

4. Context Analysis

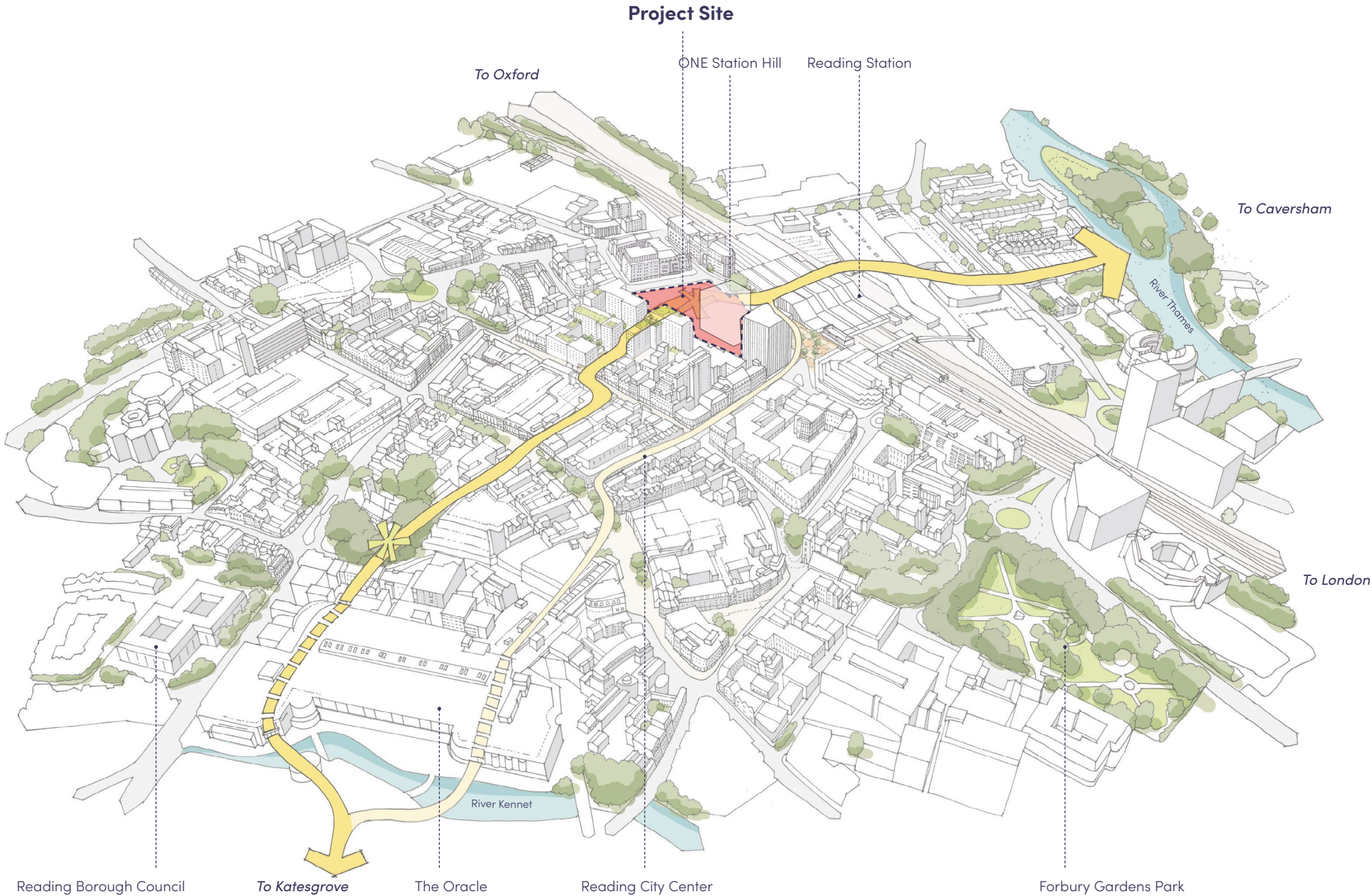
4.1 Reading Context

Reading occupies a distinctive position as a historic market town evolved into a compact, high-density urban centre shaped by rail infrastructure, waterways, and incremental redevelopment. Its layered townscape mixes fine-grain historic streets with post-war and contemporary mixed-use buildings, while fast rail links place London 23 minutes away, strengthening its role as a key transport hub within the Thames Valley/M4 growth corridor, home to major technology and financial firms including Microsoft, Oracle, Prudential and others in the wider cluster.

