

LICHFIELDS

Waterfront Square, Reading

Townscape and Visual Appraisal
Packaged Living Ltd.

July 2024

Executive Summary

This Townscape and Visual Appraisal considers the townscape and visual effects arising from the application scheme for Waterside Square. It has been informed by, best practice guidance, townscape character assessments and heritage designations as well as planning context relevant to the consideration of townscape and visual matters.

Townscape effects

The townscape assessment considers the effects on the townscape character of the site itself and a number of surrounding Townscape Character Areas (TCA).

The site lies within TCA1: Vastern Road which has Low value, comprising predominantly 20th or 21st century buildings of no particular architectural interest,>it is a robust townscape with Low susceptibility and Low sensitivity to change. To the south of, and including, the railway and station is TCA2 Station Hill with TCA3 Station Hill East extending along Forbury Road. Both these areas have Low sensitivity to change. TCA4 Kings Meadow includes the River Thames and associated areas of open space, has a High value townscape due to its amenity and recreational value. It has medium susceptibility to change from the proposed development due to the existing urban context of buildings resulting in Medium sensitivity to change.

The analysis of the baseline has found the existing vacant building to be a neutral element within the townscape. The extensive frontage car park and substation detract from adjacent areas although the river is a positive aspect of the townscape to the north. The assessment has found the site to have Low townscape value with Medium susceptibility to change due to its relationship to the River. Combined this gives a Low to Medium sensitivity to change with the higher sensitivity along the River.

The proposed development would wholly transform the character of the site resulting in a High degree of change. There would be a series of benefits to the townscape in aesthetic, functional and perceptual terms due to improved permeability, introduction of new planting and public realm along the River Thames, improved ground level interface with existing streets including well-designed and detailed buildings, active frontages and natural surveillance. The assessment has found that this would result in a Major Beneficial effect on the townscape character of the site (p25).

The effects on the TCAs is set out in section 5.0, in summary:

- There would be positive (Moderate Beneficial) effects on the townscape of TCA1: Vastern Road
- There would be Negligible effects on TCA2 Station Hill and TCA3 Station Hill East to the south.
- There would be a Minor Beneficial effect on TCA4: King's Meadow to the north where there would be improvements to the River frontage as a result of the new public realm and uses. The proposal is of high quality and has responded sensitively to its location on the riverside and is compatible with existing buildings within the surrounding urban context.

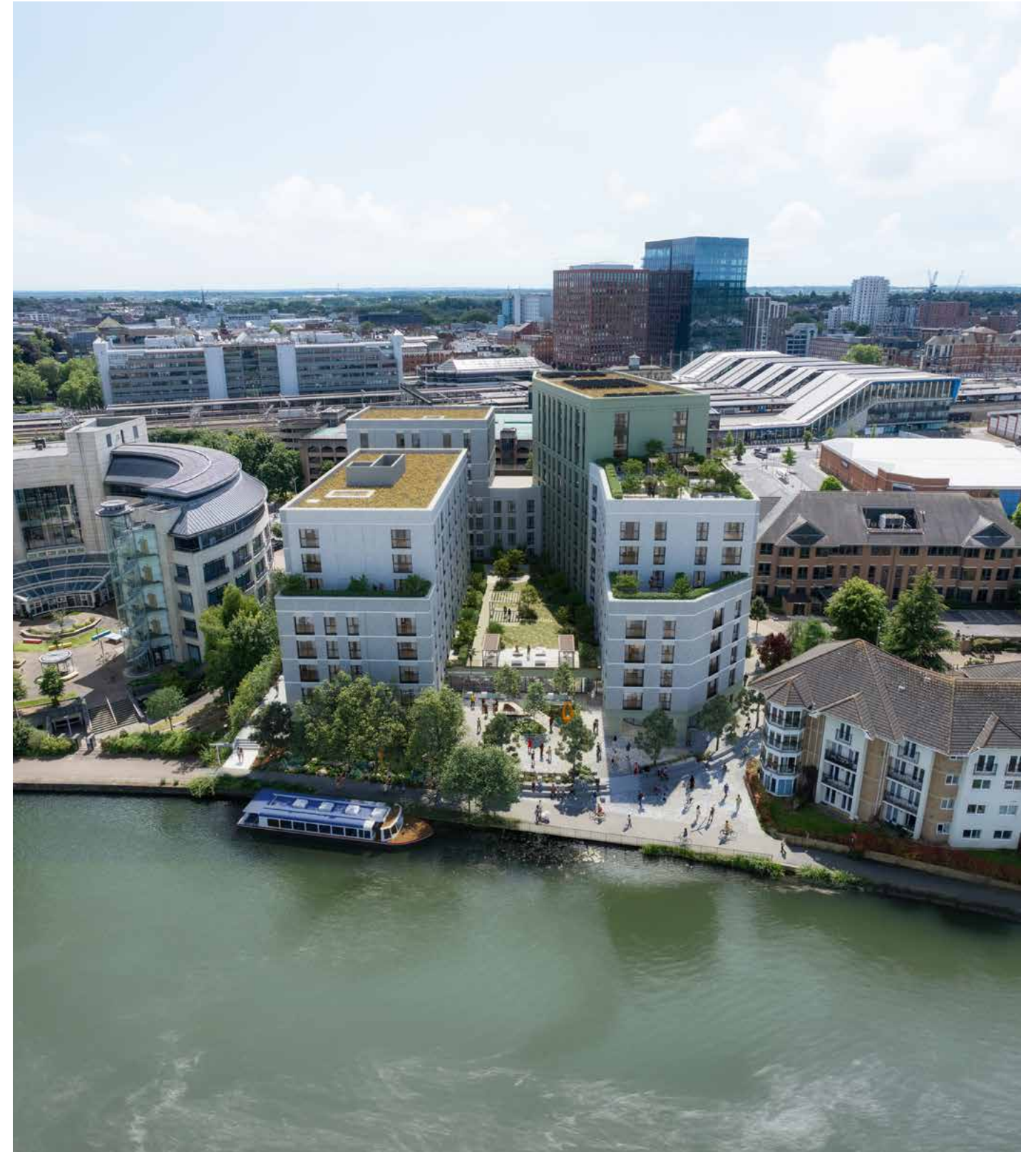
Overall it has been found that there would be no adverse townscape effects.

Visual effects

The assessment of visual effects has considered at total of 18 representative view locations and the effects on visual receptors over a range of different distances and directions. The scope of the assessment was agreed with planning officers during pre-application discussions. The assessment includes the consideration of the sequence of views obtained by people along the path to the north of the River and crossing Christchurch Meadows. It also shows the cumulative changes arising from developments in the surrounding area that already have planning permission and considers the additional effect of the proposal in that context.

The visual assessment (set out at pages 28-116 and summarised on page 117) has found that there would be generally beneficial visual effects on receptors in the surrounding area as a result of the replacement of the existing office building and its car park with a residential led development of up to 11 storeys and public open space and commercial use fronting the river.

People along Vastern Road would experience Minor to Moderate Beneficial visual effects as a result of the introduction of a distinctive and well designed new building frontage in high quality materials that would positive define and activate Vastern Road together with high quality public realm and new street trees. Although more prominent in the street scene, it would complement and enhance townscape character at the eastern end of Vastern Road as well as increasing legibility. From the junction with Trooper Potts Way, there would be a Moderate Beneficial



Waterside Square - birds eye view from north

effect. The view along Norman Place and the route to the River would be opened up by the alignment of the building and the removal of the substation.

Leaving Reading station from the northern entrance, there would be a Minor beneficial visual effect, the distinctive and well designed building would act as a marker to Norman Place and a view towards the river would be opened up.

Travelling along the Thames Path and crossing Christchurch Bridge, people would experience a Moderate to Major Beneficial effect close to the site (where the proposed new public realm with public art and seating would provide a more attractive and interesting interface with the river and the architectural design of the building would provide greater visual interest and its scale and form would be compatible with the context.

Approaching the site from the east, views from around Caversham Lock are limited by buildings and trees and people would experience a Negligible to Minor Beneficial effect. Beyond Reading Bridge and for pedestrians crossing Reading Bridge, where more of the site frontage would be seen there would be a Moderate Beneficial visual effect. From Caversham Bridge, people would experience a Minor Beneficial effects.

People within Christchurch Meadows would see the proposed development from various locations. Along the public footpath on the north bank of the river there would be Moderate Beneficial to Major Beneficial effects. The proposal would be a characteristic addition to the more urban side of the river introducing additional planting. The building form would relate well to adjacent buildings and break up the massing along the frontage and the relationship to adjacent buildings would remain comfortable, irrespective of the location of the viewer. Crossing the open space, some screening is provided by trees along the river, and wider panorama including the emerging urban context around the station is seen and there would be a Minor Beneficial to Major Beneficial visual effects. To the west, around Caversham War Memorial, where there is increased screening, there would be a Negligible to Minor Beneficial effect.

The potential for effects on people within open spaces in the wider area has been considered and found that there would be a Minor Beneficial visual effect in views from Balmore Walk (view 9) and Hills

Meadow (view 18), a Negligible to Minor Neutral visual effect in views from Forbury Gardens (view 15) and a Negligible effect on views from McIlroy Park.

Cumulative effects

The potential for cumulative townscape and visual effects has also been considered.

Within TCA1 Vastern Road, planning permission has been granted for the redevelopment of the vacant site at 55 Vastern Road with buildings up to 11 storeys and a connection to Christchurch Bridge as well as for redevelopment of the retail warehouse development to the south of Vastern Road (Vastern Court and Reading Metropolitan). Together these developments will introduce a taller, more intensively developed urban character along Vastern Road and provide greater permeability within an area that is promoted for regeneration and redevelopment in planning policy. To the north of the station, the Station Hill Masterplan includes a series of tall buildings in TCA2. These developments are seen together in views as a cluster of tall buildings marking the station.

The proposed development would be compatible with this emerging townscape character and would further reinforce permeability and legibility. It would fit in with the general townscape pattern of increasing height away from the River and would not undermine the emerging cluster around the station.

The visualisations including the cumulative schemes show that the scale and form of development would complement the 55 Vastern Road scheme, while maintaining the role of the latter as a focal point in views from Christchurch Meadows towards the bridge link.

The cumulative schemes around the station will create a prominent cluster of tall buildings on the skyline marking the station. The scheme would be well separated from and considerably lower than the cluster and would not distract from or undermine the legibility created.

Conclusion

The assessment has considered the effects of the scheme on the townscape of the site and surrounding area. It has been found that the scheme is acceptable in townscape and visual terms and complies with the relevant planning policy context.



CGI of the Vastern Road frontage

LF67133/03

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Townscape and Visual Appraisal
Packaged Living Ltd.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Townscape and Visual Appraisal (TVA) has been prepared by Lichfields on behalf of Packaged Living to accompany an application for planning permission for a residential-led redevelopment at Norman Place, Reading ('the Site') for:

“Demolition of the former Covea Insurance building and construction of residential-led development, access from Norman Place and associated car parking, infrastructure and landscaping”

- 1.2 The site has an area of approximately 0.54ha and is situated around 130m to the north-east of Reading Station between Vastern Road, the Thames Path, Clearwater House and Norman Place (see Figure 1: Aerial Context Plan). The relevant local planning authority (LPA) is Reading Borough Council (RBC).

- 1.3 This TVA has been prepared to provide an analysis of the potential townscape and visual effects arising from the proposed development. It has been undertaken in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition, associated Landscape Institute Guidance including relevant clarifications on the interpretation of GLVIA3, Townscape Character Assessment TIN 05/17 (as updated) and Visual Representation of Development Proposals TGN 06/19. Reference has also been made to information on sensitive views and townscape character set out in the planning policy context which includes the Assessment of Significant Views with Heritage Interest (ASVHI) (January 2018) and Reading Tall Building Study and Update.

- 1.4 A more detailed overview of the methodology and criteria applied to the assessment is provided in Appendix 1.

- 1.5 In summary, the assessment considers:

1. The townscape character of the site and its surroundings;
2. The visual role of the site in the surrounding area;

3. The sensitivity of the existing townscape and views to change, having regard to the susceptibility of receptors to change and the value of the townscape and visual resources;
4. The scale and extent of the change to the townscape and views that would result from the proposed development, and
5. The effects of the proposed development on key townscape and visual receptors and whether the change would be beneficial, neutral or adverse.

- 1.6 Pre-application discussions with Officers between September 2023 and February 2024 have confirmed the scope of the assessment with further details contained in Section 3.

- 1.7 The appraisal has been based on visualisations produced by Ambiente and illustrative visual material by Assael as well as the drawings and other relevant information submitted with the planning application.

Structure of the Report

- 1.8 The report contains the following further sections:

- **Section 2: Summary of planning policy context** – provides a high level overview of the key planning policy requirements;
- **Section 3: Baseline conditions** – defines the scope of the study area and sets out the existing townscape character of the site and surrounding area, the main visual receptors and key representative views;
- **Section 4: The proposed development** - summarises the proposed development,
- **Section 5: Townscape and visual appraisal** - considers the potential for townscape and visual effects and whether those are beneficial, neutral or adverse in light of the and townscape character of the site and surrounding area and the relevant policy context, and
- **Section 6: Summary and conclusions** - summarises the findings of the analysis relevant to the proposal.



Figure 1: Aerial Context Plan (Google Earth, 2022); Site boundary indicated with redline

2.0 Summary of planning policy context

2.1 The relevant statutory development plan comprises Reading Borough Local Plan (RBLP) which was adopted in November 2019. The following national and local policy and guidance is relevant and is a material consideration:

1. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2023);
2. Assessment of Significant Views with Heritage Interest (ASVHI) (January 2018);
3. National Design Guide (January 2021);
4. National Model Design Code (July 2021); and
5. National Planning Practice Guidance: Design.

2.2 A partial review of the Local Plan is being undertaken with initial consultation undertaken November 2023. This included the proposed redevelopment of the Site to provide new homes. This plan is at a very early stage in its preparation.

2.3 The site is not within the Reading Station Area Framework, December 2010 (RSFA) area. However, following reference to this document during pre-application consultation on the scope of the study, it has been reviewed. The Reading Tall Buildings Strategy (RTBS) (January 2008, and 2018 update) has also been referred to in terms of townscape character areas and view locations even though the proposal is not a tall building.

2.4 The policies map shows that the Site lies within Reading Central Area (as well as the, Central Core, Office Core and Air Quality Management Area). The River Thames and areas of open space along it are identified as a Major Landscape Feature (Policy EN13). Christchurch Meadows to the north of the River Thames is designated as Local Green Space/Public Open Space (Policy EN7). The site falls just outside the Station Area Tall Building Cluster (Policy CR10) and the Station/River Major Opportunity Area (Policy CR11). The extent of these designations is shown on Figure 2.

2.5 The site lies within a locally identified view from McIlroy Park towards Chazey Barn Farm, the Thames Meadow and the Chilterns escarpment (1) (see Figure 3).

2.6 The key townscape and visual policy considerations are:

1. Is the proposal a Tall Building? Is site in an accessible location where change or increased densities are encouraged? (RLP CC6, CR10 and H2; NPPF Paragraphs 128 and 135);
2. Would proposals be sympathetic to local character within this area? Is the development well integrated with the context including surrounding townscape and landscape setting? Has regard been had to factors including topography; layout, form, scale, appearance, details and materials, views and uses? Would it contribute to local distinctiveness or create a positive new identity or sense of place? (RLP CC7, CR2, H2 and EN5, NPPF Paragraph 128, 135, NDG);
3. Would proposals create a well-defined public realm and high-quality place that is attractive, safe and functions well. Would a positive contribution to urban design objectives including continuity and enclosure, permeability and legibility be made? Have existing trees and natural features been retained and street trees introduced where possible? Does the scheme have appropriate and effective landscaping? (RLP CC7, CR2, CR3 and EN14, NPPF Paragraphs 135 and 136, NDG);
4. Would development be sensitive to nearby open spaces and waterspaces with no adverse effect on the setting, character and appearance of the River Thames as a major landscape feature? Would the relationship of buildings and spaces to the watercourse be enhanced having regard to distinct character, views and public realm (RLP EN7, EN11 and EN13);
5. The proposal is of high architectural design quality? Is the scheme attractive? Has consideration been given to the relevant requirements local and/or national design guidance? Has the design evolved as a result of effective engagement? (RLP policy CR2; NPPF Paragraphs 131, 135, 137 and 139); and
6. Does the proposal optimise the use of land? (RLP policy CR2 and H2; NPPF Paragraph 123, 135).

