

3. PUBLIC REALM PARAMETERS

3.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The central area of Reading has very limited open spaces and public realm, and the site should ensure new public open space is both multifunctional and high-performing. Much of the open spaces and public realm in the

central area, particularly that in the development framework area, is in need of urgent improvement and new development should contribute to providing high quality open space as part of their development.

The public realm/open space strategy for the development will require:

- Areas of open space and interconnecting public realm to be well designed, functional, adaptable and capable of efficient maintenance. These spaces must be designed to ensure a vibrant, lively and thriving public realm.
- The public spaces will provide both a place to stop and reflect, while also acting as an important network of thoroughfares.
- Development to improve and enhance St Mary's Butts as a multi-functional shared public space that manages buses and other traffic within a shared surface area with pedestrian priority.
- Integrate St. Mary's Butts within an extended open space area including the graveyard, the churchyard, associated open areas and the historic structures and building frontages around this open space.
- The (possible) removal (and subsequent re-provision elsewhere) of the disabled/temp car parking from Hosier Street to provide a new shared surface market space.
- Private communal amenity areas within developments that also provide some visual benefits and sense of openness within the development.
- Significantly enhanced existing routes including Queens Walk and Düsseldorf Way as active multi uses spaces with high quality landscape treatment that mitigates against uncomfortable micro climatic impacts. Each space should have its own distinctive character – soft landscape for Queens Walk and hard landscape (reflective of Düsseldorf's cobbled 'Altstadt') for Düsseldorf Way, retaining some of the heritage/twinning town assets associated with the area.
- Welcoming shared surface streets at podium level and that relate to the surrounding development in terms of active frontages and entrances and include appropriate lighting improvements. New streets should be comfortable and appropriate for their localised use in terms of wind/micro-climate considerations.
- Two principle 'pedestrian crossroads' within the development: the westerly junction will be at Hexagon Square and the easterly one shall be at Minster Square. Development shall front these key junctions and not intrude on sightlines, thereby maintaining legibility and way-finding throughout the development.
- Provide a public realm scheme for both sides of Castle Street that creates a high-quality environment and enhances the setting of the existing townscape.
- The new shared surface market space is likely to be restricted at its junction with St. Mary's Butts where the electricity sub-station is likely to be retained. There is potential here for the market to more visibly re-connect with the street pattern in this area, via hard surface improvements and could potentially mirror the triangular area to the west of The Minster. This area should include facilities to enable higher quality stalls to be erected quickly and then removed to allow this area to be used for other activities when the market is not operating. The tea hut could be relocated into this space into an enlarged kiosk with long opening hours, to help to animate this space.
- Designs that utilise existing trees as far as practicable. New street trees should be planted into the ground wherever possible, but where otherwise unachievable over the podium, planters or raised beds should be used.
- The design of the public realm or communal amenity spaces should create opportunities for people to meet and engage to counteract social isolation and loneliness. Explore the inclusion of community food growing as part of rooftop/courtyard gardens.

DESIGN CODE

Development proposals will need to include details of layout and landscaping for all the areas of public realm to produce high quality streets and spaces that can be used by all members of the community. This will include proposals for hard and soft surfacing, tree and landscape planting, street furniture including seating and facilities for safe children's play, signage, lighting, public art, interpretation boards to explain the history of the area and how the new development links back and connects to and/or rediscovers that history. Düsseldorf Way is to be retained as a symbol of the town's longstanding twinning association with Düsseldorf, and cultural art, such as the 'cartwheeling boys', retained in any scheme that comes forward.

Many of these elements will need to be considered as part of the development of a design code for the whole area which will be prepared and agreed as part of the first applications for development of the framework area. The design code will also cover building materials, architectural detailing, etc., with the intention of ensuring a high quality and coordinated approach to the detailed design and finishes for the area.

MATERIALS

Reading town centre features a strong palette of paving and hard landscape materials defined in the late 1990's and carried forward to this day. The combination of red brick paviors and granite detailing is a robust and recognisable hallmark of the town centre.