In recent decades, this context has shifted toward a more metropolitan condition, driven by intensification around the station and town centre. Phase 3 forms part of this evolution, reinforcing the transition from transport infrastructure to a dense, mixed-use urban quarter through taller buildings, activated podiums, and a legible public realm structure. Architecturally, this approach employs robust, long-life materials and vertically expressed façades to mediate between human-scaled streets and the emerging skyline, positioning Phase 3 as a contemporary continuation of Reading's urban narrative—one that balances historic grain with confident, city-scale form.



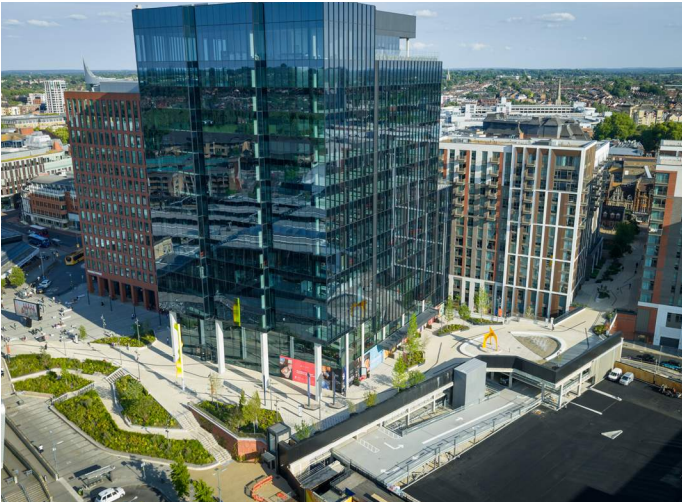
Station Hill existing site condition, looking south towards Friar Street



4.2 Site Context

The site occupies a pivotal position immediately adjacent to Reading railway station, forming a primary threshold between regional transport infrastructure and the town centre. Its context is defined by intense movement, changes in level, and the convergence of key routes that link the station concourse with Friar Street and the wider retail core. Architecturally, this demands buildings of civic presence and clarity, capable of addressing long views, accommodating high footfall, and providing a legible transition from large-scale infrastructure to a more pedestrian-focused urban grain.

In townscape terms, the site plays a critical stitching role within the wider Station Hill development, repairing historic severance between the station and the town centre. The emerging development framework establishes a coherent sequence of streets, squares, and podium-level public spaces that draw activity east-west, reinforcing permeability and wayfinding. This context positions the site not as an isolated plot, but as an integral piece of a comprehensive urban quarter—where massing, active frontages, and public realm work collectively to extend the town centre’s character up to the station edge and anchor new development within Reading’s evolving urban core.



Existing site with ONE Station Hill and Phase 1



4.3 Greyfriars Road

Greyfriars Road is architecturally defined as a transitional civic corridor, mediating between Reading's historic town centre and the higher-density station quarter. Its character is shaped less by fine-grain continuity and more by scale, movement, and infrastructure, with buildings presenting robust, planar façades that respond to wide carriageways and long sightlines. The street accommodates multiple modes of movement, including a dedicated cycle route running between the Station Hill area and the town centre, which reinforces its role as a key connective spine. Development is typically mid- to large-scale, with massing stepping up toward the station, marking a clear shift in urban intensity and townscape character.

Architectural expression along Greyfriars Road is predominantly contemporary, with brick, stone and concrete deployed in restrained compositions that prioritise proportion, vertical rhythm and legibility over ornament. Collectively, the street supports a civic architectural language—accepting infrastructure and movement as defining elements, while using articulation, material quality and landscape integration to humanise the public realm.

A planning consent was also granted to a nearby site on Greyfriars Road south of the site to build a co-living development.



Greyfriars Road



Greyfriars Gate



Junction between Greyfriars Road and Station Hill



Greyfriars Church



Greyfriars House Co-Living Planning Consent between Greyfriars Road and Garrard Street

4.4 Garrard Street

Garrard Street is a secondary town-centre street that plays an important transitional role between the intensity of the station environment and the finer grain of central Reading. Historically more service-oriented in character, the street has been defined by relatively narrow carriageways, limited building setbacks, and a mixed townscape of back-of-house façades, servicing access, and smaller-scale commercial frontages. Its spatial enclosure and reduced traffic speeds give it a distinctly urban, utilitarian quality, contrasting with the primary retail routes nearby.

