

1. ASSESSMENT

1.1 PHYSICAL CONTEXT

SITE LOCATION

The site lies immediately adjacent to the railway station at the northern edge of Reading town centre, the major part of the town centre being on the other side of the railway tracks. The River Thames is to the North of the site, with the open green spaces of Christchurch Meadows beyond.

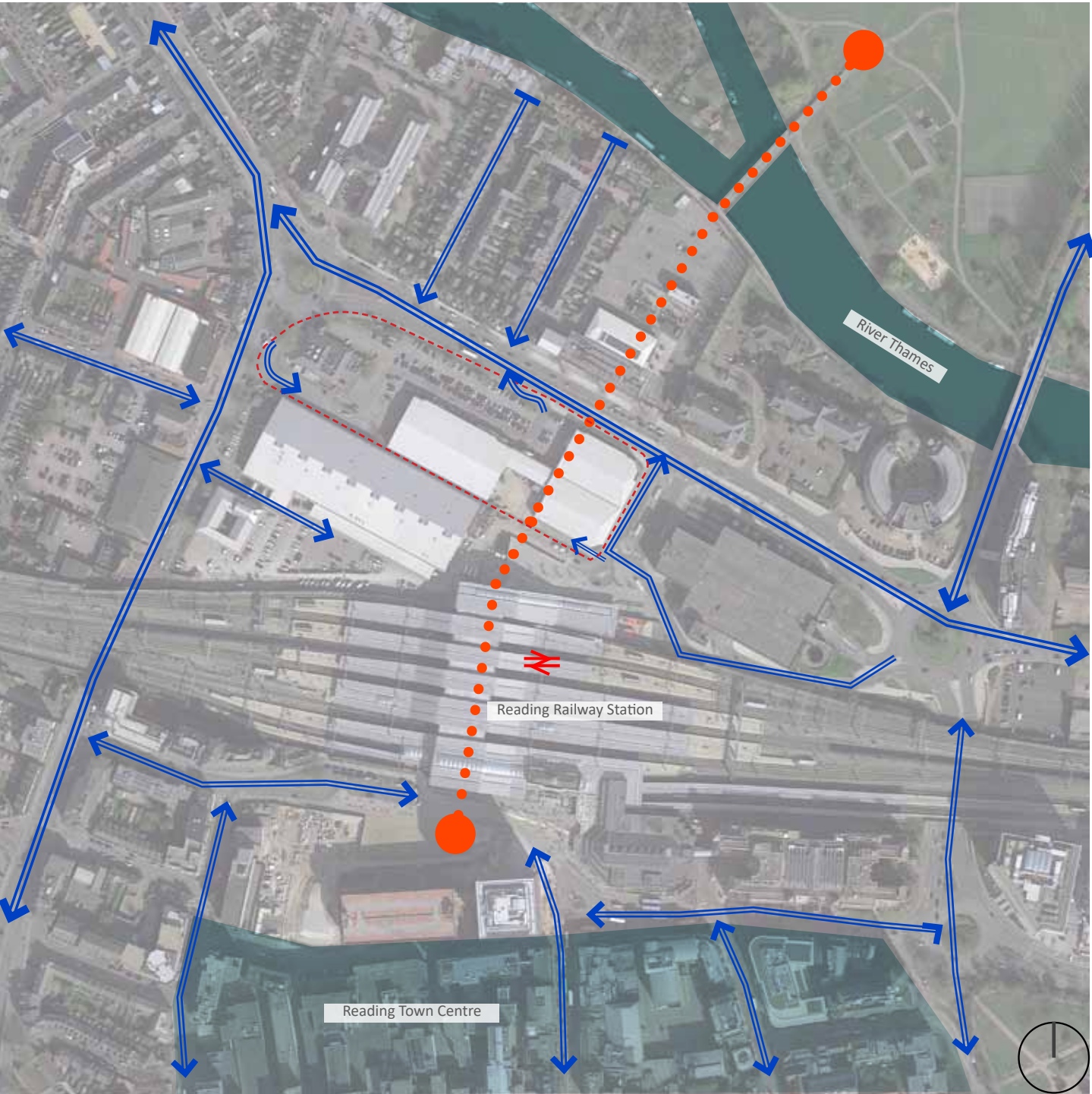
Located at the heart of a possible pedestrian and cycle route from the station to the river, the site represents a significant redevelopment opportunity, providing the potential to secure a major mixed-use sustainable development of a scale and quality that will contribute positively to the continuing development of Reading Town Centre.

