

Planning Applications Committee

02 April 2024



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	LOCAL LISTING REPORT - Hemdean House School and Lodge
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Burcu Can Cetin, Conservation Officer
Lead Councillor	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Ward	Caversham
Address	Hemdean House School and Lodge, Hemdean Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 7SD
Recommendations	To agree that Hemdean House School and Lodge be added to the List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. To report on a proposal to add Hemdean House School to the List of Locally-Important Buildings and Structures. The report identifies the building as being of local historical and architectural importance and makes an assessment based on the Council's published Local List criteria for inclusion to the list.

2. Policy context

- 2.1. Reading Borough Council maintains a List of Locally-Important Buildings and Structures ('the Local List'). Its purpose is to recognise the buildings and structures which do not meet the criteria for national listing, but are nonetheless significant to the heritage of the local area. It was agreed by Planning Applications Committee on 2nd December 2020 that decisions on additions to the Local List should be made at PAC.
- 2.2. The criteria for considering additions to the Local List are set out in Appendix 2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019).

3. The proposal

- 3.1. A nomination was received on 17/07/2024 to add Hemdean House School and Lodge to the Local List. Consultations have been carried out in accordance with the agreed process, and this report sets out the recommended action.
- 3.2. Hemdean House School is a purpose-built school for girls constructed in 1862 together with a lodge located in the field of Hem Dean in Caversham Village, which was later commemorated in the street name. After serving as a school for 165 years, Hemdean House School was closed in 2024. On a prominent position, the three-and-a-half-storey large, detached school building is constructed of red brick and a design that includes classical details, while the 'old English style' lodge is situated at the entrance to the school grounds to the west of Hemdean Road.
- 3.3. The nomination form received for the building identifies the significance of the building as follows:

- 3.4. **Principle for Selection for the Local List - (b) 1840 - 1913: any building, structure or group of buildings that is/are substantially complete and unaltered and of definite significance:**

In 1859 a new girls' school was formed in Verona Lodge, Church Street, Caversham on a site now occupied by the extension to the telephone exchange. After purchase of agricultural land on the bank of the Hemdean Botton dry chalk valley, the purpose-built school for girls opened in 1862, renamed Hemdean House School with both boarding and day places. It remained in continuous use for education until 2024 and the original school buildings with fine architectural details are largely unaltered. As shown in the period images, the Lodge was part of the original construction and was occupied by the caretaker of the school.

Historic Interest –

(a). Historical Association

i. The building or structure has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person(s) or event.

The founding of a girls' school that went beyond primary education is of national significance, and Francis Knighton and his daughters took the lead in this. Knighton is a figure of considerable local interest (see below).

The fact that the architect was almost certainly Horace Jones of London is also of national importance, as Jones was the architect of Tower Bridge and the rebuilt Caversham Park after a fire of 1850 for industrialist William Crawshay. Crawshay and Knighton worshipped at St Peter's Church in Caversham and are both buried in the churchyard there. It seems highly plausible that Horace Jones would have been recommended to Knighton by Crawshay.

ii. The building or structure has a prolonged and direct association with figures or events of local interest.

Mr Francis Knighton (1803-1883) opened a school for boys in Reading ca 1826 in Gun Street, moving ca 1835 to Gun Street and then by 1841 to 23 Church Street where Charles Havell had previously run a boys academy. Ca 1849, Mr Knighton purchased Caversham House on Church Street with 2 acres of land. Previous occupants were Sir Rufane Donkin, founder of Port Elizabeth in South Africa and Sir Nathaniel Clissold. Caversham House Academy had properties on either side of Church Street with a connecting tunnel where pedestrian crossing is now. The school playground is now the site of Caversham Library and the classrooms, the New Testament Church of God and the Working Men's Club. The school continued until 1921. The garden at the front of Caversham House was sold to Reading Corporation to widen Church Street in preparation for the new Caversham Bridge. The building was demolished in 1965 but one of the Holm Oaks from the gardens remains in St Martins Precinct. A memorial window in St Peter's Church commemorates the Knighton family.

Mr Knighton had 4 daughters and started the girls's school to be run by his two youngest daughters. Matilda Knighton retired as Principal in 1926. Rosa Knighton married Ferdinand Charles Dermott, and was co-principal until the 1890s. Alice Olivey, a pupil at school from 1902, was principal of the school from 1926 until 1972, when the Knighton family finally relinquished their interest.

Hemdean House School has alumni of national significance:

Elsie Smith MBE (1881-1968) Missionary and nurse. She spent 33 years working with Maori people on the Whanganui River. Cited in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography; awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 1955

Lizbeth Webb – Born Elizabeth Sandra Horton (1926-2013) First heard on the BBC aged 16, the 'Champagne Soprano' became a star of stage and radio. Bless The Bride was composed for her, she starred in Guys and Dolls, and featured on the Goon Show.

*Babita Sharma (1977-) Former BBC News presenter, documentary maker and author. Having grown up in corner shops in Reading and Caversham, her book *The Corner Shop: Shopkeepers, the Sharmas, and the Making of Modern Britain* was published in 2019.*

(b) Social Importance: The building or structure has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Reading's communities:

The small school, which has remained largely unaltered, served Caversham and Reading from an era pre-dating the 1870 and 1880 Education Acts. Archived information relating to the school documents the Knighton's vision for girls' education from the mid-19th century within the school building.

The British Newspaper Archive provides evidence of the importance of both the building and what was provided: 'Terms which are moderate' provided for 'superior English education in all its branches. Modern languages, music, drawing, dancing...' The house and its hilly location, were stressed: 'The Premises stand on an eminence, are detached and very healthy...'

