

HORNCastle CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



Reading Borough Council

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CONTENTS	Page
1.0 Introduction	3
1.1 Purpose of the appraisal	3
1.2 Summary of special interest	3
1.3 The area described	5
2.0 The planning policy context	8
2.1 Local planning policy	9
3.0 Location and setting	10
3.1 Location topography and setting	10
4.0 Historic development	11
4.1 History	11
4.2 The effect of historic development on plan form	12
5.0 Spatial analysis	13
5.1 Key views and vistas	13
5.2 The character of spaces within the area	14
6.0 Definition of the special interest of the conservation area	14
6.1 Definition of the character area	14
Generally	15
6.2 Activities and uses	17
6.3 Architectural and historic character; building methods and materials	17
6.4 Buildings of Townscape Merit	18
6.5 Public realm: Floorscape, street lighting and street furniture	18
6.6 Local details and features	19
6.7 Historic associations	19
6.8 Green spaces, trees and other natural elements	20
6.9 General condition of the area: The extent of loss, intrusions or damage i.e negative features	20
6.10 Problems, pressures and issues	21
7.0 Areas for further work	22
7.1 Consideration of conservation area boundary changes	22
7.2 Opportunities for enhancement	23
7.3 Monitoring and review	23
Appendix 1 - Townscape Appraisal Map	24
Appendix 2 - Relevant Local Plan Policies	26

HORNCastle CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the appraisal

This appraisal seeks to record and analyse the various features which give the Horncastle Conservation Area its special architectural and historic interest. The area's buildings and spaces are noted and described, and marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map (Appendix 1) along with listed buildings, buildings of townscape merit, significant trees and spaces, and important views into and out of the Conservation Area. There is a presumption that all of these features should be "preserved or enhanced", as required by legislation.

This appraisal builds upon national policy, as set out in *PPS5 - Planning for the Historic Environment - and associated guidance*, and local policy, as set out in the *Reading Borough Local Plan 1991-2006* and provides a firm basis on which applications for development within the Horncastle Conservation Area can be assessed. It also forms a basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals for the area.

This appraisal follows the suggested format contained in Appendix 2 of the English Heritage document "Guidance on conservation area appraisals" August 2005.

1.2 Summary of special interest

The Conservation Area comprises a small roughly triangular area between Hogarth Avenue to the east and the main A4 Bath Road out of Reading to the south. It is known locally as "Horncastle". A Public House of the same name fronts Bath Road. New Lane Hill, Greenwood Road and Poplar Avenue interlace the area, intersecting at a central area of grassed open space. The area is attractively framed on the east and south sides by a collection of small scale domestic properties, and on the west side by a backcloth of protected trees (but actually outside the Conservation Area itself). The roads in the area are not kerbed, although the margins of the central open space meet the carriageway with granite sets. This space is also defined by traditional style bollards, which together with the sets were introduced as part of an environmental improvement scheme implemented shortly after formal designation of the Conservation Area in order to protect the grassed area from ingress by motor vehicles. The improvements also included traditional style street lights on and around the central green. Seats which formed part of the original scheme are not however currently apparent. The overall character of the area is therefore one of informality with a peaceful rural rather than urban

quality to it, despite its being immediately north of the busy A4. This character is emphasised by traffic management measures which prevent through traffic accessing the area.

It lies at the very western edge of the Reading Borough, immediately inside its boundary with West Berkshire District Council. More of this relationship is discussed later in this appraisal.

The standard historical references for Reading contain little or no information about “The Horncastle”, but it is not difficult to imagine that most of what can be found in the Conservation Area is the vestige of a small hamlet surrounded by farmland, probably part of the estate of Calcot Park (now a golf course) which lies to the west. This farmland would have stretched northwards, up New Lane Hill to St Michaels Church (in the Routh Lane Conservation Area), then as now the local Parish Church. Until the early part of the twentieth century the hamlet would have been well separated from the town of Reading by green fields and from the current Calcot residential areas by the aforementioned Calcot Park. The central green space is owned by Reading Borough Council, and has been protected from unsympathetic change.