Key:

Main vehicular routes

Secondary vehicular routes

Proposed north-south pedestrian axis



Aerial view. Site’s relationship to the town centre and Reading railway station

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ACCESS

The site is bounded by Vastern Road to the north, Caversham Road to the west, the Former Royal Mail depot to the south and the lesser-used taxi drop off and bus return route of Trooper Potts Way to the east. There is one public vehicular access point to the site from Caversham Road and one egress point onto Vastern Road. Additionally there is a service access off Trooper Potts Way for deliveries to the retail park.

The road, bus and rail network give good transport links to Reading and beyond.

Pedestrian access from the town centre is via a ground level passage beneath the railway tracks. Two alternative routes are to the East and West, alongside major roads.

The pedestrian access from the railway station to the river is currently via an indirect and almost hidden route through an office development, heavily reliant on signposting rather than natural wayfinding.

- - - - - Site boundary
- Existing pedestrian routes
- ====> Existing main vehicular access
- - - - - Existing main vehicular access/under bridge crossing
- Bus only route except for access to station car park
- ==== Existing 'dead end' vehicular routes



1. ASSESSMENT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

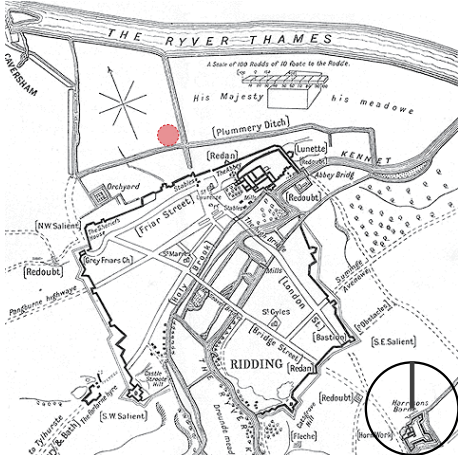
The site is located in an area that was heavily influenced by the development of the Great Western Railway(GWR), one of the main factors affecting rapid growth in Reading.

However, for a long period of time the area North of the tracks was used mainly for the GWR signalling works (until 1960) and for storage.

The first Reading station was opened on 30 March 1840 as the temporary western terminus of the original line of the GWR. The time taken to travel from London to Reading was reduced to one hour and five minutes, less than a quarter of the time taken by the fastest stagecoach. The line was extended to its intended terminus at Bristol by 1841.

As built, Reading station was a typical Brunel-designed single-sided intermediate station, with separate up and down platforms situated to the South of the through tracks and arranged so that all up trains calling at Reading had to cross the route of all down through trains.

Between 1865 and 1867, a station building, built of buff brick from Coalbrookdale with Bath Stone dressings and incorporating a tower and clock, was constructed for the GWR. In 1898 the single sided station layout was replaced by a conventional design with 'up', 'down' and 'relief' platforms linked by a pedestrian subway.



Map dated 1643



Map dated 1830



Reading Station 1865



A common negative impact of railway development is the divide that generates uneven growth between the two sides of the track.

However, in Reading, the railway follows the path of River Thames. Railway and river barges must have traded together for a short period of time before the railway took over as the main means of transport. This boundary between North and South must have been enforced by the river.

On the south, Reading grew rapidly expanding Southward. In 1911, Reading continued to expand, but this time northwards, annexing Caversham.

Aiming to connect to Caversham, redevelopment works since 1989 have incorporated means of linking the two sides of the tracks for better connectivity and more even growth. It can be argued that the current station retail park, which turns its back on the station and has an open frontage only to Vastern Road, has undone some of the work that was previously carried out to improve connectivity.



