

# **ROUTH LANE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**



**Reading Borough Council**

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## **ROUTH LANE 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 Routh Lane 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 Routh Lane 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 lying south of properties fronting The Meadway (which are modern and not part of the Conservation Area). The other sides of the triangle are defined by New Lane Hill to the west and Routh Lane to the east, which meet at a point just south of St Michael's Church, which lies at the heart of the Conservation Area.

The area is framed on its west side by the graveyard of St Michael's Church and a small terrace of cottages known as Church Cottages, and more modern houses north and south of these. Although the graveyard and cottages have obvious links with St Michael's Church, they are not part of the Conservation Area, as they lie within the administrative boundary of West Berkshire District Council. The boundary of the Conservation Area is therefore somewhat artificial at this point. The east side of the Conservation Area comprises individually designed houses on large plots. The grounds of the former Meadway School lie beyond these. To the south of the Conservation Area lies modern housing, although Tarlton Court immediately to the south has a green space in front of it, which presents a pleasant transition at this entrance to the conservation area.

The roads within the core of the area, around the church itself, are generally not kerbed, and do not have footpaths, which is an essential part of the rural feel and character of the Conservation Area. Bollards at the northern end of Routh Lane prevent through traffic here. There is a parking layby to the west of the church and informal parking to the east. Formal footpaths are evident on the west side of New Lane Hill and on both sides south of its junction with Routh Lane. Just south of this junction is a small triangular grassed area with a seat facing the church and cast iron bollards separating it from New Lane Hill.

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 south of the busy primary route of The Meadway. New Lane Hill, which is effectively the western boundary of the Conservation Area, is also a busy link between The Meadway (and Tilehurst village) and the main A4 Bath Road at its southern end. Traffic management measures which prevent through traffic accessing the area however maintain essentially quiet character of the rest of the area.



New Lane Hill away from church

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

The key features of the area are therefore:

- its focus on St Michael's Church;
- a little altered historic street pattern, now protected by traffic management measures;
- Routh Lane in particular still has a rural character, with no kerbs or footpaths;
- several curtilages are enclosed by old brick walls, some of which are high and enclose views from the road;
- the domestic use, scale and character of the area, which is of substantial dwellings in large plots;
- the substantial tree cover in the area.

Although a small area, and in spite of new development in the area, and surrounding it, it retains a rural charm and character, which makes it 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 21 August 1987. 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 (but see following paragraph). It is however 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.

Newbury District Council (now West Berkshire District Council) were not at the time particularly supportive of the idea of a proposed Routh Lane Conservation Area, commenting in a report to Committee that: "The tree-lined lanes create a village like quality between two suburban areas, which is a particularly pleasant feature of New Lane Hill. However modern residential infill has depreciated the historical quality of the area. Whilst the Routh Lane Area is pleasant it does not have the necessary special architectural or historic quality to merit designation as a conservation area." The report did however indicate that were Reading Borough Council to go ahead with designation that they would refer the matter back to Committee with a view to designating their adjoining area as well. This does not appear to have happened, and may yet be worth following up even at this late stage, because it is felt that the graveyard and Church Cottages are clearly historically associated with St Michaels Church at the centre of the Routh Lane Conservation Area. By the



same virtue, it might also have been worth considering whether re-naming the Conservation Area as “St Michael’s” rather than “Routh Lane” might have been a more appropriate title for the Conservation Area.

### **1.3 The Area described**

The character and boundaries of the Routh Lane Conservation Area remain unchanged since its designation, although there is a current development taking place on the former “The Bungalow” site on Routh Lane, the access to which development appears to affect the character of the Lane by introducing kerbing at its entrance. The site of Iris Court also has planning permission and listed building consent for refurbishment/redevelopment, although these seek to preserve and hopefully enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.



