

117-119 Oxford Road
Heritage Impact
Assessment

5.OXFD - 117-119 Oxford Road - Heritage Impact Assessment

0.0 Document Information

0.1 Issue/Revision: Friday 10th April 2026

0.2 Site Address: 117-119 Oxford Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 7UH

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Report

1.1.1 This Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the retention, alteration, and upward extension (or demolition with reinstatement of windows) of Russell Hall, together with its conversion from D2 (assembly and leisure) use to C3 residential use. The proposals also retain Russell House and consider the wider heritage implications of development within the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area.

1.1.2 The report identifies the significance of relevant designated and non-designated heritage assets, assesses the impact of the proposed development on that significance, and demonstrates how the scheme responds to its historic and townscape context in accordance with statutory duties and planning policy.

1.2 Site Context

1.2.1 The application site comprises 117–119 Oxford Road, Reading, and includes Russell House to the Oxford Road frontage and Russell Hall located to the rear, accessed via Zinzan Street. The site lies within the Oxford Road Character Area of the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area.

1.2.2 The surrounding area is characterised by a dense urban grain comprising historic terraces, civic buildings, and later infill development, forming part of Reading's central urban core.

1.3 Proposed Development

1.3.1 The proposed development comprises the retention and sensitive adaptation of Russell Hall, including an upward extension through the raising of eaves level, gable ends and ridge throughout by 1500mm, the introduction of additional storeys within a reconfigured roof form, and associated alterations including dormers, rooflights, and new openings.

1.3.2 The scheme retains the existing building in full and seeks to enhance its long-term viability through residential conversion, while removing later unsympathetic additions and reinstating original materials where appropriate.

1.4 Structure of the Report

1.4.1 The report is structured as follows:

1.4.2 Section 2 sets out the assessment methodology.

1.4.3 Sections 3 to 9 describe the site, designations, policy context, historic development, architectural character, significance, and setting.

1.4.4 Sections 10 to 12 assess the proposed development, impacts, and mitigation measures.

1.4.5 Sections 13 to 15 consider enhancement, justification, and the heritage balance.

1.4.6 Section 16 provides the overall conclusion.

1.5 Authorship

1.5.1 This Heritage Statement has been prepared by Oscar Wilson, ARB registered architect and RIBA Chartered Architect, Director of Pont + Wils Architects Ltd, a RIBA Chartered Practice with experience in

heritage-led design and assessments, across Reading Borough and other local authorities / councils.

2.0 ASSESSMENT PRODUCTION METHODOLOGY

2.1 Purpose and Approach

2.1.1 This Heritage Assessment has been prepared to establish the significance of the site and its surroundings and to assess the effect of the proposed development on designated and non-designated heritage assets. The assessment is proportionate to the scale of development and informed by national and local planning policy.

2.1.2 The methodology follows a staged, evidence-based approach aligned with the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) and Historic England guidance on understanding significance and managing change.

2.2 Desk-Based Research

2.2.1 The assessment commenced with a review of available planning history, statutory designations, heritage listings, and relevant planning policy documents.

2.2.2 Historic mapping and documentary sources were examined to understand the evolution of the site and its wider urban context.

2.2.3 The Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area Appraisal (March 2020) was reviewed in detail to inform an understanding of local character, significance, and sensitivity to change.

2.3 Site Survey and Analysis

2.3.1 A detailed site visit was undertaken to assess the existing buildings, their condition, architectural character, and contribution to townscape.

2.3.2 A photographic record was compiled to document key elevations, views, and contextual relationships, including visibility from Oxford Road and Zinzan Street.

2.3.3 The assessment considered intervisibility with nearby streets, surrounding development, and the degree to which the buildings contribute to or are experienced within the public realm.

2.4 Policy and Legislative Framework

2.4.1 The assessment has been prepared with regard to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings, their settings, and the character or appearance of conservation areas.

2.4.2 National policy has been considered through the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024), supported by the Planning Practice Guidance (2019), which sets out the approach to significance, harm, and public benefit.

2.4.3 Historic England guidance has informed the assessment, including Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (2008), particularly in relation to understanding significance, values, and change.

2.4.4 At local level, the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019) and the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area Appraisal (March 2020) have been reviewed to inform the analysis of character, sensitivity, and policy expectations.

2.4.5 A summary of relevant policy and guidance is provided in Appendix A: Heritage Planning Policy and Guidance.

2.5 Professional Authorship and Experience

2.5.1 This assessment has been prepared by Oscar Wilson, ARB registered architect and RIBA Chartered Architect, Director of Pont + Wils Architects Ltd.

2.5.2 The practice has established experience in heritage-led design within Reading, including work on Oxford Road and other designated heritage assets.

2.5.3 Relevant experience includes projects at Grovelands Baptist Church (locally listed), Reading Old Cemetery Arch (Grade II), and 50 Mount Pleasant (Grade II), where a recent consent was granted for the conversion of the building to residential use, including the removal of a C20 rear wing and internal reconfiguration. This project was designed by Oscar Wilson on behalf of Pont + Wils Architects and has



informed an understanding of local authority expectations regarding heritage-led adaptation.

2.6 Constraints and Limitations

2.6.1 No significant constraints have affected the preparation of this assessment. The site has been accessible for inspection, and sufficient historic and contextual information has been available to form a robust understanding of significance.

2.6.2 The assessment is based on available documentary evidence, site observations, and published conservation area appraisal material.

2.7 Historical Use Context

2.7.1 The hall has historically operated as a D2 assembly and leisure use; a dancing school. Built as one of two Trade Union Halls around 1920, it was the larger of the pair; the smaller but identical hall in front was demolished around 2000 and replaced by a small block of flats. The dancing school rented it from approximately 1982 to 2010, after which it became a D1 religious building until around 2020, when the Scouts took over for a year before it reverted to religious use (Hindu). There were brief voids between each occupation.

2.7.2 The building is therefore currently in use as a D1 religious building; a Hindu Temple.

2.8 Methodological Summary

2.8.1 The methodology adopted ensures a proportionate, structured, and evidence-based assessment of significance and impact.

2.8.2 It provides a clear and transparent basis for evaluating the heritage implications of the proposed development and for applying the NPPF heritage balance in subsequent sections of this report.

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3.0 SITE LOCATION AND CONTEXT

3.1 The application site comprises 117–119 Oxford Road, Reading, RG1 7UH, including the main frontage building, Russell House, and the rear hall building, Russell Hall. The site is located on the south side of Oxford Road, approximately midway between Waylen Street to the west and Zinzan Street to the east. The site is predominantly rectangular in plan, with Russell House fronting Oxford Road and rear access to Russell Hall from Zinzan Street.

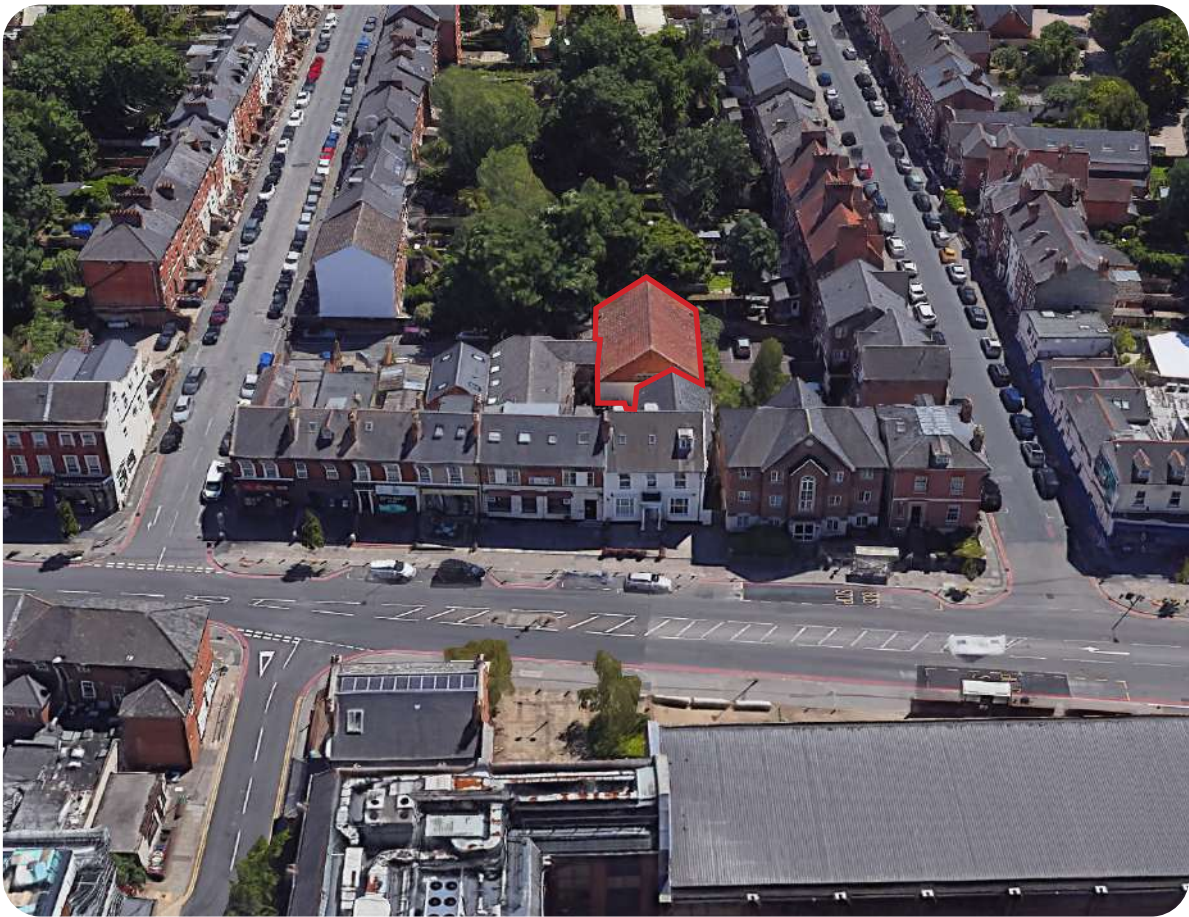
3.2 Russell House is a four-storey mid-terrace property, currently in mixed commercial and residential use. It was originally two Victorian terrace shops each with living accommodation over and was completely rebuilt in about 1960 into a Bank. Russell Hall, located to the rear, is a part-one, part-two storey structure dating from the 1920s. The hall is largely hidden from public view, being visible only from the rear access on Zinzan Street and via very narrow glimpses through a small gap between buildings on Waylen Road. The building incorporates an undercroft parking area at ground floor level, and an above-out-rigger extending from Russell House, which abuts but does not join Russell Hall. This outrigger partially obscures the front third of the hall from Zinzan Street, further limiting public visibility.

