

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	250415
Address:	Shinfield Park, Whitley Wood Lane, Shinfield, Wokingham, RG2 9FW		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed redevelopment of site for flexible employment use (Use Class E(g)(ii)-(iii)/B2/B8) together with servicing areas, parking, landscaping and other associated works, including demolition.		
Heritage Asset:	Wider setting of Lodge to Meteorological Office and Lane End Farm House – both Grade II listed Listed buildings are classed as designated heritage assets under the NPPF (2024) and in the Council's Local Plan policies		
Site Visit Made:	Yes, perimeter only		

Summary Of Recommendations

No objection subject to condition

Comments On Proposal

The application proposes the demolition of Shire Hall, the Brutalist former County Civic Centre with the comprehensive redevelopment of the site as prominently form warehousing and logistics hub.

Designed by the County Architect Richard Paul, Shire Hall was conceived following the reconfiguration of regional administration with the Local Government Act of 1972. Construction work commenced in 1976 taking five years to complete with the building officially opened by the late Queen in April of 1982. With only a few exceptions, post-war civic buildings were designed in some form of Brutalist fashion – to a lesser or greater degree - as the style was seen as being municipally 'pure' and without unnecessary frippery or ornamentation of the past, an allegory for post-war positivity and efficiency. Ironically Brutalism become a symbol of urban decay with the utilitarian form and stark materials deeply unpopular across the country. Indeed, Sir Simon Jenkins noted in *A Short History of British Architecture*: "*Few styles in history can have been met with so many pleas from its users to see it destroyed.*" Despite the overwhelming negative association with the style, it does have its supporters and there are a good number of examples which have been added to the National List – indeed, some are even Grade I.

Within the opening summary of the applicant's heritage assessment, it is asserted

that” *“Shire Hall holds no heritage interest”* – although this is evidently contradicted later in Section 3.3 it states: *“Having reviewed the available documentary information and undertaken a site visit, it is considered that Shire Hall is of some historic and communal interest.”* Be that as it may, there is no doubt the building does hold some historic interest. There is social and communal interest, landmark interest (these criteria notably absent from the statement’s assessment), but also the built form and material usage. Whilst the style may be nationally unpopular, Shire Hall is known as local landmark – thousands drive past it every day. It would be wrong to simply dismiss it based on a pre-conceived notion of the style, or worse a pre-determined conclusion.

Having a varying degree of historic interest is not necessarily a prerequisite for preservation, it can – particularly in this case - more about recognising the values of the site and treating it accordingly. It is recognised – from a heritage perspective – the building would be very difficult to reconfigure to modern standards (although not impossible – see Mountbatten House in Basingstoke as an example), both financially as well as practically. Changes in demand for commercial space and other social economic factors have bearing on a site’s current and future function, as well as the previously mentioned general distaste for the Brutalist form. All this considered, whilst there absolutely is historic interest in the building, no objection is raised to its demolition. A recording condition is, however, advised – further detail below.

With respect to the proposal’s impact upon the nearest designated heritage assets – the Grade II listed Lodge to Meteorological Office to the northeast and Lane End Farmhouse to the southeast – both these building’s settings have been so heavily compromised by development, that arguably little, if any, significance is now drawn from their setting. Given this, no harm would occur to their significance through the proposals. Similarly, other assets within the vicinity which have a potential degree of intervisibility (for example the Grade I St. Mary’s Church in Shinfield – where, I believe, there is visibility of the site from the tower), arguably their setting is negligibly impacted or marginally enhanced through the reduction in overall height and concentrated mass.

In this regard, no objection is raised to the application from a heritage perspective. As noted above, given there is local interest in the building, a recording condition is advised upon any grant of planning permission and placed in the HER for posterity. Given the submitted heritage assessment has gone a long way in producing the required recording (photographs, drawings, description), the condition is not considered unreasonable and should not place undue burden on the applicant.

Conditions

No development shall commence on site until a programme of recording of Shire Hall has been carried out. This shall be to the equivalent of a Historic England Level 2 Building Record, as set out in ‘Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice’ (Historic England 2016). A report detailing the results of this record shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and subsequently submitted to the HER by the applicant.

Reason: In order to record the architectural and historic interest of the building. Relevant policy: National Planning Policy Framework Section 16 (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment) and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy TB24.

Date:

01/04/2025

Signed:

Roderick McDonald
Built Heritage Officer