



# Reading Tall Building Strategy

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**Reading Tall Building Strategy**

*Reading Borough Council*

January 2008, Entec UK Limited

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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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A baseline assessment of the Reading Central Area has been undertaken to determine which locations would be appropriate for the development of tall buildings. Baseline assessments have been made of townscape character, visual amenity (both within central Reading and into central Reading), historical significance, environmental constraints e.g. flood risk, and market demand. The aim of these assessments is to find a location which is both economically viable and appropriate and/or beneficial in terms of environmental considerations.

The baseline study has resulted in the identification of three areas which are termed 'preferred locations' for tall buildings. However, the report notes that the entirety of these areas would not be appropriate for tall buildings both in terms of potential environmental impacts, and also with regard to market demand. Therefore chapter 6 of this report focuses on providing design considerations. These are both general design considerations which should be made when developing any tall building, and also more detailed principles for each of the preferred locations. This goes some way to proposing an overall vision for the areas, the development of tall buildings only being a part of the ongoing development of Reading.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

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### 2.1 Purpose of Guidance

Produced in 1999, the Reading City 2020 Vision set the bar for development within the city centre which should aspire to complement its emerging role as a city and capital of the Thames Valley. Part of this vision includes the development of high-quality tall buildings within the City's central area and in recent years Reading Borough Council has received a number of planning applications for new tall buildings. Furthermore the Council envisages other similar proposals are likely to emerge in the near future.

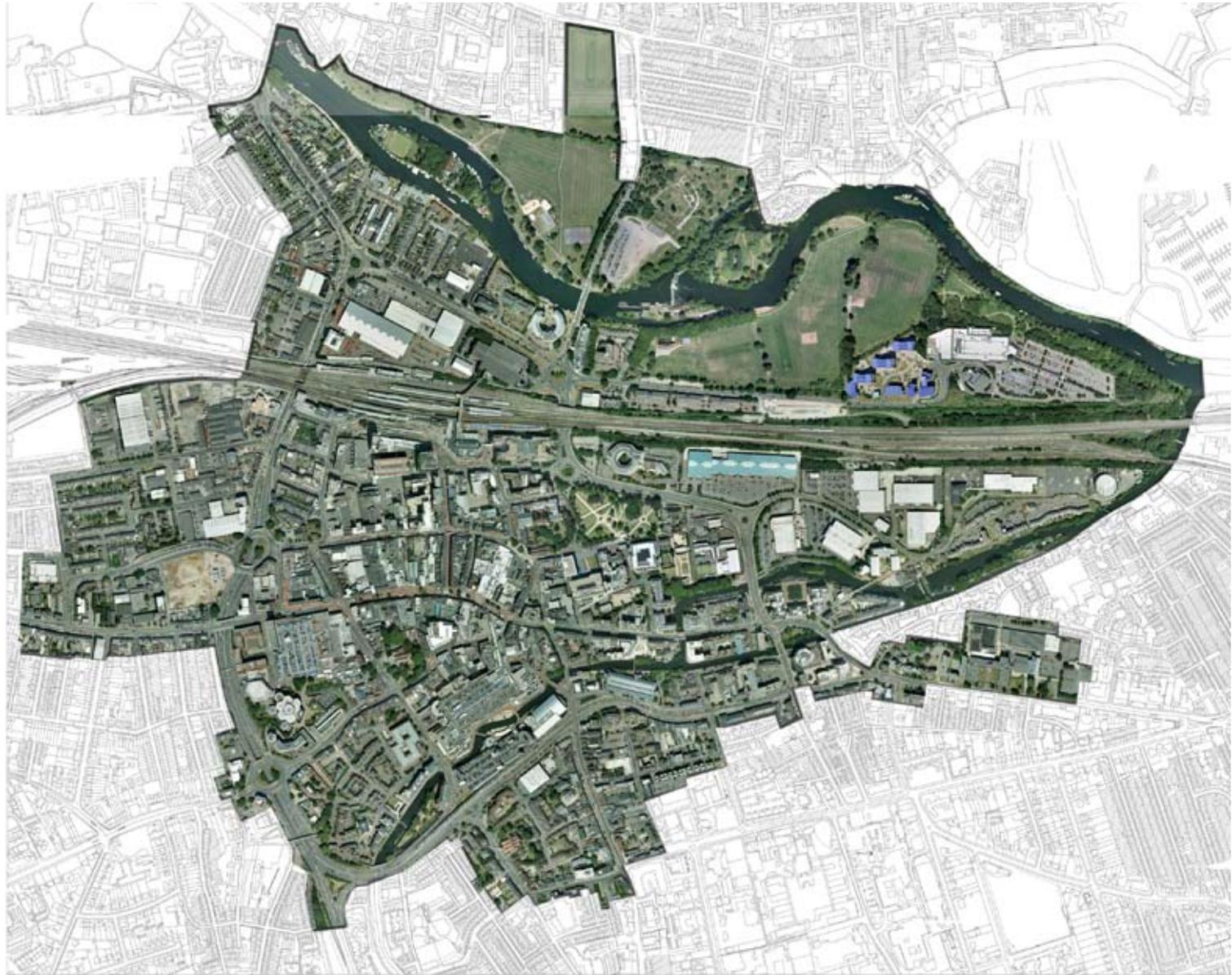
It is therefore apparent that tall buildings are to become a feature of central Reading. However, as it stands there is no adopted policy in the Local Plan to specifically cover building height. There is some supporting text to one of the Local Plan policies that deals with the issue, but given the emerging challenges and opportunities this is considered not to be adequate. More detailed policy guidance is required in the emerging planning framework for the centre, and this needs to be supported by a clear and robust evidence base. CABE and English Heritage have set out guidelines for how such an evidence base can be achieved and that a tall building strategy is necessary.

This strategy will inform the development of a tall buildings policy and of specific guidelines for individual sites and areas that will be documented within the Reading Central Area Action Plan. It will also operate as a useful tool for the Council in assessing proposals for taller buildings in the central area of Reading over the coming years.

### 2.2 Tall Buildings Definition

1. CABE (2007) 'Guidance on Tall Buildings' CABE and English Heritage

For the purposes of this assessment a building termed 'tall' is over 10 commercial storeys or equivalent. This definition has been reached having undertaken an analysis of the urban form of Reading and following discussion with Reading Borough Council. The CABE tall buildings guidance document talks about 'contextually tall' buildings. Within the context of central Reading, the predominant building height is between 3 and 5 storeys. There are however numerous examples of groupings of taller buildings e.g. along Kings Road, and of individual buildings which are significantly taller e.g. Thames Tower and Western Tower. Ten storeys was defined as a height which across the whole of the central area, within the context of Reading, could be termed 'tall'.



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**Figure 2.1: Reading Central Area**

# 3 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

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## 3.1 National

There are a number of Planning Policy Statements (national planning policy) which indirectly relate to the planning and design of tall buildings; these include:

- PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development
- PPS3: Housing
- PPS6: Planning for Town Centres
- PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment
- PPS22: Renewable Energy

The details of these guidance notes will need to be taken into account when drafting planning policy.

### Guidance on Tall Buildings

Recent national guidance relating directly to tall buildings was published in July 2007 by English Heritage and CABI who reviewed and updated their joint Guidance on Tall Buildings to reflect recent changes to the planning system. The guidance sets out how best to evaluate proposals for tall buildings, and in so doing, helps inform local authorities in the production of tall buildings policy.

The guidance strongly endorses a development-plan led approach to ensuring the appropriate development of tall buildings. By identifying locations where tall buildings are, or are not, appropriate in development plan documents and then by effectively communicating this, local authorities will ensure that tall buildings are properly planned as part of an exercise in place-making rather than in an ad-hoc, reactive, piecemeal manner.

In identifying locations where tall buildings would and would not be

appropriate, local authorities are encouraged to carry out a detailed urban design study, which should:

- Take into account the historic context of the wider area through the use of historic characterisation methods;
- Carry out a character appraisal of the immediate context;
- Identify where tall buildings might enhance the overall townscape; and
- Identify sites where the removal of past mistakes might enhance the overall townscape.

The Reading Tall Building Strategy provides this information.

The Guidance goes on to note that having identified the constraints and opportunities, specific policies should be drawn up including some which are related to specific locations. This should be detailed within the development plan or (as in the case for Reading) within supplementary planning documents where note should also be made of those areas that are deemed to be appropriate, sensitive, or inappropriate for the location of tall buildings.

Moving on the guidance states that in terms of informing policy direction and setting the parameters for suitable tall buildings, applicants seeking planning permission should ensure the following are considered:

- The relationship to context;
- The effect on the historic context;
- The effect on world heritage sites;
- The relationship to transport infrastructure;

- 
- The architectural quality of the building;
  - The sustainable design and construction of the proposal;
  - The credibility of the design both technically and financially;
  - The contribution to public space and facilities;
  - The contribution made to the permeability of the site and the wider area; and
  - The provision of a well designed environment.

The guidance stresses that tall buildings should be in appropriate locations, should be of excellent design quality and should enhance their immediate location and wider setting. They should produce more benefits than costs to the lives of those affected by them.

## 3.2 Regional

Generally regional guidance does not tend to deal in great detail with design matters. However, through strategically important issues such as quality of life and efficient use of land, the context for tall buildings is set.