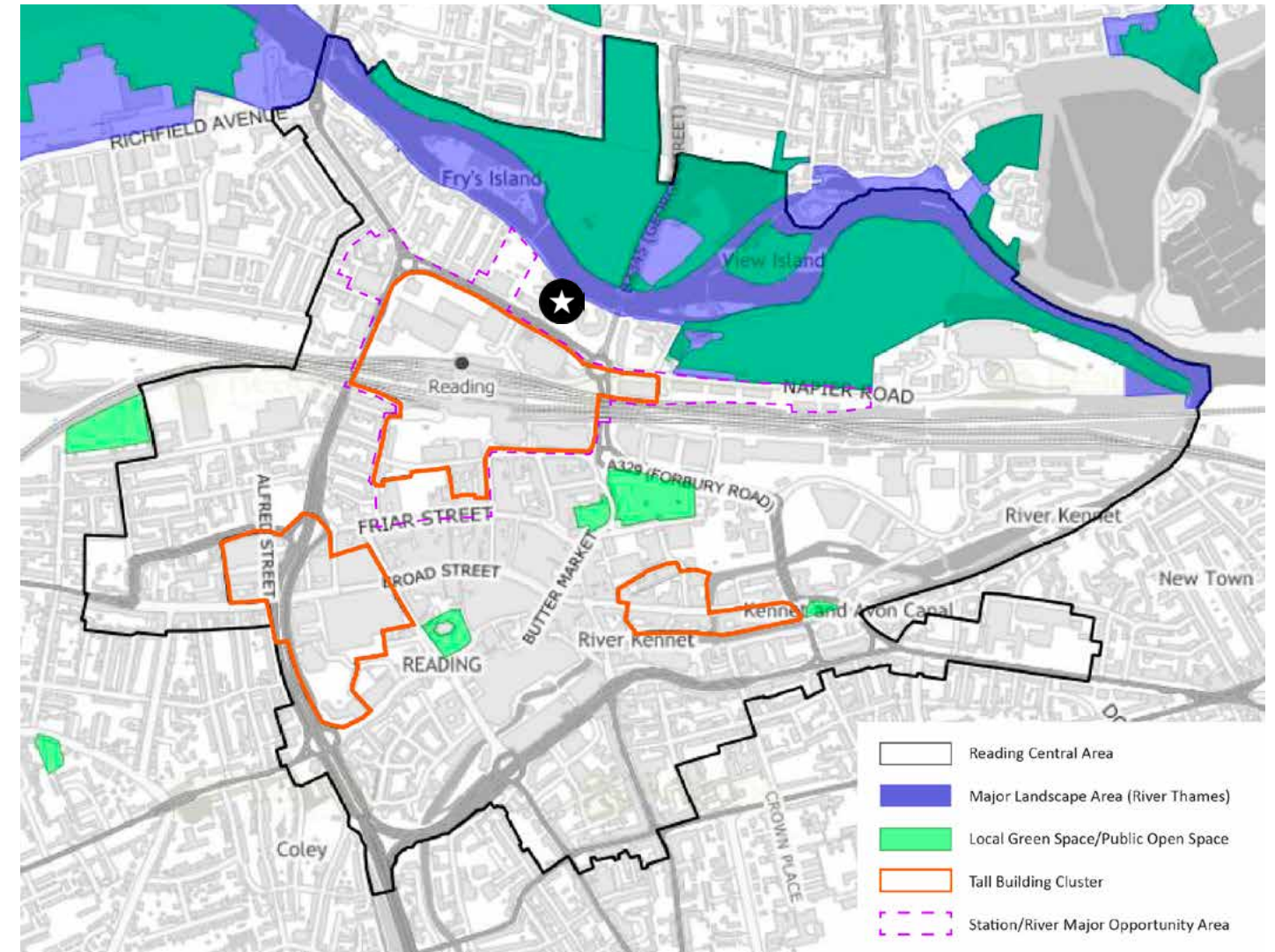


Figure 2: Policy Context Plan (edited extract from Reading Borough Local Plan Proposals map); Site location indicated with star symbol

2.7 A more detailed summary of the relevant policy context is provided in Appendix 2.

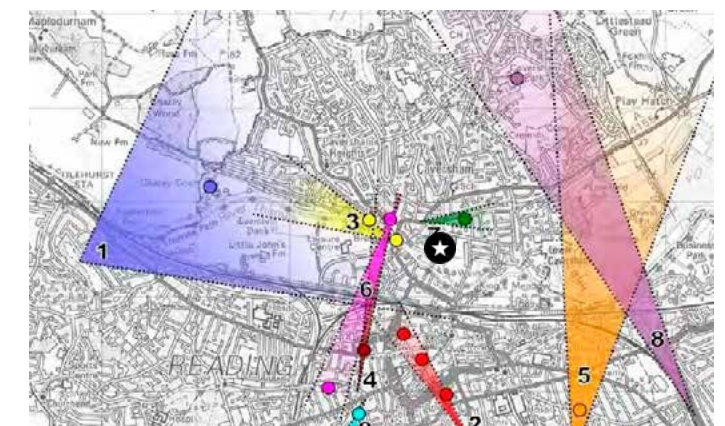


Figure 3: Significant views with Heritage Interest(Reading Borough Local Plan)

3.0 Baseline conditions

- 3.1 The baseline has been established by a combination of desk study and fieldwork.
- 3.2 The desk study included a review of the relevant policy context and documents that define the townscape character of the site and surrounding area including Ordnance Survey mapping, aerial photography, historic mapping and review of relevant background documents. A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) plot has been prepared using GIS to help to define the zone within the proposed development may be visible and the study area for the assessment.
- 3.3 Fieldwork recorded the character and qualities of the site and the surrounding area, confirmed the ZTV and the location of people in the surrounding area who may experience changes in their visual amenity. Fieldwork was undertaken in September, October and December 2023 and has enabled an understanding of visibility in mid winter conditions. Photography for the visualisations was undertaken in April and June 2024.

Site and surrounding area

- 3.4 The Site is bound by Vastern Road to its south and the River Thames to its north, with the Thames Path running between the site and River. Norman Place - a cul-de-sac – defines the Site's western edge together with a narrow pedestrian link connecting to the Thames Path. The footpath adjacent to the site stops at the building frontage with the main pedestrian route being on the opposite side of Norman Place. To the east is Clearwater Court, a five to six storey office building occupied by Thames Water, which has a distinctive broken circular form with central space overlooking the river.
- 3.5 The Site is occupied by a currently vacant four storey buff brick built office building with a large hipped roof that was developed in the 1990s. The building has some accommodation in the roof and a symmetrical façade to both principal elevations. It has car parking to the front, which includes some amenity planting and an elevated area of hardstanding to the north. There is an electricity

substation on the Norman Place frontage. There are a few small trees within the car park and on the edge of the open space to the north. There are trees within a grassed area at the base of the retaining wall which abuts the Thames Path overhanging the boundary and also trees along the boundary within the Clearwater Court site.

- 3.6 Beyond Norman Place to the west of the site, on the Vastern Road frontage is Sovereign House which is a detached hipped roof office building of three storeys, and to the north west of the Site is a four storey residential block in buff brick - Thames Court- which has a cranked form, projecting bays to the river and a hipped roof. Outside Thames Court is a ramp up to Christchurch Bridge.
- 3.7 The site is approximately 200m from the northern entrance of Reading Station. The multi storey station car park is on the opposite side of Vastern Road, with Trooper Potts Way, which connects to the station's northern entrance, to its west. Beyond is the Station Retail Park which extends to the west along Vastern Road. On the opposite side is a vacant site known as 55 Vastern Road which has a block of two storey building on the frontage, one of which is locally listed. Both sites have planning permission for redevelopment (as set out in section 4). West of 55 Vastern Road is a mixed area of terraced houses, apartments and a four storey office building (Great Brighams Mead) facing the junction with Caversham Road. The apartment buildings have a series of private amenity spaces fronting the river.
- 3.8 At the roundabout junction of Vastern Road with George Street is Thames Quarter, a recent residential tower up to 23 storeys. Reading Bridge House, an 11 storey office building, fronts George Street adjacent to Reading Bridge (locally listed). To the north of the railway line are a series of office buildings of seven to 11 storeys.
- 3.9 The building on the Site is currently vacant. It is a neutral element within the townscape although the extensive frontage car park and blank frontage provided by the substation to the footpath detract from the quality of the townscape.



Photo 1: Site from Vastern Road



Photo 2: The site from from Vastern Road close to the junction with Trooper Potts Way



Photo 3: Western edge of the Site looking along Norman Place including the substation. Thames Court is seen beyond.



Photo 4: Site as viewed from the Thames Path



Photo 5: View east along the Thames Path from the north-western edge of the Site towards Reading Bridge.



Photo 6: View north-west along the Thames Path from the north-western edge of the Site towards Christchurch Bridge

Townscape character

- 3.10 To establish the townscape character of the surrounding area and the contribution of the application site to this character, fieldwork and desk study has been undertaken to define broad areas that, on the whole, have similar townscape characteristics (noting that there may be some anomalies within them).
- 3.11 For each character area identified, the key characteristics – the physical, experiential, aesthetic and perceptual factors - that give the area its distinct sense of place are set out. Based on GLVIA3 (para 5.5) and National Design Guide (para 34), this has considered the following aspects of townscape character where relevant:
1. The context and setting;
 2. Topography and relationship to built form;
 3. Historic evolution;
 4. The urban grain – pattern and scale of streets, development plots and buildings;
 5. Land use and activity;
 6. Movement patterns;
 7. The scale, mass, form and proportion of buildings;
 8. Building style, details and use of materials including vernacular traditions, and
 9. The public realm including the role of open spaces and vegetation.
- 3.12 These aspects are usually positive features but can also be negative in a degraded environment. The townscape/landscape receptors that may be sensitive to change arising from development are those positive characteristics are that could be directly or indirectly affected.
- 3.13 The value of the townscape has also been assessed having regard to any designations and the value of its component parts. The existing landscape/ townscape quality and value is categorised as very high, high, medium, low or very low, based on the scoring criteria in Appendix 1.

Wider context and setting

- 3.14 The Site lies within the urban area of Reading, to the south of the Thames Path and the River Thames. Reading Station is located around 130m to the south-west with the multi-storey station car park immediately to the south of Vastern Road. The site is separated from the main historic core of Reading by the elevated railway and office buildings and other developments along the railway and Forbury Road. There is an emerging cluster of tall buildings to the south and south-west of the station with Thames Tower (14 storeys) and One Station Hill (17 storeys). There is also a tall building at the eastern end of Vastern Road - Thames Quarter, which steps up to 23 storeys.
- 3.15 The emerging context will continue to change with planning permission having been granted for the redevelopment of 55 Vastern Road for a residential led scheme of up to 11 storeys and the redevelopment of the retail warehouses to the site to the south of the station (Reading Metropolitan and Vastern Court). Within the wider context there is also planning permission for the redevelopment of buildings at 97a-113 Caversham Road for three and four storey homes and an application has been submitted to increase the height of the Great Brighams Mead building, although this remains to be determined.
- 3.16 The main shopping core and historic centre is located to the south of the station around the Church St Mary and Market Place. Forbury Gardens, a registered park and garden (Grade II) lies to the south-east and includes the remnants of Reading Abbey (Scheduled Monument).
- 3.17 To the north of River Thames is Christchurch Meadows, an extensive area of open space and playing fields extending along the north side of the River, beyond which is Caversham. There are connections to the north via pedestrian/cycle footbridge (Christchurch Bridge) to the north-east and via Reading Bridge. To the east are further open spaces around the Reading Lido at Kings

Meadow, to the north-east beyond the car park at Hills Meadow and to the west of Caversham Bridge at Rivermead Park.

- 3.18 There are pedestrian and cycle routes along both north and south banks of the River Thames, with the Thames Path long distance route on the south bank.
- 3.19 The RTBS provides a high level analysis of townscape character of the Central Area, which was updated in 2018. This has been reviewed as part of the analysis of current townscape character. The character areas defined in that study remain broadly relevant. Where change has occurred since the document was last updated, regard has been had to that change and the descriptions of the townscape updated. Where appropriate minor adjustments to the boundaries of the areas has also been made.
- 3.20 The Site lies within the Vastern Road Townscape Character Area (TCA 22) as identified in the RTBS.
- 3.21 Other relevant character areas include Station Hill (TCA1) which lies to the south of the Vastern Road Area, Reading Station East (TCA2) which extends along Forbury Road including office development at Forbury Place and King's Meadow (TCA23) which includes the river and assoiated open spaces to the north.



Photo 7: Southern entrance to Reading Station as viewed from Station Hill with Grade II listed former station building in the foreground.



Photo 8: Thames Tower and station building from Forbury Road



Photo 9: Christchurch Meadows

Topography

- 3.22 The Site is located on low lying land within the valley of the River Thames.
- 3.23 The Site is level with the external areas to the north and south around 38.2 to 38.8m AOD. There is a small retaining wall around 0.5m in height along the frontage with the Thames Path at around 37.5m AOD. The retaining wall returns along the boundary with Clearwater Court, increasing in height to 1.7m. The path connecting Norman Place to the Thames Path ramps down gently.
- 3.24 The topography of the wider area is shown on Figure 4. This shows that the centre of Reading sits on an area of higher ground south of the River Thames and either side of the River Kennet. The landform rises steeply to north west of Caversham Bridge and beyond Lower Caversham to the north. To the south-west, the land rises steeply towards Tilehurst and to the south-east there is a ridge of higher ground along Shinfield Road and Wilderness Road and Church Road.
- 3.25 The RTBS notes:
“...The valley landform facilitates short and mid range views down into the centre of Reading. However the sloping valley sides also ensure that there is a fairly tight visual envelope.”

