

Heritage Statement

49B Zinzan Street, Reading RG1 7UG Off-road parking enclosure, replacement boundary wall and two new windows to the Baker Street elevation

1. Introduction and Purpose

This Heritage Statement is submitted in support of a householder planning application at 49B Zinzan Street, Reading RG1 7UG. It has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which require applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposal and to assess the impact of the proposed works upon that significance. The site lies within the Russell Street / Castle Hill Conservation Area, a designated heritage asset. The property is not a listed building, nor does it lie within the curtilage of a listed building. The proposal comprises the formation of a secure enclosure around existing off-road parking spaces using brickwork piers and black painted metal gates and railings; replacement of a dilapidated timber boundary fence with a new brick wall; installation of two ground-floor windows on the Baker Street elevation.

2. The Heritage Asset: Russell Street / Castle Hill Conservation Area

The Russell Street / Castle Hill Conservation Area was formally designated in 1974 as one of Reading's first conservation areas. It was placed on the Historic England Heritage at Risk register due to a combination of poor maintenance, insensitive alterations, intensified use as Houses in Multiple Occupation, and degraded public realm. A comprehensive Conservation Area Appraisal was adopted in March 2020, which reassessed the area's boundaries, significance and vulnerabilities.

The conservation area's special interest lies in its status as a remarkable microcosm of Reading's residential building styles from the late 18th century to the early 20th century, encompassing Georgian villas and terraces, substantial Victorian single-family houses, later polychrome-patterned artisan terraces, and Arts and Crafts influenced Edwardian villas. The area boasts 151 listed addresses and numerous Buildings of Townscape Merit, concentrated along Castle Hill/Castle Street, Russell Street, Baker Street and the Oxford Road. The extensive use of Reading's famous local brick industry is exemplified in polychrome brick, tiles and terracotta throughout the area. Cast iron railings, traditional boundary walls and historic streetscape features contribute to the area's character.

3. The Application Site and Its Immediate Context

The property lies on the corner of Zinzan Street and Baker Street, opposite The Oasis Community Centre, within the "Russell Street and streets east" character area as defined in the Conservation Area Appraisal. The Oasis Community Centre dates from the 1860s and was originally the Eagle public house; it is now well-restored and maintained by the Carey Baptist Church as a community meeting place.

Baker Street is one of the earliest streets in the conservation area, with smaller Georgian terraced houses in the section east of Russell Street and a well-preserved red brick early Georgian terrace of substantial two-storey houses with basements to the west of that junction. The fine listed Georgian terrace at 61–79 Baker Street,

complete with original doors, fanlights and windows, was among the first buildings constructed in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Views along Baker Street, including the characteristic bend in the road and the sight of the Caversham escarpment beyond, are identified as important in the Appraisal.

Zinzan Street and the surrounding streets were developed on former market gardens once owned by Mrs Zinzan, with the majority of the houses dating from prior to 1853. The Conservation Area Appraisal notes that Zinzan Street has been adversely affected by intense HMO use, insensitive alterations, overhead wires, painted-over brick facades, and the removal of front garden walls for bin storage. The Appraisal identifies frequent fly-tipping, poor definition of frontages, and anti-social behaviour as negative features of this character area.

The existing rear hardstanding was designated as three off-street parking spaces by planning permission reference 0000025144 dated 23 January 1974. The area is currently open and unsecured, and is affected by recurring fly-tipping, unauthorised parking and associated anti-social behaviour.

4. Significance of the Affected Heritage Asset

The significance of the Russell Street / Castle Hill Conservation Area can be summarised under the following headings, drawing on the adopted Conservation Area Appraisal:

Historical interest: The area developed largely in the 18th century as an area of intense residential housing to the west of the town centre, centred along two early medieval routes — Castle Street/Castle Hill leading to Bath, and the Oxford Road leading towards Pangbourne and Oxford. The progressive development and infill of Reading's early market gardens is evident from the layout of the first north-south connector roads of Russell Street and Prospect Street. Baker Street was laid out circa 1815–1825 and is one of the earliest streets in the conservation area. The area also holds associations with the early photography pioneer William Fox Talbot, whose "Reading Establishment" studio was at 55 Baker Street.

Architectural interest: The conservation area is a concentrated repository of Reading's residential building styles, with housing spanning both wealthy and more modest examples from the Georgian through to the Edwardian period. Red brick is the dominant building material, displaying a full range of brick colours and finishes used throughout all style periods within the area, alongside stucco, Welsh slate, red tile and stone dressings. Traditional boundary treatments — including brick walls, cast iron railings and stone kerbs — are important features that define street edges and contribute to the character and legibility of the streetscape. The Appraisal identifies the loss of front boundary walls as a significant negative issue throughout the conservation area.

