

7 | Townscape Visual Impact Assessment

View from public seating area at Broad Street looking north east.

7.43 This view is taken from a public seating area along Broad Street looking north east toward the Site. Dominated by the pedestrian, the townscape of the wider area appears loose with a variety of buildings around.

7.44 The proposal is hidden entirely behind the existing built form. As such, there would be no changes to the townscape.



Figure 7.30 Existing View 9



Figure 7.31 Proposed View 9

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Views along Friar Street

- 7.45 The key views where the proposal would be visible would be from close range along Friar Street looking east and west.
- 7.46 The proposal has evolved through a careful and iterative process of arranging the massing in a manner where there is minimal impact on the townscape of the street.
- 7.47 Undoubtedly, the overall scale of the building is larger than that established along the southern side. However, the carefully arranged setbacks, with contextually design street frontage ensures that the proposal blends with the wider street area.
- 7.48 The use of brick on the frontage and terracotta curtain wall for the set back floors carefully distinguishes the 'roof' level with the main facade. This allows the street level frontage to appear unified with the wider street frontage, whilst still harmonising with the overall architectural language of the proposal.



Figure 7.32 Proposed view from Friar Street looking east

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- 7.49 When viewing from the east, the proposal sits much lower than the existing Angel House/Novotel/Ibis building. It appears calm and subservient within the view and enhances it in a positive way.
- 7.50 Additionally, this view would be seen with the completed Station Hill Phase 3 development (Plot E) which, even at minimum parameters would be higher than the propose development.
- 7.51 The view looking west, from the Station Road is dominated by the listed buildings at Queen Victoria Street and 147 Friar Street. These are subject to a revised application with additional height proposed over No 146 and No 145. Cumulatively, the proposal is seen in context of the revised proposals for QVS 1. The setback floors, whilst visible, blend harmoniously with the brick materiality of the street level frontage.



Figure 7.33 Proposed view from Friar Street looking west

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Assessment of Townscape Impact

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| <p>7.52 The proposals consist of a six storey building with the top two floors set back from the Friar Street frontage. The proposal has been carefully arranged and tested in terms of the massing through various long, medium and close distance views. The final proposals are of a scale that are not visible in any key views that impact on the highly significant historic buildings and conservation areas.</p> | <p>7.56 Further larger developments, relating to Station Hill, Plot E, would be comparable to the scale of the Ibis and would add further bulk and massing along the views.</p> | <p>7.60 Overall, the proposal would result in the following townscape enhancements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a comprehensively developed commercial square at the heart of Reading town centre with improved public realm along Fife Court; • New pedestrian routes both east-west and north-south and better connectivity with the phase 1 of the Queen Victoria Street proposal; • The redevelopment of buildings that make limited contribution to the street scene and vitality of area; creating a more viable form of development that would ensure occupation; • Addition of new buildings of appropriate scale and high quality architectural style and materials, relating to their sensitive heritage contexts; • Retention and restoration of the historic Bugle PH that would continue the narrative of Reading's pub history within the wider area; • A well designed and appropriate frontage on the south side of Friar Street opposite the obtrusive Novotel/Ibis; and, • The positive visual effect of the Proposed Development on the surrounding area through the quality of its design and materials and through the increased activity and illumination brought day and night. |
| <p>7.53 The assessment of the views (Long and medium included in the DAS) and close range views show that the building would be largely invisible in most views, part from close views along Friar Street, looking either east or west.</p> | <p>7.57 As such, the proposal would sit comfortably within the existing and emerging context of the wider area as a high quality 21st Century layer.</p> | |
| <p>7.54 Whilst the scale of the building appears to have a 'bigger floor plate' than the comparatively finer grained buildings, the elevation treatment breaks the building to incorporate a similar rhythm as established within the street frontage. The use of brick on the frontage and terracotta curtain wall for the set back floors carefully distinguishes the 'roof' level with the main facade. This allows the street level frontage to appear unified with the wider street frontage, whilst still harmonising with the overall architectural language of the proposal.</p> | <p>7.58 In terms of its architectural appearance, the building frontage is proposed in red brick to reflect the materiality of the existing buildings found elsewhere on Friar Street. Panels of brick detailing are also included to the red brick part of the building to add visual interest. In order to achieve architectural unity, the upper set back floors are proposed to be in a similar colour tone. This further reduces the apparent massing of the building when seen in views. The predominant use of red brick reflects that on surrounding buildings and part of the special interest of the surrounding conservation area.</p> | |
| <p>7.55 Additionally, the views along Friar Street are dominated by the 14 storey Angel House/Novotel/Ibis Hotel. The stepped and glass clad building sits intrusively on the skyline along the northern part of Friar Street and dominates it.</p> | <p>7.59 Whilst the scale of the building would clearly represent a change to the building and the townscape of Friar Street but one that would enhance the heritage and townscape setting while contextual and high quality new development.</p> | |

