

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	252196
Address:	37 Broad Street, Wokingham, RG40 1AU		
Proposal:	Householder application for the proposed erection of part single, part two-storey rear extension, basement extension, 1no. roof dormer, addition of 3no. rooflights, removal of side wall and changes to fenestrations.		
Heritage Assets:	Nos 35 And 37 And Front Railings, 35 And 37, Broad Street – Grade II listed building since 1969 <i>Setting of:</i> Oxford House – Grade II Colburn House – Grade II Montague House – Grade II 30-36 Broad Street – Grade II 28 Broad Street – Grade II The Elms – Grade II* 24 Broad Street – Grade II 22 Broad Street – Grade II Tudor House – Grade II* (N.B. – not an exhaustive list) Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area Listed buildings along with conservation areas are classed as designated heritage assets under the NPPF (2024) and in the Council’s Local Plan policies.		
Site Visit Made:	Yes		

Summary Of Recommendations

Objection – refusal advised based upon harmful elements of application.

Comments On Proposal

The application proposes of a number of proposed alterations to no. 37 Broad Street, a semi-detached Grade II listed building located within the heart of the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area. Along with its attached mirrored neighbour - no. 35 - the Victorian townhouse of c.1850 is distinctive in the townscape, formed with an almost eclectic collection of architectural features combined together to form an interesting pair of buildings. No. 37 was used as

commercial offices until 2009 when it reverted back to a single residential dwelling. The proposals can be broadly summarised as follows:

- Alteration to the roof including box dormer and rooflights
- Insertion of new window to the side elevation
- Alteration and extension to the rear elevation
- Internal reconfiguration

No. 35 is located towards the north-western end of Broad Street, within a collection of historic buildings. This area of the town is remarkably well preserved – reflected by – and perhaps partly of – the concentration of statutory listings. This is a highly sensitive area of townscape and thus any proposed change must be appropriately considered and managed.

Whilst the building, may, as part of the wider townscape appear to be well preserved, upon a closer inspection it, regrettably, has not been well-treated in recent years. No historic windows or doors remain (some are uPVC and composite – a point to raised later in this commentary), nearly all the internal architectural features (save the staircase) have been lost with replicas (of varying degrees of success) installed. Given this, two points arise: the opportunity to re-instate appropriately detailed and formed architectural features, and the emphasis on the preservation of the remaining interest of the building.

The application was subject to an extensive pre-application submission as to as assess whether certain aspects of the proposals would be acceptable – such is good planning practice and strongly advised when dealing with the historic environment. Regrettably the advice has not been fully heeded by the applicant, with the principle of some of the proposals contained within the application – whilst altered from the pre-app – simply unacceptable due to the arising harm to the significance of the listed building and Conservation Area.

Roof

The roof form and appearance of no. 37 is effectively unchanged since the original construction, it therefore provides a strong contribution to the significance of the building. The architectural interest is drawn from the prominent, uninterrupted nature of the pitches, with the mirrored chimney stacks distinctly located half-way up the internal valley pitch – a design which, whilst not unheard of, is certainly unusual, particularly in reference to the butterflyed form. Save for the regrettable overlarge rooflight on the south-eastern pitch of no. 35, the pair of roofs are original in appearance and form, thus providing a high degree of interest to the listed building(s). For these reasons a box dormer on the internal pitch would not be supported due to the disruption of the original appearance and dilution of architectural interest. Whilst the scale of the box dormer has been reduced from the pre-application stage and is located further away from the primary elevation, it would still be visible from the street scene. As a presiding principal, harm to special interest should not be sought to become acceptable through lessened visual impact, a core conservation philosophy which is reinforced through the

planning process. For example, as the Inspector stated in the dismissed appeal APP/T0355/W/21/3283434:

“Whilst this would lessen the impact of the proposal on the wider character and appearance of the area, good conservation practice seeks to retain the integrity of historic assets whether they are publicly accessible or not. The lack of wider visibility does not therefore lessen the extent to which the proposal would harm the special interest of the building.”

