

**Market Place/ London Street Conservation Area  
Conservation Area Appraisal  
(V9.0 DRAFT FOR WEBSITE 18 MAY 2021)**



This review of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area appraisal has been produced by past and present members of Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) for consultation and comment.

All images unless otherwise credited have been taken by CAAC members.

Comments on this document can be made by writing to CAAC chair Evelyn Williams by email to [chair.readingcaac@gmail.com](mailto:chair.readingcaac@gmail.com).

The current adopted version of the conservation area appraisal (dated 2007) can be found on the Reading Borough Council website: <https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Market-Place-London-St-Original-CAA.pdf>.

## **Market Place/London Street Conservation Area Appraisal**

**Foreword by Councillor Tony Page, Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment  
Planning and Transport for Reading Borough Council**

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## **Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, Reading**

### **A community-led Conservation Area Appraisal**

#### **Initial Statement**

Reading has fifteen Conservation Areas. Each has an individual appraisal. Historic England (HE) recommend that appraisals should be undertaken for each Conservation Area and that these should be reviewed every five years to ensure that they reflect the up-to-date situation and are continuing to do the job they are designed for – to protect ‘the character or appearance of an area which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’.

A new community-led, Reading-wide Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) was been set up in 2016 to advise Reading Borough Council when reviewing conservation area appraisals or policies for the preservation and enhancement of CAs, heritage sites or other features of historic importance.

The Market Place/London Street CA was originally designated in 1972 and extended in 1982. It was last appraised by the Council’s external consultants, The Conservation Studio of Cirencester, in April 2007. Their report was formally adopted by the Council at that time and, as many of that report’s findings and recommendations have been found to remain relevant today, where appropriate they have been carried forward in this Appraisal.

This appraisal has been prepared by the Reading CAAC, using an adaptation of the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit an approach to carrying out appraisals recommended by HE.

The appraisal is preceded by a one page summary of the CA. The first part of the appraisal comprises a Statement of Special Interest, which summarises the key qualities and features which give the area its character and which justify the special protection afforded by a conservation area. This is followed by a more detailed analysis of each of the key elements and areas. Photographic appendices for all listed buildings, buildings of townscape merit, shopfronts and views are at the end of the appraisal as is a historic summary of the area.

The appraisal provides details on the historic and architectural interest of this area and positive features of its character, as well as highlighting issues that are negatively affecting the character and appearance of the CA.

The existing boundaries of the CA have been reviewed. An extension is proposed to include: to the north west - Cross Street, Queen Victoria Street and both Friar Street (including the Harris Arcade) and Broad Street as far as Queen Victoria Street. An additional small extension will include Forbury Road rounding off the northern and eastern boundary of the Abbey Quarter within this CA.

The area contains 90 buildings and structures (or groups of buildings) listed by Historic England. These are shown in Appendix III with summary details from the HE listing, a link to

the full HE listing and images of each building taken between 2018 and 2021. Each of the 53 Buildings of Townscape Merit (BTM) is listed in Appendix IV, a brief summary provided and images of each building taken between 2018 and 2021. Listed buildings and BTM are shown on Map 3

Appendix V and Map 6 illustrate views into the conservation area, out of the area and within.

Original or substantially original shopfronts are shown in Appendix VI and conservation area trees in Appendix VI and Map 5.

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## Summary of Key Characteristics

This section summarises those elements which create the area's character and justify its designation as a Conservation Area (CA), to assist key decisions on its development and enhancement. The key characteristics are:

- The centre of Reading's civic and commercial activities since the twelfth century that has seen several waves of development in the last 900 years.
- London Street was created to link the Abbot's market place outside the main gate of Reading Abbey to routes south. In the eighteenth century London Street was a fashionable commercial and residential street and a significant proportion of buildings remain from this time.
- Quiet Church Street links London Street with Southampton Street and S Giles Church.
- St Laurence's Church on Town Hall square and its churchyard.
- The Town Hall complex comprises four phases of development on the site that now houses Reading Museum and Art Gallery, the Concert Hall, the Victoria Hall, the coroner's court and ceremonies room. It is a fine example of Reading brick and terracotta.
- The statue of Queen Victoria on Town Hall Square was erected in 1887. It has observed some of the most important events in Reading over the last almost 120 years.
- In 1840 the railway came to Reading and at the end of the century the construction of Queen Victoria Street began by local developer J C Fidler. This wide straight street created a direct link between the station and Broad Street which the Borough Council insisted should be as straight a line as possible.
- High Bridge over the Kennet provides good views to east and west.
- The Kennet forms the natural boundary of Reading town centre bridged by picturesque High Bridge. The CA also crosses Reading's dual-carriageway orbital Inner Distribution Road (the IDR). Not quite as scenic, the excavation of the IDR at this point was one of the key drivers for the creation of this CA in the 1970s.
- Reading's retail centre of gravity shifted again in 1998 with the opening of the Oracle shopping mall and associated leisure activities and restaurants along this stretch of the Kennet.
- The CA is blighted by delayed development of key sites and as retail and commercial fashions and needs have changed, redevelopment has not always enhanced the context of the remaining historic fabric. However, this CA will never stand still with continuous waves of development to meet the needs of a thriving and growing town.
- On the western edge of the recently defined Abbey Quarter and home to Reading's Museum and Art Gallery, the CA has the potential to be a focal point for visitors.
- The CA breaks down into four sub-areas of distinctive character: Abbey Quarter west; Reading Central east; Duke Street and London Street, Church Street and environs of S Giles' Church.

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## Statement of Special Interest

### SS1 Introduction and Summary

The Market Place/London Street CA straddles the Kennet and Reading's Inner Distribution Road. It includes the areas that formed the western edge of Reading Abbey precincts and Reading's Medieval town centre and commercial district and the road from the south leading to them.

Until the civic offices moved west from the Old Town Hall the area was also the centre of Reading's civic life.

Built around the original Medieval street pattern, the CA includes a significant proportion of Victorian and post-war architecture with examples of survivors from the eighteenth and earlier centuries.

Boundary adjustments have been proposed to include more of Reading's historic commercial and retail centre which acknowledge the importance of this heritage.

### SS2 Key Characteristics

The key characteristics of the Conservation Area are:

- Linear conservation area beside the planned medieval southern approach road, over the River Kennet, to a market place and church outside one of Reading Abbey's gateways;
- The area includes Queen Victoria Street, a wide planned commercial street linking Reading Station with Broad Street at the turn of the twentieth century;
- The Hospitium of St John the Baptist, founded in 1189;
- Two of Reading's three medieval parish churches: St Laurence's and St Giles', both with well treed churchyards;
- Isolated examples of timber-framed 16th and 17th century buildings e.g. 27 & 28 Market Place, 49 & 53 London Street and 3 & 5 London Road;
- Good examples of prestigious Georgian town houses in London Street;
- The fine collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century municipal buildings in Blagrove Street including Waterhouse's distinctive Town Hall and Victoria Hall, the Concert Hall and Museum, Library and Art Gallery;
- Groups of historic building around Market Place;
- Special historic and architectural focus around St Laurence's Church and the Town Hall complex;
- Many examples of building with bricks (red, blue and buff) from Reading's extensive local brickworks;
- On Station Road one of the UK's first railway hotels now the Malmaison;
- Fine examples of nineteenth century bank and commercial buildings notably the buildings that were formerly: Barclays (originally Simonds) Bank, King Street; NatWest Bank, Market Place and Reading Savings Bank on London Street.
- Three green open spaces namely the churchyards of St Laurence's and St Giles' and the burial ground of the Friends Meeting House;
- Public open space (part-pedestrianised) composed of Market Place and Town Hall Square i.e. the area around the statue of Queen Victoria;

- Jacksons Corner, a once busy crossroads and locally known landmark;
- Trees in the public realm particularly street trees in London Street, Market Place, Town Hall Square and Queens Road;
- Tranquil atmosphere of Church Street;
- Art deco shops of Harris Arcade;
- The presence of the River Kennet and a short visible length of Holy Brook;
- Lengths of natural stone kerb and historic paving in the courtyard of The George Hotel, Thorn Lane and alleys off London Street;
- Three examples of 19th and early twentieth century monuments: Sir John Soane's Simeon Monument, Blackall Simond's statue of Queen Victoria; and Edward VII statue;
- The brutalist building on the corner of High Street and King Street that was once part of Barclays Bank (now Honest Burgers);
- The Black History Mural on Mill Lane.

### **SS3 Issues and vulnerabilities**

- Vacant commercial and retail space and neglect particularly around Market Place and occasionally along London Street. Some examples such as Coopers and the former Central Club are of long standing and have a negative impact on the CA;
- Many 1960s and 1970s developments pay little heed to their context and some have a notably negative effect on the character and appearance of the CA;
- Traffic noise and pollution detracts from the character and environmental quality of London Street. Public transport on other areas in the CA is less problematic;
- Many of the unlisted, and some of the listed, buildings in the conservation have been adversely affected by the use of inappropriate modern materials or details. Common faults include:
  - the replacement of original timber sash windows with uPVC;
  - the loss of original panelled front doors and their replacement with stained hardwood or uPVC;
  - the loss of original shopfronts to modern fascias and glass and aluminium shopfronts;
- Street clutter including a plethora of out of date signage for visitors to Reading which has now been overtaken by new signage and should be removed;
- Historic streetscape and local distinctiveness are under threat from the requirements of traffic management and public amenities;
- Utilities work does not always re-instate road and pavement surfaces like for like;
- Poor public realm on the traffic island on which the Edward VII stands;
- Poor pavement surfaces on Duke Street and the northern section of London Street;
- The rear of London Street buildings along East Street and St Giles Close are prone to neglect and what once were gardens have been given over to car parking or the building of modern extensions that do not enhance the character and appearance of the original fabric of the street;
- Lack of green space.

## SS4 Recommended measures

In order to address the issues and vulnerabilities set out above, Section 8, The Conservation Area Action Plan, sets out in tabular form a series of measures with timescales which should be undertaken to ameliorate these issues.

## SS5 The 2020 Boundary and Character Area Adjustments

This appraisal extends beyond the current boundary to the north west of the existing CA to include; Cross Street, Queen Victoria Street, Harris Arcade and both Friar Street and Broad Street as far as Queen Victoria Street. The justification for making this proposal is:

In this area there are many (12) buildings of townscape merit, and some (13) listed buildings, with superb examples of Reading brickwork design.

Friar Street and Broad Street were, like London Street, laid out by the Abbot of Reading Abbey to link with Market Place as the commercial hub of Reading.

- **Queen Victoria Street and Station Road**

The buildings on each side of Queen Victoria Street are listed and represent Victorian Reading professional office building at its best. Some shop fronts have been altered.

The vista from the John Lewis (Heelas) building on Broad Street down pedestrianised Queen Victoria Street towards Reading Station (The Three Guineas) is a fine avenue which is worthy of protection within the CA and preserves the vision of the late nineteenth century Borough of Reading.

Harris Arcade from Friar Street through to Station Road was a late 1920s enhancement to Reading's shopping experience. The shop units, decorative features and ambience have been retained and maintained in their original style and condition.

The benefits of this extension as a separate character area are seen to be that it expands the area that conserves and recognises Reading's retail and commercial heritage from the period of Reading Abbey around Market Place to the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century.

- **South east of Forbury Road**

A small extension will include the area to the south east of Forbury Road incorporating this corner of the Abbey Quarter into the CA.

Consideration was given to extending the area further to the east to include: Forbury Gardens, Abbey ruins, Reading Gaol and St James Church. We recommend that it would be preferable, following Reading Borough Council's designation of the area as The Abbey Quarter, that a separate CA should be investigated rather than an extension to this CA. If this were to be done the eastern boundary of this CA would also be re-considered.

- **Foot of East Street on Queen's Road**

It was felt beneficial to make a small adjustment to the boundary to include the whole of the small green space at the foot of East Street on which the John Ravera artworks are situated.

