

List Entry³² 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.”

- 5.44 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.

- 5.45 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 Entry³³ 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.”

- 5.46 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

- 5.47 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

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

³³ Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

buildings within the Market Place, and an attractive townscape / architectural grouping appreciated in local views across this space / street.

- 5.48 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

- 5.49 This Grade I listed building and local landmark is the ancient Parish Church within the heart of the historic settlement of Reading. The List Entry³⁴ 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 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 ...”

- 5.50 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.

³⁴ Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)



Figure 5.13: View of St Laurence's Church from Town Hall Square and from Market Place

- 5.51 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.
- 5.52 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

- 5.53 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.

- 5.54 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

- 5.55 The Grade II listed purpose-built Telephone Exchange by Leonard Aloysius Scott Stokes overlooks Minster Street and dates from c.1900. The List Entry³⁵ describes this building in some detail as follows:

"MINSTER STREET 1. 5128 (South Side) No 41 to 45 (consec) (Telephone Exchange) SU 7173 SE 3/13IA 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. 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."

- 5.56 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.

³⁵ Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)



Figure 5.14: View of Telephone Exchange, Minster Street

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

5.57 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.

5.58 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 within 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

5.59 The Grade I listed church and landmark is located north of historic Gunn Street. The List

Entry³⁶ 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).”

- 5.60 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.
- 5.61 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.³⁷ 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 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

³⁶ Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

³⁷ Pevsner, N. The Buildings of England: Berkshire, 2002, p.202

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 5.15: View of Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

- 5.62 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.
- 5.63 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

- 5.64 The Grade II listed church and landmark is positioned south of Deansgate Road. The List Entry³⁸ 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 ...”

- 5.65 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.
- 5.66 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.³⁹ 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.

³⁸ Historic England, The National Heritage List for England (website)

³⁹ Pevsner, N. The Buildings of England: Berkshire, 2002, p.201



Figure 5.16: View of Church of St Giles, Southampton Street

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

5.67 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.

- 5.68 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

- 5.69 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.
- 5.70 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.
- 5.71 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

⁴⁰ *A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3*, ed. P H Ditchfield and William Page (London, 1923).

⁴¹ Historic England National Heritage List for England (website)

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'.

