

MINSTER QUARTER AREA
OUTLINE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Reconnecting with Reading's Historic Town Centre

DECEMBER 2018



Reading
Borough Council
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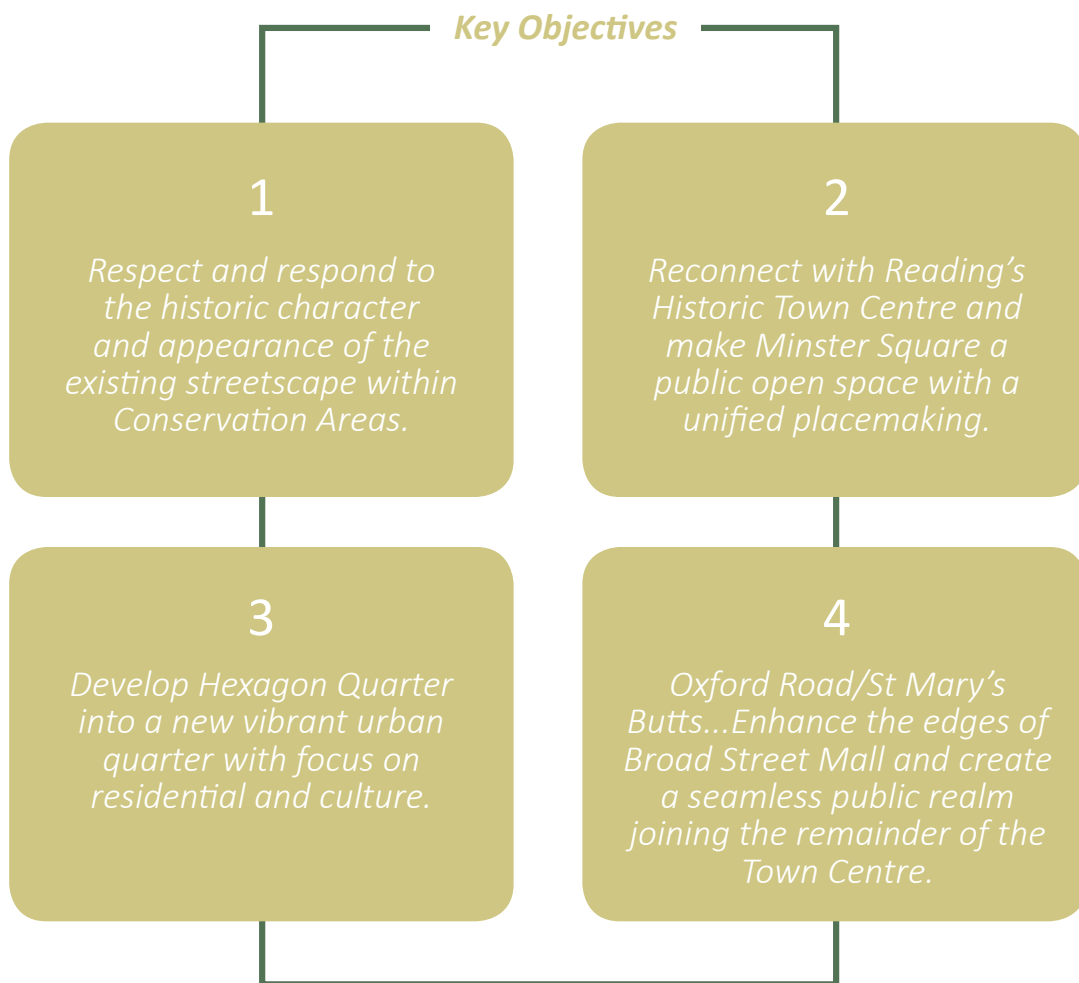
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VISION STATEMENT

The Minster Quarter Area will be a distinctive and high-quality, high density, mixed use area within Reading's Central Core. The area will portray a unique character and sense of place retaining the historical associations of the area and its wider environs, providing high quality public realm, both through the enhancement of existing public spaces adjacent to the site and the provision of new spaces that provide a setting and focus for new development.

Development will contribute positively to conserving and enhancing the adjoining conservation areas at St. Mary's Butts/Castle Street and Russell Street/Castle Hill, and to protecting and enhancing the listed St Mary's Church and its setting.

The area will host a wide range of uses and activities that will contribute to an active, well designed public realm throughout daylight and evening hours. There will be a mix of residential, office/commercial/retail and leisure/community facilities, built to high densities that will include tall buildings, complemented by high quality open spaces (as large as those that they replace) that together will create a new destination and a desirable place to live and be at one's leisure. The area will appeal to all sectors of Reading's population as a place to live in, work in, study in and visit.



1. SETTING THE SCENE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Minster Quarter Area provides a significant development opportunity for a major new mixed use scheme in the heart of one of the most buoyant and dynamic urban centres in the South East. The area forms part of the West Side Major Opportunity Area identified in the Reading Central Area Action Plan (adopted in January 2009) and western tall buildings cluster which is being carried forward in the Draft Local Plan that was submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2018. Under this plan, the area is identified for improvement and regeneration through the mixed use development of various sites.

The site contained the former Civic Offices. The Civic Offices were opened in 1971 but, partly because they contained high levels of asbestos, they had reached the end of their economic life and were demolished in 2016. This now enables the regeneration and redevelopment of the site and the opportunity to deliver a high quality mixed-use development contributing to the high quality regeneration of the area and to the Council's aims and aspirations for this part of Reading.



Old Civic Offices



Minster Quarter Area today

At the same time as the former Civic Offices were demolished, adjoining land owners have also been considering the future of their sites. The owner of the Broad Street Mall (Moorgarth plc.) has ambitious plans to revitalise the shopping centre and at the same time intensify and develop the use of their holding by adding tower blocks above and adjacent to the existing structure of the Broad Street Mall (BSM). This framework addresses the possible development options for the Broad Street Mall.

Thames Valley Police has also indicated that it intends to vacate its existing Reading Headquarters building in the near term. The Police have requested that their landholding be included in any planning proposals/framework for the area.

1.2 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this document is to set out a framework and principles for promoting the development of the area to ensure a co-ordinated, high quality, comprehensive development creating a multi-purpose urban quarter in Central Reading. This framework interprets relevant policies in the Council's existing and emerging local plans and offers further detailed guidance on how the area could be developed.

It indicates one possible way of developing the site in accordance with those planning policies, subject to further more detailed consideration. However, the site could be developed in different ways. This framework

does not prevent alternative layouts and forms of development subject to demonstrating compliance with relevant planning policies.

This framework provides urban design guidelines by means of supplementary planning guidance, which will be used to inform future planning applications made jointly or individually by landowners across the site.

