

35-39 Friar Street
Reading

Townscape & Heritage Visual Impact Assessment

May 2022

Consultancy for the
Historic Built Environment

KMHHeritage

Contents

1	Introduction	2
	Purpose	2
	Authorship	2
2	The site and its surroundings.....	3
	Historic Context.....	3
	Friar Street and the Town Centre – history and townscape	6
	Friar Street Today	10
	The Site	12
	35-38 Friar Street	14
	The townscape of Friar Street and the contribution made by Nos. 35-39 Friar Street.....	16
3	The policy context	19
	The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990	19
	The National Planning Policy Framework	19
	Reading Local Plan	22
4	The proposed scheme and its effect.....	23
	The proposed scheme.....	23
	The townscape and visual impact of the proposed scheme.....	25
	Effect Criteria	25
	View One.....	27
	View Two.....	29
	View Three	32
	View Four	34
	Summary.....	36
5	Compliance with policy and guidance	37

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to accompany emerging proposals for Nos. 35-39 Friar Street, Reading.

Purpose

- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to assess the townscape and heritage context of the site and the contribution that the site makes to that. It then considers the impact of the proposed development on townscape views.
- 1.3 This report should be read in conjunction with the drawings and assessment prepared by Stefan Shaw Studio.

Authorship

- 1.4 The author of this report is Nick Collins BSc (Hons) MSc MRICS IHBC. Nick has twenty years' experience in the property sector, including most recently as a Director of the Conservation Team at integrated design consultants, Alan Baxter & Associates. Nick spent nine years at English Heritage as Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings & Areas where he led a specialist team of historic building inspectors, architects, and archaeologists on a wide range of heritage projects in East & South London. Previously Conservation Officer at the London Borough of Bromley, Nick began his career at international real estate consultancy Jones Lang LaSalle as a Chartered Surveyor.

2 The site and its surroundings

Historic Context

- 2.1 The first mention of Reading is in 870. The Domesday Book records a borough, with one church. The town occupied high ground at a crossing of the River Kennet just west of its marshy confluence with the Thames, which runs to the north. It is also located at the point where the main post-Roman road from London to Bath crossed a key North-South route from Oxford to Southampton and Winchester.

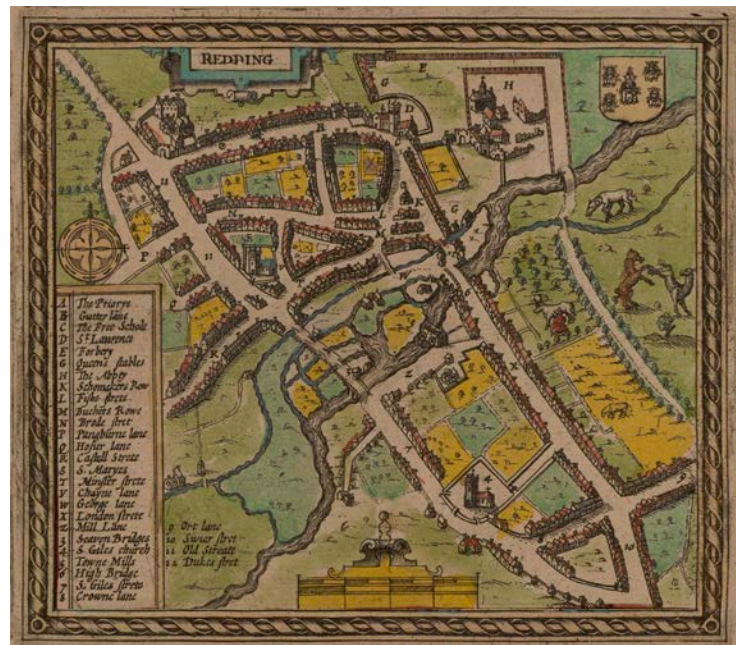


Figure 1: Reading: published in 1611 by John Speed

- 2.2 The town became a prosperous centre for cloth-making during the medieval period. During the Civil War Reading changed hands three times in as many years, however in 1725 Daniel Defoe still found the town 'very large and wealthy' and 'handsomely built'. The big timber framed houses he would have seen are now rare; as early as 1813 Reading was described as chiefly of brick - although that was also just after the Kennet and Avon Canal began to ship in Bath stone. Later, from 1840, materials and prosperity came with the arrival of the Great Western Railway.
- 2.3 From the mid-18th century onwards, Reading began to flourish as an important stopping off place between Bath and London. Inns flourished and regular public coaches began in 1780.

Leather tanning continued and other industries developed, most notably brewing, brick and tile making, iron-founding and boat building.

- 2.4 This expanding late Georgian town is seen at its best on the approach roads and inner suburbs. King's Road and Queens Road, of the 1830s, amended the medieval town plan, providing a more direct approach through and from London.
- 2.5 Many of these buildings were built in stone, such as 173-185 King's Road illustrated below.



Figure 2: 173-185 King's Road Grade II* listed, built c.1832

- 2.6 The Great Western Railway arrived in Reading in 1840. This led to the a rapid growth of major industries, notably Huntley & Palmers, biscuit makers, and Suttons Seeds, which provided work for a rapidly increasing population.
- 2.7 Philanthropic gifts excepted, their buildings have almost gone, but districts of terraced housing complete with red brick Board Schools remain to the east and south. These are good places to see how vigorously the local brick makers exploited the Thames Valley earths and clays for their coloured bricks, tiles and terracotta.
- 2.8 The use of brick and terracotta for main building material and decorative detailing was used in domestic and commercial buildings, both grand and humble.



Figures 3& 4: The former Huntley & Palmer factory in Reading town centre and The Mount, Christchurch Road – built for a manager at Huntley & Palmer Biscuit Factory



Figure 5: Terraced housing in Reading

- 2.9 During this period Caversham, to the north of the River Thames, became an overspill suburb and in 1892 the forerunner to the University was founded, though architecturally this did not come into its own until after 1945.
- 2.10 Following the second world war development pressure exceeded what had been predicted and the town became popular for white-collar employment and London overspill such that many streets are now entirely filled by office blocks in the town centre. The ring road – the proposals for which were first adopted in 1966 – was completed in two phases – the first up to 1971 and the second after 1978 on a slightly less destructive route.
- 2.11 Otherwise, much of the post-war development of Reading focused on new housing with areas such as Lower Earley expanding rapidly.