There is an ambition to more fully integrate the wider site area into the same, or similar palette, continuing to employ the same materials, although with variation around form and scale or paving units.

Complete reinvention of a new palette for the site should be avoided, although materials should respond to a hierarchy of movement, i.e. the best materials for the slowest and most discerning movement users, with highest quality materials for pedestrian and cycle areas.

Paving types should be consistent for areas of primary routes, and change at key junctures, such as main spaces and movement nodes. Where possible, and expressed through a continuity of materials, pedestrian and cycle movement should be prioritised with materials continuing onto and through vehicle carriageways.

STREET FURNITURE / SIGNAGE

Much of the street furniture in the town reflects the high percentage of Victorian architecture in the town centre, and this traditional approach contrasts with contemporary architecture and the regeneration of the Minster Quarter Area. Consequently, a fresh approach to street furniture could be taken to the wider site, reinforcing the individual character of specific spaces (especially the area around The Minster and the Hexagon), but one that ensures integration across the site as a whole.

This will necessitate different developers and land owners, agreeing and working to a common palette and site wide public realm code.

A signage strategy should be developed that unifies the aesthetic across the town centre. This should follow on from the directional signage and interpretation scheme recently implemented as part of the Abbey Quarter restoration.



Provide sufficient seating and consider comfort (sun, shade, wind, etc)



Provide planting and green areas as much as possible, ensure tidyness

LIGHTING

Lighting will be required to provide good levels of safety and performance to all areas, including the basement and sub-podium levels. Poorly lit areas should be avoided, and applicants bringing forward proposals within the area will need to provide a comprehensive lighting strategy that should integrate with surrounding land ownerships.

The proposed residential areas may present a constraint to high level and excessive lighting, especially late at night, and care should be taken to achieve a balance between the amenity of residents, and the safety and functionality of the public realm at street level.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the lighting of feature buildings, including St Mary's Church, the Hexagon, and new towers/tall buildings on the site. Individual squares and spaces could develop an individual lighting strategy, unified via an overall approach to lighting connecting roads and streets.

PLANTING

The wider area is home to some of Reading's most significant trees, particularly in the area around St Mary's churchyard. These include both indigenous and exotic trees and their success over many decades or centuries of growth may prove an indicator for choice of planting street trees elsewhere.

However, it is also noted that several of these species (Indian Bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*) for example), are wide spreading trees and suited only to more generous public spaces and not the intimate streetscape envisaged for much of the area.

Street trees therefore will need to be predominately fastigate (upright) in form, although tree height need not be a constraint, with trees providing valuable cooling and shading during summer months in urban areas. Tree planting positions should be decided with orientation, shadowing and views/outlook in mind.

Additional planting, especially along the green corridor 'highline' route envisaged for Queens Walk, should be low maintenance, robust and drought tolerant. This may lead to the identification of grass and prairie species which work best planted in large swathes or groups for maximum effect.

In addition, planting can provide opportunities for playful interaction with the landscape. As followed in several towns and cities, edible planting strategies may be adopted and promote community gardening activity where space allows, encouraging social interaction and good neighbourhood.



Use a variety of planting solutions and quality detailing



Create an attractive planting scheme throughout



Use robust and attractive street furniture that unifies the public realm



Consider colour to visually link areas and break up paved areas

MAINTENANCE

Material selection should be robust and durable, capable of withstanding vehicular traffic in areas, and avoid complex patterns or shapes that can cause issues with the replacement of materials after intervention from statutory undertakers.

Designs should allow for safe and continuous access to all areas of the public realm for maintenance and repair work but equally take a balanced approach to the excessive introduction of maintenance corridors and access zones in the public realm, as these can have a detrimental effect on the achievement of quality places.

Sustainable material choices should be capable of replication and re-ordering in the case of fault/breakage, and all materials should be tested for fitness for purpose. Podium level materials will need to be specified to withstand fire-tender and other emergency/ maintenance vehicle access.

Where possible, low maintenance materials should be employed on both buildings and in the public realm that do not require treatment, preservation applications or complicated cleansing operations.



