



Village Hotels, Reading

Landscape and Visual Technical Note

On behalf of **VUR Village Trading No.1 Ltd.**

Introduction

- 1.1 Stantec was commissioned by VUR Village Trading No1 Ltd. to undertake a landscape and visual appraisal to accompany a planning application for the proposed single storey, flat roof extension at the ground floor level ('the Proposed Development') to the front of the former Crowne Plaza, Reading ('the Site').
- 1.2 The objective of this document is to summarise the context of the Site, key landscape planning policies, guidance and character evidence, the features and character of the Site and its visual amenity, as well as general recommendations with regard to the Proposed Development. This document is not intended to comprise a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

Landscape & Visual Context

- 1.3 The Site is located within the northern extents of Reading, bound to the north by the River Thames and crossing point of Caversham Bridge. The Site is accessed from the south via Richfield Avenue, and located at the intersection of Richfield Avenue, the A4155, and Waterman Place. The Site is situated within a developed urban area with terraced residential development located to the south-east along the A4115, and large scale industrial / commercial development to the south-west on Richfield Avenue. Rivermead Park and its associated leisure complex adjoins the Site to the west, tracing the course of the River Thames. The Site is located within the Borough of Reading (please refer to **Appendix 1: Site Context Plan**).
- 1.4 The Site forms part of the former Crowne Plaza Hotel complex and comprises the south-eastern frontage of the built form and associated car parking. The built form of the hotel complex and the subsequent belt of mature trees forms a physical and visual buffer between the Site and surrounding context of Rivermead Park to the west. To the east, the Site is set back from Richfield Avenue by a band of ornamental planting and mature trees, which soften the transition from the streetscape. The wider context is characterised by the residential suburbs of Caversham to the north and the large-scale industrial setting to the south-west, which is bisected by railway infrastructure. To the west, beyond Rivermead Park, agricultural land and green space line the corridor of the River Thames.
- 1.5 St Peter's Conservation Area, situated approximately 200m north of the Site, is the only Conservation Area within the study area, with the Registered Park and Garden of Caversham Court situated within.
- 1.6 A limited network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) is present across the study area, the most notable of which being PRoW 01 and PRoW 24, which follow the banks of the River Thames in the south and north respectively. The Thames Path National Trail runs to the north of the Site, along the southern bank of the river.

Landscape Policy Context

- 1.7 The Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted 4th November 2019, sets out planning policies for development in Reading up to 2036, and is the main consideration in deciding planning applications. Policies of relevance to landscape and visual matters are set out below.
- 1.8 **Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm** outlines the requirement for all development to be of high-quality design that enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading within which it is located. Developments must respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, meeting the urban design objectives which include:

- *"Character – a place with its own identity and sense of place;*

- *Continuity and enclosure;*
- *Quality of public realm and provision of green infrastructure and landscaping;*
- *Diversity – meets a wide range of needs.”*

- 1.9 Policy CC8: Safeguarding Amenity** aims to ensure that new development does not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment for others, particularly where it would affect existing residential properties. This is to be considered in terms of privacy and overlooking, visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development, and harm to outlook.
- 1.10 Policy EN5: Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest** identifies a series of significant views across the area within which the Site sits. These include “*view upstream from Caversham Bridge*” and “*view southwards down St Annes Rd towards Downshire Square*”. As such, development should not harm, and where possible make a positive contribution to these views.
- 1.11 Policy EN13: Major Landscape Features and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty** sets out a series of Major Landscape Features (MLF) within which permission “*will not be granted for any development that would detract from the character or appearance*”. The Site is situated wholly within the Thames Valley MLF, and as such, development should seek to maintain and enhance the natural beauty and visual amenity of the feature.
- 1.12 Policy EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodlands** outlines trees, hedges and woodland as defining components of Reading’s landscape, forming important features contributing to the character of the Borough. New development “*shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site*” with trees and woodland to be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance.