Friar Street and the Town Centre – history and townscape

- 2.12 Medieval Reading Abbey was situated on rising ground north of the River Kennet and north east of the early river crossing and the settlement centred around St Mary's Butts. The growth of the town after the foundation of the abbey stimulated the building of St Laurence's Church which was built to serve the population which grew up around the Abbey and is located at the far eastern end of Friar Street.
- 2.13 Gradually as the focus of the town moved eastwards a new market place, dominated by St Laurence's Church, replaced the earlier market place by St Mary's Butts.

- 2.14 As the influence of the Abbey grew a new north-south road leading directly to the newly established market place by the church evolved. This formed the outer edges of medieval Reading with Friar Street forming the northern boundary. This can be recognised in John Speed's Map of 1611 (figure 1).
- 2.15 Friar Street evolved firstly as a residential street, with commercial premises encroaching as the town's prosperity grew. The following image from 1875 shows Friar Street looking west.



Figure 6: Friar Street 1875, looking west

- 2.16 At that time the majority of buildings were faced in brick or stucco with a number of detached as well as terraced premises on the street. Whilst there was a general datum-line for the highest buildings on the street, there was also variation particularly to the west.
- 2.17 Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries Friar Street continued to develop - and be re-developed - as the commercial success of the town grew. Figure 5 shows a view from an almost similar position as Figure 4, looking west along Friar Street, taken in 1973.
- 2.18 The more uniform classical regularity of the architecture has given way to more exuberant and eclectic Victorian and 20th century styles.



Figure 7: Friar Street in 1973

- 2.19 By the end of the 20th century any sense of uniformity of architectural style or approach had long disappeared, and buildings ranged in height, scale, form, architecture and materials. This is illustrated in the following image from 'google maps' from 2009.

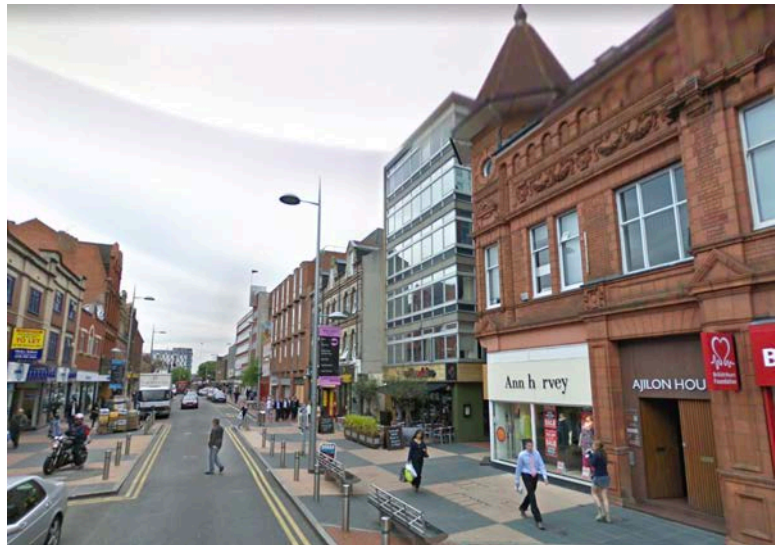


Figure 8: Friar Street in 2009

- 2.20 Buildings generally previously rose to 6 storeys but ranged from 2 storeys on the southern side to up to 14 storeys on the north – with this variation cheek-by-jowel being historically characteristic.
- 2.21 An element of the townscape which is characterised in varying forms on Friar Street – and across the rest of the town centre – is the marking of corners with an architectural flourish or device. This is particularly apparent at the junction between Friar Street and Station Road but also at Cross Street – which can be seen in the context of the Town Hall and St Laurence's Church.



Figure 9: Friar Street at its junction with Cross Street, looking east



Figures 10&11: Friar Street and Broad Street

- 2.22 Other examples include those shown above, which also showcase the use of brick and terracotta for detailing as well as a building material.
- 2.23 The street is closed, to the east, by the tower to Alfred Waterhouse's Town Hall and Council building, as shown in figure 7, as well as the tower of St Laurence's Church. However the gentle curve of the street means that these landmarks only become properly visible after Station Road.

Friar Street Today

- 2.24 In reality, the townscape of Friar Street at its western end has been completely altered in the last few years following the consent to re-develop the Friars Walk Shopping Centre and other buildings to the west as well as behind to the north – as part of the Council's aspirations for the Station Hill area of the town centre.
- 2.25 The impact of this is illustrated below in photographs taken in October 2021.





Figures: 12-15: Friar Street October 2021

- 2.26 Whilst a nod to a 'datum line' of development on the northern side of Friar Street has been attempted, the Ibis/Novotel Hotel the west of Station Road rises to 14 storeys.
- 2.27 The Friars Walk Shopping Centre has now been demolished, leaving the exposed side of both No.39 & Nos.35-38 Friar Street. Permission has been granted for 'Plot E & F' of the Station Hill redevelopment, of which Plot E will be immediately adjacent to a newly formed Friars Walk. This development rises to seven storeys and along with other new development to the west sets a 'new' datum along the northern side of Friar Street.
- 2.28 To the west, views to the end of Friar Street are now terminated by a newly completed 18 storey tower block.

The Site

- 2.29 The site does not lie in a conservation area or contain any listed buildings.
39 Friar Street
- 2.30 No.39 Friar Street was constructed as a town house between 1780 and 1800 during the period that the town was becoming an increasingly prosperous commercial town and stopping-off point on the coach road to London.
- 2.31 Built as part of a terrace, the façade is of brick and rises two storeys above the ground floor. It has a particularly plain façade. Above ground floor the building is symmetrical with each storey marked by four evenly spaced sash windows. The roof is concealed by the brick parapet.
- 2.32 The ground floor of the building was converted to a pharmacy in the 1860s and in 1903 the curtilage was subdivided and the rear of the garden plot sold off to another property.
- 2.33 The ground floor was occupied by a motor engineer in 1915.
- 2.34 Following many subsequent uses, in recent years the ground floor has functioned as an amusement arcade and a boxing gym, while the upper floors are occupied by offices.



