

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT: 154 FRIAR STREET READING RG1 1HE



A Report by Paul Stamper Heritage
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1. INTRODUCTION

This Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is to accompany applications for planning and listed building consent for a range of works to create four Class C1 apartments for short term letting at 154 Friar Street, Reading.

This HIA has been commissioned by Bezael Yerushalmy & Son Industries (1985) Ltd via the scheme's architect, Ian Allerston (DHA Architects).

It is not proposed to rehearse the legislative or policy background, other than to note the relevance to this application of NPPF (para 196) which guides that '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.'

This report does not address below-ground archaeology, the assessment of which is a separate discipline and is not relevant here due to the nature of the proposals.

A note on the report's author is included below as Appendix A.



Figure 1. Site location plan off Friar Street (DHA Architects).

2. SITE HISTORY, AND THE BUILDING

Reading's historic development is now well understood, and is set out in its 2023 Historic Area Assessment. The medieval town was a planned development by Reading Abbey, with Friar Street, referred to as 'New Street' in 1165, being the last street to be built.¹

154 Friar Street occupies a typical medieval burgage plot, narrow and long, running back to a common east-west rear boundary midway back to Broad Street. It is a three-storey, two-bay, building with a brick frontage to the upper floors with a modern ground-floor shop beneath. Stairs to the upper floors are accessed by a door to the left of the frontage. It was built as a pair with Number 153 (which is not listed), and to the front, behind the parapets, the buildings have a shared hipped, slate-covered, roof running parallel to the street (Figure 3). The first-floor windows (altered) of Number 154 are slightly larger (three-over-four) than those to the second floor (three-over-three). The List entry (below) dates it - or rather its frontage - to c.1800, which appears correct. Behind is a long, flat-roofed, range in a redder brick which abutts and is later than that to the front.

The ground floor is in retail use and falls outside the scope of this application, with the upper floors being offices.



*Figure 2. 154
Friar Street
(Jon Simon on
HE List entry).*

¹ [Reading-HSHAZ-Historic-Area-Assessment-2022-Approved-27.2.23.pdf](#)