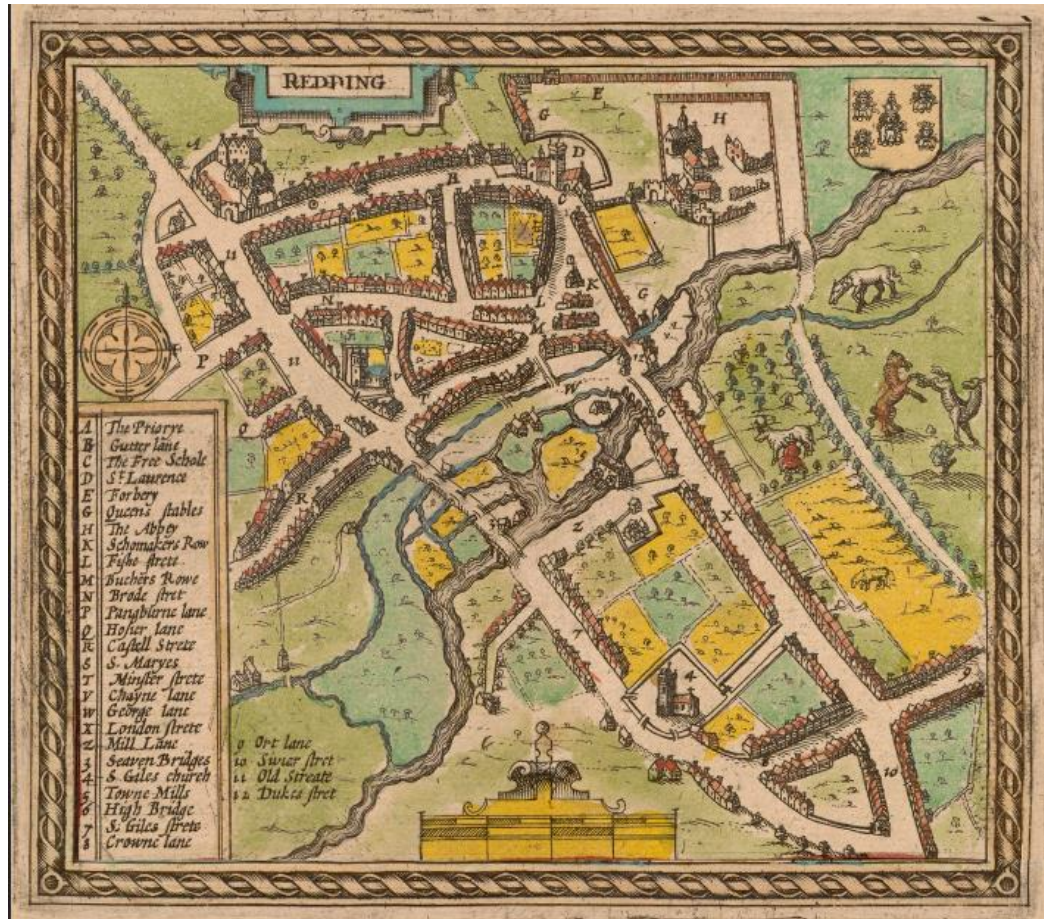


Figure 5.17: John Speed's Atlas of Great Britain dated 1611⁴²

5.72 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.

5.73 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

⁴² Berkshire Museum (website)

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.

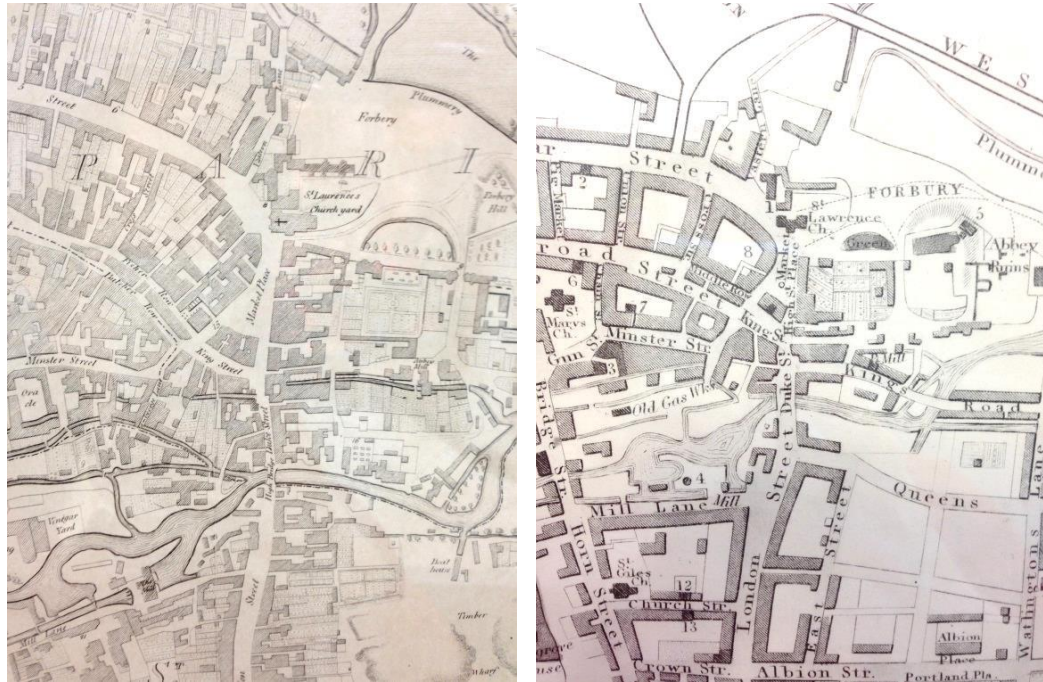


Figure 5.18: Charles Tomkins' 1802 (L) and Edward Weller's 1840 (R) maps of Reading

- 5.74 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*⁴³, written in 1923, the town's 19th

⁴³ *A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3*, ed. P H Ditchfield and William Page (London, 1923).

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.”

