

Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment
December 2023

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Report

Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Site

Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading

Client

Peveril Securities Ltd

Date

December 2023

Planning Authority

Reading Borough Council

Grid Reference

SU 72025 73860

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Report Status

FINAL

Orion Ref

PN3952

Orion QA Ref

RQA-00415-00393

Contents

Executive Summary

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Aims, Objectives & Methodology
- 3.0 Statutory and Planning Policy Framework
- 4.0 Archaeological & Historic Baseline
- 5.0 Proposed Development and Potential Impact on Heritage Assets
- 6.0 Summary and Conclusions

Sources Consulted

List of Illustrations

- Figure 1: Site Location Map
- Figure 2: HER monuments data
- Figure 3: HER events data
- Figure 4: Designated archaeological assets
- Figure 5: Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) data
- Figure 6: 1798 John Man's Plan of Reading
- Figure 7: 1840 New Plan of the Borough of Reading
- Figure 8: 1847 St Laurence Reading Tithe Map
- Figure 9: 1879 Ordnance Survey Map
- Figure 10: 1899 Ordnance Survey Map
- Figure 11: 1912-1913 Ordnance Survey Map
- Figure 12: 1931-1932 Ordnance Survey Map
- Figure 13: 1947-1948 Aerial Image
- Figure 14: 1962-1973 Ordnance Survey Map
- Figure 15: 1986-1990 Ordnance Survey Map
- Figure 16: 2006 Ordnance Survey Map
- Figure 17: 2023 Ordnance Survey Map
- Figure 18: 2023 Google Earth Image

List of Plates

- Plate 1 View east across the study site from the site's western boundary
- Plate 2 View west across the car park within the study site, taking in new development to the west and the railway and new development to the south of it

Appendix A – HER Gazetteer

Timescales Used in This Report

Prehistoric

Palaeolithic	450,000 - 12,000 BC
Mesolithic	12,000 - 4,000 BC
Neolithic	4,000 - 2,200 BC
Bronze Age	2,200 - 700 BC
Iron Age	700 - AD 43

Historic

Roman	43 - 410AD
Saxon/Early Medieval	410 - 1066AD
Medieval	1066 - 1485AD
Post Medieval	1486 - 1901AD
Modern	1901 - Present Day

Executive Summary

This archaeological desk-based assessment considers the site of Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading (hereinafter referred to as the “Study Site”). In accordance with government policy (National Planning Policy Framework 2023), this assessment draws together the available archaeological, historic, topographic and land-use information in order to clarify the heritage significance and archaeological potential of the study site.

The assessment has been commissioned by Peveril Securities Limited to support a full planning application for demolition of the existing three office buildings, and construction of new 11 storey buildings, with amenity space at roof level (part indoor and set back), to provide 576 residential dwellings consisting of 1, 2 and 3-bedroom apartments. The development will include ancillary facilities for residents, such as a residents’ lounge, gym and communal workspace. The buildings will be set in landscaping to the front and between the buildings together with roof terraces. Parking is proposed for 39 cars and 6 motorbikes. Three internal storage spaces are proposed at ground floor for 289 bicycles and an additional 20 cycle spaces are provided externally for visitors. The site is 1.26 ha in size and stretches east to west along Napier Road, bound by the railway line to the south, Napier Road and Kings Meadow to the north, Thames Quarter to the west and a Network Rail site to the east. The site is located within the administrative boundary of Reading Borough Council and is very well connected to the train station, bus services and town centre facilities.

In accordance with government policy (National Planning Policy Framework), this assessment draws together the available archaeological, historic, topographic and land-use information in order to clarify the heritage significance and archaeological potential of the study site.

The study site does not contain any designated archaeological assets, as such no physical alterations to designated archaeological assets have been identified. The assessment has considered the setting of Reading Abbey, which occupies a parcel of land located c.200m south of the study site. Due to the largely modern character of the wider setting and the degree of separation provided by the surrounding developments, the study site is considered to not make a contribution to the significance of the scheduled monument.

The assessment has identified a potential for alluvial deposits to be present within the study site, which may hold palaeoenvironmental evidence. Such remains, if present, are considered likely to be of Local Significance.

A low potential for archaeological remains from all past periods is considered due to impacts caused by the two previous phases of development. Based on available evidence from recent ground investigations carried out within the study site the upper sequence appears to be heavily truncated by modern development; as such it is anticipated that general groundworks for the construction of the development would not result in a high level of physical impact on non-designated archaeological remains.

The LPA’s archaeological advisor has been consulted and has confirmed that any further works required could be secured by way of a condition. It is our recommendation that the additional works would comprise limited geoarchaeological/palaeoenvironmental investigations. Given the previous disturbance of the archaeological horizon due to historic railway construction, goods yard and buildings, and the later office buildings, a watching brief is likely to yield very little, if any, information and would therefore be of limited value.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This archaeological desk-based assessment considers Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading (Figure 1). It has been researched and prepared by Orion Heritage on behalf of Peveril Securities Ltd. The site (hereinafter referred to as the “study site”) is located at grid reference SU 72025 73860 and is sub-rectangular. It is currently in commercial use comprising three office buildings with associated access, hardstanding and car parking.
- 1.2 This document has been prepared in support of a full planning application for demolition of the existing three office buildings, and construction of new 11 storey buildings, with amenity space at roof level (part indoor and set back), to provide 576 residential dwellings consisting of 1, 2 and 3-bedroom apartments. The development will include ancillary facilities for residents, such as a residents’ lounge, gym and communal workspace. The buildings will be set in landscaping to the front and between the buildings together with roof terraces. Parking is proposed for 39 cars and 6 motorbikes. Three internal storage spaces are proposed at ground floor for 289 bicycles and an additional 20 cycle spaces are provided externally for visitors. The site is 1.26 ha in size and stretches east to west along Napier Road, bound by the railway line to the south, Napier Road and Kings Meadow to the north, Thames Quarter to the west and a Network Rail site to the east. The site is located within the administrative boundary of Reading Borough Council and is very well connected to the train station, bus services and town centre facilities.
- 1.3 In accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2020), the assessment draws together available information on designated and non-designated heritage assets, topographic and land-use information so as to establish the potential for non-designated archaeological assets within the study site. The assessment includes the results of a site survey, an examination of published and unpublished records, and charts historic land-use through a map regression exercise. The assessment also considers the setting of heritage assets and provides an assessment of how their settings contribute to their significance.
- 1.4 The assessment enables relevant parties to assess the significance of heritage/ archaeological assets on and close to the study site and considers the potential for hitherto undiscovered archaeological assets, thus enabling potential impacts on assets to be identified along with the need for design, civil engineering or archaeological solutions. It also provides an understanding of any constraints to development of the study site due to the presence of nearby heritage assets and provides an assessment of the potential impact the proposed development would have on the significance of heritage assets and also provides design responses that would serve to reduce that impact in line with local and national policy.
- 1.5 The study area used in this assessment is a 500m buffer from the site’s centre (Figures 2-5).
- 1.6 A site visit was undertaken on 24th August 2023 when the conditions were sunny/overcast with clear visibility.

Location, Topography and Geology

- 1.7 The study site is located in Reading, c.350m north-east of Reading train station. The site is bound to the north by Napier Road, to the east by commercial development, to the west by a residential apartment building and to the south by the Great Western Railway. King’s Meadow riverside park, comprising sports &

play areas and the Thames Lido are located north of the study site beyond Napier Road.

- 1.8 The bedrock geology of the study site comprises Seaford Chalk Formation and Newhaven Chalk Formation – Chalk. Superficial deposits of Alluvium - clay, silt, sand and gravel are recorded in the study site's eastern half, while in the western half superficial deposits of Langley Silt Member – clay and silt are recorded.¹
- 1.9 Extensive geotechnical ground investigations were carried out at the study site in 2022 and 2023 by Curtins Consulting Limited,² the results of which are also submitted in support of the planning application. Topsoil was encountered from ground level in areas of soft landscaping along the Network Rail retaining wall on the southern boundary of the study site to a max. depth of 0.18m bgl. Made Ground was encountered in the remaining exploratory locations to a max. depth of 2.10m bgl, comprising hardstanding of tarmacadam/block paving to 0.30m bgl, underlain by granular sub-base materials to depths up to 0.60m bgl, with localised deepening to 0.90m bgl. Cohesive made ground was encountered in some locations as soft dark brown/black sandy gravelly clay with gravels of concrete, brick fragments, chalk and flint. Granular Made Ground, thought to be associated with historical railway sidings, was encountered from 0.60m to 1.60m bgl. Underlying the cohesive and granular made ground, reworked ground was encountered from 1.30m to 2.10m bgl. Underlying the made ground soils were the superficial Alluvium deposits to a max. depth of 3.70m bgl. River Terrace deposits were encountered underlying the Alluvium to depths ranging from 7.30m and 10.30m bgl. Several subsurface obstructions were encountered during the ground investigations. These comprised one insulated metal pipe associated with the air conditioning system of the one of the buildings on site, which is not present on utility drawings and the remaining obstructions are suspected to comprise old brick footings/concrete associated with the historical goods shed on site. Within BH03 a suspected thick subsurface slab/loading bay or 1m thick foundation was present from c.0.90m to 1.90m bgl. This is thought to be contemporary with the railway infrastructure which was present on the site.
- 1.10 Four boreholes³ are recorded immediately north of the study site, on the north side of Napier Road. Made ground up to 0.85m deep, underlain by clay/sand was recorded.⁴

¹ https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk/?_ga=2.127469198.2049289651.1662547922-31267891.1662547922

² Curtins. 2023. Napier Road, Reading, Phase 2 Ground Investigation.