Figure 16: 39 Friar Street, Reading (2021)

- 2.35 Throughout its history the building has been extensively modified. The façade of the building, while complete at first and second storey levels, is compromised by the insertion of the recently replaced modern shop front, and no trace of original ground floor doors or window openings remain. The windows of the upper storeys are all of similar construction but are all later modern replacements. The roof structure is modern as are the roof coverings.
- 2.36 Internally, a series of internal refurbishments before and after the buildings was listed have removed all fixtures, fittings and furnishings.
- 2.37 In more recent years, the building has been sandwiched between modern 1970s/80s development which completely altered its context.

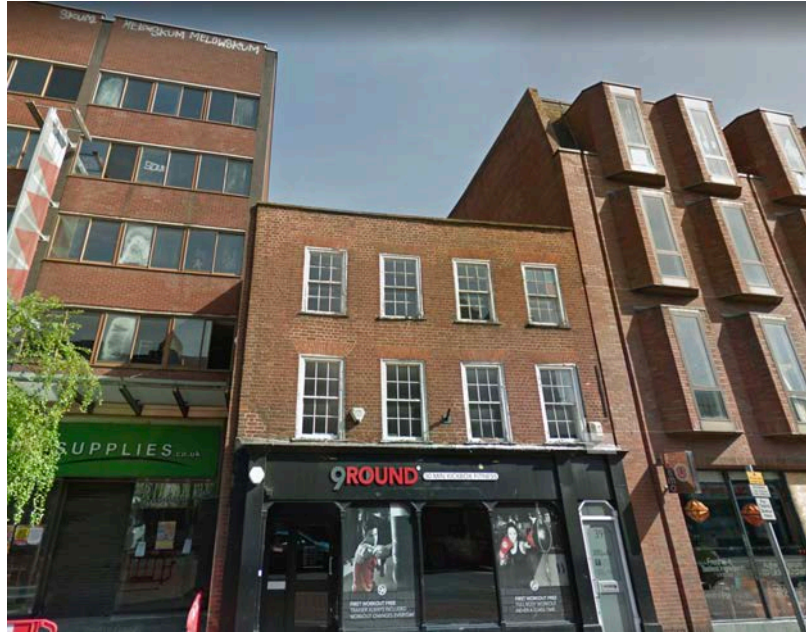


Figure 17: 39 Friar Street with 35-38 to the right and the former Friars Walk Shopping Centre development to the left (©googlemaps May 2019)

- 2.38 This 'new' context has left the building isolated and no longer forming part of a coherent streetscape on the northern side of Friar Street – which is dominated by buildings of a considerably higher scale.
- 2.39 The building, previously listed Grade II, was de-listed by Historic England in 2018 – recognising that it no longer had the special architectural or historical interest to warrant its inclusion on the Statutory List. The Council nevertheless regard the building to be a non-designated heritage asset.

35-38 Friar Street

- 2.40 Adjacent to the east, Nos. 35-38 Friar Street is a 1980s/90s office development with retail at ground floor. Whilst on its Friar Street elevation it only comprises ground and two upper floors (one of which is notionally a stylised mansard floor) due to modern floor-to-ceiling standards, it sits taller than its neighbours. The building steps up behind its frontage a further floor and plant.
- 2.41 The building's architecture is entirely 'of its time' and other than the use of brick does not relate particularly coherently with the other buildings in Friar Street – either old or new.



Figures 18&19: 35-38 Friar Street and its eastern context

- 2.42 Figure 17 shows Nos.35-38 Friar Street in its existing context, with a late Victorian commercial building immediately to the east followed by the six storey 1960s building adjacent to Merchant's Place. The eastern corner of Merchant's Place is rather grandly marked by the turret of Ajilon House – an exuberant Flemish neo-renaissance building of the late 19th century in brick and terracotta.

The townscape of Friar Street and the contribution made by Nos. 35-39 Friar Street

- 2.43 With regards heritage assets, Friar Street does not lie in a conservation area, other than its very eastern tip adjacent to the Town Hall and Market Place. There are no listed buildings in the immediate environment of the Site – the closest being No.147-149 Friar Street, on the southern side at the junction with Station Road.
- 2.44 The list description for No.147 makes clear that the two storey shop front is the main interest of the building and the reason why it is listed.

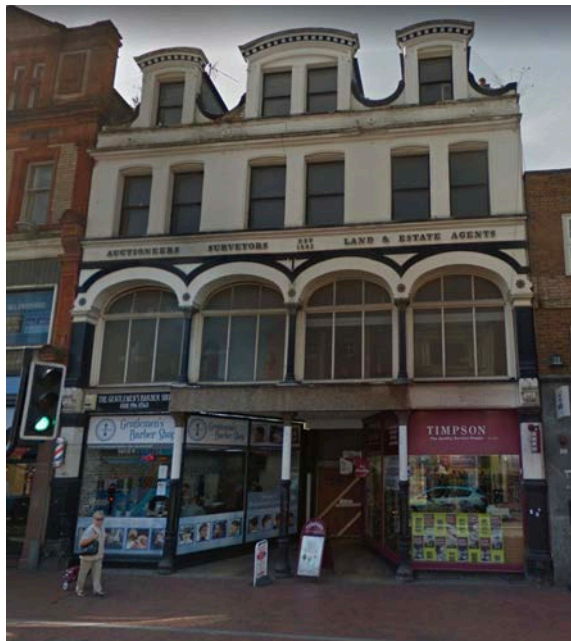


Figure 20: 147 Friar Street

- 2.45 Further to the east, 148-149 Friar Street are listed as part of the set piece development of Queen Victoria Street, stretching to the south. It is only their end returns that turn into Friar Street at the north and Broad Street at the south. Dating to 1894 they are in a Dutch gabled free Baroque style.
- 2.46 The street is, nevertheless, an important historic thoroughfare in Reading and as described in the previous section, the townscape of Friar Street has evolved over the past 500 years. First its geographical and then commercial success influenced the nature of the buildings in the town centre and along Friar Street.
- 2.47 The gentle curve of the street at its eastern end means that longer views open up around its junction with Station Road.

