



Reading
Borough Council
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**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990
APPEAL UNDER SECTION 78**

**APPEAL BY BERKELEY HOMES (OXFORD & CHILTERN) LTD AGAINST THE DECISION
BY READING BOROUGH COUNCIL TO REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION FOR
Demolition of existing structures and erection of a series of buildings ranging in height
from 1 to 11 storeys, including residential dwellings (C3 use class) and retail
floorspace (A3 use class), together with a new north-south pedestrian link, connecting
Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road
AT
55 Vastern Road, Reading, RG1 8BU**

**INSPECTORATE REFERENCE: APP/E0345/W/21/3276463
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL REFERENCE: 200188/FUL**

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

BRUCE EDGAR, FRSA

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ON BEHALF OF READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

Date: September 2021

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Qualifications, Experience and Declaration

Bruce Edgar, FRSA, Reading Borough Council, Conservation & Urban Design Officer (CUDO)

- Full member IHBC;
- M. Philosophy (Architectural History) Uni. of Wales;
- B. Architecture (Hons), Uni of NSW;
- Corporate Member Planning Institute Australia (Urban Design Chapter);
- Member of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites - UK), World Heritage Committee (since 2009). Experience in the UK includes:
- Former Senior Urban Designer, (Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, 2006 -2009), and Policy Advisor (English Partnerships) working on Collaborative Design Workshops / Enquiry by Design, for Masterplans and Regeneration schemes for historic environments with Local Councils and developers;
- 2015 - 2021, worked as Conservation and Urban Design Officer at the following Councils: LB Redbridge, LB Tower Hamlets, LB Wandsworth, LB Richmond, LB Enfield and Reading BC;
- Master of Philosophy (Classical British Architectural History 1650 - 1850), Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture 1997-2003.
Conservation experience in Australia includes:
- 13 Years as a Specialist Planner Architect, Heritage Branch, NSW Department of Planning; Including assessing and advising on conservation areas and assessing planning applications of statutory listed buildings; writing guidelines and advice on heritage planning and practice;
- 6 years as a conservation architect in private practice, preparing heritage statements, including 3 years as an expert heritage advisor.
- A member of ICOMOS Australia since 1990, including contributing to different versions and evolution of the Australian Burra Charter, which has been adopted for guidance in Scotland.

1. Introduction and Scope of Evidence

- 1.1 This proof of evidence is supplied in support of and in addition to the Council's Heritage Statement of Case (SoC) (Appendix L) in respect of Reason for refusal 5. In accordance with guidance within the Inspector's Pre-Conference Note, unaltered elements of the Heritage SoC are not repeated here.
- 1.2 In terms of coverage, I provide no changes to the policy section of my Heritage SoC, although Section 4 below briefly touches on some policy aspects in terms of heritage significance vs. benefits, but these matters are comprehensively discussed in Mr. Markwell's Planning SoC. In part, I make commentary regarding the statements and statements that the Appellant has attributed to 'the Conservation Officer'. For clarification, these concern the comments of the previous conservation/historic buildings consultant, Mr. Jonathan Mullis, who provided assistance to the Council at pre-application and application stage.
- 1.3 Since the publication of the Council's Heritage SoC, there has been an agreed SoCG and therefore this Proof will refer to elements of common ground and 'uncommon ground' where relevant.

2 Significance of the Heritage Asset

Introduction

- 2.1 An aspect of Uncommon Ground (SoCG 8.19) is, “*the level of significance of the locally listed building*”. The Council’s Heritage SoC explains that the building is of high significance. The Appellant’s case is that the building has limited significance and that as a consequence, the total loss of the building would result in limited harm. This section of this proof will therefore further examine the elements of significance of the building and provide further commentary on the Appellant’s assertions.