Assessment against Policies

7.62 Policy EN 6 of Reading's Local Plan states:

In areas characterised by heritage assets, the historic environment will inform and shape new development. New development will make a contribution to the historic character of the area by respecting and enhancing its architectural and visual qualities and considering how heritage considerations can influence the design of new development. When determining planning applications for new development, the following factors will be taken into consideration:

- a *The positive contribution of the development to the existing historic townscape (scale, height, mass, proportion, plot size, street form, materials, significant vistas and views, and open space);*
- b *Sensitivity to historic context;*
- c *Reflection of borough-wide major heritage themes that contribute to local distinctiveness (e.g. patterned brickwork or former worker terraced housing);*
- d *Whether development promotes and/or improves access to previously undiscovered or neglected historic significance.*

7.63 Policy CC7 requires all development to be of "high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located." In addition, it states:

Developments will also be assessed to ensure that they: -

- *Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm;*
- *Create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion;*
- *Address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable and easy to understand by them, including providing suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily;*
- *Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping."*

7.64 The proposed development takes cues from the established rhythm and proportions and continues them in a contemporary interpretation, while also recognising that there is room for individual architectural expression within this varied townscape. In doing so, it attempts to create a distinctive yet contextual building that add a new twenty-first century layer to the character of the area. As part of this process, the building seeks to ground itself within this wider townscape.

7.65 Having undergone a rigorous process of design iteration, in consultation with the Council Officers alongside the Civic Society and Design Review Panel, the proposal has positively responded to comments and concerns raised through engagement process. This has led to the lowering of the height of the proposal, retention and restoration of the Bugle PH and its integration within the main development, and a carefully considered architectural language and materiality that unifies the proposal with the street scene whilst remaining subservient within the wider area.

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- 7.66 The proposal clearly respects the rhythm, scale and proportions of its neighbours, using vertical emphasis within the façades to break down the façade into a series of bays.
- 7.67 At six storeys, the height and massing of the proposed building would project above the established skyline along south side of Friar Street. This massing has been tested repeatedly through various long, medium and close distance views. The proposed setbacks are a result of this carefully considered context. The assessment of the views (Long and medium included in the DAS) and close range views show that the building would be largely invisible in most views, part from close views along Friar Street, looking either east or west.
- 7.68 In any case, the proposal is not a divergence from the existing context which includes the 14 storey tall Ibis Hotel opposite. Additionally, the emerging context of the Station Hill proposals would also be seen in cumulative views, where the proposal would continue to appear harmonious to its more sensitive heritage context.
- 7.69 As such, the proposal complies with policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) and CR2 (Design in Central Reading) that seek development to be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area within which it is located.
- 7.70 It will also conform with relevant policies of the Section 12 of the NPPF: 'Achieving well-designed places', which "reinforces the importance of good design in achieving sustainable development, by ensuring the creation of inclusive and high quality places".

Section 7

Conclusion.

