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## Decision Summary

**This building has been assessed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest. The asset currently does not meet the criteria for listing. It is not listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended.**

**Name:** 55 Vastern Road

**Reference Number:** 1480955

## Location

Reading, RG1 8BU

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

**County:**

**District:** Reading

**District Type:** Unitary Authority

**Parish:** Non Civil Parish

**National Park:** Not applicable to this List entry.

**Decision Date:** 17-Mar-2022

## Description

### Summary of Building

The former entrance range of the Reading Electric Supply Co Ltd works, comprising an office and vehicular access with accommodation over, built in the early-C20 to the designs of F W Albury or his practice, altered by about 1970 and again in the late C20.

### Reasons for currently not Listing the Building

The locally listed building at 55 Vastern Road, Reading, the former offices and entrance to the Reading Electric Supply Co Station, of 1903 built to the designs of F W Albury, is not listed for the following principal reasons:

Degree of Architectural interest:

- \* a modest building of some aesthetic merit but lacking the requisite architectural distinction in its composition, elevational treatment, use of materials and interior fixtures and fittings evident in listed buildings of this type and date;
  - \* significant loss of historic fabric and form has occurred including the remodelling of the original office entrance and doorway at the ground floor, and interior reconfiguration resulting in the removal of fixtures, fittings and plan-form.
- Degree of Historic interest: \* local historic interest is acknowledged for the association with renowned architect F W Albury and the provision of electricity to the town but the building is a vestigial element of a once much larger industrial site, the loss of which denudes the claim to national historic interest.

## History

55 Vastern Road is the remaining structure of the former Reading Electric Supply Co Ltd works, taken over by the Scottish and Southern Electricity (SSE) company in 1958; the other historic buildings on this industrial site have been demolished. The Reading Electric Supply Co Ltd was incorporated in 1892, with one of their directors being F W Albury, of the Reading architectural practice Albury and Brown, and the architect who designed the new buildings, which were constructed in 1894; the complex was extended in 1898 and 1926.

The site chosen for the electrical generating station was at Vastern Road, located between the River Thames to the north and Reading railway station and its sidings to the south.

The locally listed building is the former entrance lodge located at the east end of 55 Vastern Road. Mapping evidence suggests that it was built between 1897 and 1910; the Local List entry suggests a construction date of 1903. The

historic Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1932 indicates that at this time there was a building attached to the east side of vehicular entrance which was removed in the mid-C20. Historic photographs in the Heritage Statement accompanying the planning application indicate that overall the industrial buildings on the site were relatively plain with some architectural detailing to the gable ends.

The building attached to the west (left) of the locally listed building was probably constructed in about 1903 as a warehouse for the Company, also apparently designed by Albury, but was described in the 1910 Ordnance Survey (OS) map as a roller-skating rink before becoming a food store during the First World War, and warehousing in the post-war period. More recently it served as offices for SSE and there is no evidence of the rink or previous functions. It has been significantly altered externally and to the rear is a modern extension. Internally, all of the fixtures and fittings are modern, but some of the round, iron columns of the structure remain exposed on the first floor. This attached building is noted here for historical context but is not being assessed for listing.

The locally listed building comprised an entrance lodge with pedestrian access for workers and an integrated carriageway or vehicular entrance. Historic mapping indicates that it was set back from a forecourt with surrounding walls. It probably functioned as offices on the ground floor, with the main entrance at the central bay of the principal front. A separate entrance to the west of the bay accessed the superintendent's accommodation on the first floor. On the east side of the bay was a carriage or vehicular entrance.

By about 1970, the vehicular entrances were infilled with rendered blockwork to the south and timber-clad blockwork to the north. Other significant remodelling probably also occurred at around the same time, including: the main entrance was partially infilled to create a window: the entrance door to the first floor accommodation was replaced: the chimney stacks were truncated: the interior was reconfigured including removing the stairs to the first-floor accommodation: the lightwell between the locally listed building and offices next door was blocked in: a doorway from the vehicular entrance into the office was infilled; toilet and workshop facilities were inserted into the rear wings at the ground floor: a door opening was punched through the west party wall into the adjacent offices: a doorway from the vehicular entrance into the offices was infilled and in the rear wing toilet and workshop facilities were installed. On the first floor, the former accommodation was reconfigured including the removal of partitions, chimneypieces and infilling of some windows. In the late-C20, the fenestration was replaced with PVC-u alternatives; ramps were inserted for access and internal doors mostly replaced. The building is currently vacant (January 2022).