The key features of the area are therefore:

- its focus on a triangular area of green space, which is its key feature;
- a little altered historic street pattern, now protected by traffic management measures;
- roads and a central green with no pavements or kerbs, except for granite sets defining the edge of the central green, together with few footpath links;
- the domestic use, scale and character of the area, which could be described as being of cottage style;
- the tree cover to the west of the area which provides a backcloth to and enhances the area and also softens views out of the area - Greenwood Road is an especially attractive green approach to the area;
- the north side of the Bath Road within the Conservation Area comprises a bank which, with its important trees and hedge line, is an important “Gateway” not only to the Conservation Area but also the Borough as a whole.

Although a small area, it is quite distinctive within Reading Borough, and comprises features justifying its Conservation Area status. It also fits the concept that new Conservation Areas, i.e. those designated after the Planning Committee resolution of 20 February 1987, should be small, easily definable and manageable.

The boundaries of the area are indicated on the Appraisal Map appended to this report. It was formally designated on 1 June 1988. Because of its location

immediately bordering the then Newbury District Council (now West Berkshire District Council) boundary, a number of representations received suggested that the Conservation Area should be extended into the immediately adjoining part of that District. Although this request was rejected by the adjoining authority, the trees therein, which form an important backcloth to the Horncastle Conservation Area are protected by Tree Preservation Orders, and, because it is customary for adjoining authorities to consult each other on planning applications in such close proximity, the impact of any such proposals on the character and setting of the Conservation Area can still be taken into account, as can be seen on recent applications to redevelop Rowan House to the west in the West Berkshire District Council area. It is however fair to say that despite the importance of the trees to the setting of the Horncastle Conservation Area, the properties outside the Reading Borough boundary are of a markedly different character to those within, by virtue of their much larger scale and being generally detached and on quite large plots. These properties also show more signs of “urbanisation” of the countryside, for example by introducing high brick walls and gates, as well as the larger size of dwelling. Fortunately, these elements are set back from the highway edge and the soft verges without kerbs have been retained to maintain this essential feature at the edge of the Conservation Area. The actual highway itself and the verges here are actually within the administrative area of Reading Borough Council, thus affording this authority some control over access design, to the obvious benefit of the character and setting of the Conservation Area.

1.3 The Area described

The character and boundaries of the Horncastle Conservation Area remain unchanged since its designation, although 2 new houses have been built to the rear of the Horncastle Public House. These are of a scale commensurate with neighbouring properties to the north, and incorporate features found elsewhere in the Conservation Area. Environmental improvements (originally incorporating seats), also took place to the central green shortly after its designation, as well as the erection of conservation area street signs. As a separate exercise, a “Gateway” sign to the Borough has also been erected on the north side of the A4 in the south west corner of the Conservation Area.

The designated area is therefore a compact area of mainly domestic scale and domestic use properties, the majority of which retain their original character, including 2 groups of listed buildings, as follows:

1-6 Horncastle Almshouses, New Lane Hill. Listed Grade II. Built 1852 (see (“Mary Lyne Almshouses” stone tablet on front). Mock Tudor style. One and a half storeys. Red brick with grey brick diapers and stone dressings. Old tile roof. 6 ridge chimneys with paired shafts and alternately spiral and diapered

raised patterning. 6 gabled dormers with 3-light mullioned casement windows with leaded panes. 6 4-light similar casements on ground floor. Slight central break with pediment, grey brick headers with red brick quoins, Tudor archway with beaded door and rubbed brick relieving arch. Passage access to individual rear accesses. Modernised and rear out-shuts altered. 4 ft high brick wall to street, with stone capped gate piers in centre. Slightly marred by a close boarded fence on its corner with Poplar Avenue.



Almshouses

12-14 New Lane Hill. Listed Grade II. Probably late 17th century. 2 storey timber framed pair of thatched cottages with central chimney, hipped roof and flanking lean-tos. Painted brick infill. Four ranges of 2 three light casements. Ledged doors. Windows have little wooden hoods on ground floor. Interior - low ceilings on ground floor, pre-war modernisation.

There are three other groups of unlisted nineteenth century cottages in the area:

2-8 (evens) New Lane Hill. An early C19 terrace of 4 2-storey white painted cottages with clay tiles on half-hipped roofs. Informal front gardens with wooden fences and hedges. Have a picturesque group value, helping to frame the central green.