3.3 The immediate surroundings are characterised by a mix of mid-19th century brick terraces and later 20th-century infill development. Oxford Road predominantly comprises two- to three-storey buildings with retail, commercial, and residential uses at street level, creating an active urban frontage. Building heights generally range from two to two-and-a-half storeys, with pitched roofs the prevailing form, contributing to a coherent townscape rhythm along the street.

3.4 In terms of townscape character, Oxford Road functions as a primary east–west corridor within central Reading, connecting the town centre with surrounding residential and commercial areas. The street exhibits a strong sense of enclosure, with buildings aligned closely to the pavement, and active frontages supporting both residential and commercial activity. Traditional brick terraces and later infill buildings give the street a layered historic character, with materials including red brick, stucco, and clay tiles commonly used.

3.5 The wider urban context is defined by the Reading Central Area, within which the site is located. The area comprises a dense urban grain, with a mix of retail, office, and residential uses, and is well served

Aerial View of the site looking South from the Oxford Road



Aerial View of the site looking West from Zinzan Street

Partial View
between
Pheonix
Place/5
Waylen
Street



Partial View
through
Pheonix
Place Car
Park



Partial View
between
125 Oxford
Road/
Pheonix
Place



Shop to
Russell
House
Frontage on
Oxford Rd



Russell Hall
Site Entry
Via Zinzan
Street



Approach to
Russell Hall



Russell Hall
Bin Store/
Shed/
Cold Store
Structure for
Shop



Rear
Outrigger/
Undercroft
Parking
to Russell
House



by public transport, including bus routes along Oxford Road and pedestrian connections to Reading West Railway Station, approximately 700 metres to the east. The site's central location ensures high accessibility and proximity to local amenities.

3.6 The site is within the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area. The south side of Oxford Road, where the site is located, was added to the Conservation Area in 2004. The site does not border any listed buildings or buildings of townscape merit. The nearest listed buildings, including Holy Trinity Church and 104 Oxford Road, are to the north side of Oxford Road, with views of the site blocked by Russell House. Other nearby Grade II listed buildings, such as 101 Oxford Road (11 properties to the east) and 139–141 Oxford Road (beyond Waylen Road to the West, 8 properties away), cannot see any relevant part of the site.

3.7 The rear portion of Russell Hall and The Hill is only partially visible from limited points within the surrounding urban fabric. Views are available through the narrow gap between the rear of the Georgian detached dwelling at 125 Oxford Road and the side of the 21st-century, 14-unit Phoenix Place building on Waylen Road, through the gated access to Phoenix Place's rear parking courtyard, and via a small gap at the side of Phoenix Place adjacent to the end-of-terrace pre-1870s Victorian dwellings at 5 Waylen Road. These restricted viewpoints mean Russell Hall and The Hill are largely experienced in private or semi-private contexts, with minimal presence within the public streetscape.

3.8 The site adjoins two properties noted in the Conservation Area appraisal as sites or buildings of opportunity for improvement: Phoenix Place to the rear and 123 Oxford Road. Any proposed redevelopment must consider the scale, form, and materiality of surrounding buildings, ensuring proposals respect the rhythm, height, and character of the Oxford Road frontage, while avoiding harm to the wider Conservation Area.

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4.0 PLANNING AND HERITAGE DESIGNATIONS

4.1 Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area

4.1.1 The application site lies within the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area, specifically within the Oxford Road Character Area. The south side of Oxford Road, where the site is located, was added to the Conservation Area in 2004.

4.1.2 The wider Conservation Area is valued for its historic and architectural significance, comprising predominantly two- and three-storey buildings including Georgian terraces, detached villas, Victorian shops, and community buildings. The streetscape is defined by its regular rhythm, pitched roofs, polychrome brickwork, terracotta detailing, and a combination of residential and retail uses, particularly in the upper floors of retail properties. The area retains strong early 19th-century origins despite later alterations and modern infill.

4.1.3 The Oxford Road Character Area forms a linear corridor along Oxford Road, historically connecting Reading town centre to Pangbourne and onward to Oxford. The street accommodates a mix of uses, from shops with residential accommodation to churches and civic buildings. Early mapping demonstrates that retail properties with upper-floor dwellings extended westward from the town centre, notably between Alfred Street and Eaton Place, and between Russell Street and Waylen Street.

4.1.4 The area is noted for its diverse architectural detailing, including Arts and Crafts influences, polychrome brickwork, and terracotta embellishment. Key buildings such as Oxford Road Community School and Holy Trinity Church provide visual anchors, while terraces such as Prospect Terrace and the northern retail-residential parade at 152–180 Oxford Road exemplify the historic street rhythm and materiality.

4.1.5 The site does not border any listed buildings or buildings of townscape merit. The nearest listed buildings are all located to the north of Oxford Road and are visually separated from the site by Russell House, which blocks views of the majority of the site. Holy Trinity Church and 104 Oxford Road are not able to see relevant parts of the application site. 101 Oxford Road lies 11 properties to the east, while 133–135 Oxford Road are one street over (Waylen Road) or six properties away.

4.1.6 The site directly adjoins properties identified as sites/buildings of opportunity for improvement, namely Phoenix Place and 123 Oxford Road, which present potential for enhancement in future redevelopment proposals.



— Proposed Conservation Area boundary 2019

- - - 2004 Conservation Area boundary

Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure SS5.1: Proposed Conservation Area boundary

November 2019



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4.2 Materials and Townscape

4.2.1 Red brick is the dominant construction material throughout the Oxford Road Character Area, complemented by polychrome brick detailing and terracotta embellishments. Stucco is present on notable terraces and retail buildings, and roofs are almost entirely slate, with some red-tiled roofs such as Oxford Road Community School.

4.2.2 Rear yards and mews historically supported ancillary uses, including stonemason's yards, some of which have been redeveloped. Modern infill and alterations along Oxford Road, particularly on the north side, are generally considered unsympathetic to the historic streetscape and have informed the revised Conservation Area boundary.

4.3 Key Positive Characteristics

4.3.1 The Oxford Road Character Area retains several important historic assets and features, which contribute positively to its special architectural and historic interest. These include the listed Georgian terraces at 149–177, 187–193, 195–197, 197–203, and Prospect Terrace at 2 Lorne Street / 237–247 Oxford Road, although many are in poor condition. Early Georgian single-family residences at 101 and 104 Oxford Road, Oxford Road Community School, Holy Trinity Church with sealed catacombs and its Pugin chancel screen, and Bridge Hall (currently housing a church) provide visual and historical anchors. Other key positive features include Providence Chapel with its polychrome brick façade, The Pavilion (a former cinema now home to Lifespring Church), the Gothic Revival villa at 118 Oxford Road, the unpainted polychrome terrace of shops at 152–180 Oxford Road, the twinned polychrome terraces at 249–253 and 255–261 Oxford Road, the artisan terrace at 1–9 Prospect Street, and Prospect Mews, which retains small terraces and its original stone entranceway. Recent enhancements such as repainted cast iron bollards, new tree planting along the route, and the greyed brick end first floor at 109B Oxford Road facing Zinzan Street further contribute to the streetscape.

4.4 Negative Features

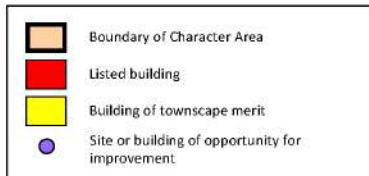
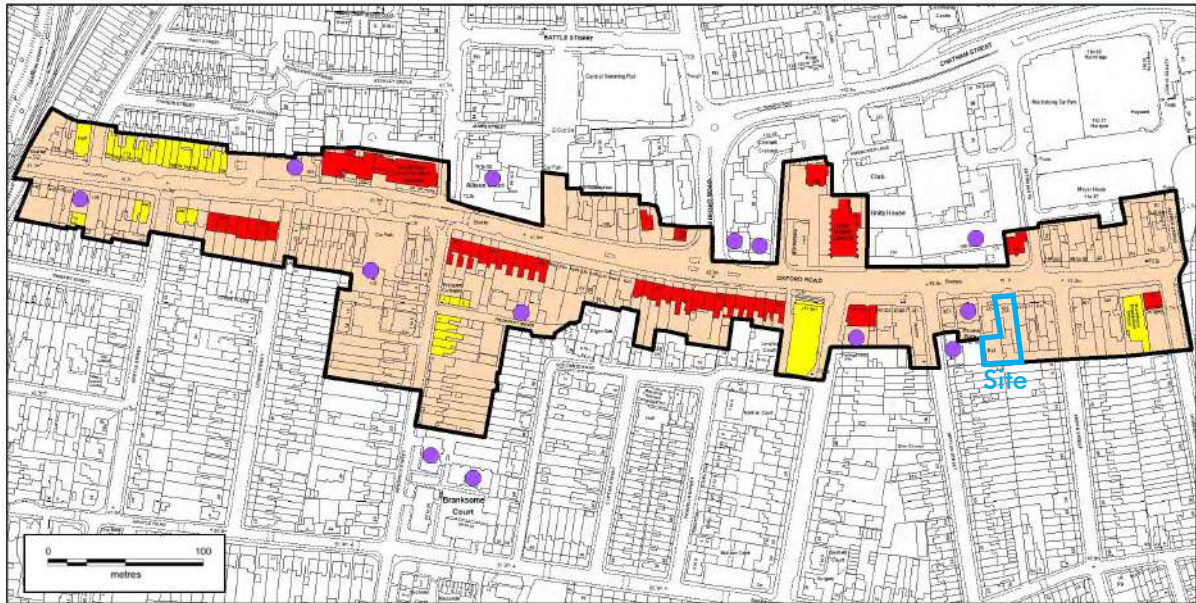
4.4.1 Despite the positive elements, the Oxford Road Character Area suffers from numerous detractors that impact its heritage value and visual cohesion. Modern intrusions along the north side of Oxford Road, whether included in the Conservation Area boundary or not, include modern shop fronts that have destroyed original 19th-century retail elevations and the widespread presence of metal roller security doors. Garish, illuminated, and irregularly sized retail signage disrupts visual harmony along the retail corridor, particularly on the north side between Alfred Street and Eaton Place and on the south side between Zinzan Street and Russell Street. Front retail spaces are often poorly kept and encroach onto pavements, detracting from the traditional street line and impeding pedestrian flow, notably between Waylen Street and Russell Street. Many properties are in a poor state of repair, with redundant wires, satellite dishes, and uPVC windows, while commercial and residential waste is poorly managed. Excessive and inconsistent street signage and estate agent boards, as well as poorly maintained pavements with tarmac patches among stone slabs (especially on the south side between Russell Street and Prospect Street), further undermine the area. Additional negative factors include traffic-related air quality hotspots, the removal of the spiralet at Holy Trinity Church, and the poor decorative condition of the railway bridge over Oxford Road.