Academic work was entered for public exams by the College of Preceptors, with teaching provided by 'qualified staff and visiting Professors'.

There are strong local memories of the family which founded the school and its particular ethos. As testimony by contemporary teachers and pupils reveals, local people who attended the school as children frequently sent their own children to the school, through multiple generations. The size of the classrooms, as built for Francis Knighton, were an important factor in the school ethos. Hemdean House provided 'a school environment which was very happy for staff and pupils alike. (Anna Greaves, Senior School teacher, report in Caversham Bridge Community Newspaper June 2024)

Hemdean House maintained strong links with St Peter's Church (where Francis Knighton is buried), and a small side gate opens onto Hemdean Rise, making an easy walk to the church via the Mount and across Church Road. The school developed links with local businesses and charities, supporting Caversham traders by opening the annual Christmas Late Night Shopping in St Martin's Precinct with festive music and carols.

Architectural Interest –

(a). Sense of place - i. The building or structure is representative of a style that is characteristic of Reading..

The style of Hemdean School illustrates the prevalence of superior polychromatic brickwork with stone mouldings in and around central Caversham, where terraces of Victorian houses and 'villas' spread out from the centre. In Hemdean Hill and Hemdean Rise, for example, where such housing survives in a great state of completeness, these polychromatic brick terraces form the southern border of the school's site.

Additionally, the school and its lodge have been carefully sited in their hilly location, and this chimes with the careful siting of the polychromatic brick terraces in Caversham, which move up and down the hills and are contoured around the curve of principal roads such as Gosbrook Road.

(b). Innovation and Virtuosity - i. The building or structure has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials.

The architectural details of Hemdean House are very fine, with horizontal courses of cream brick against a red brick ground that visually tie into the stone detailing of the windows and doors. Above the windows, which survive mostly intact with their original configurations and even glass, are prominent keystones, illustrated in the appended photographs. A variant of Flemish bond brickwork has been used throughout the exterior of the original building.

There is a combination of individual windows with arched tops, a triple bay on the front façade, and a fashionable polygonal bay window to the south side overlooking the site of the formerly large conservatory, whose plinth remains in the ground. The sites of the original toilets, and in one instance an original water closet attached to the north side of the building, attest to the remarkable completeness of the school building. The block which originally housed music rooms survives, despite an unattractive 20th-century addition.

There are two significant fireplaces which remain inside the building along with several boarded-up fireplaces of simple design. The interior panelling and shuttering remain around the principal windows, and there is a very fine staircase of several levels as well as original floor tiles and panelled oak door with what is likely to be the original brass knob at the front. Finally, there are artefacts from the school's history and archival materials which survive, as well as paintings and prints documenting the school at various moments in its history.

(b). Innovation and Virtuosity - ii. The building or structure is the work of a notable local/national architect/engineer/builder.

The Reading Mercury reported on 18 August 1860 that the school was designed by H Jones. London. Horace Jones was active in Caversham at that time. He designed the School and the Parish School, which became the Caversham Centre for Adult Education, now Caversham Health Club. All the evidence points towards Horace Jones being the architect of Hemdean House.

Sir Horace Jones PPRIBA (20 May 1819 – 21 May 1887) was an English architect particularly noted for his work as architect and surveyor to the City of London from 1864 until his death. He served as president of the Royal Institute of British Architects from 1882 until 1884, and was knighted in 1886. His most recognised work, Tower Bridge, was completed posthumously.

(b). Innovation and Virtuosity - iii. The building or structure shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering.

The school's architecture is certainly progressive for a date of the later 1850s, as it displays the polychromy that was coming into fashion during this decade in part due to the architectural writer John Ruskin and the Oxford Style – for example, the Natural History Museum in Oxford by Benjamin Woodward and Thomas Deane (1855-59). Instead of the gothic style so popular in Oxford, however, Hemdean House displays classical features that were to reappear during the emergent Arts and Crafts Movement, which it anticipates in some ways.

It appears as though the brief of the school's architect was to build in a progressive style that was absolutely up-to-date for 1850s Britain, while working to a budget and keeping features simple. The major decorative features are subtle ones, such as the prominent keystones above the windows.

(c). Group Value - i. The buildings/structures form a group which as a whole has a unified architectural or historic value to the local area.

The significance of the girls' school for 165 years, from 1859 to 2024, and its integral link to Caversham House Academy in the heart of Caversham Village has significant historic value to Caversham.

The link of the polychromatic brickwork of Hemdean House to the slightly later terraced housing surrounding it has previously been noted.

Final Comments: *Hemdean House School, which is visible from Hemdean Road and from Balmore Walk, is striking building of architectural importance. The site with the Lodge at the bottom of the hill still evokes the school built for girls in 1862. The emphasis on the importance of girls' education was ahead of its time, and 165 years is a remarkable period for a school to provide continuous education. It leaves an important legacy. The legacy of the Knighton family who occupied Caversham House, Church*

Street for almost 100 years remains important. Their lengthy contribution to education at both Caversham House Academy and Hemdean House School deserves full recognition.

4. Consultations

4.1. The following were consulted on the proposed addition to the Local List:

- Multimedix Holdings Limited(landowner);
- Caversham ward councillors;
- Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee;
- Reading Civic Society; and
- Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA) and Caversham GLOBE (local community groups).

4.2. Responses were received from:

4.3. Stephen Hodgson on behalf of Multimedix Holdings Limited

"Thank you for your letter dated 11th February 2025 regarding the proposal to add Hemdean House School to the List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures of Local Heritage Significance. We acknowledge receipt of the letter. Please find our responses to specific questions as requested, in blue, in the document attached.

