

# Assessment of significant Views with Heritage interest



Reading, January 2018

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# **Assessment of significant Views with Heritage interest**

## **Views studies foreword**

Reading is a modern, vibrant and successful town and the economic centre of the Thames Valley. It has seen substantial change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has challenges to rise to, and meet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms of housing, economic potential, infrastructure and quality of life. It has a strong built heritage and a visible history that goes back some 900 years. These View studies seek to add to the understanding of the town's cultural heritage, its landscape and its historic assets. They are an evidence base to help and inform all those involved with sustaining both the town's history and its future. Hopefully they will also contribute to the enjoyment of those who experience these views as part of their daily lives.

January 2018



# **Assessment of significant Views with Heritage interest**

**Reading**

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## **Introduction**

The topography of Reading set within its River valleys and with higher ground to the north and south of these River plains, together with the substantial historic and heritage assets of the town, result in a number of longer cross town views which have both visual and historic interest.

Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee was formed in 2016 and comprises people with an interest in the built environment and its heritage. Members are drawn from local amenity societies, residents associations, independent historical, architectural and planning experts and local residents and businesses.

The work of the CAAC in respect of community led Conservation Area re-appraisals began to identify certain views which were important to the town but not directly within Conservation Areas and which were not otherwise sufficiently valued or protected. This led to discussions between Reading Borough Council and the CAAC about carrying out a possible Views study to raise awareness of the merits of these views to inform future decision making. These discussions coincided with the start of the preparation of the new Reading Local Plan by the RBC Planning Policy team.

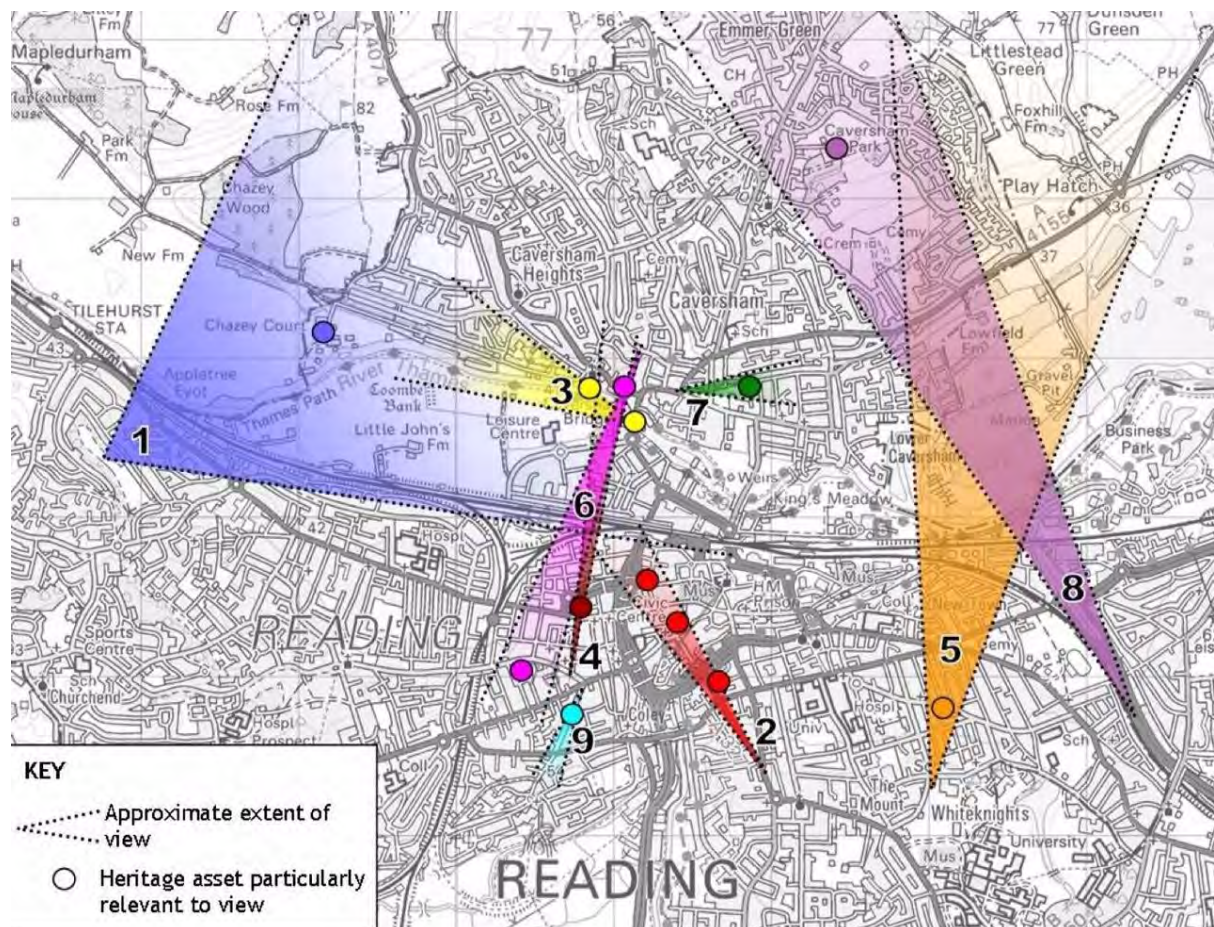
A number of potential views were put forward by the CAAC and considered by RBC. The Planning Policy team came to the view that a new policy 'EN5 PROTECTION OF SIGNIFICANT VIEWS WITH HERITAGE INTEREST' was justified. The CAAC agreed to provide a study of each of the views that were selected to provide a basis of evidence and analysis.

The studies makes use of the methodology and format of the 'Oxford View Cones Study' developed by Historic England, the Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxford City Council and others to provide a sound methodology to identify the special quality of views. This was applied to Views in Oxford in 2015.

The study method brings together History, Social context, and Visual analysis including current Detractors and Sensitivity to future change in order to provide a basis for the better appreciation and consideration of the value of the views.



The nine Reading Views here analysed are by no means an exhaustive list of views important to Reading. Many other views are cited in other parts and other policies of the Local Plan. It should also be recognized that Planning policies alone are not sufficient to protect the views.



**Overall Plan of Views** (*Reading Local Plan*)

## Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to those who have contributed to these Views studies and the formulation of the new Policy.

- Many CAAC members have contributed local historical research, editorial and other assistance. Particular acknowledgement is due to Kim Pearce and Evelyn Williams.
- Reading Borough Council Planning Policy team.
- Reading Central Library, Reading Museum, the Berkshire Record Office and the Tate Gallery for permission to use images cited in the text.
- Photo credits are to Kim Pearce and Evelyn Williams unless otherwise indicated in the text.



**View 1. From Mclloy Park, towards Chazey Barn Farm, the Thames meadows and the Chiltern Escarpment.**

**1.1.1 Introduction**

**Figure 1.1** *General View below*



Mclloy Park in Tilehurst is the one place within the Borough where there is a complete view of the Town centre, the Caversham escarpment dropping down to the river, glimpses of the River Thames itself and also out of the Borough towards Mapledurham. In terms of heritage, the two photos below give the centre left and centre right hand views (facing north east). The Grade one listed Chazey Barn is clearly visible in the distance. The treed Caversham escarpment dropping down to the River, so much part of Reading's character is a heritage element itself, in that it is a man made landscape. On the right hand side of the panorama is the town centre, a view relevant to the tall buildings policy.



**Figure 1.2** *Centre left hand view, glimpses of the Thames, Grade 1 listed Chazey Barn and the Caversham escarpment*





**Figure 1.3** Centre right part of view with Caversham escarpment and water meadows.



**Figure 1.4** Further east is the town centre, a view relevant to the implementation of Reading's tall buildings policy.

### 1.1.2 Present Viewers

This is a freely accessible view that many residents of Tilehurst and the surrounding area enjoy and use on a daily basis. This includes those seeking general recreation and access to semi natural open space as well as dog walkers. New visitors to the park, on coming out of the woods that enclose the entrance, find that they have an exceptional view of the Thames Valley and Reading.

The importance of this view of the Thames is recognised by the River Thames Society and the Thames Rivers Trust who included it in their book, 'Exploring the Thames Wilderness'. The site was designated a Local Nature Reserve in 1992 and is one of three which with Lousehill Copse and Arthur Newbery Park form a wildlife corridor along this ridge above the Thames. Tilehurst Globe produced a leaflet about the park with a suggested circular walk (*Tilehurst Globe* [www.tilehurst-globe.org.uk/textframes/leaflet%20mclloyss%201.pdf](http://www.tilehurst-globe.org.uk/textframes/leaflet%20mclloyss%201.pdf)). They describe the park as 'a mix of ancient woodland and open meadow land in the heart of Tilehurst'. Friends of Mclloy Park meet monthly (except in August and December) to carry out tasks in the park.

The view is also experienced from much of the mid 20th Century housing below the Park contributing to the quality of life for the residents of this area and adding to its attractiveness. Modest terraces and semi detached houses of limited architectural character nevertheless have some of the finest views in Reading.

### 1.1.3 Viewers in the Past

William E C Mclloy donated the land for the park. He was the owner of Reading's Oxford Street department store and was Mayor of Reading for five terms from 1938-1943, during the Second World War. He was made Freeman of the Borough in 1944. He stood unsuccessfully as MP for Reading in the 1945 general election but was defeated by the Labour candidate Ian Mikardo. The department store closed in 1955 and the first mention of the park is in the 1956 guide to Reading.

There are two stories about why William Mclloy bought this land and then donated it to Reading Borough Council for a park and both relate to views. The first story is that he donated the land for the park to the Borough to protect the view from his house (*On old Reading Council website and here* [www.geograph.org.uk/photo/612000](http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/612000)). He lived at Carrick-a-Rede, 12 Clevedon Road in Tilehurst, at the bottom of the hill near Tilehurst Station. The second story is that from the café on the top floor of Mclloy's Department Store, there was a view of this hill and that the land was purchased to protect this view (*Handscamb. Sue. Tilehurstp85*).

It seems likely that he must also have been aware of the View from the hill but further historical research would be necessary to establish this.





**Figure 1.5** *McIlroy's Department Store today, Corner of Oxford Street and Cheapside (photo Evelyn Williams)*

#### **1.1.4 The Viewing Place**

The viewing place provides 'kinetic' views – that is a series of changing panoramic views seen as a person moves through this linear park. The views change as a result of the direction a person is facing and the framing effect of trees. With regard to the value of the foreground, the park preserves a rough grassland character as a foreground with framing provided by hedgerow and small trees to the north eastern boundary. The grassland reflects the previously pastoral agricultural use of the land and the history of the hillside. The park is managed to provide wildlife habitat with birds and insects contributing to its wild life quality.

#### **1.1.5 General Description of the View**

McIlroy Park provides a series of wide views towards Mapledurham, the Caversham escarpment, the Thames water meadows and the Town centre. Mapledurham is outside the Borough boundary and the views to the Town centre are covered by the tall buildings policy. This description therefore confines itself to the two 'central' views (centre left and centre right facing north east) of the Caversham escarpment and the Thames water meadows although all four views contribute to and make up the viewing experience.

#### **1.1.6 Topography and layout of the view**

**Elevation/Height:** McIlroy Park and the Caversham escarpment are at similar elevations or contour levels and are both circa 40 metres above the level of the Thames and water meadows adjoining it, which lie in the valley below.

**Foreground:** The foreground is of rough grassland, hedgerow and trees as described above in 1.1.4.

**Middle ground:** Due to the topography and the sharp falling away of the land there is a limited middle ground of trees and hedgerow.

**Distant:** There are distant fine views of the escarpment, the Thames and the water meadows and the buildings and structures within these views.

### **1.1.7 Green Characteristics**

On the horizon, the view extends beyond the Borough to high wooded ground in South Oxfordshire.