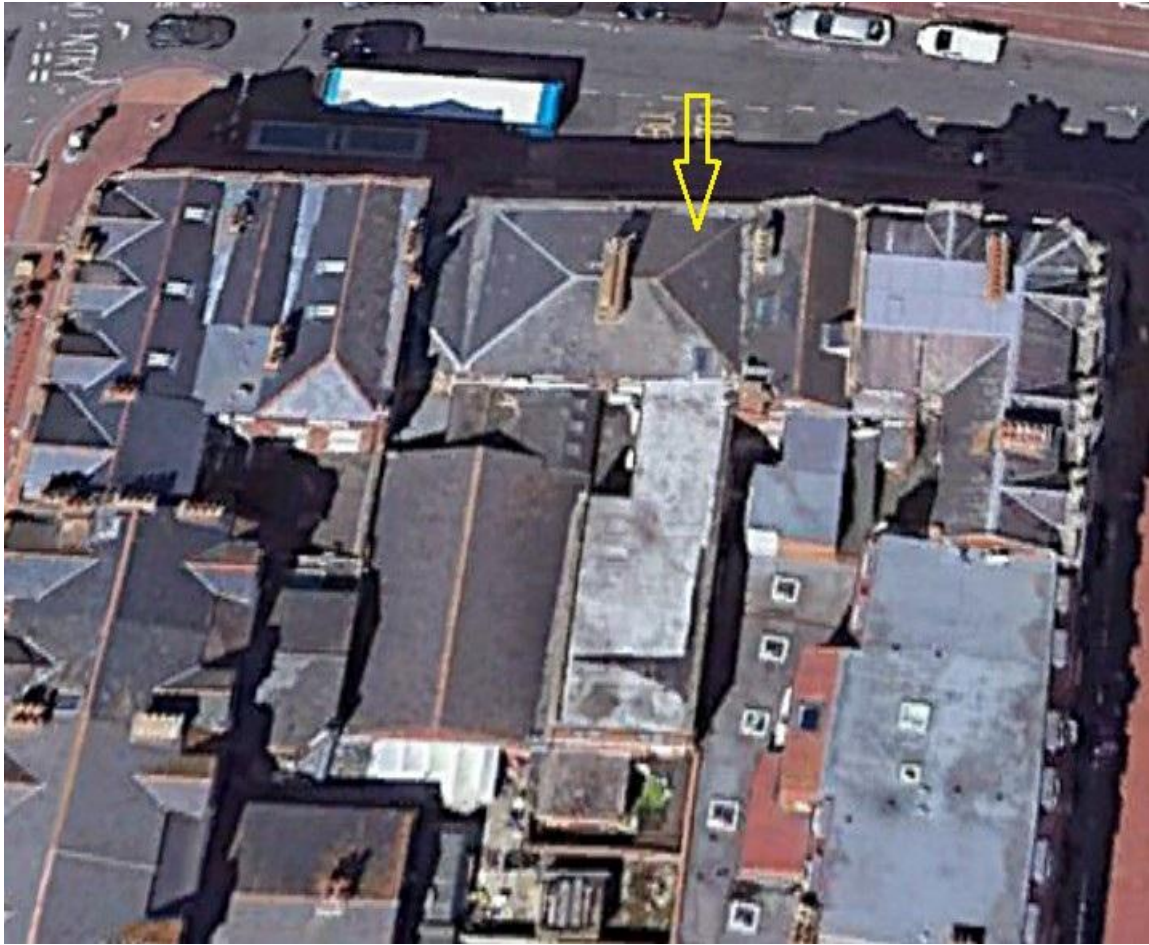


Figure 3. Satellite image showing 154 Friar Street (arrowed) with the common hipped roof with Number 153. To the rear is the later long thin range. Source: Google Earth 2022.

Survey by DHA Architects found that while elements of the floor plan (front and back rooms in the front block of c.1800, and the position of the stairs) remained, very few internal features survived (the stairs themselves have modern balustrading etc). Skirting and architraves are modern.



Figure 4. Existing floor plans (DHA Architects)

3. DESIGNATIONS

3.1 Listing

The building was first listed at Grade II in 1978 (List Entry 1113489). The List entry reads:

Formerly a pair with No 153 (too altered to include). Circa 1800. 3 storeys, red brick with stone cills to 1st floor and stone coping to parapet. 2 ranges of glazing bar sashes. Modern shop front.

As shown on Figure 5 several listed buildings stand within the vicinity of Number 154, most notably Number 155 on its east side (List entry 1303154), a strikingly decorative brick-and-stone building (now with shop to ground floor) with bay windows to the first and second floor and a gabled top.