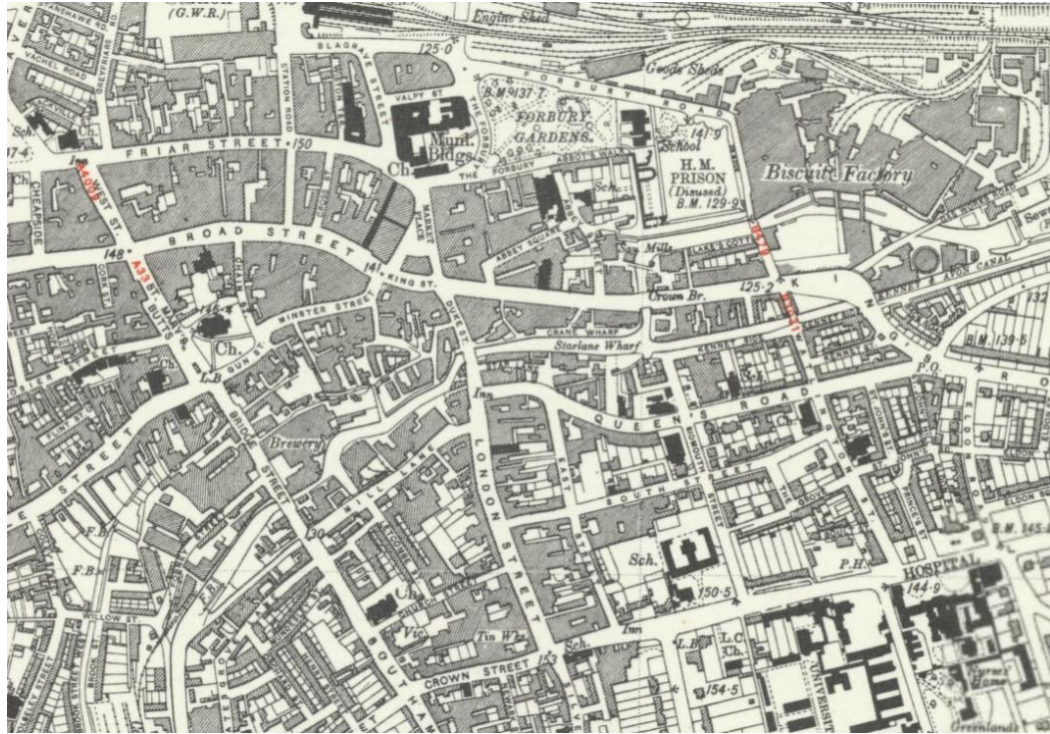


Figure 5.19: Extract of Ordnance Survey (OS) map 1947

- 5.75 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.
- 5.76 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.

Character and Appearance

General Characteristics

5.77 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.

5.78 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 5.20: Diversity of the built townscape within the conservation area

- 5.79 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 5.21: The graveyard of St Laurence's Church is one of the few areas of open green space

- 5.80 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.
- 5.81 The published Conservation Area Appraisal⁴⁴ 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

- 5.82 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

⁴⁴ Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

fashionable part of town.

- 5.83 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.



Figure 5.22: Area 1: London Street is a broad, strongly linear route, with a high number of surviving historic buildings

- 5.84 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.

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

- 5.85 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 5.23: Area 2: Church Street and St Giles' Church has a much more tranquil character than London Road

- 5.86 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

- 5.87 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."⁴⁵
- 5.88 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.⁴⁶
- 5.89 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.

⁴⁵ Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

⁴⁶ Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007



Figure 5.24: Area 3: Contrasting larger scale modern development dilutes the historic character of this part of the conservation area

Character Area 4: Market Place

5.90 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 Blagrove Street, and The Forbury, for example.



Figure 5.25: Area 4: View eastwards along Friar Street to the key landmark buildings of St Laurence's Church and the Town Hall

5.91 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 Blagrove 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 5.26: Longer views of the St Laurence’s Church and Town Hall

- 5.92 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.”

- 5.93 The noted The Buildings of England volume for Berkshire further describes the Market Place as “a triangular space of no particular distinction”⁴⁷, 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

⁴⁷ Pevsner, N. *The Buildings of England: Berkshire*. Yale University Press 2002

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



Figure 5.28: Remaining 18th and 19th century buildings on the south side of the Market Place

- 5.94 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.

