

# Campaigners praise Reading council decision to refuse demolition of Drews site

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**Campaigners have expressed their delight and praised the council for rejecting plans to demolish a historic site in Reading and replace it with flats.**

Plans to replace the 19th century malthouse and former hardware store on 71-73 Caversham Road with 44 flats were unanimously rejected by the council's Planning Applications committee on Wednesday (October 7).

Councillors raised concerns about the loss of the locally listed heritage asset, which was most recently home to cherished store Drews Ironmongers, and the height of the proposed seven-storey building.

Jonathan Dart, chairman of BTCA, said the association is "absolutely delighted" that the committee agreed that a block of flats at the height proposed would be in the wrong place given the low-rise Victorian/Edwardian buildings in the surrounding residential area and replacing the Drews building with the block of flats would cause a loss of heritage.

He added: "I'd like to thank everyone who signed our petition.

"I think we all owe a debt of gratitude to Bell Tower Secretary David Neale for organising it as well as speaking at the planning committee meeting.

"I would also like to thank David's wife Mary and Bell Tower committee member Julia Wink for their work on the application for local listing."

The planning officers' report had recommended approval of the application from site owner S2 Caversham, while more than a thousand people signed a petition opposing the plan.

The buildings at 71-73 Caversham Road date back to 1871, making them the oldest surviving buildings in the area between the railway and the River Thames.

They were originally Henry Dowson's malthouse complex, serving Simonds, Reading's largest brewery and one of the town's most famous industries.

Their most recent use was housing Drews, the ironmongers.

In 2020, the BTCA successfully applied to have the buildings locally listed.

Although the buildings have been used for many purposes since the 19th century, they retain many of their original features.