Map dated 1962



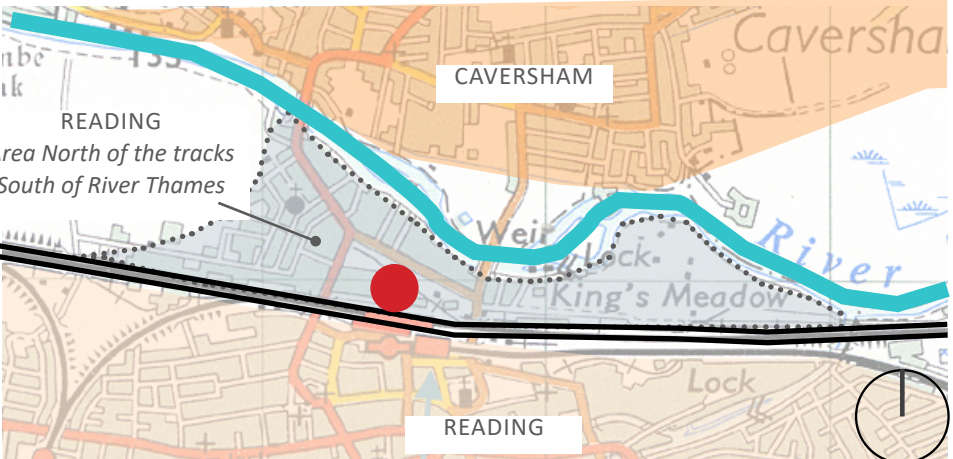
Reading Station 1960



Reading Station 1963



Reading Station 1966



1. ASSESSMENT

CHARACTER AREAS

Currently, the 1.77 hectare site contains Class A1 floorspace and associated parking. To the South and West there are storage facilities and small retail units. On the northern boundary, the site is separated by Vastern Road from a row of terraced houses and some office accommodation. The surrounding uses on the eastern boundary are mostly commercial: office space and a town centre multi-storey car park.



