

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	252302
Address:	URS Building, Whiteknights Campus, Earley, RG6 6BW		
Proposal:	252302: Application to vary condition 2 of planning consent 243128 for the proposed external and internal refurbishment, repairs and alterations consisting of replacement windows and doors; replacement roofs, including new roof lights, cowls and lanterns; installation of solar panels; concrete repairs; full mechanical and electrical services upgrade; erection of two external staircases; new detached bin and bike store, and hard and soft landscape and accessibility improvements. Condition 2 refers to the approved details, and the variation is for internal alterations.		
Heritage Asset:	URS Building – became grade II listed building in 2016. Listed Buildings are classed as designated heritage assets under the NPPF (2024) and in the Council's Local Plan policies.		
Site Visit Made:	Yes, for pre-app 251168		

Summary Of Recommendations

The application provides an insufficient level of detail.

The Built Heritage Officer wishes the applicant to seek an alternative fire-compliant solution that retains the existing screens or at the least replacements that accurately replicate the appearance of the existing.

Comments On Proposal

The proposal description recorded in the consultation memo and Development Control database is inaccurate. It appears to derive from the generic heading on the application form rather than from the applicant's stated intention. The covering letter (25 September) clarifies that the applicant seeks amendments to both the planning permission and listed building consent for the extant scheme to repair and repurpose the URS Building.

Under Section 10 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, listed building applications must include:

- adequate particulars to identify the building,

- plans and drawings necessary to describe the works; and
- any other particulars required by the authority.

Although the applicant has included numerous drawings covering the areas of change, the submission lacks the heritage information required to assess the impact of the revised works on the building's significance, as required by the NPPF (paras. 207, 212 and 213). A proportionate description of significance and assessment of impact is essential.

Previous heritage assessments by Purcell (under application 241744) identifies the stair cores and atria as areas of high significance for their material expression and contribution to circulation routes. The timber glazed screens, encountered throughout all stairwells, are noted as significant for their material consistency and visual contribution to the sequence of spaces.

The current justification for removing the original timber screens is limited to a single sentence claiming they cannot meet fire certification requirements. No supporting evidence has been submitted to demonstrate:

- why compliance is now unachievable,
- why upgrading the existing screens, as previously proposed and approved in 2024, is now no longer possible,
- or why alternative fire-compliant solutions were discounted.

During the on-site pre-application discussions (251168), several alternative configurations were reviewed, and Officers emphasised the strong visual contribution of the existing screens—particularly the horizontal timber banding, which reinforces the building's architectural language. At the time the architect was asked to explore alternative option with fire-resistant materials with timber veneer finishes to address compliance concerns that would allow the existing screens to be retained.

In response letter to pre-application, which had input from the Built Heritage Officer, the Case Officer expressed disappointment at the loss of original timber screens, acknowledging this results in further loss of historic fabric. However, a fire compliance requirement was understood. Of the options presented in the applicant's Timber Screen Options Study, Option 1B (five-panel configuration) was preferred for closely replicating the existing appearance whilst maintaining an appropriate glazing ratio (void to solid). The horizontal timber elements were expected to be replicated.

The newly introduced "half-leaf" door design was not previously discussed and introduces an unwelcome vertical emphasis, detracting from the established visual character.

Having reviewed the response dated 04/11/2025, to this application from the 20th Century Society, as the Council's Built Heritage Officer whole heartedly concurs with their comments in respect of this matter under consideration here.

As such without the adequate justification being provided as to why now upgrading the existing screens as previously approved is not possible and no suitable alternative approach possible would be possible that keeps the screen, no approval to replace the screens should be agreed to.

	07/01/26	Signed:	Keith Frost Built Heritage Officer
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