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Our Ref: Whitley Library LL

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*13 September 2018*

Your contact is: **Steve Vigar, Planning**

Dear Mr Brooks

**NOTIFICATION THAT WHITLEY LIBRARY 205 NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, READING, RG2 7PX HAS BEEN ADDED TO THE LIST OF LOCALLY IMPORTANT BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES OF LOCAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

I write to formally notify you, as representative of the owner of the building, that Whitley Library has been added to Reading Borough's List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures in recognition of its local heritage significance. This follows requests from the Council's Valuer and separately from local residents.

This building meets the adopted criteria for adding buildings or structures to the list of buildings or structures with local heritage significance as set out in the Council's Sites and Detailed Policies Document 2012 (altered 2015).

In summary Whitley Library:

- has a prolonged and direct association with figures or events of local interest.
- has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Reading's communities.
- is representative of a style that is characteristic of Reading.
- has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials
- forms a group which as a whole has a unified architectural or historic value to the local area.
- is an example of deliberate town planning from before 1947.
- has a prominence and landmark quality that is fundamental to the sense of place of the locality.

### **Reasoning**

South Branch Library (now Whitley Library) was opened on Tuesday 2 April 1935 by the Mayor Dr G.H.R Holden. It was the first purpose built community building in the centre of Whitley.

It is a significant building in the development of the community of South Reading and was in place before many of the houses around it had been built. It pre-dates the nearby community centre opened in the 1940s and which now houses Whitley Library which has now vacated the original building.

Other pre-war community buildings in the centre of Whitley were Blagdon Road Nursery School opened in 1937 (still existing but much extended since), the Whitley Health and Maternity Clinic in 1938 and St Agnes' Church in 1939.

The junction of Long Barn Lane, Northumberland Avenue and Cressingham Road was seen as a hub for the area and the Library building was erected there, facing the roundabout. The building has a distinctive frontage, which has a round plaque inserted in the triangular construction above the entrance door with 'LIBRARY' embossed on it and a wreath surrounding the letters. The building has been extended to the south but that has not detracted from the look and shape of the original building façade. When originally opened it had a wooden fence around it which has now been removed and replaced by a low wall (see images in local studies collection BRN 33425 & 33440).

Behind the library is a Second World War ARP post or shelter. It is marked on a map of ARP posts in Reading Museum's collection and its position is clearly visible on the ground. Before any change in use of the site takes place this should be fully documented and investigated in terms of its heritage significance.

This whole library site is a significant local landmark of considerable community significance.

### Historical Association

The library building that has served the community for over 80 years since it opened in 1935. During the Second World War the library was an ARP group headquarters and there is still an underground post or air raid shelter on the site behind the library.

### Social Importance

The building was socially important as the local library which as well as providing books also held activities for the local community.

Most early Whitley community buildings no longer exist in their original form. Some, like the old Four Horseshoes public house, have been demolished and replaced with residential buildings. Some have been replaced with more modern buildings, for example the Health Centre. Some public houses, like the Northumberland Arms, have been converted into shops. The only other community building which continues to exist in largely its original form in this area is the Whitley Community Centre, though that has been extended and altered from its form when it was first built.

### Architectural Interest

#### a) Sense of Place

The style is characteristic of municipal and institutional developments in Reading at that time. Very few examples of this style remain and this one is particularly distinctive because of its façade and 'LIBRARY' in bronze letters in a cartouche over the entrance.

It has been referred to as 'the architecture of hope'.

When the library was opened in April 1935 the construction was described as brick, faced with two inch bricks. The architect (at this point) is unknown.

Although understated, the building exhibits the use of non-standard materials of high quality with particular attention to detailing.

The main symmetrical façade consists of a large projecting, single storey, gabled entrance porch of brick with stone detailing. Behind the projecting porch entrance is a two storey height, symmetrical brick gable with stone parapet and two flanking, flat roofed 'wings'. The gable has a central stone plaque with surrounding wreath and the word "Library" in bronze in typical Art Deco style font.

The brickwork is all well-built in Scottish bond (5 courses of stretchers and 1 course of burnt headers) and built in thin, 2 inch bricks with light mortar with sharp inclusions.

The porch consists of brickwork with an arched entrance built of sandstone ashlar with moulding and recessed doorway; the porch has stone surrounds around two flanking windows of sandstone with decorative squares in relief at the corners; the stone parapet the front gable is slightly concaved and continues around building.

The interior is largely 'institutionalised' with the only surviving features being some original doors.

Original cast iron hoppers and down pipes exist. Windows have been replaced in uPVC throughout.

The rear of the main building is constructed in the same materials but is devoid of architectural detailing.

To the right is a flat roofed extension in matching style (but thicker) brick in stretcher bond; the extension is not of architectural or historic interest.

#### Group value

i) The Whitley Library opened in this red-brick building on 2 April 1935 on the northern corner of Cressingham Road and Northumberland Avenue. It was provided at a time that the Council's housing expansion in Whitley had become very extensive particularly in Cressingham Road, the adjoining Shinfield Road estate and along Northumberland Avenue. The junction of Long Barn Lane, Northumberland Avenue and Cressingham Road was seen as a hub for the area and the Library building was erected there, facing the roundabout.

ii) The development of Whitley was a planned development which had several phases. The library represented the pre Second World War phase of development when urbanisation steadily encroached on what had been farmland. Other developments included the acquisition of Goddard's Farm for allotments (on Hartland Road) in 1930 and subsequent use of some of this land for housing.

Speaking at the opening Councillor A. W. Tudor chairman of the Public Libraries Committee said "*The town was well equipped with libraries, having the Central Library, perhaps one of the best in the South of England, libraries on the west and north, and now one on the south. They now only wanted one more, in the east, and if they could get that one the Library Committee would equip it.*" Later in the ceremony the Mayor said "... he would like to congratulate the chairman on the way the library had been equipped; it was a most charming place, and it would prove an acceptable acquisition to the Corporation property in that part of the town"

Both Caversham and Battle libraries are nationally listed Nos. 1113456 and 1302878.

#### Notes:

The site of the library also includes Second World War underground ARP post and/or air raid shelters which would benefit from further investigation and documentation.

Based on evidence currently available, the main *architectural* significance of the building is confined to the front porch entrance and main front gable with flanking elements. There is an absence of architectural or historic interest within the interior, right hand extension or rear elevation. *Social* importance (significance) has more to do with the site as a whole.

Future development proposals should conserve the non-designated heritage asset in a manner appropriate to its significance (NPPF para 184). There may be some archaeological significance associated with the ARP post which should be discussed with Berkshire Archaeology.

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Please find attached a general information sheet regarding the local listing of a building or structure.

There is a period of six weeks beginning with the date of this letter during which you may notify the local planning authority of any reason why you believe the building should not have been locally listed.

Comments can be made in writing to me at the email or postal addresses above.

Any comments received will be considered and you will be notified of any revision to the decision to locally list the building.

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Yours faithfully,

*SDV*  
Steve Vigar  
Principal Planning Officer

Building/ structure identification:  
Grid reference: E 472229 N 171065  
Buildings within red line on plan below

Cc Steve Hicks RBC Valuation Section  
Giorgio Framalicco Head of Planning Development and Regulatory Services  
Evelyn Williams  
Dennis Wood  
Church and Whitley Ward Councillors  
Cllr Rose Williams  
Matt Rodda MP