8 Conclusion

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| <p>8.1 This Heritage and Townscape Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared in accordance with paragraph 189 of the NPPF and is submitted alongside an application for planning permission and listed building consent for a heritage led redevelopment of 138-144 Friar Street. There is a concurrent application for a revised scheme at No 148-145 Friar Street & 1-15 Queen Victoria Street, Reading.</p> | <p>8.5 Following detailed on-site investigations and structural assessment, the proposal would retain and restore much of the building, including the front part and part of the flank elevations alongside the roof. These parts are considered to be of greater value and would be incorporated within the proposal.</p> | <p>8.8 Whilst the loss of some of the fabric at Bugle will be considered to cause some harm, this would be mitigated by the appropriate recording of the building and interpretation provided insitu. Additionally, the new use proposed for the Bugle, its restoration and incorporation within the wider proposal will result in considerable heritage benefits that would easily outweigh the low level of less than substantial harm.</p> |
| <p>8.2 This report considers the impact of the proposal on the heritage assets and townscape of the area. It provides a proportionate assessment of the significance of the application Site and this is followed by an assessment of the effect of the proposals on that significance. Key views sensitive to heritage receptors were also identified to understand the impact of the proposed scale and massing of the proposals.</p> | <p>8.6 No 138-143 Friar Street are unlisted and have been altered beyond recognition. The modern shopfronts further detracts from the contribution to the setting of the listed buildings and wider the townscape of the area. The proposal to rebuild it to a more appropriate scale whilst adhering to the architectural homogeneity and urban grain would ensure that the character and appearance of the wider area and the setting of the listed buildings continues to be enhanced.</p> | <p>8.9 In townscape terms, the proposed development takes cues from the established rhythm and proportions and continues them in a contemporary interpretation, while also recognising that there is room for individual architectural expression within this varied townscape. In doing so, it attempts to create a distinctive yet contextual building that add a new twenty-first century layer to the character of the area.</p> |
| <p>8.3 Within the Site, The Bugle PH is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset, recently locally listed by the Council. Whilst much altered the main building along Friar Street has historic and communal value, alongside some townscape value.</p> | <p>8.7 The proposed scheme of works is based on an understanding of the significance, character, historic development and surviving historic fabric of the locally listed Bugle alongside the other heritage assets within the vicinity. The proposals have been designed to ensure that the scale and design remain homogeneous with the existing street frontage whilst providing a new 21st Century quarter within the area.</p> | <p>8.10 The elevation treatment breaks the building to incorporate a similar rhythm as established within the street frontage. The use of brick on the frontage and terracotta curtain wall for the set back floors carefully distinguishes the 'roof' level with the main facade. This allows the street level frontage to appear unified with the wider street frontage, whilst still harmonising with the overall architectural language of the proposal.</p> |
| <p>8.4 To the rear, the wing that contained tenements in the mid 19th Century has no architectural value and has been altered internally as well as externally. This part of the building has limited historic value.</p> | | |

- 8.11 In terms of massing and visual impacts, the proposal would enhance the area's townscape setting with a contextual and high quality new development. Whilst views along Friar Street would continue to be dominated by the 14 storey Angel House/Novotel/Ibis Hotel, the proposal would sit harmoniously within its sensitive as well as emerging context, such as the new development at Plot E, Station Hill.
- 8.12 The assessment of the views (Long and medium included in the DAS) and close range views show that the building would be largely invisible in most views, part from close views along Friar Street, looking either east or west.
- 8.13 Having undergone a rigorous process of design iteration, in consultation with the Council Officers alongside the Civic Society and Design Review Panel, the proposal has positively responded to comments and concerns raised through engagement process. This has led to the lowering of the height of the proposal, retention and restoration of the Bugle PH and its integration within the main development, and a carefully considered architectural language and materiality that unifies the proposal with the street scene whilst remaining subservient within the wider area.
- 8.14 Overall, the proposal would positively contribute to the existing historic and sensitive townscape of Reading in terms of its scale, height, massing, proportions, fenestration, materiality and street frontage. It also responds positively to the local context to create a contemporary development which harmonises with the surroundings and reinforces Reading's local distinctiveness.
- 8.15 As such, the scheme will result in enhancement in heritage and townscape terms by optimising use of the heritage assets within town centre as well as considerably improving their commercial frontages and would be in compliance with relevant local plan policies- EN1, EN4 and EN 6. In addition, the proposal complies with policies CC7 and CR2 that seek development to be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area within which it is located.
- 8.16 In accordance with NPPF paragraph 203, the proposal takes a balanced judgment against the limited loss of significance against the significance heritage benefits. As such, the scheme is found to be compliant with local and national planning policy (as outlined in Section 2) as relevant to heritage.
- 8.17 In addition, having undergone a rigorous iterative process of design evolution and considered architectural language, scale and massing, the proposal is also compliant with Section 12, Policy 130 of the NPPF which requires new development to achieve high quality design.

