Built Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (HTVIA)

Debenhams & Vue, The Oracle, Reading

December 2022

Turley

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Client
The Oracle Limited Partnership

Our reference
PACS3000

December 2022

1. Introduction and Approach

Purpose of the Report

1.1 This Built Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (HTVIA) has been prepared by Turley to accompany a full planning application for Proposed Development at former Debenhams store and Vue cinema within The Oracle complex within the town centre of Reading ('the Site'), the location of which can be found at **Figure 1.1**. The Site comprises two separate development parcels, which are the former Debenhams store which adjoins the main shopping centre at its east end, addresses Yield Hall Place at the east and also the waterside (River Kennet) to the south, and the Vue cinema to the southside of the river, and addresses London Street to the east and Mill Lane (part of the Inner Distributor Road (IDR)) to the south. This HTVIA has been prepared on behalf of The Oracle Limted Partnership (the 'Applicant') to provide appropriate and proportionate information to the local planning authority (Reading Borough Council or 'RBC') with regard to the likely built heritage, townscape and visual effects in relation to these proposals within the town centre.

Figure 1.1: Site Location Photograph (red line)

1.2 Planning permission is sought for the repurposing and redevelopment of sites at the eastern end of the Oracle to provide a mixed use development comprising residential and town centres uses. The proposals focus around two main sites:

- Former Debenhams department store at the eastern end of the Oracle shopping centre building and northern side of the River Kennet, to be known as Yield Hall Place 1; and
- Vue cinema building on the southern side of the River Kennet and to the east of the Oracle Riverside multi storey car park, to be known as Yield Hall Place 2.

1.3 Two detailed planning applications are submitted; one application for Yield Hall Place 1 and one application for Yield Hall Place 2. These applications will be submitted concurrently to Reading Borough Council and expected to be considered and determined in this way by the local planning authority. This report is submitted in respect of both applications and assesses the proposals as a single scheme for the purpose of the technical assessment undertaken. An illustrative plan is submitted with both planning application which identifies the full extent of the proposed developments, and the schemes assessed for the purposes of this report. Where matters only pertain to one of the planning application sites, these are specifically identified within the report.

1.4 Alongside the development proposals on the two sites identified above, a suite of public realm enhancements is proposed within the vicinity of The Oracle, including:

- Junction with London Street and Inner Distributor Road;
- Yield Hall Place from junction of London Street to Minister Street; and
- Oracle Riverside.

1.5 For the purposes of the application, the development proposals (the 'Proposed Development') for the Site / both sites comprise:

"Yield Hall Place 1 (Former Debenhams):

Mixed use development comprising part demolition of former department store and erection of new building comprising build to rent residential use (Class C3) and commercial uses within Uses Class E. Reconfiguration and change of use of remaining department store floorspace (Class E) to uses with within Use Class E and / or bar (Sui Generis Use) and / or experiential leisure use (Sui Generis Use). Associated public realm, infrastructure works and external alterations to shopping centre, including creation of new shopping centre entrance. [and]

Yield Hall Place 2 (Vue Cinema):

Mixed use development comprising demolition of existing buildings and erection of new building comprising build-to-rent residential use (Class C3), cinema (Sui Generis) and ground floor commercial uses within Use Class E. Associated public realm and infrastructure works."

1.6 The application submission has been informed by a constructive process of pre-application engagement with RBC and their officers. A process that has also included presentation to and discussion with other key stakeholders including Design South East (acting as the Design Review Panel (DRP) and adviser to RBC) and Historic England. Turley has earlier prepared a Preliminary Built Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal report, which has been shared with stakeholders as the design evolved during the pre-application stage. This report was also used actively to assist in determining the scope of baseline appraisal work, as well as the approach and methodology to assessing built heritage, townscape, and

visual impacts. The findings of that report also provided advice to the project team to support the design development process.

1.7 With regard to built heritage impacts, section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty upon the local planning authority in determining applications for development affecting listed buildings to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the building's special interest or its setting. Under section 72, the Act also requires that special attention be given to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. There is, however, no corresponding statutory duty relating to the setting of conservation areas.

1.8 The National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework' or NPPF) 2021 then provides the Government's national planning policy on the conservation of the historic environment. In respect of information requirements for applications, it sets out that:

"In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary …"[1]

1.9 National planning policy also provides further guidance with regard to the requirement for assessment of both townscape and visual effects in relation to new development and in achieving good design. This underpins the purpose of this report. Accordingly, the relevant legislative and policy context is set out in summary at **Section 2** and also in full at ***Appendix 1*** to this report.

Approach and Methodology

Site and Study Area

1.10 The application Site is defined by its role within the mixed use and vibrant town centre of Reading and also its accessible location near to key transport routes, including the IDR (part of the A329) running east-west, London Street and its continuation Duke Street running north-south into the historic core, the waterways of the River Kennet and Avon Canal, and associated pedestrian / cycle links. The main railway station serving the town is located less than 500m to the north. The Site is now vacant but was formerly in commercial use as part of a purpose-built retail and leisure complex dating from the late 20th century. The two development parcels straddle the river – to its north and south sides – and both comprise large scale and format modern buildings and urban blocks, albeit employing a mix of more traditional cladding materials. These buildings are orientated to address the riverside and also London Street, with more inactive frontages to the service yard at Yield Hall Place and also the IDR.

1.11 Historically the Site forms part of the former industrial area along the river and canal. This is immediately to the west of the ancient north-south route of London Street / Duke Street through the historic core of Reading, which crosses the Kennet at High Bridge and also leads into the Market Place. It was in the later 20th century that the greatest degree of change occurred to this past layout and character. The post war development of the IDR along the south side of the river and a new bridge crossing along the line of Yield Hall Place established a new pattern of movement and also a generally larger grain and scale of built form, infrastructure and spaces. Older buildings on both sides of London Street at its north end were cleared away, and more recently the comprehensive development of The Oracle complex has further established a new mix of uses and character for the area. As found today, the Site integrates poorly with the older street pattern and activity, although the wider complex has embraced the river to create new public realm along the water. The Oracle itself has become the focus of leisure and retail uses not only for this town but also as a centre of regional importance, although this role is now changing in response to wider national trends.

1.12 Initially a 500-metre radius of search from the centre of the Site has been established for the Study Area. This was considered appropriate from our professional assessment and analysis of the likely built heritage and townscape effects of new development of this type and scale on the wider urban area given the particular history, pattern, form and character of the surrounding townscape. There will be more distant areas beyond this with some inter-visibility with the Site, however, the effects on heritage and townscape receptors beyond the Study Area would not be significant and, as such, further detailed assessment is not warranted. This approach is supported by the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition (GLVIA3), which states that the scale of assessment should be appropriate and proportional to the nature of the Proposed Development.

1.13 The related visual appraisal considers the approximate zone of visual influence of the scheme proposal within a wider 1km Study Area, with further long distant views being considered were identified and relevant. This has been informed by the production of a computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), which identifies where in the surrounding townscape the Proposed Development is likely to be visible. This has been modelled using the latest LIDAR data available and proposed height, scale and massing of the scheme and looks at a wider 2km study area. This is included at **Appendix 3** to this report.

Surveys

1.14 A preliminary desk study was undertaken to establish the physical components of the Site and its surrounding townscape. Built heritage assets were identified within the Study Area, published townscape characterisation studies reviewed, and visual receptors to the Site from within this area were identified, along with a number of supporting representative viewpoints that could be tested to better appreciate the likely visual effects of the Proposed Development within its context. Historical and current Ordnance Survey (OS) maps and aerial photography were utilised to identify these features, alongside other online sources such as the National Heritage List for England (Historic England) and RBC. This desk study included a review of relevant legislation, national and local planning policy and guidance, which is set out in full at **Appendix 1**.

1.15 Field studies were then undertaken built heritage consultant(s) and townscape / landscape specialist(s) firstly in August 2021 and again in April 2022, during which the visibility was recorded as good each time. The key features of the Site and surrounding townscape were identified, and the nature and extent of likely visibility of the Proposed Development was established. Representative views were selected based upon the localised screening effect of distance, topography, built form and vegetation. This was accompanied by the identification of a number of townscape character areas (TCA), locating built heritage assets, and also key views and vistas, within the Study Area to help describe the wider surroundings of the Site and how the development may affect the character of these areas. The field study also involved travelling around the Study Area and producing a working photographic record.

[1] National Planning Policy Framework 2021 - Paragraph 194

Appraisal Methodology

1.16 The approach and methodology for undertaking this HTVIA is set out in full at **Appendix 2** accordingly. Our team's professional approach is based upon informed and reasoned professional judgement, taking into account a combination of quantitative and qualitative factors. In summary, our team's methodology is drawn from the following legislation, planning policy and best practice guidance, including:

- The relevant statutory duties of The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990;
- The NPPF 2021, supporting NPPG and relevant DCMS and Historic England (HE) guidance, including Principles of Selection for Listed Buildings 2018, GPA Note 2 (Managing Significance in Decision Taking) 2015, GPA Note 3 (Setting of Heritage Assets) 2017 2nd Edition, and various supporting HE Advice Notes;
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd Edition) 2013 (Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment) (GLVIA3);
- Townscape Character Assessment 2017 (Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 05/2017); and
- Visual Representation of Development Proposals, 2019 (Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 06/19).

Contents of the Report

1.17 This report is set out in eight sections, and four appendices. This introductory **Section 1** outlines the approach and methodology for the assessment of built heritage assets, townscape character and visual amenity sensitivities relating to the Proposed Development on the Site.

1.18 **Section 2** provides a summary of the legislation and planning policy / guidance, at both national and local levels, relevant to the consideration of the Proposed Development in relation to built heritage, townscape and visual matters.

1.19 This is followed by, **Sections 3-5**, which is the process of establishing the baseline conditions of the Site and its Study Area for each of these closely related disciplines.

1.20 **Section 3** (Built Heritage) firstly sets the scene with a short description of the historical development of the Site within the context of its local area. Section 3 then identifies the built heritage assets; the significance of which has the potential to be affected (indirectly through change to setting and views) by the Proposed Development. Also provided is a proportionate description of the particular significance and any contribution of setting of each of these heritage assets.

1.21 **Section 4** (Townscape Character) complements that heritage baseline, by describing the value of the defined townscape character areas (TCA) relevant to the Site and the Study Area. This is drawn from published characterisation studies as appropriate, alongside site-specific analysis.

1.22 **Section 5** sets out the identification of key visual receptors and associated recommended representative views (RV) in relation to the Proposed Development on Site.

1.23 **Section 6** then provides an assessment of the likely effects of the Proposed Development on the described baseline conditions; with regard to the built heritage assets, townscape character and visual amenity / views. Subsequently analysed in **Section 7** are the 18 no. representative viewpoints that have been identified and agreed with RBC officers for testing as part of earlier pre-application discussions. These have been used; alongside other descriptive information provided by the project architects, to inform the assessment of effects arising from the Proposed Development. For these representative views, existing photography and a proportionate mix of types of proposed accurate visual representations (AVR) have been provided.

1.24 A summary of the findings of this assessment is set out at the end of this statement within **Section 8**.

1.25 The HTVIA is supported by a series of figures and technical appendices that can be found towards the end of this document (including **Appendix 3: Supporting Figures**).

1.26 **Appendix 4** is a separate document prepared by the appointed visualisation consultant (Ambiente Architectural Visualisation) that sets out the technical methodology used to prepare AVRs to support the assessment of effects. This also includes full size versions of the AVRs, and baseline photography that are also shown as insets and for ease of reference in **Section 7**.

2. Legislative and Planning Policy Context (Summary)

2.1 This document has been informed by desktop and on-site analysis for the Site and local and wider area, and also through review of the following relevant legislation and planning policy and documents:

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 – in particular as relates to the statutory protection of the special interest and setting of listed buildings, and also the character and appearance of conservation areas;
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) and NPPG – in relation of national guidance on achieving good design that responds positively to its context, and also the conservation of both designated and non-designated heritage assets;
- The local Development Plan for Reading Borough Council, including:
  - Local Plan (2019) – in particular:
  - Policies EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas), EN4 (Locally Important Heritage Assets), EN5 (Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest), EN6 (New Development in an Historic Context), CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), CR2 (Design in Central Reading) and CR10 (Tall Buildings).
- Supplementary Planning Documents / Guidance / background evidence for RBC, including:
  - Assessment of Significant Views with Heritage interest (2018);
  - Historic Environment Background Paper (2018), to the then emerging Local Plan;
  - Reading Tall Building Strategy Update Note (2018);
  - Reading Tall Building Strategy (2008), including Tall Building Market Analysis (2007);
  - City Centre Framework (2008);
  - Conservation Area Appraisals (various).
- Historic England best practice advice:
  - Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment (2015);
  - Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2nd Edition) (2017); and
  - Historic Environment Advice Notes (various),
- National Design Guide: Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places (2019).

3. Historical Development and Built Heritage Assets

Historical Development

Reading Town

3.1 It is important to understand the historical development / time depth of the Site and its role in the local area as part of any contextual study that informs its future development and also the design approach. As a supporting study to the then emerging Local Plan a Historic Environment Background Paper (2018) was prepared by RBC, which included a draft Heritage Statement (2014) for the town and Borough of Reading. Together with the various published Conservation Area Appraisals, this evidence has been reviewed as part of our own initial analysis. The Heritage Statement states in overview that:

"There has been a long history of settlement in the area, with the name Reading having Saxon roots. Reading Abbey was a very important and prestigious religious centre throughout the Middle Ages. Much of Reading's growth took place in the Victorian era after the development of canals. The arrival of the railway led to the significant expansion of manufacturing in the town. This history is reflected in over 800 listed buildings, fifteen conservation areas and two scheduled ancient monuments, as well as six museums and a host of designated heritage assets. Those that seek out Reading's heritage are richly rewarded.

This long heritage is important in forming the identity of the town and its people. It has a direct influence on the quality of life of its residents and is a key asset to the local and regional economy. Reading's heritage is an important and unique asset, albeit sometimes our best kept secret."

3.2 Appendix 1 to the Reading Tall Building Strategy SPD (2008), referred to as Cultural Heritage Desk Study, is also of particular relevant to our analysis. It is outlined that this study reappraises and synthesises existing information and evidence from various sources, including those relating to historic buildings and conservation areas. It includes information held in the local Sites and Monuments Record, but is principally based on historic maps and plans. This information is collected and mapped to assist in an analysis of the town plan and the definition of major historic topographic units within the town. This process of reappraisal generates a clearer picture of how the central area has evolved through time.

3.3 The more recently adopted Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) provides a succinct description of the Central Reading area (which includes the Site itself), in terms of its historical development and also current projections for its future growth. In summary, it states that:

"The character of the town centre is strongly linked to the history of the town. There is some evidence of Roman settlement, and the name of Reading has Saxon origins, with the original Saxon settlement in the vicinity of St Mary's church. The development of Reading Abbey, founded in 1121, was a major economic stimulus for the town. The historic core of the centre dates from medieval times, around the three medieval churches of St Laurence's, St Giles' and St Mary's. Reading was mostly contained within its medieval boundaries until the end of the 18th century, when the town began to expand as a result of improved transport links (including transformation of the River Kennet into a canal, linking Reading with other areas), and industrialisation. Reading's emergence as an industrial centre is largely attributable to the arrival of the Great Western railway in the mid-19th Century.

The opening of the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) in 1960 transformed the town centre, with changes to the physical appearance of Reading, including alterations to the historic street pattern, the loss of historic buildings, and dissection of the town centre. Parts of Reading's historic core were demolished during the mid-20th Century, to make way for more modern developments. However, much of historical merit remains.

More recently, there has been substantial new development within the centre. The opening of the Oracle centre in 1999 helped to establish Reading as one of the leading shopping locations in the UK. More recently, Reading station has been transformed, increasing passenger capacity and removing a significant bottleneck on the rail network. New public spaces north and south of the station provide a focus for new development. New tall buildings have been developed in the centre, and, with further tall buildings already permitted, the skyline of Central Reading is set to transform ..."

Figure 3.1: Extract John Rocque's Map of Reading dated 1761[2]

[2] Berkshire County Record Office

3.4 The settlement of Reading was established at the lowest point of the River Kennet, where it could be forded. The original crossing place was at today's Bridge Street, and here the roads from Oxford, Southampton, Bath and London converged. Reading's location on the Kennet, near its junction with the Thames, means that it is in a favourable position for waterborne trade as well as passing traffic on the roads. The foundation of Reading Abbey by Henry I also fostered the growth of the town. This was located in the area of today's Forbury, transferred to the Benedictine order in the mid-13th century, and grew steadily so that by the mid-14th century it had become one of the richest abbeys in the country. Its royal patronage made it one of the main pilgrimage sites in England, and inevitably a population grew up around it which made a living from the many people visiting the town.

3.5 In its earliest years, the principal route through Reading followed Southampton Street, Bridge Street and St Mary's Butts in a north-south direction, past St Mary's Church and the original nucleus of the town. As the influence of the Abbey grew, the route along London Street and Duke Street to the Market Place outside St Laurence's Church became more popular, and shifted the focus of the town eastwards. It is this 12th century route which forms the back-bone of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. Reading Abbey was largely destroyed during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, after which its building materials were steadily quarried for reuse elsewhere in the town. Despite the loss of this key draw to the town, Reading continued to thrive on a range of trades and industries, including cloth and leather manufacture, and silk weaving.

3.6 One of the earliest detailed modern maps of Reading shows the town arranged in a broadly triangular shape to either side of the River Kennet. Friar Street formed one side of the triangle; with Southampton Street, Bridge Street and St Mary's Butts forming a second side, and London Street, Duke Street and Market Place the third. A church is located at each apex: St Laurence's, St Mary's and St Giles'. An extract of John Rocque's 18th century map is included at Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.2: Photograph of Medieval St Lawrence's Church at the head of the Market Place, dated late 19th century[3]

[3] Berkshire Archives and Local Study Centre

3.7 The early established triangular settlement pattern remained legible through the 18th century, although some additional linear development had expanded westwards along Castle Hill and Bath Road, and also eastwards along London Road. Whilst the town itself remained relatively contained, its role and reputation grew in importance when work began in the early-18th century to make the both the Rivers Kennet and Avon navigable. This encouraged further trade and connection with Bath and Bristol in the west, and also London in the east. Construction began on a canal to connect the two rivers in 1794, and this was completed in 1810. This created a continuous waterborne route between Bristol and London, passing through Reading, and also highlighted Reading's importance commercially and industrially.

Figure 3.3: Extract of Ordnance Survey (OS) map dated 1877 (approximate area of the Site identified by a red circle)

3.8 The town filled out over the early decades of the 19th century. The medieval linear development along the three main routes again expanded outwards with new streets and development, and as a result of the improvements in transport and infrastructure in the town, and its status on the key transport route of the Kennet and Avon Canal. The Great Western Railway opened through the town in 1840, and as with the canal, this catalysed further growth and expansion. Major industries now began to be established in the town, including the biscuit manufacturers Huntley and Palmers, which by 1900 was the largest biscuit

manufacturer in the world and employed over 5,000 people in the town. The Site itself formed part of that growing industrial importance for the town at that time, with its direct connection with the River Kennet waterway. Figure 3.3 includes an extract of the 1877 Ordnance Survey map held by Berkshire Archives.

Figure 3.4: Photograph of the High Bridge from the east looking west towards the Site, dated 1981 (prior to The Oracle redevelopment)[4]

3.9 Into the 20th century Reading grown to become much denser and built-up, so that the early triangular street pattern had been both in-filled and surrounded by further streets of housing and industry. However, the medieval street pattern of London Street, Duke Street and Market Place remained legible, with its fine-grained street pattern of narrow-fronted plots, up to the Second World War. It was during and then immediately after this war that the greatest change occurred to the townscape. Extensive enemy bombing during the war necessitated the redevelopment of many central sites, albeit joined in the post-war period by even more comprehensive development plans for the future town that impacts much of the historic core. Larger-scale redevelopment has also occurred along the waterside and close to the new Inner Distribution Road (IDR), which was constructed between 1969 and the late-1980s east to west to the southern edge of the town centre. It is this road, more than any other late-20th century development, which has impacted upon the character of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and the town as a whole. It now bisects this designated area just south of the river and very near to the Site itself and involved the demolition of elements of Reading's historic core and building stock.

[4] https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/

The Site

3.10 Historically the Site forms part of the former commercial / industrial area along the canalised River Kennet. This is immediately to the west of the more ancient north-south route of London Street / Duke Street through the historic core of Reading, which crosses the Kennet at High Bridge and leads into the Market Place further north. Figure 3.3 and this extract of the 1877 Ordnance Survey indicates a much more complex and finer grain pattern of waterways and streets / lanes prior to the more comprehensive industrialisation of this area that continued into the 20th century. Mill Lane can be seen in the late 19th century still addressing the waterfront, and also where a large corn mill (St Giles's Mill) and its race dominated the area between the two ancient bridge crossings. The extract from the later 1934 Ordnance Survey map (Figure 3.5) illustrates the past uses, built form and pattern of streets and spaces in the interwar period. The old mill race had been built over as part of canalisation of the River Kennet. From the Site westwards the waterway of the Kennet and Avon Canal was then dominated by the industrial complexes of Reading Gas Works, Huntley and Palmers Biscuit Factory and Simmonds Brewery, to name just a few of the main industrial premises. Figure 3.6 is an aerial photograph, also from the inter-war period, that illustrates the appearance of the Site and its local waterside area prior to the effects of post-war redevelopments.

Figure 3.5: Extract of OS map dated 1934 (approximate area of the Site identified by a red circle)

3.11 It was again in the later 20th century that the greatest degree of change occurred to this past townscape form and character in relation to the Site. The development of the IDR (Queens Road) bypass along the south side of the canal and a new bridge crossing along the line of Yield Hall Place established a new pattern of movement and also introduces a generally larger grain and scale of built form, infrastructure and spaces. Older buildings on both sides of London Street at its north end were cleared away; leaving more isolated or divided historic built elements. More recently, the comprehensive development of The Oracle centre has further established this new character for the area on both sides of the Kennet to the

west of the ancient bridge crossing of London Street. One remnant of the historic use of this Site however is the existing stone plaque "Reading Corporation Tramways Power Station" to the south elevation of the Vue cinema, which was taken from the former tramways depot building of 1903 following its demolition in 1998.

Figure 3.6: Aerial photograph of the Site from the east looking across High Bridge / London Street in the foreground along the canal westward to the former Tram and Bus Depot and The Seven Bridges Brewery, dated 1932[5]

3.12 As found today, the Site no longer integrates with, nor positively addresses or activates, London Street. The existing buildings are modern, large scale and of no particular architectural and or historic interest in relation to nearby heritage assets. Although largely inward looking as a shopping centre, The Oracle development itself has embraced the river to create new public realm along the water (Kennetside / Oracle Riverside). The name The Oracle is taken from that of the earlier 17th workhouse that once existed on part of its site towards Minster Street. This was one of the earliest workhouses built in the country and its primary use was for the production of cloth. Archaeological remains of the workhouse and its associated industry remain below this later redevelopment.

Figure 3.7: Photograph of Site as seen from the south east and Queens Road / London Street (2022)

Figure 3.8: Photograph of Site as seen from the west and Bridge Street bridge along River Kennet (2022)

[5] https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk

Built Heritage Assets

3.13 The NPPF 2021 defines a heritage asset as:

"A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing)."

3.14 Designated heritage assets are those that possess a level of heritage interest that justifies designation under relevant legislation and are, consequently, subject to particular procedures in planning decisions that involve them. The NPPF defines designated heritage assets as:

"A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated under the relevant legislation."

3.15 The NPPF[6] also identifies that heritage assets include both designated heritage assets and assets identified by the relevant local planning authority (including local listing). These are known as non-designated heritage assets.

3.16 The Site does include any statutory listed buildings, nor does it contain any buildings or structures that have been identified to be of heritage interest at the local level (i.e. local listing or non-designated heritage assets for the purpose of the NPPF).

3.17 The eastern part of the south area of the Site does, however, fall within the boundary of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, which is a designated heritage asset for the purpose of national policy. The proposed redevelopment of that part of the Site would then directly affect the significance of this conservation area. However, the boundary for this designated area as it currently crosses this part of the Site is in our view appears somewhat arbitrary as it pre-dates the development of The Oracle scheme.

3.18 No buildings or spaces within the Site have been identified in the relevant published Conservation Area Appraisal dating from 2007 as making any positive contribution to the significance or setting of this heritage asset.

3.19 The Proposed Development for this Site would have the potential to affect the significance of this, and also a number of other heritage assets within the local and also wider townscape area of the Site indirectly through change to the character and appearance of part of their shared settings and also local views. These receptors include other designated heritage assets such as statutory listed buildings, conservation areas and a scheduled monument, and potentially non-designated heritage assets.

3.20 The following built heritage assets have been scoped in as relevant to our contextual analysis in tables 3.1-3.3. This has been based on an initial review of existing published information, focussed desktop and archival research by our team, the establishing of an initial 500m radius study area, and then working outwards to gauge any other potentially significant visual effects with regard to other heritage assets at a greater distance from the Site. In addition, the relevant Historic Environment Record (HER) for this local planning authority area (Berkshire County and RBC) has been consulted.

3.21 To further assist the scoping in and scoping out process of these heritage asset receptors, the visibility of the Site and emerging height, scale and massing of emerging proposed built development (as provided in model format by the scheme architects) within the surrounding townscape area was assessed at that stage using a computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV). This analysis is further described in relation to visibility and likely visual effects in a later section of this report. This analysis has been further confirmed by our on-site review.

3.22 A field study then has been undertaken as part of our process of analysis (firstly in August 2021 and again in April 2022 - during which the weather conditions were reported as good on both occasions). The location and extent of the identified built heritage assets were confirmed and explored during this survey, including consideration of heritage significance and also any contribution of setting and the experience of views whilst in the field.

Designated Heritage Assets

Listed Buildings

3.23 The Site is located within the local and wider setting of a number of statutorily listed buildings or structures of special architectural and or historic interest. These designated heritage assets have first been identified using HE's National Heritage List for England map web resource. Following this initial stage of identification, a further stage of on-site inspection has informed the scope of listed buildings that have been included in our appraisal. The listed buildings and or structures that are identified as having the potential to be affected by the proposed development on Site are identified in Table 3.1. Some of these have been grouped together for the purposes of this assessment due to close similarities in their location, building type / style, use, and or age / history.

Table 3.1: Listed Buildings

Type	Name
Listed building	Nos.2-4 London Street (Grade II)
Listed building	Coroner's Court, London Street (Grade II)
Listed building	High Bridge (Grade II)
Listed building group	London Street: Nos.33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62.66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 London Street (all Grade II)
Listed building	Nos.24-52 Queen's Crescent (Grade II)
Listed building group	The George Hotel, King Street (Grade II) Building on south-east corner, Yield Hall Place (Grade II)
Listed building group	Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place (including No.10 High Street) (all Grade II)
Listed building Landmark	Church of St Laurence (Grade I)

[6] MHCLG, National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 - Annex 2: Glossary

Listed building	Telephone Exchange, Minster Street (Grade II)
Listed building Landmark	Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts (Grade I)
Listed building Landmark	Church of St Giles, Southampton Street (Grade II)

Conservation Areas

3.24 Part of the Site is located within the designated area of one conservation area (Market Place / London Street), and the wider Site also within the local and wider setting of this and a number of other conservation areas that have been designated by the local planning authority. These designated heritage assets have first been identified using the local planning authorities' web resources. Following this initial stage of identification, a further stage of on-site inspection has informed this scope. The conservation areas that are identified as having the potential to be affected by the development of the Site are identified in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Conservation Areas

Type	Name
Conservation Area	Market Place / London Street
Conservation Area	St Mary's Butts / Castle Street

Scheduled Monument

3.25 The Site is located within the local setting of one designated scheduled monument, which has been identified using HE's National Heritage List for England map web resource. Following this initial stage of identification, a further stage of on-site inspection has informed our appraisal to exclude other such designations from our baseline analysis as not having the potential to be affected by the proposed development. Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: Scheduled Monument

Type	Name
Scheduled monument	High Bridge

3.26 In addition, we have identified that there are a much larger number of other designated (and also potential non-designated) heritage assets within the wider surrounding area of the Site. These have been scoped out from our assessment however; as informed by both desktop analysis and on site survey, in light of the screening and or filtering effects on visibility of distance, street pattern, intervening built form and or mature vegetation, and also in terms of the particular heritage significance of the asset and its relationship (or lack of) within its wider townscape setting and the Site itself.

3.27 A **Heritage Assets Plan** (HAP) is provided as part of this document to illustrate the location of potential built heritage asset receptors (both scoped in or out) within the surrounding area of the Site and Reading town centre. This is included as a figure at ***Appendix 3***.

3.28 It is noted that analysis of the archaeological resource or any below ground heritage assets within the Site or its surrounding area falls outside the remit of this report.

Heritage Significance and Setting

3.29 The NPPF 2021 defines the 'significance' of a heritage asset as:

"The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting ..."[7]

3.30 Supporting NPPG confirms that heritage interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic, and also provides further detail as below:

- *"Archaeological interest: As defined in the Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework, there will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.*
- *Architectural and artistic interest: These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skill, like sculpture.*
- *Historic interest: An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity."* [8]

3.31 Moreover, the NPPG also confirms that the terms 'special architectural or historic interest' of a listed building and the 'national importance' of a scheduled monument are used to describe all or part of what, in planning terms, is referred to as the identified heritage asset's significance[9].

3.32 Historic England has published guidance with regard to the preparation of statements of heritage significance, and how the proper analysis of the significance of heritage assets should be used to inform an assessment of impacts on that significance as a result of proposed change.[10] The 'setting' of a heritage asset is defined by the NPPF to comprise:

"The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to

[7] MHCLG, National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 – Annex 2: Glossary.
[8] Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 18a-006-20190723
[9] Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 18a-006-20190723
[10] Historic England: Advice Note 12: Statements of Heritage Significance 2019

the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral."[11]

3.33 Historic England has published good practice advice[12] in respect of the setting of heritage assets and also views analysis, providing detail on understanding setting and views and how this relates to heritage significance, and also how to gauge the indirect impact of any changes on that significance. In understanding how, and to what degree an element of setting contributes to the significance of a heritage asset, consideration should be given (inter alia) to: the physical surroundings of the asset, including its relationship with other heritage assets; the way the asset is appreciated; and the asset's associations and patterns of use. Our baseline appraisal work also recognises that historic, functional and or visual inter-relationships exist between the identified heritage assets, for particular example where a conservation area provides the key element of the setting of a statutory listed building or group that contributes to their significance. Accordingly, the sometimes complex and overlapping nature the heritage interests of these assets will be acknowledged and articulated. Further guidance on the definition of setting and how it should be taken into account is set out in NPPG.

3.34 Historic England has also in the past provided further guidance for their staff (and others) on their approach to making decisions and offering guidance about all aspects of England's historic environment[13]. This provides advice on how to assess the contribution of elements of a heritage asset, or within its setting, to its significance in terms of its 'heritage values'. These include: evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal. This supplements the established definitions of heritage significance and interests set out in founding legislation and more recent national planning policy and guidance.

Designated Heritage Assets

Listed Buildings

3.35 Listed buildings are defined as designated heritage assets that hold special architectural or historic interest. The principles of selection for listed buildings are published by the Department of Digital, Culture Media and Sport, and supported by Historic England's Listing Selection Guides for each building type. This is supported by Historic England's Listing Selection Guides for each building type.[14]

Conservation Areas

3.36 Conservation areas are designated on the basis of their special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Historic England has published guidance in respect of conservation areas, and this provides a framework for the appraisal and assessment of the special interest and significance of a conservation area.[15]

Scheduled Monuments

3.37 Scheduled monuments are those archaeological sites which are considered by the government to be of national importance. Historic England has published selection guides for different types of archaeological remains.[16] Scheduling refers to the legal system for protecting nationally important monuments and archaeological remains in England and Wales. Its aim is to preserve the best examples of these for the benefit of current and future generations. These assets are added to the 'Schedule' (the list of legally protected monuments) by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, under powers contained in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, 1979.

Statements of Heritage Significance

3.38 The statements of heritage significance set out in the following sub-section of this baseline appraisal are proportionate to the importance of each of these built heritage assets, and provide a sufficient level of description to understand and appreciate the historic and heritage context, and the potential impacts of the Development on Site. The description of the particular significance and interests of each heritage asset is provided, including any contribution of setting (including the Site itself) and views to that significance. This work is in accordance with the requirements of the NPPF 2021 (paragraphs 194-195) and also best practice guidance and advice published by the DCMS and Historic England (HE).

3.39 Our analysis has been undertaken on the basis of the definition of an initial study area, followed by review of existing published information, focussed desktop and archival research by our professional team. In addition, the relevant Historic Environment Record (HER)[17] for this local planning authority area has been consulted. A site / field study was subsequently undertaken by these consultants. The location and extent of the identified built heritage assets were confirmed and explored, including consideration of heritage significance and also any contribution of setting and views whilst in the field.

The Site

3.40 As informed by our baseline analysis, it is our assessment that the existing condition of the Site does not contribute to the understanding or appreciation of the significance of any of the heritage assets identified within the defined Study Area. This assessment is further described for each heritage asset receptor in the statements of heritage significance following. The past development of the Site has connections to the historic industrial use of the local area along the waterways of the river and canal from the 19th century. However, this link is no longer legible on Site, and the existing large scale modern buildings and spaces are of no particular architectural and or historic interest. As found today, the Site no longer integrates with, nor positively addresses or activates, London Street. However, The Oracle mixed use development itself has embraced the river to create new public realm along the water.

Figure 3.9: Photographs of Site as seen from Yield Hall Place looking south east (L) and Queens Road / IDR back from the east (R) (2022)

[11] MHCLG, National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 – Annex 2: Glossary.
[12] Historic England, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition): The Setting of Heritage Assets, 2017
[13] English Heritage (now Historic England) Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance 2008
[14] Historic England, Selection Guides 2011 (and updated).
[15] Historic England Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management 2019 (2nd edn).
[16] Historic England, Selection Guides 2018 (and updated)
[17] The Archaeology and Historic Buildings Record (AHBR)

Listed Buildings

Nos. 2-4 London Street (Grade II)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.41 The Grade II listed Nos. 2-4 London Street is positioned adjacent to the River Kennet at the north corner of London Street. The List Entry[18] describes the building in some detail as follows:

"Mid C19 altered. 2 storeys and basement, rendered brick. Simple cornice and parapet. Hipped tiled roof (part old tiles). 4 bays, the left-hand bay has flanking recessed walls and slight panel to parapet. The 3 right hand bays are arched recesses (centre with depressed arch and higher parapet) and impost bands. Cross-glazed sash windows, round head to outer windows of the right-hand group. Ground floor, 2 modern shop fronts."

Figure 3.10: View of Nos. 2-4 London Street

3.42 Nos. 2-4 London Street is of special architectural and historic interest by virtue of its age and as a good example of mid-19th century commercial town architecture, consisting of painted brick with engaged banded pilasters and relieving arches, topped with a plain stone cornice and parapet. A wooden shopfront faces Yield Hall Place. The building conforms to design, evidencing shop layouts and their relation to the wider townscape. It possesses group value alongside the Coroner's Court, as well as High Bridge. Nos. 2-4 face the River Kennet with its composition of entrances and shopfronts informed by the width of bridge and passage of traffic. Nos. 2-4 London Street demonstrate historic interest as purpose-built shop units, highlighting traditional commercial patterns in this area of Reading over multiple centuries.

[18] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.43 Nos. 2-4 London Street addresses both London Street on its east side and Yield Hall Place on its south side, with the River Kennet to the north. It corresponds with High Bridge and the Coroner's Court as historic townscape at a key crossing point over the river. As such, it jointly reflects Reading's past alongside neighbouring historic development, evidencing multiple civic, transport and commercial uses in an urban setting. Neighbouring listed buildings positively affect how the significance of Nos. 2-4 is appreciated; they are positive setting contributors. Modern commercial development surrounding the building elsewhere lacks architectural interest and does not enhance the appreciation of its significance.

3.44 The Site is located approximately 10m south-west of the listed building from its nearest boundary. The western portions of the Site are positioned opposite Nos. 2-4 London Street on both sides of the River Kennet on Yield Hall Place. There is a high degree of intervisibility between the Site the listed building. As modern development of low architectural merit, the Site lacks any historic interest that might affiliated it with Nos. 2-4 or affect how its significance is appreciated. It does not correspond with historic building patterns previously evident on Yield Hall Place. Therefore, it makes a neutral contribution towards the significance of the listed building, or to some degree detracts as part of its historic townscape setting.

Coroner's Court, London Street (Grade II)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.45 The Grade II Listed Coroner's Court is positioned on the corner between London Street and Star Lane, directly to the south of the River Kennet. The List Entry[19] describes the building as follows:

"Mid C19 adapted Ventian Gothic. Rendered brick. Dentil cornice and parapet. 3 storeys with 2 storey wing to east. Divided by composite pilaster strips into 1-5-1 bays. Parapet raised over 3 centre bays. Band over ground floor. Glazing bar sash windows with heavy surrounds, attached colonnetes on 2nd floor with corbels above to cornice, corbelled columns with crocket caps on 1st floor with pointed arch in panel, tympanum fretted and decorated. On ground floor, 3 tripartite segmental headed windows with vermiculated voussoirs and 2 door pieces. Engaged outer columns support brackets to cornice, inner engaged columns with crocket caps to blind round headed arch. Shouldered lintels, pattern repeated on upper panels of 6 panel doors. Slate roof with one large chimney stack also rendered with a chevron pattern on panel above. 2 storey wing to left and bad fit, forms 'L' plan with doorway to west and smaller doorway in channelled surround to left of it. River front has 1+3 bays with arched window surrounds on 1st floor. Rails to river. Quadilobe pattern gates to street."

3.46 The significance of the Coroner's Court is derived from its special architectural and historic interest as a landmark building overlooking the river Kennet, adjacent to High Bridge. Elaborate front elevations facing the Kennet River and London Road are in a grand and eclectic classical order with Venetian Gothic elements, typical of mid-19th century architectural trends. It demonstrates a period taste for combining multiple historical styles. Engaged columns and pilasters with finely moulded capitals flank windows and entrances, outlining the building's essential classical proportions through their repetition and regularity, ornamented with relieving arches. These compliment the rusticated quoins at the ground storey, whilst presenting a more fanciful Venetian design on the first floor with rich floral motifs. The grandiose design reflects the building's status as an important civic building, having served as a coroner's court. It shows evidential value, conforming to both a mid-19th century architectural typology and illustrating the specific layout of a historic coroner's court through its well-preserved features. It possesses group value alongside

[19] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

High Bridge, as well as Nos. 2-4 London Street, as part of the traditional townscape in this area. The Coroner's Court demonstrates historic interest, given its specific traditional function, serving local people over many generations.

Figure 3.11: View of Coroner's Court, London Street

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.47 The Corner's Court faces both London Street on its east side and the River Kennet on its north side. As previously noted, High Bridge and Nos. 2-4 London Road possess group value alongside it, with architectural forms that address the river the river and the street, forming part of a key Reading thoroughfare. As neighbouring development, the jointly evidence traditional civic, transport and commercial use married together in an urban environment. These listed buildings make a positive contribution towards the significance of the Coroner's Court as setting. Modern commercial development elsewhere, whilst somewhat in keeping of the essential historic layout of this townscape, makes at best only a neutral setting contribution.

3.48 The Site is located approximately 40m south-west of the listed Coroner's Court from its nearest boundary. The southern part of the Site, on the opposite side of London Street, can be viewed in conjunction with the listed building further south. However, modern development within the entire Site, lacking any architectural interest, does not contribute towards the appreciation of the listed building's significance, failing to address London Road's historic street form. The northern part of the Site is further recessed on the other side of the River Kennet and partially obscured by Nos. 2-4 London Street. The Site is distanced enough on Yield Hall Place from the listed building to not register any overtly negative impact on its significance as setting, making a neutral contribution overall.

High Bridge (Grade II), including Scheduled Monument designation

Architectural and Historic Interest / National Importance

3.49 The Grade II listed bridge spans the River Kennet, connecting Duke Street and London Street, which is also designated as a scheduled monument in recognition of its national importance and archaeological interest as a key river crossing and ancient structure within Reading. The List Entry[20] describes the structure as follows:

"1788. Architect: Robert Brettingham of Princes Street, Hanover Square. A single segmental rusticated and vermiculated arch with a plain ashlar keystone. Plain circular recessed panels in spandrels. A curved string follows the pavement but with a plain solid panelled balustrade and moulded coping. The balustrade is curved outwards at each end and finished with a rectangular pier. Graceful design of considerable architectural merit. (Ancient Monument. Berks No 1)."

Figure 3.12: View of High Bridge from the waterside

3.50 High Bridge demonstrates special architectural and historic interest as a good example of a late-18th century bridge, designed by notable architect, Robert Brettingham. Brettingham's designs were informed by his travels to Italy during his early life, with his designs and sketches exhibited at the Royal Academy through the 1780s. As well as the 1799 High Bridge, he produced a celebrated design for a bridge at Benham Place. High Bridge spans a narrow section of the river, having a relatively small-scale and simple composition with a single segmental arch. The classical design is roughly symmetrical with rusticated masonry voussoirs, ashlar keystones and parapets with stone panelling on each side. Later historic cast iron lamps are fixed to the parapets. Overall, the bridge is well-proportioned with individual elements contributing towards a cohesive whole. Well preserved fabric provides good evidence of late-18th century

[20] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

bridge construction and the materials, techniques and processes involved. As a key piece of civic infrastructure spanning the Kennett and directing traffic along the London Road, it shows historic interest, associated with traditional commercial and transport patterns, ich have affected the lives of local people for many centuries. It has informed Reading's wider streetscape, predating most buildings that surround it.

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.51 High Bridge spans the River Kennet. This historic waterway makes a positive contribution towards the listed bridge's significance as setting, having determined the original concept and dimensions for this bridge. London Street, running north and south from each end of the bridge contains a mix of historic and modern commercial development, though generally laid according to the traditional street plan. The street, bridge and aligning development can be viewed in unison as an important historic throughfare within the context of Reading. There, historic buildings, on both sides of the river, including Nos. 23 London Street, Nos. 2-4 London Street and the Coroner's Court, positively affect how the significance of the listed bridge is appreciated. These elements responding to a traditional townscape make an overall positive contribution as setting.

3.52 The Site is positioned approximately 40m south-west of High Bridge from its nearest boundary. The lower sides of the bridge, containing most of its significant historic fabric cannot be seen from London Street and Yield Hall Place (aside from the modern bridge directly to the west). The modern tarmac road deck, historic parapets and streetlamps attached are more exposed features which can be viewed in relation to the Site at various instances. However, north and south parts Site do not impose on any key views of the listed bridge and obscured from the east by intermediary development either side of London Street and the River Kennet. The Site fails to align with historic street patterns set out across Yield Hall Place and London Street. Whilst containing development of poor architectural quality, this does not negatively affect appreciation of High Bridge in its context. The Site is recessed away to the west for the most part with limited intervisibility alongside the asset. Therefore, the Site makes only a neutral contribution towards the significance of the listed and scheduled bridge as an element of its setting.

Group: Nos. 33-41 and Nos. 44-46 London Street (all Grade II)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.53 Nos. 33-41 and Nos. 44-46 London Street form a mixed group of Grade II listed buildings of typically 2-4 storeys, dating predominantly from the 19th century with some 18th century exceptions. These have been grouped according to their group value as neighbouring assets making up the historic townscape on London Road (and conservation area designation). The List Entries[21] provide some description of these listed buildings:

"No 33 (former Everyman Theatre) Formerly Primitive Methodist Chapel. Frieze inscribed "Primitive Methodist Chapel 1866", but in fact built 1843 as a Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institute. Architect: William Brown. 3 storeys. Symmetrical. Carefully developed Greek Ionic front engaged fluted columns and angle piers. Good detail. Entablature and pediment. Ground floor channelled. Scroll patterned moulded string at 1st floor cill level. 3 windows on 2nd floor with architrave surround. 3 on 1st floor, centre one with frieze and pediment, flanking windows with frieze and cornice. Central 6 panelled door and two 3-light windows on ground floor. Dickens read "Pickwick Papers" here."

"No 35 Mid C19 - probably circa 1862-66 if built in connection with the adjoining Primitive Methodist Chapel (To 33 qv). 4 storeys. Bath stone with rustic quoins, entablature and blocking course. 1 range of tripartite windows with stone pier mullions glazing bar sashes 2nd floor, rest casements, blocks to cills on 2nd floor, bracketed stone balcony on 1st floor. Ground floor has altered shop front carried through from No 37."

"Nos 37 and 39 Mid C18, incorporating part of an older house (see studs in through passage to right). Each 3 storey. No 39 built of silver grey header bricks with red dressings, quoins, string at 2nd floor level, painted brick dentil cornice, blue and red diaper pattern in parapet. Old tile roof. 3 windows on upper floors, glazing bar sashes. Early C19 shop front removed and heavy modern shop continued from No 35 to No 39 inserted. No 37 is a similar design to No 39 but red brick."

"No 41 Mid C19. 3 storeys quasi-Italianate. Red brick with Bath ashlar moulded impost bands, moulded cill bands with cill blocks and bracketed cornice. Slate roof with coped verges. 3 ranges of round headed windows with grey and Bath stone alternating voussoirs, raised keys; hood moulds with foliage stops. Cross glazed sash windows. 6 panel door with radiating fanlight to right. A heavy timber frame on side elevation to this house visible in through passage to right of No 39."

"Nos 44 and 46 Mid C18, altered; rear rebuilt. 2 1/2 storeys, painted brick. Mansard tile roof (No 46 old tiles) with 2 gabled 2 light (modern) dormers. 4 modern casements on 1st floor. 2 modern shop fronts on ground floor and a large through passage opening to right."

Figure 3.13: View of Nos. 33-41 London Street

[21] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

3.55 This large townscape grouping at Nos. 33-41 and Nos. 44-46 demonstrate architectural and historic interest as typical examples of 19th and 18th century commercial buildings aligning London Street – an important historic throughfare within Reading, crossing the River Kennet. Of brick construction, common buildings techniques materials, including brick and Bath Stone are reflected through preserved fabric, illustrating the historic layout of shops combining residential accommodation.

3.56 No. 33 features a particularly grand Bath Stone Neo-classical façade, purposed built in 1843 as a Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institute, then used as Methodist Chapel from 1866 and later as an Everyman Theatre. Its symmetrical composition contains engaged fluted Ionic columns and pilasters with a large entablature and pediment above and ground floor rustication. This impressive architectural design is indicative of the cultural importance ascribed to educational institutions in the early to mid-19th century. It shows strong evidential value given its well-preserved features illustrating former use patterns, as well as historic interest. Charles Dickens is reputed to have read his novel, Pickwick Papers, in this building during its days as a theatre. Its many former uses contribute towards historical narratives focused on this area of Reading; the listed building has accommodated social, educational and religious happenings, experienced by Reading inhabitants over many decades.

Figure 3.14: View of Nos. 35-41 London Street

3.57 No. 35 is also of Bath Stone, likely built c.1862-66, a couple of decades after No.33, though in a similarly grand Neo-classical style. Rusticated quoins and tripartite windows across the upper storeys, featuring pilasters, a balustrade and a pediment, present fine details onto London Street. Nos. 37-39 are of brick construction with white dentilled stucco cornices beneath parapets at the roof line. Off set from one another, No. 39 contains grey as well as red brick, standing slightly taller. These are more typical mid-18th century commercial and residential buildings, having more restrained, albeit dignified, architectural features. The ground floor modern shop front extending across Nos. 35 to 39 lacks architectural interest, providing a negative distraction from preserved historic fabric above.