The importance of the architect, FW Albury

- 2.2 At paragraph 8.20 of the SoCG it is a matter of uncommon ground “*whether Albury designed the locally listed building*”. Paragraph 3.25 of the Council’s Heritage SoC rebuts this, as there is no evidence that it was anyone else. It appears that the distinction which the Appellant is attempting to draw is whether Albury produced the drawings or was it someone in his company.
- 2.3 The Council considers it to be a moot point as to whether Albury *himself* actually designed the building, or whether it was someone in his company who actually produced the drawings, which is likely, and to Albury’s instruction. The Principal of the firm rarely does the drawings. Either way, given that Albury was a founding member of the Electric Supply Company, it is reasonable to assume that he took a very personal interest in putting his/his firm’s own stamp on the Works with the intricate entrance/lodge building, rather than producing simply a utilitarian building. This building was the ‘public face’ of the electric supply company. There appears to be some difference of opinion between the various heritage experts

recently involved with this building as to the precise influences on the architectural style, but it is clear that this was an eclectic blend of architectural styles.

- 2.4 In the same way that many buildings are, for instance ‘by’ (attributed to) Nash or Waterhouse, they are likely to be designed by an architect in the company and not the architect themselves. At paragraph 7.82 of the SoCG it is stated that there is dispute between the parties as to whether Albury himself designed the building but for the reasons set out above, there is considered in fact to be no argument that this is an ‘Albury building’. Paragraphs 3.17 and 3.20-3.24 of the Council’s Heritage SoC explains the importance of Albury and his work. The architect, the quality of his work - on this and other buildings - and his wider influence, are all key elements of the high level of the building’s heritage significance. The Appellant dismisses this as a mere ‘minor work’ by notable architect, but I do not accept this. Just as minor work by Nash or Waterhouse could be considered to be of high heritage significance, so too is this building, being the work of notable architect Albury, of high significance.

Value of the locally listed building in terms of its completeness

- 2.5 The Appellant considers that the building’s condition is a limiting factor in its value. However, the external works which have been set out in paragraph 2.5 of Mr Weeks’ Heritage SoC are largely reversible, minor works. The key internal features are not stated, but nibs of previous walls, chimney breasts, and cornices are present. His assertion that “*the building’s local heritage value is limited to the front façade*” is his own. This is not the position of the former historic buildings/conservation consultant or myself and as can be seen from the local listing criteria for selection (my Heritage SoC Appendix 6), the attributes of the building are in fact various.
- 2.6 At paragraph 2.6 of Mr Weeks’ SoC, the example of No. 3 Craven Road in Reading is given as a much more complete building associated with an identified and notable

local architect and he considers it to have more value. It is worth noting that the Borough's locally listed buildings are varied in terms of their historical associations, architects, architectural style and indeed level of completeness but for the reasons above and as also set out in my SoC. The Appellant has not accepted the significance of the locally listed building and I dispute this. The status of the building as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) is agreed (SoCG paragraph 7.74).

- 2.7 Paragraph 4.2 of Mr. Weeks' SoC contains a number of points regarding the value of the locally listed building, many of which I have already responded to. With reference to guidance in GPA Note 2 and the NPPF, all indications are of a high level of significance. As the Council's Heritage SoC sets out in some detail at paragraphs 3.16-3.25, the locally listed building possesses historic interest through social and industrial importance (paragraphs 3.16-3.19), architectural and stylistic interest (paragraphs 3.20-3.21), and further, the work is by a notable local, and indeed, regionally important architect (paragraphs 3.22-3.25). The building is considered to be all the more important by the redevelopment of the rest of the site because it would provide a tangible link with the past.

Other discussions regarding significance and value of the NDHA

- 2.8 In relation to the discussion as to the value to be placed on the NDHA (whether the value is of the building itself or merely its façade, Mr. Weeks' paragraph 4.2), as has been explained, the words asserted to have been said by Mr. Mullis at pre-app stage are not verified or an accepted record.
- 2.9 Claims that Mr. Mullis stated that the value of the locally listed building is principally due to its façade is countered in the Council's Heritage SoC at paragraphs 3.27-3.29 and 3.38. From 2.8 of Mr Weeks' SoC it is not agreed that Mr. Mullis stated that the key part of the locally listed building in heritage terms was

the front façade. In any event, the façade examples presented in the Appellant's DAS (and critiqued at paragraphs 3.48-3.50 of the Council's Heritage SoC) are not comparable to this appeal situation. This building is an intricate, compact, entrance building, of local interest and sound construction and appears capable of incorporation into a redevelopment scheme.