1-9 (odds) New Lane Hill. A late C19 terrace of 2 storey patterned brickwork cottages. Much altered, particularly number 1 by the addition of a single storey flat roofed extension to its side (although this was also extant at the time of designation of the Conservation Area), but generally in keeping (and setting a pattern and scale) with the character of development in the Conservation Area. Informal front gardens. Originally faced a brick boundary wall at the rear of the Horncastle Public House, since developed for two houses.

11 and 15 New Lane Hill & Greenwood House, Greenwood Road. Informal collection of cottages which adds to the character of the area, helping to contain the setting of the south side of the central green.



11/15 New Lane Hill (left) & Greenwood House (right)

The remaining buildings in the area do not always pay any particular recognition to the character of the area in design terms, but nor do they cause particular harm. Their scale is in keeping with that of the Conservation Area as a whole. The best of these is probably Redroof Cottage to the north of the Almshouses, between them and the James Butcher flats (Horrocks House) on the corner of New Lane Hill and Hogarth Avenue, which reflects the character of the Almshouses in its use of dormers and a projecting front porch, and having adequate space around it.

The Horncastle Public House. Essentially turns its back on the Conservation Area per se, fronting the A4 Bath Road. Part of its rear garden has been developed for two houses, which face in to the Conservation Area and partly frame the south east corner of the central green. Like Redroof Cottage (above) these seek to reflect the character of the Almshouses (and Redroof Cottage) in the use of dormers and projecting front porches.

214 & 216 Bath Road. Are a pair of 1930s style bay fronted semis, the scale and materials of which reflect those of the remainder of the Conservation Area.

27 & 29 Hogarth Avenue and Horrocks House. Are of more recent date, but in terms of scale reflect their neighbours in the Conservation Area, although in terms of design reflect their neighbours on the opposite side of Hogarth Avenue.

The Conservation Area boundaries as originally designated could possibly have been drawn to exclude the last three mentioned groups, but the sites are important in respect of entrances to and the setting of the Conservation Area. If these were to come forward for (re)development, there would be scope for improving the setting of the Conservation Area.

As has already been mentioned, the properties to the west of the Conservation Area (in the West Berkshire District area) are considered to be of a different scale and character, and, although there was a lobby for their inclusion in the Conservation Area at the time of its designation, it is not felt that they should be re-considered for inclusion.

There are no Tree Preservation Orders in the Conservation Area. Nevertheless trees are an important element of the character and quality of the area, as can be seen on the Appraisal Map attached at Appendix 1 to this report. Trees in the West Berkshire Council area immediately to the west of, and outside, the Conservation Area are however protected by Tree Preservation Orders. In declaring a Conservation Area however, no trees within it can be removed without prior notice being given to the local planning authority, thereby affording an opportunity if necessary to make such an order.

2.0 The planning policy context

Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. A conservation area is defined as “*an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”. It is the quality and interest of an *area*, rather than that of individual buildings, which is the prime consideration in identifying a conservation area.

Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas. Section 72 specifies that, in making a decision on an application for development in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

This document should be read in conjunction with national planning policy guidance, particularly PPS5 - Planning for the Historic Environment, plus associated guidance. The layout and content of this conservation area appraisal follows guidance produced by English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the English Historic Towns Forum 2005 published in February 2006.

2.1 Local planning policy

The Reading Borough core strategy was found to be “sound” in December 2007 and was adopted on 29 January 2008. Policy CS33 provides a strategic level policy that indicates that the historic environment including their settings will be preserved and enhanced. This policy will, in part, replace the Reading Borough Local Plan policies, including some of the saved policies discussed below. Proposals will have to have regard to PPS5 and associated guidance.

The Local Plan policies which seek the preservation and enhancement of archaeological sites, historic parks and gardens, listed buildings and conservation areas are set out in Chapter 6 of the *Reading Borough Local Plan 1991-2006* which was adopted on 14th October 1998, the majority of policies of which were “saved” by Direction of the Secretary of State on 24 September 2007 (with effect from 27 September 2007). The saved policies of particular note are Policies CUD 6 (Demolition of Unlisted Buildings in Conservation Areas) and CUD7 (New Development in Conservation Areas), which outline Reading Borough Council’s approach to development in Conservation Areas. Copies of these policies can be found at Appendix 2 of this document. With regard to listed buildings in the Conservation Area, Policies CUD 1 ((Works Affecting Listed Buildings), CUD 2 (Change of Use of Listed Buildings), CUD 3 (Maintenance of Listed Buildings) and CUD 4 (Setting of Listed Buildings) also apply.