Published Landscape Character Assessments

- 1.13** As part of Natural England’s responsibilities in delivering the Natural Environment White Paper, Biodiversity 2020 and the European Landscape Convention, Natural England has developed a series of National Character Area (NCA) profiles.
- 1.14** At a national level the Site is identified within **NCA 110: Chilterns**, where an attractive patchwork of mixed farmland and woodland form an extensive area of countryside. Half of the NCA is designated within National Landscapes, including the Chiltern Hills and North Wessex Downs. Outside of the National Landscapes there are major settlements with extensive urban fringes, including Reading, Luton and Hemel Hempstead. There are a number of recreational opportunities, including a comprehensive PRow network, open access commons, woods and downlands. As the Site is located within the urban area of Reading, the description is not considered to be of particular relevance to the landscape context of the Site and its surroundings.
- 1.15** At a county level, the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA, 2019) identifies the Site as being located within **Urban Area**, for which no further detail is provided.

Landscape & Visual Appraisal

- 1.16** The Site comprises the frontage of the former Crowne Plaza hotel complex and associated car parking, set back from Richfield Avenue by an intervening row of street trees and ornamental planting. A mature treeline aligning the northern ownership boundary serves to filter views into the Site alongside the existing built form, although near distance views are afforded from Richfield Avenue immediately to the south. The Site sits broadly flat at 40m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), sitting above the banks of the Thames, with brick retaining structures adjacent to the Thames Path National Trail in the north providing access from the waterfront to street level within the immediate context. The existing built form is characterised by its red brick, pitched roof structure, and generous awnings.
- 1.17** As set out within **Appendix 2: Site Context Photographs**, the Site has a localised visual envelope within the surrounding landscape, with views of the façades of the existing built form limited to areas within its locality. Near distance open views are available from Richfield Avenue immediately to the south, while views from the Thames Path to the north are limited to oblique glimpses. Where visible, the existing built form of the Site is not uncharacteristic within its surrounding context. Longer distance views are largely curtailed by intervening built form, and the undulating topography of the surrounding context does not afford elevated views toward the Site.
- 1.18** Overall, the Site is predominantly characterised by built form, with some planting including mature trees. The existing boundary vegetation provides containment of the Site, and as such, the majority of built form is not readily perceptible from the green space of Rivermead Park to the west. There is no intervisibility with the Site from the more sensitive locations of St Peter's Conservation Area, although partial views are afforded along PRoW 24 from the northern banks of the Thames, albeit viewed within the context of surrounding riverside development.

Proposed Development

- 1.19** The Proposed Development relates to a single storey, flat roof extension to the front of the existing hotel complex, to create extension to fitness suite Health & Wellness Club and replacement of canopy over to main entrance and associated landscaping and parking.

Impacts on the Thames Valley Major Landscape Feature

- 1.20** Policy EN13 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) sets out the requirement for development proposals to maintain and preserve the natural beauty and visual amenity of designated Major Landscape Features and National Landscapes. The policy identifies a total of 5 MLFs across the borough of Reading, designated at a local level and characterised as natural features that remain largely undeveloped and feature as a backdrop of particular importance. The Site is situated on the eastern edge of the Thames Valley MLF, adjacent to Reading City Centre (see **Appendix 3: Reading Borough Local Plan Proposals Map D** for extents). As such, the Proposed Development should seek to minimise visual impact on the MLF while preserving the natural beauty of the feature as a backdrop to the urban area of Caversham.
- 1.21** While Policy EN13 additionally refers to development within the setting of the Chiltern Hills and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes, the Site is not situated within their immediate context and observes no intervisibility.
- 1.22** The Proposed Development will occupy a very limited area of the Thames Valley MLF, and will be perceived within the context of the existing Crowne Plaza hotel complex situated within the Site. In this regard, the Proposed Development will be perceived as a very limited increase to the total built form within the Thames Valley MLF, at a scale that is characteristic of its setting. Whilst the change will be irreversible and long term, the containment afforded by the existing built form will result in a barely appreciable change to the openness of the wider Thames Valley MLF. Additionally, the location of the introduced built form will not serve to degrade the habitat function, biodiversity, or natural beauty of the Thames Valley MLF,

introducing urban features that are not uncharacteristic of the receiving setting or existing land uses.