4.4.2 Two buildings directly adjacent to the application site are specifically identified in the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area Appraisal (March 2020) as sites or buildings of opportunity for improvement. These are Phoenix Place and 123 Oxford Road, both of which currently present a degree of visual and functional discord with the surrounding historic streetscape. The proximity of these properties to the application site provides potential opportunities for enhancement and positive contribution to the overall character of the Conservation Area in any redevelopment proposals.

4.5 Key Listed Buildings

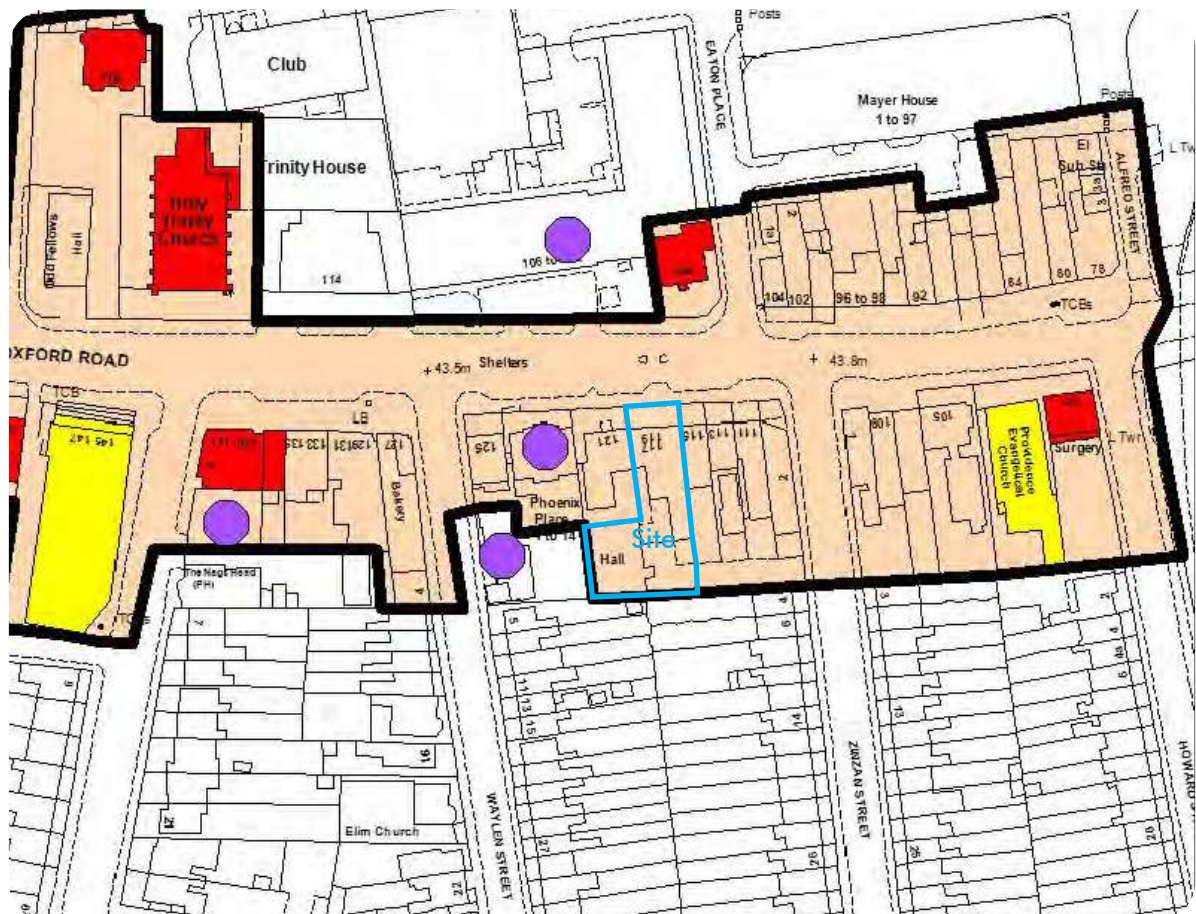
4.5.1 The following key listed buildings are located in the vicinity of the site and provide important historic context, though none directly adjoin the application site:

4.5.1.1 101 Oxford Road, Grade II. 2 storey plus basement detached Georgian, early 19th century. Red



Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area
Figure 6.2.1: Character Area 6.2—Oxford Road
November 2019

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brick, stone dressings, central doorway, timber cornice and slate roof. Original garden walls. Forms a good group with adjoining Chapel and 105 Oxford Road. 1113545.

4.5.1.2 104 Oxford Road (N. side), Royal Meteorological Society, Grade II. Early 19th century, 2 storey Georgian detached. Red brick, central stone/stucco Doric portico and cornice, slate roof. 1113549.

4.5.1.3 139 and 141 Oxford Road, Grade II. 3 storeys, mid 19th century, painted brick. Windows replaced with uPVC, original arched doorway and fanlight to left, recorded in listing notes, lost since 2004 Appraisal. Red brick extension to side on Russell Street with poor window/wall ratio. Included as extreme example of the deterioration of listed buildings in this part of the Conservation Area. 1321910.

4.5.1.4 Holy Trinity Church (N. side), Grade II. 1826 and 1845, stone gabled façade with lancet windows and octagonal bell turret. Interior has reclaimed chancel screen by Pugin. 1113550.

4.5.2 These listed buildings provide historic context and visual anchors within the Conservation Area. Their separation from the application site ensures that proposals will not result in direct harm to the setting of these listed structures.

5.0 POLICY CONTEXT

5.1 Overview

5.1.1 The application site at 117–119 Oxford Road lies within the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area. Proposals must take account of planning policies relating to heritage assets, conservation areas, and central Reading's townscape. Development is expected to respond sensitively to the historic character and architectural significance of the area, while ensuring sustainable use of the site.

5.2 Legislation and Guidance

5.2.1 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

5.2.1.1 Sections 66 and 72 of the Act require the Local Planning Authority to give special regard to preserving the setting of listed buildings and to pay special attention to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. This statutory duty underlines the importance of sensitive design and retention of heritage assets within the site.

5.2.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024)

5.2.2.1 The NPPF provides guidance on sustainable development, design quality, and the historic environment. Paragraphs 189–208 emphasise the need to assess the significance of heritage assets, avoid or minimise harm, and weigh 'less than substantial harm' against public benefits. Paragraphs 124–136 highlight the requirement for high-quality design that respects local character, scale, massing, and materials, particularly within historic streetscapes. Paragraphs 124–125 support sustainable development in accessible, central locations, including adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

5.2.3 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG, 2019)

5.2.3.1 The PPG supplements the NPPF, providing detailed guidance on the adaptive reuse of non-designated heritage assets, and on mitigating harm to heritage assets through sensitive design, appropriate scale, and the use of contextual materials.

5.2.3.2 It also provides guidance on ensuring development respects the setting of adjacent listed buildings.

5.2.4 Historic England Guidance

5.2.4.1 Historic England guidance, including Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (2008) and overview notes, stresses the importance of understanding the significance of heritage assets, retaining historic fabric wherever possible, and integrating new development sensitively within historic streetscapes.

5.2.5 Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019)

5.2.5.1 The Local Plan provides policies for the protection of heritage assets, the conservation of townscape character, and the delivery of sustainable residential development.

5.2.5.2 It requires proposals to consider the scale, massing, and materiality of surrounding buildings, and to support residential redevelopment only where it maintains or enhances heritage and design quality.

5.2.5.3 Policies also emphasise the protection of community uses, including D1 and D2 uses, where viable.

5.2.6 Reading Central Area Action Plan

5.2.6.1 The Action Plan encourages sensitive infill, reuse, and conversion of buildings, particularly in conservation areas, to ensure development is sustainable, contextually appropriate, and enhances the public realm.

5.2.7 The Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area Appraisal (March 2020)

5.2.7.1 Said appraisal identifies sites and buildings of opportunity for improvement, such as Phoenix Place and 123 Oxford Road, which provide context for assessing adjacent development proposals.

5.2.7.2 The appraisal emphasises that development should maintain the scale, rhythm, and materiality of the Conservation Area while addressing negative features and seeking opportunities for enhancement.

