

From: CADRA

Date: 20 July 2020 at 15:11:54 BST

To: james.schofield@reading.gov.uk

Subject: 200853 Former Nat West Bank, 7 Bridge St, Caversham, Reading, RG4 8AA

Dear Mr Schofield,

Caversham and District Residents Association (CADRA) would like to comment on this application within the newly extended St Peters Conservation Area.

We welcome in principle the proposed re use of the former Nat West Bank building. We have no objection to the proposed first floor extension to the rear. We welcome the tidying up of the rear parking but believe there is further scope for the detailed design of hard landscaping and planting to the rear of the building, both adjacent to the new proposed sliding folding doors and on the unused triangular area in the south west corner of the site. The backland area to this side of Bridge St has suffered in recent years from unplanned parking and dereliction and these proposals could form the basis for a new start for this part of the backland area.

We do have concerns in regard to the proposed alterations to the ground floor front elevation of the bank building. The building is cited within the Conservation Area appraisal as a building of townscape merit (pages 22 and 23). It forms a group with two other former bank buildings at the junction of Bridge St and Church Road and the appraisal states that It has a “ **strong frontage to the ground floor**”.

More generally the Appraisal adopted in November 2018 states in respect of SS3 Issues and vulnerabilities (page 2) that :

“ The loss of original architectural details, particularly front elevation and boundary wall details, is a cumulative and damaging problem. “

and subsequently in the same section:

“ Situated around the junction of Church Road, Church Street, and Bridge Street are three well detailed banks. One has already closed as a bank and evolving banking practice may continue to threaten their future. Care will be needed with design details, with ground floors being especially vulnerable to changes of use”.

Further on Section 7 of the appraisal ‘ Negative feature, issues and opportunities for enhancement ‘ states:

“ 7.9 The banks

The closure of one of the banks at the junction of Bridge Street and Church Road, and the planned closure of a second, is of considerable concern, because of their prominent location, important character and historical significance in the heart of the area. Any work to existing or former bank premises should respect the architectural character of their elevations, including those at ground floor.“

The applicant argues that the frontage to no 7 Bridge Street is not original to the building and that it was built when the building was converted to bank premises. Whether or not this is the case, the current ground floor frontage is robustly detailed with fluted timber columns and pilasters and substantial section timber windows and now forms part of the history of the building. The proposal is to keep the pillars and pilasters only and place them on new narrow plinths and insert new metal framed glazed shopfronts. There are no details submitted of the proposed new arrangement.

Leaving aside the practicalities of separating the columns and pilasters from a possible integral timber frame assembly and placing the pilasters on thin plinths, CADRA do not believe that adding a new material and inserting metal glazed shopfronts enhances the frontage. The proposal represents a loss of original architectural detail.

Given the proposed use of the ground floor front premises, the existing ground floor frontage arrangement would seem suitable without change, other than substituting clear glass into the existing timber frames.

We would suggest that the Conservation Officer be invited to look at the proposal. We have no objection to the proposal for a new shopfront to the adjacent building no 9 Bridge St.

In summary CADRA welcome the proposed new use for the building but object to the changes to the frontage to no 7 as currently proposed. I hope these comments are useful to you in your consideration of the application.

Kind regards

On behalf of CADRA

REPLY FROM ARCHITECT

NICHOLAS HILL THOMPSON

Architect

Nicholas Hill Thompson RIBA
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1904/NHT

28th July 2020

Planning

Reading Borough Council Civic Offices

Bridge Street

Reading RG1 2LU

Re: Alterations, 7 Bridge Street, Caversham, RG4 8AE

Planning Application Number 200853

Dear Mr Schofield

I have studied, with interest, the observation comment made by Caversham and District Residents' Association on the above application.

The Applicant is very grateful for the interest, support and suggestions that have been afforded by

CADRA for the application.

The concern expressed on the alterations to the ground floor street frontage to No 7 Bridge Street

is perfectly understood in the context of the significant position that the edifice occupies within the St Peter's Conservation Area.