It is, therefore, the principle of a box dormer, in any position on this building, which is unacceptable due to the arising harm. Given the additional visual impact the same principle applies to a rooflight on the front portion of the internal pitch.

Similarly, on the north-western pitch, given the unchanged form and high visibility of the ‘blank’ slate appearance, rooflights on this pitch would also not be supported. Again, such advice was given during the pre-application stage that due to the unaltered and thus sensitive appearance no insertion of rooflights would be considered acceptable.

Insertion of new window on the north-western flank

Conversely to the roof pitch above this wall, this elevation has been altered, and not treated in the best manner. The extant fenestration is freely placed (i.e. not in a strict classical arrangement) and thus the introduction of a further window, of modest size and appropriate detailing, would not appear unusual here and thus not seek to unduly harm the appearance or interest of the side flank. This, coupled with the relatively discreet nature of the position and proposed size, does not raise an objection.

Removal of the boundary wall as to create a wider parking provision

This wall appears to be of some age (notwithstanding some re-building in parts), perhaps early 20th century – an initialled limestone ashlar block is inset into the wall with ‘JHW’ carved, this may refer to J(M?) Wescott who was known to own the buildings in at least 1910. It is not clear whether the walling forms part of no. 37 or the neighbouring (of which it appears to be partly attached) Oxford House – clarification would need to be sought on this issue. Notwithstanding ownership or association, the wall being of age, ancillary in nature and in existence and association at the time of listing would meet the test of being curtilage listed and thus to be treated as part of the listed building (be this no. 37 or Oxford House). It appears to be physically attached to Oxford House, or at the very least directly abuts and thus the removal may have consequences on the neighbouring structure. The age and significance would need to be better understood, however it can be advised that at this stage the removal of part would not be supported due to the contribution to the listed building’s significance. Furthermore, fencing as a partial replacement would not be considered acceptable due to lower architectural standard of the form and materiality.

Two-to-three storey ‘tower’ rear extension

The proposed rear alteration will be considered in two parts, as, they will be effectively read as two separate elements. 'Tower' elements are not uncommon as part of original designs for 19th century townhouses, indeed the form and purpose arguably evolved from the medieval garderobe. Whilst nos. 35 and 37 were not designed with such an element, it would not be unusual or surprising to see this form and type of area to the rear built-form. Appropriately executed in material and detailing, it may even be able to be read as original/historic. This element would require a loss of some historic fabric (mainly the dropping of a window sill to form a doorway, some brickwork for toothing in and some subterranean brickwork), however these are relatively minor. As with the 'single' storey element, as the subterranean space already exists, the principle of going below ground can be accepted. This area likely formed the original coal store, however, is evidently in very poor condition fabric wise. There is also, whilst not exclusive to this proposal, a benefit in removing the metal fire escape and associated elements which clutter the rear elevation. Given this, no objection would be raised to this element subject to further detailing – including a parapet detail (further considered below).

Single/double height rear extension

As with the above, as the area of 'excavation' already exists, the principle of additional lower-ground accommodation can be accepted (although the existing volume would need to be slightly increased for practical purposes). The overall form and massing of the 'single' storey element is relatively modest and would allow for the rear elevation still to be clearly read and understood, even combined with the 'tower' element. These alterations, in contrast to the large, dominant, highly inappropriate rear extension to no. 35, whilst permanently altering the rear elevation of the building – which is relatively unchanged from original construction – are considered, as a principle, not unsympathetic to the host.

In terms of architectural detailing and material treatment, whilst the proposed red brick and black Crittall style glazing is not inappropriate, undoubtedly further architectural detail can be included as to allow for a greater degree of interest. And whilst such details can be secured under condition, it is important to accept the principle of a design standard at application stage. Consideration should be given to some form of parapet finish, for example through a moulded cornice or tile creasing with brick on edge. Currently the addition presents as a rather ordinary 'box', lacking in architectural interest. Given the listed status of the townhouse, it would be expected for any alteration to 'go the extra mile' in design terms.