5.3 Development Expectations

5.3.1 Development proposals should retain or adapt heritage assets sensitively, ensuring the character, scale, and form of existing buildings is respected.

5.3.2 Proposals should support sustainable residential uses in a manner that does not harm the character of the Conservation Area.

5.3.3 New development should respond to statutory, national, and local guidance, including the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the NPPF 2024, PPG 2019, Historic England guidance, the Reading Borough Local Plan, and the Central Area Action Plan.

5.3.4 Development should seek to integrate with adjacent buildings identified as sites for potential enhancement, taking opportunities to improve the character and visual quality of the area,

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6.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE

6.1 The application site at 117–119 Oxford Road (also known as Russell House / Russell Hall) has a complex history of use, adaptation, and planning applications, reflecting its central location and the pressures for residential redevelopment.

6.2 Planning History

6.2.1 PL/12/1793: Change of Use (Approved, 2013)

6.2.1.1 The change of use from D2 (assembly and leisure) to D1 (place of worship) was approved on 4 February 2013.

6.2.1.2 This permission established the principle of community use within the building, following a period of vacancy and reduced demand for its former use as a dance hall.

6.2.1.3 The supporting Design and Access Statement identified the proposal as a sustainable reuse of an underutilised building, with no external alterations proposed.

6.2.1.4 In heritage terms, this application demonstrates that the building has historically accommodated flexible, community-based uses, that its continued use did not result in harm to the character or appearance of the area, and that adaptive reuse has been considered acceptable on the site.

6.2.2 PL/14/0236: Variation of Condition

6.2.2.1 This application was withdrawn in 2014.

6.2.3 PL/15/1133: Prior Approval (Approved, 2015)

6.2.3.1 This prior approval concerned the change of use of the first and second floors from Class B1(a) offices to C3 dwelling houses, converting the space into four residential flats under Class O of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.

6.2.4 PL/15/1576: Proposed Change of Use and Extension (Withdrawn, 2015)

6.2.4.1 The application proposed the change of use and extension of the B1 office to form one 3-bedroom and three 2-bedroom dwellings.

6.2.4.2 It was withdrawn prior to determination, reflecting concerns regarding the design and scale of the proposal.

6.2.5 PL/16/0961: Change of Use (Approved, 2016)

6.2.5.1 Approval was granted for the change of use at basement and part ground floor from retail (Class A1) to office (Class B1a).

6.2.5.2 Collectively, these applications illustrate ongoing pressure for residential redevelopment, reflecting the site's sustainable location within central Reading and the suitability of the upper floors for housing.

6.2.6 PL/15/0535: Residential Conversion and Extension (Refused, 2015)

6.2.6.1 This application proposed the erection of a second-floor rear extension and the conversion of the upper floors to six residential units.

6.2.6.2 The scheme, which included a mansard roof and rear extensions, was ultimately refused on 22 June 2015.

6.2.6.3 The refusal indicates a clear sensitivity to the scale and massing of extensions, the impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and the relationship between the historic frontage and later rear additions.

6.2.7 Prior Approval Applications and Other Consents (2015 onwards)

6.2.7.1 Prior approval was granted for the conversion of the upper floors to residential accommodation, forming four units.

6.2.7.2 Additional applications for residential conversion and alteration were withdrawn. These applications further demonstrate ongoing pressure for residential redevelopment while confirming the site's suitability and sustainable location within central Reading.

6.2.8 Pre-Application Enquiry: Ref: 201281 (2021)

6.2.8.1 A pre-application enquiry was submitted proposing the demolition of the existing rear hall and construction of nine 1-bedroom flats.

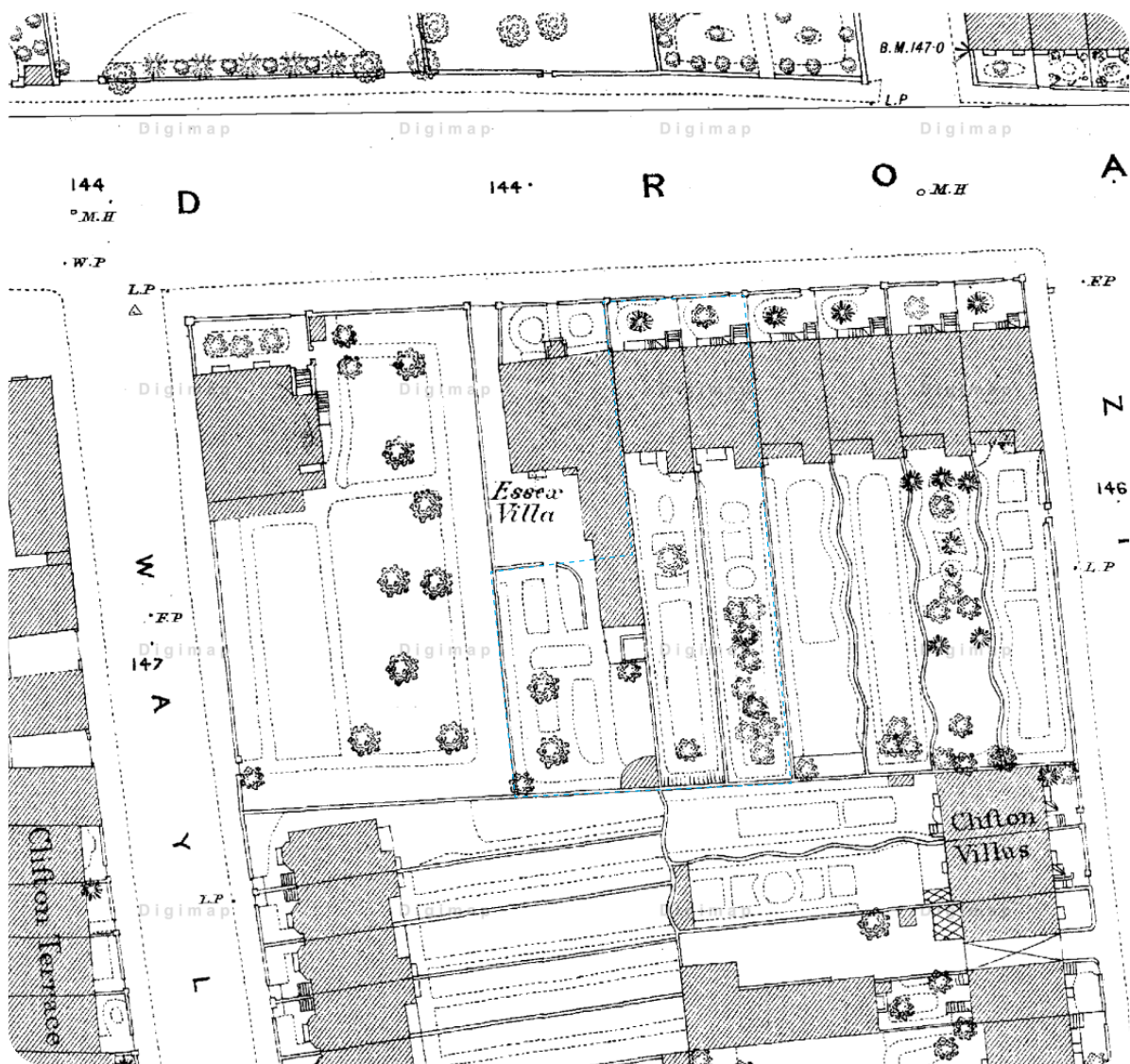
6.2.8.2 The Council's response indicated that the proposal was not supported. Key points raised by officers included the identification of the existing hall building (c.1920s) as a non-designated heritage asset, the unsuitability of its demolition, and the harm that the proposed replacement building would cause to the Conservation Area due to excessive scale and density, an inappropriate flat roof form, and a poor relationship to surrounding traditional buildings.

6.2.8.3 Officers expressed a clear preference for the retention and conversion of the existing building, employing a design approach that reflects prevailing pitched roof forms and the scale of the area.

6.2.8.4 The proposal conflicted with Local Plan Policy OU1, as insufficient justification was provided to demonstrate that the community use was no longer needed.

6.2.8.5 The scheme was considered an overdevelopment of the site.

6.2.8.6 Concerns were also raised regarding internal space standards, residential amenity, and potential overlooking of neighbouring properties.



1890s OS Mapping



Middle: 1910s OS Mapping
Bottom: 1930s OS Mapping

----- Current Site Boundary

1950s OS Mapping



Middle: 1970s OS Mapping
Bottom: 2005 OS Mapping

----- Current Site Boundary

6.2.9 Summary of Planning History

- 6.2.9.1 The planning history establishes a clear and consistent approach in relation to the site.
- 6.2.9.2 The principle of reuse and adaptation of the existing building has been supported.
- 6.2.9.3 Proposals involving significant extension or redevelopment have been treated more critically.
- 6.2.9.4 There is a strong policy and design expectation to retain the existing building, particularly given its identification as a non-designated heritage asset.
- 6.2.9.5 The site is sensitive in townscape terms, forming part of the Oxford Road Conservation Area, where scale, form, and character are key considerations.
- 6.2.9.6 The 2021 pre-application advice is particularly instructive, confirming that demolition and comprehensive redevelopment are unlikely to be supported.
- 6.2.9.7 Any successful scheme should focus on conversion, careful extension, and contextual design.
- 6.2.9.8 The current proposals have been developed to respond positively to the site's heritage significance, to respect the established scale and character of the surrounding townscape, and to align with the Council's clear preference for retention and sensitive adaptation.

7.0 ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

7.1 Russell House: Frontage Building. Russell House is a four-storey mid-terrace property with a slate roof. The primary frontage onto Oxford Road presents red facing brickwork at upper level with stone detailing around the central doorway. The building is currently occupied by the Eco Market shop, with an awning and black, white, and green signage. Windows on the frontage are timber casement, painted white, which contribute modestly to the historic character of the façade.