The main School House and the Nursery building (Lodge) have been part of the history of Caversham for 160 years. I truly appreciate the effort that must have gone into the historical research of Hemdean House School and buildings. My family and I have had a personal connection the school for nearly 50 years, yet much of the information was new to us, in particular the possibility that the architect may be Sir Horace Jones. Can I suggest that a transcript is forwarded to the Berkshire Archives, to further enrich the historical records it holds regarding Hemdean House.

We will endeavour to preserve the buildings discussed throughout the document: that being, the House and Lodge as stated in the document. Please can site map be updated with annotations of the buildings of interest only: there are several wooden buildings and prefabricated structures on-site that have little to no heritage significance are not mentioned in the proposal. I have provided an amended site plan for ease.

*I hope this proposal forms the start of further applications regarding significant buildings of historical interest in the area such as **St Anne's Well** or other schools such as the **Queen Anne's site in Caversham** or the **Abbey in Reading***

In the meantime, as custodians of the site, I would appreciate more information on what the what is expected from the site should the application be successful. I would also like to know if I am expected to attend the meeting where the application is discussed. My email address is provided above for ease and speed of communication."

(Comments of the landlord on the nomination form are attached as Appendix 2)

4.4. Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee

"Reading CAAC support the local listing nomination for Hemdean House School and are pleased to see the whole site including the original school building and lodge are part of the nomination."

4.5. Reading Civic Society

"In summer 2023 I was taken around the site and the historic building by some of the children at the school. It was certainly interesting.

Based on the case put forward – we judge is worthy of being adopted as a Locally listed Building.”

5. Assessment

The proposal to add a building or structure to the Local List should be considered against the criteria in Appendix 2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019).

5.1. Exclusions

5.1.1. The Local Plan specifies that a building should not be considered for the Local List where it is already part of a conservation area, scheduled monument or subject to an Article 4 direction relating to historic or architectural interest. Hemdean House School and Lodge is not within any of these existing designations and can therefore be considered against the other criteria.

5.2. General principles

5.2.1. Hemdean House School and Lodge dates from 1862 and therefore needs to be considered against the following general principle:

b. 1840 - 1913: Any building, structure or group of buildings that is/are of clearly-defined significance in the local context and where elements that contribute to its/ their heritage significance remain substantially complete.

5.2.2. The research on the history of Hemdean House School opening in 1862, the school and lodge's presence on the Ordnance Survey Map dating back to 1877, and the architectural characteristics of the building indicate that it was built between the 1850s and 1870s. There have been no serious alterations that undermine the main school buildings and the lodge's character.



Figure 1. The OS Map dating 1877

5.3. Significance

5.3.1. To be added to the Local List, a building or structure must fulfil at least one of the defined significance criteria, which fall into two categories – historic interest and architectural interest. These are assessed below.

Historic Interest

a. Historical Association

i. The building or structure has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person(s) or event.

ii. The building or structure has a prolonged and direct association with figures or events of local interest.

5.3.2. The foundation of Hemdean House School could be directly associated with women's education history and related acts in Britain. In the 19th century, there was growing awareness of the importance of educating women beyond the basic level. The Education Act of 1870 established the foundation for elementary education for children, leading to academically oriented education for girls rather than only domestic skills. As

such, Hemdean House School, being one of the first girls' schools in Reading, represents the transition of national education aims for girls.

- 5.3.3. The founder of the school is Mr Francis Knighton, who opened schools for boys in many locations within the Reading Town Centre and in Caversham, was the schoolmaster of Caversham House Academy for years. It was not only Mr Knighton himself but also his family who managed these schools. Hemdean House School was run by his daughters Matilda and Rosa. Being an organist at one time at Caversham Church and playing and worshipping at St Peter's Church, Mr Knighton was a well-known person. Today, a memorial window in St. Peter's Church honours the Knighton family.
- 5.3.4. The submitted nomination file discusses Horace Jones of London, the designer of Tower Bridge of national importance, as the possible architect of Hemdean House School. However, none of the studies on Horace Jones's buildings clearly indicate or mention the nominated asset. This aspect is discussed under the assessment of the architectural interest of Hemdean House School and Lodge.
- 5.3.5. However, as listed on the file for the subject asset, Hemdean House School has alumni of national significance:
- Elsie Smith MBE (1881 - 1968) Missionary and nurse. She spent 33 years working with Maori people on the Whanganui River. Cited in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography; awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 1955
 - Lizbeth Webb - Born Elizabeth Sandra Horton (1926 - 2013) First heard on the BBC aged 16, the 'Champagne Soprano' became a star of stage and radio. Bless The Bride was composed for her, she starred in Guys and Dolls, and featured on the Goon Show.
 - Babita Sharma (1977-) Former BBC News presenter, documentary maker and author. Having grown up in corner shops in Reading and Caversham, her book The Corner Shop: Shopkeepers, the Sharmas, and the Making of Modern Britain was published in 2019.

b. Social Importance

The building or structure has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Reading's communities. Such buildings/structures may include places of worship, schools, community buildings, places of employment, public houses and memorials which formed a focal point or played a key social role.

