



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 June 2025

by Hannah Guest BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/25/3363345

Folk House, Church Street, Reading RG1 2SB

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Charterist Developments Ltd against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/24/0661.
 - The development proposed is described as “replacement of rotten timber windows with UPVC windows”.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in this appeal is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to (i) the impact on the significance of the appeal property as a non-designated heritage asset, (ii) whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and (iii) the effect of the proposal on the significance of nearby listed buildings.

Reasons

3. Church Street is located within the centre of Reading. It is a narrow street connecting London Road to St Giles' Church and Southampton Street. The end of the street where the appeal property is located comprises largely of terrace and linked houses, many of which are historic. Despite most of the houses being only 2-storeys, the narrowness of the street creates an appreciable degree of enclosure.
4. The Reading Quaker Meeting House, which is Grade II Listed, is located adjacent to the appeal property, albeit set back from Church Street. I understand that the appeal property was originally constructed as a mission hall and classroom block associated with the meeting house.

Non-designated heritage asset

5. The appeal property at four storeys is the tallest building along the section of Church Street where it is located. It includes a full height brick projection next to the entrance door. This, together with its height, make it very prominent in the street scene, particularly when approaching the appeal property from the direction of Southampton Street. The buildings ornate chimneys draw attention when

approaching the appeal property from London Street. This view also includes the spire of the Grade II Listed St Giles' Church.

6. The appeal property is identified as a Building of Townscape Merit in the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA)¹. The CAA explains that buildings identified as having "townscape merit" will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered 19th century buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provides the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, they make a positive contribution to the special interest of the conservation area.
7. From my observations on site, I can find no reason to disagree. The appeal property is an attractive red brick building, typical of Reading, and includes period characteristics and materials. The significance of the appeal property, as a non-designated heritage asset, derives from its architectural and aesthetic value, as well as its historic connections to the Reading Quaker Meeting House.
8. I saw on my visit that some of the paintwork on the existing windows is cracked or peeling. However, there were no obvious visual signs that the existing windows were rotten, or in a poor condition that was beyond repair. There is also no substantive evidence before me to demonstrate this.
9. There are very limited details before me regarding the design of the proposed windows. I understand that the proposed frames, known as Charisma Rose, are a uPVC timber effect sash window and that the top glazing bars would be removed to reflect the appearance of the existing windows.
10. Nonetheless, in the absence of any detailed measurements, cross sections of the proposed frames and details of the joinery, there is nothing before me to demonstrate that the proposed windows would reflect the slim profile of the existing windows. The exact finish of the window frames is unclear and how this would compare to the existing painted wooden frames. I am also unsure what is proposed for the existing glazing and panel between the bottom of the first-floor windows and top of the ground floor windows. Given this, it is difficult to fully assess the effect of the proposed windows on the significance of the appeal property as a non-designated heritage asset or the scale of any harm.
11. Notwithstanding this, the introduction of contemporary materials and any alteration to the profile of the windows, as a result of the proposal, would erode the architectural integrity of the appeal property and consequently harm its significance to some degree. The scale of this harm would depend on the detailed design of the proposed windows and how well they replicate the existing windows.
12. Accordingly, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, based on the information before me, the proposal would conflict with Policies CC7, EN1 and EN6 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) (Local Plan). These policies seek to ensure that all development responds positively to the local context and reinforces local character and distinctiveness, including the historic character, by protecting and enhancing the historic environment, including its architectural and visual qualities.

¹ Reading Borough Council – Market Place/London Street Conservation Area Appraisal written and produced by The Conservation Studio, 1 Querns Lane, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, GL7 1RL.

Designated heritage assets

13. The appeal property is located in the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area (CA) I have therefore approached this appeal in the context of Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the CA.
14. From the evidence before me and my observations on site, the significance of the CA, in so far as it relates to this appeal, is the architectural integrity and aesthetic value of the historic buildings and how their layout and composition relates to the evolution of the area. In addition, the CAA identifies the view along Church Street from London Street, which includes the St Giles' Church spire, as an important view and a feature that makes an important contribution to the historic character and appearance of the CA. The CAA also recognises the loss of original architectural details, including the replacement of original timber sash windows with uPVC or aluminium to be an ongoing issue.
15. The appeal property in its current form, despite the existing windows requiring a repaint, makes a positive contribution to the significance of the CA.
16. The appeal property is also located close to several Grade II Listed buildings, including the adjacent Reading Quaker Meeting House, Nos 7-9 and 11 Church Street opposite the appeal property and Nos 6a, 6b and 6c further along Church Street on the same side as the appeal property.
17. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires me to give special regard to preserving these buildings or their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.
18. From the evidence before me and my observations on site, the significance of these listed buildings, for the purposes of this appeal, derives from their architectural integrity and aesthetic value.
19. There is a high level of intervisibility between the appeal property and the nearby listed buildings. With the exception of Reading Quakers Meeting House, the appeal property is seen alongside these listed buildings in the view along Church Street from London Road. The buildings together frame the view of St Giles' Church spire. The largely historic townscape setting of the listed buildings, including the appeal property, contributes positively to their significance.
20. As above, in the absence of full details of the proposed windows, it is difficult to fully assess the effect of them on the significance of the CA and the setting and significance of the listed buildings, or the scale of any harm.
21. Notwithstanding this, given the prominence of the appeal property, the introduction of contemporary materials and any alteration to the profile of the windows would be readily apparent from within the CA and the setting of the listed buildings, including the important view of St Giles' Church spire. The harm resulting from the proposal to the architectural integrity of the appeal property would subsequently erode the significance of the CA and historic townscape setting of the listed buildings. The proposal would therefore neither preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area nor would it preserve the setting of the listed buildings.

22. Accordingly, in the absence of substantive evidence to the contrary, based on the information before me, the proposal would result in, at the very least, moderate harm to the significance of the CA and the setting and significance of the listed buildings. It would therefore conflict with Policies CC7, EN1 and EN6 of the Local Plan. It would also conflict with Policy EN3 of the Local Plan, which seeks to conserve and enhance the special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas, by among other things, restoring original building features.

Heritage balance

23. The harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets would be less than substantial. As such, Paragraph 215 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires this harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
24. In this case, the proposed windows would improve the energy efficiency of the appeal property. While this would be a meaningful benefit, its contribution to mitigating climate change would be modest. I therefore afford it moderate weight.
25. I appreciate that the improvements in energy efficiency would also benefit the occupants of the appeal property in terms of increased warmth and reduced energy bills and would likely require less ongoing maintenance. Nonetheless, these benefits are largely private. There is also no substantive evidence before me that dismissing the appeal would risk the future long-term condition of the building or the continuation of its existing residential use.
26. It may be that the degree of harm to the significance of the CA and setting and significance of the listed buildings would not be substantial. Nevertheless, Paragraph 212 of the Framework gives great weight to the conservation of the designated heritage assets, irrespective of whether any harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm. In this case, the modest public benefits would therefore not outweigh the harm that I have identified to the significance of the CA and listed buildings.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

27. I have found that, for the reasons above, in the absence of evidence to the contrary and based on the information before me, the proposal would harm the significance of a non-designated heritage asset and would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, which is not outweighed by public benefits. The moderate benefits of the proposal in terms of improving the energy efficiency of the building and reducing ongoing maintenance do not outweigh this harm.
28. Accordingly, the proposal would conflict with the development plan, read as a whole. Having had regard to all material considerations, it has not been demonstrated that there are any of sufficient weight to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with it. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Hannah Guest

INSPECTOR