



FORMER JOHN LEWIS DEPOT, LETCOMBE STREET, READING  
(ALSO KNOWN AS JLP MILL LANE)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK BASED ASSESSMENT

AUGUST 2024



## REPORT

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The site of the former John Lewis depot, Letcombe Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 2HN has been reviewed for its below ground archaeological potential.

The site comprises a broadly rectangular area of c. 0.44 ha currently occupied by a large and centrally placed vacant two-storey John Lewis Customer Collections warehouse, with a customer car park to the west and service yard to the east. Mill Lane runs along the northern boundary with the site, with the Reading Inner Distribution Road or (IDR A329) just beyond. The site lies at a lower level to the A329 road. The setting of the site is characterised by the River Kennet, the A329 and the Oracle Shopping Centre complex to the north, London Street to the east, St Giles' Church and a burial ground to the south and Letcombe Street to the west.

This assessment supports an application for planning permission to redevelop the site. The development involves the demolition of the existing building and redevelopment of the site comprising erection of a new building for up to 215 build to rent residential dwellings (Use Class C3) together with flexible commercial / community space (Use Class E/F1/F2), residents' facilities, landscaping, public realm, amenity space, cycle parking and disabled car parking.

In terms of relevant nationally significant designated heritage assets, no World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks or Gardens, Conservation Areas, Historic Wrecks or Historic Battlefield sites have been identified on the site. The site lies outside of, but adjacent to the Conservation Area 'Market Place and London Street, Reading' and within a locally recognised Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP) as designated by Reading Borough Council.

The nearest Scheduled Monuments to the study site comprise the remains of Reading Abbey, the Cluniac and Benedictine monastery and Civil War earthworks (NLE 1007932), c. 500m to the northeast, and the High Bridge (NLE 1005388) c. 200m to the northeast.

This assessment complies with the requirements of paragraph 200 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that applicants must describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposed development, including any contribution made by their settings. It is also intended to provide evidence to assist the local planning authority in discharging their statutory duties as required by local and national planning legislation, policy and guidance.

The site is within an area of high archaeological potential within the medieval town and characterised historically by the proximity of the River Kennet and medieval and post-medieval water management and the early history of local industries such as milling, tanning, leather working, brewing and clothmaking. The extreme southern strip of the site has been shown on historic maps to have been related to the graveyard of St Giles' Church and is currently adjacent to a Quaker burial ground; the site is well-documented as being outside the known extent of the modern burial ground.

The site and environs have been subject to extensive previous archaeological work. In 1998/99, 47 small trenches were monitored on the site, no significant archaeological features were noted. The only artefacts were in the form of three sherds of post-medieval pottery and two capped wells of probable Victorian date. In 2007, the adjacent site to the west (Signal House) was evaluated and similarly no significant archaeology was present, the site apparently having been truncated by quarrying activities.

Regarding heritage assets of archaeological interest, no designated or non-designated built or below ground archaeology of significance is recorded on the study site. As there is a clear, ground-tested, evidence base proven by fieldwork that the previous developmental impacts on the site are severe, the site can be considered to no longer have a potential for the survival of archaeological heritage assets or deposits of archaeological interest. In consideration of this, RPS suggests that that no further archaeological mitigation measures are required in respect of the proposed development.

Regarding designated built heritage assets - principally the amenity and setting of nearby listed buildings within the adjacent Conservation Area on London Street and Southampton Street, the listed St Giles' Church

and churchyard - the assessment suggests that any potential 'archaeological' harm from the proposed development falls within the 'no harm' classification established by paragraph 208 of the NPPF.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF STUDY

- 1.1 This updated below ground archaeological desk-based assessment has been prepared by Gillian King and Craig Halsey of RPS on behalf of John Lewis Plc. Research for the report was undertaken by Alex Slater and the graphics were designed by Nida Bhunnoo of RPS.
- 1.2 The subject of this assessment, also known as the study site, is the former John Lewis depot, Letcombe Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 2HN (Fig. 1). The site lies to the south of Mill Lane (the A329), west of London Street, north of Crossland Road and east of Letcombe Street and to the south of the town centre. The site lies approximately 100m to the south of the River Kennet and on the floodplain of the river.
- 1.3 The site is currently occupied by a large now vacant John Lewis Customer Collections warehouse and associated car parking and service area, the Reading Inner Distribution Road or Mill Lane (A329) road runs along the northern boundary with the site lying at a lower level to the road. The urban landscape is characterised by the River Kennet, the A329 and the Oracle Shopping Centre complex to the north (named after the 17<sup>th</sup> century Oracle Workhouse, shown on the map series between 1802 and 1850). With London Street to the east, St Giles' Church and a Quaker burial ground to the south and Letcombe Street to the west.
- 1.4 The study site covers an area of c. 0.44 ha and is centred at NGR SU 71619 73043 (Fig. 1). The site measures approximately 100m east to west by 50m north to south.
- 1.5 The site falls under the jurisdiction of Reading Borough Council as the local planning authority. This assessment supports an application for planning permission to redevelop the site. The development involves the demolition of the existing building and redevelopment of the site comprising erection of a new building for up to 215 build to rent residential dwellings (Use Class C3) together with flexible commercial / community space (Use Class E/F1/F2), residents' facilities, landscaping, public realm, amenity space, cycle parking and disabled car parking (Fig. 17). No basements are proposed.
- 1.6 In accordance with government guidance (NPPF, 2023, Section 16, paragraphs 195 to 214) and the Reading Local Plan, this desk-based assessment identifies and assesses archaeological potential of the site (NPPF: para 200). It combines the available archaeological, topographic and land-use and research evidence to determine the significance of any heritage assets that may be affected by the proposal (including development affecting the setting of archaeological heritage assets). The assessment also examines the potential impact of any proposed and previous development on the significance and interest of any designated and non-designated archaeological assets and their settings.
- 1.7 The assessment complies with the 'Standards and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessments' (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, rev. October 2020).
- 1.8 In terms of relevant nationally significant designated heritage assets, no World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks or Gardens, Conservation Areas, Historic Wrecks or Historic Battlefield sites have been identified on the site. The site lies adjacent to the 'Market Place and London Street, Reading' Conservation Area and within a locally recognised Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP) as designated by Reading Borough Council.
- 1.9 The nearest Scheduled Monuments to the study site comprise the remains of Reading Abbey, the Cluniac and Benedictine monastery and Civil War earthworks (NLE 1007932), c. 500m to the northeast, and the High Bridge, a stone bridge of one arch over River Kennet, which was rebuilt by the Corporation in c. 1788 (Fig. 2. SMR 1005388, RD1412, 01023.00.000, 05050.03.020), which lies c. 200m to the northeast.
- 1.10 This assessment complies with the requirements of paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that applicants must describe the significance of any heritage

assets affected by a proposed development, including any contribution made by their settings. It is also intended to provide evidence to assist the local planning authority in discharging their statutory duties as required by local and national planning legislation, policy and guidance.

- 1.11 The site is within an area of high archaeological potential, characterised by the proximity of the River Kennet and medieval and post-medieval water management, with milling at the Minster Mill and St Giles' Mill (Oracle Site 300, Ford *et al*: 2013), nearby tanning, leather working, and brewing and militia storage industries on the study site. A detailed history of St Giles' Mill is given in Ford *et al*, 2013.
- 1.12 The extreme southern strip of the site has been shown on historic maps to have been part of the graveyard of St Giles' Church and is currently adjacent to a Quaker Burial Ground, although well-documented as being outside of the modern burial ground. There is no evidence to suggest that the historic burial ground extended over this tiny southern zone of the site.
- 1.13 The site has been subject to extensive archaeological watching brief works, under a former planning application (96/0692), in December 1997 to January 1998 by Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS). A total of 47 test-pits were monitored across the site (Fig. 16). It was formerly known as the 'Heelas Warehouse' and was subject to an archaeological watching brief during its construction in 1997-1998. No archaeological features were noted in any of the sections. The only artefacts were in the form of three sherds of Post-Medieval pottery which were recovered from the spoil heap of Trench 39 only. Two Post-Medieval (probably Victorian) capped wells were discovered. The watching brief showed that the current warehouse construction had not disturbed any heritage assets or deposits of archaeological interest and that previous activity on the site had heavily disturbed the site, apparently by the construction of the former factory (prior to the John Lewis Warehouse) and may have involved the levelling and stripping of the site area. No evidence of the historic graveyard extending into the site was found in these works (Gleave, M., 1998 TVAS in-house publication MLR97/98). The site immediately to the west (Signal House) has also been archaeologically evaluated and no significant finds or features were recorded, but evidence that the site had been truncated to the natural chalk, possibly as a result of quarrying.
- 1.14 With regard to designated built heritage assets - principally the amenity and setting of nearby listed buildings within the 'Market Place and London Street, Reading' Conservation Area on London Street and Southampton Street, the listed medieval St Giles' church and its treed churchyard - the assessment suggests that the cumulative 'archaeological' harm from the proposed development falls within the 'no harm' classification established by paragraph 208 of the NPPF. As the study site lies within the existing, wider urban setting, the redevelopment proposals are not considered likely to impact upon the setting of designated heritage assets, such as the nearby listed buildings on London Street and Southampton Street and the listed heritage assets associated with St Giles' Church, churchyard and tombs. The scope of this report addresses below ground archaeology only and no detailed assessment of built heritage assets, views and vistas or the impact of the proposed development on their settings has been made. The aim of the assessment is to consider whether the proposed development will adversely affect the archaeological interest of below ground non-designated heritage assets (Fig. 2a).
- 1.15 This desk-based assessment comprises an examination of evidence obtained under licence from the Berkshire Historic Environment Record (HER search date: May 2024), as well as published and unpublished material and charts historic land-use through a map regression exercise and aerial photographic analysis (Figs. 1-16).
- 1.16 Data gathering to inform this desk-based assessment has established that in terms of relevant nationally significant designated heritage assets, as defined below in Section 2 and as shown on Figure 2 a-b, no World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks or Gardens, Historic Wrecks or Historic Battlefield sites have been identified on or within close vicinity of the site. The site does not contain any locally listed 'Buildings of Townscape Merit'. In terms of

relevant local designations, the site lies within an Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP) as designated by Reading Borough Council (Fig. 2a and b).

[https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Local\\_Plan\\_Adopted\\_November\\_2019.pdf](https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Local_Plan_Adopted_November_2019.pdf)

- 1.17 The nearest listed buildings lie to the east of the site fronting London Street, to the south-west of the site at St Giles's Church, churchyard and tombs and to the west of the site on Southampton Street. There are 50 records for listed buildings within 250m of the study site on the HER.
- 1.18 The Conservation Area 'Market Place and London Street, Reading' lies to the south of the site bounded by Crossland Road and includes St Giles' Church to the south-west (Fig. 2. ERM 1397). The Conservation Area Appraisal describes the special interest as being derived from various contributions on the wider streetscape, but also the contribution of two of Reading's three medieval churches: St Laurence's and St Giles', both with well treed churchyards. As well as the three green open spaces namely the churchyards of St Laurence's and St Giles' and the burial ground of the Friends Meeting House. The Inner Distribution Road (IDR), which is of no historic or architectural interest, cuts this conservation area in half and contributes negatively to the Conservation Area.
- Conservation Area Appraisal: <https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Market-Place-London-St-Original-CAA.pdf>
- 1.19 Reading has secured High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) status for three conservation areas in the centre of the town. High Street Heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ) are a heritage-led regeneration initiative lead by Historic England, working with local councils and the community to create economic growth and improve the quality of life in our historic high streets. The HSHAZ covers parts of three conservation areas, including the eastern section of 'Market Place and London Street' but does not include the area of the conservation around St Giles' Church and near to the study site.
- [https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Local\\_Plan\\_Adopted\\_November\\_2019.pdf](https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Local_Plan_Adopted_November_2019.pdf)
- 1.20 The assessment therefore enables relevant parties to assess the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets on or near the site, to consider the impact of the proposed development on the significance of these assets and to consider the need for design, civil engineering, and/or archaeological or built heritage solutions to the potential identified.
- 1.21 With regard to heritage assets of archaeological interest, no designated or non-designated built or below ground archaeology of significance is recorded on or near the study site. As there is a clear ground-tested evidence base – proven by fieldwork on and adjacent to the site - that the impact of previous and existing development is severe, the site can be considered to no longer have an archaeological potential for the survival of archaeological heritage assets or deposits of archaeological interest, in the proposed area of development. In consideration of this, it is suggested that no further archaeological mitigation measures are required. The decision for this, however, remains with Reading Borough Council and their archaeological advisors, Berkshire Archaeology.