The document is intended to:

- set out a vision and framework for the future development of the area;
- recommend improvements to the public realm in the wider area including providing new areas of public realm within the site;
- clarify planning policy in relation to the development of the area, reminding applicants, residents and the business community of the tall building status of the area;
- set out the Local Planning Authority's expectations for future planning applications;
- identify and resolve constraints and other barriers to development;
- inform future planning applications, and it may be reviewed in the future as a result of changing circumstances (it is not a blueprint for future development); and
- provide a context for future community consultation as part of the planning application process.

1.3 TOWN CONTEXT

Reading sits at the heart of the South East and Thames Valley, one of the most successful sub-regions in Europe. The sub region is economically buoyant, and has one of the UK's highest economic activity rates at 85%. It is a magnet for inward investment, with a high concentration of ICT firms. It is home to 13 of the world's top 30 global brands, with the likes of Vodafone, Prudential, Microsoft and Cisco all based locally.

Businesses are drawn to the area by the availability of a highly skilled workforce, access to London (with the Queen Elizabeth Line due to open in 2019) and international transport hubs (including Heathrow Airport), the high quality of life on offer and knowledge intensive business clusters based around a number of sectors.

Whilst the tight boundary of Reading Borough is home to a population of around 163,000, the wider urban area is home to a population of around 275,000 with a broader retail catchment of over 1.2m.

This is a significant aspect of the Reading of today: a sub-regional capital attracting large numbers of workers, shoppers and visitors from a wide area, adding to its vitality and success. This success is likely to continue, as the population of the Reading Urban Area grew by nearly 8% in the period 2001 to 2011, higher than the national average. With significant housing development being proposed in the period up to 2036, the population of the area is forecast to continue to grow significantly.

Central Reading has experienced rapid growth in the last 20 years. Reading is now one of the UK's top shopping destinations. The Town Centre has seen significant development in the last 20 years and planning permission has been granted for a number of major schemes. Further afield, there is significant development in south Reading and the development of a number of Strategic Development Locations is underway south of the Borough in the adjoining Wokingham Borough.

Reading is one of the most prosperous towns in the UK, with a high footprint of Tech Industries (KPMG 2015)¹ and high levels of productivity (Centre for Cities 2017)². It is the capital of the Thames Valley Sub Region and the main centre for retail and leisure activity, in addition to its importance as a transport hub and service centre.

The Submission Draft Reading Borough Local Plan, which plans the development of Reading up to 2036, seeks to provide over 15,000 new dwellings in that period, with 53,000²sqm offices, 148,000²sqm of industrial and warehousing floorspace and up to 45,000²sqm of new retail floorspace. The Minster Quarter Area is an important development site lying within the Reading Central Area and an identified Major Opportunity Area (MOU) as well as the Tall Buildings Western Grouping (Policy CR10). Its development for a mix of uses can make a valuable contribution to meeting some of the future development needs identified in the local plan.

¹ KPMG Tech Monitor, 2015

² Centre for Cities, Cities Outlook, 2017

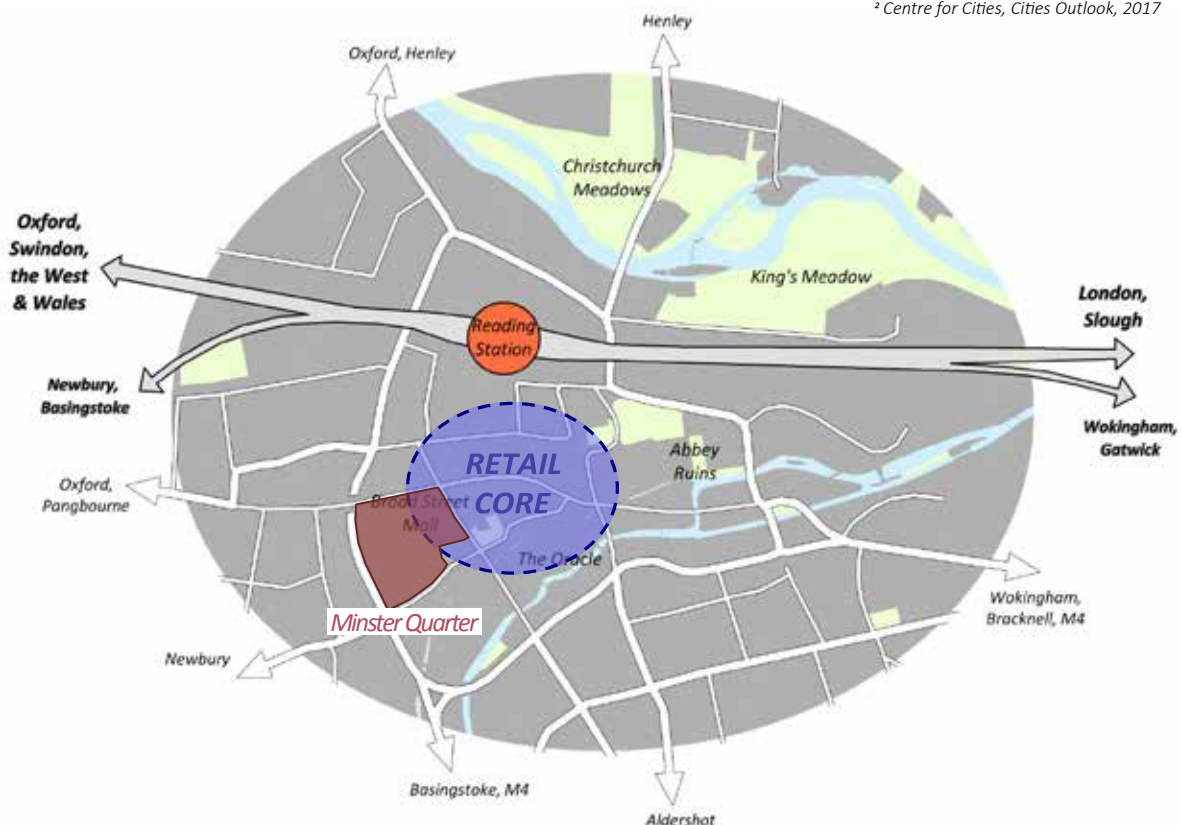


Figure 1 READING CENTRAL AREA

1.4 FRAMEWORK AREA DESCRIPTION

The Minster Quarter Area lies in the south west part of Central Reading. It is situated on the edge of the core retail area, and provides easy access to the Oracle shopping centre. The site is approximately ten minutes' walk from Reading Station, and offers frontage onto the Inner Distribution Road (IDR). It also bounds Castle Street and St Mary's Butts, which are historic streets that once formed part of the Saxon centre of Reading. Both streets fall within the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area. The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area is on the western side of the IDR, opposite the Minster Quarter Area. The location of the Minster Quarter Area is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 2 shows the extent of the wider site, which is bounded by 3 main roads - the IDR in the West, Oxford Road in the North, Castle Street in the South, and by the narrow yet busy pedestrian lane of Chain Street in the East. The site comprises:

- Broad Street Mall (including its associated multi-storey car park), the frontage to Oxford Road, St Mary's Butts and the Minster of St Mary's and adjoining churchyard;

- a sub area of approximately 2.1 hectares that includes the site of the previous Civic Offices and various areas of public realm and circulation space including Hosier Street, Düsseldorf Way and Queens Walk. This part of the site is in the ownership of the Council (shown in brown) and features a below ground podium and servicing level. It includes the current location of the Charter Market;
- Thames Valley Policy Headquarters (shown in yellow).