Communal interest: The conservation area is home to active community organisations, including the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA), which has fostered improved private property maintenance and public realm care. The Oasis Community Centre opposite the application site is a valued community facility.

5. Assessment of Impact

The NPPF requires that proposals within a conservation area should preserve or enhance the character and appearance of that area. The Conservation Area Appraisal identifies a number of issues in the immediate vicinity of the site that are harmful to the conservation area's character, including poorly maintained boundary treatments, fly-tipping, anti-social behaviour, loss of front boundary walls, and poorly defined street edges. The Appraisal's management plan specifically identifies the loss or change of original boundary features, including walls and railings, as a key concern requiring action, and recommends that householders understand the added value and visual importance of boundary walls and railings.

Each element of the proposal is assessed against the significance of the conservation area as follows:

Parking enclosure (brick piers and metal gates/railings): The existing open, unsecured hardstanding presents a poorly defined street edge on Baker Street, which is identified in the Appraisal as a negative characteristic of this part of the conservation area. The proposed enclosure uses brick piers and visually permeable black painted metal gates and railings, materials and forms that are consistent with the traditional boundary treatments found throughout the conservation area. The Appraisal notes that original iron railings survive in a number of locations and contribute positively to the streetscape. The enclosure will define and strengthen the street edge, provide visual permeability, and present a lighter and more sympathetic appearance than a solid roller shutter alternative. The design was refined following pre-application engagement (PL/25/0326) from an earlier carport and roller-door concept to the present conservation-sensitive approach. The enclosure will have a positive effect on the character of the conservation area by improving the definition of the Baker Street frontage and introducing high-quality, traditional materials consistent with the area's special interest.

Replacement boundary wall: The existing dilapidated timber fence on the boundary with No. 47 is to be replaced with a new brick wall of matching character and materials to existing boundary treatments in the area. The Conservation Area Appraisal identifies poorly maintained boundaries, hedges, fences and gates as detrimental to local character and recommends enforcement action to address them. The replacement of a deteriorating fence with a well-detailed brick wall directly responds to the Appraisal's objectives and will modestly enhance the appearance of the conservation area.

Windows to Baker Street elevation: Two new ground-floor windows will be sized and proportioned to align with local fenestration patterns. Materials and detailing, including frames, cills and lintels, will be sympathetic to the host building and the conservation area. The windows face the public realm on Baker Street and will not result in material overlooking of private gardens or habitable rooms. The Conservation Area Appraisal notes that multi-pane single-glazed windows and traditional fenestration are important characteristics of the area's housing stock. The new windows, designed to harmonise with local vernacular proportions and detailing, will have a neutral to marginally positive effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

6. Assessment Against Policy

Under Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the local planning authority is required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area. The NPPF states that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within conservation areas to enhance or better reveal their significance, and that proposals which preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset should be treated favourably.

The proposal causes no harm to the significance of the Russell Street / Castle Hill Conservation Area. No heritage assets of any value are lost or diminished. Instead, the proposal achieves a modest but meaningful enhancement by replacing a neglected boundary with high-quality traditional materials, improving the definition of the Baker Street street edge, discouraging anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping, and introducing sympathetically designed fenestration. These benefits directly address several of the negative features and vulnerabilities identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal, including poor boundary definition, fly-tipping, anti-social behaviour, and poorly maintained frontages.

7. Conclusion

This Heritage Statement has identified the significance of the Russell Street / Castle Hill Conservation Area and assessed the impact of the proposed works at 49B Zinzan Street upon that significance. The proposal is of modest scale and uses high-quality, traditional materials appropriate to the conservation area. It will not cause harm to the character or appearance of the conservation area. On the contrary, the works will deliver a small but genuine enhancement by strengthening the street edge on Baker Street, replacing a deteriorating boundary with well-detailed brickwork, discouraging anti-social behaviour, and introducing sympathetic fenestration in keeping with the local vernacular. The proposal accords with the relevant statutory duties, national policy and the objectives of the adopted Conservation Area Appraisal and is respectfully commended for approval.

8. References

- Reading Borough Council, *Russell Street and Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal*, March 2020
- Design and Access Statement for 49B Zinzan Street, Reading RG1 7UG (submitted with this application)