

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	250549
Address:	Red Cross Centre, 53A Denmark Street, Wokingham, RG40 2AY		
Proposal:	Application for advertisement consent for the proposed installation of 1 no. externally illuminated wall-mounted sign, 4 no. non- illuminated wall-mounted signs and 3 no. non-illuminated window manifestations.		
Heritage Asset:	Wokingham Town Conservation Area Wokingham Memorial Orthopaedic Clinic (Red Cross Centre) – NDHA Setting of Grade II listed Duke’s Head Public House <i>Listed buildings are classed as designated heritage assets under the NPPF (2024) and in the Council’s Local Plan policies</i>		
Site Visit Made:	Yes		

Summary Of Recommendations

Objection – Harm to heritage assets

Comments On Proposal

The application proposes a number of advertisements for a dental clinic which is to operate at the former Red Cross Centre (historically the Wokingham Memorial Orthopaedic Clinic) located on the bottom end of Denmark Street within the Wokingham Town Conservation Area.

What became the Wokingham Memorial Orthopaedic Clinic was once a much larger building. Originally constructed in 1856 as a Primitive Methodist Chapel and subsequently extended in 1902 with Sunday school annex. After the Methodists left, the building was used by the Salvation Army until they moved to the Gospel Hall on Sturges Road (of which they are still located) and in 1920 the Red Cross Committee determined to establish an orthopaedic clinic for the good of the town’s children. Initially located in the Town Hall, the clinic was established and dedicated to the memory of the men who gave their lives in the Great War of 1914-1918, and paid for by public subscription, the building was opened in April 1923 by the Marchioness of Downshire. Regrettably the main element of the Chapel was demolished and

replaced with an uninspiring 1980s office building, of which the application site includes part, but also the wholly remaining historic element – the Edwardian annex. This building, by virtue of its age, architectural and historic interest as well as the positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, the Red Cross Centre (limited to the historic element) is identified as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA).

The appropriate use of buildings – particularly historic ones – is, of course, to be encouraged. A dental clinic is considered a good and appropriate function for the building and location, and there is no central objection to the advertisement of the clinic through signage affixed to the building. However, any advertisement must be well considered and sympathetic to the host and historic environment. As the application proposes a number of elements, and it would be prudent to assess these individually:

- With respect to the main signage to be affixed to what is the de facto primary elevation of the 1980s element, there is no core objection to an advertisement in this location, there was after all the Red Cross sign in the location for many years, the removal of this, the parking sign etc. all will assist in decluttering the elevation. However, the proposed size is too large and would seek to dominate this area. The 1.39m by 0.995m should be reduced by approximately 20%, with a width no greater than 0.8m. There is a discrepancy between the measurements proposed on the application form and drawings – this needs to be corrected and be consistent. The overall design is though acceptable. However, clarification is required on the material – the application form states: ‘timber or acrylic’ – this needs to be specific. Timber would be the obviously preference, however an aluminium di-bond with a matt (low-sheen) finish would be acceptable. There would also be a preference for moulded border as opposed to a flush panel. The proposed trough lighting is not acceptable in both principle or detail. Unlike ‘late night’ establishments (such as public houses, take-aways etc.) which have a genuine need for a degree of illumination, a business which primarily operates in day light hours does not have such a need to signpost the establishment. As a general principle illumination should be kept to an absolute minimum within the historic environment, and whilst there are undoubtedly exceptions to this within the CA, and indeed on Denmark Street, these examples are likely to have been installed historically, within a previous planning environment, or without consent. As such, no illumination would be acceptable on this primary advertisement.
- There is no objection raised to the proposed window manifestations.
- The re-painting of the windows to a white hue is welcomed. The paint should not be of a gloss, but of a low-sheen finish.
- There is no central objection to the proposed signage around the entrance door, however the 4no. signs does present a somewhat cluttered effect. Consolidating the signs to 2no. – one either side as to incorporate the practice’s logo with the opening times/contact information into single longer displays would assist in reducing this unnecessarily cluttered aesthetic. Clarification on the proposed signage material and finish is also required. And whilst the proposed lighting is not acceptable, a small discreet fitting over the entrance door, as to allow for security/ability to ‘open up’ would not be of

concern.

- What is of great concern, however, is the proposed illumination of the historic part of the application site and the memorial tablet. This is a sombre reminder to those who gave their life in the Great War and should be treated with the utmost respect. Lighting it up in a manner as proposed is not appropriate. Whilst the intension of this proposal may be well-meaning, and in other contexts may be fitting, however it is not here. As noted above illumination in the historic environment should be kept to a minimum with a low level of luminosity. As such, the proposed lighting to both the memorial tablet and building should be omitted.

As Historic England's Street's for All, Advice for Highway and Public Realm Works in Historic Places (2018) advises: *"It is widely accepted that a sensitive approach, such as in relation to the positioning of lights or signs within a conservation area, can significantly improve the experience of residents and visitors. This is considered an essential element of good place-making. Too much clutter, such as a multitude of road markings or large flashing screens, can create impressions which severely damage historic landscapes."*

The application makes no mention of consultation with the War Memorials Trust, which should always be a primary consideration when making proposals affecting war memorials.

Given the above, the application as proposed is not currently acceptable. However, provided the application is amended in line with the points raised above, it may become acceptable.

If amendments in line with requirements outlined above are not forthcoming, an objection is raised to the application as the proposal would seek to introduce advertisements that, due to size and illumination, would be visually dominant and unduly prominent to the detriment of the streetscape failing to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area (S72, P(LBCA)A 90).

The proposals as presented would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Wokingham Town Conservation Area through the introduction advertisement and lighting which would seek to erode the established character and appearance of the designated heritage asset. (Section 16, NPPF).

Given the identified harm, the proposals would conflict with Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy and Policy TB19 and TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery local plan.

Conditions

N/A

Date:

31/03/2025

Signed:

Roderick McDonald
Built Heritage Officer

