



Emailed to: planning.enquiries@wokingham.gov.uk

04/11/2025

Dear Connie Davis,

Site: College of Estate Management (URS Building)
Ref: 252302 and 252389

Thank you for consulting the Twentieth Century Society on the above applications, to vary condition 2 of listed building consent 243128 and planning permission 243127 respectively at the Grade II-listed URS Building.

The Society objects to the variation of this condition because of the harm that will result due to the removal of the timber screens. The Society were engaged in pre-application discussions for this application.

Significance

The College of Estate Management building (1970-3) was designed by Howell, Killick, Partridge & Amis to house the College following its incorporation into the University of Reading. With its strong silhouette and distinctive form, this 'extrovert building' stands out from its context and forms an important point of reference on the campus. Pevsner's Buildings of England volume for Berkshire notes approvingly that architecture at the University 'reached a climax with Howell, Killick, Partridge & Amis's College of Estate Management of 1970-3, a linear megastructure that is at once rigorous and extravagant in its deployment of closely spaced concrete framing' (p. 80).

Constructed as a major new teaching building of four and five storeys, the building was designed to house two lecture theatres, tutorial, studio and conference rooms, and a range of other teaching spaces and offices. These spaces extend from a central spine accommodating circulation cores at its centre, sandwiched by long corridors. 'The concept is a linear stack of corridors and services, from which the rooms and halls jut out and step up in irregular blocks and groupings, precariously crowned by a small water tank.' (Pevsner, p. 461). On the north side, the open ground floor is sheltered by the overhanging floor above, creating a colonnaded undercroft.

The structure consists of a series of reinforced concrete frames throughout the length of the building. The major frames are placed in pairs at regular intervals, with the beam-ends projecting both horizontally and vertically and with uprights clasped between, giving the building its distinctive

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rugged appearance. In contrast with its red-ish/tan fair-faced concrete frame, it is clad in red-ish/brown pre-cast concrete panels incorporating a Thames Valley aggregate, giving the building a distinctive two-tone colouring.

Policy

The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024)** states at **Paragraph 202:**

‘Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.’

At **Paragraph 212:**

‘When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.’

And at **Paragraph 213:**

‘Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.’

The Society’s Assessment

It is unclear why the proposed approach to the screens as indicated in the listed building consent application documentation is no longer viable. As the **Design & Access Statement** for that application states, ‘the existing timber glazed screens are of high heritage significance’. The proposed scheme retained the majority of the existing glazed screens, with existing Georgian wired glass replaced with a new fire-rated clear glass, and the frames resealed with a fire-retardant coating. This condition variation application states that the existing internal timber screens are unable to achieve any fire certification – therefore, it is unclear why this approach was undertaken initially. Justification has not been provided for this change in approach. We would expect to see a fire engineer’s report justifying why retention of the existing timber frames is no longer viable, and why their viability has changed since the listed building consent application.

It is also unclear why the replacement glazed panels in the timber screens have been reduced from six glazed panels to five, why the timber frame dimensions have been altered, and whether the requirement for a ‘door and half’ approach for the doors to the stairwells has been derived from the change from six-panel modules to five-panel modules. The provided sectional drawings indicate that

the solid timber 'half leaf' will substantially change the appearance of these doors, by disrupting the continuous rhythm of the glazed panels. This will have the effect of impacting the architectural significance of the stairwells, which are regarded as significant elements of the listed building. This appears to only be introduced because of the unjustified proposed change from six- to five-panel modules.

We remind the applicant of parts **0.17** and **0.18** of **The Building Regulations 2010: Approved Document B (Fire Safety, Volume 2)**:

0.17 Where Part B applies to existing buildings, particularly buildings of special architectural or historic interest for which the guidance in this document might prove too restrictive, some variation of the provisions in this document may be appropriate. In such cases, it is appropriate to assess the hazard and risk in the particular case and consider a range of fire safety features in that context.

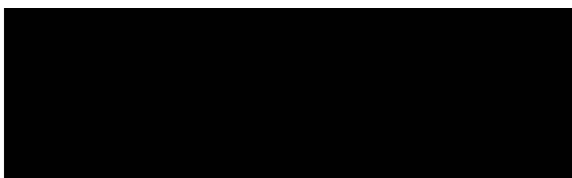
0.18 Fire safety engineering might provide an alternative approach to fire safety. Fire safety engineering may be the only practical way to achieve a satisfactory standard of fire safety in some complex buildings and in buildings that contain different uses.

It is unclear if a range of fire safety features that could mitigate the requirement for removal of the timber screens as per **Approved Document B 0.17** have been considered, whether alternative approaches have been considered as per **Approved Document B 0.18**, why the existing timber screens are no longer viable for retention, and why the replacement timber screens replace 6-panel bays with 5-panel bays, with the resultant impact on stairwell door design. In the absence of this information, the Society's assessment of this application for variation of condition 2 of Listed Building Consent 243128 is that **NPPF 213** has not been met due to a lack of clear and convincing justification for harm to the significance of the Grade II-listed designated heritage asset that is the URS building.

We would like to ask whether the local planning authority (LPA)'s building control officers can share their assessment of the scheme with the Society, within the context of **Approved Document B 0.17**.

Yours sincerely,

Gus Wray



Caseworker

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Remit: The Twentieth Century Society was founded in 1979 and is the national amenity society concerned with the protection, appreciation, and study of post-1914 architecture, townscape and design. The Society is acknowledged in national planning guidance as the key organisation concerned with the modern period and is a constituent member of the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies. Under the procedures set out in the *Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications – Notification to Historic England and National Amenity Societies and the Secretary of State (England) Direction 2021*, all English local planning authorities must inform the Twentieth Century Society when an application for listed building consent involving partial or total demolition is received, and they must notify us of the decisions taken on these applications.