Iris Court

Environmental improvements (incorporating a seat), also took place to the central green shortly after its designation, as well as the erection of conservation area street signs (although strictly speaking those at the northern ends of New Lane Hill and Routh Lane are actually situated outside the Conservation Area).

The designated area includes the following listed buildings:

Church of St Michael. Listed Grade II. The south aisle is 14<sup>th</sup> century, with a brick tower of 1737 of red and grey brick in English bond with header bond corner piers. The rest, including the stone spire with brick banding, angle pinnacles, flying buttresses and large gablets dates from 1856 (Architect: George Edmund Street). It is built of flint on a stone plinth with stone strings and dressings, and a tiled roof. South aisle window said to be by William Morris. The churchyard contains many trees and a number of headstones dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is enclosed by an attractive brick wall.



St Michaels Church

Iris Court, New Lane Hill (formerly listed under Church Road). Listed Grade II. This is an early 19<sup>th</sup> century former rectory of St Michaels Church. Altered and extended in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Stucco south front. 19<sup>th</sup> century brick porch. Mansard roof, lower part tiled, incorporating segmental pedimented dormers. Slate upper slopes. Large chimneys. The listing entry advises “included to provide setting for St Michael’s Church, Goodwyns and Church Cottages (latter in Tilehurst Civil Parish)”. The last named, although mentioned, are not however listed in their own right. It was last used as accommodation for the elderly, but is currently unoccupied, as are modern extensions to the rear. Planning permission and listed building consent exists for renovation of the main building and redevelopment of the extensions. Former stables to the east and backing directly on to Routh Lane were replaced

by 8 new flats in the early 1980s, but the original boundary wall was here repaired/replaced thus retaining the character of the area. The site is enclosed by a high brick wall on the Routh Lane side, but a chain link fence on the New Lane Hill side. The site contains important trees, protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

Goodwyns. Listed Grade II. A 16<sup>th</sup> century timber framed building with 17<sup>th</sup> century and later additions. Pebble dash (brick) infilling. Old tile roof. 3 chimneys. Within the curtilage is a single storey doctor's surgery erected in the late 1960s that is out of character. The site is enclosed by a mixture of high fences and walls.

221 New Lane Hill (Green Lea). Listed Grade II. 17<sup>th</sup> century thatched cottage. Modernised. Rendered. 2 bays with eyebrow dormers. Central chimney. Rendered. Situated behind a low flint and brick wall.



'Green Lea' 221 New Lane Hill

The remaining buildings in the Conservation Area are unlisted and are as follows:

The Rectory, Routh Lane. 1960s replacement for the original rectory. Situated behind a high brick wall.



The Bungalow, Routh Lane. Mid 1950s. Formerly bounded by a high fence and hedge. Currently being redeveloped for 4 bungalows with a formal access drive to Routh Lane.

Green Willows, Routh Lane. Mid 1960s house. High brick wall and wooden gates in front.

Fairway, Routh Lane. 1960s chalet bungalow. Post and rail fence in front.

Orana, Routh Lane. 1960s chalet bungalow. Low brick wall in front.

The Nook, New Lane Hill. New dwelling at rear of “Orana”. Early 1990s.

The Grange, Routh Lane (formerly Orchard House). Large inter-war house. Brickwall in front.

Highfields, Routh Lane. Large house. 1980s. Half timbered style. Behind high brick wall.

Heritage House, Routh Lane. Large house. Half timbered style. 1980s. Wooden fence with high hedge in front.

St Michaels Cottage, New Lane Hill. Older building with slate roof. Outbuildings apparently used for a pottery and wood craftsmanship in the 1950s and 60s. Wooden fence and high hedge in front.

Glenrock House, New Lane Hill. New house. Brick wall in front.

223 New Lane Hill. Large 1980s house. Brick wall in front.

The previously described buildings are clearly not “historic”, but because of their individual design, generally generous plots, and the retention of frontage walls and grass verges to the highway, they impart a rural feel to the area compared with the modern suburban developments to the north and south, and therefore “stand out” in this context. The planning circumstances of the Conservation Area and surrounding areas have not materially changed since its original designation, such that no amendments to the boundaries are proposed. Generally, developments within the conservation since its designation have sought to preserve or enhance its character in accordance with national and local planning policies.