Figure 12 EXTENT OF PUBLIC REALM

PUBLIC ART, HERITAGE FEATURES AND PLAY

Historically, public art has most often been expressed through the ornament and decoration of great buildings, sculpture, water features and edifices such as steps and staircases in the public realm are additional elements that can make a contribution to the richness of the built environment.

As noted in the site's inclusion in the western tall building cluster, there is a requirement for high-quality architecture. This requirement places specific emphasis that where buildings meet the ground, the standard of architectural detailing needs to be particularly strong.

Public art as part of building definition and articulation can make a positive contribution to the public realm and impression of the area as a quality destination and encourage inward investment, neighbourhood stewardship and community.

Beyond buildings themselves, public art and play should be integrated into the very essence of the public realm. This means extending beyond a 'catalogue' approach to design and specification, instead ensuring that all aspects of the street can make a contribution to forming a series of artistic pieces that are functional, playful and artistic.

This builds on the tradition of street art and furniture in the area, ranging from the taxi shelter and Jubilee Fountain in St Mary's Butts, to the clock, water feature and 'Cartwheeling Boys' along Düsseldorf Way.

Play, where specifically provided, should cater for all ages ranges (children and adult) as well as make provision for accessible and disabled play.



- 1) Jubilee Cross within St. Mary's church yard (Grade II listed)
- 2) Jubilee Fountain at St. Mary's butts (Grade II listed)
- 3) Clock at former civic centre site
- 4) Cartwheeling Boys sculpture. This sculpture was designed to mark the town's twinning with Düsseldorf in 1948.

FOOTBRIDGE / DECKING OVER IDR

A pedestrian link across the IDR to Howard Street/Baker Street will improve the access to the town centre, particularly for people living within the Baker Street area.

This link would re-instate a direct connection to Hosier Street that existed before the IDR was built.

A number of options are possible for this pedestrian link, ranging from pedestrian bridge to a more desirable

solution of a green bridge to the ambitious solution of decking over part of the IDR. The indicative options have been further outlined below. These will need further testing for feasibility.



Indicative example

Footbridge Option

A footbridge link should be the minimum option to create a link across the IDR.

The bridge would need to be designed to have an attractive and elegant form and act as a landmark, making a positive contribution to the architecture and public realm of the development framework site.



Indicative example (Mile End Park, London)

Green Bridge Option

A green bridge would be a more desirable solution and should be aimed for.

The green bridge would need to be designed to have an attractive form and provide sufficient planting to detract from the traffic on the IDR, making the journey across the IDR a more enjoyable experience and eliminating the feeling of a 'barrier'.



Indicative example

Decking Over Option

Decking over the IDR should be explored as an ambition for the area and as a means to reduce the environmental and visual impacts of the IDR.

This aspirational option could deliver a large contribution of open space and park landscape, providing the Baker Street/Oxford Road communities with recreational space that they currently lack.

3.2 HEXAGON QUARTER

In common with Reading's renaissance drive to deliver new squares and spaces, the Hexagon Quarter will transform and regenerate the area so that it becomes an attractive destination within the town centre.

Largely driven by new residential development with mixed uses at ground floor, the sub-podium service level void created by the Civic Centre will allow for this to become Reading's primary car-free (at least on-street) residential community, and therewith, create a new place-typology of urban living and animated residential streets at ground floor, adjacent to vibrant town-centre uses.

Above ground level, Hexagon Quarter will provide new tall buildings as part of the 'Western Cluster' in the RBC Tall Buildings Strategy, subservient to planned development at Station Hill, but nonetheless a significant landmark quarter for the town with long-range, and skyline visibility.

Any development proposals will need to consider their impact on adjoining areas and demonstrate how they have given special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation areas that adjoin the area.

As with all areas of tall buildings in the town, additional care will need to be taken to maintain quality and reduce shading at ground level, particularly towards neighbouring residential areas, whilst utilising materials that are safe, high quality and of lasting durability.