5.95 The published Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal⁴⁸ 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.*

Summary of Significance

5.96 The published Conservation Area Appraisal⁴⁹ 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 Blagrove 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;*

⁴⁸ Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

⁴⁹ Reading Borough Council. Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

- *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.*

5.97 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.

5.98 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

5.99 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.

- 5.100 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 5.29: Photographs of Site as seen from Queens Road (L) and the Oracle Riverside (R)

St Mary’s Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area

Historical Development

- 5.101 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.
- 5.102 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.
- 5.103 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 5.30: Coates's Map of Reading dated 1802

- 5.104 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

- 5.105 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.

- 5.106 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 5.31: View of Church of St Mary's and its Churchyard

- 5.107 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 Butts, 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.

- 5.108 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 5.32: View of Gun Street / Castle Street frontages either side of the Bridge Street approach

- 5.109 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

- 5.110 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

5.111 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

5.112 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

5.113 The published Conservation Area Appraisal⁵⁰ 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*

⁵⁰ Reading Borough Council. St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal. 2007

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.*

Contribution of Setting and Site to Significance

5.114 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 5.33: 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)

6. Proposed Development and Impact Assessment

Introduction

- 6.1 The built heritage assets which would likely be affected directly and or indirectly by the application proposals and this scheme for the Site have been identified and their significance (and also any contribution of setting to that significance) described proportionately as part of this report in **Sections 3-5**. This is our baseline appraisal with regard to built heritage matters, which accords with the requirements of the NPPF 2021 (paragraphs 194-195) and best practice guidance. In summary, the relevant designated heritage assets are set out 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

- 6.2 A summary of the relevant heritage legislation, planning policy and guidance for guiding change within the historic environment is also set out in full at **Section 2**. This includes the statutory duties of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, national planning policy set out in the NPPF 2021, and supported by NPPG, the local Development Plan and other relevant guidance.
- 6.3 Together these previous sections and appendices provide appropriate and proportionate information for the full consideration of the likely built heritage impacts of the Proposed Development on Site by the determining local planning authority.

Proposed Development

- 6.4 Two applications were made valid by RBC on 19 December 2022 and 5 January 2023 respectively, and accordingly the Proposed Development for the Site (both sites) are described as:

“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.

(RBC application reference number: 221916)

[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.

(RBC application reference number: 221917)”

- 6.5 Further discussions have been had with officers (and their advisers) at RBC during the determination period of these applications. As a result, a number of changes have been made to the design of the Proposed Development, and it is this revised scheme that is the subject of the technical assessment in this new report.
- 6.6 The original supporting Design and Access Statement (DAS) provided a comprehensive description of the scheme design and its approach. This included a review of how the Proposed Development responds 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 RBC’s Urban Place Lab (UPL) advisory group, Design Review

Panel (DRP) and Historic England. A Revised DAS has now been prepared by the appointed architects to further describe this process of further design evolution during the application period. Furthermore, our assessment of heritage impacts is based on the scheme as set out in the fully revised architectural / landscape design information produced by RTKL Architects and LDA Landscape Architects and, including a package of drawings, illustrations and CGIs. New Accurate Visual Representations (AVRs) have also been prepared by Ambiente on the basis of the revised scheme design; again for each of the RBC agreed representative viewpoints.

- 6.7 This impact assessment related to the Proposed Development should therefore be read in conjunction with the full application material submitted (and again revised), including the overarching Planning Statement, prepared by Turley. This complementary report 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.

Assessment of Impacts

Approach

- 6.8 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) for the original application scheme in order to test the likely visibility of proposed new built form on Site 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.
- 6.9 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 report.
- 6.10 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 2015⁵¹, 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

⁵¹ Historic England, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice (GPA) in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision Taking in the Historic Environment 2015

context. HE's GPA Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets 2017 (2nd Edition)⁵² has also been employed, which provides a step-by-step approach to assessing first, how setting and also views contributes to the significance of identified heritage assets, and then how the effects of a development on heritage significance and setting can be measured. The extended design process included further consideration of how the scheme could potentially maximise enhancement and also minimise harm in heritage terms. HE's Advice Note 4: Tall Buildings 2022⁵³ is another key guidance document that has been employed as a guide during the design process and for undertaking this assessment of impacts within the historic environment.