As has already been mentioned, the graveyard and Church Cottages to the west of the Conservation Area (in the West Berkshire Council area), are considered to be worthy of conservation area status because of their obvious associations

with St Michael's Church, and West Berkshire Council should be approached again in this regard (since this is a matter in their jurisdiction).



St Michaels Churchyard from New Lane Hill. Heritage House beyond

There are a number of Tree Preservation Orders in the Conservation Area, particularly on the sites of Iris Court, St Michael's Church and Hall, The Rectory and St Michael's Cottage, but in any event 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. 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 the provisions set out in PPG15 (as superseded on 23 March 2010 by 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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**

The boundaries of the Routh Lane Conservation Area are shown at Appendix 1. The area lies about 3km west of Reading centre, and lies immediately to the south of modern properties in The Meadway, a primary distributor road between Reading town centre and Tilehurst. It is defined by New Lane Hill to the west and Routh Lane to the east. Immediately surrounding the area, with the exception of St Michael's graveyard and Church Cottages to the west, are areas of modern housing. Historically, St Michael's Church was central to the Parish of Tilehurst with links to Tilehurst village itself. It is prominently situated at the top of New Lane Hill, but the surrounding area forms something of a plateau on which Tilehurst village is situated. The village is approached from all directions by hills.

Apart from the St Michael's Church itself, Iris Court (the former church Rectory) two other listed buildings and two unlisted buildings in the area, properties date only from about the 1960s, but all are centered on an historic street pattern which has a distinctly rural feel to it.

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. St Michael's Church however dominates some wider views.





4 Church Cottages

#### 4.0 Historic development

##### 4.1 History

Reading is named after the Readingas, Saxon followers of Reada, ‘the Red’, who settled in the spit of land in the fork of the Thames and Kennet in the 6<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, making good use of the town’s road and river links. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Reading was an important market and coaching town; new industries developed, notably brewing, iron-founding and brick and tile making. Early 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 about 5k from Reading town centre, from which it is approached up hills. Transport even until the 20th century was traditionally by carriers cart.

The Victorian County History of the Counties of England describes the Parish of Tilehurst (of which St Michael's is the parish Church) as follows: "The Bath Road forms the southern boundary of the parish for some distance. From this road a branch runs north along the eastern side of Calcot Park to the village of Tilehurst, where it divides into two, near St Michael's Church. One branch is called Churchyard Lane and runs northeast into Norcot Lane to join the Oxford Road; the other branch goes past the church to Back Lane, leading to Tilehurst and the hamlet of Armour, where there is a village hall, and also to Blagrove Recreation Grounds." It is not difficult to envisage these roads as Routh Lane and the extension of New Lane Hill respectively, or their continuation to what are now St Michaels Road and Church End Lane respectively, although these historic routes (lanes) have effectively been severed by The Meadway, which is of fairly modern construction and a continuation of the main Tilehurst Road out of Reading town centre. The Meadway does not of course appear on late nineteenth century maps of the area.

The Blagrove family (see following paragraph) were principal landowners from the late 18th to the early 20th century. The parish of Tilehurst of which St Michaels Church is the centre was originally much more extensive than it is now extending eastwards towards Reading and westwards to and including Theale. The name Tilehurst comes from "tigel" meaning a tile and "hurst" meaning "wooded hill". Historically, brick and tile making have been pre-eminent elements in Tilehurst life. There is evidence of man being in Tilehurst in prehistory, and Roman remains have been found near St Michaels Church.

