate setting of the heritage assets listed above. It is a wide and busy road with an eclectic mixture of commercial and residential buildings dating from the 19th century but interspersed with many 20th and 21st century buildings. The buildings fronting the road have changed considerably since the mid-19th century; therefore, as the setting to the heritage assets, Oxford Road currently does not represent the original setting of the listed buildings. The significance of the designated assets relates primarily to their date, use of traditional materials and architectural details, where setting makes little contribution to significance.

Step 3: Impact of the Proposed Development on Significance

1.18 Proposed new developments in close proximity to heritage assets can impact on their significance by the inclusion of the development in the view towards and from the asset. It is considered that the scale, form and materials of the proposal is in keeping with the surrounding built form and will not alter the visual relationship or views between the heritage assets and Oxford Road.

1.19 The significance of a heritage asset is derived not only from its physical presence and historic fabric but also from its setting – the surroundings in which it is experienced. The immediate setting of the heritage assets is Oxford Road, which is a wide and busy main road lined with a huge variety of commercial, retail and residential buildings. The views along Oxford Road, the surroundings in which the heritage assets are experienced, will not be altered by the new development at 2 Bedford Road.

1.20 In making an overall assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the setting and hence significance of the heritage assets, it is important to note that the important components of significance, such as the fabric and architecture of the buildings, would be unaffected. The proposed new development replaces an existing building and views at the junction of Bedford Road and Oxford Road would not be materially altered.

Step 4: Maximise Enhancement

1.21 The proposed development is of a scale, form and materials that are sympathetic to the area and represent a positive contribution to the street scene.

Summary

1.22 For the reasons given above, it is concluded that the proposed development will have a positive impact on the street scene on the corner of Bedford Road and Oxford Road, as it replaces a derelict and run down building of limited architectural interest. The proposal has been carefully and sensitively conceived and preserves the setting of the listed buildings and the setting of the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area, leaving their settings unharmed. The proposal therefore accords with Sections 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 12 of the NPPF and Policy CS33 of the Reading Core Strategy (2008), and Policies EN1 and EN6 of the Draft Reading Borough Local Plan (March 2018)

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'C. Keen', is written over a faint rectangular grid background.