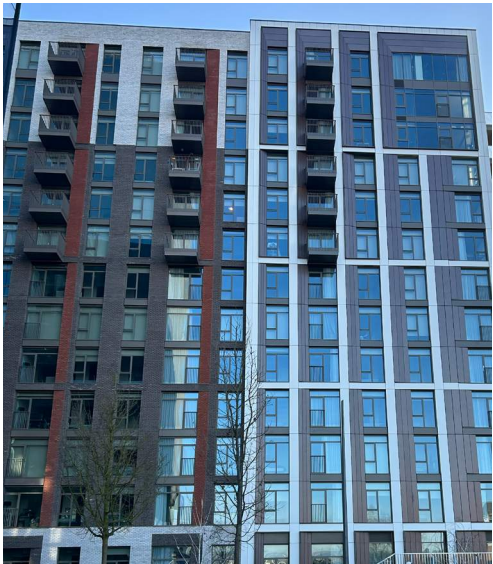
Recent regeneration associated with the Station Hill development has repositioned Garrard Street as a key urban connector and place-making corridor. New development introduces active frontages, residential entrances, and podium-level activation that significantly increase pedestrian presence and overlooking. Landscape interventions, integrated servicing strategies, and improved pedestrian permeability are transforming the street from a functional edge condition into a legible part of the wider town centre network



ONE Station Hill South side



ONE Station Hill South side



Ebb Residential north side



Ebb & Flow residential elevation north with Greyfriars House consented height



Greyfriars House Co-Living Planning Consent between Greyfriars Road and Garrard Street

4.5 Station Hill

Station Hill, at its junction with Greyfriars Road and extending toward Tudor Road, is characterised as a principal arrival corridor and civic edge to the town centre. This stretch directly addresses the station environment and accommodates intense pedestrian movement, public transport activity, and servicing functions. The street has an inherently infrastructural quality, with generous widths, long sightlines, and a scale that responds to the proximity of the station. Architecturally, this context calls for buildings with a strong civic presence—clear massing, vertical articulation, and robust base conditions that reinforce legibility and signal arrival into the town centre.

Through the Station Hill regeneration, the character of this route is evolving from a vehicle-led threshold into a defined urban street that prioritises pedestrian experience and placemaking. New development along Station Hill and Tudor Road introduces active frontages, prominent building entrances, and a coordinated public realm that frames movement between the station, Greyfriars Road, and the wider town centre. Taller mixed-use buildings, articulated podiums, and landscape elements work together to mediate scale and improve enclosure, transforming the street into a civic boulevard.



ONE Station Hill North Side



Phoenix House



Reading Station Landscaping



Reading Station Landscaping



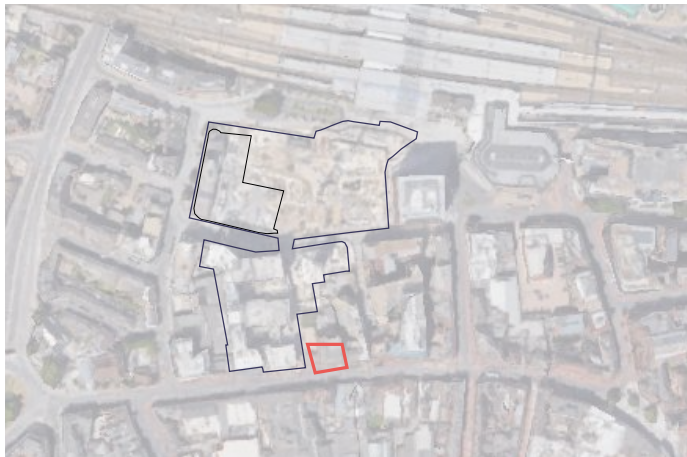
Reading Station Landscaping

4.6 Surrounding Developments

4.6.1 35 Friar Street / Cosmos

The Friar Street development by Cosmos, located at the corner of Friar Street and Friars Walk, occupies a highly prominent town-centre site that marks a key point of transition between Reading’s primary retail spine and emerging pedestrian routes.