Whilst not directly comparable, particularly in material appearance, the below images are provided as examples where similar concepts have sought to add additional architectural detail to a single storey addition:



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Balustrading

Whilst there is no overriding issue the principle of balustrading, there is concern as to the proposed design of glass and metal (stainless steel finish?) as this would appear too commercial in nature. The balustrading should be revised to either be painted (black or another dark hue) metal in the form of a 19th century ironwork or similar, or painted timber, or – subject to detailing – a truly frameless glass design, that has no handrail or vertical supports (this of course raises other issues), or indeed a combination of these, such as:



Internal re-configuration

Starting at the top of the building, the following comments are made:

- There are no fundamental concerns with respect to general re-configuration on the top level – these will of course need to be reconsidered as a consequence of the unsupportive nature of the dormer/rooflights. However, there are no concerns over the removal of the modern eaves 'boxing in' nor the insertion of stud room to form an en-suite at this level (subject to plumbing details). No historic architectural features remain here.
- Similarly, no concerns are raised over the insertion of a stud room as to create another en-suite bathroom, effectively moving the function from the neighbouring space. Again, subject to detailing and M&E information.
- The retention of the original ground-to-lower ground staircase is welcomed, and such a retention would seek to maintain a greater degree of the building's interest within this plan form.
- Concern still remains over the creation of the large aperture through the extant kitchen into the new element. Whilst the area would no longer be read externally, good conservation practice allows for the retention of as much as possible of the walling as to allow for the room(s) still to be read as

individual elements. The window itself is modern and thus no concern is raised over its loss. A greater amount of walling to be retained would be required as to demonstrate the previous room form and avoid the 'vast openness' of the space. The down stand is noted and welcomed, with a section drawing required to demonstrate this, however the nibs should be greater, of at least 100cm each side of the opening.

Other points arising

As noted above, the building contains very little historic fabric with many architectural features of a lower standard than would be expected. There is, therefore, the opportunity to reinstate, where appropriate, architectural features and detailing.

More specifically, it is noted the front door has been replaced with an inappropriate composite door. From the available evidence, this appears to have occurred between July 2017 and May 2018. The previous door appeared to be the original 19th century and thus its loss is highly regrettable. Similarly, the sash windows to the lower ground floor appear to have been replaced with inappropriate uPVC units between September 2016 and July 2017. Whilst it is understood such changes were not undertaken by the current owner, both these elements need to be addressed, as they are unlawful alterations which have sought to harm the significance of the listed building. Appropriately detailed replacements have been proposed as part of this application, which, of course, is welcomed. However, it must be noted the positive aspects of such do not outweigh the issues and identified harm to the significance of the listed building. Replacement of the door and windows are not exclusive to the proposals and may be subject to enforcement action at any time.

In the extant kitchen, and proposed dining room, the chimney breast has been altered as to accept the range cooker. The size and form of this opening does not tally with historic plans and thus this may have been altered unlawfully. Notwithstanding this, there is an opportunity to reinstate an aperture of correct proportion and fire surround of appropriate detailing as to further benefit the building. Such details could be conditioned.

In conclusion, whilst elements of the application are acceptable, the principle concerning alteration to the roof cannot be overcome. Amendments are required to other components as to become acceptable. And whilst there are benefits to the application, these are not exclusive to the proposals, and do not seek to outweigh the identified harm.

The way forward

As above, the alterations to the roofscape should be omitted and amendment made to other elements as advised. If such amendments are not forthcoming it would be advised the application is refused based upon the arising harm to the designated heritage assets.

Conditions			
N/A at current time			
Date:	12/10/2025	Signed:	Roderick McDonald Built Heritage Officer

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