The Local Plan’s conservation objectives are stated as:

- (i) to conserve or enhance the Borough's stock of listed buildings and other buildings of architectural quality or historical significance;
- (ii) to identify protect or enhance areas of character;

(iii) to identify and conserve areas of archaeological significance and to protect or enhance finds and sites for the education and enjoyment of Reading residents.

3.0 Location and setting

3.1 Location, topography and setting



Greenwood Road north to Almshouses

The boundaries of the Horncastle Conservation Area are shown at Appendix 1. The area lies about 4km west of Reading centre, and lies immediately to the north of the main A4 Bath Road west out of Reading. It is bounded by Hogarth Avenue to the east and Greenwood Road/New Lane Hill to the west. Hogarth Avenue is a more recently built link between the main part of the original New Lane Hill and the Bath Road, replacing that part of New Lane Hill which lies within the Conservation Area. Historically, it would have linked the village of Tilehurst, and particularly the Parish Church of St Michael at the top of New Lane Hill, with the main Bath Road.

Apart from two seventeenth century thatched cottages, the properties in the Conservation Area date from the early to middle nineteenth century to the present day, but form an identifiable group centered on a triangular central green area, where old roads (lanes) intersect.

The area is situated on a slight rise, steepest nearer the Bath Road itself, levelling out where the green is situated. The land here is probably a river terrace at the edge of the former flood plain of the River Kennet and Holy Brook, which lie further to the south.

The area is however fairly well screened from the outside on all sides, which limits views into and out of the area, except at close quarters.

4.0 Historic development

4.1 History

Reading is named after the Reading as, Saxon followers of Reada, ‘the Red’, who settled in the spit of land in the fork of the Thames and Kennet in the 6th century. At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, Reading belonged to the king and included a small borough and two manors. Reading Abbey was founded by Henry I in 1121. The abbey dominated the town and became one of the richest religious houses in England making Reading a wealthy place, and a centre of religion and pilgrimage.

Wool and leather were Reading’s principal trades in the 16th and early 17th centuries, making good use of the town’s road and river links. In the 18th century Reading was an important market and coaching town; new industries developed, notably brewing, iron-founding and brick and tile making. 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 new transport links. The Kennet and Avon Canal was opened in 1810 bringing London and Bristol, two major sea ports, into direct communication by water. Of much greater significance, however, 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 and Suttons Seeds, which provided work for a rapidly increasing population.

Between 1850 and 1900 the population of the Borough more than trebled from 21,456 to 72,217 and the housing stock increased accordingly. Development eastwards was more normal as part of this post-railway late 19th century expansion of the town during which period large numbers of houses were built and growing civic pride was celebrated in the building of Reading’s Town Hall (1875), the Concert Hall (1882), and the Museum and Library (1883-4). Reading Grammar School is of the same period, built between 1865-71, to the designs of Alfred Waterhouse, a local resident of Reading from 1868.

Development westwards generally came much later, but “Horncastle” clearly existed as a hamlet in the early part of the nineteenth century (and even before), in an area which was much more rural in character than the majority of Reading’s other conservation areas, particularly those close to and to the south/east of the town centre.

Horncastle was historically part of Tilehurst Parish. Tilehurst was an extensive parish, mostly rural and situated on high ground, containing many farms, with brick and tile making an old established local industry. It is gathered around St Michaels Church to the north of the Horncastle Conservation Area. “Tilehurst” comes from the old English “tigel” meaning “tile” and “hurst” meaning “wooded hill”. As befits its name, Tilehurst was home to a number of kilns making clay tiles from the Thames Valley clay found in these wooded hills. Apocryphal evidence suggests that the Mary Lyne Almshouses were amongst the first to use these tiles, although they would have been replaced since.

The Almshouses were built in 1851 for “six widows without encumbrances or unmarried of 60 years or upwards belonging to the Church of England and of respectable character”. They have recently been refurbished.

Horncastle, like most of the hamlets in this general area grew up round a spring, which abounded in this area. There was also a pond here, which was “accidentally” filled in during road widening in the area.

Tilehurst (and Horncastle) was not administratively part of Reading until 1911.