- 6.11 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.

Built Heritage Assets

- 6.12 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 report. 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.

- 6.13 **Table 6.2** 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.

- 6.14 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 6.2** in relation to each heritage asset.

⁵² Historic England, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice (GPA) in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets 2017 (2nd Edition)

⁵³ Historic England, Advice Note (HEAN) 4: Tall Buildings 2022 (2nd Edition)

- 6.15 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, NPPG⁵⁴ 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.
- 6.16 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.
- 6.17 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”⁵⁵. 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).

⁵⁴ NPPG, Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 18a-018-20190723 (Revision date: 23 07 2019)

⁵⁵ 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 and elements on both sides of the river, to 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 both historic and local building characteristics such as the use of brickwork, pitched roof forms and an industrial heritage aesthetic for the eastern blocks. 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 with a positive contextual response along Yield Hall Place and the west side of London Road nearby, and also 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, stepping the increasing height of new buildings on Site away from London Street and this edge of the conservation area, and also referencing both historic and local building characteristics for the eastern blocks, all 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 and elements. 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 and detailing. The revised scheme also references both historic and local building characteristics through the use of brickwork, pitched roof forms and an industrial heritage aesthetic for the eastern blocks on Site. 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 south-east corner, Yield Hall Place Listed Building group (all Grade II)	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 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 or crowning elements. For the revised scheme, 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 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	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.

(Grade II)		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	Harm	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 “... <i>views of St Mary's Church are not readily apparent until one is quite close to it</i>” (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 or crowning elements for those taller blocks, which would create a more distinctive and interesting skyline. 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,
Listed Building	Less than Substantial	
(Grade I)	(Lower End)	

		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 Listed Building (Grade II)	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 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 an 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 / elements 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 eastern edges of the conservation area. The deliberate articulation of the massing, elevations and roof forms or crowning elements, varying building heights, and also the maintenance of gaps between the taller blocks against the sky, would be appreciated 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. The design approach also includes references to both historic and local building characteristics, such as the use of brickwork, pitched roof forms and an industrial heritage aesthetic for the easternmost blocks on Site. 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 with a positive contextual response, 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 or crowning elements. 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

- 6.18 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.
- 6.19 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.
- 6.20 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.
- 6.21 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

- 6.22 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.

- 6.23 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.
- 6.24 The supporting Design and Access Statement (DAS) (and also as Revised) 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 detailed design and use of materials 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.
- 6.25 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 changes brought about by this scheme. This would accord with paragraph 199 in relation to these particular heritage assets.
- 6.26 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.

- 6.27 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 NPPG⁵⁶) 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 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.
- 6.28 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. It is also during the application determination period (post validation) that the scheme design has further evolved in response to ongoing constructive discussions with RBC officers and their advisers.
- 6.29 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

⁵⁶ NPPG, Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20140306

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).

- 6.30 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.
- 6.31 NPPG confirms that public benefits can also include such heritage benefits, which are changes that would enhance or better reveal the significance of heritage assets⁵⁷. 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 with a positive contextual response, and also wider 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

- 6.32 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.
- 6.33 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

⁵⁷ NPPG, Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20140306

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.

- 6.34 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).
- 6.35 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 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.
- 6.36 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.
- 6.37 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.

- 6.38 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 with a positive contextual response replacing existing building of no merit, and also wider public realm improvements.

7. Summary and Conclusions

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 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 report (**Sections 3-5**). 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.
- 7.3 We have 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**; as informed by review of the full application material submitted for this scheme (as original and also as now further revised during the determination period). We have followed relevant best practice advice regarding decision-taking for development within the historic environment⁵⁸ and also in relation to assessing the impact of change on the setting and views of heritage assets⁵⁹. 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.
- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 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

⁵⁸ Historic England: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment (Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 2) 2015

⁵⁹ Historic England: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 3) (2nd Edition) 2017

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.

- 7.6 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).
- 7.7 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 with a positive contextual response, and also wider 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.
- 7.8 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.
- 7.9 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.

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