7.2 Russell House: Rear Elevation. To the rear, Russell House comprises red facing brickwork with a white painted slab above the undercroft parking area. Windows are modern white UPVC. A first-floor rear outrigger extends above the undercroft, with supporting columns. This element disrupts the rhythm of the bays of Russell Hall's easterly elevation, splitting one of the key feature windows and limiting natural light into the hall.

7.3 Russell Hall: Rear Building. Russell Hall is a single-form, gable-ended, single-storey structure with a vaulted internal space. Three of its façades are in red facing brickwork in English bond. The easterly elevation, visible from Zinzan Street, is painted yellow. The hall has no decorative features of note on its brickwork or slate roof. Window heads feature simple soldier coursing, with gable vents above. The principal easterly-facing windows retain partially surviving original timber casement frames, painted white, with decorative leaded glazing bars and localised stained glass in the fanlights. The largest windows on the east and west elevations comprise a triple-column format with two timber mullions and a single higher-level transom.

7.4 External Alterations and Negative Features. The easterly elevation is currently negatively impacted by two sheds/cold store structures and bins positioned at the end of the site access, which dominate the view from Zinzan Street. Two air-conditioning units are also attached to the side elevations. The rear outrigger of Russell House further disrupts the rhythm of the principal bays of the hall, splitting a feature window, reducing natural light into the hall, and adversely affecting the external aesthetic. These interventions, combined with the building's plain form, result in Russell Hall contributing minimal architectural interest or heritage value.

7.5 Townscape Contribution. Overall, Russell Hall offers limited contribution to the surrounding townscape. Its appearance, condition, and the cumulative impact of adjacent structures and modern installations mean the building has negligible value in terms of streetscene or heritage. The hall is not visible from Oxford Road and is only seen from the rear site access on Zinzan Street, with a small sliver visible through a gap on Waylen Street. The rear elevation's disrupted bay rhythm and loss of fenestration integrity further weaken any positive contribution. Russell House, by contrast, retains a more coherent frontage that aligns with the character of Oxford Road, though its rear elements partially compromise the hall's aesthetic.



East Elevation



East Elevation



East Elevation



East Elevation:
Russell House
Undercroft Parking



North Elevation



North Elevation



West Elevation: Through Phoenix
House Car Park



South Elevation

8.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF HERITAGE ASSETS

8.1 Overview

8.1.1 The application site comprises Russell House and Russell Hall, both located within the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area. The site is not directly associated with any listed buildings, and no part of the site forms a designated heritage asset.

8.1.2 The nearest listed buildings are situated across Oxford Road, including 101, 104, 139–141 Oxford Road, and Holy Trinity Church. Views to these assets are blocked by existing buildings, including Russell House, meaning there is no intervisibility that would contribute to their significance.

8.1.3 The Conservation Area designation recognises the historic and architectural value of Oxford Road as a linear corridor of predominantly 19th-century residential and commercial terraces. However, the site itself makes only a limited positive contribution to this character.

8.2 Russell House

8.2.1 Russell House retains traditional architectural elements, including a slate roof, red facing brickwork, stone detailing to the façade, and white-painted timber casement windows. These features, whilst traditional in appearance, date from the 1960s, when Russell House was rebuilt (as a Bank)

8.2.2 The frontage aligns with the general rhythm and scale of neighbouring terraces and maintains a modest degree of visual coherence in the Conservation Area.

8.2.3 The rear of Russell House includes an outrigger at first-floor level above the undercroft parking area, which disrupts the rhythm of Russell Hall's east-facing bays, splitting one of the principal windows, limiting natural light into the hall, and negatively affecting the external aesthetic.

8.2.4 While Russell House has some heritage interest, its rear additions and relationship with Russell Hall limit the overall contribution of the site to the Conservation Area.

8.3 Russell Hall

8.3.1 Russell Hall is a single-storey gable-ended structure dating from the 1920s, with a vaulted interior and three façades in red brickwork in English bond.

8.3.2 The easterly elevation, visible from the rear access on Zinzan Street and glimpsed through adjacent gaps, is painted yellow. The building has no significant decorative features, except partially surviving original timber casement windows with leaded glazing bars and localized stained glass fanlights.

8.3.3 The external appearance of Russell Hall is negatively affected by:

8.3.3.1 Russell House's rear outrigger splitting the principal east-facing window.

8.3.3.2 Two air-conditioning units attached to the side elevations.

8.3.3.3 Ancillary sheds and cold store structures prominently located at the end of the site access.

8.3.4 These factors mean that Russell Hall has minimal architectural or heritage value and contributes little to the Conservation Area's streetscene.

8.4 Contribution to the Conservation Area

8.4.1 Although the site lies within the Oxford Road character area of the Conservation Area, its contribution is limited.

8.4.2 Russell House provides some coherence to the street frontage, but Russell Hall is largely hidden, disrupted, and offers no meaningful visual or historic linkage to surrounding listed buildings or townscape features.

8.4.3 The site's significance is primarily contextual, forming part of the historic layering of Oxford Road without enhancing the significance of nearby listed buildings.

8.5 Summary

8.5.1 Russell House retains modest historic and architectural value and contributes to the continuity of the Oxford Road frontage.

8.5.2 Russell Hall possesses negligible external architectural value, limited internal interest, and minimal contribution to the streetscene or Conservation Area.

8.5.3 The site's overall contribution to the historic character of the Conservation Area is limited and largely contextual.

8.5.4 Any future proposals should retain the modest positive elements of Russell House while recognising that Russell Hall contributes little heritage value and can be replaced without harm to the Conservation Area.

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9.0 ASSESSMENT OF SETTING

9.1 Overview

9.1.1 The setting of the application site comprises Russell House and Russell Hall, the immediate surrounding properties, and the broader Oxford Road character area within the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area.

9.1.2 The site does not directly border any listed buildings, and key heritage assets in proximity—such as 101, 104, 139–141 Oxford Road, and Holy Trinity Church—are located across Oxford Road. Existing structures, including Russell House, block any intervisibility, meaning the site does not materially affect their setting.

9.2 Russell House

9.2.1 Russell House contributes modestly to the Oxford Road streetscape through its frontage alignment, slate roof, red brickwork, and traditional timber windows.

9.2.2 Its setting is defined primarily by the adjacent terraces along Oxford Road and the continuation of the street's 19th- and early 20th-century scale and rhythm.

9.2.3 The building maintains visual coherence with its immediate neighbours and helps preserve the linear townscape character of the Conservation Area.

9.3 Russell Hall

9.3.1 Russell Hall is a single-storey gable-ended structure largely hidden from Oxford Road, visible only from the rear access on Zinzan Street, through a small gap on Waylen Street, and from the rear courtyards of neighbouring properties.

9.3.2 The building's setting is disrupted by the rear outrigger and undercroft of Russell House, which splits its principal east-facing window, reduces natural light, and negatively impacts its external appearance.

9.3.3 Ancillary structures, including sheds, cold store units, and air-conditioning units, further diminish the quality of the hall's setting.

9.3.4 The hall's limited visibility, lack of architectural interest, and poor condition mean its contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is negligible.

9.4 Relationship to the Conservation Area

9.4.1 The Oxford Road character area relies on coherent rhythm, scale, materials, and active frontages to maintain its heritage significance. Russell House supports this continuity modestly at the frontage, while Russell Hall makes no positive contribution.

9.4.2 The presence of the hall does not influence the setting of adjacent or nearby listed buildings due to blocked views and intervening development.

9.4.3 Sites adjacent to Russell Hall, notably Phoenix Place and 123 Oxford Road, are identified in the 2020 Conservation Area Appraisal as sites/buildings of opportunity for improvement, indicating the broader streetscape's potential for enhancement.

9.5 Impact Assessment

9.5.1 Any sensitive redevelopment or adaptation of the site should seek to:

- 9.5.1.1 Retain and enhance the positive contribution of Russell House to the streetscape.
- 9.5.1.2 Replace Russell Hall in a manner that improves its immediate setting, removes visually intrusive elements, and reinforces the rhythm, scale, and materiality of the Conservation Area.
- 9.5.1.3 Avoid adverse effects on the setting of nearby listed buildings and maintain the integrity of the Oxford Road character area.

9.5.2 The current condition of Russell Hall, including disrupted windows, unsightly ancillary structures, and limited visibility, means that redevelopment could enhance the overall setting of the site within the Conservation Area without causing harm to heritage assets.

10.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

10.1 The proposed development comprises the retention and sensitive adaptation of Russell Hall, including an upward extension to provide an additional storey and accommodation within the roofspace, facilitating the conversion of the existing D2 hall into C3 residential use. The proposal responds directly to previous pre-application advice by retaining the existing building and introducing a form, scale, and materiality that reflects the surrounding townscape.

10.2 The existing hall structure may be retained in full, including its primary form, roof profile, and the majority of its original fabric. The building will be extended vertically, with the eaves, gable ends, and ridge raised by approximately 1500mm throughout, allowing for the introduction of a new upper floor while maintaining a subservient relationship to the host structure and surrounding context. If demolished, the windows of quality will be retained and reinstated as part of the replacement building.

10.3 The external appearance of the building will be enhanced through the removal of unsympathetic additions, including external sheds, cold storage structures, bins, and wall-mounted air-conditioning units. The eastern elevation, currently painted yellow, will be restored to its original red brick finish, reinstating the building's historic material character.

10.4 The existing windows of heritage value will be retained and refurbished. The left-hand window to the eastern elevation, currently a poor-quality replacement, will be replaced with a new timber casement window designed to match the original windows in form, detailing, and materials, including white-painted timber frames, leaded glazing bars, and localised stained glass elements to the upper lights.