2.10 At paragraph 7.74 of the SoCG, the Appellant does not dispute the status of the building in local listing terms (that it is therefore a Non-Designated Heritage Asset). That it has significance is therefore accepted, but for the reasons set out above, the significance of the building is high, not 'relatively low', as the Appellant opines, as each of the reasons for concluding such are flawed. The setting is not a constraint, nor is its condition.

2.11 At paragraph 3.53 of the Council's Heritage SoC it is stated that the partial loss of the asset - i.e.. were there a *suitable* façade retention scheme presented - would constitute less than substantial harm, but still a medium to high level of harm would result. The conclusion of the Council's SoC is that the significance of the locally listed building is high and therefore the total loss of eradicating the Heritage Asset in the appeal scheme would result in a substantial level of harm.

Considerations for inclusion of the locally listed building within the redevelopment scheme

2.12 I now return to the issue of whether a convincing case has been made by the Appellant not to include the locally listed building within the redevelopment proposal. Such a case would include a full understanding of the scale, structural stability and adaptability to change of the building itself. The Appellant has not shown that the dimensions, condition and overall functionality of the building mean that it is wholly or partly (façade) incapable of retention. The following section of this proof suggests that there are concerns within the Appellant's assumptions,

particularly in the way the adaptability of the building has been rejected on flooding grounds and the assessment of the scale of the building itself.

- 2.13 In this situation, the applicant's DAS (page 37 'option studies') cannot be relied on to have accurately picked up the dimensions of the locally listed building and therefore correctly assessed whether it is capable of inclusion within the redevelopment scheme, as there are no indications in the DAS of the redevelopment scheme 'responding' accordingly. Page 37 of the DAS simply shows the NDHA set within or adjacent to a large, blank building envelope. The focus of an initial scoping study should be identifying significant features of the building and a usual starting point would be setting horizontal and vertical planes for the window openings for the adjoining redevelopment scheme. At Appendix 1 I provide a sketch to illustrate this.
- 2.14 Ideally scoping should identify on more than just openings and note the key features of the locally listed building and for those to be used as reference points for the adjacent redevelopment. I would have expected the sections in the DAS to be much more extensive, scalable and accurate, so you could appreciate the detail of the locally listed building and properly work from the design cues. The façade scoping itself would only deal with two dimensions whereas a fuller study would pick up the dimensions of the building in 3D, rather than just 2D.
- 2.15 No real effort has been put into securing a meaningful design setting for the locally listed building, nor for a viable alternative use and this is perfectly possible, according to the Council's surveyor, Mr. Rumbold, who has considerable experience of adapting such buildings, including Albury buildings.

Conclusion

- 2.16 This section of the proof has described the building's significance in its own right and as a product of a notable architect. It is largely complete, adaptable but

importantly; it has design attributes which need to be *correctly recorded* to see if they can be incorporated into a redevelopment.

3. Whether the locally listed building is capable of retention and re-use

Introduction

- 3.1 This section of this proof expands on Section ii ('Retention and Re-use') of the Council's Heritage SoC which discusses the viability of including the locally listed building within the redevelopment proposals and in particular, whether it would be possible to overcome the issue of flood risk (paragraph 3.40).