The existing regional planning document, Regional Planning Guidance 9 does not offer a great deal of detail on issues relating to tall buildings. However, its first key principle is to focus development on urban areas, for reasons of promoting an urban renaissance, making efficient use of land and integrating land use and transport. This focus on urban areas is reiterated through policy Q1, which also emphasises the importance of high quality design.

Policy Q2 turns to the issue of quality of life, and highlights the contribution that design solutions tailored to key sites can make, especially where they take account of public health, crime prevention and community safety issues, and which build upon local distinctiveness.

The main purpose of policy Q3 is to ensure that development is carefully located and designed to make better use of land and create viable catchments for services and infrastructure, and this includes seeking a greater intensity of development in existing centres. Q5 states that the larger centres in the region will be the focus for major retail, leisure and office developments.

The South East Plan will, when finalised, be the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East and part of the development plan for the purposes of determining planning applications, and will replace the Berkshire Structure Plan as well as RPG 9. The draft South East Plan was submitted to the government on 31 March 2006.

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An Examination in Public has now been held and a panel report was received in August 2007. The next stage of consultation, on proposed changes, will take place in early 2008, working towards adoption in autumn 2008.

The draft plan has sustainable development at its heart, and also includes cross-cutting policies relating to climate change, resource use and sustainable construction. Another of these cross-cutting themes is a focus of development on urban areas and continued commitment to urban renaissance (policy CC8a, and reiterated for the sub-area including Reading in WCBV2). Policy CC8b refers to the designated regional hubs (which include Reading) and encourages high density and mixed land uses that require a high level of accessibility, so as to create 'living centres'.

This is underlined for employment in policy RE2 and for housing in H3. In terms of housing, H5 says that guidelines should be prepared for the design of new housing encouraging sustainable construction and addressing the implications of changing lifestyles.

The issue of the character of settlements and landscape in the region is dealt with by cross-cutting policy CC12, which seeks to conserve and enhance the character, distinctiveness and sense of place of these areas. It also looks for opportunities for creating a high quality environment based on a shared vision that places emphasis on good design, innovation, sustainability and achieving a high quality of life. More detail is given through later policies, such as BE1 and BE7. BE1 seeks improvements to the urban environment, through design solutions focusing on local context, local distinctiveness and sense of place, and through higher densities and mixing uses. BE7 seeks the conservation and where appropriate enhancement of the historic environment, particularly the contribution made to the key concepts of local distinctiveness and sense of place.

More specific policy on town centres is also included in the Plan, including policy TC1, which promotes accessible, attractive and vibrant town centres. TC4 offers further guidance, about strengthening centres through measures including the promotion of urban regeneration, quality urban design and an attractive and safe environment. As a primary regional centre, Reading is a focus for retail, employment, a range of housing, and uses which attract a significant number of people.

Other policies in the Plan seek to give further guidance on sustainable construction. Of particular significance to tall buildings is policy EN2, which deals with Combined Heat and Power.

There should be mini - and micro - CHP in all developments, and district heating infrastructure in large scale mixed use developments.

Whilst regional guidance therefore does not deal with tall buildings explicitly, it sets the context for tall buildings by directing high-density development to urban areas, particularly their centres, and emphasising the issues of the effect of design on quality of life, and the regional importance of local distinctiveness and local sense of place.

## 3.2 Local

The context for local policy on tall buildings is set by the aforementioned Reading City 2020 Vision document. This document set out the vision for the future of Reading and was produced in 1999 for consultation and to provoke discussion. The vision sees Reading as a city in the making, and the vision is that, by 2020, Reading will be established as a city and the capital of the Thames Valley, and a gateway between Europe and the UK.

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Although not a planning document, it was particularly concerned with redevelopment within the centre of Reading. To support Reading's future as an emerging city, indicative illustrations of the vision for the centre included the siting of taller buildings in areas appropriate for redevelopment. This document has, since its production, informed the development of policy including the Reading Central Area Action Plan.

The development plan for Reading is the Reading Borough Local Plan, which was adopted in 1998. As noted earlier the Local Plan does not include a policy to deal specifically with the height of buildings, and, given the increased number of proposals for tall buildings coming forward, this is considered to be a gap in policy.

However, the supporting text to policy CUD14 does include some guidance on height of buildings. This states that "apart from a handful of exceptions, Reading is a low rise town and the higher buildings which do exist are found in the town centre". It envisages that this should continue to be the case, in order to emphasise the importance of the centre and in order to prevent tall buildings erected in isolation having adverse effects on existing landmarks, the streetscene and microclimate. It further states that proposals "will only be considered favourably where they are a visual asset, well designed, distinctive and located in appropriate positions such as on corners or to close views, thereby contributing towards the environment of the town centre."

The main policy CUD14 deals with standards of design in development. It expects all development to exhibit a high standard of design and be compatible with the scale of the surrounding environment. In addition, the policy deals with matters such as lighting, materials, public art, outdoor spaces, listed buildings and

conservation areas, landscaping, parking, street furniture, active frontages and rear elevations. Buildings should be accessible, and take account of energy conservation and efficiency.

In terms of the historic environment, the Local Plan seeks to protect conservation areas, the setting of listed buildings, historic parks and gardens and scheduled ancient monuments through policies CUD7, CUD4, CUD10 and CUD11 respectively.

Policy CEN2 extends protection to the areas of traditional terraces in the centre, including areas which are in close proximity to current proposals for tall buildings. Development should not have a detrimental effect on the character or fabric of those areas. In more general terms, policy KEY2B of the Plan seeks to protect cultural and historic assets and at the same time create and improve areas of character and interest.

Policy HSG5 deals with residential design standards and states that the character, density and design of development should be of an acceptable standard and appropriate to the surrounding area. Other matters dealt with in the policy include safe and secure environments, open space provision, minimising noise and creating adequate privacy, car parking, highway provision, equality of access and sustainable design. HSG9 looks at suitable locations for residential development, taking into account access to infrastructure, open space, services and public transport.

It is worth noting that the only recent refusal of a tall building in the centre, a 20 storey building on Kennet Street/Queens Road, was refused on the basis of policies CUD4, 7 and 14 and HSG5 and 9, as well as PPGs and the guidance on tall buildings produced by CABE and English Heritage.

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The Borough adopted their Core Strategy in January 2008. This document contains the overarching policies to set the context for the development of more detailed guidance in later documents. The Tall Buildings Strategy has informed policy in the Core Strategy Document.

One of the key elements of the Spatial Strategy is a concentration of much of the development on the centre of Reading, as the most accessible location in the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-region. This will typically involve medium- to high-density, accessible mixed-use schemes. The Strategy also begins to identify the potential areas for regeneration, noting the West Side/Chatham Street, the Station/River and the East Side.

The Core Strategy is committed to sustainable development in general. As part of this, the first policy sets challenging standards for sustainable construction and design (CS1), and this will need to be applied to all developments including tall buildings. Another of the main principles of the Core Strategy is to emphasise the link between development density and accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport. Policy CS4 is the main policy to articulate this, but it is supported by policy CS10 directing major office development to the centre of Reading and policy CS15 setting out an approach to housing density that seeks high density in the centre.

Policy CS7 deals with design and the public realm. Developments should be of high quality design, and the policy ensures that components of the proposal including height and massing will be assessed to make sure that they make a positive contribution to the character, continuity and enclosure, quality of the public realm, ease of movement and permeability, legibility, adaptability and diversity. The need to create or reinforce local distinctiveness is also vital, as

is creating safe and accessible environments. Policy CS33 protects the historic environment, and reiterates the need for proposals to preserve and enhance local character.

The next Development Plan Document to be produced within the LDF is to be the Reading Central Area Action Plan, which envisages significant high density development in the centre of Reading. The Reading Central Area Action Plan (RCAAP) is to be submitted in March 2008, and the tall buildings strategy will inform its emerging policy. The Plan will contain a tall buildings policy, as well as site-specific guidelines dealing with areas where tall buildings may be appropriate.

As part of the development of the RCAAP, options for the location of tall buildings were consulted upon. The following three options were considered: 'Dispersal', where tall buildings would be appropriate across the whole central area; 'Ring', which would entail a circle of tall buildings roughly in line with the Inner Distribution Road; and 'Clusters', where clusters of tall buildings would be appropriate in suitable locations. 'Clusters' was overwhelmingly the preferred option chosen by the public and it also scored the best in the Sustainability Appraisal.

The Berkshire Structure Plan 2001-2016 includes many of the same themes that are present at the regional level. The Plan directs development to the main settlements, particularly their centres (DP1, DP2, H3, E1, S1), promotes good design that creates a sense of place (DP5), protects and where appropriate enhances the historic environment (EN4), promotes renewable energy and energy conservation (EN8), and ensures higher housing densities in highly-accessible areas (H6).

The Structure Plan also includes a vision for Reading directly linked

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to the Reading City 2020 Vision, and states that “Reading centre will be transformed by high quality large scale mixed use development providing major expansion of employment, retail, leisure and housing in a highly accessible location” (paragraph 3.15).

More detailed guidance on tall buildings in individual areas is contained within the Council’s range of SPGs and SPDs in the central area.