The Caversham escarpment dropping down to the river and largely planted on its upper slopes in the Victorian and Edwardian era is a strong heritage element in itself. The planting of specimen and forest trees in large numbers have created a man made landscape. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>C, much of this was bare pasture land for sheep grazing. These large trees not only mask considerable residential development but add a further 20 to 25 metres to the apparent height of the escarpment and thus increase its visibility in other views throughout Reading.

The rural landscape of the water meadows, to the centre right of the view, is from this vantage point largely intact. The strong lines of the hedgerows in the water meadows add scale and perspective and remind the viewer of past and present agricultural use.

The trees beyond the water meadows effectively screen much development. This could be strengthened along Richfield Avenue.

The rough grassland of the park itself and the boundary trees frame the views.

### **1.1.8 Architectural characteristics**

The mid 20C housing in the foreground of the view, although without architectural merit, demonstrates the topography of the site and the steep fall in the land towards the river as only the first storeys and roofs of these houses are visible. These built elements also provide contrast in the foreground and due to the trees on the boundary of the site are only partially visible.

In the left hand view towards the Caversham escarpment the Railway line and associated buildings are well hidden by the lie of the land particularly in summer. Whilst in the right hand view towards the water meadows the line of the railway to Oxford comes into sight and trains travelling on the tracks add movement to the view.

In the distance the Grade I listed Chazey Court Barn is clearly visible to the naked eye at the foot of the Caversham escarpment. This very large late 17C/ early 18C seven bay barn with a steeply pitched roof and red brick walling forms part of a Group with Chazey Court farmhouse which is Grade II \* listed and also partially visible. Chazey Court farm house is dated mid 17C and incorporates some older work including Norman windows and doorway. Historic England listing notes state that the construction of the Barn and the stable chapel at the farmhouse is very similar to the Tudor building at Mapledurham House. This Grade 1 listed barn is currently on English Heritage's at risk list with the statement "Historic England and their structural engineering team are working with the Local Planning Authority in reviewing the rate of deterioration." It is given the highest (A) risk category "Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed."

Residential buildings on the escarpment in the distant view are largely hidden by tree cover or only partially visible, however the Grade II listed Chiltern House (now offices) by William Ravenscroft with its tiled roof and gables is largely visible.

On the horizon Emmer Green water tower is also visible from some view points and acts as a reference point.

#### **1.1.9 The influence of light and seasons**

The best conditions for viewing are on a bright clear day in the afternoon. Cloud formations add greatly to the variety of view experienced due to the wide expanse of sky. In the summer months tree cover to the boundary of the park in the middle ground increases.

#### **1.1.10 Detractors**

The 'Rivers' sports club building 3 storeys high with light coloured cladding and a light brick situated on the edge of the water meadows is an example of a detractor that protrudes into the view. Likewise some of the industrial buildings adjacent Richfield Avenue and the rail line have large areas of light coloured cladding that are very reflective and draw the eye, competing for prominence with other aspects of the view.

#### **1.1.11 Sensitivity to change**

With regard to the park itself, consideration could be given when any periodic maintenance takes place, as to how best to optimise and frame the views in respect of the treatment and growth of the hedgerows and small trees on the north east boundary of the park.

There is potential risk of harm to the view due to cumulative mature tree loss on the Caversham escarpment. The trees mask, hide and disguise considerable residential development. There is a natural desire for house holders to have views out and light and space around property. The corollary of a view out, however, is a view in. Some trees reach the end of their natural life. The majority of trees on the escarpment are in private gardens. There is further scope for identifying some individual trees or groups of trees that feature in this and other views to provide a further data set for RBC to take into account when assessing tree work applications and replacements.

In addition to the above is the potential risk of similar tree cover loss due to cumulative piecemeal development.

Any development or redevelopment within or on the fringes of the water meadows could damage the view and needs careful consideration. Any new development would preferably be low rise and of appropriate non reflective materials.

A sensitive solution needs to be found to ensure that a restored Chazey Barn remains a visually distinct part of this view.



**Figure 1.6** *Annotated View analysis (winter)*

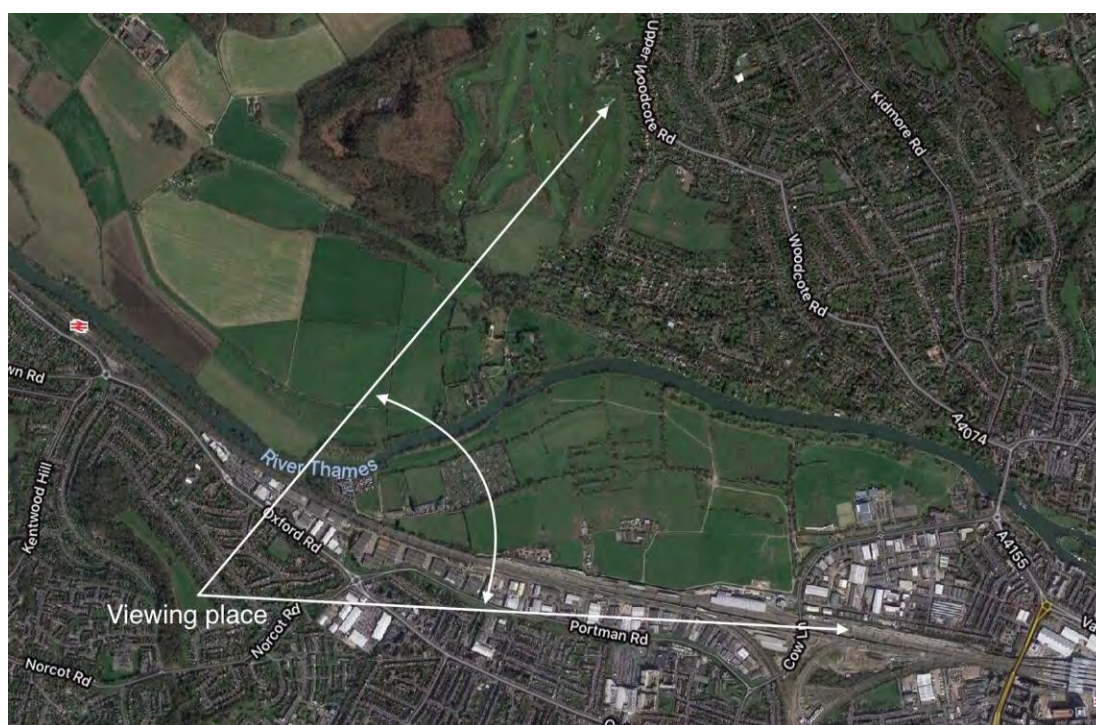


**Figure 1.7** *Detail of View annotated (winter)*





**Figure 1.8** *Detail of View, Grade I listed Chazey barn, with the Thames below and to the right*



**Figure 1.9** *Plan showing Viewing place and View (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital Globe)*

## View 2. View looking north down Southampton Street from Whitley Street.

### 2.1.1 Introduction



**Figure 2.1** *The general view from the top of Southampton Street*



This view looks north down Southampton St. From the junction with Mount Pleasant and shows the tower and spire of St Giles, glimpses of the chequerboard tower and pinnacles of St Marys and the Caversham escarpment in the distance. Further down the street, the top of Greyfriars Church also comes into view. Southampton Street is one of the main routes into Reading and is a major road, the A327. Consequently this is a busy thoroughfare and not universally attractive but like its prettier younger sibling, London Street, it includes many historic and listed buildings.

**Figure 2.2** *The start of the viewing place at the Pheasant*



### 2.1.2 Present Viewers

Southampton Street is a one way street and present viewers may experience it on foot, bicycle, bus or in a car. Changes to the view are experienced from the top of the hill down to the River Kennet at the Oracle roundabout as features appear and disappear from view. The gantry over the road and the Inner Distribution Road flyover both present barriers to a clear view towards the bottom of the street

From a precise point near West Hill bus stop it is possible, on a clear day, to see the spire of St Giles, the tower of St Mary's Minster and Greyfriars weather vane appearing in sequence from the foreground to the distance.

### 2.1.3 Viewers in the Past

As today, most people on the street were going to and from Reading including to the market place on St Mary's Butts. This area was the centre of Reading until the foundation of Reading Abbey and the removal of the market closer to the Abbey. At that time a second road, London Street was built.

At the top of Southampton Street the two routes to and from Reading divide now as they did in the past. Southampton Street or parts of it have been known by other names in the past, including Horn Street and Bridge Street. The historic foot of Southampton Street was lost when the IDR was built. At the bottom of Southampton Street the road meets the Kennet and the area once known as Seven Bridges, from which H&G Simonds took the name of their brewery. On old maps the succession of river channels and crossings can be discerned (see Civil War defences map below).



**Figure 2.3** Extract from map of Civil War defences (town centre at the bottom of the map) shows defences across Southampton Street and also the Seven Bridges over the Kennet and Holy Brook (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection).

Some of the viewers of the past were troops of the English Civil War. During the siege of Reading (April 1643) fighting took place along Southampton Street. The tower of St Giles Church was a defensive position and was damaged by cannon fire. Further up Southampton Street there are defensive positions including at the corner of Waldeck Street and Southampton Street.

Civil War siege action in this area culminated in fighting at Harrison's Barn, on the corner of Christchurch Road and Whitley Street with the pond in front of it. The pond was a welcome stop for travellers on the road, especially those bringing animals to or from market who would have come uphill either from Reading or going to Reading. In the nineteenth century the pond was replaced by a pump and trough which served the same purpose.

For some in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the walk out of Reading to the top of Southampton Street was a pleasant walk to the top of a hill to get a good view of Reading and the Kennet. The best views captured by eighteenth century engravers are slightly to the east of Southampton Street between the top of Hill Street and Waldeck Street. It is possible that visitors walked up London Street, but it is unlikely they walked up Silver Street as it was a street with a notoriously bad reputation. The railway arrived in Reading in 1840 and the view from the top of the hill was considered scenic enough to be included in Measom's Guide to the Great Western Railway (1860).

*"A pleasant walk will be found leading from Spring Gardens across the high banks which rise from the Kennet to Whitley, on the Southampton-road. On this route, about three miles from Reading, is the village of Three Mile Cross, or "Our Village", the residence of the late Miss Mitford, whose delightful descriptions of rural scenes have never been surpassed."*

As Reading spread southwards more and more houses were built along the street and to either side. A tram route ran up and down Southampton Street to Whitley Street in the twentieth century and there were underground public toilets at the top.

#### **2.1.4 The Viewing Place**

The viewing place starts at the top of Southampton Street and provides subtly changing views as Southampton Street is descended. The viewing place is one of the historic approaches into Reading. It is urban in character. Three notable viewing places are significant to this view:

1. The top of Southampton Street
2. The junction with Chesterman Street
3. The three churches from the West Hill bus stop (approximately)





**Figure 2.4** *Viewing place 1. From the top of Southampton Street.*



**Figure 2.5** *Viewing place 2 from the junction with Chesterman Street, St Giles in the middle distance (photo Evelyn Williams).*



**Figure 2.6** Viewing place 3. The three churches, Southampton Street at Junction with West Hill (photo Evelyn Williams).

### 2.1.5 General Description of the View

This view looks down Southampton Street from Whitley Street. The tower and high spire of St Giles Church dominate the view. Aligned with St Giles the chequerboard tower and pinnacles of St Mary's are also visible. Further down the street, the bell turret of Greyfriars Church comes into the view

The view of the town centre becomes more constricted as you approach the foot of the hill. As the hill flattens, early nineteenth century buildings on the west overshadow the street.

### 2.1.6 Topography and layout of the view

**Elevation/Height:** There is a fall of some 20 metres from the top of Southampton Street to the bottom of the street at the Inner Distribution Road. This is a view which follows the street pattern for a considerable way across Reading. Only after Greyfriars Church does the view break away from the street pattern.

**Foreground:** In the foreground there is terraced housing lining the street, further down are some larger and more imposing villas and terraces.

**Middle ground:** The middle ground is dominated by St Giles church spire and the mass of the Holm Oak.

**Distant:** In the distance are the town Centre churches, the Oracle shopping mall, the gantry over A327 and the IDR and the Caversham escarpment. The height or elevation of the top and middle of

the street helps reduce the impact of the traffic sign gantry and the IDR flyover as the viewer looks over the top of these elements.