3.58 No. 41 London Street is a mid-19th century commercial building of red brick. Its three bay three storey arrangement is well-proportioned, featuring elaborate fenestration in the form of round arched windows with alternating Bath Stone and grey stone voussoirs, alongside floral motifs. Stone stringcourses and a dentilled cornice beneath the roofline further define the front façade of the listed building onto London Street. On the opposite side of the road, the mid-18th century Nos. 44-46 present relatively modest painted brick elevations with an uneven mansard tile roof. Shop fronts were remodelled in the 20th century and a new passage introduced to the north, of lower architectural interest. Despite this, special architectural and historic interest is demonstrated, with Nos. 44-46 containing well-preserved fabric evidencing traditional use patterns.

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.59 The southern portion of the Site is located approximately 50m north-west from the nearest of this group of listed buildings (Nos. 33-41 and Nos. 44-46) on London Street. Nos. 33 and 35, at the north east of the group, can be seen most prominently from the direction of the Site over a crossroads. Further south and on the east side of London Street, listed buildings are more obscured from the Site by the street profile, providing intermediary development to the north. Buildings within the Site lack architectural interest and do not contribute towards any appreciation of the listed buildings' significance. The Site is contained in a distinctly different townscape character area, and on the other side of the IDR, failing to correspond with London Street's historic street patterns. As such, the Site makes at best only a neutral contribution to the appreciation of the significance of this group of listed buildings, although the contrasting modern form and large scale experienced as a backdrop to more historic rooflines in some shared views looking north along London Street is a detracting characteristic.

Group: Nos. 49-53 and 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 London Street (all Grade II)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.60 Nos. 49-53 and 48-58, 62-76, 80, 86-88 London Street form a group of Grade II listed buildings dating from the 18th and 19th centuries, though Nos. 49-53 stands as an exception with some remaining 16th century fabric. These listed buildings provide good evidence of traditional commercial architecture on one of Reading's prominent historic streets. Frontages of mixed designs and materials, including both brick and Bath Stone Ashlar, reflect the piecemeal development of this area. Buildings possess group value as historic townscape developed in a variety of phases, showcasing changes along this street over multiple centuries. The published List Entries[22] provide some description of these buildings:

"Nos 49-53 A timber framed building of the C16 and possibly earlier on the east side of London Street, re-fronted and remodelled into a pair of dwellings probably in the C18 or C19, with shop fronts of the late C19 and C20. Remodelled and extended in the late C20 and early C21.

Nos 44 and 46 Mid C18, altered; rear rebuilt. 2 1/2 storeys, painted brick. Mansard tile roof (No 46 old tiles) with 2 gabled 2 light (modern) dormers. 4 modern casements on 1st floor. 2 modern shop fronts on ground floor and a large through passage opening to right.

Nos 48 to 52 (even) Mid C18 altered. 2½ storeys. Painted brick, brick block eaves cornice. Mansard old tile roof (No 52 has lower pitched roof). 4 gabled dormers. 5 windows on 1st floor (early-mid C19 replacements probably), Nos 48 and 50 tripartite, No 52 late glazed; 2 others. Modern shop fronts, No 50 early C20. Rear rebuilt except No 52.

[22] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

Nos 54 to 58 (even) 1753/4. 3 storeys, attic and basement. Brick, brick strings between floors (painted on 2nd floor). Brick dentil and moulded cornice. Parapet. No 54 has mansard slate front slope, rest and Nos 56 and 58 are old tile roof. One dormer. Each house has 3 windows, glazing bar sashes, 1st floor windows have late C18 cast-iron balconies of intersecting arch pattern. Nos 54 and 56 each have one door and modern shop window. Inside No 56 on ground floor is a reeded marble fireplace and a wide panelled hall with arch. No 58 has 2 windows (lacking glazing bars) and one door. Doors have moulded architrave surround and moulded cornice supported on consoles; Nos 56 and 58 have 6 panel doors. Cast-iron spearhead rails with patterned standards. More dormers and occasional grey brick to rear.

Nos 62 to 66 (even Early C19. 3 storeys Bath stone ashlar; string at 1st floor level, entablature, cornice and parapet. Slate roof. 4 windows on upper floors, glazing bar sashes, 3 on ground floor with splayed reveals and door with heavy Doric pilasters, entablature and cornice. 6 panelled door with high rectangular fanlight over. Interior: front room to north has deeply undercut palmette cornice. To south is early C20 replica-style block (Nos 64 and 66) 3 storeys and basement red brick with stone modillion cornice and blocking course. 5 ranges of windows, glazing bar sashes with panels below. Bath stone pilaster doorcase to left, similar to No 62 (retaining lattice pattern glazing in rectangular fanlight).

No 68 Early C19. 4 storeys, painted Bath stone, strings between floors. Cornice and shaped blocking course. Slate roof. 2 windows on upper floors; glazing bar sashes with architrave surrounds. Ionic shop front removed and replaced with modern plate glass.

Figure 3.15: View south down London Street

[continued]

No 70 Early C19. 4 storeys and basement. Bath stone, channelled with struck voussoirs on ground floor, string at 1st and 2nd floor cill levels. lst and 2nd floor windows have architrave surrounds. Cornice and shaped blocking course. Slate roof. 3 windows, glazing bar sashes, on upper floors, moulded cornices on 1st floor. 2 semi-circular headed windows (without glazing bars) on ground floor and a modern 6 panel door. Cast-iron foot scraper. Back door has arched radiating fanlight.

No 72 1849. Built as Savings Bank by John Billing. Italianate. 3 storeys. Bath stone ashlar, ground floor channelled with struck voussoirs. This house is set back between Nos 70 and 74 which have rustic piers flanking No 72 to ground floor height. Heavy modillion and panel cornice to cope. Quoined break. 1st and 2nd floors have tripartite windows - arched and stepped on 2nd floor with corbelled flat bow stone balcony; segmental pediment to 1st floor with heavy balcony on stone brackets. Below is engraved "Reading Savings Bank" in masonry. 2 arched windows on ground floor. Round headed door with modern door and fanlight. Basement area railings have alternate pendants fillers.

Nos 74 and 76 II GV 2. Mid C18. 2 storeys, attic and basement. Brick , painted cornice and parapet. Flanking conical rainwater heads. Coped verges. Old tile mansard roof to No 76 with 3 dormers. No 74 has old tiled roof. No 74, altered 2 storey extension to No 76: 3 windows on 1st floor, 2 windows and yard entrance on ground floor, glazing bar sashes. No 76 has 5 windows on upper floors, and central door, doorcase altered; crude short pilasters on panelled plinths, pulvinated frieze and curved pediment. 6 panelled door, rectangular fanlight (lacking glazing bars). Railings on each side of alternating pattern.

No 80 House and shop dated 'w j March 25 1753' on stone tablet set in rear wall: street front remodelled mid C19. Timber-framed with brick infill; brick walls to front and rear (the former stuccoed and lined out to resemble ashlar), brick chimney stacks. Old tile roof and hanging to rear gable. Two-unit plan with transverse central stair; original entry at foot of stair, from access passage through left-hand side of building. Two storeys plus basement (to front) and attic. Front elevation of 3 storeys (at attic level a screen for the original gable). To ground floor, a 4-panel door (upper panels glazed) with over light to left, a C20 shop window in C19 opening to right, with basement light under. Impost mouldings to piers between openings, carrying plain facia surmounted by cornice. At first floor level, 3 windows, sashes with glazing bars to top sash only, in projecting surrounds with brackets under cills. Similar window (with C20 glazing) to centre of second floor, the cill set on a plain projecting band. Above, window, similar band, heavy projecting cornice and parapet. Above, ½ hip of original roof, and stacks to right-hand flank wall visible. Rear elevation has doorway to right at ground floor level, and single light original window openings to ground and first floors, all under ½-brick segmental arches. Lower opening partially blocked to accommodate mid C19 sash like those on front; upper has C20 steel casement. Eaves line continued across gable by two projecting brick courses, above which gable is tile hung on timber framing, with central C20 casement in earlier opening; roof ½-hipped above. The interior has been little altered, retaining the original dog-leg stair with closed strings, and column-on-vase baluster from top to bottom. The ground floor front room has a simple wooden cornice and chimney piece. The building is archaic for its date both in its plan and constructional details; the former closely resembles the usual form of terrace house in London c 1660-80 (for which see Post Medieval Archaeology, 8, (1974), pp 80-91).

No 88 Early C18 to London Street, refronting earlier building. 2 storeys, attic and basement. Brick. Old tiled roof hipped to left. 1 dormer. 2 windows on 1st floor, segmental headed glazing bar sashes. Mid C19 shopfront on ground floor: 3 pilaster strips and dentil cornice to fascia. Jettied 1st floor to Church Street has dragon beam to front, the ground floor brick infill, 1st floor rendered. Modern weatherboarding at rear. The interior has turned baluster staircase, lower flight sliced in two, the cellar has a fragment of stone, possibly mediaeval with a chevron carved on it. Evidence that the London Street front was formerly jettied."

3.61 It is noted that nearby No.69 London Road is identified on the statutory list, but has been demolished and replacement by new development since designation in 1978.

Figure 3.16: View north down London Street

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.62 The Site is located approximately 100m north of this extended grouping of listed buildings at Nos. 49-53, 69 and 48-58, 62-76, 80, 86-88 London Street. This group is contained on and south of London Street's intersection with London Court. Partial and glimpsed views between some of these buildings and the Site are feasible, though they are generally obscured by the enclosure of the street. The Site registers no architectural interest, or historical connection, affecting appreciation of the significance of these heritage assets. The Site makes at best only a neutral contribution towards the significance of these listed buildings as an element of their wider townscape setting and views.

Nos. 24-52 Queen's Crescent (Grade II)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.63 The Grade II listed terraced crescent is positioned on the south side of Queen's Road. The List Entry[23] describes the building as follows:

> *"1832-33. J J Cooper architect (according to Colvin). A very slight crescent with houses on a skew, following the curve of the road. 3 storeys Bath stone ashlar. Channelled ground floor. Band over ground floor. Plain cornice and parapet. 3 ranges of glazing bar sashes each, 1st floor centre of each with pediment. Ground floor windows round headed, one each, No 44 1+3 (formerly 2 houses). Bracketed hoods to 4 panel doors with rectangular over lights and architrave surrounds. Butterfly roofs with brick chimneys. No 40 rendered. No 24 has no door but 3 round headed windows on ground floor."*

Figure 3.17: View of Nos. 24-52 Queen's Crescent

3.64 Queen's Crescent is of heritage significance by virtue of its special architectural and historic interest as a large-scale early-19th century residential terrace, composed in a classical Regency style by J. J. Cooper. Of Bath Stone construction, individual units are finely proportioned, showing same regularly repeating composition across the length of the crescent. This induces a grand and palatial effect across the crescent, further emphasised by continuous stringcourses at the roofline and above rusticated ground storeys. Impressive classical detailing features throughout. Doorways are flanked by volutes, ground floor windows are rounded, and middle first-floor windows are topped with ornamental pediments. The Crescent is a major landmark feature on the south side of Queen's Road, though now appears relatively isolated as an historic townscape feature. It provides good evidence of late-19th century well to do dwellings in this part of Reading, with preserved features indicating traditional and evolving household living patterns.

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.65 Queen's Crescent is a large and visually impressive terrace when viewed in the local context of Queen's Road. It is isolated as historic development, indicated clearly by differing forms and materiality of nearby modern residential and commercial buildings, principally of red brick. These do not relate to the listed crescent or affect how its significance is appreciated. Overall, the contribution made by setting is neutral. The Site is located approximately 170m west of Queen's Crescent from its nearest boundary on the south side of the River Kennet. The listed terrace facing Queen's Road cannot be seen from the Site at street level as result of the meandering street profile and intermediary development The Site does not affect how the listed terrace's significance is appreciated; it makes no contribution towards its significance as part of a shared setting.

[23] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

Group: The George Hotel, King Street (Grade II) & Building on south-east corner, Yield Hall Place (Grade II)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.66 These Grade II listed buildings together form the George Hotel, facing onto both Yield Hall Place and King Street. The List Entries[24] describe these buildings in some detail as follows:

"Nos 8 and 9, Nos 10. to 12 (consec) (The George Hotel) Including Nos 61 to 63 (consec) Minster Street. First mentioned 1423. Built at various dates round a courtyard with one entrance from King Street and secondary entrance from Minster Street. King Street front Nos 11 and 12 a modern fake timber design but original timber members survive. 3 storeys. 4 modern windows, on ground floor 2 angled bay windows and central carriage arch . Nos 8 and 9 and return to Minster Street, 4 storeys early C19, stucco and slate roof with rounded corner, moulded cornice over 2nd floor and moulded cope to parapet. No 9 has 2 windows, modern casements. No 8, 3 windows on curve with 2 storey framing pilaster strips on ground floor, doubled to Minster Street. Glazing bar sashes except 1st floor. Nos 62 and 63, raised surrounds, cornices to 1st floor. Nos 61 forms a slight break with Ionic pilasters framing centre and outer incised pilasters, also pedimented 1st floor windows. 3 storey 3 window brick and tile extension to Yield Hall Lane. Ground floor a continuous range of modern glazing bar shop windows. The Courtyard is cobbled and the facades are mainly C18 painted brick with various groups of C18 and early C19 windows; south block with brick block cornice. [and]

Figure 3.18: View of George Hotel, King Street and Building on south-east corner, Yield Hall Lane

[continued]

Building on south-east corner. Part of the George Hotel. Early C19 altered. 2 storeys and garrets. Red brick with mansard tile roof, large ridge chimney and 3 roof lights. 4 ranges of late C19 sashes. 2 blocked doorways. Segmental arches over ground floor openings (1 door arched) with grey brick headers. Included for group value - for vistas from Minster Street."

3.67 The George Hotel, King Street and the Building on South-East Corner, Yield Hall Place, both forming the George Hotel, register special architectural and historic interest as predominantly 19th century buildings, heavily altered, possessing some medieval fabric and on the site of an early inn. Despite having a modern frontage onto king street, mimicking late-medieval construction, original timbers do remain. This and the plan form of the buildings, possessing an interior courtyard, shows evidential value, reflecting the evolving use of the plot and buildings as an inn and now a hotel over many centuries. The segmental arches onto Yield Hall Lane are typical late-19th century ornamental features complimenting the traditional functional arrangement of the rear yard space and layout of entranceways and windows. The assets historic interest as a longstanding location for commercial and social activity in Reading from the 15th century or earlier.

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.68 The listed George Hotel, King Street and Building on south-east corner, Yield Hall Lane falls within Character Area 3 of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. The immediate setting of the two listed buildings is very varied. The main George Hotel faces north onto King Street, situated within Readings traditional commercial centre. Though stylistically unique in its locality, it is appreciated alongside many other historic building's forming Reading old town centre, of group value alongside. Together, these buildings convey the piecemeal development of Reading over multiple centuries through the exposition of varied and fine architectural styles, reflective of buildings' original and continued uses. The hotel building on the south-east corner is concealed from focus of commercial of development around King Street. Nos. 10-12 King Street, to the north-east, providing some group value as historic townscape, though this far more limited in this area, dominated by The Oracle shopping centre to the south.

3.69 The northern portion of the Site is located approximately 60m south of these two listed buildings forming the George Hotel. Despite its relatively close proximity, there is no visibility between the Site and these listed buildings at street level due to an intermediary east wing forming part of The Oracle shopping centre. The George Hotel on King street faces north away from the Site, forming part of a separate commercial streetscape. The listed building on the south-east corner, facing Yield Hall Lane, is obscured from views from the Site by larger modern commercial development, forming part of the shopping centre. The Site does not affect how the significance of these listed buildings is appreciated. Therefore, the Site makes no positive contribution as part of this groupings wider townscape setting.

Group: Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place (including No.10 High Street) (all Grade II)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.70 Nos.48-49 Market Place dates from the mid 18th century and was likely originally built as a mixed use building for both commerce and residential on this key historic space within the town. The List Entry[25] describes this building as:

"Coloured stucco facade with cornice and blocking course, band at 2nd floor cill height. Slate roof. 4 storeys. 4 ranges of glazing bar sashes. Modern marbled offices on ground floor."

3.71 The significance of this listed building derives principally from its high quality and high-status example of mid-18th urban commercial building of this period. Historically this also illustrates the growing commerce and wealth in Reading and its town centre at this time. The grand, well ordered and Classically influenced

[24] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

[25] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

architecture, and use of materials and fine detailing, further underlines the importance of the use of this site and its prestigious location fronting the Market Place in this period. The frontage and roof line of this building also enjoys group value as part of a highly varied ensemble of historic buildings that each address and part enclose the ancient Market Place (including Nos.50-51 & 52 along the south side). In this way these buildings in this defined grouping also contribute to the historical record and visual interest / distinctiveness of the local townscape.

Figure 3.19: View of the South side of the Market Place (Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52)

3.72 Within this group, Nos.50-51 dates from the latter part of the 19th century and was originally built as a later phase and expansion of the banking premises at 3-5 King Street immediately to the rear and sharing the same urban block (Barclays Bank). The List Entry[26] describes this building in detail as:

"3½ storeys red brick and terracotta with ashlar dressings and granite faced ground floor. Tiled roof. Central Flemish gable. Windows with 1, 4 and 1 lights across facade, centre window with mullions, all plate glass sashes. Moulded eaves cornice forms coping to false parapet, modillion cornice over 2nd floor. 2 doorways on ground floor, to right semi-circular pediment breaking into 1st floor and rusticated surround. To left 4 centred arch over light notching upper lights of 3 central shop front windows."

3.73 The significance of this listed building derives principally from its qualities as a representative example of a late 19th century commercial building. It is also linked to an earlier established (1830s) bank premises adjoining within this block (3-5 King Street - also a listed building). Historically this building illustrates a further and later phase in the expansion and growing commercial wealth of Reading town centre. The distinctive Renaissance style in brick and stone, and features such as the shaped gable, further underlines the importance of this commercial use in this period.

3.74 No.52 Market Place, also including No.10 High Street to the corner, dates from the early 19th century and was likely originally built for mix of use – commercial shop frontages to the street and also some residential to the upper floors. It commands the south east corner of the Market Place and entrance from the High Street. The List Entry[27] describes this listed building as:

"4 storeys, stucco. 3 bays to Market Place, 4 to High Street. 1st and 2nd floors divided into bays by Ionic pilasters and attenuated entablature. The 3rd floor is a built-up attic with incised dividing piers and incised frieze. Slate roof. Blocking course with tiled coping. Glazing bar sash windows, a number plate glass to Market Place. 1st floor windows to Market Place have fluted Doric side columns in reveals. 1st floor windows to High Street have receded architraves, 2nd floor narrow panelled architraves. Ground floor bays divided by panelled piers. Rusticated archway to left facing High Street, blocked but with a rectangular over light and a patterned semi-circular fanlight."

3.75 The significance of this building derives principally from its high-quality example of early 19th century mixed use building, historically illustrates the continued growth in commerce and wealth in Reading and its town centre at this time. The grand, well-proportioned and Classically influenced architecture, and use of quality materials and Neo-Classical detailing, further underlines the importance of this use and this site within the Market Place at this time. The corner frontages of this building are distinctive in views south into the square, and again also enjoys group value as part of a now more disparate collection of historic buildings that part enclose the Market Place / High Street.

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.76 The setting of this group of listed buildings comprises the surrounding Market Place / London Street Conservation Area; the character and appearance of which is further described in this report. These are buildings that contribute positively to the significance of the conservation area as examples of the surviving historic commercial buildings within the Market Place, and an attractive townscape / architectural grouping appreciated in local views across this space / street.

3.77 The Site itself also falls within the conservation area designation, albeit only partially, and forms part of the wider and highly diverse townscape setting of this listed building. The Site does not share any historical or architectural links to these listed buildings that are of positive interest. Overall, the Site is not an element of the wider setting of the listed building group that contributes positively to its heritage significance.

Church of St Laurence (Grade I)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.78 This Grade I listed building and local landmark is the ancient Parish Church within the heart of the historic settlement of Reading. The List Entry[28] describes this building in some detail as follows:

"Church of England. Structure Norman to C15 with excessive restorations of 1867. Flint with Bath stone ashlar quoins and dressings. Taynton stone elements. Principal feature the tile C15 three stage tower closing vista to north of Market Place - crenelated parapet, octagonal chequered clasping buttresses

[26] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)
[27] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)
[28] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

with strings, capped by crenelation (spirelets removed); sundial to south dated 1727, main entrance to west. Tower built 1458. Tiled roofs with centre valley (nave and north aisle).

1+4 bay nave, two very wide chancel bays. Nave south wall has small Norman window at west end and a late C12 round headed doorway with waterleaf capitals; other openings restored Decorated style. Chancel east end has three lancets with blind lancets between. North aisle and chancel aisle probably 1521 (when present arcade built) see flat topped two light cusped windows and three light east window.

Interior: Norman fragments in north aisle door, king-post roof of C15. 1522. Font. Good C18 pulpit. Fine bench ends with tracery panels and poppyheads in chancel. Organ case (very fine) 1741 by Byfield. Pulpit also 1741 - panelled single storey affair on mid C19 stand. A number of brasses and memorials. The best is the memorial to John Blagrave (died 1611, author of "The Mathematical Jewell"). The principal interest of this church is that it was built at the Abbey gate. The circa 1200 work may possibly be in connection with foundation of St John's Hospice …"

Figure 3.20: View of St Laurence's Church from Town Hall Square and from Market Place

3.79 The Grade I designation denotes a building of 'exceptional' interest; relating to its particularly high importance historically and architecturally in the local and national story. St Laurence's Church is of significance as a long-standing feature of Reading, and an important element of the town's historic core. it is of architectural interest as a place of worship which multiple phases of construction and rebuilding, as well as high-quality interior features such as the benches and pulpit. These multiple phases record the past and continuing importance of its use as a place of Christian worship. The wider historic urban townscape emphasises its role at the centre of social, cultural and religious life in Reading over several centuries.

3.80 St Laurence's Church was founded in the 12th century, and originally the outer gate of Reading Abbey was attached to the southern flank wall. It is constructed of flint with stone quoins and other detailing, and a red tile roof. Parts of its structure, including the quoins and a small window in the nave, are 12th century fabric, whilst much of the building dates from a phase of rebuilding in 1522. Interior features such as the pulpit and organ case date from the mid-18th century, whilst the List Entry makes reference to *"excessive restorations of 1867".* The remnants of building fabric from different phases of the church's development reflect its long history as part of Reading's religious, social and cultural life.

3.81 St Laurence's Church is of historic interest as one of the longest-standing buildings in Reading, and has been a prominent visual landmark in views along Friar Street, Market Place and Duke Street for all of its history. The building displays multiple phases of change and development in its physical fabric from the 12th century onwards, and is an important physical record and expression of the long use of this site as a Christian place of worship. The church therefore also derives historic interest from its possible relationship to the 12th century foundation of this institution. It also represents the last intact building related to Reading Abbey and its precinct to the east.

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.82 The setting of St Laurence's Church comprises the townscape area of the surrounding Market Place / London Street Conservation Area; the character and appearance of which has been described previously in this report. The church is a local landmark and overlooks the urban spaces of both Town Hall Square to the west and Market Place to the south. Conversely it is a focal point in many views from these spaces and connected streets within the local townscape and conservation area. This underlines its key importance historically as a living record of Reading's religious, social and cultural life. It forms part of an urban townscape diverse in terms of the ages, types, and architectural styles of its buildings. Whilst the individual buildings around the church have been altered and added to over time, the overall layout of the street pattern on Friar Street and Market Place remains legible as historic. There is a key associative relationship between the church and these nearby historic buildings and space, where the church would have been the primary place of worship for past residents of the area, as well as passing merchants to the town.

3.83 The northern portion of the Site is located approximately 290m south of the listed church. There is no visibility between St Laurence's Church and the Site at street level due to intervening buildings. Views of the church tower are conceivable from upper storeys of modern development within the Site, though these are not publicly accessible areas. The Site is too distanced and obscured by intermediary development to have any effect on how the significance of the church is appreciated. Hence, it makes a no contribution towards its significance as part of that wider setting.

Telephone Exchange, Minster Street (Grade II)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.84 The Grade II listed purpose-built Telephone Exchange by Leonard Aloysius Scott Stokes overlooks Minster Street and dates from c.1900. The List Entry[29] describes this building in some detail as follows:

"MINSTER STREET 1. 5128 (South Side) No 41 to 45 (consec) (Telephone Exchange) SU 7173 SE 3/13lA 26.7.73. II 2. Circa 1900. Architect Leonard Aloysius Stokes (a Voysey/Lethaby follower who had married Miss Gane daughter of the General Manager of the National Telephone Company). His aim was to develop a British style of architecture, free from revivals of past styles. The building consequently appears somewhat plain. 3 storeys of red brick with stone dressings in an attenuated Georgian style.

[29] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

Concealed roof. 5 bays wide, the end bays project slightly. To right is door with cornice and lunette window above. To left a window treated in a similar runner. Centre 3 bays divided by chamfered piers supporting cornice at 2nd floor level. Large windows between on each floor, 6 windows on 2nd floor. Single sash windows in breaks."

Figure 3.21: View of Telephone Exchange, Minster Street

3.85 The significance of the listed building is derived from its special architectural and historic interest as an example of a c.1900 telephone exchange an important piece of civic infrastructure in this period. Historically, this illustrates the residential expansion of reading and advances in mass communication by telephone. The building is a good example of a Telephone Exchange designed by architect, Leonard Stokes, 1910-12 President of Royal Institute of British Architects, notable for designing over 20 telephone exchanges. The fine, symmetrically composed and classically influenced architecture, use of high-quality ashlar and stone detailing against red brick, underlines the importance of this former use, despite its relatively plain appearance. Stokes aimed for a new British architectural style, free of any strict classical order or overtly historicist trend. The building contributes to the historical record and visual interest of this part of Minster Street as the last remaining historic building in this area. The side elevation onto Earley Place lacks the decorative finish of the front façade, registering lower architectural interest.

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.86 The Telephone exchange fronts north onto Minster Street, enclosed all around by late-20th century development. The listed building is isolated as historic development though neighbouring buildings are of similar dimensions, form and materiality, constructed of red brick with stone finishes. The Oracle shopping centre fronts the entirety of this street section to the north, spanning east and west. Modern commercial development adjacent to the listed building lacks architectural interest and does not affect how its significance is appreciated from Minster Street.

3.87 The northern part of the Site is located approximately 50m south-east of the listed Telephone Exchange from its nearest boundary. Despite its relative proximity, there is no intervisibility between the listed building and the Site. This is due to intermediary development forming the east side of The Oracle Shopping Centre. Part of the Site is contained with the eastern part of this large-scale commercial premises, though entirely obscured from development forming part of the same complex positioned nearer the listed building. Modern development within the Site in no way affects how the significance of the Telephone Exchange is understood or appreciated; it makes no positive contribution as part of setting.

Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts (Grade I)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.88 The Grade I listed church and landmark is located north of historic Gunn Street. The List Entry[30] describes the buildings in some detail as follows:

"Church of England. Like St Laurence's, a Reading landmark. Nothing retains of the Norman Church except a doorway built into north wall. Built in distinctive materials: a chequer work of quarry and quaternary flint and Taynton stone ashlar with tiled roofs. Prominent west tower, hall church with four bay aisled nave and projecting chancel. The tower, 1550-53, is of three stages, crenelated and with polygonal angle buttresses capped by crocketed pinnacles. The south aisle with projecting gabled porch in third bay is 5+2 (later) bays with dividing buttresses and Decorated-style tracery. Three bay chancel (1864) in Early English style with bill flowers to moulded cornice. (Built in knapped and squared flint).To north vestry projects with door to east and older polygonal turret with decorated cornice. The north transept is indicated by a gable. Three bay north aisle (1871, Joseph Morris) with decorated tracery.

Interior: south arcade circa 1200 with chamfered soffits and alternately scalloped and fluted caps (Pevsner sees these as transitional waterleaf) North arcade has a circa 1300 1½ bay return screen to form transept. Arch brace truss roof with scissor braces above. Four dormers in south slope of nave roof. Screen dated 1631 under west tower gallery has cusped panelling. Memorial to William Kendrick (died 1635). Memorial by Flaxman to John Monck (died 1809)."

3.89 The Grade I designation denotes a building of 'exceptional' interest; relating to its particularly high significance, both historically and architecturally, in the context of the local St Mary's Butts area and Reading more widely. The church has undergone many phases of development through its long history from the medieval period onwards, forming a key element of Reading's historic core. It shows evidential and communal value as a place of worship remodelled according to the times, with many high-quality interior features such as the wooden screens and memorials. Well-preserved features demonstrate the former and continuing importance of its use as a place of Christian worship. The local streetscape further highlights its functional relationship as a nexus of social, cultural and religious life in this part of Reading over many generations.

3.90 A small part of St Mary's Church dates from the Norman period, specifically a doorway in the north wall. Pevsner makes note of a c.1200 south arcade and c.1300 arch at the east end of the north aisle within the church.[31] It is constructed from a decorative chequer work of quarry and quaternary flint with Taynton stone ashlar and tiled roofs. The medieval hall church composition has four bays with an aisled nave and projecting chancel. The prominent tower dating from 1550s, consists of a three-part composition of

[30] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

[31] Pevsner, N. The Buildings of England: Berkshire, 2002, p.202

crenelations with polygonal angle buttresses capped with crocketed pinnacles. The Early English style three-bay chancel and north transept date from the late-19th century, reflecting a renewed interest in medieval architecture during the Gothic Revival. Historic fabric dates from different periods and stages in the church's long development, showcasing its unique history as part of Reading's religious, social and cultural life. St Mary's Church is of historic interest as one of the longest-standing buildings in Reading, and has been a prominent visual landmark in views along Minster Street, Castle Street, Broad Street and St Mary's Butts through all its history. The building displays multiple developmental through its physical fabric from the Norman period onwards. It is an important physical record and expression of the long use of this site as a Christian place of worship. The church derives historic interest from its relationship to the formerly intact Norman church previously on this site.

Figure 3.22: View of Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.91 The Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts is a key landmark and the centrepiece of the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area, falling within Character Area 1: St Mary's Church and Churchyard. The setting of the church has been described as part of the assessment of the conservation area that follows. This forms a generally enclosed area with many nearby historic resident and commercial buildings having a positive affect on how church's significance is appreciated. They are associative as preserved aspects of traditional social and religious life in this part of Reading. Traditional building typologies evident within the conservation area make positive setting contributions towards the listed church.

3.92 The Site is located approximately 180m south-east of the listed church from its nearest boundary. The church cannot be seen at street level adjacent to or anywhere within the Site, except perhaps the tower from roof level, though this is not accessible to the public. This is due to principally to intermediary modern development forming the wider Oracle shopping centre, as well as other neighbouring buildings and street forms. No part of the Site affects how the architectural or historic interest of St Mary's Church is appreciated or understood; making no positive contribution towards its significance as part of a wider townscape context and setting.

Church of St Giles, Southampton Street (Grade II)

Architectural and Historic Interest

3.93 The Grade II listed church and landmark is positioned south of Deansgate Road. The List Entry[32] describes:

> *"Church of England. The small medieval church was rebuilt 1872 by J.P. St Aubyn in Early English style retaining only the C13 aisle walls and Perpendicular west tower. Ashlar steeple 1873. Flint faced with Bath stone dressings. Tiled roof. Three bay aisled nave and slight transept. Y tracery lancet windows except i. plate tracery twin 2-light lancets in belfry. ii. 3 light Perpendicular west window. iii. Good decorated-type transept windows. iv. Geometric east window. Tower joins at skew and has corner and side buttresses. Pointed west door. Traces of mediaeval walling on south and west sides. Three bay chancel with flanking chapels. Interior: rich Early English-style chancel. Norman fragments in tower (a capital possibly from the Abbey). Early C16 brass to John and Jane Bowyer. A number of good C18 memorial tablets and a good sculpted memorial to Harwood Awberry (date 1748) by Peter Scheemakers ..."*

3.94 The Church of St Giles is of special architectural and historic interest as a late-19th century church rebuilt according to the design of prominent Victorian church architect, J.P. St Aubyn, in an Early English style, with some retained 13th century fabric and in the context of Church Street local London Street area, as well as Reading more widely. The church underwent a major phase of reconstruction between 1872 and 1873. It shows good evidence of Victorian Gothic Revival principles applied to a place of worship, rebuilt according to the times, with many high-quality interior features, such as memorials, dating from previous centuries. These showcase its evidential and communal value as a place of Christian worship. The local streetscape further accentuates its traditional standing within the social, cultural and religious life in this part of Reading since the 13th century.

3.95 Aisle walls and the core of the Perpendicular west tower date from the 13th century, with the majority of the rest of the church's fabric dating the from the late-19th century. The church is constructed of flint faced with Bath stone dressings and an ashlar steeple. The Early English style Victorian chancel reflects the renewed interest in medieval architecture during the Gothic Revival. Pevsner notes this as particularly "rich" example.[33] With historic fabric that dates from different periods and stages in the church development, it manifests a unique history, having been an important part of the religious, social and cultural life in this area. The Church of St Giles shows historic interest as, in part, one of the longest-standing buildings in Reading. There has been a prominent visual landmark in views along Church Street, London Street and Southampton Street in place here since the 13th century. The building reflects multiple phases of change and development in its physical fabric, as a significant physical manifestation of its long use as a Christian place of worship.

[32] Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

[33] Pevsner, N. The Buildings of England: Berkshire, 2002, p.201

Figure 3.23: View of Church of St Giles, Southampton Street

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.96 The Church of St Giles is a landmark building facing on to Southampton Street. The listed church is best appreciated from the churchyard immediately surrounding it and in key views towards the building down either end of Southampton Street. The church is surrounded on all sides by residential development which takes a variety of forms. This densely packed, reflective of the church's urban setting. Amongst these are some preserved historic dwellings. Nos. 26-28 and Nos. 34-38 South Hampton Street are located just opposite the church to the west, where, as elsewhere, historic residential and commercial architecture subsists in a mix of well-proportioned early-19th century formal classical styles alongside more modest late-19th century vernacular styles. Late-20th century development between historic properties generally respects Southampton Street's traditional layout. The church is legible as a landmark feature inset into an historic residential street, acting as a religious and communal hub. 19th century residential development visible alongside the church makes a positive contribution towards appreciation of its significance, of similar age and suggestive of its wider use. However, most residential development nearby is late-20th century, having neutral affect as setting.

3.97 The southern portion of the Site is located approximately 200m north-east of the listed church from its nearest boundary. Only the church steeple can be seen with the remainder of the listed building obscured by a late-20th century commercial warehouse on the opposite side of Queen's Road. The Site is clearly distinct from the heritage asset in distance and also local townscape characteristics. As such, it has no affect on how the significance of the listed church is understood or appreciated, thereby making no contribution as part of its wider setting.

Conservation Areas

Market Place/London Street Conservation Area

Historical Development

3.98 The settlement of Reading was established at the lowest point of the River Kennet, where it could be forded. The original crossing place was at today's Bridge Street, and here the roads from Oxford, Southampton, Bath and London converged. Reading's location on the Kennet, near its junction with the Thames, means that it is in a favourable position for waterborne trade as well as passing traffic on the roads, and the origins of the settlement are therefore probably commercial.[34] The foundation of Reading Abbey by Henry I also fostered the growth of the town. This was located in the area of today's Forbury Gardens, transferred to the Benedictine order in the mid-13th century, and grew steadily so that by the mid-14th century it had become one of the richest abbeys in the country.[35] Its royal patronage made it one of the main pilgrimage sites in England, and inevitably a population grew up around it which made a living from the many people visiting the town. St Laurence's Church, on the corner of Friar Street and the Market Place, and very close to the former site of the Abbey, was built in the Norman period to serve the population which established itself around the Abbey.

3.99 In its earliest years, the principal route through Reading followed Southampton Street, Bridge Street and St Mary's Butts in a north-south direction, past St Mary's Church and the original nucleus of the town. As the influence of the Abbey grew, the route along London Street and Duke Street to the Market Place outside St Laurence Church became more popular and shifted the focus of the town eastwards. It is this 12th century route which forms the backbone of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. Reading Abbey was largely destroyed during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, after which its building materials were steadily quarried for reuse elsewhere in the town. Despite the loss of this key draw to the town, Reading continued to thrive on a range of trades and industries, including cloth and leather manufacture, and silk weaving.

3.100 One of the first maps to show the town of Reading in detail is John Speed's map or Atlas of Great Britain, surveyed in 1611. This shows that the settlement was arranged in a broadly triangular shape to either side of the River Kennet. Friar Street formed one side of the triangle; with Southampton Street, Bridge Street and St Mary's Butts forming a second side, and London Street, Duke Street and Market Place the third. A church is located at each apex: St Laurence's, St Mary's and St Giles'.

3.101 Rocque's later map of Reading shows that the town remained contained within the Medieval, triangular street pattern well into the 18th century, although some additional linear development had expanded westwards along Castle Hill and Bath Road, and eastwards along London Road. Whilst the town itself remained relatively contained, its role and reputation grew in importance when work began in the early 18th century to make the both the Rivers Kennet and Avon navigable. This encouraged further trade and connection with Bath and Bristol in the west, and London in the east. Construction began on a canal to connect the two rivers in 1894, and this was completed in 1810. This created a continuous water bourn route between Bristol and London, passing through Reading. This location on a key transport route from east to west across the country caused Reading to flourish as an important layover location for journeys on the waterway.

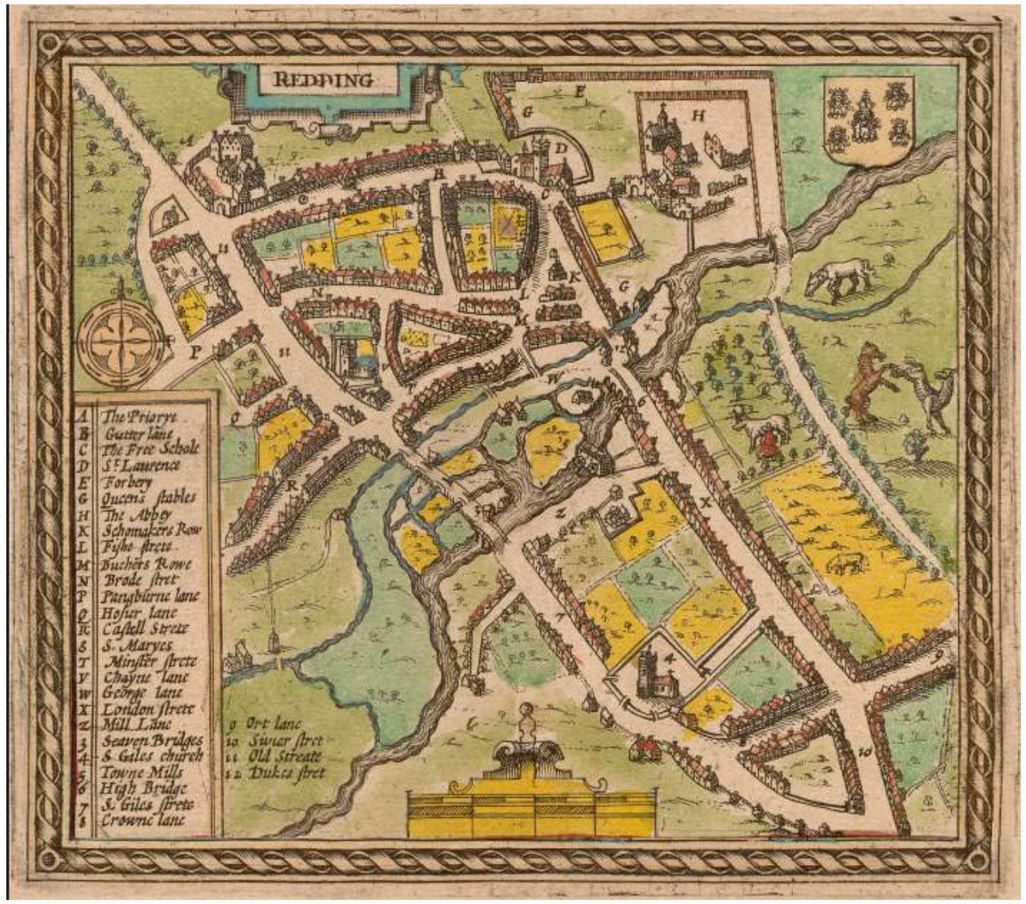


Figure 3.24: John Speed's Atlas of Great Britain dated 1611[36]

3.102 Both Charles Tomkins' and Edward Weller's maps of Reading, surveyed in 1802 and 1840 respectively, show the town in slightly more detail. To either side of London Street, Duke Street and Market Place the town filled out over the early decades of the 19th century. The Medieval linear development along the three main routes expanded outwards with new streets and development, as a result of the improvements in transport and infrastructure in the town, and its status on the key transport route of the Kennet and Avon Canal. The Great Western Railway opened through to the town in 1840, and as with the canal, this catalysed further growth and expansion. Major industries now began to be established in the town, including the biscuit manufacturers Huntley and Palmers, which by 1900 was the largest biscuit manufacturer in the world and employed over 5,000 people in the town.

[34] *A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3*, ed. P H Ditchfield and William Page (London, 1923).

[35] Historic England National Heritage List for England (website)

[36] Berkshire Museum (website)

Figure 3.25: Charles Tomkins' 1802 (L) and Edward Weller's 1840 (R) maps of Reading

3.103 An early Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1877 shows the extent of development in the conservation area over the course of the 19th century. The linear form of the medieval route of London Street, Duke Street and Market Place remained clearly discernible, along with the Medieval established narrow-fronted plots lining the streets. The most densely developed area was north of the River Kennet, around the Market Place itself, and along the 12th century routes of Broad Street and Minster Street, whilst to the south there remained several areas of gardens, small orchards and open ground. Additional streets had been laid with groups of terraced housing out to either side of the main spinal route, and industrial uses were concentrated along the banks of the river. This is the first survey to show the individual building plots within the building lines of each street. The Town Council Chamber and Offices are extant, having been completed in 1875, and also demonstrating the growing civic profile and commercial influence of this town. The adjacent Concert Hall was added between 1879 and 1882, whilst the Art Gallery and Museum were constructed in 1897, as part of a large public complex. In A History of the County of Berkshire[37], written in 1923, the town's 19th century growth is described as:

"Reading has grown very rapidly of late years; a great increase of population took place at the end of the 19th century, when the nearer western suburbs were laid out, but in 1850 it was still a small and pretty town, whose wider streets and open green spaces counteracted many of the evils of defective sanitation."

3.104 By the mid-20th century, the Ordnance Survey map of 1947 shows that Reading had continued to grow outward and the townscape also become much denser at its commercial and civic centre. The early established triangular street pattern had been both in-filled and surrounded by further streets of housing and industry. However, the medieval street pattern of London Street, Duke Street and Market Place remained clearly legible, with its fine-grained street pattern of narrow-fronted plots fronting the road. The centre of Reading sustained significant damage during the Second World War, including to the historic Market Place and the Site itself. As is the story of many large town and cities in England during the post war period, a combination of the clearance of bomb sites and new modern comprehensive developments has had a substantial impact on the structure, fabric and look of the centre as found today.

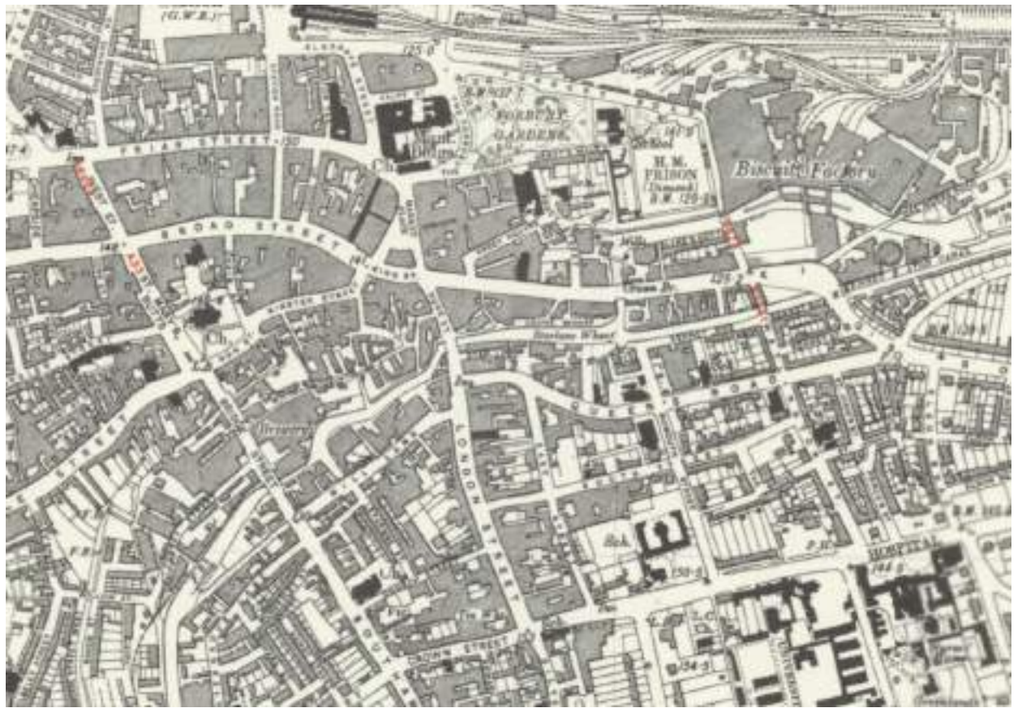


Figure 3.26: Extract of Ordnance Survey (OS) map 1947

3.105 Accordingly, in the late 20th century a great deal of redevelopment occurred in the town, which included the removal of parts of the historic core to construct modern office buildings and shopping centres. Many buildings along the east and west sides of the Market Place were renewed, along with the buildings at the eastern end of Friar Street nearby. Larger-scale redevelopment has occurred close to the Inner Distribution Road, which was constructed between 1969 and the late 1980s. It is this road, more than any other late 20th century development, which has impacted upon the character of the conservation area and the town as a whole. It now bisects the conservation area just south of the river and involved the demolition of a great deal of the historic core.

[37] *A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3*, ed. P H Ditchfield and William Page (London, 1923).

Character and Appearance

General Characteristics

3.106 The scale of buildings in the conservation area generally varies between two, three and four storeys, also with a lesser number of modern office developments reaching five storeys. The recent development scheme immediately to the south of the Site (to the backland area of Jackson's Corner frontage) is an example of a five-storey introduction to this townscape. Just beyond the boundaries of this part of the conservation area (to the east of the Market Place) the regenerated office core to the south of The Forbury and north of King Street introduces a greater scale and height, as appreciated in local views.

3.107 The predominant building material within the historic core is brick, in a variety of colours / patterning and often stuccoed, contributed principally by the evolved historic 17th, 18th and 19th century building stock. There are also some very few surviving examples of timber-frame construction from the earliest period, such as at 27 and 28 Market Place, 88 London Street and 3-5 London Road. The Medieval churches of St Laurence and St Giles stand out in their use of flint and stone; a distinctive building material demonstrating the importance of these ecclesiastic landmarks. Twentieth century redevelopments sometimes conforms to the preponderance of brick construction, but in several places a less-sympathetic material palette has been introduced, using concrete panels or extensive glazing for example. There are instances of post war buildings that have paid little heed to their historic context in terms of scale, materiality or detailed design, such as the Site building itself. Overall, this area is characterised by diversity in the character and appearance of buildings; as a result of the piecemeal development and redevelopment of plots over a long period of time, albeit within an earlier established street pattern (**Figure 4.9**).