Tilehurst has always had strong links with Reading itself. The manor of Tilehurst was the property of Reading Abbey, until the dissolution of the monasteries. The Abbot exercised rights to cut furze here. The first church dates back to at least the 12th century, situated close to a spring, and around which grew a small hamlet of buildings for people who worked on the land. It passed into the hands of Sir Francis Englefield in 1545, and to The Crown in 1585. The next 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. The Blagrove family were the next notable occupants of Calcot Court (newly rebuilt in 1759), and were noted for their philanthropy in relation to the parish generally and right up to the 20th century. See also section 6.7.

Tilehurst did not become, 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 historic road pattern of country lanes linking St Michael's Church with Tilehurst village to the north and the main Bath Road to the south. These roads still retain a rural feel despite the relative newness of properties in the Conservation Area on the east side of Routh Lane, contrasting with the more obvious suburban developments which surround the conservation area.

This area clearly possesses a sense of history, which has its basis in a rural village centred on St Michael's Church.

### **5.0 Spatial analysis**

#### **5.1 Key views and vistas**

Although most directly approached from the north from The Meadway, the most dramatic entrance is from the south via New Lane Hill, where St Michael's Church and its prominent spire come into view after the bend towards the top of New Lane Hill opposite its junction with Cockney Hill. From the south it is fully open to view and not hidden by intervening properties as it is from the north and along the Meadway. The spire of the church is however a prominent landmark above intervening properties from greater distances.

Apart from the church, no individual building stands out in each street in the Conservation Area, and views out of the Conservation Area from the centre are similarly limited. What views there are from the ends of roads in the Conservation Area are to modern suburban developments to the north,

although the view south is more open towards the larger properties which flank the top of New Lane Hill to the south.

## 5.2 The character of spaces within the area

Notwithstanding that fact that the Conservation Area is defined throughout by historic walls, some quite high, it is generally speaking quite spacious in layout and “feel”. This is particularly true when viewed from the south and west, with St Michael’s Church, Iris Court and the surrounding residential properties being centered in their own large plots, with the trees in the grounds of the Church and Iris Court (particularly on its west side) being a particularly important element to the character of the area.



New Lane Hill entrance from south. Green in front of Tarlton Court

This sense of space is enhanced by: the wide grass verge to the carriageway west of the Church; the verges on either side of Routh Lane at its north end before it tapers between the characteristic high walls of the Conservation Area; the space at the southern end of Routh Lane south of the church, although this is a mixture of grass and tarmac where part of the old lane has been closed off with bollards; the space in front of Tarlton Court to the south of the Conservation Area, which provides an open entrance and vista to the Conservation Area from the south; and the generally verdant nature of the



frontages to New Lane Hill on its west side, with the exception of the otherwise attractive Church Cottages, which are built on the back edge of pavement.

The informal character of Routh Lane itself with its general lack of kerbing to delineate the highway edge also helps the feeling of a sense of space.

The area also benefits from good tree cover as previously stated. This provides good setting for the Conservation Area as a whole.

## **6.0 Definition of the special interest of the conservation area**

### **6.1 Definition of the character of the area**

It is focused on St Michael's Church, which is its key feature, and a little altered historic street pattern as previously described. A lack of formal kerbing in the core of the area gives the area a quite rural feel within the mostly twentieth century built up urban area which surrounds it. Further, whilst many of the dwellings in the Conservation Area are of quite recent build, they possess a variety and sense of space which adds to the rural feel of the area, particularly when compared with the more obviously suburban developments which surround them. Finally, tree cover in and around the area adds to the green and rural feel of the area.

Generally.

*Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area:*

- Retention of listed original buildings, particularly St Michael's Church at the very heart of the area, and their settings with few detrimental changes by way of new development and/or addition of non-traditional materials;
- New developments generally respecting the rural character of the area;
- Maintenance of strong boundary lines to the frontage of properties, particularly high brick walls;
- Maintenance of soft edges to highway edges;
- Good tree cover within the grounds of individual properties;
- 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 newer properties;
- Some loss of original brick walls on property frontages;

- Lack of traditional street furniture, including street lighting;
- Over-reliance on individual telegraph poles throughout the area with attendant wires radiating out to the houses within it;
- Enhancement of open space to south of St Michael's Church requires consideration e.g. removal of redundant tarmac.