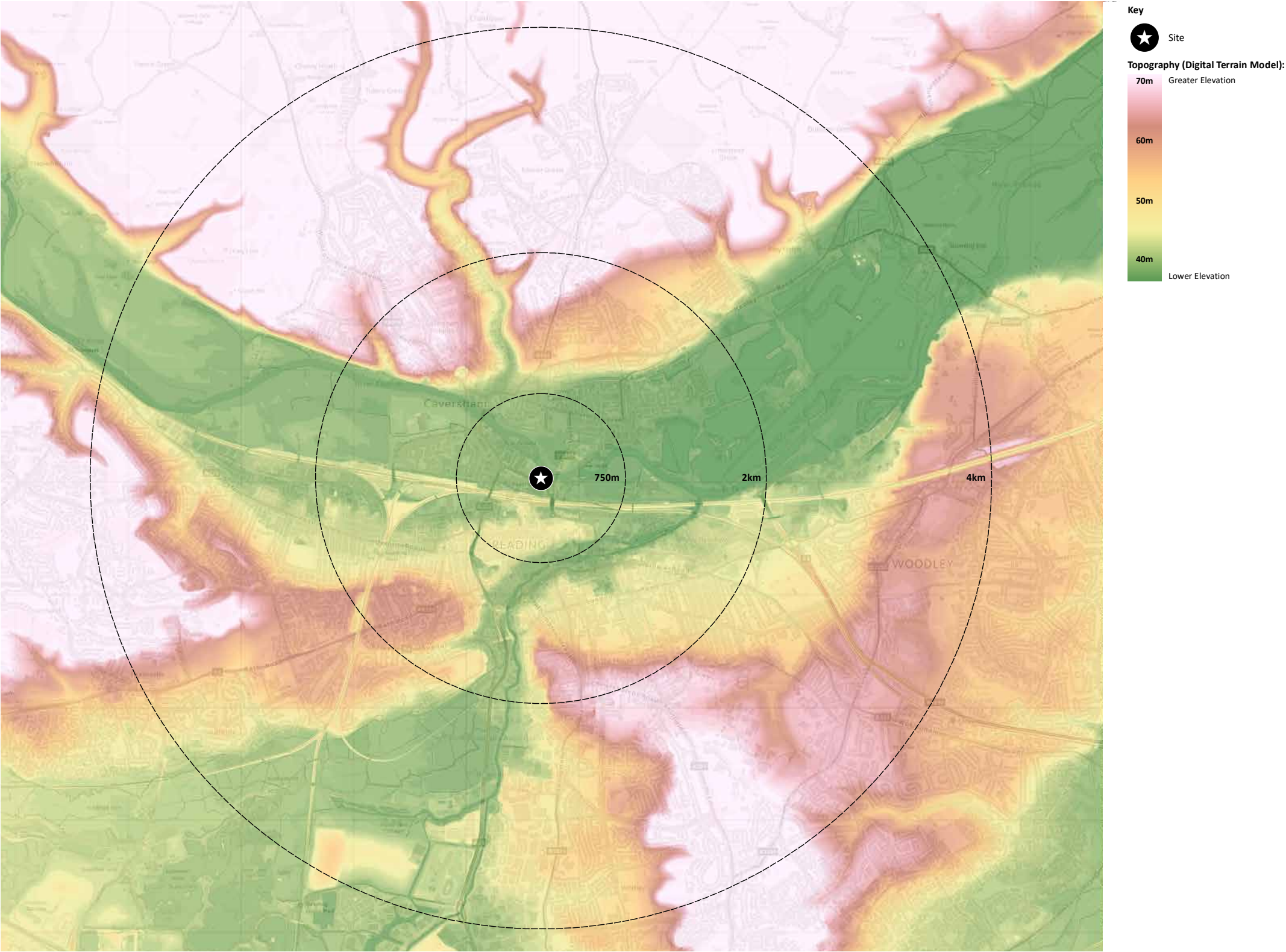


Figure 4: Topography plot (Ordnance Survey, 2023)

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

- 3.26 The Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) is the area within which views of the proposed development could be obtained. This has informed the extent of the Study Area defined within this TVA.
- 3.27 The ZTV plots were created using ESRI GIS software (version 10.8.2). The modelling was based on the following datasets:
 - LiDAR Digital Surface Model (DSM) 1m spatial resolution; the Environment Agency, 2019 – temporary coverage: 2019, and
 - OS Open Map Local, 2023.
- 3.28 The ZTV plot identifies the areas where there is a potential line of sight between the scheme and the viewer, assuming a viewer height of 1.6m (the median of average male and female heights). They are based on the ground terrain plus built features and do not therefore include screening provided by vegetation. The ZTV (Figures 5 and 6) shows the following areas of theoretical visibility (in pink).
- 3.29 The ZTV plots are based on a Digital Surface Model (DSM) which includes the ground terrain plus built features and vegetation, accurate to 1m. This uses full surface screening produced from the last return LiDAR signal, which is usually flown during winter months meaning that it shows the lowest potential level of screening from vegetation cover. It is important to note that the actual visibility can be overrepresented in the ZTV. The plots may, for example, show visibility through vegetation cover where a theoretical line of sight is present but where in reality the cover would be so dense that it would be difficult to discern a building through the vegetation. Nor do the plots confirm whether the whole development would be visible or a very small part of it.

3.30 Analysis of the ZTVs found that there would be potential for visibility of the emerging scheme by people from several areas within the local and wider context where there may be sensitive visual and/ or townscape receptors. These include, but are not limited to, potential visibility from:

- Along Vastern Road between the roundabout junctions with Caversham Road to the west and Napier Road/George Street/Bagnall Way to the south-east;
- Along the Thames Path which runs from west to east to the north of the Site;
- Bridges along the River Thames including Reading Bridge, Christchurch Bridge and Caversham Bridge;
- Various open spaces/parkland within the local area, including Christchurch Meadows to the north; King’s Meadow to the east, Rivermead Park to the north-west and Forbury Gardens to the south-east;
- The northern (around Bagnall Way) and southern (around Station Hill) entrances to Reading Railway Station, and
- Areas at longer ranges including Balmore Walk, Westfield Road and Horse Close to the north; Henley Road and around Dunsden Green to the north-east and from McIlroy Park to the west (see following page).

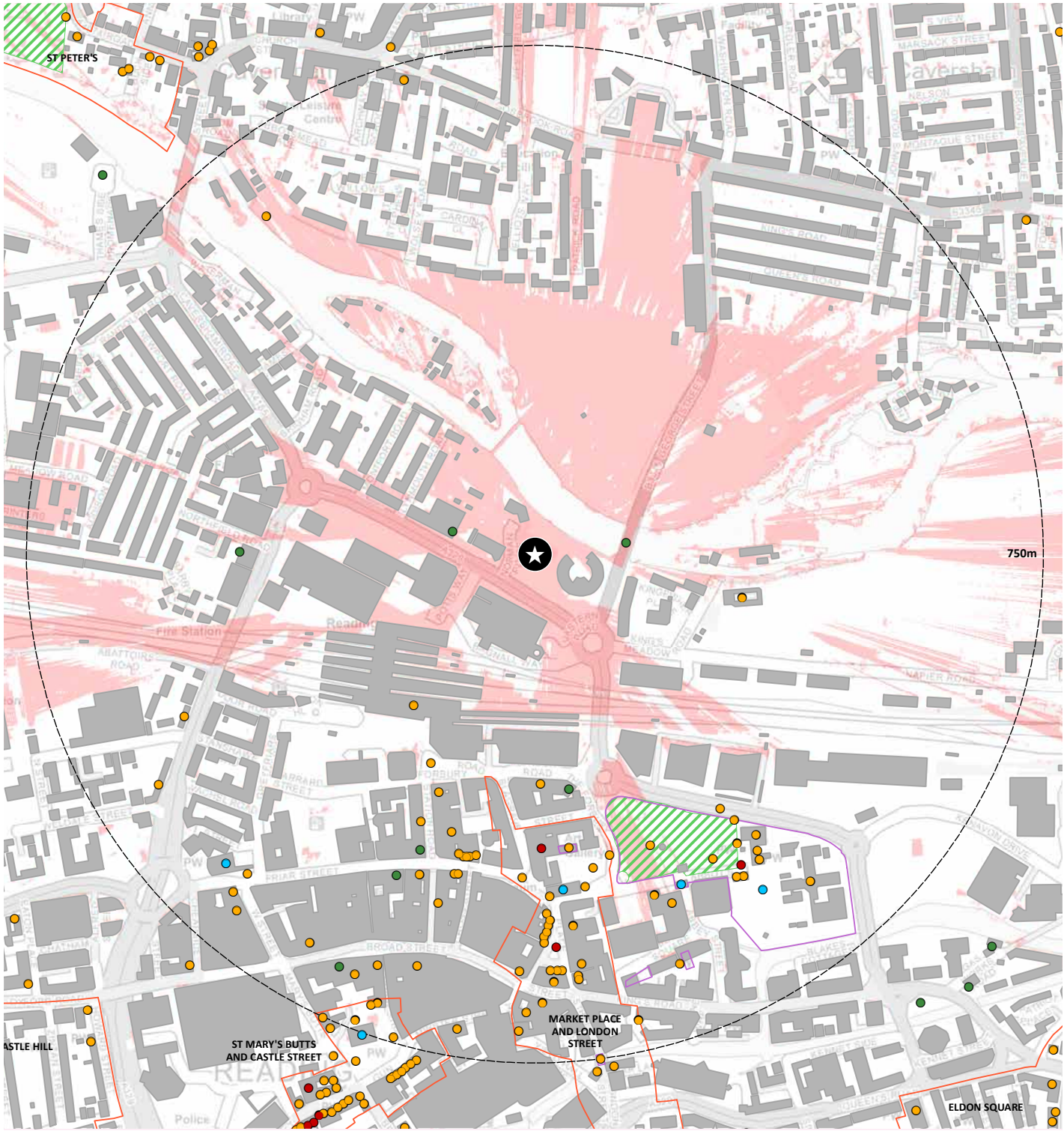
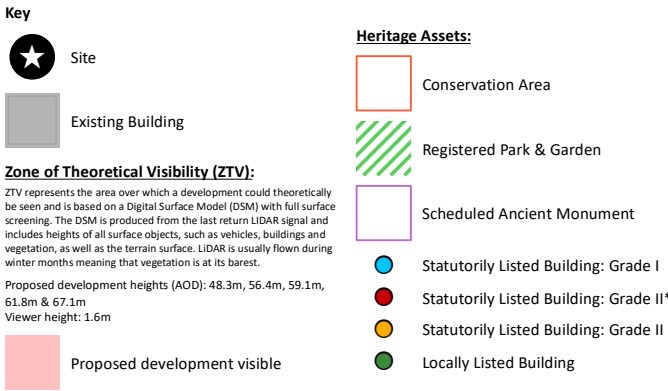
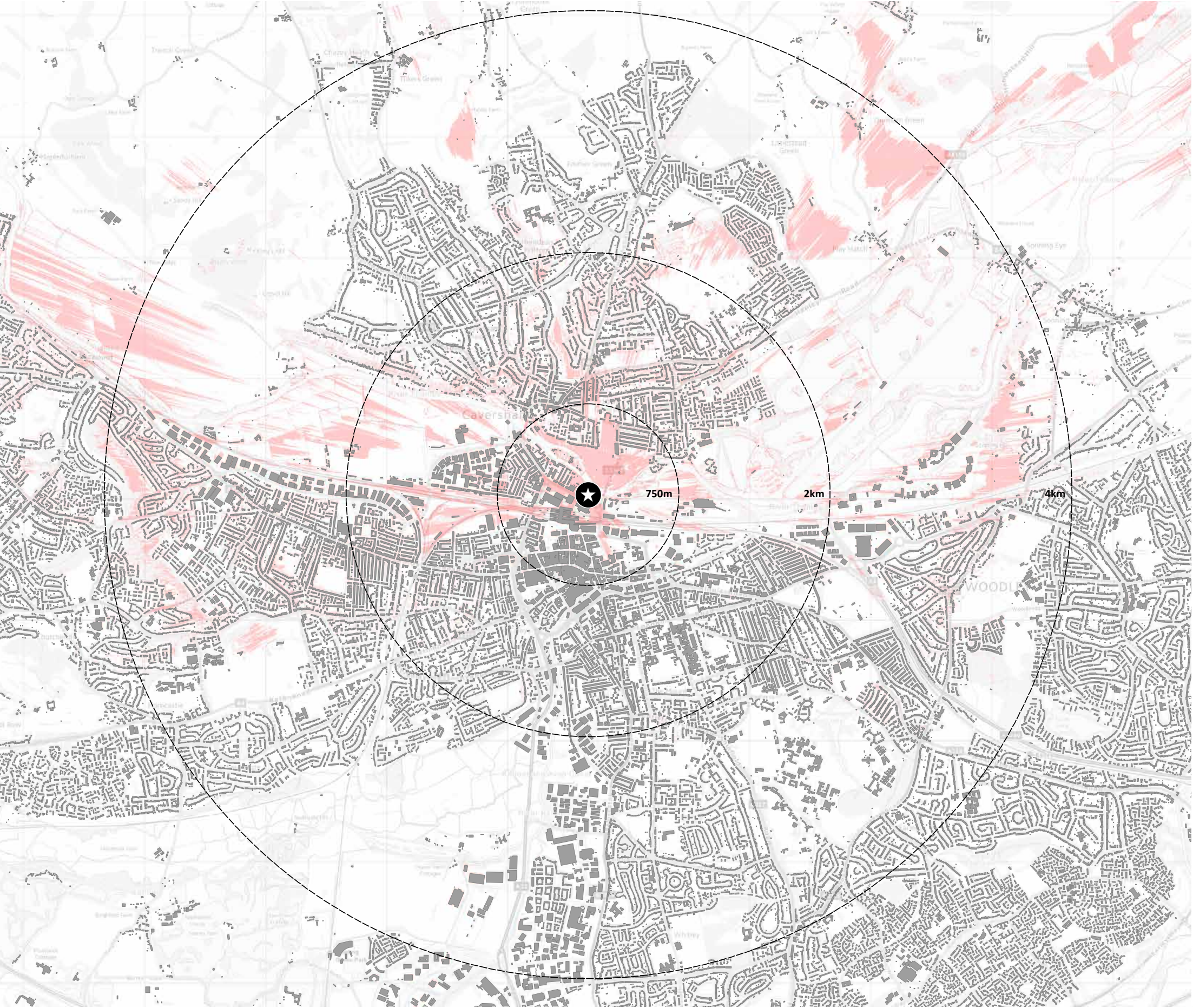


Figure 5: Zone of Theoretical Visibility plot (750m radius from Site) (Ordnance Survey, 2023)



Site



Existing Building

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV):

ZTV represents the area over which a development could theoretically be seen and is based on a Digital Surface Model (DSM) with full surface screening. The DSM is produced from the last return LIDAR signal and includes heights of all surface objects, such as vehicles, buildings and vegetation, as well as the terrain surface. LIDAR is usually flown during winter months meaning that vegetation is at its barest.

Proposed development heights (AOD): 48.3m, 56.4m, 59.1m, 61.8m & 67.1m
Viewer height: 1.6m



Proposed development visible

Figure 6: Zone of Theoretical Visibility plot (4km radius from Site) (Ordnance Survey, 2023)

Historic evolution

- 3.31 Reading is believed to have established in Saxon times on the high ground around St Mary's Minster Church at junction of Castle Street, Gun Street and Bridge Street and St Mary's Butts. The RTBS comments that Reading:

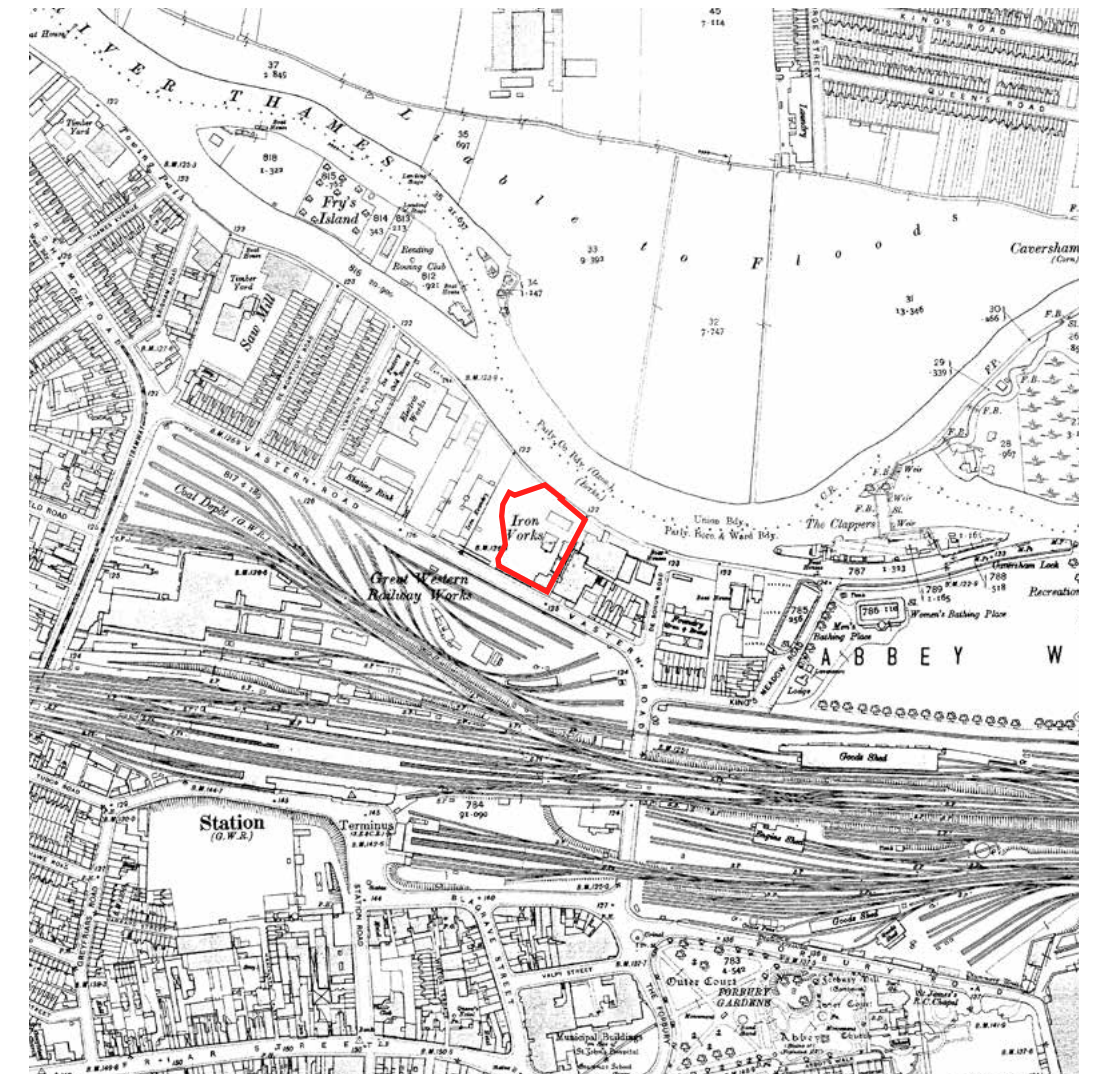
“was originally part of the Royal estate of the Saxon kings of Wessex and is particularly notable for the part it played in the conflicts with Viking invaders that formed the context in which King Alfred the Great established a strengthened Saxon kingdom in the 9th/10th century.”