There is some specific guidance in the Design Concept Statement for the Kenavon Drive area on tall buildings. It allows for taller buildings to be developed to the north of the area, without significant visual or daylight impact on existing properties. Higher structures should be located towards the west of the area as a transition to the city centre. Key locations, for instance the western gateway, should be emphasised by developing taller buildings along the western boundary and approach of Kenavon Drive. The scale of buildings should then step down towards the heart of the development along Kenavon Drive and also from the northern portion of the development, to adopt a residential character in line with the scale of Kennet Walk.

The Chatham Street Development Brief notes the potential for a new landmark tower of up to 25 storeys at the prominent northeastern corner. Taller buildings should continue on the northern edge of the site: massing should step down from the tower, but still maintain a scale of ‘civic importance’ (up to 14 storeys). Proposals should include a transitional height zone from the taller buildings within this development to the existing residential area to the west. Building fronting Oxford Road should not exceed 12 storeys, while buildings on the eastern side should step down from the scale of the tower, but can retain a taller massing profile. The view from the south

should be limited to a single landmark building on the deck above the IDR.

The Station Hill South Planning and Urban Design Brief covers an area that is likely to see significant development for taller buildings. The aim is to create a place of character and distinction through the introduction of tall buildings. There will be a series of tall buildings to form an identifiable cluster in the centre, acting as landmarks for Reading and functioning at a local level to mark gateways through the study area. This should demonstrate design excellence, a positive contribution to the skyline, and a positive relationship to other buildings, streets, public and private spaces. It should also acknowledge scale, rights to light and character of surrounding areas. An interesting skyline should be created, with attention paid to the evening skyline.

A prominent iconic building would be located close to the station (not exceeding a nominal height of 135m AOD), with several other landmark tall structures in a cluster to signify and reinforce the importance of the station area. The tallest buildings should be adjacent to the station plaza. Buildings close to the iconic structure should be subservient, but lead the eye upwards towards the landmark. A second key landmark building should punctuate the western end of the study area adjacent to the proposed MRT stop, and should be significantly lower than the building adjacent to the station plaza. This would help to provide local legibility. There should be a gradual increase in scale and mass towards the station, whilst still maintaining the low- and mid-rise character of Friar Street. On Greyfriars Road, shoulder height setbacks of a maximum of 7/8 storeys should be introduced. On most block corners, key buildings should be accentuated to provide additional legibility, and there needs to be frontage on all elevations of tall buildings. Views

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from areas such as Caversham and the River Thames should be considered.

The Borough has policy emerging through the Local Development Framework. The Core Strategy was subject to Examination in September 2007, and the Inspectors Report is expected in December 2007. This document contains the overarching policies to set the context for the development of more detailed guidance in later documents.

One of the key elements of the Spatial Strategy is a concentration of much of the development on the centre of Reading, as the most accessible location in the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-region. This will typically involve medium- to high-density, accessible mixed-use schemes. The Strategy also begins to identify the potential areas for regeneration, noting the West Side/Chatham Street, the Station/River and the East Side.

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character, continuity and enclosure, quality of the public realm, ease of movement and permeability, legibility, adaptability and diversity. The need to create or reinforce local distinctiveness is also vital, as is creating safe and accessible environments. Policy CS33 protects the historic environment, and reiterates the need for proposals to preserve and enhance local character.

The next DPD to be produced within the LDF is to be the Reading Central Area Action Plan, which envisages significant high density development in the centre of Reading. The RCAAP is to be submitted in March 2008, and the tall buildings strategy will inform its emerging policy. The Plan will contain a tall buildings policy, as well as site-specific guidelines dealing with areas where tall buildings may be appropriate.

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# 4 BASELINE REVIEW



## 4.1 Introduction

In keeping with guidance established in the CABE Tall Building Guidance specific baseline information relating to the following topic areas has been collected in order to identify locations where tall buildings would or would not be appropriate:

- A townscape character assessment;
- Topography and flood risk;
- Assessment of the historic context;
- A visual assessment identifying key views both from within the Reading central area and from the wider Reading area.
- Social infrastructure, sustainable travel and open space

Unless otherwise stated, the study area for the baseline review has been restricted to the Reading Central Area as defined in the Reading Central Area Action Plan (Figure 4.1).

In addition a review of the following has also been undertaken:

- Demand and Market Issues in order to determine where there would be the most demand for tall buildings and to ensure that the tall buildings would be occupied.

For each of the criteria assessed a summary of the significance is given under the heading 'conclusion'.

1. CABE (2007) 'Guidance on Tall Buildings' CABE and English Heritage

2. CABE (2000) 'By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System - Towards Better Practice'

## 4.2 Townscape

As required by the CABE document 'Guidance on Tall Buildings' a townscape character assessment of the central Reading area has been undertaken. This exercise develops a clear understanding of the existing townscape character and how it is created to ensure that further development does not harm any areas with a strong, intact character. In doing this, twenty six character areas have been defined. The geographical extent of each character area is shown on Figure 4.1. They have been defined due to similarities in the following criteria:

- Architectural style;
- Urban grain and townscape scale;
- Presence of townscape designations;
- Townscape condition;
- Key views.

The criteria have been informed by the CABE document 'By Design'

<sup>2</sup> Differences in all of these factors result in varying townscape character and different capacities for the inclusion of tall buildings.

Detailed descriptions of each character area and their sensitivity in townscape terms to the development of tall buildings are given in Appendix 1. Those character areas with capacity for tall buildings and no capacity for tall buildings in terms of townscape character are shown on Figure 4.1. Only areas with a low sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings are judged to have some capacity for tall buildings. At this stage the exact height has not been defined; the

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assessment only defines areas which have a level of capacity for buildings over 10 storeys and those which do not. The areas are broad and strategic, and it is not proposed that tall buildings be developed across the entire area. This would not be appropriate in terms of preserving a high level of townscape character and urban design within Reading. Further design guidance is given in chapter 6. Each tall building application, even those within areas defined as being appropriate for tall buildings in townscape terms, must be subject to a detailed assessment process which looks at the surrounding context in terms of building height, block size, historic designations, topography and key local views.

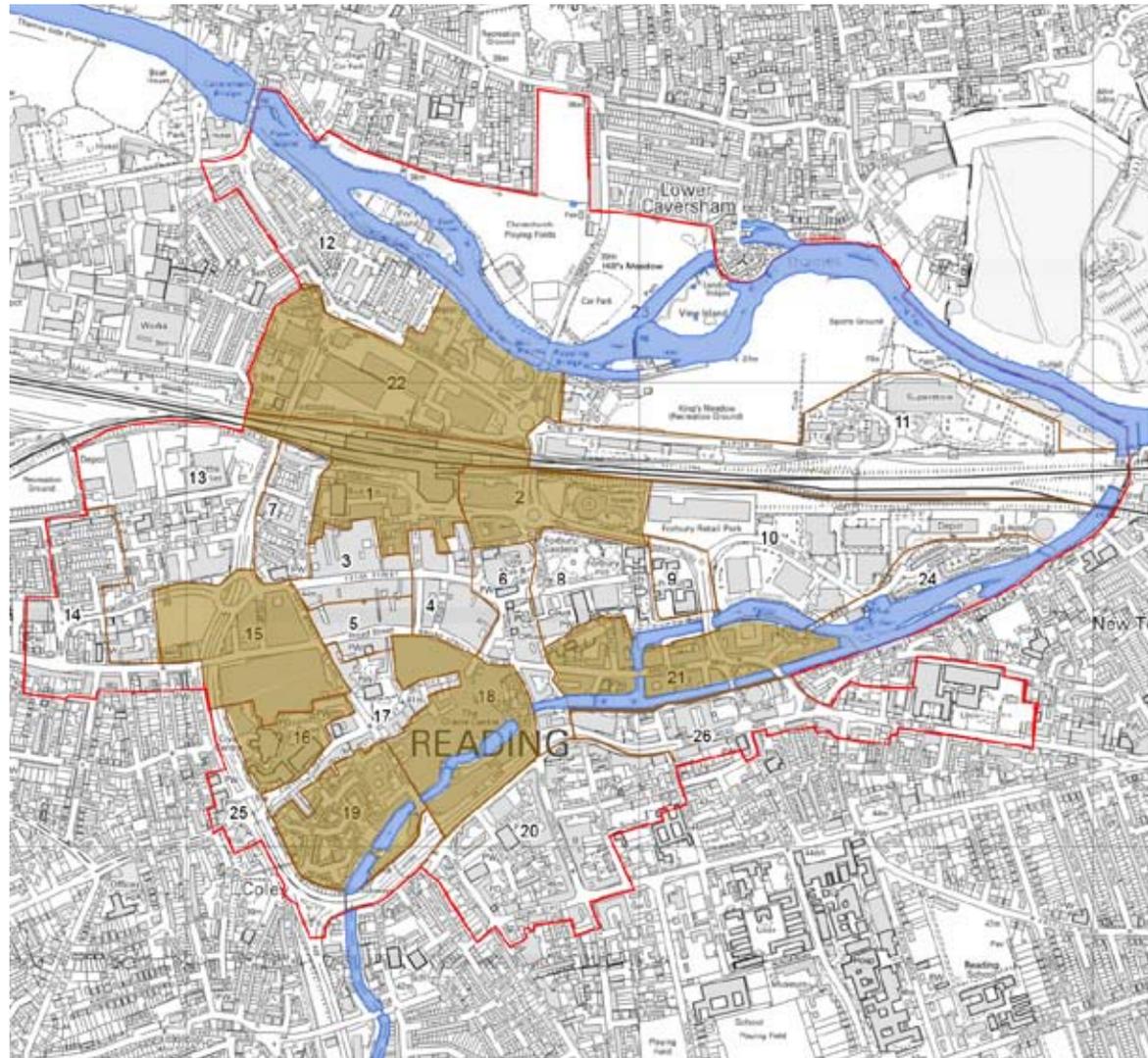
There are 8 character areas which are judged to have a capacity for tall buildings. These areas are largely, but not wholly towards the edges of central Reading, adjacent to major transport routes such as the IDR and the railway line. Within these areas there is an absence of historic built form, and although the building style and heights across these areas is variable, there are characteristically occasional buildings of between 8 and 10 storeys. The buildings were largely constructed during the middle and later stages of the 20th century and have a medium sized or large block size. With the exception of character area 19 'Mallard Row to 'Fobney Street' they all have a predominantly office or industrial land use.

historic built form e.g. the Market Place, which have a distinctive architectural style and character.