Figure 3.27: Diversity of the built townscape within the conservation area

3.108 Several buildings in the conservation area, particularly along London Street, have retained 19th and early 20th century shopfronts which testify to the importance of this commercial route historically, as a main approach road to the town's Market Place and principal shopping area on Broad Street. The predominant use in the conservation area remains commercial, though there is a small proportion of residential use to the upper levels of buildings along the main route, and a more prevalent residential character to secondary roads such as Church Street and South Street.

Figure 3.28: The graveyard of St Laurence's Church is one of the few areas of open green space

3.109 The bridge over the River Kennet on Duke Street creates a break in the building line along the road which, coupled with the mature tree on the riverbank, creates a welcome hiatus to the densely-packed frontage. The river is an important feature of the conservation area, where it reflects the motive for Reading's original settlement in this location. Aside from the open space created by the watercourse, the only other open spaces in the conservation area are the graveyards of St Laurence's Church, St Giles' Church and the Friends Meeting House on Church Street.

3.110 The published Conservation Area Appraisal[38] divides this area into a number of smaller sub-areas or 'character areas' to aid the description of their townscape character. These character areas are also summarised in this section below.

Character Area 1: London Street, south of the IDR

3.111 The area of London Street to the south of the Inner Distribution Road is identified as Area 1. This strongly linear route is very broad, which creates long views up its length, taking in the buildings which line each side. These building lines contain a mixture of architectural styles and ages, and represent a broad cross section of individual plots dating from several centuries in the development of the town. Some remain from the 16th and 17th phase in the development of the town, whilst a greater number of 18th and 19th century elegant houses have survived to reflect the popularity of this area as a fashionable part of town.

[38] Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

Figure 3.29: Area 1: London Street is a broad, strongly linear route, with a high number of surviving historic buildings

3.112 The majority of buildings fronting London Street are either listed, or identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal as buildings of townscape merit, and this high concentration of historic buildings contributes to a high-quality townscape with plenty of visual interest. The historic buildings in this character area are interspersed with a small amount of modern redevelopment; primarily focussed along East Street at the eastern boundary of the conservation area, and to the north and south ends of London Street. To the immediate south of the IDR, however, there is an area of much larger-scale office redevelopment which does not reflect the finer grained street scene on London Street to the south, and diminishes the historic character of the area.

3.113 Historically, London Street was primarily residential in character and use, but overtime commercial premises have occupied the majority of the buildings along this medieval street, and it is now characterised by a preponderance of business and professional uses. As one of the original principal routes through the town, it has also historically been fairly wide. Today, modern alterations to the road to create bus stops and lay-by parking have increased the vehicular traffic and dominance of the roadway so that the street's character is much more emphatically urban than its provincial origins. The route of the Inner Distribution Road across the north end of the character area severs London Street from the town centre, and compromises the legibility of the road as a key part of Reading's medieval street pattern. The broad, open junction, the constant high level of traffic and the noise associated with this major road also detract from the overall historic appearance of the area.

[39] Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

Character Area 2: Church Street and environs of St Giles' Church

3.114 The boundary of the conservation area and Area 2 extends westwards from London Road, in a spit which encompasses Church Street and St Giles' Church, thereby taking in one of Reading's three Medieval churches. As one approaches eastwards along Church Street, the spire of St Giles can be glimpsed, framed between two listed buildings.

Figure 3.30: Area 2: Church Street and St Giles' Church has a much more tranquil character than London Road

3.115 Though modern development has encroached upon the historic character of this area, the medieval church, along with other listed buildings and buildings of townscape merit, and remnants of the historic floor scape, remain to reflect the role of this street as part of the historic layout of the town. The narrow proportions of Church Street give it the atmosphere of a town alley, and this reflects the tight knit layout which emerged as the town grew. These enclosed proportions, together with a more residential character and the green open space of St Giles' Churchyard, contribute to a tranquil atmosphere entered from the relative bustle of London Street.

Character Area 3: Jackson's Corner incl. King Street, Duke Street and the River Kennet

3.116 The two lateral divisions of the River Kennet and the Inner Distribution Road make this area the most disparate of the four character areas. Whilst the River Kennet creates a welcome break and open space in the otherwise continuous building line, the Inner Distribution Road is described by the Conservation Area Appraisal as *"… a wide, characterless dual-carriageway that completely disrupts the historic street pattern and spoils the continuity of the Duke Street / London Street route to and from the town centre."*[39]

3.117 There is a close mix of old and new building stock here. Much the larger scale, modern development of the Oracle Shopping Centre and neighbouring office buildings are located around the junction between Duke Street and the Inner Distribution Road, and the Conservation Area Appraisal highlights that the high proportion of undistinguished modern development dilutes the historic character of the area.[40]

[40] Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

Figure 3.31: Area 3: Contrasting larger scale modern development dilutes the historic character of this part of the conservation area

3.118 Nineteenth century commercial buildings are focussed around the crossroads at King's Road and Duke Street, which is a busy junction and a local landmark. Several historic buildings nearby are notable; including Barclays Bank on King Street, of architectural interest for its ornate Italian palazzo style, and The George Hotel, first mentioned in the early-15th century, with the present building dating from the 17th or 18th century.

Character Area 4: Market Place

3.119 This sub-area encompasses the Market Place at its centre, and also the environs of St Laurence's Church and the Town Hall complex at its north corner. These are key buildings and local landmarks within the conservation area as a whole, which as a group constitute the defining architectural image of historic Reading. Key views of these landmark buildings are available from the surrounding streets, including Duke Street and Market Place, Friar Street and Blagrave Street, and The Forbury, for example.

3.120 St Laurence's Church and the Town Hall complex overlook the Market Place and Town Hall Square, where a large area has been pedestrianised in the more recent period. The lack of vehicular traffic allows for a better appreciation of these key historic buildings. Good views of the church and Town Hall complex, and particularly the deliberately placed Clock Tower, are also available from further away on King Street / Duke Street to the south and on Blagrave Street to the north. Key views are identified in the published Conservation Area Appraisal – appended townscape analysis map – including the local view looking north from High Street past the Site towards the landmark tower of the Parish Church. Other landmark buildings within the area of the Market Place include the tower of the Corn Exchange Arcade entrance (listed building) on the west side, and also the curve of Jackson's Corner (former department store – building of townscape merit) on King Street / High Street.

Figure 3.32: Area 4: View eastwards along Friar Street to the key landmark buildings of St Laurence's Church and the Town Hall

Figure 3.33: Longer views of the St Laurence's Church and Town Hall

3.121 The Conservation Area Appraisal also identifies the Market Place as a "significant open space" within this sub-area, which is now enclosed by a variety of ages, scales, forms and styles of buildings on each side, and also anchored visually by the Parish Church at its north corner and the distinctive Simeon Monument at its heart. The Appraisal describes that:

"The Market Place was partly destroyed by a bomb in 1943 and the buildings around Market Place show a variety of styles and periods in which, unfortunately, mid 20th century Brutalist architecture figures largely. Nos. 27/28 and 29/31 have timber frames (altered) from the 17th century or earlier. On the opposite side of Market Place, Nos. 13-16 (NatWest Bank) dates from c1875 in a Renaissance palace style. Facing north, on the lower side of Market Place, nos. 48/49 is a stuccoed mid 18th century building."

3.122 The noted The Buildings of England volume for Berkshire further describes the Market Place as *"a triangular space of no particular distinction"*[41], and it is considered that this verdict is a result of the considerable rebuilding and infrastructure which occurred in the post war and late 20th century period. Visual interest and character is derived from the historic buildings which survive on the corner of Friar Street and along the north part of the west side of the Market Place, including the entrance to the Corn Exchange Arcade. On the opposite side Nos.13-16 dates from the late-19th century and is built in a Renaissance palazzo style, whilst the listed buildings facing north on the lower side of the triangular Market Place survive from the 18th century, and also contribute positively to the remaining historic character in the area. The Simeon Monument or obelisk in the centre of the triangular Market Place, and the statue of Queen Victoria outside the Town Hall, are also local historic features which enhance the public realm conservation area and create a distinctive sense of place.

Figure 3.34: The historic buildings on the west side of the part-pedestrianised Market Place date from the 17th-19th centuries

3.123 As has been described, along the southern part of the east side of the Market Place and also west side extensive bomb damage during the Second World War necessitated the redevelopment of several sites. Instead of the fine-grained building line packed with visual interest shown in late 19th / early 20th century photographs, this frontage is now comprised of several unsympathetic modern structures which have reduced the historic character and appearance of this Medieval space. The vehicular traffic through the Market Place, including numerous large buses, also detracts from the character of this key historic space.

Figure 3.35: Remaining 18th and 19th century buildings on the south side of the Market Place

3.124 The published Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal[42] looks to draw its townscape character analysis together with a summary of the *"… features [within Character Area 3] that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area"*. These are listed as:

- *The close proximity of St Laurence's Church and Town Hall buildings makes a strong architectural statement;*
- *St Laurence's Church and distinctive tower;*
- *The large public open space (part-pedestrianised) composed of Market Place and the area around the statue of Queen Victoria;*
- *Town Hall complex comprising Victoria Hall, Concert Hall, Town Hall and Museum, Library and Art Gallery;*
- *The collection of historic buildings looking onto Market Place;*
- *The monument in Market Place, designed by Sir John Soane in 1804 to commemorate Edward Simeon a mayor of Reading and Governor of the Bank of England, and the statue of Queen Victoria;*
- *Good views of Town Hall clock tower and the tower of St Laurence's Church;*
- *Trees, greenery and open space of St Laurence's churchyard;*
- *Trees in the public realm which soften the harsh urban townscape; and*
- *Natural stone kerbs.*

[41] Pevsner, N. *The Buildings of England: Berkshire.* Yale University Press 2002

[42] Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

Summary of Significance

3.125 The published Conservation Area Appraisal[43] again provides a clear summary of the special interest (and overall heritage significance) of this designated area. Those features / aspects that are considered to justify designation are listed as:

- *Linear conservation area beside the planned medieval southern approach road, over the River Kennet, to a market place and church outside one of Reading Abbey's gateways;*
- *The Hospitium of St John the Baptist, founded in 1189 (Scheduled Monument);*
- *Two of Reading's three medieval churches: St Laurence's and St Giles', both with well treed churchyards;*
- *Isolated examples of timber-framed 16th and 17th century buildings e.g. nos 26/27 Market Place, nos 49/53 London Street and nos 3/5 London Road;*
- *Good examples of prestigious Georgian town houses in London Street;*
- *The fine collection of 19th century municipal buildings in Blagrave Street including Waterhouse's distinctive Town Hall and Victoria Hall, Concert Hall and Museum, Library and Art Gallery;*
- *Groups of historic building around Market Place;*
- *Special historic and architectural focus around St Laurence's Church and the Town Hall complex;*
- *Many examples of building with bricks (red, blue and buff) from Reading's extensive local brickworks;*
- *Fine examples of 19th century banks and commercial buildings notably Barclays Bank, King Street and NatWest Bank, Market Place;*
- *Three green open spaces namely the churchyards of St Laurence's and St Giles' and the burial ground of the Friends Meeting House;*
- *Public open space (part-pedestrianised) composed of Market Place and Town Hall Square i.e. the area around the statue of Queen Victoria;*
- *Jacksons Corner, a once busy crossroads and locally known landmark;*
- *Trees in the public realm particularly street trees in London Street, Market Place and Town Hall Square;*
- *Tranquil atmosphere of Church Street;*
- *The presence of the River Kennet and a short visible length of Holy Brook;*
- *Lengths of natural stone kerb and historic paving in the courtyard of The George Hotel, Thorn Lane and alleys off London Street; and*
- *Two examples of 19th century monuments: Sir John Soane's Simeon Monument and the Queen Victoria statue.*

3.126 In summary, the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area principally derives its significance from the principal spinal route running through Reading, made up of London Street, Duke Street and Market Place. This constitutes one of the principal medieval approach roads to the heart of old Reading. It leads directly to the historic core of the town, which is focussed on the landmark space of the Market Place, and the key buildings of St Laurence's Church and the Town Hall complex. This grouping makes up the defining image of historic Reading and its architecture. The ruins of Reading Abbey (albeit outside the conservation area boundary) also remain to the immediate east of St Laurence's Church, and these also reflect the long role of this area at the epicentre of Reading's history and growth.

3.127 This strongly linear conservation area contains some rare surviving timber-framed buildings of the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as several good examples of the Georgian townhouse typology in London Street, a great deal of 19th century commercial architecture, and some considerable 20th century redevelopment. This broad cross section of building ages and styles reflects the continuing importance of the route over time, as well as the changing economic fortunes and uses found along its length; and the evolving tastes and fashions in domestic and commercial architecture over this long period.

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.128 The Site forms two areas either side of the River Kennet. Part of the southern portion of the Site falls within the boundaries of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, on its east side, in *Character Area 1: London Street, south of the IDR*. The existing condition of the Site (both within or outside the conservation boundary) does not contribute positively to the understanding or appreciation of the significance of this heritage asset. The past development of the Site has connections to the historic industrial use of the local area along the waterways of the river and canal from the 19th century. However, this link is no longer legible on Site, and the existing large scale modern buildings and spaces are of no particular architectural and or historic interest. As found today, the Site no longer integrates with, nor positively addresses or activates, London Street.

3.129 In describing the other 'negative features' of Character Area 1, the Conservation Area Appraisal states that *"Modern development at north and south extremities of London Street, adjacent to road junctions, spoils the overall historic appearance of the area."* Furthermore, Section 6.10 (Issues) of this document highlights that *"Many 1960s and 1970s developments pay little heed to their context and some have a notably negative effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area. More recent development within the conservation area has shown a marked improvement but design of new development remains a major issue."*

Figure 3.36: Photograph of Site as seen from Queens Road

[43] Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

Figure 3.37: Photograph of Site as seen from the Oracle Riverside

St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area

Historical Development

3.130 During the Anglo-Saxon period, the Borough of Reading was centred on the Old Market and Old Street. Early maps refer to this area as 'St Mary's Butts', the site marks where two prominent roads, connecting Oxford to Winchester and London to Bath, met above the lowest bridging point over the River Kennet at this time. St Mary's Church, named in the Domesday Book of 1086, faced onto the old market at the corner of this cross-roads, now filled by the southern portion of the adjacent graveyard, with Minster Street diverted south towards Gun Street. The earliest major south-north route followed Southampton Street and Bridge Street to St Mary's Butts where the current Church now stands.

3.131 The foundation of the Cluniac Abbey by Henry I led to a shift in commercial focus towards the east of the town. Reading's developing plan form followed this trend, becoming increasingly centred towards the end of what is now Friar Street, accommodating a new sizable marketplace, away from the confines of the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area. Despite forming the oldest part of Reading, it grew into a more peripheral, albeit still important, area through the medieval period. Current street patterns date from this time when the area fell within St Mary's Parish. The name St Mary's Butts derives from the range where men were obliged by law to practice archery. St Mary's Church, though rebuilt entirely in the 16th century, is on an Anglo-Saxon site and incorporates remnants of the old church.

3.132 The earliest map of Reading, shown in John Speed's atlas of Great Britain of 1611, presents St Mary's Butts as one of three converging points, alongside Greyfriars and St Laurence's, with these churches, interconnected by roads, forming key hubs in the early townscape. However, the most developed area was still clearly to the immediate west of the old abbey beyond. An essentially triangular planform contained the whole town until the onset of more rapid expansion in the second half of the 18th century. Rocque's map of 1761 indicates development west of Castle Street and initial development eastwards across London Road. Coates's map of 1802 presents this area in further detail, revealing Reading's late-18th century growth. The original The Oracle workhouse operated until c.1850, was contained within the conservation area with an entrance attached to No. 15 Gun Street. This location is now an entrance to the modern The Oracle shopping centre.

Figure 3.38: Coates's Map of Reading dated 1802

3.133 The Inner Distribution Road (IDR), built in the 1970s, led to a physical and visual barrier to the west and south of the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area. Further 1970s redevelopment at the Police Station, Magistrates Courts, Civic Centre, Hexagon, Broad Street Mall and later The Oracle shopping centre have also led to its enclosure and disruption of longer views.

Character and Appearance

General Characteristics

3.134 The conservation area occupies two north-south and east-west roads, though St Mary's Church and Churchyard is contained within its own space as a landmark building to the north-east. The area predominantly consists of two and three storey buildings built to face directly onto pavements, reflective of original medieval street patterns. Walls surrounding land around St Mary's Church provides a natural focus for this area's historic buildings, serving as a pleasant open green resting place amidst this urban townscape. Castle Street extends westwards from the south-west of this green area. It is a wide thoroughfare, a principal vehicular traffic route with narrow footpaths. St Mary's Butts broadly shares this character. The Churchyard, Almshouses and Holybrook open spaces have a more tranquil character relative to the very busy St Mary's Butts and the Gun Street/Castle Street routes. Overall, there is limited green public open space within the conservation area. Most backyards and gardens to residential properties fronting these roads have been repurposed for car parking, accentuating the urban character of this area.

3.135 Buildings in the conservation typically date from the late-18th and 19th centuries with some significant 17th century (or earlier) exceptions. Modern redevelopment has, for the most part, responded to the traditional design, scale and materials found across historic buildings, so as not have an overtly negative effect on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. 16th century Timber-framed buildings, some with the typical first-floor jetties, including Nos. 15-17, 2-6 Castle Street, and Nos. 35-37 and 57 St Mary's Butts, feature, alongside 17th century buildings such as No. 8 Castle Street, Nos. 14-16 Castle Street and No. 15 Gun Street. Remaining historic buildings are mostly of brick and in a variety of hues and compositions, generally the most popular building through the late-18th and 19th centuries.

Figure 3.39: View of Church of St Mary's and its Churchyard

3.136 Road and pedestrian surfaces are built of modern tarmac with concrete utilised, as well as some brick. Traditional stone flags feature in front of St Mary's Church and cobbled passageways can be found at No.17 Castle Street and No.57 St Mary's Buts, as remnants 16th century complexes, and there is a cobbled access area in front of No.57 St Mary's Butts, with small areas of cobble elsewhere. Street lighting columns, signage and street furniture are modern, with no examples of traditional lighting, save at the Almshouses and in St Mary's Churchyard.

3.137 The conservation area is situated at the top of a small incline leading up from the River Kennet crossing, yet intermediary development along Bridge Street ensures views of St Mary's Church are not appreciable until one is nearby. This is the case across many other adjacent streets. However, the tower at St Mary's Church is a key landmark feature and can be viewed from along approaches in all directions. St Mary's Church in Castle Street is another local landmark within the context of Castle Street. The main historic views out of the conservation area are towards Greyfriars Church to the north, along St Mary's Butts and West Street, to Castle Hill to the west, interrupted by the IDR and the large roundabout, and down south towards St Giles Church along Bridge Street and Southampton Street, also interrupted by the IDR. Views east are reduced by the proximity of buildings just beyond the conservation area boundary. Generally, the character of the conservation area is enclosed. This has been accentuated by larger modern developments just outside. There are key shorter views inside, especially orientated to and from the west of St Mary's Church.

Figure 3.40: View of Gun Street / Castle Street frontages either side of the Bridge Street approach

3.138 The published Conservation Area Appraisal divides this area into a number of smaller sub-areas or 'character areas' to aid the description of their townscape character. These character areas are also summarised in this section below.

Area 1: St Mary's Church and Churchyard

3.139 St Mary's Church is situated at the centre of the Conservation Area, within its largest public open space with good pedestrian access, bounded by walls and buildings facing it across its east and north side. The Grade I listed church, open churchyard and pedestrian routes contrast markedly with densely packed buildings aligning roads elsewhere in the conservation area. Alms houses at the south and east boundaries of the churchyard were cleared in the late-19th century, allowing for its reconfiguration into an open space. The Conservation Area Appraisal identifies the "features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area" as:

- *The site of the Minster Church of St Mary and its walled churchyard, which dominate the very core of the historical centre of Reading as well as the Conservation Area itself;*
- *Good pedestrian links through and around the site, and pedestrian links via Chain Street to Broad Street to the north and The Oracle to the south;*
- *Some potential to stop and sit in the churchyard;*
- *The generally well-maintained character of the site.*

Area 2: St Mary's Butts

3.140 St Mary's Butts is a wide thoroughfare with heavy traffic. A commemorative fountain on a central traffic island is a key local feature alongside a traditional refreshment kiosk. The island is positioned between two carriageways. Road layouts, materials and street furniture pay little regard to the position of St Mary's Butts within the Conservation Area. Properties fronting St Mary's Butts show historic character, forming some of the oldest buildings in Reading. They correspond with properties on Castle Street to the south in terms of scale and architectural style. The Conservation Area Appraisal identifies this character area in summary as:

- *The traditional 16th century buildings at the southern end of St Mary's Butts (numbers 35-37 St Mary's Butts and "The Horn" adjoining them to the south), and at 57 St Mary's Butts, the latter retaining its cobbled access and passageway and cobbles in front of the building;*
- *The Victorian Fountain and kiosk, which are local landmarks on the "island" in the centre of St Mary's Butts;*
- *Views to St Mary's Church and Churchyard.*

Character Area 3: The Gun Street and Castle Street frontages

Buildings across Gun Street and Castle Street are typically of two and three storeys facing directly onto the back edge of pavements, aligning with medieval street patterns. As part of the core of old Reading, there are high quality examples of buildings dating from the 16th century and later. Despite the range in ages of these buildings, there is general a coherence of scale and massing, sustained by modern developments also. St Mary's Church in Castle Street, and to a lesser extent the former Congregational Chapel, now "Dogma" at 11 Castle Street, are landmark buildings interrupting this arrangement. Busy traffic and the poor quality of road, street furniture comprises attractive views of street frontages which can be appreciated from a variety of viewpoints along streets. Magistrates Court and Police Station buildings to the west interrupt these views to an extent. The Conservation Area Appraisal identifies the "features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area" as:

- *St Mary's Church in the centre of the northern part of Castle Street within the Conservation Area is a local landmark building even without its missing "pepper pot";*
- *The corner buildings at Gun Street/Bridge Street, Bridge Street/Castle Street and Castle Street/St Mary's Butts, at the crossroads of the Conservation Area are local landmark buildings;*
- *The "Sun Inn" is now also an important corner landmark building representing the western limit of the Conservation Area on the north side of Castle Street;*
- *The 16th Century survivors at numbers 15 and 17 Castle Street, the former retaining a cobbled passageway;*
- *The gentle curves apparent in the building frontages to Castle Street are also a key feature of the buildings here, giving further coherence to the matching scale of the buildings along the frontage;*
- *Traditional shop frontages in Gun Street;*
- *The open space between the almshouses between 51 and 55 Castle Street providing a unique green space seen from the frontage of this part of the Conservation Area;*
- *The Holy Brook which links the rears (albeit partly in a listed culvert) of the properties in Castle Street and Gun Street on their south sides, and which at its western end is an attractive landscaped foil to the generally built up of this part of the Conservation Area;*
- *Railings at the front of several properties on the south side of Gun Street and Castle Street.*

Summary of Significance

3.141 The published Conservation Area Appraisal[44] again provides a clear summary of the special interest (and overall heritage significance) of this designated area. Those features / aspects that are considered to justify designation are listed as:

- *Its position at the Saxon centre of Reading at a cross-roads of the main east-west and north-south routes through the town, just north of an original crossing point across the River Kennet, upon which river the town grew.*
- *The Grade I listed Church of St Mary in St Mary's Butts, a Reading landmark, originally Norman, and mentioned in the Domesday Book, but now mostly Medieval in origin, which is the focal building of the Conservation Area.*
- *St Mary's Churchyard, an important open space in the centre of town.*
- *Other important landmark buildings including the Grade II* listed St Mary's Church in Castle Street.*
- *The architectural and historic interest of the area's other buildings, with examples dating from the sixteenth century to the present day, but the majority of which show a coherence of scale within their various architectural styles.*
- *The presence of some of the oldest surviving buildings in Reading, including 3 existing public houses ("The Allied Arms", "The Horn" and "The Sun") dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, and the former "Shades" public house at 15 Gun Street dating from the 17th century. "The Sun" is also reputed to be on the site of the former Reading Gaol.*
- *Important Grade II* listed buildings at 15 and 17 Castle Street (both 16th century), 19 Castle Street (early 18th century), 63 Castle Street (circa 1750) and the Church of St Mary, Castle Street (1798).*
- *35-37 St Mary's Butts ("County Delicacies") and 57 St Mary's Butts ("The Allied Arms"), which also date from the 16th century.*
- *The Queen Victoria Jubilee Fountain in St Mary's Butts, a local landmark.*

[44] Reading Borough Council. St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

- *The Grade II* listed Holy Brook Culvert to the rear of numbers 1- 31(odd) Castle Street, plus the remainder of the Holy Brook which links the rear of the properties on the south side of the conservation area.*
- *A high percentage of listed buildings, listed individually and for their group value, dating from before 1875.*

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

3.142 The Site in no way affects how the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area is appreciated. Its nearest boundary to the Site is located approximately 70m away to the west. However, there are no views between the conservation area and the Site as result of large-scale commercial development intervening, including and surrounding the wider The Oracle shopping centre complex. Key views within the conservation area are enclosed and limited to immediate streets and open spaces. The Site makes no contribution towards the character and appearance of the conservation area, nor does it contribute to the significance of this heritage asset as part of its wider townscape setting or views.

Figure 3.41: View towards St Giles Church and also the modern shopping centre of The Oracle within the middle-ground from within the conservation area (Bridge Street)

4. Townscape Character Baseline

Introduction

4.1 An appraisal of the townscape character within the 500m study area from the Site has been undertaken to understand the townscape context of the Proposed Development and identify the key features and characteristics. This analysis builds on the heritage analysis of townscape character, which is described within the previous **Section 3**. The baseline townscape appraisal has also been informed by a desk-based study and on-site analysis to confirm and expand findings, which includes review of the character appraisals adopted by Reading Council. This process has resulted in the identification of a number of local townscape character areas (TCAs), which form the townscape receptors against which the townscape effects of the Proposed Development will be assessed.

Published Characterisation Studies

Reading Tall Building Strategy SPD 2008 (including Update Note 2018)

4.2 Appendix 1 to the Reading Tall Building Strategy SPD (2008) is referred to as Townscape and Visual Assessment. This baseline analysis (section 02: townscape assessment) provides detailed descriptions for each identified character area within the town centre area, and also their relative sensitivity in townscape terms to the development of tall buildings. Twenty-six character areas have been defined accordingly. The SPD outlines that they have been defined due to similarities in the following criteria: architectural style; urban grain and townscape scale; presence of townscape designations; townscape condition; and key views. The geographical extent of each character area is illustrated at **Figure 4.1** (extract from Appendix 1).

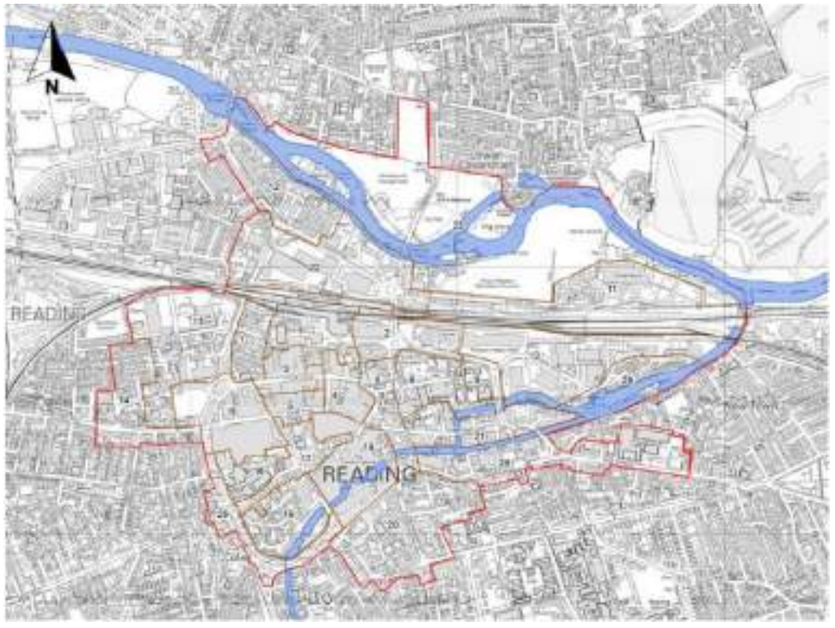


Figure 4.1: Figure 2.1 Townscape Character Areas (extract)

4.3 Appendix 1 identifies that the Site is entirely located within the defined "The Oracle Character Area" (no.18). The townscape characteristics, and also key views and landmarks, of this character area within the central area of Reading are described in the 2008 SPD (and also its 2018 Update) - included in full at **Figure 4.2**.

Land Use	The Oracle is a single development that fills the space between Broad Street, Mill Lane, Bridge Street and Duke Street. It provides a major shopping centre for Reading town centre, with the main access from Broad Street. The Kennet and Avon canal flows through the centre of the development. It is a key feature of the site and forms the focus of a civic space which includes seating, play spaces and cafes.
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to the Russel Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area
Architectural style	Late 20th century. Buildings materials are variable including concrete, brick and glass.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The large expanse of covered shopping centre and occasionally tall structures creates a large scale townscape.
Townscape condition	Although the design of the Oracle building is unexceptional, the public realm along the River Kennet is an attractive and well used resource which is in good condition.
Key views within the character area	Views along the Kennet and Avon canal eastwards
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	The general roofline of this character area is 3/4 storeys, with occasional taller buildings up to 9 storeys. The rooflines of these taller buildings are designed in such a way that their design, as well as their height stands out from the surrounding roofscape. For example the angular, glass structure which is located on the roof above the Oracle on the south side of the Kennet and Avon Canal.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low. The large block size and existing landmark structures (e.g. spire on the car park) create a high capacity for the development of tall buildings. However, consideration should be given on a case by case basis to how the development would impact on the skyline above St Mary's church and the surrounding Conservation Area.

Figure 4.2: The Oracle Character Area (no.18) (extract)

4.4 Appendix 1 of the SPD uses this townscape assessment (alongside wider views analysis) to judge the capacity of the town centre to accommodate tall buildings. Accordingly, **Figure 4.3** below demonstrates those character areas which are judged to have a "low sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings", and therefore have some capacity for buildings over 10 storeys - indicated by a brown wash on this plan. This includes the TCA that incorporates the Site (i.e. no.18 The Oracle).

4.5 The subsequent Reading Tall Building Strategy Update Note (2018) re-examined each of the previous character area assessments in light of changes to the townscape condition within Reading over a ten year period. One of the conclusions of this re-examination was that TCA no.18 The Oracle (which includes the Site) continued to have townscape capacity / low sensitivity (paragraph 3.21-3.22). The Update set out that *"The suitability as a location for tall buildings remains moderate."*

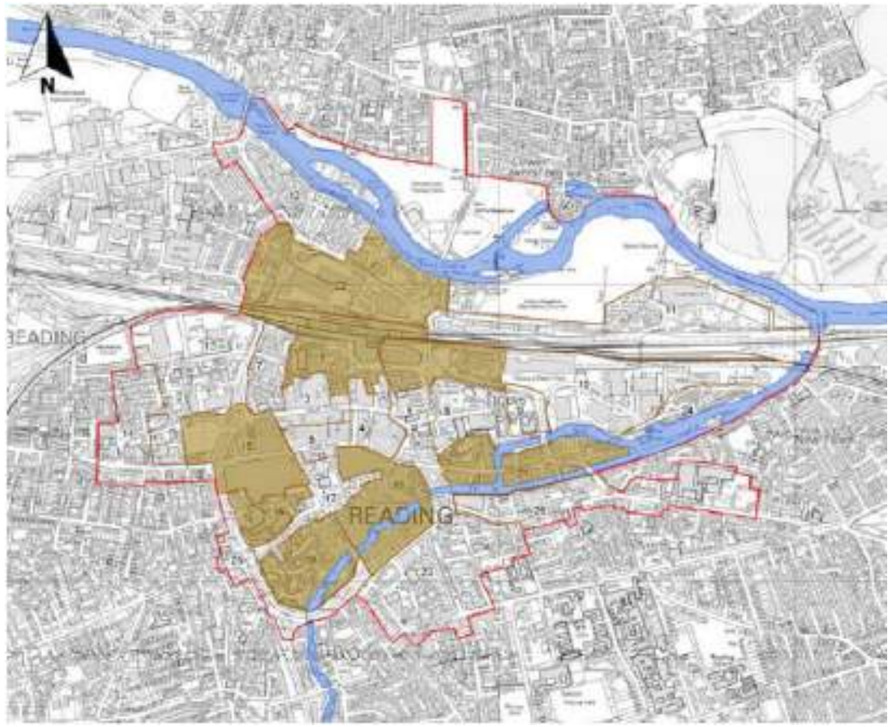


Figure 4.3: Figure 2.2: Townscape capacity for tall buildings (extract)

City Centre Framework 2008

4.6 The City Centre Framework (2008) was first prepared as a supporting document to the former Reading Central Area Action Plan. This framework provides a spatial and design overview for the central area of Reading both to guide forth coming developments and to provide reference in the consideration of planning applications, and further informs our own study. It is important to note that this document is considered at two levels:

- the central core: this includes the long-established and historic town centre, the civic centre district, the station area extending along the Thames and Riverside, Forbury Gardens, and The Oracle, including the area to the south of the Kennet; and
- the wider central area: this includes three major opportunity areas identified in the Reading Central Area Action Plan as areas for long-term expansion of the central core.

4.7 **Figure 4.4** is an extract from the framework illustrating these key areas. The Site is not located within one of the defined opportunity areas, although the area of the 'central core' includes The Oracle as one of its 'key landmarks' and also as part of the envisioned focus for future development and intensification for Reading.

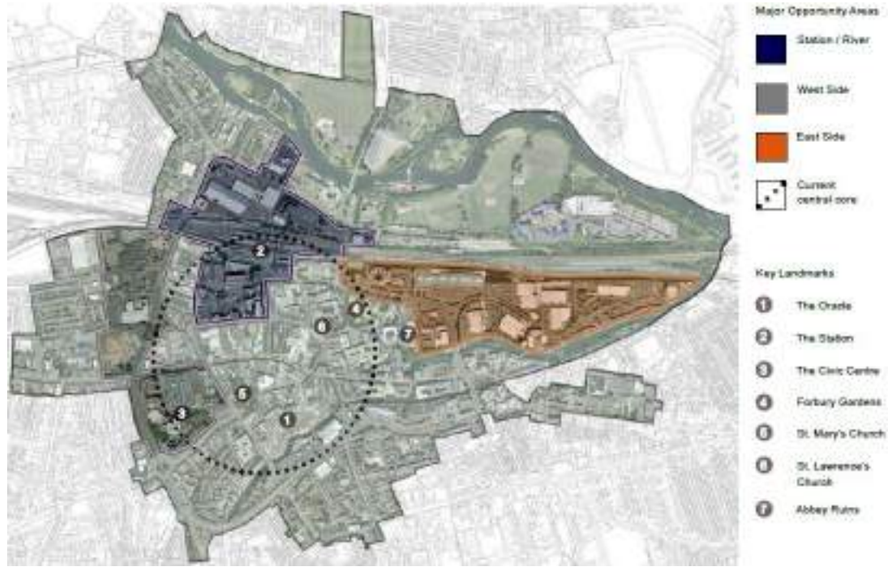


Figure 4.4: Figure 1.1: The Wider Central Area and Central Core (extract)

4.8 The framework reiterates the findings of its contemporary Tall Building Strategy SPD. This indicates the locations within the central area that have been determined to be most suitable for the location of taller buildings. It sets out that the primary location for the development of very tall buildings is the area around the station, which best meets a number of the key criteria used in the assessment for suitable locations. These criteria include:

- *proximity to sustainable transport access;*
- *capacity of the area to meet demand for social infrastructure;*
- *impact on townscape and historic character;*
- *short and long range visual impact;*
- *visual impact on open spaces;*
- *topography and flood risk;*
- *market demand; and*
- *flight path and telecommunications constraints*

4.9 A secondary category, or general guidance, is also introduced by the relevant figure within the framework. This applies to other areas outside the defined tall building zones, including the Site, and states that the *"height of new buildings to reflect surrounding building heights."* For tall buildings the key design principles are set out to include creating a positive relationship to surrounding streets, creating positive visual impact, optimising sustainability and minimising environmental impact. Alongside the key considerations of height, scale and massing, the framework provides further and broader design objectives for the town centre, which include responding the established urban structure and grain, including matters of character, ease of movement and permeability, continuity and enclosure, and legibility, and also the diversity and mix of uses. Improving access and public transport is a further key consideration, including as particularly relevant to the Site itself an objective to reduce the barrier created by the IDR. It is set out that:

"All future developments should seek to address the problems of the IDR by following urban design principles that treat the IDR as a place and not simply a traffic corridor:

- *link city centre activities into neighbouring areas;*
- *create space for environmental enhancement of the public realm through the creation of quality streets and places; and*
- *plan new development and public spaces to create a strong urban grid with active frontages along the IDR."*

Site and Local Area – Key Townscape Features

Historical Development

4.10 Historically the Site forms part of the former industrial area along the river and canal. This is immediately to the west of the ancient north-south route of London Street / Duke Street through the historic core of Reading, which crosses the Kennet at High Bridge and also leads into the Market Place. It was in the later 20th century that the greatest degree of change occurred to this past layout and character. The post war development of the IDR along the south side of the river and a new bridge crossing along the line of Yield Hall Place established a new pattern of movement and also a generally larger grain and scale of built form, infrastructure and spaces. Older buildings on both sides of London Street at its north end were cleared away, and more recently the comprehensive development of The Oracle complex has further established a new mix of uses and character for the area. As found today, the Site integrates poorly with the older street pattern and activity, although the wider complex has embraced the river to create new public realm along the water. The Oracle itself has become the focus of leisure and retail uses not only for this town but also as a centre of regional importance, although this role is now changing in response to wider national trends.

Figure 4.5: Photograph looking north along London Street towards the town centre, dated 1878, prior to post war redevelopment and severance by the IDR (HE Archives)

4.11 The historical development of the Site and local area, including the significance of the various heritage assets as part of this townscape, is described in more detail as part of **Section 3** of this baseline analysis.

Land Uses

4.12 The current land use of the Site is commercial (both retail and leisure uses), which relates to the prevailing character of the local area as part of the landmark The Oracle complex within this part of the town centre and riverside. The wider area surrounding is characterised by a mix of land uses; the key feature being the major infrastructure element of the IDR that effectively runs east-west along the southern edge of the central commercial and civic core of the town, and acts as part of its modern ring road system. Across the IDR to the north The Oracle centre is a major commercial focus for the town – predominantly in retail use, which also straddles and encloses part of the canalised River Kennet. The Oracle presents a largely inactive frontage to the IDR, including servicing routes and car parking. Along this section of the IDR (and on both sides) there are other commercial uses, including offices and the Premier Inn hotel further to the south west of the Site. The historic route of London Street is to the east of the Site, which runs north over the river crossing as Duke Street, and south away from the centre and to higher ground. This other key route has a mixed-use character, including commercial retail and offices acting in some way as a traditional high street. To the south of the Site residential uses dominate within a mix of historic and more modern properties north and south of the older established route of Church Street within that larger urban block.

Figure 4.6: View looking towards the Site along the River Kennet from the east

Topography

4.13 The Site sits within an area of relatively flat topography as both development parcels address the key feature of the canalised River Kennet at the centre of The Oracle complex. The local topography is determined largely by rising land to the south away from the basin / valley of the River Kennet and also rising land northwards to the historic core of the town centre.

Movement and Urban Structure

4.14 The Site is defined by its role within the mixed use and vibrant town centre of Reading and also its accessible location near to key transport routes, including the IDR (part of the A329) running east-west, London Street and its continuation Duke Street running north-south into the historic core, the waterways of the River Kennet and Avon Canal, and associated pedestrian / cycle links. The main railway station serving the town is located less than 500m to the north.

Figure 4.7: View looking south along Yield Hall Place and bridge to the east side of the Site

4.15 Historically, the urban structure of Reading has evolved as a grid of north-south and east-west routes, deriving from the original river crossing points. This grid of streets and creation of blocks has defined the urban structure of the town centre, which has otherwise been successively redeveloped within this framework to create a highly diverse townscape in terms of its use and also the form and character of built form. The imposition of the east-west rail corridor through the town in the 19th century has had a significant influence on that structure, and also in the more modern period the IDR has resulted in fragmentation of that older established grid. Near to the Site the key historic north-south routes of London Street / Duke Street (to the east) and Southampton Street / Bridge Street (to the west) remain legible, and also allow the flow of both transport and pedestrian movement and permeability, albeit to a degree severed by later transport interventions. There is a finer network of streets, lane and spaces within the urban blocks. The west to east flow of the River Kennet along what is now the southern edge of the commercial centre remains as an historic element and key route for pedestrians and cyclists in particular. The Oracle complex itself has a generally inward-looking character, which beneficially concentrates activity and interest within the central enclosed riverside area, but otherwise provided poor connections and permeability within this part of the town.

Built Form and Scale

4.16 The Site, and its two development parcels straddle the river and both comprise large scale and format modern blocks that were purpose-built as part of the larger retail and leisure complex of The Oracle, dating from the late 20th century. These buildings are orientated to address the riverside public realm and also London Street at the corner, albeit with more inactive frontages to the shared service yard at Yield Hall Place and also the IDR. Although large scale and grain in form and articulation, these buildings employ a mix of more traditional cladding materials.

Figure 4.8: View looking north at the pedestrian crossing of the IDR and gateway / conjunction of High Bridge Yield Hall Place bridge

4.17 Within the wider local area, the scale and form of built development tends to reflect the relative importance and proportion of the roads, streets and spaces that is addressed. Along the IDR, the blocks of The Oracle effectively range from 6-8 typical storeys in height. Around the Bridge Street roundabout further west and elevated section of the IDR to the south west of the Site existing commercial buildings rise up from 4 to 7 storeys, and then across to the north east of the Site other commercial blocks are predominantly 4-6 storeys in height. Along the converse north-south route of London Street historic buildings congregate to the south of the IDR junction and enclose the street as continuous terraces between 2-4 storeys in height across the rhythm of plots. To the south of the line of the IDR and also

either side of London Street secondary streets and more intimate spaces are defined by a lower scale and also generally finer grain of buildings of 2-3 storeys.

Architecture and Materiality

4.18 The local area of the Site comprises a diverse mix of building materials and features, which reflects the multi-phase character of the long development and also more recent redevelopment of this area. To the south of the IDR the more historically intact urban blocks retain a range of buildings that often share the use of red brick as a characteristic, including those coupled with some more targeted use of render and or stone. More modern material and architectural styles predominate along the IDR and also as part of the dominant The Oracle development. Historical local landmark buildings, such as the former Methodist Church at No.33 London Street tend to employ more powerful architectural styles and or use of high-quality materials (such as stone) to communicate their status within the townscape. The modern The Oracle development itself has also sought to landmark itself through the addition of a visually distinctive sculptural feature atop the main car park block.

Figure 4.9: View looking west along The Oracle Riverside and across the water to the shopping centre

Public Realm and Green Elements

4.19 The Site itself includes areas of hardstanding, and vehicular and pedestrian accesses, which are integrated with the wider public realm and servicing areas of The Oracle complex. There is limited greenery within the immediate area, with the exception of groups of street trees along the riverside walkways. This is a very hard urban area reflective of the town centre location and history of modern redevelopment. This makes the waterscape of the River Kennet / Avon Canal all the more important as part of the open space and visual relief within this dense built urban context. Key elements of public realm within the local area include the active riverside space at the heart of The Oracle, although connections to and permeability through this complex and the wider network of street and spaces is generally poor. Other key spaces include the historic Market Place further to the north, and the churchyards of St Mary (to the north west) and St Giles (to the south west).

Local Townscape Character Areas

4.20 The townscape character of the wider area surrounding the Site comprises a mix of different uses and diversity in age, form, scale and architectural character of existing buildings and spaces. To define townscape character receptors, which include all parts of the townscape - both ordinary areas and any of those of heritage significance, such as conservation areas - and at a scale appropriate to the Site and Study Area, local Townscape Character Areas (TCAs) have been identified at Figure 4.5, and also at **Appendix 3.**

4.21 For the purposes of our contextual analysis, and how that informs the proposed future development for the Site, we have identified that the following defined townscape character areas (receptors) are of the greatest relevance. This has been based on an initial 500m radius study area from the Site, which then has been further refined based on the findings of our desktop and subsequent site survey work. Table 4.1 identifies each of these 6no TCAs and also provide a summary description of key characteristics.