Location of the locally listed building: 55 Vastern Road Options

- 3.2 Paragraph 2.7.1 of the Design and Access Statement (DAS)is entitled, '55 Vastern Road Options' and explains that a range of options have been explored for retaining and integrating the NDHA into the redevelopment. This section sets out the 'cons' (as opposed to 'pros') of retaining the building and I offer some explicit commentary here.
- 3.3 It is suggested that pedestrian access to the site is not clear. In response, the options assume there can be only one access/entrance from Vastern Road and then goes on to consider the limitations of this single access via the locally listed building. The DAS does not appear to consider all options of pedestrian access.
- 3.4 It is suggested that the location would produce a pinched / uncomfortable access into the site. In response, this assessment is influenced by the assumption that the archway must function as the sole entrance to the site from Vastern Road. As my main SoC sets out at paragraph 3.60, there are other secondary entrance options the building could be put to.
- 3.5 It is alleged that there would be increased views of the substation (retained SSE equipment). This fails to consider the potential for visual screening and landscaping along the boundary of the substation. It also assumes the main access route travels through the building.

- 3.6 It is stated that there would be no direct pedestrian route or views of Christchurch Bridge. In response, it should be noted that the appeal scheme fails to provide a direct route or view of Christchurch Bridge. The RSAF guidance points to a view of the River, not the Bridge. I note there are views of the bridge mast from Vastern Road (and northern interchange) to the right-hand (ie. eastern) side of the locally listed building, which would be unaffected by its retention.
- 3.7 It is suggested that the ‘urban marker’ is in the wrong location for the legibility of the entrance. This again assumes the locally listed building to be the sole legibility marker in views from Vastern Road when the proposed scheme can introduce further, possibly more significant markers (through taller/more prominent buildings, artworks, views etc.).
- 3.8 It is claimed there would be extensive inactive frontage. I dispute that there would be extensive inactive frontage as the main access/pedestrian link need not travel past the side and to the rear of the building as per paragraph 3.6, above. This is presumably assuming that the main access/pedestrian link must travel past the side and to the rear of the listed building, which for the reasons stated above, need not be the case.

Other limiting factors vs. positive attributes

- 3.9 The Appellant’s position is that flood risk is a key limiting factor to the re-use/inclusion of the building, however, in my opinion, these matters do not appear to have been looked at carefully enough. Notwithstanding this failure to clearly demonstrate to the Council’s satisfaction that the building is not capable of inclusion/re-use, this matter has been examined in more detail with an external inspection of the building, and the results of this inspection and the plans have also been assessed by the Council’s in-house Surveyor, Mr. Chris Rumbold (a Senior Surveyor in the Council’s Corporate Property Services section). Mr. Rumbold has provided a separate proof in this regard.

3.10 Paragraph 2.7.4 of the Appellant’s Design and Access Statement (DAS) states:

“2.7.4 Building Retention / Demolition Flood Risk Analysis

Floor levels within the retained locally listed building are below that of the proposed recommended flooding site level of 38.60m AOD therefore the ground floor of the locally listed building would not be suitable for residential use and as such would require substantial elevational adjustments at low level further damaging the existing facade.”

3.11 At paragraph 3.40 of my Heritage SoC I say that options in terms of engineering works have not been set out by the Appellant. As can be seen in the proof by Mr. Rumbold, the works required could be relatively minimal (if the ground floor were allowed to be inundated/flooded) or involve a combination of a suspended floor and some kind of lift.

3.12 In paragraph 3.60 of my Heritage SoC I introduce some key attributes and alternative use options. However, in considering the adaptability of the building it would be worth setting out that there are many general positive features of this building’s viability for inclusion/re-use:

- The building is structurally sound. This partly merited its local listing designation, and its continued use until recently meant that the building has been maintained and consequently the heritage statement does not highlight any notable issues either.
- The ground floor-to-ceiling height at ground floor is 3.2m which is very generous, allowing scope to achieve raised floor levels, if required.
- As is evident, the building has a flat roof (with parapet). Therefore externally, there would appear to be the opportunity to adjust first floor levels too, up to the top of the parapet level and no pitched roofs would need to be removed/accommodated as part of any inclusion for a structure on top (see sketch). Were the redevelopment to include building above the NDHA, it could therefore pick up on the stylistic qualities of the locally listed building and in particular if the arch was used as an entrance, this could have many benefits to the design of the overall façade of the development.

- Its last use was as commercial offices this could be continued (as set out at paragraph 3.40 of the Heritage SoC), or a variation of this use may be perfectly suitable, such as a residential concierge.