The site also features the Hexagon Theatre, the Penta Hotel, student housing and the Magistrates Courts, along with individual retail and food and beverage establishments, as well as listed buildings and land required for Town Centre servicing.

There are several adjoining properties within the wider area which could provide future regeneration opportunities. Developers should engage with owners of these adjoining properties to ensure a comprehensive approach to regeneration. The possibility of redeveloping these adjoining properties should be actively considered and planned for in any development proposals that come forward.

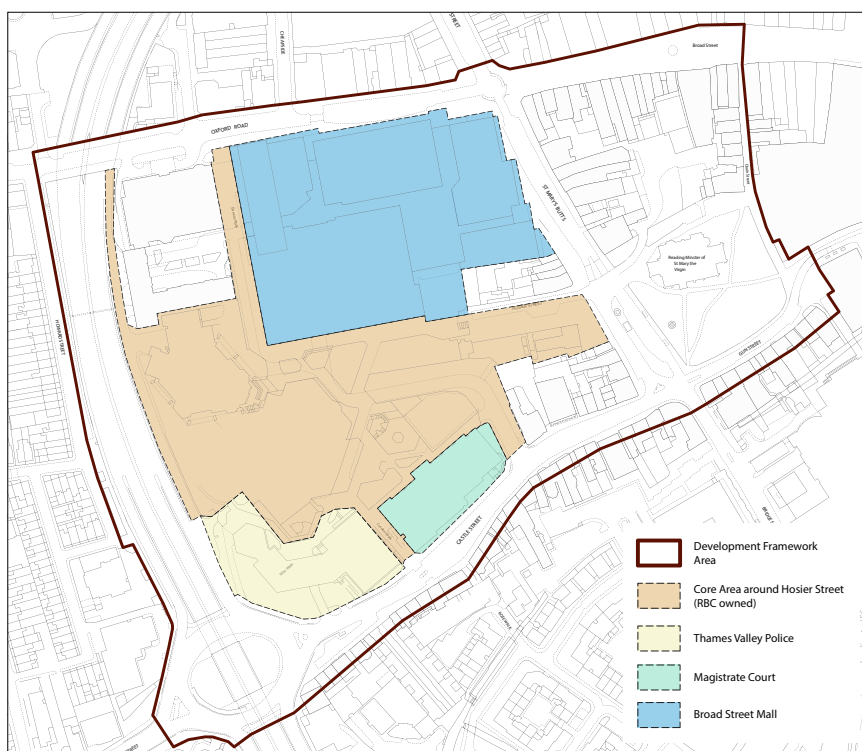


Figure 2 FRAMEWORK BOUNDARY WITH KEY OWNERSHIPS (DIAGRAMMATIC)



Reading Minster



Sun Inn Pub built in the 1700s



Hexagon Theatre entrance



Hexagon Theatre and Broad Street Mall



Thames Valley Police Headquarters

1.5 PLANNING POLICY

The site falls within the central area of Reading, which is the main location for future development and change identified by the Reading Borough Core Strategy¹. There are a range of policies in this document, including matters such as sustainable design and construction, affordable housing, infrastructure and open space, which apply to all development in Reading. It is supplemented by more detailed policies in the Reading Central Area Action Plan² (adopted in 2009) and the Sites and Detailed Policies Document³ that the Council adopted in October 2012. The Council has now submitted its Draft Reading Borough Local Plan⁴, which carries forward and updates the policies in the existing local plan documents to the Secretary of State. The Council anticipates that plan will be adopted in 2019. Relevant policies for the framework area are as follows:

CR12d, BROAD STREET MALL: *The site will be used for continued retail and leisure provision, maintaining frontages along Oxford Road and St Mary's Butts, and improving frontages to Hosier Street and Queens Walk, with uses including residential, with some potential for offices, on upper floors. This may be achieved by comprehensive redevelopment. Alternatively, a development which retains the existing mall with additional development above may be appropriate where it improves the quality of the existing mall frontages.*

CR12e, HOSIER STREET: *Development on this site will result in a new residential community centred around an improved area of public open space and a high quality environment, with an improved entrance to the site from St Mary's Butts. The edges of the open space will be activated with retail, leisure and/or other main town centre uses such as hotel use, and development may also include some limited office uses. The Hexagon theatre will only be developed if a replacement facility for Reading is provided, and approaches to the theatre will be improved. Development will also include a replacement site for the street market. The car parking below ground level will be retained and incorporated into the development.*

Policy CR10 and in particular CR10b are relevant in the context of tall buildings and the western grouping.

IMPLEMENTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION

Works

The existing podium structure is envisaged to provide level access to new development and facilities and to facilitate underground servicing and parking to serve the various developments. A survey of the podium has been commissioned. Any limited alteration to the podium through modification or extension should be designed to ensure continued trading for users and a successful dealing with the prevailing change in ground levels.

Phasing of development(s) shall allow plots to come forward in separate parcels, whilst delivering public realm and other associated benefits/requirements in a coherent manner.

The redevelopment of the area provides an opportunity for new artwork/high quality public realm treatments, as well as the re-provision of existing artworks (e.g. the clock and cartwheeling boys, etc), as may be relevant.

Section 106 Requirements

There will be standard Section 106 requirements relating to the provision of policy compliant levels of affordable housing within the residential elements of the development. Skills and training requirements will be provided in accordance with the Council's policies as set out in the Council's Employment, Skills and Training Supplementary Planning Document.

Site related works may also be covered by any Section 106 agreement. These might include alterations to accesses and other transport works; works to provide a footbridge or decking over the IDR; works to strengthen or alter the podium; works to provide parks and public realm and associated structures and facilities including works to enhance the open areas adjacent to the Minster of St Mary's; works to provide Conservation Area enhancements; the realignment and enhancement of St Mary's Butts, Queens Walk, the Oxford Road and frontages to the IDR; works

to provide and secure facilities and other benefits for the community and other works as may be identified such as the re-provision of the area for the market.

