2.3 Scale, Character & Materials

2.3.1 Existing Context

The previous sections provide an explanation of the existing characteristics of Reading from a visual, townscape, heritage and cultural perspective but there are many other more pragmatic physical factors that may also be considered.

Network & hierarchy of surrounding streets

The main thoroughfare that bounds the site to the south are Forbury Road and Kenavon Drive. Forbury Road connects to the main road through Reading, which is the heavily used A329. This connects to the A33 and ultimately the M4 which provides connection east to Heathrow Airport and London and west towards Bristol. The roads around the site have a high traffic flow, with quieter residential roads in the wider site context.

Public transport

The site is in close proximity to the Reading Train Station and bus many bus stops, which sit to the east of the site. Routes connecting the site to these transport hubs exist along Forbury Road. These routes provide connections to destinations such as; London, Heathrow Airport and Oxford.

View along Forbury Road towards the east and the site

Photograph of Reading Train Station

Walking and cycling routes

The surrounding streetscapes generally provide access for pedestrians in the form of pavements either side of vehicular routes, these routes have fairly low pedestrian movement as the developments around the site are usually accessed by car or bus. There is a pedestrianised High Street to the south west of the site, in this region there is much higher pedestrian movement. The railway disrupts pedestrian access to the north of the site, and the closest access to the north is via the Napier Road underpass.

Reading has a high rate of cycle activity with parking facilities and lots of signposted cycle routes including the new King Alfred's Way cycling route.

King Alfred's Way cycling route Reading

Notable local buildings

Within a 500m radius of the site there are some significant local buildings, these include the grade I listed Reading Abbey Ruins and the grade II listed St James's church, Reading Gaol, Forbury Gardens, Reading Abbey Gate and Assize Courts. Also located to the south east of the site is the new Berkley Homes development; Huntley Wharf.

Photograph of the St James's Church

Characteristics of the local community

The local community includes a broad mix of cultures with 35% of its population belonging to a Black and Minority Ethnic community. Reading has a generally younger population, however the proportion of older people is predicted to increase. Housing prices in the area are higher than the national average. Reading is a centre for ICT companies and is one of the largest insurance and business service centres in the country. Unemployment rates are in line with the national average whilst annual gross salaries are higher than the national average. Despite this it is the 3rd most unequal town in terms of wealth.

Photograph of Readipop Festival

2.3 Scale, Character & Materials

Local shops and facilities

The main concentration of local shops is along the High Street area to the west of the site, this also features the Oracle; an indoor shopping centre. The existing large retail parks sit at the intersection of the main thoroughfares and offer bulky goods stores and drive through fast food. A large Tesco superstore is located to the north east of the site along Napier Road.

Architectural details and materials

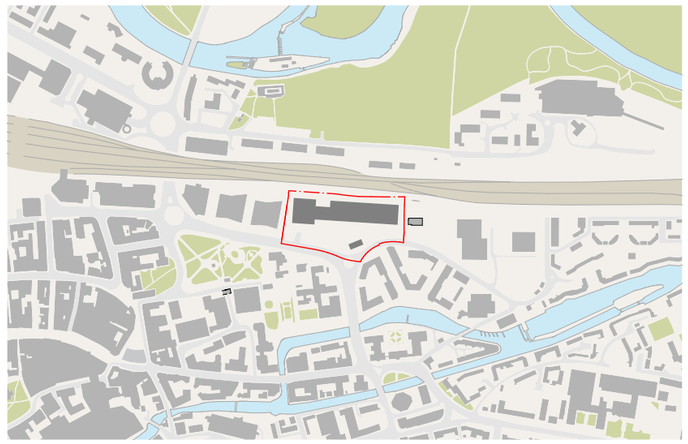
Reading town centre contains pockets of buildings with shared characteristics, mainly made from a range of brick. The brick used has a strong red colour which is dictated by the type of clay found in the area.

Grain of area - built form, street scene & roofscape

The KMV OPA site is occupied by large furniture retailers that do not contribute to the historic grain of the listed buildings to the south of the site. It is a key route to the train station but does little to contribute to the streetscape of this path. The roofscape of the existing retail park does not currently provide a strong and attractive visual character to the context of Reading.