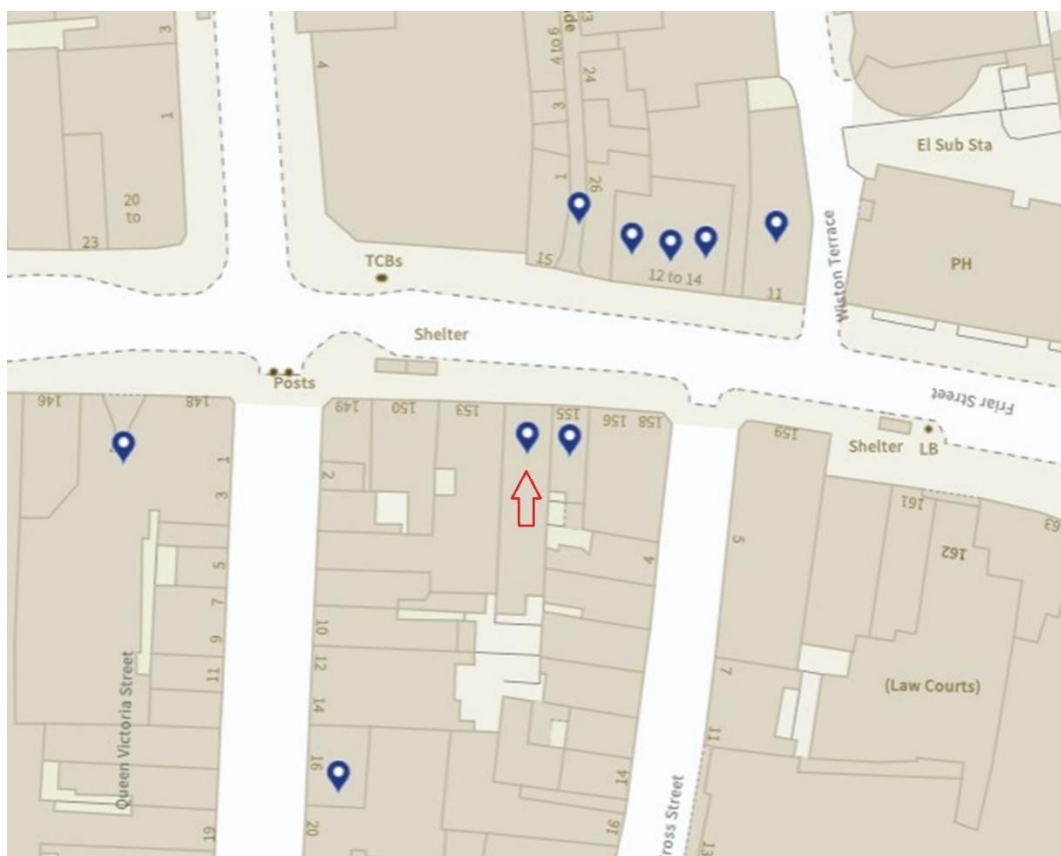


Figure 5. To show listed buildings in the vicinity of 154 Friar Street (indicated with arrow). Source: Historic England List mapping, adapted.

3.2 The conservation area

154 Friar Street would lie within a proposed Central Conservation Area. However, this has yet to be designated.²

3.3 Character Area

The 2023 Historic Area Assessment noted in section 2 defined Reading's Historic Character Areas. Broad Street and Friar Street form Area 3.2 (Figure 6).

² See page 1 of [Reading-HSHAZ-Historic-Area-Assessment-2022-Approved-27.2.23.pdf](#)