Public Realm Design Principles for the Hexagon Quarter are as follows:

- 1 Hexagon Square will be at the heart of the new quarter. This space is a collective node for key movement, incorporating the main entrance to the Hexagon. It will be large enough to hold events. The triangle of mature trees should be retained/integrated into the new landscape design.
- 2 The entrance to the Hexagon will be improved with new broader steps leading to a more generous lower space. This will better connect the Hexagon to the new the Square. The steps should be designed to allow seating and outdoor performances.
- 3 A walkway at podium level should create a connection to the IDR and create a visual link from the Hexagon Quarter to Howard Street. There is potential for a pedestrian bridge or wider decking across the IDR to reinstate historic links at this point.
- 4 Queens Walk will be transformed into a greenway that incorporates extensive planting, seating and play features, changing this space into a new linear park.
- 5 The ground floor facade of BSM should be opened up and activated with restaurant/cafe and retail uses. The width of Düsseldorf Way and Queens Walk allow for spill out space that can capture the southerly aspect. (see Appendix D for width assessment)
- 6 A new more direct pedestrian link will be created from Castle St roundabout. This new walk will guide people to the centre of Hexagon Quarter and Reading town centre beyond. The row of existing trees is to be retained where possible.
- 7 Cusden Walk will be retained in its current position.
- 8 Reading has a lack of play spaces in the Town Centre. Hexagon Quarter, being car free at podium level, has the opportunity to integrate imaginative play spaces as part of the public realm design. This can add to the sense of place and unique character of the quarter.
- 9 Due to the nature of the Hexagon, a lower level yard space will be created along the south of the Theatre. This space should see a creative design solution as outdoor space for the Hexagon, which could include (amongst other options) a climbing wall along the edge.
- 10 The impact of the IDR onto the development (and neighbouring) areas in terms of noise, pollution and visual intrusion, should be reduced. Acoustic barriers to car parks, green edges and bridging, greening and decking should all be considered and investigated for viability.
- 11 New urban blocks will be created with private garden courtyards.
- 12 There may be potential to open up the private alleyway from Hosier Street to Castle Street via the courtyard of the 'Sun Inn' pub. This could create a permeable route and add to the existing character of alleyways within Reading.