### **2.1.7 Green Characteristics**

Trees, on or adjoining the street, soften the urban character and channel or focus the view, even when quite modest in size. Some trees provide focal points, in particular between Chesterman Street and West Hill where there is a group of villas with large front gardens set back from the road, one of which has a very fine Holm Oak subject to a tree protection order (TPO). This large Holm Oak is an important component of the middle ground of the view from the top of the street. It draws the eye and its overhang over the street also obscures the traffic gantry at the bottom of the street.

Also subject to a TPO is the group of trees further north on the street behind Solent and Hamble Court in the former St Giles churchyard extension.

On the horizon, the view terminates with the green Caversham escarpment which signals the limits of the town.

### **2.1.8 Architectural characteristics**

The view is notable for the alignment of the three churches St Giles, St Mary's and Greyfriars. All three churches are medieval in origin and historic. They have undergone considerable modification since originally built. St Giles was founded in the twelfth century, there was a church on the site of St Mary's which pre-dated Reading Abbey and Greyfriars was founded at the beginning of the fourteenth century. As a result of extension and rebuilding, or in the case of Greyfriars a period of disuse, the view of the churches would have changed considerably over the centuries.

Southampton street includes many listed buildings and St Giles Church (listing no 113579) is within the Market Place / London Street conservation area. The original medieval church and tower of St Giles were damaged during the English Civil war. The fabric was restored at the end of hostilities. The photo below by William Fox Talbot, the Reading based photographic pioneer, shows the church in 1840-49 before the major rebuilding works of 1872/3 when the current tall ashlar steeple was added.



**Figure 2.7** *Photograph of St Giles Church by William Fox Talbot taken between 1840 and 1849 (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection).*

Between Chesterman Street and West Hill there is a group of five mid nineteenth century Grade II listed villas (listing nos 1248746, 1277768 and 1113587) which are set well back from the road. The garden of the house adjoining Chesterman Street provides the Holm Oak, an important element in the view.

More modest properties on the east of the street are also listed such as the Hop Leaf public house (listing no 1157021).

Of Reading wide importance is the previous British School building at 153-155 Southampton Street, Grade II listed no 1380226. The listing entry dates part of the building from 1810 and the architect as R. Billing senior. This local architect is also likely to have been responsible for 72-86 Southampton Street. 78-84 are Grade II\* listed, no 1113584.

Many of the properties display fine original railings, and other ironwork.

### **2.1.9 The influence of light and seasons**

The view is at its best in the early morning on a sunny day or in the evening when light falls on the steeples and other tall features of the view. The view is best experienced outside peak traffic hours.

### **2.1.10 Detractors**

This is a busy road and housing along the street, despite in some cases being listed, is not always well maintained. Litter and excess refuse from household bins can be a problem. Tall lighting columns can have a negative impact where they visually distract from the historic elements of the view. Traffic volume has a negative impact in respect of noise and pollution, future technological advances may help with this.

At the bottom of the street the gantry over the road and the IDR flyover impinge on the view. From further up the street, due to the elevation, the view is over the top of these elements.

For present viewers (2017) held in traffic at the junction of Crown Street, Pell Street and Southampton Street, the vacant listed buildings on two of the corners and the boarded up site on the south east corner detract from the viewing experience. Preserving the heritage at this junction needs attention or in the future there will be detractors.

### **2.1.11 Sensitivity to change**

Any new development which rose up between the escarpment in the distance and the spire of St Giles or the tower of St Mary's risks harming the view. The green escarpment terminating the view and signifying visually the distant limits of the town is an important part of its attractiveness.

New development in the middle ground between the top of the street and St Giles, as well as in the town centre, could harm the view. Care must be taken with respect to building lines, heights and massing so as not to impinge on or impede the view of the churches, (the current vacant site on the corner of Crown Street and Southampton Street would be an example where care should be taken).



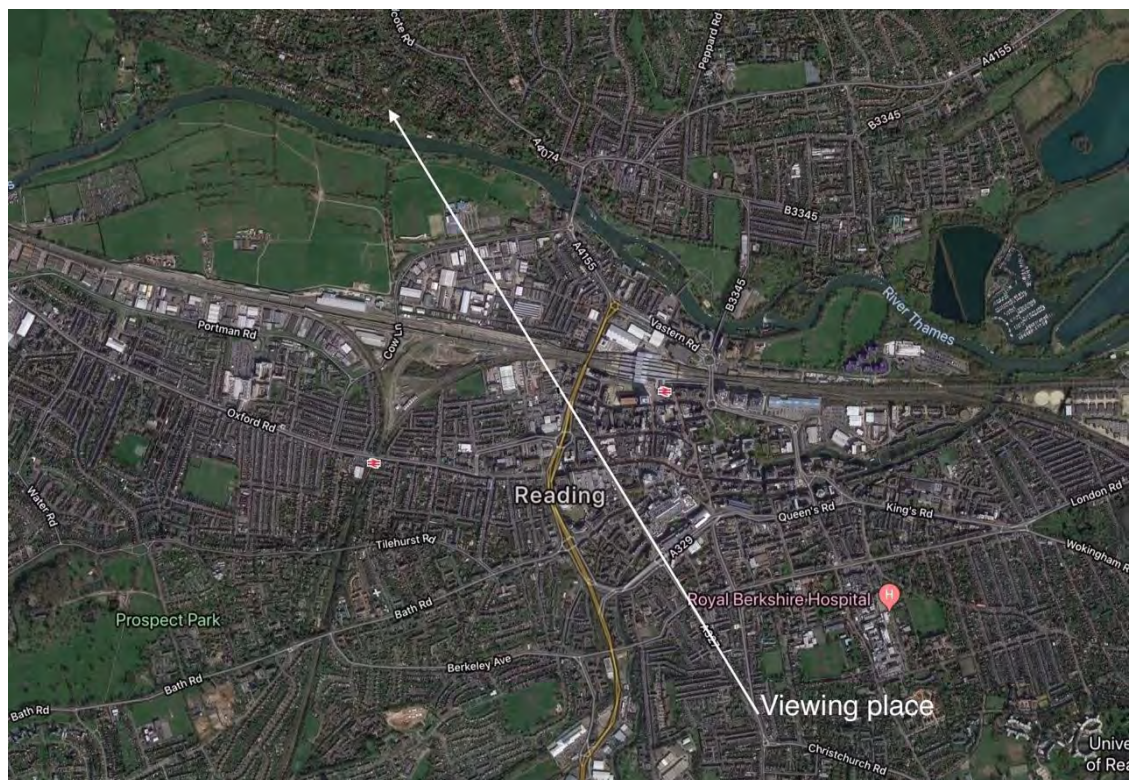
Continuing inadequate maintenance of Listed Buildings or insensitive re use would be a negative factor, whilst the converse of better and appropriate maintenance has the potential to improve the viewing experience.



**Figure 2.8** *Annotated View analysis*



**Figure 2.9** Detailed annotation, the three churches (photo Evelyn Williams).



**Figure 2.10** Overall Plan showing Viewing place and View (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital Globe).





**Figure 2.11** Detail plan of Southamton Street showing Viewing Place and View (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital Globe).

### **View 3. View upstream from Caversham Bridge**

#### **3.1.1 Introduction**

The view upstream from Caversham Bridge captures part of the Caversham escarpment. This escarpment has wide significance for the character of Reading. It is visible from the train, approaching Reading, the train station itself and in many other views from the south side of town. Its comprehensive tree cover, a man made heritage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century hides and disguises considerable density of development. The tower of St Peter's Church is visible within this view particularly in winter.



**Figure 3.1** *From the Viewing Place on the central buttress of the Bridge looking upstream (winter)*

#### **3.1.2 Present Viewers**

The Viewers today are commuters travelling to and from work, shoppers heading for the town centre, joggers and families visiting the Promenade. Anyone taking a bus to or from Reading experiences this view. Other present day viewers are walkers tackling the long distance Thames path and those using the river for leisure and sporting pursuits such as rowers and boaters on the river.

This is a view which many people experience as part of their daily life rather than seeking out or visiting especially.



### 3.1.3 Viewers in the Past

There has been a bridge on this site for approximately 900 years. In the middle ages pilgrims crossed the Bridge between the shrines in Caversham and Reading Abbey and paid tolls. There was a ferry alongside the bridge for those who could not afford the tolls. In 1642 during the English Civil War, Charles I lead his troops over the Bridge to set up a garrison in Reading.

Views from the Bridge and of the Bridge were popular with artists at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. There is a view from the Bridge by Edmund Havell Senior made in the early part of the century. William Turner visited the area and painted the Bridge itself from upstream in 1806-7, this oil painting is in the Tate Gallery.



**Figure 3.2** *'Caversham from the Bridge' looking upstream by Edmund Havell Senior 1825*  
(Copyright Reading Museum (Reading Borough Council) All rights reserved)



**Figure 3.3** *'Caversham Bridge with Cattle in the Water', c.1806-7, Joseph Mallard William Turner (1775-1851), Accepted by the nation as part of the [Turner Bequest](#) 1856. Photo © Tate, London 2018*

William Havell made an aquatint of the Bridge from the area of the Warren.



**Figure 3.4** Aquatint by William Havell 1811, the Bridge with Caversham Court Gazebo in the foreground from the area of the present day St Peters Avenue and the Warren (Copyright Reading Museum (Reading Borough Council) All rights reserved).

With poor roads, other viewers would have been those working barges transporting goods between Reading and Oxford. Despite the coming of the railway in 1840 heavy goods continued by barge until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the wharf by Caversham Bridge a thriving barge industry developed. Eels were common in the Thames and large baskets of willow rods called eel bucks were mounted on wooden frames just upstream of the Bridge to catch the eels.



**Figure 3.5** Photograph 1890 looking upstream from the bridge towards the eel bucks and St Peter's Church Tower (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection).

Leisure use of the river and thus leisure viewers increased in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and local Regattas started in 1842. Boats of every description were built and used on the river.

#### **3.1.4 The Viewing Place**

The earliest documentary reference to the bridge is in 1231. The earliest Bridge on the site served for around 700 years. A section of this original stone bridge close to the south bank was taken down during the English Civil war and replaced with a timber drawbridge to impede a Royalist relieving force arriving from Oxford. This stone bridge with its timber section features in the paintings and drawings above. A new iron bridge replaced this first bridge in 1869. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century this bridge had become inadequate, work on a new bridge was delayed by the First World War.

The current bridge was completed in 1926. The bridge is of concrete and stone with some art deco detailing. There are purpose designed viewing places on the central buttress and the bridge is noted as a structure of interest by the Panel for Historical engineering works of the Institute of Civil Engineers.



**Figure 3.6** *Reading Head of the River Race March 1950, the viewing place in use*  
(Copyright Reading Museum (Reading Borough council) All rights reserved).

#### **3.1.5 General Description of the View**

The view varies from different positions on the bridge and from the south bank and the Thames promenade. The general impression is of a green escarpment rising from the river. There are glimpses of the tower of St Peter's Church and of the restored gazebo in Caversham Court Gardens from southern viewing positions. The wide and soft curve on the North bank contrasts with the harder sharper curve on the Promenade side and charm is added as the river disappears out of sight around the bend.

### 3.1.6 Topography and layout of the view

Elevation/ Height: There is a rise of some 25 to 30 metres between river level and the top of the escarpment in the view. However, visually, this elevation is increased by the height of the mature trees on the escarpment by a further 20 to 25 metres. The effective visual height of the escarpment is therefore substantially greater and results in a more dramatic view than topography would indicate.

Foreground: The bridge itself and its granite balustrading provides the foreground and partial frame to the view.

Middle ground: The middle ground of the river often has waterfowl, pleasure boats and rowers adding movement and interest.