- **Other considerations**

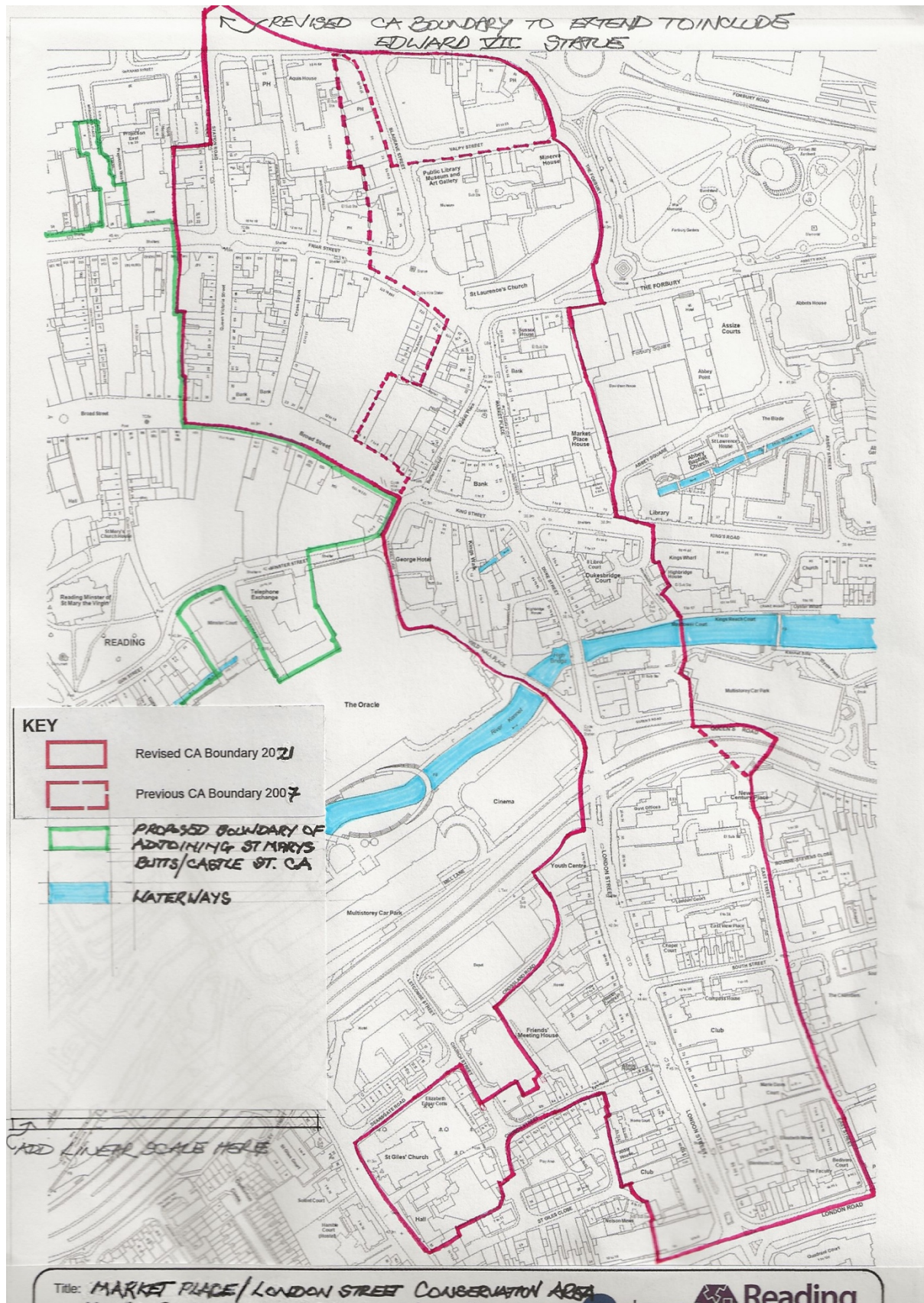
Consideration was given to incorporating a section of Southampton Street facing S Giles Church to include the previous extension burial ground of the church and the terrace of Georgian houses. However this was considered to be an excessive extension of the boundary.

In addition consideration was given to including the Grade II listed (1113563) Queen's Crescent into the CA. As the crescent is already listed this was not pursued.

- **Abbey Quarter Conservation Area**

The strong potential for a future Abbey Quarter CA has driven a review of the character areas and these have been re-aligned to match the western boundary of the Abbey Quarter. Jackson's Corner and High Street now merges with Market Place, St Laurence's Church and Town Hall. Duke Street now merges with London Street.





Map 1 Proposed Conservation Area boundary (inclusive of the proposed area extensions)

# Conservation Area Appraisal

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Policy context

The purpose of an appraisal document is to ensure that the special interest justifying designation of the conservation area is clearly defined and analysed in a written statement of its character and appearance. This provides a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for development plan policies and development control decisions, and also forms the basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals.

This appraisal describes and defines the particular historical and architectural character and interest of the Market Place/London Street CA, highlighting those features of its character and appearance that should be preserved or enhanced and identifying negative features that detract from the area's character and appearance, and issues that may affect it in future.

The CA appraisal has been produced within current national and local planning policy guidelines.

This appraisal cannot hope to mention every building or feature within the CA that might be of value. Any omission should not be taken to imply that it is not of any interest or value to the character of the area. New research, understanding and interpretation of the significance of the urban environment of the CA can result in the discovery of overlooked gems in the period between reviews.

### 1.2 Public consultation

This appraisal is in a format recommended by HE. It has been prepared by the Reading CAAC. Given the central location of this CA there are fewer local residents to consult with than in some CAs and the main impact, particularly of the boundary extension, is on local businesses. Consultation has been aimed at engaging with residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the area to help define what continues to be of special significance and worthy of protection and/or enhancement.

## 2. Landscape Setting

The Market Place/London Street Conservation Area is located in central Reading. The northern section of this conservation area, Town Hall Square and Market Place, incorporates the western section of Reading's Abbey Quarter.

From Market Place, the land slopes steeply down to the River Kennet which is crossed by High Bridge, a scheduled ancient monument, before rising again on London Street.

A second smaller watercourse, the Holybrook, crosses the conservation area underground at the junction with Kings Road before appearing above ground at the entrance to Reading Central Library.

To the west of Market Place, Broad Street and Friar Street extend on almost flat and level land towards St Mary's Butts and West Street. The eastern section of this area taking in Cross Street, Queen Victoria Street and part of Station Road is within this CA.

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### 3. Brief History of the Area

The area became the focus of the town's trade at the market established by the Abbot in the twelfth century just outside the Abbey's main gateway next to St Laurence's Church. This market replaced the older Saxon market close to St Mary's Minster which lies with the St Marys Butts/ Castle Street CA.

Market Place was a busy trading area until the market returned to Hosier Street and St Mary's Butts in the 1970s. On the east side it was dominated from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by the offices and shops of Suttons Seeds.

London Street was laid out and a new bridge over the Kennet built to connect southern routes with the market. In the nineteenth century when the new public rooms were built at the foot of London Street it was a fashionable area of small businesses, trades people and professional services. The south west corner was dominated by the ever growing Huntley Boorne & Stevens tin works.

A bombing raid on the town centre in February 1943 in which 41 people lost their lives caused extensive damage to Minster Street, the west of Market Place and Town Hall Square.

Although many buildings and structures remain from the nineteenth century and earlier, the CA includes a significant proportion of post war development especially north of the River Kennet.

In the 1970s Suttons Seeds and Huntley, Boorne & Stevens left Reading. Huntley & Palmers biscuit factory also closed at this time. The centre of civic life in Reading also decamped from the Town Hall and moved across to the new Civic Offices.

The 1970s were a boom time for the redevelopment of Reading and many historic premises and residential properties were lost to new offices. It also saw the coming of the Inner Distribution Road (IDR). The two pronged attack on Reading heritage albeit with the best of intentions galvanised residents to protect their historic town. The establishment of the Market Place/London Street CA in 1972 was one of the outcomes from those years.

Further details the archaeological heritage and historical development and notable historic events which contribute to the area's special interest are provided in Appendix II.

## 4. Spatial Analysis

### 4.1 Key characteristics and plan form

(Please refer to Appendices for images of Listed Buildings, Buildings of Townscape Merit, views in, out and within the CA, shopfronts, trees and green spaces.)

The spine of this conservation area is formed by the course of a planned twelfth century southern approach road to a market place deliberately located outside the western gates of Reading Abbey. Reading's main shopping streets, Friar Street and Broad Street lead westwards from the northern and southern ends of Market Place.

The route to the relocated centre of the medieval town follows today's London Street, Duke Street and High Street. Further to the west, Southampton Street traces an earlier north south road into Reading that ended at the Saxon market place near to St Mary's Minster which is within the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street CA. Narrow Church Street, connects London Street with Southampton Street and S Giles Church.

London Street is noticeably wider than streets closer to the town centre and, generally speaking, development to the east and west of London Street is less dense than the tight urban form found in the conservation area north of the River Kennet.

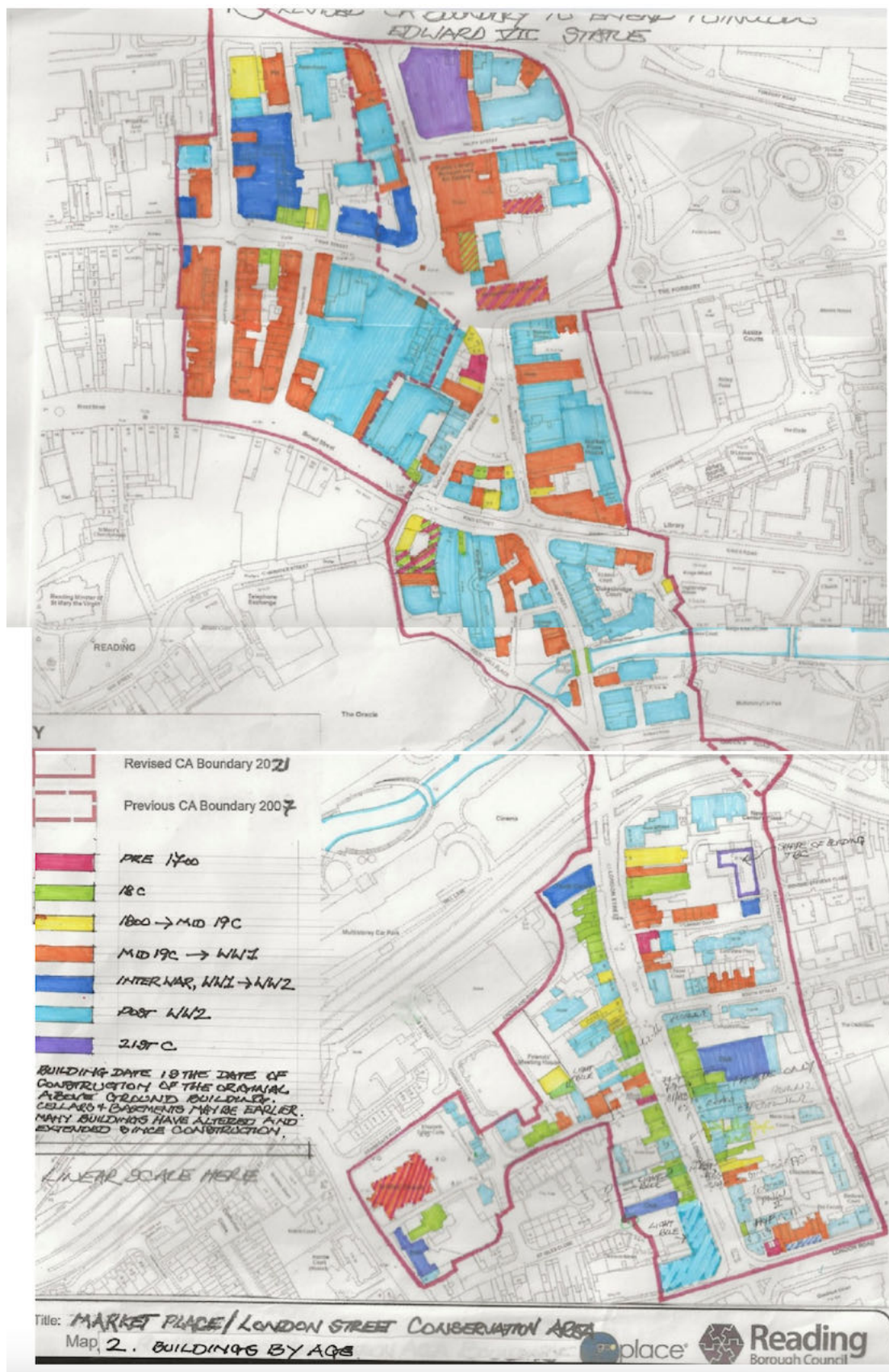
Queen Victoria Street is a planned late Victorian street of an imposing uniform design which cut a thoroughfare from Broad Street to Friar Street to meet Station Road with a vista to the railway station.

Storey heights range upwards from two storeys. There are some modern buildings within the CA, particularly on corner plots that rise to five storeys. With the exception of the old Town Hall, older buildings are no more than four storeys.