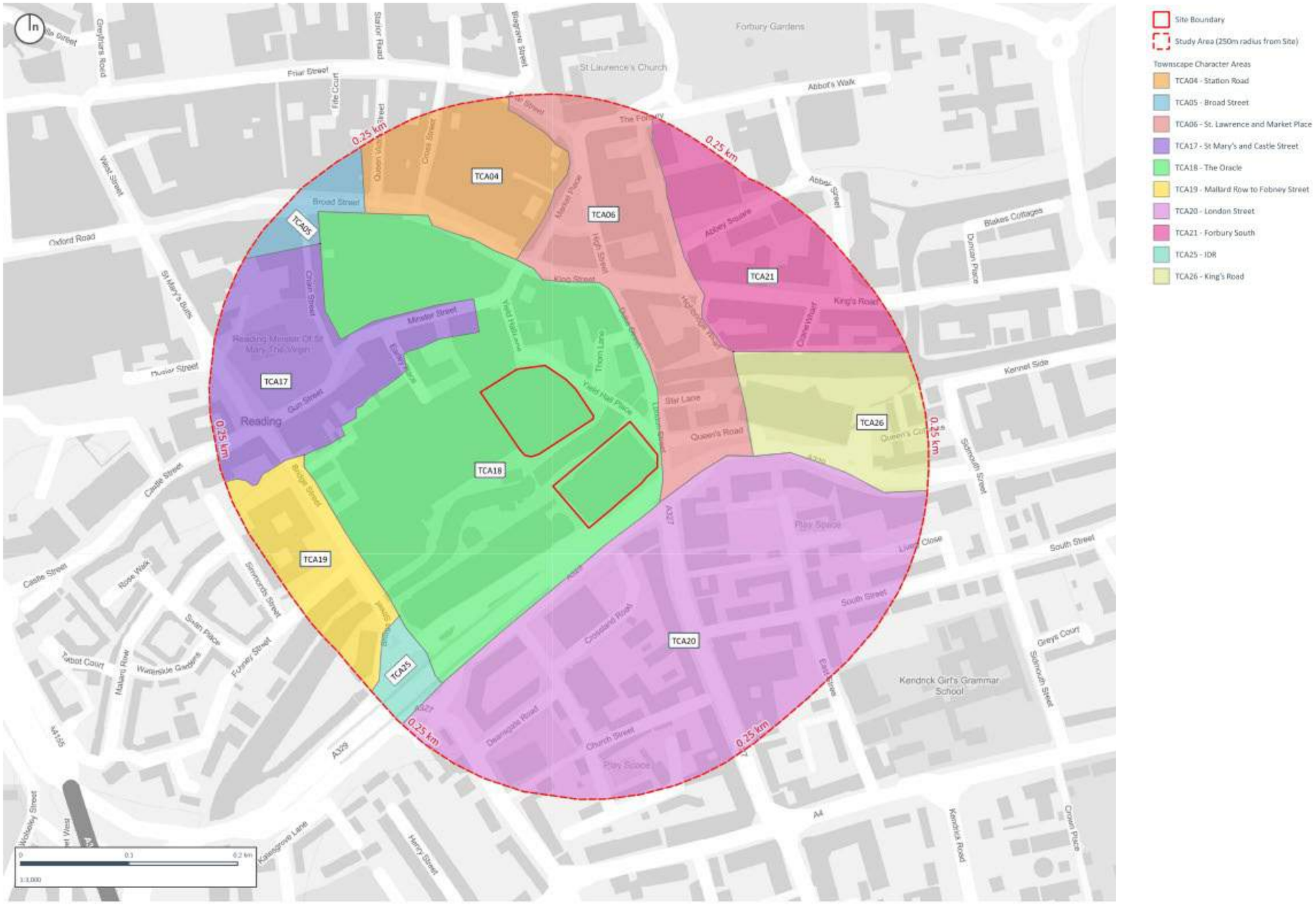


Figure 4.10: Townscape Character Areas (TCA) Plan

Table 4.1: Townscape Character Areas 6no (TCA) for study

TCA18 – The Oracle

Few or no heritage asset designations

Comprehensive commercial development, coarse grain and large-scale modern buildings

Enclosed Kennet side public realm along River Kennet

Mixed use, albeit predominantly retail

Prevailing building heights of four to nine storeys

Variety of architectural styles and use of materials

Townscape character sensitivity: Low

TCA6 – St. Lawrence and Market Place

Concentration of built heritage assets, including Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and listed buildings

Historic street pattern and fine urban grain, including focal public spaces such as Market Place and High Bridge crossing over River Kennet. Main transport route north-south

Landmark buildings include Town Hall and St Lawrence's Church

Mix of land uses

Prevailing building heights of three to five storeys

Diversity of building types, architectural styles and use of materials

Townscape character sensitivity: High

TCA20 – London Street

Concentration of built heritage assets, including Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and listed buildings

Elements of historic street pattern and fine urban grain, with coarser grain to north and south edges representing more modern redevelopment along main transport routes

Landmark building St Giles's Church

Predominantly residential land use

Prevailing building heights of three to six storeys

Relatively consistent typology of terraced blocks, some variety of architectural styles and prevailing use of red brick

Townscape character sensitivity: High

TCA17 – St Mary's and Castle Street

Concentration of built heritage assets, including St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area and listed buildings

Historic street pattern and fine urban grain, including focal public space St Mary's Churchyard. Main transport route east-west

Landmark building St Mary's Church

Mix of land uses

Prevailing building heights of two to four storeys

Diversity of building types, architectural styles and use of materials

Townscape character sensitivity: High

TCA21 – Forbury South

Few heritage asset designations

Predominantly coarse grain and large-scale modern buildings. Main transport route east-west (Kings Road))

Waterside association with River Kennet / Kennet and Avon Canal

Mixed use, albeit predominantly offices

Prevailing building heights of four to fifteen storeys

Variety of architectural styles and use of materials

Townscape character sensitivity: Low

TCA26 – King's Road

Modest number of heritage asset designations

Elements of both historic finer grain and coarse grain representing redevelopment of larger scale modern buildings

Dominating major modern vehicular transport route east-west (IDR, including Queen's Road and King's Road)

Landmark feature twin spires of St. John's and Methodist Church

Waterside association with River Kennet / Kennet and Avon Canal to north edge

Mix of land uses, including higher education campus

Prevailing building heights of three to ten storeys

Variety of architectural styles and use of materials

Townscape character sensitivity: Low

Summary

4.22 A summary of the local townscape character areas and their "value" is provided at Table 4.2. This analysis has been guided by our established methodology (and criteria) in relation to townscape character assessment, as set out in full at **Appendix 2**.

Table 4.2: Townscape Character Areas (TCA)

Name	Value
TCA18: The Oracle	Ordinary
TCA6: St. Lawrence and Market Place	Medium
TCA20: London Street	Medium
TCA17: St Mary's and Castle Street	Medium
TCA21: Forbury South	Ordinary
TCA26: King's Road	Low

5. Visual Amenity Baseline

Introduction

5.1 An assessment of the local visual context and visual amenity was first undertaken on Site in August 2021 to understand the existing extent of visibility of the Site and key views and visual receptors likely to be affected by the Proposed Development. In this context, the term 'Site' is used to refer to the full extent of the Site and the existing features within it.

5.2 Key 'representative views' were identified, which reflect the character and quality of typical views from the key receptors and to form the baseline against which the visual effect of the Proposed Development will be assessed. This process was confirmed through return site survey work (April 2022). The final selection of representative views included within the HTVIA at this application has been discussed with officers at RBC as part of the pre-application process accordingly.

5.3 ***Appendix 3*** provides a plan of the representative viewpoint locations; which form part of this assessment within the HTVIA document.

Extent of Visibility

5.4 Our visual analysis commenced by establishing the area in which the Site, and also the initially proposed development, may be visible; the different groups of people who may experience the views of the Site and envisioned development (defined as visual receptors); and the areas where views can or are likely to be possible; and the nature and extent of these views. These factors interrelate accordingly.

5.5 The visibility of the Site has been assessed using aerial imagery and the computer generated ZTV, also included at ***Appendix 3***. The ZTV mapping utilises LiDAR data with 1m grid resolution, incorporating available information on existing topography, built form and mature vegetation. The ridge heights of the Proposed Development blocks were provided by the appointed scheme architects and utilised in the production of the ZTV (on the basis of 54m maximum height). The blue colour wash indicates where in the surrounding townscape the proposed development would potentially be visible from with the darkest blue indicating the highest potential visibility. The grey / white areas demonstrating parts of the townscape where the scheme is likely to be obscured.

5.6 The ZTV was produced for an area within both a 1km and also wider a 2km radius of the Site. There may to be some more distant viewpoints beyond this from which the proposed development would be visible, but it would appear as a very small feature in the background of the view, in the context of the scale and character of the urban skyline of Reading and its wider landscape setting. As such, visual impacts from this distance would not be significant or material to the decision-making process.

5.7 As demonstrated by the initial ZTV, and also as confirmed during our subsequent site survey, the principal areas where the Site and any proposed development would be visible include the main roads running past the Site boundary (including the IDR (Queens Road), London Street and Yield Hall Place), vantage points from a number of streets and public realm / open spaces within the local area of the Site (including the riverside area of The Oracle development), river crossings and also the riverside / canalside walkways (including High Bridge, Bridge Street Bridge and others over the River Kennet and Avon), and other longer distance views from the higher ground of The Mount to the south (i.e. the continuation of London Street south to meet Southampton Street and Whitley Street), as well as open spaces to the south. The established street pattern / orientation, density of surrounding built development, all serve to limit or otherwise control the number and extent of views within the more local study area however.

5.8 As part of the early design process, the project architects also employed 3D computer modelling of the emerging scheme within an accurate model of the local Reading townscape context, which has also been used to further test the likely visibility of built form from various vantage points. A further benefit of this exercise has been to re-confirm the location and also orientation of our recommended representative viewpoints, in relation to the scheme.

Visual Receptors

5.9 Visual receptors are defined as the groups of people who may be affected by changes in views and visual amenity. They include people passing through publicly accessible places e.g. by foot, car, bicycle or public transport, people working in an area and people visiting or engaged in recreational activities. The key visual receptors which have been identified within the Study Area with the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development on Site are set out below:

- Road users on main routes, such as London Street, Southampton Street and Whitley Street running north-south, Kings Road and Queens Road (including the IDR) running east-west, also including key crossings of the River Kennet;
- Users of other local or secondary roads, streets and spaces within the town centre area, including the pedestrianised riverside area of The Oracle development;
- Users of River Kennet / Kennet and Avon Canal and other associated waterways / towpaths / bridges;
- Users of public open spaces, such as Market Place and St Mary's Churchyard, and the Mapledurham Estate; and
- Existing local residents within established housing areas to the south of the Site (beyond the IDR).

5.10 Although surrounding residential properties form a further receptor group, only the receptors identified above are considered within the HTVIA, as views from private properties are not a material planning consideration[45] unless the impact of the proposals is likely to be so great ('overbearing' or 'inescapably dominant') that it would harm the residential visual amenity of the property.

Significant / Local Views

5.11 To further assist the scoping process with regard to the visibility and views of the Site and Proposed Development, the Local Plan and its supporting SPD / SPG have been reviewed in relation to any protected or otherwise 'significant / local views' identified through the plan making process. This review is summarised in the section.

[45] Aldred's Case in 1610 established the principle that private individuals do not have a legal right to a view.

Reading Local Plan 2019

5.12 The Reading Local Plan (2019) identifies a number of "Significant Views with Heritage Interest" that would merit special protection (Policy EN5) (extract at Figure 5.1). Of the nine views identified, *"View 2: View northwards down Southampton St from Whitley St towards St Giles Church, St Mary's Church and Greyfriars Church"* is orientated towards the town centre and also the local area of the Site (but not directly towards the Site itself) from higher ground and the wider residential suburban area to the south.

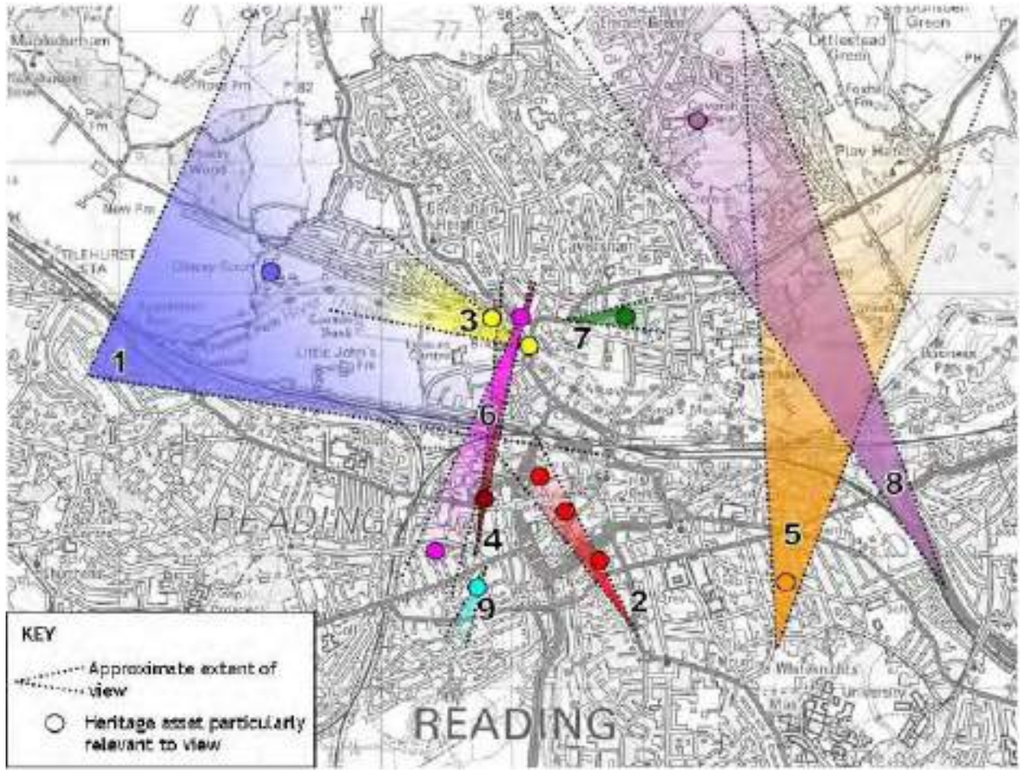


Figure 5.1: Extract Local Plan 2019: Figure 4.2: Significant Views with Heritage Interest

5.13 The Assessment of Significant Views with Heritage Interest background paper (2018) includes further detailed information on the importance and defining characteristics of View 2 and also its viewing place. As captured in **Figure 5.2**, the Site is not aligned with the key viewing corridor for this long view directed north-westwards along Southampton Street. This is further confirmed on the ZTV (**Appendix 3**), where the Proposed Development would not be experienced from this vantage point.

Figure 5.2: Extract from Assessment of Significant Views with Heritage 2018: Figure 2.11 Detail plan of Southampton Street showing Viewing Place / View 2

Reading Tall Building Strategy SPD 2008

5.14 As a starting point, Appendix 1 to the Reading Tall Building Strategy SPD (2008) is referred to as Townscape and Visual Assessment. In addition to an assessment of townscape character for the town centre, this baseline analysis (section 03: views and visual experience) provides a study of "key views" that contribute. This has identified a number of key views (1) within central Reading, (2) mid-range views into central Reading, and also other (3) long range views into central Reading.

5.15 With regard to key views within the central area itself, *"Viewpoint I: view along the Kennet and Avon Canal from Duke Street [i.e. High Bridge] westwards"*, is the most relevant to the Site (extracted at **figure 5.3**). The key features of this view to be protected as set out in this SPD are described as the *"framed views along the canal".* This is also identified in this SPD as a view which is judged to have the potential to be improved by the inclusion of tall buildings. Further guidance for this view states that:

"Views along the canal form a localised area of open views; the view is flanked on either side by a well-defined edge, created by the tall, blocky structures within the Oracle development. Long range views along the canal are restricted by a bridge in the foreground. The view has a low sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings. A key characteristic of the view is the manner in which it is framed by tall buildings with a large block size; further tall buildings would enhance this characteristic."

Figure 5.3: Viewpoint I (Extract from Appendix 1 of Reading Tall Building Strategy SPD 2008)

5.16 With regard to mid and long-range views into central Reading from within the wider townscape / landscape area (extract at **Figures 5.4-5**), there are a number of identified viewpoints with the potential to be affected by the proposed development of a taller building on Site. These are discussed below.

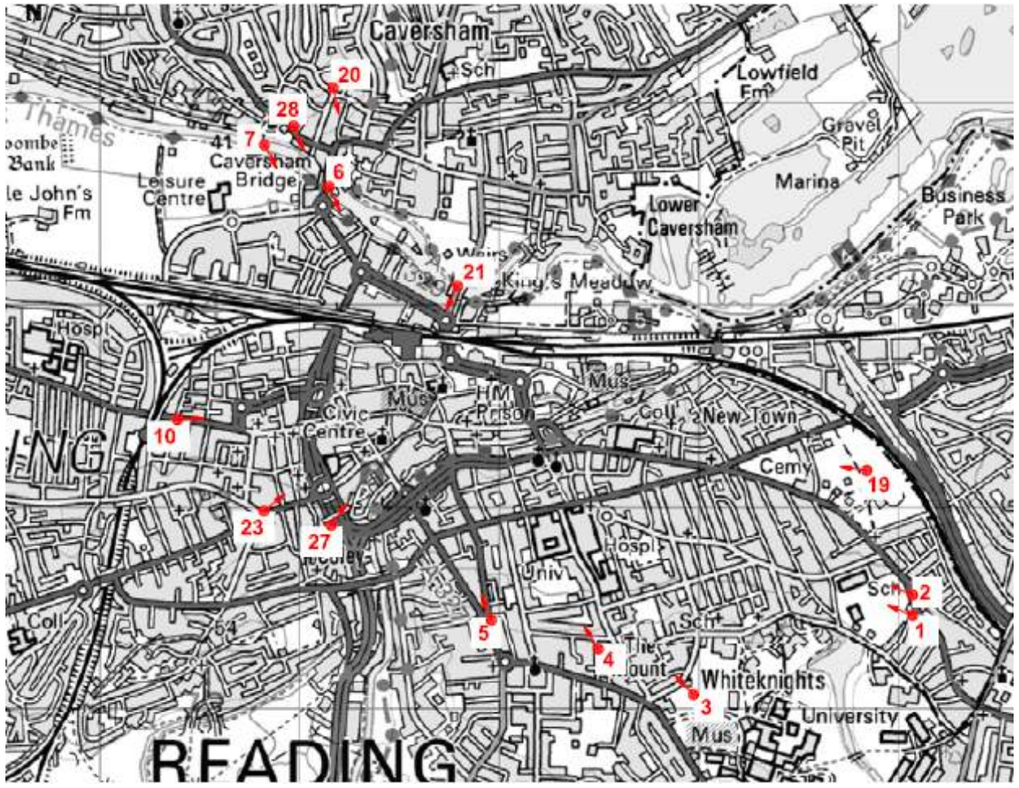


Figure 5.4: Extract from Appendix 1 of Reading Tall Building Strategy SPD 2008: Figure 3.1 Mid-range views into central Reading

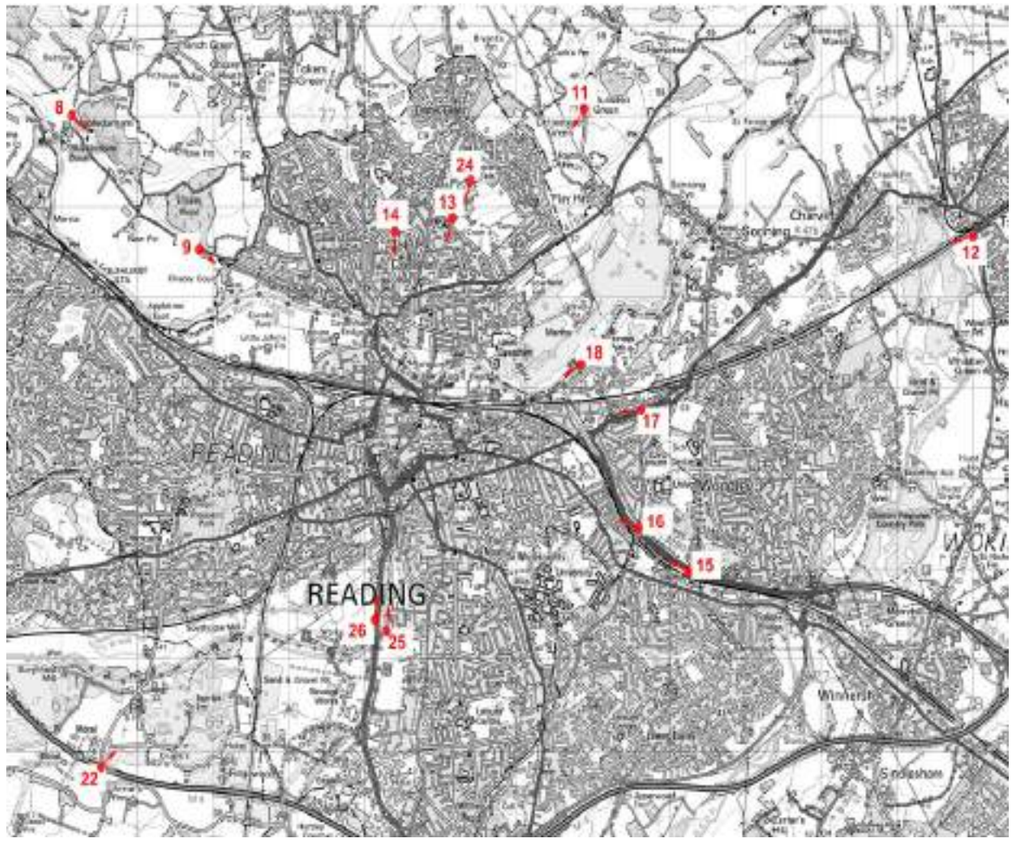


Figure 5.5: Extract from Appendix 1 of Reading Tall Building Strategy SPD 2008: Figure 3.2: Long range views into central Reading

5.17 Viewpoint 5 (From the A327, south of central Reading) is located at the junction of Mount Pleasant, Southampton Street and Whitley Street within the suburban area of The Mount. The SPD describes that:

"The A327 and adjacent residential development creates a framed and tunnelled view towards central Reading. The sloping road facilitates views down to the Oracle buildings which are a visible feature at the end of the road and form the focal point of the view. Although the buildings in the foreground are residential and low rise, the existing visibility of buildings in central Reading as a focal point creates a low sensitivity to further tall building developments."

5.18 This view is orientated towards the Site at a distance of c.825m, and has also been judged to have the potential to be improved by the inclusion of tall buildings in this SPD. The 2018 Update to this SPD did recognise however that:

"The feature which is now most apparent at the background of the view is The Blade, which is clearly higher than other surrounding elements of Central Reading, although Three Forbury Square is also visible to its left …"

5.19 The 'Zone of Theoretical Visibility' plan demonstrates that there is likely to be no visibility of the scheme from this viewpoint location.

5.20 Viewpoint 8 (From rural road north of Maple Durham) is 5.7km to the north west of the Site. This is described in the SPD as:

"The view is of a pastoral landscape interspersed with parkland trees and woodland clumps. Maple Durham House is the only visible built form. The rural character of the view and the undeveloped nature of the skyline results in a high sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings to the view. Although tall buildings within central Reading would be a background feature of the view, the block size, height and architectural style would be at odds with the rural character."

5.21 Viewpoint 9 (From footpath east of Maple Durham) is 3.7km to the north west of the Site. This is described in the SPD as:

"Views across the sloping pastoral fields in the foreground are to a wooded skyline. The roofline of housing at the western end of 'The warren' is visible in the middle distance. In the background of the view more extensive built form on the slopes of the southern River Thames valley sides (Purley on Thames) is visible. Although occasional built form is a feature, the built form is residential and low rise. The rural view has a high sensitivity to the development of tall or very tall buildings."

5.22 The character of the viewpoint has changed substantially since the SPD was published. The view is restricted to the footpath itself due to dense foliage and tree planting. Visibility of the pastoral fields and woodland in the far distance is not experienced.

5.23 Viewpoint 11 (From Dunsden Way, south of Dunsden Green) is 4.3km to the north east of the Site. This is described in the SPD as:

"Gently undulating, large arable fields form the dominant feature of the view. The fields are interspersed with overhead power lines and electricity pylons. The skyline is occasionally wooded, but the woodland does not significantly contain view which are long ranging. The wind turbine at Green Park is a feature of the view in the far distance. Although large scale man made features are a feature of the view, a strong rural character remains. The introduction of further built form, particularly tall, large blocks would further erode the rural character. The view has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings to the skyline."

5.24 Viewpoint 14 (View from Balmore Park) is located 2.15km to the north of the Site and is described as:

"This is a long range panoramic view of central Reading. Views down the grassy slope, across the residential roofline, to central Reading are possible. Thames Tower, Western Tower and Fountain House are visible on the skyline, while other tall commercial buildings in the east of Reading town centre are screened by existing vegetation. Views of Reading from this position are panoramic and are experienced from a recreational resource. It is judged that the viewpoint has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings. They would draw further attention to the central area and further detract from the tranquil nature of the view. Consideration should be given to how any proposed tall buildings respond to the existing tall buildings, and to how the skyline would be viewed as a whole. Although true of all viewpoints, this is particularly true in this instance due to the elevated and panoramic nature of the view."

5.25 Viewpoint 17 (From the A4 west of Reading) is located 3.1km to the east of the Site and is described as:

"The A4 slopes downwards into central Reading, facilitating long range views over the rooftops to the gas cooling towers in eastern central Reading. The foreground of the view is suburban in character; semi detached and detached housing along the A4 being the dominant visual feature. However, as large structures within central Reading are an existing feature of the view, there is a low sensitivity to the introduction of further tall built form."

5.26 Viewpoint 23 (From the A4155, adjacent to Coley Hill) is located c.1km to the west of the Site, and is described as:

"The view is framed by built form and boundary vegetation on both sides of the A4155. The A4155 is a key route into Reading and this shot is representative of views experienced at a key gateway into the town. The road slopes downwards towards central Reading, and buildings within central Reading, including the gas storage structures in eastern central Reading are a focus to the view. The view has a low sensitivity to the inclusion of further tall structures and could benefit from the addition of a tall structure to further focus the view."

5.27 Nearby, Viewpoint 27 (View from Coley Place towards central Reading) allows for panoramic views of the skyline of the town, including the distinctive spire of the Church of St Giles and the roof of The Oracle (c.500m to the west of the Site). It is described that this:

"… view has a medium sensitivity to the addition of a tall structure. The roofline is currently of variable height and further variety in itself would not have an adverse effect. However consideration should be given to how specific tall building proposals would respond to the surrounding roofline context. This is particularly true in this instance as a result of the panoramic nature of the view."

5.28 Viewpoint 24 (from Caversham Park) is located 3.1km to the north of the Site and is described as:

"The elevated position of Caversham Park and the open aspect provided by the sloping topography and parkland land use, facilitate long range views across to the southern side of the Thames Valley. Views into central Reading are also a feature; St. Giles' Church and the Chatham Place development are visible. Although views of central Reading are already a feature, due to the distance of the receptor, central Reading does not appear a significantly different scale to the surrounding residential development. However, should tall structures with a significantly larger block size, be developed then they would become a highly visually intrusive and uncharacteristic feature of the view. As panoramic views across the whole of central Reading are possible, the receptor would also be highly sensitive to a cumulative visual effect resulting from experiencing views of tall buildings in various locations. Due to the tranquil, parkland character of the view, it has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of further tall buildings within central Reading."

5.29 However, Caversham Park is no longer accessible to the public. Whilst acknowledged within this HTVIA, an assessment of the effects arising to the view looking towards Reading town centre as a result of the Proposed Development has not been possible.

5.30 The 2018 Update to the SPD further describes that:

"The original view analysis notes the variety in the skyline, and new developments have resulted in greater variety. The Blade provides a modern counterpoint to the spire of St Giles Church (appearing to

be of a similar height from this point). The new building under construction at Kings Point is also prominent halfway between the two. Other visible changes are the Premier Inn at Letcombe Street and the Q2 building (both under construction at the time of the original analysis and with cranes visible) and 80-82 Kings Road ..."

5.31 The subsequent Reading Tall Building Strategy Update Note (2018) re-assessed each of the views previously identified, in light of changes to the townscape condition and also visual context of Reading over a ten year period. It was recognised that a number of newer tall buildings have since come into view, however this did not effect the overall value or sensitivity of any key views identified in this document in relation to the proposed development of the Site itself (paragraph 3.30-3.32).

Conservation Area Appraisals (various)

5.32 It is also noted that there are a number of other views in the Borough that may be identified in relation to key heritage or townscape characteristics. These include views specifically identified within the published Conservation Area Appraisals by RBC.

5.33 The Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal from 2007 highlights the importance of the High Bridge as a key viewing place (both east and west along the river), as well as the view of Kennet side and The Oracle development from the modern Yield Hall Place bridge **(Figure 5.6-7)**. The Conservation Area Appraisal describes that:

"Views along the River Kennet are pleasing and a distinctive feature of the conservation area. From High Bridge looking eastwards, there is a restful though not spectacular view of the river and modern riverside developments. From the new bridge in Yield Hall Place there is an exciting view westwards of modern commercial development outside the conservation area." (page 9)

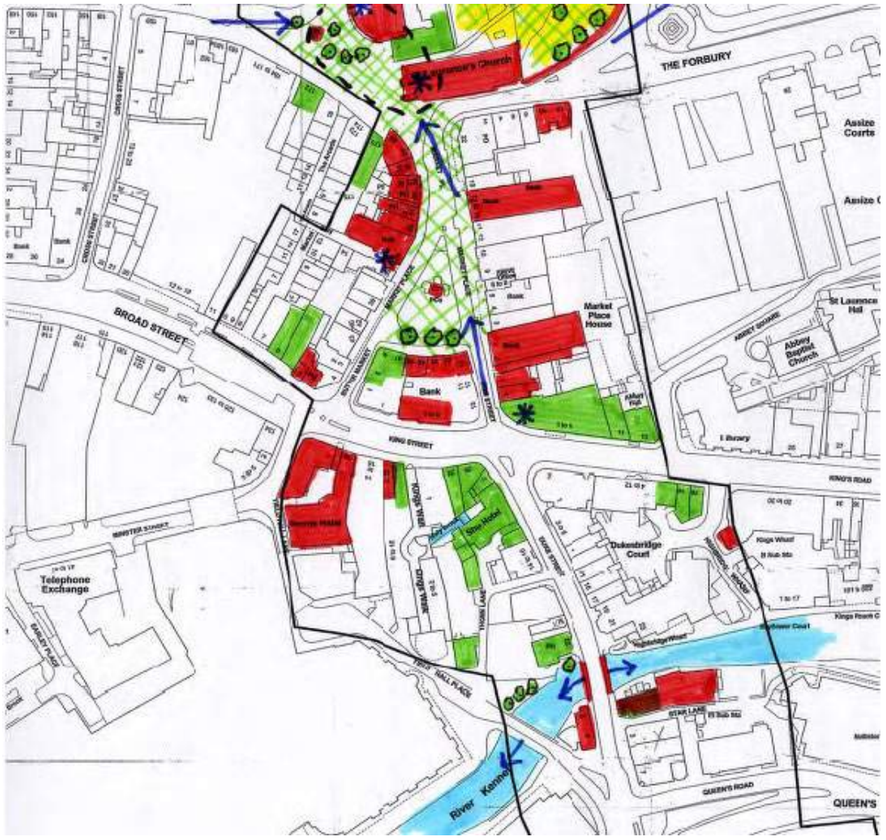


Figure 5.6: Townscape Analysis Map – extract from Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal 2007 (Part 1 North / Part 1 North)

5.34 This Appraisal document highlights a number of additional key views in its text and also mapping that are considered to be important to the character and appearance of this designated area (**Figures 5.6-7**: Townscape Analysis Map - blue arrow symbols). Consideration for the potential effects on the quality and character of these longer views channelled north along London Street towards the historic bridge crossing has been carried out during the design development stages and included as Representative Views within the HTVIA where relevant. As existing, the south flank of the Vue Cinema on Site presents a rather bulky and uninteresting termination to this view north. There is potential for new built form, scale and architectural design to address that issue in a more positive manner, including creating a new townscape marker, interest and activity for this key gateway into the town centre.

5.35 To the south east of the Site across the IDR No.33 London Street is a listed building identified in this Appraisal document as a local landmark within views (Figures 5.6-7 – black asterix symbol). At the south west end or branch of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, and to the south west of the Site, the listed building Church of St Giles (Southampton Street) is also recognised as a local landmark in both longer and local views looking north / south along Southampton Street / Bridge Street.

Figure 5.7: Townscape Analysis Map – extract from Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal 2007 (Part 2 South)

5.36 The St Marys Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area is located to the west of the Site. The relevant Appraisal document dating from 2007 highlights the importance of the listed building St Marys Church at the heart of this area and its role as a local landmark in views (**Figure 5.8**). Local views looking east to the tower of the church from Hosier Street and across St Marys Butts, and also more general townscape views looking east / north east along Castle Street, are considered to contribute to the character and appearance of these heritage assets (**Figure 5.8**: Townscape Analysis Map - pink arrow symbols). However, the Conservation Area Appraisal itself recognises the constraints on any such visual effects in relation to nearby development schemes, in stating that: *"… views of St Mary's Church are not readily apparent until one is quite close to it" (page 11).*

Figure 5.8: Townscape Analysis Map – extract from St Marys Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal 2007

Representative Viewpoints

5.37 In order to recognise and assess the likely effects of the Proposed Development on the identified visual receptors, 18 no. Representative Views (RV) from these visual receptors have been identified and agreed with officers at RBC as part of pre-application discussions. The locations of the viewpoints are set out on the RV Plan at ***Appendix 3*** and also for ease at **Figure 5.9 and Figure 5.10**. The Representative Views are also listed in **Table 5.1** with brief commentary on why they have been selected, the visual receptors they represent and the type of visualisation that has been prepared to inform the assessment provided within this HTVIA. The selection of these views has also been informed by further consideration of the townscape character areas and the significance and disposition of nearby heritage assets that help to define the nature and value of the surrounding area.

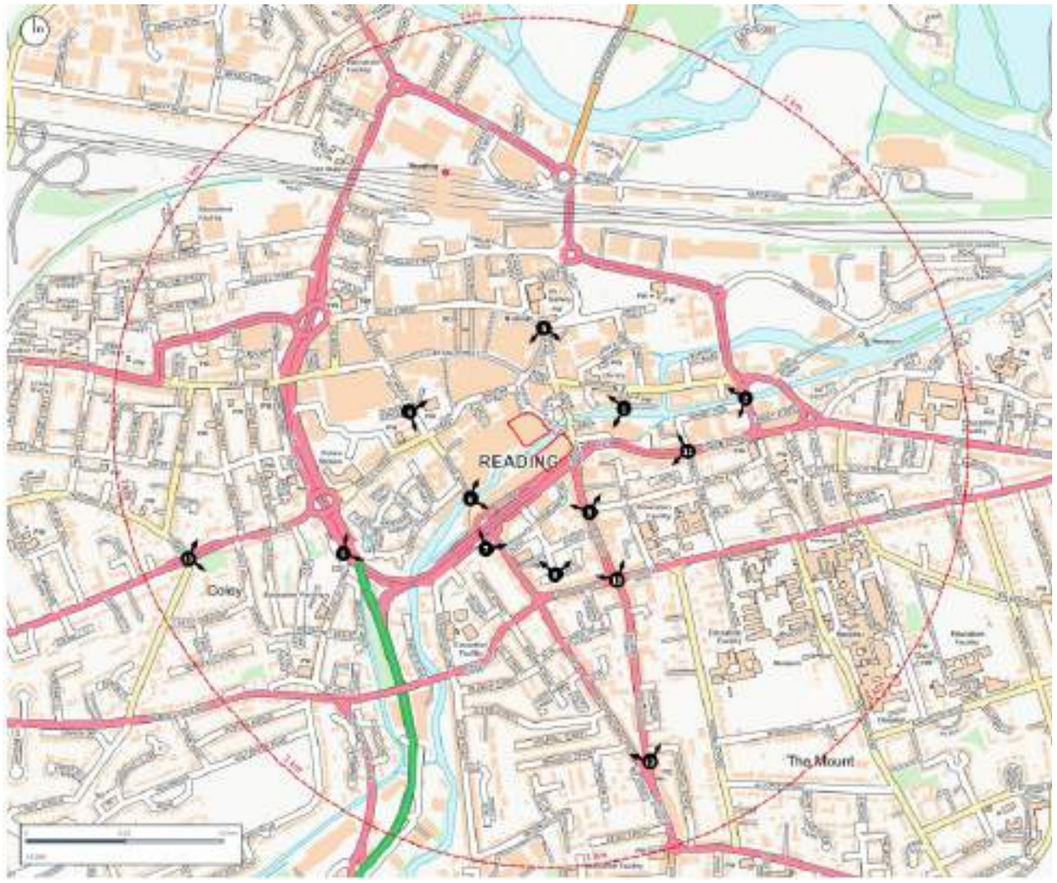


Figure 5.9: Representative Viewpoint Plan – Views within 500m radius of Site

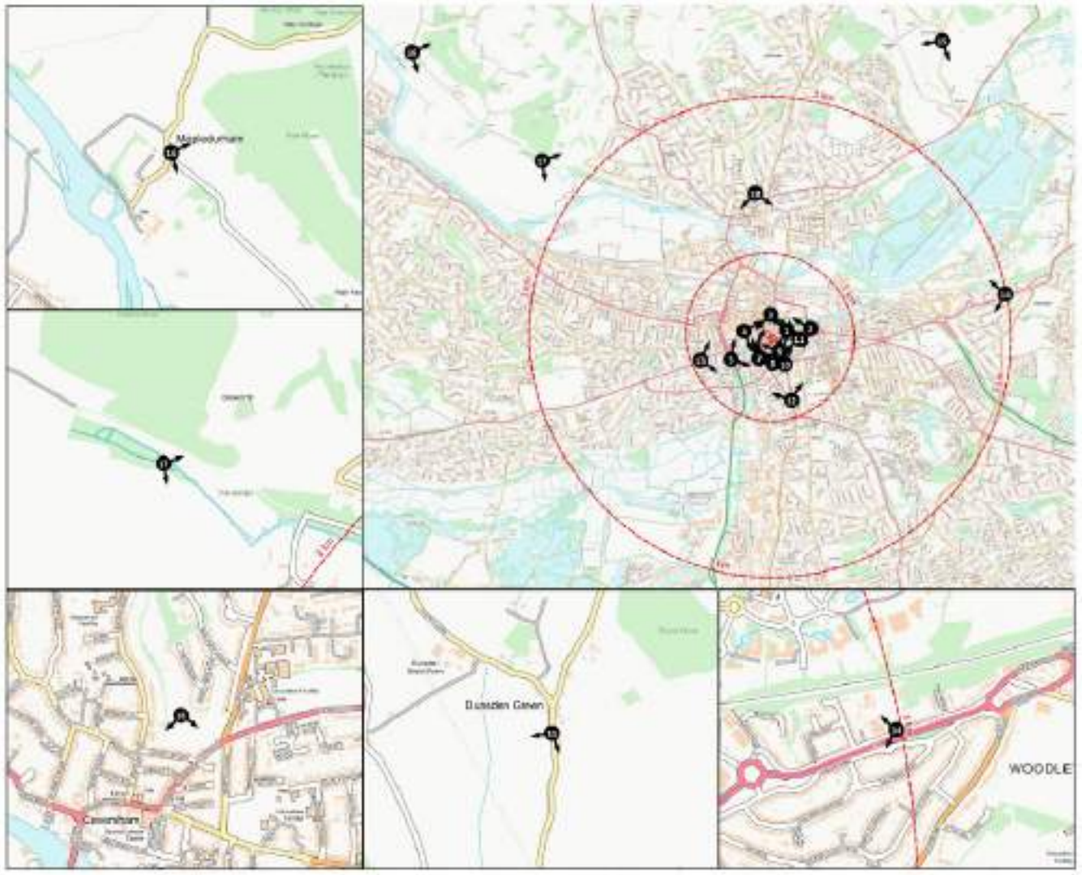


Figure 5.10: Representative Viewpoint Plan – Views outside 500m radius of Site

5.38 In order to demonstrate the likely effects of Proposed Development on the identified visual receptors, different visualisation types have been provided as Accurate Visual Representations (AVR). The type of visual representation (as also identified in **Table 5.1**) has been guided by the Landscape Institute's Technical Information Note 06/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals and GLVIA3, which recommends a proportionate approach to assessment in relation to the scale of development proposed and the sensitivity of the visual receptors. Due to the scale of development and sensitivity of the Site and its townscape context, a combination of Photomontage (i.e. render) and Photowire/Chalk massing Type 4 visualisations have been prepared.

5.39 The photomontage or fully rendered views demonstrate the materiality of Proposed Development and its relationship with the existing street scene and neighbouring buildings, and so are most helpful for closer distance views. The photowire/chalk massing views illustrate the massing of the Proposed Development and demonstrate how it sits in the wider townscape and in relation to other built form, and so are most helpful for longer distance views.

Table 5.1: Representative Viewpoints

No. / Location and orientation	Reason for inclusion	Type of visualisation
RV 1 - View from Crane Wharf (Kings Reach footbridge) looking south west	To demonstrate views experienced by users of River Kennet and Crane Wharf Footbridge (TCA21 & TCA26)	Type 4 Photomontage
RV 2 - View from Watlington Street Bridge looking west	To demonstrate views experienced by users of Watlington Street (IDR) and River Kennet (TCA26)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 3- View from Market Place (St Laurence Church) looking south	To demonstrate views experienced by users of Market Place, and also views from within Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and the context of listed buildings (TCA6)	Type 4 Photomontage
RV 4 - View from St Marys Butts / Hosier Street looking east	To demonstrate views experienced by users of St Marys Butts / Hosier Street, and also views from within Castle Street / St Marys Butts Conservation Area and the context of listed buildings (TCA17)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 5 - View from Coley Place (footbridge over IDR) looking north east	To demonstrate views experienced by users of IDR and Coley Place Footbridge (TCA25). Viewing place associated with Key View 27 (Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 6 - View from Bridge Street bridge looking north east	To demonstrate views experienced by users of Bridge Street bridge, and River Kennet (TCA19 & TCA18)	Type 4 Photomontage
RV 7 - View from Southampton Street / IDR looking north east	To demonstrate views experienced by users of Southampton Street, and also views from within Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and the context of listed buildings (TCA20)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 8 - View from Church Street / St Giles Close looking north	To demonstrate views experienced by users of Church Street, local residential community, and also views from within Market Place / London Street Conservation Area (TCA20)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 9 - View from London Street / South Street looking north	To demonstrate views experienced by users of London Street, and also views from within Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and the context of listed buildings (TCA20)	Type 4 Photomontage
RV 10 - View from London Street / London Road looking north	To demonstrate views experienced by users of London Street, and also views from within Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and the context of listed buildings (TCA20)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 11 - View from the IDR (Queens Road) / Sidmouth Street looking west	To demonstrate views experienced by users of the IDR, and also views from within the context of listed buildings (TCA26)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 12 - View from Whitley Street / Mount Pleasant looking north	To demonstrate views experienced by users of Whitley Street / Mount Pleasant. Viewing place associated with Significant View with Heritage Interest 2 and also Key View 5 (Reading Local Plan 2019 & Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 13- View from Castle Hill / Tilehurst Road / Coley Avenue looking east	To demonstrate views experienced by users of Castle Hill / local residential area Viewing place associated with Key View 23 (Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 14 - A4 West of Reading (TBS viewpoint 17 – adjusted to maximise view of site)	To demonstrate views experienced by users of the A4. Viewing place associated with Key View 17 (Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 15 – From Dunsden Way, south of Dunsden Green	Viewpoint 11 from Reading Tall Building Study	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 16 - Mapledurham estate/AONB	Viewing place associated with Key View 8 and 9 (Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 17 – Mapledurham estate/AONB	Viewing place associated with Key View 9 (Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing
RV 18 - Balmore Park	Viewing place associated with Key View 14 (Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008)	Type 4 Wireline/Chalk massing

6. Proposed Development and Impact Assessment

Introduction and Approach

6.1 This impact assessment is based on the scheme as set out in the architectural / landscape design information produced by RTKL Architects and LDA Landscape Architects and, including a package of drawings, illustrations and CGIs, Design and Access Statement (DAS), together with the AVRs produced for the scheme by Ambiente.

6.2 As previously outlined in this report (and its appendices), the methodology and approach in undertaking this assessment of effects for each of the related heritage, townscape and VIA disciplines is based upon informed and reasoned professional judgement; taking into account a combination of quantitative and qualitative factors. Notwithstanding, best practice guidance having regard to setting and views highlights the required differences in approach and methodology between each of these professional disciplines (built heritage, landscape / townscape and visual impact). For example, recognising that change to heritage significance (and setting) brought about by new uses and development is not solely a visual consideration; but can have a wider historical and experiential aspect. It is recognised, therefore, that modelling / accurate visualisation of a limited number of selected representative views is a useful tool to assist in understanding likely built heritage impacts, but only part of a much wider appreciation of change.

6.3 This impact assessment related to the Proposed Development should be read in conjunction with the full application material submitted, including the overarching Planning Statement, prepared by Turley. This complementary statement describes the policy rationale for the scheme overall, including a list of the significant wider public benefits (social, environmental and economic) that could be delivered.

Proposed Development

6.4 For the purposes of the application, the proposed development for both sites comprises:

"Yield Hall Place 1 (Former Debenhams):

Mixed use development comprising part demolition of former department store and erection of new building comprising build to rent residential use (Class C3) and commercial uses within Uses Class E. Reconfiguration and change of use of remaining department store floorspace (Class E) to uses with within Use Class E and / or bar (Sui Generis Use) and / or experiential leisure use (Sui Generis Use). Associated public realm, infrastructure works and external alterations to shopping centre, including creation of new shopping centre entrance. [and]

Yield Hall Place 2 (Vue Cinema):

Mixed use development comprising demolition of existing buildings and erection of new building comprising build-to-rent residential use (Class C3), cinema (Sui Generis) and ground floor commercial uses within Use Class E. Associated public realm and infrastructure works."

6.5 The supporting DAS provides a comprehensive description of the scheme design and its approach. This includes a review of how the proposals have responded to the constraints and opportunities of the Site and wider surrounding area, including the emerging context, as well as the scheme evolution during an extensive process of pre-application engagement with BDBC, including feedback from Design Review Panel (DRP).

Operational Effects

6.6 The key aspects of the Proposed Development once complete and operational, which are likely to affect the heritage assets and townscape and visual receptors, have been identified as:

- Demolition of existing buildings and construction of a 2no. residential blocks ranging between G+ 2-16 storeys (south) and G+7-19 storeys (North) with ground floor retail uses;
- Brick and stone as the predominant building materials reflecting the local palette with different brick colours and textures as well as grey cladding and decorative panels to define the façade hierarchy and improved articulation;
- Introduction of new active frontages, attractively varied building elevations and roof form;
- Varied building heights to add interest to the townscape in short-range and long-distanced views;
- Provision of terraces and communal amenity spaces at roof level; and
- Provision of new public realm and pedestrian route through the Site as well as dedicated cycleways, widened pavements and street tree planting.

6.7 Alongside the development proposals on the two sites identified above, a suite of public realm enhancements are proposed within the vicinity of The Oracle, including:

- Junction with London Street and Inner Distributor Road;
- Yield Hall Place from junction of London Street to Minister Street; and
- Oracle Riverside.

Demolition and Construction Effects

6.8 The key aspects of the demolition and construction phase which have potential to affect the receptors have been identified as: demolition operations; construction machinery (including tower cranes); material stockpiles; scaffolding; vehicle movements; contractor site compound, and the incremental appearance of the building itself during the construction process. Effects arising during the construction phase are short term or temporary effects and have, therefore, not been separately described. In general terms, the construction effects of the Proposed Development would be no greater in magnitude than those described below for the completed development but would generally be either neutral or adverse effects. The exception to this would be effects associated with the tower cranes during construction, which would likely be visible from a wider area than the completed building itself and so would form a noticeable skyline feature for this temporary period.

Night-Time Effects

6.9 A separate night-time assessment was not undertaken as it was considered that effects after dark would be no greater in magnitude than those described for the completed development. However, in general terms, the Proposed Development would be visible after dark because of internal lighting and external lighting in the surrounding public realm. This lighting would be seen in the context of other lighting in the surrounding urban area and would not be an incongruent feature.

Cumulative Effects

6.10 The assessment has considered the consented or under construction future developments in the area (i.e. that have recently secured consent and or have begun to be implemented) and the cumulative effect of the proposed development with these in place. However, the consented schemes in the wider townscape would be obscured by interposing built form in all views and therefore are not depicted in the AVRs. An assessment of the cumulative effects arising is therefore not relevant and/or required.

Built Heritage Impacts

Introduction

6.11 The built heritage assets which have the potential to be affected indirectly by the proposed development on Site and within their settings have been identified in **Section 2** of this document. Their significance (and also any contribution of setting to that significance) has also been described proportionately for each of these designated or non-designated heritage assets as part of our founding analysis of the baseline conditions of the Site and its history and townscape context. For ease, the designated heritage assets identified for the purposes of our HTVIA and the application scheme are listed in **Table 6.1**.