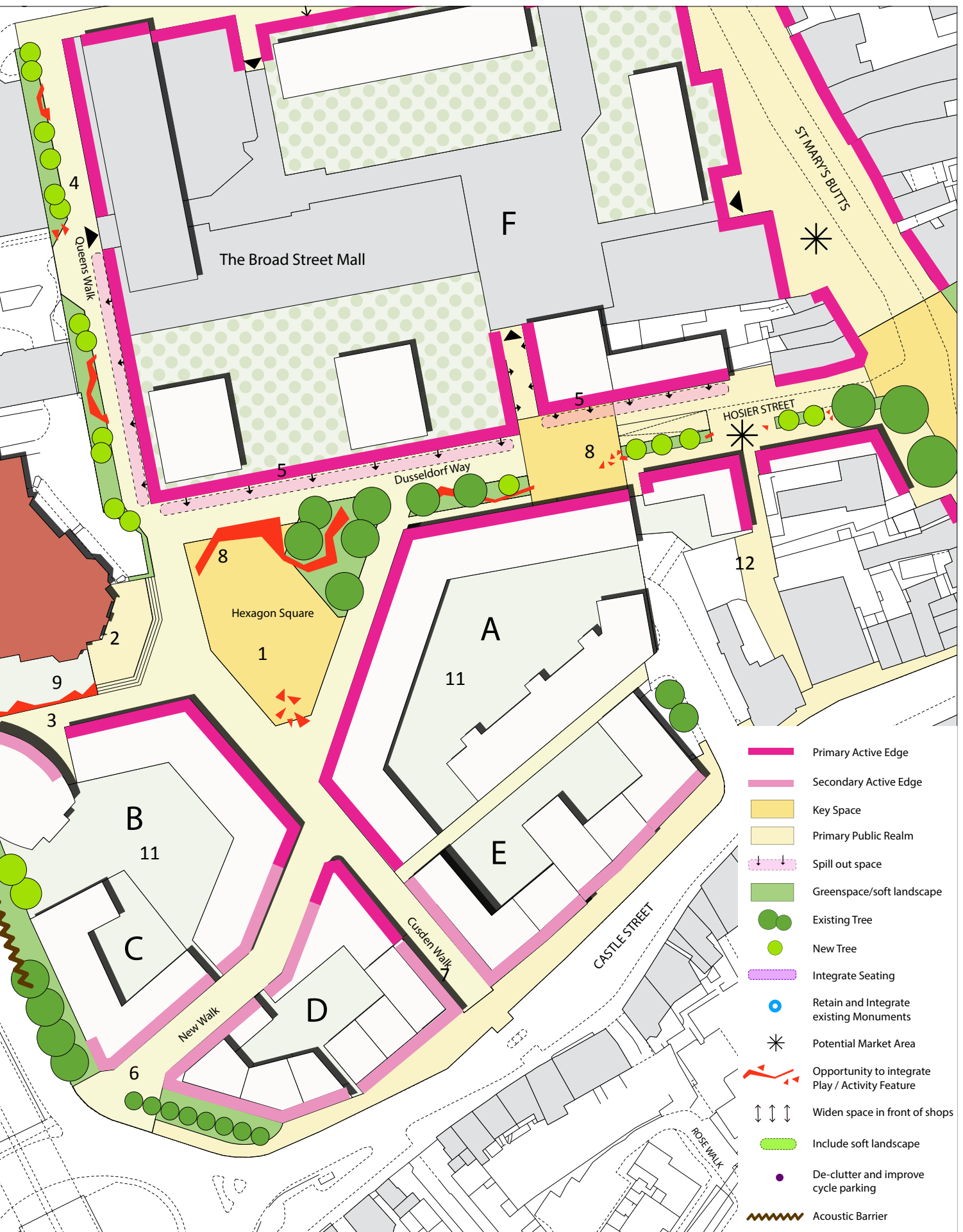


Figure 13 HEXAGON QUARTER PUBLIC REALM DESIGN PRINCIPLES

HEXAGON QUARTER - ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

Landscape and Public Realm



1 Create opportunities for extensive soft landscape along Queens Walk akin to New York's High Line Park



2 Planting combined with seating in well defined containers along Düsseldorf Way



3 Maximise opportunities for soft landscape



4 Consider colour as a means of creating a unique public realm...



5 Playful combination of hard and soft landscaped areas... could be of inspiration for Hexagon Plaza



Play and Activity Features



1 Imaginative play features should be part of the public realm concept



5 Consider a climbing wall for the lower ground facade facing the Hexagon (below podium)



2 Bespoke sculptural play / art pieces can give a unique sense of place....possible inspiration for Hexagon Plaza/Dusseldorf Way



3 Play may include a cultural theme reflecting the Hexagon



4 Consider play and activities for all ages and abilities....



HEXAGON QUARTER - ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

Flexible Events Space



1 Consider the suitability for a variety of events in the design of spaces and architecture



2 Create spaces that allow for temporary structures ... design in flexibility

4 Consider seating steps to the Hexagon entrance suitable for performances



3 Consider change in trends... allow for a space that can change with the times. Semi-permanent structures can be removed / replaced easily without affecting the principle structure of the space

New Urban Blocks



- 1 Create a high quality urban living quarter with plenty of green within private garden courtyards or podium gardens (BSM), the architecture should be contemporary and allow for mix of units creating a varied occupancy



- 2 Consider the needs of all residents within the garden courts as well as the microclimate and visual amenity



- 3 Well-sized balconies or roof terraces should be a necessity for each apartment in order to generate well-being and comfort for residents

3.3 MINSTER SQUARE

Minster Square is a celebration of Reading's oldest building in continuous use for over 1,000 years. As set out under Historic Context above, St Mary's Minster occupies a major position in the historic heart of the town.

The Bridge Street/St Mary's Butts/Gun Street/ Castle Street crossroads, marks the early commercial and spiritual heart of the town, yet since first Reading Abbey, and latterly the railway, the centre of gravity pushed northwards and then eastwards.