3.13 It is my contention that the kinds of opportunities for change afforded by the above positive features are likely to be acceptable to the character of the locally listed building and not result in significant harm to it and would allow its qualities to continue to be celebrated and appreciated.

Accuracy of the material presented

3.14 From an external site inspection and then a study of the various plans with Mr. Rumbold, it has become clear that there are various inaccuracies/inconsistencies within the submitted application material, and this should be brought to the Inspector's attention. The Council has presented these queries to the Appellant and their responses are set out at Appendix 2 of Mr. Rumbold's proof.

3.15 Of particular note is the way the building is portrayed in the cross-section (section A-A on p. 41 of the DAS) which shows the flood level 'overtopping' the ground floor cill level. For the reasons set out in the Appendices to Mr. Rumbold's proof, this appears to be incorrect and the Appellant describes the section drawing as not to scale and illustrative only. However, given that DASs are supporting information which underpins the planning application, it is of concern to be advised that this image should be disregarded. Further, this does not sit well with the statement in paragraph 6.84 of Mr. Taylor's design SoC:

"6.84. Policy CR11g also highlights the need for proposals to take account of flood mitigation. The existing finished floor level of the building is 300mm below required level from FRA, and this was also explored and discounted within the Design and Access Statement due to the required elevational adjustments to the façade in order to make this compatible with the changes in internal levels behind."

3.16 Mr. Taylor discounts residential use on the basis of the finished floor levels being below the flood level. However, Mr. Rumbold does not necessarily rule out

habitable space, if a suspended floor were to be inserted, which would bring the floor up to the same level as in the rest of the appeal scheme. 2.7.6 of the DAS notes the flood level issue, but I do not consider that the statement that elevational adjustments are necessary is correct. Firstly, this has not been proven to be necessary/related to the flooding issue and secondly, Mr. Rumbold considers that the elevations can be retained and the floor levels adjusted successfully within the building.

3.17 With reference to the submission within Mr. Rumbold's statement and the site survey, it appears that the section is incorrect in that it appears to have the front façade of the building set 0.5m lower than in real life. The Appellant's existing plans do not include a 'to scale' section plan through the building (and to correctly pick up on the various attributes of the heritage building I would normally have expected a 1:20 section, as heritage buildings are usually more detailed than more modern buildings). The section in the DAS appears to give the misleading impression that the flood level is a lot higher than it is at the façade of the building (as it would overtop the window cill). In my view, the error would have been obvious if the original planning application had been accompanied with a scaled, verified section.

3.18 The statement in paragraph 2.7.4 of the DAS suggesting "*substantial elevational adjustments would be required*" must be treated with caution, in my view. As can be seen from the actual flood level for instance, it appears it would be possible to conceal the false suspended floor that Mr. Rumbold describes in his evidence behind the low wall under the projecting bay window. Admittedly, this would mean that ground floor windows are going to be quite low in the room, but this is a design aspect that has not been given consideration and the retention of the façade as an option has been unduly dismissed. Quirks such as this are part of the

design challenge that Mr. Rumbold encounters frequently when dealing with adaptations to heritage buildings.

Opportunities for re-use and retention of the building

- 3.19 In paragraph 3.43 of my main SoC I suggest that the streetscene presence of the locally listed building could be enhanced. The above discussion sets out the general attributes of the building but notes the presentation issues in the DAS. These issues should be taken into account when drawing conclusions as to the opportunities for reuse and retention of the building as presented by the Appellant.
- 3.20 Assuming that the first floor has been correctly surveyed (although the floor to ceiling heights of the ground and first floors in the DAS section appear to have perhaps been accidentally reversed), the first floor existing plan has a floor to ceiling height of 2.9m, which again, is quite generous. The first floor of the building may or may not be required in any re use but there would seem to be scope for moving around the floor levels at the current first and roof levels if needed, meaning this building could in fact be quite adaptable. The high floor-to-ceiling heights, structural soundness and flat roof would all appear to be good starting points for inclusion of a building and a building which is of itself a gateway building would also appear to be a design advantage in giving it a purpose, rather than inclusion 'for the sake of it'. The DAS at 2.7.1 does not mention the floor levels of the building as a constraint.
- 3.21 The current pedestrian doorway to the left (west) and the former doorway in the centre (bay) would leave a step up to gain the ground level and it is not proposed that this change in level be attempted to be negotiated in either of these locations. However, the archway area (3.44m in width as surveyed on site) was once open through to the rear (as shown in photo 1 of Appendix 1 to Mr. Rumbold's proof), and whilst it may not be possible to use this space as a primary entrance to the overall redevelopment scheme, it certainly offers opportunities to provide an