Main high street stores along pedestrainised Broad Street

Reading Town Hall



Urban grain of existing Forbury Retail Park site

Landscape & natural features

The existing site provides little in terms of landscape and natural features since it is almost entirely occupied with retail buildings and hard landscaped car parking.

Boundary features

The existing site is bounded by Forbury Road and Kenavon Drive, as well as Huntley Wharf, Reading Prison and St James's Church to the south. The northern edge of the site runs parallel with the main train line. The western edges of the site adjoin the offices at Forbury Place and the eastern edge adjoins the western edge of the neighbouring retail park.

Very few natural features are incoporated in the available areas of public realm on the site

Existing boundary features

2.3 Scale, Character & Materials

2.3.1 Existing Context - Continued

The existing context is varied in terms of scale, character and materials because of the gradual historic evolution of the area and the mix of uses, which largely define the scale and character of the individual buildings and/or terraces.

Surrounding Office Buildings
These buildings typically occupy large sites and are built with large flexible floor plates and higher massing than the historic townscape elements. The offices at Forbury Place provide grade 'A' office space, of a similar standard to that in London, hoping to attract potential occupiers to this area.

Existing Retail Buildings
The surrounding retail developments are pre-fabricated low cost steel frame structures that maximise the floor plate, providing suitable opportunity for retail businesses. The retail buildings are contained within retail parks which are bounded by the railway and the main road, so they have their own car parks for ease of access. They currently are let to mainly furniture retailers.

Offices at Forbury Place
(1-3 Forbury Place, Reading, RG1 3)

Napier Court Offices
(Pennant, Hawker and Emerald House, Reading, RG1 8)

Forbury Retail Park
Forbury Retail Park, Kenavon Dr, Reading, RG1 3HS

Forbury Retail Park
Forbury Retail Park, Reading, RG1 3HS

Surrounding housing
While the predominating height of the housing stock in the wider context is that of two - three storey terraced, semi-detached and detached residential properties, there are notable exceptions to this closer to the town centre including a wide range of new build apartment buildings. These buildings seek to provide a higher density for the growing population of the town and the larger scale of these residential developments is a response to the limited opportunity to expand the town into the surrounding countryside (due to constraints such as highways). The lower terraced, semi-detached and detached residential properties tend to be brick built with pitched roofs and a vernacular style relating the era in which they were built; common style and materials. The larger apartment buildings have no distinguishable common style and materiality. Examples of these include the Berkley Huntley Wharf Scheme which faces the site and Luscinia View.

Cultural buildings
St James's Church and Reading Prison are of particular importance to the site. They sit at a prominent location on Forbury Road and are both listed.