This is also the point at which a more cohesive character (to the east) is retained.

- 2.48 The eastern end of the street retains an element of its 19th/early 20th century character – not least through the strong landmark presence of the Town Hall and St Laurence’s Church framing views to the east from Station Road.
- 2.49 The majority of buildings are in brick, with stone, terracotta and brick used for detailing.
- 2.50 Whilst there is no consistent height or scale for the buildings, the Town Hall and Church Tower remain the most prominent buildings in most views east, although as previously described a number of corner buildings do create eye-catchers to mark the entrance to the side streets, such as Cross Street.
- 2.51 To the west of Station Road the character of the street changes markedly.
- 2.52 The northern side of the road has seen more than c. 50% of its buildings redeveloped during the second half of the 20th century and beyond. Most of these have not been designed with either their immediate neighbours or wider townscape in mind.
- 2.53 Several of the buildings do not stick to a historic building line which has an impact on the integrity of the street.
- 2.54 The extent of post-war redevelopment has also had a large impact on the quality of the townscape – leaving some buildings, such as Ajilon House isolated in their immediate context.



Figure 21: Ajilon House, Friar Street

- 2.55 The relatively newly constructed Ibis/Novotel dominates views west and has fundamentally altered the townscape of this part of the town centre.
- 2.56 The southern side of the street west of Station Road has also seen considerable redevelopment in the post-war period, however generally to a lower scale than that to the north. However, the busy nature of the traffic and buses and the broad width of the street means that the two halves are rarely appreciated in the same context.
- 2.57 With regard to the existing buildings on the site, Nos. 35-38 Friar Street contributes very little to the existing townscape of Friar Street other than, perhaps, its materiality and the general lack of townscape coherence. The building does not take any cues from its neighbours stylistically.
- 2.58 Despite its more historic origins, similar to other older buildings on the northern side of Friar Street, No.39 has become an isolated remnant. However, unlike others -such as Ajilon House - its terraced form means that the dramatic change in its context has considerably lessened its contribution – and its ability to contribute in the future.
- 2.59 The strategic decision to locate Friar's Walk along the flank of the building has exposed its long blank elevation and the extent to which it has been altered and rebuilt behind its façade.
- 2.60 As a consequence, this is an occasion where the opportunity to replace No.39 Friar Street is a genuine opportunity to create a more cohesive streetscape along the northern side of Friar Street, marking the entrance to a newly created public route.
- 2.61 The aspirations contained in the Station Hill South Planning and Urban Design Brief, along with those applications already permitted and under construction are already creating a new townscape for Friar Street. It will be imperative that new development at Nos.35-39 Friar Street relate to this new environment, whilst recognising some of the key features that have given Reading its evolving character over the past centuries.

3 The policy context

- 3.1 This section of the report briefly sets out the range of national and local policy and guidance relevant to the consideration of change in the built environment.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- 3.2 The legislation governing listed buildings and conservation areas is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act'). Section 66(1) of the Act requires decision makers to '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' when determining applications which affect a listed building or its setting. Section 72(1) of the Act requires decision makers with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area to pay 'special attention... to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'.

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.3 The revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in August 2021.
- 3.4 Chapter 12 considers 'Achieving well-designed places' – key to good townscape:
- 3.5 Paragraph 126 states that 'the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable 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. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.
- 3.6 Paragraph 130 states 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 arrangements 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 users, and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

3.7 Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework relates to the historic built environment: 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' deals with Heritage Assets describing them as 'an irreplaceable resource' that 'should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.'¹

Proposals affecting heritage assets

3.8 Paragraph 194 brings the NPPF in line with statute and case law on listed buildings and conservation areas. It says 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.'

3.9 Paragraph 197 notes that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

¹ The policies set out in this chapter relate, as applicable, to the heritage-related consent regimes for which local planning authorities are responsible under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as well as to plan-making and decision-making.

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Considering potential impacts

- 3.10 Paragraph 199 advises local planning authorities that ‘When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.
- 3.11 Paragraph 200 continues, ‘Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:
 - a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;
 - b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.²
- 3.12 In terms of proposed development that will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, paragraph 201 states that ‘local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:
 - a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and

² Non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest, which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets.

- b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
 - c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
 - d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use’.
- 3.13 It continues ‘where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use’ (paragraph 202).
- 3.14 In taking into account the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset the local authority should employ a ‘a balanced judgement’ in regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset (paragraph 203).

Reading Local Plan

- 3.15 Reading Local Plan was adopted in November 2019.
- 3.16 A number of policies are relevant to the consideration of this application from a townscape and heritage perspective.
- 3.17 EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
- 3.18 EN5: Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest :
The proposals will not appear in any of the identified views.
- 3.19 CR2: Design in Central Reading
- 3.20 CR3: Public Realm in Central Reading.

4 The proposed scheme and its effect

- 4.1 The proposed scheme is illustrated in the drawings and Design & Access Statement prepared by Stefan Shaw Studio and analysed in detail therein.
- 4.2 This section of the report describes the proposed scheme in terms of its effect on the heritage and townscape significance of the site and its context, described and analysed earlier in this report.
- 4.3 A detailed assessment of the townscape and heritage effects of the proposed scheme in a series of townscape views is then provided.