internal hallway/lobby and deal with the level change internally, given the area available and Mr. Rumbold discusses this in more detail in his proof. The Appellant has unfortunately not surveyed the ceiling height in this area of the building, but suspects that the height is likely to be slightly more than 3.2 metres and I would agree with that assumption.

3.22 The Appellant does not discuss the various uses which this building could be put to, whereas my SoC (at paragraphs 3.58 and 3.60) offers a number of options.

Therefore, far from all options being discounted, many have not even been acknowledged. It appears from the survey drawings that the current adjacent SSE office buildings have a floor level which runs through to the locally listed building and it has not been argued that the redevelopment could not operate in a similar manner if such a use or similar use were offered/considered.

3.23 It is submitted that the building as a whole is capable of inclusion in the redevelopment scheme, and it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated otherwise. Given the design style to be adopted by the developer of the 'Old Power Station', it would appear to be somewhat easier to include the locally listed building within the redevelopment than if the developer had opted for a contemporary scheme. Appendix 2 shows the relevant section of Block B of the appeal scheme next an image of the locally listed building. It does not appear from these images that the building could not be successfully integrated into the chosen warehouse design idiom for the development.

4. Heritage benefits of the appeal scheme

- 4.1 Please refer to paragraph 3.55 of my Heritage SoC where I provide comments on the aspects of heritage-inspired design features of the redevelopment proposal. I wish to add nothing further here.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 I remain of the clear view that this locally listed building has a high level of heritage significance. Since being employed as the Council's Conservation and Urban Design Officer (CUDO) and becoming involved in this appeal, I am intrigued by the work of Albury and the indications are that they may be other buildings in other towns that he designed that we do not yet know about.
- 5.2 The building is, in my opinion and in that of Mr Rumbold, capable of retention and reuse and it has not been demonstrated otherwise by the Appellant. I return to a statement in the original DAS which accompanied the planning application which states that, "*...the ground floor of the locally listed building would not be suitable for residential use and as such would require substantial elevational adjustments at low level further damaging the existing façade.*" The Council's building surveyor does not agree with this view. Further, errors in surveying and presentation of the building also cast significant doubt on the extent to which an accurate assessment of the inclusion of the building has taken place. As a result, there has been in my view been *no reliable demonstration* of the inability of the building to be included (wholesale or in part) or a consequent suitable re-use; neither has there been any demonstration that the changes required in order to keep the building/façade would be *so severe* to its historical significance as to render its inclusion unviable in heritage terms.
- 5.3 Regarding the heritage benefits (only) of the scheme, it cannot be said by any stretch of the imagination that the building is proposed to be 'reused' and the Appellant's design approach does not indicate what would have been the former presence of the most notable building on the site. No parts of the locally listed building are proposed to be retained or re-used (confirmed in the SoCG paragraph 7.74). In my opinion, this design approach should not be given any heritage weight

as any design echoes of the locally listed building are tokenistic (little more than the use of brick). The Appellant is trying to paint a picture of a sense of place for their redevelopment, but unfortunately the very best of the sense of place that is evident on site will be eliminated and largely forgotten, to the detriment of future generations. Where there are good-quality reminders of the past in an otherwise relatively monotone section of dual carriageway, these should be cherished and celebrated. In the words of the NPPF (paragraph 189) heritage assets (therefore including NDHAs and buildings of local historic value says paragraph 189) are an *“..irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.”*

5.4 I therefore confirm my earlier view in my Heritage SoC that the relevant section of reason for refusal 5 - that the proposal has, *“...failed to demonstrate that retention and reuse has been explored fully”* - remains an accurate description of the Appellant’s approach to conserving the locally listed building and as with my SoC, my recommendation is that reason for refusal 5 should be retained.