### *Conclusion*

The townscape assessment indicates that the central core of the Reading Central Area would be inappropriate for developing tall building. The generally low rise and small/medium scale block size would be detracted from or destroyed by the inclusion of blocky, tall structures. Tall buildings would also overbear the small pockets of

1. Station Hill
  2. Reading station east
  3. Friar Street
  4. Station Road
  5. Broad Street
  6. St.Lawrence and Market Place
  7. Reading Station West
  8. Forbury Gardens
  9. Reading Prison
  10. Forbury Retail Park
  11. Napier Road
  12. Caversham Road
  13. Cattle Market and Chatham Place
  14. Oxford Road and surroundings
  15. Chatham Place
  16. The Civic Centre
  17. St Mary's and Castle Street
  18. The Oracle
  19. Mallard Row to Fobney Street
  20. London Street
  21. Forbury South
  22. Vastern Road
  23. King's Meadow
  24. Kennet Walk
  25. IDR
  26. King's Road
-  Areas with some townscape capacity for tall buildings



**Figure 4.1: Townscape capacity for tall buildings**

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### 4.3 Topography

Reading is located in a river valley at the confluence of the River Thames and the River Kennet. The valley sides rise steeply to Mapledurham and the Chiltern Hills in the north. To the south, the land gently undulates between 35-50m AOD, then rises up to Whitley Wood and Earley to the southeast/east and to Churchend and Tilehurst to the southwest/west. The valley landform facilitates short and mid range views down into the centre of Reading. However the sloping valley sides also ensure that there is a fairly tight visual envelope.

The manner in which Reading has developed on both the southern and northern banks of the River Thames creates an open aspect through the centre of the city and some of the most open and expansive views of the tallest buildings in the centre are experienced from the Thames Footpath to the east and west of central Reading. The River Thames flows through a wide plain subject to regular flooding, and the low lying land associated with it has become a series of parks and towpaths that form, within Reading Borough, a green riverside ribbon from Kennetmouth in the east to the Roebuck in the west. Reading is almost unique amongst large Thameside towns in having a ribbon of green space almost entirely free of development, to most of which the public has free access. The River Kennet is for the most part accessible to the public as it flows through Reading, but its character is almost entirely urban. The course of the river is largely defined by the buildings that enclose it, although in places the towpath opens out to form public open spaces.

#### *Conclusion*

The central area of Reading is fairly consistent in terms of

topography. Topography does drop towards the River Thames and the River Kennet, but the change in topography is not marked. There is therefore no one particular area which is any more or less appropriate in terms of topography itself. There are however implications which result from the topography of the central area itself (e.g. flood risk on the lowest land) and which result from the rising valley sides to the north and south outside of the central area (e.g. implications for views of built form). Both flood risk and visual issues will be discussed below.

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## 4.4 Flooding

A Draft Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has been completed for central Reading. The findings of the assessment are summarised on Figure 4.2. They highlight that north of the railway line, central Reading is subject to flood risks, the majority of the area falling within zones 3a and 3b whereby in accordance with PPS25 only water compatible and less vulnerable land uses should be developed subject to the sequential and exceptions tests. The potential flood risk area associated with the River Kennet, towards the south of central Reading is narrower. Only narrow parcels of land immediately adjacent to the route of the River Kennet fall within zones 3a and 3b. A wider area falls within zone 2 which again imposes some constraints in terms of development.

### *Significance Statement*

Due to potential flood risk, no tall buildings could be developed within zones 3b and constraints may apply to development of tall buildings within zone 3a. Any development within zone 2 would also be constrained.

## 4.5 Historical Assets & Conservation

As recommended in the recently revised CABE/English Heritage Guidance on Tall Buildings (Consultation Draft January 2007) local planning authorities should, as a matter of good practice, carry out an urban design study in order to identify locations where tall buildings would and would not be appropriate. This should take into account historic context through the use of historic characterisation methods of the wider area.

This aspect of the Strategy addresses this requirement and, as advised, follows the model provided by English Heritage's extensive urban surveys.

### **Desk Study**

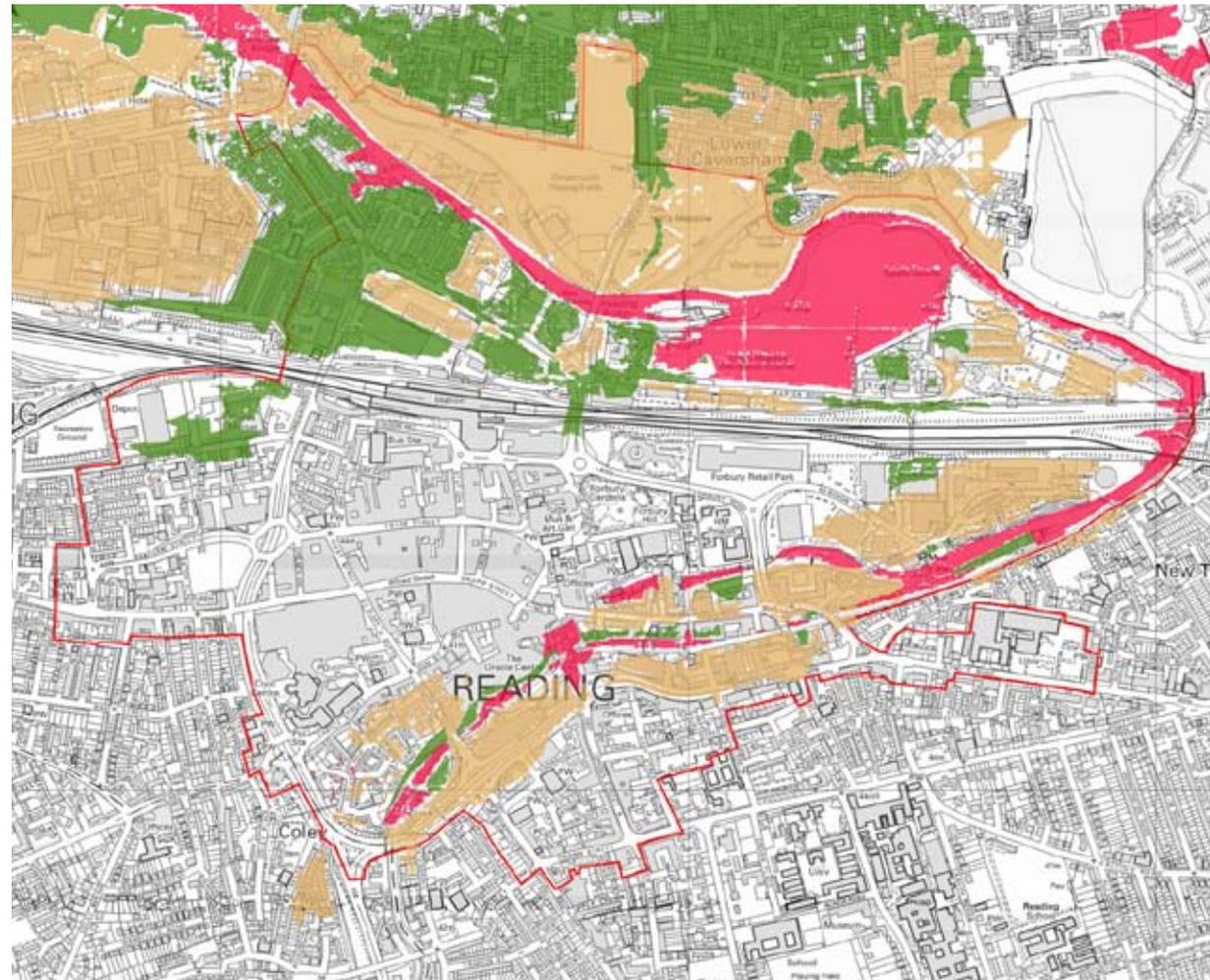
A Desk Study has been carried out which reappraises and synthesises existing information and evidence from various sources, including those relating to historic buildings and conservation areas (Appendix 1). It includes information held in the local Sites and Monuments Record, but is principally based on historic maps and plans. This information is collected and mapped to assist in an analysis of the town plan and the definition of major historic topographic units within the town.