F W Albury (1845-1912) was born in Reading and attended Reading School of Art before working at the architectural firm of William and John Thomas Brown in the town. He was an assistant to the prolific architect James Fowler of Louth in 1875-1876 before returning to Reading to join his old firm. The architectural practice of Albury and Brown became a large practice in Reading. He was elected Fellow of the RIBA in 1875 (proposed by Alfred Waterhouse and others). He designed many buildings in the Reading area, a number of which are listed: Caversham Free Public Library (National Heritage List for England (NHLE) entry 1113456) and West Branch Library, Oxford Road (NHLE entry 1302878) both Grade II and completed in 1907. Although not attributed to him in the List entries, it seems the practice also designed: the Walter Parsons Corn Stores in Forbury Road (NHLE entry 1248738, 1890, Grade II) and the former National Westminster Bank in the Market Place (NHLE entry 1113535, 1876, Grade II).

## Details

The former entrance range of the Reading Electric Supply Co Ltd works, comprising an office and vehicular access with accommodation over, built probably in about 1903 to the designs of F W Albury or his practice, altered by about 1970 and again in the late C20.

**MATERIALS:** orange-red brick elevations, with blue brick dressings to the former vehicular entrance, and stone dressings.

**PLAN:** approximately 'L' shaped footprint with additional rear wing at the west, comprising a south-facing principal front with off-centre entrance bay at the ground floor, pedestrian and vehicular entrance to the east (right) and pedestrian entrance to the west (left) providing access to the former accommodation at the first floor. Reconfigured internally in the mid-to-late- C20 to form office facilities.

**EXTERIOR:** a two-storey building with a flat roof (on top of which is a modern metal railing), constructed of brick laid in English bond. The principal front has moulded, classically-detailed stone dressings across this elevation, notably to the off-centre, double-height bay; pediment and brackets over the west doorway, and impost and elliptical arch to the vehicular entrance. The rounded bay windows have moulded stone pilasters as mullions, but the once neatly curved windows have been replaced with angular PVC-u alternatives. There is a moulded stone string course above the ground floor and cornice beneath the parapet. The principal entrance at the centre of the ground floor bay retains its moulded stone head, but the doors have been replaced with a modern window above a rendered panel. The former entrance to the first floor accommodation retains its tiled floor covering but the door and fanlight above have been replaced. The former vehicular entrance has been infilled with rendered blockwork.

The east return is blind, but the rear (north) elevation has replacement fenestration generally in existing openings which have plain stone lintels and heads. A structural joist spans the former vehicular entrance, beneath which is timber cladding with a modern door and window at the ground floor. A late-C20 external metal stair is attached to the

rear wing.

INTERIOR: the main office space at the ground floor retains some matchboard panelling and joinery including skirtings, picture rails and cornices. This space may have been divided into two rooms historically, but has been opened up into one area. The chimneypiece has been removed. Two historic, large multi-pane sash windows face onto the former vehicular entrance, presumably to enable observation of pedestrians and vehicles from the ground floor room.

The former vehicular entrance is used for storage; there are simple cornice mouldings, probably introduced when the space was converted. The moulded impost to the entrance arch are partially exposed, and a projecting pier midway appears to have the possible scars of a hinge suggesting there was an interior gate. The window and blocked door openings into the ground floor room of the office have lightly chamfered surrounds.

The rooms to the rear (north) are converted to toilets and office spaces and appear to have no historic fixtures and fittings remaining.

The hallway which once led to the stairs to the first floor has matchboard panelling. Access to the first floor is via the modernised offices to the west as the historic staircase has been removed.

The former superintendent's accommodation at the first floor comprises rooms over the office, vehicular entrance and rooms to the rear (north). All chimneypieces have been removed from the front rooms apparently, but some joinery such as skirtings, picture rails and cornices remain. The room over the former vehicular entrance has been divided into two; there are in-built cupboards and a recess where the chimneypiece would have been. One modified original door remains, all others are late-C20 fire doors. In the rooms to the north few historic fixtures and fittings remain except for sections of picture rail, a door surround and the recess for a range. The window openings onto the lightwell have been blocked. No evidence of the staircase is apparent at the first floor.