4.2 The effect of historic development on plan form

The designated Conservation Area is essentially defined by the intersection of what would have been three country lanes at a central green area. These roads - New Lane Hill, Greenwood Road and Poplar Avenue - still retain that rural feel.

Although the standard reference works on the history of Reading are quite lacking in references to this area it clearly possesses a sense of history, which has its basis in a rural hamlet situated at an important junction of local roads with the then as now main Bath Road out of Reading.

Locally, the central green is sometimes called “The Pound”. This may be a reference to a pond which was once situated in the area, but which has since been filled in.



5.0 Spatial analysis

5.1 Key views and vistas

Although most directly approached by a rise up from the south from the Bath Road and “down” from the north from Hogarth Avenue (and the main part of the original New Lane Hill), the area is well enclosed and its main focal point is the green hidden in its centre. Accordingly, no individual building stands out in each street in the Conservation Area, but most serve to frame the green from viewpoints within the area. Views out of the Conservation Area are similarly limited, although the south side of the Bath Road opposite the Conservation Area currently presents a contrast between the now cleared site of the former Horncastle Ford Garage immediately to the south east and the Aldi Supermarket east of that, and residential development to the south west, but the last is well screened by trees and hedges from the main Bath Road, and, further back, boundary fences. It would appear that a different car dealership might be taking over the former Ford Garage. Historically, the Ford Garage was a source of much local complaint because of customer parking and parking of cars awaiting delivery. In recent years, the parking problem associated with this business appears to have been overcome through a mixture of better on-site arrangements and parking restrictions within the Conservation Area itself.

5.2 The character of spaces within the area

The Conservation Area is, generally speaking, a tightly knit mix of domestic scale properties circling a central green, which defines the essential character of the area. Its appearance is totally informal despite kerbs delineating the edge of the open green space. Essentially, there are no formal footpaths through the area.

The area does however benefit from good tree cover, particularly framing the western and southern boundaries of the Conservation Area, in the grounds of larger residential curtilages. This provides good setting for the Conservation Area as a whole.

Space around individual properties is limited, given the “cottage style” scale of buildings within the Conservation Area and relatively small plot sizes. Some boundaries, particularly towards the Bath Road do however benefit from good tree and hedge cover.

The graveled parking area in front of the Horncastle Public House, on its Bath Road frontage, is not however a particularly attractive entrance to the Conservation Area. The other entrances are much more verdant by comparison, particularly that from Greenwood Road.

6.0 Definition of the special interest of the conservation area

6.1 Definition of the character of the area

It is focused on a triangular area of green space which is its key feature, and a little altered historic street pattern which intersects at this green space. The roads do not have kerbs, except where it abuts the central green, giving the area a quite rural feel within the surrounding, mostly twentieth century built up urban area which surrounds it. The buildings which surround the green area are of domestic use, scale and character, with small informal front gardens, and which can generally be described as being of cottage style. Newer developments in the area have sought to reflect this original style. Finally, the tree cover to the west and south of the area adds to the green and rural feel of the area, and presents an attractive approach to the area, particularly from the south west via Bath Road and Greenwood Road, which is an especially attractive green approach, not only to the Conservation Area, but it also situated at an important “Gateway” to the Borough as a whole.



Greenwood Road from Bath Road

Generally.

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

- Retention and maintenance of the central green area;
- Retention of listed original buildings and their settings with few detrimental changes by way of new development and/or addition of non-traditional materials;
- New developments generally respecting the scale of the original development in the area;
- Maintenance of strong, if informal boundary lines to the frontage of properties (materials vary);
- Maintenance of soft edges to highway edges;
- Good tree cover within the grounds of individual properties (including that protected by Tree Preservation Orders in the adjoining West Berkshire District Council Area);
- Traffic management measures and lack of casual parking in the area.

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

- Some (limited) use of non-traditional materials: e.g. upvc windows in the non-listed terraces;
- Some unsuitable front boundary treatments;
- Over-reliance on individual telegraph poles throughout the area with attendant wires radiating out to the houses within it;
- Lack of seating in the open green area;
- Possible issues with frontage parking and open storage at the rear of number 1 New Lane Hill.