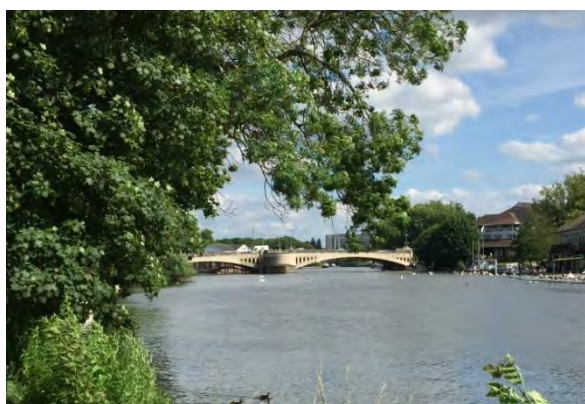
Distant: Visually the escarpment drops down towards the Thames as a green curtain as the river disappears from view around the bend.

### 3.1.7 Green Characteristics

The Caversham escarpment dropping down to the river and largely planted on its upper slopes in the Victorian and Edwardian era is a strong heritage element in itself. The planting of specimen and forest trees in large numbers has created a man made landscape. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>C, much of this was bare pasture land for sheep grazing. These large trees not only mask considerable residential development but add a further 20 to 25 metres to the apparent height of the escarpment, as set out above, and thus increase its visibility in other views from across Reading.

The apparent 'soft' edge of the northern river bank where it meets the water is an important visual and landscape detail which contributes to the overall composition

### 3.1.8 Architectural characteristics



The bridge or reinforced concrete and stone was completed in 1926. The granite balustrading and weathered bronze light fittings on the parapet of the bridge form the foreground of the viewing place. The central buttress incorporates specially designed viewing places on both the up and down stream sides.

**Figure 3.7** *The Bridge from Caversham Court Gardens looking towards the central buttress.*



The tower of the Grade II listed St Peter's Church is glimpsed amongst the trees and is particularly visible in winter. Little remains of its Norman origins and the church is principally 15<sup>th</sup> C and high Victorian. The tower dates from 1878 and is of flint in three stages with a hipped roof screened by a high corbelled parapet.

In front of the Church in the view is Caversham Court Garden which is listed in the English Heritage 'Register of Historic Parks and Gardens'. The house on this historic site was demolished in 1933, the gardens were refurbished with help from the Heritage lottery fund in 2008-9. The restored brick and plain tile gazebo, overlooking the river and visible from the Promenade and the south side of the bridge, remains and dates from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **3.1.9 The influence of light and seasons**

The view is at its best in high summer with movement on the river and the green escarpment masking most residential buildings on the slopes down to the river.

### **3.1.10 Detractors**

The new canoe club at its eastern end detracts from the setting of the restored gazebo in Caversham Court Gardens. This particular problem could be simply ameliorated by the planting of small trees or large shrubs when an opportunity arises.

Further back a recent house in the area of the Warren breaches the tree cover and the white gable emphasizes the intrusion.

Other properties, some of little architectural merit, become more visible in winter.

### **3.1.11 Sensitivity to change**

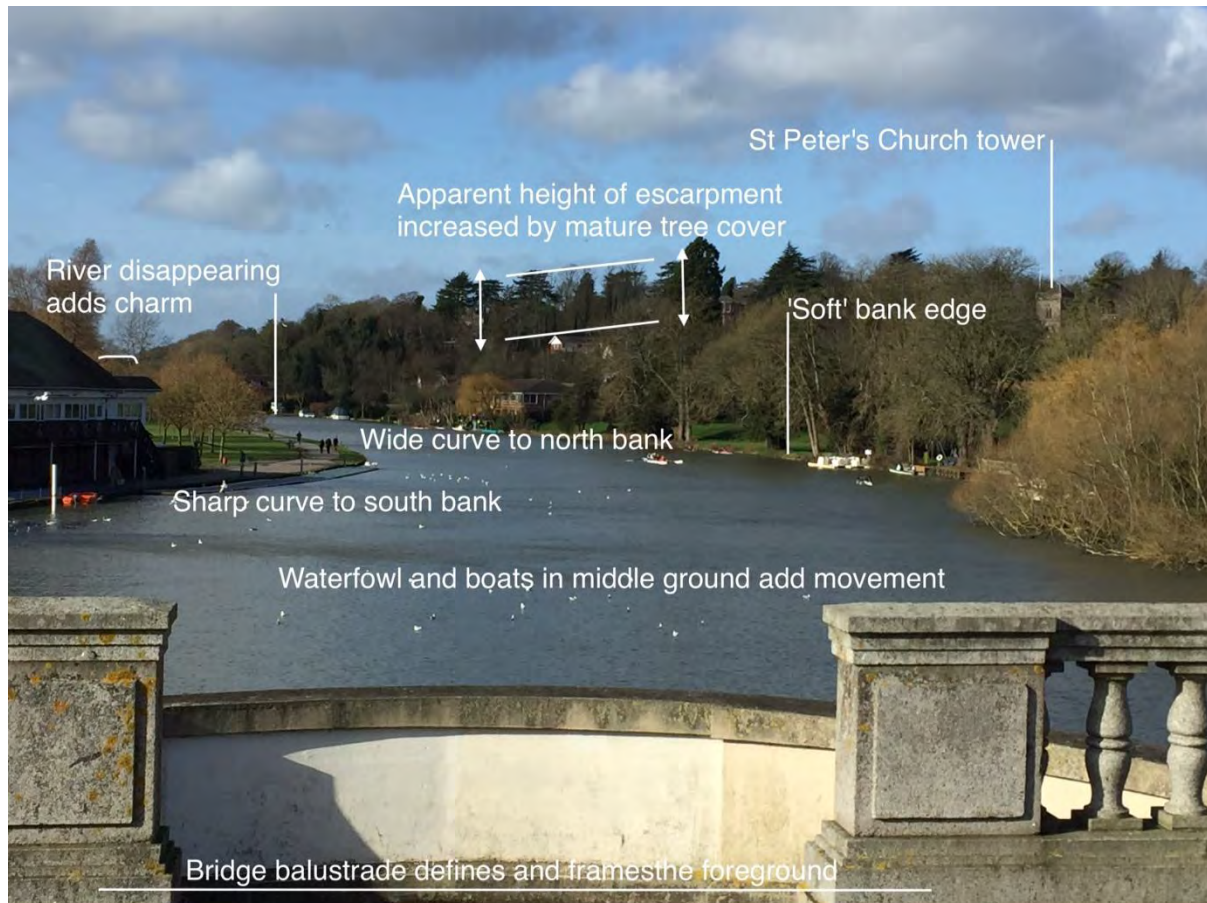
Whilst Caversham Court Gardens and a part of the escarpment are in public ownership, the majority of land on the escarpment is privately owned. Tree cover on the escarpment masks considerable density of development as the plan of the View shown below shows.

Removal of tree cover and vegetation by property owners to improve their view out as in the examples above, will of necessity impact on the view in and has the potential to harm the view.

Likewise removal of trees due to piecemeal development, extensions or the desire improve light and space around existing properties risks cumulative damage to the view of the escarpment which is not an infinite resource. Disease or age is also a factor leading to the removal of some trees.

Studies such as this current View analysis may lead to better public awareness of the value of the view and the escarpment and the riverside. Likewise the identification of valuable views may assist RBC, when tree removal and tree replacement applications are assessed.

At river level part of the charm of the view is the contrast between the sharp hard curve of the southern bank with the wide soft green curve of the north bank. It is important that the soft north bank is maintained. Close to the bridge, one length of bank has been sheet steel piled at the river edge to an unnecessary height adding a hard and discordant element. Further sheet steel piling of other parts of the northern river bank to an excessive height should be discouraged and sympathetic edge treatments should be sought where work is required to stabilise the river bank.



**Figure 3.8** *Annotated View analysis ( winter view )*



**Figure 3.9** *Canoe club and restored gazebo*

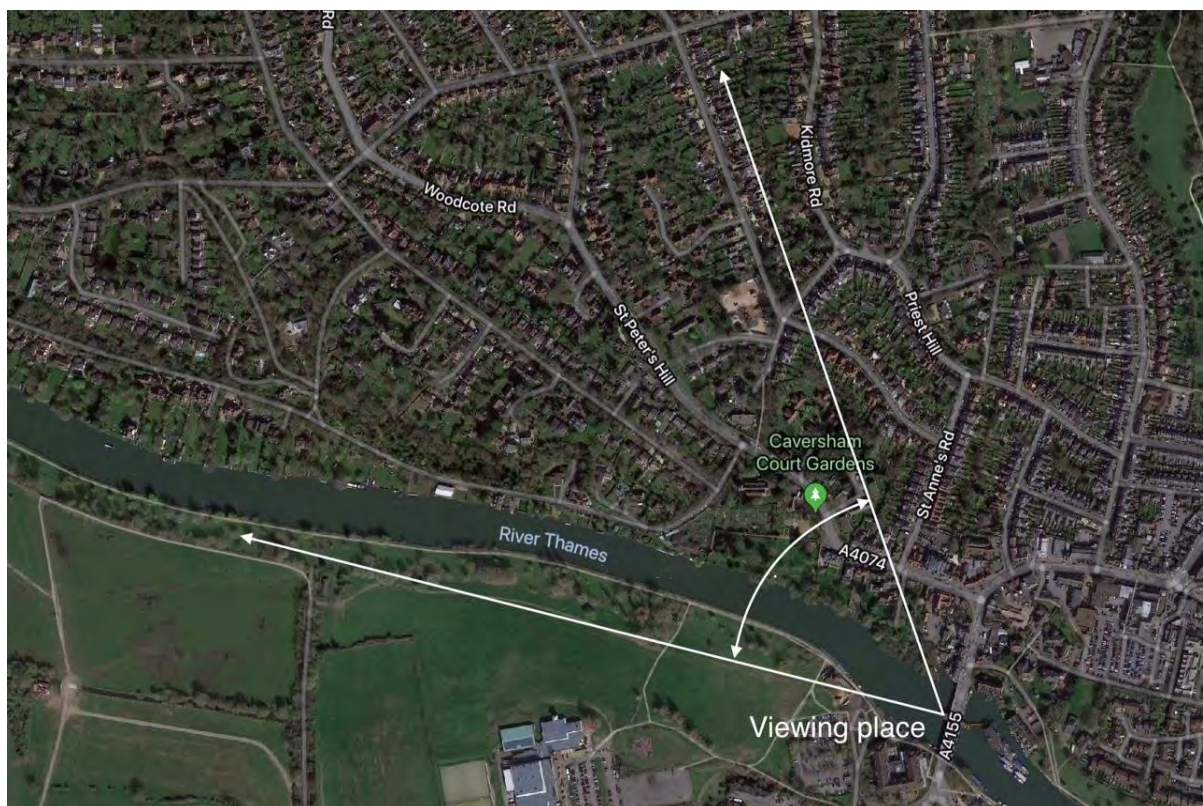


**Figure 3.10** *Glimpse of Church from south bank*





**Figure 3.11** *Detractors in the view ( summer view )*



**Figure 3.12** *Plan showing Viewing place and view (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital Globe)*



#### **View 4. View from the junction of Russell Street and Tilehurst Road towards Holy Trinity Church and the Caversham escarpment**

##### **4.1.1 Introduction**

**Figure 4.1** *General view from the top of Russell Street*



Russell Street between Tilehurst Road and the Oxford Road was laid out at the beginning of the nineteenth century on land which formed the eastern boundary of Mr William Pratt Swallow's market garden. The street looking down to the parish church of Holy Trinity is noticeably straight and broad.

At the south west corner of the junction of Russell Street with Bath Road is the Swallow family's house. After a hundred yards of steep gradient, Russell Street kinks northwards towards the Oxford Road with a steady and even gradient.

It is at this point that the view towards Holy Trinity Church in the middle ground and the Caversham escarpment in the distance presents itself.