The proposed scheme

- 4.4 The proposal is for a 11-storey mixed use development comprising public uses at ground floor and a mixture of residential dwellings on the upper levels.
- 4.5 Retail units will activate the ground floor frontages along Friar Street and Friar's Walk and engage with new public realm improvements within the surrounding area.
- 4.6 A generous lobby will also double as co-working space at first floor to be used by residents.
- 4.7 Communal rooftop terraces and play spaces will be incorporated to create a sustainable community for residents.
- 4.8 Considerable analysis of the taxonomy of the surrounding buildings has been undertaken as part of the design process to inform the approach to the facades and how the building interacts with its surroundings.
- 4.9 Thus, architectural references and materials have been carefully selected to achieve a good level of articulation to the elevations and reflecting, in a contemporary reinterpretation, the materiality and tones found in the area.
- 4.10 As recognised earlier in this report, brick and terracotta are commonly used across the town centre, with the use of red, orange and blue tones – often in patterned diaper work – creating elaborate brickwork detailing and ensuring an eclectic mix of characterful buildings.
- 4.11 The proposed architecture and materials of the scheme has taken cues from this historic – and emerging – character.
- 4.12 The primary material proposed is a textured red and orange brick, broken up by a lighter horizontal concrete banding. The

lighter tones of the horizontal banding are picked up in the cladding of the ground floor and uppermost floors of each block with the aim of tying together the materiality, for the building to be read as a whole.

- 4.13 Grey/blue sawtooth brickwork above the windows creates relief to the façade and emphasises the verticality of the fenestration. Dark metal inset balconies aim to break up the massing into three distinct, well-proportioned blocks.
- 4.14 From a townscape perspective considerable thought has been given to the emerging context – particularly the new development that is being built as part of the Station Hill development.
- 4.15 The new Friar’s Walk link is an important new north-south pedestrian/cycle route proposed as part of the Station Hill development that will connect the River Thames to the River Kennet via Reading Train Station and the historic town centre. Providing an active and engaging building that enhances the public realm will be of key importance to contributing positively to this element of the wider ambitions of Reading.
- 4.16 Responding to the existing urban grain on Friar Street, the massing has been broken in to 3 forms. The forms have been given further articulation by clear top, middle and bottom, and the importance that the proposal will play in marking the entrance to the newly created Friar’s Walk has been emphasised.
- 4.17 As noted earlier in this report and the DAS, a key characteristic within the town is the celebration of the ‘corner’. The corner of the Plot E development, opposite the site, has been designed to signify the entrance to Friar’s Walk, and the proposal seeks to provide a similarly high-quality gateway on the eastern side.
- 4.18 The massing of the main Friar Street block has been scaled to ensure the main datum to the street sits no higher than Plot E and other development permitted along the road, and the rear of the site is positioned so that its additional height is not visible from the road.
- 4.19 Within the wider context of the existing hotel and other development on Station Hill, the proposals sit comfortably within the accepted heights and scale – in most cases lower.
- 4.20 Of particular interest from a townscape perspective is the efforts undertaken to contribute possible landscaping proposals for Friar’s Walk. Clearly this will require liaison with Station Hill South and Reading Council, but there is a unique opportunity to

develop an integrated approach that could truly activate and enhance the new space.

The townscape and visual impact of the proposed scheme

- 4.21 As described earlier in this report, an analysis of the area around the site has been undertaken to understand the impact the development is likely to have on key heritage and townscape features and heritage assets. This includes: urban form, character and architectural quality, the presence of heritage assets, scale and massing, public realm, permeability and linkages, continuity and enclosure.
- 4.22 A combination of desktop study and fieldwork has been used to determine the significant views of the development.
- 4.23 The views are shown in a baseline condition, followed by an image showing the proposed development. A commentary on the existing and proposed townscape conditions is provided.
- 4.24 Large scale images are provided separately with the application, in the Design & Access Statement.

Effect Criteria

- 4.25 The assessment considers the likely significant effects that result directly from the Proposed Development itself (direct) or from consequential change (indirect) and whether likely significant effects are caused by the Proposed Development. Likely significant effects have been assessed in terms of the sensitivity of the resource affected and the magnitude of the effect or change and whether the effect is considered to be qualitatively beneficial, neutral or adverse
- 4.26 The magnitude of change/impact to townscape and heritage is measured as follows:
 - ‘Negligible’ – no material change.
 - ‘Minor’ – changes that only make a small difference to the ability to understand and appreciate the historic context or townscape setting. A minor impact may also be defined as involving receptors of low sensitivity exposed to intrusion, obstruction or change of a low to medium magnitude for short periods of time.
 - ‘Moderate’ – a change that makes an appreciable difference to the ability to understand the historic context or townscape setting. A moderate impact may also be defined as the result of moderately sensitive receptors exposed to intrusion, obstruction or change of a medium magnitude, or

highly sensitive receptors exposed to intrusion or change of a low magnitude.