This process of reappraisal generates a clearer picture of how central Reading has evolved through time. The study considers and describes:

- The extent of original historic core areas;
- The extent and location of different periods of expansion;
- The location of past and surviving commercial or industrial areas;

- Zone 3b Functional Floodplain
- Zone 3a High Probability
- Zone 2 Medium Probability

Reference should be made to the Draft Strategic Flood Risk Assessment completed by Jacobs (2007) for accurate flood risk zone boundaries



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Figure 4.2: Indicative flood risk zones

- The survival of historic street patterns and plot boundaries;
- Identification of historic areas which may have been significantly re-modelled in recent times;
- The likely patterns of preservation and survival of archaeological remains and other historic elements throughout the town centre.

Consequentially the study provides a historical development model of central Reading, highlighting the key stages in the historical development of the town and features that are characteristic of the different zones of historic interest and potential. The key phases of historic development which have determined the historic form are:

- Anglo-Saxon Foundation:AD 500-1121
- Ecclesiastical Town: AD1121-1539
- Post-Dissolution Reading: AD1539-1840
- Railway Town and growth of manufacturing and commerce: post-1840

This analysis informs the more detailed townscape assessment, where individual character areas are considered in relation to their relationship to the town during each of the four identified phases.

#### *Significance Statement*

The town was originally part of the Royal estate of the Saxon kings of Wessex and is particularly notable for the part it played in the conflicts with Viking invaders that formed the context in which King Alfred the Great established a strengthened Saxon kingdom in the 9th/10th century. Alfred established his authority as a war leader during battles with Viking forces who established their campaign

headquarters at Reading. Stories based on these events and Alfred's subsequent achievements, in many instances recorded as contemporary histories, have endured as part of national identity and remain widely popular.

However, the historic development of Reading is principally notable for the ecclesiastical town founded by Henry I, which was dominated by the Abbey. Not only did this establish the extent of the historic core of Reading, which survived largely unchanged until the mid-19th century, but it also gave rise to institutions and traditions of local governance that can be directly traced to the current Borough Council and established an enterprise culture which outlived the Abbey and is largely responsible for the character of the modern town.

#### **Implications for Tall Buildings Strategy**

An historic core area can be defined as the extent of the medieval ecclesiastical town. Buildings of historic character, and in some instance importance, may occur beyond this core area, in areas that formed part of later phases of urban expansion, but which do not reflect the time depth that is a characteristic of the historic core area.

The historic core, therefore, forms a discrete part of the central area and its sensitivity is recognized by the presence of two scheduled monuments, a registered historic park and two conservation areas, along with numerous Listed Buildings. These designations place restrictions on the form of development that might be regarded appropriate and are governed by policies that seek to protect and enhance the historic character.

The analysis of the development of the town set out in this report describes the dynamics that have been largely responsible for the

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historic character, which is described in detail in the Market Place/ London Road Conservation Area appraisal, but can also be taken as representative of the wider historic core area. Notably the road layout reflects the medieval urban form, but the architectural qualities are largely derived from the latter phases. In particular the extent of the medieval town is no longer readily discernable as its principal architectural focus, the Abbey only exists as fragments, which are often ruinous, and the other principal expression, the road layout, is encapsulated within the 19th and 20th century expansion. In this context Reading's historic environment, whilst clearly expressing its later historic and architectural qualities largely fails to articulate the most significant aspect of the local cultural heritage, and as a consequence those elements that are extant, such as the parish churches and ruined remains of the Abbey lack cohesion and context.

The prospect of locating tall buildings within the Reading central area will clearly need to be mindful of the sensitivity of the historic core area, but there is an opportunity to consider locations in close proximity in order to re-establish an architectural focus that might contribute to efforts to more clearly express the significance of the surviving medieval urban form.

Such an arrangement would clearly reference the character of the original medieval town form, which included a building which contrasted in mass, scale and height to its surroundings (the Abbey). Clearly this would be a challenging prospect, however, if integrated in a fashion that engaged with and helped articulate the historic core area, it could play a significant role in sustaining the local historic environment.

## 4.6 Visual context

The introduction of tall buildings to the centre of Reading has the potential to significantly alter the skyline as experienced by viewers both within the central area, and from further afield. Views of tall buildings can be both a positive and a negative feature. They can enhance certain views, providing a focal point, and detract from others, forming an unsympathetic backdrop to important townscape features, or becoming an uncharacteristic feature of views from tranquil rural landscapes.

The assessment of views and visual experience has been two fold. The first step was an assessment of the existing visual envelope and secondly the identification of key views within the visual envelope.

### Identification of key views

Key views identified include the following:

- Views within central Reading of designated townscapes or townscape features which are integral to the creation of character;
- Views within central Reading which, by virtue of the townscape pattern and topography are of a pleasing composition e.g. well framed, panoramic or are focused by a large scale, distinctive feature;
- Views of central Reading from the wider Reading Borough, which are tunnelled along roads or river valleys;
- Panoramic views of Central Reading from the wider Reading Borough;
- Attractive, rural views where the absence of large scale built form is a characteristic feature.

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The key views have been described and assessed under two headings. These are 'views within the city centre' and 'views into central Reading'. A description is given of the composition of the view which covers the main components and the characteristics of the foreground, middle ground and background.

Each of the key views has been attributed a sensitivity judgement. This is a judgement of the sensitivity of the view to the addition of a tall building. The criteria for making the sensitivity judgement are given in table 3.1 of Appendix 1. In identifying the sensitivity of each view, and highlighting the key characteristics of each view, information is provided as to whether an additional tall building would be an appropriate addition. There is a general presumption that all high sensitivity views would not be suited to the addition of a tall building. However, a decision regarding the appropriateness of each tall building proposal should be made on a case by case basis. Information given in Appendix 1 on the key components of each view, and the character of the view should be used when making decision as to whether the tall building in question would have an adverse visual impact.

The location of each high sensitivity view has been taken into consideration when defining the 'preferred tall building locations', and is shown below in Figure 4.3

#### **Views within central Reading**

The location of the key views and strategic views and the photographs demonstrating them are shown in Appendix 1.

Only the strategic views are detailed here. They are:

- A: Along Market Place towards St Lawrence's Church;
- B: Along Friar Street to St Lawrence's church and the Town

Hall;

- C: Along St Mary's Butts to St Mary's church;
- D: From Castle Street to St Mary's church;
- F: From Forbury Gardens towards Abbey Street;
- G: Along Queen Victoria Street towards John Lewis building;
- K: Along west Street to Greyfriar's church;
- M: Eastwards along Castle Street;
- N: North-westwards across King's Meadows;
- P: From Caversham Bridge westwards.

Views within the central area which are judged to have the potential to be improved by the inclusion of tall or very tall buildings are as follows:

- I: Along the Kennet and Avon Canal westwards;
- J: Along the Kennet and Avon Canal eastwards.

In both cases the view is currently framed by tall buildings of large block sizes. Further tall buildings of a high quality and complimentary design would further strengthen this feature of the view.

#### **Long range views**

The location of the long range key views and strategic views are shown in Appendix 1.

Only the strategic views are detailed here. They are:

- 3: From the grounds of the University of Reading, Whiteknights camps;
- 4: From 'The Mount' towards Caversham Park;





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Figure 4.3: Long range high sensitivity views

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- 7: From the Thames Path East of Reading;
  - 8: From rural road north of Maple Durham;
  - 9: From footpath east of Maple Durham;
  - 11: From Dunsden Way, south of Dunsden Green;
  - 12: From Hurst Road, Twyford, North West of Reading;
  - 14: From Balmore Park;
  - 18: from the Thames path, East of Reading;
  - 19: From Palmer Park;
  - 22: from footbridge over the M4;
  - 24: From Caversham Park;
  - 28: View from Caversham Gardens.

Views which are judged to have the potential to be improved by the inclusion of tall buildings are as follows:

- 5: From the A372 south of Central Reading;
- 10: From A329 adjacent to Gower Street;
- 17: From the A4 West of Reading;
- 21: From Reading Bridge;
- 25: From Bridge over the River Kennet, east of the A33;
- 23: From A4155 adjacent to Coley Hill;
- 26: Along the A33 towards Reading.

Detailed descriptions of the reasoning behind these judgements are given in Appendix 1. However, broadly long distance views which have the potential for improvement via the inclusion of a tall building

are views of townscape features which are of a poor quality and with a weak character or where the addition of a tall building would improve the quality of the view and add focus.

#### *Conclusion*

The visual assessment has identified a number of key views both within central Reading and from the surrounding landscape which are key to the character of the settlement. Careful consideration should be given on a case by case basis to how proposed tall buildings impact upon these key views, specifically how they will alter the character of the view, and how they will respond to surrounding townscape features and the wider skyline.

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## 4.7 Social Infrastructure

Increased residential densities across the centre will undoubtedly increase the need for development to be accompanied by additional or improved social infrastructure. It may also present challenges in terms of accommodating such needs within sites that include tall buildings, although there are increasing examples elsewhere of facilities such as schools being provided within mixed taller buildings. A study examining the community infrastructure needs associated with the provisions of the RCAAP, including any identified need for tall buildings, is underway, and is expected to report in early 2008.

### *Conclusion*

The inclusion of tall buildings would result in an increased number of people within Reading. The exact needs of the increased population would be dependent on the nature of the use of the tall buildings. The findings of the study examining community infrastructure should be taken into consideration by planning officers when assessing the appropriateness of tall building applications.

## 4.8 Sustainable travel

The key transport routes identified as part of the baseline assessment are shown on Figure 4.5.