CIL Liability

The Community Infrastructure Levy will be payable on all development in accordance with the relevant regulations and the Council's CIL Charging Schedule in place at the time any development is approved.

Planning Application Procedures

It is strongly recommended that any potential redevelopment proposals gain detailed pre-application advice from the local planning authority prior to submission of a formal planning application. Pre-application request forms can be found at:

http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/1190/Pre-Application-Enquiry-Form/pdf/Pre-app_April_2018.pdf

As part of the pre-application process, the Council will expect the prospective applicants to carry out consultation on the draft application proposals. Targeted consultations should include local residents groups, traders, business association and civic and heritage societies, as well as local landowners, both individual and institutional. Such consultation should be carried out in accordance with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement, noting that it is currently being reviewed (2013 draft version)⁵.

Details on how to make a planning application and other planning advice can be found at:

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/planningadvice>

¹ <http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/1046/Core-Strategy-Adopted-January-2008/pdf/Core-Strategy-Adopted-Jan08-Altered-Jan15.pdf>

² <http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/1047/Reading-Central-Area-Action-Plan-Adopted-January-2009/pdf/Central-Area-Action-Plan-Jan09.pdf>

³ <http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/1049/Sites-and-Detailed-Policies-Adopted-October-2012/pdf/SDPD-Adopted-Oct12-Altered-Jan15.pdf>

⁴ http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8649/LP001-Submission-Draft-Local-Plan/pdf/LP001_Submission_Draft_Local_Plan.pdf

⁵ <http://www.reading.gov.uk/businesses/planning/planning-policy/general-information-on-planning-policy/sci/>

1.6 HISTORIC CONTEXT

The wider site occupies a unique position in the history of the town, although until now, this has declined in importance as first the ecclesiastical, and later transport, retail and commercial focus in the town has drifted northwards.

Historically, the wider site was the epicentre of the town's development. The old Saxon Borough of Reading was centred on the Old Market and Old Street (the original name for St Mary's Butts) where the two main roads (Oxford to Winchester and London to Bath) crossed the lowest bridging point of the River Kennet around which the town grew.

The Castle Street/Gun Street/Bridge Street/St Mary's Butts cross-roads, would have been a busy centre of life in Saxon and medieval times, centred on the market, St Mary's Church and the churchyard. Hence some of Reading oldest surviving buildings (and pubs) are visible features of this historic legacy.

The Domesday Survey for Reading, undertaken in 1085-6, described the area as a large estate formerly held by King Edward and a church and estate held by the Abbot of Battle, evidence of a thriving urban community in the eleventh century.

The foundation of Reading Abbey to the east of the town in 1121, resulted in a shift of economic balance from the area round St Mary's Butts to the gates of the Abbey. This was also a shift from the unplanned original centre of "Old Street" (St Mary's Butts) to a more planned new centre towards the end of "New Street" (now Friar Street), incorporating a large new market place and a grid of streets between Friar Street and Broad Street. London Street and a new bridge over the Kennet were part of this plan.

During the medieval period Reading developed rapidly, based on the manufacture of woollen cloth, leather goods and silk weaving. This was

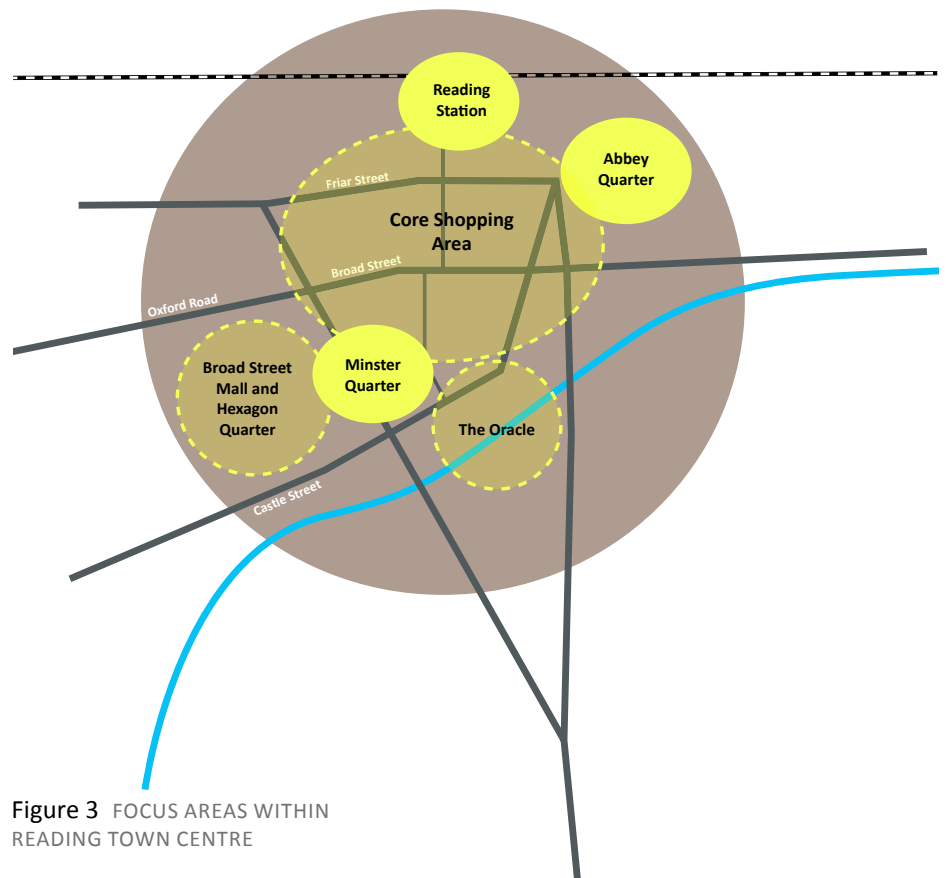


Figure 3 FOCUS AREAS WITHIN READING TOWN CENTRE

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.

The town was mostly contained within the medieval limits of the 'triangle' until the end of the 18th century when the town began to expand as a result of improved transport links and industrialisation. Castle Hill, Russell Street and Baker Street began to be developed from this time with the later additions of Victorian residential streets such as Howard Street, Jesse Terrace and Zinzan Street to the west of the site within the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area.

The most significant changes to Reading's historic street pattern (and those which redevelopment of the site may allow to remedy) are fairly recent, and were caused by the construction in the 1970s of the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) around the western and southern parts of the town centre.

The newer 1970s redevelopment of the Police Station/Magistrates Courts/Hexagon/Broad Street Mall and, later, The Oracle Shopping Centre, enclose the site periphery, but also present the redevelopment mechanism whereby it will be possible to re-discover the historic nature of this area of town and afford it the investment that, save for the 1970s, it has been lacking for the best part of a millennium.