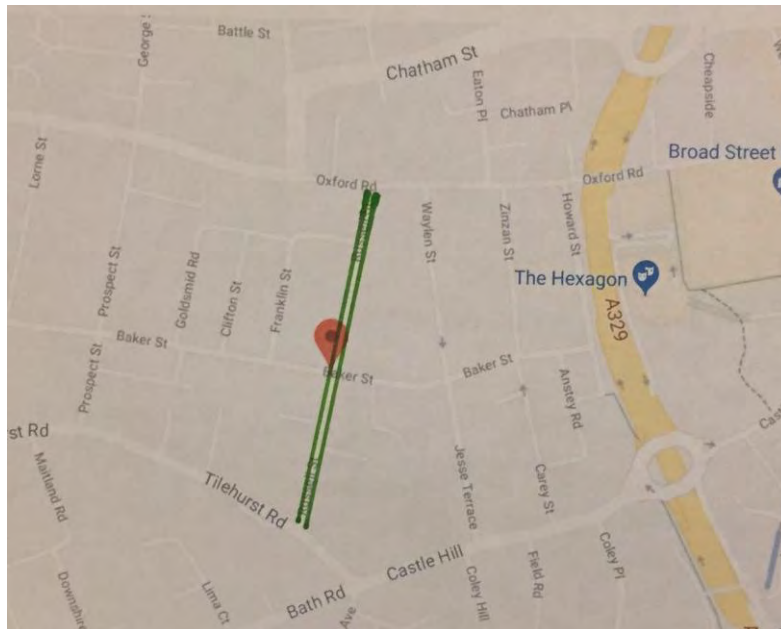


**Figure 4.2** *Holy Trinity Parish Church Oxford Road*  
(photo Evelyn Williams)

### 4.1.2 Present Viewers

Russell Street is a two-way street on more than one bus route. Changes to the view are experienced from the top of the hill down to the Oxford Road as the gradient levels.

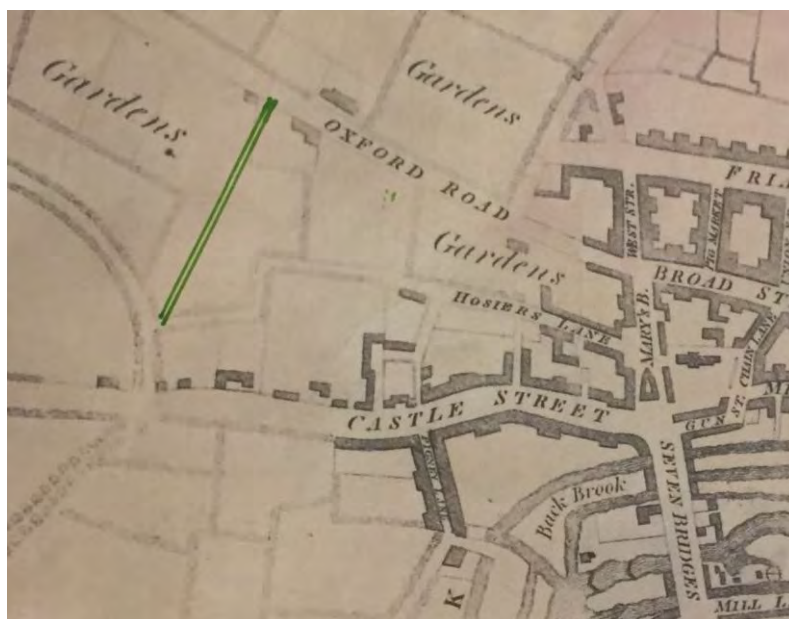
The viewer has Holy Trinity Church as an end point in the middle distance between a corridor of Georgian homes to the west and mostly Victorian homes to the east.



**Figure 4.3** Google map of the street today (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital globe).

### 4.1.3 Viewers in the Past

Some of the viewers of the past may have been troops of the English Civil War manning 'The Forlornd Hope' astride the Bath Road. At the beginning of the nineteenth century this was market gardens with few buildings interrupting a 360° view, except for those on Castle Street and St Mary's Butts.



**Figure 4.4** Extract from Man's Map of 1798, Route of Russell Street marked in green. (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library collection)

The northwest side of Russell Street was mostly built c 1820. Holy Trinity Parish Church was completed in its original form around 1830 and the north-eastern houses in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The section of the street to the south of the Baker Street crossroads, along the west side of the street, was developed with generally larger, slightly later, Georgian townhouses towards the junction with Tilehurst Rd at the southern end of the street. The positioning of the houses on the west side of the street was to gain an open view towards the centre of Reading out over the market gardens of Mrs Zinzan's Fields.



**Figure 4.5** Extract from Commissioners' map of 1834. Note houses on the west and one house at the corner with Baker Street on the east. Route of Russell Street marked in green. (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection.)

Before the church was built a person standing at the top of the hill would have had a view of the gravel pit that it replaced and to the east a free and uninterrupted view towards the town centre.

The view was documented by William Fox Talbot, or more probably his assistant in one of the very first photographs of a church. He also photographed St Giles, St Mary's Minster and St Laurence's churches. The calotype/"talbotype" print would have been taken at the Baker Street crossroads before the houses on the east of Russell Street were built. This was a stone's throw from 8 Russell Terrace (now 55 Baker Street) where Fox Talbot set up the 'Reading Establishment'.

The name for the photographic enterprise may have been coined by Fox Talbot's business manager Benjamin Cowderoy. Fox Talbot's three year relationship with Reading from 1844 to 1847 was short-lived, but it left behind many historic images of the town and its people at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Source: 'Fox Talbot and the Reading Establishment' Martin Andrews, Two Rivers Press 2014).



There is more than one image of the view, the one reproduced in Martin Andrews book shows that there are no houses on the east of the street.



**Figure 4.6** *Russell Street with Holy Trinity Church at the foot 1844-47 Fox Talbot “talbotype” (credited to Nicolaas Henneman ©Science and Society Picture Library).*



**Figure 4.7** *Fox Talbot’s view today (photo Evelyn Williams).*

#### 4.1.4 The Viewing Place

The principal viewing place is at the highest point, the junction of Russell Street and the Tilehurst Road. There are two further viewing spots as the viewer descends from Tilehurst Road to the Oxford Road.

1. Primary viewing place. Junction of Russell Street and Tilehurst Road



**Figure 4.8** View from the junction of Russell Street and Tilehurst Road (photo Evelyn Williams).

2. Crossroads with Baker Street



**Figure 4.9** View from the Baker Street crossroads. On the left the parsonage and on the right the only listed building on the east side of the street (photo Evelyn Williams).



### 3. Bottom of Russell Street



**Figure 4.10** *Almost at the junction with Oxford Road. Modern buildings on either side and the faux Tudor Nag's Head (photo Evelyn Williams).*

#### 4.1.5 General Description of the View

The view has a clear focal point looking downhill towards the church. Beyond the Church the view terminates in the wooded Caversham escarpment on the far side of the river. Russell Street is straight with an even gradient. At the top of the hill from the Baker Street crossroads on the eastern side, nineteenth century townhouses and early twentieth century semi-detached houses dominate.

The location of the church centred at the junction of Russell Street with the Oxford Road might be assumed to be an example of early 19C town planning, but that is not the case. In 1826 the site was open ground with a deep hollow where gravel had been dug out to make up the Oxford Road. It was then purchased by the Reverend George Hulme to build in and over the hollow, his own proprietary church complete with brick vaulted catacombs intended for the luxury burial of Reading's elite. The cost of the venture was to be recovered through the sale of burial spaces in the vaults below and the charging of pew rents in the church above. In 1872 Holy Trinity was made the parish church of the neighbourhood. Its use continues to this day. It is a Grade II listed building, Ref 1113550.

After the crossroads which is approximately at the middle point of the hill, there are Georgian houses on the west side and mainly late nineteenth century on the east. The parsonage on the north-western corner of the junction also draws the eye.



Almost at the junction the Life Spring Church, originally built in the late 1920s as the Pavilion Cinema, later the Gaumont Cinema and Riley's snooker hall on the west and a modern infill development of flats narrow the view. The thriving faux-Tudor Nag's Head pub adds interest to the scene.

#### **4.1.6 Topography and layout of the view**

Elevation/ Height: Russell Street falls in excess of 10 metres from its top to the level of Holy Trinity church.

Foreground: In the foreground are large Georgian houses to the west and large Victorian houses to the east. Further down the hill at the junction with Baker Street, the parsonage, originally the parsonage for Holy Trinity Parish Church, attracts the eye because of its polychrome and Victorian detailing and prominent corner position.

Middle ground: Holy Trinity Parish Church on axis with the street and the trees in front of the church form an intermediate stop to the view.

Distant: The Caversham escarpment terminates the view and completes the framing of the church.

#### **4.1.7 Green Characteristics**

There is little green in the view apart from the trees in front of the Holy Trinity Parish Church which are protected by a TPO and provide welcome softening. The distant view of the wooded Caversham escarpment is an important green element which terminates the view.

#### **4.1.8 Architectural characteristics**

All but one of Russell Street's listed buildings are on the west side: Grade II listed 48 and 50 (1113570) Bath stone, 44 and 46 brick and stucco (1156906), 40 and 42 brick (1321883), 38 and 38A brick and stucco (1113569), 36 brick (1302644) 24-34 red brick terrace (1113568), 6-22 brick (1321882). On the east side there is 41 red brick detached house (1113567).

Holy Trinity church is also Grade II listed (1113550) not because of the exterior appearance or significance, but according to its listing entry because of the 'excellent chancel screen by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin from St Chad's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Birmingham.'

None of the Victorian properties are listed.

#### **4.1.9 The influence of light and seasons**

Due to the lack of trees along the route, the view is not one that dramatically changes throughout the year along Russell Street itself. However, the trees in front of the Holy Trinity church leaf out during the spring and summer frequently hiding much of the church's façade with the austere appearance of the church in the winter months in sharp contrast once the leaves fall from the trees in the autumn.

Due to the urban makeup of the street, the view of the Caversham escarpment provides a rare and significant “green view” for the area in the spring and summer, with turning leaves in the autumn and a greyer, denuded view during the winter months.

#### 4.1.10 Detractors

This is a busy road and housing along the street, despite in some cases being listed, is not always well maintained. Street furniture clutter, overhead wires, parked cars, litter and excess refuse from household bins is an ongoing situation with high multi-occupancy use affecting the infrastructure and housing stock along the route.

#### 4.1.11 Sensitivity to change

Developments along the Oxford Road and between the town centre and Caversham could greatly affect the focus of the view and any reduction of the view of the escarpment would be a significant loss to the Conservation Area and to this view along Russell Street looking north out of the Conservation Area.



**Figure 4.11** *Annotated View analysis*



**Figure 4.12** Plan showing Viewing place and view (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital Globe)



## **View 5. View over Alexandra Road Conservation Area towards the Chilterns escarpment**

### **5.1.1 Introduction**

**Figure 5.1** *General View from the top of Alexandra Road*



This view from Whiteknights, with the University of Reading campus to the east and south is from one of the higher points in Reading. The view looks over the Kennet and Thames valleys and Kennetmouth to the Caversham escarpment in the direction of Caversham Park.

### **5.1.2 Present Viewers**

Viewers could be en route from the University or to St Joseph's College. In a car at the junction of Alexandra Road and Upper Redlands Road the viewer would be more preoccupied by traffic at the junction than the view and the same may apply to pedestrians. The junction is at the centre of a number of University halls of residence, such as St George's Hall and Mackinder Hall, so many University students will experience the view.

### **5.1.3 Viewers in the Past**

Upper Redlands Road was a popular place for Victorian developers building large villas at the turn of the nineteenth century because of the view. The viewing place is adjacent to what was then Whiteknights Park, broken up into six leasehold units in 1867. A number of the new houses were designed by the architect Alfred Waterhouse who lived a number of years at Foxhill house now part of the University.

Possibly the singer Marianne Faithfull, a pupil of St Joseph's College in the 1960s, noticed the view on her journey to and from her home on Milman Road in Katesgrove.