The implicit density resulting from the introduction of a tall buildings cluster within an existing urban fabric implies an increase in the number of people commuting, and hence an increase in the resulting carbon footprint. However, it can in fact assist in reducing energy intensive travel patterns if certain factors are taken into consideration with respect to the location, design and new infrastructure.

It is therefore important that as part of the site selection process, the current transport and commuting-related situation is assessed. For this we propose to indicate the following two physical factors in relation to the identified optional sites:

- Distances to public transport network and nodes; and
- Distances to basic amenities (currently located around the station area and the city centre)

Once these have been identified, while it will be beneficial at a later stage to assess their capacity with respect to the proposed influx that a development of this scale brings, the opportunities for improvement will become clear. Improvement will not only be beneficial to the new development, but also to the existing neighbourhood where, say, unsatisfactory infrastructure is noted.

As a guide, the IHT recommend that new developments should be located so that public transport trips involve a walking distance of 400m from the nearest bus stop and 800m from the nearest railway station. In city centres, the walking distance from a bus stop should be less than 200m. The opportunity for interchange between different

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parts of the public transport network should also be included, with the appropriate walk and wait times.

The walking distance to a railway station in a city centre should ideally be 400m and appropriately linked by other forms of transport beyond this catchment area. This measure will also be useful in identifying new infrastructural and amenity requirements within and around the selected cluster site.

As central Reading is the focus of the local transport routes and contains the station which connects Reading with the rest of the U.K, the central area is the most accessible location within the Borough in terms of sustainable transport methods. This level of accessibility is not currently provided anywhere else in the Borough.

#### **Rating criteria**

Based on the outline principles for sustainable travel the following criteria have been used to rate the character areas with respect to travel options (in order of priority).

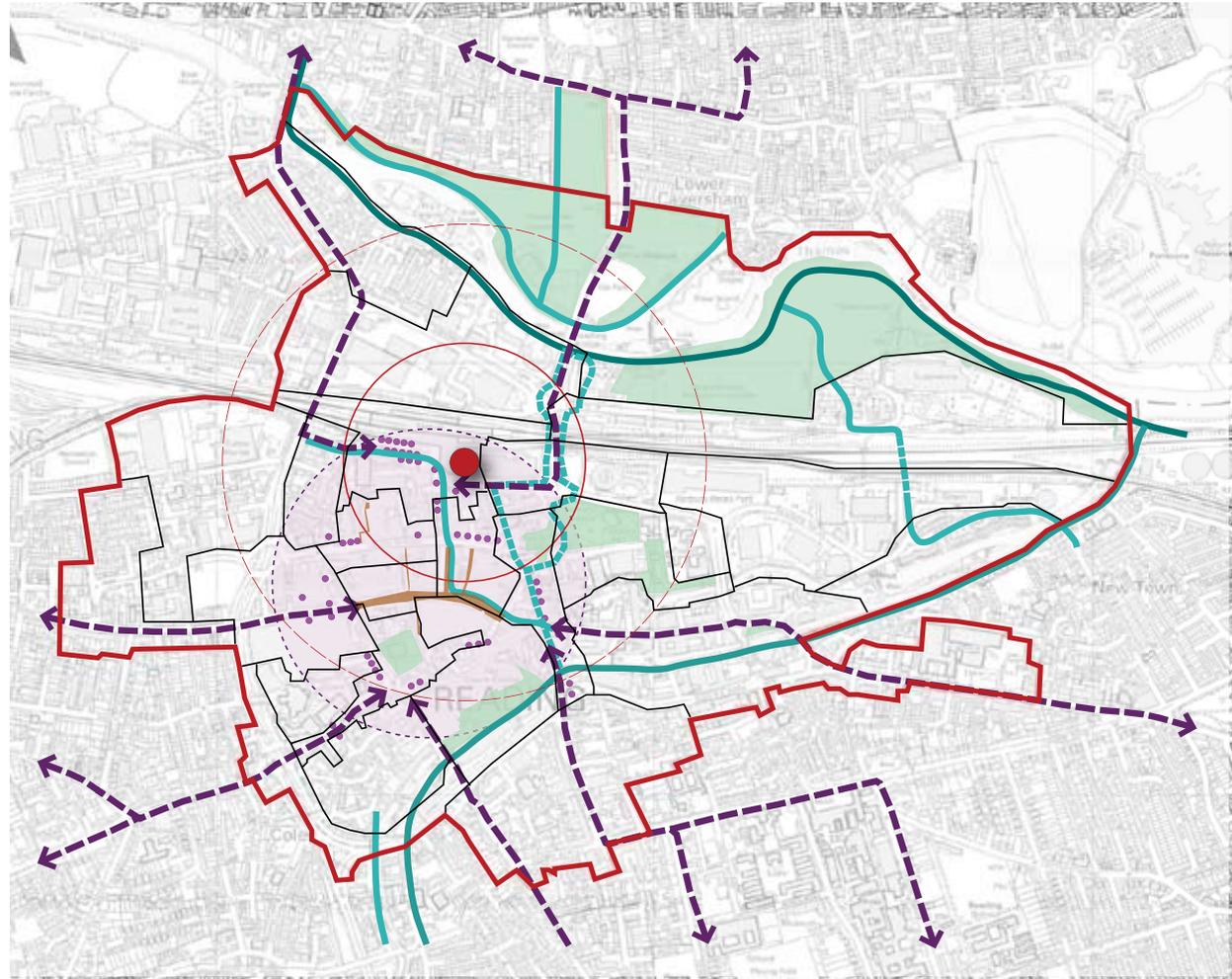
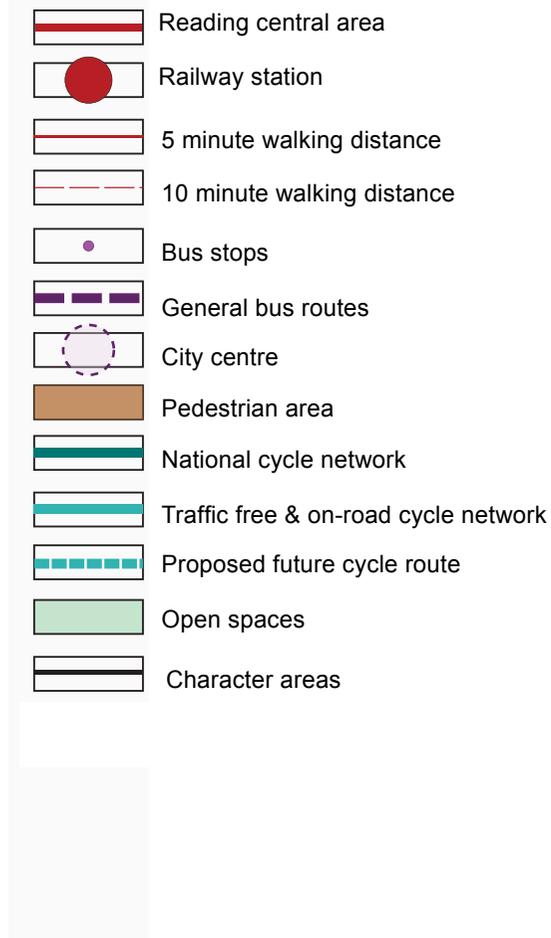
- a) 10 minutes accessible and safe walking distance from the railway station ;
- b) 10 minutes accessible and safe walking distance from Central Reading;
- c) Main bus route crosses within 7 minutes accessible and safe walking distance
- d) Main cycling route crosses through substantial part of character area;
- e) None of the above and requires improvement to sustainable means of travel.

The individual character areas are rated in the following way for their existing infrastructural capacity to encourage sustainable travel.

- Very good location for sustainable travel;
- Good location for sustainable travel;
- Infrastructural improvements required to encourage sustainable travel;
- Significant infrastructural improvements required to encourage sustainable travel.