Table 6.1: Heritage Assets (designated)

Type	Name
Listed building	Nos.2-4 London Street (Grade II)
Listed building	Coroner's Court, London Street (Grade II)
Listed building	High Bridge (Grade II)
Listed building group	London Street: Nos.33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53 and 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 London Street (all Grade II)
Listed building	Nos.24-52 Queen's Crescent (Grade II)
Listed building group	The George Hotel, King Street (Grade II) Building on south-east corner, Yield Hall Place (Grade II)
Listed building group	Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place (including No.10 High Street) (all Grade II)
Listed building Landmark	Church of St Laurence (Grade I)
Listed building	Telephone Exchange, Minster Street (Grade II)
Listed building Landmark	Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts (Grade I)
Listed building Landmark	Church of St Giles, Southampton Street (Grade II)
Conservation Area	Market Place / London Street
Conservation Area	St Mary's Butts / Castle Street
Scheduled monument	High Bridge

Assessment of Impacts

Approach

6.12 As a result of the proposed new mix of uses, changed or increased height, scale and massing of the envisioned built elements within a new layout on the Site, it is our assessment that the proposed development would have greater visibility (or would otherwise be experienced) within the local and also wider townscape area surrounding, relative to the existing condition. This has been confirmed by the preparation of a revised technical Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) in order to test the likely visibility of proposed new built form on Site now at application stage within our study area, and also preliminary on-site survey work by our team. These are both direct (Market Place / London Street Conservation Area) and indirect development impacts that relate to change brought about to an aspect of the character and or appearance of a part of a heritage asset's setting and or shared views, which could affect how their significance is understood and or appreciated within that context.

6.13 In some cases, the impacts of the scheme on heritage significance (and setting) will be similar in several ways, given the way in which each of the identified heritage assets overlap or share a relationship or similarities in terms of history, their settings and views, and or their particular heritage interests. Accordingly, efforts have been made to avoid repetition when describing development impacts in this section of the document.

6.14 The following assessment of impacts employs best practice advice provided by HE as an appropriate framework. This includes Historic Environment Good Practice Advice (GPA) in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision Taking in the Historic Environment 2015[46], which sets out the importance of good design and response to local distinctiveness for new development in the historic environment. This advice provides a checklist of factors that may influence what would make the scale, height, massing, alignment, materials and proposed use of new development successful in its context. HE's GPA Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets 2017 (2nd Edition)[47] has also been employed, which provides a step-by-step approach to assessing first, how setting and also views contributes to the significance of heritage assets, and then how the effects of a Development on heritage significance and setting can be measured. HE's Advice Note 4: Tall Buildings 2022[48] is another key guidance document that has been employed during the design process and as part of this assessment of impacts within the historic environment.

6.15 Finally, the proposed development for the Site as a whole is reviewed in light of each of the relevant statutory duties of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, national policy within the NPPF 2021 and supported by the NPPG, and also relevant local planning policy and guidance (including the local development plan) with regard to change affecting the historic environment and heritage assets.

[46] Historic England, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice (GPA) in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision Taking in the Historic Environment 2015

[47] Historic England, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice (GPA) in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets 2017 (2nd Edition)

[48] Historic England, Advice Note (HEAN) 4: Tall Buildings 2022 (2nd Edition)

Built Heritage Assets

6.16 The identified relevant built heritage assets comprise a number of designated heritage assets, including statutory listed buildings and conservation areas. Non-designated heritage assets, such as the local list identified by RBC, have been scoped out of this assessment in relation to the Site and these proposals. The full scope for our assessment is set out in the previous sections of this document. Accordingly, the description of the potential impacts of proposed change brought about by new development in this section has been informed by our baseline appraisal of the particular significance of each of these assets, and also the contribution of their settings, as found today.

6.17 **Table 5.1** below provides our detailed commentary on the nature and extent of the likely impacts of the proposed development on the significance (and setting) of each of the identified heritage assets. This tabular format is designed principally for ease of use for the decision maker and other stakeholders in the planning process.

6.18 In relation to all identified built heritage assets, the impacts of new development on heritage significance in overall terms could be neutral; where the understanding or appreciation of the significance of the asset is neither harmed nor enhanced but overall sustained, or otherwise unaffected (i.e. none). Or beneficial; where the significance of the asset is enhanced or better revealed by proposed change. Or adverse; where the experience and or enjoyment of the significance of an asset is either lost or harmed in some way as a result of change within the conservation area or the setting of another heritage asset. The complex nature of the proposed development, and also the varied relationship of the Site with the heritage assets, mean that aspects of the scheme design could result in harm to the significance of an assets, whereas other aspects of that scheme could result in beneficial effects. For clarity, such competing impacts are described fully in Table 5.1 in relation to each heritage asset.

6.19 Where harm may be caused to the significance of any of the identified "designated heritage assets", it is our assessment that in each case the magnitude of any such harm would fall within the category of "less than substantial" for the purposes of the NPPF (paragraph 202). Furthermore, NPPG[49] sets out that within each category of harm its extent may vary, i.e. there is a broader spectrum or scale within the definition of less than substantial harm, and that the decision maker would benefit from the articulation of where such an adverse impact may fall within that scale. For the purposes of this assessment, and any potentially harmful heritage asset impacts, we have described the magnitude of such harm in each case in terms of the relevant category defined by the NPPF and also where such an impact would fall on a sliding scale within that category.

6.20 With regard to "non-designated heritage assets" paragraph 203 of the NPPF establishes that the effect of a proposed development on the significance of such an asset is also a material consideration at application stage. There are no defined categories for heritage harm within the Framework (or NPPG) that would be comparable to the approach for designated heritage assets. In weighing applications that affect non-designated heritage assets, it is advised that a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the asset. No non-designated heritage assets have been identified as relevant for the purposes of the assessment of this particular scheme however.

6.21 With regard to potentially beneficial impacts, and as would apply to all heritage asset types, NPPG confirms that "public benefits" can also include "heritage benefits"[50]. These are changes brought about by development that would enhance or better reveal the significance of a heritage assets or assets. By definition, heritage benefits can also enhance the contribution of the setting of a heritage asset, reduce or remove risks to a heritage asset, and securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset or assets in support of their long-term conservation. More broadly, NPPG states that public benefits may follow from many developments and could be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental objectives as described in the NPPF (paragraph 8).

[49] NPPG, Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 18a-018-20190723 (Revision date: 23 07 2019)

[50] NPPG, Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 18a-018-20190723 (Revision date: 23 07 2019)

Table 6.2: Assessment of Likely Built Heritage Asset Impacts

Name / Address Heritage Asset Type Grade	Impact on Heritage Significance Category (Scale)	Description of Likely Development Impacts
Nos.2-4 London Street Listed Building (Grade II)	Adverse / Harm Less than Substantial (Lower End) & Beneficial	This listed building falls within the boundary of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and forms part of a small group of historic buildings that retain some legibility of the former finer grain and scale of an earlier townscape at either end of the High Bridge river crossing (also including listed buildings former Coroners Court and the bridge itself). The character and appearance of the shared setting of this townscape grouping has been substantially altered over time, particularly in the post-war period with the major intervention of the IDR and resultant severance of the historic line and enclosure of London Street as it approaches the bridge from the south, and also more modern and larger scale built development replacing predominantly former industrial uses along both sides of the river / canal (including The Oracle commercial development scheme to the west). Yield Hall Place bridge, immediately to the west of this listed building, is also a more recent intervention to this townscape area and existing views along the water. It is our assessment that the existing on Site buildings and layout, which is also part of the modern The Oracle complex, do not relate to the historic condition or character of this part of the town centre and its waterside. The Site does not therefore contribute positively to the significance of this heritage asset as part of its setting or any shared views as found today. The proposed development on this Site envisions a more intensive mix of uses, new architecture and public realm, and also significantly greater height, scale and massing of replacement built form relative to that existing. Such change would occur within local townscape setting of this listed building, including that greater scale of built development seen in relatively close views as part of the backdrop of, or otherwise in conjunction with other local views to and from, this diminutive historic riverside building. It is this particular aspect of the proposals, i.e. the resultant greater visual contrast in height and scale, that has the potential to have a distracting effect of the current experience of the listed building within its townscape and riverside setting. This could in turn detract to some degree from our understanding or appreciation of the heritage significance of this asset. Importantly, such potentially adverse effects would be moderated by the deliberate design approach to break up the massing of new built form into a series of defined blocks on both sides of the river, to the step the increasing height of these new buildings on Site away from London Street and the edge of the conservation area, and also through the detailed design and materiality of the nearest blocks which indicates improved design quality over that existing, clear articulation of elevations and roof form, and also references to local building characteristics. Any such adverse effect on the existing visibility and views of this listed building from within its local setting could result in harm to its heritage significance. It is our assessment that any such harm could only be minor in magnitude, and so would fall within the category of “less than substantial” for the purposes of the NPPF (paragraph 202), and also towards the lower end of the scale within that category. In coming to this conclusion we have taken into consideration that any such impacts on heritage significance would not directly affect any historic fabric or features of the listed building, but would be indirect and as a result of change to the character and appearance of one part of a much wider townscape and visual context. It is also important to recognise that the Site itself does not contribute positively to the significance of the listed building through setting, but includes large scale buildings of little architectural or townscape merit. This is also a site that forms a part of the modern town centre which is continuing to evolve and diversify, and which is characterised locally not as an intact historic townscape but a dynamic and highly varied urban area that is now dominated in many shared views by larger scale modern infrastructure and built form. Conversely, our assessment also identifies that the application scheme has the opportunity to improve aspects of the character and appearance of the existing setting of this listed building that could enhance or better reveal its heritage significance, i.e. public and heritage benefits for the purposes of the NPPF and NPPG. The potential heritage benefits that could flow from this scheme include the introduction of a new and richer mix of uses on Site that would complement and contribute to those existing locally and also historically, creating more active and interesting street frontages and quality architectural design along Yield Hall Place and the west side of London Road nearby, and wider public realm improvements along both sides of the river.
Coroner's Court, London Street Listed Building (Grade II)	Neutral / Sustain	This listed building is also located within the conservation area designation and near to the Site. The key townscape views of this historic building that best appreciate its architecture and historic character are within relatively close proximity, comprising local views looking south from High Bridge and across the River Kennet to its Classically inspired five bay north frontage and also looking directly east to the narrower frontage address London Street. Modern redevelopment has extended the original building at roof level and also with taller ranges extending to the south and east along the waterside, which further contains the number and extent of local views that can appreciate the historic core of this former court building from within its setting. There is retained a visual relationship with a small townscape grouping

		of other surviving historic buildings / structures, comprising Nos.2-4 London Street and High Bridge (both listed buildings), which is a positive contributor to its heritage significance as part of a shared setting and views. The Site itself makes no positive contribution to the heritage significance of this asset. Change would occur within the existing highly evolved and diverse townscape setting of this listed building as a result of the proposed development on Site, including likely glimpses of taller and or larger scale built form along the riverside to the west from High Bridge in conjunction. However, such change to the existing character or appearance of shared local views would not be so significant as to detract from our understanding or appreciation of the heritage significance of this asset. Proposals to introduce public realm improvements locally, more active and interesting frontages to the east, and also to the step the increasing height of new buildings on Site away from London Street and this edge of the conservation area, further assists in minimising and or mitigating the effects of this scheme. In addition, the existing visual and historic relationship between this listed building and the nearby Nos.2-4 and High Bridge would remain clearly appreciable within local townscape views, and would not be undermined, or detracted from, by the proposed development.
High Bridge Listed Building & Scheduled Monument (Grade II & N/A)	Neutral / Sustain	This listed and also scheduled historic structure is again located within a conservation area and to the east of the Site. The most important aspect of the setting of this listed building is its relationship with the River Kennet and as a key historic crossing into the town centre from the south. Accordingly, the views of this historic structure that best appreciate its architecture and historic / archaeological importance are those from the water itself, the riverside walkways, and also from the modern Yield Hall Place bridge looking back east. These are all vantagepoints within relatively close proximity of the bridge. Views along the river / canal in both directions, and also to the surrounding townscape, from the viewing place of the bridge itself also contribute to its heritage significance, albeit now within a very different context to that at the time of its construction in the 18th century. Although the local area has been redeveloped many times, there is retained a visual relationship of heritage interest with a small townscape grouping of other surviving listed buildings at this crossing point, which are Nos.2-4 London Street and the former Coroner's Court. The Site itself makes no positive contribution to the heritage significance of this asset as part of its wider setting. We have again identified that change would occur within the existing highly evolved and diverse townscape setting of this listed structure as a result of the proposed development, including likely glimpses of taller and or larger scale built form along the riverside to the west from High Bridge itself or as part of its backdrop in other views looking westwards along the water. However, such change to the existing character or appearance of these shared local views would not be so significant as to detract from our understanding or appreciation of the heritage significance of this asset, in particular its historic relationship with the river and as a crossing point carrying traffic north and south. In addition, the existing visual and historic relationship between this listed structure and nearby historic (listed) buildings would remain appreciable, and would not be detracted from by the proposed development on Site.
Nos.33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 London Street Listed Building group (all Grade II)	Adverse / Harm Less than Substantial (Lower End)	This is a large and architecturally diverse group of listed buildings all within the boundary of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, that together line and enclose that part of London Road as it rises up in elevation from the modern intervention and intersection of the IDR to the south. The post-war construction of the major infrastructure of the IDR, as well as other wider and later redevelopment along the former industrial riverside to the north, severely compromised the historic form and character of London Road as it approached the High Bridge crossing. To the south side of the IDR, and also in contrast, this defined grouping of historic building on both sides of London Road retains the legibility of the former finer grain and scale of an earlier townscape, and also communicate the past importance of this route into the market town. Across the IDR, the Site - and its much more recent and large scale buildings and layout - forms part of the modern The Oracle complex, which does not contribute positively to the significance of this heritage asset as part of its setting or any shared views as found today. The proposed development for the Site would introduce new uses and new architecture and spaces to replace that existing, including built form of significantly greater height, scale and massing. Such change would occur within the wider townscape setting of each of these listed buildings and the group, including that greater scale of built development seen in a number of shared views looking northward along London Street and or along or from the IDR / Queen's Road. This likely effect is confirmed by our technical analysis to prepare a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) for the envisioned maximum height of the proposed development, which indicates that there would likely be a degree of visibility of new built form from vantage points on the near section of the IDR and also along the length of London Street south to its junction with London Road and just beyond. The proposed greater visual contrast in height and scale between these historic buildings along this part of London Road and the new scheme on Site has the potential to have a detrimental effect on the current experience of their heritage significance and also their group value as part of a more intact part of the historic townscape of Reading. This is further confirmed by the visualisations prepared for both Representative Viewpoints (RV) 9 and 10 (London Street), which indicates high visibility of proposed new built development on Site as part of these street views and also across the skyline for the taller elements as part of the current scene of the wider backdrop of the town centre to the north. Within RV 9, for example, the taller elements of the scheme would rise significantly higher than the existing roofline of the listed buildings on the west side of the street and also in contrast with these and other street fronting buildings within the fore and middle ground. The proposed development would

		have a much more dominating visual presence relative to existing observed built form on Site. RV 10 illustrates that such an effect would continue for other vantage point looking north from along London Street as the viewer travels southwards, although the magnitude of that visual effect would diminish at greater distance and also as street trees and the buildings on both sides of the street take greater prominence in these views, and or part screen or otherwise filter the extent of visibility. The long view looking north along London Street is specifically identified in the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal document. It is also considered that the qualities of other more secondary views that also appreciate the architecture and historic character of these listed buildings along the north end of London Street could be impacts by these proposals. For example, a change to the visual experience of longer views looking east along the IDR towards the distinctive Classical frontage of No.33 London Street (identified as a local landmark in the relevant Conservation Area Appraisal). Accordingly, these visual effects of the proposed development on Site (in terms of changing and increasing height and scale) would detract from our understanding and or appreciation of the heritage significance of each of these designated heritage assets and their group value. It should be recognised however that such adverse effects would be moderated to some degree by the design approach for this scheme, which seeks to break up the massing of new built form visually into a series of defined blocks. This would be observed in north facing views from this part of London Street as gaps between these blocks against the sky and also a series of changing and increasing steps in height from east to west for these new buildings as they draw away from London Street and the edge of the conservation area, and also back from the IDR to their south side. The detailed design of the new blocks on the south side of the river would also be appreciable in these views, allowing for the design quality of their architecture to be seen as part of a wider townscape context. The articulation of elevations and roof form further assists in breaking down the appearance mass and bulk of these blocks, and also the use of quality cladding materials with a local reference. Overall it is our assessment that any such harm caused to the significance of these heritage assets would fall within the category of “less than substantial” for the purposes of the NPPF (paragraph 202), and also towards the lower end of the scale within that category. This assessment considers the fact that these impacts would not be direct, but indirect and as a result of change to the character and appearance of one part of a much wider townscape and visual context for this listed building group. Other important views in terms of their heritage significance would not be effected by the proposed development on Site, such as a number of more immediate views of the principal street frontages of both east and west side buildings from London Street and also those longer views looking south back up this historic street and orientated away from the Site. It is also to be recognised that the Site itself does not contribute positively to the significance of any of these listed buildings, but includes large scale buildings of little architectural or townscape merit that already characterise part of the setting and some shared views. Contextually this is also a site that forms a part of the modern town centre which is continuing to evolve and diversify, and which is characterised by a dynamic mix of uses and a highly varied townscape of both historic and more modern buildings and spaces.
Nos.24-52 Queen's Crescent Listed Building (Grade II)	Neutral / Sustain	This terraced group of listed buildings is not located within a conservation area and its located to the east of the Site along the IDR (Queen’s Road). The key townscape views of this consistent Classically inspired crescent of early 19th century townhouses that best appreciate its architecture and historic character are those within close proximity looking across Queen’s Road to their shared principal frontages, and also some longer distance views looking east or west along the IDR that can appreciate the curve and roofline of this terrace. The post-war intervention of the major infrastructure element of the IDR has changed the historic character of the immediate setting of this terrace, and other more modern and taller / larger scale built development characterises the enclosure on both sides of this route and also the bookend to either end of this earlier crescent. Change would occur within the existing wider highly evolved and diverse townscape setting of this listed building group as a result of the proposed development on the Site. Our technical analysis to prepare a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) for the envisioned maximum height of the proposed development indicates that there would likely be a degree of visibility of this new built form in conjunction with the street frontage and or roofline of the listed terrace from parts of Queen’s Road. This is further confirmed by the visualisation prepared for Representative Viewpoint (RV) 11, which indicates visibility of the upper elements of the proposed development on the skyline and as part of the wider backdrop to the view of the terrace frontage. However, it is our assessment that such an indirect impact and change to the existing character or appearance of this and other comparable views would not be so significant as to detract from our understanding or appreciation of the heritage significance of this asset. As part of the existing townscape character of this area there is an established visual relationship between the historic terrace along Queens Road and more modern taller and larger scale built form neighbouring at the north end of East Street, that immediately across the IDR (including the multi-storey car park), and also glimpses of the roofscape of The Oracle scheme (sculptural element atop the multi-storey car park) in longer view looking westwards. Additional built form would be introduced to the skyline and backdrop of the listed building in some of these longer views within this existing context, at a greater distance away to the west, and the design approach to the step the increasing height of these new buildings on Site away from London Street and its interface with the conservation area also further assists in minimising and or mitigating the effects of this scheme. Overall, this listed terrace group would retain its visual prominence, and also the legibility of its historic silhouette, to Queen’s Road.
George Hotel, King Street & Building on	Neutral / None	The George Hotel is a listed building located to the north of the Site, which falls within a conservation area designation, and also forms a group with the adjoining listed building (south east corner) to its rear and Yield Hall Lane. The heritage significance of these related historic buildings is best appreciated in townscape views along the

south-east corner, Yield Hall Place Listed Building group (all Grade II)		main route of King Street (principal frontage) and also looking east along Minster Street and at the northern end of Yield Hall Place, which are vantage points in relatively close proximity. The enclosed open yard at the centre of this urban block is also a key viewing place from where to better understand and appreciate its heritage significance and continuing historic use as a public house and hotel. Immediately to the south of this historic building group the urban block is predominately characterised by modern built form, including part of the more recent The Oracle development. The Site itself is also nearby and forms part of this comprehensive redevelopment of the town centre and riverside, which does not contribute to the understanding or appreciation of the significance of this heritage asset as part of its setting. The technical analysis to prepare a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) for the envisioned maximum height of the proposed development on Site indicates that there would unlikely be any visibility of new built form in conjunction with the street frontage and or roofline of the listed building group from viewing places along / from King Street, Minster Street, Yield Hall Place, and also from within its courtyard space. The existing street pattern and orientation, and also density and scale of surrounding buildings, constrains any such intervisibility. Although the proposed development on Site would occur within the local townscape setting of these listed buildings, such change would have no effect of the understanding or appreciation of the heritage significance of these assets.
Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place (including No.10 High Street) Listed Building group (all Grade II)	Harm Less than Substantial (Lower End)	This is an architecturally diverse group or terraced block of listed buildings within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, and which form the edge and part of the built enclosure of the historic Market Place on its south side. Together with the other varied historic buildings that remain around this key urban space they make a positive contribution to the townscape character of this conservation area, and also to the legibility of the history and the past uses and also finer grain / scale of the Market Place prior to the modern period. This part of the conservation area and setting of the listed building group does not however represent an historically intact townscape. Part of the Market Place's character was and remains the diversity of buildings that enclosure it in terms of their ages, architectural styles, form and materials, and as found today this includes the intervention of a number of larger scale post-war blocks to east and west sides. Beyond the boundaries of the conservation area the built character of Reading town centre becomes even more complex and varied, including visibly out to a number of taller and or larger scale modern developments focussed around the station, to the east and west, and along the formerly industrial river / canal-side. The Site itself forms part of the modern commercial The Oracle complex to the south and straddling the river. This is not an element of the wider setting of these listed buildings that contributes positively to their heritage significance. The proposed development on Site would introduce replacement built form of significantly greater height, scale and massing than that existing. Such change would occur within the wider townscape setting of each of these listed buildings and the group, and the upper elements of these new buildings would be seen on the skyline in a number of shared views looking south from the Market Place in conjunction. However, the prepared Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) for the envisioned maximum height of this proposed development does indicate that the visibility of new built form from within this part of the conservation area would be highly limited, due to the constraints of the surrounding street pattern and scale and density of built form. It is only from the north head of the Market Place (near to St Laurence Church) where we expect the new buildings to be seen in longer views looking south and over and above the roofline of the listed building group. This is not noted as a key view in the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal document. The accurate visualisation prepared for Representative Viewpoint (RV) 3 represents this vantage point and illustrates that a number of the upper storeys of three of the taller building proposed for the Site would be visible for the first time above the existing roof / skyline of the listed building group along the south side of the Market Place. As found today a largely open sky backdrop allows for the roofscape of this terrace to be seen in silhouette, and this characteristic of this particular view also contributes to our understanding and appreciation of the historic condition of this key urban space. The proposed scheme would introduce new built form to the background of this view that would reduce the extent of sky above that roofline and also diminish the visual presence of the architecture of these historic buildings from this vantage point. Such a shift in the in the visual balance between the remaining historic townscape and larger scale modern forms has the potential to have a detrimental effect on the current experience of the heritage significance of this listed grouping. It should be recognised however that such an adverse effect would be moderated to some degree by the design approach for this scheme, which seeks to break up the massing of new built form visually into a series of defined blocks. This would be observed in RV 3 in the clear differentiation and or gaps between these blocks against the sky, a series of changing and increasing steps in height from east to west, and clear articulation and variation to their elevations and roof forms. The detailed design and materiality of the taller new blocks on both sides of the river would also be appreciable in this view, allowing for the quality of their architecture to be seen as part of a wider townscape context. Overall it is our assessment that any such harm caused to the significance of these heritage assets would fall within the category of "less than substantial" for the purposes of the NPPF (paragraph 202), and also towards the lower end of the scale within that category. This assessment considers the fact that these impacts would not be direct, but indirect and as a result of change to the character and appearance of only one part of a much wider townscape and visual context for this listed building group; where inter-visibility is otherwise highly constrained by the local townscape pattern. Other important views of this listed building group from within the larger central area of the Market Place and also along the High Street, in terms of best appreciating their heritage significance, would not be effected by the proposed development on Site. The broader context for this proposed development is also relevant in appreciating that the Site forms a part of a large

		modern town centre which is continuing to evolve and diversify, and which is already characterised visually by a dynamic mix of uses and a highly varied townscape of both historic and more modern buildings and spaces.
Church of St Laurence Listed Building (Grade I)	Neutral / Sustain	The listed building Church of St Laurence (and its west tower) is recognised in the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal as a local landmark in both longer and local views within, and also looking into, this designated area. The key local views of this historic place of worship that best appreciate its architecture and historically important role within the town centre include those looking north from within the Market Place and also eastwards along Friar Street to the focal feature of its tower (both identified in the relevant conservation area appraisal). There are other wider and longer distance views of this landmark as part of the varied skyline of the historic centre, including glimpsed views north along Duke Street into the Market Place where the street pattern allows, and also some visibility of the tower in views north from the higher elevations of London Street and across the river. Beyond the boundaries of the conservation area the townscape of Reading becomes even more complex and varied in terms of the ages, types, height and scale, forms and architectural character of its buildings, and also the pattern of streets and spaces. The Site itself is located c.250m to the south of the listed church and forms part of the modern large scale commercial development of The Oracle along both sides of the river. This is not an element of the wider and diverse townscape setting of this heritage asset that contributes to its significance. We have identified that change would occur within this wider highly evolved and diverse townscape setting for this listed building as a result of the proposed development on Site. The prepared Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) for this scheme also indicates that there would likely be a some degree of visibility of new built form on Site in conjunction with the church, or from the immediate setting of this listed building, although such sharing of views would be highly constrained by existing street pattern and orientation, and density and scale of buildings, and also vegetation, within the surrounding area. The series of accurate visualisations prepared for this application submission further illustrates these likely effects. Representative View (RV) 3 looks south towards the Site from a vantage point near to the west tower of the church and at the north head of the Market Place, and would observe upper elements of new built form as part of the skyline, and above and beyond the existing roofline of historic buildings enclosing this space. This view is however orientated away from the listed building. RV 9 looks back north from London Street and across the IDR to the Site and proposed development. In this longer view from a higher elevation the upper part of the church tower can be glimpsed on the far and wider skyline of the town centre. Although the proposed scheme would introduce new and larger scale built form within the middle-ground of such views, this would be observed as part of an existing highly complex and diverse townscape context, and also would not remove the visibility of this landmark feature, which would remain appreciable in these glimpses above and or between buildings from London Street. It is our assessment overall that such indirect impacts and change to the existing character or appearance of such shared views would not be so significant as to detract from our understanding or appreciation of the significance of this heritage asset. The number and extent of views of the listed church that would be affected by the proposed development on the Site would be relatively limited from within the town, and the most important local views from within the key historic streets and spaces of the conservation area would be unaffected as they are orientated away from the Site. Where the character of some shared views of the church tower would be effected by these proposals, such change would occur within the established context of a highly evolved and mixed townscape, which includes contrasting and also interrelated elements of both historic and more modern built form. In respect of longer views to the tower from London Road to the south of the Site (including RV 12), the design approach of the proposed development on Site to the step the increasing height of new buildings away from London Street and its eastern interface with the conservation area further assists in minimising and or mitigating the effects of this scheme, including protecting existing glimpsed views from this vantage point. The visual prominence, architectural quality, and also the legibility of the historic use of this highly listed building within the historic core of Reading would be maintained, and the proposed development on Site would not undermine or otherwise detract from the appreciation of its landmark status in views.
Telephone Exchange, Minster Street Listed Building (Grade II)	Neutral / None	This listed building located to the north west of the Site, falls outside the conservation area designations, and also is now essentially integrated in townscape terms as part of the more modern large scale and comprehensive town centre development scheme of The Oracle on both sides of Minster Street. The heritage significance of this building is best appreciated in local views along Minster Street, but otherwise has limited visibility within the surrounding area. The Site itself forms part of The Oracle development, which does not contribute to the understanding or appreciation of the significance of this heritage asset as part of its setting. The ZTV prepared to test the envisioned maximum height of the proposed development on Site indicates that there would unlikely be any visibility of new built form in conjunction with the street frontage and or roofline of this listed building from viewing places along Minster Street. The existing street pattern and orientation, and also density and greater scale of surrounding largely modern buildings, constrains any such intervisibility. Although the proposed development on Site would occur within the townscape setting of the listed building, such change would have no effect of the understanding or appreciation of its heritage significance.

Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts Listed Building (Grade I)	Harm Less than Substantial (Lower End)	The listed Church of St Mary is recognised in the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal as a landmark in local views within this designated area. Key views to the tower of the church are identified in this appraisal to include that view looking east from Hosier Street and across St Marys Butts and also a view looking north east from Castle Street across its churchyard. The most important local views that appreciate the distinctive architecture of this historic building (including its west tower) are those from the immediate surrounding streets of St Marys Butts, Gun Street and Chain Street, and from within the closely associated space of its churchyard setting. The Conservation Area Appraisal does recognise however existing constraints on the visual presence of the church outside this designated area, and accordingly states that *"… views of St Mary's Church are not readily apparent until one is quite close to it"* (page 11). Beyond the boundaries of this conservation area the local townscape becomes even more complex and varied in terms of the ages, types, height and scale, forms and architectural character of its buildings, including the increasing intervention and dominance of large scale post-war / modern elements such as the civic centre complex to the west and The Oracle development scheme along the riverside to the south. The Site itself is located c.250m to the south east of the church and forms part of The Oracle complex. This is not an element of the wider and diverse townscape setting of this heritage asset that contributes to its significance. We have identified that change would occur within the highly evolved and diverse wider townscape setting for this listed building as a result of the proposed development on Site. However, the prepared Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) for this scheme also indicates that there would likely be very little visibility of new built form on the Site from public vantage points within the local area of this church, largely due to the screening effects of the existing street pattern and orientation, density and scale of surrounding buildings, and also in particular the mature vegetation within its churchyard. An accurate visualisation has been prepared to further assist in illustrating any potential visual effects as a result of the application scheme, which is RV 4 located at the junction of Hosier Street and St Mary's Butts, and comparable to the key view of the church tower identified in the relevant conservation area appraisal document. This visualisation indicates that the uppermost element of the tallest buildings proposed for the Site could be glimpsed on the skyline above the roofline of buildings along Gun Street and as part of the wider backdrop to this view of the landmark church in the foreground, although mature trees within the churchyard would likely have a significant screening and or filtering effect on the visibility of these new buildings in summer and when in leaf, which would be further mitigated by the effects of distance. This particular view contributes to our understanding and appreciation of the historic use and landmark status of this church, and also the quality of its architecture as experienced within the immediate context of its churchyard and also a largely intact townscape of traditional buildings enclosing this space on its south and west sides. The appearance of elements of new built form above / within the existing prevailing roofline / treeline, and as part of the wider sky backdrop to the church, would have a very minor visual effect on the overall composition and character of this view. However, the new introduction of a more modern taller building to an identified key view, and in conjunction with this landmark church and its largely intact historic setting locally, could be considered to distract to some degree from the existing visual presence and command of this listed building within this part of the conservation area. Such a visual distraction could result in a minor level of harm to the significance of this designated heritage asset. It should be recognised however that any such potential minor adverse visual effect would be moderated by the high quality design approach for the proposed development on Site, which includes moves to break up the massing of new built form into a series of defined blocks, and employ clear articulation and variation in materiality and detailing to elevations and roof forms, which would also create a distinctive and attractive taller element against the sky. Overall it is our assessment that any such harm caused to the significance of this heritage asset would be very minor and would fall within the category of "less than substantial" for the purposes of the NPPF (paragraph 202), and also towards the very lowest end of the scale within that category. This assessment considers the fact that these impacts would not be direct, but indirect and as a result of change to the character and appearance of only one part of a much wider townscape and visual context for this listed building. Visibility of the new scheme from within this conservation area and the local setting of the church is very highly constrained by the surrounding pattern and density of the townscape. Many other important views of this listed building from within the churchyard and surrounding streets, which best appreciate its architecture and historic character, would not be effected by the proposed development on Site. Overall the historic landmark status of this church within this townscape would remain. It has also been identified that St Mary's Church features as one of a sequence of landmarks in View 2 of the list of "Significant Views with Heritage Interest" set out in the Local Plan (Policy EN5), however the alignment of this longer distance view along Southampton Street would be orientated away from the Site. The visualisation prepared for RV 4, also from this higher vantage point to the south of the town centre, confirms that the defining characteristics of this view would not be undermined by these proposals. A number of other viewpoints from the wider suburban area of Reading have also been tested as part of the application submission, including where the tower of this church may be glimpsed as part of an existing highly complex and diverse skyline context. Overall this analysis supports our assessment that the landmark status of this church would not be undermined by the proposed development in either local or long views within or across the town centre.
Church of St Giles, Southampton Street	Neutral / Sustain	The listed building Church of St Giles is recognised in the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal as a local landmark in both longer and local views, including those looking north and south along the historic route of Southampton Street / Bridge Street, as well as other skyline glimpses from the IDR and more elevated vantage points to the south and west of the town centre. This church is located to the edge and within a south western branch of the conservation area, and beyond the boundaries of this designated area the local townscape becomes even more complex and varied in terms of the ages, types, height and scale, forms and architectural

Listed Building (Grade II)		character of its buildings, including the increasing intervention and dominance of large scale post-war / modern elements such as the IDR to the north, and Premier Inn hotel and The Oracle complex also to the north. The Site itself is located c.250m to the north east of the listed church and forms part of The Oracle scheme along the riverside. This is not an element of the wider and diverse townscape setting of this heritage asset that contributes to its significance. There are also important more localised views that appreciate the distinctive architecture of this historic building (including its tower and spire) from Southampton Road at its west end, and also from within the closely associated space of its churchyard setting. We have identified that change would occur within what is a highly evolved and diverse wider townscape setting for this listed building as a result of the proposed development on Site. The prepared Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) for this scheme also indicates that there would likely be very little visibility of new built form on Site from vantage points within proximity of the church, largely due to the screening effects of the existing street pattern and orientation, density and scale of buildings, and also vegetation within its churchyard. The series of prepared accurate visualisations further helps to illustrate these likely effects, and relatively high degree of visual constraint. These includes RV 8 from the edge of this part of the conservation area looking north east, albeit orientated away from the church and its landmark spire. RV 5 represents a longer view looking towards the Site and across the town centre from its western edge and the elevated footbridge across the IDR from Coley Place. The spire of the church can be glimpsed in this more panoramic view as part of the town's skyline. Although the proposed scheme would introduce new and larger scale built form as part of this skyline, such change would be observed as part of an existing highly complex and diverse townscape context, and also would not prove to be distracting being located some distance to the north (left hand side) away from this landmark. These indirect impacts and change to the existing character of a very limited number of shared views would not detract from our understanding or appreciation of the significance of this designated heritage asset. The most important local views of the church from Southampton Street, and also within the key historic streets and spaces (including the churchyard) of the conservation area, would be unaffected, due to their orientation and or the constraints of surrounding built form and vegetation. The visual prominence, architectural quality, and also the legibility of the historic use of this listed building and churchyard setting would be maintained. Where some longer views of the church's spire on the skyline would be effected by the development proposals, such change would occur within the established context of a highly evolved and mixed townscape, and would not undermine or otherwise detract from the appreciation of its landmark status in these views. St Giles' Church features as a landmark in View 2 of the list of "Significant Views with Heritage Interest" set out in the Local Plan (Policy EN5), however the alignment of this long view along Southampton Street would be orientated away from the Site. The visualisation prepared for RV 12, also from this higher vantage point to the south of the town centre, confirms that the defining characteristics of this view would not be undermined by these proposals.
London Street / Market Place Conservation Area	Adverse / Harm Less than Substantial (Lower End) & Beneficial	The easternmost part of the Site (south block) falls within the designation of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, whereas the remainder of the Site forms part of its local townscape setting. This is a relatively large townscape area within Reading town centre, which also includes a substantial number of listed buildings and other buildings and or structures of local heritage interest. As found today, that part of the conservation area immediately to the south of the river / canal has been substantially altered in the post-war period, including the loss of much of the historic built fabric, fine grain and scale along London Street on the southern approach to the High Bridge crossing, and also now the dominance and severance of large scale modern infrastructure (the IDR) and also commercial redevelopments such as The Oracle now addressing the water on both sides. The buildings and layout of the Site itself form part of the modern The Oracle scheme and do not relate to the historic condition or character of this part of the town centre and its former industrial riverside. This is not a site that contributes positively to the significance of the conservation area as part of its designation or its local townscape setting or views. For example, the overall form and south flank of the Vue cinema building presents a rather bulky and uninteresting architectural termination to the view north along London Street at this key gateway into the town centre. We have identified that as a result of the proposed development on Site – including a new mix of uses, new form and larger scale of redesigned buildings and associated public realm improvements – part of the character and appearance of the conservation area would change, and also that of an area within its even more highly evolved and diverse townscape setting and some shared views. Specifically with regard to "Historical Assets & Conservation" the Tall Building Strategy SPD 2008 outlines the considerations and constraints that the heritage assets within the town centre would place on future taller building development. However, this document also recognises that such heritage considerations should also be balanced against the positive role that such intensification of development could play in engaging with, and also helping to better articulate, the historic core of Reading. Furthermore, the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal 2007 highlights the importance of the High Bridge as a key viewing place (both east and west along the river), as well as the view of Kennetside and The Oracle from the modern Yield Hall Place bridge. This document describes that *"Views along the River Kennet are pleasing and a distinctive feature of the conservation area. From High Bridge looking eastwards, there is a restful though not spectacular view of the river and modern riverside developments. From the new bridge in Yield Hall Place there is an exciting view westwards of modern commercial development outside the conservation area."* The Tall Building Strategy identified that for this view further tall buildings could enhance this characteristic.

Study of the ZTV prepared on the basis of the envisioned maximum height of the proposed development indicates that there would be visibility of the taller built elements of the new scheme on Site from a number of vantage points within the conservation area designation. However, this technical exercise also indicates that distance, topography and the visually screening effects of the established street pattern, density of built form and or intervening mature vegetation would all be significant factors. The number and extent of views of the new taller buildings on Site would be limited / constrained therefore, and it is indicated that from within the greater area of the public realm of this large designated heritage asset this scheme would not be readily visible. The ZTV indicates that the visual effects of the proposed development would include the streets and spaces near to the Site, such as Yield Hall Place, both bridges across the river, that part of London Street extending from the riverside southwards to its junction with London Road and just beyond, and a section of the IDR at its junction with London Street. Whereas there are likely to be only glimpsed views of the proposed taller building on the skyline from within the important historic space of the Market Place c.200m to the north (visible from a vantage point at its north head only) for example.

There would be no effect on the key views specifically identified in the relevant conservation area appraisal within the area to the north of the river; where these views are either orientated away from the Site and towards existing landmark features or spaces or are otherwise screened by the intervening townscape. Other key views along Church Street looking west or southwards along London Street within the area to the south of the river would also not be affected. There would also be likely little or no effect on views experienced out from the key historic open spaces of the churchyards belonging to the two Parish Churches that bookend the conservation area in the north and to the south. However, views testing has indicated that the larger scale and taller new built elements of the proposed development on Site would be clearly observed as part of the visual experience from key identified viewing places such as High Bridge and Yield Hall Place bridge, and also the long view looking north along London Street over the IDR and towards these crossings.

The accurate visualisation prepared for VP 3 from the north end of the Market Place illustrates that a number of the upper storeys of each of the three taller built elements proposed for the Site would be visible at a distance above the existing roofline of listed buildings along its south side. This introduction of new built form to the existing open sky backdrop and historic building silhouette could be considered to be detrimental to a positive aspect of the character and appearance of this view and also in turn that of the conservation area. From the vantage points of the bridges closer to the Site, the proposed development would introduce replacement built form of a significantly greater height, scale and massing relative to that existing. Such change would occur within the local townscape setting of the listed building Nos.2-4 London Street, which is a remnant of the since greatly compromised historic pattern, grain and scale. The resultant greater visual contrast in height and scale between old and new again has the potential to distract from the existing positive experience of the listed building within riverside views. VP 9 represents a view looking north along the historic route of London Street towards the town centre and the river crossing, which is also framed by groups of listed buildings to both sides. Although sight of the existing large scale and unrelieved elevation / roof form of the Vue Cinema on Site does not contribute positively to the character or quality of this view, the taller elements of the new scheme would rise significantly higher than the prevailing rooflines to the fore and middle-ground and would have a much more dominating and contrasting visual presence relative to that existing. These visual effects from these particular locations within the conservation area would likely detract to some degree from the established characteristics of the conservation area, and would therefore equate to harm to as aspect of our understanding or appreciation of the significance of this designated heritage asset.

It is important to recognise however that any such potentially adverse effects would be moderated by the well-considered approach and design quality of the replacement buildings proposed for the Site. This design looks to break up the massing of new built form into a series of defined blocks on both sides of the river, and also to the step the increasing height of the new buildings away from London Street to the east and also the IDR to the south; and those edges of the conservation area. This deliberate articulation of the form and also elevations, varying building heights, and also the maintenance of gaps between the taller blocks against the sky, would be appreciate in longer views from both the north and south, including as shown in the visualisations for VP 3 and 10. The detailed architectural design of the new buildings on both sites would also be appreciable within these views, and in particular from closer proximity on London Street and along the riverside. Here the quality of that proposed would be evident, and would add new visual interest and greater animation to the street scene, including the use of cladding materials with a local reference.

Overall, it is our assessment that any such harm to the significance of the conservation area as a whole would fall within the category of “less than substantial” for the purposes of the NPPF (paragraph 202), and also towards the lower end of the scale within that category. In coming to this conclusion, we have taken into consideration that any direct impacts through redevelopment would be confined to only a small part of the area of this relatively large designated heritage asset, and also that the Site itself does not contribute positively to the character of the conservation area but includes modern large scale buildings of no particular architectural / townscape merit. The indirect effects of this scheme as a result of change to the local townscape setting of the conservation area would be limited in terms of the number and

		extent of shared views from within that area. In addition, such proposed change would occur on a site that is currently experienced as an integral part of the wider modern town centre of Reading, which is continuing to evolve in form and scale and also to further diversify in use and built character. Conversely, our assessment also identifies that the application scheme has the opportunity to improve aspects of the character and appearance of the conservation area that could enhance or better reveal its heritage significance, i.e. public and heritage benefits for the purposes of the NPPF and NPPG. Such beneficial heritage impacts could include the introduction of a new and richer mix of uses on Site that would complement and contribute to those existing locally, as well as the introduction of more active and interesting street frontages and quality architectural design, and also public realm improvements and urban greening along Yield Hall Place, the riverside of London Street and at the junction with the IDR immediately to the south. Other heritage benefits could include the creation of new private amenity spaces at roof terrace level on Site that would create opportunities for new views outward to experience the wider townscape surroundings, including the appreciation of views looking across the historic townscape of the nearby conservation areas, along the river and canal, and landmarks such as the listed Parish churches and Town Hall.
St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area	Neutral / Sustain	The St Marys Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area is located c.250m to the west of the Site, and which therefore falls within the wider townscape setting of this designated heritage asset. The published St Marys Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal highlights the importance of the listed building St Mary's Church at the heart of this area and its role as an historic landmark in local views, and also the positive qualities of other surviving historic buildings along Castle Street and Gun Street (and also part enclosing the churchyard) as part of the defining character and appearance of this designated area. The boundaries of this conservation area are tightly drawn around this fragment of historic townscape within the centre of Reading. The wider urban context beyond these boundaries becomes ever more complex and varied in terms of the ages, types, height and scale, forms and architectural character of its buildings and spaces, including the increasing intervention and dominance of large scale post-war / modern elements such as the civic centre complex to the west and The Oracle development scheme along the riverside to the south, which can be experienced as part of a number of shared views from within the conservation area. The Site itself forms part of The Oracle complex, and is not an element of the wider and diverse townscape setting of this heritage asset that contributes in any way to its significance. We have identified that as a result of the proposed development on Site change would not occur within the conservation area itself, but within what is a highly evolved and diverse wider setting. The prepared Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) for this scheme is helpful in indicating that there would likely be very little visibility of proposed new built form from vantage points within the conservation area, including no change to views from the public realm along Castle Street or Gun Street, nor from within the heavily treed space of the churchyard at its centre. This is largely due to the screening effects of the existing street pattern and orientation, density and scale of intervening buildings, and also existing mature vegetation. Importantly, there would be no effect on the key views specifically identified in the relevant conservation area appraisal that look east along Castle Street, look south east along the lane of the Castle Street almshouses, and look north east at the tower of the church from the key junction of Castle Street and St Mary's Butts. However, views testing has indicated that the upper storeys of the taller new built elements of the proposed development on Site would likely be visible from a very isolated area of the conservation area immediately to the west of the church and on part of Hosier Street at the edge of this designated area (which is also identified in the conservation area appraisal as a key viewing place). Accordingly, an accurate visualisation has been prepared for this location as RV 4. Although the uppermost elements of the tallest proposed buildings could be visible to the far skyline and above the treeline / roofline of Gun Street buildings, such change would not undermine the historic landmark status of St Mary's Church as experienced within its churchyard, nor fundamentally upset the existing visual relationship between this church, this space and the other surrounding historic buildings that provide traditional enclosure. Mature trees within the churchyard would likely also have a significant screening and or filtering effect on the visibility of the new scheme from this location. Overall, the proposals would have only a minor visual effect on the composition and character of this particular view. It is our assessment that whereas the landmark listed church has some particular sensitivities in visual terms (which has been described previously in this section / table), our understanding and appreciation of the significance of the larger and more complex / varied townscape-based heritage asset of this conservation area would be little effected by proposed redevelopment within its wider setting. We have confirmed the highly limited number and extent of views from within the conservation area that could be effected by these proposals. We also recognise that any such visual change experienced would occur within the established context of a highly evolved and diverse townscape setting beyond the boundaries of this designated area, and also a number of existing views of taller and larger scale more modern buildings across the extended town centre from within the conservation area. The quality of the design approach for the proposed development on Site and how it has looked to respond to the history and character of its location is also a further consideration for the assessment of impacts. The design has sought to break up the massing of new built form into a series of defined blocks, and employ clear articulation and variation in materiality and detailing to elevations and roof forms. As part of this is the intention to create a distinctive and attractive taller element against the sky that would complement the existing varied skyline of Reading. In overall terms the significance – character and appearance – of the conservation area as a whole would not be harmed by the proposed development on Site, but sustained.

Consideration against relevant Heritage Legislation and Planning Policy

Statutory Duties

Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990

6.22 We confirm that in light of the relevant statutory duty of the Planning Act 1990 (section 66(1)), considerable weight and importance is required to be given to the requirement to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the special interest and setting of the identified listed buildings within the surrounding area of the Site. This assessment recognises that the indirect impacts of the proposed development on Site would likely cause a degree of harm to the significance of a number of listed buildings through change to a part of their setting and some shared views. This is discussed further in relation to these affected listed buildings and national policy set out in the NPPF 2021 later in this section.

6.23 The eastern part of the Site is located within the boundary of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. Accordingly, the Act also requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area for new development. This assessment has identified that the proposals on Site have the potential to enhance aspects of the character and or appearance of the conservation area, and also conversely to result in a degree of harm to the existing character in other ways. Again, such effects are discussed in more detail in terms of national policy later in this section.

6.24 The setting of a conservation area is not enshrined in legislation and does not, therefore, attract the weight of statutory protection. Accordingly, section 72(1) of the 1990 Act would not apply in determining this application in relation to the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area located further to the north east of the Site, although national policy and the local Development Plan would do so.

6.25 The meaning of preservation with regard to the setting of listed buildings, and also the character of conservation areas, under the relevant parts of the 1990 Act can be taken to be the avoidance of harm. However, such a presumption is not overriding or irrebuttable, as there will be cases where such harm would be outweighed by material considerations powerful enough to do so. Accordingly, the overarching Planning Statement submitted with this application provides an assessment of the overall planning balance in light of the relevant part of this legislation.

National Policy

NPPF 2021 and NPPG

6.26 In accordance with the requirements of paragraphs 194-195 of the NPPF 2021, the significance (and also any contribution of setting to that significance) of each of the identified designated or non-designated built heritage assets has been described proportionately in this document by our team. This is our built heritage baseline analysis, including a description of the historical development of the Site and its local context and also the statements of heritage significance for each of these assets or defined groups.