³ <https://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html>

⁴ <https://api.bgs.ac.uk/sobi-scans/v1/borehole/scans/items/428459>, <https://api.bgs.ac.uk/sobi-scans/v1/borehole/scans/items/428458>, <https://api.bgs.ac.uk/sobi-scans/v1/borehole/scans/items/428457>, <https://api.bgs.ac.uk/sobi-scans/v1/borehole/scans/items/428456>



Plate 1 View east across the study site from the site's western boundary taking in the railway to the south



Plate 2 View west across the car park within the study site, taking in new development to the west and the railway and new development to the south of it

2.0 Aims, Objectives & Methodology

2.1 The principal aims of the desk-based assessment is to:

- Gain an understanding of the archaeological potential of the study site;
- Identify any archaeological constraints to the development of the study site; and to
- Assess the likely impact of the proposed development.

2.2 The results of the archaeological desk-based assessment will inform an archaeological strategy for further on-site assessment and formulation of a mitigation strategy, as appropriate to the archaeological potential of the study site.

2.3 This desk-based assessment conforms to the requirements of current national and local planning policy (including *National Planning Policy Framework* 2023) and it has been designed in accordance with current best archaeological practice, and the appropriate national and local standards and guidelines, including:

- Management of Recording Projects in the Historic Environment: MORPHE (Historic England 2015);
- Code of Conduct (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists [CIfA] [revised edition] 2014); and
- Standard and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment (CIfA January 2020).

2.4 It is noted that the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists defines desk-based assessment as:

“a programme of study of the historic environment within a specified area or site on land, the inter-tidal zone or underwater that addresses agreed research and/or conservation objectives. It consists of an analysis of existing written, graphic, photographic and electronic information in order to identify the likely heritage assets, their interests and significance and the character of the study area, including appropriate consideration of the settings of heritage assets and, in England, the nature, extent and quality of the known or potential archaeological, historic, architectural and artistic interest. Significance is to be judged in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate.”

2.5 The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard for desk-based assessment states that:

“Desk-based assessment will determine, as far as is reasonably possible from existing records, the nature, extent and significance of the historic environment within a specified area. Desk-based assessment will be undertaken using appropriate methods and practices which satisfy the stated aims of the project, and which comply with the Code of conduct and other relevant regulations of CIfA. In a development context desk-based assessment will establish the impact of the proposed development on the significance of the historic environment (or will identify the need for further evaluation to do so) and will enable reasoned proposals and decisions to be made whether to mitigate, offset or accept without further intervention that impact.”

Methodology

2.6 The archaeological desk-based assessment will include:

- Map regression based on Ordnance Survey maps and tithe/enclosure maps and apportionments held online;

- Examination of material currently held in the Berkshire Historic Environment Record, including Historic Landscape Characterisation for the study site and the 500m radius study area
- Consultation of the National Heritage List for England;
- Site inspection;
- No previous intrusive archaeological investigations have been carried out at the study site; previous archaeological evaluation and excavation records relating to sites nearby;
- Other published works, reports and other information relevant to the desk-based assessment;
- Online aerial photography including Google Earth and Bing Aerial; and
- Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) data, available from the PAS website.

1.1 The urban nature of the study site does not provide favourable conditions for the examination and interpretation of Lidar data; therefore, this resource was not utilised for this assessment.

3.0 Planning Background and Development Plan Framework

Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979

- 3.1 The Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as amended) protects the fabric of Scheduled Monuments but does not afford statutory protection to their settings.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) & National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

- 3.2 Government policy in relation to the historic environment is outlined in Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), entitled 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment'. This 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 of the contribution that heritage assets make to our knowledge and understanding of the past.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 Paragraph 200 states that planning decisions should be based on the significance of the heritage asset, and that the level of detail supplied by an applicant should be proportionate to the importance of the asset and should be no more than sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal upon the significance of that asset.
- 3.5 Paragraph 209 requires the decision-maker to take into account the effect on the significance of non-designated heritage assets and to take a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of harm or loss and the significance of the asset(s) potentially affected.
- 3.6 Annex 2 of the NPPF has the following heritage related definitions:
- 3.7 *Historic Environment*: all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora.
- 3.8 *Historic Environment Record*: information services that seek to provide access to comprehensive and dynamic resources relating to the historic environment of a defined geographic area for public benefit and use.
- 3.9 *Heritage Assets* are defined as a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).
- 3.10 *Archaeological Interest* is defined as a heritage asset which holds, or potentially could hold, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

- 3.11 *Designated Heritage Assets* comprise: A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Parks and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Areas designated under the relevant legislation.
- 3.12 *Significance* is defined 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.
- 3.13 *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.
- 3.14 Heritage assets that have not been designated as a listed building, scheduled monument, registered park and garden, protected wreck, battlefield or conservation area are referred to as non-designated heritage assets.
- 3.15 The NPPF is supported by the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG):
- 3.16 Paragraph 18a-001 makes a clear statement that any decisions relating to Listed Buildings and their settings and Conservation Areas must address the statutory considerations of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as well as satisfying the relevant policies within the National Planning Policy Framework and the Local Plan.
- 3.17 Paragraph 18a-009 outlines that the assessment of the impact of a proposed development on the setting of a heritage asset needs to take into account and be proportionate to the significance of the asset being considered, and the degree to which the proposed development enhances or detracts from the significance of the asset and the ability to appreciate the significance.
- 3.18 The NPPG outlines that although the extent and importance of setting is often expressed in visual terms, it can also be influenced by other factors such as noise, dust and vibration. Historic relationships between places can also be an important factor stressing ties between places that may have limited or no intervisibility with each other. This may be historic as well as aesthetic connections that contribute or enhance the significance of one or more of the heritage assets.
- 3.19 Paragraph 18a-013 concludes:
- "The contribution that setting makes to the significance of the heritage asset does not depend on there being public rights or an ability to access or experience that setting. The contribution may vary over time. When assessing any application which may affect the setting of a heritage asset, local planning authorities may need to consider the implications of cumulative change. They may also need to consider the fact that developments which materially detract from the asset's significance may also damage its economic viability now, or in the future, thereby threatening its on-going conservation."*
- 3.20 The key test in NPPF Paragraphs 205-208 is whether a proposed development will result in substantial harm or less than substantial harm. However, substantial harm is not defined in the NPPF. Paragraph 18a-018 of the NPPG provides additional guidance on substantial harm. It states:
- "What matters in assessing if a proposal causes substantial harm is the impact on the significance of the heritage asset. As the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear, significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting. Whether a proposal causes substantial harm*

will be a judgment for the decision maker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. In general terms, substantial harm is a high test, so it may not arise in many cases. For example, in determining whether works to a listed building constitute substantial harm, an important consideration would be whether the adverse impact seriously affects a key element of its special architectural or historic interest. It is the degree of harm to the asset's significance rather than the scale of the development that is to be assessed."

- 3.21 Paragraph 208 of the NPPF outlines that where a proposed development results in less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset, the harm arising should be weighed against the public benefits accruing from the proposed development. Paragraph 18a-020 of the NPPG outlines what is meant by public benefits:

"Public benefits may follow from many developments and could be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental progress as described in the National Planning Policy Framework (Paragraph 8). Public benefits should flow from the proposed development. They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and should not just be a private benefit. However, benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be genuine public benefits."

Local Planning Policy

- 1.2 The study site is located within the planning area for Reading Borough Council. The Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted November 2019) contains the following policies relevant to this assessment:

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;*
- *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.

The Council will monitor buildings and other heritage assets at risk through neglect, decay or other threats, proactively seeking solutions for assets at risk including consideration of appropriate development schemes that will ensure the repair and maintenance of the asset, and, as a last resort, using its statutory powers.

Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect or of damage to a heritage asset, the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision.

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.

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.*

Guidance

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

- 3.22** The purpose of this document is to provide information to assist local authorities, planning and other consultants, owners, applicants and other interested parties in

implementing historic environment policy in the NPPF and NPPG. It outlines a six-stage process to the assembly and analysis of relevant information relating to heritage assets potentially affected by a proposed development:

- Understand the significance of the affected assets;
- Understand the impact of the proposal on that significance;
- Avoid, minimise and mitigate impact in a way that meets the objectives of the NPPF;
- Look for opportunities to better reveal or enhance significance;
- Justify any harmful impacts in terms of the sustainable development objective of conserving significance and the need for change; and
- Offset negative impacts on aspects of significance by enhancing others through recording, disseminating and archiving archaeological and historical interest of the important elements of the heritage assets affected.

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice In Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England 2017)

- 3.23 Historic England's Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 provides guidance on the management of change within the setting of heritage assets.
- 3.24 The document restates the definition of setting as outlined in Annex 2 of the NPPF. Setting is also described as being a separate term to curtilage, character and context; while it is largely a visual term, setting, and thus the way in which an asset is experienced, can also be affected by noise, vibration, odour and other factors. The document makes it clear that setting is not a heritage asset, nor is it a heritage designation, though land within a setting may itself be designated. Its importance lies in what the setting contributes to the significance of a heritage asset.
- 3.25 The Good Practice Advice Note sets out a five-staged process for assessing the implications of proposed developments on setting:
1. Identification of heritage assets which are likely to be affected by proposals;
 2. Assessment of whether and what contribution the setting makes to the significance of a heritage asset;
 3. Assessing the effects of proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset;
 4. Maximising enhancement and reduction of harm on the setting of heritage assets; and
 5. Making and documenting the decision and monitoring outcomes
- 3.26 The guidance reiterates the NPPF in stating that where developments affecting the setting of heritage assets results in a level of harm to significance, this harm, whether substantial or less than substantial, should be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme.