- 3.32 The importance of Reading in the 12th century following the founding of Reading Abbey by Henry I, a destination for pilgrims. Although the Abbey was destroyed in the dissolution in the 16th century, Reading remained an important town, its wealth in the 17th century related to the trade in cloth with the settlement linking to the River Kennet. In the 18th century, iron manufacturing and brewing became important industries and a hospital and prison were developed in connection with its role as County town. During the 19th century, the town became known for Huntley and Palmers biscuit factory (at the eastern end of Forbury Road) and Sutton's seeds.

- 3.33 The railway was introduced in the mid 19th century, with the first station on the Great Western Railway (GWR) in 1840 and the station entrance (now the Three Guineas PH) being built in the 1860s. Due to flooding from the River Thames the land to the north of the station remained largely undeveloped until the late 19th century. Railway sidings and Vastern Road can be seen on mapping from the 1870s (Map 1). No development is shown on the site. A towing path is shown along the river and Caversham Lock can be seen together with an inlet marked as a bathing place. There is a bridge linking to Caversham and timber yards and saw mills in that area. Caversham Mill to the east is marked as a corn mill.

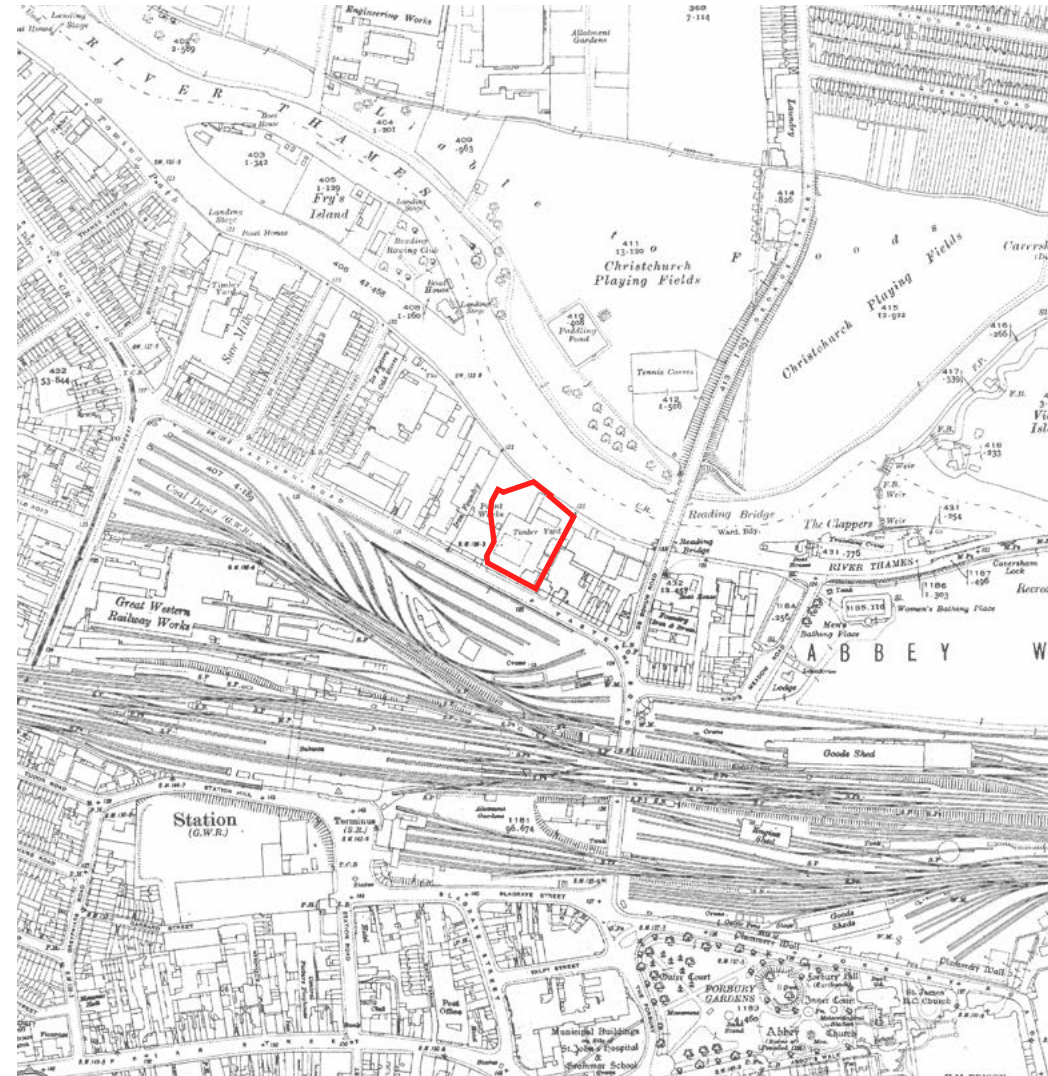


Map 1: 1879 (Promap/Ordnance Survey)

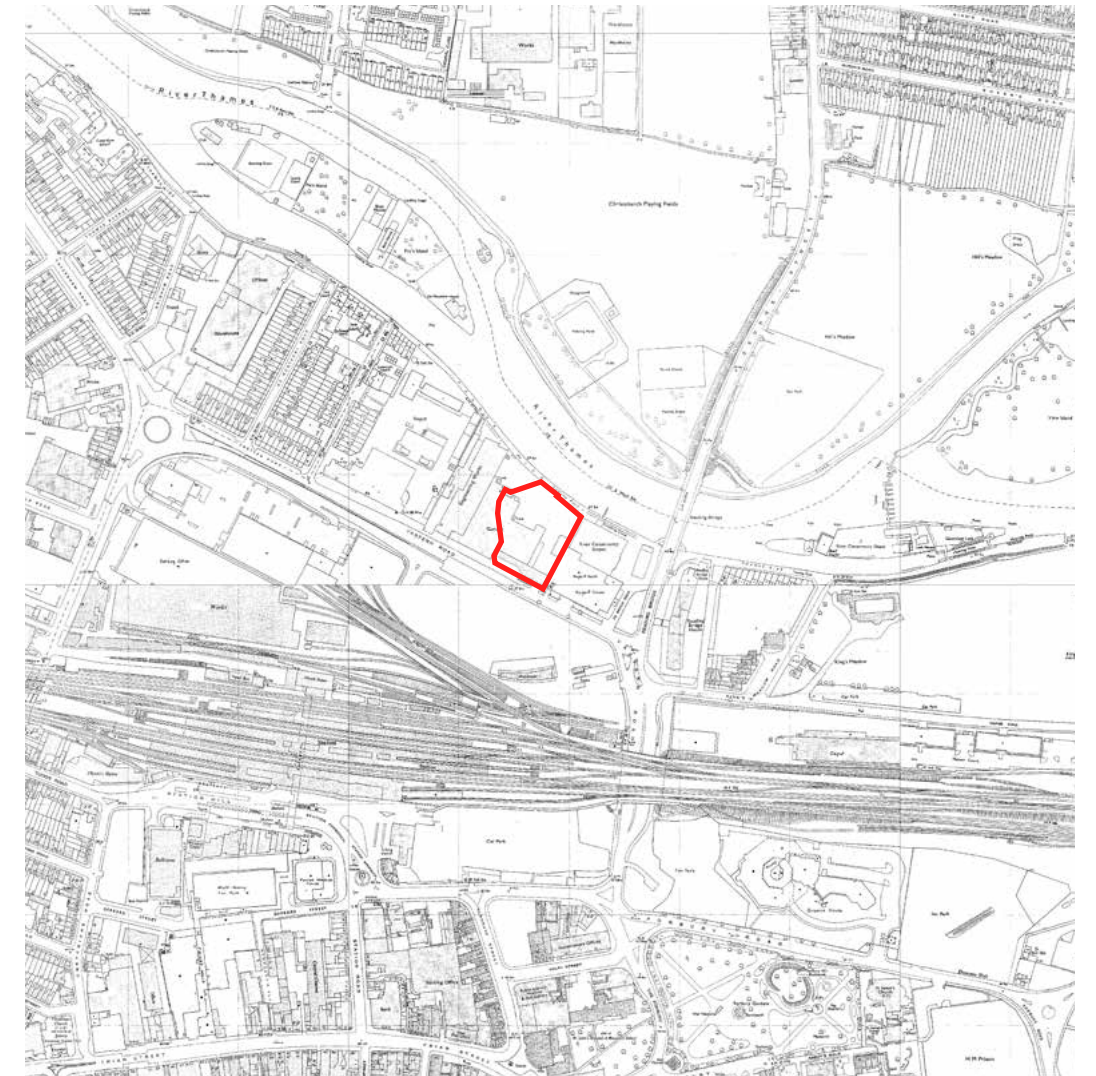


Map 2: 1912-1913 (Promap/Ordnance Survey)

- 3.34 By the end of the 19th century, the land south of Vastern Road was occupied by the GWR works with Thames Bank ironworks shown on the site and boat yards marked in the vicinity of Clearwater Court. Kingsmeadow is marked as a recreation ground. By the end of the Edwardian period (Map 2), there are a combination of terraced houses and a skating rink to the north of Vastern Road in addition to the iron works, electric works and a sawmill.
- 3.35 Reading Bridge (locally listed) was built in 1923 to connect with Lower Caversham with the current Caversham Bridge following in 1926. They are shown on mapping from the 1930's (Map 3) as is the Reading Lido (Grade II listed) which had been built in 1902. Christchurch playing fields can also be seen. Caversham Mill is marked as disused. A paint works is shown on the Site in more detailed mapping from this time.
- 3.36 By the mid to late 20th century Reading Bridge House had been built together with the multi-storey station car park and the Station Shopping Park retail warehousing. The current office buildings, which included Sovereign Court to the west of Norman Place were constructed on the site of former industrial buildings in the 1990s. Clearwater Court was built as a headquarters for Thames Water and opened in 2001. Christchurch Bridge was opened in 2015.



Map 3: 1931-1932 (Promap/Ordnance Survey)



Map 4: 1979-1990 (Promap/Ordnance Survey)

Townscape character and quality

- 3.37 The following townscape character areas (TCA) have been identified in the immediate area as having the potential to be altered as a result of the proposed development.
- 3.38 These TCAs are identified on the Townscape Character Areas Plan at Figure 7. As noted above they have been largely based on the character areas defined in the RTBS, although there have been some adjustments to reflect more recent changes:
 - TCA 1: Vastern Road (blue);
 - TCA 2: Station Hill (pink);
 - TCA 3: Reading Station East (orange), and
 - TCA 4: King’s Meadow (green).
- 3.39 The character of these areas is described on the following pages. Their townscape quality has been evaluated by reference to Table 1 in Appendix 1.

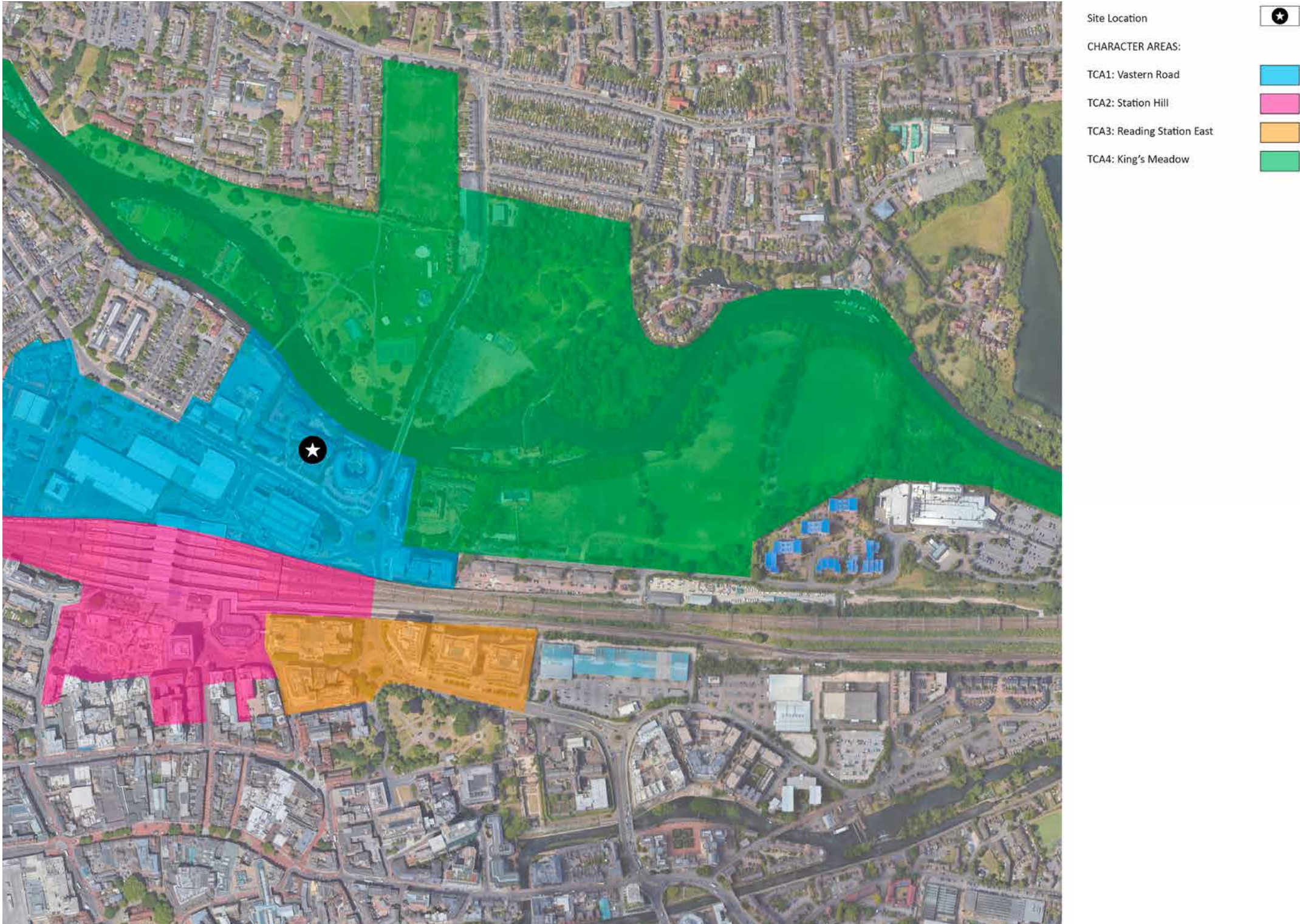


Figure 7: Townscape Character Areas Plan (Google Maps, 2022)

Townscape Character Area 1: Vastern Road

3.40 TCA1 extends from the River Thames in the north to the railway in the south and from Reading Bridge House in the east to Caversham Road in the west excluding the residential areas west of 55 Vastern Road. The site is located within this area. The area identified in the TBS has been adjusted to include Thames Quarter which has a frontage to Vastern Road at its eastern end and is considered to now form part of this TCA.