- 1.23** With consideration to its visual amenity, visual receptors within the Thames Valley MLF include pedestrians, users of recreational spaces and users of the wider cycle network, Thames Path National Trail and PRow network where appreciation of views is contributory to the amenity experience of their journey. Due to the containment afforded by existing built form within the Site, intervisibility from within the wider MLF to the west is highly limited. Views are limited to receptors within the immediate locality of the Site, and where afforded are of an oblique and transient nature. On this basis, the Proposed Development will result in a barely perceptible change to existing views, with introduced built form observed within the context of the existing Crowne Plaza hotel complex.
- 1.24** Alternatively, receptors to the east with views inwards towards the Thames Valley MLF include primary and secondary road users, whose appreciation of their surroundings is incidental to their experience. The Proposed Development will be visible within the context of the existing Crowne Plaza hotel complex within the Site, which currently serves to curtail wider views into the Thames Valley MLF. The introduced features observe an appropriate scale that does not increase the overall quantum of built form within views, nor break the existing roofline. As such, there will be no reduction in intervisibility into the Thames Valley MLF, therefore preserving and maintaining its natural beauty and visual amenity.
- 1.25** It is acknowledged that the construction phase will also result in a number of alterations to the character and visual amenity of the Thames Valley MLF through the temporary addition of plant, machinery and boarding. In this regard, the effects that will occur during construction will typically be adverse in nature and fluctuating in intensity as operations progress. However, due to the likely exceptionally limited scale and duration of the construction programme these effects will only be experienced for a brief period.

Recommendations

- 1.26** In conclusion, the appraisal confirms that the existing built form within the Site is only visible from locations within its immediate vicinity. The addition of the Proposed Development will increase the footprint of the built form in this locality but will retain existing boundary features and be seen in the context of the existing built form. As such, the Proposed Development will not alter the context of nor interrupt any key views and will sit below the existing skyline.
- 1.27** The receptors of greatest sensitivity within the study area include the River Thames MLF, users of the Thames Path National Trail, and the setting of St Peter's Conservation Area. Due to the considered location, orientation and height of the proposed extension, effects for these receptors will be barely appreciable with limited or no intervisibility with the Proposed Development, which will in any case be characteristic of its receiving setting.
- 1.28** Roof profiling and form sympathetic to the existing development will help to ensure that the extension is in keeping with the character of built form within its surroundings, and that its visual envelope is kept to a minimum. Orienting the extension to the front of the hotel complex will additionally minimise impact on the visual receptors with a higher sensitivity to the north, whilst enhancing the character of views from Richfield Avenue.
- 1.29** Other receptors have the potential to be subject to adverse effects, such as the trees within the Site to the south, along the Site boundary. As such, existing trees will be retained and protected during construction in accordance with BS 5837:2012, mitigating any potential effects.