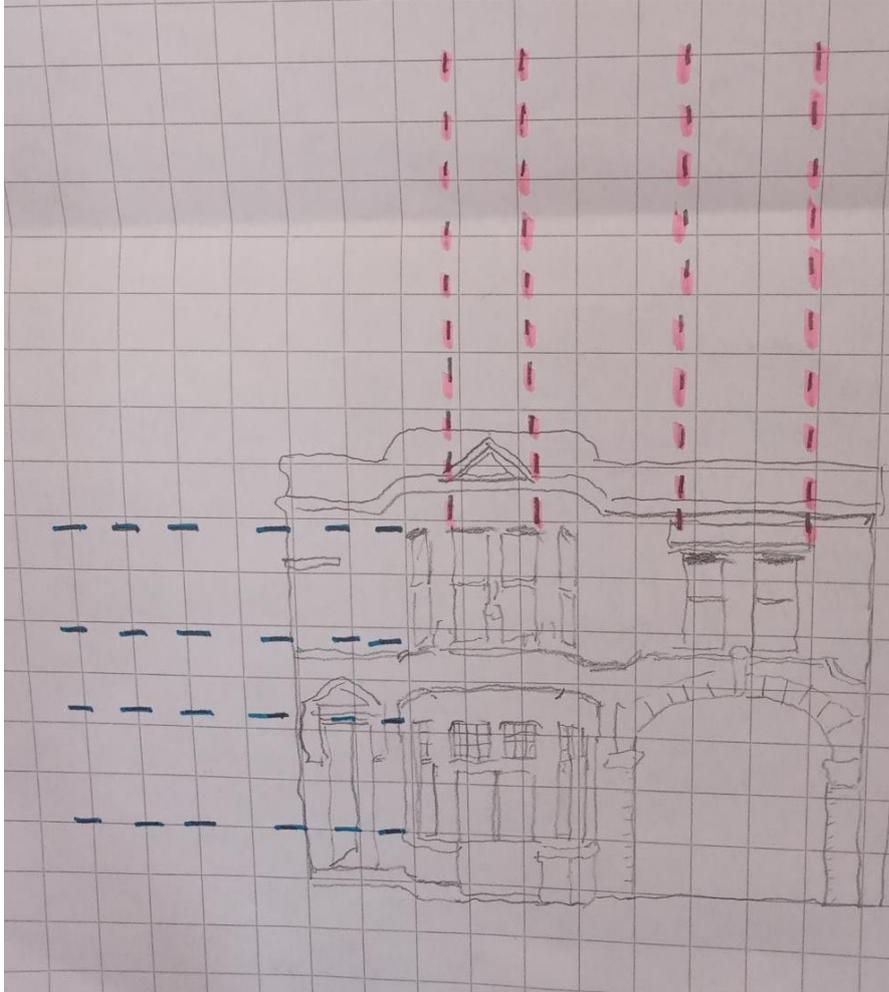
5.5 The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this appeal reference APP/E0345/W/21/3276463 in this proof of evidence is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institutions and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

Bruce Edgar, FRSA

Conservation and Urban Design Officer, Reading Borough Council M. IHBC M.Phil.
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Appendix 1

Sketch of the locally listed building (not to scale) indicating how design and stylistic elements of the building could and should have been identified and presented in the DAS, in order to inform the design rationale of the redevelopment scheme.



Appendix 2 'The Goods Warehouse' (Block B of the appeal scheme), extract from the Appellant's DAS 3.4.5 'Vastern Road Context Elevation' set against photo of the locally listed building.