The Horncastle Conservation Area and the buildings within it have generally retained the charm which led to its original designation, despite some pressures to redevelop land since, including the development of two new houses behind the Horncastle Public House. These do however look towards the Conservation Area, whereas the Horncastle still “turns its back”.



2-8 New Lane Hill (left) new houses rear of Horncastle (right)

Historically, the greatest pressures on the area have arisen from “rat-running” and overflow car parking from business uses on the south side of the Bath Road, but in recent years this has been rectified by the introduction of traffic management measures, including bollards across the road in front of the almshouses, and by a change in the nature of the businesses on the south side of the Bath Road. Clearly however consideration of any (new) development on the south side of the Bath Road must consider the impact of such on the

character and setting of the Conservation Area as a material planning consideration, not least views in to and out of the Conservation Area.

6.2 Activities and uses

Historically and currently, the Conservation Area was/is essentially a residential area, save for “The Horncastle” Public House fronting Bath Road and a small general store (and former post office) at number 1 New Lane Hill. A painting and decorating business also currently operates from the single storey flat roofed side extension to number 1 New Lane Hill, with evidence of frontage parking connected with the business and also open storage at the rear (visible through the tree screen), which somewhat detracts from the appearance of the property and the area generally (at one of its entrances).

The area generally has a quiet residential atmosphere within its core, despite the proximity of the main Bath Road immediately to the south of it. This is clearly a busy primary route. Traffic using the main road does however by-pass the Conservation Area, which is generally immune from the direct impact of traffic. Nor currently does there appear to be any of the previous problems of “rat running” or with parking associated businesses on the south side of the Bath Road. A number of properties do not have their own parking provision, but there is now a residents parking scheme in place in the area, and the area does benefit from reasonable accessibility to local amenities by foot and public transport.

6.3 Architectural and historic character: building methods and materials

The Conservation Area contains a core of Victorian and a pair of earlier thatched cottages, with some twentieth century infills. The surrounding areas are much more modern. The Area retains its historical character and special architectural interest.

With the exception of the thatched cottages, the buildings in the Conservation Area are generally of brick, with clay tile roofs, which are distinguishing features of Reading’s architecture and there are examples of good quality brickwork in the Conservation Area, particularly in the Mary Lyne Almshouses, with some also visible in the terrace at 1-9 New Lane Hill. Brick was a popular building material in the 19th centuries and the ready availability of different coloured bricks provided the opportunity for the lively polychromatic brickwork found throughout Victorian/Edwardian Reading. The town had several brickworks, the most notable being S & E Collier Ltd at Water Road and Elgar Road and two brick works in the Tilehurst area.

6.4 Buildings of Townscape Merit

Buildings identified as having “townscape merit” will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered 19th century and later buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provides the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, they make a positive contribution to the special interest of a conservation area.

Buildings of Townscape Merit help create a conservation area’s distinctive and interesting historic townscape. As recommended in PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment “ In considering the impact of a proposal on any heritage asset, local planning authorities should take into account the particular nature of the significance of the heritage asset and the value that it holds for this and future generations. This understanding should be used by the local planning authority to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposals.”

Clearly, all the buildings within the Conservation Area are important to its “townscape”, but it is generally unlisted corner buildings which strictly have a more commanding presence. It is difficult argue that any in the Horncastle Conservation Area strictly meet this criterion, because of their small and generally discrete style and design, and the generally secluded (from outside view) of the Conservation Area as a whole.

6.5 Public realm. Floorscape, street lighting and street furniture.

Road and footway (where they exist) surfaces are predominantly modern i.e. tarmac, but in the core of the area, the central green public space has benefited from an environmental improvement scheme (albeit lacking any seating). Apart from granite kerbs to the central green, the roads are epitomised by not having hard kerb edges. This is an essential feature of the character of the Conservation Area and should be retained. The exception is Poplar Avenue, which is gravelled, but is essentially a driveway to the thatched cottages at 12-14 New Lane Hill, also serving as a footpath to Hogarth Avenue. Their condition at the time of writing does not give cause for concern. They are in generally reasonable condition, with not too much current evidence of repairs by “utilities” throughout the area). These surfaces are not however particularly attractive and not “traditional” in conservation area terms.

The green is protected by granite sets and cast iron bollards, and although a waste paper bin and a dog waste bin are provided, there are no seats to take advantage of the green area.