Huntley Wharf
Huntley Wharf, Reading RG1 3DH

Luscinia View
Luscinia View, Reading, RG1 8

St James's Church
St James's Church, Reading, RG1 3FD

Reading Prison
Reading Prison, Reading, RG1 3HY

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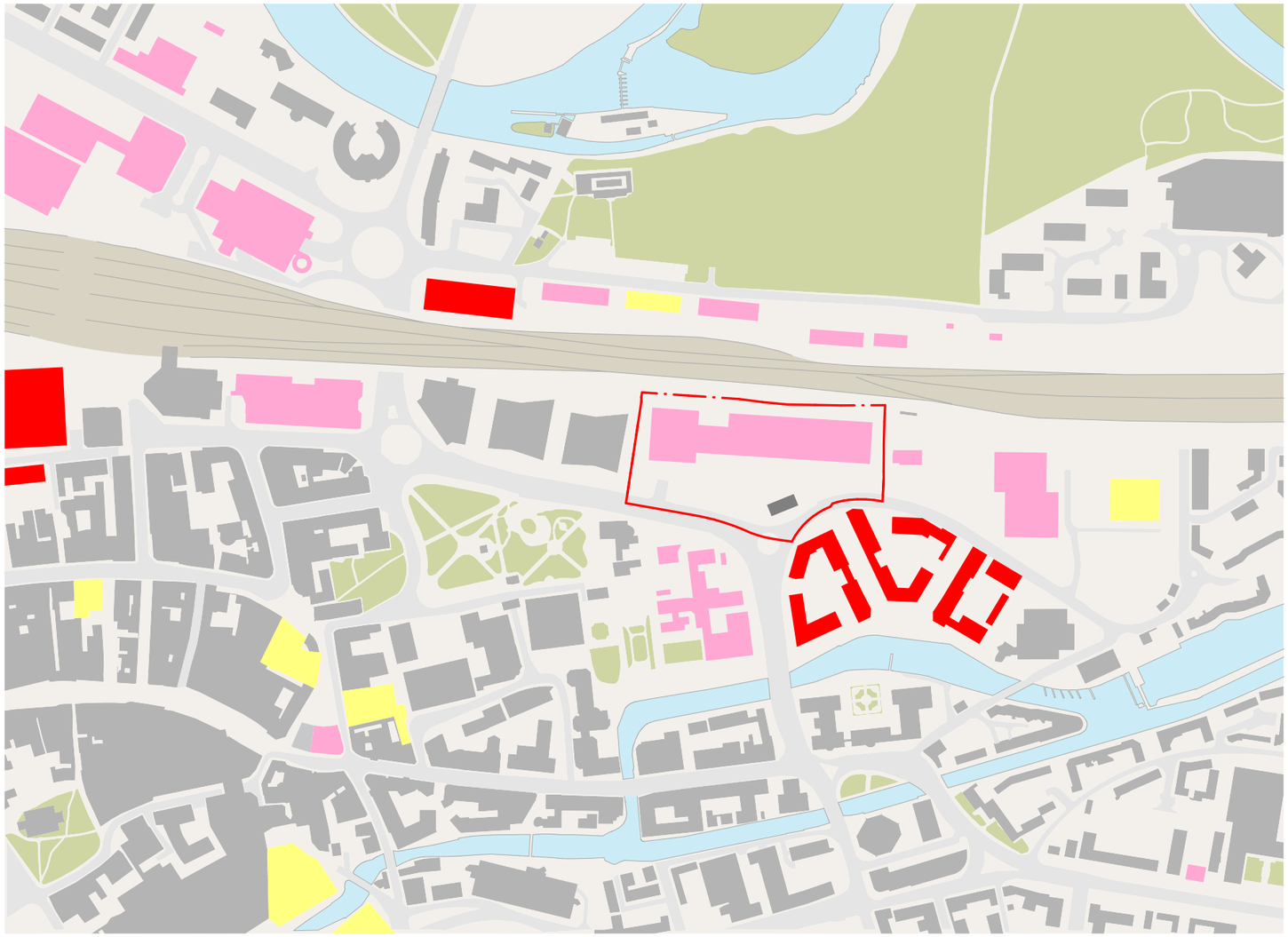
2.3 Scale, Character & Materials

2.3.2 Existing Context - Consented and Emerging

Reading Town Centre and the surrounding area is in the process of undergoing significant change, with a number of major developments either coming forward in the near future, or already being built.

The emerging pattern of development within the borough will focus on new, high-density residential development in and around the town centre on existing brownfield sites, preserving the suburbs in the process.

As such, many of these major applications are of relevance to the KMV OPA and the wider regeneration objectives for Reading Town Centre, providing context to this application.



Allocated Development Site
Developments in Planning
Under Construction / Recent Completion

Existing site plan - Emerging Context Diagram

2.3 Scale, Character & Materials

2.3.2 Existing Context - Consented and Emerging

The Oracle Apartments

There are plans to transform a portion of the Oracle shopping centre into apartments (around 475) of mixed sizes. This will also include refurbishment of the existing cinema, and adding new leisure areas.

Status: Application has been submitted and is pending determination

- 449 Homes
- 28,000 sq ft of film space
- 28,000 sq ft of entertainment/leisure/flexible workspace
- 38,000 sq ft of retained retail space
- 37 new trees and a 1,900 sq ft park

Apartments at The Oracle

Station Hill

The area around Reading Station is slowly getting re built following the stations own redevelopment. Station Hill (the flagship project on the site) will consist oif an 18 storey office building. Whilst on Friar Street there are plans for 600 apartments to be built, in total the whole scheme on Station Hill will provide over 1,000 homes.

Status: Public Realm open for public to use as pedestrian route. Phase 1 complete summer 2024, Phase 2 practical completion in December 2024.