St. Mary's Minster is a magnificent building with links back to 979 AD. It is set within the context of a mature churchyard amidst spectacular trees and ancient stones.

Although clearly a special and sacred space, the combination of Minster, medieval frontage and greenspace, could be better combined to help reinforce one of the town's forgotten, yet greatest spaces, enhancing public realm and carefully reconfiguring this as a 'new' square.

The public realm design principles for Minster Square are described below:

- 1 Create a generous, traditional church square/focal space in front of St. Mary's Church. Consistent paving material should run across the street to link into the Hexagon Quarter, working to pull both sides of the street together as a single, coherent place.
- 2 It would be highly desirable to see a re-configuration of the widest part of St. Mary's Butts and the consolidation of bus movement routes to reduce bus impact
- 3 A new market square could be created along the western churchyard wall and northwards on the eastern elevation of the BSM offering a new and more visible location for the daily market.
- 4 Existing monuments and features, such as the Victorian Fountain and Jubilee Cross will be retained. The existing tea hut will be retained but possibly in an alternative location.
- 5 Seating should be sensitively integrated along the existing churchyard walls. This is particularly desirable along the wall facing the new market square capturing the south-westerly aspect. The walls along the path to the north of the Minster are already used by people sitting on them, and this should be formalised and enhanced.
- 6 The appearance of the service yard should be improved.

Illustrative Examples



Create opportunities for seating along the churchyard wall and towards the new market square



Sensitively integrate seating along the churchyard edges



Figure 14 MINSTER SQUARE PUBLIC REALM DESIGN PRINCIPLES



Re-configure the movement routes along St. Mary's Butts to integrate a new market square



Provide a new pavement for Minster Square that enhances its historic importance, aids pedestrian priority and calms traffic.

3.4 ST. MARY'S BUTTS / OXFORD ROAD

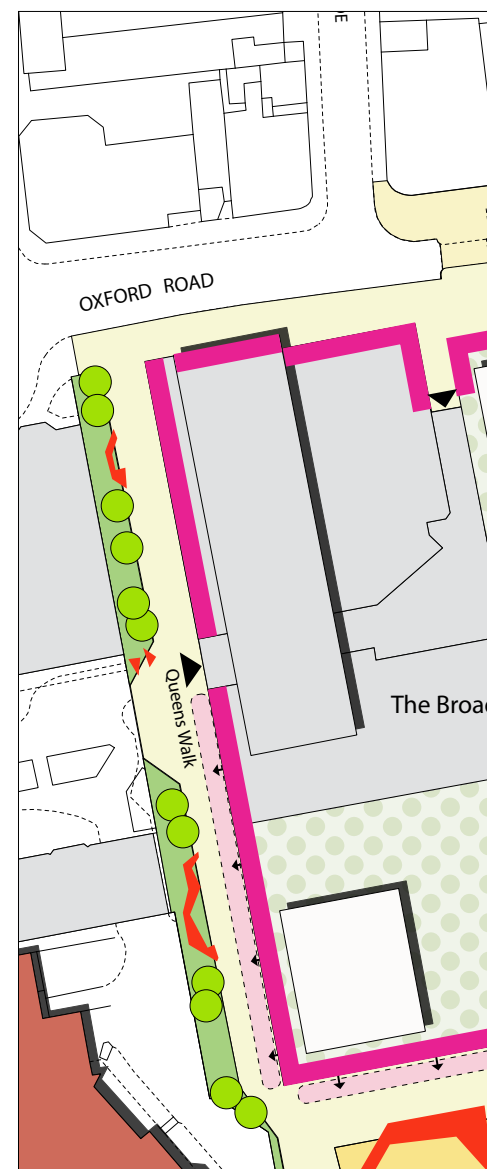
Rounding off the site and presenting a northern facade to the existing town, the primarily public realm enhancements to both St Mary's Butts and the Oxford Road, will be a welcome refresh to an area dominated by tarmac and service vehicles.