## 2 PLANNING BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN FRAMEWORK

- 2.1 Legislative frameworks provide protection to the historic environment while planning policy guidance provides advice concerning how the historic environment should be addressed within the planning process.
- 2.2 National legislation regarding archaeology, including scheduled monuments, is contained in the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act* (1979), amended by the *National Heritage Acts* (1983 and 2002, and updated in April 2014).
- 2.3 Historic Parks and Gardens, and Historic Battlefields, have received recognition under the *National Heritage Acts*. Such sites are described on Registers maintained by Historic England on behalf of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), but such designation does not afford statutory protection.
- 2.4 For other components of the historic environment, the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act* 1990 and the *Town and County Planning Act* 1990 provide statutory protection to listed buildings and their settings, including provisions in relation to designating and to preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of Conservation Areas.
- 2.5 Section 66 (1) of the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act* 1990 states that '*In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses*'.

### National Planning Policy

- 2.6 In March 2012, the government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and it was last updated in December 2023. The NPPF is supported by the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), a series of guidance papers, with the guidance on Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment last updated 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2019. (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment>).
- 2.7 The NPPF is additionally supported by three relevant Good Practice Advice (GPA) documents published by Historic England: *GPA 1: The Historic Environment in Local Plans*; *GPA 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* (both published March 2015). The second edition of *GPA3: The Setting of Heritage Assets* was published in December 2017.
- 2.8 Section 16 of the NPPF, entitled *Conserving and enhancing the historic environment* provides guidance for planning authorities, property owners, developers and others on the conservation and investigation of heritage assets. Overall, the objectives of Section 16 of the NPPF can be summarised as seeking the:
- Delivery of sustainable development;
  - Understanding the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits brought by the conservation of the historic environment;
  - Conservation of England's heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance; and
  - Recognition that heritage makes to our knowledge and understanding of the past.
- 2.9 Section 16 of the NPPF recognises that intelligently managed change may sometimes be necessary if heritage assets are to be maintained for the long term. Paragraph 200 states that planning decisions should be based on the significance of the heritage asset and that level of detail supplied by an applicant should be proportionate to the importance of the asset and should

be no more than sufficient to review the potential impact of the proposal upon the significance of that asset.

- 2.10 *Heritage Assets* are defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF as: *a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape positively identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions*. They include designated heritage assets (as defined in the NPPF) and assets identified by the local planning authority during the process of decision-making or through the plan-making process.
- 2.11 Annex 2 also defines *Archaeological Interest* as a heritage asset which holds or potentially could hold evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.
- 2.12 A *Designated Heritage Asset* comprises a: World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area.
- 2.13 *Significance* is defined in Annex 2 as: *The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. This interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting*.
- 2.14 *Setting* is defined as: *The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral*.
- 2.15 The NPPF goes on to state in paragraph 206 that 'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification', before identifying that 'Substantial harm to or loss of assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II\* listed buildings, grade I and II\* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional'.
- 2.16 In paragraph 207, the NPPF states that 'Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss .....', before continuing 'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal ....' (paragraph 207).
- 2.17 In short, government policy provides a framework which:
- Protects nationally important designated Heritage Assets;
  - Protects the settings of such designations;
  - In appropriate circumstances seeks adequate information (from desk-based assessment and field evaluation where necessary) to enable informed decisions;
  - Provides for the excavation and investigation of sites not significant enough to merit *in-situ* preservation.
- 2.18 The NPPF reiterates that the conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance is a core planning principle, requiring a flexible and thoughtful approach. Furthermore, it highlights that neglect and decay of heritage assets is best addressed through ensuring they remain in active use that is consistent with their conservation. Importantly, the guidance states that if complete, or partial loss of a heritage asset is justified, the aim should then be to capture and record the evidence of the asset's significance and make the interpretation publicly available.

- 2.19 Key elements of the guidance relate to assessing harm. When assessing what constitutes ‘*harm*’ to a heritage asset the NPPF (195 to 214) categorises harm into three areas: *substantial harm*; *less than substantial harm*; and *no harm*. ‘*Substantial harm*’ is any impact which could cause harm to or the loss of the significance of a heritage asset. This is typically attributed to listed buildings, those of historic importance, registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites. This harm could result from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting. When it is considered that there will be ‘*less than substantial harm*’ the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use will be considered (NPPF paragraph 202).
- 2.20 An important consideration should be whether the proposed works adversely affect a key element of the heritage asset’s special architectural or historic interest. Additionally, it is the degree of harm, rather than the scale of development, that is to be assessed. The level of ‘substantial harm’ is considered to be a high bar that may not arise in many cases. Essentially, whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision taker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the NPPF. Importantly, harm may arise from works to the asset or from development within its setting. Setting is defined as the surroundings in which an asset is experienced and may be more extensive than the curtilage. A thorough assessment of the impact of proposals upon setting needs to take into account, and be proportionate to, the significance of the heritage asset and the degree to which proposed changes enhance or detract from that significance and the ability to appreciate it.
- 2.21 In considering any planning application for development, the planning authority will be mindful of the framework set by government policy, in this instance the NPPF, by current Development Plan Policy and by other material considerations.

## Additional Guidance

- 2.22 Further, more detailed guidance on specific issues is provided in a series of Historic England Advice Notes (HEANS). HEAN3 addresses the issue of *The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans* and was published in October 2015.
- 2.23 Nationally important archaeological sites are listed in a Schedule of Monuments and are accorded statutory protection – these are known as Scheduled Monuments. National legislation regarding archaeology, including scheduled monuments, is contained in the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act* (1979), amended by the National Heritage Acts (1983 and 2002).

## Local Planning Policy

- 2.24 The Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted on 4th November 2019. This document sets out the planning policies for development in Reading up to 2036 and is the main consideration in deciding planning applications.
- 2.25 The Local Plan replaces all previous development plans – the Core Strategy, Reading Central Area Action Plan and Sites and Detailed Policies Document – which no longer apply. The role of the Local Plan is to ‘*proactively conserve and enhance the historic environment and promote its enjoyment*’ (2019: para 4.2.1).
- 2.26 Reading Borough contains a diverse range of heritage assets:
- 800 nationally Listed Buildings (including 30 Grade I and Grade II\*);
  - Nine ‘Significant Medieval Sites’ including St Giles’ Church
  - Five Conservation Areas, including Buildings of Townscape Merit identified in each of the
  - Conservation Area appraisals;

- Two Scheduled Ancient Monuments (Reading Abbey, including the Civil War earthworks and Reading Gaol, and High Bridge);
- Five Historic Parks and Gardens;
- Locally listed buildings and structures
- 15 Article 4 Directions protecting locally distinctive buildings by removing permitted development rights;
- Various sites of industrial heritage;
- The Berkshire Historic Environment Record, which contains comprehensive records of over 1200 archaeological sites and finds in Reading.

2.27 The Local Plan is accompanied by a Proposals Map (April 2017), which shows the geographical extent of policies in the plan.  
[https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Local\\_Plan\\_Adopted\\_November\\_2019.pdf](https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Local_Plan_Adopted_November_2019.pdf)

2.28 The main policies that apply are as follows, but are abridged where not relevant to the study site:

**2.29 EN1: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT**

***Historic features, areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings will be protected and where possible enhanced. This will include:***

- ***Listed Buildings;***
- ***Conservation Areas;***
- ***Scheduled Monuments;***
- ***Historic parks and gardens; and***
- ***Other features with local or national significance, such as sites and features of archaeological importance, and assets on the Local List.***

***All proposals will be expected to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. Any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits.***

***Applications which affect Listed Buildings will not have an adverse impact on those elements which contribute to their special architectural or historic interest including, where appropriate, their settings.***

***Applications which affect Historic Parks and Gardens will safeguard features which form an integral part of the special character or appearance of the park or garden. Development will not detract from the enjoyment, layout, design, character, appearance, features or setting of the park or garden, key views out from the park, or prejudice its future restoration.***

***Applications which affect, or have the potential to affect, the significant features of heritage assets should be justified by a Heritage Statement.....***

**2.30 EN2: AREAS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

***Applicants should identify and evaluate sites of archaeological significance by consulting the Historic Environment Record. This will require an assessment of the archaeological impacts of development proposals to be submitted before the planning application is determined. Planning permission will not be granted in cases where the assessment of the archaeological impacts is inadequate. Where remains cannot be preserved 'in situ,' remains should be properly excavated, investigated and recorded. This will require***

*adequate provision for the identification, investigation, recording and publication of the archaeological resource. Where appropriate, Section 106 agreements will be negotiated to protect, enhance and interpret archaeological remains. Development proposals which will have an adverse effect on scheduled monuments and other nationally important archaeological remains and their settings will not be allowed unless there is clear and convincing justification in the form of overriding public benefits.*

2.31 A Proposals Map shows 'Areas of Archaeological Potential'.

**2.32 EN3: ENHANCEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS**

*The special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas will be conserved and enhanced. Development proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Positive consideration will be given to proposals which take opportunities to enhance the character of conservation areas.....*

**2.33 EN4: LOCALLY IMPORTANT HERITAGE ASSETS**

*Development proposals that affect locally important heritage assets will demonstrate that development conserves architectural, archaeological or historical significance which may include the appearance, character and setting of the asset....*

**2.34 EN5: PROTECTION OF SIGNIFICANT VIEWS WITH HERITAGE INTEREST**

*New development should not harm and where possible should make a positive contribution to views of acknowledged historical significance.*

*The following views merit special protection [abridged]:*

*2. View northwards down Southampton St from Whitley St towards St Giles Church, St Mary's Church and Greyfriars Church*

**2.35 EN6: NEW DEVELOPMENT IN A HISTORIC CONTEXT**

*In areas characterised by heritage assets, the historic environment will inform and shape new development. New development will make a contribution to the historic character of the area by respecting and enhancing its architectural and visual qualities and considering how heritage considerations can influence the design of new development. When determining planning applications for new development, the following factors will be taken into consideration:*

*a. The positive contribution of the development to the existing historic townscape (scale, height, mass, proportion, plot size, street form, materials, significant vistas and views, and open space);*

*b. Sensitivity to historic context;*

*c. Reflection of borough-wide major heritage themes that contribute to local distinctiveness (e.g. patterned brickwork or former worker terraced housing);*

*d. Whether development promotes and/or improves access to previously undiscovered or neglected historic significance.*

2.36 The Conservation Area 'Market Place and London Street, Reading' lies to the south of the site. The northern half of this linear conservation area contains the site of the town's medieval marketplace, and the restored 19th century Town Hall within which are the Museum of Reading and the Reading Concert Hall. Immediately to the west is the commercial heart of Reading i.e., Broad Street and the modern Oracle Shopping Centre. Immediately to the east is Forbury Gardens, the site of the outer precinct of Reading Abbey, now a public park and the town centre's largest public open space. The southern half of the conservation area, comprising London Street and Church Street, lies on the south side of the River Kennet which flows eastward under High Bridge, shortly to join the Thames. The southern half is severed from the town centre by the Inner

Distribution Road (IDR), a wide dual carriageway that is difficult for pedestrians to cross. The River Kennet passes through the narrow mid-point of this linear conservation area. The land rises gently northward from the river to St Laurence's Church where it becomes level. Similarly, the land and rises gently southward from the river to the upper end of London Road.

2.37 Previous planning applications identified on the study site are:

- 83/TP/0821- Demolition of majority of factory, refurbishment and remainder for light ind. use, car parking & lorry access.
- 84/TP/0216 - Storage and facilities, temporary offices with supporting gantry over existing temporary offices.
- 93/00520/FD - Use of existing building for B8 storage & distribution
- 96/00692/FD - Erection of warehouse with customer collection facilities ancillary car park and servicing area