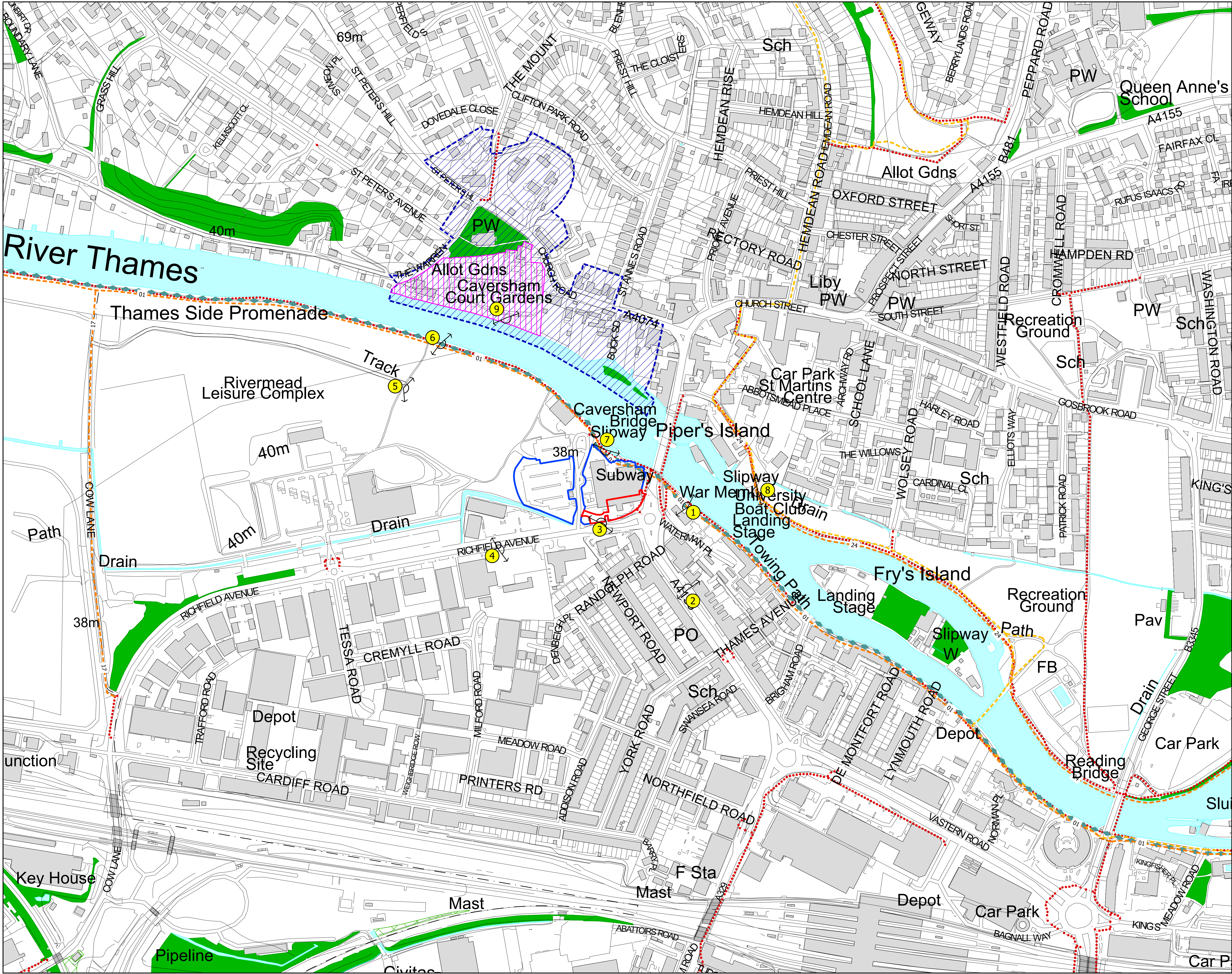
Summary

- 1.30** The set of receptors mentioned above is not exhaustive but covers some of the most sensitive receptors likely to be subject to the greatest magnitude of change. It is likely that the

landscape will have the capacity to accommodate the Proposed Development without unacceptable impacts, and with some appreciable benefits.

- 1.31** With particular consideration to the Thames Valley MLF, due to the considered location and strong containment of the Proposed Development, impacts will be very limited in nature and will not result in a degradation of character or visual amenity.

Appendix 1: Site Context Plan



The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured

Revision

Date

Drm

Ckd

LEGEND

Site Boundary

Ownership Boundary

Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^

Existing Water Courses and Features ^

Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^

Public Rights of Way *

Sustrans Cycle Route +

National Trails # / Long Distance Walks ^

Cycle Route ++

Listed Buildings ~

Conservation Area ~/##

Registered Parks and Gardens ~

Location of Photographic Viewpoints
(Site Context Photographs: 1-9)

Sources:
^ OS Mapping
^ Historic England National Monument Records GIS Data Set
+ Reading Borough Council Definitive Map
+ Sustrans National Cycle Network GIS Data
++ Department of Transport Cycle Network Model
Reading Borough Council Local Plan Proposals Map Adopted

Data collected for constraints and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation (insetted using the British National Grid) and may itself not be accurate. Stantec shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

FIGURE 1

Project
Village Hotels, Reading

Drawing Title
Site Context Plan

Date
16.04.2025

Scale
1:2,500 @A1
1:5,000 @A3

Drawn by
EJ

Check by
DP

Project No
333102256

Drawing No
LN-LP-01

Revision
-

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Appendix 2: Site Context Photographs