#### **5.1.4 The Viewing Place**

The viewing place is almost at the extreme east of the borough boundary as it meets Wokingham.

There are several viewing places:

1. From the central reservation on the junction. The focus of the viewer is on the distant view of Caversham and the trees at the kink in Alexandra Road in the foreground. Further east the view is beyond the borough boundary into Wokingham. The blue roofs of Luscinia View, next to Tesco on Napier Road and those of Thames Valley Park, beyond the borough boundary are obscured.
2. From the west corner of the junction on Alexandra Road. From this viewing point it is possible to see the tops of the Oracle office buildings at Thames Valley Park.
3. Immediately to East along Upper Redlands Rd, there are views out across St Joseph's School playing field particularly in winter.
4. Moving down Alexandra Road, the distant view disappears as the street flattens and turns west. At this point the Road is joined by an unexpected and delightful street or alley, Lydford Road, along the northern boundary of St Joseph's School, continuing past Redlands Primary School to Cardigan Road. The Alexandra Road conservation area begins and continuing down Alexandra Road which is flanked by trees, the view is stopped by London Road.



**Figure 5.2** *View from the west side of Alexandra Road junction*



**Figure 5.3** *Lydford Rd with Northern Boundary Wall of St Joseph's School (photo Evelyn Williams).*



**Figure 5.4** *Looking north down Alexandra Road towards London Road (photo Evelyn Williams).*

### **5.1.5 General Description of the View**

From the main viewing point the general public can appreciate the limits of the town clearly delineated by the Chiltern escarpment and the encirclement of the borough by trees and open country to the north.

### **5.1.6 Topography and layout of the view**

**Elevation/Height:** The viewpoint is some 25 metres above the level of the Thames in the valley below and looks across to the top of Chiltern escarpment which is higher at about 45 metres above the river.

**Foreground:** Road and paving surfaces and wall and hedge boundary features constitute the foreground. Upper Redlands Road follows the ridge line. The viewing point is just outside the Alexandra Road Conservation Area.



Middle ground: This is the Alexandra Road Conservation Area and east over Redlands. There are Specimen trees which add interest.

Distant: There are fine views across to the Caversham/Chiltern escarpment.

### **5.1.7 Green Characteristics**

The middle view is dominated by large numbers of trees lining the street and specimen trees in gardens. A strong hedge lines is an important element of the foreground. High wooded ground on the Chiltern escarpment ends the view.

### **5.1.8 Architectural characteristics**

Apart from the roofs of houses in Alexandra Road and walls around properties, the view from the top of the hill is not greatly influenced by architectural features. The grid of modest terraces built in the 1870s for Huntley and Palmer workers is below the viewpoint and not visible. The Grade II church of St Lukes although approximately on axis with the view is obscured by trees even in winter although it is partially visible immediately along Redlands Rd across the adjoining St Josephs playing fields. Caversham Park House is also visible from here. From the main viewing point Wycliffe Baptist Church on the Kings Rd can be glimpsed.

### **5.1.9 The influence of light and seasons**

The view is more obscured during the summer when trees are in full leaf. In autumn, when some of these photographs were taken, the view was enhanced by yellow, orange and red colours of the foliage.

### **5.1.10 Detractors**

In the foreground a plethora of street furniture, an overgrown telegraph pole, speed limit signs, traffic calming measures and particularly bright red banners and boards announcing St Joseph's College, founded in 1910, detract from the view and catch the eye. There is scope for the rationalisation and reduction of visual impact of these elements during routine maintenance and replacement.



**Figure 5.5** *Looking north down Alexandra Road at the junction with Upper Redlands Road (photo Evelyn Williams)*

### 5.1.11 Sensitivity to change

The view could be adversely impacted by tall buildings built to the east of Reading, close to the border with Wokingham, or at Caversham Park.



**Figure 5.6** *Annotated View analysis*



**Figure 5.7** *View Analysis (detail)*

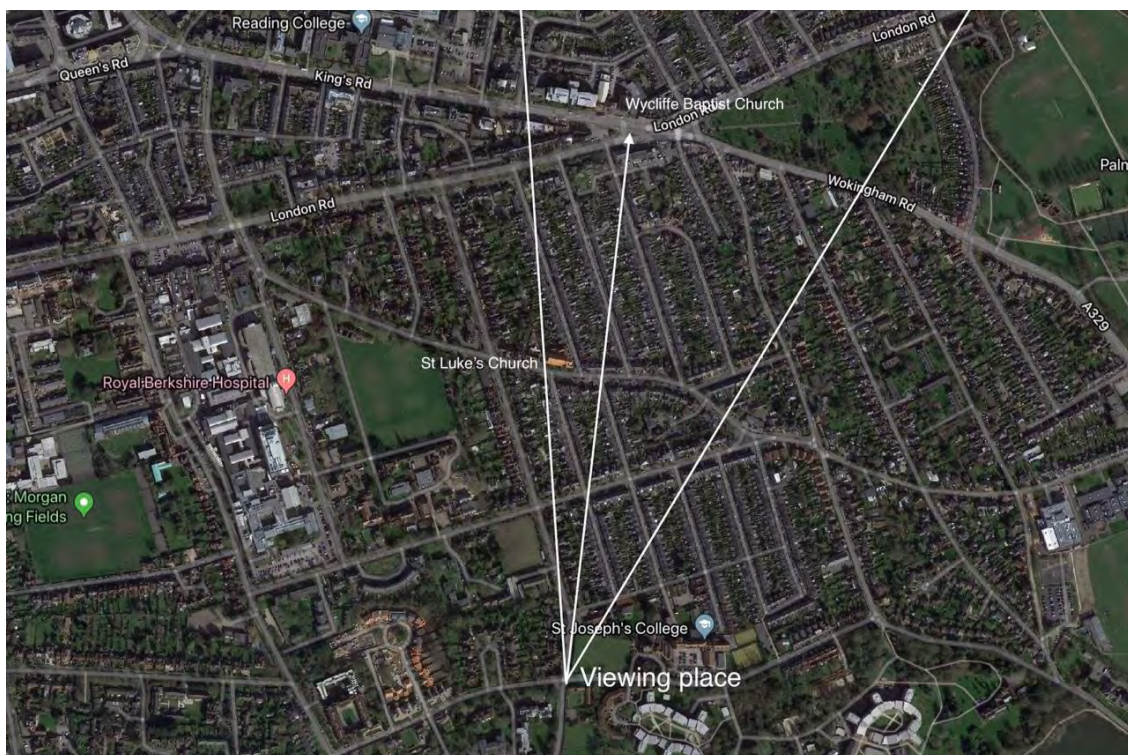


**Figure 5.8** *View Analysis (detail)*





**Figure 5.9** Plan showing Viewing Place and View (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital globe)



**Figure 5.10** Detail plan showing Viewing Place (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital Globe)



## View 6. View southwards down St Annes Rd towards Downshire Square.

### 6.1.1 Introduction

**Figure 6.1** *General View below*



This view taken adjacent to the listed St Annes Well at the top of St Annes Rd, at the junction with Priest Hill, looks south over the eastern end of St Peter's Conservation Area and across to the Downshire Square Conservation Area on the far horizon. All Saints Church in Downshire Square with its bell turret is visible on the horizon.



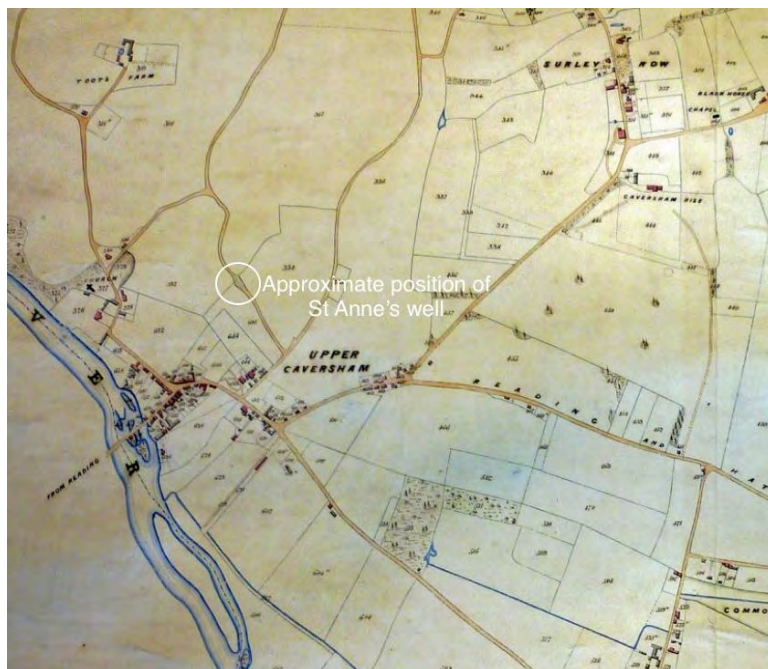
**Figure 6.2** *Detail of the view, the horizon with the roof of All Saints Church and specimen trees*

### 6.1.2 Present Viewers

Viewers today are principally those who live in the area and commuters heading for Reading whether on foot or by car. At rush hour, it is a car borne commuter route towards the town centre and due to limited passing places in St Annes Rd, car drivers and their passengers have enforced leisure to study the view whilst waiting to proceed.

### 6.1.3 Viewers in the Past

Viewers in the past would have been pilgrims visiting St Anne's Well which is directly adjacent to the viewing place. In Caversham, dedications to Mary the Mother of Jesus and her mother, St Anne, date back to the Middle Ages. Pope Urban VI authorised devotion to St Anne in 1378. St Anne's well was under the care of the Augustinian Canons and its mineral waters drew many pilgrims and were reported to have effected cures. The well was lost until workmen discovered it in 1906 during the construction of houses nearby. In 1908, a formal dedication took place for the memorial drinking fountain and cover, designed by William Ravenscroft, a nationally known local architect (*Historical information courtesy of CADRA*).



**Figure 6.3** Extract from the tithe map dated 1844, the approximate position of St Anne's well is ringed (Copyright. Image courtesy of Berkshire Records Office, object reference D/D1/162/1B)

### 6.1.4 The Viewing Place

Priest Hill leading to the Mount is an old road. In the early 1900s St Annes Rd was laid out southwards from St Anne's Well joining Priest Hill to Church Rd. Church Road is at a lower elevation and runs parallel to the Thames. The photographs below show the dedication ceremony of the brick well head and cover in 1908 and indicate the open nature of the surroundings. By 1930 the area had become much as we see it today.





**Figure 6.4** Photo of dedication ceremony of the new well head and cover 1908  
(Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection)



**Figure 6.5** St Anne's Well and surroundings beyond circa 1908  
(Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library collection).



**Figure 6.6** St Anne's Well and surroundings circa 1930  
(Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection).





**Figure 6.6** *Detail of the well today*

**Figure 6.7** *Looking towards the viewing Place at the junction with St Anne's Road*

### **6.1.5 General Description of the View**

From the top of the St Annes Rd adjacent to the Well, the view is southwards down the road, over listed buildings in the Conservation area and their gardens along Buckside. On the far side of the Thames the view passes over the current industrial areas around Richfield Avenue and Milford Rd, which due to their low elevation are not visible. The higher level railway tracks beyond exiting Reading station to the west are visible in the view and trains crossing add movement and interest. The view ends on the far horizon of higher ground of the Downshire Square Conservation Area and the Tilehurst Road, picking up features in this area which are clearly visible.

### **6.1.6 Topography and layout of the view**

**Elevation/Height:** St Anne's Well is some 20 metres above the level of the River Thames in the valley below, whilst the ground level at the horizon where the view terminates in the distance is around 40 metres above river level. The apparent level is increased by the height of features on the horizon such as All Saints Church and the specimen trees planted in the 19C.

**Foreground:** The foreground is of St Annes Rd, parked cars and the turn of the 20th century houses largely of brick.

**Middle ground:** The middle ground features the eastern end of St Peter's Conservation Area and also picks up trees in the back gardens of Buckside in the Conservation Area, the roof of the boathouse and the trees adjacent to and beyond it in Richfield Avenue.