- 1300 new homes
- 95,000 sq ft of retail, leisure and amenity space
- 625,000 sq ft of office space
- 2 acres of public realm linking the station to the town centre

Station Hill

Minster Quarter Central

The area comprising of the Broad Street Mall has a proposal to have 4 towers built on top of it which would create over 400 flats. The Hexagon which is a theatre in Reading is set to be remodelled as well as large public square and more green space are all in planning.

Status: Outline development framework produced in December 2018. Recommended for approval at committee on 02/04/2025 (PL/24/0173).

- 618 residential units
- 90 bed hotel
- Flexible working and conference facilities
- Outdoor performance space

Minster Quarter

117 Caversham Road

There is a 97A application for 60 homes to be built on Caversham Road. This site is currently made up of derelict buildings and will provide both houses and apartments.

Status: S106 signed 5 September 2023, uploaded to planning portal 23/4/2025.

- 42 market price flats/houses
- 18 affordable flats/houses
- 30 parking spaces
- Cycle spaces

Friar Street

There is a planning proposal for the Bugle Pub site which proposes to build a new hotel complex on the site which encompasses over 150 rooms and will preserve the frontage of the former pub. Within this area there are also plans to create a market square, which would provide a space for independent retailers as well as local events.

Status: Ref. PL/22/1235 - approved 24 May 2025

- 163 bed hotel
- 104 apartment hotel rooms

Reading Gaol

There are aspirations for this site to be turned into a housing scheme, after previous proposals around a cultural hub were rejected.

Status: No current applications

- Grade II listed
- Sensitive to Reading Abbey
- Ambition to transform it into and arts centre
- “Save the Reading Gaol” campaign

Caversham Road

CGI of The Porter Building

Reading Gaol

2.4 Historical Development of Site

2.4.1 Town History & Timelines

Historic timeline in photographs

1822

Biscuit making began in Reading

In 1822 Joseph Huntley opened a biscuit bakery in Reading which later became Huntley and Palmer

1840

Reading Railway Station was built

The railway was opened in 1840 and brought lots of jobs to the area, it provided a quicker route between London and Reading than by the road

1971

M4 opened

The M4 was opened in 1971 which provided better connectivity between London and the West of England

1125

Reading Abbey was built

The Abbey was built by Henry I, which brought a lot of people and money to Reading, including pilgrims and the King.

1837

St James's Church was built

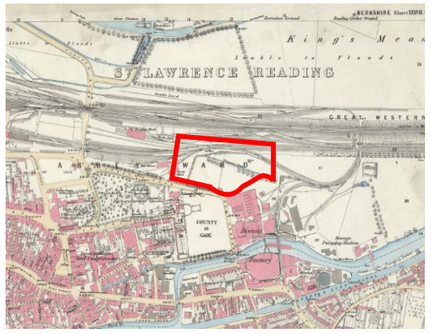
St James's church was built in 1837 next to the Reading Abbey ruins, parts were built using stones from the Abbey ruins. The architect for the church was Augustus Pugin, this was one of his first church designs.

1856

Forbury Gardens became a town park

Formerly known as the Forbury in medieval times, in 1856 local people collected money to buy the land and the ruins which became essential for leisure time in Victorian Reading. The garden was laid out with a botanical character and opened to the public.

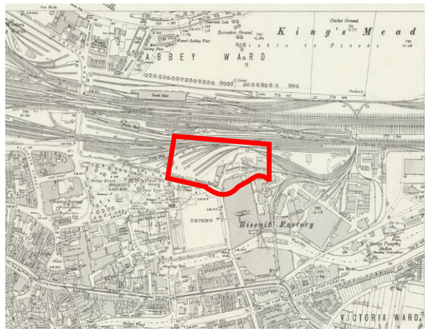
Historic timeline in maps



1875

Map of Reading

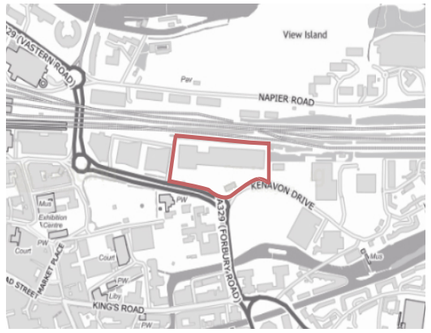
The town became a county borough and at a similar time a permanent military presence was established in the town, as well as new municipal buildings being built and opened.