1. Aerial view of the retail park and royal mail depot



2. Railway station, northern entrance



3. Railway Station car park



4. Vastern Road office buildings



5. Vastern Road residential



6. Caversham Road fire station

Application site

Residential Use

Office Use

Industrial Use/ Parking/ Substation

Retail Use

Photos direction and location

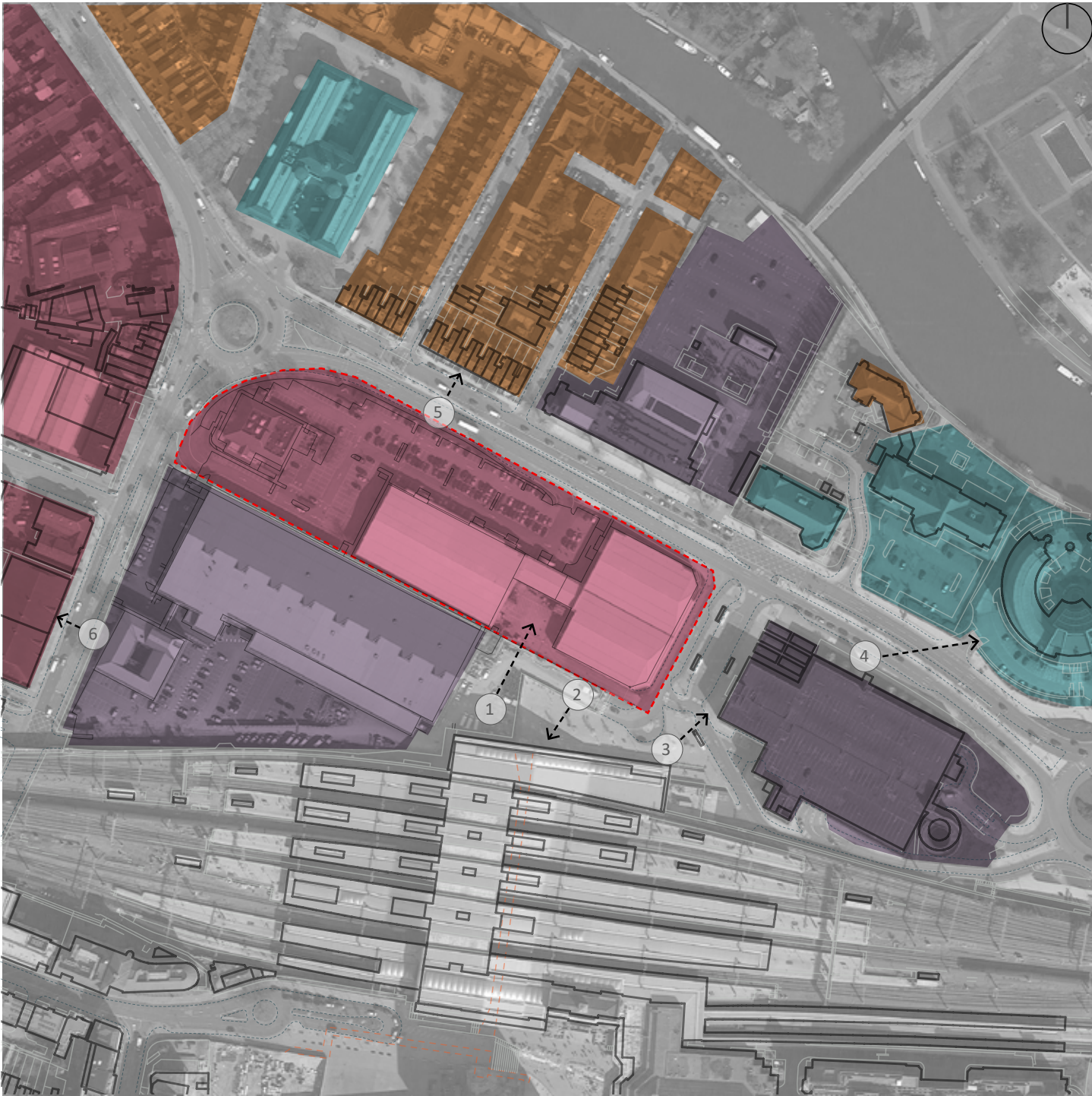


Diagram plan view of surrounding Uses

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HEIGHTS

The surrounding uses on the eastern boundary are mostly commercial: office space and a town centre multi-storey car park.

The heights vary according to use. The single houses are two storeys with pitched roofs; the heights of the office and commercial buildings to the East and West of the site are considerably taller, the multi-storey car park being the tallest at 5-6 storeys.



1. Vastern Road



2. Office Building on Vastern Road



3. Office Building on Vastern Road



4. Caversham Road



5. Royal Mail and Retail back of house

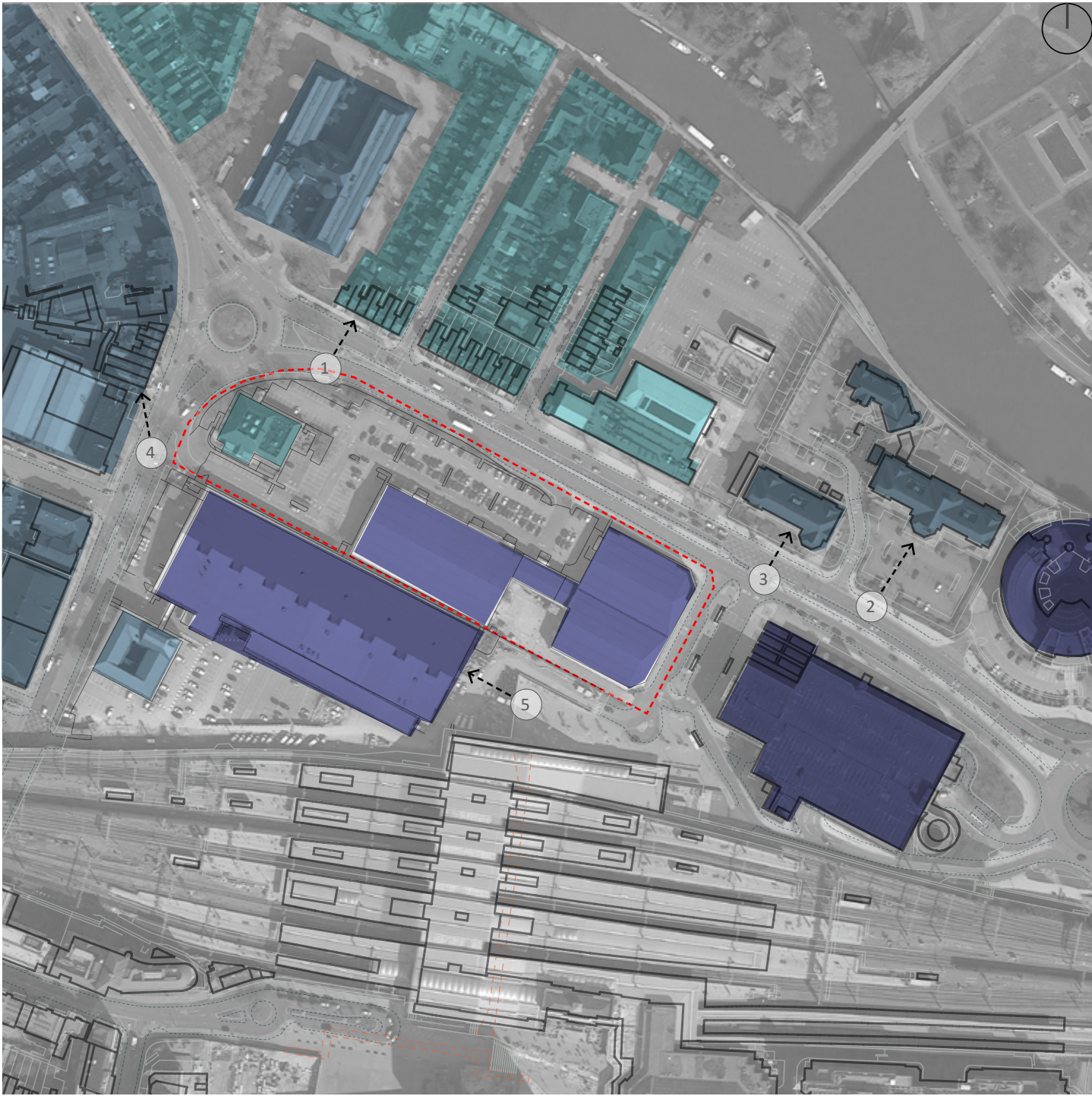
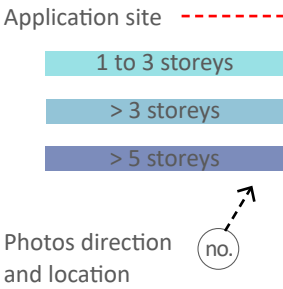