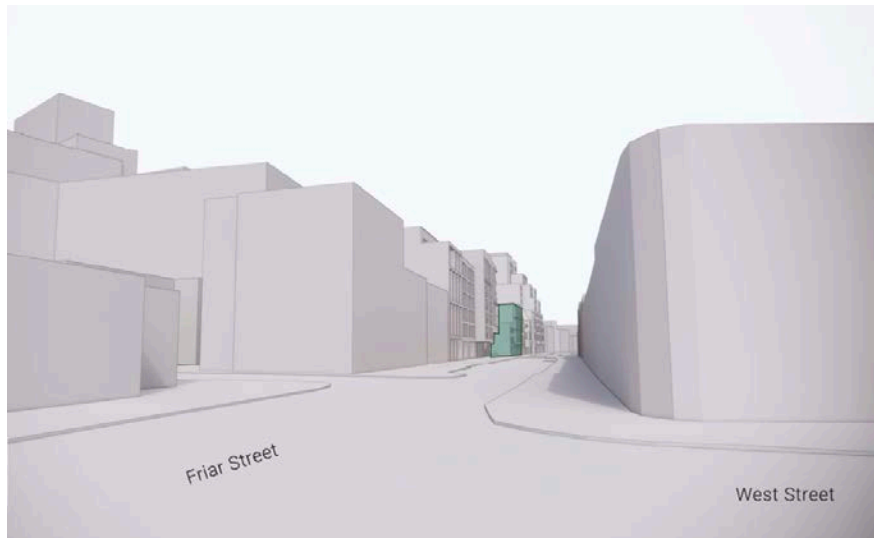
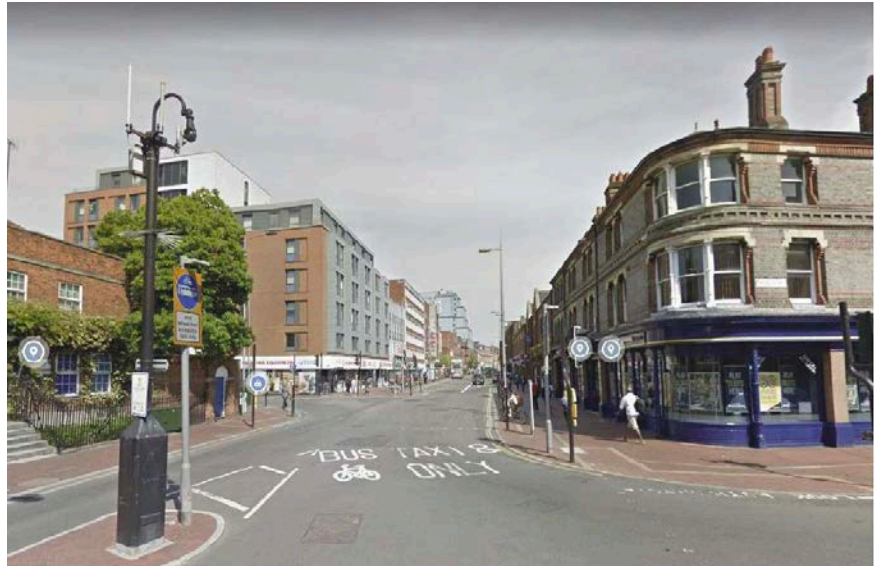
- 'Major' – a fundamental change in the appreciation of the resource and historic context or townscape setting. A substantial impact may also be defined as the result of highly sensitive receptors exposed to intrusion, obstruction or change of a high or medium magnitude for prolonged periods

4.27 The impact of proposals is measured as follows:

- 'Neutral': there is negligible or no impact.
- 'Beneficial': the impact of the development is to improve the condition or circumstances of the townscape receptor.
- 'Adverse': the impact of the development is to harm the condition or circumstances of the townscape receptor.

View One

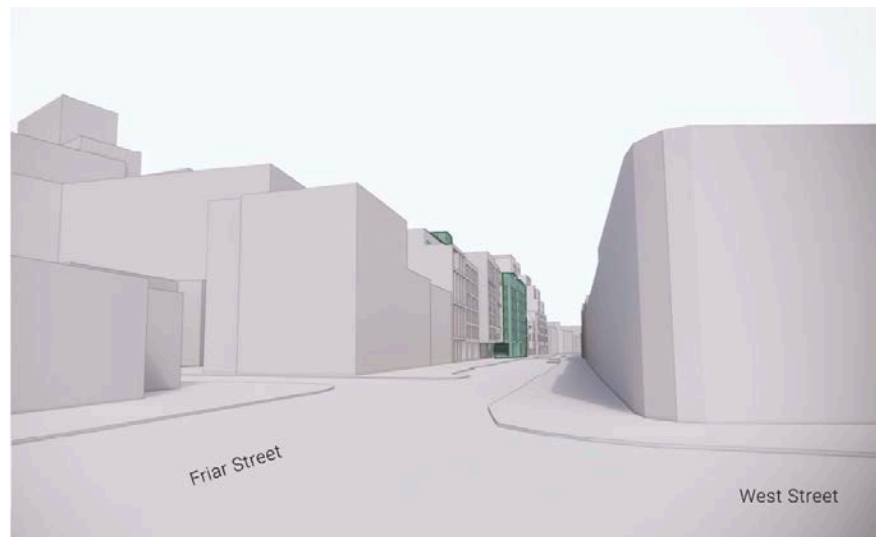
Baseline



- 4.28 View 1 is looking east along Friar Street at its junction with West Street. On the immediate left is the re-built vicarage to Greyfriar's Church, with its Grade II listed Quadrant walls, and on the right is a good example of the use of decorative brickwork in 19th century commercial development. Here blue/grey brick is detailed with red brick and stone.
- 4.29 Beyond, looking up Friar Street, the centre of the view is dominated by modern and post-war architecture on its northern side, with the view framed in the background by the mass of the Ibis/Novotel Hotel.

- 4.30 Currently the exposed side flank of No.35-38 and No.39 Friar Street are just glimpsed, but this will be hidden by the completed Plot E site adjacent to the west.
- 4.31 The quality of the townscape in this view is ordinary – whilst there is clearly a distinguishable townscape structure – particularly in the historic linearity of Friar Street – much of the development in the view is modern and of little architectural merit with remnants of interest, such as 93-98 Friar Street (on the corner) interspersed between modern replacements.
- 4.32 The scale of development on the northern side is obviously of a greater height than the south – visually peaking with the Ibis/Novotel Hotel.

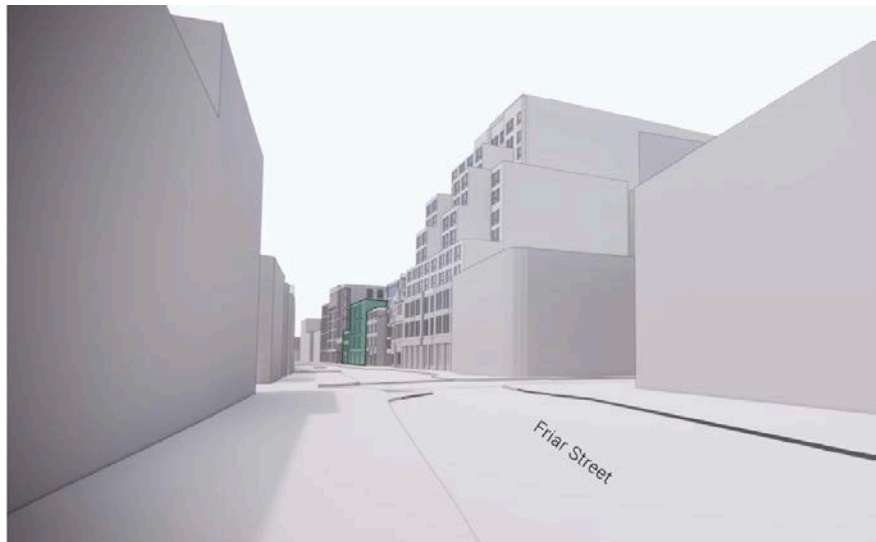
Proposed



- 4.33 The proposed development will be just visible forming part of the overall townscape of the north side of Friar Street in this view.
- 4.34 By stepping back the majority of the massing, the building sits comfortably within the overall streetscape and alongside the development at Plot E – marking the entrance to Friar's Walk.
- 4.35 The use of traditional materials and with creative thought given to their decorative use, the building should sit well in its wider town centre context.
- 4.36 The magnitude of change to townscape in this view will be minor and beneficial. The proposed new building sits some way down the street and will fit comfortably into the existing (and emerging) townscape but will also positively help to mark the entrance to Friar's Walk – an important new north-south link through the town.