Reading's orbital Inner Distribution Road (IDR) cuts through the CA just south of the Kennet. This orbital route around Reading was begun at the end of the 1960s but not completed until the 1980s. It allowed the pedestrianisation of Broad Street and reduced the amount traffic in the town centre.

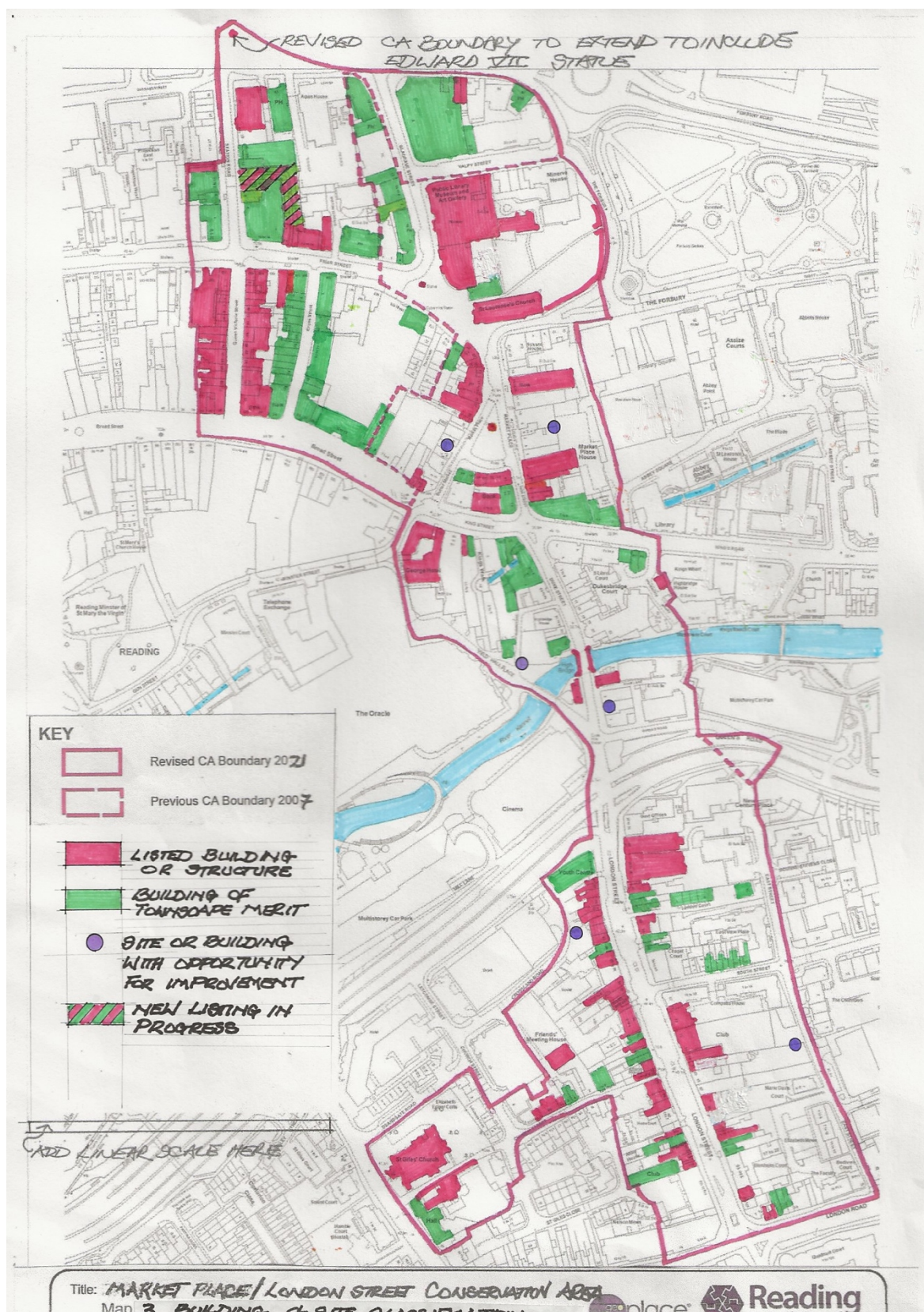
The only significant green open spaces are graveyards adjoining three places of worship: St Laurence's Church, St Giles' Church and the Friends Meeting House. In addition there is the Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) roof garden, a small triangular green lawn space adjacent to Century House on Queen's Road and a well maintained garden in planters at 1 London Street, adjacent to High Bridge. Adjacent to the CA there is an area of green space in St Giles Close and on the western side of Southampton Street is the St Giles burial ground extension.





Map 2 Buildings by age





**Map 3 Listed Buildings, Buildings of Townscape Merit and Sites or Buildings with Opportunities for Improvement**



#### **4.2 Views into the area (see Appendix V)**

- Approaching London Street from narrow Silver Street the wide road opens up at a major north-south and east-west cross roads with London Street and Crown Street;
- The vista from John Lewis on Broad Street northwards down Queen Victoria Street towards Reading Station is a fine urban boulevard that future development should leverage and capitalise on;
- From Reading station along Station Road, Queen Victoria Street presents a red brick gateway into Broad Street and John Lewis (Heelas) building is a landmark;
- View south along Blagrove Street towards the municipal buildings (to be added to map and appendix).

#### **4.3 Views within the area (See Appendix V)**

- Queen Victoria's statue is a landmark from all directions in the northern section of the CA;
- Looking south from High Bridge, the view of London Street opens up with the Black History Mural making a visual statement on the wall of the former Central Club to the west and Great Expectations to the east;
- Looking north from the foot of London Street, although marred by the rear of the Oracle shopping centre, Grosvenor casino and Queen's Road car park, straight ahead High Bridge and narrower street pattern of the town centre beckon;
- The great width and the slight curve and rise of London Street permit long oblique views southwards of the street's fine Georgian architecture, especially its west side;
- Looking west along Church Street to S Giles is a view typical of many picturesque market town;
- Looking east along Friar Street the Town Hall, St Laurence's Church and Queen Victoria's Statue on Town Hall Square are landmarks;
- Jacobs clock from High Street looking south;
- Approaching Market Place from the south the view of St Laurence's church is framed by Jacksons Corner to the east and the modern corner of the old Barclays (formerly Simonds) Bank building (currently Honest Burgers) to the west;
- Open space in Market Place enables good views of surrounding buildings especially nos 23-34 Market Place which are listed. In summer, three trees in the southern end of the Market Place block the view of nos. 46-52 Market Place, a fine row of historic buildings which compete with adjacent undistinguished modern architecture;
- Views of High Bridge from the east on both sides of The Kennet (to be added to map and appendix).

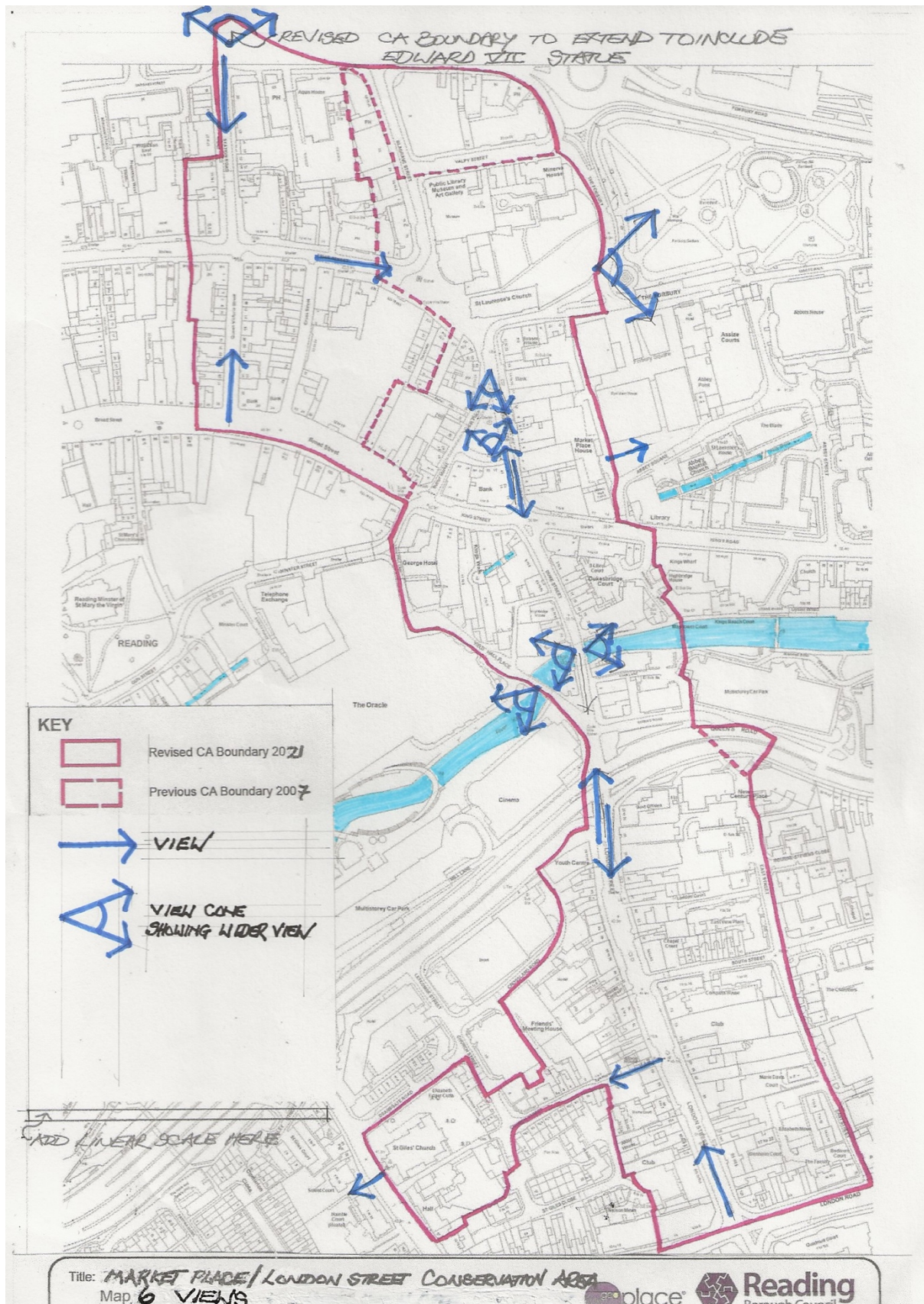


View south from the foot of London Street

#### 4.4 Views out of the area (see Appendix V)

- There are good views from St Laurence's churchyard looking towards Forbury Gardens including the Blade;
- From S Giles Church west, the fine avenue of yew trees leading to the extension burial ground of S Giles churchyard;
- From Abbey Square westwards there is a view towards Reading Abbey and Reading Gaol;
- From the new bridge in Yield Hall Place there is an exciting view westwards of the Oracle, a modern retail and restaurant development along the Kennet, outside the conservation area.
- From King Edward VII statue three generations of Reading Railway stations are visible – modern, 1840s and 1960s;
- View along King's Road looking west (to be added to map and Appendix);
- View from crossroads of King's Road, King Street, High Street and Duke Street west towards Broad Street (to be added to map and Appendix).





**Map 6 Conservation Area Views**



#### 4.5 Trees (see Appendix VII)

4.5.1 Trees are few and because of their scarcity they make a significant contribution to this urban conservation area's special character and sense of identity.