6.27 The application scheme and the design process has taken account of the key principles set out in paragraph 197 of the NPPF, which encourages development proposals to consider the desirability of sustaining and also enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; supporting the positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities, including their economic vitality; and, also the desirability of new development making its own positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

6.28 The supporting Design and Access Statement (DAS) to this application outlines how the wider vision and approach for the new mix of uses and overall layout, scale and massing of new built form and spaces for the reanimation of this Site have through the design process sought where possible to minimise and or mitigate harm to the significance and setting of heritage assets, in balance with optimising the development potential of this key site at the southern gateway to the town centre, historic river crossing and waterside, and also as part of the larger The Oracle development scheme. The DAS also provides further description of the ways in which the design looks to positively respond to the history and heritage of this site and local area, including the past industrial / commercial character of the riverside. References to the urban vernacular and prevailing local materials found in the town in proposed new architecture and landscape design demonstrates the intention to create a place with identity that also that reflects local character and distinctiveness.

6.29 Paragraph 199 of the NPPF sets out that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. As part of our assessment we have identified that the significance (and setting) of a substantial number of the designated heritage assets, which have been scoped in as relevant to the proposed development for the Site, would likely either be sustained or otherwise unaffected by the envisioned change brought about by this scheme. These heritage assets are identified in **Table 6.2**. This would accord with paragraph 199 in relation to these particular heritage assets.

6.30 The NPPF also then sets out at paragraph 200 that any identified harm to, or loss, of the significance of such heritage assets requires clear and convincing justification. It is our assessment of the proposed development for this Site that such change would likely cause a degree of harm to the significance of a number of designated heritage assets. The heritage assets that would be affected in this way have been identified as the listed building Nos.2-4 London Street (as experienced in a number of shared local views in conjunction with the application scheme), the listed building groupings of Nos.33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 London Street (as seen in shared views looking north along the south end of this historic route), Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place (as seen in some longer views looking south across this space and to the skyline), the listed Church of St Mary (as experienced in some longer glimpsed views from the north east and again on the skyline), and the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area (within which part of the Site is located). Such potentially adverse impacts would principally be as a result of the visually distracting effects of an increase in the overall height, scale and massing of new built form on Site within the setting of, and also some shared views to and from, these heritage assets.

6.31 It is our assessment that any potential harm caused to the significance of each of the listed buildings or groups, and also the conservation area, would be minor in magnitude, would fall within the category of less than substantial for the purposes of the NPPF (paragraph 202), and also would fall towards the lower end of the scale within that category (as further guided by NPPG[51]) in each case. The magnitude of any such adverse impact would be moderated by the fact that proposed change on Site would not directly effect any historic fabric or features of a listed building or other positive element within the conservation area designation, and for each of the listed buildings would be an indirect impact as a result of change to the character and appearance of a smaller part of their much wider townscape setting. Also that the existing modern condition of the Site does not contribute in any positive way to the significance of these

[51] NPPG, Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20140306

heritage assets as found today. There exist a substantial number of local and other longer distance views of these listed buildings from within the conservation area and across the wider town centre, which better experience and appreciate the heritage interests of the listed building, and which are not orientated towards, or would otherwise be effected by the proposed development on this Site. Again the proposed development would impact only part of a much wider and highly diverse urban setting within which each of these heritage asset are experienced and observed dynamically, and which is a townscape that has changed substantially in character from that historic as a result of post-war redevelopment and infrastructure, and has also continued to evolve through more recent comprehensive town centre schemes such as The Oracle itself.

6.32 It is also to be noted that the potential for the proposed development of this key town centre Site to result in adverse impacts on the significance (and setting) of heritage assets, and also how that could be balanced against an objective to achieve a viable quantum and quality of new built form and spaces, has been considered from the start as part of an iterative design process. This has included the process of optioneering and the testing of views using 3D computer modelling of iterations of the scheme prior to design fix. Such considerations and discussions have also formed part of a process of pre-application engagement with the local planning authority and other stakeholders (including Design Review Panel), including scheme refinements and revisions undertaken by the Applicant during this process in response.

6.33 NPPF Paragraph 202 sets out more fully that for cases of the category of less than substantial harm this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals as a whole, including where appropriate securing the optimum viable use of the asset or assets. The overarching Planning Statement provides a full assessment of the overall planning considerations and merits for this Site and the proposed development. This includes the overall planning balance in relation to any potential harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, and all other relevant material considerations. The NPPF advises that it is for the decision maker to determine whether any adverse impacts of granting planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the "public benefits" of an application scheme. In response, it is one of the key conclusions of the Planning Statement that any potential less than substantial harm to the significance of a number of listed buildings and one conservation area would be outweighed by the public benefits that the proposed development could deliver as a whole, in the terms of the NPPF when read as a whole, and also in light of the relevant and overarching statutory duties of the 1990 Act. This provides the clear and convincing justification required for a scheme that would result in a minor degree of harm to heritage significance (paragraph 200).

6.34 The identification and potential delivery of "heritage benefits" should also be recognised as part of the determination of this application scheme and the overall planning balance undertaken by the decision maker. This responds not only to paragraph 200-202 of the NPPF in relation to heritage harm (as has been described previously in this section), but also paragraph 206 that encourages local planning authorities to look more proactively for opportunities for new development within conservation areas, and also within the setting of other heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance.

6.35 NPPG confirms that public benefits can also include such heritage benefits, which are changes that would enhance or better reveal the significance of heritage assets[52]. By definition, heritage benefits can also enhance the contribution of the setting of a heritage asset, reduce or remove risks to a heritage asset, and securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset or assets in support of their long term conservation. In summary, our assessment has identified the following potential heritage benefits that could flow from this scheme as:

- Introducing a new and richer mix of uses on Site that would complement and contribute to those existing locally, as well as the introduction of more active and interesting street frontages and quality architectural design, and public realm improvements. All which would enhance the character and appearance of this part of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and also the setting of the nearby listed building Nos.2-4 London Street; and

- Creating new private amenity spaces at roof terrace level on Site that would create opportunities for new views outward to experience the wider townscape surroundings, including the appreciation of views looking across the historic townscape of the nearby conservation areas, along the river and canal, and landmarks such as the listed Parish churches and Town Hall.

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

6.36 It is recognised that the local Development Plan is required to be in conformity with the requirements of the NPPF at national level, and also the relevant statutory duties of the Planning Act 1990, which have been previously discussed in this section.

6.37 Due consideration has been given to Policy EN1 of the Local Plan, which requires development proposals to protect, and where possible, enhance the significance of all designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings, and also respond to the historic character and local distinctiveness of the local area of the Site . Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. This policy also outlines that any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits. In response; we have previously described that proposed development on Site is likely to result in a degree of harm to the significance of a number of listed buildings and one conservation area. With regard to the NPPF category of less than substantial harm (and lower end of that scale in each case) to heritage significance, it is for the decision maker to determine whether any such adverse impacts of granting Planning Permission would outweigh the wider public benefits (including any heritage benefits) of the scheme overall, when assessed against the provisions of the NPPF taken as a whole, and also in light of the overarching statutory duties of the Planning Act 1990. Accordingly, the planning balance for this application is again discussed in more detail in the Planning Statement.

6.38 Also in accordance with the requirements of Policy EN1, a Heritage Statement has been provided as an integral part of this HTVIA report. The analysis / assessment set out in this document demonstrates a proportionate understanding and appreciation of the significance of the identified heritage assets in our stud area, and also describes effectively how proposed change would effect their significance (and setting).

6.39 Policy EN3 relates to conservation areas, and sets out that development proposals within these areas should make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, and also that positive consideration would be given to proposals which take opportunities to enhance the character of conservation areas. Accordingly, both the DAS and this report describe how the scheme design has sought to respond to the distinctive character of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, where the Site falls partially within and also within the setting of this area. Our assessment has also identified a

[52] NPPG, Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20140306

number of enhancements that these proposals would deliver through the new mix of uses, the quality architecture of replacement buildings and also public realm improvements.

6.40 Policy EN4 relates to locally important heritage assets, however no non-designated heritage assets have been scoped into this assessment in relation to this application scheme.

6.41 Policy EN5 relates to the protection of significant views with heritage interest, and sets out that new development should not harm, and where possible should make a positive contribution to, views of acknowledged historical significance. In response; our HTVIA includes a proportionate assessment of the likely effects of the proposed development on Site on the relevant visual receptors, and also on the character of both local and longer distance (representative) views that have been agreed with RBC for analysis at application. This is set out in Sections 6 and 7 of this report. It has been identified that View 2 of the adopted list of Significant Views with Heritage Interest is located within our study area, however the alignment of this long view from the high vantage point of Whitley Street along Southampton Street would be orientated away from the Site itself. This view includes the listed buildings St Mary's Church and St Giles's Church as part of a sequence of landmarks that forms part of its heritage interest. Both these heritage assets have been assessed in terms of development impacts as part of HTVIA, and in relation to their setting and shared views. In addition, the accurate visualisation prepared for RV 12, also from this higher vantage point to the south of the town centre, indicates that the defining characteristics of these views would not be undermined by these proposals.

6.42 Policy EN6 (New Development in an Historic Context), sets out that in areas characterised by heritage assets, the historic environment should inform and shape new development. A number of key considerations, or factors, are provided as part of this policy guidance. In response; both the DAS and this HTVIA report describe how the scheme design has sought to respond to the history and distinctive character of the Site and its local, and although the optimised scale of these proposals would likely result in some adverse heritage impacts, this scheme also has the potential to deliver enhancements such as a richer mix of uses, quality new architecture replacing existing building of no merit, and also public realm improvements.

Townscape Impacts

Effects on Site Character

6.43 The existing Site buildings and layout do not relate to the historic condition or positively contribute to the townscape character of this part of the town centre and its waterside. Through the demolition of the eastern extent of The Oracle shopping centre and the Vue cinema building, the Proposed Development presents the opportunity to enhance the Site's contribution to the townscape and visual amenity and reenvisage the Site to better relate to its surrounding context and introduce a comprehensive scheme. This includes a scheme which enhances its contribution to the setting of nearby heritage assets and contribution to the London Street/Market Place Conservation Area.

6.44 The introduction of new, high quality residential buildings with ground floor commercial space across two principal blocks either side of the River Kennet would enhance the townscape character in this location and add interest to the city skyline in both short-range and long-range views. This would be reaffirmed by the variation of height within each block which includes stepped up massing south-north and east- west, with the tallest building located at the north-western extent of the Site.

6.45 Added interest is further achieved by the varied use of material palette is used to articulate the elevations and establish a vertical emphasis to the buildings and make them slenderer in appearance. The choice of material palette also takes precedent from the surrounding townscape and therefore enables the new building to better integrate into the existing townscape character. This includes the use of masonry and terracotta, as well as decorative panels to the upper storeys. A light buff coloured brick is applied to parts of the building facing the river and seeks to establish an architectural relationship with the colour palette of The Oracle. A red brick is used on the buildings that face the outer edges of the scheme, relating the scheme to its immediate surroundings and materials found within the London Street/Market Place Conservation Area.

6.46 Copings and horizontal banding at ground floor level presents a horizontal emphasis, establishing a human scale to the development and grounding the building.

6.47 The external composition of the building also enhances its contribution to the townscape character and adds interest to the streetscape. This takes precedent from the history and historic character of the Site and local area, such as the window proportions which express industrial characteristics in parts, and the use of 'heavy' materials at ground floor such as the black powder coating architraves to the windows and door opening, reflective of the buildings and or spaces of the past industrial heritage of the wharf side. This helps articulate the building at ground floor and establish a base. The vertical stacking of the window assemblies and balconies, the fine details of the panels between grouped windows establish a 'middle' to the building, and the detail at parapet level and decorative panels reaffirm the 'crown' to the building. Overall, this helps reduce the potentially perceived prominence of the buildings due to the increase of building height and mass in this location and allows the building profile to appear slenderer.

6.48 A positive aspect of The Oracle development is the way it has created new active public realm along both sides of the river. The Proposed Development takes advantage of this and enhances its contribution to the public realm and visual amenity.

6.49 The introduction of a new active frontages on to new and improved public realm including a new pedestrian route through the Site, widened pavements with dedicated cycleways, and new street tree planting and landscaping would improve the vibrancy of the local area and help to integrate the Proposed Development in the surrounding townscape.

6.50 The Proposed Development also improves the permeability of the Site and better connects the existing Kennet side routes and spaces. It also better defines the building frontages towards Yield Hall Place and London Street which, in turn, enhances the heritage significance of this part of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, and immediate setting / views to and from the listed buildings Nos.2-4 London Street, Coroners Court and High Bridge.

6.51 The high-quality architecture and improved public realm will enhance local townscape views. This includes views along the primary vehicular route of Queens Road as it passes through the conservation area; in particular at a key gateway location at the crossing of London Street and entrance into the town centre across the river from the south.

6.52 Further, the taller building development will establish wayfinding towards Reading town centre in long-distanced views and presents the opportunity to create a new landmark. This is important for a Site that is positioned at a key historic crossing of the Kennet, at an entrance into a leading retail destination (The Oracle), and also at a southern gateway area for the town centre.

6.53 Overall, the Proposed Development would result in a **High Magnitude of Change** and a **Beneficial Effect**.

Effects on Townscape Character Areas

TCA 18 – The Oracle

6.54 The Proposed Development is likely to be experienced from many of the primary thoroughfares within TCA 18 given the scale of the development and the River Kennett which presents long-range open views along the river corridor. Direct changes to TCA 18 would therefore arise.

6.55 The scheme would introduce development of greater scale, height and massing by comparison of the existing buildings. It would introduce two buildings of varying building heights, adding interest to the streetscape and enhancing visual amenity. The ground floor active frontage would positively contribute to the townscape character and public realm.

6.56 In close distance views from along the River Kennett, the Proposed Development would form a new prominent feature and would replace views of the low-quality shopping centre building and the Vue cinema with commercial units at ground floor and contemporary residential development above. Tall buildings are not completely uncharacteristic of the character area which includes buildings rising up to 9 storeys, and the proposed stepping of levels would help mediate the change in scale between nearby lower scale buildings to the north and south. Where experienced, the proposal would introduce a high-quality architecture to the streetscape and improve wayfinding to Reading town centre and The Oracle.

6.57 The varied use of materiality and the articulation of elevation treatment will add further interest to views experienced within the TCA.

6.58 The impact of the Proposed Development on the townscape is demonstrated by Representative Viewpoint 6 in ***Section 7***.

6.59 Overall, the Proposed Development would result in a **High Magnitude of Change** due the densification of buildings in this location and the scale, height and massing which is larger than that existing. There would

likely be a direct, permanent, long-term effect comprising positive changes which overall is considered to be a **Beneficial Effect.**

TCA 06 – St. Lawrence and Market Place

6.60 There would be no direct change to the characteristics of TCA 06 as a result of the Proposed Development. Awareness of change arising from the development will predominantly be experienced within the southern portion of the TCA when looking west, as well as to the north of the High Street where the upper storeys of the new development will rise above the existing buildings. Where experienced, the new buildings would introduce an abrupt change in building scale and height and would reduce visibility of open sky, having an adverse impact to the townscape. However, it would introduce an architecture of high-quality and add interest to the skyline due to the varied building heights, materiality and articulated elevation treatment. The Proposed Development would also establish wayfinding towards Reading town centre and The Oracle. The magnitude of change would be **Medium.** The type of effect is **Neutral**.

6.61 The impact of the Proposed Development on the townscape is demonstrated by Representative Viewpoint 3 in ***Section 7***.

TCA 20 – London Street

6.62 There would be no direct change to the characteristics of TCA 20 as a result of the Proposed Development and visibility of the proposal would be limited within the TCA, as demonstrated on the ZTV. Awareness of change arising from the development is most likely to be experienced on London Street itself where the upper storeys of the built development would be experienced rising above the roofscape of the existing buildings. Where experienced, the new buildings would introduce an abrupt change in building scale and height by comparison to the buildings experienced within the townscape character and visibility of open sky in distanced views would be reduced, having an adverse impact to the townscape character. However, it would introduce high-quality architecture and add interest to the skyline due to the varied building heights, materiality and articulated elevation treatment. The Proposed Development would also establish wayfinding towards Reading town centre and The Oracle. The magnitude of change would be **Medium.** The type of effect is **Neutral**.

6.63 The impact of the Proposed Development on the townscape is demonstrated by Representative Viewpoint 7, 8, 9 and 10 in ***Section 7***.

TCA 17 – St Mary's and Castle Street

6.64 There would be no direct change to the characteristics of TCA 17 as a result of the Proposed Development. There would be very limited awareness of change arising from the development due to interposing buildings and tree planting, even in winter views. Where experienced, visibility would be limited to glimpsed views through foliage. The magnitude of change would be **Negligible.** The type of effect is **Neutral**.

6.65 The impact of the Proposed Development on the townscape is demonstrated by Representative Viewpoint 4 in ***Section 7***.

TCA 21 – Forbury South

6.66 There would be no direct change to the characteristics of TCA 21 as a result of the Proposed Development. Awareness of change arising from the development is most likely to be experienced on the main thoroughfares such as King's Road and Abbey Square London Street itself where the upper storeys of the built development would be experienced rising above the roofscape of the existing buildings. Where experienced, the new buildings would add interest to the skyline and establish wayfinding towards Reading town centre. The magnitude of change would be **Negligible.** The type of effect is **Neutral**.

6.67 The impact of the Proposed Development on the townscape is demonstrated by Representative Viewpoint 1 and 2 in ***Section 7***.

TCA 26 – King's Road

6.68 There would be no direct change to the characteristics of TCA 26 as a result of the Proposed Development. Awareness of change arising from the development is most likely to be experienced on Queen's Road and on the south bank of the River Kennett. This is likely to be limited to the upper storeys of the built development, with glimpsed views of improved public realm to the eastern extent of the Site. The magnitude of change would be **Negligible.** The type of effect is **Neutral**.

6.69 The impact of the Proposed Development on the townscape is demonstrated by Representative Viewpoint 11 in ***Section 7***.

Table 6.3: Summary of Townscape Effects

Townscape receptor	Value	Susceptibility to change	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Type of effect
TCA 1: The Oracle	Ordinary	Low	Low	High	Beneficial
TCA 6: St Lawrence and Market Place	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Neutral
TCA 20: London Street	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Neutral
TCA 17: St Mary's and Castle Street	Medium	Medium	High	Negligible	Neutral
TCA 21: Forbury South	Ordinary	Low	Low	Negligible	Neutral
TCA 26: King's Road	Low	Low	Low	Negligible	Neutral

Visual Effects

Introduction

6.70 The assessment of visual impacts likely to arise from the Proposed Development comprised initially, an assessment of the likely extent of visibility of the Proposed Development and the receptors likely to be affected and secondly an assessment of the impacts on the views from each of the representative viewpoints, provided in the following **Section 7**. This assessment should be read in conjunction with the AVRs of the Proposed Development prepared by the appointed visualisers and contained within ***Appendix 4***, and also CGIs of the scheme prepared by the scheme architects contained within the Design and Access Statement (DAS).

Extent of Visibility of the Proposed Development

6.71 The visibility of the Site would increase with the implementation of the Proposed Development due to increased height when compared to the existing buildings. The extent of visibility is demonstrated by the computer generated ZTV provided at **Appendix 3**. This identifies where in the surrounding townscape the Proposed Development would potentially be visible.

6.72 The ZTV identifies high visibility in the immediate context along London Street to the south, Queen's Road to the east, and the A329 to the south west. Visibility of the upper storeys of the Proposed Development are likely from other nearby streets although this is limited due to the densely built-up streets. This includes visibility from the bank of the River Kennett and the north of Market Place Square. Other more distant areas, where it is anticipated the Proposed Development would be visible from, include the A33 to the south.

Assessment of Effects on Visual Receptors

6.73 **Table 5.3** below provides a summary assessment of the likely key effects of the Proposed Development on the visual receptors identified during the baseline appraisal. This is informed by the Representative Views Assessment provided in **Section 6** and the full size AVRs provided in **Appendix 4**. The effect on visual receptors takes account of the extensive amount of development being constructed in the townscape surrounding the Site. AVRs to demonstrate the massing of the consented and under construction schemes and how the Proposed Development sits within the evolving context are also provided in **Appendix 4** for each of the Representative Views.

Table 6.4: Assessment of Effects on Visual Receptors

Visual Receptor	Sensitivity	Commentary
Road users on main routes, such as London Street, Southampton Street and Whitley Street running north-south, and Queens Road (including the IDR) running east-west, also including key crossings of the River Kennet.	The views are not identified or protected in policy, however, some receptors are located within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area or would experience the Proposed Development alongside listed buildings. Whilst some of the view are relatively unremarkable, others are of heritage significance. Therefore, the visual receptor has an **Ordinary - Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of moderate importance to pedestrians and road users. The visual receptor has a **Low-Medium Susceptibility to Change** and an overall **Low-Medium Sensitivity**.	Pedestrians and motorists along London Street, Southampton Street, Whitley Street would experience the upper storeys of the Proposed Development when travelling north towards the Site and Reading town centre. Glimpsed views of the Proposed Development would first become visible at the southern extent of Southampton Street and Whitley Road from the relatively elevated topography where the upper storeys of the taller elements would be experienced amongst the existing urban townscape in the distance. Similarly, interspersed visibility of the upper storeys of the scheme would be experienced from Queen's Road, beyond existing mid-rise buildings. Visibility of the Proposed Development would increase when experienced from London Street due to the close proximity, the change in topography and the contrast in building heights. The Proposed Development would add a new layer of high-quality built form and add interest to the views experienced by this receptor. The varied building heights and articulated façade design with an established base, middle and crown would introduce a landmark feature within the townscape and would establish wayfinding to The Oracle and Reading town centre. Some of the views that represent the visual receptor has the potential to be effected by a mix of adverse and beneficial effects and therefore, on balance, the effect has been concluded to be Neutral. **Magnitude of change:** varies from Medium close to Site to Low at greater distance along route **Type of Effect:** varies from Beneficial to Neutral **Representative Views**: 7, 9, 10, 11, 12
Users of other local or secondary roads, streets and spaces within the town centre area, including the pedestrianised riverside area of The Oracle development.	The views are not identified or protected in policy but do capture views from designated heritage assets or the views include designated heritage assets within their townscape setting. Therefore, the visual receptor has an **Ordinary-Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low-moderate importance to pedestrians and road users. The visual receptor has a **Low-Medium Susceptibility to Change** and an overall **Low-High Sensitivity**.	Users of local and/or secondary roads within the town centre are likely to experience the upper storeys of the Proposed Development. Lower levels are likely to be obscured from view owing to screening by existing buildings and dense nature of the town centre. Where visible, the Proposed Development would introduce a contrasting building height to that existing although establish a landmark feature and wayfinding towards Reading town centre. **Magnitude of change:** varies from Low to Medium **Type of Effect:** Neutral - Beneficial **Representative Views**: 1, 3, 4, 6, 9
Users of River Kennet / Kennet and Avon Canal and other associated waterways / towpaths / bridges	The views are not identified or protected in policy, however, capture views along the River Kennet and associated waterways. Views are relatively unremarkable, although notable exceptions include views of nearby heritage assets. Therefore, the visual receptor has a **Low-Medium Value**. The experience of views and	Receptor would largely experience the middle and upper storeys of the Proposed Development. It would introduce a landmark feature in views and establish wayfinding towards Reading town centre and The Oracle. Public realm enhancements would also be experienced by this receptor within close proximity to the Site. **Magnitude of change:** varies from **Low-Medium** **Type of Effect:** Beneficial **Representative Views**: 1, 2, 6

Visual Receptor	Sensitivity	Commentary
	visual amenity is likely to be of low-moderate importance to residents. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and an overall **Low Sensitivity**.	
Users of public open spaces, such as Market Place and St Mary's Churchyard, and the Mapledurham Estate	The views are a mix of those identified within Reading Tall Building Strategy (Viewpoint 16 and 17 from Mapledurham estate) to those that include designated heritage assets within their townscape setting. Therefore, the visual receptor has a **Medium-High Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low-moderate importance to pedestrians and road users. The visual receptor has a **Low-Medium Susceptibility to Change** and an overall **Medium-High Sensitivity**.	Visibility of the Proposed Development would be limited to the visual receptor. This includes the view from St Mary's Churchyard where the scheme is likely to be obscured from view by interposing buildings and dense vegetation, and Market Place where visibility is limited to the upper storeys of the taller elements. Elsewhere, the Proposed Development would appear in the background of views in the far distance, or fully obscured from view from vantage points such as Mapledurham Estate. **Magnitude of change:** varies from **Low-Medium** **Type of Effect: No effect or Neutral-Beneficial** **Representative Views**: 3, 4, 16, 17, 18
Existing local residents within established housing areas to the south of the Site (beyond the IDR).	The views are not identified or protected in policy although some do capture views nearby designated heritage assets. Therefore, the visual receptor has an **Ordinary-Medium Value.** The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low-moderate importance to pedestrians and road users. The visual receptor has a **Low-Medium Susceptibility to Change** and an overall **Low-Medium Sensitivity**.	Visibility of the Proposed Development would be limited to the upper storeys of the taller elements. Lower levels are likely to be obscured from view owing to screening by existing buildings and dense nature of the town centre. Where visible, the Proposed Development would establish a landmark feature and wayfinding towards Reading town centre. **Magnitude of change:** varies from **Low-Medium** **Type of Effect:** Beneficial **Representative Views**: 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13

6.74 Due consideration to the criteria of Policy EN6 (New Development in an Historic Context), CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), CR2 (Design in Central Reading), and CR10 (Tall Buildings) of Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 has been carried out. Please refer to the Design and Access Statement and Landscape Strategy which demonstrates how the Proposed Development addresses the criteria and responds appropriately to its context.

7. Representative Views Assessment

Introduction

7.1 This Section sets out the assessment of the impact of the Proposed Development for the Site on the representative views as identified earlier in the HTVIA. The assessment follows the methodology set out in ***Appendix 2*** and includes consideration of how the Proposed Development could affect the experience of visual amenity.

7.2 The "Representative Views Assessment" underpins the assessment of effects on visual receptors and local townscape character areas as described earlier in **Section 6**. It has also informed aspects of the impact assessment on the significance of heritage assets in that section. The baseline visual appraisal, set out in **Section 5** of the HTVIA, identified a number of representative views, which are located at ***Appendix 3***. A series of verified visualisations / AVRs have been prepared from these viewpoints by specialist consultants. The detailed methodology document on the production of AVRs is provided along with the full size visualisations at ***Appendix 4***.

7.3 None of the views are static, being kinetic and variable in nature when experienced within the townscape. The visualisations provide two-dimensional representations of a complex scenic experience and, as such, are indicative. However, they have been chosen to give an impression of the maximum effect of the Proposed Development in the viewing experience. Whilst the visualisations are provided for appraisal, the image is no substitute for the actual visual experience from a representative viewpoint or experienced by a visual receptor. It is essential when considering these views that the individual is aware of the viewing experience at each location, i.e. to be aware of traffic noise, weather, the surrounding buildings, and any other similar matters. It is, therefore, recommended that this document is taken on site to fully appreciate the nature of the viewing experience in each representative viewpoint location.

7.4 In determining the effects of the Proposed Development a judgement is made regarding the design quality of the completed scheme. This is informed by the supplied visualisations and the supporting planning application information. Where the type of effect has been identified as beneficial, neutral, or adverse, this is based on a professional judgement made by the assessor. The proposed changes to views because of the new built form are likely to include both beneficial and adverse impacts and will be perceived differently by different individuals. In overall terms, the building design is of high architectural quality, and that the height and form of the building would integrate with surrounding existing or consented future development schemes. Judgements on the appearance of the buildings will depend on the personal preferences of the individual. Where visible, consented schemes in the immediate context have been modelled in the views and are shown in the cumulative views with full size images at ***Appendix 4***.

7.5 The consented schemes in the wider townscape would be obscured by interposing built form in all views. An assessment of cumulative effects arising as a result of the nearby emerging schemes has therefore not been carried out.

7.6 A summary of the effects on Representative Views is provided in **Table 7.1.**

Table 7.1: Summary of Effects on Representative Views

Location	Value	Susceptibility to Change	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change / Type of Effect
RV1 - View from Crane Wharf (footbridge), looking south west	Low/Medium	Low	Low/Medium	Medium / Beneficial
RV2 - View from Watlington Street Bridge, looking west	Ordinary	Low	Low	Low/Beneficial
RV3 - View from Market Place (St Laurence Church), looking south	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium / Neutral
RV4 - View from St Marys Butts/Hosier Street, looking east	Medium/High	Medium	Medium/High	Low/Neutral
RV5 - View from Coley Place (footbridge over IDR), looking north east	Medium	Low	Medium	Low / Beneficial
RV6 - View from Bridge Street bridge, looking north east	Ordinary	Low	Low	Medium / Beneficial
RV7 - View from Southampton Street/IDR, looking north east	Ordinary	Low	Low	Low/Neutral
RV 8 - View from Church Street/St Giles Close, looking north	Low/Medium	Low	Low	Low/Neutral
RV 9 - View from London Street/South Street, looking north	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium/Neutral
RV 10 – View from London Street/London Road, looking north	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low/Neutral
RV 11 – View from the IDR (Queens Road)/Sidmouth Street, looking west	Low/Medium	Low	Low/Medium	Low/Neutral
VP 12 - View from Whitley Street / Mount Pleasant looking north	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low/Neutral
VP 13 - View from Castle Hill / Tilehurst Road / Coley Avenue looking east	Medium	Low/Medium	Medium	Low/Neutral
RV 14 – View from A4, looking west (viewpoint 17 of TBS)	Medium	Low	Low/Medium	Low/Beneficial

RV 15 – Viewpoint 11 from TBS	Medium	Low	Low	N/A
RV 16 – Mapledurham estate/AONB (Viewpoint 8 of TBS)	Medium	Low	Medium	N/A
RV 17 – Mapledurham estate/AONB (Viewpoint 9 of TBS)	Medium	Low	Medium	N/A
RV 18 - Balmore Park	Medium	Low	Medium	Low/Neutral

Representative Viewpoint 1 – View from Crane Wharf (King's Reach footbridge), looking south west

Existing Baseline Situation

7.7 This viewpoint is located on King's Reach Bridge which links Crane Wharf and Queen's Road, approximately 200m to the east of the Site. The view is experienced by pedestrians and cyclists travelling across the bridge.

7.8 The view extends along River Kennett and is well contained by built form which comprises four storey residential and office buildings of red brick construction with balconies and windows facing the river. The foreground and middle ground of the view is dominated by the river which is aligned with pathways and the four storey buildings on each side. Stationery cars within an office car park are experienced to the left-hand-side of the view. High Bridge, which crosses the River along London Street is visible in the background of the view. Mature trees to the west of High Bridge partially obscure visibility of the Oracle shopping centre (the northern portion of the Site) in the background of this view which rises above the tree line.

Sensitivity

7.9 The view is not identified or protected in planning policy however it does capture views across Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. It is therefore considered to be of **Low/Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of moderate importance to users of the footbridge. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Low/Medium Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.1: Representative Viewpoint 1 – Existing

Effect on View

7.10 The Proposed Development would be experienced in the background of this view. It would rise above the existing treeline and roofline of buildings in the far distance.

7.11 The River Kennett would remain the focal point within the view, however, the Proposed Development would introduce a landmark feature in the distance and add interest to the background. In turn, wayfinding towards Reading town centre would be established.

7.12 Added interest would be achieved through the proposed massing which comprises buildings of varying heights (rising between 7-19 storeys) and the gable ended roofscape of the 7-storey building to the eastern extent of the Site. This would be reaffirmed through the vertical emphasise applied to the elevation treatment and the composition of windows and balconies which presents a slenderer appearance, further articulated by the varied materiality.

7.13 The distinction between the two parcels of land either side of the River Kennett is also experienced in this view. The separation of buildings with a sky gap between helps break up the massing in this view and reduces the potentially perceived prominence of new buildings when experienced cumulatively.

7.14 The magnitude of change would be **Medium,** and the type of effect would be **Beneficial** through added interest and wayfinding to Reading town centre in this view.

Figure 7.2: Representative Viewpoint 1 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 2 – View from Watlington Street Bridge, looking west

Existing Baseline Situation

7.15 This viewpoint is located on Watlington Street Bridge crossing River Kennett, approximately 500m to the east of the Site. The view is experienced by pedestrians and motorists travelling along Watlington Street.

7.16 The foreground and middle ground of the view is dominated by the River Kennett which is aligned by the pedestrian pathway and trees to the left-hand side. The view is well contained by built form to the right-hand side which comprises residential properties of various heights and materials. This includes the residential building Verto, 120 King's Road, which rises 18 storeys. A single storey gable ended former warehouse building and a taller residential building is experienced beyond which rises up to 10 storeys, located on the south bank of the river. The 7 storey residential building Queens Wharf is experienced to the left-hand side. The north side of the river is bordered with pathways and mature trees which extend into the background of the view and screen visibility of built form beyond.

7.17 The Site is not experienced in this view as it is screened by mature trees and existing interposing buildings.

Sensitivity

7.18 Although the view captures mid-range views towards Market Place/London Street Conservation Area, the view is not identified or protected in planning policy so is of **Ordinary Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to road users and pedestrians on Watlington Street Bridge. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Low Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.3: Representative Viewpoint 2 – Existing

Effect on View

7.19 The Proposed Development would be experienced in the background of this view. It would rise above the existing treeline and roofline towards The Oracle shopping centre in the far distance although remain below the building line of the buildings in the foreground and middle ground of this view which rise up to 18 storeys.

7.20 The River Kennett would remain the focal point within the view, however, the Proposed Development would introduce a landmark feature in the distance and add interest to the background through the stepped building height and articulated elevation treatment. In turn, wayfinding towards Reading town centre would be established and the public realm and visual amenity would be enhanced.

7.21 Added interest would be achieved through the proposed massing which comprises buildings of varying heights (rising between 2-19 storeys) and high-quality architecture. This would be reaffirmed through the slender appearance of the buildings which would be achieved through the vertical emphasise applied to the elevation treatment and the composition of windows and balconies, further articulated by the varied materiality.

7.22 The distinction between the two parcels of land either side of the River Kennett is also experienced in this view. The separation of buildings with a sky gap between helps break up the massing in this view and reduces the potentially perceived prominence of new buildings when experienced cumulatively.

7.23 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Beneficial** through added interest and wayfinding to Reading town centre in this view.

Figure 7.4: Representative Viewpoint 2 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 3 – View from Market Place (St Laurence Church), looking south

Existing Baseline Situation

7.24 This viewpoint is located on Market Place, on the pavement by St Laurence Church, approximately 250m to the north of the Site. The viewpoint is situated within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, near to a concentration of Grade II and II* listed buildings. The view is experienced by pedestrians and motorists travelling along Market Place.

7.25 The view extends along Market Place and is well contained by buildings of various styles and periods, which serve as reminders of the busy urban context. The foreground of the view largely comprises Market Place road which is wide in this location accommodating a bus stop to the left-hand side and car parking to the right-hand side. A pedestrian crossing is also experienced in the foreground, as well as the arcade which sits beneath the curved building on the corner of The Forbury and Market Place. Number 28 and 29 Market Place, the latter being the Coopers Arms pub, are visible to the right-hand side of the view, both listed grade II. Market Place Square, recognisable by the Simeon Monument standing at its centre, and a bus stop can be seen in the middle ground of the view. Three mature trees partially screen views of buildings around the square which rise four storeys. Red brick buildings which rise 4-5 storeys are also experienced in the background of the view. The Site is not experienced in the view.

Sensitivity

7.26 The view is not identified or protected in planning policy, however, does capture views from within Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and the setting of a number of listed buildings. It is therefore of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of moderate importance to road users and pedestrians on Market Place. The visual receptor has a **Medium Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.5: Representative Viewpoint 3 – Existing

Effect on View

7.27 The Proposed Development would be experienced in the background of this view. The new buildings would rise above the existing roofline of the buildings along the south side of Market Place Square, although below the three-four storey buildings either side of this view along Market Place, including 28, Market Place (listed grade II).

7.28 Where experienced, the new buildings would introduce an abrupt change in building scale and height and would reduce visibility of open sky, having an adverse impact to the townscape view. However, it would introduce an architecture of high-quality and add interest to the skyline due to the varied building heights, materiality and articulated elevation treatment. Further, the proposed building heights descend away from the listed buildings along Market Place, appearing as a continuation of the streetscape. The prominence of the new buildings is therefore reduced, adding a secondary layer of architectural interest to the background. This would be reaffirmed by the architectural characteristics and materiality of the new buildings and the vertical emphasis of their façade treatment which expresses a slenderer building profile.

7.29 The magnitude of change would be **Medium,** and the type of effect would be **Neutral** with added interest to the background of this view through the introduction of high-quality architecture which remains a secondary feature in this view experienced within the conservation area.

Figure 7.6: Representative Viewpoint 3 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 4 – View from St Marys Butts / Hosier Street, looking east

Existing Baseline Situation

7.30 This viewpoint is located at the junction between St Marys Butts and Hosier Street, opposite the Church of St Mary the Virgin (listed Grade I), approximately 350m to the north west of the Site. The viewpoint is situated within the St Marys Butts Conservation Area, near to a concentration of Grade II listed buildings. The view is experienced by pedestrians and motorists on Marys Butts and Hosier Street.

7.31 The foreground of the view comprises the road junction between St Mary's Butts and Hosier Street with moving vehicles which emphasises the kinetic nature of this view and its urban context. The town cemetery is visible in the middle ground of the view. The tall monument to the south edge of the cemetery stands as a focal point within the view with mature trees beyond. The tower and south aisle of the Church of St Mary the Virgin is experienced to the left of the view. To the right-hand side, the view is contained by three-four storey terraced buildings, constructed of red brick and articulated by horizontal masonry banding. The Site is not experienced in the view.

Sensitivity

7.32 The view is not identified or protected in planning policy, however, it does capture a view from St Marys Butts Conservation Area and views from the Grade I listed church and a number of buildings listed Grade II. It is therefore of **Medium/High Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of moderate importance to users of St Marys Butts and road users and pedestrians on Hosier Street. The visual receptor has a **Medium Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium/High Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.7: Representative Viewpoint 4 – Existing

Effect on View

7.33 There would very limited visibility of the Proposed Development in this view owing to interposing buildings and mature trees to the south of the Church of St Marys Butts, even in winter views. It is possible that the new buildings would be experienced in the background of the view, however, this would be interspersed amongst the dense tree foliage with new buildings remaining below the existing skyline.

7.34 The Church of St Marys Butts would remain a prominent feature of this view, and the appreciation for the character and appearance of St Marys Butts Conservation Area would be sustained.

7.35 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Negligible** with no overall harm or improvement to the view.

Figure 7.8: Representative Viewpoint 4 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 5 – View from Coley Place (footbridge over IDR) looking north east

Existing Baseline Situation

7.36 This viewpoint is located on Coley Place Footbridge over The Inner Distribution Road, approximately 600m to the west of the Site. The view is experienced by pedestrians and cyclists using Coley Place footbridge.

7.37 The view is open in character and extends along Coley Place Footbridge and beyond. The IDR is visible in the foreground, to the left of the view, as it passes underneath the footbridge which dominates the right-hand side of the view. Three storey buildings are experienced to the right-hand side of the view, mostly accommodating residential use. Mature trees to the eastern end of the bridge obscure visibility beyond.

7.38 Taller buildings located within Reading town centre are experienced in the background of this view. These include residential buildings on Mallard Row, Riverside House on Fobney Street, the Oracle and the Blade. The spire of St Giles Church is visible to the right-hand side.

7.39 The Site is partially visible in the background, though predominantly screened by interposing built form.

Sensitivity

7.40 The view is identified as Key View 27 within Reading Tall Building Strategy report (2008) so is of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to users of Coley Place footbridge. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.9: Representative Viewpoint 5 – Existing

Effect on View

7.41 The Proposed Development would be experienced in the background of this view, rising above the existing skyline.

7.42 The Proposed Development would add interest to the view and establish wayfinding to Reading town centre and The Oracle shopping centre. This would be achieved through the proposed massing and varied building heights (rising 2-19 storeys), reaffirmed by the high-quality architectural characteristics of the new buildings and composition of windows, balconies, and use of materiality which reinforces a vertical emphasise and a slender appearance.

7.43 The distinction between the two parcels of land either side of the River Kennett is appreciated in this view, specifically the separation of buildings and 'sky gap' which helps break up the massing in this view and reduces the potentially perceived prominence of new buildings when experienced cumulatively.

7.44 The spire of St Giles Church would remain a landmark feature to the right-hand side of this view.

7.45 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Beneficial** through establishing wayfinding with a new layer of high-quality architecture in the background of the view.

Figure 7.10: Representative Viewpoint 5 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 6 – View from Bridge Street bridge, looking north east

Existing Baseline Situation

7.46 This viewpoint is located on Bridge Street bridge, approximately 200m to the west of the Site. The view is experienced by pedestrians and motorists on Bridge Street bridge and, to some degree, users of River Kennett, although at a lower level.

7.47 The foreground of the view comprises the bridge, the pavement, and the bollards/balustrade that align it. The middle ground of the view extends along River Kennett and is framed by commercial buildings on each side of the river which accommodate restaurants and retail units at ground floor. The shopping unit House of Fraser, which is part of the Oracle centre, is visible to the left of the view and rises the equivalent of 10 storeys. The coned roof of the entrance building to the Oracle on the south bank of the river stands in the centre of the view in the background. The white antenna of the Vue Cinema is visible to the right-hand side beyond, as well as an office building rising 14 storeys to the left-hand side.

Sensitivity

7.48 The view is not identified or protected in planning policy so is of **Ordinary Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to road users and pedestrians on Bridge Street bridge. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Low Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.11: Representative Viewpoint 6 – Existing

Effect on View

7.49 The Proposed Development would be experienced in the background of this view. It would be experienced in the context of large-scale buildings within Reading town centre. The new buildings would continue to frame the River Kennett and would establish wayfinding towards The Oracle development. Added interest to this view would be achieved through the proposed massing and varied building heights (rising 2-19 storeys) as well as the high-quality articulated elevations of the new buildings. The vertical emphasis would be appreciated in this view, presenting a focal point beyond the less articulated, lower quality buildings in the foreground.

7.50 The magnitude of change would be **Medium,** and the type of effect would be **Beneficial** with high-quality architecture experienced in the background of the view.

Figure 7.12: Representative Viewpoint 6 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 7 – View from Southampton Street / IDR, looking north east

Existing Baseline Situation

This viewpoint is located on the ring road to the north of Southampton Street, facing the IDR bridge, approximately 250m to the south west of the Site. The viewpoint is situated within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. The view would be experienced by pedestrians and motorists travelling on Southampton Street.

7.51 The foreground of the view comprises the three-laned vehicular road and the roundabout which is visible to the left-hand side. The view extends along Southampton Street and is framed by the IDR bridge to the left-hand side and the Premier Inn Hotel to the right-hand side which rises 7 storeys. Traffic lights are also experienced in the middle distance of the view, serving as reminders of the urban context.

7.52 The upper storeys of the southern extent of the Site are partially experienced in the background of the view. The white roof and the southern extent of the site are visible in the background of the view looking north east though partially screened by the IDR bridge.

Sensitivity

7.53 The view is not identified or protected in planning policy so is of **Ordinary Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to road users and pedestrians on Victoria Street. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Low Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.13: Representative Viewpoint 7 – Existing

Effect on View

7.54 The upper storeys of the Proposed Development would be partially experienced in the background of this view, rising above the IDR bridge. The stepped-up massing of the new buildings would be visible, echoing characteristics of the Premier Inn to the right-hand side. The ring road and the IDR bridge would remain as prominent features with the new development establishing wayfinding to The Oracle and the town centre in the distance.

7.55 The magnitude of change would be Low, and the type of effect would be Neutral with no overall harm or improvement to the view.

Figure 7.14: Representative Viewpoint 7 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 8 – View from Church Street / St Giles Close, looking north

Existing Baseline Situation

7.56 This viewpoint is located on St Giles Close, at the junction with Church Street, approximately 300m to the south of the Site. The viewpoint is situated within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. The view is experienced by local residents, pedestrians and motorists on Church Street and St Giles Close.

7.57 The foreground of the view comprises St Giles Close. It is aligned with pavements and dropped curbs which provide access to carparking and gateways to private housing. The view extends along St Giles Close and is well contained by domestic scale residential properties in the middle ground which rise two storeys. Three storey residential buildings are experienced in the background of the view.

7.58 The Site is predominantly screened by intervening built form although glimpses of the roof are visible in the background.

Sensitivity

7.59 The view is not identified or protected in planning policy, however, it does capture views across Market Place/London Street Conservation Area so is of **Low/Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to road users and pedestrians on Church Street/St Giles Close. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Low Sensitivity**.

Effect on View

7.60 The upper storeys of the Proposed Development would be partially experienced in the background of this view, specifically the 19-storey element of the northern extent of the Site. The new buildings would be largely obscured from view by the two-three storey buildings in the middle ground, as well neighbouring buildings within The Oracle complex in the background.

7.61 Where visible, the new buildings would introduce high-quality architecture in the background of the view and would establish wayfinding towards Reading town centre.

7.62 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Neutral** with no overall harm or improvement to the view.

Figure 7.15: Representative Viewpoint 8 – Existing

Figure 7.16: Representative Viewpoint 8 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 9 – View from London Street / South Street looking north

Existing Baseline Situation

7.63 This viewpoint is located on London Street at the junction with South Street, approximately 230m to the south of the Site. The viewpoint is situated within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. The view is experienced by local residents, pedestrians and motorists on London Street and South Street.

7.64 The foreground of the view extends along London Street, where it is possible to see the descending topography of the area. The middle ground of the view is well contained by built form which is of a domestic scale, accommodating both residential and commercial uses. The buildings predominantly rise two-three storeys and have stucco and red brick external finishes. The street is aligned with pavements on each side. Parked cars are also visible.

7.65 The curved roof of the southern portion of the Site is visible in the background of the view. The low levels of the building are largely screened by trees along the London Street and interposing buildings.

Sensitivity

7.66 The view is not identified or protected in planning policy, however, does capture a view within Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and views from the setting of a number of listed buildings so is of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of moderate importance to road users and pedestrians on London Street/South Street. The visual receptor has a **Medium Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.17: Representative Viewpoint 9 – Existing

Effect on View

7.67 The Proposed Development would be experienced in the background of the view, rising above the two-four storey buildings along London Street. The stepped-up massing of the southern block rising between 9 and 16 storeys is experienced from this vantage point, with the lower block acting as a transition between the low-rise buildings within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and the tall buildings to the centre of The Oracle. Similarly, the variation of building heights of the northern block is also experienced in this view where the crown of the building is visible, although partially obscured from view by the trees that align London Street.

7.68 Where experienced, the new buildings would introduce an abrupt change in building scale and height and would reduce visibility of open sky, having an adverse impact to the townscape view. However, the scheme would introduce a high-quality landmark feature in the background of this view. Although introducing buildings of greater height and density, the vertically articulated elevations will enable the buildings to add interest to this townscape view and reaffirm wayfinding to Reading town centre and The Oracle. This is reinforced by the varied materiality which echoes that found within the conservation area, as well window proportions which echo the character of the former industrial use of the Site and surrounding area.