4.0 Archaeological and Historic Baseline

Archaeological Heritage Assets

- 4.1 The heritage assets under consideration have been identified by means of a review of the following resources:
- Berkshire Historic Environment Record (HER) Data;
 - The National Heritage List for England (NHLE) held by Historic England;
 - Historic England Archive;
 - Pastscape;
 - Review of historic mapping.
- 4.2 These resources have been used to provide an understanding of the heritage assets which may be affected by the proposed development. This chapter will describe the heritage assets which may be affected and assess their significance.
- 4.3 The locations of heritage assets recorded on the HER within the 500m radius study area are shown on Figures 2 – 5 and are listed in full at Appendix A; those relevant to the study site are discussed below.
- 4.4 The study site is located within an area of archaeological potential, as stipulated within the Reading Borough Council Local Plan Map.⁵ Policy *EN2 Areas of Archaeological Significance* of the Local Plan⁶ applies.
- 4.5 The area comprising the study site is covered by the Historic England Aerial Archaeology Mapping Explorer.⁷ The study site is visible on a number of photographs taken in the early 1940s, which show a large goods shed within the area comprising the study site.
- 4.6 The Cambridge University Collections of Aerial Photographs (CUCAP)⁸ is presently closed to the public and there is currently no projected reopening for services. The CUCAP collection is searchable online and contains two photographs showing the study site, however, detailed analysis has not been possible. Details of the two images are at Appendix A.
- 4.7 Google Earth imagery is available for the study site from 1985 to the present day. The 1985 image is blurry and does not provide any useful information. The remaining images, dating from 2003 to 2023, show the study site in its current layout.
- 4.8 A site visit was undertaken on 24th August 2023 to gain a greater understanding of existing land use and the potential for archaeological constraints within the study site. Conditions were sunny/overcast with clear visibility. The study site is currently in commercial use and contains three office blocks with associated access, hardstanding and car parking. The railway line to the immediate south of the study site is held by a very high retaining wall which is of a similar height to the buildings within the study site. The site walkover identified no evidence of extant or buried archaeological remains. The study site is located within flood zone 2. King's Meadow immediately north of Napier Road is located within flood zone 3⁹ and is liable to floods from the River Thames. Historic Mapping shows King's Meadow labelled 'liable to floods' and Reading Museum holds information about the

⁵ <http://my.reading.gov.uk/custom/ReadingLocalPlanSolo.html>

⁶ https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Local_Plan_Adopted_November_2019.pdf

⁷ <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html>

⁸ <https://www.cambridgeairphotos.com/map/>

⁹ [https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/flood-zone-results?polygon=\[\[471894,173891\],\[472174,173869\],\[472169,173811\],\[471888,173838\],\[471894,173891\]\]¢er=\[472031,173851\]&location=RG1%25208BW](https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/flood-zone-results?polygon=[[471894,173891],[472174,173869],[472169,173811],[471888,173838],[471894,173891]]¢er=[472031,173851]&location=RG1%25208BW)

'Flooding History of the Thames Valley' which includes a postcard depicting 'floods at a recreation ground in Reading, June 1903, thought to be King's Meadow looking towards the Great Western Railway'.¹⁰

Portable Antiquities Scheme

- 4.9 The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) encourages the recording of archaeological objects found by members of the public in England and Wales. A search of the online PAS database is appended to this report.
- 4.10 The PAS data is not available to download with spatial data, however, rough spatial information can be viewed, but not reproduced, using the PAS KML download in Google Earth. The KML download does not show any entries within the study site.
- 4.11 A search of the Portable Antiquities Scheme database returned 21 findspots within 1km from the study site.

Historic Landscape Characterisation

- 4.12 The Berkshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) data records the study site as being located within an area of 'Industrial and Extractive' activity (Figure 5).

Previous archaeological investigations

- 4.13 No previous archaeological investigations have been carried out at the study site.
- 4.14 There have been numerous investigations within the 500m study area including desk-based assessments, watching briefs, geoarchaeological studies, evaluations and excavations. These investigations are illustrated at Figure 3 and listed at Appendix A; investigations of particular relevance to the study site are discussed below.
- 4.15 Immediately west of the study site, at the Thames Quarter site, an archaeological evaluation (ERM2254) and subsequent watching brief (ERM2255) were carried out in 2018. Three archaeological trial trenches and three trenches excavated by the site contractor were investigated and recorded. All trenches revealed deposits of modern made ground, to a depth of at least 1.3m, below hard surfaces and make up layers. Concrete slabs and services also occurred in a number of trenches. No trench was sufficiently deep to encounter certainly natural deposits and no finds were recovered. In view of the results, it was not possible to confirm authoritatively if any buried remains might yet survive in some parts of the site. It was certainly clear that large parts of the site had been significantly disturbed by previous development. Several test pits and areas of excavation associated with ground remediation and construction work were observed during the course of the watching brief. Consistent stratigraphy was recorded across the site and comprised up to 1.5m of modern made ground, underlain by between 1m and 1.5m of alluvial clay above red-yellow sandy gravel. No deposits of archaeological interest were identified and no finds were recovered, however, it was noted that the deeply buried alluvium generally appeared undisturbed.
- 4.16 To the east of the study site, a trial trench running the length of the site and to a depth of c.1.75m was excavated (ERD85) in 1986 prior to the proposed redevelopment of the Network Rail depot. The site is located within the vicinity of a

¹⁰ <https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/flooding-history-thames-valley>. Museum object number REDMG:1966.96.5)

postulated Danish camp. The trench profile was dominated by c.1.5m of compacted chalk infill with the high brick content suggestive of a modern date relating to the construction of the nearby railway tracks. This chalk infill sealed a succession of shallow alluvial deposits and was in turn sealed by the brick foundations of the previous Great Western Railway depot. No deposits indicative of any prehistoric or Viking activity were observed.

- 4.17 The redevelopment of Energis House, c.80m south of the study site, included a geoarchaeological borehole investigation and desk-based assessment (ERM1434, ERM1377). The geoarchaeological assessment by QUEST recorded the presence of a WNW to ESE paleochannel across the northern part of the site infilled with peat and alluvium from c.33m OD. It is suggested that this peat represents a possible Mesolithic to Neolithic semi-terrestrial land surface. The peat has the potential to hold important ecofactual remains that can be used to recreate the prehistoric environment of Reading. Similar sites on the edge of the floodplain and terrace edge, for example at Thames Valley Park,¹¹ have also recorded *in situ* occupation evidence.
- 4.18 An archaeological evaluation and watching brief (ERM871) were carried out c.100m south-west of the study site during the course of the development of the former NCP car park at Forbury Road in 2007 and 2008. The results demonstrated that the site contained no significant archaeological remains. However, it was possible to identify an alluvial sequence capped by a peat horizon that appears to have occurred consistently throughout the site and which can be taken to present the landscape environment of the site up until the 19th century. There was no evidence of the Plummery Wall, and it is likely that this precinct boundary lay further south, under what is now Forbury Road. An earlier archaeological watching brief (ERM494; carried out between 1987-89) immediately south, did record evidence of the course of what was interpreted as the Plummery Wall (MRM15914), however, the construction method observed was anomalous in comparison with other abbey period walling and it was thought possible that the length noted was a post-monastic rebuild. Further east a surviving 90m length of the Plummery Wall (MRD6365, 01022.19.000) was recorded during an archaeological watching brief on six contractor's test pits on the north side of Forbury Road (ERM492), c.190m south of the study site. It was found that the surviving profile was much altered, and no parts of the visible elevations could be considered to be original. At Forbury Roundabout, c.270m south-west of the study site, groundworks for the construction of a new carriageway between 1987-89 revealed a length of the Plummery Wall and associated stratigraphy on the south side. South of the wall, pits, which were suggested to be quarries or borrows for gravel and chalk required in the construction of the wall, two burnt clay hearths and a number of unburnt human bones from at least three individuals were recovered (MRD1384, 01022.08.100; MRD1385, 01022.08.110; MRD1386, 01022.08.200; MRD1387, 01022.08.300; MRD1388, 01022.08.400).
- 4.19 A watching brief (ERM2157) was carried out at Thames Lido, c.130m north of the study site, in 2017. The groundworks identified stratified deposits dating to the construction of the lido (first opened in 1902), and also identified river silts of unknown date. No archaeologically relevant features were uncovered and no finds were retrieved.
- 4.20 Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) maintained a watching brief c.200m south/south-east of the study site in 2017 during the construction of a fast-food restaurant (ERM2294). MOLA observed the excavation of two 1m³ foundation trenches; neither reached the gravel substrate and the fills comprised modern

¹¹ Barnes *et al.* 1997

made ground beneath a tarmac carpark. MOLA did not observe any features of archaeological interest.

- 4.21 The site of Reading Abbey, Abbey Wharf and Forbury Gardens have been extensively excavated and the nature of these sites has been extensively researched (ERM1238-44, ERD119, ERM1859, ERM1511, ERM2183, ERM2148, ERM2295, ERM401, ERM402, ERM2425, ERM1246, ERD42, ERD40, ERM1844, ERM1298, ERD71, ERD51, ERM412, ERM410, ERM228, ERM232, ERM1299, ERM400, ERM2137, ERM1866, ERM841, ERM1911, ERM1912, ERD37, ERD972, ERM1036, ERM922, ERM890).

Undated

- 4.22 There are no undated archaeological finds or features recorded by the HER within the study site.
- 4.23 Excavations c.420m south of the study site, at the former RAOB club, recorded timber revetments and 19th century structures (MRD15726). The two timber revetments are suggested to be of an earlier date, however this has not been confirmed.