The Routh Lane 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 new houses on plots on the east side of Routh Lane and the proposed redevelopment of Iris Court. Generally these have met the test of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Historically, the greatest pressures on the area have arisen from “rat-running” but in recent years this has been rectified by the introduction of traffic management measures, including bollards and signage.



South along Routh Lane - new build past bollards

## **6.2 Activities and uses**

Historically and currently, the Conservation Area was/is essentially a residential area, save for St Michael's Church itself.

The area generally has a quiet residential atmosphere within its core, although The Meadway to the north and New Lane Hill to the west are clearly busy primary routes. Traffic using these roads in reality by-passes the residential core of the Conservation Area which tends to "face" Routh Lane or has access to it. This means that the Conservation Area is generally immune from the direct impact of traffic. The residential properties have their own parking provision, thus obviating any obvious need for car parking, but 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**

At the core of the Conservation Area are St Michael's Church and three other listed buildings. These have already been fully described. The majority of the properties in the Conservation Area are however quite modern, as such there is little to discuss here in architectural and historic terms. As has been stated before, the character of the Conservation Area owes most to its historical street pattern and rural feel rather than necessarily any intrinsic qualities of (modern) buildings within the Conservation Area. However frontage brick walls are also a linking feature of the 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 Routh Lane Conservation Area strictly meet this criterion, because of their style and design, and the generally secluded (from outside view) of the Conservation Area as a whole. The unlisted Church Cottages, immediately to the west of the Conservation Area (albeit that they are situated outside Reading Borough) are worth mentioning in this respect, because they are a key element of the streetscape and are also important in respect of views in to and out of the Conservation Area - a material consideration in planning and conservation area terms.

### **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, are epitomised by not having hard kerb edges. This is an essential feature of the character of the Conservation Area, and where it exists should be retained as an essential feature. 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.

Mention has been made of the space at the southern end of Routh Lane south of the church. This is a mixture of grass and tarmac where part of the old lane has been closed off with bollards, and deserves appraisal for possible enhancement.

Street lighting columns, signage and street furniture are modern, and this is another area with considerable potential for improvement. There are no examples of traditional lighting in the Conservation Area.

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 St Michaels Church, details of which have already been discussed. Architecturally, the remaining properties are quite varied and, except for a small number, are quite modern. There is therefore no obvious link between them in terms of style, design and use of (local) materials. The properties are however “linked” by the retention of the country lane feel of the area, with grass verges and the general absence of



footpaths, together with the retention of a number of historic boundary walls to enclose frontages to the lane.

## **6.7 Historic associations**

St Michael's Church defines much of the history of the Conservation Area. It was first built in about 1189, though nothing of that structure remains, though some remnants of the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century building are evident in the south aisle. The current (restored) church dates from 1854, the cost being borne by the Routh family. The architect was George Edmond Street RA, whose Oxford practice also boasted the presence of both William Morris and William Speakman Webb. Street was responsible for a number of churches and also the Law Courts in London.

The Routh family, who clearly give their name to the central road through the Conservation Area, and the Conservation Area itself, are clearly important historical associations. Dr. M J Routh, president of Magdalen College, Oxford, was Rector here from 1810, succeeded by his nephew, the Rev. J W Routh until 1905.

Amongst Dr. Routh's neighbours were Dr Valpy, Headmaster, and Henry Zinzan, whose family occupied the Manor at Tilehurst. Both Valpy and Zinzan are remembered by Reading street names.

The first notable landowner in the area 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.

