

**Re: Proposed New Signage to the front elevation at Buenasado Argentine Steakhouse
CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL TO ACCOMPANY PLANNING APPLICATION.**

This Conservation Area Appraisal accompanies a planning application for the works as described within the application.

Our aim is to obtain approval from Reading Borough Council to our proposals to enable the scheme to progress.

Summary of special interest

The St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area was designated in 1972.

The special interest which justifies designation of the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area derives from the following features:

- 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.
- 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.

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Location

The boundaries of the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area are shown at Appendix 2. It is situated immediately to the south of properties fronting Reading's traditional main shopping street, Broad Street, from which it is accessible via the northern end of St Mary's Butts and Chain Street.

It lies north west of the Oracle Shopping Centre, to which access can be gained at either end of Gun Street.

Two main road links cross the area, St Mary's Butts/Bridge Street north to south, and Castle Street/Gun Street/and a small section of Minster Street west to east. Only the south side and a small stretch on the northern side of Castle Street (eastern end) lie in the Conservation Area. The remaining northern side of Castle Street comprises the Magistrates Court/Police Station Complex, behind which are the Civic Offices and the Hexagon, and to the north-east of which lies the Broad Street Mall Shopping Centre. The latter also faces the northern end (western side) of St Mary's Butts. This whole area is a 1970s redevelopment; however, that part of this area centred on the site of the Hosier Street Market and land to the west is currently under discussion for further redevelopment and presents considerable potential to improve the appearance and setting of this part of the Conservation Area.

The western end of the Conservation Area is marked by the line of that part of the town's Inner Distribution Road which separates the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area from the Castle Hill/Russell Street Conservation Area to the west.

The southern boundary of the Conservation Area is demarcated by the Holy Brook, south of which are more recent housing developments and offices accessed from Bridge Street on part of the former Simmonds/Courage Brewery site to the west of Bridge Street. The aforementioned Oracle Shopping Centre (a large part of which was also part of the former Simmonds/Courage Brewery site) also lies to the south of The Holy Brook to the east of Bridge Street.

The John Lewis (formerly "Heelas") department store marks the eastern boundary of the site, and south of that, on the opposite side of Minster Street, is a main Telephone Exchange, with the "Oracle" beyond this and to the south.

The Conservation Area therefore represents an historic oasis surrounded on three sides by post 1970s and later developments, and only to the north by the more historic Broad Street, which however backs on to the Conservation Area, often in the form of rear service yards and parking spaces which are accessed from St Mary's Butts adjacent to St Mary's Church.

General character and plan form

Essentially the Conservation Area lies at the crossing of two north/south and east/west roads. Except for St Mary's Church and Churchyard, which form a key open space and landmark building in the north-east segment of the cross-roads, the character of the area is one of two and three storey buildings built right up the back edge of pavements. This character is reflective of the medieval street pattern of this part of Reading, which is recognised as being the original core and market place of the town, before the advent of Reading Abbey "drew" the centre of gravity of the town and its market place to the western end of Friar Street. More recently, the market has moved to its current position, in Hosier Street, once again close to its original home. With this background in mind, it is not surprising to find that St Mary's Butts was shown as "Old Street" on older maps of the town, whereas Friar Street was shown as "New Street".

The cross-roads lie immediately north of the original fords/bridging points of the River Kennet upon which Reading grew, providing the main route south to places like Winchester and Southampton and north to Wallingford (historically a very important town) and Oxford. The Minster Street/Gun Street/Castle Street axis was originally the main east-west route between London and Bath.

Originally, there was a row of back-to-back houses running down the middle of the southern end of St Mary's Butts and on the outside of the churchyard. The latter were actually alms houses, built in the late sixteenth century, rebuilt in the late eighteenth

century and demolished circa 1865, when they were “relocated” to the western end of Castle Street. A plaque on the wall of the latter testifies to the original almshouses in the Churchyard.