Prehistoric

- 4.24 The HER does not record any Prehistoric finds or features within the study site.
- 4.25 Geoarchaeological investigations c. 80m south of the study site identified a peat horizon interpreted as a Mesolithic or Neolithic buried semi-terrestrial land surface (MRM16767). The investigations also identified a palaeochannel, which is thought to represent a former tributary of the River Kennet and the Plummary Ditch shown on historic 18th century mapping. The HER entry notes that the channel appears to have been filled in the late 1800's as part of its use as a railway yard. The HER entry states the following:

'The peat deposits occur at depths of 32.7-34.01m AOD and vary in thickness from 15cm-1m. The build-up of peat suggests the closure or migration of a former channel, representing a land surface of probable Mesolithic or Neolithic date. The location of the deposit, at the margin of the floodplain, presents potential for remains associated with Prehistoric occupation or exploitation to be present. The thickest deposits appear to represent accumulation over around 1000 years.'

- 1.3 A piled timber dwelling and associated Mesolithic and Neolithic charred wood and bone (animal?) (MRD1303, 00994.00.000) were recorded c.280m north of the study site, on Clappers Island (View Island). The dwelling and finds were located in 1882 and there is some confusion surrounding the associated finds.
- 1.4 The HER records the following findspots within the 500m study area: the findspot of a Bronze Age axe head (MRD11235, 02047.00.000) was recorded c.180m north of the study site; c.240m south of the study site the findspots of Neolithic flint flakes (MRD11355, 02109.00.000), redeposited Neolithic-Bronze Age flints and pottery (MRD3901, 02108.00.000) and Bronze Age pottery and a residual flint flake (MRD15554) were recorded. The findspot of sherd of Iron Age pottery was recorded c. 340m southwest of the study site (MRD11345, 02103.00.000) and the findspot of Prehistoric worked and burnt flints was recorded c.300m southwest of the study site (MRM15881). Mesolithic finds in the form of a tranchet axe, a pick and a blade (MRD11164, 02002.00.000), various Neolithic finds including a perforated hammer head (MRD11185, 02021.00.000) and various Bronze Age

artefacts (MRD11218, 02042.00.000) were dredged from the River Thames c.380m north-west of the study site.

Roman

- 4.26 There are no Roman finds or features recorded within the study site or its immediate environs. Within the wider study area, the HER records a findspot of Roman pottery and a coin c.250m south of the study site (MRD3898, 02096.00.000). The findspot of a Roman coin (MRD11296, 02071.00.000) was recorded c.350m north-west of the study site.
- 4.27 No Roman roads are recorded in the vicinity of the study site.¹²

Saxon and early Medieval

- 4.28 The earliest evidence of a settlement in Reading dates to the 8th century. The name Readingum comes from the Readingas, an Anglo-Saxon tribe.¹³
- 4.29 Viking invaders set up a camp in Reading during their invasion of Wessex in the 9th century. King Ethelred and Alfred the Great unsuccessfully attempted to remove the Viking occupation at the Battle of Reading in 871. The description of the battle in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is the earliest surviving written description of Reading.¹⁴ It has been suggested that the Plummery Ditch, to the north of Reading Abbey, was part of the ramparts of the Viking fortification.¹⁵
- 4.30 After the Norman Conquest, some Reading land was included in the foundation grant of Battle Abbey, whereas some was retained by King William.¹⁶ Reading was called a borough in the Domesday survey; the town and manor were surveyed separately.¹⁷
- 4.31 There are no Saxon-early medieval finds or features recorded within the study site by the HER.
- 4.32 A cemetery containing at least 40 inhumations was recorded by the HER c. 270m south of the study site during the installation of drainage pipes in the early 1900's (MRD1378, 01022.04.000). The location and dating of the burials are tentative, the HER notes that the burials are likely associated with the pre-1550 graveyard of St Laurence Church.
- 4.33 The HER records the findspots of Saxon pottery sherds (MRD11364, 02110.04.000; MRD11362, 02110.02.000; MRM15882; MRD3902, 02110.00.000; MRD15554) as well as the findspot of a spearhead (MRD11363, 02110.03.000) within the 500m study area. Early Medieval artefacts in the form of an iron Merovingian bit and iron knife and an iron spearhead (MRD11346, 02104.00.000) were recovered from the River Thames c.380m north-west of the study site.

Medieval

- 4.34 Reading Abbey was founded by Henry I in 1121 (MRD1374, 01022.00.000, NHLE1007932). Its foundation grant included "*Reading itself and Cholsey, together*

¹² The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain: an online resource

<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl/map.html>

¹³ Cameron, 1963, p. 64

¹⁴ Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle [Rolls Series], Vol. II, p. 62

¹⁵ Fletcher, 1839, p. 98; 'The Vikings in Reading', Reading Museum

¹⁶ DB Phillimore reference: Berkshire 1,41; 1,42; 15,2

¹⁷ Ditchfield & Page, 'Borough', 1923, p. 342

with woods, arable lands, pastures, meadows, waters, mills, fisheries, churches, chapels, churchyards, oblations and tithes with a mint and one moneyer at Reading".¹⁸ This grant included the land which had formerly been held by Battle Abbey.¹⁹ The abbey was largely destroyed at the Dissolution in 1538.²⁰ It is feasible that the study site formed part of the abbey's holdings.

- 4.35 Alongside the Abbey, the Abbey precinct also comprised ancillary buildings including the Abbots House, stables, a mill, bakehouse and kitchens. The northern wall to the precinct was known as the Plummery Wall and the southern boundary was formed by the Holy Brook. The Abbey founded two hospitals and St Laurence Church. The abbey also administered the Hospital of St Mary Magdalen for the care of lepers. The remains of at least three in situ burials (MRD6364, 01022.18.000) were recovered from a contractor's pipe trench immediately north of St James' Church and Forbury Gardens (ERM495), c.200m south of the study site, between 1987-89. The existence of other burials was confirmed by subsequent contractors' excavations, spoil from which included human bone. Although none of the burials were dated, their location is within the area of the abbey precinct normally reserved for the lay cemetery according to the standard Benedictine plan. This cemetery is believed to have continued in use after the Dissolution until 1556, after which the burial ground was transferred to St Laurence's.
- 4.36 The Abbey Wharf was located to the south-east of the main abbey precinct, c.400m south of the study site. Activity at the wharf has been divided into five phases of use which included revetments, layout modifications, building of a yard and ancillary buildings (MRD1401, 01022.15.000; MRD1402, 01022.15.100; MRD1403, 01022.15.200; MRD1404, 01022.15.300; MRD1405, 01022.15.400; MRD1406, 01022.15.500; MRD1407, 01022.15.510; MRD1408, 01022.15.520). The wharf continued in use into the post medieval period (MRD1409, 01022.15.600, MRD1410, 01022.15.700; MRD1411, 01022.15.800).
- 4.37 In 1150, King Stephen built a castle within the Abbey grounds, but this was destroyed in 1152, the probable motte remains in situ although has been modified by later activity (MRD3934, 02113.08.000).
- 4.38 A possibly medieval arrowhead (MRD11395, 02122.00.000) was dredged from the River Thames c.380m north-west of the study site.

Post Medieval

- 4.39 Reading changed hands several times during the English Civil War. It was taken over by Royalist troops in 1642, and subsequently besieged and re-taken by the Parliamentarians in 1643. There was significant damage to the fabric and economy of the town as a result.²¹
- 4.40 The Second Battle of Reading took place on the 9th December 1688. It resulted in a victory for William of Orange against soldiers loyal to James II.²² The people of Reading sided with the Protestant cause and are said to have assisted William's troops²³ (MRD15703 and MRD3981, 02114.30.000).
- 4.41 Reading's economic growth in the 19th century was based on iron production and brewing. Huntley & Palmer's Biscuit Factory operated on the east side of Forbury

¹⁸ 1125 Foundation Charter, in BL Egerton MS 3031

¹⁹ Ditchfield & Page, 'Borough', 1923, pp. 342-343

²⁰ Baxter, 2016, pp. 131-168

²¹ Coates, 1802, pp. 25-28; Tomkins, 1805, p. 39

²² Dugdale, 1819, p. 59; Lysons, 1813, p. 165

²³ Ditchfield & Page, 'Borough', 1923

Road, c.270m southeast of the study site, from 1846 to 1972 (MRD15661).²⁴ They expanded on the north side of the River Kennet in 1868, and part of the Kennet was used as a canal for the factory (MRD5764).²⁵ It was at one point the largest biscuit factory in the world and was one of the first international food brands.²⁶ A retail park was constructed on the site after the demolition of the factory in the late 20th century. Geotechnical investigations, a trial trenching evaluation and an archaeological watching brief (ERM2324 and ERM2394) were carried out at the site prior to redevelopment in 2019. The heavily truncated remains of the basement structures associated with the factory were recorded within several of the trenches and the archaeological investigations confirmed that no remains earlier than those associated with the biscuit factory were present within any of the trenches and that development during the 19th and 20th centuries had significantly reduced the potential for remains of an earlier date to survive within the site.