3.41 The key characteristics of this character area are summarised below:

- **Historic evolution** – the area was undeveloped until the construction of the railway in the mid-19th century. The area south of Vastern Road was used as sidings and other uses associated with the railway. North of Vastern Road industrial uses began to emerge including an ironworks and paint factory on the Site with boat builder and terraced housing on the site of Clearwater Court. Reading Bridge was built in the early 20th century with the majority of buildings in the area dating from the mid 20th century and later.
- **Land use and activity** - The area is predominantly retail, office and commercial- in its land use with some residential uses on the river frontage and at Thames Quarter. There are ‘big-box’ retail warehouses on Station Shopping Park and office uses at Sovereign House, Reading Bridge House and Clearwater Court as well as that being the former use of the Site. A self-storage warehouse and gymnasium are located towards the area’s western extent. There is extensive car surface parking and a multi-storey car.
- **Street and movement patterns** –Vastern Road is the primary vehicular and pedestrian route through the area along a north-west/ south-east axis, connecting with Caversham Road to the west which leads to Reading town centre and to Caversham and beyond. To the east, it links to Forbury Road and George Street at the eastern end crosses Reading Bridge to the east. Bagnall Way forms a block with Trooper Potts Way linking to the station. There are connections to the riverside via Norman Place.
- **Urban grain, building/plot layout and relationships** – The area has a coarse urban grain with medium to large urban blocks.

There is variation in the placement of buildings within plots and in the size of the building footprints, which are medium to large. In general, buildings are sited in positions that define the frontage although a number are vacant or inactive. Other areas have poor frontage definition and prominent parking.

- **Built form, scale and massing** – The built form varies considerably in height with the tallest located to the east. Reading Bridge House is 11-storey building with a slightly angle horizontal form and Thames Quarter has an 11 storey shoulder, stepping up to 23 storeys. Clearwater House is six commercial storeys and the Station Multi-storey car park five storeys. Elsewhere buildings are generally one to four storeys in height. Other than the circular form of Clearwater House, buildings have rectangular forms with a combination of hipped and flat/ parapet roofs.
- **Architectural style, materials and details** - The architectural character, materials and details vary according to the age and use of the buildings and are typical of their typology. The retail warehouses and multi-storey have a functional appearance with buff and red brick, expressed concrete and metal cladding materials. The buildings



Photo 10: The Station Shopping Park



Photo 11: Clearwater Court



Photo 12: View south-east along Vastern Road



Photo 13: Reading Bridge House



Photo 14: View towards Reading Station, multi-storey car park and retail buildings to south of Vastern Road



Photo 15: View north-east from Thames Path towards the River and Reading Bridge

on Norman Place are faced in buff brick with hipped roofs. Reading Bridge House is faced in a combination of brick and stone panels with the concrete frame evident at ground level. The rounded light stone C-shape form of Clearwater House is distinctive with postmodern references including two feature glazed stair cores. Thames Quarter is a recent tower that terminates the view along Vastern Road and has a stepped form with lower shoulder in red brick with the tower in a buff cladding that complements the materials of Reading Bridge House and Clearwater Court.

- **Landscape elements** – The Thames Path runs along the area’s northern edge with more limited pedestrian permeability present from north to south. Though the setting of the River provides some visual amenity there is a general lack of public open and green space within the area itself, with street trees along the western and central parts of Vastern Road. The entrance to Reading Station at the southern edge of the area is fronted by a small functional pedestrianised plaza.

3.42 The RTBS defines the townscape condition of the area as follows: *“The large, blank faces [of the buildings] create an unexceptional area of townscape which does not respond well to the surrounding residential land use. Although the buildings are occupied and function well for their purpose, their design is unattractive and creates a weak and uninspiring area of townscape”*.

3.43 There are few elements of townscape value within the area. There is some interest in the frontage to 55 Vastern Road (although planning permission has been granted for demolition), the street trees along Vastern Road are a feature and the outlook to the north over the River is attractive.

3.44 The area has a Low townscape value.



Photo 16: Existing building on the Site



Photo 17: Thames Quarter as seen along Vastern Road



Photo 18: Street trees along Vastern Road



Photo 19: Plaza entrance to Reading Station

Townscape Character Area 2: Station Hill

3.45 This is a small area including the railway station and buildings to the south including the area around Station Hill, Garrard Street and Greyfriars Road. It covers the station and Plot F of the Station Hill Masterplan

3.46 The key characteristics of this character area are summarised below:

- **Historic evolution** – this area has evolved around the railway station with the historic listed station building being a focal point at the station entrance. The area was redeveloped during the second half of the 20th century and is currently undergoing redevelopment as part of the Station Hill Masterplan.
- **Land use and activity** – the area includes a variety of retail, office with some residential uses including the recently completed Ebb and Flow development which connects to Friar Street. It is a busy area with pedestrian and vehicle movements associated with the railway station.
- **Street and movement patterns** – the streets and urban blocks are broadly rectangular and are influenced by the line of the railway. The blocks are relatively small and permeability across the area is good.
- **Urban grain, building/plot layout and relationships** – the area is undergoing considerable change as a result of the implementation of the Station Hill Masterplan. Thames Tower was reclad and extended in 2017 and One Station Hill has been constructed on the site of a former multi-storey car park. The buildings extend to the edge of the public realm giving a well-enclosed urban sense of place
- **Built form, scale and massing** – there is considerable variety in the scale and form of buildings in this area ranging from the low rise station buildings which each have distinctive individual massing and roof forms to the more rectangular massing and vertical forms of Thames Tower (15 storeys) and One Station Hill (17 storeys) which has stepping rectangular forms and steps down to a lower ground entrance to Garrard Street.

- **Architectural style, materials and details** – There are a variety of architectural styles and details with buildings reflecting their use and age of construction. The station building is a mix of brick and glazing, Thames Tower is clad in brick coloured terracotta cladding and One Station Hill has a curtain glazed frontage.
- **Landscape and public realm elements** – the concourse in front of the station is predominantly hard surfaced and urban in character but has amphitheatre seating and good quality paving. There are some small street trees along Station Hill which add to the amenity of the public realm and there is a statue within the turning circle at the front of the station.

3.47 The area is generally robust, with areas that have been recently redeveloped, are in the process of being redeveloped or are vacant awaiting redevelopment. The historic station building is a distinctive focal point and a positive townscape receptor.

3.48 The area currently has a Low townscape value.



Photo 20: Reading Station concourse/The Three Guineas pub (Grade II listed)



Photo 22: Entrance to Reading Station from Forbury Road



Photo 24: View west along Tudor Road



Photo 21: View across station concourse towards Thames Tower/Station Road



Photo 23: One Station Hill (under construction at time of capture)



Photo 25: View south along Caversham Road

Townscape Character Area 3: Reading Station East

3.49 This area extends east from Station Hill along the railway including development along Forbury Road.

3.50 The key characteristics of this character area are summarised below:

- **Historic evolution** – Forbury Road appears to have been laid out in the 19th century along the edge of the railway lines and station terminus. Historically the land to the north was occupied by sidings, warehouses and station buildings with development in the block to the south mainly becoming established during the second half of the 19th century. The public house at the junction is seen on mapping from the mid 19th century.
- **Land use and activity** – the area is predominantly occupied by office buildings with ancillary retail uses. Forbury Road is a busy route connecting to the station and Reading Bridge
- **Street and movement patterns** – Movement patterns are defined Forbury Road a busy dual carriageway which connects to Reading Bridge under the railway with a quiet single carriageway road to the station. Pedestrian movement is along the pavements with key desire lines to the Station, under the railway and to Forbury Gardens. Permeability is limited by the large blocks and the railway.
- **Urban grain, building/plot layout and relationships** – The area has a grain of large urban blocks with large building footprints along the railway. These are set back from the frontage, incorporating areas of amenity planting and some seating. To the south of Forbury Road are a series of varied mid sized blocks of different ages and styles that extend to the back of pavement.
- **Built form, scale and massing** – The buildings along the railway have a large, rectangular massing with some stepping in plan and in section to provide interest. Apex Plaza extends from the station to George Street

and is around 7 storeys in height. The buildings opposite are generally four to five storeys and tie into the street frontage. The buildings to the west of George Street have angled frontages and step up in height to 11 storeys.

- **Architectural style, materials and details** – There are high quality purpose built office buildings to the east of George Street with predominantly glazed frontages expressed structure and mix of terracotta, metal and stone cladding details. West of George Street building are either faced in metal cladding panels or have traditional brick construction/cladding.
- **Landscape elements** – There are street trees and formal amenity planting within the purpose built office building frontages. Seating has been integrated in to some of these areas.

3.51 Townscape character derives from large scale office buildings dating from the late 20th and first decades of the 21st century, with some occasional older buildings.

3.52 The area has a Low townscape value.



Photo 26: Two Forbury Place as seen from Forbury Road



Photo 27: View west across roundabout junction with Forbury Road and Vastern Road



Photo 28: View east along Forbury Road



Photo 29: View south from junction of Forbury Road and Blagrove Street



Photo 30: View along Forbury Road towards Apex Plaza (seen to left)



Photo 31: Amenity planting/pedestrianised space within Forbury Place

Townscape Character Area 4: King's Meadow

3.53 This is an area of predominantly open space along the River Thames extending westwards from King's Meadow to Caversham Bridge, including Christchurch Meadows and Hill's Meadow and development off King's Meadow Road.

3.54 The key characteristics of this character area are summarised below:

- **Historic evolution** – the area has historically remained open and used as meadows due to the proximity to the river. During the 19th century boat houses and a bathing place became established along the river together with a cricket ground.
- **Land use and activity** – predominantly open space used for formal and informal recreation including King's Meadow, Christchurch Meadow and Hill's Meadow although most of this area is used as a surface car park. There is also parking serving King's Meadow. The public open spaces are well used with play areas, skate park and paddling pool as well as the Thames Lido. Events are also staged within the area. There are water-based activities along the River Thames which includes a number of boat houses as well as boat repair service and moorings.
- **Street and movement patterns** – There are main routes through the area along the north and south banks of the River Thames with connections across the river at Caversham Lock, Reading Bridge, Christchurch Bridge and Caversham Bridge. There are footpath links to the wider area via View Island to Lower Caversham and across Christchurch Meadow to Caversham.
- **Urban grain, building/plot layout and relationships** – Buildings are sporadic and located on the islands within the river or along the river. The exception to this is along King's Meadow Road where there is a medium footprint office building and some finer grain townhouses.
- **Built form, scale and massing** – This is a predominantly undeveloped area with buildings comprising low rise and small scale buildings of one and two storeys associated with recreational and leisure facilities such as Thames Lido and boathouses. The townhouses are three storeys and the five storey office building (occupied by the Environment Agency).

- **Architectural style, materials and details** – The refurbished Thames Lido, buildings at Caversham Lock and house on King's Meadow Road are built in brick, have hipped or pitched clay tile roofs and early 20th century detailing. The Lido has a sympathetic contemporary extension. The Environment Agency offices and townhouses date from the late 20th century are faced in brick and have some consistency in their simple arched windows.
- **Landscape elements** – extensive areas of maintained grassed open space along the River Thames. There are trees within the open spaces and along the River in places. The River is the main feature of the landscape with visual interest created by the moored boats as well as the infrastructure of Caversham Lock, weir and Reading hydro.

3.55 The area provides a break from the surrounding urban areas and has recreational and amenity value in its open spaces and vegetation. There are also moorings and boathouses, weirs and locks and other riverside uses which add to the distinctive character of the area.

3.56 The area has a High townscape value.



Photo 32: View from Thames Path towards Christchurch Bridge and Christchurch Meadows



Photo 34: View north-east across sports pitches within Christchurch Meadows



Photo 36: River Thames as viewed from King's Meadow



Photo 33: View south towards Reading Town Centre from Christchurch Meadows



Photo 35: Caversham Lock as viewed from Thames Path



Photo 37: Buildings within Forbury Place and Reading Town Centre as viewed from King's Meadow

Visual baseline

Visual receptors

- 3.57

Visual receptors are people within the surrounding area whose views or visual amenity could be affected by development proposals. The extent to which people perceive changes to views or visual amenity as being detrimental is largely dependent on their expectation and activity. Visual receptors that are more susceptible to changes to views include:

1.

Users of public open spaces, whose focus is on amenity;

2.

Visitors to tourist attractions, and

3.

Users of public rights of way, whose focus is on amenity.
- 3.58

Other receptors who as a result of their context or activity tend to be less susceptible to visual change include:

1.

Motorists, their passengers and people using public transport whose views are transient and generally not focussed on visual amenity (unless using a tourist route), and

2.

People at work or engaged in other activities such as shopping or active recreation.
- 3.59

Desk study and fieldwork has been undertaken to establish the visual receptors within the wider area that are influenced by the proposed development.
- 3.60

Visual receptors relevant to the study include:

1.

People using the Thames Path;

2.

People on boats on the River Thames;

3.

People using open spaces in the surrounding area (Christchurch Meadows, Hills Meadow, King’s Meadow and Rivermead Park);

4.

People using the local footpath/ cycle network including Christchurch Bridge, and

5.

People on travelling along streets (pedestrians, cyclists and people in vehicles).
- 3.61

The visual assessment considers effects on views from publicly accessible locations and does not consider the visual effects of the proposed development on the outlook from residential property which is forms part of residential amenity and dealt with as a planning matter in the Planning Statement.

Key representative views

- 3.62

This analysis has considered a selection of publicly accessible views obtained from the surrounding area that are representative of the experience of different types of visual receptor. The views have been chosen to reflect the typical views over a range of distances and some of the main receptors of changes to views and visual amenity.
- 3.63

The selection of view locations has been discussed and agreed with RBC officers. The process of identifying the views has involved:

•

The preparation of Zone of Theoretical Visibility Plots;

•

A review of view locations contained within the RTBS (2008 as updated 2018), RSAF (December 2010) and ASVHI (January 2018);

•

A review of view locations included in Townscape and Visual Assessments accompanying other planning applications, and

•

A review of other locations requested by the Planning Officer.
- 3.64

It was agreed that the representative view locations in Table 3.1 would be assessed with reference to Type 4 Accurate Visual Representations (AVRs). These are the most robust and accurate form of visualisation. The level of detail of the visualisation is also provided.

Table 3.1: Representative view locations

Ref.	Location	Receptors	Photography	AVR type and level
1	Vastern Road (east)	Pedestrians, motorists and cyclists travelling along Vastern Road	24mm (for details see Appendix 3)	Type 4, Level 3 (full render)
2	Vastern Road (west)	Pedestrians, motorists and cyclists travelling along Vastern Road	24mm	Type 4, Level 1 (wireline)
3	Thames Path (west)	Walkers and cyclists travelling along the Thames Path	24mm	Type 4, Level 3 (full render)
4	Reading Bridge	Pedestrians, motorists and cyclists travelling along Reading Bridge	24mm	Type 4, Level 3 (full render) (summer and winter view)
5	Christchurch Bridge	Pedestrians and cyclists travelling along Christchurch Bridge	24mm	Type 4, Level 3 (full render)
6	Caversham Bridge	Pedestrians, motorists and cyclists travelling along Caversham Bridge	24mm	Type 4, Level 1 (wireline)
7	Station Hill	Pedestrians and those on public transport travelling at Station Hill	24mm	Type 4, Level 1 (wireline)
8	Thames Path (Caversham Lock)	Pedestrians and cyclists travelling along the Thames Path	24mm	Type 4, Level 1 (wireline)
9	Balmore Walk	Pedestrians and users of Balmore Walk	24mm	Type 4, Level 1 (wireline)
10	Vastern Road/Trooper Potts Way	Pedestrians, motorists and cyclists travelling along Vastern Road	24mm	Type 4, Level 3 (full render)
11	Christchurch Meadows/ footpath along Thames	Pedestrians, cyclists and users of Christchurch Meadows	24mm	Type 4, Level 3 (full render) (summer and winter view)
12	Christchurch Meadows	Pedestrians, cyclists and users of Christchurch Meadows	24mm	Type 4, Level 2 (chalk render) (summer and winter view)
13	Caversham War Memorial	Pedestrians, cycists and users of Christchurch Meadows	24mm	Type 4, Level 1 (wireline)
14	McIlroy Park	Pedestrians and users of McIlroy Park	24mm	Type 4, Level 1 (wireline)
15	Forbury Gardens	Pedestrians and users of Forbury Gardens	24mm	Type 4, Level 1 (wireline)

3.65 These are shown on Figure 8 (in yellow) and the photographs from these locations and associated details are provided in section 5.0.

3.66 Baseline photography was undertaken on 15 April 2024 in clear weather conditions with good visibility. Additional summer photographs were taken from the locations agreed in June 2024. Photographs have been taken using a Full Frame Sensor Camera using a fixed focal length lens mounted on a tripod and levelled. Details of the camera and lens and height above ground level are provided in Appendix 2: Visualisation Methodology.