### 3 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

#### Geology

- 3.1 The British Geological Survey 1:10,000 scale (superficial and bedrock) geology maps and previous geotechnical investigations in the area show that the site is underlain by the Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation (Seaford Chalk Formation) and Newhaven Chalk Formation. Superficial deposits comprising the Taplow Gravel Formation (Sand and Gravel) are present along the southern site boundary. The ground conditions are described in several publicly available BGS borehole records in close proximity to the site.
- 3.2 Within the historic core of Reading, the Chalk is masked by glacial gravels which are classified as part of the Taplow Terrace. Deposits of exposed chalk, and floodplain alluvium associated with the watercourses, lie immediately to the north (Bridgland 1996 and Wymer 1999).
- 3.3 The site lies on the historic floodplain of the River Kennet above the 30m AOD contour on alluvial river silts and the valley gravels (BGS). The 1999/98 watching brief works on the site, however, found the underlying solid geology to be Upper Chalk (Gleave, M., 1998, TVAS in-house publication MLR97/98). The evaluation of the site to the west found evidence of truncated chalk and quarrying.
- 3.4 An environmental site assessment (ESA) and geotechnical ground investigation (GGI) was undertaken at the site between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021 under full time supervision of Ramboll UK Limited (see Ramboll, 2022). The Ramboll report, dated 28<sup>th</sup> January 2022, presents the findings and conclusions of a combined Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) as well as Preliminary Geotechnical Investigation undertaken at the site. The main objective of the work was to assess whether there were significant constraints or conditions on-site from a ground contamination and/or geotechnical perspective that could affect the redevelopment of the site.
- 3.5 In December 2021, two boreholes (BH01 at the west and BH02 to the east) were drilled to depths of 20 m below ground (bgl) using cable percussive techniques, alongside five windowless sampling boreholes (WS01-07) to a maximum depth of 4 m bgl. WS02 and 03 were in the western car park, WS 01, 04 and 07 within the warehouse and WS05 and 06 in the western service bay area.
- 3.6 Tarmacadam hardstanding (west of the site) and concrete hardstanding (east of the site) was found to be present overlying the Made Ground, followed by depths of superficial Taplow Gravels (found in WS02 and WS03) that did not extend across the whole site and ranged from 0.4 to 2.0 m thick. The Made Ground/Taplow Gravels were underlain by structureless chalk of the Seaford Chalk Formation. Groundwater was encountered at depths between 2.70 m bgl (BH02) and 3.36 m bgl (BH01). The main constraint to the work was the presence of a second concrete slab beneath the building that prevented sampling from beneath the building (Ramboll, 2022, p.ii).
- 3.7 In summary, the report revealed that, below the hardstanding, the site was underlain by Made Ground of approximately 0.9 m thickness, followed by depths of superficial Taplow Gravels (found in WS02 and WS03 only) that does not extend across the site and ranges from 0.4 to 2.0 m thick. The Made Ground / Taplow Gravel is underlain by structureless chalk of the Seaford Chalk Formation, the base of which was not proven. The chalk was recovered as gravelly silt to silty gravel with gravel of chalk and flint. Flint is fine to coarse with occasional cobbles (Ramboll, 2022, 45).
- 3.8 Made Ground (i.e. anthropogenic material deposits) was present at all drilling locations, generally comprising a dark grey / brown sandy gravel with brick, concrete, asphalt, flint and rare metal and plastic to circa 38.93mAOD to 37.70m AOD. Beneath the made ground, Dark reddish brown to light grey to brown sands and gravels were encountered from 36.33m AOD to a thickness of 1.5m,

overlying the Lewes Nodular Clay Formation (Seaford Chalk Formation) and Newhaven Chalk Formation. Contamination Survey was also carried out (Ramboll, 2022).

3.9 In summary, the ground investigation was limited by the following factors:

- Internal windowless sampling boreholes (WS04 and WS07) were not successfully drilled. The coring team from Borehole Solutions Ltd cored through the concrete slab flooring of the warehouse at the locations; however, the window sampling team from Dynamic Sampling Ltd encountered an obstruction at approximately 0.5 m bgl at both locations. The obstruction was thought to be a second concrete slab. WS01 was cancelled due to insufficient overhead clearance for the drilling rig.
- The two deeper boreholes drilled with the cable percussion rig did not achieve the targeted depths of 35 m bgl in BH02 and 25 m bgl in BH01. This was due to the presence of flints in the Chalk bedrock which led the cable percussive method to refuse at 20 m bgl.

## Topography

3.10 The historic core of Reading occupies land formed between the River Thames and the River Kennet as they flow east to a confluence a short distance east of the town centre.

3.11 The study site area is characterised by the River Kennet, which lies 100m to the north, and its associated water management features in the form of mill ponds, races, sluices and mill streams or leats, *etc.* (Figs 1-15). The area is crossed by numerous small river channels that were historically important but are now canalised and mainly flow in underground conduits in the Mill Lane area, but these conduits are not known to extend into the site area. The original 'leat' – a channel dug to power the corn grinding wheels for St Giles' Mill – still flows beneath the Mill Lane area but hidden from view (<https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/blog/readings-hidden-waterways>).

3.12 The Holy Brook is the most northerly of the stream channels and flowed along the edge of the floodplain and formerly fed the Abbey Mill. To the south of the Holy Brook and roughly parallel was the course of the Minster Mill stream, which fed the Minster Mill. A third channel, the Back Brook ran between the edge of the floodplain and the modern main course of the Kennet. South of the Kennet, in the area of the study site, were the channels associated with the Town, or St Giles, Mill (Oracle Site 300, Ford *et al*: 2013).

3.13 The site surface morphology has been modified by the construction of the local urban grain, and especially the formation of the A329 and large development to the north of Mill Lane. The site is generally flat with a slight uphill slope towards the east of the site.

## 4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND WITH ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Timescales used in this report

#### Prehistoric

|              |           |           |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| Palaeolithic | 900,000 - | 12,000 BC |
| Mesolithic   | 12,000 -  | 4,000 BC  |
| Neolithic    | 4,000 -   | 1,800 BC  |
| Bronze Age   | 1,800 -   | 600 BC    |
| Iron Age     | 600 -     | AD 43     |

#### Historic

|                      |           |         |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Roman                | AD 43 -   | 410     |
| Saxon/Early Medieval | AD 410 -  | 1066    |
| Medieval             | AD 1066 - | 1485    |
| Post Medieval        | AD 1486 - | 1799    |
| Modern               | AD 1800 - | Present |

### Introduction

- 4.1 This chapter reviews the available archaeological evidence for the study site and the archaeological/historical background of the general area, and, in accordance with NPPF, considers the potential for any yet to be discovered archaeological evidence on the study site.
- 4.2 What follows comprises a review of known archaeological assets within a 250m radius of the study site (Fig. 2), also referred to as the study area, held on the Berkshire Historic Environment Record (HER), together with a historic map regression exercise charting the development of the study area from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards until the present day. This assessment considers evidence from a bespoke 250m search of the Berkshire Historic Environment Record, commissioned in November 2021 (Fig. 2). A new HER data set has been requested from the Berkshire HER and the report will be updated accordingly once received.
- 4.3 Chapter 5 subsequently considers the site conditions and whether the proposed development will impact the theoretical archaeological potential identified below.
- 4.4 In terms of nationally significant designated heritage assets, as defined above in Section 2 and as shown on Figure 2, no World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks or Gardens, Conservation Areas, Historic Wrecks or Historic Battlefield sites have been identified on the site. The site lies adjacent to the Conservation Area 'Market Place and London Street, Reading' and within a locally recognised Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP) as designated by Reading Borough Council (Fig. 2, ERD5). The nearest Scheduled Monuments to the study site comprise the remains of the Medieval Reading Abbey 0.5km to the northeast and Civil War earthworks, (the latter unscheduled but also located c.200m to the east and c.400m to the south), and the scheduled High Bridge c. 200m to the northeast. The locations of designated heritage assets within 250m of the study site are indicated on Figure 2 and only includes the High Bridge

(Fig. 2. SAM 1005388, RD1412). This 250km radius search area is referred to in this desk-based assessment as 'the study area' (Fig. 2).

- 4.5 In the text, not all the heritage assets identified on the Berkshire HER and other available sources are discussed, but those considered to be relevant to the purpose of this desk-based assessment.
- 4.6 As the study site already lies within the existing, wider urban setting, characterised by the modern shopping complex, multi-storey carpark and the busy A329 the redevelopment proposals are not considered likely to impact upon the setting of designated heritage assets, such as the nearby listed buildings on London Street and Southampton Street and the listed St Giles' church, churchyard and tombs. There are 50 listed buildings on the HER in a 250m radius of the study site. and these are not discussed in detail here. The assessment complies with the 'Standards and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessments' (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, rev. Jan 2017). This assessment relates to cultural heritage matters in the form of archaeology solely, it is not a landscape character assessment or a visual environment appraisal and the impact on heritage views and vistas would need to be discussed in a bespoke report on these matters.
- 4.7 In general, the HER entries within the study area are characterised by finds of Medieval and Post Medieval archaeology, derived from the southern development of the town of Reading away from the early dominance by the Saxon settlement north of the River Kennet and to the north of the site and also the Abbey and precinct further to the northeast. The immediate study site area is characterised by the Post-Medieval development of the town and the history of water management and water related Medieval and Post-Medieval industries such as milling, brewing, tanning and dyeing.
- 4.8 Chapter 5 subsequently considers the site conditions and whether the proposed development will impact the theoretical archaeological potential identified below.

## Previous Archaeological Work

- 4.9 The HER records that a previous desk-based assessment has taken place on the study site by Soil Consultants Ltd. in 1997 '*Desk Study on Historical Development at Mill Lane/Crossland Road, Reading*', unfortunately this unpublished report could not be located for this study, although the ensuing watching brief report is referenced below and throughout this assessment (Fig. 2. ERM608).
- 4.10 The site has been subject to extensive watching brief works in December 1997 to January 1998 by Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS) and a total of 40 (47) geotechnical trenches were monitored across the site (Fig. 2. ERD5, ERM68 and Fig. 16). This included the monitoring of the demolition and removal of ground slabs for the former Heelas warehouse, and the excavation of column bases and trenches for service runs and soakaways. Spoil heaps were inspected for artefacts. All trenches showed the underlying ground had been disturbed to a considerable depth. The stratigraphy of the site comprised 0.2m-0.4m of concrete, over made ground of bricks and rubble to a depth between 1m and 2m, over the natural Upper Chalk, which was typically truncated by 0.2m. Only a small percentage of the trenches had any alluvium surviving, the rest having been removed by previous development activity on the site. No archaeological features were noted in any of the sections. The only artefacts recovered from the site were in the form of three sherds of Post-Medieval pottery from the spoil heap of Trench 39 only. Two capped wells were discovered within trenches 15 and 23 at depths of 1.9m and 0.8m respectively. These were both photographed but further analysis of these post-Medieval (probably Victorian) features was not possible owing to the instability of the trench edges.
- 4.11 The watching brief report concluded that the Heelas warehouse construction had not disturbed any heritage assets or deposits of archaeological interest but that previous activity on the site had heavily disturbed the site, apparently by the construction of the former warehouse (prior to the

John Lewis Warehouse) and may have involved the levelling and stripping of any houses that once stood here, as evidenced by the two capped wells uncovered during the archaeological investigation (Fig. 2. ERD5, Gleave, M., 1998 TVAS in-house publication MLR97/98).

- 4.12 The HER also records that archaeological evaluation took place on the site of Signal House, Letcombe Street in 2007 (Fig. 2. ERM666), just to the west of the Study Site. The field evaluation was carried out following the demolition of Signal House, and the site was therefore relatively flat, apart from an area which had previously been occupied by a basement. According to the British Geological Survey, the underlying geology consists of Valley Gravel (BGS 1946). However, gravel was only encountered in two trenches (3 and 5), with the remaining trenches only revealing chalk.
- 4.13 A total of five trenches were dug. The trenches varied in length from 5.4m – 8.5m at ground level, and between 4.6m – 5.9m at their base. The former building on the site, Signal House, had recently been demolished. The grubbing out and removal of the concrete floor slab and foundations of this building had disturbed the ground to a degree, so that the first deposit recorded in each trench consisted of a loose layer of soil and demolition rubble. The one exception to this was Trench 3, which was in an area previously occupied by a basement.
- 4.14 Trench 1 revealed disturbed soil and demolition rubble up to 1.0m thick, was removed to reveal a layer of re-deposited gravel which lay above terram sheeting. This deposit was encountered in all the trenches, apart from Trench 3, and presumably represents a bedding layer associated with the construction of the previous building on the site. In Trench 1 this deposit was about 0.3m thick and lay above up to 1.2m of dark greyish brown sandy silt, which contained frequent fragments of brick and tile. Once again, this layer was recorded in all trenches, apart from Trench 3, and seems to represent a reclamation deposit which, based on the brick and tile fragments, dates from the 19th century at the earliest. This made ground deposit lay directly above up to 1.4m of light greyish brown sandy clay with frequent chalk and flint inclusions which in turn lay above about 0.4m of mid brownish grey sandy clay with similar inclusions. These sandy clay layers probably represent a deposit of head material, resulting from the natural erosion of the underlying chalk to the south. Natural chalk was encountered immediately below the lower sandy clay layer, although the trench had begun to flood with ground water shortly before this deposit was reached.
- 4.15 Beneath the 19th century made ground layer a well cut through the sandy clay deposits and into the natural chalk. It was lined with slightly curved bricks 'specials', which seem to have been specifically produced for the purpose. These bricks would seem to date the well to the second half of the 19th century.
- 4.16 In Trench 2, the clean chalk natural was encountered immediately below a made ground layer, suggesting that the area had been truncated prior to the made ground deposits being dumped. It appeared possible that the area may have been quarried, for either chalk or gravel, or both. Trench 3 was aligned approximately north - south and was in part of the site which had previously been occupied by a basement and the area had been quite badly disturbed by the removal of the concrete slab floor of the basement. Trench 4 had evidence of a natural channel filled with sand was noted, but as with Trenches 2 and 5, the general area had been truncated.
- 4.17 In conclusion, it appears that the site to the west and potentially the study site area had been truncated, possibly by quarrying, and that the dump layers of made ground were used to raise the level of the sites perhaps to prevent flooding, or to provide level ground for building. The results of the 2007 evaluation were recorded as being very similar in character to that recorded during the watching brief on the study site (Gleave 1998). Except for a late 19th-century well, no archaeological features were recorded during the evaluation, and no finds of material earlier than the 19th century were noted (Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 2007).
- 4.18 As there is a clear ground-tested evidence base that the impact of previous and existing development is severe, the site can be considered to no longer have an archaeological potential for the survival of archaeological heritage assets or deposits of archaeological interest, in the proposed area of development.