4.5.2 A group of seven plane trees along Queens Road is protected by a TPO.

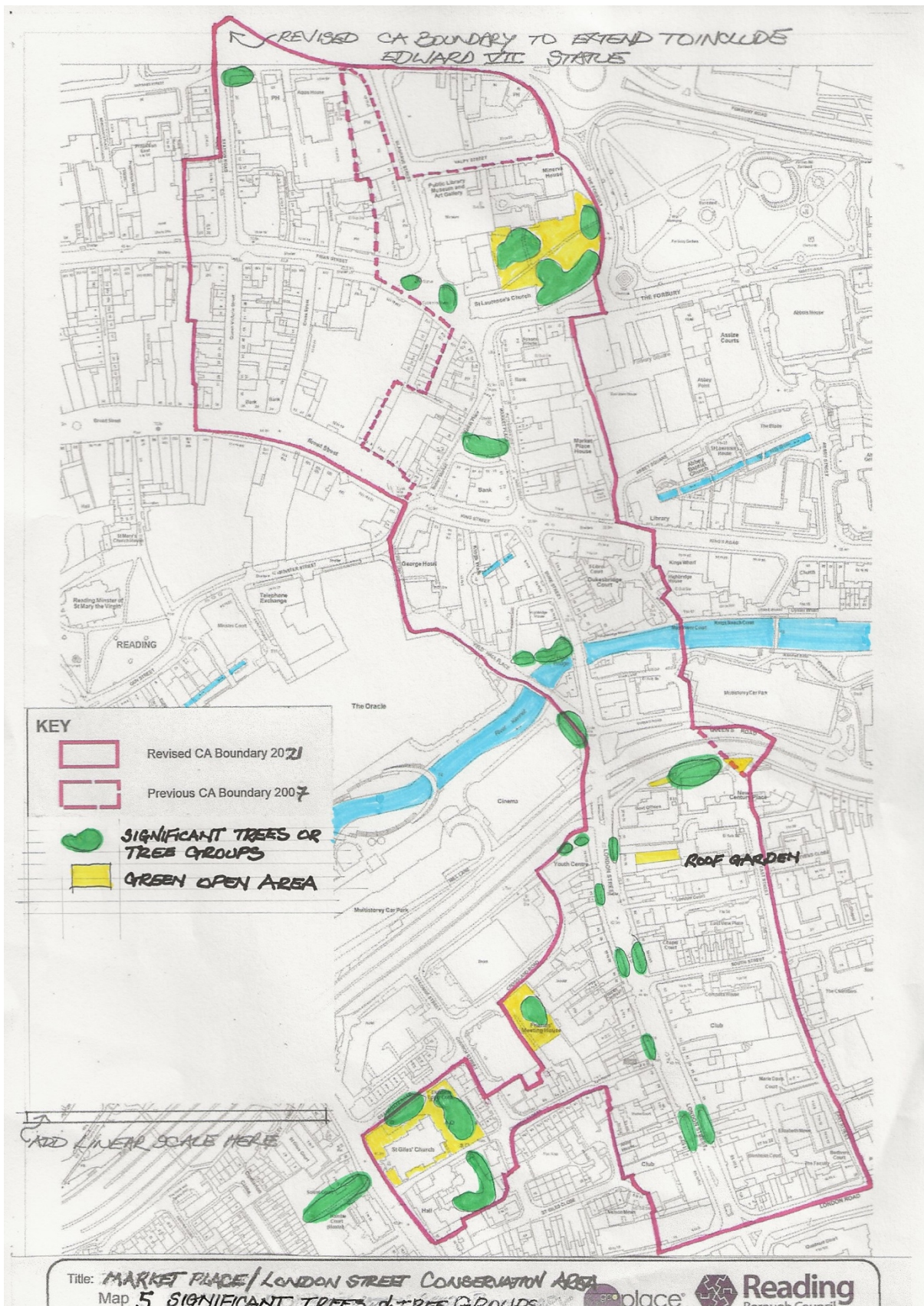


*Seven plane trees on the southern side of Queens Road protected by a TPO*

4.5.3 Significant tree groups are to be found in the area's three burial grounds.

4.5.4 Significant individual trees and small groups in the following locations are of special note: Market Place and outside the Town Hall; young street trees in London Street, Mill Lane and Blagrove Street, riverside trees by High Bridge. These and other significant trees in the townscape are marked on the Townscape Appraisal map. It has not been possible to identify every notable tree and lack of a specific reference does not imply that it must not be of value.





Map 5 Trees and green space in the street scene



## 5. Buildings and Public Realm

### 5.1 Key positive characteristics

The CA includes a Grade I listed church (St Laurence's), a scheduled ancient monument (High Bridge on Duke Street), the Grade II and Grade II\* listed Town Hall, Concert Hall and Museum complex, Grade II\* listed 73-75 London Street and an abundance of Georgian and Victorian shops, commercial and residential properties many of which are listed.

In addition six local landmarks are of particular note: the Simeon Obelisk in Market Place (GII) by Sir John Soane (1804), the Queen Victoria Jubilee Statue sculpted by George Simonds (1887), Edward VII statue (1902) the Gothic-style drinking fountain on the south side of St Laurence's church tower (c1850), the wall enclosing St Giles' Vicarage garden in Church Street and the Black History Mural on Mill Lane.



*The Black History Mural at the foot of London Street during the 2029 Reading half marathon*

Lesser features that enhance the CA and cumulatively help to give a sense of place, notably:

- Historic railings beside the Quaker burial ground (east side), in St Laurence's churchyard and in front of nos. 73-75 and nos. 54-58 London Street;
- Bollards in Church Street;
- Cast-iron street name signs in Yield Hall Lane, Broad Street and elsewhere;

- Cast-iron plaque marking the site of the main abbey gateway on the south wall of St Laurence's Church;
- Projecting clock on Jacobs jewellery shop in King Street;
- 'Jacksons Corner' sign attached to Jackson's shop;
- 'Charter for 2003' set in paving outside the Town Hall (now wearing away and not easy to read);
- Lamp fittings (restored) on High Bridge;
- Historic lamp column (re-used) in St Laurence's church yard;
- Henry West memorial and church window in St Laurence's churchyard;
- Carving in stone at churchyard entrance showing graveyard was enlarged in 1791;
- Entrance to the Corn Exchange on Market Place with its clock;
- Great Expectations Hotel, previously the assembly rooms and home of the Literary, Scientific and Mechanic's Institute on London Street;
- John Ravera artworks featuring old and new Reading industries at the northern end of East Street;
- The collection of distinctive eighteenth and nineteenth century headstones and chest tombs in St Laurence's churchyard;
- The wall of St Laurence's churchyard restored in 2015 after 30 years of being supported with scaffolding.



*Entrance to St Laurence's Churchyard from Forbury Road*



## 5.2 Historic shopfronts (see Appendix VI)

The CA contains some nineteenth/early twentieth century shopfronts, or parts of shopfronts, that make a positive contribution to the special interest of the area. The two most notable are 103 London Street which is an original early 19th century shopfront with two flat bows with frieze and moulded cornice over (obscured by modern fascia) and 8 High Street (Oxfam) which has a tiled and terracotta façade in Art Nouveau style of 1904. The following premises, mostly in London Street, retain historic shopfronts or significant elements of a historic shopfront that should be preserved.

The list is not exhaustive and occupants are as of August 2020:

- 54 London Street (residential);
- 82 & 84 London Street (Paya takeaway and Bakery House restaurant);
- 90 - 94 London Street (Mustard Tree, Wilkins Kennedy, Reading Community Learning Centre);
- 103 London Street (Berkshire Accountants);
- 114 London Street (MAS recruitment);
- Blagrove Arms, Blagrove Street;
- Jacksons, Kings Road;
- 24 King Street (Prospect Estate Agents);
- 5 Buttermarket (Picnic);
- 27 & 28 Market Place (now closed – last occupants Kik Sports);
- 46 & 47 Market Place (Chancellors Estate Agents);
- 8 High Street (Oxfam Bookshop);
- 147 Friar Street (previously Haslams);
- 149 Friar Street;
- 155 Friar Street (once Haslams offices)



*Regency Art Needlework Depot, 103 London Street c1935 (Reading Borough Libraries)*



*103 London Street today*

### 5.3 Materials, styles and features

The conservation area contains buildings from the twelfth century onwards with an obvious preponderance of late eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings. There is also much late twentieth century redevelopment, some of which because of its design, scale and materials, have a negative effect on the special architectural interest of the conservation area.

St Laurence's and St Giles' churches are the two oldest buildings in the area, the latter almost totally rebuilt in 1873. From the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there are a few isolated examples of timber-framing with typical jetties at first floor e.g. 26 & 27 Market Place, 88 London Street and 3 & 5 London Road. These rare survivors of Reading's pre-industrial urban development are a surprising find amongst a townscape that is characterised by post-1750 buildings.

London Street, just outside the town centre, hosts examples of elegant Georgian town houses, notably 73-79.

The present day appearance displays little evidence of the nineteenth and twentieth century industry along and just off this street. In particular at the southernmost end, redeveloped in the 1970s, was Huntley, Boorne & Stevens tin factory. A few fragments of wall are all that remain of this significant local industry that sent Huntley & Palmers biscuits safely all over the world.

Around Market Place and Blagrove Street there has been much rebuilding in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The nineteenth century developments display good examples of

Reading's Victorian brick architecture, not only the listed Town Hall complex but also modest commercial buildings such as Jacksons, 1-9 Kings Road and 46/47 Market Place.

Queen Victoria Street, two parallel terraces of yellow brick and terracotta was built as a new street at the beginning of the twentieth century. The architects were at various times Charles Smith & Sons and Spencer Slingsby Stallwood. Most of it was built for Reading property developer J C Fidler.

St Laurence's Church and St Giles' Church are both constructed with local stone and flint. Elsewhere, the use of flint is negligible but natural stone is used for buildings seeking grandeur such as High Bridge, no. 33 London Street and the Victorian banks in Market Place and King Street.

Brick is one of the distinguishing features of Reading's architecture and there are examples of good quality brickwork throughout the conservation area. Brick was a popular building material in the 18th and 19th centuries and the ready availability of different coloured bricks provided the opportunity for the lively polychromatic brickwork found throughout Victorian Reading. 17 Blagrove Street is a particularly good example of Reading brickwork.

#### **5.4 Buildings of local historic interest and positive buildings**

There are many listed buildings and structures and buildings of townscape merit within the CA as well as undesigned heritage assets.

##### **5.4.1 Listed Buildings**

There are 90 listed buildings or groups of buildings in the CA; 28 in Abbey Quarter west; 12 in Reading Central east; 40 in Duke Street, The River Kennet and London Street and 10 in Church Street and the environs of S Giles' Church. Most are Grade II but three are Grade II\* and one is Grade I.

These are all identified on Map 3 and are also listed in Appendix III where images are provided along with a short summary and link to the Historic England listing entry.

##### **5.4.2 Buildings of townscape merit**

There are 53 buildings of townscape merit; 16 in Abbey Quarter west; 12 in Reading Central east; 22 in Duke Street, The River Kennet and London Street and 3 in Church Street and the environs of S Giles' Church. These are identified on Map 3 and listed in Appendix IV.

##### **5.4.3 Other undesigned heritage assets**

The interior wall of Huntley Boorne & Stevens tin factory and After Dark Club (originally S Giles church hall) on London Street is an important undesigned heritage asset.



*Interior wall of Huntley, Boorne & Stevens factory at the rear of London Street on St Giles Close*

### **5.5 Public Realm - floorscape, street lighting, street furniture and local detail**

Road and footway surfaces are predominantly modern i.e. tarmac, concrete and brick products. However, there are sections of London Street which when exposed for road repairs reveal an older cobbled surface beneath and a cobbled surface to Thorn Lane.

The pedestrianised surface in Market Place and in Town Hall Square around the Queen Victoria statue has been much improved with new paving and the planting of trees. Footways close to the Town Hall are paved with grey stone.

There are lengths of granite stone kerbs in Blagrove Street, the Forbury and Market Place. Thorn Lane has a carriageway of stone setts and Church Street's tarmac carriageway is flanked by two rows of square-section stone setts. Examples of historic paving are confined to privately maintained areas such as the courtyard of The George Hotel (which has a cobbled entrance), and stone-paved alleys beside no. 41 and between 112 and 114 London Street. These small areas of historic floorscape should be preserved.

Street lighting columns, most signage and street furniture are modern.