The cross-roads should therefore be seen as a busy centre of life in Saxon and medieval times, centred on the market, St Mary's Church, the churchyard and the cross-roads. Historically, there have been at least 4 public houses (inns) and 2 or 3 churches in this small area, and before it was redeveloped, a number of industries were situated in the area immediately surrounding the Conservation Area, for example early mills based on the River Kennet, and latterly the now relocated Courage/Simmonds Brewery.

Archaeology

Although previously thought to be a wintering place for the Danes, Reading is named after a Saxon tribe, the *Readingas*, who settled in the area in the 6th century. Work on development sites in Reading has uncovered evidence of early Saxon occupation.

The Domesday Survey for Reading, undertaken in 1085-6, described a large estate formerly held by King Edward and a church and estate held by the Abbot of Battle, evidence of a thriving urban community in the eleventh century. This was centred where the main north-south and east-west roads crossed to the south west of the current site of St Mary's Church.

Key views and vistas

The Conservation Area basically lies at the top of an incline from the Kennet river crossing, but because of the tightness of the properties at the northern end of Bridge Street to the back edge of the pavement, views of St Mary's Church are not readily apparent until one is quite close to it. The same applies when approaching the site from other points of the compass. Nevertheless the tower of St Mary's Church itself provides good views of these approaches (important historically to defend the church). The similarly named, St Mary's Church in Castle Street is also another local landmark, but again, is more prominent close up and from views from either end of Castle Street. It is, however, less prominent nowadays, because it is missing the “pepper pot” (bell tower) feature which once adorned the plinth which still stands above the building.

A minor local landmark structure is the Victorian Fountain situated on the “island” in the middle of St Mary's Butts, as is the facility provided by a refreshment kiosk adjacent to it. At the southern end of the island were once subterranean Victorian toilets, which are now closed/sealed off.

The main historic views out of the area are: to Greyfriars Church to the north along St Mary's Butts and West Street; up Castle Hill to the west, although this is interrupted by the Inner Distribution Road and the large roundabout above it at the western end of Castle Street; and south to St Giles Church down Bridge Street and Southampton Street (but again interrupted by the Inner Distribution Road). Views to the east are foreshortened by the closeness of buildings on this boundary. The Conservation Area is therefore very much an historic enclave surrounded by much more modern developments which do not provide significant views out of the area, but which generally benefit from good views in to it. It is situated at the centre of some very active parts of the town, which people walk across and often rest in, and (apart from the grassed area outside the Civic Offices) provides the only public green area at the

western end of the town centre. Within the Conservation Area there are potentially interesting views to and from the west from St Mary's Church along the important east-west pedestrian axis via the site of the Hosier Street Market from the Civic Offices/Hexagon/Broad Street Mall southern entrance to St Mary's Church. Currently the views to St Mary's Church are significantly better than those from it. However, the previously mentioned development of the Hosier Street brings with it considerable potential for improvements to this part of the Conservation Area, its wider setting and views to and from it. The Oracle is the foremost shopping and leisure destination in the Thames Valley region. 40 miles west of London, with one of the UK's busiest railway stations, Reading's proximity to the country's capital makes it a popular commuter town. The Oracle has transformed the retail and leisure offer for Reading and its surrounding areas.

Site Location

- The site lies at The Oracle, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2AQ

Use

The application is to allow the proposal for new signage at Buenasado Argentine Steakhouse with Buenasado investing in it to give it more kerb appeal.

Amount of development

- To supply new signage to the front elevation
- There are no external ground works and there are no trees and hedges on site which will affect this proposal.

Layout

- The proposed signage will have minimal effect on the layout and access to the building will remain as existing.

Scale

There will be no impact on the historic interest of the exterior of the building with regards to the size and scale of the proposed signage.

Landscaping

No proposals for landscaping forms part of this application due to the location of the site.

Appearance

- The new signage will be sympathetically designed to match/compliment the surrounding area and its current and historical significance.

Access

- Vehicular access to the premises remains unaffected.
- Pedestrian access to the premises will remain unaffected.