- 4.42 In 1723 the Kennet Navigation opened to boats to Newbury.²⁷ The Kennet and Avon Canal opened in 1810. This allowed travel from Reading to the Bristol Channel by barge.²⁸
- 4.43 The Great Western Railway is located immediately south of the study site. The first Reading station was opened as a temporary western terminus to the original Great Western Railway in 1840 (MRD6024, 05053.00.000; MRD6039, 05053.07.000). The line was extended to Bristol in 1841. In 1849 the South Eastern Railway was extended, connecting the London to Brighton mainline with the Great Western mainline at Reading²⁹ (MRD6125, 05056.00.000). This was followed by the London and South Western Railway connecting Reading to Basingstoke.³⁰ A steel girder railway under bridge (MRM16714), constructed between 1870 and 1947, is located c.60m south-east of the study site. inhumations
- 4.44 From 1856, the South Eastern and Great Western railway lines converged at a junction to the east of the station.³¹ The Huntley & Palmers Biscuit Factory on the Kings Road possessed private railway sidings, which connected to the three main railway lines out of Reading³²
- 4.45 Reading County Gaol is a grade II listed building (MRM16192, NHLE1321948) and is located c. 230m south of the study site. The original gaol was built in 1786 and the listed building at the centre of the prison complex was built in the 1840s. Throughout the last century the gaol was used as an internment centre, a WWII military prison, an overflow prison, and a borstal before returning to use as an adult prison in 1969. Between 1992 and 2013 the prison was used as a remand centre and young offenders' institution before closing in early 2014. The prison is located within the former Reading Abbey Precinct and is built over the abbey ruins.
- 4.46 Forbury Gardens is a grade II registered park and garden and is located c. 200m south of the study site. The garden was built over part of the former abbey precinct (NHLE 1000586). The public open space includes memorial statues and a mound thought to relate to an earlier castle (MRD6289, 04143.00.000; MRD3980, 02114.08.000; MRM15880, MRM16206, MRM16509).

²⁴ 'Factory: Humble Beginnings', Huntley & Palmers

²⁵ 'Factory: Expansion, Huntley & Palmers

²⁶ UOR, 'Records of Huntley & Palmers'

²⁷ Clew, 1968, pp. 24-30

²⁸ Clew, 1968, p. 73

²⁹ Chapman, 1936, pp. 113-114

³⁰ BRO Q/RUO1/17

³¹ BRO Q/RUM103

³² 'Factory: Transporting the Biscuits', Huntley & Palmers

- 4.47 A storm/flood culvert (MRM15994) which is shown on the 1882 1st edition Ordnance Survey mapping of Reading was re-discovered in c.2005 and is located c.40m north of the study site's north-western corner.

Map regression

- 4.48 The study site is shown as part of King's Meadow on the 1798 John Man Plan of Reading (Figure 6).
- 4.49 The 1840 New Plan of the Borough of Reading (Figure 7) shows the study site located in King's Meadow, north of the Great Western Railway.
- 4.50 The 1847 St Laurence Reading Tithe Map (Figure 8) and associated apportionments record the entirety of the study site in detail. The study site is shown as being located within King's Meadow, immediately north of the rail corridor of the Great Western Railway. The details are as follows:

Plot Number	Plot Name	Owner	Occupier	Cultivation/Use
20	Part of King's Meadow	John Welldale Knollys	Charles Poulton	Meadow

- 4.51 By 1879, as shown on the Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 9), the study site comprised a goods yard associated with the Great Western Railway.
- 4.52 By 1899, as shown on the Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 10) the study site comprised a large goods shed, a crane and spurs/sidings. An east-west aligned track is shown immediately north of the site, where Napier Road is located now.
- 4.53 No major changes are shown on the 1912-13 Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 11).
- 4.54 The 1931-32 Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 12) shows an extension to the goods shed but no other major changes.
- 4.55 The 1947-48 Aerial Image (Figure 13) shows the study site in its environs, but no detailed analysis was possible.
- 4.56 The 1962-73 Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 14) shows the large, extended, goods shed and spurs/sidings within the study site.
- 4.57 The buildings currently occupying the study site had been constructed by 1986-1990, as shown on the Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 15). A large retaining wall runs along the study site's southern boundary.
- 4.58 No changes are visible within the study site in the 2006 and 2023 Ordnance Survey Maps (Figures 16 and 17).
- 4.59 The 2023 Google Earth Image (Figure 18) shows the current layout of the study site, which has not changed since the office buildings and associated access, hardstanding and parking were constructed in the 1980s.

Past Impacts, Summary of Archaeological Potential and Assessment of Significance

- 4.60 The available evidence has been assessed in an attempt to determine the nature and extent of any previous impacts upon any potential below ground archaeological deposits which may survive within the study site. This includes a site visit on 24th August 2023.
- 4.61 The map regression has shown that the study site formed part of King's Meadow until the late 19th century, when it was developed for use by the railway, initially comprising a goods yard and spurs/sidings and later on a goods shed, crane and spurs/sidings. By the 1980s the study site had been redeveloped with the extant buildings.
- 4.62 The assessment has identified two phases of development within the study site which are likely to have truncated at least the upper archaeological sequence. In the late 19th century the study site was occupied by infrastructure associated with the Great Western Railway. Construction and demolition of the railway infrastructure will likely have resulted in significant ground disturbance across the study site. The construction of the current buildings and associated infrastructure in the late 20th century is also likely to have resulted in significant ground disturbance across the study site. No previous archaeological investigations have been carried out within the study site, however, recent ground investigation works in 2022 and 2023 have shown the presence of made ground to a depth of up to 2.10m bgl, underlain by alluvial deposits. Works carried out on adjacent sites have shown the presence of made ground to a depth of up to 1.5m, underlain by alluvial deposits.
- 4.63 The alluvial deposits within the study site may hold palaeoenvironmental evidence.
- 4.64 In light of the two previous phases of development within the study site it is considered that there is generally a low potential for surviving archaeological remains from all past periods. Should any remains survive, these would likely be of Local to Regional Significance.
- 4.65 The presence of the medieval Reading Abbey and its former precinct is well documented c.200m south of the study site through extensive archaeological investigations and historic mapping. Archaeological evidence of the abbey precinct appears to be contained within the boundaries shown on early mapping; this, coupled with the past impacts on the study site, indicates a low potential for medieval features to be present within the study site. Such remains are considered likely to be fragmentary and of Local to Regional significance.
- 4.66 Post medieval/modern use of the study site includes use for the railway and commercial purposes and truncated railway features are present within the study site, as shown by recent ground investigations. Such remains are considered likely to be fragmentary and of negligible significance.

Designated archaeological assets

- 4.67 This section will consider the potential effects of development within the study site on the significance of designated archaeological assets, including through effects to their settings. Built heritage is not considered in this report.
- 4.68 Heritage assets and potential impacts will be assessed using best practice, including that set out in Historic England's Good Practice Advice Note 3, The Setting of Heritage Assets. Historic England guidance outlines the following five-step process for assessing setting (Historic England 2017):
- Step 1: Identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected

- Step 2: Assess the degree to which these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s) or allow significance to be appreciated
- Step 3: Assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful, on that significance or on the ability to appreciate it
- Step 4: Explore ways to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm
- Step 5: Make and document the decision and monitor outcomes

4.69 A 500m search radius was used to establish which archaeological assets required assessment for impacts. In some limited cases, some assets can have a wider setting which is sensitive, therefore the wider area outside of the search radius was also considered in the preparation of this assessment, to determine if additional designated archaeological assets required inclusion in this assessment. No additional archaeological assets were identified.

4.70 The archaeological assets which require assessment have been selected with reference to the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) database held by Historic England. No statutory designations (Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Registered Battlefields, Registered Parks and Gardens or World Heritage Sites) are located within the study site boundary.

4.71 The scheduled remains of Reading Abbey (Reading Abbey: a Cluniac and Benedictine Monastery and Civil War Earthwork, NHLE 1007932) lie c. 200m south of the study site.

Assessment of designated archaeological assets, including assessment of significance, setting and relationship to study site

4.72 The scheduled remains of Reading Abbey (Reading Abbey: a Cluniac and Benedictine Monastery and Civil War Earthwork, NHLE 1007932) lie c. 200m south of the study site. The scheduled monument description states:

The monument, which consists of four separate areas, includes the known surviving remains of Reading Abbey, the surviving parts of the associated mill and hospitium and the site of a building believed to be the abbey stables. The abbey was established in 1121 by Henry I as a cell of the Cluniac order, the parent abbey being at Cluny in Burgundy; by the mid 13th century it had transferred obedience to the Benedictine order. Through the 13th and early 14th centuries the foundation flourished and by the mid 14th century, it had become one of the ten richest abbeys in the country.

In the 16th century the Abbey fell victim to the purges of the Dissolution and was forcibly taken by the Crown in 1539. The monks were evicted and the last Abbot, Hugh Farrington, hanged at the Abbey Gate. The Abbey buildings passed into the hands of Lord Somerset, protector to Edward VI, who demolished most of the church and much of the abbey buildings. Thus today the Abbey survives largely as a ruin. Walls stand almost to their original height but have been robbed of all facing stone so that only the core survives.

The ruins, which are listed at Grade I, consist of the south transept and chapter house, separated by a once roofed passage over which the treasury was located. Further south, towards the River Kennet, stands the west wall of the parlour and warming room with the dormitory above. Adjacent to the river lay the necessarium or toilet block.

The cloisters were to the west of the chapter house and were flanked along the southern side by the refectory, the south wall of which still stands to a height in excess of 2.5m.

The site of the gateway to the inner precinct survives to the west of Abbot's Walk, though its present form is the result of rather heavy restoration by Gilbert Scott in 1860, following a collapse of the structure. The gateway is listed as a Grade I building.

To the east the Abbey grounds extended to Forbury Road, and to the south-east to the bank of the River Kennet. Excavations in this area in 1970, within the confines of Reading Prison, located an Apsidal chapel, demonstrating the potential for survival of archaeological evidence in this area of the site.

At the western extremity of the abbey complex, in what is today the churchyard of St Lawrence's church, a hospitium was located. Founded in 1189-93 by Abbot Hugh II, it was dedicated to John the Baptist and consisted of a residence for 26 poor, a refectory and an accommodation block for visitors. A portion of this, rebuilt in the 15th century, survives incorporated into the fabric of a modern municipal building north of the graveyard.

To the south of the main abbey complex and spanning Holy Brook, is a single 13th century arch, all that remains of the abbey mill. The mill wheel is thought to have been positioned to the east of this arch.

Additional lesser medieval buildings, possibly associated with the abbey complex, have been recorded in this vicinity. These include the remains of a bakehouse to the north of the mill, discovered in 1860, and a building to the west, located by excavations in advance of development in 1976.