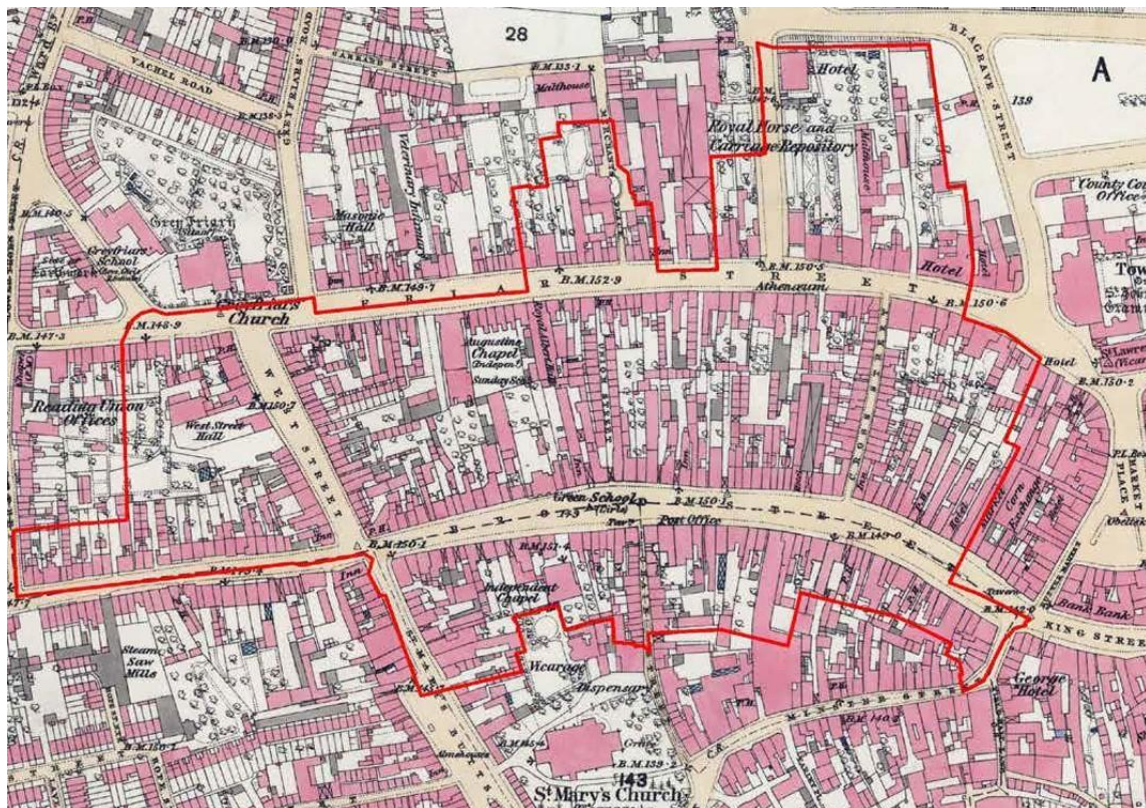


Figure 6. Character Area 3.2, with 154 Friar Street lying just west of Cross Street. Base map OS 25 inch (surveyed 1875, published 1879).

154 Friar Street lies within Sub-Area 3.2.5, whose character is ‘historic and modern retail’, within a large block of properties defined as making a positive contribution to the character area.³

4. THE PROPOSALS

Fuller details are provided in the applications. In summary, they seek consent for a range of works to create four Class C1 apartments for short term letting on the building’s upper floors as follows:

Unit 1 – Studio apartment with a GIA of 35.2sqm. The layout places the kitchen and bathroom at the rear to connecting with the existing drainage in the middle of the building. The main accommodation is shown as a single room to retain the grain of the original layout in the front part of the building.

Unit 2 – a two-bed, four-person apartment with a GIA of 68.8 sqm. As with the adjoining studio, the kitchen and bathroom have been placed centrally in the building. As proposed the bedrooms are ‘inner rooms’ - that is to say, accessed through the living room – to make the best use of space.

Unit 3 – As unit 1, but with a GIA of 34.6sqm

Unit 4 – As unit 2, but with a GIA of 69.1 sqm.

³ [Reading-HSHAZ-Historic-Area-Assessment-2022-Approved-27.2.23.pdf](#) Figure 61.

