



## Cemetery Junction Arch Proposal



November 2020

## Introduction

Junction Arch Heritage and Arts (JAHA) is a Community Interest Company (CIC) formed in 2019 with the aim of acquiring the Grade II listed Cemetery Junction Arch and repurposing it as a heritage and arts, and community co-working hub. JAHA is an organisation with a clear social mission formed of the local community who are strongly supportive of the project which aims to protect and conserve an at-risk designated heritage asset.

Since formation, JAHA has actively engaged with Reading Borough Council and has made several approaches around acquiring the building which have unfortunately been unsuccessful. JAHA also consult and engage with other stakeholders. These include local community groups and potential partnership organisations and companies such as Reading Voluntary Action (RVA), Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC), Reading Rep and Blue Collar Food, the association and involvement with which is considered to be a key contributor to the success of the proposal.

JAHA has undertaken a pragmatic study and research which has resulted in a viable revenue-generating proposal (set out below) that will deliver local economic, individual and community impacts through the provision of co-working and meeting space; a wellbeing pod; outdoor 'street' food area with covered seating and exhibition space. On the basis that JAHA acquire the building, the proposal will be implemented following a two-phased approach that will ensure that the heritage is sustained and acts as a catalyst for community-focused and partnership-led activities. It is important to highlight that phase 1 of the proposal is highly dependent on loan funding. Consequently, the loan funding request will be targeted and dependent on JAHA's threshold for taking on debt, and its ability to service it. It is in this context, and the commercial realities of the proposal, that an application to the Architectural Heritage Fund's Heritage Impact Fund will be made.

Demonstrating JAHA's continuing commitment to the building and the project, especially in the context of extremely difficult external conditions, is the recent commissioning of two significant grant-funded reports to further inform the proposal for the building. These are a 'Report & Valuation' (Fairweathers Chartered Surveyors, 7 October 2020) and a 'Co-working Market Assessment (Draft)' (Fourth Street, 28 October 2020)<sup>1</sup>. The Valuation Report states the Market Value as of the date of the report and based on assumed vacant possession and existing state as **£nil**. This valuation is unsurprising when considering the building's condition ("semi-derelict" (p.2, Fairweathers)) and the constraints on type of re-use, including its listed status (Grade II) and that of the cemetery (Grade II), design, size, plan form, location, condition and the perceived likely conservation deficit (e.g. associated with residential use). In addition to these, the Valuation Report, as expected, highlights external factors such as market uncertainty due to the impact of COVID-19, being taken into consideration. This is a situation that is unlikely to change in the short-to- medium term and taken with the fact that the building fabric continues to rapidly decay and deteriorate, and the immovable factors around re-use which diminish some of its commercial potential and attractiveness, the position on the market value is unlikely to turn positive.

In the light of the Valuation Report, JAHA request that Reading Borough Council consider asset transfer as the best solution for the building and the site. In doing so, the Council will provide the community with the opportunity to turn what is currently a highly visible liability with

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<sup>1</sup> A business plan has also been drafted and SWOT analysis undertaken, amongst others

no value into an asset that creates demonstrable social impact. There is a growing body of evidence on the impact of interacting with heritage on individual and community wellbeing with positive outcomes on social relationships, sense of belonging, pride of place, ownership, and collective empowerment (What Works Wellbeing, 2019). Heritage can be used as a mechanism to achieve regeneration. This is evidenced by the successful Historic England Heritage Action Zones initiative, where repurposing schemes for heritage based on or around a high street act as a successful catalyst for wider social, economic and environmental outcomes, (Historic England, 2019) as well as attracting further funding. It is envisaged that the Junction Arch will stand at the heart of what can become a new district of culture for Reading, with the area's 50+ commercial premises forming a vibrant and thriving local centre. We also believe that the project will help create social cohesion and give the community a much-needed focal point for the reinvigoration of East Reading's economy.

### **Background to the Proposal**

In formulating the proposal, JAHA has considered the wider setting of the building, notably the cemetery and the mixed-use urban context, and the potential for uses such as residential and commercial to be accommodated within it, and on the site. Set out below are the significant building and site-specific factors which have been evaluated when considering potential uses.

- **Listed status**

Both the building and the cemetery benefit from statutory protection because of their designated status – they are both Grade II listed (List entry nos. 1113512; 1001641) The listed status is a formal recognition of their heritage value and reflects their special architectural (in the case of the building) and historic interest in the national context. It also brings them under the consideration of the planning system, so that they can be protected for future generations (Historic England).