- 5.3.6. Hemdean House School is an independent school, and there is no evidence of its clear influential role in Caversham or Reading's development. The school is hardly mentioned in the historical development of the village or social life, not having a particular significance compared to any other school.
- 5.3.7. It is known that after 1850, Caversham, Lower Caversham, and Emmer Green continued to attract wealthy newcomers, including businessmen, professionals, and retired military officers, who settled on the parish's south-facing slopes. They occupied large homes and more modest villas, resulting in a considerable increase of affluent private residents from 40 in 1876 to 94 in 1895 and 199 by 1907. The development pattern in the vicinity of Hemdean School House constitutes typical Victorian terraces, very different from the highly rural character of Hemdean House School grounds, which hosted boarding and day school within a pleasant open green site.
- 5.3.8. Although the nomination file includes the school's links to the school's education quality, local memory of the Knighton family, local businesses and charities, festive music and carols and some spatial/physical connections to St Peter's Church, it is considered the asset was not a focal point or had a key social role that features an important local interest, it has a limited social value.

c. Industrial Importance

The building or structure clearly relates to traditional or historic industrial processes or important businesses or the products of such industrial processes or businesses in the history of Reading or are intact industrial structures, for example bridges.

5.3.9. Hemdean House School and Lodge is not considered to fulfil this criterion.

Architectural Interest

a. Sense of place

i. The building or structure is representative of a style that is characteristic of Reading.

5.3.10. Hemdean House School and Lodge do not have the noticeably patterned brickwork that is common in Reading. However, the brickwork of the buildings comprises both Flemish and English bonding of red brick, contrasting cream-coloured single-brick stripes, the distinctive feature of the mid-1850s to late 1870s, adding unique characteristics to the local architecture. As such, the nominated asset is especially noteworthy for adding value to the Caversham and Reading styles.



Figures 2 and 3. Details of brick bonding: Flemish bond on the principal façade (left), the mixture of Flemish and English Bond on the southern façade (right) (photographs are from an appendix of the nomination file)

b. Innovation and virtuosity

i. The building or structure has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials.

ii. The building or structure is the work of a notable local/national architect/engineer/builder.

iii. The building or structure shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering.

5.3.11. The following text is from Reading Mercury dated 18 August 1860:

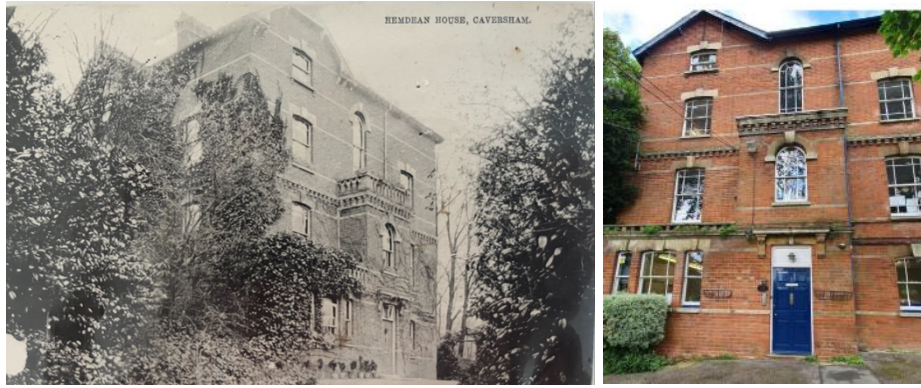
“Caversham New Schools.—On Tuesday last the foundation stone of a new school room was laid at Caversham. The Caversham school has for some time been under a somewhat heavy rental, and it was resolved by the committee of management that building should be raised, and a subscription opened for that purpose. Liberal subscriptions were received, plans for schools and a master's residence were procured from Mr. H. Jones, architect, London, and approved of, but the funds at the disposal of the committee did not justify them in

carrying out the whole of the design. They have therefore determined to build only one school room and the master's house, the contract for which will involve an expenditure of about £600, a large portion of which has been already subscribed.

*At four o'clock the children of the school, headed by the Caversham Academy Band, under the direction of **Mr. Knighton**, marched to the spot where the new building is about to be erected, bearing number of banners with mottoes, Success to the new schools," " Search the scriptures," " Train up a child in the way should go," &c.*

*The Rev. J. Bennett was the officiating minister. On arriving at the ground, the choir sang psalm, and prayer was then offered up, and after the customary service was gone through, Mrs. John Stephens proceeded to perform the ceremony of laying the foundation stone. In the name of Mrs. Stephens, Mr. Worthington said he begged to express the great pleasure she had had in laying the foundation stone of that new school, and she trusted that the poor children of this and future generations would be brought up in that school and receive a good sound Christian education, and learn their duty towards God and man. The children were then re-formed into a procession and were again led by the band and marched to the orchard belonging to Mrs Monck, where, under a tent, tea and cake were provided for them. Besides other gentlemen present we noticed Captain Coffin, Captain Harrison, and those mentioned above. During the afternoon the band played several airs, and the children left highly delighted with their treat. **The contract for the erection of the schools has been taken by Mr. B. Dunn, jun., builder, Southampton-Street.**"*

- 5.3.12. The nomination file states Horace Jones, a nationally important architect, might have designed Hemdean House School and Lodge, and the above paragraph from the local newspaper refers to plans being procured from his practice. However, there is no other evidence confirming this, therefore the Council cannot confirm that Horace Jones was the Architect and worked on the nominated asset. However, it is clear that that Hemdean House School and Lodge design is influenced by the widespread national styles of the period of 1850s to 1870s: mid-Victorian classic together with Italianate and Victorian gothic details, displaying local workmanship and techniques.
- 5.3.13. The main architectural feature of the main schoolhouse is its unusual domestic appearance, which blends formal education use with the flexibility of the Victorian classical style. To the front elevation, the asymmetrical design of three bays is composed of an end gable of a shallow pitched roof supported on brackets with dentil detail and carved bargeboards, a central bay defined by double-storey projection with front door under the bracketed hood and round-headed windows on upper floors, and a left bay displaying main bay organisation centred and vertically aligned segmented arched marginal glazed timber sash windows under large stone segmental arches with prominent keystones, and pronounced stone corniches and cream horizontal bandings.
- 5.3.14. The southern side elevation of the building has a similar gable with a bay window on the ground floor but a two-storey, two-bay element to the left, as appears in the photographs below. It is noted that both the front and side elevations, due to the prominent position and height of the building, have been the most visible faces of Hemdean House School, although historic photographs reveal the loss of some decorative elements such as original bargeboards, stone cornice eaves, and parapets. It is noted that there are also some surviving elements of the interior: staircase, floor tiles, shutters and fireplaces.