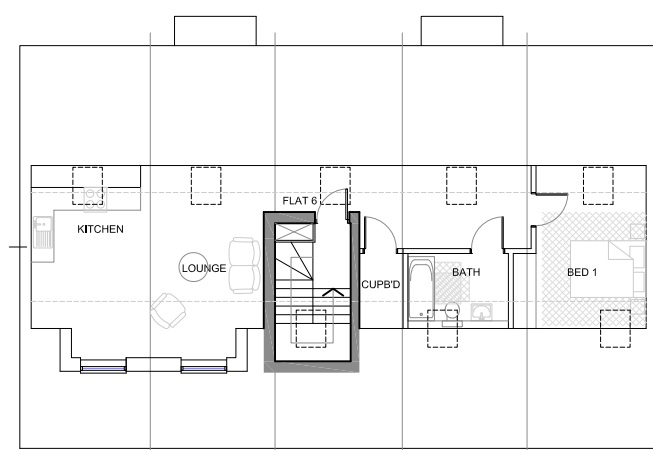
10.5 New first-floor windows will be introduced within the extended portion of the building. These will reflect the proportions and rhythm of the existing fenestration, incorporating two mullions and a high-level transom, but will omit decorative leaded and stained glass detailing to ensure that the original ground floor windows remain visually prominent.

10.6 The roof will be reconfigured to accommodate the additional storey, incorporating a pitched form finished in clay tiles to match the existing roof. Heritage-style rooflights will be introduced on both the eastern and western roof slopes, while a double-width dormer will be positioned on the eastern elevation. This dormer will be carefully proportioned, with its width aligned to the vertical window bays below, ensuring a coherent and balanced composition.

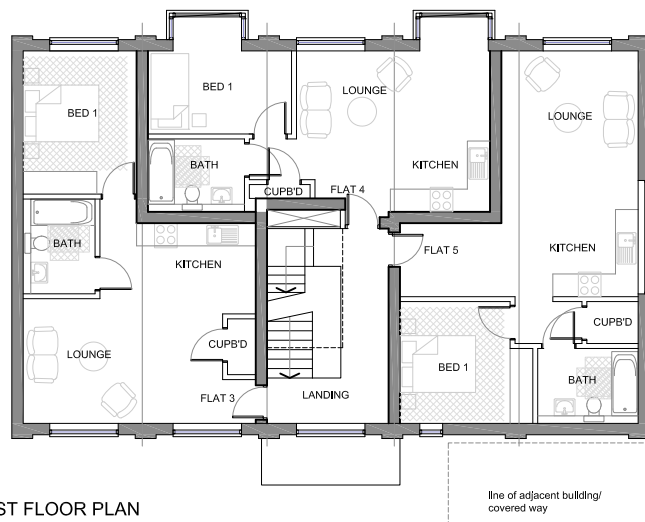
10.7 Two first-floor oriel windows will project from the western elevation, facing towards the Phoenix Place courtyard. These elements are designed to enhance internal amenity while remaining contained within private rear views, avoiding impact on the wider streetscape.

10.8 A new communal entrance will be introduced on the eastern elevation facing Zinzan Street. This will replace an existing window within the central bay of the five-bay elevation and will comprise a new doorway with an associated sidelight. The entrance will be articulated by a forward-projecting, self-supporting rain canopy structure, providing both functional weather protection and a clear point of arrival for residents.

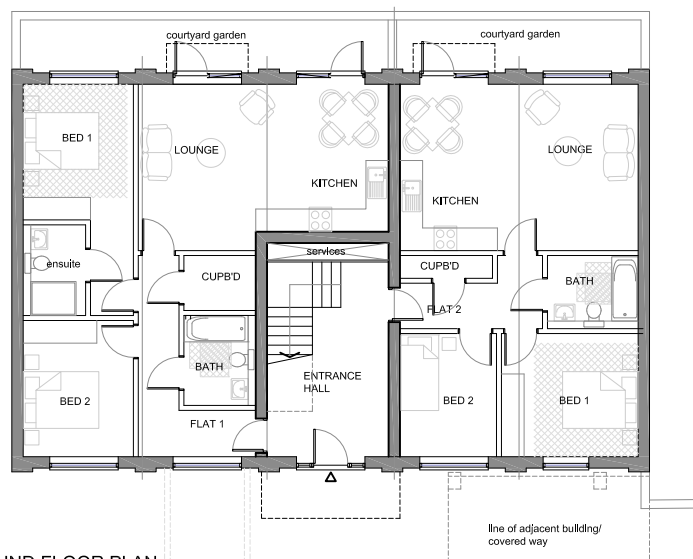
SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION (GIA m² above 1.5m FFL)	
GROUND:	
FLAT 1: (2B 4P)	76.0m²
FLAT 2: (2B 3P)	62.0m²
FIRST:	
FLAT 3: (1B 1P)	46.5m²
FLAT 4: (1B 1P)	39.0m²
FLAT 5: (1B 2P)	49.8m²
SECOND:	
FLAT 6: (1B 2P)	62.7m²
TOTAL:	336.0m²
Accommodation complies with NPPF house design standards	



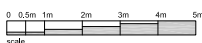
SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



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REV:

client:
MRS. P. CHOPPING
FORMER MEETING HALL
117 - 119 OXFORD ROAD
READING
BERKS, RG1 7UH

project:
PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE TO
RESIDENTIAL
drawing:
PROPOSED:
FLOOR PLANS

date:
SEP 21
scale:
1:100@A2
drawing no.:

1824 - P2.01

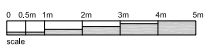
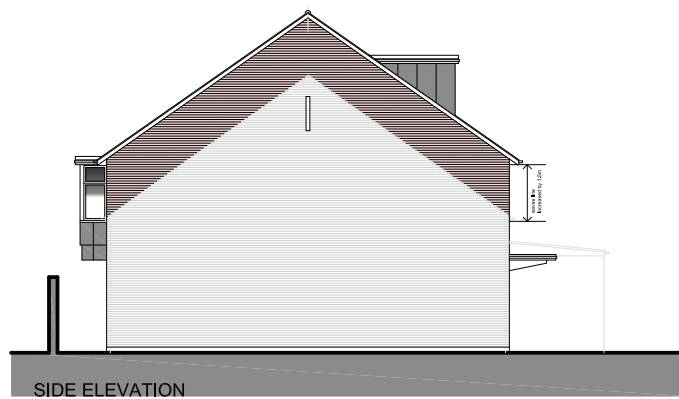
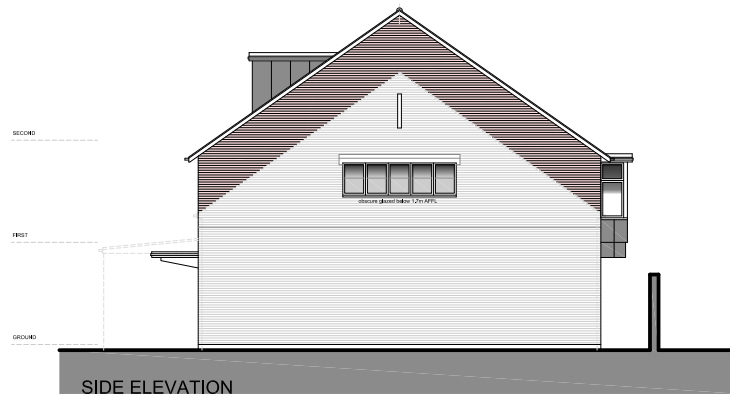
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PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE TO
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ELEVATIONS

date:
SEP 21
scale:
1:100@A2
drawing no.:

1824 - P2.02

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NT

rev:

10.9 The gable ends and existing ventilation features will be retained, preserving the simplicity of the building's form. The proposed material palette, including red brickwork and clay roof tiles, will match the existing building, ensuring continuity and reinforcing the building's character.

10.10 Internally, the development will provide six residential units across three levels, with a total gross internal area of approximately 336.0m². The accommodation schedule comprises two two-bedroom units at ground floor level, three one-bedroom units at first floor level, and one one-bedroom unit at second floor level. The layout has been designed to optimise natural light, outlook, and functional living arrangements.

10.11 Overall, the proposed development represents a considered and contextual approach to the reuse of Russell Hall, enhancing its architectural quality, improving its contribution to the Conservation Area, and delivering a viable residential use in accordance with local and national planning policy.

-

11.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

11.1 Methodology

11.1.1 The impact assessment of the proposed development on heritage assets follows established guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021), Historic England's Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (2008), and the Reading Borough Council Local Plan (2019:2036).

11.1.2 The assessment considers:

11.1.2.1 The significance of heritage assets affected, including Russell Hall (a non-designated heritage asset), Russell House (locally significant) and the Oxford Road Conservation Area.

11.1.2.2 The potential effects of the proposed works on the architectural, historic, and evidential value of these assets.

11.1.2.3 The wider contribution of the site to the character, appearance, and setting of the surrounding streetscape and conservation area.

11.1.3 The methodology involves:

11.1.3.1 Identifying significance: evaluating which features, elements, and materials contribute to the heritage value of the site and adjacent assets.

11.1.3.2 Characterising harm: assessing potential impacts against the retained significance.

11.1.3.3 Applying the NPPF framework: categorising harm as:

11.1.3.3.1 No Harm: The proposals do not affect the heritage significance of the asset or its setting. Often applied where interventions are reversible, minor, or not visible.

11.1.3.3.2 Less than Substantial Harm: The proposals result in a minor or moderate negative impact on the significance of a heritage asset. NPPF paragraph 202 advises that public benefits can outweigh this level of harm. This category is typically subdivided informally: low-end or high-end less than substantial harm, depending on the degree of impact.

11.1.3.3.3 Substantial Harm: The proposals would materially reduce or destroy the heritage significance of the asset. This includes demolition of a listed building, removal of key historic fabric, or intervention that undermines the integrity of the Conservation Area. National guidance (NPPF paras. 201–203) treats substantial harm as exceptional, requiring clear and convincing justification.