A substantial mound, now incorporated into Forbury Gardens as a 19th century landscape feature, is thought to be a reworked Civil War earthwork. This in turn may have been constructed using the remains of a motte which is recorded as having been built in the abbey precinct in 1150 and destroyed in 1152.

- 4.73 Previous archaeological investigations and cartographic sources provide a good understanding of the limit of the abbey precinct. Reading Abbey was founded by Henry I in 1121 and its foundation grant included "Reading itself and Cholsey, together with woods, arable lands, pastures, meadows, waters, mills, fisheries, churches, chapels, churchyards, oblations and tithes with a mint and one moneyer at Reading."³³ It is therefore a reasonable assumption that the study site formed part of the abbey's holding during the medieval and early post-medieval periods, up until the Dissolution in 1538.
- 4.74 The scheduled area covers an area which is bounded by the River Kennet in the south, the A329 at the east, Forbury Road to the north and 'The Forbury' in the west. The scheduled area includes the Abbey Ruins, Reading prison, Forbury Gardens, St James Church and the Abbey Gateway.
- 4.75 Historic mapping indicates the north-eastern part of the precinct was developed in the 18th century as the Gaol and much of the former abbey precinct has been redeveloped in intervening years. As such, it is recognised that the immediate setting of the abbey remains have changed considerably in the 18th-20th centuries.
- 4.76 The upstanding remains of Reading Abbey and associated structures are located within the central and eastern part of the precinct. They are protected as listed buildings, which are not discussed in this report.

³³ 1125 Foundation Charter, in British Library Egerton MS 3031. Available at <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/cartulary-of-reading-abbey>

- 4.77 St James Church, Reading Prison and Forbury Gardens are located between the study site and the Abbey. From the abbey remains these structures obscure the view towards the study site and provide a closer modern intrusion to the visual experience of the abbey remains.
- 4.78 The scheduled remains are bound by modern development in every direction. The study site forms part of the wider modern urban landscape which forms part of the wider setting of the abbey precinct. Any historical ownership and/or functional connections that study site may have had with the abbey have long been severed.
- 4.79 On balance, the study site forms part of the wider modern urban landscape setting of the scheduled abbey precinct, however, due to the largely modern character of the wider setting and the degree of separation provided by the surrounding developments, the study site is considered to not make a contribution to the significance of the scheduled monument.

5.0 Proposed Development and Potential Impact on Heritage Assets

Site Conditions

- 5.1 The study site is currently in commercial use comprising three office buildings with associated access, hardstanding and car parking.

The Proposed Development

- 5.2 This document has been prepared in support of a full planning application for demolition of the existing three office buildings, and construction of new 11 storey buildings, with amenity space at roof level (part indoor and set back), to provide 576 residential dwellings consisting of 1, 2 and 3-bedroom apartments. The development will include ancillary facilities for residents, such as a residents' lounge, gym and communal workspace. The buildings will be set in landscaping to the front and between the buildings together with roof terraces. Parking is proposed for 39 cars and 6 motorbikes. Three internal storage spaces are proposed at ground floor for 289 bicycles and an additional 20 cycle spaces are provided externally for visitors. The site is 1.26 ha in size and stretches east to west along Napier Road, bound by the railway line to the south, Napier Road and Kings Meadow to the north, Thames Quarter to the west and a Network Rail site to the east. The site is located within the administrative boundary of Reading Borough Council and is very well connected to the train station, bus services and town centre facilities.

Potential Archaeological Impacts and Mitigation Measures

- 5.3 The assessment has identified a potential for alluvial deposits to be present within the study site, which may hold palaeoenvironmental evidence. A low potential for archaeological remains from all past periods is considered due to impacts caused by the two previous phases of development. Based on available evidence from recent ground investigations carried out within the study site the upper sequence appears to be heavily truncated by modern development; as such it is anticipated that general groundworks for the construction of the development would not result in a high level of physical impact on non-designated archaeological remains. Should any remains survive, these would likely be of Local to Regional Significance.
- 5.4 The LPA's archaeological advisor has been consulted and has confirmed that any further works required could be secured by way of a condition. It is our recommendation that the additional works would comprise limited geoarchaeological/palaeoenvironmental investigations. Given the previous disturbance of the archaeological horizon due to historic railway construction, goods yard and buildings, and the later office buildings, a watching brief is likely to yield very little, if any, information and would therefore be of limited value.
- 5.5 The study site does not contain any designated archaeological assets, as such no physical alterations to designated archaeological assets have been identified.
- 5.6 The proposed development would comprise of 11 storey buildings. These changes have the potential to affect the setting of the scheduled monument Reading Abbey. The assessment has considered the setting of Reading Abbey, which occupies a parcel of land located c.200m south of the study site. The study site forms part of the wider modern urban landscape which forms part of the wider setting of the abbey precinct, with no historical ownership/functional links remaining. Due to the largely modern character of the wider setting and the degree of separation provided by the surrounding developments, the study site is considered to not make a contribution to the significance of the scheduled monument.

6.0 Summary and Conclusions

- 6.1 This archaeological desk-based assessment considers land at Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading, which is proposed for residential redevelopment (Fig. 1).
- 6.2 In accordance with government policy (National Planning Policy Framework), this assessment draws together the available archaeological, historic, topographic and land-use information in order to clarify the heritage significance and archaeological potential of the study site.
- 6.3 The study site does not contain any designated archaeological assets, as such no physical alterations to designated archaeological assets have been identified. The assessment has considered the setting of Reading Abbey, which occupies a parcel of land located c.200m south of the study site. Due to the largely modern character of the wider setting and the degree of separation provided by the surrounding developments, the study site is considered to not make a contribution to the significance of the scheduled monument.
- 6.4 The assessment has identified a potential for alluvial deposits to be present within the study site, which may hold palaeoenvironmental evidence. Such remains, if present, are considered likely to be of Local Significance.
- 6.5 A low potential for archaeological remains from all past periods is considered due to impacts caused by the two previous phases of development. Based on available evidence from recent ground investigations carried out within the study site the upper sequence appears to be heavily truncated by modern development; as such it is anticipated that general groundworks for the construction of the development would not result in a high level of physical impact on non-designated archaeological remains. Should any remains survive, these would likely be of Local to Regional Significance.
- 6.6 On this basis, it is clear that the impact of the proposed development on the archaeological potential of the study site could be adequately mitigated, and the development made acceptable in terms of archaeological impacts. It therefore accords with the requirements in paragraph 209 of the NPPF and policy EN2 of the Local Plan.
- 6.7 The LPA's archaeological advisor has been consulted and has confirmed that any further works required could be secured by way of a condition. It is our recommendation that the additional works would comprise limited geoarchaeological/palaeoenvironmental investigations. Given the previous disturbance of the archaeological horizon due to historic railway construction, goods yard and buildings, and the later office buildings, a watching brief is likely to yield very little, if any, information and would therefore be of limited value.

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1840 New Plan of the Borough of Reading