Approximate extent of the Site



Site Context Photograph 1: View north-west from The Thames Path National Trail

Approximate extent of the Site



Site Context Photograph 2: View north-west from A4115

Approximate extent of the Site



Site Context Photograph 3: View north-east from Richfield Avenue

Approximate extent of the Site



Site Context Photograph 4: View north-east from Richfield Avenue

Approximate extent of the Site



Site Context Photograph 5: View east from Rivermead Park

Approximate extent of the Site



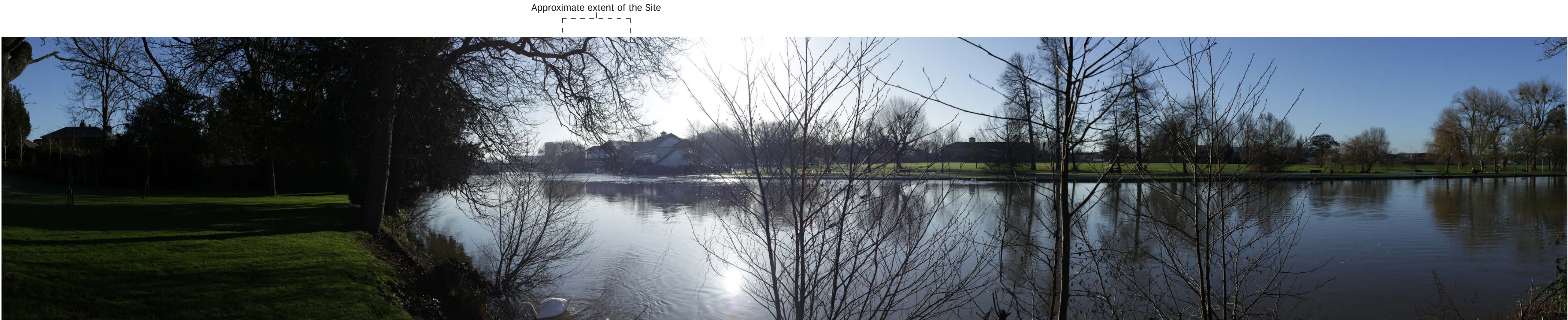
Site Context Photograph 6: View east from The Thames Path National Trail