View Two

Baseline

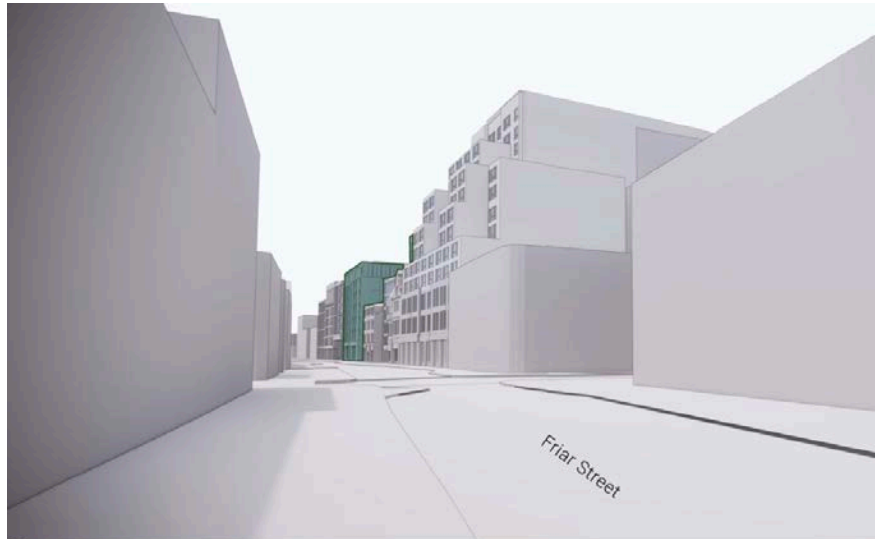


- 4.37 View 2 is looking west along Friar Street from the junction with Cross Street.
- 4.38 On the left-hand side at the junction with Queen Victoria Street, Nos. 1-31 Queen Victoria Street (which stretches the length of the street) is listed Grade II.
- 4.39 The site, Nos. 35-39 Friar Street, is just visible, obliquely in the middle distance in front of the emerging Plot E development.
- 4.40 The majority of the buildings in the view are of red brick and classical in proportion, style and detailing except for 148-149

Friar Street (on the left) which forms part of the set piece Queen Victoria Street. This is in a Dutch gabled free Baroque style using yellow brick and terracotta detailing.

- 4.41 In reality, the view is dominated by the scale and mass of the Hotel building which appears beyond and behind 23 Friar Street - on the corner of Friar Street and Station Road. Whilst its immediate front elevation sits in line with a broad datum along the street, it quickly steps up behind the front elevation in a series of steep setbacks.
- 4.42 The quality of the townscape in this view is good. The view contains both listed buildings and also buildings of good architectural quality. Many of the buildings display architectural characteristics which are not just of high-calibre but also typical of Reading. It is only the scale of the hotel that is discordant in this view.

Proposed



- 4.43 The proposed development will be visible in the middle distance in this view, at a scale and massing consistent with Plot E, to its west, and in general, with the emerging datum of the northern side of Friar Street.
- 4.44 Its scale will not be out of context with the rest of the street as the majority of the mass is pushed back such that it is not visible in this view.
- 4.45 The choice of materials and the scale of the building means that it will act as a high quality marker of the newly created Friar's Walk.
- 4.46 The magnitude of change to townscape in this view will be minor and beneficial. The proposed new building will fit comfortably into the existing (and emerging) townscape but will also positively help to mark the entrance to Friar's Walk – an important new north-south link through the town.
- 4.47 The proposals will have no impact on the setting of Grade II listed Nos. 147-149 Friar Street, located on the left hand side of the view.

View Three

Baseline



- 4.48 View 3 is looking east along Friar Street from the southern side of the street, looking towards Nos. 35-39 Friar Street.
- 4.49 To the left in the foreground is the emerging Plot E development and beyond, providing the dominant backdrop to the view is the western side elevation of the Hotel building.
- 4.50 As described earlier in this report, No. 39 Friar Street was built as a terraced house, with buildings abutting on both sides. As a consequence, the side elevation now presents a long and blank (and scarred) elevation that contributes nothing to the townscape of Friar Street.
- 4.51 This is exacerbated by the creation of Friar's Walk – which is a key new link through the town centre.
- 4.52 The view, and the buildings within it, typifies the varied nature of the townscape along the northern side of Friar Street, particularly to the west of Station Road. There is a huge variety in scale, form, age, style and materials.
- 4.53 The quality of the townscape in this view is ordinary. Whilst some of the buildings are of a better quality than others (for example Ajilon House), others are either architecturally disconnected - such as the 1960s 30 Friar Street - or of a scale that dominates the street, such as the hotel building.

Proposed



- 4.54 The proposed development will appear prominently in this view where a full appreciation of the design intention will be discernible. This includes the materiality and decorative use of brickwork as well as the activation of both Friar Street and Friar's Walk.
- 4.55 The building has been carefully designed to mark the corner and sit comfortably opposite the Plot E development.
- 4.56 The articulation of the front façade reduces the impact of the mass on the street front – to ensure that it does not over dominate its surroundings and the approach to a 'top, middle and bottom' of the architectural form relates well to the more traditional architectural styles found further to the east.
- 4.57 The magnitude of change to townscape in this view is moderate. The proposed development will make an appreciable – and beneficial – difference to the townscape. The building will help to clearly mark the entrance to Friar's Walk with a high-quality design. The activation, particularly of Friar's Walk will be a huge townscape benefit over the existing situation.