The regeneration of the Minster Quarter Area, will allow for the rediscovery of St Mary's Church as the southernmost landmark building within the perimeter of the IDR. This will become the focus for a revitalised public realm and create a new townscape that repairs aspects of historic streets surrounding the site. This offers a unique opportunity to reinstate the historic "triangle" of Reading's urban structure and respect and re-link the surrounding heritage streets and neighbourhoods.

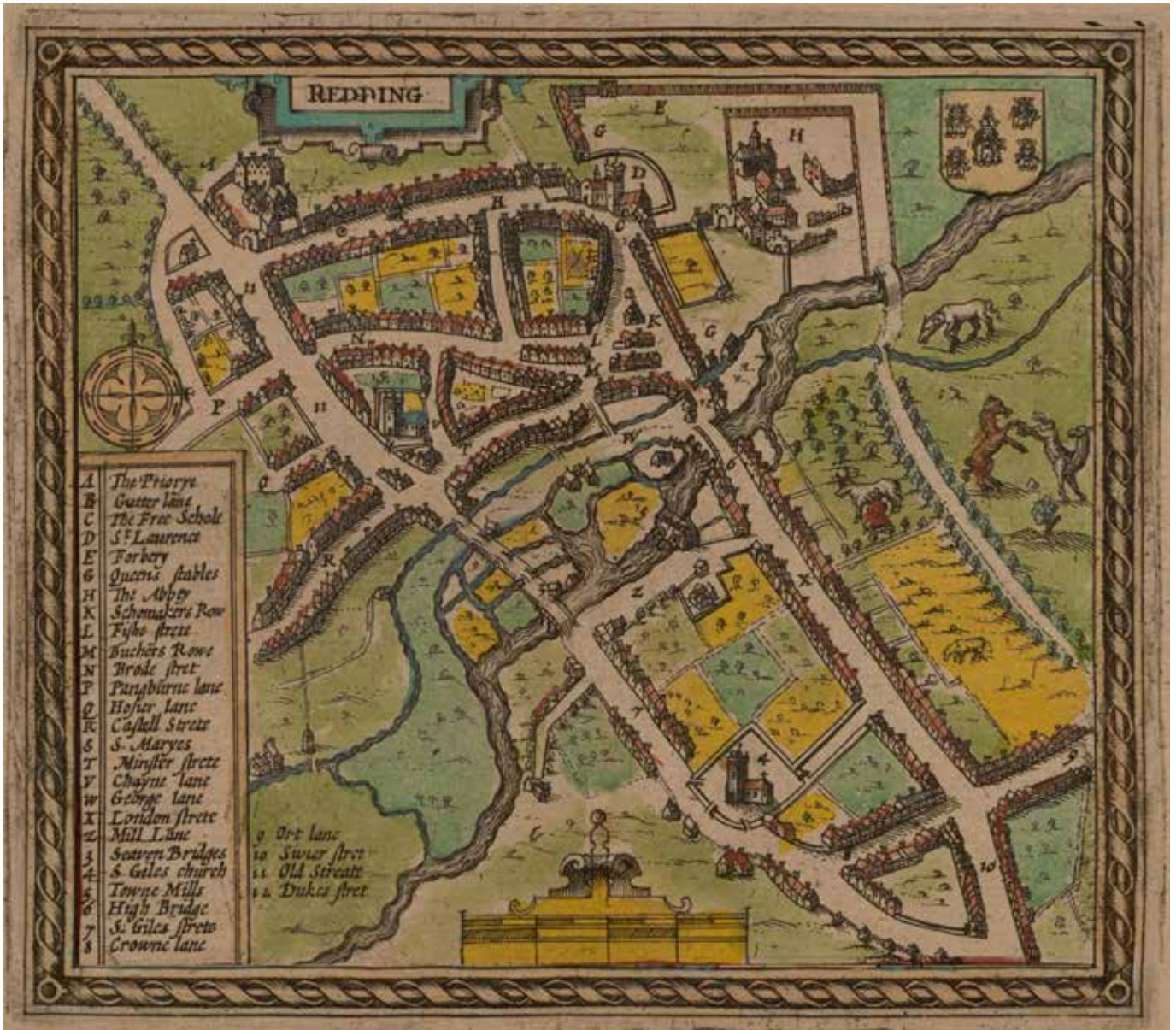


Figure 4 MAP OF 'REDPING' BY JOHN SPEED, 1611



Castle Street in 1890



St. Mary's Butts in 1912



St. Mary's Butts in 1887

Image source: ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reading,_Berkshire; ² https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Castle_Street,_Reading,_1890.jpg;

³ <https://www.getreading.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/pick-past-st-marys-butts-6240898>; ⁴ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St._Mary%27s_Butts,_Reading,_1887.jpg

1.7 SITE CONTEXT

The wider site presents both an opportunity and a constraint to redevelopment. The immediate environs of the Minster Quarter Area represent one of the largest brownfield regeneration opportunities in the town centre, the largest, certainly within the IDR, and a significant area for growth within Reading and the Thames Valley as a whole.

The historic context of the site as outlined above, presents a rich urban tapestry to respond to, but requires a sensitive response and the best possible architecture to succeed.

Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

Good architecture responds positively to its context. Therefore, understanding the constraints and opportunities presented within the site is a critical element of achieving sustainable regeneration.

The primary constraints include:

- Noise and severance along the IDR to the west
- High percentage of historic buildings and sensitive townscape, especially along Castle Street, St. Mary's Butts and further away from the site in the St Mary's Butts/ Castle Street Conservation Area and the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area.
- Views and vistas towards St Mary's Church
- Areas of blank frontage associated with the Broad Street Mall, Magistrates Courts and Police buildings
- Frequent and heavy bus movement through the area
- High concentration of pedestrian movement to the north and through St Mary's Butts
- Land depression/excavation of basement area beneath the former Civic Centre podium
- The existing market

A number of the above can also be considered opportunities, to which it will be possible to positively respond.