- 4.19 From 1996 to 1998, a team of up to 50 archaeologists worked on excavations on the site of The Oracle development, just across the A329 Mill Road to the north of the site. They discovered an ancient tannery, items from the ruins of Reading Abbey and a water mill dating back to the Domesday Book. The Oracle itself takes its name from a 17th century workhouse, one of the earliest in the country and was built in 1628 by John Kendrick, a philanthropist who had made his fortune in the cloth industry. A very condensed summary of the Oracle excavations is given here for context, but the original monograph should be referred to for more detail: *Under the Oracle: Excavations at the Oracle Shopping Centre site 1996-8, The Medieval and Post-Medieval Urban Development of the Kennet Floodplain in Reading* (Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph 36; 2014) by Ben Ford, Dan Poore, Ruth Shaffrey and David Wilkinson. The monograph reports on the substantial evidence recovered across a number of excavation sites to the north of the study site, fully illustrated with historic maps and site plans and drawings. The sites each produced evidence for medieval and post-medieval water management, extracts from this report are cited throughout this assessment and RPS is grateful to the team at Oxford Archaeology for this critical information resource.
- 4.20 In summary, the excavations carried out by Oxford Archaeology in advance of the building of the Oracle shopping centre revealed a long sequence of development of the Kennet floodplain at Reading. Of significance is the evidence of milling at the Minster Mill and more importantly St Giles' Mill (Oracle Site 300, Ford *et al*: 2013), as well as the tanning, leather working and dyeing industries. The Oracle Site 300, St Giles' Mill lies just to the north of the site across the A329 and under the new Oracle shopping centre development. One of the main aims of the 1996-8 excavations was to explore the milling industries of the study site area. The Oracle excavations also contributed greatly to the understanding of the important Reading sites: the Oracle Workhouse and the Yield Hall, all discussed in the 2013 Monograph. The Oracle Workhouse was originally created for poor clothiers. The archaeologists discovered below the remains of the workhouse were the pits of a 16th century tannery. The workshop was turned into an army barracks during the Civil War and demolished in 1850, but its name lives on in Reading (Figs. 3 and 4).
- 4.21 The Oracle excavations also revealed that a watermill stood on the south bank of the River Kennet since the Domesday Book in 1086. It is likely that this is St Giles' Mill was rebuilt on a much larger scale around 1600, which survived until it was pulled down to build the Reading tram depot in 1903, the last mill in Reading to be demolished (Fig. 2. Oracle Site 300 and Figs. 3 to 10). A carved stone 12th century corbel, which had been taken from the ruins of Reading Abbey, was also found during the excavations. The work was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological unit and funded by Hammerson plc, the company which owns the Oracle shopping centre.
- 4.22 When Hammerson PLC acquired the 22-acre Oracle site in the south of Reading town centre in March 1997, the area had most recently been occupied by Reading-based Simonds' Brewery (latterly owned by the Courage brewing company) and by the Reading Transport bus depot (formerly the Reading Corporation tram depot) (Figs. 1-13).
- 4.23 The Oracle excavations show that there is a large and established research evidence base for archaeological sites in this area of Reading and that the study site does not represent a key or much needed opportunity to fill gaps in the data, therefore, the precautionary principle would not be proportionate here. Based on the available fieldwork and research evidence base the site appears to no longer have archaeological potential or present the opportunity to contribute to key research objectives for the immediate area.

## Prehistoric

### Palaeolithic

- 4.24 No Palaeolithic finds are recorded within the wider 250m study area.

4.25 Geotechnical and previous archaeological works on the site indicate the natural geology of the study site to be predominantly recently deposited alluvium and Upper Chalk, although palaeoliths could be encountered in the nearby gravel geology. However, research into the Palaeolithic period in Southern Britain (Bridgland 1996, and Wymer 1999) conclude that the Taplow terrace gravel geology in this location does not contain any rich artefact assemblages (Bridgland 1996: 29). Lower Palaeolithic handaxes from these gravels tend to be relatively rare and in rolled or heavily rolled condition, indicating transportation from their original point of deposition.

4.26 Overall, the archaeological potential of the study site for the Palaeolithic period can generally be defined as low.

### **Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age**

4.27 Prehistoric activity on the Thames and Kennet floodplains throughout prehistory is widely recorded, however, there is little evidence from the immediate site area. Typically, small quantities of residual flint material from the early prehistoric periods might be expected from the general area, but the potential for *in situ* Mesolithic and Neolithic evidence is low.

4.28 Twelve pieces of Mesolithic flintwork was recovered from The Anchorage, Bridge Street, Reading (Fig. 2. MRD7373, 02113.20.601. SU 7150 7305)

4.29 A Neolithic flint knife was recovered from the River Kennet by High Bridge (Fig. 2. 02004.00.000-MRD11168, SU71750 73290). The potential for Neolithic settlement remains to be encountered on the study site is low.

4.30 Early Prehistoric activity may have occurred in the general vicinity of the site but is unlikely to be represented by more than small quantities of residual scattered flints and it can be considered unlikely that evidence for activity or settlement will be present. Overall, the archaeological potential of the study site for the earlier prehistoric periods can generally be defined as low.

4.31 Whilst it is recognised that river valleys provided attractive environments for prehistoric occupation and habitat exploitation from the Mesolithic period onwards and that, more generally, the absence of HER evidence is not always a valid indicator of absence of occupation evidence (especially within urban areas where little or no archaeological systematic survey or investigation has taken place), in this instance the absence of later prehistoric activity evidence from the area is considered sufficient to accord the study site a generally low potential for prehistoric remains.

4.32 No later prehistoric (Bronze Age to Iron Age) material is recorded from the study search area and were any to be discovered on the study site it would more likely represent 'background noise' in an established prehistoric landscape than indicate any form of settlement activity in the vicinity of the study site.

### **Roman**

4.33 The nature and extent of the Roman occupation of Reading remains unclear. Many of the known finds were made during the 19th century, and much of the area is now built over. It seems likely that the area was occupied, not by a town, but by a number of farmsteads throughout the late Iron Age and Roman periods (Ford *et al* 2013).

4.34 Evidence from archaeological excavations at Reading Abbey c.0.5km northeast of the study site suggest that a small Roman settlement may have occupied the ridge of land between the River Kennet and the flood plain of the Thames in that area. However, other evidence of Roman date is sparse and tends to suggest that the main area of activity was south of the River Kennet where a river port for the transport of waterborne cargoes to the road systems for the remaining journey to the regional capital at Silchester has been suggested (Rivet 1964 and Astill 1978, 77).

4.35 There are very limited finds of Roman date within the study area search radius and the HER has only three records, as follows: an earthenware bottle from the River Kennet near High Bridge

(Fig.2. 02061.05.000-MRD11260. SU 71700 73240 ); Roman pottery dredged from the River Kennet (Fig. 2. 02061.05.001-MRD11261. SU 71700 73240); and a quern stone was found in the garden of The Queen's Hotel (Fig. 2. 02085.00.000 - MRD11310. SU 71905 73205).

- 4.36 Some residual Roman pottery was additionally recorded at 67-73 London Street (Fig. 2. ERD64-5, RD15610 - MRD15710).
- 4.37 From the available information, it is apparent that during the Roman period the study site lay way from the centre of any known or postulated activity. The potential of the study site for the Roman period can be identified as low.

## Saxon

- 4.38 The Saxon origins of Reading are reasonably well understood and recorded on the HER under the Event Record: RD15634 (Fig. 2.). The probable extent of Saxon town is shown in G.G. Astill's 'Historic Towns in Berkshire', with the site lies to the south of the area designated as the Saxon Town centred around St Mary's Church and the old marketplace, in the Minster Street and St Mary Butts area. Astill shows the site, however, as within the Medieval town, which extended as far south as Crown Street. The road system particularly London Street and Bridge Street are well established by the medieval period and probably Saxon in origin.
- 4.39 The position of Reading in a border zone between two Saxon provinces has been documented (Astill 1978; Gelling 1973) and an early Saxon burial ground at Kennetmouth provides relatively rare evidence of this period in this section of the Thames Valley. Early to mid-Saxon pottery found during the Oracle excavations is noted by Paul Blinkhorn in the 2013 Monograph (Ford *et al.*: 2013) and there is good evidence that an early Saxon settlement existed in the vicinity of the study site and later medieval town, but to date little structural evidence of it has been discovered.
- 4.40 The name Reading is of a type associated with Saxon settlements and is thought to mean 'the people of Reada'. The earliest documentary reference to a settlement at Reading dates from AD 870-871, when the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that a Danish army set up a winter camp there and repulsed the attacks of King Ethelred of Wessex and his brother Alfred (later King Alfred the Great). In his biography of King Alfred, Asser records a rampart between the rivers Thames and Kennet '*on the right hand side of the royal vill*' (Astill 1978, 75). Astill has suggested that the royal vill mentioned by Asser could have been situated around the area of St Mary's Church, where a coffin containing a hoard of 9th-century coins was found, and it is interesting that a sherd of Ipswich ware pottery, which tends to be associated with high status sites of the mid Saxon period in the region, was also recovered during excavations nearby at 90-93 Broad Street. Although the precise location of this camp is unknown, it probably occupied the site of the later Abbey to the northeast of the study site and to the west of the Abbey (Astill 1978, 77).
- 4.41 Although, the location of any early Saxon structural settlement remains to be established by fieldwork, late Saxon settlement is thought to have developed around St Mary's Church in the area around Minster Street and Broad Street to the north of the study site (Astill 1978; RD15634-RD15634, SU71428 73366).
- 4.42 A nunnery may have been in existence at Reading by the 11th century, possibly founded during the reign of King Edgar (959-75). The Domesday Book records that Abbess Elveva held a church in Reading with an estate of 8 hides in 1066; the church (almost certainly St Mary's) and its estate were subsequently granted by William the Conqueror to his new foundation of Battle Abbey in Sussex in 1071. By the time of Domesday Book there were two manors at Reading, one manor of 43 hides held by the king in demesne, and the other (assessed at 8 hides in 1066, but only 3 in 1086) was held with the church by the Abbot of Battle. Domesday Book also records the existence of a small borough at Reading; the king and the Abbot of Battle held 29 properties each, and a single property was held by Henry de Ferrers. Edward the Confessor seems to have been associated with the initial development of the borough, and the existence of coins minted at

Reading between c 1044 and 1046 shows that a mint was operating there during his reign. Astill suggests that the late Saxon borough was probably focused on the Old Market and Old Street (now Bridge Street), where two major long-distance routes crossed (from Oxford to Winchester and from London to Bath). St Mary's Church stands at this crossroads, facing onto the market (Ford *et al*: 2013, 5 and Figs. 1-4).

- 4.43 Finds of Saxon and early Medieval date within the study area search radius include: a dagger from 3-7 Queens Road in 1937 to the south (Fig. 2. 02091.00.000, MRD11317, SU71810 73260); an iron axe and spearhead from the River Kennet (Fig. 2. 02100.00.000, MRD11339, SU 71650 73200).
- 4.44 The mill system was probably established by the Saxon or Early Medieval period and an 11th century date has been recorded for the watercourse at Bridge Street (Fig. 2. 02113.18.100 - MRD3948, SU 7152 7312 ). The archaeological investigations revealed sterile gravels overlain by alluvial silts. These silts were associated with 11<sup>th</sup> century channel management activities. The southern bank was not found. It was quite possibly a principal course of the Kennet. A series of medieval revetments and post medieval land reclamation areas associated with two tributaries of the Kennet in the Bridge Street area. 12<sup>th</sup> to 13th century pottery was found during the evaluation (Fig. 2. 09025.00.000 - MRD15600, SU 71487 73165 and 09026.00.000). A small complete medieval pot and two lines of post holes were discovered behind 72 London Street, but no further details are available (Fig.2. 02113.33.000 - RD11368).
- 4.45 In view of the available information the study site and the area around the site can be considered likely to have a low potential for the Saxon period.