Traditional style street lighting columns are to be found on and around the central green, but otherwise street lighting columns, signage and street furniture are modern, and this is another area with considerable potential for improvement. The Bath Road frontage contains a number of traffic signs.

Properties in the Conservation Area rely on individual telegraph poles throughout the area with attendant wires radiating out to the houses.

6.6 Local details and features

The pre-eminent local detail is the presence of the central green, surrounded by cottage style dwellings making good use of local bricks and tiles.

6.7 Historic associations

As previously stated, “local histories” do not tell us very much directly about the Horncastle area per se, but the Mary Lyne Almshouses are important locally and in Reading history. See paragraph 4.1 above.



Almshouses from north

The pre-eminent historical connection in the immediate area is the nearby Calcot Court and its long-time occupiers the Blagrove family. They owned much of the adjoining land. The Blagrove family (see following paragraph) were principal landowners from the late 18th to the early 20th century.

The first notable owner was Sir Peter Vanlore, who built a mansion at Calcot Place, possibly the site of Calcot Court to the west of the Horncastle Conservation Area. His tomb is in St Michaels Church (in the Routh Lane Conservation Area to the north). His daughter and her husband, Henry Zinzan, are also buried there. The Blagrove family were the next notable occupants of Calcot Court (newly rebuilt in 1759), and were noted for their philanthropy in relation to Tilehurst parish generally and right up to the 20th century, but not noticeably, the Horncastle area. Calcot Park remained a private estate until 1929, when it became a Golf Club.

6.8 Green spaces, trees and other natural elements

Apart from the central green space, there is no other green space in the area, but the importance of this green space to the character of the Conservation Area cannot be understated.

Trees also make a significant contribution in “framing” and providing a backcloth to this Conservation Area’s special character and sense of identity, particularly to the west and south of the area. Significant tree groups are shown on the Appraisal Map at Appendix 1.

Because of their importance to the character and appearance of a Conservation Area, where they are not already protected by a Tree Preservation Order (and there appear to be none in this Conservation Area, although trees immediately to the west of the Conservation Area in the West Berkshire District Council Area are protected) it is necessary to give the local planning authority 6 weeks notice of any intention to cut down, top or lop any tree in a Conservation Area, which also enables a local planning authority to consider whether the trees should be formally protected by the making of a Tree Preservation Order.

6.9 General condition of the area: The extent of loss, intrusions or damage i.e. negative features.

The general state of repair of the properties in the Conservation Area is good. The Mary Lyne Almshouses have only recently been renovated.

The open space at the centre of the Conservation Area is also a generally well maintained, if lacking seating, providing a quiet oasis, notwithstanding its proximity to the busy A4 Bath Road to the south, having close views of surrounding properties, not least the particularly attractive Mary Lyne Almshouses.

However, in common with many of Reading's Conservation Areas, the Area is lacking in the quality, if not the state of repair, of the highway environment. This is worst at the Bath Road end of New Lane Hill, but the central core, based on the green, remains attractive, not least because of good use of traditional materials and street furniture.

All of these areas would benefit from continued monitoring, and the seizing of opportunities for improvement as they arise.

6.10 Problems, pressures and issues

Design of new development

Within the Conservation Area itself there have been few recent developments, but these have generally respected the character, scale of buildings and materials used in the Conservation Area, thus maintaining its character and appearance. A small number of elements within the Conservation Area detract from its character, but (larger) developments immediately outside the Conservation Area will probably continue to have the greatest impact on the character and setting of the Conservation Area, given their context adjoining or near the Conservation Area and which could have a notably negative effect on its character and appearance. This is particularly relevant here because the areas most under pressure for (re)development - the large housing plots to the west and the former Ford Garage to the south - lie in the adjoining West Berkshire District Council Area. Inter-Authority protocols should ensure that Reading Borough Council is able to comment and input into any potential applications here, which of course it must do in order to protect the character and setting of the Conservation Area. The design of new development within and adjoining/near the Conservation Area therefore remains a major issue.

Loss of original architectural details

In general terms the loss of original features, particularly front elevation and boundary features is generally limited to the terrace at 1-9 New Lane Hill. Some boundary treatments give cause for concern, although the variety (ranging from brick walls in front of the Almshouses to wooden fences and hedges elsewhere - generally of low scale) of treatments does generally lend an air of informality to the area. There is a clear issue here in terms of respecting the setting of individual buildings as well as enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, in accordance with policies contained in PPS5 and accompanying guidance and policies contained in the Reading Borough Local Plan/Local Development Framework.