Diagram plan view of surrounding heights

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1.2 SITE ASSESSMENT

EXISTING BUILDINGS AND USE

The 1.77ha site is in the ownership of Aviva Life & Pensions UK Limited and is currently occupied by retail units comprising 6,969 sq m of Class A1 floorspace.

The Retail Shopping Park is made up of 5 units, which are presently let to the operators set out in Table 1.

In its current configuration, the site presents itself as a barrier to integration with the wider area, adding a layer of mass and use between Reading and Caversham that would be better suited to a less central location.

There is no direct route for walking from the centre of Reading to Caversham. As shown in the diagram to the right, using the direct link that is provided through the railway station, pedestrians face a series of barriers both physically and visually to reach the river and Caversham beyond.

Unit	Size	Tenant
1	1,436 sqm	Mothercare
2	1,224 sqm	Aldi
3	291 sqm	Majestic Wine
4	3,261 sqm	The Range
5	757 sqm	TGI Friday

Table 1. Existing uses



In discussing the site, Reading Tall Buildings Strategy notes:

The large, blank faces of the warehouses create an unexceptional area of townscape which does not respond well to the surrounding residential land use. Although the buildings are occupied and function well for their purpose, their design is unattractive and creates a weak and uninspiring area of townscape.



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SITE SURROUNDING AREA



1. ASSESSMENT

WIDER CONTEXT



1.



2.