The scheme is characterised by a compact, high-density form that reinforces the established street line while responding to the scale and activity of Friar Street. The massing is composed to maintain a strong urban edge, with upper levels stepping and articulating to reduce perceived bulk and sit comfortably within the surrounding townscape.

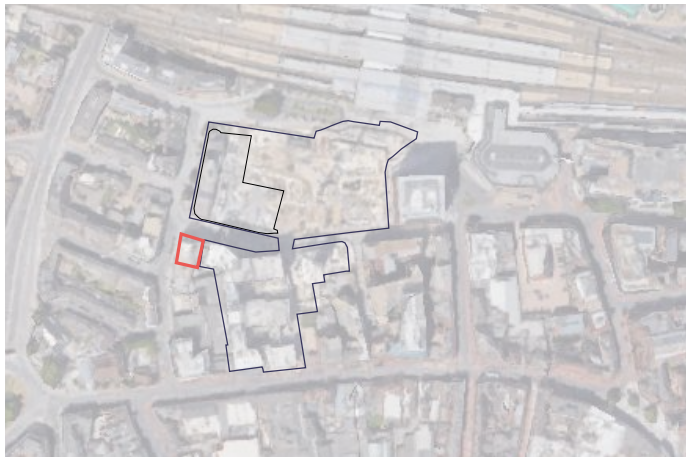


35 Friar Street located at the entrance of Phase 1

4.6.2 Greyfriars House / ELDER

Greyfriars House is being redeveloped by Elder into a part-7, part-13-storey co-living scheme delivering 266 units—comprising both standard and larger accessible homes—following the approval of planning permission on 29 August 2025. The project will replace the existing office building at 20–30 Greyfriars Road with a contemporary, car-free development featuring extensive shared amenities, including communal kitchens, lounges, co-working areas and wellness facilities, all designed to support flexible, community-focused urban living.

The scheme forms a key part of the town-centre regeneration strategy, repurposing an underutilised site to provide high-quality accommodation in a highly accessible setting.



Greyfriars House located on the junction of Greyfriars Road and Garrard Street

4.7 Site Constraints

The site is subject to several interrelated constraints that have strongly informed the design response. Development must accord with the existing outline consent, including the approved parameters and design code, which set clear limits on massing, height, setbacks, frontage activation and podium treatment.

Despite these constraints, the scheme is required to deliver a high-quality public realm, particularly at podium level, ensuring generous, legible and well-landscaped spaces that support activity, permeability and a positive pedestrian experience across Station Hill.

A summary of the considered constraints that have informed the development response are as follows;

1. Thames Water Sewer:

A strategic Thames Water sewer runs beneath parts of the Phase 3 site, constraining foundation design, basement extent and podium structure and requiring defined easements and maintenance access to be maintained.

2. Active Frontages:

The outline consent and Design Code require active frontages at both street and podium levels along Greyfriars Road, Garrard Street and Station Hill, limiting the location of servicing, plant ventilation and life-safety infrastructure at ground floor.

3. Interface with adjacent Phase 2 podium:

The Phase 3 podium must physically and structurally integrate with the completed Phase 2 podium while also accommodating revised levels, structural tolerances and fire separation requirements

4. Ground Utilities:

Dense networks of existing utilities beneath Greyfriars Road and Garrard Street restrict new connections, limit excavation and influence the positioning of vehicle access points, substations, drainage infrastructure and landscaping components.

5. Cycle Lane:

The Outline consent for Phase 3 establishes an area of highway along Greyfriars Road incorporating a shared cycle and pedestrian route with associated landscaping. This route is to ensure continuity of movement between Station Hill, Reading Station and the wider town centre.

6. Building Safety Act:

The Building Safety Act and BS 9991:2024 introduce requirements for multiple stair cores, evacuation lifts, podium separation between uses and dedicated fire-fighting access, significantly constraining ground-floor layouts, facade arrangements and permeability.

7. Vehicle Access:

Vehicle access is tightly constrained by the car-free strategy, narrow town-centre streets and active frontage requirements, necessitating carefully controlled access points for servicing, refuse and limited accessible parking without undermining pedestrian priority.

8. Outline Parameters:

The approved outline Parameter Plans fix maximum building envelopes, heights, setbacks and minimum public realm widths, constraining the location, massing and footprint of development while limiting the extent of permissible deviation at Reserved Matters stage.