3.67 Where there is screening provided by foliage in the visualisations based on photography from April, reference has been made, where available, to photography and site visit in December 2023.

3.68 In addition to View 11, the following views were requested by officers to show a series of views (equivalent to the kinetic experience of people moving along the path) from the north side of the River Thames:

- View 11 b: North bank of Thames north-east of site, and
- View 11 c: North bank of Thames.

3.69 It was agreed that these did not need to be type 4 AVRs and could be provided as non-verified visualisations. It should be noted that these images are illustrative and are based on a computer model, in some instances combined with a photographic imagery. The illustrative view locations are shown in white on Figure 8.

3.70 In addition to view 12, the following further locations from Christchurch Meadows have also been considered. Officers also agreed that these could be also provided as non-verified illustrative visualisations:

- View 12 b: Christchurch Meadow, footpath north of playground and
- View 12 c: Christchurch Meadow, north.

3.71 Effects on receptors at the following further view locations have also been assessed, at the request of officers through pre-application discussions, with reference to non-verified illustrative visualisations:

- View 16: Reading Railway Station north entrance;
- View 17: Southern Thames Path near Reading Bridge, and
- View 18: Hills Meadow.

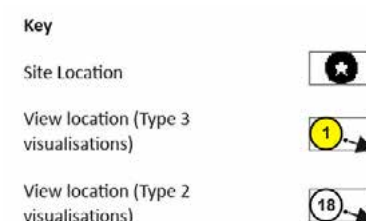


Figure 8: Key representative viewpoint location plan (Ordnance Survey, 2023)

4.0 The Proposed Development

4.1 The key features that are relevant to the townscape and visual appraisal are summarised below:

1. The existing building and the substation would be demolished and replaced with a building with an integrated substation. The development proposes a total of 254 build to rent apartments with ground level concierge and amenity facilities including gym for residents as well as a commercial/ retail use fronting the River. There is a podium garden at first floor level and a roof terrace on Block B. A number of trees on the site would be replaced with an increase in the number of trees provided overall.
2. The buildings are set back around 6m from the Vastern Road frontage with raised beds with amenity planting integrated either side of the steps up to the entrance. In addition, two street trees are proposed to be incorporated within the pavement. Along Norman Place, the building line is set back by 1.6 m to 12m enabling a footpath along the east side of Norman Place as well as planting including street trees. A wider link to the Thames Path is also proposed. Planting beds have been introduced along this frontage where space. Residential accommodation provides natural surveillance and active frontages in this area.
3. The buildings fronting Vastern Road step in height from 11 storeys at the junction with Norman Place to nine storeys closest to Clearwater Court with a five storey linking block. Above first floor level the buildings define a central podium that is open to the River side. Along Norman Place the building forms step down from 11 to eight to five storeys closest to the River Thames. On the Clearwater House side a five storey link block separates the frontage from the riverside blocks which step down from eight to five storeys fronting the River.
4. The main entrance to the development is located on the Norman Place frontage within Building B. The 11 storey element is clad in a fluted, soft green pre-cast concrete cladding which ties in with the base of the building. The panels have been designed to reflect the undulation of water and are graduated in scale with larger scallops higher up the building.

There is a projecting horizontal band every second floor and windows on the upper three floors are grouped together giving a vertical expression to the top. The remaining buildings facades are generally faced in a pale grey/ cream brick except for the lower link buildings which are in a darker brown brick with simple window details to provide contrast. Detailing of the light brick buildings includes a concrete banding and panels above the windows with an undulating detail. The top is expressed with a double band at the parapet.

5. An area of public open space is proposed on the Thames frontage. This incorporates a play trail, terraced seating managing the difference in levels as well as a focal piece of public art. This includes a more generous entrance to the Thames Path. Existing trees have been retained along the Thames Path. Defensible planting is provided on the boundary with Clearwater Court and providing separation between dwellings and Norman Place.

4.2 Further details on the proposed design are included in the Design and Access Statement and application drawings.



Site layout plan (Assael)



Sketches of Mews Street (top); Norman Place (bottom) (Assael)



Public realm



Frontage to Vastern Road

Cumulative schemes

3.72 The area around the station and along Caversham Road and Vastern Road has been a focus for regeneration with a number of projects that have been granted planning permission and remain extant. A number of these involve tall buildings which will change the local townscape and therefore an assessment of the additional cumulative townscape and visual effects arising from the proposal in conjunction with the following has been undertaken.

1. 55 Vastern Road (Old Power Station) - Demolition of existing structures and erection of a series of buildings ranging in height from 1 to 11 storeys for a mix of residential and retail uses integrating a new north-south pedestrian link, connecting Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road. (main application ref 200188) as amended by (ref 231673)
2. Vastern Court (also known as Reading Station Park) - land west of Trooper Potts Way – outline planning permission was recently granted on appeal. It would introduce buildings with a maximum height of 55.1m to 87.9m AOD on the Vastern Road frontage (four to 12 storeys on the illustrative masterplan) and stepping up to 18 storeys (112.9m AOD) adjacent to the station's northern entrance on Trooper Potts Way (application ref 200328 – granted via recovered appeal APP/E0345/W/21/328974)
3. Reading Metropolitan (80 Caversham Road) – outline planning permission for development stepping up to 24 storeys adjacent to the station - application ref 182252
4. Station Hill Masterplan Plots A, B, C and D (ref 192032)
5. Station Hill Masterplan Plot F (refs 201533/201537 as amended by 201536/201532).



55 Vastern Road (1) (Berkeley Homes)



Vastern Court (2) (Collado Collins Architects)

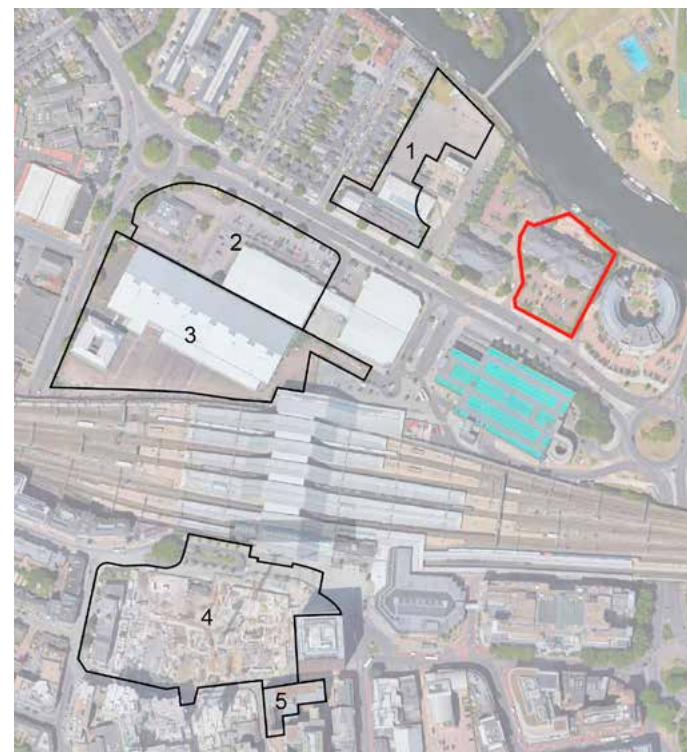


Figure 9: Cumulative schemes location plan



Reading Metropolitan (2) (Federated Hermes)



Station Hill Masterplan (4,5) (Federated Hermes)

5.0 Townscape and visual appraisal

Effect on townscape character

- 5.1 The townscape effects have been considered at both a site-wide and character area level.
- 5.2 An assessment of the changes to townscape character has been made having regard to the sensitivity of the townscape to change (a combination of its value and susceptibility), the extent to which the townscape would change and whether the proposed change would be beneficial, neutral or adverse overall in townscape terms.
- 5.3 A balanced view has been taken in cases where there are both positive and negative changes and a narrative discussion of positive and negative factors is provided. Consideration has been given as to whether the overall effects on receptors are adverse, neutral or beneficial. A neutral effect is one where, on balance, the changes are entirely consistent with the existing townscape or would be neither positive nor harmful overall.
- 5.4 Further details of the methodology are provided in Appendix 1.

Effect on the townscape character of the site

- 5.5 The site is a vacant office building, built in the late 20th century that has extensive frontage parking and some amenity planting. The building is a neutral element within the townscape but the frontage parking and the substation are functional and elements that detract from the experience and appearance of the immediate public realm. The site has a low townscape value. There are no historic structures on or immediately adjacent to the Site and the buildings and the external spaces are typical of the age and function of the building and have no particular townscape value. The setting of the site along the River Thames is a positive feature and the River itself a valued feature of the wider landscape. Due to the proximity of the site to the River Thames it has been assessed as having Medium susceptibility to change. The site has a Low to Medium sensitivity to change with the greatest sensitivity along the frontage to the Thames Path.
- 5.6 The proposed development would replace the existing office building with a residential-led development with some commercial or retail facilities at ground level (café). The building would

have a more extensive footprint and introduce a taller built form on the site with elements arranged in a broadly U shaped form stepping from five to 11 storeys and with a central podium garden. A new publicly accessible space would be provided along the river and the link to the River Thames via Norman Place would be widened and altered.

- 5.7 There would be a High degree of change to the townscape character of the site.
- 5.8 The building would extend closer to the Vastern Road frontage, providing improved urban definition, an active frontage and natural surveillance. The front entrance would be clearly legible with steps and signage to highlight. Amenity planting and street trees would extend tree planting along Vastern Road and provide visual amenity at street level. The removal of the substation and its re-provision within the building would enable marked enhancement of the route to the river through improved visual connection, natural surveillance and active frontages provided by the residential uses and a clear definition of public and private space through the introduction of defensible planting at the threshold to ground level homes. New public open space would be provided along the river, improving the accessibility, functionality and quality of the space along the river by incorporating high quality planting, retaining trees where possible and introducing seating, public art and new uses opening out onto the River. A further connection would be introduced along the eastern boundary in the form of a mews street improving the permeability through the site to the River. This route would be overlooked by flats and have an active frontage with insets within the frontage with planting and paths creating defensible space and a threshold to the units.
- 5.9 The building forms step down in height towards the River, with the tallest element marking the junction of Norman Place and Vastern Road. The arrangement of the buildings respond to the routes to the river and frontage with a more broken down edge to the River, creating a legible form that responds to its context. The steps in the massing, both in section and in plan, successfully break up built form into a series of buildings. This is reinforced by the variation in the architectural design and materials applied to the different

elements. The detailing has drawn reference from River introducing curved and undulating elements that add interest and would create a highly distinctive building. The use of pale and brown brick reflects the general palette of materials in the immediate surroundings. The contrast and interest created by the use of green coloured pre-cast concrete, the circular columns and glazing clearly define the base taking its cues from the wider landscape. The use of green concrete with banding and undulating panels creates a highly distinctive urban marker at the junction. The arrangement of the fenestration and the detailing of the facades, including the grouping of windows, provides vertical emphasis, breaks down the elevations and reduces the apparent scale. The tops of the buildings are subtle, appropriate to the scale of the development, with banding defining the parapet. The architectural design and design of the public realm is considered to be of high quality.

- 5.10 Overall there would be a **Major Beneficial** effect on the townscape character of the site itself.

Effect on Townscape Character Area 1: Vastern Road

- 5.11 As set out in Section 3, the Vastern Road TCA has a Low townscape value. There are no designated heritage assets within the area and few elements of historic townscape interest within the TCA. The built form of the area generally comprises buildings of the late 20th or early 21st century that are typical of their age and type and of no particular architectural interest. The area is robust and has Low susceptibility to changes to the townscape associated with more intensive redevelopment for residential uses. The sensitivity of the TCA to change is also Low.
- 5.12 The proposed development would replace an existing four storey office building with its extensive frontage car park with a building comprising linear wings that step up from five to 11 storeys fronting Norman Place and five to nine storeys adjacent to a new mews street along the boundary with Clearwater Court. They are linked by a single storey podium garden at first floor level and a five storey building on Vastern Road. The proposed development would be seen within the eastern part of the TCA including from Trooper Potts Way and Norman Place. There would be limited potential for views from the western end of Vastern Road or Caversham Road.

- 5.13 The proposal would result in a High degree of change to the TCA.
- 5.14 The formation of the mews street along the eastern boundary of the site, connecting to the Thames Path from Vastern Road, would create a smaller urban block that would be characteristic of the scale and form of the existing urban block structure along the River. Together with the widening and creating a more attractive route to the River via Norman Place, the new mews would improve pedestrian permeability across the site and to the River.
- 5.15 The built form has been designed with a perimeter arrangement that has building frontages addressing the adjacent streets and routes. The building line is set back from the carriageway of Vastern Road a comparable distance to some other buildings within the TCA. Although closer than the existing building, this position is considered a more positive and appropriate relationship to the Vastern Road. There is a varied set back to Norman Place due to its curved alignment with improvement in the definition of the eastern edge through the formation of a new frontage that addresses it and improved visibility towards the river.
- 5.16 The existing connection to the Thames Path via Norman Place would be enhanced by the removal of the substation and provision of a wider public realm with increased planting. The frontage to Norman Place would be better defined by the new building. The new uses and interface created by the residential uses, windows and entrances would generate activity and provide natural surveillance. The quality of the public realm of Norman Place and the perception of safety would be improved.
- 5.17 The river frontage would be enhanced by the replacement of a tired private space with a high quality public open space, with new planting, seating and public art. The building frontage and café use would generate activity within the space. The set back along the Thames Path ties in with a wider pattern of small open areas, mostly private spaces, that are seen along the River frontage between Reading and Caversham bridges as identified within the DAS.
- 5.18 The built form has been designed to step down in height to five storeys to respond to the River and to

- relate comfortably to Thames Court and Clearwater Court to either side. The tallest building elements are positioned on the Vastern Road frontage where their height can be comfortably assimilated within the broad street with an appropriate sense of enclosure for a central urban street. The 11 storey height ties in with the established height of Reading Bridge House and the shoulder of Thames Quarter at the eastern end of Vastern Road and is appropriate within this TCA. The stepping in height from north to south also reflects the general transition in scale towards the north and around the station.
- 5.19 The stepping in height and plan would break up the massing of the perimeter blocks to give the impression of a series of linked buildings rather than a single mass. The detailed design and use of materials further reinforce this. The materials palette of cream and brown, ties in well with materials colour tones within the TCA and immediate context at the eastern end of Vastern Road. The undulating and fluted detailing of the cladding and circular columns would provide visually interesting textures and patterns that makes subtle reference to the riverside setting and enlivens the frontage. The natural setting of the river and meadows is referenced by the use of green coloured concrete cladding at ground level and in the 11 storey element.
- 5.20 Due to its height, design and materials, the 11 storey building would be a distinctive element within the local streetscape that would mark the junction of Vastern Road with Norman Place. This would be seen from the northern entrance to the station and assist with wayfinding. Due to the varied and robust nature of the townscape it is considered that the variation in materials and details would be a positive addition to townscape that would provide architectural interest that would together with the proposed external landscaping and planting would reinforce and improve the existing sense of place.
- 5.21 The proposed street trees on the frontage would extend existing tree planting to the east along the Vastern Road frontage, reinforcing this characteristic feature. The retention of trees along

the Thames Path and adjacent to Clearwater Court and the provision of replacement and additional tree planting would further enhance the interface of the TCA with the River.

5.22 Overall there would be a **Moderate Beneficial** effect on the Vastern Road TCA.

Effect on surrounding townscape character areas

5.23 The effects of the proposed development on wider townscape character is considered below with reference to the townscape character areas defined through the analysis of existing conditions.

Effect on Townscape Character Area 2: Station Hill

- 5.24 This area has a Low townscape value, as set out in Section 3. Positive elements within the TCA include the historic station building, statue at the western end of Forbury Road and areas of new public realm around the station. Otherwise the townscape is robust including a variety of buildings from the 20th century and some sites under construction as part of the Station Hill Masterplan. The relatively recent northern entrance to the station and blank retaining wall to the railway forms the interface with TCA1. TCA2 has low susceptibility to change associated with a residential led development up to 11 storeys in height and has Low sensitivity to change.
- 5.25 There would be no direct effects on this area. The effects on TCA2 would be limited to localised views of the 11 storey building in the wider context, mainly from its southern edge (View 16) and from adjacent to the north-east corner of Thames Tower (View 7). There would be a Very Low change TCA2.
- 5.26 The greater height and rectangular form of the scheme would be glimpsed from limited locations. The rectangular form and vertical proportions would be in keeping with the immediate context and these would be no adverse effects on positive townscape receptors. The distinctive materials would contribute to legibility.
- 5.27 There would be a **Negligible** effect on the townscape of TCA2.