Widening pavements, and integrating a palette of materials common to the new quarter as a whole will strengthen the integrity of the site and encourage footfall from the main east west route of Broad Street/Oxford Road.

Smaller squares at road junctions and a redefinition of streets as spaces, achieved by widening and decluttering, will contribute to enhancements in this area, and lead to a recognition of the significant investment above ground.

The public realm design principles for St. Mary's Butts / Oxford Road are described below:

- 1 The northern edge of BSM is currently constrained by the location of bus stops along Oxford Road leaving little space for pedestrians and no spill out space for retail units. Ideally the footpath should be widened and bus stops located within the carriageway.
- 2 The pavement to the east of BSM should see a continuation of material from the south of St. Mary's Butts. Space for market stalls should be retained.
- 3 Improve public realm in St Mary's Butts and improve/enhance BSM facade fronting St Mary's Butts as part of a comprehensive scheme for the development of the Broad Street Mall.
- 4 Improve street surface, pavement and bus stops along Oxford Road.
- 5 The public realm of the junction of Broad Street/St Mary's Butts has potential for some improvement. Soft landscape, unified street furniture and formal cycle parking should be provided. The removal of the railings and signal posts should be explored.
- 6 The pavement east of BSM feels undefined with street clutter and pinch points. Improvements to bus stops and routing should be explored to create a more continuous public realm along this street. Although allowance needs to continue to be made for deliveries to shops at this end of the road.
- 7 Sufficient private amenity and garden space will need to be provided for new residents on top of the BSM roof. This should be clearly visible from street level, and where possible descend below podium level over building parapets to help soften the building structure. Explore the inclusion of community food growing as part of rooftop gardens.