## Medieval

- 4.46 In the Medieval period the site lay on the floodplain of the River Kennet (above the 30m contour) and within the southern area of the emerging town. The late Saxon historic core of the settlement was focused on St Mary's Church, and this remained the nucleus of the settlement into the 12th century when the foundation of Reading Abbey became a major influence over the area, c. 500m to the north-east of the study site. The Abbey became one of the principal religious foundations in the country and by virtue of its Royal patronage and extensive landholdings; it commanded significant power over the local and regional economy, integral to the growth and prosperity of Reading.
- 4.47 Reading Abbey was founded in 1121 by King Henry I, youngest son of William the Conqueror. He intended it to be his own burial place and memorial, and although he died in France, he was buried in Reading before the Abbey's High Altar in 1136. In its heyday, the Abbey was one of the largest monastic sites in Europe. It was closed in 1539 as part of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and it suffered greatly in the following years. The structural remains that survive were re-opened to the public in 2018 following major conservation work.
- 4.48 The site of Reading Abbey is now a designated Scheduled Monument, not illustrated on Fig. 2 as it lies 0.5km to the northeast of the site.  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1007932>
- 4.49 The history of milling is especially significant for this area of the Medieval town and evidenced by St. Giles' Mill to the north across Mill Lane (Fig.2. RD15635 and Phase 2 of St Giles' Mill RD15636, as well as post-medieval milling evidence RD15636). St Giles' Mill (Oracle Site 300, Ford *et al*: 2013) is recorded for corn and fulling from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and by 1545, two mills for corn and one for fulling are recorded on the main branch of the Kennet within the vicinity of the Mill Lane site (Figs. 2 and 3. Astill 1978, Gleave 1998). The numerous water management features of the immediate area can be seen on Figures 3 to 8.

- 4.50 The earliest map of Reading published in John Speed's 'Atlas of Great Britain' in 1611 clearly shows a network of open streams and ditches to the south of the town and the configuration of the early mill system (Fig. 3). The Holy Brook, Minster Mill Stream and Back Brook are shown dividing the floodplain into a series of small islands north of the main channel of the Kennet (Fig. 3).
- 4.51 Speed's wider map shows that the plan of the town in the early 17th century resembled a triangle with a church roughly at each corner: St Mary's, St Giles' and St Laurence's. The two long roughly north-south sides of the triangle are formed by the two old rivalrous routes mentioned above. The River Kennet, spanned by two bridges (one over each route), flowed through the centre of the town. The northern side of the triangle was Friar Street. The most developed area is shown to be north of the Kennet and west of the site of Reading Abbey. This map identifies and names London Street and Duke Street and illustrates the triangular marketplace beside St Laurence's. A lane branched westward from London Street to St Giles' Church, the precursor of today's Church Street. Within the conservation area the construction in the 1970s of the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) across the lower end of London Street has caused a significant change to its historic street pattern, as the new road and modern development obliterated Mill Lane, which led westwards from the bottom of London Street to the mill beside the Kennet.
- 4.52 There is clear documentary evidence for mills have been sited at Mill Lane since the early 13th century, if not as early as Domesday (Fig. 2. 02113.14.000 RD3942. SU 71680 73160). Located on a branch of the Kennet, parallel to Mill Lane was a group of mills and it is likely that some of the Domesday mills may have been sited here, and documents certainly give evidence of corn and fulling mills in the 13th century. A single sherd of medieval pottery sherd was found at Mill Lane, Letcombe Street, Southampton Street just to the west of the study site in 1976 (Fig. 2. ERD10, 02113.24.000). A bill hook (agricultural tool), an arrowhead and a double-edged battle axe were also found from the River Kennet (Fig.2. 02113.37.000 - RD11372). The medieval mill stream was recorded at Reading Bus Depot, Mill Lane (Fig. 2. 02114.18.000). Archaeological observations in 1994 and 1995 at the Anchorage a site c. 200m to the west of Mill Lane, produced evidence of 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century activity (including Mesolithic flint finds). The excavations at St Giles' Mill are discussed under the HER entry ERD84 (see Fig. 2. ERD84, RD15635 and RD15637 and RD1567, 02113.14.000).
- 4.53 The medieval Minster Mill recorded at the Reading Oracle excavations (Fig. 2. ERD46 and ERD47, ERD86, Site150: MRM18353) is evidence of local milling activity. The Oracle site also had evidence of activity during the mid-12th to mid-13th century in the Yield Hall area (Site 12: MRM18355) and from the mid-13th to 15th century on the Yield Hall Lane frontages (Site 12: MRM18355) as well as evidence of the Back Brook (Site 101: Medieval MRM18222 and post-Medieval MRM18223) and other water channels, especially in the yield Hall car park area (RD15648).
- 4.54 The Oracle sites (Fig. 2. ERD46, ERD47, ERD86, ERD90, ERM1567) recorded evidence of medieval revetments (RD15638) and medieval and post medieval timber structures (RD15639) as well as medieval finds generally (RD15640) and dumped material (RD15641). There are numerous records on the HER for the Oracle investigations which are not all detailed here.
- 4.55 Other local archaeological works have contributed to the picture of medieval and post medieval industrial activity. Investigations of land at 67-73 London Street (Fig. 2. ERD64, ERD124, RD15615 - RD15615) recorded a medieval foundry (RD15610), Medieval pits and Post-Medieval features (RD15614; RD15615). At 69 London Street investigations recorded post-medieval features (Fig. 2. ERD80, RD15615). At 24-26 East Street 17<sup>th</sup> century Medieval ditches, undated ditches and a pit were recorded (Fig. 2. ERM1959, RM15903, MRM15991). At 96-102 London Street medieval and post-medieval pits, foundry waste, gullies and wells and soakaways were discovered (Fig. 2. RD15706, RD15707, RD15708, RD15709). Further research data is available from the HER and in the desk-based assessment for 43 London Street (ERM2346) and the desk-based assessment and heritage statement for After Dark, 112 London Street (Fig. 2. ERM2103, ERM 1903). Another nearby findspot is the sherd of Medieval pottery (off-white fabric with green

glaze: Surrey Ware) found during a watching brief at the corner of Mill Lane, Letcombe Street and Southampton Street, by the Berkshire Archaeological Unit in 1979 (Fig. 2. ERD10, 02113.24.000 - RD11376). No medieval stratigraphy noted as the site was very disturbed by cellaring. A number of wells of possibly 19th century date were also observed. There is some discrepancy between the NGR given on the HER record and the location described, but it is very possible that this broadly negative evidence is from the study site or Signal House (Fig. 2. 02113.24.000 - RD11376).

- 4.56 The Bridge Street area of the town forms a cluster of entries from the HER for the medieval period including: waterfronts (Fig. 2. ERD46, 47 and 49, RM953, 02113.18.000); an 11th century watercourse (02113.18.100); a leat or millstream (02113.18.200); revetments (02113.18.201); a clay bank (02113.18.202); a Late 12th or early 13th century channel (02113.18.300) and a revetment (02113.18.301); a chalk and gravel bank (02113.18.302) and 13<sup>th</sup> chalk hardstanding (02113.18.400); and flint and mortar walls (02113.18.401; 02113.20.600).
- 4.57 From a review of the available information, during the Medieval period the study site lay beyond the Abbey precinct, within the extent of the developing Medieval town. The archaeological potential of the study site for the Medieval period can therefore be identified as low because of the truncation of the site.

## Post Medieval & Modern (including map regression exercise)

- 4.58 The economic fortunes of the town following the Dissolution of the Abbey in 1539 are unclear, however, given the town was established and formed a regional market centre and appears not to have suffered economically (Fig. 2. RD3963, SU717 733). For example, Bear Wharf, Fobney Street, also has numerous medieval and post-medieval records also including (Fig. 2. ERD55, 02113.23.020) possible postholes and a modern wall of recent date, but also post-medieval hard standing (02113.23.030) and redeposited material (02113.23.050), silty clay layers (02113.23.060) and river deposits (02113.23.070, 02113.23.080, 02113.23.090) and revetments (02113.23.100). A Post-Medieval coin hoard was found at Yield Hall, Reading (Fig. 2. 02114.28.000- RD11386).
- 4.59 The urban nature of the study area means that it is difficult to separate the medieval and post-medieval development chronologically as the archaeological record is continuous through these periods. The progression of development across the study area is more clearly seen through map regression study (Figs. 3 to 14) and aerial photography (Fig. 15).
- 4.60 The first published map of 'Redding', produced by Speed in 1611, clearly shows a network of open streams and ditches in the south of the town (Fig. 3). This shows street frontages such as London Street to the east (marked 'x') and Minster Street to the north completely built up, occupation along Bridge Street ('3') is more dispersed. The Holy Brook, Minster Mill Stream and Back Brook are shown dividing the floodplain into a series of small islands north of the main channel of the Kennet. The Minster Mill is depicted as two buildings with two waterwheels by Speed on the Minster Mill channel, and he also shows what is a schematic, rather than an accurate, representation of St Giles Mill ('5'), apparently with two waterwheels spanning the main channel of the Kennet. On the wider map, the large building shown on an island between the Minster Mill Stream and the Kennet is probably the Yield Hall (Ford *et al*: 2013). The study site area south of St Giles' Mill ('5') and north of St Giles Church (shown here with its earlier tower and a clearly defined burial ground), lies some distance from the site perimeter. This suggests that the original burial ground of St Giles's Church did not extend as far east or north as the study site. The site is shown as open areas, of treed and grassed plots, but with a small complex of buildings enclosed with a stone wall shown on what is to become Mill Lane and on the area of the study site, perhaps the early origins of the brewery (Fig. 3). The stylised nature of the map-base is shown by the over-sized cow and farmer depicting the pastoral nature of land to the west of London Street.

- 4.61 During the Civil War the town was encircled by defences comprising a series of bastions linked by palisaded earthen banks. Apparently during the Siege of Reading in 1643, this area was flooded to serve as a line of defence for the town's besieged Royalist garrison. There were also a series of ditches to the north of Reading, filled with the waters of the River Thames and denying Parliamentary forces an easy route into town. The alignment of the Civil War earthwork defences is taken from a 1643 plan by the Rev. J. M. Goulding (copy in Reading Library), which shows the study site in open land south of the St Giles' Mill building, which now is seen spanning two canalised streams of the main course of the Kennet, south of the Holy Brook, with associated bridges also illustrated (Fig. 4). The HER dataset shows these defences are included within the scheduled monument designation further to the northeast. The Civil War defences are shown in the vicinity of the study site, but some distance away to the west of London Street and south of St Gyles's *[sic]*. This map is significant as it shows how by 1643 the water features to the north of the site have been regularised and canalised into a more formal regime (Fig. 4). It is evident that the site has little potential to hold archaeological evidence of the Civil War history of Reading.
- 4.62 St Giles' Church with square tower is shown on Speed's map of 1611. St Giles Church (listing no 113579) is within the 'Market Place and London Street' conservation area. The original medieval church and tower of St Giles were apparently damaged during the English Civil War (Fig. 2. 02113.11.000 RD3937 and MRM18258). The fabric was restored at the end of hostilities, with subsequent major rebuilding works of 1872/3 by J P St Aubyn in the Early English style retaining only the 13th century aisle walls and Perpendicular west tower but adding the current tall ashlar steeple. There are apparently traces of medieval walling on south and west sides. The graveyard retains much of its 19th century atmosphere. The current Church of St Giles on Southampton Street, and its churchyard tombs, are listed Grade II and located to the southwest of the site at NGR SU 71648 72950. The 20<sup>th</sup> century war memorial and war shrine are also listed (Fig 2. MRM182580). St Giles was probably founded in the twelfth century, and there was a Saxon church on the site of St Mary's, which pre-dated Reading Abbey.
- 4.63 St Giles's Church was apparently built on the other side of the River Kennet so that those who lived in the southern part of the town were able to go to church even when the river was in flood. This area of Church Street is located within the 'Market Place/London Street' Conservation Area (Fig. 2).
- 4.64 The view along Bridge Street is notable for the alignment of the three churches of St Giles, St Mary's and Greyfriars. All three churches are medieval in origin but each has undergone considerable modification since originally built. As noted in section this assessment is not a landscape character assessment or a visual environment appraisal, but as a tall building is potentially proposed strategic views should be considered between the designated heritage assets of the medieval churches.
- 4.65 John Rocque's 1761 'Map of Berkshire' shows that the town had developed with the study site now within the southern suburbs. Early 19th century maps show the town had hardly extended beyond its medieval core but a fast town expansion was stimulated by the development of the canals. The Kennet Canal was completed in 1723 and the Kennet and Avon Canal opened in 1810, bringing London and Bristol, two major seaports, into direct communication by water. On Rocque's plan Mill Street is clearly set out with buildings all along the southern side and the Kennet to the west used for Oyster beds. The street frontage shows a continuous line of buildings with open land to the rear (Fig. 5).
- 4.66 Roque's 1752-3 (not illustrated) - although drawn with west to the top - shows the study site in more detail. The St Giles Mill is clearly shown as a long narrow building spanning the main course of the Kennet, this and the other channels crossing the area are still shown uncanalised and the course of the Kennet to the Mill appears wide and free flowing. A few small buildings are shown to the east of St Giles Mill and may be part of the failed water pumping station constructed in the mid-1690s. The floodplain is mostly meadow and gardens. Mill Lane is clearly set out with properties fronting the southern side in a continuous line. The Giles Mill area

corresponds to site 300 of the Oracle excavations. The 1802 Tomkins Map of Reading shows a similar picture (not illustrated).