Figures 4 and 5. Historic photograph of the school building (date not known) (left) and existing front elevation of the building (right) (from appendices of the nomination file)

5.3.15. The Lodge of Hemdean House School displays the impressive architecture of the main school building on a modest scale of more 'old English style' housing. The materials used include facing red brick in Flemish Bond under two gabled stone tiled roofs with original decorative bargeboards, ridge tiles and ornamental chimneys intact. The main elements of interest are the central projecting gable of the main entrance with fine architectural detailing featuring an arrow slit ventilator with decorative cream brickwork and a dentil horizontal band. The order and design of the bays are the same as the main building, while the right gable of its street-facing side elevation has a distinctive gothic window design.



Figures 6 and 7. Historic photograph of Hemdean House School and Lodge (date not known) (left) and the front elevation of the lodge (right) (from the social media account of the school)

c. Group value

- i. The buildings/structures form a group which as a whole has a unified architectural or historic value to the local area.
- ii. The buildings/structures are an example of deliberate town planning from before 1947.

5.3.16. Whilst the design of the buildings does not relate particularly closely to that of any of its immediate neighbouring terraces, the main school building, lodge and some other partially remained buildings such as music room have group value within the boundaries of the school ground.

5.4. Conclusion of assessment

5.4.1 Hemdean House School and Lodge qualifies for addition to the Local List because it:

- Is not within a conservation area, scheduled monument or area subject to an Article 4 direction relating to historic or architectural interest

- Dates from between 1840 and 1913 and is of clearly-defined significance in the local context and elements that contribute to its heritage significance remain substantially complete;
- Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its historical association;
- Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its sense of place;
- Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its innovation and virtuosity;
- Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its group value.

5.4.2 A description of the significance of the building for inclusion in the Local List is included in Appendix 3.

6. Contribution to strategic aims

6.1. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:

- Healthy Environment
- Thriving Communities
- Inclusive Economy

6.2. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:

- People first
- Digital transformation
- Building self-reliance
- Getting the best value
- Collaborating with others

6.3. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

6.4. Local listing of buildings and structures helps to achieve the Healthy Environment theme of the Corporate Plan, by helping to retain those buildings that contribute towards making Reading a more attractive place to live and connect Reading's residents to the town's past.

7. Environmental and climate implications

7.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

7.2. Local listing of buildings and structures, where it leads to the retention of those buildings or structures, can help to address the climate emergency by negating the need for demolition and new development, which are processes that use significant amounts of energy and result in emissions. However, in the long-term, it can be more difficult to achieve high levels of energy performance in older buildings than in new builds. There are therefore potentially either positive or negative effects, and schemes will need to be assessed at the application stage in terms of their compliance with the Council's policies.

8. Community engagement

8.1. Details of the consultation carried out are set out in section 4 of this report. The scope of consultation to be carried out on proposals for addition to the Local List was part of the local listing process agreed by Planning Applications Committee on 2nd December 2020 (Minute 56 refers).

9. Equality impact assessment

- 9.1. It is not expected that there will be any significant adverse impacts on specific groups due to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religious belief as a result of the recommendations of this report.

10. Other relevant considerations

- 10.1 None of this report.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1. Addition to the Local List is not a statutory process, and there are no legal implications of the recommendations of this report.

12. Financial implications

- 12.1. Consideration of this nomination and any resulting amendments to the Local List will be accommodated within existing budgets.

13. Timetable for implementation

- 13.1. Not applicable.