Additional opportunities include:

- Inclusion of the site in Reading's western cluster of tall buildings as per existing policy
- The historic focus of the area as the origin of the town, and the associated medieval frontage
- The 'forgotten' space of St Mary's churchyard
- Attractive historic elevations and building façades along Castle Street
- Creative articulation of building 'crowns' at upper storey levels
- Generous street width along St Mary's Butts
- Pre-existent car-free areas along Hosier Street/Düsseldorf Way
- High levels of public sector land ownership
- Willing and engaged landowners with appetite for regeneration and redevelopment
- Highly accessible public transport location

Height Classification Zones

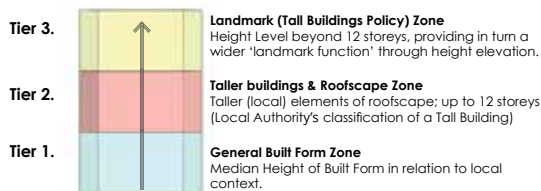


Figure 5 EXISTING 'MEAN' HEIGHT ANALYSIS AND TALLER BUILDINGS INDICATING BUILDING 'CROWN' CHARACTERISTIC

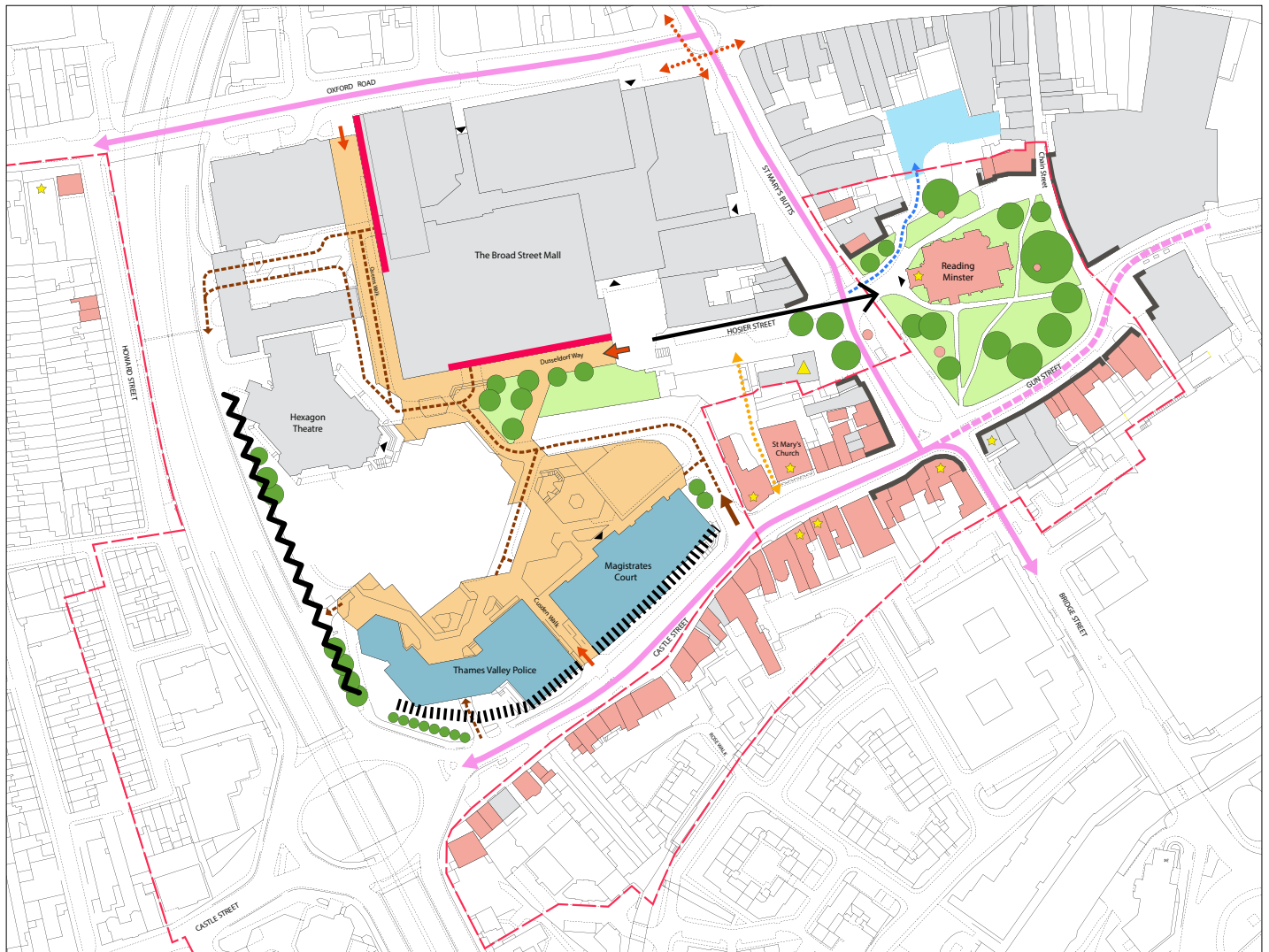
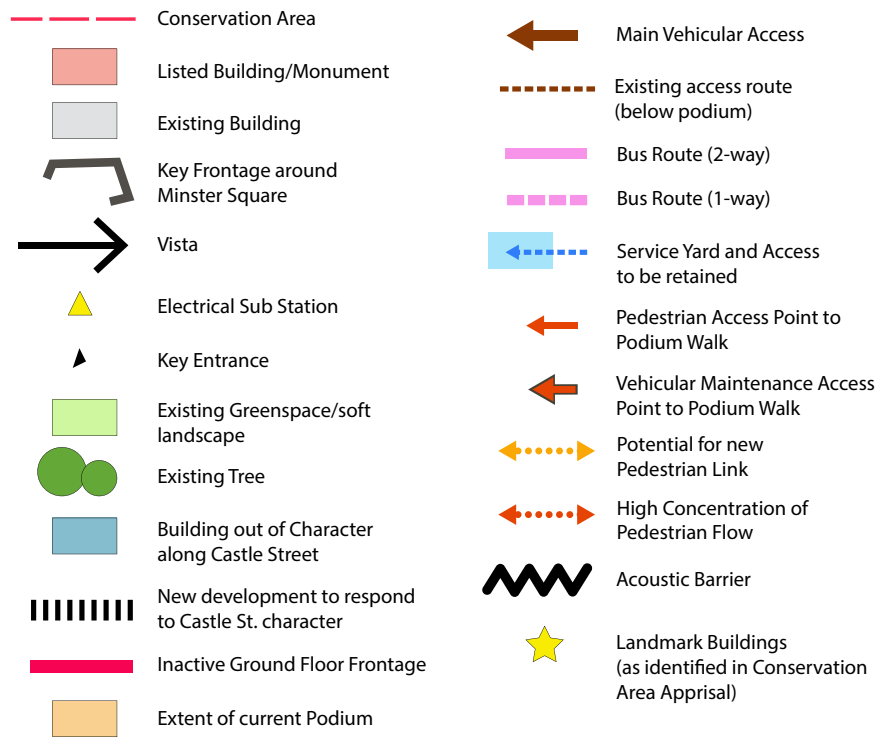


Figure 6 SITE CONSTRAINTS DIAGRAM

2. THE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

2.1 PUBLIC REALM LED DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The driver behind the redevelopment of the Minster Quarter Area of Reading is the creation of a new destination from the void left by the demolition of the former Civic Centre. It also aims to repair the fractured fabric of the wider townscape in the local area.