**Distant:** The view ends on the horizon, where features on the horizon line are clearly visible to the naked eye.

### **6.1.7 Green Characteristics**

Small flowering trees and shrubs in front gardens soften some of the foreground down St Annes Road. Mature larger trees in the gardens to Buckside and on the far side of the river merge together to form a strong green element which contributes greatly to the middle ground. As previously mentioned, tall specimen trees planted in the 19C to the gardens of houses and villas around Downshire Square, the Bath and Tilehurst Roads feature strongly in silhouette on the horizon.

### **6.1.8 Architectural characteristics**

The starting point for the view is the Grade II Listed memorial well head and decorative iron work cover designed by William Ravenscroft, photos above. Locally Ravenscroft also designed Grade II Chiltern Court in Caversham, the Grade II Henry building at Katesgrove School, Goring Roman Catholic Church, the Masonic building Henley on Thames and many individual houses and villas in the Reading area, working in a mixture of an Arts and Crafts, and Gothic style.

The houses down St Annes Rd were built at the beginning of the 20th C, largely of red brick with some render and originally slate roofs. The 17 C grade II cottage down Buckside continues the view

All Saints Church on the horizon in Downshire Square, Grade II listed was designed by JP St Aubyn, built circa 1865 -74 of coursed rubble with ashlar dressings and a tiled roof with a bell turret. Aubyn worked in the Gothic revival style of his day. The roof and turret are visible in the view. Foundations were laid for a tower and spire to rival that of Christ Church in Reading. If this had been completed it would have made an outstanding landmark due to the elevation of the site but the money ran out and the work was discontinued (*Historical information: Downshire Square Conservation Area Appraisal*).

### **6.1.9 The influence of light and seasons**

The best conditions for viewing are on a bright clear day in the morning in the Spring or early Summer.

### **6.1.10 Detractors**

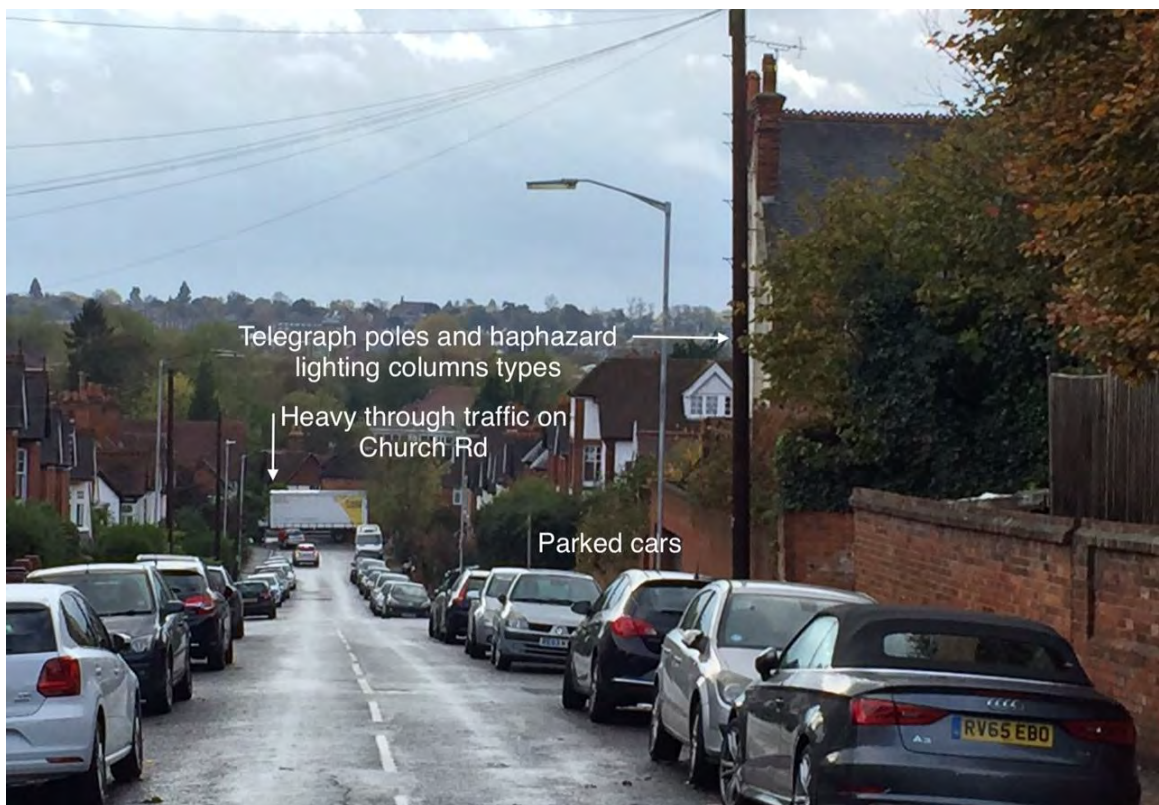
Traffic and parked cars interfere with enjoyment of this view as do large lorries passing in Church Rd at the bottom of St Annes Rd, although the parked cars do act as a traffic calming measure reducing the road effectively to a single lane. Telegraph poles also detract from the view.

### **6.1.11 Sensitivity to change**

The area in this view most sensitive to change relates to the middle and far middle ground of the view. Care would need to be taken with regard to the height and bulk of any development or redevelopment in the employment areas bounded by Cardiff Road and Richfield Avenue which might intrude upon the view. This also applies to the area between the Oxford road and the Railway line within the view. The horizon line could also be sensitive to adverse change, through the height or bulk of future development.



**Figure 6.8** *Annotated View analysis*



**Figure 6.9** *Detractors*





**Figure 6.9** Plan showing Viewing place and View (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital Globe).

## View 7. View of St Anne's Church Tower from the west

### 7.1.1 General description of the view and its characteristics

For this shorter and more focused View, an abbreviated form of analysis is used. The methodology of the Oxford View Cones approach nevertheless informs the analysis.



**Figure 7.1** General view with tower on the axis of South Street, Baptist church by Waterhouse in foreground (photo Megan Aldrich)



**Figure 7.2** Polychrome brick Baptist Church with corner tower by Waterhouse



**Figure 7.3** View of tower from Priest Hill

There are several viewing points of the Church tower from the west, the principal one looking down South street at the junction with Prospect St and Gosbrook Road, where adjacent to the front of the Baptist church, the tower of St Anne's is on axis with and framed by the street. Linked to South Street by a pedestrian cut through, Falkland Rd further east is also on axis with tower. There also several views of the tower from the west across the Westfield Rd recreation ground. Further back the tower is also visible from the west from Priest Hill. Generally the tower rises above and identifies the surrounding area of 2 storey late 19C and early 20C housing in which it sits. The tower is also visible from the new, above track, public concourse at Reading Station. The tower is of narrow



dimensions compared to its height and this gives two impressions a) that the tower is taller than it is and b) that it appears farther away than it is.



**Figure 7.4** *Looking across the Westfield Road recreation ground*

Present viewers are local residents and those who use Caversham centre to shop or work. The tower is set on and rises above the level ground of the Thames plain which surround it and it is from these level areas that it is principally visible although there are also views from higher ground such as Priest Hill. Green characteristics include the setting of the Westfield Rd Recreation ground and in turn, the tower adds identity and contributes to the character of the recreation ground. From South Street and elsewhere green contributions are made by trees and shrubs to the front gardens of domestic houses. The view is best experienced on a bright sunlit day when the warm colours of the brick and stone materials of the tower are reflected and at their best.

### **7.1.2 History of the view**

Gosbrook Road and Prospect Street are roads linking original village settlements and predate the laying out of South St and the residential roads around St Anne's Church, these latter roads were all laid out at the end of the 19C.

The church of Our Lady and St Anne is the full title of the Church. In Caversham, dedications to Mary the Mother of Jesus and her mother, St Anne, date back to the Middle Ages. Pope Urban VI authorised devotion to St Anne in 1378. The earliest reference to the Shrine of Our Lady of Caversham is 1106, when Duke Robert of Normandy, eldest son of William the Conqueror, presented a relic from the crusades. This shrine became a site of medieval pilgrimage and is thought to have been near what is now Dean's Farm. There are records of the shrine being visited and richly



endowed by royalty as late as the early reign of Henry VIII and Caversham was a major site of pilgrimage until the Reformation. In the 1890s, Mrs Florence Crawshay, wife of the wealthy industrialist who owned Caversham Park, converted to Roman Catholicism. She and Mrs Anne Lovegrove invited a group of French Sisters of Mercy to come to Caversham and local Catholics were then able to have Mass and Sacraments in their own neighbourhood. The newly created Parish was given the title of Our Lady and St Anne to recall the former shrine of Our Lady and the chapel of St Anne on the mediaeval Caversham Bridge. Revival of devotion to Our Lady of Caversham began in 1897. In 1898 Dr Cockran purchased and donated the site of the Church and School. The foundation stone was laid in 1899 and the Church was built and blessed in 1902.

The church is part of an architecturally unified complex which includes a convent, presbytery and a primary school. In the 1950s a stone chapel in the mediaeval style was built incorporating stones from the Chapel of St Anne on the bridge. The renewed shrine of Our Lady of Caversham with its mediaeval statue was dedicated in 1959 (*source of historical information CADRA*).



**Figure 7.5** *The Church and tower*

The church complex and tower were designed (and built over a number of years at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) by Canon Alexander J C Scoles, who was both an architect and Roman Catholic priest, possibly with his assistant Geoffrey Raymond. The Church as a whole of red brick with stone detailing is in a gothic revival style. The tower was built in 1907 of red brick with stone quoins and banding. The top of the tower is both castellated and stepped and the overall impression is possibly more Arts and Crafts mixed with Elizabethan than gothic.

The principal viewing place is from the front of the Prospect Street Baptist Church, 1875-77, which is Grade II listed and designed by Alfred Waterhouse whose other buildings include Reading Town Hall and the Natural History Museum. On a difficult corner site and of red brick with stone capped plinth and grey blue decorative bricks, this church has a banded tiled roof and the Grade II Listing notes indicate that the building is included as a good example of Waterhouse's use of materials with brick stone and roof tiles of different colours (*Source Historic England listing notes*).

The Church forms a focal point between Prospect Street and South Street and in design terms resolves a difficult corner. Details include early English Gothic style windows and stepped buttresses with red and grey brickwork on the gable.

### 7.1.3 Detractors and Sensitivity to change

Detractors include heavy traffic adjacent to the viewing place in Prospect Street and adjacent to the Westfield Rd recreation ground as well as timber telephone poles in South Street.

The tower of this church, surrounded by the flat land of the Thames plain, rises above the adjacent areas of largely two storey residential housing and gives the area its character. Care needs to be taken that the height and mass of any redevelopment sites in the area are carefully considered in respect of their relation to the tower from multiple viewing places. This would relate for example to the temporary school site adjacent to the Recreation ground that may come forward for development in due course.



**Figure 7.6** Plan showing Viewing place and view (Map data: Copyright Google, Digital Globe)



## View 8. Towards Caversham Park House from the A329(M) and the Railway

### 8.1.1 Introduction

**Figure 8.1** *View from the A329M*



These Views represent a significant marker of arrival into Reading on two of the main approaches on the east side of the town, a) from the A329M by car and b) by train from the Railway on the London Paddington line. Striking views are seen of a distant Palladian Mansion on a hill.



**Figure 8.2** *One of the views from the train, on the railway looking across the Thames*



### 8.1.2 Present Viewers

Viewers today are the travelling public approaching Reading from the East whether by car from the motorway network or by train to and from London Paddington. It is a view seen by all travellers on the Railway network to and from the West Country and Wales. This means that from the railway this is a view seen by several million people each year.

### 8.1.3 Viewers in the Past

The A329M was constructed in the 1970s and therefore represents a relatively recent viewing place. The Great Western Railway was constructed in the 1840s and travellers on this line have therefore enjoyed the view of the house as a precursor to arriving at Reading Station for around 175 years.