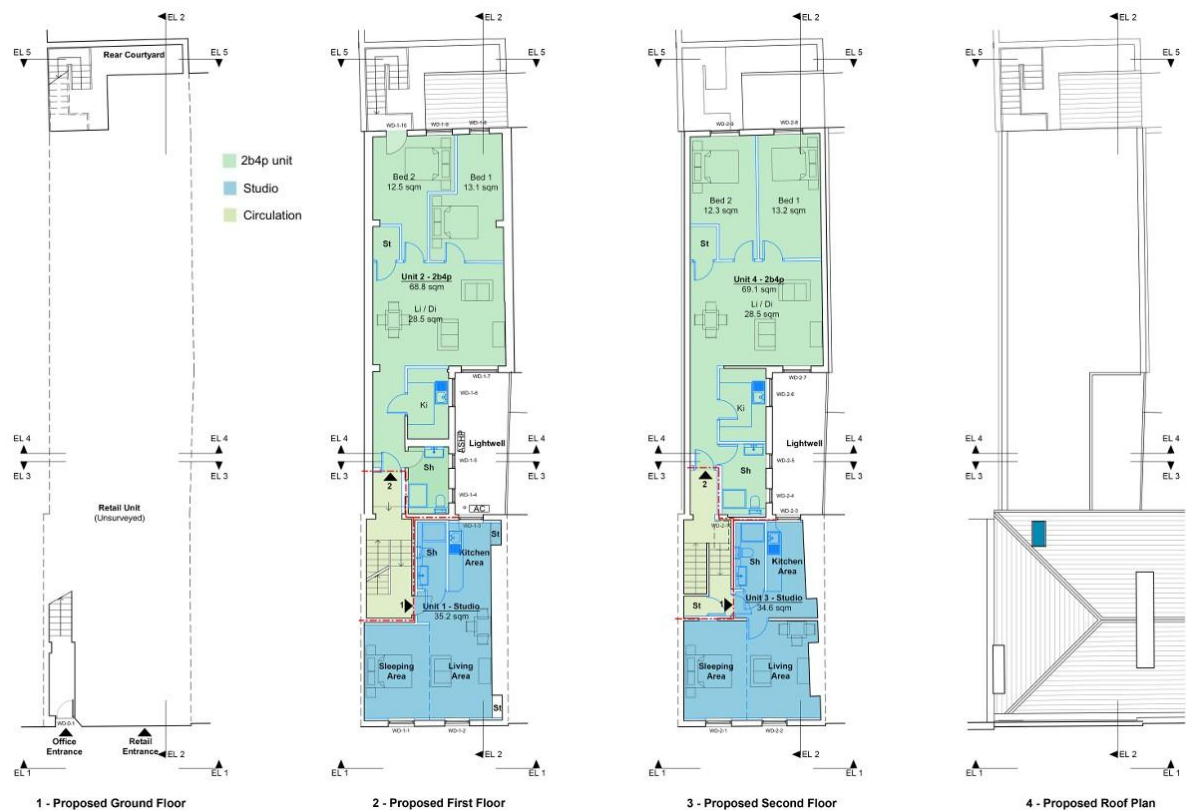


Figure 7. Proposed floor plans (DHA Architects)

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Direct impact

As noted above, other than aspects of the c.1800 floor plan, no historic features survive on the first and second floors. While the conversion will require the introduction of new partitions and services we do not believe these will be harmful to the historic structure.

Indirect impact

Other than repairing the windows to the frontage, no works are proposed to the building's exterior. Thus the scheme would have no direct impact on the setting of nearby listed buildings. The refurbishment of the front windows would be beneficial to the Character Area.

6. CONCLUSIONS

We assess that the proposals would cause no harm (as defined by the NPPF) to the listed building and its significance, and indeed would see beneficial repairs to its front windows which would also enhance the Character Area. Returning the building's upper floors to residential use – albeit for short-term letting rather than permanent occupation – would reflect their original function and be entirely appropriate.

We suggest the applications should be consented.

APPENDIX A: REPORT AUTHOR

Dr Paul Stamper is a specialist in the English landscape and its buildings. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, a Visiting Faculty at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation (Virginia, USA), formerly a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Local and Regional History at the University of Leicester, and has taught at the universities of Oxford, Bristol, Leicester and Cambridge. He is a former Vice President of the Society for Medieval Archaeology and of the Royal Archaeological Institute, and a former President of the Medieval Settlement Research Group. He has published extensively through monographs, articles and book reviews.

Since 1981 he has been directly employed in researching and managing England's historic environment, firstly with the Victoria County history in Shropshire and then for 20 years with English Heritage/Historic England. There he had various roles after joining in 1996, latterly as Senior Adviser in the Designation Department responsible for overseeing the writing and later revision of the 44 designation selection guides covering all aspects of the historic environment.

After leaving Historic England in 2016 he set up his own consultancy, Paul Stamper Heritage <https://paulstamperheritage.wordpress.com>. Most of its work involves assessing the significance of historic buildings, places and landscapes, and the likely impact of proposed changes. In 2021 he became a consultant to Montagu Evans LLP, specialising in change and development in historic landscapes.