## **6.Character Areas**

The conservation area divides into four character areas:-

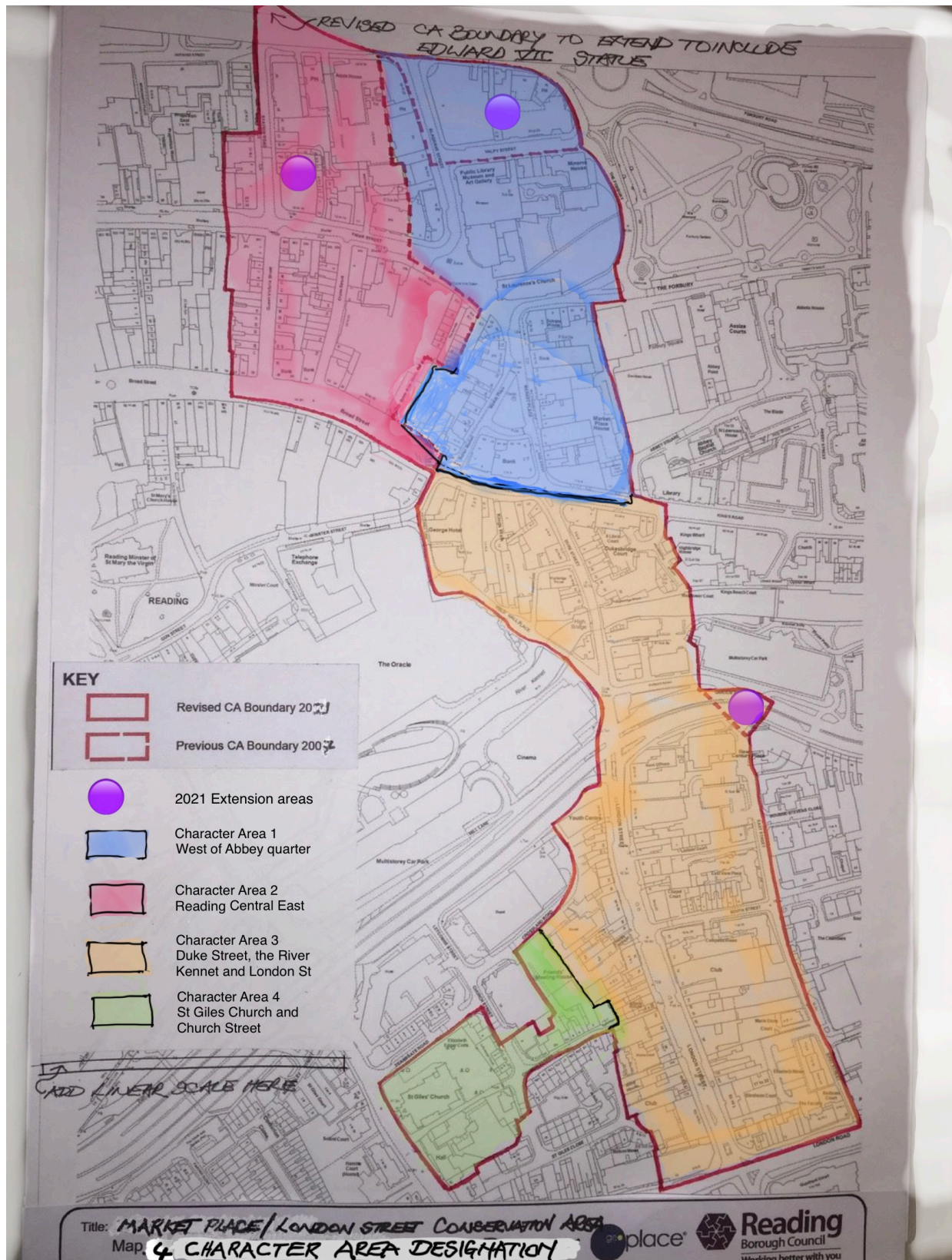
Abbey Quarter and west

- Area 1: Abbey Quarter west
- Area 2: Reading Central east

South of the Abbey Quarter

- Area 3: Duke Street, the River Kennet and London Street
- Area 4: Church Street and environs of S Giles' Church;





Map 4 Character Areas



## Character Area 1: Abbey Quarter west

In this area there are 16 buildings of townscape merit, and 28 listed buildings.

St Laurence's Church and the adjacent Town Hall complex are the key buildings of this character area. The early twelfth century church looks down the Market Place and overlooks Town Hall Square. Originally the outer gate of Reading Abbey was attached to its south flank. Along the south side of the church, a covered walkway was built by the mathematician John Blagrave in 1619, known as Blagrave's piazza. Later the parish stocks stood beneath it and a drinking fountain was built there in the 1860s. The walkway was demolished in 1867.

The collection of municipal buildings in Blagrave Street is arranged around an eighteenth century town hall. In 1785 the old town hall in the upper storey of the Abbey Hospitium was demolished and a new one was built in 1786, now known as Victoria Hall with an Italianate style interior added in 1864 to accommodate the Father Willis Organ. In 1875 a new building designed by Alfred Waterhouse with bricks from the Reading firm of Colliers was completed. Waterhouse wrapped his new building around the earlier town hall and carefully placed the clock tower for views from Friar Street and Market Place. In the next few years, further buildings were added to the complex. A public library and museum by Thomas Lainson were added in 1883-4 and an Art Gallery by W R Howell in 1897. This group of buildings, decorated with a lively display of red and blue bricks and terracotta, sculptures and friezes is one of the defining images of Reading's architecture. The pairing of the stone and flint medieval church tower and Waterhouse's red and blue brick clock tower display a lively contrast of colour and building materials, both in a Gothic style.





*The Town Hall in the 1970s before the tower was rebuilt. St Laurence's Church and Market Place in the foreground. (Norman Wicks, Reading Borough Libraries).*



The tower was badly damaged in the 1943 bombing of the town centre and was not reconstructed until the 1980/90s. This formed part of a long programme of refurbishment works that followed Reading's decision in the 1970s to retain the municipal buildings despite the move of civic functions to new offices.

The modern R+ office building at 2 Blagrove Street, on the corner of Forbury Road and Blagrove Street, blends well with the surrounding townscape and provides attractive reflections of Reading Museum on Valpy Street.

The Market Place and its continuation into the pedestrianised paved space in front of the Town Hall has its origins in the twelfth century. It was described in the 1960s by the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner as a "triangular space of no visual distinction", a comment that is repeated in the revised 2010 edition. In the 1970s it had a fairly scruffy appearance.

	
<p><i>Market Place in the 1970s. copyright Terry Allsop</i></p>	<p><i>Colonnade on east side of Market Place (now square columns) in the 1970s. copyright Terry Allsop</i></p>

Improvements in 2007 included the removal of the underground Victorian public toilets and ventilation chimney and the refurbishment of the Simeon Monument, with a financial contribution from the Soane Museum Trust, had a beneficial impact but more work is still needed. Today, its potential as a pedestrianised public open space is partly constrained by the movement of, predominately, buses through Friar Street and The Forbury.



*Cutting the ribbon in 2007. Will Palin, then Assistant Director of the Sir John Soane Museum and Councillor Graeme Hoskin, then Lead Councillor for Culture (Richard Bennett)*

New paving and tree planting has much improved the Market Place and Town Hall Square. Despite this, successive waves of information signage and generations of litter bins has contributed to a muddled and run down look.



*Town Hall Square*

The buildings around Market Place show a variety of styles and periods in which mid-twentieth century predominate.

27 & 28 and 29 & 31, formerly the Coopers off-licence and later public house, closed in 2010, has timber frames (altered) from the seventeenth century or earlier. On the opposite side of Market Place, 13-16 (previously NatWest bank) dates from c1875 in a Renaissance palace style. Facing north, on the lower side of Market Place, 48/49 is a stucco'd mid-eighteenth century building. Lloyds bank closed in 2016 and it has now been converted to a bar/restaurant with hotel above. The former Simonds/Barclays bank was converted into a restaurant (The Botanist) in 2017.

Jacksons Corner is a spacious crossroads where curved late nineteenth century corner buildings such as 1-9 King's Road (Jacksons) and 2 Duke Street/25 King Street (Jacobs) have been designed to take account of their prominent location. Jacksons closed in 2013 and has subsequently been used for filming an episode of the TV series Endeavour and is now in process of conversion to residential flats above and to the rear and restaurants at street level.

Character Area 1: Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- The close proximity of St Laurence's Church and Town Hall buildings makes a strong architectural statement;
- St Laurence's Church and distinctive tower;
- The Hospitium;
- The large public open space (part-pedestrianised) composed of Market Place and Town Hall Square around the statue of Queen Victoria;
- Town Hall complex comprising Victoria Hall, Concert Hall, Town Hall and Museum, Library and Art Gallery;
- Jacksons Corner, a once busy crossroads and locally known landmark;
- Simonds (later Barclays) Bank, King Street by Henry and Nathaniel Briant, 1838-9, in an ornate Italian palazzo style;
- Brutalist corner extension to Barclays Bank built in the 1970s, this is Reading's only Brutalist building in a conservation area;
- 8 High Street, an ornate tiled and terracotta building in Art Nouveau style originally built as the shoe department of Jacksons;
- Views up High Street of St Laurence's church tower;





*View up High Street towards St Laurence's church tower*

- Remnant of the Arcade which included the People's Pantry and was destroyed by bombing in 1943;
- The collection of historic buildings looking onto Market Place;
- 1960s/70s lighting fixtures on buildings around Market Place;
- The monument in Market Place, designed by Sir John Soane in 1804 to commemorate Edward Simeon a mayor of Reading and Governor of the Bank of England;
- The statue of Queen Victoria;
- Good views of Town Hall clock tower and the tower of St Laurence's Church;
- Trees, greenery and open space of St Laurence's churchyard in particular the Dogwood Jesus tree with its beautiful pink blossom in Spring;
- A good collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century tomb stones in St Laurence's churchyard marking the burials of some well known of Reading families;
- Trees in the public realm which soften the harsh urban townscape;
- Natural stone kerbs.



Soane Point, 6-8 Market Place

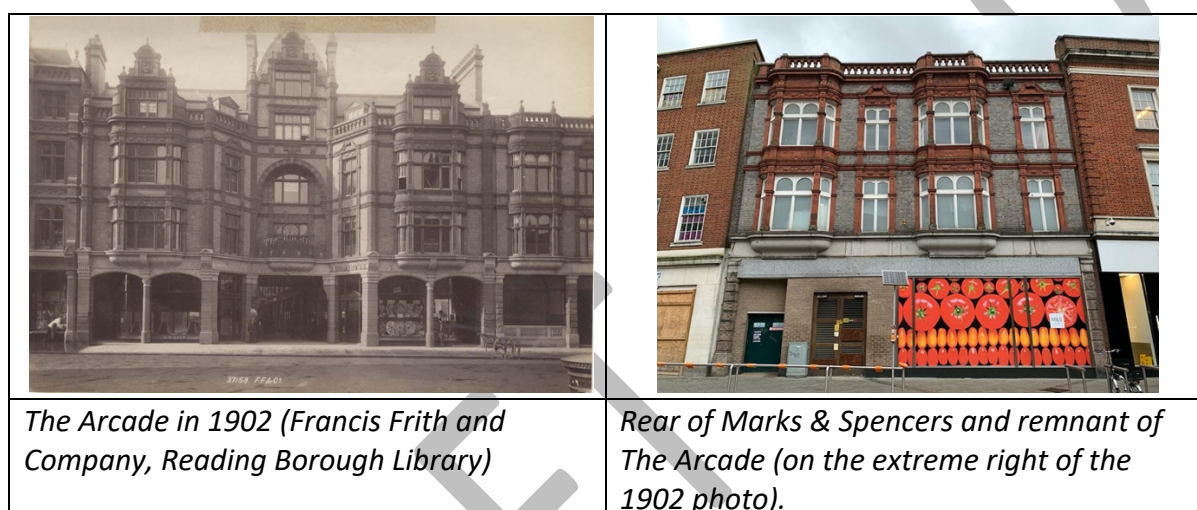
Character Area 1: Features that have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Post war architecture in Market Place is undistinguished and fails to respect neighbouring historic buildings e.g. 19-22 Market Place/2-8 The Forbury and 37-43 Market Place;
- Vacant commercial properties;
- A small amount of conflict of traffic and pedestrians in Market Place;
- Loss of original historic windows and front doors to modern replacements e.g. 10- 12 The Forbury;
- Loss of original architectural features;
- Plethora of signs and other street furniture including litter bins, some of which is redundant;
- Simeon obelisk needs some care and attention (mainly cleaning);
- Because Market Place has not been protected from the street food market the paving and monument has been damaged;
- Declining condition of the Henry West memorial in St Laurence's Church yard;
- Poor condition of tombs and stones in St Laurence's churchyard some of which are listed;
- Coopers and 27-28 Market Place next door have been empty for many years awaiting re-development of the former Bristol & West arcade that stretched from Market Place



to Town Hall Square (see Area 5 below). These are two of the oldest buildings and most significant buildings in Market Place and their decline is a blot on the landscape;

- Boarded up facade of the Bristol & West Arcade;
- Town Hall Square suffers from a mish-mash of new Abbey Quarter signage and old information signs which are damaged and superfluous;
- Redundant Readybike stands;
- The rear entrance to Marks and Spencer in Friar Street is scruffy and unsightly. The first floor is the only remaining part of 171-175 Friar Street and the entrance to the Arcade (F W Albury 1894). The Arcade together with the rear of some Market Place buildings were all but destroyed by the February 1943 bombing raid on Reading. It is comprised of red and grey bricks and terracotta with columns of Aberdeen and Cornish Granite;



## Character Area 2: Reading Central east

In this area there are 12 buildings of townscape merit, and some 12 listed buildings, with superb examples of Reading brickwork design. This is Victorian Reading office buildings at its best. The buildings are much as they were built, though with some unhelpful shop fronts.