7.69 The magnitude of change would be **Medium,** and the type of effect would be **Neutral** with the introduction of high-quality architecture in this view despite the increase of massing which contrasts with the two-four storey buildings aligning London Street within Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

Figure 7.18: Representative Viewpoint 9 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 10 – View from London Street / London Road looking north

Existing Baseline Situation

7.70 This viewpoint is located on London Street at the junction with London Road, approximately 400m to the south of the Site. The viewpoint is situated within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. The view would be experienced by local residents, pedestrians and motorists on London Street and London Road.

7.71 The view extends along London Street. The foreground of the view comprises the vehicular junction with pedestrian islands, bollards and street furniture. The middle ground of the view is contained by built form which is of a domestic scale, accommodating residential and commercial uses. The buildings experienced in this view date to the late twentieth century and have a mix of stucco and red brick finishes, typically rising three-four storeys. The street is bordered with pavements on each side. Thames Tower is experienced in the background of this view, rising 14 storeys. The Site is visible in the background of the view, although largely screened by trees along the street and interposing buildings.

Sensitivity

7.72 The view is not identified or protected in planning policy, however, does capture a view within Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and views from the setting of a number of listed buildings so is of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of moderate importance to road users and pedestrians on London Street/London Road. The visual receptor has a **Medium Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.19: Representative Viewpoint 10 – Existing

Effect on View

7.73 The upper storeys of the taller elements of the Proposed Development would be partially experienced in the background of the view, rising above the two-four storey buildings along London Street.

7.74 Where experienced, the new buildings would introduce an abrupt change in building scale and height in the distance and would reduce visibility of open sky, having an adverse impact to the townscape view. However, the scheme would introduce a high-quality landmark feature in the background and would reaffirm wayfinding to Reading town centre and The Oracle. It would remain a secondary feature given the distance between the Site and the viewpoint location and would add interest, achieved by the articulated elevations, varied materiality and crowning of the taller elements.

7.75 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Neutral** with no overall harm or improvement to the view.

Figure 7.20: Representative Viewpoint 10 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 11 – View from the IDR (Queens Road) / Sidmouth Street looking west

Existing Baseline Situation

7.76 This viewpoint is located on Queens Road, at the junction with Sidmouth Street, approximately 350m to the east of the Site. The view would be experienced by local residents, pedestrians and motorists on the IDR, Queens Road and Sidmouth Street.

7.77 The foreground of the view comprises Queens Road and the central reservation with planting and metal barrier, and an elevated road sign to the left-hand side. The street is bordered with pavements on each side. The middle ground of the view extends along Sidmouth Street, contained by built form on each side of the street which comprises residential properties with stucco and red brick finishes. To the left of the street these comprises Queens Crescent, a grade II listed 1830s terraced row rising three-storeys with a uniform facade. Residential properties rising four storeys are experienced to the right of the view and in the background.

7.78 The upper storeys of the Site are visible in the background of the view, although partially screened by trees and interposing buildings.

Sensitivity

7.79 The view is not identified or protected in planning policy although does capture a view from the setting of Queens Crescent (listed Grade II) and views across Market Place/London Street Conservation Area so is of **Low/Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to road users and pedestrians on the IDR (Queens Road)/Sidmouth street. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Low/Medium Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.21: Representative Viewpoint 11 – Existing

Effect on View

7.80 There would be limited visibility of the Proposed Development in this view owing to interposing buildings. Visibility would be restricted to the upper storeys of the taller elements of the scheme, and the upper storeys of the 7 storey buildings with the gable ended roofscape to the east.

7.81 The Proposed Development will appear as a subservient feature in the background of this view although would positively establish wayfinding towards Reading town centre and The Oracle. The variation in building height, as well as the roof profile of the 7 storey buildings to the east will add interest, reinforced by the high-quality architecture and the slender appearance of the buildings through vertical emphasis on the elevation treatment. The new buildings will be experienced within an urban context, including modern development and Queens Crescent to the left-hand side which remain a prominent feature in the view.

7.82 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Neutral** with no overall harm and limited improvement to the view.

Figure 7.22: Representative Viewpoint 11 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 12 – View from Whitley Street / Mount Pleasant looking north

Existing Baseline Situation

7.83 This viewpoint is located on Whitley Street between the junction with Southampton Street and the junction with Highgrove Street, approximately 850m to the south of the Site. The viewpoint is situated near to the Significant View with Heritage Interest 2 and Key View 5, as identified in Reading Tall Buildings Strategy (2008) document[53]. The view would be experienced by local residents, pedestrians and motorists travelling along Whitley Street and the Mount Pleasant area.

7.84 The foreground of the view comprises Whitley Street which is aligned with pavements either side. The descending topography to the north is experienced from this vantage point. The middle ground of the view is framed by built form, rising one-two storeys with stucco and red brick finishes. The Pheasant public house and associated car park is visible to the left-hand side of the view, bounded by a red brick wall. Sporadically planted trees along Whitley Street partially filter views of built form beyond, although still partially visible in the background as the topography rising in the far distance.

7.85 The Site is predominantly screened by interposing built form in the background of the view.

Sensitivity

7.86 The view is associated with Significant View with Heritage Interest 2 and also Key View 5 in Reading Local Plan 2019 and Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008 so is of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to road users and pedestrians on Whitley Street/Mount Pleasant. The visual receptor has a **Medium Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.23: Representative Viewpoint 12 – Existing

Effect on View

7.87 The Proposed Development would be largely obscured from view due to interposing buildings, changing topography which descends to the north, as well as an evergreen mature tree to the centre of the view. Visibility is limited to the upper storeys and west elevation of the 19-storey block, and a small portion of the building within the western extent of the Site.

7.88 Where visible, the building would appear as a subservient feature in the background of the view and would be experienced within an urban townscape context, including taller buildings in the background. The Proposed Development would remain below the existing treeline and considerably lower than the buildings in the foreground of this view.

7.89 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Neutral** with no overall harm or improvement to the view.

Figure 7.24: Representative Viewpoint 12 – Proposed

[53] Reading Borough Council, *Reading Tall Building Strategy,* 2008

Representative Viewpoint 13 – View from Castle Hill / Tilehurst Road / Coley Avenue looking east

Existing Baseline Situation

7.90 This viewpoint is located on Castle Hill, at the junction with Tilehurst Road, approximately 950m to the west of the Site. The viewpoint is situated near Key View 23 of Reading Tall Buildings Strategy (2008) document and is located within Russell Street / Castle Hill Conservation Area. The view is experienced by local residents, pedestrians and motorists on Castle Hill and Tilehurst Road.

7.91 The view extends along Castle Hill, where it is possible to see the descending topography of the street. The foreground of the view comprises a wide road junction, containing several lanes of traffic. Traffic lights and street lighting are experienced in the middle ground of the view. The view is contained by built form and mature vegetation either side. To the left-hand side, built form comprises residential properties rising 4 storeys, constructed of red brick and white stucco. Properties of similar scale and material are also visible to the right-hand side and in the background of the view although largely obscured by street furniture and tree planting. Metal railings separate the pavement from the vehicular road. Mature trees along Castle Hill screen views of built form to the right-hand side of the view. Glimpsed views of taller buildings are experienced in the background including the residential building Verto, 120 King's Road, which rises 18 storeys.

7.92 The western extent of the Oracle shopping centre is partially visible in the background of the view though screened by adjoining built form.

Figure 7.25: Representative Viewpoint 13 – Existing

Sensitivity

7.93 The view is identified as Key View 23 in Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008 and also captures a view from within Russell Street / Castle Hill Conservation Area so is of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to road users and pedestrians on Castle Hill/Tilehurst Street/Coley Avenue. The visual receptor has a **Low/Medium Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium Sensitivity**.

Effect on View

7.94 Visibility of the Proposed Development would be limited to the western extent of the Site and some visibility of the new buildings within the eastern portion, specifically the upper storeys due to changing topography which descends to the north, and interposing buildings and evergreen mature tree planting. Where experienced, the stepped up massing and slender profile of the buildings would be appreciated, reaffirmed by the articulated elevations and varied materiality. The development would be experienced amongst buildings of a similar scale in the background of this view and would reaffirm wayfinding towards Reading town centre in the distance.

7.95 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Neutral** with no overall harm and some enhancement to the view.

Figure 7.26: Representative Viewpoint 13 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 14 – View from A4 West of Reading, looking west

Existing Baseline Situation

7.96 This viewpoint is located on London Road, on the south side of the A4 near the junction with Hilltop Road, approximately 3km to the east of the Site. The view is experienced by motorists on the A4 and London Road and pedestrians in the area.

7.97 The foreground of the view is dominated by the London Road and the A4 which are separated by metal railings. The A4 comprises a wide road containing several lanes of traffic with traffic lights and street lighting which accommodate a pedestrian crossing in the middle ground. The road is bordered by built form to the right-hand side which rises two storeys and accommodate residential properties separated from the road by boundary walls. Mature planting is experienced in the middle ground of the view to the left-hand side, extending in the background of the view. The wider townscape of central Reading is visible in the background of the view although difficult to discern the buildings due to distance.

7.98 The Site is experienced in the view.

Sensitivity

7.99 The view is identified as Key View 17 in Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008 so is of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to road users and pedestrians on the A4. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Low/Medium Sensitivity**.

Effect on View

7.100 The Proposed Development would be experienced in the background of this view and would appear as a small element of the existing urban skyline of Reading town centre and in the context of buildings of a similar scale and architectural character. Visibility would be limited to the upper storeys of the scheme. The new buildings would add variation to the skyline of Reading and would add interest, achieved by the stepped building heights and vertical emphasis of elevation treatment, although experienced from a distance.

7.101 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Beneficial** with added interest introduced to this distanced view towards Reading town centre.

Figure 7.27: Representative Viewpoint 14 – Existing

Figure 7.28: Representative Viewpoint 14 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 15 – Viewpoint 11 of TBS - Henley Road 4155 north east of Play Hatch

Existing Baseline Situation

7.102 Viewpoint 15 is located from Henley Road, approximately is 4.3km to the north east of the Site. The view is experienced by motorists travelling along the road and pedestrians in the area. It captures viewpoint representative of Viewpoint 11 of the Reading Tall Building Strategy.

7.103 The foreground and middle ground of the view is dominated by the gently undulating large arable fields, and the hedge to the left-hand side which marks the boundary between the field and Henley Road. The fields are interspersed with overhead power lines and electricity pylons. The skyline is occasionally wooded, but the woodland does not significantly contain view which are long ranging. Low-rise residential development is experienced in the far distance of this view with taller buildings visible in the background of the view.

7.104 The Site is not experienced in the view in its current form.

Sensitivity

7.105 The view is identified as Key View 11 in Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008 so is of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low importance to road users and pedestrians on Victoria Street. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Low Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.29: Representative Viewpoint 15 – Existing

Effect on View

7.106 The Proposed Development would not be experienced in this view.

7.107 There would be no change to this view and therefore no effect would arise.

Figure 7.30: Representative Viewpoint 15 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 16 – Mapledurham Estate/AONB (Viewpoint 8 of Reading Tall Building Strategy)

Existing Baseline Situation

7.108 Representative Viewpoint 16 is located approximately 5.7km to the north west of the Site. It is experienced by visitors of the Mapledurham Estate and local walkers.

7.109 The foreground and middle ground of the view is dominated by pastoral landscape interspersed with parkland trees and woodland clumps. There is distance visibility of low-rise development in the background of this view although the view is very much rural in character.

7.110 The Site is not experienced in the view in its current form.

Sensitivity

7.111 The view is identified as Key View 8 in Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008 so is of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low/moderate importance to visitors of the Mapledurham Estate. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.31: Representative Viewpoint 16 – Existing

Effect on View

7.112 The Proposed Development would not be experienced in this view.

7.113 There would be no change to this view and therefore no effect would arise.

Figure 7.32: Representative Viewpoint 16 – Proposed

Representative Viewpoint 17 – Mapledurham Estate/AONB (Viewpoint 9 of TBS)

Existing Baseline Situation

7.114 Viewpoint 9 (From footpath east of Maple Durham) is 3.7km to the north west of the Site. It is experienced by visitors of the Mapledurham Estate and local walkers.

7.115 Although this view is included within the Tall Building Strategy (Viewpoint 9), the character of this view has substantially changed since the Strategy was published in 2008. Today, the footpath is aligned with dense tree planting and visibility towards Reading town centre is therefore restricted. The foreground is dominated by trees and shrubbery which restricts visibility of the pastoral landscape beyond.

7.116 The Site is not experienced in the view in its current form.

7.117 Photography for this view has not been included due to the restricted visibility.

Sensitivity

7.118 The view is identified as Key View 9 in Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008 so is of **Medium Value,** although this view has substantially altered since the Tall Building Strategy was published due to tree planting and overgrowth. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low/moderate importance to pedestrians visiting the Mapledurham Estate. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium Sensitivity**.

Effect on View

7.119 The Proposed Development would not be experienced in this view.

7.120 There would be no change to this view and therefore no effect would arise.

Representative Viewpoint 18 – Balmore Park, Caversham, looking south

Existing Baseline Situation

7.121 This viewpoint is located within Balmore Park, approximately 2km to the north of the Site. The view is experienced by recreational users of Balmore Park and local residents in the area.

7.122 The open character of the view and the descending topography of the park visible in the foreground allows for wide views towards Reading town centre. In the middle ground, the mature tree belts which define the park boundaries largely screen adjoining built form in the view. The wider townscape beyond is visible in the background of the view. Distinctive features in the view are three tall buildings; the Thames Tower, Western Tower and Fountains House, which are prominent features in the background of the view.

7.123 The Site is currently not experienced in the view.

Sensitivity

7.124 The view is identified as Key View 14 in Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008 and captures the skyline of Reading so is of **Medium Value**. The experience of views and visual amenity is likely to be of low/moderate importance to users of Balmore Park. The visual receptor has a **Low Susceptibility to Change** and a **Medium Sensitivity**.

Figure 7.33: Representative Viewpoint 18 – Existing

Effect on View

7.125 There would be very limited visibility of the Proposed Development in this view due to changing topography which descends to the south, and interposing buildings and mature evergreen tree planting. Visibility would be limited to the upper storeys of the tallest element of the proposal (rising 19 storeys) which would be experienced amongst an urban context, including taller buildings (Thames Tower) and the emerging context in the distance. The new built form would be a subservient feature in the background of this view, reinforced by the distance between the Site and the viewpoint location (2km).

7.126 The magnitude of change would be **Low,** and the type of effect would be **Neutral** with no overall harm or improvement to the view.

Figure 7.34: Representative Viewpoint 18 – Proposed

8. Summary

Introduction

8.1 This HTVIA report has been founded on a thorough study of the Site and its built heritage, townscape and visual context, and through understanding and appreciating these features and resources, a robust impact appraisal of the proposed development on Site has been undertaken.

8.2 In accordance with relevant legislation, national and local planning policies and guidance, the proposed development is of high quality architectural / landscape design and would respond appropriately to the townscape characteristics and its wider context, including the historic environment, as part of good place-making.

Built Heritage Assessment

8.3 In summary, the relevant built heritage asset considerations in the determination of this application for the proposed development include both direct and indirect impacts on the understanding and or appreciation of the significance of a number of designated heritage assets within the surrounding area of the Site, through change to the existing character and appearance of a part of a conservation area and also part of the shared setting and views for this and other heritage assets.

8.4 Firstly, a proportionate description of the baseline conditions in relation to each of the identified and potentially affected built heritage assets has been undertaken within this document (**Section 3**). The approach to the process of scoping the heritage assets for analysis is also confirmed in this earlier section, which has also been shared with the local planning authority as part of pre-application discussions. Our founding baseline analysis provides a description of the heritage significance and interests of relevant each heritage asset, and also any contribution made by setting (including the Site itself) to that significance. This work has been undertaken in accordance with best practice guidance and advice as established by DCMS and Historic England, and meets the requirements of paragraphs 194-195 of the NPPF 2021.

8.5 We have then assessed and described the likely impacts of the proposed development on Site on the significance (and setting) of each of the identified heritage assets in **Section 6** of the document; as informed by review of the full application material submitted for this scheme. We have followed relevant best practice advice regarding decision-taking for development within the historic environment[54] and also in relation to assessing the impact of change on the setting and views of heritage assets[55]. An assessment of the impacts of the proposed development as a whole on the significance of heritage assets has also been undertaken, in light of the relevant statutory duties, national and local policy and guidance for development within the historic environment.

8.6 The wider vision and approach for the new mix of uses and overall layout, scale and massing of new built form and spaces for the reanimation of this Site have through the design process sought where possible to minimise and or mitigate harm to the significance and setting of heritage assets, in balance with optimising the development potential of this key site at the southern gateway to the town centre, historic river crossing and waterside, and also as part of the larger The Oracle scheme. The contemporary architectural and landscape design has also looked to respond positively to the history and heritage of the Site and local area, in order to create a place with identity that also that reflects local character and distinctiveness.

8.7 Our assessment has identified that aspects of the proposed development would likely cause a degree of harm to the significance of a number of designated heritage assets, comprising the nearby listed building Nos.2-4 London Street, the listed group Nos.33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 London Street, Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place, the Church of St Mary, and the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. Such adverse impacts would principally be as a result of the visually distracting effects of an increase in the overall height, scale and massing of new built form on Site within the setting of, and also some shared views to and from, these heritage assets. Such harm to heritage significance we have assessed to fall within the category of "less than substantial" for the purposes of the NPPF (paragraph 202), and towards the lower end of scale within that category, in each case.

8.8 The NPPF sets out that it is for the decision maker to determine whether any adverse impacts of granting planning permission would demonstrably outweigh the "public benefits" of an application scheme. In response, it is one of the key conclusions of the application Planning Statement that any potential less than substantial harm to the significance of the conservation area and also a number of listed buildings would be outweighed by the public benefits that the proposed development could deliver, in the terms of the NPPF when read as a whole, and also in light of the relevant and overarching statutory duties of the 1990 Act. This provides the clear and convincing justification required for a scheme that would result in a minor degree of harm to heritage significance (NPPF paragraph 200).

8.9 Conversely, the identification and delivery of "heritage benefits" (which are also defined as public benefits for the purposes of the NPPF) allied to this scheme must also be recognised as part of the determination of this application and the overall planning balance. In summary, our assessment has identified the following beneficial heritage impacts as:

- Introducing a new and richer mix of uses on Site that would complement and contribute to those existing locally, as well as the introduction of more active and interesting street frontages and quality architectural design, and public realm improvements. All which would enhance the character and appearance of this part of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and also the setting of the nearby listed building Nos.2-4 London Street; and

- Creating new private amenity spaces at roof terrace level on Site that would create opportunities for new views outward to experience the wider townscape surroundings, including the appreciation of views looking across the historic townscape of the nearby conservation areas, along the river and canal, and landmarks such as the listed Parish churches and Town Hall.

8.10 As part of our assessment we have also identified that the significance (and setting) of the number other designated heritage assets, which have been scoped in as relevant to the proposed development for the Site, would likely either be sustained or otherwise unaffected by the envisioned change brought about by this scheme. This would accord with paragraph 199 in relation to these particular heritage assets.

[54] Historic England: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment (Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 2) 2015

[55] Historic England: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 3) (2nd Edition) 2017

8.11 Due consideration has also been given as part of this assessment of built heritage impacts to the local Development Plan, and other supplementary planning documents / guidance, as relevant to this scheme. Including the Local Plan 2019 and Conservation Area Appraisals.

Townscape and Visual Assessment

8.12 A townscape and visual assessment have been undertaken based on site survey and analysis. The assessment included:

- A review of relevant planning policy and guidance;
- Identification of the baseline quality and characteristics of the local townscape character and local views and identification of key visual receptors and representative viewpoints; and,
- Assessment of the impact of the proposed development on townscape character and key views.

8.13 The TVIA has identified that the Site is largely located within 'The Oracle' Townscape Character Area which is not designated and overall is of Low/Ordinary townscape value. However, the eastern extent of the Site is located within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

8.14 EN6 of Reading Local Plan 'New Development in a historic context' states that 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.

8.15 The baseline assessment confirmed that the existing Site buildings and layout do not relate to the historic condition or positively contribute to the townscape character of this part of the town centre and its waterside. Further, the existing buildings within the Site do not contribute to the significance of nearby heritage assets. Through the demolition of the eastern extent of The Oracle shopping centre and the Vue cinema building, the Proposed Development presents the opportunity to enhance the Site's contribution to the townscape and visual amenity and reenvisage the Site to better relate to its surrounding context and introduce a comprehensive scheme. This includes a scheme which enhances its contribution to the setting of nearby heritage assets and contribution to the London Street/Market Place Conservation Area.

8.16 Key visual receptors in the area with potential to be affected by the Proposed Development have also been identified. These include road users on main routes, such as London Street, Southampton Street and Whitley Street running north-south, and Queens Road (including the IDR) running east-west, also including key crossings of the River Kennet; users of River Kennet / Kennet and Avon Canal and other associated waterways / towpaths / bridge; and open space users such as Market Place and St Mary's Churchyard, and the Mapledurham Estate. The visual receptors ranged from having a Low to High sensitivity. The baseline assessment also identified 18 no. key representative views. The Site appears in the background of some views identified within Reading Tall Building Strategy as well as local views where the Proposed Development has the potential to be experienced alongside designated heritage assets within their townscape setting. The effects to these views have been assessed in the Visual Impact Assessment.

8.17 The Proposed Development comprises two buildings ranging from G+2-19 storeys. It has been concluded that the introduction of new, high quality residential buildings with ground floor commercial space across two principal blocks either side of the River Kennet would enhance the townscape character in this location and add interest to the city skyline in both short-range and long-range views. This would be reaffirmed by the variation of height within each block which includes stepped up massing south-north and east- west, with the tallest building located at the north-western extent of the Site. Added interest is further achieved by the varied use of material palette which is used to articulate the elevations and establish a vertical emphasis to the buildings and make them slenderer in appearance.

8.18 The introduction of a new active frontages on to new and improved public realm including a new pedestrian route through the Site, widened pavements with dedicated cycleways, and new street tree planting and landscaping will improve the vibrancy of the local area and help to integrate the Proposed Development in the surrounding townscape. The Proposed Development will also improve the permeability of the Site and establish wayfinding towards Reading town centre and the retail destination of The Oracle.

8.19 Overall, the assessment of effects on the six assessed townscape character areas were identified as:

- **Beneficial effect of High magnitude –** TCA1 The Oracle
- **Neutral effect of Medium magnitude –** TCA 6 St Lawrence and Market Place, TCA 20 London Street; and,
- **Neutral effect of Negligible magnitude –** TCA 17 St Mary's and Castle Street, TCA 21 Forbury South, and TCA 26 King's Road

8.20 The assessment of visual effects identified that there would be changes to local views arising from the Proposed Development. The quality of local streetscape views in close proximity to the Site is likely to improve as views of the existing building, which are of low quality and make a poor contribution to the townscape character, would be replaced with views of a new building of high-quality design and construction with improved active frontage. The Proposed Development would provide added visual interest to views along the River Kennett, Market Place, Coley Place, Church Street, and London Street. In views from further afield the taller element of the Proposed Development would be visible on the skyline in the background of views. The variation of building heights and vertical emphasis of elevation treatment would contribute positively to the appearance of the skyline and establish wayfinding to Reading town centre and The Oracle, experienced amongst a varied urban townscape context.

8.21 Overall, the Proposed Development would lead to the following residual, permanent type of effect and magnitude of change on the assessed visual receptors:

- **Neutral and Beneficial effects, varying from Medium to Low magnitude -** Road users on main routes, such as London Street, Southampton Street and Whitley Street running north-south, and Queens Road (including the IDR) running east-west, also including key crossings of the River Kennet; users of other local or secondary roads, streets and spaces within the town centre area, including the pedestrianised riverside area of The Oracle development; and users of public open spaces, such as Market Place and St Mary's Churchyard, and the Mapledurham Estate.
- **Beneficial effects of Low to Medium magnitude -** Users of River Kennet / Kennet and Avon Canal and other associated waterways / towpaths / bridges; and existing local residents within established housing areas to the south of the Site (beyond the IDR).

8.22 In summary, the Proposed Development would continue to contribute to the wider revitalisation of Reading town centre and present enhancements to the public realm and quality of built form. The effects on townscape and visual receptors would be beneficial or neutral and would comply with planning policy objectives identified in the Local Plan. Overall these effects, within the context of the existing baseline conditions for the Site and our study area, would not be considered to be 'significant' for the purposes of EIA.

Appendix 1: Legislation, Planning Policy and Guidance

Statutory Duties

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a general duty as respects listed buildings in the exercise of planning functions. Subsection (1) provides that:

> *"In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses."*

It has been confirmed[56] that Parliament's intention in enacting section 66(1) of the 1990 Act was that decision-makers should give 'considerable importance and weight' to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings, where 'preserve' means to 'to do no harm'. This duty must be borne in mind when considering any harm that may accrue and the balancing of such harm against public benefits as required by national planning policy. It has been confirmed that this weight can also be applied to the statutory tests in respect of conservation areas.[57] The Secretary of State has confirmed[58] that 'considerable importance and weight' is not synonymous with 'overriding importance and weight'.

It is also a statutory duty for the decision maker when determining applications for planning permission within conservation areas that (Section 72):

> *"In the exercise, with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, of any powers under any of the provisions mentioned in subsection (2), special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area."*

Importantly, it has been confirmed that this weight can also be applied to the statutory tests in respect of conservation areas.[59] The Secretary of State has confirmed[60] that 'considerable importance and weight' is not synonymous with 'overriding importance and weight'. It has been demonstrated that section 72 requires attention to be directed to the effect on the conservation area as a whole rather than on particular parts of it.[61] The setting of a conservation area is not however protected by statute.

European Landscape Convention
The European Landscape Convention (ELC) provides a basis for closer co-operation on landscape issues across Europe and was signed and ratified in the UK. This recognition to landscape matters raises the profile and the ELC has been set out to improve approaches to the planning, management and protection of landscapes throughout Europe.

The ELC defines landscape as "*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*" and it includes townscape, as well as all forms of rural landscape.

Relevant national guidance include:

Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition, 2013 (Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment) (GLVIA3)

Townscape Character Assessment, 2017 (Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 05/2017)

Visual Representation of Development Proposals, 2019 (Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 06/19)

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021
The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was first introduced in March 2012 and has subsequently been republished as revised in December 2016 and 2018, February / June 2019 and July 2021. The new NPPF provides a full statement of the Government's planning policies.

Chapter 12 of the Framework outlines the Government's guidance regarding requiring good design.

Paragraph 124 establishes that for the Government the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this.

Paragraph 127 sets out that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

> *"a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
>
> *b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
>
> *c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
>
> *d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
>
> *e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
>
> *f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users46; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience."*

Paragraph 128 establishes that design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of

[56] Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Limited and (1) East Northamptonshire District Council (2) English Heritage (3) National Trust (4) The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Governments, Case No: C1/2013/0843, 18th February 2014.
[57] The Forge Field Society v Sevenoaks District Council [2014] EWHC 1895 (Admin); North Norfolk District Council v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government [2014] EWHC 279 (Admin).
[58] APP/H1705/A/13/2205929.
[59] The Forge Field Society v Sevenoaks District Council [2014] EWHC 1895 (Admin); North Norfolk District Council v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government [2014] EWHC 279 (Admin).
[60] APP/H1705/A/13/2205929.
[61] South Oxfordshire DC v SSE & J Donaldson [1991] CO/1440/89.

individual proposals.

Paragraph 130 states that permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development. Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, because of changes being made to the permitted scheme.

Paragraph 131 also sets out that in determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

Paragraph 170 of the NPPF goes on to say that the planning system should '*contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment*' by a number of things including:

> *a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes…(in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
>
> *b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside …*

Paragraph 171 states that '*Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.'*

Chapter 16 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment, sets out the Government's policies regarding planning and the historic environment.

Paragraph 194 requires the significance of the heritage assets, which may be affected by the proposals to be described as part of any submission, ideally as part of a Heritage Statement report. The level of detail should be proportionate to the importance of the assets and sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposals on their significance.

Paragraph 195 sets out that local planning authorities should also identify and assess the particular significance of heritage assets that may be affected by proposals. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of proposals in order to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

Paragraph 197 states that local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of all heritage assets and putting them into viable uses consistent with their conservation; the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Paragraph 199 further outlines that local planning authorities should give great weight to the asset's conservation when considering the impact on a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset. The more important the heritage asset, the greater the weight should be.

Annex 2 of the NPPF defined "conservation" as:

> *"The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance."*

Paragraph 200 specifies that any harm to, or loss of, significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.

Paragraph 201 outlines that local planning authorities should refuse consent where a proposal will lead to substantial harm or total loss of significance, unless it can be demonstrated that this is necessary to deliver substantial public benefits that outweigh such harm or loss, or a number of other tests can be satisfied.

Paragraph 202 concerns proposals which will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset. Here harm should be weighed against the public benefits, including securing the optimum viable use.

Paragraph 203 sets out that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Paragraph 206 states that proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of a heritage asset should be treated favourably. It outlines that local planning authorities should also look for opportunities for new development within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance.

The local Development Plan

The Development Plan for this local planning authority area comprises the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and other published SPD and SPG. These documents provide local guidance with regard to development affecting heritage assets, townscape character and visual amenity, and should accord with the statutory duties and the general principles outlined in the NPPF.

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

The new Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted on 4 November 2019. This document sets out local planning policies for development in Reading up to 2036, and are the main considerations in deciding planning applications. The Local Plan replaces previous development plans - the Core Strategy, Reading Central Area Action Plan and Sites and Detailed Policies Document - which no longer apply.

The relevant Local Plan policies for the development of the Site and built heritage, townscape and visual matters include:

- *Policies EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment),*
- *EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas),*
- *EN4 (Locally Important Heritage Assets),*

- *EN5 (Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest),*
- *EN6 (New Development in an Historic Context),*
- *CC7 (Design and the Public Realm),*
- *CR2 (Design in Central Reading), and*
- *CR10 (Tall Buildings).*

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was first issued by the Government in 2014 as a web based resource and living document. This is intended to provide more detailed guidance and information with regard to the implementation of national policy set out in the NPPF. The most recent updates date from 2019.

In paragraph 003 the design guidance category supports the need to evaluate and understand the defining characteristics of an area in order to identify appropriate design opportunities and policies. Paragraph 007 goes on to state that views into and out of larger sites should be carefully considered from the start of the design process.

With regard to development affecting heritage assets PPG reiterates that conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance is a core planning principle[62]. It states that conservation is an active process of maintenance and managing change that requires a flexible and thoughtful approach[63]. The NPPG notes that where changes are proposed to heritage assets, the Framework sets out a clear basis for decision-taking to ensure that heritage assets are conserved, and where appropriate enhanced, in a manner that is consistent with their significance and thereby achieving sustainable development[64].

Harm to significance may arise from works to the heritage asset or from development within its setting. A thorough assessment of the impact of changes within setting upon heritage significance should take into account, and be proportionate to, the significance of the heritage asset, together with the degree to which proposed changes enhance or detract from that significance and the ability to appreciate it.

NPPG sets out that whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision taker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the policy in the Framework. In general terms, substantial harm is a high test, so it may not arise in many cases[65]. In my view this would that be a harmful impact that would result in the significance of a heritage asset being either entirely removed or significantly reduced.

Accordingly, further guidance has been provided by the Courts in the Bedford case, with regard to assessing the degree of harm likely to be caused to a designated heritage asset (listed building in this case)[66]. It was interpreted that:

> *"What the inspector was saying was that for harm to be substantial, the impact on significance was required to be serious such that very much, if not all, of the significance was drained away.*
>
> *Plainly in the context of physical harm, this would apply in the case of demolition or destruction, being a case of total loss. It would also apply to a case of serious damage to the structure of the building. In the context of non-physical or indirect harm, the yardstick was effectively the same. One was looking for an impact which would have such a serious impact on the significance of the asset that its significance was either vitiated altogether or very much reduced."*

Public benefits are defined in PPG as anything that delivers economic, social or environmental progress as described in the Framework (paragraph 7)[67].NPPG confirms that public benefits should flow from the proposed development. They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and should not just be of private benefit. It is noted that benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be genuine public benefits. Public benefits may include heritage benefits[68], such as:

- *"Sustaining or enhancing the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting;*
- *Reducing or removing risks to a heritage asset; and*
- *Securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset in support of its long term conservation."*

In the design guidance[69] category this supports paragraph 130 of the NPPF which states that 'permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents'. It also refers to the accompanying National Design Guide, which sets out ten characteristics for a well-designed place:

- *"Context – enhances the surroundings.*
- *Identity – attractive and distinctive.*
- *Built form – a coherent pattern of development.*
- *Movement – accessible and easy to move around.*
- *Nature – enhanced and optimised.*
- *Public spaces – safe, social and inclusive.*
- *Uses – mixed and integrated.*
- *Homes and buildings – functional, healthy and sustainable.*
- *Resources – efficient and resilient.*
- *Lifespan – made to last."*

Other relevant national guidance include:

National Design Guide: Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places 2019

Department of Culture, Media and Sport Circular: Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings 2018
The Principles of Selection for listing buildings sets out the general criteria for assessing the special interest of a building in paragraph 16, as below:

[62] Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 18a-003-20140306
[63] Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 18a-003-20140306
[64] Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 18a-003-20140306
[65] Paragraph: 017 Reference ID: 18a-017-20140306
[66] [2013] EWHC 2847 (Admin)
[67] Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20140306
[68] Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20140306
[69] Paragraph 001 Reference ID: 26-001-20191001

"Architectural Interest. To be of special architectural interest a building must be of importance in its architectural design, decoration or craftsmanship; special interest may also apply to nationally important examples of particular building types and techniques (e.g. buildings displaying technological innovation or virtuosity) and significant plan forms;

Historic Interest. To be of special historic interest a building must illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural, or military history and/or have close historical associations with nationally important people. There should normally be some quality of interest in the physical fabric of the building itself to justify the statutory protection afforded by listing. When making a listing decision, paragraph 17 sets out that the Secretary of State may also take into account:

"Group value: The extent to which the exterior of the building contributes to the architectural or historic interest of any group of buildings of which it forms part, generally known as group value. The Secretary of State will take this into account particularly where buildings comprise an important architectural or historic unity or a fine example of planning (e.g. squares, terraces or model villages) or where there is a historical functional relationship between the buildings. Sometimes group value will be achieved through a co-location of diverse buildings of different types and dates.

Fixtures and features of a building and curtilage buildings: The desirability of preserving, on the grounds of its architectural or historic interest, any feature of the building consisting of a man-made object or structure fixed to the building or forming part of the land and comprised within the curtilage of the building.

The character or appearance of conservation areas: In accordance with the terms of section 72 of the 1990 Act, when making listing decisions in respect of a building in a conservation area, the Secretary of State will pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area."

General principles for selection are also set out in this advice, in paragraphs 18-23. These include: Age and rarity; Buildings less than 30 years old; Aesthetic merits; Selectivity; and National interest, although State of repair will not usually be a relevant consideration.

In addition to the criteria and general principles set out in the guidance, a number of Selection Guides for different building types have been published by Historic England, first in 2011 and then later updated. These Selection Guides provide further information regarding each building type, and demonstrate what features are considered significant and likely to make a building of special architectural or historic interest when assessing each building type.

In addition, comparable Selection Guides have also been published by Historic England since 2018 in relation to the designation of scheduled monuments and their different types.

Historic England: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision Taking in the Historic Environment 2015
GPA Note 2 provides information to assist in implementing historic environment policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the related guidance given in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). These include; assessing the significance of heritage assets, using appropriate expertise, historic environment records, recording and furthering understanding, neglect and unauthorised works, and marketing. It provides a suggested staged approach to decision-making where there may be a potential impact on the historic environment:

1. Understand the significance of the affected assets;
2. Understand the impact of the proposal on that significance;
3. Avoid, minimise and mitigate impact in a way that meets the objectives of the Framework;
4. Look for opportunities to better reveal or enhance significance;
5. Justify any harmful impacts in terms of the sustainable development objective of conserving significance and the need for change;
6. Offset negative impacts on aspects of significance by enhancing others through recording, disseminating and archiving archaeological and historical interest of the important elements of the heritage assets affected.

With particular regard to design and local distinctiveness, advice sets out that both the NPPF (section 7) and NPPG (section ID26) contain detail on why good design is important and how it can be achieved. In terms of the historic environment, some or all of the following factors may influence what will make the scale, height, massing, alignment, materials and proposed use of new development successful in its context:

- *"The history of the place.*
- *The relationship of the proposal to its specific site.*
- *The significance of nearby assets and the contribution of their setting, recognising that this is a dynamic concept.*
- *The general character and distinctiveness of the area in its widest sense, including the general character of local buildings, spaces, public realm and the landscape, the grain of the surroundings, which includes, for example the street pattern and plot size.*
- *The size and density of the proposal related to that of the existing and neighbouring uses.*
- *Landmarks and other built or landscape features which are key to a sense of place.*
- *The diversity or uniformity in style, construction, materials, colour, detailing, decoration and period of existing buildings and spaces.*
- *The topography.*
- *Views into, through and from the site and its surroundings.*
- *Landscape design.*
- *The current and historic uses in the area and the urban grain.*
- *The quality of the materials."*

Historic England: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets 2017 (2nd Edition)
GPA Note 3 provides information to assist in implementing historic environment policy with regard to the managing change within the setting of heritage assets, and also now views analysis. This also provides a toolkit for assessing the implications of development proposals affecting setting and views. A series of stages are recommended for assessment, these are:

- *"Step 1: identifying the heritage assets affected and their settings.*
- *Step 2: assessing whether, how and to what degree these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s).*
- *Step 3: assessing the effect of the proposed development.*
- *Step 4: maximising enhancement and minimising harm.*
- *Step 5: making and documenting the decision and monitoring outcomes."*

Historic England: Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management 2019 (2nd Edition)
This Historic England Advice Note supports the NPPF and NPPG and is intended to set out ways to manage change in a way that conserves and enhances historic areas through conservation area designation, appraisal and

management. It seeks to offer advice to all those involved in managing conservation areas so that the potential of historic areas worthy of protection is fully realised, the need for community and owner consultation examined, and the benefits of management plans to manage change, and achieve regeneration and enhancement, fully exploited. Advice on appraisal of conservation areas is also given, as assistance in demonstrating special interest and articulating character, guiding investment, and in developing a management plan.

Historic England: Advice Note 2: Making Changes to Heritage Assets 2016
This advice note provides general advice according to different categories of intervention in heritage assets, including repair, restoration, addition and alteration, as well as on works for research alone. This covers different types of heritage assets, including buildings and other structures; standing remains including earthworks; buried remains and marine sites; as well as larger heritage assets including conservation areas, registered landscapes, and World Heritage Sites.

Historic England: Advice Note 4: Tall Buildings 2022 (2nd Edition)
This Historic England Advice Note updates previous guidance by English Heritage and CABE produced in 2007. It seeks to guide people involved in planning for and designing tall buildings so that they may be delivered in a sustainable and successful way through the development plan and development management process. It states that the advice is for all relevant developers, designers, local authorities and other interested parties. Advice on making a planning application for a tall building, as well as assessing the impact of development proposals is set out.

Historic England: Advice Note 7: Local Heritage Listing 2021 (2nd Edition)
Historic England provides information on local heritage listing of heritage assets such as buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or parks, gardens and other designed landscapes, to assist community groups, owners, applicants, local authorities, planning and other consultants, and other interesting parties in implementing historic environment legislation, the policy in the NPPF and the related guidance in the PPG.

Historic England: Advice Note 12: Statements of Heritage Significance 2019
This Historic England Advice Note provides general advice with regard to preparing statements of heritage significance and also the analysing of significance for the full range of heritage assets. This is designed primarily for applicants proposing changes to heritage assets and accords with the Framework as revised.

English Heritage (now Historic England): Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance 2008
This guidance document sets out Historic England's approach to making decisions and offering guidance about all aspects of England's historic environment. The contribution of elements of a heritage asset or within its setting to its significance may be assessed in terms of its "heritage values":

> *"Evidential Value: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.*
>
> *Historical Value: the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.*
>
> *Aesthetic Value: the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.*
>
> *Communal Value: the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.' (Paras. 30-60)"*

A draft has been released for public consultation and subsequent revision of this document in 2018.

SPD / SPG / Evidence Base

RBC: Assessment of Significant Views with Heritage interest 2018

RBC: Historic Environment Background Paper 2018, to the then emerging Local Plan

RBC: Reading Tall Building Strategy Update Note 2018

RBC: Reading Tall Building Strategy 2008, including Tall Building Market Analysis 2007

RBC: City Centre Framework 2008

RBC: London Street / Market Place Conservation Area Appraisal 2015

RBC: St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal 2015

Appendix 2: Built Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal Methodology

Built Heritage Impact Methodology

Assessment of the heritage significance (and setting) of the identified built heritage assets is undertaken in accordance with paragraph 194 of the NPPF 2021, which sets out that local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of the affected heritage assets proportionate to the potential impact of proposed development. Assessment is also in accordance with national guidance and advice from the Department of Culture Media and Sport and Historic England.

The NPPF (Annex 2) defines the significance of a heritage asset as:

> *"The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting."*

Designated heritage assets are those which possess a level of heritage interest that justifies designation and are then subject to particular procedures in planning decisions that involve them. The NPPF also identifies that heritage assets include both designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).

Listed buildings are defined as designated heritage assets that hold special architectural or historic interest. The principles of selection for listed buildings are published by the Department of Culture Media and Sport and supported by English Heritage's Listing Selection Guides for each building type. Conservation areas are designated on the basis of their special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Historic England has published guidance in respect of conservation areas (Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management 2019) and this provides a framework for the appraisal and assessment of the special interest and significance of a conservation area. For locally listed buildings Historic England provides further advice (Advice Note 7: Local Heritage Listing 2021).

Historic England Advice Note 12: Statements of Heritage Significance from 2019 provides general advice with regard to preparing such statements of heritage significance and also the analysing of significance for the full range of heritage assets. This is designed primarily for applicants proposing changes to heritage assets and accords with the NPPF as revised. This sits alongside Historic England's past published document Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance from 2008, which earlier set out Historic England's approach to assessing significance and making decisions about all aspects of the wider historic environment (now awaiting revision and reissue).

Historic England provides further information to assist in implementing historic environment policy in the NPPF and the related NPPG (Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision Taking in the Historic Environment 2015). This advice includes; assessing the significance of heritage assets, using appropriate expertise, historic environment records, recording and furthering understanding, neglect and unauthorised works, marketing, and good design and local distinctiveness for new development.

The setting of a heritage asset is defined by the NPPF (Annex 2) to comprise:

> *"The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral."*

Historic England has published guidance to assist in implementing historic environment policy with regard to managing change within the setting of heritage assets (Historic England Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets 2017 (2nd Edition). This also provides a toolkit for assessing the implications of development proposals affecting setting. This advice note not only updates the first edition but also replaced the Historic England guidance document "Seeing the History in the View: A Method for Assessing Heritage Significance within Views" from 2011, in particular in the light of recent planning cases and to provide further advice on views. It looks to reiterate existing advice that the heritage interest in views is a matter of the contribution of views to the significance of heritage assets, which aligns views in these terms closely with setting. It is also sought to underline the importance of consideration of views under Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013), while highlighting the distinction between analysis of setting and landscape analysis.

Within the HTVIA our assessment of the particular significance (including contribution of setting to that significance) for each of the likely affected designated or non-designated heritage assets (and also where defined as groups for descriptive purposes) will be proportionate to the importance of each of the affected assets and provide a sufficient level of description to understand the likely effects of the proposed development on Site. It has also been recognised that historic, functional and or visual inter-relationships exist between a number of the identified heritage assets, for particular example where a conservation area provides the key element of the setting of a statutory listed building or locally listed building or group that contributes to their significance. Accordingly the sometimes complex and overlapping nature the heritage values of these assets is acknowledged; principally by grouping closely related heritage assets together where possible when undertaking more detailed analysis.

Our analysis also then identifies that the effects of the proposed development on Site would be confined to indirect impacts on the significance of a number of heritage assets within the Study Area, through change to a part of their settings and also shared views.

Our assessment of impacts for each of the heritage assets within the combined HTVIA employs best practice guidance / advice provided by Historic England (and also DCMS) as an appropriate framework. This assessment recognises that the impact of development could be beneficial or harmful (i.e. adverse) to the significance of a heritage asset or assets, on the ability to understand or appreciate that significance, or could be a combination of both factors, or could also be neutral. The overall effects of proposed change on the significance of each of the heritage assets will also reviewed in light of the relevant statutory duties of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, national policy within the NPPF and supporting NPPG and other national guidance / advice, and the relevant local planning policy and guidance for change within the historic environment.

Proper and full assessment of impacts for the application submission is informed by information on the architectural and landscape design of the proposed development; sufficient in detail and illustration to indicate the likely quality of such proposals. This is set out in the package of drawings, visualisations and also the Design & Access Statement, prepared by the scheme architects.

It has also been noted in this HTVIA that the ability to combine an analysis of built heritage, townscape and visual impacts within one document is an aid and advantage to the determination of the final application; in articulating the likely effects of development more widely. However, best practice guidance with regard to setting and views highlights the required differences in approach / methodology between each of these professional disciplines (built heritage, landscape / townscape and visual impact). For example, recognising that change to heritage significance (and setting) brought about by new uses and development is not solely a visual consideration; but can have a wider historical and experiential aspect. Modelling / accurate visualisation of a

limited number of selected representative views is a useful tool to assist in understanding likely built heritage impacts, but only part of a much wider appreciation of change. The methodology for the related disciplines of townscape and visual impact appraisal follows accordingly.

Townscape and Visual Impact Methodology

The methodology for townscape and visual assessment is based on current best practice as set out in:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition, 2013 (Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment) (GLVIA3);
- Landscape Character Assessment, 2017 (Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 05/2017);
- Townscape Character Assessment, 2017 (Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 05/2017);
- Visual Representation of Development Proposals, 2019 (Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 06/19).

The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) states that this type of appraisal provides a tool for identifying and assessing the *"the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity*" (Paragraph 1.1). It goes on to emphasise that the appraisal has two interlinked elements of: landscape, as a resource; and visual amenity, including views. The effects of both must be addressed in the assessment.

The definition of landscape in the European Landscape Convention, which the UK has signed and ratified, includes villages and towns and cities and the GLVIA states that 'townscape' refers to areas where the built environment is dominant. It goes on to state that townscape includes the buildings and the different types of urban spaces, and the relationship between the two.

Baseline townscape appraisal

The baseline townscape appraisal included a mixture of desk study and field work to identify and record the character of the townscape within the study area. A preliminary desk study of Ordnance Survey (OS) maps and aerial photography was undertaken to establish the physical components of the Site and its surroundings. A review of the wider context of the Site was undertaken which referenced the current published townscape or landscape character studies relating to the study area at national, regional and local level. This was followed by fieldwork to assess the key characteristics of local townscape character. This has included a summary of associated elements, features and aesthetic and perceptual factors which contribute to the townscape.

Once these factors were established the local townscape character areas (townscape receptors) with potential to be affected by the proposed development and their associated key characteristics were identified. A judgement was then made on the Value of each of these based on the approach set out in *GLVIA3* and as described below.