However I think the comments indicate that there may be some confusion in the perceived timescale

of the original construction and subsequent alterations. I hope to clarify this.

As mentioned in the Heritage Statement a three storey building occupied the site in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The premises were in use as an optician and

jeweller for the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. At the time of the road widening, around 1913, the existing building was remodelled so that the three storey frontage was aligned with the straightened thoroughfare. The remodelling included the First and Second floors to the West, South East and North as indicated by the jolly Edwardian

brick and stone cavity wall construction. It also included the typical heavily modelled pilasters, capitals and signage fascias framing the wider Ground floor shop front and entrance and the side, arched, living quarters' entrance door.

Following the remodelling the use of the building continued as a jeweller and optician with the shop and workshop on the Ground floor, and associated living accommodation on the Ground, First and Second floors. The shop had its own entrance within the wider section of the Ground floor fully glazed shop front with an additional arched entrance door, to the living parts, in the narrower section.

The building was fundamentally a superior quality, although typical arrangement, shop and workshop with living quarters behind and above which occupied a significant position in the historic town of Caversham; so important as to be purchased and altered by the Council, and subsequently survive the relatively large scale demolition and redevelopment carried out all around during the road improvements.

In the early "fifties" The Westminster Bank obviously took a shine to the premises and the Ground floor was subsequently changed to bank premises. The typical lightweight glass shop front was duly scrapped in favour of the rather ascetic financial institution style frontage which has remained until the present day. Apart from signage etc that was the only alteration to the frontage that took place in the early "fifties". Fortunately the heavily modelled pilasters, capitals and signage fascias framing the wider shop front and the side entrance door have survived since the early twentieth century re-alignment.

The intention of the Applicant's proposed alterations to this section of the frontage between the main pilasters is to substantially re-establish a welcoming, lightweight shop front appearance whilst retaining the more prominent, robust and interesting architectural elements of the bank frontage. The use of dark slim metal framing is intended to endorse the significance of the mid century "bank" joinery within the much earlier twentieth century retail arrangement.

The CADRA comment refers to the loss of original architectural detail. There is no original architectural detail or even fabric other than what remains from the nineteenth century building

and is immersed in the heavily altered Ground floor internal (and possibly side external) walls. What remain, fortunately, are important architectural elements of some significant and fascinating alterations from major periods of the town's history which can be agreeably exploited

at yet another remarkable moment in the building's life.

Yours sincerely

N H Thompson

cc Fox Payne Associates: Matthew Payne

Caversham and District Residents' Association

CADRA REPLY TO COMMENTS BY JONATHAN MULLIS, THE ARCHITECT.

From: CADRA

To: james.Schofield@reading.gov.uk

Cc: "Mullis, Jonathan" <jonathan.mullis@reading.gov.uk>

Sent: Thursday, 30 Jul, 20 At 13:16

Subject: 7 Bridge Street, PAN 200853

Dear Mr Schofield

200853

Site Address: 7 Bridge Street Caversham Reading RG4 8AA

Description: Removal of ground to first floor staircase and enclosure, first floor extension at the rear and alterations to shop front at ground floor level.

I am writing on behalf of CADRA in response the email of 28 July from Nicholas Thompson.

Mr Thompson refers to earlier uses of the building and the alterations made when the junction was remodeled and the current bridge constructed in the period around WWI.

Researches in preparation for the reappraisal of St Peters Conservation Area confirm that by 1929, all three banks were in place. A harmonious group of post war buildings, they formed an important aspect of a credible retail and business area, demonstrating solidity and reliability and linking Caversham to Reading following the boundary change in 1911.

While it is undoubtedly true that significant changes were made in the early 20thC, it is disingenuous to suggest that this justifies a modern shop front for which no details are provided in the application. This takes no account of the important group value of the three banks or the important stage of history which they represent. See pages 1,2,4,10,22,23,26,49 of the appraisal document.

I hope this will be helpful to you in considering the application. I have copied Mr Mullis and would value his opinion.

kind regards

Caversham and District Residents Association