Pedestrianised Grade II listed Queen Victoria Street was laid out at the end of the nineteenth century to link Broad Street with Station Road and through to Reading Station. Station Road developed slowly after the station was built in 1840. Its main function was providing facilities to support travellers such as the listed Grade II Great Western Hotel built in 1844 and one of the first railway hotels in Britain.



*Station Road in 1978 before the demolition of the Broadway (Pearl) Buildings in the distance although some features have been re-used on the new development (Reading Borough Library)*

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth century office developments along the street appeared such as the fantastic Broadway Buildings (1902) by local architect Joseph Morris and the more restrained King Edward Buildings (1903 Hoare & Wheeler).

In 1929 Harris Arcade was built to provide a link from an entrance at Friar Street to Station Road. Occupants of the units provided retail, personal and professional services.

Further south other examples of landmark character buildings include the Bull Hotel, 23 Broad St, which was in existence in the 1850s and closed in 1975 and the Haslams Building at 159 Friar St (previously Reading Gas Company). Reading's main post office for most of the twentieth century is now a Yates wine lodge.

Character Area 2: Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- The façade and spire of the Haslams building, 159 Friar Street, formerly Reading Gas Company and later British Gas;
- The façade and balconies of 156 Friar Street;
- The brickwork of the buildings in Cross Street;
- The façade of the old Bull Hotel;
- The superb features in the brickwork of the buildings in Queen Victoria Street;
- The Lloyds Bank building in Broad St;
- Harris Arcade;
- King Edward VII statue at Reading Station.

Character Area 2: Features that have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- The array of bins in front of various properties in Friar St makes the area look scruffy;
- Garish shop signage e.g. Coral and Betfred in Friar St;
- The staining of the bricks on Yates building (the old Post Office vacated in the 1990s) is unsightly;
- The traffic island on which the Edward VII statue stands is in need of improvement;
- Trade bins along Station Road.

### **Character Area 3: Duke Street, the River Kennet and London Street**

In this area there are 22 buildings of townscape merit, and some 40 listed buildings.

A modern shopping mall (Kings Walk) and modern development on the east side of the Duke Street/King's Road junction incorporates window frames and pinnacles from the original building and blends in reasonably with neighbouring buildings.

High Bridge, rebuilt over the Kennet in 1788, stands just upstream from a narrow modern pedestrian bridge built approximately 200 years later. The close proximity of the two bridges typifies the close mix of old and new development that characterises this part of the area.

London Street has medieval origins and is marked 'London Strete' on John Speed's 1611 map of Reading. Though many of London Street's buildings have a distinctively Georgian, and later, appearance, parts of older structures, such as 35-39 London Street, can be found including cellars made from stones liberated from Reading Abbey, possibly in the 16th century.

There are a few remaining sixteenth/seventeenth century buildings including 49-53 London Street, listed grade II, which has an eighteenth century front on an earlier, timber-framed building and 88 London Street which has a jettied first floor to Church Street. 49/51 London Street contains seventeenth century panelling.

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, London Street was a fashionable part of town and many of the elegant houses which lined either side of the road still survive. A blue plaque commemorates Dr Anthony Addington for whom 73 and 75 were built.

Then, as now, the street was unusually wide.

Through the 1960s – 1980s many London Street properties were vacant and became dilapidated. Refurbishment resulted in many now being little more than facades with a considerable loss of the original fabric i.e. 49-57 London Street. Huntley & Palmers original shop at 119-121 London Street, marked by a plaque, was extensively rebuilt to match the appearance of the original shop.

London Street today contains a few specialist retail shops and restaurants as well as commercial and professional premises but is increasingly a residential street. Development



at the 'top' and 'bottom' of the street, beside the London Road and IDR junctions respectively is predominantly post war.

The width of the carriageway has been re-aligned and re-arranged in late 20th century to accommodate lay-by parking, bus stops and more recently bus lanes.



*View north down London Street*

Character Area 3: Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- The unusual width of the street, which rises gently from the River Kennet with a slight eastward curve and creates a visually interesting townscape;
- The high concentration of historic buildings on either side, many of which are listed;
- The mix of architectural styles and periods with an overall majority of late eighteenth/nineteenth century buildings;
- High quality townscape and well-proportioned relationship between tall buildings and wide street;
- The predominance of brick with occasional use of stone and stucco;
- The strong vertical rhythm created by regular bays of aligned windows and doors;
- Key buildings such as 1 London Street, built as a coroner's court with fine railings to the Kennet and vermiculated voussoirs; 33 London Street, originally the Literary, Scientific and Mechanic's Institute, 1843, by W Brown and 73-79 London Street,

described by the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner as the “best” of the Georgian houses;

- The former Ship Hotel, Duke Street, an early twentieth century re-building of an earlier coaching inn and once the flagship Reading commercial hotel for local brewers H & G Simonds;
- River Kennet and riverside views from the two bridges;
- The George Hotel, King Street, built around a courtyard with entrances from King Street and Minster Street, first mentioned in 1423 but built and re-built many times;
- The 1990 black history mural on the northern façade of the 1920s building originally Kingham’s garage and later the Central Club that closed in 2005.
- Side alleys and streets which afford glimpses and views to east and west;
- Wide pavements;
- Street trees which help to soften the otherwise urban environment;
- Holy Brook, glimpsed from inside Kings Walk;
- Historic stone setted road surface in Thorn Lane;
- Views of the Kennet south down Highbridge Wharf and Highbridge House
- Prevalence of white-painted vertical sliding sash windows
- The variety of historic architectural details including; pedimented door cases, iron balconies and railings, timber shopfronts;
- John Ravera artworks at the foot of East Street;
- The Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) roof garden;
- The planters on the waterfront next to 1 London Street.

Character Area 3: Features that have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Noise and fumes from a constant stream of traffic exacerbated by the introduction of a third lane for buses in 2019;
- London Street is severed in two by the Inner Distribution Road;
- Modern development at northern and southern extremities of London Street, adjacent to road junctions, spoils the overall historic appearance of the area;
- Rear of London Street properties west generally presents a poor appearance and is decidedly visible to traffic jammed at the IDR junction;
- Rear of London Street properties present a poor appearance on East Street with gardens turned over to car parking or modern developments;
- View from the Great Expectations north is marred by the Oracle to the west and the Grosvenor Casino and Queens Road Car Park to the east. This detracts from the longer view towards High Bridge and the London Street Brasserie;
- Poor quality of Duke Street pavement;
- Modern alterations to the carriageway and pavement e.g. pelican crossing, CCTV towers, concrete paving do not always respect the quality of the street’s historic buildings;
- Loss of original windows and front doors to modern replacements;
- Loss of original slate roofs and other architectural features such as gates and railings;
- Plethora of signs and other street furniture, some of which is redundant;

- Some shop signage does not enhance the character and appearance of the area and in some cases for example Grosvenor Casino animated advertising it detracts from the heritage setting;
- Dumping of domestic rubbish and overflowing trade bins;
- Garish shop signage;
- Nos. 14 & 16 King Street (once Mothercare now vacant), built c1950 is out of character with neighbouring historic buildings;
- Historic architectural character is diluted by a number of undistinguished post war developments that have been allowed to dominate. Duke Street in particular, unlike London Street, does not always present its best face to its frontage. The spartan frontage reduces noise and pollution from a busy street to the flats above the retail units. To the rear of buildings, the architects intentions become clearer and more pleasing, although marred by commercial and domestic rubbish bins and parking;
- No. 22 Duke Street (former Lower Ship Hotel) has been empty since XXX and boarded up although well maintained by the brewery Samuel Smiths;
- Morning after evidence of Reading's night time economy.



*Rubbish and bins on London Street*



*Traffic cameras and bins on London Street*

#### **Character Area 4: Church Street and environs of S Giles' Church**

In this area there are three buildings of townscape merit, and ten listed buildings.

Church Street links London Street to S Giles' church and thereby to Southampton Street. In addition to S Giles' Church, the Friends Meeting House, not easily seen because it is set back behind a modern single storey extension, is a key building with a secluded burial ground to the rear (north).

On the south side of the street is a modern housing development (outside the conservation area) that stands on the site of Huntley, Boorne & Stevens tin works. Nos 4-6c, on the north side, is a row of 19th century buildings, three of which are listed. The eastern end of the street

is narrow and confined. Proposals to widen it in the 1870s thankfully came to nothing. It opens out at a road junction between church, historic houses and S Giles church hall. Unfortunately, modern development and a view northward of the Oracle's multi-storey car park dispel the historic character promoted by the old church, vicarage and graveyard opposite. S Giles' Church is one of the three medieval churches of Reading, much altered and 'restored' by J P St Aubyn in 1873.

This character area, located between the noise and pollution of traffic in London Street and Southampton Street has a distinctively quiet atmosphere enhanced by the trees and greenery of the churchyard.

Character Area 4: Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Narrow entrance from London Street with attractive view of S Giles' church spire;
- S Giles' Church and old vicarage;
- Friends Meeting House and secluded burial ground;
- Row of 19th century houses on north side;
- Prevalent use of brick;
- Tranquil atmosphere;
- Green open space of S Giles' churchyard;
- Remnants of historic floorscape (stone setts and kerbs at edge of carriageway);
- Early twentieth century Arts & Crafts style parish hall (Southampton Street);
- Pedestrian friendly area with infrequent traffic.





*Looking west along Church Street to S Giles*

Character Area 4: Features that have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Modern single storey extension spoils the setting and appearance of the listed Friends Meeting House;
- The wide intersection of Church Street and St Giles Close, surrounded by modern development, erodes historic character between the historic buildings of Church Street and St Giles' Church;
- Modern housing development of St Giles Close intrudes upon historic character;
- Rear of London Street properties onto St Giles Close generally presents a poor appearance;
- Poorly maintained road and pavement surface;
- Wheelie bins intrude upon the historic streetscene;
- Persistent graffiti on the southern wall of 88 London Street is not removed quickly.



*View north from Church Street out of the CA*

## **7. Negative features, issues and opportunities for enhancement**

### **7.1 Loss of original architectural features and detail**

Most original shopfronts and signage have been successively modernised over the centuries and present an array of different styles and fashions which do not always contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Doors and windows have been replaced in some cases with inappropriate modern versions. The chains around Queen Victoria's statue on Town Hall square were removed at some unknown time in the past possibly during the Second World War.

### **7.2 Street furniture and surfacing**

The food market held in Market Place is very popular, however this has led to an ongoing risk to the York stone paving which has not been adequately protected. Damage has also been caused to the Simeon Monument which has been blackened by smoke and grease;

There is a plethora of redundant signage in the CA. The introduction of signage for the Abbey Quarter around the time of the re-opening of the Abbey in 2018 did not result in a tidy up of old damaged, surplus and out of date information boards.





There are three redundant Readybike stands within the CA or immediately adjacent.



### 7.3 Advertising and shop signage

Garish advertising and shop signage is ubiquitous in the CA which is after all at the centre of Reading's retail area. The animated and illuminated advertising of the Grosvenor Casino is particularly intrusive.

In Town Hall Square the rear delivery and pick up entrance is a major blight on the appearance of the square and the movement of pedestrians along Friar Street.

Opportunities should be taken as they present themselves with a change of owners and occupiers or with the refreshing of existing signage for improvements to be made that comply with the current planning policy on shop fronts and signage.

#### **7.4 Rubbish and bins**

The management of rubbish and bins within the CA is not always appropriate to the enhancement of the area as a destination for shoppers, visitors and those who wish to admire Reading's town centre heritage.

In the town centre the weekly BID cardboard collection includes an inappropriately located collection point next to the dog fountain on the south side of St Laurence's church.

Unightly trade bins are a problem at the front of properties along Station Road and the rear of Duke street.

London Street is becoming progressively more residential which brings the problem of rubbish disposal, including flytipping and bins left on the street. Overflowing trade bins are also a problem here.

#### **7.5 Rear of properties**

The rear of many properties in this CA are visible to pedestrians and cars using streets behind the main roads.

The rear of Duke Street is generally neglected despite being a well-used pedestrian route from King's Road to the Kennet.



*Rear of Dukesbridge House on Duke Street*



The rear of properties on London Street which were once gardens are visible along East Street, St Giles Close and from the vantage point of Mill Lane and the IDR. Some spaces are now being developed and some are given over to parking.



*Rear of London Street properties from East Street*



*Rear of London Street properties from the IDR travelling east*

## **7.6 Sites awaiting development**

Sites awaiting development in the town centre often lie unoccupied and deteriorating despite the granting of planning permission.