- 4.67 The 1809 Ordnance Survey Surveyors Drawing is not clear for the study site area but shows the layout of the town and particularly Mill Street and the now more regularised water systems in the site area (Fig. 6).
- 4.68 The HER notes an early 19th century bath complex a short distance to the north east of the site (MRM18537, SU 7174 7312). The bath complex was owned by John Hopper.
- 4.69 The 1840 Tithe Map of St Giles Reading (Fig 7) together with the Tithe Award, also shows the site occupied by gardens relating to the Brewery shown on the site, to the south of St Giles' Mill, which now is comprised of several buildings and forms a cruciform shape across the southern channel of the Kennet. Mill Lane is clearly set out, kinking to the south around the large mill building, but the brewery and its garden appears to be the only property shown between Bridge Street (here called Horn Street) and London Street. Properties were packed along London Street, so the absence of these buildings is a stylistic method of shoeing local industry on the Tithe Map solely (Fig. 7). The extent of the graveyard of St Giles by 1840 is not shown, but the brewery gardens appear to occupy approximately the same footprint as the current John Lewis warehouse, a well or circular flower bed is shown, with paths laid out in an ornamental pattern (Fig. 7).
- 4.70 The Noake family owned both a brewery on the south side of Castle Street and a malting house on the east side of London Street in Reading from at least the end of the 17th century. John Blandy (1759-1821), the younger son of William Blandy Senior of Reading, founded the famous law firm of Blandy & Blandy in the town. His younger sons were William & Charles Blandy. In 1831, they joined forces with John Yard Willats, taking over a share of Willats & Stephens' Mill Lane Brewery, and forming the company of Willats, Blandy & Blandy. The brewery is said to have begun in 1750, apparently by William May (d. 1763) brother-in-law of Robert Noake. By 1796, the Mill Lane Brewery was in overseen by the Aldermaston Wharf brewery and the Blandy family. The Brewery became Blandy & Blandy Brewers in 1852 before merging with Rickford & Hawkins' Castle Brewery in 1855 when the Mill Lane brewery was largely demolished. Extract from: [http://www.berkshirehistory.com/businesses/castle\\_mill\\_lane\\_brewery.html](http://www.berkshirehistory.com/businesses/castle_mill_lane_brewery.html)
- 4.71 The 1839-40 Ordnance survey map shows that the commercial prosperity of the town entered a new era with the arrival of the Great Western Railway but the site area is unchanged on the 1879 OS series (Fig 8, 1839-40 OS not illustrated).
- 4.72 The First Edition Ordnance Survey (Fig 8: 1879) shows the central part of the study site still occupied by buildings of the same footprint as the Brewery Buildings but now without the garden area and this area is labelled 'Militia Stores' (drill sheds and drill ground) with two large north-south aligned large apparently storage buildings shown. Letcombe Street has been laid out with residential properties on both sides and the Reading Baths in the east. A malt house for the local brewery industry lies to the west of Letcombe Street. The Friends' Meeting House is established and a 'Grave Yard' is shown, possibly extending up to and into the site's southern boundary. The Mill Tail is shown to the north and the Mill occupies a different shape but is still evident to the north, with properties fronting Mill Lane and the Lane separating the 'St Giles's' corn Mill from the study site, gardens are also seen on the study site and Bath Court has been built to the west (Fig. 8).
- 4.73 The 1895 GOAD Fire Insurance Plan (Fig 9) shows the study site in more detail and a clearer configuration of light industrial buildings are evident. To the north the mill is now named 'Hurley & Son, St Giles Flour Mill' and there are many properties facing onto Mill Lane including a public house perhaps relating to the brewery. A corn store sits opposite the mill on the southern side of Mill Lane. On the study site the large stores building has been replaced by a large warehouse, again in approximately the space occupied by the current warehouse. This is labelled 'T. Cook Jnr. & Sons. Wholesale Clothiers' and is a cutting out factory for the cloth trade. A parallel but smaller store building to the east is labelled 'empties' perhaps for the pub and brewery. The extent of the

graveyard is not shown, but the southern extreme appears to be labelled 'Garden'. The large factory building has several stories it appears to have large east west running skylights to allow light into the workplace below (Fig. 9).

- 4.74 Evidence from the HER for the site itself at Mill Lane and Crossland Street is recorded under ERM608 and ERD5 on the HER and records the discovery of two Victorian or 19th century wells (Fig. 2. ERD5 MRM16011, see section 4.9 of this report). ERM608 appears to refer to an earlier assessment of the site in 1997. This unpublished document by Soil Consultants Ltd. 1997. Desk Study on Historical Development at Mill Lane/Crossland Road, Reading, unfortunately this report could not be located for this study, although the ensuing watching brief report is referenced throughout this assessment (Fig. 2. ERM608).
- 4.75 A Post Medieval Quaker Meeting House and burial ground is recorded and still survives at 2 Church Street (Fig. 2. MRM17697, MRM16018) and has revealed post-medieval pottery finds (MRM1640280).
- 4.76 The 1895 GOAD plan is the last historic map to show the St Giles Mill, which elsewhere is labelled 'steam power only'. It was demolished in 1901 for the creation of the Tramways Depot shown on the Third Edition Ordnance Survey map series of 1912 (Fig 10). Figure 10 shows the new tramway Power Station with the tram lines into Mill Lane and extending east towards London Street. Bath Court is still shown and the factory building on the site and stores as seen in 1895. Tram networks had been developed along Bridge Street (100 m west), London Street (40 m east) and Mill Lane (40 m north). The hospital and Reading Baths were no longer labelled on the 1912 map.
- 4.77 The 1912 wider landscape is dominated by the brewery, gas works and the new tramway buildings. The area south of Mill Lane is covered by high density terraced housing and the Friends' Meeting House with its clearly defined burial ground – now not extending into the site - is shown to the south of the site (Fig.10).
- 4.78 The Revised Ordnance Survey (Fig 11: 1931) shows a similar layout for the general area, with perhaps a larger extension of the factory built on the site. By 1931, the gasworks was no longer depicted on the map, and a tram and bus depot had been developed adjacent to the tramway power station. A printing works was present 30m west.
- 4.79 The 1956-57 Ordnance Survey (Fig 12) shows redevelopment of the study site with a large factory appearing to cover a large parcel of the central area of the site. Houses are shown on the site to the west (Fig. 12). The tram depot, tramway power station, and tram and bus depot had been replaced with a corporation transport depot by 1957 and the graveyard was no longer present to the south of the site. The factory on site extended off site to the north. Several unlabelled works were present 15m northeast, 90 m east, and 25 m northwest respectively. Several garages were located 135 m southwest, 220 m south, and 145 m northeast respectively. The former Reading Tin Works was now labelled as a 'works'. Several tanks (of unknown contents) were present 130 m northwest adjacent to the brewery and north of the River Kennet. Another tank (of unknown contents) was located 125 m northeast but was no longer depicted on the map of 1961.
- 4.80 In the mid-20th century, the centre of Reading was redeveloped by demolishing parts of the historic core of the town to provide offices and shopping precincts. The construction of the Inner Distribution Road, which started in 1969, improved traffic circulation but severed links between different areas of the town. After the turn of the century, the construction of the Oracle Shopping Centre reinvigorated the town centre but meant the loss of a number of historic buildings including Simonds' brewery on the banks of the River Kennett. The canal became disused and impassable by the 1940s but since 1992 has been reopened for leisure uses following a restoration scheme by the Kennet and Avon Trust. Figure 13 shows the 1988-1993 Ordnance Survey mapping where the major road of the A329 has been built to the north of the site, labelled Mill Lane, but removing all the properties that formerly stood on Mill Lane up to the edge of the study site. A depot is shown, which is the Heelas Warehouse (Fig. 13). Modern development is evident in the surrounding area

and Crossland Road is set out and other newly formed streetscapes. The houses on Letcombe Street have gone on the western part of the study site.

- 4.81 The 2003 series shows the John Lewis Customer Collection Depot in its current footprint on the site (Fig 14).
- 4.82 Figure 15 shows the aerial photograph of the site in 2021, showing the scale of the large warehouse on the site and the extent of modern development in the area, especially to the north (Fig.15)
- 4.83 Figure 16 shows the watching brief trenches investigated on the site by Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS) on the site, see section 4.9 to 4.16 of this report.

## Historic Landscape Characterisation

- 4.84 The HLC data for the site (Figure 2c) characterises the site as 'Historic Settlement Core' which correlates with the site's location in the urban core of Reading.

## Assessment of Significance (Designated Assets)

- 4.85 This section identifies and assesses the significance of the designated built heritage assets that are recorded within the 250m radius study search area. Existing national policy guidance for archaeology (the NPPF as referenced in section 2) enshrines the concept of the special 'significance' of heritage assets. Significance as defined in the NPPF centres on the value of an archaeological or historic asset for its 'heritage interest' to this or future generations.
- 4.86 Approximately, 50 listed buildings are recorded in the 250m radius study search area, but these are at a sufficient distance to be unaffected archaeologically by development at the study site. A list of these buildings is not contained in this report but is available on the HER study search upon request and their locations are shown on Figure 2.
- 4.87 The significance of the listed sites needs to be assessed against the four values set out in the NPP, GPA3 and in Policy DP34 of the MSDP; these are Architectural Value, Historic Value, Artistic Value and Archaeological Value. As the study site lies within the existing, wider urban setting of the relevant Scheduled Monuments and historic town, and nearby listed buildings, the redevelopment proposals are not considered likely to impact upon the significance of their setting.

## Assessment of Significance (Non-Designated Assets)

- 4.88 In terms of relevant local designations, the study site lies within an Area of Archaeological Potential as defined by Reading Borough Council. While it is possible that previously unknown archaeological remains may be present within the study site boundary, the balance of probability is that these remains will be of local significance.
- 4.89 The map series shows a graveyard to the south of the site and possibly crossing its southernmost extremity. The known data suggests that no human burials were ever located on this part of the study site, but the possibility cannot be eliminated entirely based on the available data from the map series (Figs. 4 to 12).
- 4.90 Overall, while it is possible that archaeological remains may be present within the study site boundary, the balance of probability is that these would, in the context of the Secretary of State's non-statutory criteria for Scheduled Monuments (DCMS2013), most likely be of local significance. They would also be largely removed by successive phases of large-scale development of the site.
- 4.91 Archaeological potential by period and the likely significance of any archaeological remains which may be present is summarised in table form below and mapped where possible on Figure 2:

| Period:       | Identified Archaeological Potential | Identified Archaeological Significance |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Prehistoric   | Low                                 | Low (Local)                            |
| Roman         | Low                                 | Low (Local)                            |
| Anglo-Saxon   | Low                                 | Low (Local)                            |
| Medieval      | Low                                 | Low (Local)                            |
| Post Medieval | Low                                 | Low (Local)                            |

4.92 This assessment has identified that the archaeological potential of the study site can be considered to be low for all periods of past history.

## 5 SITE CONDITIONS, THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW OF POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSETS

### Site Conditions

- 5.1 The site is currently occupied by a large vacant John Lewis Customer Collections warehouse and associated car parking. The Reading Inner Distribution Road or Mill Lane (A329) road runs along the northern boundary with the site lying at a lower level to the road. The urban landscape is characterised by the River Kennet and the Oracle shopping centre complex (named after the 17th century Oracle Workhouse, shown on the map series between 1802 and 1850) to the north, London Street to the east, St Giles' Church and the Quaker burial ground to the south and Letcombe Street to the west (Plates 1 to 7).
- 5.2 The study site covers an area of c. 0.44 ha of retail warehousing and associated car parking and is centred at NGR SU 71619 73043. The site measures approximately 100m east to west by 50m north to south.
- 5.3 The extreme southern strip of the site has been shown on historic maps to have been part of the graveyard of St Giles' Church and is currently adjacent to a Quaker burial ground, although well-documented as being outside the modern burial ground. It cannot be entirely proven that previously unknown post-medieval human burials could be encountered in this small zone of the site, but it is extremely unlikely.
- 5.4 In terms of relevant nationally significant designated heritage assets, no World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks or Gardens, Conservation Areas, Historic Wrecks or Historic Battlefield sites have been identified on the site. The site lies adjacent to the 'Market Place and London Street, Reading' Conservation Area and within a locally recognised Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP) as designated by Reading Borough Council (Fig. 2).
- 5.5 The site is within an area of high archaeological potential, characterised by the proximity of the River Kennet and medieval and post-medieval water management, with milling at the Minster Mill and St Giles' Mill (Oracle Site 300, Ford *et al*: 2013), nearby tanning, leather working, and brewing and militia storage industries on the study site. A detailed history of St Giles Mill is given in Ford *et al* 2013.
- 5.6 The site has been subject to extensive previous archaeological work, under a former planning application (96/0692). It was formerly known as the 'Heelas Warehouse' and was subject to an archaeological watching brief during its construction in 1997-1998. Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS) investigated all the groundworks for the construction of the warehouse and 47 trenches were monitored on the site. No archaeological features were noted in any of the sections (Gleave, M., 1998 TVAS in-house publication MLR97/98). The only artefacts were in the form of three sherds of Post-Medieval pottery and two capped wells of probable Victorian date (Fig. 16).
- 5.7 With regard to designated built heritage assets - principally the amenity and setting of nearby listed buildings within the 1 'Market Place and London Street, Reading' Conservation Area on London Street and Southampton Street, the listed St Giles' church and churchyard - the assessment concludes that the cumulative archaeological harm from the proposed development falls within the 'no harm' classification established by paragraph 208 of the NPPF. As the study site lies within the existing, wider urban setting, the redevelopment proposals are not considered likely to impact upon the setting of designated heritage assets, such as the nearby listed buildings on London Street and Southampton Street and the listed St Giles' churchyard and tombs. However, the scope of this report addresses below ground archaeology only and no detailed assessment of

built heritage assets or the impact of the proposed development on their view corridors or settings has been made.