The area houses some of Reading's oldest and most significant buildings, 1970's shopping centres, and municipal infrastructure, and was previously the centre-piece of the 'brave new world' of the 1960's and 1970's town regeneration.

Key to successful regeneration will be the extent to which the development framework is lead by, and delivers on, the creation of a new public realm for the community as a place to adopt as one of the most inclusive, safest and flexible pieces of townscape in Reading and the Thames Valley.

Towns and cities are best and most frequently experienced at the street level. The development framework, advising on a multi-level environment, will need to work harder than conventional planning guidance to ensure that quality and safety of public and private realm are provided. This includes the upper levels of podium on BSM, as well as the service areas below podium, plus everything in-between.

The indicative 3 dimensional development framework, acknowledges the ambition of land owners (including RBC) to deliver tall buildings and will necessitate a high quality approach to design at street level and in the round.

In part, this will be achieved by leveraging value from the existing heritage assets on or around the site (e.g. views or vistas of (or toward) key buildings). But also by creating a network of open spaces and destinations that work with the wider mix and distribution of uses in the town centre.

The development of the site will focus on providing a distinctive, high-quality multi-functional destination within the western area of Reading's Central Core. The area will convey its own unique character and sense of place as a tall and dense urban quarter, whilst retaining historical associations and conserving or enhancing the adjoining Conservation Areas in a way that strengthens local identity, and where possible, re-knits the street pattern back into the surrounding area.

Development proposals will need to demonstrate how special attention has been given to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation areas.



Figure 7 HISTORIC STREET PATTERN IN 1900 (BEFORE IDR)



Figure 8 1970'S INTERVENTION (CIVIC CENTRE, IDR)

2.2 DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK RATIONALE

The site has much to offer. It occupies a major parcel of mixed-use land between the retail core of the town centre and the adjacent residential areas and commercial infrastructure beyond.

It offers a considerable opportunity to provide a high quality public realm with new squares and spaces, that link to these surrounding areas resulting in a reconnected piece of townscape.

The development framework rationale therefore, requires a solution that is greater than the sum of its parts, delivering quality buildings, around a network of squares, streets and spaces.

The development framework seeks to 'borrow' from heritage assets and other adjoining assets. Thus the churchyard of St Mary's is envisaged to become the largest new greenspace in the town after Forbury Gardens.

Düsseldorf Way will become a key pedestrian street linking the Hexagon

Theatre and St Mary's Minster. Whereas Queen's Walk could become Reading's answer to the New York High Line aerial park and restored greenspace, maximising the value of this under celebrated space.

The range of block sizes seeks to tread a balance between the desire to reinstate the lost historical street pattern, and allow for larger, deeper format perimeter blocks to support town centre residential uses above and retail at ground floor.

The site should become a place of discovery, where views and vistas both hold, but also lead, the view, mixing avenues, with smaller, intimate lanes and spaces which will become the town centre streets for Reading's newest community.

Interfacing with almost all of Reading's major streets the development framework will provide a resource for a larger draw of residents. At the upper levels, the site will make a valuable contribution towards Reading's skyline and longer-term city-status aspirations.

Consequently, the redevelopment will add significant value to the town on a host of levels. This will require a balance between building heights, quality of materials, density, space afforded to the public realm and an affordable, dynamic and inclusive place to live and work.

The development will need to work harder than most to make financial contributions to the ambitious programme of public realm measures, high levels of affordable housing and other infrastructure provision in accordance with relevant local plan policies.

The development framework is indicated by the illustrative layout in figure 10 below. It seeks to combine quantum, mass and space to deliver this programme, whilst respecting the sensitive nature of the surrounding areas. It has given special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation areas.

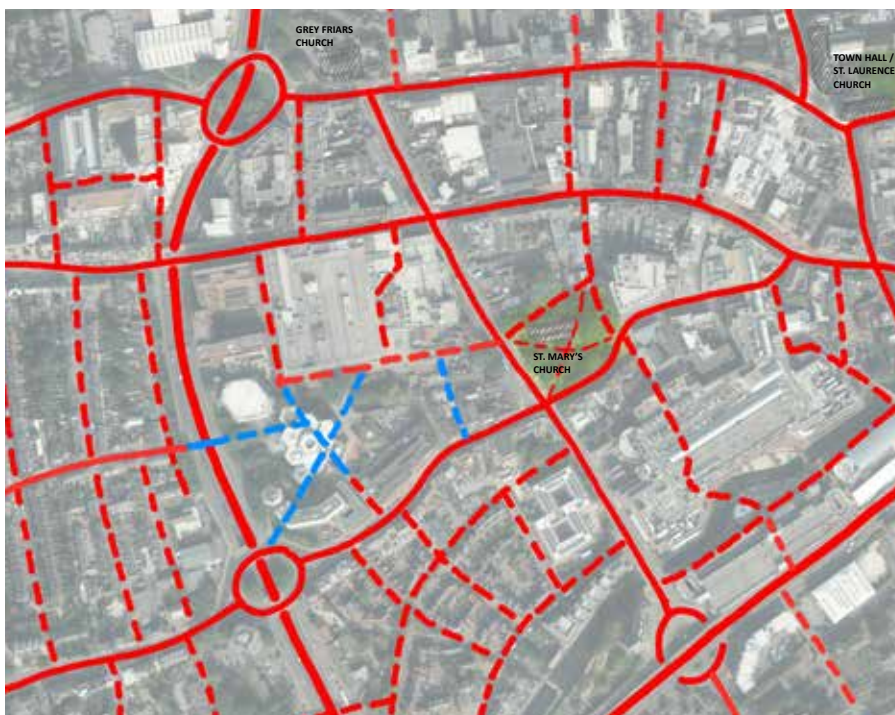


Figure 9 REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY



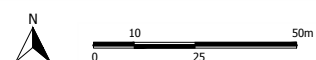
New York Highline - elevated park



Figure 10 INDICATIVE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK MASTER PLAN



- 2 Thames Valley Police Site
- 3 New Minster Square
- 4 Hexagon Square - flexible events space at podium level
- 5 Tower Square
- 6 Minster Place
- 7 Gun Street Square
- 8 Queens Walk 'Greenstreet'
- 9 20 storey residential landmark tower located on IDR
- 10 Vista to Landmark / Corner
- 11 Potential Areas for Local Market
- 12 New Lane Connection
- 13 3-4 storey height set backs along Conservation Area/Castle Street
- 14 Indicative BSM Development
- 15 Private amenity space for residential units including balconies, roof terraces, garden courtyards and podium gardens on top of BSM
- 16 5 storey mixed use block (commercial on ground floor, residential on upper floors)
- 17 7-9 storey mixed use block (commercial on ground floor, residential on upper floors)
- 18 6 storey residential block
- 19 Potential/opportunity for future bridge link
- 20 Direct pedestrian route
- 21 1 - 1.5 storey retail pods or permanent 'market stalls' wrapped around Sub Station
- 22 Vehicular (restricted) access possible
- 23 Improved entrance situation to the Hexagon... making it part of Hexagon Plaza
- 24 Improvements to pavements, carriageway and bus stops around BSM
- 25 Activation of southern facade along Dusseldorf Way/Hosier St. Provide spill out space for restaurants/cafes
- 26 Potential for outdoor bar space and start-up yard at the Hexagon lower ground floor level (below podium level)...
- 27 Reduce the impact of the IDR to the development area in terms of noise, pollution, and visual intrusion. Consider acoustic barriers as part of the underground car park structure along the IDR edge.