The former Bristol & West Arcade, including Coopers on Market Place, has been awaiting redevelopment for many years. It is now closed and despite approved planning applications, work has not started. The site stretches from Town Hall square to Market Place and so has a major impact on Character Area 1.



*Bristol & West Arcade from Town Hall Square*





*Coopers on Market Place*

At 29-35 Station Road the offices adjacent to Garrard Street are boarded up awaiting redevelopment following the granting of planning permission for No 1 Reading which rises to 22 floors. Meanwhile the boarded up site does not present a pleasing approach to the town centre.

The former Central Club at the foot of London Street has been sold but is awaiting development.

### **7.7 Sites for improvement (see Map 3)**

Post war office development particularly Soane Point and 38-41 Market Place looks tired and should the opportunity present itself, efforts should be made to ensure that the solution enhances the character and appearance of the CA.

The area to the rear of the Lower Ship hotel along Thorn Lane often appears as a no-man's land despite its proximity to the Oracle Riverside and the latent appeal of the cobbled road surface and red brick buildings.

The Grosvenor Casino building on London Street north of the IDR with its garish animated and illuminated advertising detracts from the view of High Bridge to the north.

The neglected rear of London Street properties along East Street and the now vacant Olympia Ballroom need attention to improve the street. On the west side of London Street near the IDR the rear of properties which were once gardens are now neglected car parks.

### **7.8 Negative views out of the conservation area**

Vistas from the conservation area west onto Southampton Street are not particularly enticing for the pedestrian. From Deansgate Road, the currently closed and boarded up Red Lion public house awaits demolition.

Looking north from Letcombe Street the Oracle car park foreshortens the view.

High rise developments on the fringes of the CA have a major impact on views out of the area. The impact of higher-rise developments beyond the boundary, although not always negative, should be given due weight when planning applications are considered.

### **7.9 Impact of Traffic**

Parts of the CA are pedestrianised but even so traffic flows through and along its margins can be a distraction at busy times.

The CA is divided by Reading's IDR, a busy road which at peak times can be just a car park of polluting vehicles.

Market Place and Friar Street are predominantly used by buses and taxis serving the town centre. Pollution is consequently less and most local residents are Reading-Buses-friendly.

The busy junction at the foot of London Street with the IDR is regularly the site of traffic accidents resulting in bent railings and broken traffic lights. The junction should be improved and enhanced to prevent this risk to pedestrians and traffic.





*Damaged barriers at the foot of London Street where Mill Lane merges (2016)*

London Street is quieter but still busy and noisy at peak times. The removal of informal crossing points and traffic islands following the introduction of the bus lane made this street less welcoming to pedestrian traffic.

#### **7.10 Condition and maintenance of graveyards**

The condition of some of the graves within St Laurence's churchyard in particular is poor and they are in need of maintenance.

## 8 Action Plan

**Table 1 – All Conservation Areas**

Policies, attitudes and actions which need to be applied to all of Reading's Conservation Areas if the town's remaining historic character is to be protected and enhanced as it should be. These apply to the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area as fully as they do to all, particularly with regard to the careful protection of architectural detail in any building alterations. It is acknowledged that these proposals have resource implications, especially for Reading Borough Council, at a time when resources are stretched and limited.

ISSUE	ACTION	WHO	TIMESCALE
Loss of original architectural features and details (see 7.1). Insensitive change and development not requiring planning permission, permitted development	<b>Guidance:</b> Provide guidance document on 'approved' methods for common small scale alterations <b>Awareness:</b> Provide householder information on the added value of 'period detail' and detail on economic alternatives for energy efficiency savings Material prepared by other planning authorities could be used as a model for preparing written guidance	RBC and CAAC	Within 1 year
Loss or change to original boundary features.	<b>Awareness:</b> Provide householder information document on the added value and visual importance of boundary walls and railings <b>Policy:</b> Article 4 directions could be implemented as resources allow	RBC and CAAC	Within 1 year

Insensitive development undertaken without permission (see 7.1 e.g. window replacement in listed buildings)

**Guidance:** Provision of property owner guidance on legal requirements for alterations/development/tree works in conservation areas.

**Enforcement:** Legal enforcement by RBC to secure reversal of changes

RBC and CAAC  
RBC

Within 1 year  
Immediate and ongoing

Redevelopment within or adjoining the Conservation Area should respect the general height, massing and alignment of existing buildings and use a palette of materials which reflect its existing character (see 7.6 & 7.7)

**Guidance, Policy:** Supplementary Design guidance planning document for development in historic areas. **Support:** Use CAAC to gain informed comment on planning applications affecting Conservation Areas

RBC and CAAC

Within 1 year  
Immediate and ongoing

**Table 2 – Market Place/London St. Conservation Area**

Policies and actions which are specific to this Conservation Area, to retain and enhance its important contribution to the life of Reading as a whole. They may require some limited revenue resources, which it is recommended should be given high priority, but little or no public capital expenditure. Engagement with Reading UK CIC and the BID is crucial to the achievement of some of these improvements.

ISSUE	ACTION	WHO	TIMESCALE
Sites awaiting development/unoccupied properties	<b>Identification &amp; Enforcement:</b> RBC should use the powers that it has to enforce development and maintenance of properties especially those that are listed.	CAAC can identify and inform RBC to use the processes that are available to it subject to resources.	Immediate and ongoing.
There is a plethora of redundant signage in the CA. The introduction of signage for the Abbey Quarter around the time of the re-opening of the Abbey in 2018 did not result in a tidy up of old damaged, surplus and out of date information boards.	<b>Training/Awareness:</b> RBC staff should take into account existing signage when new signage is proposed for roads, pavements or information.  Existing superfluous and redundant signage should be removed and damage made good using CIL funding for the town centre.	Traffic Department, planning department and CAAC.  CAAC to survey to identify.  RBC councillors and officers to approve and allocate funding.	Immediate and ongoing.  Immediate.  At next CIL allocation opportunity.
Rationalisation and improvement of the several eras of waste bins in Town Hall Square	<b>Identification:</b> Remove and replace.	CAAC to survey to identify.  RBC councillors and officers to approve and allocate funding.	Immediate.  At next CIL allocation opportunity.



ISSUE	ACTION	WHO	TIMESCALE
There are three redundant Readybike stands within the CA or immediately adjacent.	Remove if of no immediate use.	RBC to review and make a decision.	Immediate.
Garish advertising and shop signage is ubiquitous in the CA which is after all at the centre of Reading's retail area.	<b>Training/Awareness/Enforcement:</b> RBC staff should take the opportunity presented by the HSHAZ project to educate shop owners about shopfront and signage policy and enforce any future deviations using planning enforcement.	RBC including planning enforcement.	Immediate (HSHAZ project) and ongoing.
In Town Hall Square the rear delivery and pick up entrance is a major blight on the appearance of the square and the movement of pedestrians along Friar Street.	<b>Communication/Awareness:</b> RBC and CAAC to engage with Marks & Spencers to bring about improvements.	CAAC & RBC	Completion within two years.
The management of rubbish and bins within the CA is not always appropriate to the enhancement of the area as a destination for shoppers, visitors and those who wish to admire Reading's town centre heritage.	<b>Communication/Enforcement:</b> RBC to communicate and enforce using the Town Centre & Abbey Quarter BIDs to work with traders and business owners where possible.	RBC & BIDs	Completion within two years.

**ISSUE**

The rear of many properties in this CA are visible to pedestrians and cars using streets behind the main roads.

Neglect at the rear of properties undermines the character and appearance of the CA but are generally seen as unimportant by developer.

The busy junction at the foot of London Street with the IDR is regularly the site of traffic accidents resulting in bent railings and broken traffic lights. The junction should be improved and enhanced to prevent this risk to pedestrians and traffic.

**ACTION****Communication/Enforcement:**

Pre-application planning advice and decisions should uphold the importance of the rear of buildings and gardens to the character and appearance of the CA.

**Transport planning:** RBC should review the IDR for the potential to reduce its use by private transport and review the safety of this junction. This should take into account the five goals for public realm enhancement in Historic England's *Streets for All* advice.

**WHO**

RBC to communicate and enforce through planning department and planning decisions.

RBC

**TIMESCALE**

Immediate and ongoing.

Develop a strategy and plan for the IDR within 5 years.

ISSUE	ACTION	WHO	TIMESCALE
London Street is quieter but still busy and noisy at peak times. The removal of informal crossing points and traffic islands following the introduction of the bus lane made this street less welcoming to pedestrian traffic.	<b>Transport planning:</b> Linked with the IDR review RBC should review the one-way route decisions that the local authority made in the late 1960s/1970s which continue to have a detrimental impact on London Street and the more recent introduction of the bus lane. This should take into account the five goals for public realm enhancement in Historic England's <i>Streets for All</i> advice.	RBC	Develop a strategy and plan to review Reading's one-way system and for London Street within 5 years.
The condition of some of the graves within St Laurence's churchyard in particular is poor and they are in need of maintenance.	<b>Funding:</b> Prepare a maintenance strategy and work with the relevant church and charity authorities to maintain the graves, some of which are listed within the listed churchyard.	RBC and St Laurence's Church (?tbc)	Prepare strategy (which could also cover other churchyards which are the responsibility of RBC) within two years and then ongoing.
Significant trees in burial grounds/public space to be considered for TPO.	<b>Policy/Strategy:</b> Heritage trees in public spaces are not always protected by a Tree Protection Order leading to a misleading impression that they are not protected.	CAAC to initiate for action by RBC	At next review of RBC tree strategy.
The food market held in Market Place is very popular, however	<b>Communication:</b> Food market stalls should take measures to	RBC in collaboration with Reading UK CIC.	Immediate notification and then ongoing for new stall holders.



ISSUE	ACTION	WHO	TIMESCALE
this has led to an ongoing risk to the York stone paving and Simeon Monument which has not been adequately protected.	protect the stone and ironwork from damage.		
Reading Borough Council needs to demonstrate civic pride in relation to heritage on an ongoing and continuous basis particularly in town centre CAs such as this.	<b>Communication/Enforcement:</b> The re-opening of Reading Abbey was a great day for Reading but every sign of neglect such as Coopers in Market Place is perceived as lack of respect for Reading's heritage.	<p>RBC to update its Heritage Strategy.</p> <p>RBC/heritage organisations to use the opportunity provide by HSHAZ to reinforce pride in Reading's heritage.</p> <p>CAAC and other organisations on an ongoing basis championing the towns heritage.</p>	Next update of heritage strategy.

## **Appendix One Public consultation on the Draft Appraisal of Market Place/London St Conservation Area**

### *Outline Strategy*

*Covid-19 has prevented the usual round of meetings and walkabouts which have been used in both St Peters and the Russell Street./Castle Hill reviews to gauge the community's views.*

*An online survey has been drafted (surveymonkey) which could also be completed by email.*

*Reading CAAC now has its own website on which the draft appraisal will be placed together with a link to the online survey. This can also be publicised using Reading CAAC's Twitter account.*

*Other possibilities include Zoom meetings and if restrictions ease over the summer of 2021 leafleting and walkabouts in small groups may be possible.*

*[Property owners in the extension areas will be circularised.]*

## **Appendix Two Archaeology and Historical Development of the area**

### **Pre-historic, Roman and Saxon periods**

There is evidence of limited pre-Saxon activity, in the form of a small number of Prehistoric and Roman finds. Occasional chance Prehistoric and Roman pieces of pottery, stone tools and coins were recorded within the Conservation Area over the years.

Asser's Life of Alfred records that in 870-71 the Danes wintered in Reading and built a defensive earthwork between the Kennet and the Thames 'on the right hand side of the royal vill'. This earthwork is most likely to have been across the spur of land where Reading Abbey was later built although as yet no evidence for it has been discovered. The name Vastern, retained today in Vastern Road, also points to a Viking settlement of some sort and in 1831 a Viking sword was found in the area.

### **Medieval and Tudor periods**

With the foundation of Reading Abbey in 1121 and consecration in 1164 there was a shift in economic activity away from St Mary's which was the focus of Saxon Reading to the Abbey gates.

As the influence of the Abbey grew, the early route along the course of today's Southampton Street, Bridge Street and St. Mary's Butts was rivalled by a south-north road leading directly to the newly established market place by St Laurence's Church via a new bridge over the Kennet. This new road followed London Street over the Kennet at High Bridge and led along Duke Street to the Market Place i.e. the backbone of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

Broad Street and Friar Street were also laid out to the west to connect with the original Saxon centre.

Medieval and late medieval finds and structures such as wells and cess pits have been found around Market Place, Friar Street and Broad Street.