11.1.3.3.4 Neutral or Minor Positive Impact (Enhancement): While not 'harm,' assessments often explicitly recognise where proposals improve significance or remove negative features. Can also include restoration, reinstatement of original materials, or removal of intrusive modern elements.

11.1.3.3.5 Incremental or Cumulative Harm: Sometimes described where multiple small changes combine to affect significance. Useful in Conservation Areas or historic streetscapes.

11.1.3.4 Considering cumulative effects: assessing combined impacts of extensions, new openings, removal of unsympathetic structures, and material changes.

11.1.3.5 Evaluating context: including visibility, intervisibility with other heritage assets, and contribution to

the streetscape or Conservation Area.

11.2 Types of Harm

11.2.1 Harm to heritage assets can be visual, physical, or evidential:

11.2.1.1 Visual harm arises when alterations disrupt the appearance, scale, proportion, or rhythm of heritage assets.

11.2.1.2 Physical harm occurs through the loss, replacement, or alteration of historic fabric, including structural changes or unsympathetic extensions.

11.2.1.3 Evidential harm arises where historic features or details that demonstrate the evolution of a site are lost or obscured.

11.2.2 Harm can also be assessed in terms of its reversibility, permanence, and whether mitigation can reduce its impact.

11.3 Assessment of Heritage Assets

11.3.1 Russell Hall: The building is a non-designated heritage asset whose significance derives primarily from its original timber casement windows, the gable-ended form, and its evidential role within the site's historical development. The hall is currently compromised by unsympathetic additions, including yellow paint on the eastern elevation, external sheds, cold store structures, bins, air-conditioning units, and the rear outrigger of Russell House, which disrupts the rhythm of fenestration and natural light.

11.3.2 Russell House: Russell House is not a Grade II-listed adjacent building, whose contribution to the Conservation Area is principally through its façade and overall streetscape presence. The proposals do not alter Russell House in a manner that would affect its significance.

11.3.3 Oxford Road Conservation Area: The character and appearance of the Conservation Area are derived from the rhythm of the streetscape, consistent building lines, scale, materiality, and historic details. Russell Hall is not prominently visible from Oxford Road, and therefore contributes only modestly to the wider streetscape.

11.4 Anticipated Impacts of the Proposed Development

11.4.1 Positive impacts include:

11.4.1.1 Removal of visually intrusive structures and air-conditioning units.

11.4.1.2 Restoration of the eastern elevation to original red brickwork.

11.4.1.3 Retention and refurbishment of original timber casement windows with leaded glazing bars and stained glass elements.

11.4.1.4 Sensitive introduction of new windows and roof features, carefully proportioned to respect the original fenestration.

11.4.1.5 Reintroduction of a coherent architectural composition and improved legibility of Russell Hall as a historic structure.

11.4.2 Potential negative impacts include:

11.4.2.1 The upward extension, raising eaves, gable ends, and ridge lines by 1500mm, introducing a modest vertical change in scale.

11.4.2.2 The addition of new first-floor windows, heritage rooflights, and the eastern dormer, which alter the roofline and create minor visual change.

11.4.2.3 The introduction of a new communal entrance on the central bay of the eastern elevation, altering the historic rhythm of that façade.

11.5 Determination of Harm Level

11.5.1 Applying the NPPF guidance and the methodology outlined above, the proposed works are carefully evaluated against the retained significance of Russell Hall, the setting of Russell House, and the Conservation Area:

11.5.1.1 Visual and physical harm is present only in a minor, controlled form due to the sensitive design of

the vertical extension, dormer, and roof alterations.

11.5.1.2 The building's most significant features, particularly the original windows and the gable-ended form, are retained and enhanced.

11.5.1.3 The proposals remove existing elements that currently cause harm to the site's heritage value and appearance.

11.5.2 On balance, the development is considered to result in less than substantial harm, at the lower end of the spectrum, because the minor adverse effects (mainly from the vertical extension and new openings) are limited in scale, carefully mitigated, and offset by significant heritage and visual improvements.

-

12.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

12.1 Overview

12.1.1 The proposed mitigation measures are designed to ensure that the adaptation and extension of Russell Hall retains its heritage significance, minimises harm, and enhances the building's contribution to the Conservation Area.

12.1.2 Mitigation focuses on sensitive design, retention of key features, and careful selection of materials and construction techniques to reinforce authenticity.

12.2 Retention of Significant Fabric

12.2.1 The primary form, roof profile, and original brickwork of Russell Hall will be retained.

12.2.2 Existing windows of heritage value, including the timber casements with leaded glazing bars and stained glass elements, will be refurbished and preserved.

12.2.3 The gable ends, ventilation features, and architectural rhythm of the building will be maintained, ensuring continuity of historic character.

12.3 Removal of Detrimental Elements

12.3.1 Unsympathetic additions, including external sheds, cold storage units, bins, and wall-mounted air-conditioning units, will be removed to restore the building's external coherence.

12.3.2 The rear outrigger and Russell House columns that currently disrupt the fenestration rhythm will be retained only as required for structural purposes, with careful detailing to reduce visual impact.

12.4 Restoration of Materials and Finishes

12.4.1 The easterly elevation, currently painted yellow, will have paint carefully removed to reveal the original red brickwork.

12.4.2 The existing red facing brickwork will be repaired using matching brick types and lime-based mortar, replicating the historic joint width and tooling.

12.4.3 All new or repaired clay roof tiles will match the existing in colour, profile, and texture.

12.5 Windows and Joinery

12.5.1 Original timber casement windows will be refurbished, including scarfing decayed timber, repairing leaded glazing bars, and reinstating localised stained glass elements.

12.5.2 The poor-quality replacement window on the easterly elevation will be replaced with a high-quality timber casement matching the surviving historic windows in proportions, detailing, and materials.

12.5.3 New upper-level windows introduced as part of the extension will reflect the proportions of existing fenestration but will omit decorative leaded glazing, maintaining the hierarchy of original windows.

12.5.4 All painted finishes will be breathable, microporous, and coloured white, ensuring longevity and preventing moisture trapping.

12.6 Roof and Upper Floor Works

12.6.1 The eaves, gable ends, and ridge throughout the building will be raised by approximately 1500mm to accommodate the new upper floor.

12.6.2 The new roof will be pitched, finished in clay tiles matching the existing, and incorporate heritage-style rooflights on both roof slopes.

12.6.3 A double-width dormer on the easterly elevation will be carefully proportioned to align with the vertical window bays below.

12.6.4 Two oriel windows on the western elevation facing the Phoenix Place courtyard will provide natural light internally while remaining visually contained from the streetscene.

12.7 New Communal Entrance

12.7.1 A new communal front door will replace a window within the central bay of the five-bay eastern elevation facing Zinzan Street.

12.7.2 The entrance will feature a sidelight and a forward-projecting, self-supporting rain canopy, providing functional weather protection while visually integrating with the façade.

12.8 Site Protection and Construction Protocols

12.8.1 Temporary protection measures will be installed around all retained historic windows, brickwork, and decorative elements during construction.

12.8.2 Construction logistics will ensure that bins, scaffolding, and materials do not obscure or damage the historic fabric.

12.8.3 All trades will be instructed to follow conservation best practice, including careful handling of original fabric and minimal intervention where possible.

12.9 Overall Rationale

12.9.1 The combination of retention, restoration, and sensitive new work ensures that the architectural and historic significance of Russell Hall is preserved.

12.9.2 All construction methodologies, materials, and detailing are selected to reduce any harm, enhance the authenticity of the building, and improve its contribution to the Conservation Area.

12.9.3 These mitigation measures align with guidance from Historic England, the NPPF, and local planning policies relating to heritage and conservation.

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13.0 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

13.1 Overview

13.1.1 The proposed development not only mitigates harm to Russell Hall but also presents opportunities to enhance the building's heritage value and its contribution to the Conservation Area.

13.1.2 Enhancement opportunities are considered in the context of NPPF guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment, Historic England best practice, and local planning policy.

13.2 Restoration of Original Fabric

13.2.1 The removal of yellow paint from the easterly elevation restores the original red brick finish, reinstating the authentic material palette and improving the building's visual coherence.

13.2.2 Repair and refurbishment of original timber casement windows with decorative leaded glazing bars and stained glass reinstates the building's historic character and decorative interest.

13.2.3 Removal of external sheds, cold storage structures, bins, and air-conditioning units eliminates visual clutter, allowing the original form and fenestration rhythm to be appreciated from the surrounding context.

13.3 Improvement of Architectural Composition

13.3.1 Raising the eaves, gable ends, and ridge by 1500mm provides space for sensitive upper-floor accommodation while allowing the building's proportions to be expressed in a more coherent manner.

13.3.2 New upper-level windows, dormers, and heritage rooflights are designed to complement the existing building form without competing with or diminishing the prominence of historic features.

13.3.3 The double-width dormer on the easterly elevation and the oriel windows on the westerly elevation enhance internal amenity while carefully integrating with the architectural rhythm, providing visual interest within private views.

13.4 Introduction of a New Communal Entrance

13.4.1 The proposed communal front door to the easterly Zinzan elevation, including the forward-projecting, self-supporting rain canopy and sidelight, provides a clearly legible and functional point of access.

13.4.2 The entrance has been designed to be sympathetic in scale and detailing to the historic building, avoiding harm to the fenestration rhythm and enhancing the overall legibility and use of the building.

13.5 Public Realm Benefits

13.5.1 Repositioning of bins and removal of unsightly structures improves views from Zinzan Street and the Phoenix Place courtyard, creating a tidier, more coherent streetscape.

13.5.2 The restoration of materials and careful detailing contributes positively to the local townscape, enhancing the character of the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area.

13.6 Long-Term Heritage Sustainability

13.6.1 By converting Russell Hall into residential units, the proposals ensure the building remains in active use, preventing future decay or neglect.

13.6.2 Sensitive material choices, including matching brickwork, lime mortar, clay tiles, and traditional timber joinery, ensure the longevity of historic features and reduce the risk of future harm.