2.3 CHARACTER AREAS AND KEY COMPONENTS

The architecture and historic evolution of the site can be reasonably proportioned into four character areas. Between them, they contain some of Reading's oldest buildings, the first large-scale shopping mall to be built in the town, and the former civic and municipal quarter.

Consequently, each of these lends itself to an alternative approach which is, (respectively) to:

- a) Conserve
- b) Enhance and refurbish, and
- c) Redevelop

The development framework will seek to preserve these differences in character, whilst unifying the wider site into a whole area regeneration opportunity.

Specific attributes for these character areas are described opposite:

1 - Hexagon Quarter

Hexagon Quarter will be a distinctive, dense and high-quality urban quarter within Reading's Central Core. The site will provide a unique character and sense of place that will be unified by a high quality public realm and seek to create an inviting new gateway to and from the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area and the residential areas of West Reading.

2 - Minster Square

Minster Square, the oldest part of Reading, will be enhanced as a rediscovered public square and open space within its historic setting. Development will contribute positively to conserving and enhancing the adjoining Conservation Area in a way that strengthens local identity and which builds on the edges of Gun Street and St Mary's Butts to emphasise the historic setting.

Particular attention will be paid to protecting and enhancing the listed St Mary's Church and its churchyard setting as public realm/open space to serve the development of the area. Consideration to expand the current Charter Market into the street will enliven levels of activity locally and provide an enhanced setting for the market.

3 - St. Mary's Butts / Oxford Road

The streets and edges along Broad Street Mall will be enhanced to provide a coherent public realm, which will link the Development Framework Area to the remainder of the Town Centre and create a seamless appearance.

4 - Castle Street

Buildings along the southern edge of Castle Street display a unique integrity of historic continuity in the town. As such this area is singled out as an independent character area requiring neighbouring buildings to step-down to maintain the existing street dimensions.



Indicative perspective view from Minster Square



Indicative perspective view from south

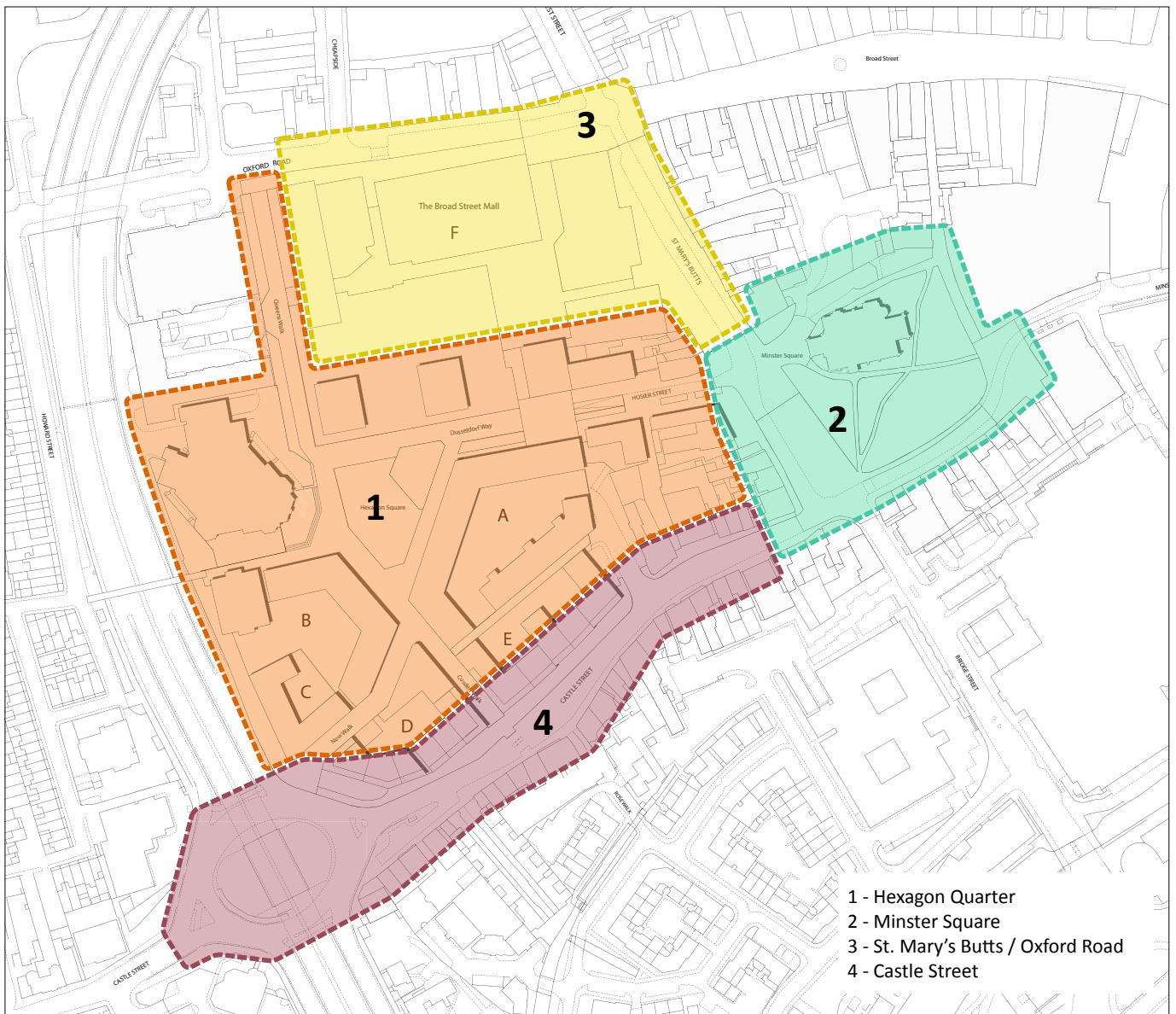


Figure 11 CHARACTER AREAS



Indicative perspective view from Castle St. roundabout



Indicative perspective view axis between Hexagon and Minster