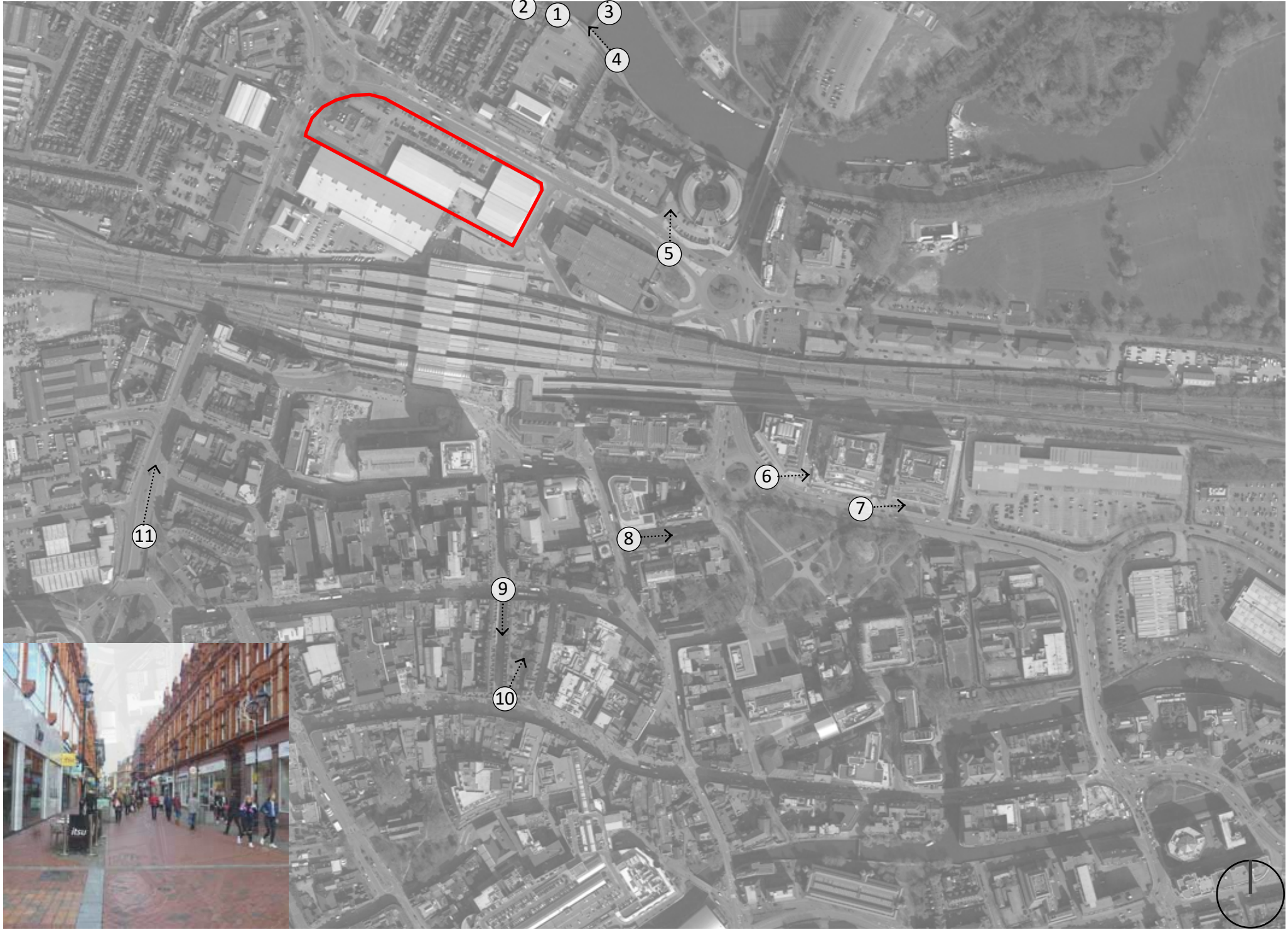
3.



4.



5.



11.



10.



9.



6.



7.



8.

1. ASSESSMENT

EMERGING TOWNSCAPE

There has been a significant amount of re-development in Reading in the last decade. A number of large scale schemes will contribute to the future skyline and townscape.



4. Kenavon Drive



3. Chatham Place



1. Former Thames Quarter site



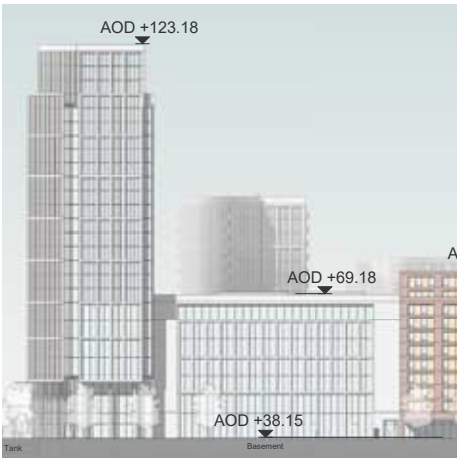
2. Station Hill



5. King's Point



6. 29-35 Station Road



7. Former Royal Mail site



8. Former SSE site