1847 St Laurence Reading Tithe Map

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1899 Ordnance Survey Map

1912-1913 Ordnance Survey Map

1931-1932 Ordnance Survey Map

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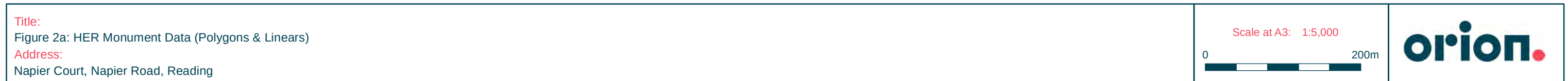
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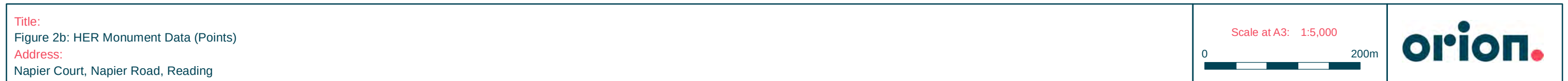
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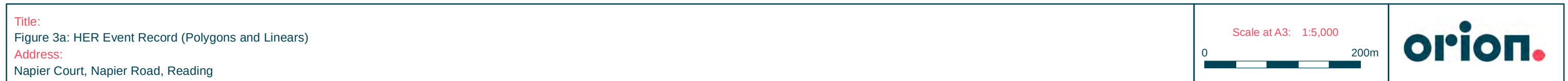
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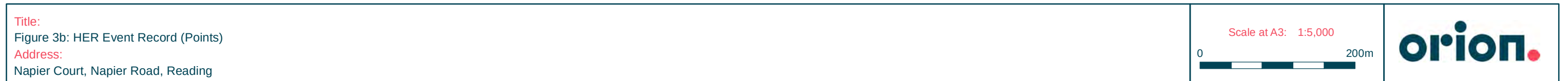
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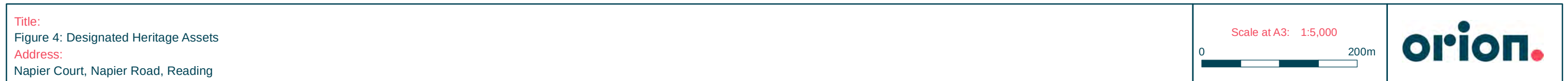
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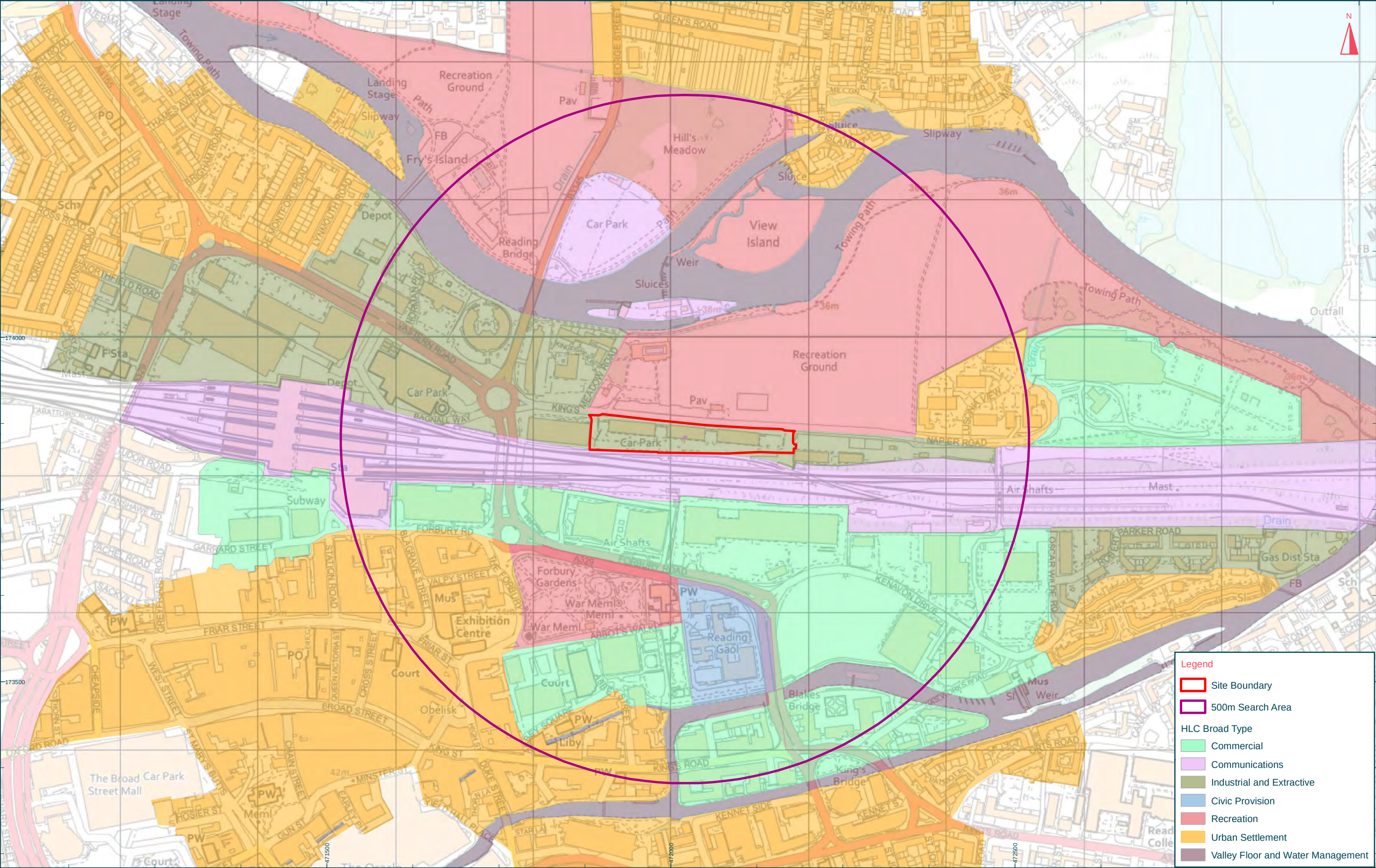












Title:
Figure 5: HLC Data

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Scale at A3: 1:5,000

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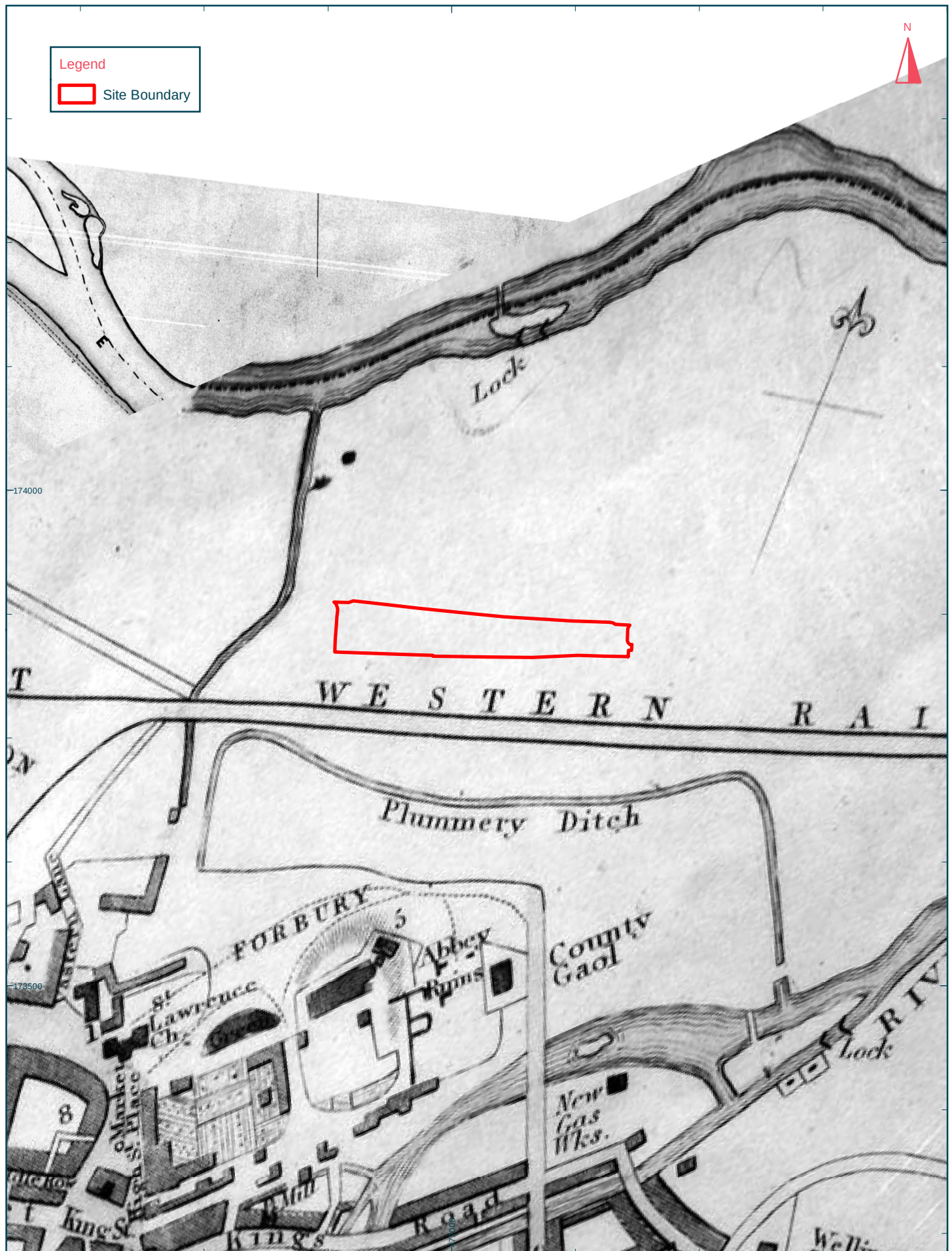




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Figure 6: 1798 John Man's Plan of Reading
Address:
Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading

Scale at A4: 1:5,000
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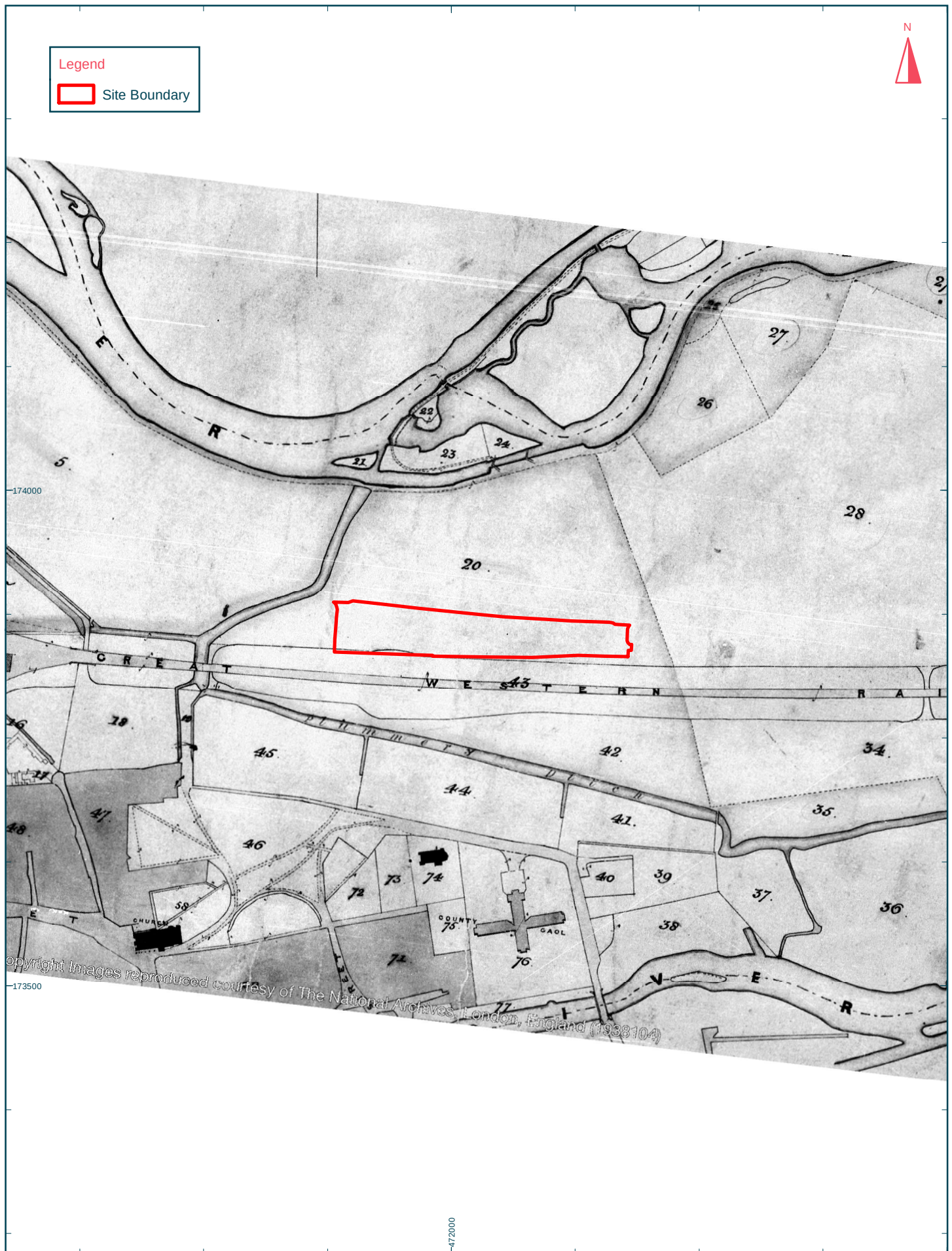