Site Context Photograph 7: View south from The Thames Path National Trail

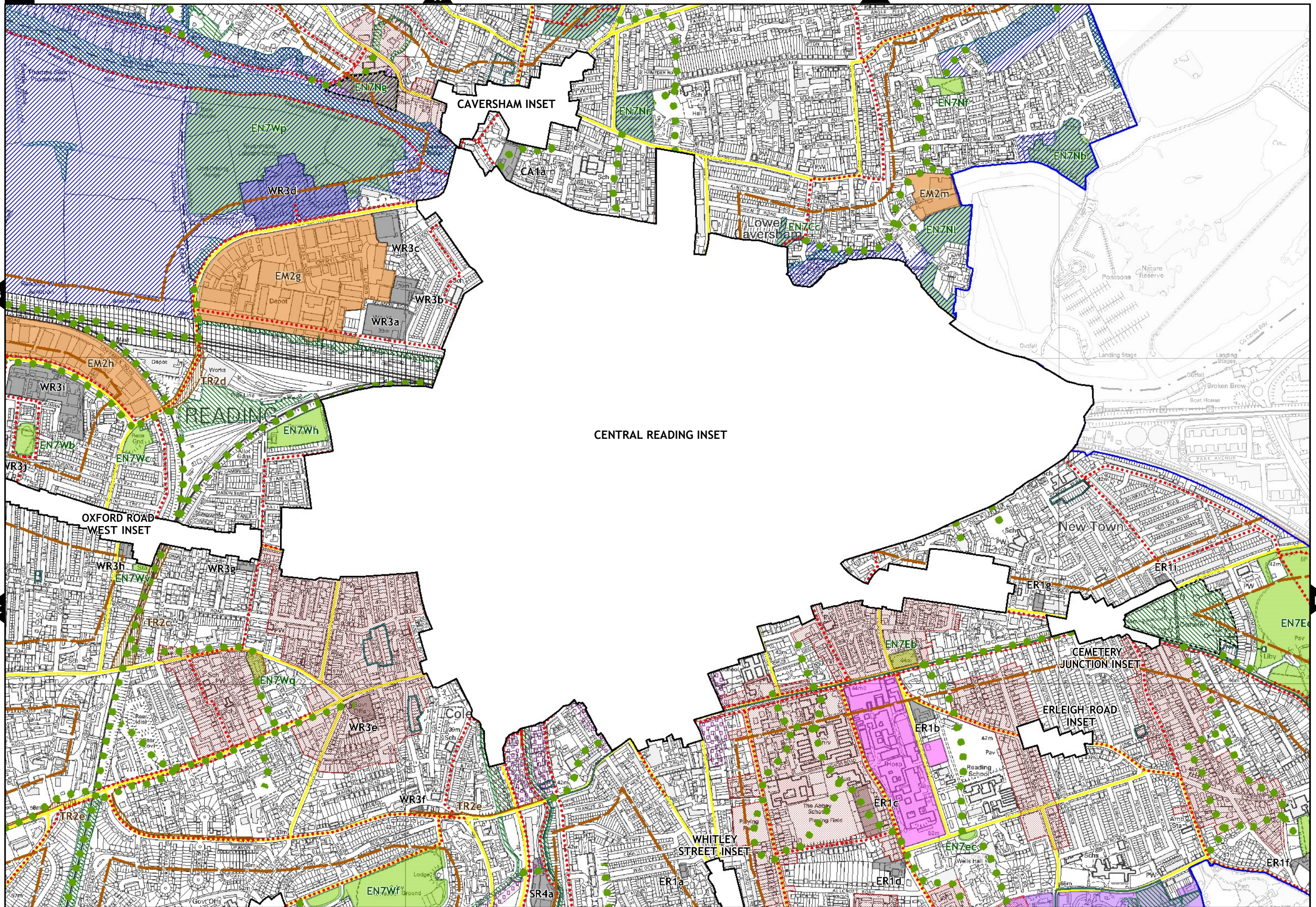


Site Context Photograph 8: View south-west from PRoW 24



Site Context Photograph 9: View south-east from St Peter's Conservation Area

Appendix 3: Reading Borough Local Plan Proposals Map D



PROPOSALS MAP KEY

	Reading Borough boundary		Boundary of identified centre ³ (policy RL1) (also shows boundaries of inset maps)
	Conservation area* (see policies EN1, EN3)		Key frontage in district and local centres (policy RL3)
	Boundary of Article 4 Direction* (see policies EN1, H7)		Major Hazard Sites* (see policy OU2)
	Scheduled Ancient Monument* (see policy EN1)		Primary Shopping Area (policy CR1)
	Historic Park or Garden* (see policy EN1)		Office Core (policy CR1)
	Area of archaeological potential (policy EN2)		Central Core (policy CR1)
	Local Green Space and Public Open Space (policy EN7)		Designated primary frontage in Central Reading (existing) (policy CR7)
	Area of identified biodiversity interest* ¹ (see policy EN12)		Designated primary frontage in Central Reading (proposed) (policy CR7)
	Existing or proposed Green Link (policy EN12)		Terraced housing in Central Reading (policy CR9)
	Major Landscape Feature (policy EN13)		Tall buildings cluster (policy CR10)
	Boundary of Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (see policy EN13)		Major Opportunity Area boundary (policies CR11-13 and SR1-3)
	Ancient Woodland* (see policy EN14)		Site identified for development or change (policies CR11-14, SR1-4, WR1-3, CA1, ER1)
	Air Quality Management Area* (see policy EN15)		Abbey Quarter (policy CR15)
	Core Employment Area (policy EM2)		North of Friar Street and East of Station Road (policy CR16)
	Major Transport Project ² (policy TR2)		Leisure and recreation use of the Kennetside areas (policy SR5)
	Area safeguarded for Crossrail* (see policy TR2)		Caversham Park (policy CA2)
	M4 Smart Motorway project* (see policy TR2)		Whiteknights Campus, University of Reading (policy ER2)
	Classified Highway Network* (see policy TR3)		Royal Berkshire Hospital (policy ER3)
	Cycle Routes* (see policy TR4)		

* Denotes a contextual designation, i.e. a designation that the Local Plan does not control.

¹ Includes Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, protected and priority species and their habitats, Priority and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, the River Thames and its tributaries (including the River Kennet and the Kennet & Avon Canal)

² Shows only those Major Transport Projects that are at a stage where they can be shown on the Proposals Map—please see policy TR2 for a full list

³ Where the boundary of Reading Centre is shown, this is the boundary within which the Central Reading policies (CR1-16) will apply