The features found at 24 to 26 East Street have been interpreted as delimiting the extent of the Medieval town and a tenement layout within the site. Of particular interest, is whether archaeological evidence supports this as the Medieval town limits or whether sites beyond this boundary were occupied during the Medieval period and if so, the date at which this expansion occurred. Two sites containing non-structural Medieval features lie within that boundary. Those sites are 68 and 74 to 76 London Street. A Medieval foundry was also located at 67 to 73 London Street. It was used to cast domestic wares.

The lack of continual occupation from the Saxon and Medieval periods and into the Post-medieval period within sites along London Street contrasts with the sites in the historic town centre. There is one exception and that is the site of 76 to 102 London Street where there was non-structural evidence of activities dating from the 11th through to the 19th centuries. Excavations in 2019 of a medieval tilery and long term occupation of the site at 40-68 Silver Street may be evidence of occupation beyond the accepted limits of the Medieval town.



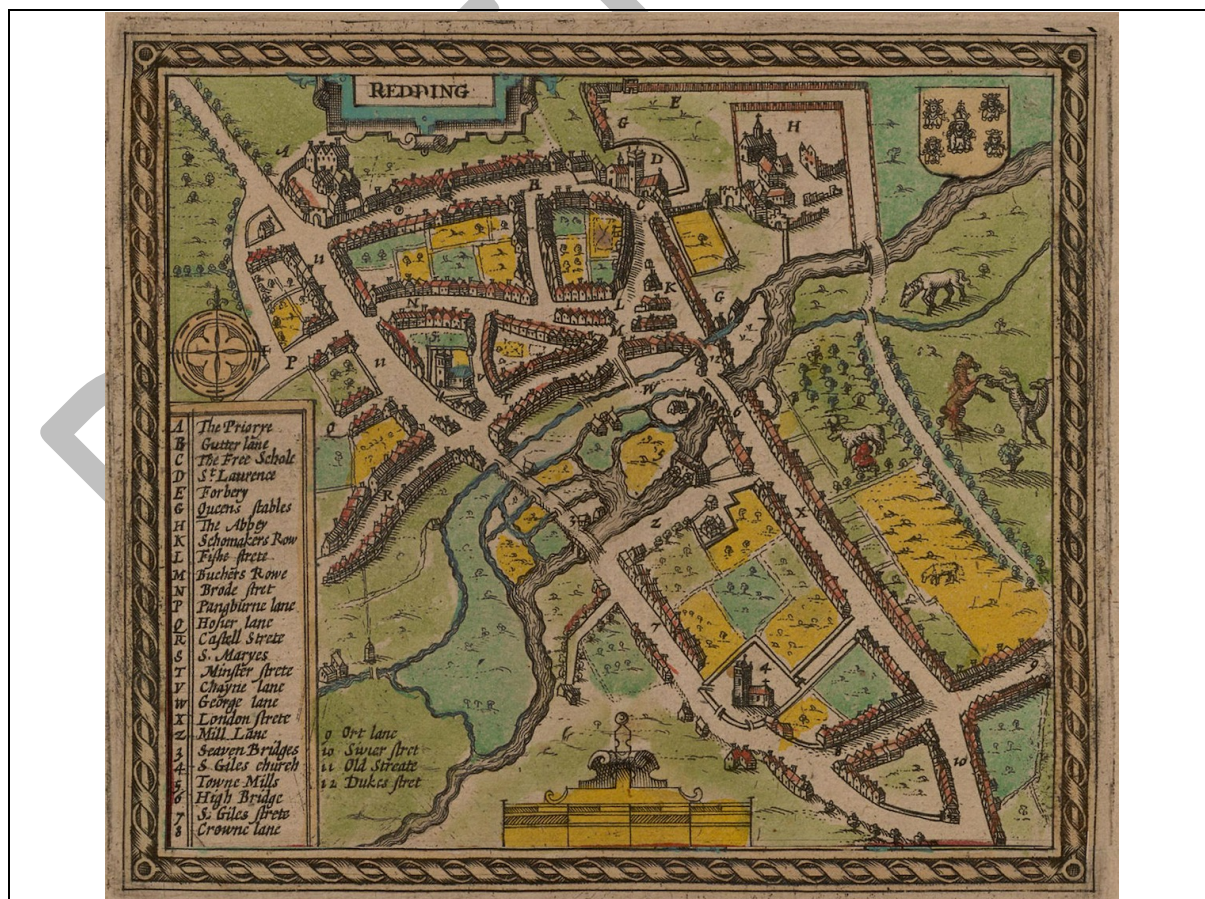
Structural remains dating to the medieval period were located at the Coopers complex, at 27 to 28 Market Place. There was also evidence of a timber framed 17th century structure.

During the medieval period Reading developed rapidly, based on the manufacture of woollen cloth, leather goods and silk weaving. This was encouraged by its good location on the crossing of major historic land routes, and by the proximity of the two waterways – the River Kennet and the River Thames.

Further south along London Street and beyond the town boundary, at 107, a small assemblage of animal bone was found to date from the Medieval or early Post-medieval and is assumed to be associated with butchery and tanning Industries. It was common to locate the more polluting industries further from the town boundary in the Medieval and Post-medieval periods. There is limited evidence of widespread industries and, based on the surviving built environment, the expansion of Reading southwards along London Street consisted mainly of residential dwellings with some small scale industrial and limited numbers of large-scale industrial sites scattered between high-status houses.

The remainder of the archaeological investigations within the Conservation Area have been concentrated around London Street. Most of the evidence is non-structural and dates from the 12th to 14th centuries.

### Seventeenth to Nineteenth centuries



*John Speed's map of Reading 1611 – the basic street plan is retained today*

The earliest map of Reading, published in John Speed's atlas of Great Britain in 1611 shows that the plan of the town in the early 17th century resembled a triangle with a church roughly at each corner: St Mary's, St Giles' and St Laurence's. The two long roughly north-south sides of the triangle are formed by the two routes mentioned above. The River Kennet, spanned by two bridges (one over each route), flowed through the centre of the town. The northern side of the triangle was Friar Street. The most developed area is shown to be north of the Kennet and west of the site of Reading Abbey. This map identifies and names London Street and Duke Street and illustrates the triangular market place beside St Laurence's. A lane branched westward from London Street to St Giles' Church, the precursor of today's Church Street.

Before Speed's map, Amyce's survey of 1552 documented property ownership and occupancy in the centre of Reading. The information was used by Peyton to prepare a useful map in 1919.

Defensive ditches and a pit, dated to the 17th century and located at 24-26 East Street, are interpreted as part of the Civil War defences.

From the mid-18th century onwards, Reading began to flourish as an important stopping-off place between Bath and London. Inns flourished and regular public coaches began in 1780. Leather tanning continued and new industries developed, most notably brewing, brick and tile making, iron-founding, and boat building.

In 1786 a new Town Hall was built, which is the Victoria Hall in the present-day Town Hall. High Bridge, built of Portland Stone in 1787 to replace a wooden bridge of 1707 (which was itself a replacement), is now the oldest bridge over the Kennet, all of the bridges in Bridge Street having been replaced.

During the coaching era, London Street was on the main route from the town centre to London via London Road. The Crown Inn (now demolished) at the corner of London Street and Crown Street was one of Reading's premier coaching inns as was The George on Duke Street.

Early 19th century maps show the town had hardly extended beyond its medieval core but a fast town expansion was stimulated by the development of the canals. The Kennet Canal was completed in 1723 and the Kennet and Avon Canal in 1810, bringing London and Bristol, two major sea ports, into direct communication by water.





### 1813 map of Reading

*Before Queens Road, South Street, Station Road and the coming of the railway and before Queen Victoria Street. None the less the major streets are still recognisable.*

In the 1830s Queens Road was laid out to the east of London Street with new residential developments in Bath stone brought to Reading along the Kennet & Avon canal, such as Queen's Crescent following shortly afterwards.

A further boost to the development of Reading was the construction of the Great Western Railway which reached the town in 1840. The coming of the railway resulted in a rapid growth of major industries, notably Huntley & Palmers, biscuit makers, and Suttons Seeds, which provided work for a rapidly increasing population. Suttons had an enormous site stretching east from Market Place to Abbey Square and the Forbury which was vital to sell to Berkshire farmers on market day. Huntley & Palmers had a shop on Market Place and Arthur Cooper had an off-licence on Market Place which later became part of H & G Simonds.

In the 1840s London Street was comprised of businesses and retail outlets such as tailors, umbrella makers, ironmongers, bakers, booksellers, solicitors and educational institutions. This retail pattern continued into the twentieth century with shop owners living on the premises. It became a significant industrial area on the edge of the town centre. Nos 119-121 was the home of Joseph Huntley's (later Huntley & Palmers) first bakery and opposite was the ironmongers that was to become Huntley, Boorne and Stevens tin works. The tin works did not close until the 1970s when all but a few walls were demolished and the factory was replaced by residential and commercial properties.



*Huntley Boorne & Stevens London Street (permission to be obtained Reading Libraries – Sidney Gold)*

In the later twentieth century very few of the upper stories were in use and this was a cause of concern. At this time many businesses left London Street with traders pointing to the impact of the one-way system and later the IDR. In the late 1960s and early 1970s many properties were vacant and becoming dilapidated.





53-57 London Street c1980 (Reading Borough Libraries)



44-50 London Street c1970 (Sidney Gold, Reading Borough Libraries)

### Twentieth century to the present day

Reading market was held at Market Place until the second half of the twentieth century. It was a bustling, busy and sometimes grubby business area surrounded by large enterprises such as Suttons Seeds offices and shops, auctioneers, banks, inns and off-licences.

Significant redevelopment of the west of Market Place took place after the Second World War because of wartime damage to the Market Arcade. To the east the Suttons Seeds site was redeveloped in the 1970s when Suttons left the town centre. This was linked with a proposed route for Reading's Inner Distribution Road which, if it had materialised, would have been very destructive to the Forbury Gardens.

Shops and businesses continued, down High Street and Duke Street to London Street. One of Reading's first vegetarian restaurants was on the first floor of 7 High Street (now Perry's Caribbean Cuisine) and was linked with the health food store next door at no 8 (collectively known as The High).

No 1 London Street, formerly the police and coroners court and now a solicitors was in an almost derelict state in the 1970s and barely recognisable compared with the building we have today.



*No 1 London Street c1980 across the Kennet. In the foreground the site of Dukesbridge House has been cleared. (Reading Public Libraries)*

Queen Victoria Street provides an open boulevard and long view from Broad Street to Reading Station. It was laid out around the turn of the twentieth century for local developer and merchant J C Fidler. Reading Corporation purposefully set out to create as straight a continuous sight line as possible along a Queen Victoria Street and Station Road. The construction was not quite finished at the time of Mr Fidler's death in December 1903.



*Queen Victoria Street c1915 (Bryant Stationer and Tobacconist, Salisbury Road, Reading Borough Libraries)*

Market Place with the Simeon monument in the centre was beautified in 2007 after the market moved to Hosier Street.

In 1999 the Oracle shopping mall was opened and completely changed the appearance of western boundary of this CA. Just south of High Bridge, the building that now houses the London Street Brasserie was restored.

Plans for the conservation and re-opening of Reading Abbey which took place in 2018 incorporated the launch of Reading's Abbey Quarter as a historic area of Reading. The western edge of this CA (Character Area 1) is part of the Abbey Quarter. This important project draws attention to the impact that four hundred years of Reading Abbey still has on the town and its commercial areas almost 500 years after it was dissolved.

Within the conservation area there were two significant changes to its historic street pattern in this period. Both were caused by the construction in the 1970s of the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) across the lower end of London Street. Mill Lane, which led westwards from the bottom of London Street to a mill beside the Kennet, has been obliterated by the new road and modern development; Queens Road, created in the 1830s as part of the eastward expansion of Reading, has, at its junction with London Street, been re-aligned and widened with an ensuing loss of many historic buildings.

The wide dual-carriageway of the IDR slices London Street into two parts. Its construction necessitated the demolition of many buildings. A one-way system and other traffic management measures have blocked the former north-south thoroughfare from London Street to Market Place and the town centre.

**Photographic Appendices**  
**Appendix III Listed Buildings**

[SPACE MARKER – SEE SEPARATE DOCUMENT]

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**Appendix IV Buildings of Townscape Merit**  
[SPACE MARKER – SEE SEPARATE DOCUMENT]

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## **Appendix V Views**

[SPACE MARKER – SEE SEPARATE DOCUMENT]

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## **Appendix VI Shopfronts**

[SPACE MARKER – SEE SEPARATE DOCUMENT]

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## **Appendix VII Trees**

[SPACE MARKER – SEE SEPARATE DOCUMENT]

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