Effect on Townscape Character Area 3: Reading Station East

- 5.28 As set out in Section 3, TCA3 has a Low townscape value. It is a robust townscape of mainly modern office buildings with a limited number of late 19th century remnants on the south side of Forbury Road. It has low susceptibility to change arising from the development of an up to 11 storey residential led scheme to the north of the railway. TCA3 has Low sensitivity to change.
- 5.29 There would be no direct effects on this character area. The effects on TCA3 would be limited and localised views of the 11 storey building in the wider context from the junction of Forbury Road and Vastern Road. Views from other parts of the area are screened by the buildings along the railway.
- 5.30 The change to TCA3 would be Very Low.
- 5.31 From roundabout there would be views of the top of the development beyond the railway. It would be seen in the context of a number of buildings of similar scale and rectangular form. It would be a characteristic and acceptable addition to the wider townscape context that would result in a **Negligible** effect on TCA3.

Effect on Townscape Character Area 4: King’s Meadow

- 5.32 The landscape-dominated TCA4 King’s Meadow includes the River Thames, islands and bridges and the areas of open space of Christchurch Meadow, King’s Meadow and Hills Meadow. As set out in Section 3, it is an area of High townscape value. TCA has a generally verdant and open character with extensive and varied recreational use. The urban interface and varied building scale, form and heights to the south of the river (within TCA1) form part of the context including existing buildings of similar height and overall mass. The susceptibility of the area to change associated with the replacement of the existing building on the site with taller built form is Medium. The sensitivity of TCA4 to change is Medium.
- 5.33 The proposed development would replace the existing building with a taller built form that steps down to five storeys on the River frontage. A new

- area of public open space would be provided in place of the existing private amenity space.
- 5.34 There would be no direct effects on TCA4 with changes resulting from views of the altered urban context. These would be most clearly seen from Christchurch Meadows east of Fry Island (views 11 and 12) with less visibility from west of Fry Island (View 13), Hills Meadow (View 18) and Kingsmeadow and around Caversham Lock (View 8). There would be a Low change to the character of the TCA.
- 5.35 The proposed development would be of comparable height to other development seen across the River. It would be seen in the context of a variety of 20th and 21st century buildings along the River, railway and within Reading town centre including some of rectangular and stepping forms and large mass. The development would step down in height to five storeys closest to the riverside. Its scale, massing and use of pale brickwork would tie in well with the different materials of adjacent buildings. The detailed design has drawn reference from the river with undulating and fluted details, curved glazing, circular columns and a green-coloured base to the building and will provide visual interest in close views.
- 5.36 The proposal would enhance the interface with the Thames Path through the introduction of public open space addressed by ground level commercial uses that would activate the river frontage and residential uses above that would generate activity and provide natural surveillance. Additional tree planting and seating would be introduced together with public art as well as improved linkages to Vastern Road that would enhance permeability.
- 5.37 Overall and on balance, there would be a **Minor Beneficial** effect on TCA4.

Cumulative effects

- 5.38 The potential for cumulative townscape effects has also been considered. Within TCA1 Vastern Road, planning permission has been granted for the redevelopment of the vacant site at 55 Vastern Road with buildings up to 11 storeys and a connection to Christchurch Bridge. Planning permission has also been granted for redevelopment of the retail warehouse development to the south of Vastern

- Road (Vastern Court and Reading Metropolitan). Together these developments will introduce a taller, more intensively developed urban character along Vastern Road and provide greater permeability within an area that is promoted for regeneration and redevelopment in planning policy. The proposed development would be compatible with this emerging townscape character and would further reinforce permeability and legibility. It would fit in with the general townscape pattern of increasing height away from the River and would not undermine the emerging cluster around the station.
- 5.39 The proposed development would not give rise to any additional townscape effects in combination with development already approved in TCA2 or TCA3 due to its limited intervisibility from these areas.
- 5.40 In relation to TCA4, the cumulative schemes will introduce a series of tall building forms that will form a distinctive cluster around the station and will be seen across much of the character area together with new development at 55 Vastern Road, to the north Christchurch Bridge. In the context of the marked changed to the character of the wider urban context seen from TCA4, the additional effect of proposed development would be very limited and would be compatible with both the existing and emerging townscape.

Summary of townscape effects

- 5.41 The proposed development would transform the character of the site resulting in a series of benefits to the townscape in aesthetic, functional and perceptual terms that would result in a Major Beneficial effect due to improved permeability, introduction of new planting and public realm, improved ground level interface with the street including active frontages and natural surveillance.

As set out in Table 1, there would also be positive (Moderate Beneficial) effects on the townscape of TCA1: Vastern Road and Negligible effects on the surrounding TCAs to the south. There would be a Minor Beneficial effect on TCA4: King’s Meadow to the north where there would be improvements to the River frontage as a result of the new public realm and uses. The proposal is of high quality and has responded sensitively to its location on the riverside and is compatible with existing buildings within the surrounding urban context.

Visual effects

- 5.42 The visual appraisal has been undertaken with reference to 18 representative views. It gives an overview of the likely range of visual effects and receptors affected.
- 5.43 The visual effects have been assessed by considering and combining
- 1. The capacity of the receptors (or people) to accept changes to views dependant on their activity and perception and the values attributed to that view (the nature of the visual receptor), and
 - 2. The predicted degree (or magnitude) of change to the view (its scale, extent and permanence) – i.e. the nature of the change.
- 5.44 The effect has been assessed as being on a scale of Nil, Negligible, Minor, Moderate and Major having regard to the definitions in Table 7 in Appendix 1. Consideration has been given to whether the effect overall would be beneficial, neutral or adverse having regard to the visual characteristics of the townscape and the change arising from the application proposals. Where there are both positive and negative aspects of change, a judgement is made of the overall balance of effects and a narrative given to explain the rationale for the judgement.
- 5.45 The nature of the change has been assessed as being beneficial, neutral or adverse having regard to the visual characteristics of the townscape and the change arising from the application proposals.
- 5.46 The appraisal of visual effects is set out on the following pages. A narrative assessment of the kinetic analysis effects on people using the footpath the north side of the River Thames and within Christchurch Meadows has also been undertaken in relation to views 11 and 12 respectively.



Table 5.1: Townscape Effects on Site and Townscape Character Areas

Aerial view looking south towards the Site (Assael)

Site/Character Area	Value	Susceptibility to Change	Overall Sensitivity	Degree of Change	Effect on Townscape character
Site	Low	Low to Medium	Low to Medium	High	Major Beneficial
TCA1: Vastern Road	Low	Low	Low	High	Moderate Beneficial
TCA2: Station Hill	Low	Low	Low	Very Low	Negligible
TCA3: Reading Station East	Low	Low	Low	Very Low	Negligible
TCA4: King’s Meadow	High	Medium	Medium	Very Low	Minor Beneficial

View 1: Vastern Road (east)

Role of site in view / baseline description

Visibility of site

The frontage of the existing building is seen beyond frontage car parking and amenity planting.

Key elements in view

The dual-carriageway and broad pavements of Vastern Road are prominent foreground elements. Clearwater Court defines the street frontage at the junction and provides interest with its curved form. Sovereign House and existing development on the frontage to the 55 Vastern Road site also provide some enclosure to the frontage but are lower in scale, whereas the building on the site is set back, drawing attention to the frontage landscaped parking area.

Sensitivity

Receptors

Pedestrians, motorists and cyclists travelling along Vastern Road.

Value of view

Low – This is a general townscape view that is dominated by the road. It comprises modern office buildings of varying appearance and limited scenic or amenity value.

Susceptibility

Motorists and cyclists along Vastern Road are transient receptors and likely to be focussed on their journey. They are not focussed on or expecting high levels of visual amenity. Their susceptibility to change is Low.

Pedestrians have some awareness of visual amenity but would be focussed on their journey and not expecting high levels of amenity in the context of Vastern Road and the busy roundabout. Their susceptibility to visual change is Low.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of all visual receptors to change is Low.

Nature of change

The proposed development would replace the existing building in the view and extend closer to the frontage of Vastern Road with views of its southern and part of its eastern elevations. It would screen the flank of Sovereign House. The tallest element would be 11 storeys at the junction of Norman Place stepping down to eight storeys adjacent to Clearwater House, with five storey linking elements between the blocks.

The degree of change within the view would be High.

Visual effect

The new buildings would provide improved visual definition of the Vastern Road frontage, replacing the existing car park with an active frontage. Planting would be provided at ground level to maintain a green corridor along Vastern Road including two new semi-mature street trees within the pavement.

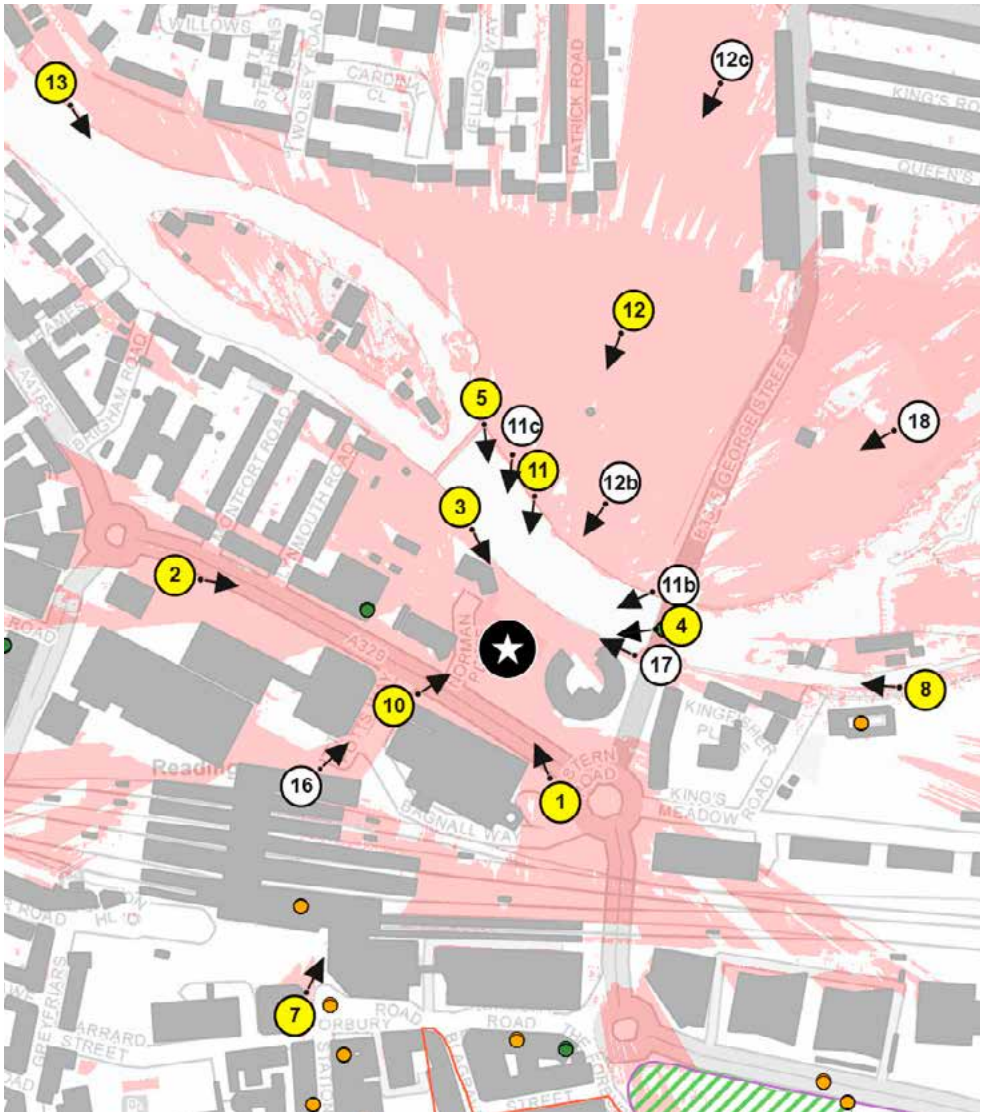
The heights step down and would relate comfortably to Clearwater House, maintaining the visual prominence of its unusual, curved form expressed at roof level. The stepping up to the junction with Norman Place provides vertical emphasis on the frontage that correlates with the expressed vertical form and horizontal roof level emphasis of Clearwater House.

The light brick complements the materials of Clearwater Court and is appropriate for the context. The use of green concrete as a highlight would be distinctive. Together with the large glazed windows it clearly defines the base of the building. Its extension into the corner building would highlight this block and reinforce the legibility of Norman Place within the street. The darker brick of the link blocks would combine with the set back and step down to break up the massing of the building. The elevations are well composed with a balance of horizontal and vertical elements and detailed design features that express the hierarchy of the facades. The proposed development would introduce a well designed frontage of appropriate appearance for its context that would repair and enhance the street.

There would be a Moderate Beneficial visual effect on receptors in this location.

Cumulative Effect

There would be filtered views of 55 Vastern Road along the frontage beyond Sovereign House. The development would replace existing two storey buildings with taller built form (up to 11 storeys). The scale and form of 55 Vastern Road would complement that of existing development at the eastern end of Vastern Road as well as that proposed on the site.



Extract from Viewpoint Location Plan



Image details

Visualisation type	Type 4, AVR3
Camera/ Sensor/ Lens	Canon 5D MarkII (FFS)/24mm TS
Date and Time	24/04/14 11.01
Grid Co-ordinates	E 471712.1430 N 173922.6260
Direction of View	North-west
Camera height	38.1810m AOD
Enlargement	Approx 100% @A1

View 1: Existing



View 1: Proposed



View 1: Cumulative



View 2: Vastern Road (west)

Role of site in view / baseline description

Visibility of site

The existing building is screened only a small part of the amenity planting on the frontage is seen.

Key elements in view

The dual-carriageway and central reservation of Vastern Road are prominent foreground elements. Consistent terraced housing and vacant industrial building at 55 Vastern Road define the frontage to the north with surface parking to the south. Clearwater Court and Reading Bridge House are seen together with Thames Quarter terminating the view, with the top of the multi storey car park and office buildings along the railway beyond low rise retail warehouse development. Street trees tie the varied elements within the streetscape together.

Sensitivity

Receptors

Pedestrians travelling along the south side of Vastern Road. Motorists and cyclist would be travelling in the opposite direction.

Those travelling towards the site n the north side of the road would have views of the site screened by trees and buildings.

Value of view

Low – This is a general townscape view that is dominated by the road. It comprises a mix of terraced houses, retail warehousing and office buildings of varying appearance and architectural quality.

Susceptibility

Pedestrians have some awareness of visual amenity but would focussed on their journey and not expecting high levels of amenity in the context of Vastern Road. Their susceptibility to visual change is Low.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of all visual receptors to change is Low.

Nature of change

The top of the proposed development would be seen along the Vastern Road frontage. In the summer months there would be some screening of the western elevation by the street trees along Vastern Road. Two new street trees would be introduced.

The degree of change within the view would be Medium.