View Four

Baseline



- 4.58 View 4 is looking west along Friar Street. As described previously, this view similarly typifies the eclectic nature of the townscape of Friar Street, particularly its northern side.
- 4.59 The view comprises buildings from the 19th through to the 21st century reflecting different styles forms and materials.
- 4.60 The predominant material is brick: Alijon House in red brick with terracotta; 32-24 Friar Street in a yellow brick with red brick detailing, and 35-39 in red brick but of very differing ages and styles.
- 4.61 The view shows the emerging Plot E development beyond No.39 Friar Street. No.39 now looking oddly out of proportion with the rest of the street.
- 4.62 The quality of the townscape in this view is ordinary. Whilst there are some buildings of quality in the view, there are also buildings such as No.31 Friar Street as well as 35-37 Friar Street (part of the site) which are either out of context or of little architectural quality.

Proposed



- 4.63 The proposed development will appear prominently in the centre of this view.
- 4.64 Its height and massing fronting Friar Street can be fully appreciated from this point where it will sit comfortably alongside Plot E and within the wider context of the other buildings on the northern side of the street.
- 4.65 In recognising the variation in scale with Nos. 32-34 Friar Street, the side elevation has been given considerable articulation so that it does not present a large blank elevation to the street. This will reflect the use of brick for both construction and decorative purposes across Reading Town Centre.
- 4.66 The building will provide a suitable marker to Friar's Walk that will sit contextually and comfortably with Plot E on the western side of the new thoroughfare.
- 4.67 The magnitude of change to townscape in this view is moderate. The proposed development will make an appreciable – and beneficial – difference to the townscape. The building will help to clearly mark the entrance to Friar's Walk with a high-quality design. The activation, particularly of Friar's Walk will be a huge townscape benefit over the existing situation.
- 4.68 The quality of the architecture proposed will ensure that even where more prominent, the building will contribute positively and contextually to Friar Street.

Summary

- 4.69 Overall, the townscape view analysis demonstrates that even where the proposed building is most prominent the carefully considered scale and massing, choice and tonality of materials and articulation of the facades as well as the positive role it will play in marking Friar's Walk will ensure that the building is a Beneficial contributor to the townscape of the area.
- 4.70 The majority of the mass of the proposed building will be set back along Friar's Walk where it will sit comfortably in the context of the rest of the Station Hill development and the existing hotel building.
- 4.71 The proposals will have no impact on any designated heritage assets. The listed Town Hall and St Laurence's Church, which form important landmarks at the eastern end of Friar Street, cannot be seen in the same context as the development site due to the gentle curve of the road.
- 4.72 Other listed buildings in the wider vicinity are generally not seen in the same context, and where they are, the proposed development will have no impact on their setting or special interest. There are no nearby conservation areas.

5 Compliance with policy and guidance

- 5.1 The report has provided a description and analysis of the site and its townscape and heritage context, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, the report describes how the proposed scheme will affect that context.
- 5.2 In terms of legislation, the proposals preserve the setting of the nearby listed buildings, and thus complies with S.72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 5.3 With regards to the NPPF, the proposals have taken into consideration the policies outlined in Chapter 12 regarding well-designed places.
- 5.4 As required by paragraph 130 we believe that through the design quality and consideration given to the surrounding context, the proposals will add to the overall quality of the area in a visually attractive way.
- 5.5 As demonstrated, the design has been informed by an understanding of the local character and historic, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.
- 5.6 The proposals have been designed to create a strong sense of place – in particular enhancing the newly created Friar’s Walk – working with the emerging Plot E development to create a welcoming, active entrance to the new north-south link through the town centre.
- 5.7 With regards the historic built environment and Chapter 16, the views analysis demonstrates that the proposed scheme complies with Paragraph 201 of the NPPF - it certainly does not lead to ‘substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset’. It also complies with Paragraph 202 for the reasons given in detail earlier in this report - the scheme cannot be considered to harm the heritage significance of any nearby listed buildings or conservation area.
- 5.8 With regards paragraph 203, despite the fact that Historic England de-listed No. 39 Friar Street, if the Council were to consider that element of the site as a non-designated heritage asset we believe that the proposals meet the balance identified in that policy.
- 5.9 The significance of the asset is so diminished – particularly with the exposure of its blank side elevation and loss of almost all original detailing – that the loss of the building is outweighed by the benefits of the scheme and their contribution to the Council’s wider aspirations for this part of the town centre.

- 5.10 As a consequence, this is an occasion where the opportunity to replace No.39 Friar Street is a genuine opportunity to create a more cohesive streetscape along the northern side of Friar Street, marking the entrance to a newly created public route.
- 5.11 It is our view that the proposals cannot reasonably be considered to cause harm to any of the heritage assets identified earlier in the report and this is underlined by the townscape views produced and commented upon.
- 5.12 Reading Borough Council Local Plan
- 5.13 In satisfying the NPPF, the proposed scheme also satisfies Reading's local policies for architecture, urban design and heritage assets.
- 5.14 With regards Policy CR2, the DAS demonstrates that the architectural details and materials chosen are of a high quality and respect the form and quality of the detailing and materials of other town centre buildings.
- 5.15 For the reasons given earlier, we believe that the proposals satisfy Policy EN1: historic features, areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings will be protected.
- 5.16 As described earlier, there are no locally listed buildings or conservation areas in the immediate vicinity (EN3 & EN4) and the site does not fall within any of the identified significant views (EN5).
- 5.17 In summary, the analysis in this report along with the Design & Access Statement and the townscape views prepared to test this demonstrate that the proposals will have no harmful impact on either townscape or heritage asset and provide an opportunity to enhance a site which currently makes no contribution to the conservation area or surrounding area.
- 5.18 In doing so the proposals comply with national and local statute, policy and guidance in respect of townscape and built heritage

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