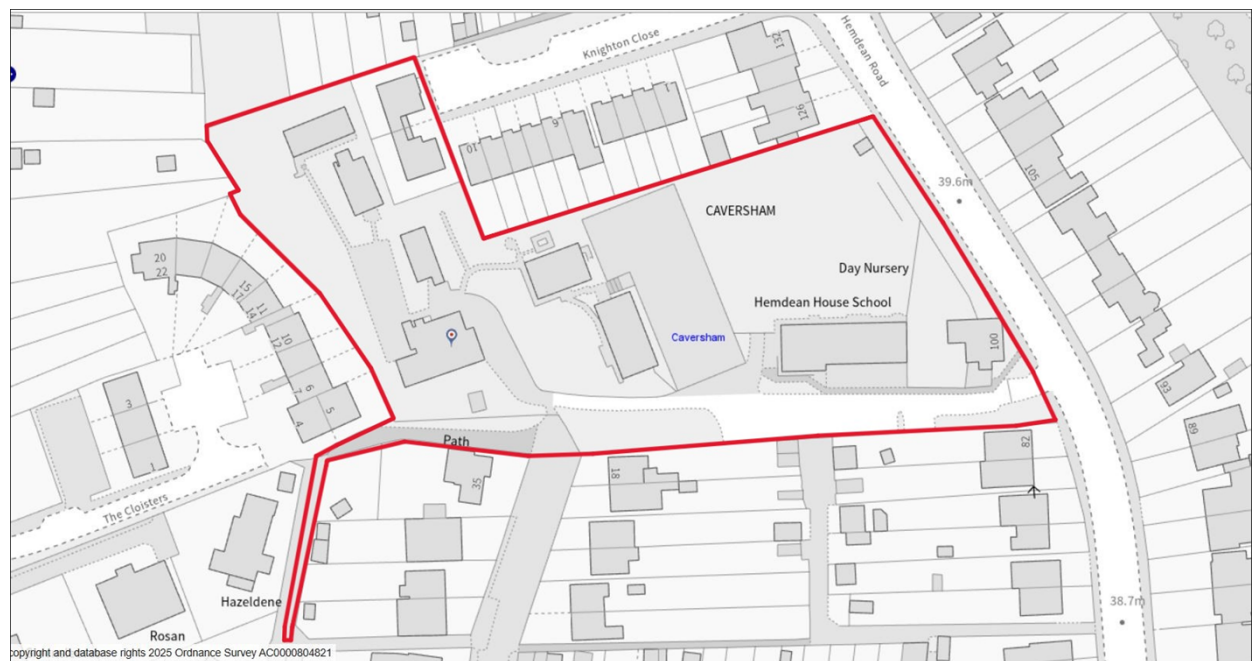
14. Background papers

- 14.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. Location map
2. Nomination form (with landlord's comments on it)
3. Proposed local list text

Appendix 1: Location plan



Appendix 2: Nomination Form with landlord's response on it

Your reference number is FS-Case-630939026.

(Additional information provided by the Landlord)

Thank you for submitting Nominate a building or structure for adding to the Local List. You can download a PDF copy of your nomination at the bottom of this page.

Address of building/structure: Hemdean House School and Lodge, Hemdean Road, Caversham, Reading

Postcode of building/structure: RG4 7SD

Owner of building (if known): Hemdean House School Ltd, **Multi-Medix Holdings Ltd owns the building**

Age of building: (b) 1840 - 1913: any building, structure or group of buildings that is/are substantially complete and unaltered and of definite significance.

Please provide comments or further explanation of above: In 1859 a new girls' school was formed in Verona Lodge, Church Street, Caversham on a site now occupied by the extension to the telephone exchange. After purchase of agricultural land on the bank of the Hemdean Bottom dry chalk valley, the new purpose-built school for girls opened in 1862, renamed Hemdean House School with both boarding and day places. It remained in continuous use for education until 2024 and the original school buildings with fine architectural details are largely unaltered. As shown in period images, the Lodge was part of the original construction and was occupied by the caretaker of the school.

The above statement we believe to be true.

The building or structure has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person(s) or event:

Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The founding of a girls' school that went beyond primary education is of national significance, and Francis Knighton and his daughters took the lead in this. Knighton is a figure of considerable local interest (see below).

Frances Buss opened the first girls school in North London (collegiate) in 1850 and was the first to coin the term "Headmistress". We believe the first ever ladies school in reading was the Abbey, but it may also be Amersham Hall in 1861, our school was probably the third girls school, we think after the education act of 1870. Nevertheless significant achievement.

The fact that the architect was almost certainly Horace Jones of London is also of national importance, as Jones was the architect of Tower Bridge and the rebuilt Caversham Park after a fire of 1850 for the industrialist William Crawshay. Crawshay and Knighton worshipped at St Peter's Church in Caversham and are both buried in the churchyard there. It seems highly plausible that Horace Jones would have been recommended to Knighton by Crawshay.

Horace Jones has been the subject of a new biography: Horace Jones, Architect of Tower Bridge by David Lascelles (Cornwall: Profile Books, 2024)

<https://www.towerbridge.org.uk/discover/people/sir-horace-jones>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Jones_\(architect\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Jones_(architect))

To the best of our knowledge there is no evidence that Horace Jones ever visited Hemdean House or indeed designed it.

The building or structure has a prolonged and direct association with figures or events of local interest:

Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: Mr Francis Knighton (1803 - 1883) opened a school for boys in Reading ca 1826 in Gun Street, moving ca 1835 to Gun Street and then by 1841 to 23 Church Street where Charles Havell had previously run a boys academy. Ca 1849, Mr Knighton purchased Caversham House on Church Street with 2 acres of land. Previous occupants were Sir Rufane Donkin, founder of Port Elizabeth in South Africa and Sir Nathaniel Clissold. Caversham House Academy had properties on either side of Church Street with a connecting tunnel where the pedestrian crossing is now. The school playground is now the site of Caversham Library and the classrooms, the New Testament Church of God and the Working Men's Club. The school continued until 1921. The garden at the front of Caversham House was sold to Reading Corporation to widen Church Street in preparation for the new Caversham Bridge. The building was demolished in 1965 but one of the Holm Oaks from the gardens remains in St Martins Precinct. A memorial window in St Peter's Church commemorates the Knighton family.

We believe this to be correct

Mr Knighton had 4 daughters and started the girls' school to be run by his two youngest daughters. Matilda Knighton retired as Principal in 1926. Rosa Knighton married Ferdinand Charles Dermott, and was co-principal until the 1890s. Alice Olivey, a pupil at the school from 1902, was principal of the school from 1926 until 1972, when the Knighton family finally relinquished their interest.

We believe this to be correct

Hemdean House School has alumni of national significance:

Elsie Smith MBE (1881 - 1968) Missionary and nurse. She spent 33 years working with Maori people on the Whanganui River. Cited in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography; awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 1955

Lizbeth Webb - Born Elizabeth Sandra Horton (1926 - 2013) First heard on the BBC aged 16, the 'Champagne Soprano' became a star of stage and radio. 'Bless The Bride' was composed for her, she starred in 'Guys and Dolls', and featured on the 'Goon Show'.