- 5.8 The construction of the existing buildings and land modelling and quarrying can be considered likely to have had a severe, widespread negative archaeological impact, through the cutting of foundations and services, and in particular through the creation of existing foundations and site levelling works (Fig 16).

## Proposed Development

- 5.9 The development involves the demolition of the existing building and redevelopment of the site comprising erection of a new building for up to 215 build to rent residential dwellings (Use Class C3) together with flexible commercial / community space (Use Class E/F1/F2), residents' facilities, landscaping, public realm, amenity space, cycle parking and disabled car parking. No basements are proposed. The development proposals are illustrated on Figure 17.

## Review of Potential Development Impacts on Non-Designated Assets

- 5.10 As identified above, there are no designated archaeological assets on the study site.
- 5.11 Owing to the low archaeological potential identified for the study site, it is considered unlikely that the proposed residential development has the potential to cause any significant archaeological impact.
- 5.12 The general area contains locally listed buildings and public art in the form of the mural on Mill Street to the east of the site, the development of the site will not cause material harm to these non-designated archaeological and built heritage assets (see Plates 1 to 7).

## 6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The site of the former John Lewis depot, Letcombe Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 2HN has been reviewed for its below ground archaeological potential.
- 6.2 The site comprises a broadly rectangular area of c. 0.5 ha currently occupied by a large and centrally placed vacant two-storey John Lewis Customer Collections warehouse, with a customer car park to the west and service yard to the east. Mill Lane runs along the northern boundary with the site, with the Reading Inner Distribution Road or (IDR A329) just beyond. The site lies at a lower level to the A329 road. The setting of the site is characterised by the River Kennet, the A329 and the Oracle Shopping Centre complex to the north, London Street to the east, St Giles' Church and a burial ground to the south and Letcombe Street to the west.
- 6.3 This assessment supports an application for planning permission to redevelop the site, the details of the proposed development involve a build to rent residential apartments scheme, with accompanying commercial and under-croft car parking. No basements are proposed.
- 6.4 In terms of relevant nationally significant designated heritage assets, no World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks or Gardens, Conservation Areas, Historic Wrecks or Historic Battlefield sites have been identified on the site. The site lies outside of, but adjacent to the Conservation Area 'Market Place and London Street, Reading' and within a locally recognised Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP) as designated by Reading Borough Council.
- 6.5 The nearest Scheduled Monuments to the study site comprise the remains of Reading Abbey, the Cluniac and Benedictine monastery and Civil War earthworks (NLE 1007932), c. 500m to the northeast, and the High Bridge (NLE 1005388) c. 200m to the northeast.
- 6.6 This assessment complies with the requirements of paragraph 200 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that applicants must describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposed development, including any contribution made by their settings. It is also intended to provide evidence to assist the local planning authority in discharging their statutory duties as required by local and national planning legislation, policy and guidance.
- 6.7 The site is within an area of high archaeological potential within the medieval town and characterised historically by the proximity of the River Kennet and medieval and post-medieval water management and the early history of local industries such as milling, tanning, leather working, brewing and clothmaking. The extreme southern strip of the site has been shown on historic maps to have been related to the graveyard of St Giles' Church and is currently adjacent to a Quaker burial ground; the site is well-documented as being outside the known extent of the modern burial ground.
- 6.8 The site and environs have been subject to extensive previous archaeological work. In 1998/99, 47 small trenches were monitored on the site, no significant archaeological features were noted. The only artefacts were in the form of three sherds of post-medieval pottery and two capped wells of probable Victorian date. In 2007, the adjacent site to the west (Signal House) was evaluated and similarly no significant archaeology was present, the site apparently having been truncated by quarrying activities.
- 6.9 Regarding heritage assets of archaeological interest, no designated or non-designated built or below ground archaeology of significance is recorded on the study site. As there is a clear, ground-tested, evidence base proven by fieldwork that the previous developmental impacts on the site are severe, the site can be considered to no longer have a potential for the survival of archaeological heritage assets or deposits of archaeological interest. In consideration of this,
- 6.10 Based on the findings of this assessment RPS suggest that no further archaeological mitigation measures are required in respect of the proposed development.

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The National Archive

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Domesday Online – <http://www.domesdaybook.co.uk/>  
Historic England: The National Heritage List for England – <http://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>  
Portable Antiquities Scheme – [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)  
<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk>  
<http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/>  
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Victoria County History Berkshire Volume 3 1923

## Cartographic

1610 Speed's Map of Berkshire

1643 Guiling Map of Reading

1761 John Rocque's Map of Berkshire

1802 Tomkins Map of Reading

1807 Terrier, Reading Corporation

1809 Ordnance Survey Drawing

1840 Weller Map of Reading

1847 St Lawrence Reading Tithe Map

1853 Clacy Map of Reading

1861 Dower map of Reading

1877 Ordnance Survey

1895 GOAD Insurance Plan

1900 Ordnance Survey

1912 Ordnance Survey

1931 Ordnance Survey

## REPORT

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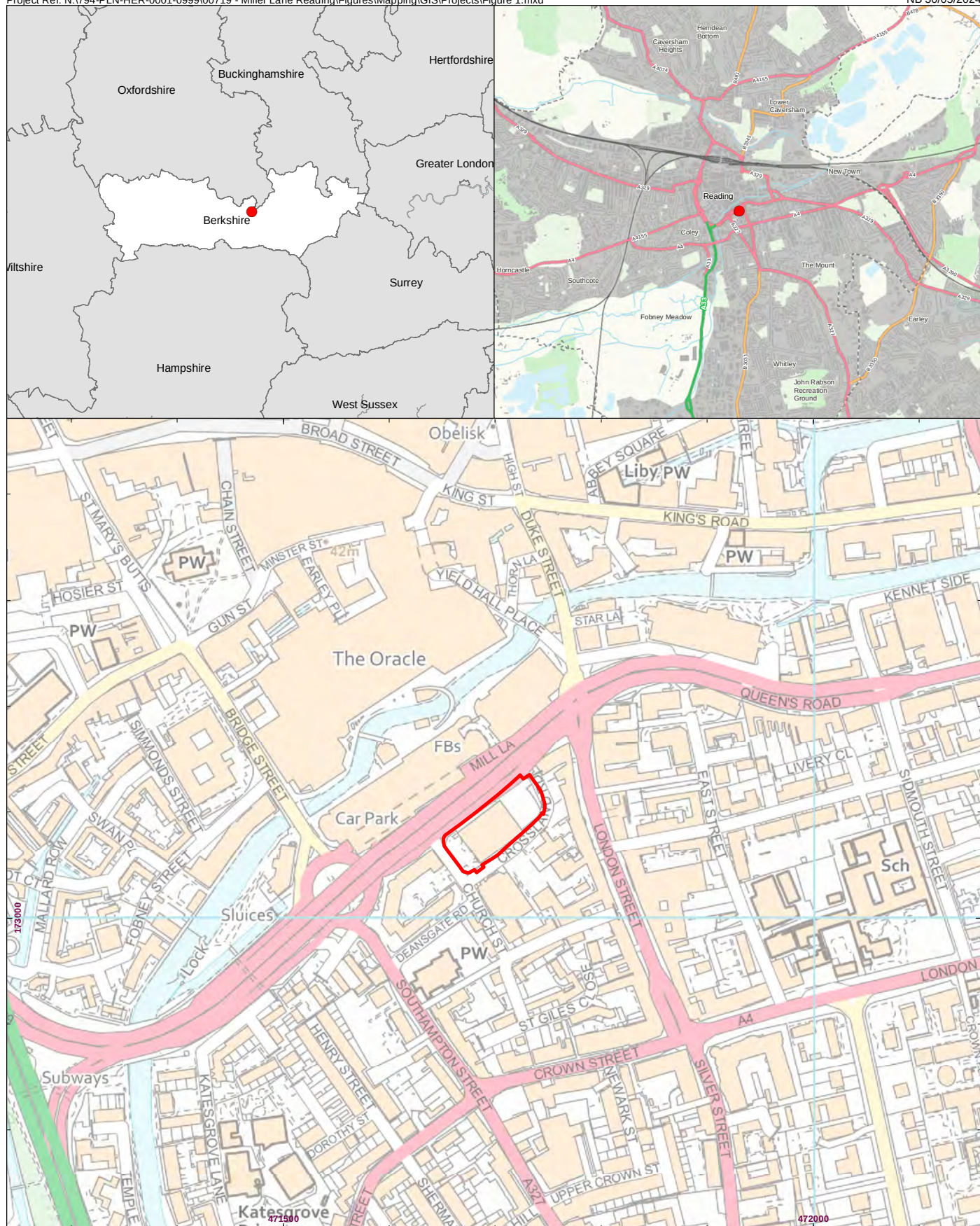
1961 Ordnance Survey

1979 Ordnance Survey

2020 British Geological Survey Sheet 268 Reading



**FIGURES**



Site Boundary



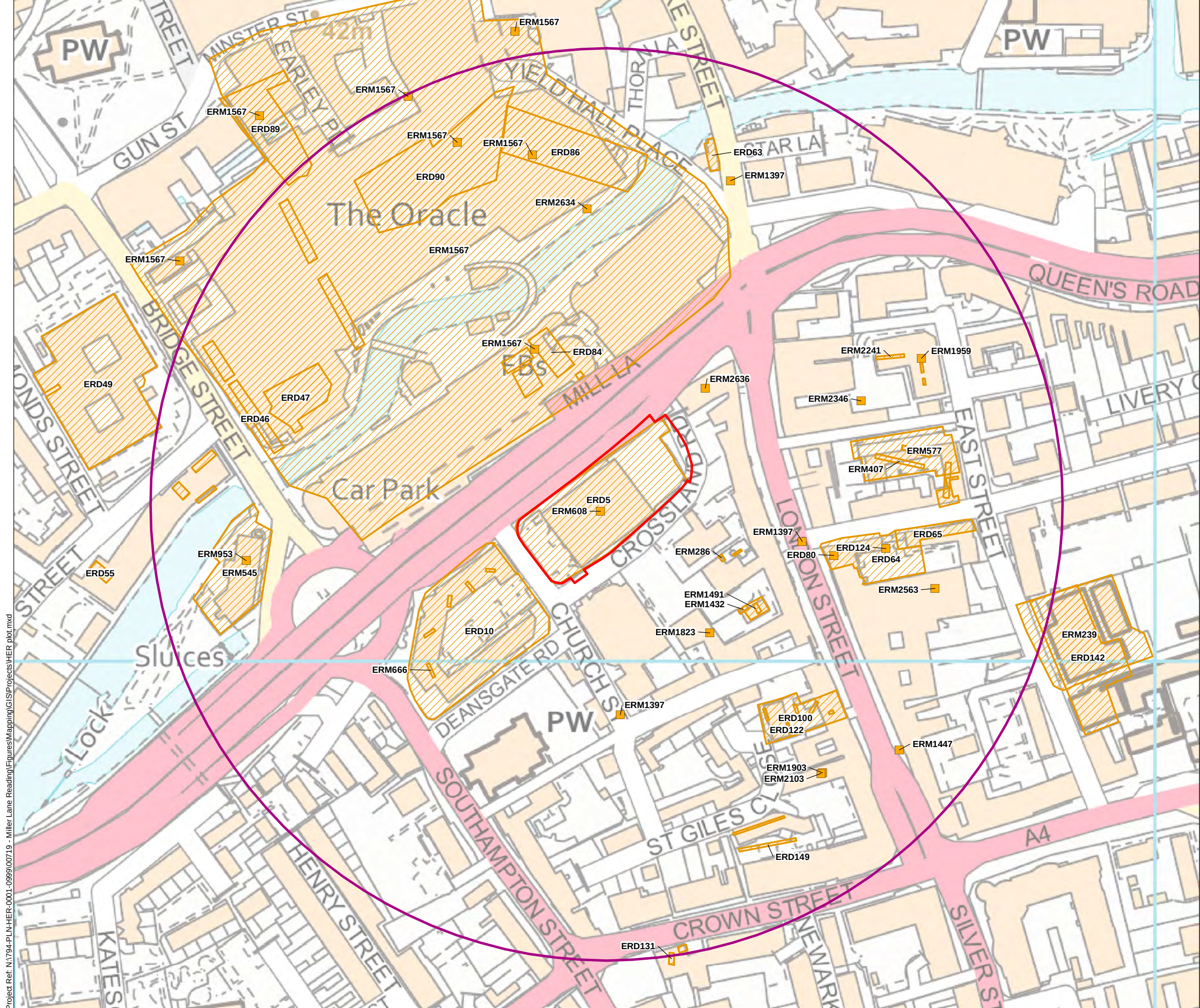
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Scale at A4: 1:5,000