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Figure 7: 1840 New Plan of the Borough of Reading
Address:
Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading

Scale at A4: 1:5,000

0 200m

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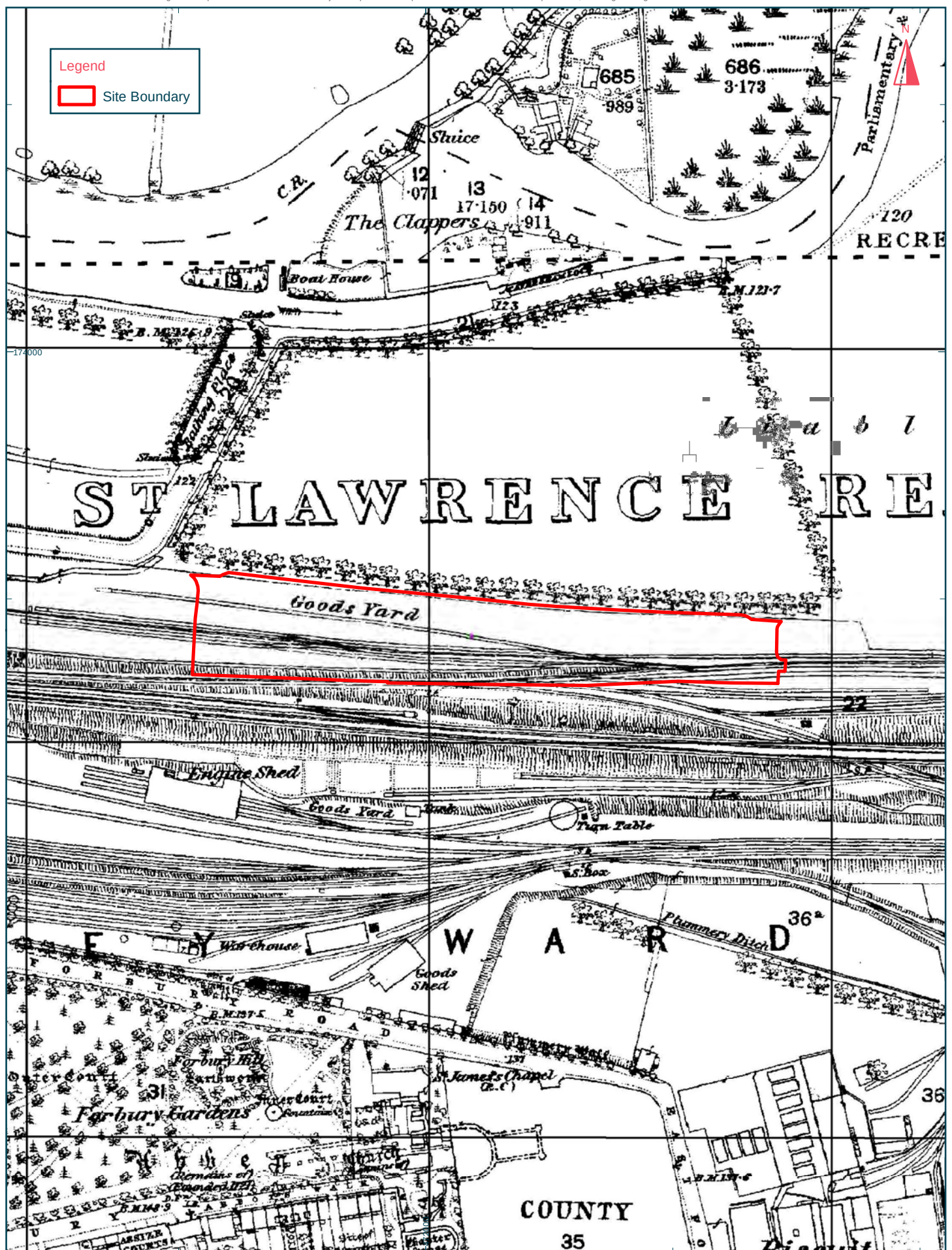


Title:
Figure 8: 1847 St Laurence Reading Tithe Map
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Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading

Scale at A4: 1:5,000

0 200m

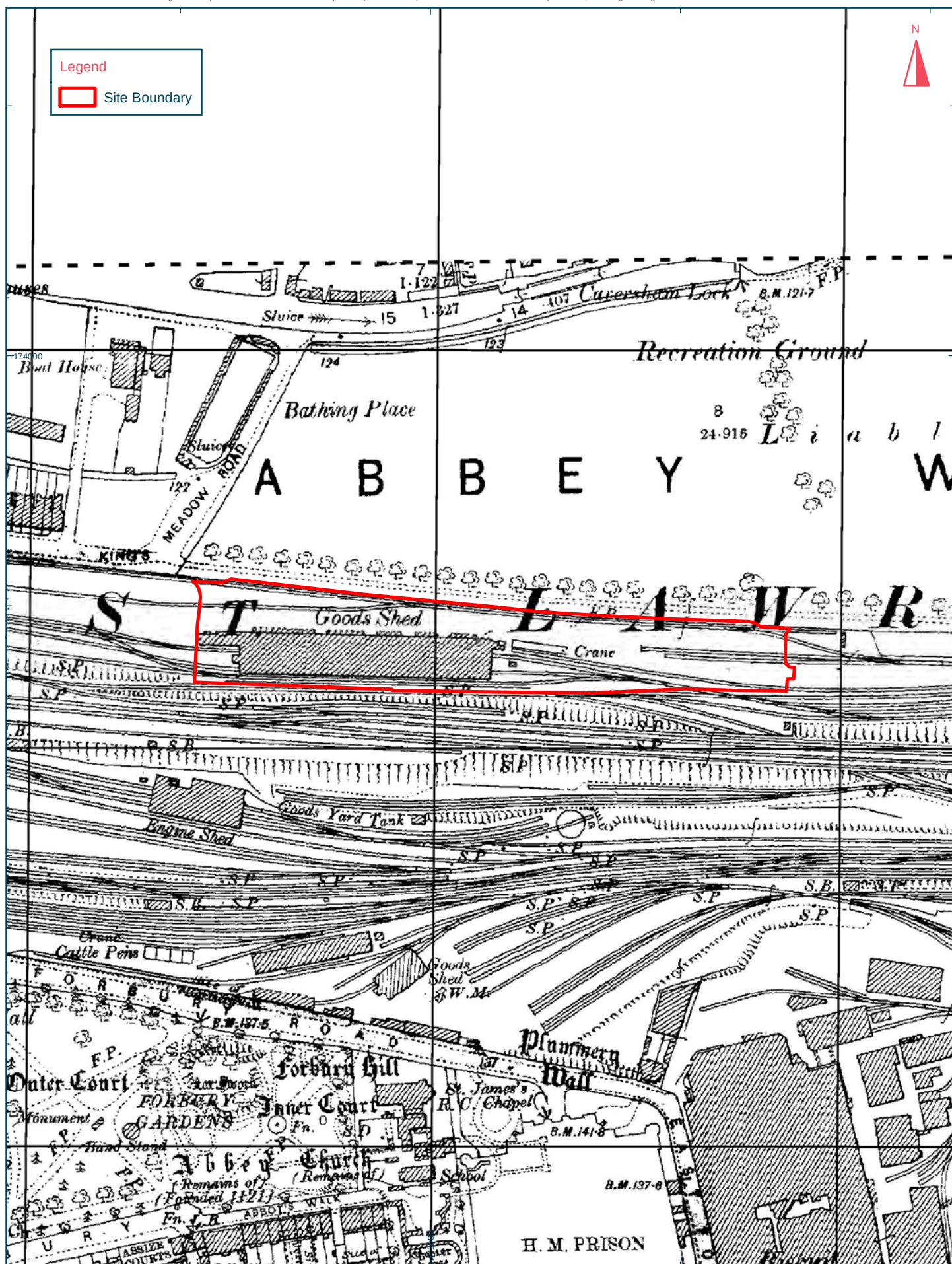
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Figure 9: 1879 Ordnance Survey Map 1:2,500
Address:
Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading

Scale at A4: 1:2,500
0 100m

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Title:
Figure 10: 1899 Ordnance Survey Map 1:2,500
Address:
Napier Court, Napier Road, Reading

Scale at A4: 1:2,500

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