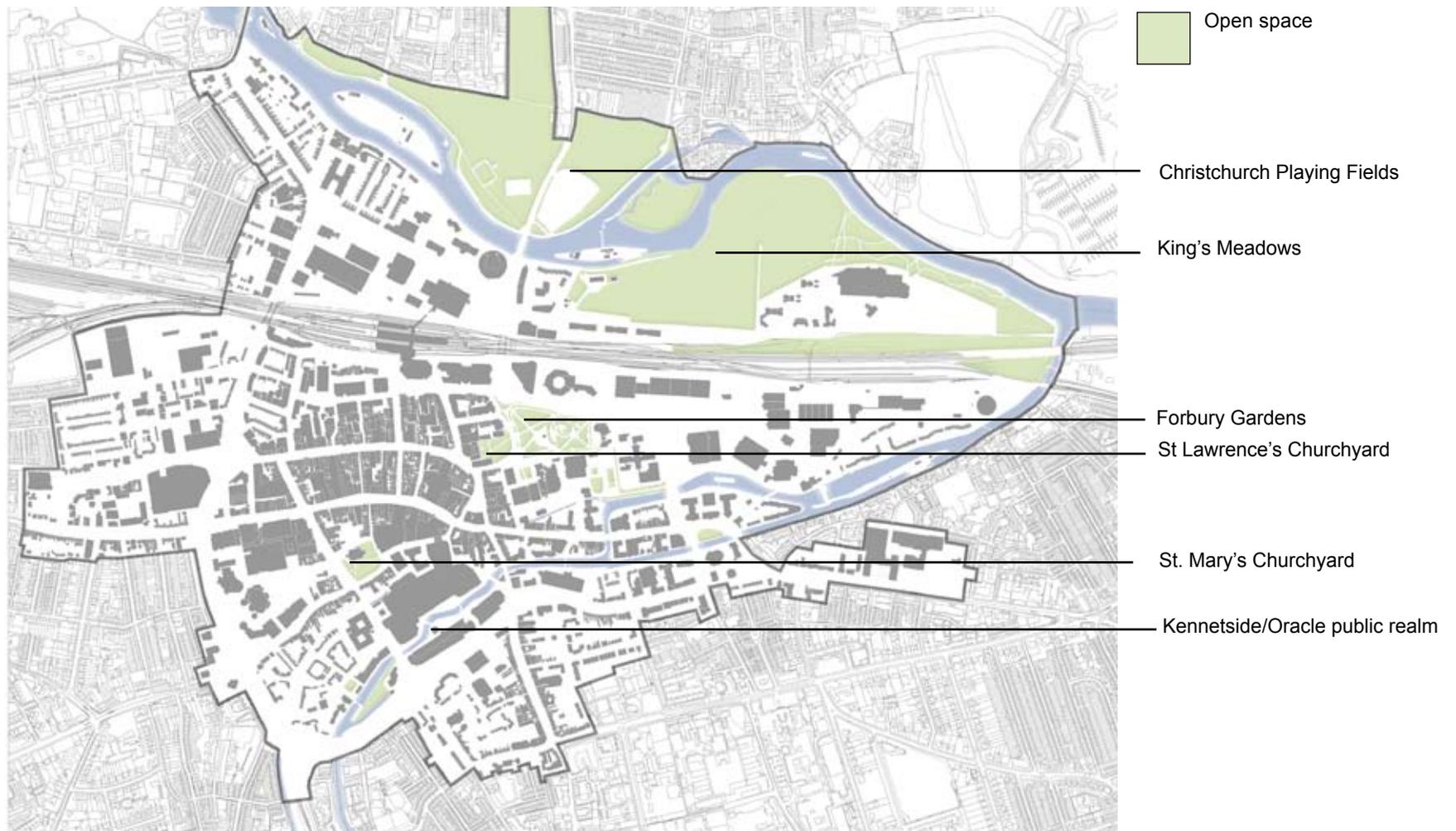
It is important to note that:

- Accessibility by personal transport (by car) is ignored in this exercise as it is deemed unsustainable, and although most areas are accessible by this means of transport, current congestion problems and a traffic impact study are outside the scope of this study;
- A character area that scores a low rating in terms of sustainable modes of travel is highlighting a potential opportunity for improvement of the existing infrastructural provision for the current occupants/users;
- Although it is suggested at times that the current public transport provision is adequate, this is only referring to accessibility to the bus main routes and bus stops but does not consider the possible needs for improvement in capacity as a result of an increase in density brought about by a tall building cluster development;
- In general, the presence of safe cycling routes in Reading is poor and there is scope for improvement of the current cycle network.



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Figure 4.5: Transport links analysis



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**Figure 4.6: Green Space**

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The rating given for each character area in sustainable transport terms are shown in Chapter 5.

## 4.8 Open space

The CABI guidance on tall buildings states that,

‘The development should interact with and contribute positively to its surroundings at street level; it should contribute to safety, diversity, vitality, social engagement and ‘sense of place’. (pp5 – CABI guidance on tall Buildings)’

The key public spaces within Central Reading have been mapped on Figure 4.5. These are open/civic spaces which will be protected by planning policy. Assessment of the potential impact of tall buildings on each of these protected open spaces is made as part of the assessment of townscape character. The assessment considers the potential changes to character which would be experienced as a result of introducing tall buildings with a large block size in close proximity to the areas of open space.

### *Conclusion*

No tall buildings can be developed on the areas of protected open space. Consideration should be given on a case by case basis of the potential impact of tall buildings upon the existing open spaces shown on Figure 4.6

The existing public transport nodes and amenities are measured against a radius that is considered to be an ‘acceptable’ walking distance.

## 4.9 Market Analysis

The construction of a tall building within Reading should form the focus of a development of a specific area of the town rather than be perceived as an individual scheme in isolation. Given the importance of the rail link and taking into consideration schemes either under construction or in the planning pipeline there are currently two distinct areas of the office market in Reading where a tall building is potentially viable (sites north and south of the station).

Over the longer-term there will be greater scope for more tall buildings upon other sites around the town centre, most notably locations to the east and west of Reading. However, most notably for the latter to succeed the area will require large scale regeneration in order to improve upon occupier’s current perception of the area and impact positively upon the achievable rental levels.

Reference should also be made to the separate market analysis report completed by Knight Frank.

# 5 BASELINE ANALYSIS

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## 5.1 Analysis of Character Areas

Using the baseline information collected, an analysis has been made of the potential for developing 'tall' buildings in each of the character areas defined. As stated above in section 4.2, the whole study area has been split into character areas. The character areas have been used as a geographical basis for analysing the suitability for the development of tall buildings. Each character area was assessed to determine the potential for developing tall buildings in terms of townscape character. A number of character areas were immediately ruled out as tall building locations, within the townscape and visual character assessment (see Appendix 1). Reasons for character areas being ruled out include status as a Conservation Area, a strong, distinctive and valued architectural style, a small scale, residential urban form or a consistently low rise skyline. Only areas judged to have a low sensitivity to the development of tall buildings in townscape terms (which includes an analysis of historical importance) are taken forward as possible tall building locations.

The eight areas which were not ruled out due to townscape character considerations are listed in the tables below and details given on how they perform in relation to the other baseline assessment criteria. There is no weighting for any of the criteria considered. All criteria are judged to be of equal importance for the purpose of this assessment.

It is recognised that the character areas do not exist independently of one another. Any development on the south side of character area 1 for example, will have indirect effects on character area 3. The most obvious indirect effect would be as a result of an altered skyline. In recognition of this fact, for each character area below, proximity to adjacent sensitive townscape/historical features (Conservation

Areas and Listed Buildings) is noted and any visual sensitivities are highlighted.

### Character Area 1: Station Hill

Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The large townscape scale and the precedence for tall structures, contribute to this area having a high capacity for the development of further tall buildings in terms of townscape character.
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce: post 1840.  Any tall building development should be sensitive to the setting of the listed station building and Great western House (now Malmaison).
Surrounding historical sensitivities	The character area is located approximately 250m away from Forbury Gardens at its nearest point. Tall buildings within the character area e.g. Thames Tower, already form a feature of views from the park, creating a strong identity as a central Reading park.  The character area is located approximately 100metres away from the Market Place at the nearest point. Any tall building development should consider the potential impact of tall buildings on views experienced within the Market Place.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been defined.
Key views into the character area	Views of current buildings within the character area are possible from the A4, A327 and A33 when travelling into the city.  Buildings within the character area form elements of the view from various points within central Reading, including Forbury Gardens.  From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Tall buildings planning applications	The 2007 application for the Station hill site proposes residential units together with office, retail, arts and leisure uses. The tallest building would range from 150-161 metres.
Market demand	This location is considered prime in terms of the office market due to its proximity to the station and core amenities in the centre.
Flood Risk	The area is not covered by either the Zone 3A, 3B or 2 flood risk zones.
Transport	Very good: The area is in the main within 10 minutes walking distance of the train station.
Suitability as a location for tall buildings	High: The large townscape scale and the precedence for tall structures, all contribute to this area having a high capacity for the development of further tall buildings. There is a good level of market demand for the site and it is a sustainable location in terms of transport provisions. As has been noted, any tall building development should seek to mitigate potential visual effects on surrounding sensitive heritage features e.g. the Market Place and Forbury Gardens.

### Character Area 2: Station Area East

Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The high density of development within the character area, the characteristic large block size and the absence of historic townscape features within the area ensures a low sensitivity to the development of further tall buildings. The absence of any key views also contributes to this being an appropriate location when judged against townscape character criteria.
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce: post 1840
Surrounding historical sensitivities	Forbury Gardens is located immediately to the east of the character area.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been identified within the character area.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Market demand	This location is considered prime in terms of the office market due to its proximity to the station and core amenities in the centre.
Flood Risk	The area is not covered by either the Zone 3A, 3B or 2 flood risk zones.
Transport	Good: More than half of the area falls within 10 minutes walking distance of the train station, is relatively close to central Reading and the station area amenities and has relatively good provision and access to public transport. In addition, a future National Cycle Network route is proposed.
Suitability as a location for tall buildings	High: The high density of development within the character area, the characteristic large block size and the absence of historic townscape features within the area ensures a low sensitivity to the development of further tall buildings. The area performs well in terms of sustainable transport provisions. Although, as has been noted, the character area is located in close proximity to Forbury Gardens, any impacts resulting from the development of tall buildings within this character area would be experienced indirectly by receptors in Forbury gardens. Views of tall buildings within Reading are an existing and characteristic feature of the Gardens.