Traffic noise and pollution

The character and environmental quality of the area are currently no longer spoiled by noise and pollution of traffic using the area as a “rat run”, nor is there current evidence of former parking problems associated with businesses on the south side of Bath Road, since the area now benefits from traffic management measures, including a residents parking scheme.



Looking north past Almshouses

Street clutter

This is not generally an issue with regard to the overall character and appearance of the Conservation Area as a whole, except on the Bath Road frontage, as a consequence of its function as a main road junction.

Attention has also been drawn to the detrimental impact of individual telegraph poles and wires radiating out from them.

7.0 Areas for further work

7.1 Consideration of conservation area boundary changes

Given that there are no changes in circumstances since the Conservation Area was originally designated, and the generally more modern developments

adjoining the Conservation Area, no changes are recommended to the Conservation Area boundary.

7.2 Opportunities for enhancement

Floorscape and street furniture improvements should be considered in this area, including replacing telegraph poles. Seating provision should also be considered for the central green area.

Notwithstanding the current appearance of the Conservation Area, it may also be expedient, subject to the requisite publicity and the views of local people to consider whether the local planning authority should consider using its powers to withdraw permitted development rights which affect the external appearance of dwelling houses in the Conservation Area, namely alterations to doors, windows, roofs and frontages. However, a better approach would be to seek mechanisms whereby original details can be repaired and/or restored, although inevitably this will have funding repercussions.

7.3 Monitoring and review

This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:

- A survey of the area to identify changes in its character and appearance;
- An assessment of whether the various recommendations detailed in this document have been acted upon, including proposed enhancements;
- A detailed building/property condition survey;
- The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and any necessary action;
- Publicity and advertising.

Appendix 1 - Townscape Appraisal Map



Horncastle Conservation Area Townscape Appraisal Map



Conservation Area Boundary



Listed Building



Tree Preservation Orders



Green space



Important green edge

Appendix 2 - Relevant Local Plan Policies

The following policies from the Reading Borough Local Plan (1991-2006) are relevant to the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area:

POLICY CUD 6: DEMOLITION OF UNLISTED BUILDINGS IN CONSERVATION AREAS

CONSENT TO DEMOLISH IN A CONSERVATION AREA WILL NORMALLY ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT IT IS WHOLLY BEYOND REPAIR, INCAPABLE OF REASONABLY BENEFICIAL USE, OF INAPPROPRIATE STRUCTURE OR DESIGN, OR WHERE ITS REMOVAL OR REPLACEMENT WOULD BENEFIT THE APPEARANCE OR CHARACTER OF THE AREA. DEMOLITION WILL BE MORE FAVOURABLY ASSESSED WHERE THERE ARE APPROVED DETAILED PLANS FOR REDEVELOPMENT AND A CONTRACT FOR CARRYING OUT THE WORKS HAS BEEN ENTERED INTO.

POLICY CUD 7: NEW DEVELOPMENT IN CONSERVATION AREAS

AS APPROPRIATE NEW DEVELOPMENT IN CONSERVATION AREAS SHOULD MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE AREA BY RESPECTING OR ENHANCING ITS ARCHITECTURAL AND VISUAL QUALITIES AND ACHIEVING A HIGH STANDARD OF DESIGN. DEVELOPMENT WITHIN CONSERVATION AREAS WILL NORMALLY BE PERMITTED ONLY WHERE THE PARTICULAR HISTORIC OR ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF THE AREA WILL BE PRESERVED AND THERE IS NO LIKELIHOOD OF HARM BEING CAUSED TO THE AREAS CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE.

THE BOROUGH COUNCIL WILL AS APPROPRIATE SEEK TO PRESERVE THE EXISTING BALANCE OF USES IN CONSERVATION AREAS.

Because of the high percentage of listed buildings in the Conservation Area. Policies CUD 1 ((Works Affecting Listed Buildings), CUD 2 (Change of Use of Listed Buildings), CUD 3 (Maintenance of Listed Buildings) and CUD 4 (Setting of Listed Buildings) also apply.