1909

Map of Reading

The first cinemas in Reading were built and the town boundaries were extended again to include Caversham and Tilehurst.



2000s

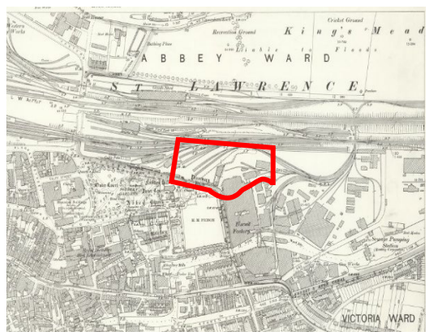
Map of Reading

The prominent shopping centres and the M4 had been built and opened. There was also a major shift in the industry biscuit making, the bulb industry and the beer industry all closed or moved out of the town and firms began to move their headquarters from London to Reading.

1898

Map of Reading

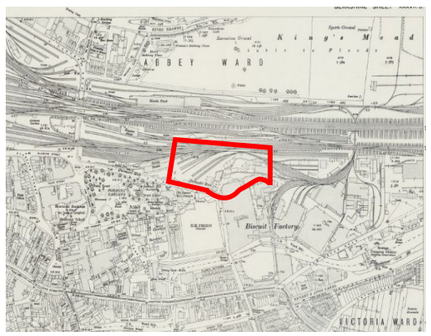
Large sections of terraced housing were built and the town was a popular place for beer, bulbs and biscuits. By this time the boundaries of Reading had been enlarged.



1931

Map of Reading

The first council house had been built and Reading university was opened. Whilst an aerodrome was opened in Woodley.



2.4 Historical Development of Site

2.4.1 Town History & Timelines - Continued

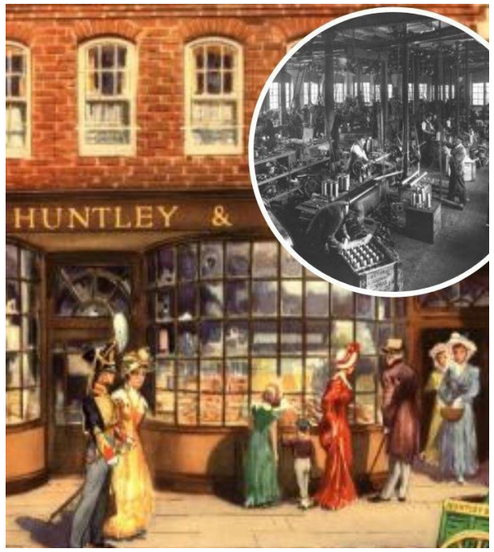
History of Biscuit Making

Joseph Huntley set up a biscuit making bakery in London Street, Reading in 1822, they were an important employer at the time and had over 5,000 employees.

10 years later in 1832 Huntley set up a biscuit manufacturer, which was later absorbed by Huntley, Boorne and Stevens, the business was then brought by Huntley and Palmers in 1919.

Biscuits produced here were exported worldwide, using bridges and tram lines. Over 400 different types of biscuit were produced and sold in decorative tins.

Biscuit manufacturing on the site was ceased in 1976 and the company merged with others and moved production to Liverpool.



Huntley and Palmer at 72 London Street

Huntley and Palmers Biscuit Packaging

Huntley and Palmers Biscuit Factory

Biscuit Tunnel

The underpass that runs from Napier Road to Kenavon Drive was formerly a biscuit tunnel which carried shuttle engines full of biscuits from Huntley and Palmers factory to a siding at Reading Station.

This underpass was previously closed after the biscuit factory shut down, it only re opened in 2015. The route provides direct access for people living on Napier Road and Luscinia View to Reading town centre via cycling and walking.

Proposals seek to tap into this existing infrastructure to create exciting links to potential adjacent properties when proposals do come forward.

Biscuit Tunnel from Napier Rd to Kenavon Drive

Huntley and Palmers Train used to Transport Biscuits

Location of Factory and Tunnel