Listing is not a preservation order, preventing change but rather it can be considered to assign a requirement for the careful consideration of potential change, including new sensitive uses, to ensure that it does not affect special interest or result in the loss of significance.

It is within this context that the proposal has been formed. Conservation is an active process of maintenance and managing change and the risks of neglect and decay are best addressed through ensuring that heritage assets remain in active use that is consistent with their conservation (Para 002, National Planning Practice Guidance, 2019). National planning policy (NPPF, Section 16 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment', 2019) directs that heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

JAHA believe that the proposal for mixed commercial use is the most appropriate and viable option when attempting to obtain a balance between viability, maintaining significance and the on-going conservation of the building and the site. It is considered that the Arch historically served an administrative function and urban burial grounds in the 19th century were originally envisaged as public open spaces (belonging to the 'park family'), professionally designed to be attractive places to visit in their own right and regarded as much as public landscapes as they were functional burial places

(Ken Worple, 2007). There is a growing acceptance of cemeteries being used for cultural activities and the site has the benefit of providing an appropriate physical separation between the building and the consecrated ground to ensure that a respectful distance is maintained between the proposed new use and the existing. The proposal, notwithstanding small-scale alteration, and intervention (phase 1) and (enabling) development in the form of single-storey extensions (phase 2), is therefore responsive to the historic character of the site. Furthermore, we believe that it is responsive to the environmental objective of conserving and enhancing the historic environment whilst creating a viable use for the building and the site. JAHA believe that the proposal is conservation-led and respectful of the significance of the building and the cemetery. It is important to highlight that the extensions will not require the removal of historic fabric through the creation of new openings (as would be required if re-purposed for residential use) but will rather have independent external access arrangements. The proposal envisages a sensitive adaptation to achieve a sustainable outcome.

Historic England has identified cemeteries and associated buildings as particularly vulnerable and neglected heritage assets and they work with local authorities and community groups to find imaginative solutions to protect and conserve them and we believe that they will be supportive of our imaginative solution.

JAHA consider that the change of use to residential would be inconsistent with historic character, and impact significance, and would therefore likely be objected to by Historic England and other statutory consultees.

- Design, size, plan form, and location

The building is of a design, size and plan form which reflects its original use as an ornamental gatehouse, likely facilitating an administrative function rather than residential. Where residences for caretakers were contemplated, these took the form of lodges of characteristically residential design. Our research has indicated that cemetery lodges originally conceived for residential use have limited commercial attraction due to their location and general reticence around living within or on the boundary of a cemetery. Consequently, owners, who are generally local authorities, have difficulty in selling this type of asset. On this basis, and the factors noted below, JAHA dismissed the possibility of the building accommodating part-residential use.

JAHA believe that the size of the building does not easily lend itself to residential conversion. Reference to the Nationally Described Space Standards, suggests that the smallest properties which can be built under these standards are 37 square metres (sqm) for those one-bedroom dwellings with a single bed space, and 50 sqm for one-bedroom dwellings with a double bed space (Centre for Cities, Blog Post, Anthony Breach, 13 January 2020). In order to provide a good standard of residential amenity, extensions would be necessary. This fact, coupled with the type of new use, and the consideration of key stakeholder responses to such a proposal, suggests that residential use would not be viable and consistent with the conservation of the building and the site.

- Condition and the perceived likely conservation deficit

The building is currently vacant and in poor condition with deteriorating stonework, damp problems, and a death-watch beetle infestation in its roof. Furthermore, a structural (visual) inspection report produced in April 2016 by KRP Consulting Engineers stated that, at the time of the survey, there were “numerous visible structural and cosmetic defects which should be remedied to ensure the longevity of the building”. The report also set out a list of nine defects / signs of movement, several of which appear to be significant. JAHA understands that a structural inspection was carried out earlier this year. We have very recently received a copy of the report but have not had the opportunity to review it in any great detail. Notwithstanding that, we strongly believe that on the basis of the 2016 report, the continuing deteriorating condition of the building, and conversations with knowledgeable local experts, that the defects and signs of movement are likely to have increased and/or been exacerbated through the lack of maintenance and repair. The deterioration in the building’s condition needs to be dealt with as a matter of emergency and given its listed and protected status, the absence of adequate maintenance and repair is of serious concern. Prompt action is therefore required to pre-empt further decay and deterioration of building fabric and remedy problems (some of which may not be immediately evident based on a visual inspection)<sup>2</sup>. As Historic England state “Repair is normally carried out to sustain the significance of the building or place. Equally important in most cases is keeping the building in use, which is the best way to safeguard its future”. Research on the local residential sales and letting market indicates that the repurposing of the building for residential use, and a consideration of the costs of repair and development to facilitate this use would likely result in a conservation deficit making it an unviable option. In terms of the proposal, the Valuation Report provides a Market Value of £165,000, based on the building being refurbished and converted for community use.