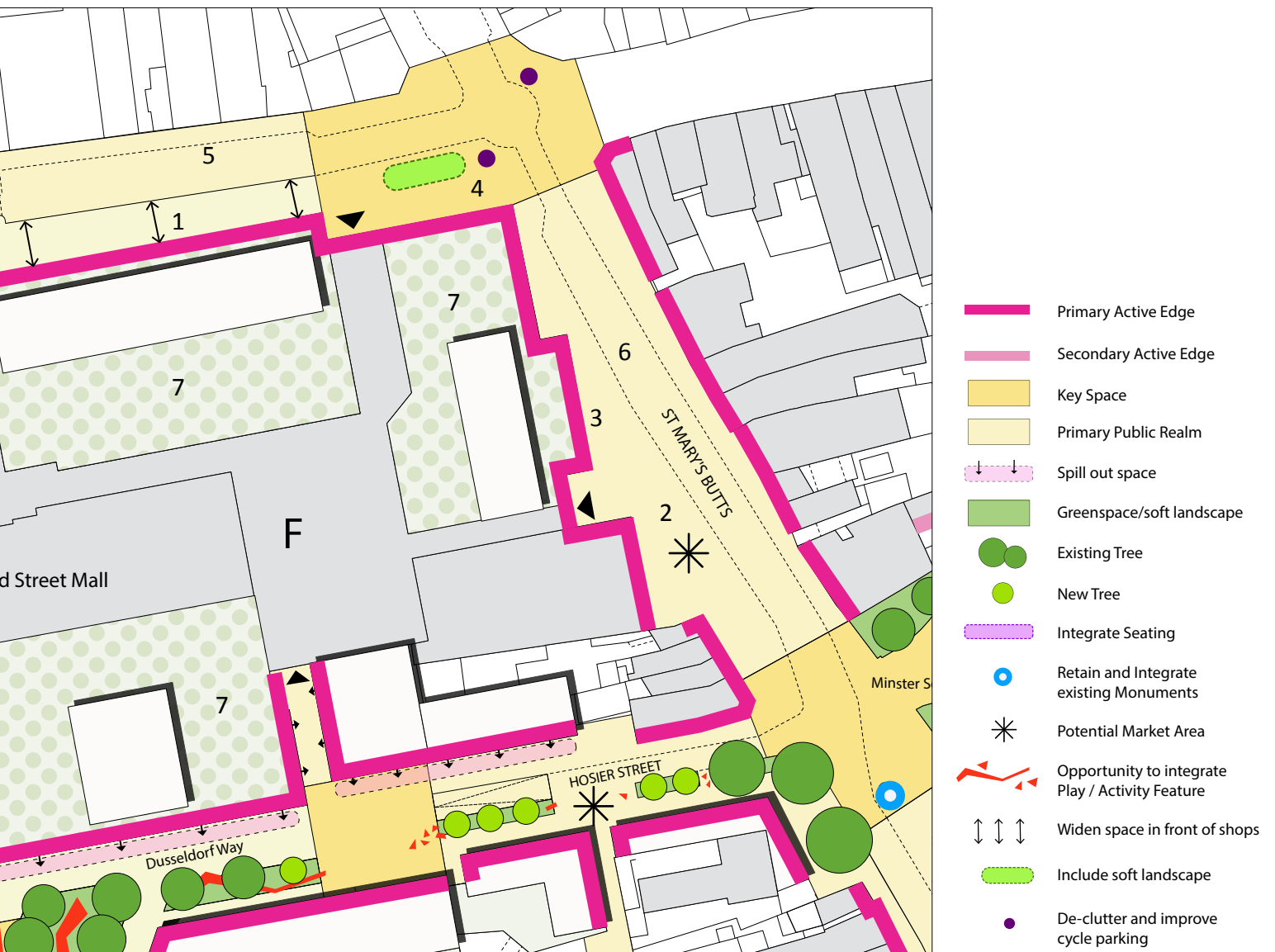
Illustrative Examples



Consider combined Planter and seating units



Larger trees would have more impact



Small landscape space with seating



Simple clutter free, timeless cycle hoops



3.5 CASTLE STREET

As a conservation area Castle Street and any new development along this street needs to respect and enhance this heritage asset. Castle Street forms the gateway into the town centre from the west and contains many historic buildings giving an attractive character. The redevelopment of the Magistrate's Court and Police Station sites opens a unique opportunity to repair the townscape of the northern section of Castle Street.

The conservation area appraisal prepared by RBC sets out the detailed character assessment and suggests a number of general principles and opportunities for enhancement. These include:

- Develop strategies to de-clutter the public realm and consider a more coherent pavement and street furniture.
- Consideration should be given generally to improving floorscapes and pedestrian friendliness throughout the Conservation Area.
- Review parking arrangements and investigate if a reduction in parking is possible.

More specific development principles relating to any new development replacing the Magistrate's Court and Police Station along the north side of Castle Street are:

- Respect and respond to the historic character and appearance of the existing streetscape within Conservation Areas.
- New buildings need to respond appropriately to the high density of listed buildings of various grades in the street, enhancing this part of the conservation area, and achieving high quality design in replacing the existing buildings.

- Development will need to contribute to restoring an active frontage along the street with the majority of buildings set at the rear of the pavement. This may require specifying a mix of commercial use of ground floors in buildings otherwise intended for residential use, or the introduction of buildings with a modern interpretation of 'townhouse' frontages.
- Building heights and widths along Castle Street vary greatly. Buildings are predominantly 3 storey (ranging from 7.5 - 11.3m eaves height) and show vertical emphasis in the elevational treatment. The street has a strong enclosure and shows small variations in building orientation and set backs. New development frontages should find solutions that mimic this principle without being pastiche.
- Eaves heights along the street need to follow an appropriate height to create a balanced streetscene. However, buildings may be higher, but need to be set back. 3D studies should be undertaken to find the appropriate form.

- Building form and proportion as well as materials and detailing need to be appropriate for Castle Street and should reflect the existing character principles.
- Provide and implement a public realm scheme for both sides of Castle Street that creates a high-quality environment for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists, enhances the setting of the existing townscape of great historic and architectural interest and provides a high-quality context for the redevelopment of the Magistrate's Court and Thames Valley Police HQ.

In addition the NPPF states in Paragraph 200: *"Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably."*



Variation in building form along Castle Street (extract of street)



Castle Street west



Castle Street east