Babita Sharma (1977-) Former BBC News presenter, documentary maker and author. Having grown up in corner shops in Reading and Caversham, her book 'The Corner Shop: Shopkeepers, the Sharmas, and the Making of Modern Britain' was published in 2019.

We believe this to be correct

The building or structure has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Reading's communities: Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The small school, which has remained largely unaltered, served Caversham and Reading from an era pre-dating the 1870 and 1880 Education Acts. Archived information relating to the school documents the Knighton's vision for girls' education from the mid-19th century within the school building. The British Newspaper Archive provides evidence of the importance of both the building and what was provided: 'Terms which are moderate' provided for 'superior English education in all its branches. Modern languages, music, drawing, dancing... The house and its hilly location, were stressed: 'The Premises stand on an eminence, are detached and very healthy...'

Academic work was entered for public exams by the College of Preceptors, with teaching provided by 'qualified staff and visiting Professors'.

There are strong local memories of the family which founded the school and its particular ethos. As testimony by contemporary teachers and pupils reveals, local people who attended the school as children frequently sent their own children to the school, through multiple generations. The size of the classrooms, as built for Francis Knighton, were an important factor in the school ethos. Hemdean House provided 'a school environment which was very happy for staff and pupils alike. (Anna Greaves, Senior School teacher, report in Caversham Bridge Community Newspaper June 2024) |

Though, it has been in existence for circ 160 years, it has not played an influential role in the development of the area or the life of one of Reading's communities simply by the nature of the fact it has always been a very small, private school and the current site proposed of historical interest is situated away from Caversham's centre.

Hemdean House maintained strong links with St Peter's Church (where Francis Knighton is buried), and a small side gate opens on to Hemdean Rise, making an easy walk to the church via the Mount and across Church Road. The school developed links with local businesses and charities, supporting Caversham traders by opening the annual Christmas Late Night Shopping in St Martin's Precinct with festive music and carols.

Early links with St Peter's church were strong and Hemdean has always maintained links to the local community. But again, due to the nature of its size, its influence would have been limited. At the most, the School would have had 150 children, significantly smaller than Caversham Primary School or Thameside the schools that would have educated more children in the area.

The building or structure clearly relates to traditional or historic industrial processes or important businesses or the products of such industrial processes or businesses in the history of Reading or are intact industrial structures, for example bridges: No

Please provide further comments or explanation:

The building or structure is representative of a style that is characteristic of Reading: Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The style of Hemdean School illustrates the prevalence of superior polychromatic brickwork with stone mouldings in and around central Caversham, where terraces of Victorian houses and 'villas' spread out from the centre. In Hemdean Hill and Hemdean Rise, for example, where such housing survives in a great state of completeness, these polychromatic brick terraces form the southern border of the school's site.

Additionally, the school and its lodge have been carefully sited in their hilly location, and this chimes with the careful siting of the polychromatic brick terraces in Caversham, which move up and down the hills and are contoured around the curve of principal roads such as Gosbrook Road.

We can confirm that the school is made with the same brickwork as the rest of Victorian Caversham.

The building or structure has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials: Yes.

Please provide further comments or explanation: The architectural details of Hemdean House are very fine, with horizontal courses of cream brick against a red brick ground that visually tie into the stone detailing of the windows and doors. Above the windows, which survive mostly intact with their original configurations and even glass, are prominent keystones which are illustrated in the appended photographs. A variant of Flemish bond brickwork has been used throughout the exterior of the original building. There is a combination of individual windows with arched tops, a triple bay on the front façade, and a fashionable polygonal bay window to the south side overlooking the site of the formerly large conservatory, whose plinth remains in the ground.

The windows are similar to those found on priest hill, the conservatory was a wonderful feature, but sadly we only can see it in pictures. The footprint of this has been replaced with a yew tree.

The sites of the original toilets, and in one instance an original water closet attached to the north side of the building, attest to the remarkable completeness of the school building.

The toilets were demolished in the 80s and I believe these were not original

The block which originally housed music rooms survives, despite an unattractive 20th-century addition.

The buildings on the site are terrapins, installed in eighties these were not replacing music rooms but additions to the school as part of modernising the school.

There are two significant fireplaces which remain inside the building along with several boarded-up fireplaces of simple design. The interior panelling and shuttering remain around the principal windows, and there is a very fine staircase of several levels as well as original floor tiles and a panelled oak door with what is likely to be the original brass knob at the front. Finally, there are artefacts from the school's history and archival materials which survive, as well as paintings and prints documenting the school at various moments in its history.

There are several Victorian fireplaces in the building, but nothing worthy of any significance, they are plain in their design and made of cast iron as per the fireplaces of the day. The door is not original nor is the door Knob. Sadly there is no Victorian coloured glass in the building, some of the windows are of traditional sash. The plaster is not original on the walls or ceilings due to modernising it for daily school use.

The building or structure is the work of a notable local or national architect/engineer/builder: Yes.

Please provide further comments or explanation: The Reading Mercury reported on 18 August 1860 that the school was designed by H Jones, London. Horace Jones was active in Caversham at that time. He designed the steel framed Caversham Park for William Crawshay following a major fire in 1850; and also St Anne's Primary School and the Parish School, which became the Caversham Centre for Adult Education, now Caversham Health Club. All the evidence points towards Horace Jones being the architect for Hemdean House.

Sir Horace Jones PPRIBA (20 May 1819 - 21 May 1887) was an English architect particularly noted for his work as architect and surveyor to the City of London from 1864 until his death. He served as president of the Royal Institute of British Architects from 1882 until 1884, and was knighted in 1886. His most recognised work, Tower Bridge, was completed posthumously.