Figure 1

Site Location





**Legend**

- Site Boundary
- 250m search radius

Previous Archaeological Work:

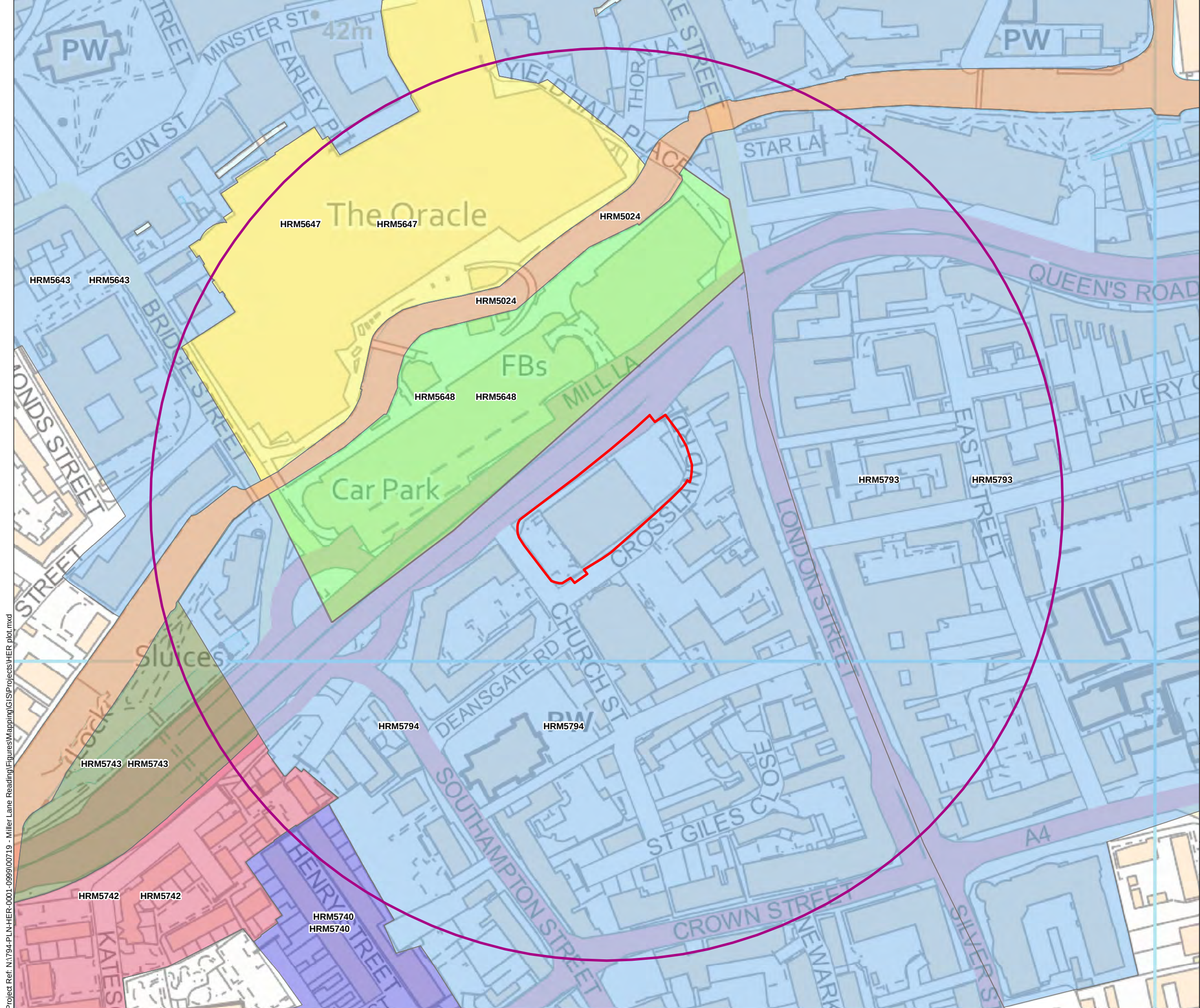
- HER Events Points
- HER Events Polygons



0 50 100m  
Scale at A3: 1:2,000



Figure 2b  
HER Events Plot



Legend

- Site Boundary
- 250m search radius

Historic Landscape Characterisation:

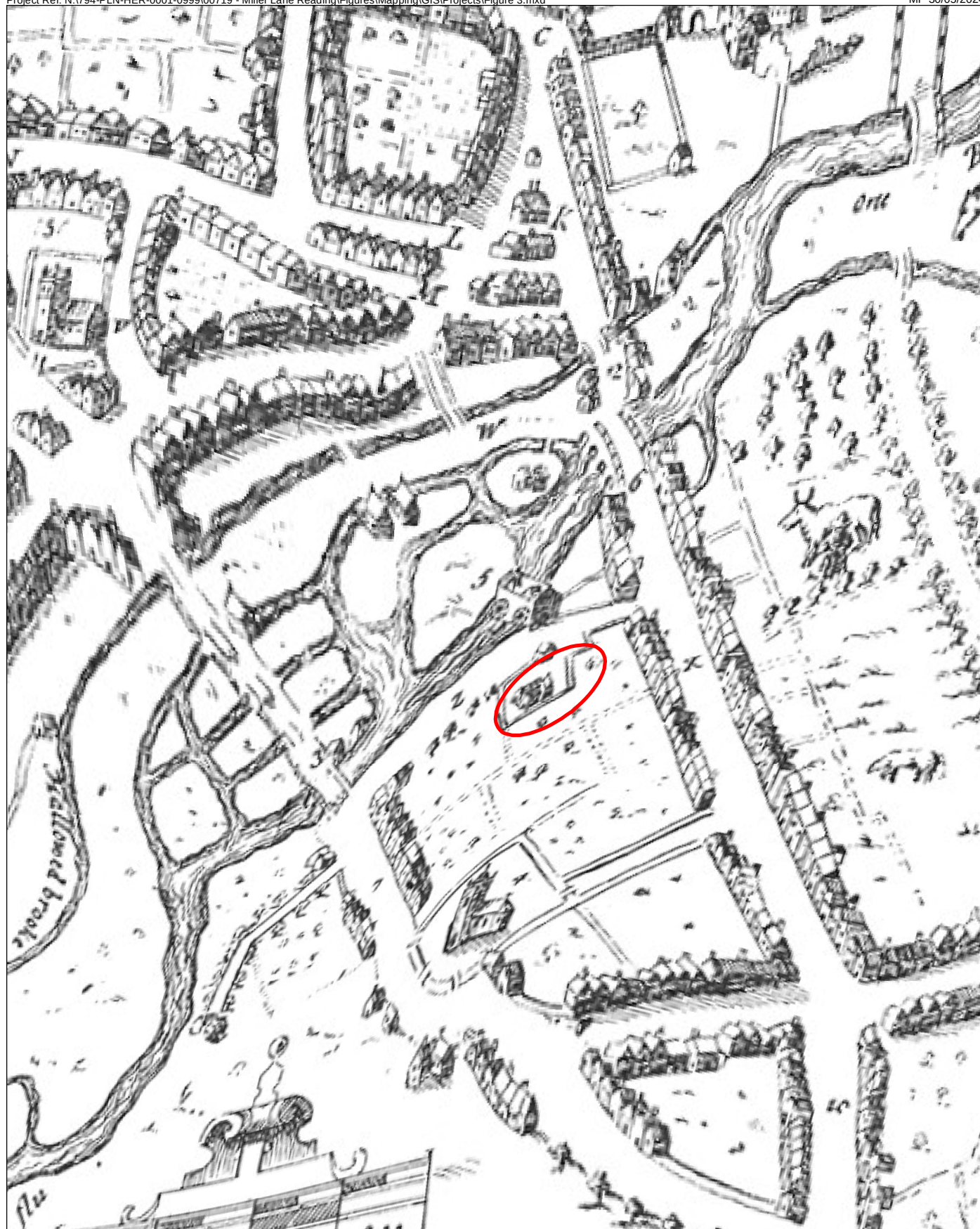
- Car Park
- Flats
- Historic settlement core
- River
- Road
- Shopping Centre
- Terraced housing



0 50 100m  
Scale at A3: 1:2,000



Figure 2c  
HLC Plot



Approximate Site Location



0 30 60 90m

Scale at A4: 1:3,500 approx.



Figure 3

1611 John Speed Map of Reading



Approximate Site Location



0 30 60 90m

Scale at A4: 1:3,500 approx.



A TETRA TECH COMPANY

Figure 4

1643 Map of Reading by the Rev.  
J.M. Goulding



Approximate Site Location



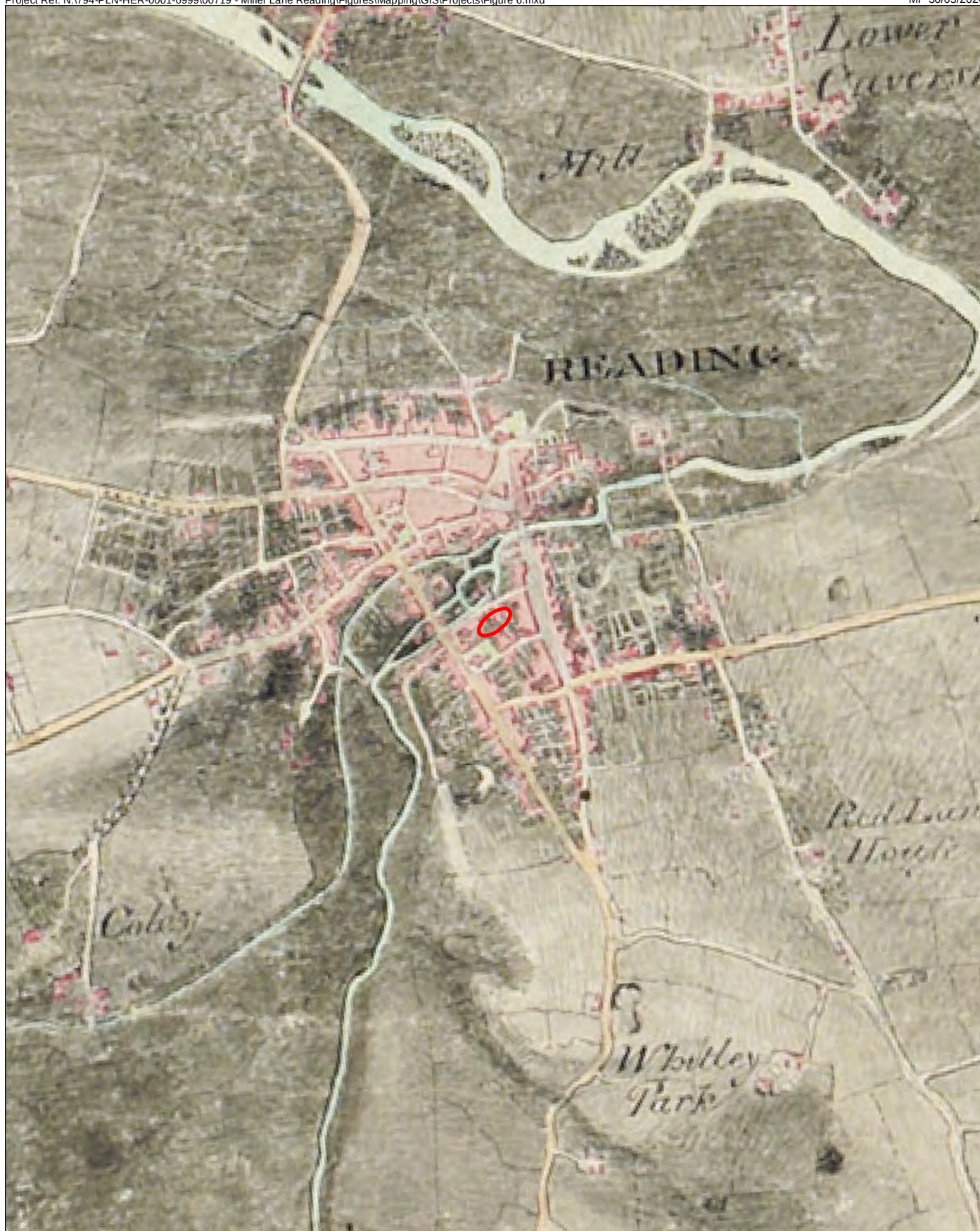
0 150 300 450m

Scale at A4: 1:15,000 approx.



Figure 5

1761 Rocque Map of Berkshire



Approximate Site Location



0 150 300 450m

Scale at A4: 1:15,000 approx.



Figure 6

1809 OSD