## The Proposal

### **Phase 1**

JAHA plan to apply to the Architectural Heritage Fund for a Heritage Impact Loan (amount to be confirmed and informed by the structural survey). With this loan we will initiate Phase 1 of the project and will:

- Treat the damp problem and death watch beetle infestation (£21,000 ASRS Services).
- Replaster the interior with the appropriate lime plaster (£20,000 JMT Services).
- Recommissioning the buildings – electrics, plumbing etc (£10,000 Mohammed Nazir).
- Carry out immediate necessary repairs to ensure safety of the stonework (£8500 A F Jones).
- Creating the Food area with the construction of the shipping containers (£25,000 Blue Collar).

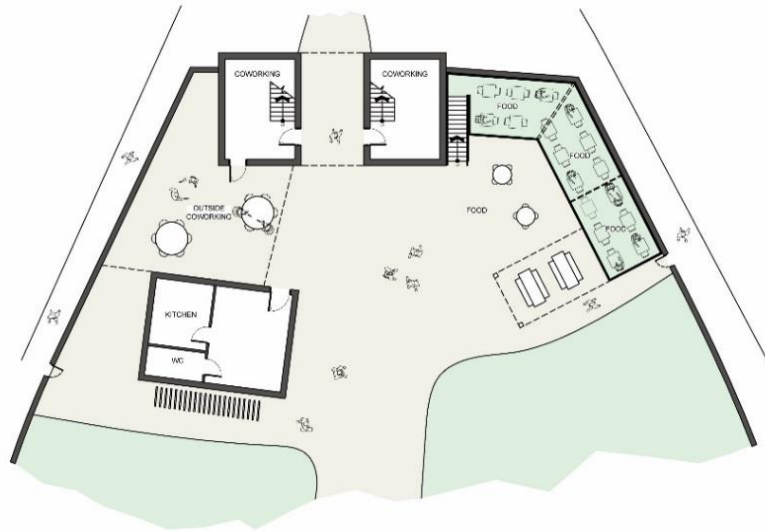
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<sup>2</sup> There is no direct legal obligation on the owner of a heritage asset to carry out repairs. However, local, and central government may force repairs to be carried out by using an urgent works notice on a listed building not in use, where the works are urgently necessary for its preservation. If it appears that reasonable steps are not being taken for properly preserving the building, then it may be compulsorily acquired.

- Secure expert architectural consultancy for the initial work (£5,000 Arc Studios).
- Commission Repair Work Survey on complete renovation of stonework (£3,288 A F Jones).
- Survey the parts of the structure not surveyed in the 2016 structural inspection, i.e. the steel frame and the ground around the Arch, and carry out any immediate and necessary repairs (£30,000 (estimate))

### Phase 1 – Artist Impression





## Phase 2

JAHA we will seek grants from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage Enterprise Scheme and their Grants for Heritage programmes. JAHA have long established relationship with this organisation. These grants will enable Phase 2 of the project in which we will:

- Undertake the full restoration of the Arch.
- Redevelop the south side of the site creating a discreet foliage covered single storey building that will consist of a community space, where exhibitions of Heritage and Art can be showcased and that the local community will be able to use for activities and meetings. Jelly and Nature Nurture have expressed interest in making use of the space and Wycliffe Church are interested in running a Wellbeing Pod there, that will help people suffering from the psychological effects of COVID-19. The building will also contain toilets a small kitchen and a shower (to be costed). We have formed a partnership with Reading Rep that will likely involve the sharing of the admin costs involved.
- Landscape a small community garden. The Nepalese gardening group IRDC are interested in helping with this.

JAHA's initial sources of income will be:

- £10,000 from Blue Collar for rental of the food area.
- £13,090 - £20,000 from either the rental of all the rooms within the Arch as offices or from dedicated desks in co-working space. The market assessment carried out for JAHA by Fourth Floor Street Marketing consultants suggests that an income of

£16,000 - £20,000 is feasible for dedicated desks within a co-working space (focused on social enterprise – RVA / RISC).

Wycliffe Church will be happy to talk to individuals or companies using the offices/dedicated co-working spaces, about the use of their parking spaces.

**Phase 2 – Artist Impression** (the east elevation will remain visible and be a feature within the extension)