<https://www.towerbridge.org.uk/discover/people/sir-horace-jones>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Jones_\(architect\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Jones_(architect))

Horace Jones has been the subject of a new biography: Horace Jones, Architect of Tower Bridge by David Lascelles (Cornwall: Profile Books, 2024)

Firm confirmation of this would be welcomed.

The building or structure shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering:

Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The school's architecture is certainly progressive for a date of the later 1850s, as it displays the polychromy that was coming into fashion during this decade in part due to the architectural writer John Ruskin and the Oxford style -- for example, the Natural History Museum in Oxford by Benjamin Woodward and Thomas Deane (1855-59). Instead of the gothic style so popular in Oxford, however, Hemdean House displays classical features that were to reappear during the emergent Arts and Crafts Movement, which it anticipates in some ways.

It appears as though the brief of the school's architect was to build in a progressive style that was absolutely up-to-date for 1850s Britain, while working to a budget and keeping features simple. The major decorative features are subtle ones, such as the prominent keystones above the windows.

We can confirm the keystones are attractive and the simplicity of the design, appealing,

The buildings/structures form a group which as a whole has a unified architectural or historic value to the local area: Yes.

Please provide further comments or explanation: The significance of the girls' school for 165 years, from 1859 to 2024, and its integral link to Caversham House Academy in the heart of Caversham Village has significant historic value to Caversham.

The link of the polychromatic brickwork of Hemdean House to the slightly later terraced housing surrounding it has previously been noted.

The building does not form part of a group of structures though it does have a similar style of other Victorian buildings in the area. While it does hold a historical connection to Caversham village centre, the original school site no longer exists to provide the connection. Though, it no doubt adds to the patchwork of rich history in Caversham village, it's significance is limited in comparison to role Caversham Bridge or St Anne's Well played in the development of the village.

The buildings/structures are an example of deliberate town planning from before 1947: No

Please provide further comments or explanation:

Please upload any evidence you have assembled that help to make the case as to why the building or structure fulfils the above criteria: Hemdean House School testimonies.docx, CB.Jun-p10_17.05.24.pdf, CB.Jun-p11_17.05.24.pdf

Please briefly describe the relevance of the evidence you have attached: 2 PowerPoints have been emailed to the Conservation Officer:

1. Architecture
2. Period Images

Uploaded files include testimonies from former teachers and pupils and a recent article about the school in the Caversham Bridge newspaper.

Please provide any additional comments that you would like to make in support of adding this building or structure to the Local List: Hemdean House School, which is visible from Hemdean Road and from Balmore Walk, is a striking building of architectural importance. The site with the Lodge at the bottom of the hill still evokes the school built for girls in 1862. The emphasis on the importance of girls' education was ahead of its time, and 165 years is a remarkable period for a school to provide continuous education. It leaves an important legacy.

The legacy of the Knighton family who occupied Caversham House, Church Street for almost 100 years remains important. Their lengthy contribution to education at both Caversham House Academy and Hemdean House School deserves full recognition.

It would be nice if the Knighton contribution to education is recognised, we appreciate that they were not the first to do this and that beliefs and attitudes towards womens education was changing and they were part of this change.

Name: Helen Lambert, CADRA Chair

Email address:

Date of nomination: 17/07/2024

Appendix 3: Proposed local list text

Founded by Mr. Francis Knighton, an important educator in Reading and Caversham, Hemdean House School is one of the earliest girls' schools in the region. It played a pivotal role in the development of academic education for women, reflecting the broader social changes initiated by the Education Act of 1870. The school remained operational for 165 years, providing education to generations of girls until its closure in 2024. It also holds historical significance through its alumni, including Elsie Smith MBE, a missionary and nurse; Lizbeth Webb, a renowned soprano; and Babita Sharma, a former BBC News presenter and author, further underscoring the institution's lasting impact on the community and beyond.

Together, Hemdean House School and Lodge represent an important example of mid-Victorian architecture, notable for their fine detailing and their contribution to the architectural landscape of Caversham and Reading. Constructed in 1862, the buildings exemplify a distinctive mid-19th-century architectural style, combining elements of Victorian classical design with local building traditions. Unlike the typical patterned brickwork seen in Reading, the brickwork of Hemdean House School and Lodge features a mix of Flemish and English bonding with red brick, contrasted by cream-coloured single-brick stripes. This characteristic detailing is emblematic of the mid-1850s to late 1870s, adding a unique dimension to the local architectural vernacular and enhancing the architectural significance of the area.

The main school building occupies a prominent position and is distinguished by an unusual domestic appearance integrating formal educational use with the flexibility of Victorian design principles with Italianate influences. The asymmetrical principal elevation includes three bays, with a shallow-pitched roof supported by dentil-bracketed eaves and carved bargeboards. The central bay features a double-storey projection, a front door beneath a stone bracketed hood, and round-headed windows on the upper floors. The typical bay design is visible on the left, defined by vertically aligned marginal glazed windows with stone segmental arches, prominent keystones, and stone cornices. The southern side elevation consistently mirrors these features, incorporating a ground-floor Victorian bay window and a two-storey, two-bay left element. Built on a more modest scale, the Lodge reflects the main school building's design with a more 'old English style'. Constructed from red brick in Flemish bond, the building has two gable design under stone-tiled roofs, surviving original features of bargeboards, ridge tiles, and ornamental chimneys. The central entrance features a noticeable small projecting gable with an arrowslit ventilator surrounded by patterned cream brickwork. The Lodge's design closely follows that of the main building, with a distinctive gothic window on the right gable of its street-facing elevation. Hemdean House School and Lodge, with their architectural and cultural significance, constitute a group and remain important markers in the history of education and the built heritage of Caversham and Reading.