The Blagrove family (see paragraph 4.1 above) were however occupiers of Calcot Court and principal landowners in the area from the late 18th to the early 20th century. They were noted for their philanthropy in relation to the parish generally, right up to the 20th century. In Tilehurst, the Blagrove family provided a hospital and a recreation ground which were named after them. Calcot School and the former National School in Tilehurst also owe something to the family. The Blagrove family were also responsible for Church Cottages (1799) on New Lane Hill. Originally for servants of Calcot Park, they were subsequently and since used and managed by the Church.

## **6.8 Green spaces, trees and other natural elements**

Apart from the churchyard itself and the small green space to the south of it, there is no other green space within the area, although, as previously stated

(paragraph 5.2 above), the entrances to the area (but outside it) are quite open.

Trees also make a significant contribution to this Conservation Area's special character and sense of identity. Significant tree groups (Tree Preservation Orders) 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 Orders (and there are a number in this area covering trees at St Michael's Church and Hall, Iris Court and St Michael's Cottage) 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.



View south along New Lane Hill (churchyard on right)

#### **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, although the site of Iris Court is currently unoccupied and awaiting development (refurbishment of the listed building and redevelopment of the

extensions) and development is also currently under way at “The Bungalow” in Routh Lane.

The open space to the south of St Michael’s Church is also a generally well maintained area, but would benefit from enhancement by removing the tarmac, which appears to be no longer required for vehicular use.

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 (roadways, footways 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 a number of recent developments, particularly on the east side of Routh Lane. This area is generally of quite recently built properties, and even more recent developments have sought to respect the character, scale of buildings and materials used in the Conservation Area, thus maintaining its character and appearance (and meeting the test of “preserving or enhancing” the character and appearance of the conservation area). However there are some reservations as to how the finished entrance to the redeveloped “Bungalow” site will appear in relation to the soft verges found in the immediate vicinity. Iris Court also has planning permission and listed building consent for development.

No significant developments immediately outside the Conservation Area (which would have an 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) are apparent at this stage. As the land to the west of the Conservation Area lies within the West Berkshire Council administrative 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 an issue.

### *Loss of original architectural details*

In general terms the loss of original features is not an issue for the majority of properties in this Conservation Area, given their relative modernity, and the earlier buildings in the area have also retained their original character. Boundary features have also been retained either in their original or rebuild form throughout the area.



Entrance to St Michaels churchyard

### *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”, since the area now benefits from traffic management measures, including a residents parking scheme.

### *Street clutter*

This is not generally an issue with regard to the overall character and appearance of the Conservation Area as a whole, except possibly in relation to signage at the entrances to the Conservation Area. It is worth noting that the green conservation area street signs at the northern ends of Routh Lane and New Lane Hill are strictly speaking situated outside the Conservation Area.



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.

It is however considered appropriate to approach West Berkshire District Council again seeking their designation of St Michael's Graveyard and Church Cottages, New Lane Hill as a Conservation Area because of their obvious historical affinity with St Michael's Church itself and the Routh Lane Conservation Area.

### **7.2 Opportunities for enhancement**

Floorscape and street furniture improvements should be considered in this area, including replacing telegraph poles and the introduction of traditional style street lighting. Enhancement of the green area immediately south of St Michaels Churchyard, particularly the removal, of apparently redundant tarmac, should also be considered for the central green area.

Given the quite varied appearance of the Conservation Area, and the relative modernity and individual design of residential properties (on the east side of Routh Lane) it is not deemed appropriate or necessary 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 and roofs, as has been suggested in other Conservation Areas in Reading. However, consideration could be given, subject to public consultation, to restricting changes to frontage walls. Those defining the curtilages of listed buildings are however already subject to planning control. A better approach however would be to seek mechanisms whereby original frontages might be restored and/or repaired, although inevitably this will have funding implications.

### **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



## Routh Lane Conservation Area Townscape Appraisal Map



Conservation Area Boundary



Listed Building



Tree Preservation Orders



Landmark building



Other building of townscape value



Green space



## **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.