There has been a house at Caversham Park for over 800 years. The house and park have had distinguished owners and occupiers over the centuries. These include William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke and Protector of the Realm who died in Caversham Park in 1219. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Sir Francis Knollys, the Treasurer of Queen Elizabeth I demolished the house and rebuilt it further to the north. During the Civil War it was owned by the Royalist Earl of Craven and confiscated and used to imprison Charles I. Following the Civil War and the Restoration, the Elizabethan Manor House was demolished and rebuilt by Lord Craven. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century the house and estate were acquired by the Earls of Cadogan. Again the house was rebuilt and the gardens remodelled. This house burnt down, was replaced and then enlarged by Major Charles Marsack the next owner. This house also largely burnt down in 1850.



**Figure 8.3** *Sailing barge being towed from Kennet Mouth to the Thames circa 1825. Caversham Park is visible on the hill in the distance. Print probably by William Havell (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection)*

**Figure 8.4** *Present day photo from a train on the railway taken slightly to the east of Figure 8.3 above. Caversham Park House is still visible on the hill in the distance.*

As set out in more detail in 8.1.8, the building that is seen today was erected for the new owner William Crawshay, an ironmaster in the 1850s.

It is the south front of this Palladian ensemble of a central block flanked by two lower pillared colonnades which is strikingly visible from a distance in the views. The gardens to the south sloping down towards the Thames valley, where some elements of work by Capability Brown are still evident, frame the house within the view.

In the early 20th century the house was used as a convalescent home for wounded soldiers and then by the Oratory School.

Since 1943 the BBC Monitoring Service has been based at Caversham Park, providing invaluable information and briefings for the Government and the BBC during WWII, the subsequent Cold War and up to the present day. Due to changes in technology and the proliferation of media sources the BBC has recently announced the closure of the service from Caversham Park. The long association with the BBC adds another layer of history and interest to the house and the view.

#### **8.1.4 The Viewing Place**

Both the A329M and the Railway provide 'kinetic' views – that is a quick series of changing views seen as the car or the train moves along. The view from the A329M is visible for a relatively short period of time but is striking due to the house being straight ahead of the viewer on axis with the road through the windscreen. From the Railway the view is at 90 degrees to the direction of travel and it is frequently interrupted by trees, buildings or railway structures in the way as the train moves so that the view becomes a series of intriguing glimpses.

#### **8.1.5 General Description of the View**

From both the A329M and the Railway, Caversham Park House is a clearly visible historic landmark dominating the wooded hill on the far side of the Thames.

#### **8.1.6 Topography and layout of the view**

Elevation/Height: Caversham Park House is situated on the highest point of the Chiltern escarpment in the area and is thus seen on the horizon from a distance. Caversham Park House, at ground level, is some 40 to 45 metres above the level of the Thames. As the house is three stories the top of the main house is some 55 metres above the level of the Thames and the Railway. The A329M slopes down as it runs north and the house is some 35 metres higher than the road seen across the dip of the Thames Valley.

Foreground: The foreground is largely made up of urban transport infrastructure, tarmac, chippings, gantries and street furniture.

Middle ground: This is made up of trees and vegetation and some intervening buildings and from the Railway the river Thames.

Distant: There are distant fine views of the escarpment on the horizon line either side of the house.



### 8.1.7 Green Characteristics

An extensive and unbroken green, well treed escarpment on the horizon frames the house. Both the trees and the house add to the apparent height and visibility of the escarpment. There are no other buildings other than the Palladian mansion visible on the horizon line. Large specimen trees are apparent even from this distance either side of the house. The middle ground below the house is also green and is constituted by the gardens to the south of the house and the largely open space of Reading cemetery below the garden.

### 8.1.8 Architectural characteristics

The previous two 18C houses on this site although destroyed by fire were three storey and of 5 central bays flanked by a further two projecting elements of two bays each at the ends of the house making 9 bays in all. The influence of these previous houses is seen today in the present building which also has 5 central bays flanked by one wider bay at each end giving 7 bays in all but covering a similar footprint to the previous houses.



**Figure 8.5** Caversham Park House circa 1798, print drawn and engraved by William Poole. Five central bays with two further projecting bays at each end. The colonnades have not yet been built (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection).



**Figure 8.6** *Caversham Park house as it is today.*

The building as seen today was erected for the new owner William Crawshay an ironmaster in the early 1850s, by architect Horace Jones who later also designed Tower Bridge in London. The house is built on an iron frame, an early example of this technique. Jones inserted his seven bay block, (five central and two wider end bays) of three storeys between the two surviving colonnades of 1840 by John Thistlewood Crew.

It is the south front of this large Palladian ensemble of a central block flanked by two lower pillared colonnades which is strikingly visible from a distance in the views. The gardens to the south slope down towards the Thames valley, where some elements of work by Capability Brown are still evident, and frame the house within the view.

### **8.1.9 The influence of light and seasons**

The best conditions for viewing are on a bright clear day when the sun is on the south elevation of the house bringing out the golden colour of the stonework and casting shadows which emphasize the modelling of the stone colonnades and mouldings on the main house. Cloud formations add greatly to the variety of view experienced due to the wide expanse of sky.



### 8.1.10 Detractors

Elements which are part and parcel of the infrastructure of this view, such as tall streetlights on the A329(M) and gantries, fences, junction boxes etc on the Railway affect the view in some positions. It is difficult to see how these can be practically ameliorated in the short term and they can also be considered as part of the viewing experience. Possibly in the longer term when planned maintenance and replacement take place, if there are alternative options, then consideration could be given to any options which reduce the impact on the view or at best do not worsen it. Light coloured roofing on buildings visible from the A329(M) detracts from the view from certain positions.

### 8.1.11 Sensitivity to change

Any new development on lower ground in front of this south side of the house and the green escarpment on either side would need careful consideration to avoid projecting into and harming the view. In particular the garden and park to the south of the house are vital to the framing of the view. Likewise built development which might become visible on the skyline/horizon should be avoided. Careful consideration should be given to roof and cladding colours in respect of light industrial or office development on the Business parks at the end of the A329(M). In respect of views from the railway careful consideration should also be given to the height of any development proposals if these were to come forward in the vicinity of the Marina on the far side of the Thames.



**Figure 8.7** *Annotated View analysis*





## View 9. View southwards along tree lined Coley Avenue

### 9.1.1 General description of the view and its characteristics

For this shorter and more focused View, an abbreviated form of analysis is used. The methodology of the Oxford View Cones approach nevertheless informs the analysis.



**Figure 9.1** General view down Coley Avenue (photo credit [www.coleypark.com](http://www.coleypark.com), Copyright Graham Horn)

The view along Coley Avenue to the south, out of the Conservation Area is an historic view worthy of note and retention. There have been trees along the route since at least the turn of the 19C (Coates map, 1802) and probably from much earlier in the 18C, and the road once formed the private drive to Coley Park Manor. The Manor was rebuilt in the mid 19C. The road has tall red brick walls (more predominant at the northern end of the road along the western edge), and affords a pleasant walk or drive despite its often moderately heavy traffic. The Avenue provides narrow but significant views to the south and also in reverse back north towards the Castle Hill/ Russell Street Conservation Area from the southern part of the Avenue.



**Figure 9.2** View back towards the Conservation Area (photo Karen Rowlands)



Present viewers are local residents and car born commuters. From the Bath Road junction with the Avenue, the road is largely level but rises slightly to a crest and then falls again more steeply close to the junction with Berkeley Avenue. At the junction with Berkeley Avenue, the road has been realigned and then to the south drops again and curves back towards its original line. The trees that line the Avenue are Limes (*tilia x europea*). It is believed they were planted circa 1906 when the previous Avenue trees were felled. Outside of the line of the trees, the road remains substantially bounded by 19C brick walls. These are taller at the northern end of the road along the western edge, with lower walls elsewhere. The buildings which line the road are as a whole well set back and are a mix of 19C and more modern buildings. The view is best experienced in Spring, Summer or Autumn when the trees are in leaf.



**Figure 9.3** *View towards Bath Rd and the Conservation Area from the Berkeley Avenue junction*

**Figure 9.4** *19C and 20C buildings line the Avenue*



**Figure 9.5** *Boundary treatment typical wall detailing*



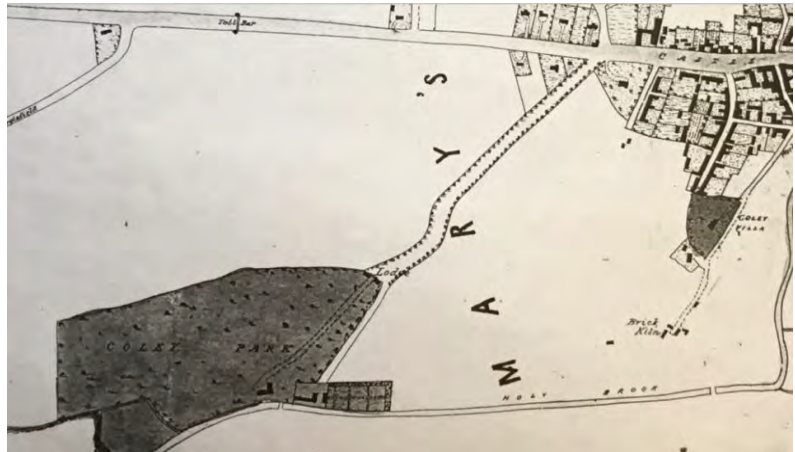
**Figure 9.6** *Boundary treatment typical wall detailing*



### 9.1.2 History of the view

Historical evidence for the Coley Park Estate and House go back some 700 years. The original house was close to The Holybrook. In the early 19C the house was rebuilt on higher ground away from the river. This is Coley House as it survives today, now a private hospital. (source [www.coleypark.com](http://www.coleypark.com)) The drive to Coley Park Manor began at the junction with the Bath Road and was laid out with trees probably as early as the 18C. This drive is now Coley Avenue. Coates map of Reading 1802 (Berkshire Records Office) shows the start of the Avenue and this is shown tree lined. Likewise Dormer 1843 indicates a tree lined drive.

**Figure 9.7** Extract from Dormer map of 1843 showing drive to Coley Park. (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Berkshire Record Office)



**Figure 9.8** FoxTalbot's early photograph of the tree lined avenue circa 1844-47 (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection)



The early photograph by Fox Talbot, during his association with Reading between 1844 and 1847, is taken looking north up Coley Avenue towards the Bath Road and the current Conservation Area.

Large stone and render gateposts were erected circa 1870 on each side of the entrance to the Avenue. These were topped with winged dragons (Wyverns). These large gate posts were demolished at some point in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to widen the Bath Road Intersection. During the latter half of the 19C land was sold off either side of the Avenue for large private houses. The original trees to the Avenue were felled around 1905. The postcard illustrations below indicate the original trees in a photo taken in 1903 and the subsequent photo taken 1907 from a similar position shows the replanted trees (source [www.coleypark.com](http://www.coleypark.com)). Also visible in the photos the separate smaller gate and piers to Yeomanry House, the lodge of which survives today.



**Figure 9.9** Stone gate piers to the Avenue taken from Bath Rd in 1903 prior to tree felling (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection)



**Figure 9.10** Stone gate piers to the Avenue taken from Bath Rd in 1907 after replanting (Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of Reading Library Collection)



### 9.1.3 Detractors and Sensitivity to change

Detractors include heavy traffic on the Avenue at peak times. Some boundary wall areas have been rendered and topped with wooden panels which detract from the generally interesting 19C brick walls which predominate in the Avenue. Trees in the avenue should be retained and replanted where appropriate in the future. Any future development either side of the Avenue should respect and take note of both the trees and the long expanses of brick walling which give the Avenue its character.



**Figure 9.11** *The Avenue, from the Viewing place in winter after pollarding, the render on an original brick wall is a detractor.*



**Figure 9.12** *Plan showing Viewing Place and view (Map data: Copyright. Google, Digital Globe)*