## Selected Sources

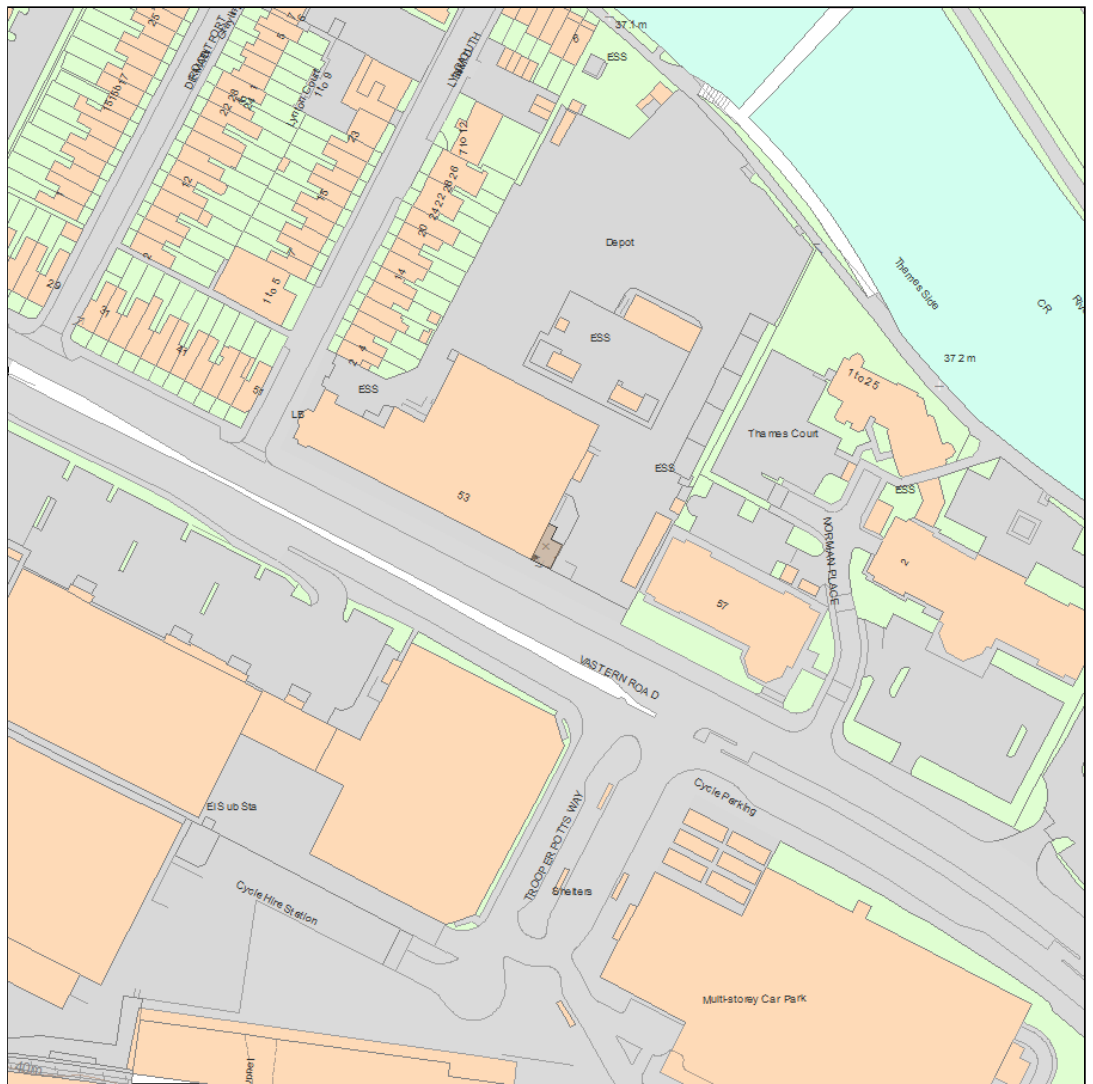
### Websites

Local List entry, accessed 2/2/22 from <https://www.reading.gov.uk/planning/conservation-areas-listed-buildings/locally-listed-buildings/#LL8>

## Map

National Grid Reference: SU7154774071

The below map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - [1480955.pdf](#) - Please be aware that it may take a few minutes for the download to complete.



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