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Appendix 1

References.

Appendix 1: References

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Online resources

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University of Leicester special collections: <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll4>

<https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/>

<http://ww2.berkshirenclosure.org.uk/calmview/>

Appendix 2

**Statutory List
Descriptions.**

Appendix 2: Statutory List Descriptions

147 Friar Street

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1113488

Date first listed: 14-Dec-1978

Statutory Address 1: 147, FRIAR STREET

District: Reading (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference: SU7149673571

Details

1. 5128 SU 7173 12/492

FRIAR STREET (South Side) No 147

2. Circa 1880s. 3½ storey commercial frontage. Painted brick with stone voussoirs and dressings. Cornice and parapet. 3 high segmental headed dormers with ramped moulded coping between and modillion cornices, centre 2-light. These and 3 pairs of windows on 2nd floor are plate glass sashes. 4 depressed arches on 1st floor under cornice and fascia with outer pilasters and dividing fluted columns with Corinthian caps. Cornice and fascia over ground floor shop front of similar pattern with recessed entrance. The 2 storey shop front is the main interest of this building and it is included for that reason.

1-31 Queen Victoria Street

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1113564

Date first listed: 14-Dec-1978

Date of most recent amendment: 01-Aug-1979

Statutory Address 1: 1-31, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET

Statutory Address 2: 148,149 AND 150, FRIAR STREET

Statutory Address 3: 2-32, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET

Statutory Address 4: 24-28, BROAD STREET

Statutory Address 5: 35-38, BROAD STREET

District: Reading (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference: SU7152373529

Details

In the entry for BROAD STREET (north side)

1/558 Nos 24 to 28 (consec) Nos 35 to 37 (consec) the numbering shall be amended to read Nos 24, 26, and 28 and Nos 35, 36 and 37

FRIAR STREET (South Side) 2/558 Nos 148 and 149

The numbering shall be amended to read Nos 148, 149 and 150

QUEEN VICTORIA STREET 1. 5128 Nos 1 to 31 (odd) Nos 2 to 32 (even) SU 7173 NE 1/558 SU 7173 SW 2/558 SU 7173 SE 3/558 SU 7173 12/558 II

2. Including Nos 148 and 149 Friar Street and Nos 24 to 28 and 35 to 37 (consec) Broad Street. A circa 1894 commercial street with returns to Broad and Friar Streets. Probably by Joseph Morris. Dutch gabled free Baroque style. 3 1/2 storeys, yellow brick and terracotta with dividing Ionic pilasters. Dentil cornice. Pilasters to dormers, broken pediments above. An elongated pattern of shallow bays to 1st and 2nd floors 4:2:1:1:1:1:3. Mullion and transom window to bays, sashes with architraves (and pediments on 1st floor) to rest. Modern shopfronts, retaining cornice to fascia and scroll brackets to pilasters, only one shop retains prewar shopfront. Large returns to Broad Street. The return to east (No 28 Broad Street) supported by No 26 (dated 1894, grey brick with red terracotta dressings) and by No 24 (an early C20 Bank with -large shaped pediment doorway on corner to Cross Street; red brick with stone dressings and stone fret patterns to gables).

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Heritage | Regeneration | Placemaking