The Value of each of the identified townscape character areas was assessed with reference to the following criteria and the definitions of level of value set out in **Table A.1**:

- *Any designations or policies (both national and local) which may be present; and,*
- *The presence or absence of other attributes which contribute to townscape value such as townscape condition, scenic quality, rarity, representativeness, conservation interests, recreation value, perceptual aspects or associations e.g. with writers, artists or historic events.*

Table A.1: Value of Townscape Receptors

Value	Typical Level of Designation/ Rarity	Typical Examples
Very High	International, National	World Heritage Sites, and/or key features of World Heritage Sites. No potential for substitution.
High	National, Regional	National Parks or AONBs and/or key features of these, Scheduled Monuments, some Conservation Areas, and townscape areas with typically a significant number of Grade I/II* listed buildings, and/or Registered Historic Park and Gardens. No or limited potential for substitution.
Medium	Regional, Local	Townscape areas designated at local level e.g. Special Landscape Areas, some conservation areas and other undesignated areas or features of notable scenic quality or recreational value with value perhaps expressed through non-official publications or demonstrable use. Limited potential for substitution.
Ordinary	Local	Townscape features or character areas which are not related to designated, or non-designated heritage assets, or a planning designation; and/or mentioned in guidebooks or on tourist maps; and/or referenced in art and literature; and/or is of little scenic or townscape importance and are of average quality. Considerable potential for substitution.
Low	Local	Townscape features or local character areas in poor condition or quality and/or identified for recovery.

Baseline visual appraisal

The baseline visual appraisal established the area in which the Site, and emerging scheme proposals, may be visible; the different groups of people who may experience the views of the development (defined as visual receptors); and the nature of these views. These factors interrelate, but for the purpose of the assessment are dealt with in that order.

The visibility of the Site was first established via the preparation of a computer generated zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) which identified the area from which the Proposed Development was likely to be visible and allowed the identification of potential visual receptors and supporting representative viewpoints. The visibility was then verified by a walkover survey which established the area within the study area from which the Site is currently visible. The key visual receptors within this area were then identified (i.e. groups of people within this area who experience (or may experience) views of the Site).

In most assessments, unless specifically requested by the LPA, visual receptors are restricted to groups of people in publicly accessible places. Normally, views from private residential properties are not included as changes to private views are not a planning consideration[70] unless the development is likely to be so overbearing or dominating that they could result in unacceptable living conditions. Where this is possible, a separate residential visual amenity assessment is undertaken.

Following identification of the key visual receptors, representative viewpoints were identified to reflect typical views from the key visual receptors. The number and location of representative viewpoints was agreed with the local planning authority as part of the pre-application process. A description and evaluation of the identified views was then undertaken, which considered the following:

- *"type and relative numbers of people, and their occupation or activity;*
- *location, nature and characteristics;*
- *nature, composition and characteristics of the views (including directions);*
- *elements which may interrupt, filter or otherwise influence the views;*
- *seasonal changes in the view."*

Assessment of Townscape Effects

Townscape effects include:

- *Changes to, and/or complete or partial loss of features, elements, characteristics or perceptual aspects that contribute to the character and distinctiveness of the Landscape/local Landscape area; and/or,*
- *Introduction of new elements or features that influence the character and distinctiveness of the townscape/local townscape area;*

The assessment of townscape effects considered the sensitivity of the townscape receptor and the magnitude of the predicted effect.

The sensitivity of townscape receptors relates to the value attached to that receptor (which was established as part of the baseline assessment) and the susceptibility of the receptor to the type of change or development proposed. *GLVIA3* defines susceptibility as "*the ability of the landscape receptor (whether it be the overall character or quality/condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element and/or feature, or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies*" (Para. 5.40).

Judgements on the susceptibility to change of each of the identified townscape receptors were made based on the scale set out in **Table A.2.**

[70] Aldred's Case in 1610 established in English law that views from private property cannot be protected.

Table A.2: Susceptibility to change of townscape receptors

Susceptibility to change	Description
High	Townscape receptor[71] would be unlikely to accommodate the type of development proposed without undue negative consequences for the maintenance of the baseline townscape character and/or the achievement of townscape planning policies and strategies. Townscape receptor has little or no relationship to the type of development proposed and/or would be difficult to replace or substitute if lost e.g. ancient woodland, veteran trees and historic parkland. Characteristics of the townscape which contribute to the townscape character are highly sensitive and would be fundamentally altered by the type of development proposed.
Medium	Townscape receptor would be compromised by the type of development proposed and/or the achievement of townscape planning policies and strategies would be compromised. Townscape receptor has some relationship to the type of development proposed and/or could be partially replaced or substituted if lost. Townscape receptor is moderately sensitive, and characteristics of the receptor would be altered by the type of development proposed. The general townscape character would remain but would be weakened by the type of development proposed.
Low	Townscape receptor would be likely to accommodate the type of development proposed without undue negative consequences for the maintenance of the baseline townscape character and/or the achievement of townscape planning policies and strategies. Townscape receptor has a close relationship to the type of development proposed and could be easily replaced or substituted if lost. Townscape receptor is of low sensitivity and characteristics of the townscape would not be significantly altered by the type of development proposed. The general townscape character is resilient to change.

A judgement on the overall sensitivity of each townscape receptor (ranging from Very High to Very Low) was made based on the combined evaluation of susceptibility and value attached to the receptor together with informed professional judgement and guidance provided in *GLVIA3*.

The magnitude of townscape effect considered the size or scale of the effect, the geographical extent of the effect and the duration and reversibility of the effect.

Judgements on the magnitude of townscape effect were broadly based on the descriptions of magnitude set out in **Table A.3** below.

Table A.3: Magnitude of Townscape Effects

Magnitude of Effect	Definition
High	Permanent loss of all or most of the key characteristics of a townscape receptor and/or addition of major new elements which would be dominant features with little or no relationship to the townscape receptor. Changes would substantially alter the character of a large area.
Medium	Permanent partial loss or change to some of the key characteristics of a townscape receptor and/or addition of new elements which would be prominent features. Changes would result in a large change to the character of a small area or a noticeable change to a larger area.
Low	Permanent limited/localised loss or change to common characteristics of a townscape receptor and/or addition of new elements which would be noticeable features but largely in keeping with the existing character. Changes would result in a small change to the character of a large area or a noticeable change to a small area. Also includes temporary and/or reversible changes of larger scale or extent.
Very Low	Small scale changes to common characteristics of a townscape receptor and/or small scale additions of new elements which are in keeping with the existing character. Changes would not noticeably alter the character of the area. Also includes temporary and/or reversible changes of small or medium scale and extent.
Negligible / None	No, or barely discernible, change to townscape receptor

Consideration was also given to the Type of Effect in terms of whether it is Adverse, Beneficial or Neutral. Often, effects will include a combination of both beneficial and adverse effects. However, a judgement is made on the nature of the overall effect which is based on the following terms:

- ***Adverse:*** *overall harm to townscape character/feature;*
- ***Beneficial:*** *overall improvement to townscape character/feature; or*
- ***Neutral:*** *a combination of both adverse and beneficial effects with no overall harm or improvement to townscape character/feature*

Assessment of Visual Effects

Visual effects include:

- *Changes to, and/or complete or partial loss of features, elements, characteristics or perceptual aspects that contribute to the character and distinctiveness of the view; and/or,*
- *Introduction of new elements or features that influence the character and distinctiveness of the view;*

The assessment of visual effects considered the sensitivity of the visual receptor and the magnitude of the predicted effect.

The sensitivity of the visual receptor comprised a judgement on the value attached to the views and an assessment of the susceptibility of each receptor to the type of change proposed.

A judgement on the value attached to the views was made with reference to the following criteria and the definitions of value set out in **Table A.4**.

- *Planning designations e.g. Designated Views or Protected Vistas identified in local or regional planning policy;*
- *Other designations relating to landscape features or heritage assets e.g. key views identified in conservation area appraisals or recorded in citations for listed buildings or registered parks and*

[71] Includes townscape character areas, townscape elements or features and particular aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the townscape.

gardens; and,

- *Indicators of the value attached to views by visitors e.g. views identified in guidebooks or on tourist maps, official viewpoints (often with sign boards and interpretive material) or views referenced in literature or art.*

Table A.4: Value attached to views

Value	Typical level of designation / Rarity	Typical Examples
Very High	International, National	Views associated with sites of international importance e.g. World Heritage sites
High	National, Regional,	Designated views of national or regional importance e.g. views of noted importance to sites of national importance e.g. Scheduled Monuments, AONBs, Grade I/Grade II* listed buildings, and/or Registered Historic Park and Gardens
Medium	Regional, Local	Views identified or protected at local level e.g. identified in local planning policy or guidance and views associated with heritage or townscape features of regional or local importance e.g. some Conservation Areas and Grade II/II* listed buildings. May also include views which are undesignated, but value perhaps expressed through non-official publications or its contribution to enjoyment of a designated or non-designated heritage asset.
Ordinary	Local	The view from the identified visual receptor is not related to designated, or non-designated, heritage assets, or a planning designation; and/or mentioned in guidebooks or on tourist maps; and/or referenced in art and literature; but contributes positively to the visual amenity experienced by the receptor.
Low	Local	The view from the identified visual receptor does not make a positive contribution to local visual amenity.

The assessment of susceptibility of visual receptors was based on the approach set out in para 6.32 of GLVIA3 which notes that:

> 'the susceptibility of different visual receptors to changes in views and visual amenity is mainly a function of:
>
> - *The occupation or activity of people experiencing the view at particular locations: and,*
> - *The extent to which their attention or interest may therefore be focussed on the views and the visual amenity they experience at particular locations'.*

Judgements on the susceptibility of a visual receptor to change are broadly based on the descriptions of susceptibility set out in **Table A.5** below.

Table A.5: Susceptibility to change of visual receptors

Susceptibility	Description
High	Receptors for whom the view and visual amenity is of high importance to the experience or activity including: people engaged in outdoor recreation whose attention or interest is likely to be focused on the landscape and on particular views e.g. waymarked walks through the landscape; and visitors to heritage assets or other attractions where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience.
Medium	Receptors for whom the view and visual amenity is of moderate importance to the experience or activity including: Travellers on most road or rail routes
Low	Receptors for whom the view and visual amenity is of low importance to the experience or activity including: people engaged in outdoor sport or recreation which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the landscape; and people at their place of work whose attention may be focussed on their work, not on their surroundings, and where the setting is not important to the quality of working life.

A judgement on the overall sensitivity of each visual receptor (ranging from Very High to Very Low) was made based on the combined evaluation of susceptibility and value attached to the receptor together with informed professional judgement and guidance provided in GLVIA3.

The magnitude of visual effect considered the size or scale of the effect, the geographical extent of the effect, and the duration and reversibility of the effect.

Judgements on the magnitude of visual effect were broadly based on the descriptions of magnitude set out in **Table A.6** below.

Table A.6: Magnitude of Visual Effects

Magnitude of Effect	Definition
High	Permanent loss of all or most of the key characteristics of a view and/or addition of major new elements which would be dominant features. Changes would substantially alter the character of the view.
Medium	Permanent partial loss or change to some of the key characteristics of the view and/or addition of new elements which would be prominent features. Changes would result in a large change to the character of a small part of the view or a noticeable change to a larger part of the view.
Low	Permanent limited/localised loss or change to a view and/or addition of new elements which would be noticeable features but largely in keeping with the existing character of the view. Changes would result in a small change to the character of a large part of the view or a noticeable change to a small part of the view. Also includes temporary and/or reversible changes of larger scale or extent within the view.
Very Low	Small scale changes to common characteristics and/or small scale additions of new elements to the view. Changes would not noticeably alter the character of the view. Also includes temporary and/or reversible changes of small or medium scale and extent.
Negligible / None	No, or barely discernible, change to the view.

Consideration is also given to the Type of Effect in terms of whether it is Adverse, Beneficial or Neutral. Often, effects will include a combination of both beneficial and adverse effects. However, a judgement is made on the nature of the overall effect which is based on the following terms:

- ***Adverse:*** *overall harm to the character/quality of the view and loss of visual amenity;*
- ***Beneficial:*** *overall improvement to the character/quality of the view and improvement of visual amenity; or*
- ***Neutral:*** *no overall harm or improvement to the view or visual amenity (likely to be the result of a combination of both adverse and beneficial effects or very small changes).*

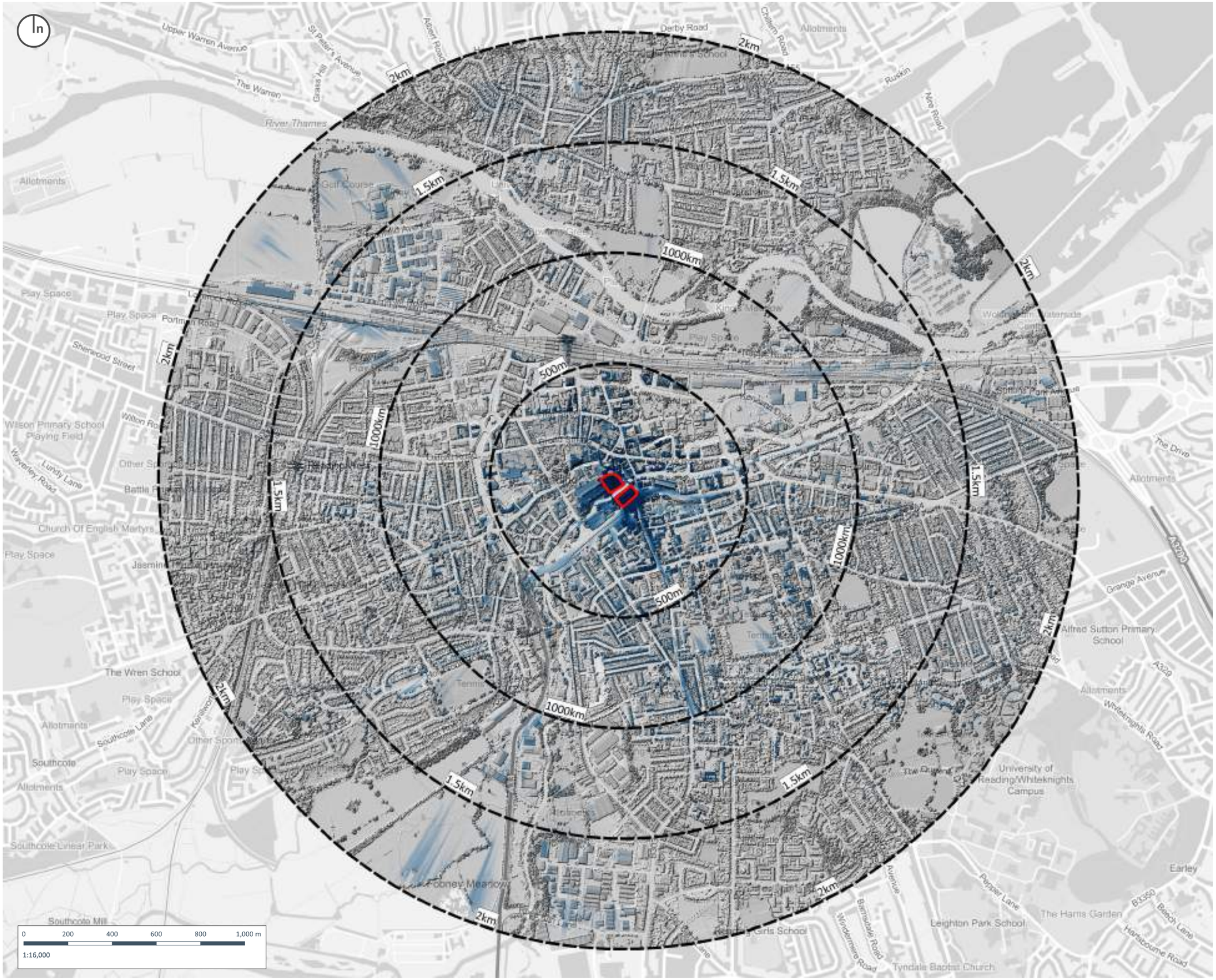
Appendix 3: Supporting Figures

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Plan (500m / 2km radius)

Heritage Assets Plan (HAP) (500m radius)

Townscape Character Areas (TCA) Plan (500m radius)

Representative Viewpoints (RV) Plan (500m / 2km radius)



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Site Boundary

Study Aea

LIDAR DSM 2019 1M

Low potential visibility

High potential visibility

CLIENT:
The Oracle Limited Partnership

PROJECT:
Debenhams & Vue, The Oracle, Reading

DRAWING:
Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) - 1.5km

PROJECT NUMBER:
PACS3000

DRAWING NUMBER:	CHECKED BY:
GIS_100	IJ
REVISION:	**STATUS:**
v.1	Draft
DATE:	**SCALE:**
October 2022	1:16,000 @ A3

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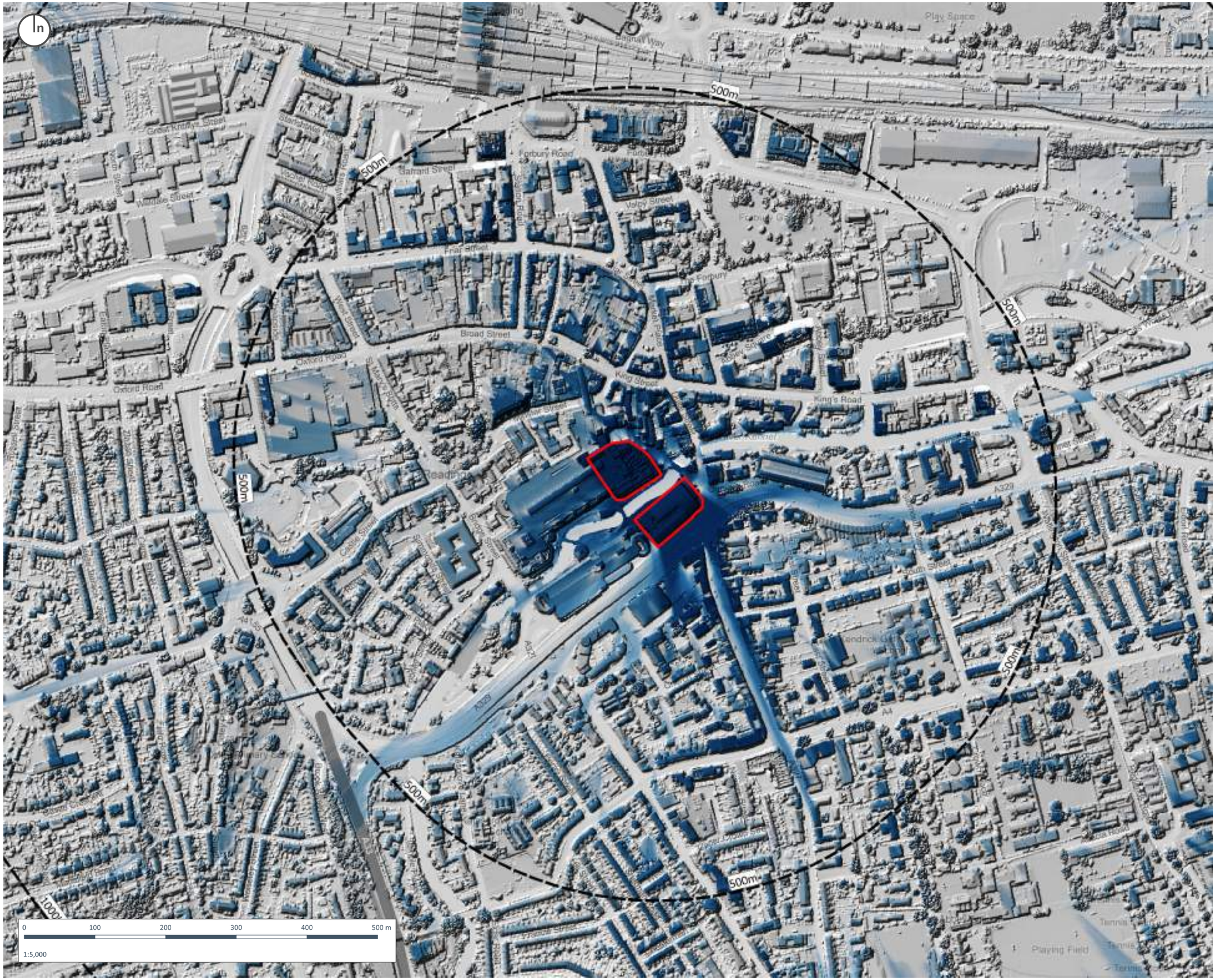

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Site Boundary

Study Aea

LIDAR DSM 2019 1M

Low potential visibility

High potential visibility

CLIENT:
The Oracle Limited Partnership

PROJECT:
Debenhams & Vue, The Oracle, Reading

DRAWING:
Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) - 500m

PROJECT NUMBER:
PACS3000

DRAWING NUMBER:	CHECKED BY:
GIS_101	IJ
REVISION:	STATUS:
v.1	Draft
DATE:	SCALE:
October 2022	1:16,000 @ A3

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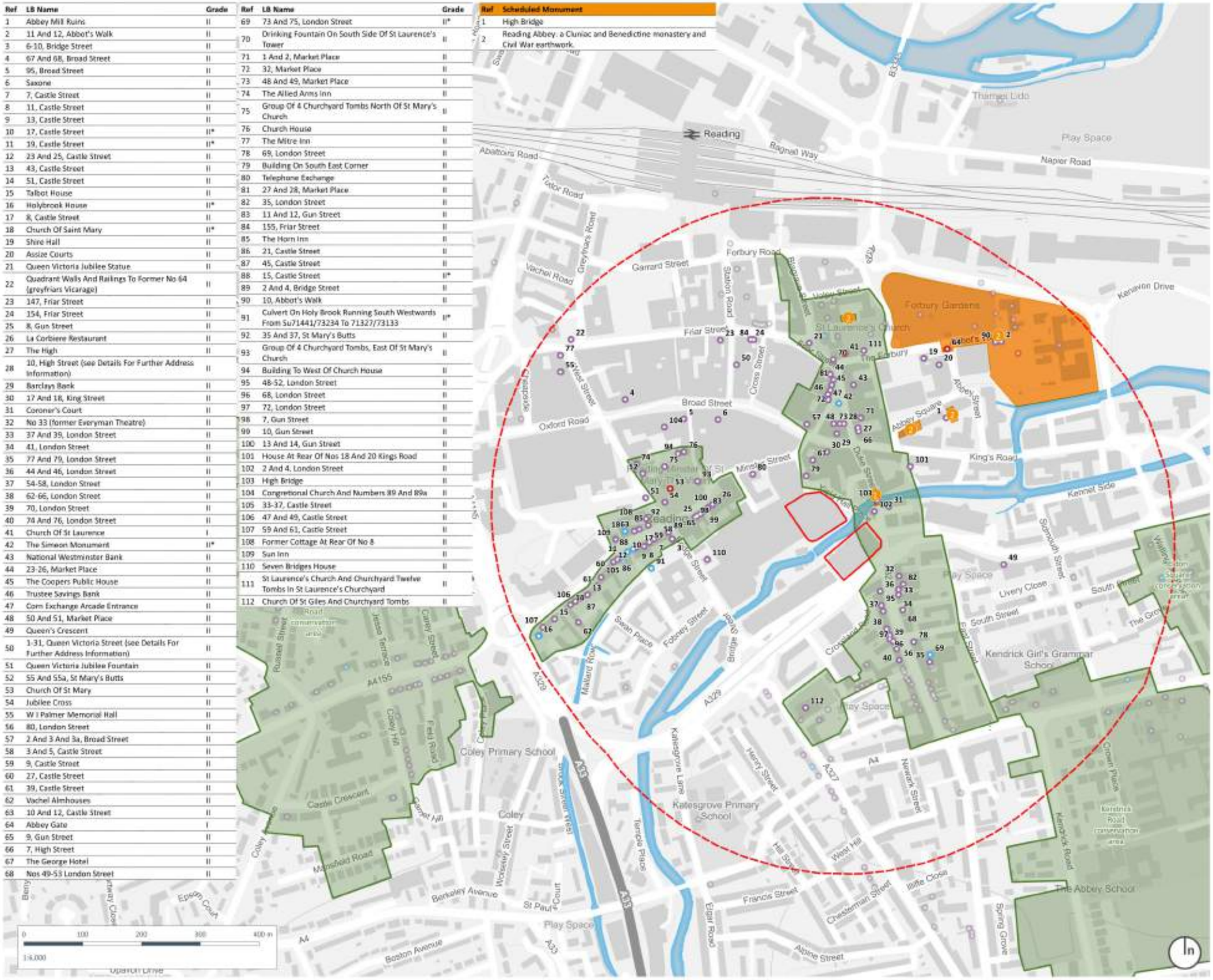
Ref	LB Name	Grade
1	Abbey Mill Ruins	II
2	11 And 12, Abbot's Walk	II
3	6-10, Bridge Street	II
4	67 And 68, Broad Street	II
5	95, Broad Street	II
6	Saxone	II
7	7, Castle Street	II
8	11, Castle Street	II
9	13, Castle Street	II
10	17, Castle Street	II*
11	19, Castle Street	II*
12	23 And 25, Castle Street	II
13	43, Castle Street	II
14	51, Castle Street	II
15	Talbot House	II
16	Holybrook House	II*
17	8, Castle Street	II
18	Church Of Saint Mary	II*
19	Shire Hall	II
20	Assize Courts	II
21	Queen Victoria Jubilee Statue	II
22	Quadrant Walls And Railings To Former No 64 (greyfriars Vicarage)	II
23	147, Friar Street	II
24	154, Friar Street	II
25	8, Gun Street	II
26	La Corbiere Restaurant	II
27	The High	II
28	10, High Street (see Details For Further Address Information)	II
29	Barclays Bank	II
30	17 And 18, King Street	II
31	Coroner's Court	II
32	No 33 (former Everyman Theatre)	II
33	37 And 39, London Street	II
34	41, London Street	II
35	77 And 79, London Street	II
36	44 And 46, London Street	II
37	54-58, London Street	II
38	62-66, London Street	II
39	70, London Street	II
40	74 And 76, London Street	II
41	Church Of St Laurence	I
42	The Simeon Monument	II*
43	National Westminster Bank	II
44	23-26, Market Place	II
45	The Coopers Public House	II
46	Trustee Savings Bank	II
47	Corn Exchange Arcade Entrance	II
48	50 And 51, Market Place	II
49	Queen's Crescent	II
50	1-31, Queen Victoria Street (see Details For Further Address Information)	II
51	Queen Victoria Jubilee Fountain	II
52	55 And 55a, St Mary's Butts	II
53	Church Of St Mary	I
54	Jubilee Cross	II
55	W I Palmer Memorial Hall	II
56	80, London Street	II
57	2 And 3 And 3a, Broad Street	II
58	3 And 5, Castle Street	II
59	9, Castle Street	II
60	27, Castle Street	II
61	39, Castle Street	II
62	Vachel Almhouses	II
63	10 And 12, Castle Street	II
64	Abbey Gate	I
65	9, Gun Street	II
66	7, High Street	II
67	The George Hotel	II
68	Nos 49-53 London Street	II
69	73 And 75, London Street	II*
70	Drinking Fountain On South Side Of St Laurence's Tower	II
71	1 And 2, Market Place	II
72	32, Market Place	II
73	48 And 49, Market Place	II
74	The Allied Arms Inn	II
75	Group Of 4 Churchyard Tombs North Of St Mary's Church	II
76	Church House	II
77	The Mitre Inn	II
78	69, London Street	II
79	Building On South East Corner	II
80	Telephone Exchange	II
81	27 And 28, Market Place	II
82	35, London Street	II
83	11 And 12, Gun Street	II
84	155, Friar Street	II
85	The Horn Inn	II
86	21, Castle Street	II
87	45, Castle Street	II
88	15, Castle Street	II*
89	2 And 4, Bridge Street	II
90	10, Abbot's Walk	II
91	Culvert On Holy Brook Running South Westwards From Su71441/73234 To 71327/73133	II*
92	35 And 37, St Mary's Butts	II
93	Group Of 4 Churchyard Tombs, East Of St Mary's Church	II
94	Building To West Of Church House	II
95	48-52, London Street	II
96	68, London Street	II
97	72, London Street	II
98	7, Gun Street	II
99	10, Gun Street	II
100	13 And 14, Gun Street	II
101	House At Rear Of Nos 18 And 20 Kings Road	II
102	2 And 4, London Street	II
103	High Bridge	II
104	Congretional Church And Numbers 89 And 89a	II
105	33-37, Castle Street	II
106	47 And 49, Castle Street	II
107	59 And 61, Castle Street	II
108	Former Cottage At Rear Of No 8	II
109	Sun Inn	II
110	Seven Bridges House	II
111	St Laurence's Church And Churchyard Twelve Tombs In St Laurence's Churchyard	II
112	Church Of St Giles And Churchyard Tombs	II

Ref	Scheduled Monument
1	High Bridge
2	Reading Abbey: a Cluniac and Benedictine monastery and Civil War earthwork.


Reading
Abattoirs Road
Tudor Road
Vachel Road
Greyfriars Road
Garrard Street
Forbury Road
Station Road
Friar Street
Cross Street
West Street
Broad Street
Oxford Road
Minster Street
Bridge Street
Fobney Street
Swan Place
Mallard Row
Bridge St
A329
A4155
Coley Primary School
Castle Crescent
Coley
Mansfield Road
Berkeley Avenue
Wolseley Street
St Paul's Court
Boston Avenue
Epsom Court
A4
A33
Play Space
Katesgrove Lane
Katesgrove Primary School
Henley Street
A327
Newtown Street
Hill Street
West Hill
Francis Street
Chesterman Street
Alpine Street
Spring Grove
Kendrick Road
The Abbey School
Kendrick Girl's Grammar School
Livery Close
South Street
Sidmouth Street
Napier Road
Play Space
Thames Lido
Bath Road
Ragnal Way
Kennet Side
King's Road
Abbey Square
Abbey Street
Forbury Gardens
St Laurence's Church
Kenavon Drive
Holy Street
Blagrave Street
Duke Street
Cross Street
Friar Street
Broad Street
Minster Street
Bridge Street
Fobney Street
Swan Place
Mallard Row
Bridge St
A329
A33
Katesgrove Lane
Henley Street
A327
A4
Newtown Street
Hill Street
West Hill
Francis Street
Chesterman Street
Alpine Street
Spring Grove
Kendrick Road
Crown Place
Elgar Road
Berkeley Avenue
St Paul's Court
Wolseley Street
Boston Avenue
Epsom Court
Mansfield Road
Castle Crescent
Coley
Coley Hill
Field Road
Russell Street
Jesse Terrace
Coley Street
Coley Place
Vachel Road
Greyfriars Road
Garrard Street
Station Road
Friar Street
Cross Street
West Street
Broad Street
Oxford Road
Minster Street
Bridge Street
Fobney Street
Swan Place
Mallard Row
Bridge St
A329
A4155

Station Hill
Great Knollys Street
Stanshawe Road
Forbury Road
Garrard Street
Vachel Road
Weldale Street
Sackville Street
Friar Street
Station Road
Queen Victoria Street
Cross Street
Broad Street
Oxford Road
West Street
Cheapside
Alfred Street
Forbury Gardens
Abbey Square
Abbey Street
Blakes Cottages
King's Road
Kennet Side
Kennet Street
Gas Works Road
Play Space
Minster Street
Hosier Street
Reading
Star Lane
Queen's Road
Sidmouth Street
Livery Close
South Street
Kendrick Girl's Grammar School
The Dell
Bridge Street
Swan Place
Fobney Street
Mallard Row
Coley Primary School
Katesgrove Lane
Katesgrove Primary School
Henry Street
Upper Crown Street
Sherman Road
West Hill
Hill Street
Newark Street
Kendrick Road
Crown Place
University of Reading/London Road Campus
Acacia Road
Redlands Road
Tennis Court
Coley
Garnet Street
Dover Street
Wolseley Street
Brook Street West
Temple Place
Field Road
Baker Street
Carey Street
Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road conservation area
Eldon Square conservation area
Wellington Street
St John's Street
Kenavon Drive
A329
A4155
A327
A33
A4

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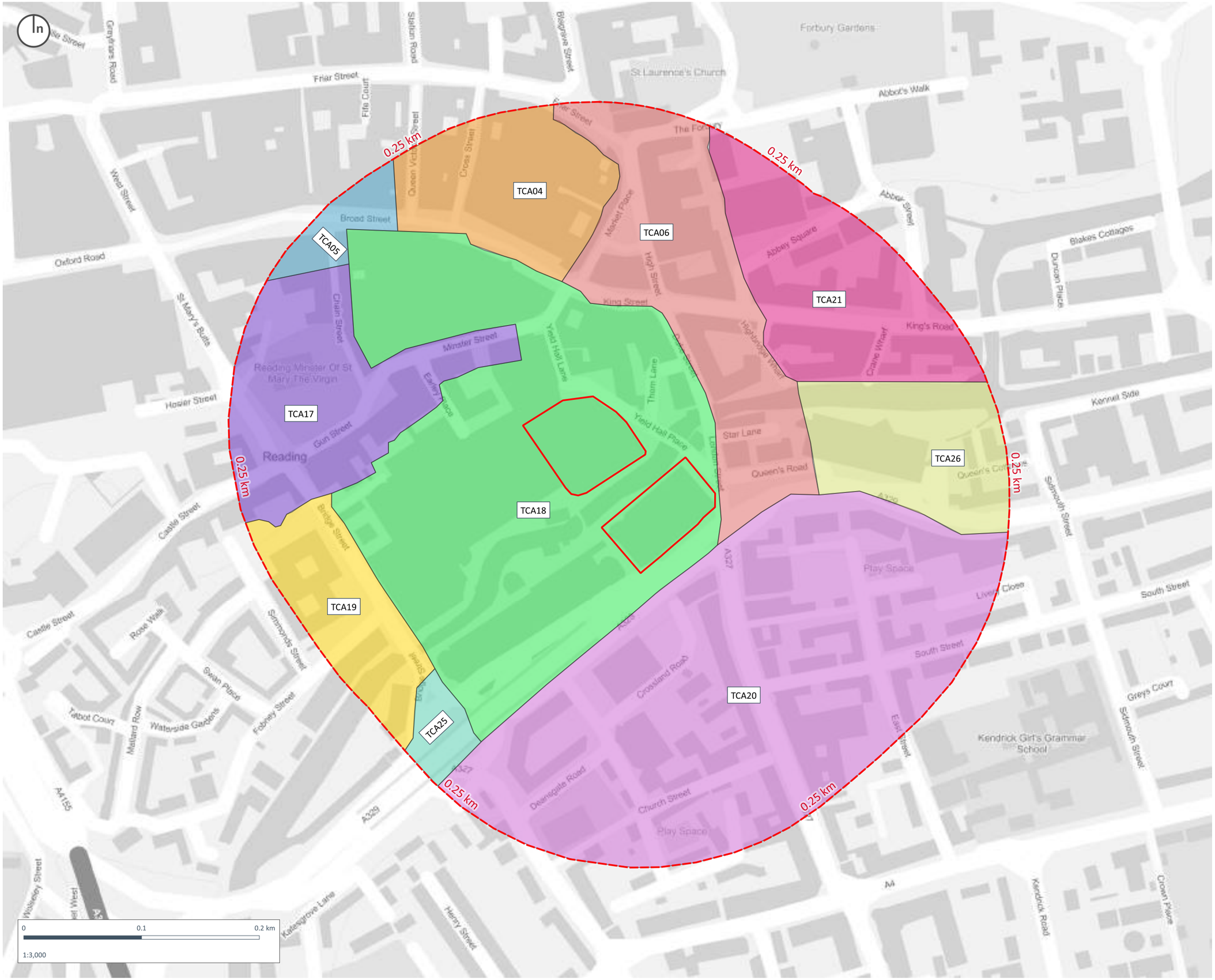

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Site Boundary

Study Area (250m radius from Site)

Townscape Character Areas

- TCA04 - Station Road
- TCA05 - Broad Street
- TCA06 - St. Lawrence and Market Place
- TCA17 - St Mary's and Castle Street
- TCA18 - The Oracle
- TCA19 - Mallard Row to Fobney Street
- TCA20 - London Street
- TCA21 - Forbury South
- TCA25 - IDR
- TCA26 - King's Road

CLIENT:
The Oracle Partnership Limited

PROJECT:
Debenhams & Vue, The Oracle, Reading

DRAWING:
Townscape Character Area Plan

PROJECT NUMBER:
PACS3000

DRAWING NUMBER:
GIS_105a

CHECKED BY:
RB

REVISION:
1.0

STATUS:
Complete

DATE:
October 2022

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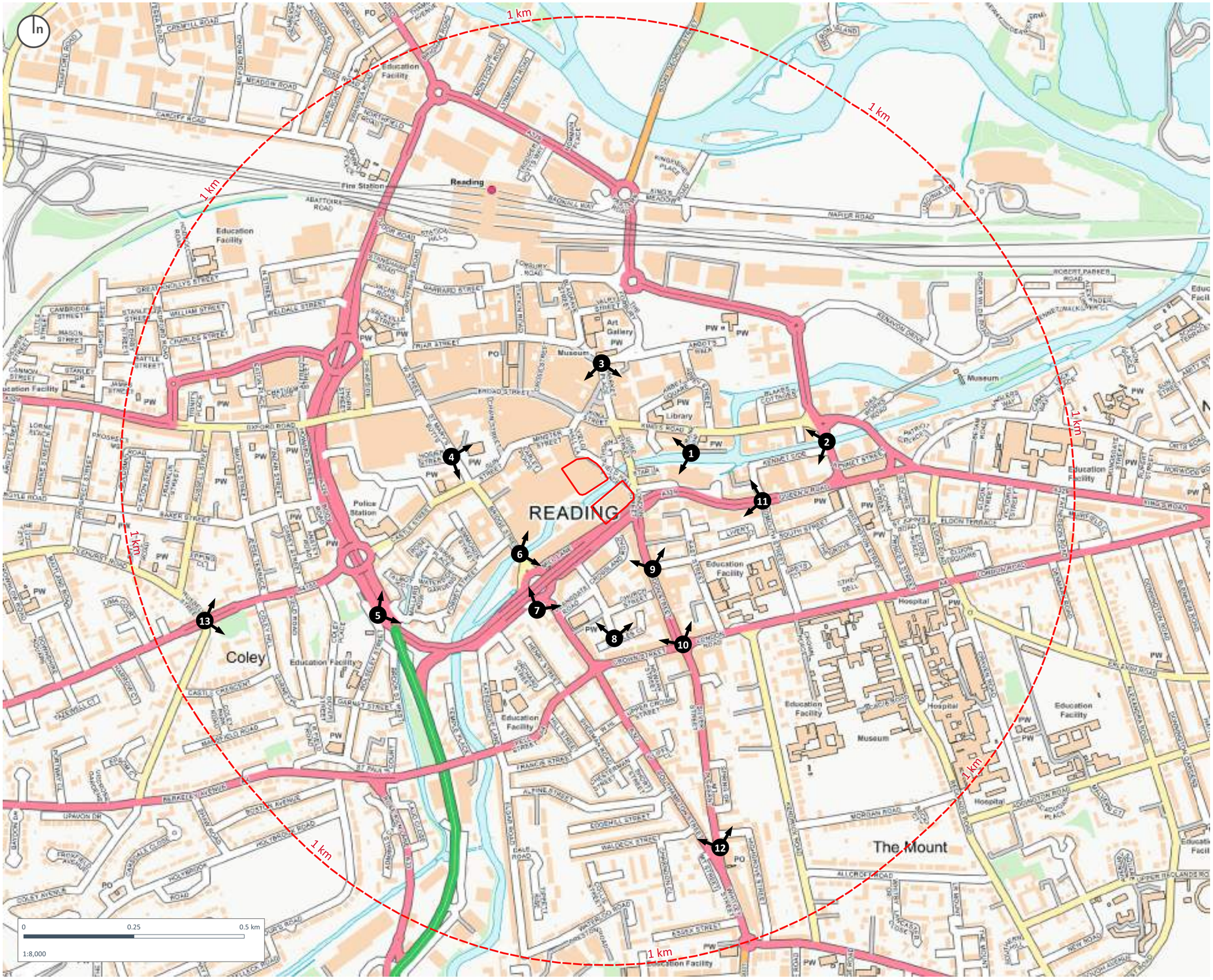

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Site Boundary

Study Area (1km radius from Site)

Views

CLIENT:
The Oracle Partnership Limited

PROJECT:
Debenhams & Vue, The Oracle, Reading

DRAWING:
Viewpoint Location Plan within 1km radius

PROJECT NUMBER:
PACS3000

DRAWING NUMBER:
GIS_107

CHECKED BY:
EC

REVISION:
1.0

STATUS:
Final

DATE:
November 2022

SCALE:
1:8,000 @ A3

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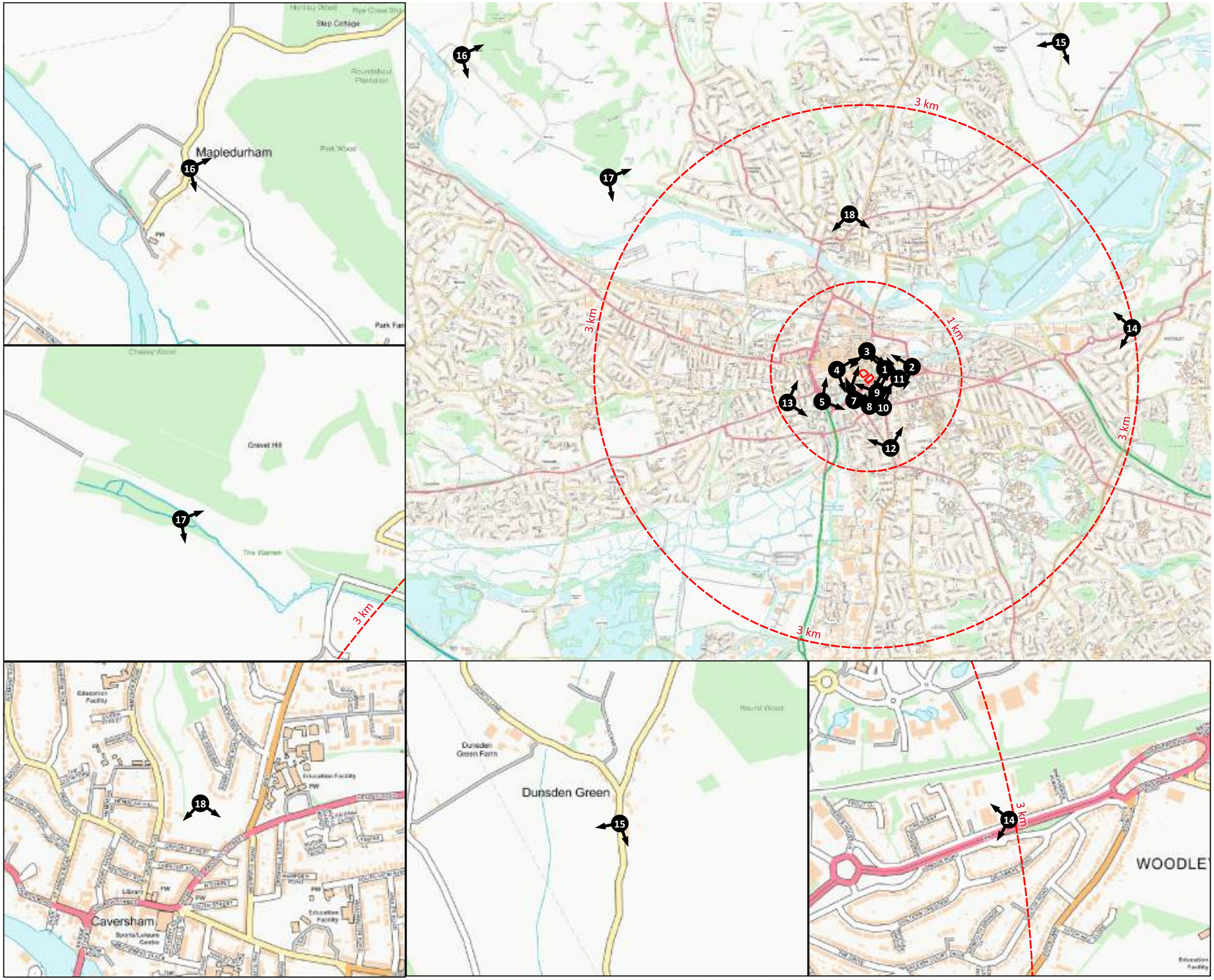

CLIENT:
The Oracle Partnership Limited

PROJECT:
Debenhams & Vue, The Oracle, Reading

DRAWING:
Viewpoint Location Plan – Long-range views

PROJECT NUMBER:
PACS3000

DRAWING NUMBER:
GIS_107

CHECKED BY:
EC

REVISION:
1.0

STATUS:
Final

DATE:
November 2022

SCALE:
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Appendix 4: Accurate Visual Representations (AVRs) and Visualisation Methodology

Ambiente Architectural Visualisation

Methodology Statement

The Oracle, Reading

ambiente architectural visualisation, Suite 2, Second Floor, New Hall Hey Business Centre, New Hall Hey Road
Hurstwood Rawtenstall Rossendale BB4 6AJ

01706 215160 | ambiente-i.com

ambiente

Photography

All views were initially identified on an Ordanance Survey map by the Planning Consultant and Architect. The photographer then visited the positions to identify any obstructions such as signage, road works etc. which would impact on the camera position.

Once the positions had been agreed the photographer then marked spots with surveyors chalk via a plum line from the centre of the tripod. All the images were taken from 165cm from the centre of the lens. The camera was then aligned using a spirit level.

The images were recorded using a Canon 5D Mk II camera (Full frame sensor 36mmx24mm, native resolution 5616x3744 pixels) The lens used was a Canon 24mm TS-E Mk II which has an angle of view : 84°. A TS-E is a shift lens. The centre of the lens can be raised or lowered to adjust the position of the subject. This method is commonly known as architectural photography. The 24mm shots were used because an 84° angle of view allows for the development to be viewed in context with its surroundings.

Surveying and Verification

We identified key points within each photograph such as roof corners lampposts etc. (*fig1*). The requested points were surveyed by a professional land and engineering surveying team. The information was then provided as a 3D CAD file (*fig.2*.)

This information was then imported into the 3D software to begin the camera matching process. A 3D camera was created to match the equipment used in creating the photographs and was positioned according to the survey information. The scene was verified by matching the survey points to their respective positions on the photographs. This is achieved by a pan and zoom tool which allows to check the accuracy of the survey points relative to the photograph.

Fig.1 Example of Survey Points requested

Fig.2 3D CAD data received from Surveyors

ambiente

3D Model and Compositing

A 3D model of the scene was provided by the Architect. Additional detail was added to the model which was then positioned according to the survey data and site plan provided by the architect.

A lighting system was used to determine the direct sunlight component within the scene. The date, time and location are then added accordingly.

Materials were applied to the model to reflect the chosen specification if the image was required to fully rendered. Each camera was then rendered to produce a still image of the proposed. (*Fig.3*)

The computer generated image was then combined with the photograph a technique referred to as 'compositing'.

Fig.3 Base render ready for composition

Fig.4 Final composited photomontage

ambiente architectural visualisation, Suite 2, Second Floor, New Hall Hey Business Centre, New Hall Hey Road
Hurstwood Rawtenstall Rossendale BB4 6AJ

01706 215160 | ambiente-i.com

parkers

parkers

BUY 1 GET

BUY 1 GET

HOUSE OF FRASER

HOUSE OF FRASER

EVANS

EVANS

EX54 UTU

EX54 UTU

ONE WAY

ONE WAY

Winkworth
SOLD
0118 402 2300
GET IN LANE
Town centre
All other routes
Queens Road

Winkworth
SOLD
0118 402 2300
GET IN LANE
Town centre
All other routes
Queens Road

Biffa

Biffa

Priority over
oncoming
vehicles
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vehicles
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London
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