Visual effect

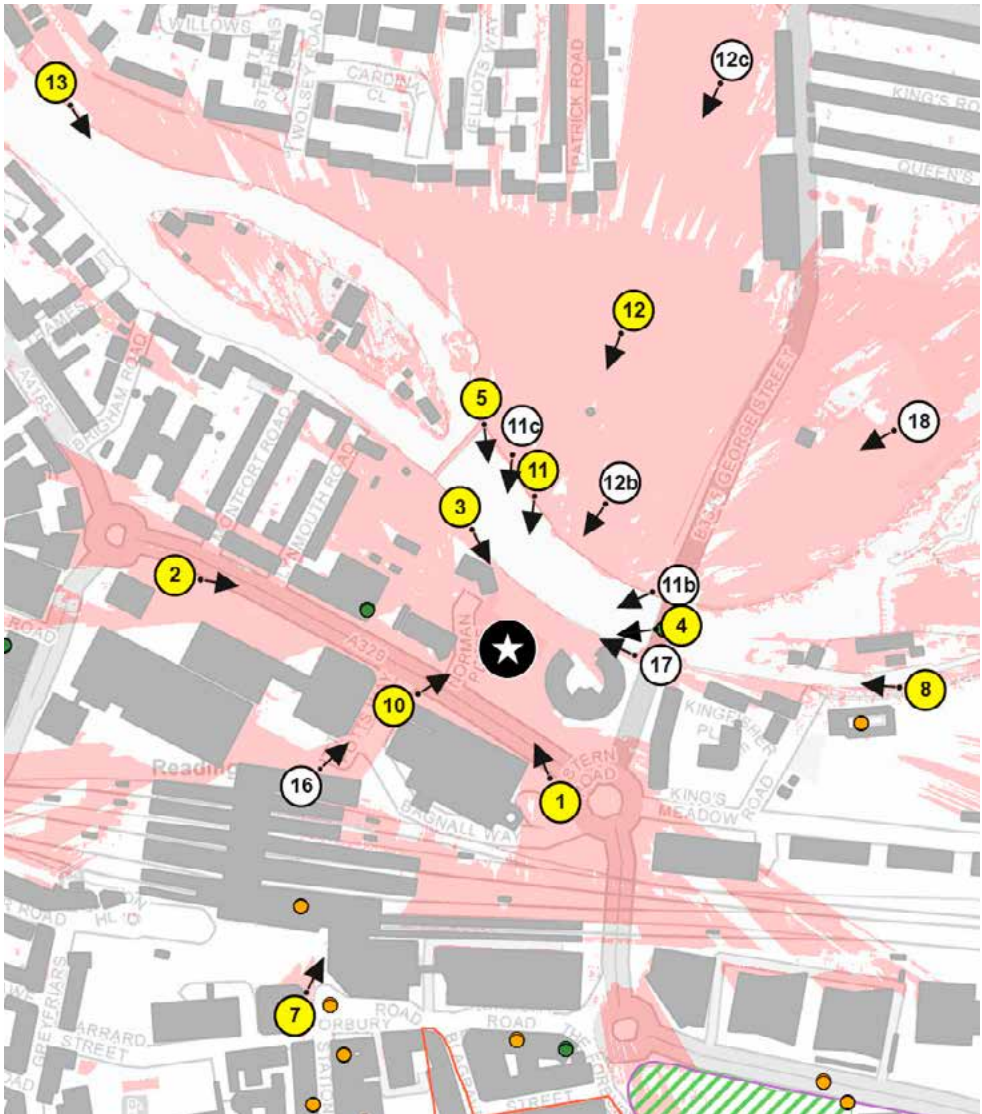
The proposal would provide better frontage definition of both Vastern Road and Norman Place. It would complement the form and scale of existing buildings seen at the eastern end of Vastern Road and on the skyline. The proposed street trees would extend the tree lined frontage. The facades would be broken down by the banding and fenestration and would be a well-designed addition to the frontage. The soft green colour of the cladding would be distinctive adding to local distinctiveness and providing a local marker of the route to the river via Norman Place, enhancing legibility.

There would be a **Minor Beneficial** visual effect.

Cumulative effect

There would be views of developments at 55 Vastern Road (yellow) and Vastern Court (red) from this location. These developments would introduce buildings of greater height and larger massing along the frontage to Vastern Road. Once built, 55 Vastern Road would screen part of the proposed development. The proposed development would be a relatively minor and characteristic addition to this emerging context.

The additional cumulative visual effect of the proposed development would be limited given the extent of change within the foreground of the view.



Extract from Viewpoint Location Plan

Image details	
Visualisation type	Type 4, AVR1
Camera/ Sensor/ Lens	Canon 5D MarkII (FFS)/24mm TS
Date and Time	24/04/14 12.58
Grid Co-ordinates	E471396.3780 N 174108.1470
Direction of View	East
Camera height	37.9620
Enlargement	Approx 100% @A1

View 2: Existing



View 2: Proposed



View 2: Cumulative



View 3: Thames Path (west)

Role of site in view / baseline description

Visibility of site

The northern elevation of the existing building and the raised area of private space is seen between Thames Court and Clearwater Court.

Key elements in view

The River Thames and Reading Bridge and the Thames Path leading to the ramped entrance to Christchurch Bridge, marked by the foreground railings. In the foreground, fronting the River are a varied array of buildings from the late 20th and 21st centuries including offices and apartments with considerable variation in form, height and materials. Beyond Reading Bridge, trees are seen on the skyline.

Sensitivity

Receptors

Walkers and cyclists travelling along the Thames Path.

Value of view

Medium – A general townscape view along the River. The River and Reading Bridge provide the main focus. The buildings along the frontage are of varied architectural style and generally limited quality. Clearwater Court has some interest in its distinctive glazed stair towers and unusual curved form.

Susceptibility

Pedestrians and cyclists using the Thames Path are focussed on visual amenity in this location. Their susceptibility to visual change is High.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of visual receptors to change is High.

Nature of change

The stepping form of the proposed development would replace the existing building in the view and be seen in place of the existing building and the top of the Thames Quarter tower. The five storey frontage would be seen stepping up to eight storeys with views of the public space on the frontage.

The degree of change within the view would be Medium.

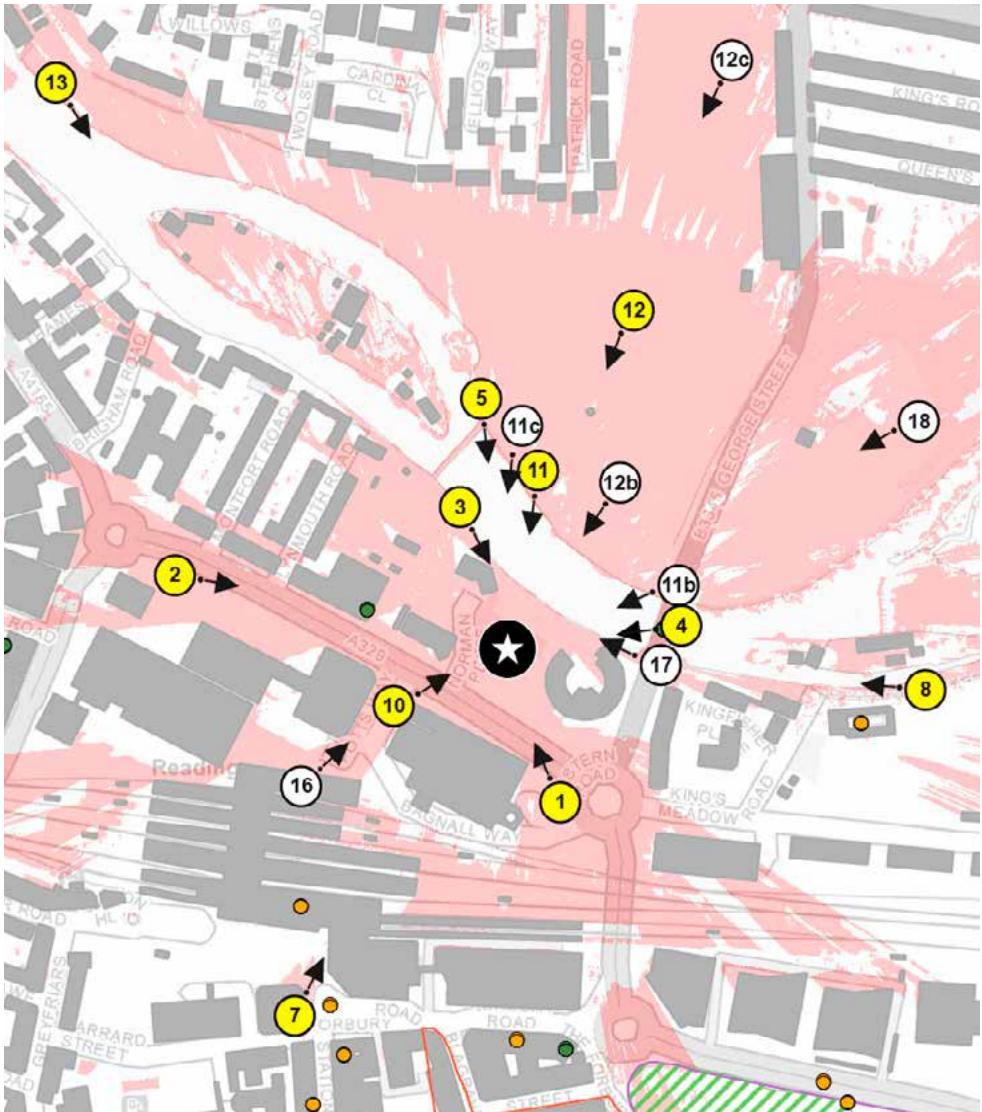
Visual effect

The height of the proposed development would tie in well with adjacent buildings along the river. Clearwater Court would remain a distinctive element. The form and articulation would fit in with the varied townscape of the river frontage and provide a well balanced and attractive frontage. The new area of public realm would provide a focal point including a new piece of public art, planting, steps and seating. The palette of pale bricks would complement the generally pale tones of the surrounding buildings. The green concrete finish to the columns and curved glazing would differentiate the base and tie into the riverside setting.

There would be a **Moderate to Major Beneficial** visual effect.

Cumulative effect

There would be no cumulative effects from this location.



Extract from Viewpoint Location Plan



Image details

Visualisation type	Type 4, AVR3
Camera/ Sensor/ Lens	Canon 5D MarkII (FFS)/24mm TS
Date and Time	24/04/14 09:13
Grid Co-ordinates	E 471637.9180 N 174141.3840
Direction of View	South-east
Camera height	37.6220
Enlargement	Approx 100% @A1

View 3: Existing



View 3: Proposed



View 4: Reading Bridge

Role of site in view / baseline description

Visibility of site

The northern elevation of the existing building and the raised area of private space is seen between Clearwater Court and Thames Court. The building is partly screened by trees along the Thames Path and within Clearwater Court.

Key elements in view

The River Thames and Reading Brige and the southern path leading to the ramped entrance to Christchurch Bridge and boats on the river. Fronting the Thames Path is Clearwater Court with its distinctive stair towers, the existing office building on the site and Thames Court. The vacant 55 Vastern Road site is partly screened by trees with filtered views through to terraced houses and apartments beyond. The view is of a developed, urban river frontage with trees and planting providing some softening.

Sensitivity

Receptors

Pedestrians, motorists and cyclists travelling across Reading Bridge.

Value of view

Medium – This is a pleasant view of the River from the locally listed Reading Bridge. A similar view is identified in the Reading Tall Building Study (RTBS) and Reading Station Area Framework (RSAF). It comprises modern office and residential buildings of varying appearance and limited varied quality along the southern bank.

Susceptibility

Pedestrians have some focus on visual amenity crossing the River. Their susceptibility to visual change is Medium.

Motorists and cyclists crossing Reading Bridge are on the far side of the bridge and are transient receptors and likely to be focussed on their journey. They are not focussed on or expecting high levels of visual amenity. Their susceptibility to change is Low.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of pedestrians to change is Medium.

The sensitivity of motorists and cyclists to change is limited by their focus on their journey and fleeting nature of the views along the river and is Low.

Nature of change

The proposed development would replace the existing building between Clearwater Court and Thames Court. Two linear blocks would be seen stepping down from eight to five storeys. Screening from trees within Clearwater Court and along the Thames Path would remain. The tallest element would be largely screened, with only a small part seen on the skyline.

The degree of change within the view would be Medium.

Visual effect

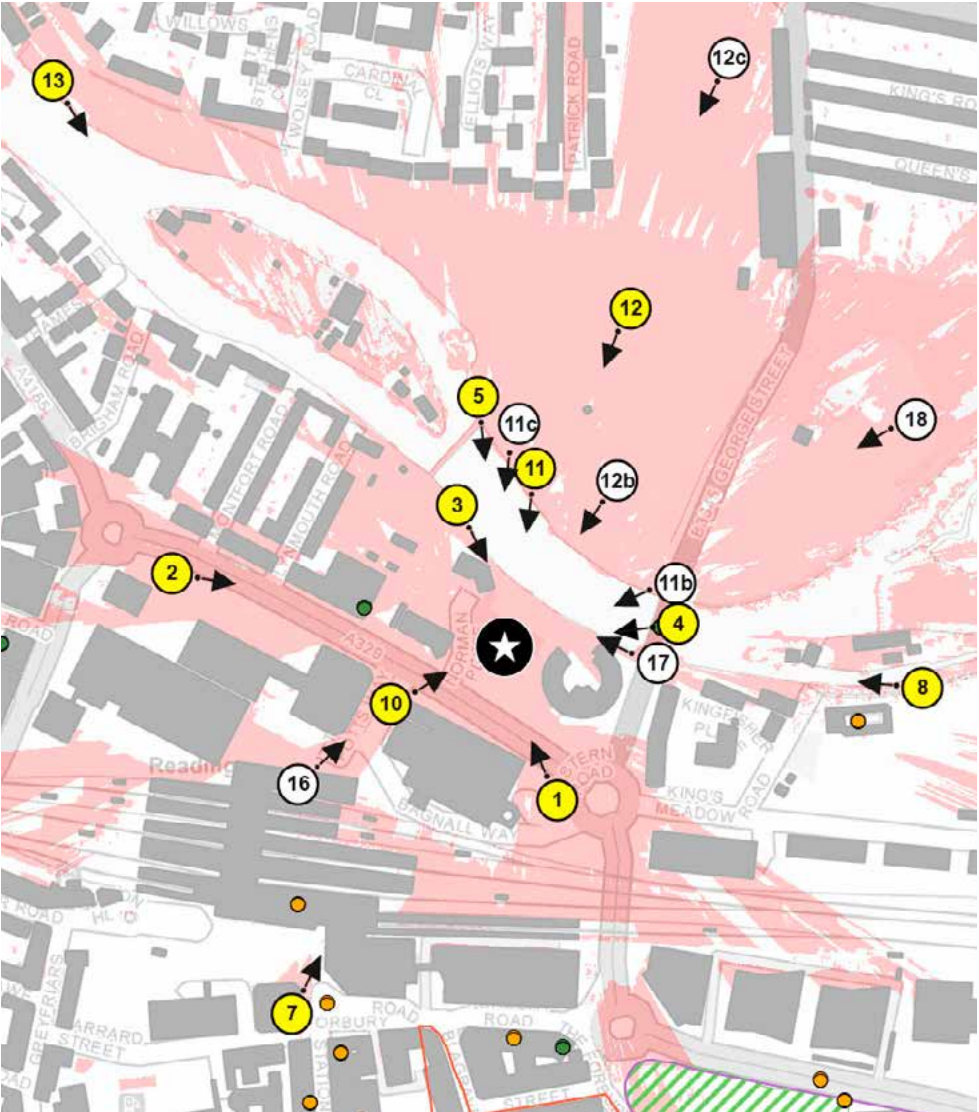
There would continue to be a developed frontage to the river. The proposed development, although taller than the existing building, would relate comfortably to scale of the adjacent buildings with the stepping forms tying into the varied context. The elevations would be attractively proportioned and articulated with expressed banding and vertially proportioned and aligned windows. The proposed pale materials palette ties in well with the adjacent buildings.

The area of public realm would introduce some additional planting, extending greenery visual interest and activity along the Thames Path.

There would be a **Minor to Moderate Beneficial** visual effect.

Cumulative effect

55 Vastern Road (yellow) would be seen beyond Thames House next to the ramped access to Christchurch Bridge. It would replace a currently vacant site with new development on the river frontage. A limited part of the top of a building on Vastern Court (red) would be seen as a further layer stepping up beyond the proposed development and Clearwater Court, marking the station beyond. The increase in height on the 55 Vastern Road would draw the eye. The proposed development would combine with this to provide a well integrated and positive change along the river frontage.



Extract from Viewpoint Location Plan

Image details	April 2024	June 2024
Visualisation type	Type 4, AVR3	
Camera/ Sensor/ Lens	Canon 5D MarkII (FFS)/24mm TS	
Date and Time	24/04/14 13:17	24/06/26 09:28
Grid Co-ordinates	E471793.9020 N 174057.7140	
Direction of View	South-west	
Camera height	43.0760	
Enlargement	Approx 100% @A1	

View 4: Existing (April '24)



View 4: Proposed (April '24)



View 4: Cumulative (April '24)



View 4: Existing (June '24)



View 4: Proposed (June '24)