13.6.3 The enhancements reinforce the hierarchy of heritage features, ensuring the original windows and architectural form remain dominant and appreciated.

13.7 Summary of Enhancement Opportunities:

13.7.1 Restoration of original brickwork, windows, and fenestration rhythm.

13.7.2 Removal of detrimental external structures and air-conditioning units.

13.7.3 Sensitive introduction of upper-level accommodation, dormers, and rooflights.

13.7.4 Introduction of a legible and contextually sympathetic communal entrance.

13.7.5 Improvements to the public realm through reorganisation of site boundaries and removal of clutter.

13.7.6 Long-term sustainability of the building through a viable residential reuse.

13.7.7 Collectively, these measures enhance both the heritage significance of Russell Hall and its contribution to the Conservation Area, delivering a positive impact while maintaining respect for historic character.

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14.0 JUSTIFICATION AND PUBLIC BENEFITS

14.1 Overview

14.1.1 The proposed development is justified on the basis that it delivers a sensitive reuse of Russell Hall, preserves the building's key heritage features, and provides wider public benefits in accordance with national and local planning policy, including the NPPF and Reading Borough Local Plan.

14.1.2 The proposals respond to pre-application advice, addressing previous concerns regarding scale, form, and the relationship to surrounding heritage assets while enhancing the site's contribution to the Conservation Area.

14.2 Heritage Justification

14.2.1 The scheme retains and refurbishes the most significant heritage elements of Russell Hall, including original timber casement windows with decorative leaded glazing bars and stained glass, gable ends, and

fenestration rhythm.

14.2.2 Unsympathetic features and later additions, such as external sheds, bins, cold storage, air-conditioning units, and the yellow-painted easterly elevation, are removed or restored, improving the building's authenticity and its architectural coherence.

14.2.3 The upward extension, including raising eaves, gable ends, and ridge by 1500mm, is carefully proportioned to maintain a subservient relationship to the historic fabric, ensuring the original heritage features remain dominant.

14.3 Public Benefits

14.3.1 Sustainable Residential Reuse: The conversion of Russell Hall into six residential units provides a viable, long-term use, securing the building's future and preventing decay or neglect.

14.3.2 Improved Architectural Quality: Removal of intrusive structures and reinstatement of high-quality materials enhances both the building and its immediate streetscape, contributing positively to the character of the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area.

14.3.3 Public Realm Enhancement: Repositioning of bins and elimination of visual clutter improves views from Zinzan Street and Phoenix Place, enhancing pedestrian experience and local amenity.

14.3.4 Contextual Design: New features, including dormers, heritage rooflights, oriel windows, and the communal entrance with rain canopy, are designed to complement the existing building, ensuring the proposals do not dominate or detract from surrounding historic fabric.

14.3.5 Long-Term Sustainability: Use of traditional materials, matched brickwork, lime mortar, clay tiles, and sympathetic window detailing ensures durability and ongoing maintenance of heritage significance.

14.4 Balancing Harm and Benefit

14.4.1 Any limited harm resulting from the upward extension, new roof features, or additional openings is mitigated by the removal of intrusive elements, restoration of original fabric, and enhancement of architectural quality.

14.4.2 The public benefits, including sustainable reuse, improved streetscape, and long-term heritage preservation, are considered to outweigh any very minor level of less than substantial harm.

14.5 Policy Support

14.5.1 The proposals align with national guidance in the NPPF (2021, paras 199–208) and Planning Practice Guidance, which support the conservation of heritage assets while allowing for development that brings clear public benefits.

14.5.2 Reading Borough Local Plan policies relating to heritage, design, and housing support the sensitive reuse of non-designated heritage assets, the enhancement of conservation areas, and the provision of high-quality residential accommodation in central Reading.

14.5.3 The scheme also responds to Historic England guidance on conservation principles, ensuring that interventions are proportionate, reversible where possible, and respect the significance of heritage assets.

14.6 Summary

14.6.1 The development delivers a considered balance between retaining heritage significance and providing clear public benefits.

14.6.2 By addressing existing detractors, restoring key features, and introducing a sensitive reuse, the scheme both preserves and enhances Russell Hall's contribution to the Conservation Area.

14.6.3 The approach demonstrates that minor, controlled alterations can achieve long-term sustainability and usability without compromising heritage values.

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15.0 SUMMARY OF HERITAGE BALANCE (NPPF TEST)

15.1 Overview

15.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (2021, paras 199–208) establishes that proposals affecting heritage assets must be assessed in terms of harm to significance. Any harm must then be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

15.1.2 The significance of the heritage assets at the site includes:

15.1.2.1 Russell Hall: a non-designated heritage asset of low significance, principally derived from its original timber casement windows and evidential role in the historic development of the site.

15.1.2.2 Russell House: a positive contributor to the streetscape and the character of the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area.

15.1.2.3 The Conservation Area: with significance derived from consistent building lines, historic scale, and architectural character of Oxford Road and adjacent streets.

15.2 Assessment of Harm

15.2.1 Following the methodology set out in Section 11, harm has been assessed as follows:

15.2.1.1 No harm: where development would not affect the significance of the heritage asset.

15.2.1.2 Less than substantial harm: minor negative effects on significance that may be outweighed by public benefits.

15.2.1.3 Substantial harm: material diminution of heritage significance.

15.2.2 Russell Hall's limited harm arises primarily from:

15.2.2.1 The upward extension, raising eaves, gable ends, and ridge by 1500mm.

15.2.2.2 Introduction of new roof features, dormers, and first-floor windows.

15.2.2.3 Minor alteration to the eastern fenestration pattern to accommodate a communal entrance.

These elements are carefully proportioned and designed to maintain the dominance of original heritage features, ensuring that harm remains at the lower end of the 'less than substantial' spectrum.

15.3 Public Benefits

15.3.1 The public benefits of the proposals include:

15.3.1.1 Sensitive reuse of Russell Hall as residential accommodation, securing long-term viability.

15.3.1.2 Removal of unsympathetic external structures, restoring historic fabric and improving the streetscape.

15.3.1.3 High-quality reinstatement of original features, including timber windows and red brickwork, enhancing authenticity and heritage value.

15.3.1.4 Improved internal amenity, functional layout, and sustainable use of a centrally located building.

15.4 Balancing Harm and Public Benefits

15.4.1 In accordance with the NPPF, the limited harm identified is clearly outweighed by the substantial public benefits.

15.4.2 The proposals:

15.4.2.1 Preserve the most significant heritage features of Russell Hall.

15.4.2.2 Enhance the contribution of the building to the Conservation Area.

15.4.2.3 Improve the visual quality of the site in views from Zinzan Street and Phoenix Place.

15.4.2.4 This balancing exercise demonstrates that the proposals meet the NPPF requirement for a proportionate and justified response to heritage constraints, where minor harm is mitigated by tangible benefits.

15.5 Summary

15.5.1 The heritage balance confirms that the proposals achieve a careful equilibrium between preservation and adaptation.

15.5.2 Any limited, less than substantial harm is outweighed by public benefits, including long-term building retention, streetscape enhancement, and high-quality residential use.

15.5.3 The proposals therefore satisfy the NPPF test, providing a positive outcome for both heritage conservation and sustainable development.

16.0 CONCLUSION

16.1 Overall Assessment

16.1.1 This Heritage Statement has assessed the significance of Russell House and Russell Hall, the contribution of the site to the Russell Street / Castle Hill / Oxford Road Conservation Area, and the impact of the proposed development on that significance.

16.1.2 Russell House is identified as a positive contributor to the streetscape along Oxford Road, despite it having been rebuilt in the 1960s and not holding any heritage value; while Russell Hall is a later 1920s structure of lower significance, with its heritage value primarily derived from its surviving architectural features, particularly its timber casement windows and evidential role in the site's historic development.

16.2 Effect of the Proposals

16.2.1 The proposed development retains Russell Hall and Russell House in full, ensuring that the established frontage and townscape contribution to Oxford Road is preserved.

16.2.2 The works to Russell Hall comprise a sensitive upward extension, including the raising of eaves, gable ends and ridge throughout by 1500mm, together with internal conversion to residential use. These works are carefully designed to respect the scale, form and character of the host building and surrounding Conservation Area context.

16.2.3 The proposals also deliver significant improvements to the building's appearance through the removal of unsympathetic additions, reinstatement of original red brickwork, repair and retention of historic windows, and introduction of appropriately detailed new elements.

16.3 Heritage Balance

16.3.1 The assessment has identified that the proposals result in a limited degree of less than substantial harm to the significance of the Conservation Area and the non-designated heritage asset (Russell Hall).

16.3.2 However, this harm is localised, carefully controlled, and occurs primarily as a result of the vertical extension and associated roof alterations. Importantly, the original architectural features that contribute most strongly to significance are retained and enhanced.

16.3.3 The scheme delivers clear public benefits, including the sustainable reuse of an underutilised building, long-term retention and maintenance of historic fabric, removal of visually harmful accretions, and enhancement of the wider townscape environment.

16.3.4 In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, the identified less than substantial harm is considered to be outweighed by these public benefits.

16.4 Compliance with Policy and Guidance

16.4.1 The proposals are consistent with national and local planning policy, including the statutory duty under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the NPPF, Planning Practice Guidance, and relevant Historic England guidance.

16.4.2 The development demonstrates a clear understanding of significance, proportionate intervention, and a design-led approach to heritage adaptation.

16.5 Conclusion Summary

16.5.1 The proposed development represents a considered and appropriate response to the heritage context of the site.

16.5.2 It preserves the key elements of significance, enhances the appearance and functionality of Russell

Hall, and maintains the contribution of Russell House to the Conservation Area.

16.5.3 Overall, the scheme is considered to be acceptable in heritage terms, delivering a balanced outcome in which limited harm is outweighed by clear and demonstrable public benefits, in accordance with national and local planning policy.

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