### Character Area 15: Chatham Place

Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Medium: The existing built form is large scale and blocky, ensuring that tall buildings would not result in a significant change to the urban grain. The absence of notable townscape features ensures a suitability for re-development. However, careful consideration should be given on a case by case basis to how tall buildings would impact upon key views along West Street to Greyfriar's Church and to how they would be viewed from, or impact upon views of, St. Mary's Church. It is proposed that new buildings directly abutting St. Mary's Butts should not be tall structures. Any tall buildings should be set back from this road and the Conservation Area.
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Surrounding historical sensitivities	The St Mary's/Castle Hill Conservation Area is located to the south.
Key views within the character area	Along West Street to Greyfriar's Church
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west.  From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Market demand	The occupier perception of the area is very poor.
Flood risk	The area is not covered by either the Zone 3A, 3B or 2 flood risk zones.
Transport	Significant infrastructural improvements required: This character area is cut off from the station and city centre and has poor provision of public transport and cycle routes.
Suitability as a location for tall buildings	High: The existing built form is large scale and blocky, ensuring that tall buildings would not result in a significant change to the urban grain. The absence of notable townscape features ensures a suitability for re-development. However, careful consideration should be given on a case by case basis to how tall buildings would impact upon key views along West Street to Greyfriar's Church and to how they would be viewed from, or impact upon views of, St. Mary's Church. It is proposed that new buildings directly abutting St. Mary's Butts should not be tall structures. Any tall buildings should be set back from this road and the Conservation Area.

### Character Area 16: The Civic Centre

Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: Due to the large scale of the individual elements of the character area, a tall building would not appear uncharacteristic. A tall building could provide structure and focus to the character area which is currently composed of poor quality, undistinguished buildings which creates a weak townscape character. However, careful consideration should be given to retaining glimpsed views to St. Mary's church and the surrounding Conservation Area and it is essential that the building does not become an intrusive and dominant feature of the skyline of views towards St. Mary's Conservation Area.
Historical significance	Anglo Saxon Foundation: AD 500-1121 Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Surrounding historical sensitivities	St. Mary's Church in the St. Mary's/Castle Hill Conservation Area is located adjacent to the character area. Castle Street to the south of the area contains numerous Listed Buildings.
Key views within the character area	Views from the Civic Centre to St. Mary's Church and Conservation Area
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west.  From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Market demand	This area could be developed for tall buildings but should be considered as a long term aspiration. Tall buildings would have to be developed following, or alongside significant urban renewal and public realm enhancements.
Flood risk	The area is not covered by either the Zone 3A, 3B or 2 flood risk zones.
Transport	Infrastructural improvements required: This character area is within walking distance of the centre and main bus routes but is relatively distant from the railway station and existing cycle routes.
Suitability as a location for tall buildings	High: Due to the large scale of the individual elements of the character area, a tall building would not appear uncharacteristic. A tall building could provide structure and focus to the character area which is currently composed of poor quality, undistinguished buildings which creates a weak townscape character. However, careful consideration should be given to retaining glimpsed views to St. Mary's church and the surrounding Conservation Area. It is essential that the building does not become an intrusive and dominant feature of the skyline of views towards St. Mary's Conservation area.

### Character Area 18: The Oracle

Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The large block size and existing landmark structures (e.g. spire on the car park) create a high capacity for the development of tall buildings. However, consideration should be given on a case by case basis to how the development would impact on the skyline above St Mary's church and the surrounding Conservation Area.
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to the Russel Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area
Surrounding historical sensitivities	The character area is adjacent to st Mary's/Castle Street Conservation Area.
Key views within the character area	Views along the Kennet and Avon canal eastwards
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Tall building planning applications	-
Market demand	-
Flood risk	The area is covered by small pockets of zones 3a and 3b flood risk, and the majority of the area falls within the zone 2 flood risk area.
Transport	INfrastructural improvements required: the area is within walking distance of the centre and main bus routes, signed on-road cycle routes and the National Cycle network traffic free routes, but the majority of the site is relatively distant from the railway station.
Suitability as a location for tall buildings	Moderate: The large block size and absence of historic features within the site create some capacity for tall buildings. However, consideration should be given to the sensitivity of the adjacent St. Marys Butts and Conservation Area. The area does not perform well in terms of sustainable transport provisions, and there area also significant flood risk considerations.

### Character Area 19: Mallard Row to Fobney Street

Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The area is characterised by apartment block buildings which are taller than the average residential built form in Reading. The apartment blocks create a medium sized townscape scale and urban grain. Buildings up to 10 storeys would not appear uncharacteristic in townscape terms. However, should built form taller than 10 storeys be proposed, careful consideration should be given to how the increased scale and density of development would impact upon St. Mary's Butts Conservation Area.
Historical significance	Anglo-Saxon Foundation: AD 50-1121 Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to the St. Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area.
Surrounding historical sensitivities	The St. Mary's/castle street conservation Area is adjacent to the northern boundary of the character area.
Key views within the area	No key views within the character area have been defined.
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Market demand	The perception of this area by occupiers is poor.
Flood Risk	The area is covered by small pockets of zones 3a and 3b flood risk, and the majority of the area falls within the zone 2 flood risk area.
Transport	Infrastructural improvements required: the area is within walking distance of the centre and main bus routes, but the majority of the site is relatively distant from the railway station and existing cycle networks.
Suitability as a location for tall buildings	Moderate: The presence of existing tall apartment buildings ensures that buildings of a similar height would not be uncharacteristic. However, should built form taller than 10 storeys be proposed, careful consideration should be given to how the increased scale and density of development would impact upon St. Mary's Butts Conservation Area. The area does not perform well in terms of sustainable transport provisions. The poor market perception also detracts from the suitability of this area for tall buildings.

### Character Area 21: Forbury South

Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The existing large block size and the presence of buildings up to 7 storeys and construction of a building up to 15 storeys ensures that a building of up a similar height would not be uncharacteristic. However, due to proximity to Reading Abbey, careful consideration should be given on a case by case basis to potential visual impacts which may result.
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD 1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading; AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840. Blake's cottages are listed structures within the character area.
Surrounding historical sensitivities	The character area is located approximately 150m from Reading Abbey (Scheduled Ancient Monument).
Key views within the character area	View along Wallington Street to the twin spires of St. John's Church and the Methodist Chapel.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Tall buildings planning applications	Abbey Mill House is a 15 storey building with planning permission. There is an application for a building up to 14 storeys on the site of the existing King's Point building which has been permitted.
Market demand	The site is not located ideally for tall buildings due to the distance from the station. There is some potential for the site as a secondary office location, although it is considered that when abbey Mill House is developed, it may satisfy the market need for tall buildings without the need for further development.
Flood risk	The majority of the area falls within zone 2 for flood risk. The area closest to the Kennet falls within zone 3a.
Transport	Significant infrastructural improvements required: The site has good access to public transport routes that link to the centre and station area but is otherwise poorly situated in terms of alternative and sustainable means of travel. A National Cycle Network traffic free route crosses through the length of the area and a link to the centre signed on road route is proposed for the future.
Suitability as a location for tall buildings	High: Although the area is not currently considered to be optimum in terms of market demand, the development of Abbey Mill House will raise the profile of this part of Reading. The existing large block size and the presence of buildings up to 7 storeys and construction of a building up to 15 storeys ensures that a building of up a similar height would not be uncharacteristic. However, due to proximity to Reading Abbey, careful consideration should be given on a case by case basis to potential visual impacts which may result.

### Character Area 22: Vastern Road

Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The large block size which exists within the character area and the absence of any key views or visual focal point makes this an appropriate location for tall buildings. However it is proposed that tall structures should not be developed along the north and western boundaries of the character area as these boundaries are shared with small scale residential areas. any proposed built form should respond in terms of height and scale to the residential area. The tallest structures should be located to the south of the character area, adjacent to the railway line. In this area the townscape features are larger scale, and adjacent to large scale features outside of the area e.g. existing station buildings, Thames Tower and Western Tower.
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840.
Surrounding historical sensitivities	The nearest historical designation is the Market Place conservation Area which is located approximately 300m to the south.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been identified for this area
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Market demand	Currently not considered a major office location although should development around the station be successful in delivering 360 degree accessibility (rather than focusing on the established links to the south of the train line) the location would be sought after by occupiers.
Flood risk	The majority of the area falls within the zone 2 flood risk zone.
Transport	Infrastructural improvements required: Although this area is close to the railway station, access across the railway is poor and will require improvement to take full advantage of its location. The links to the city centre are also poor but two main bus routes cross the area at either end. A future National Cycle Network traffic free route is proposed that would link the existing National Cycle Network traffic-free route along the river to the station area and city centre from one side of the character area.
Suitability as a location for tall buildings	High: The large block size which exists within the character area and the absence of any key views or visual focal point makes this an appropriate location for tall buildings. There are no key views which could be blocked by development of tall buildings. In order for tall building development within this area to be viable in terms of market considerations, there would need to be associated public realm enhancements and enhanced accessibility to improve market perception of the area.

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## 5.2 Conclusion of analysis

Having summarised the baseline information for each character area, and made consideration of the sensitivities of each according to each of the baseline analysis topics, the following areas have been judged most appropriate for the development of tall buildings.

- Site 1: Character area 1 – Station Hill
- Site 2: Character area 2 – Station Road East
- Site 3: Character area 15 – Chatham Place
- Site 4: Character area 16 - Civic Centre
- Site 5: Character area 21 - Kings Road
- Site 6: Character area 22 – Vastern Road

Although the preferred locations broadly share the same boundaries as the character areas, the boundaries have been altered to accommodate the identified key views, i.e. in the southern section of character area 16 where the development of a tall building would block the identified key views of St Mary's church.

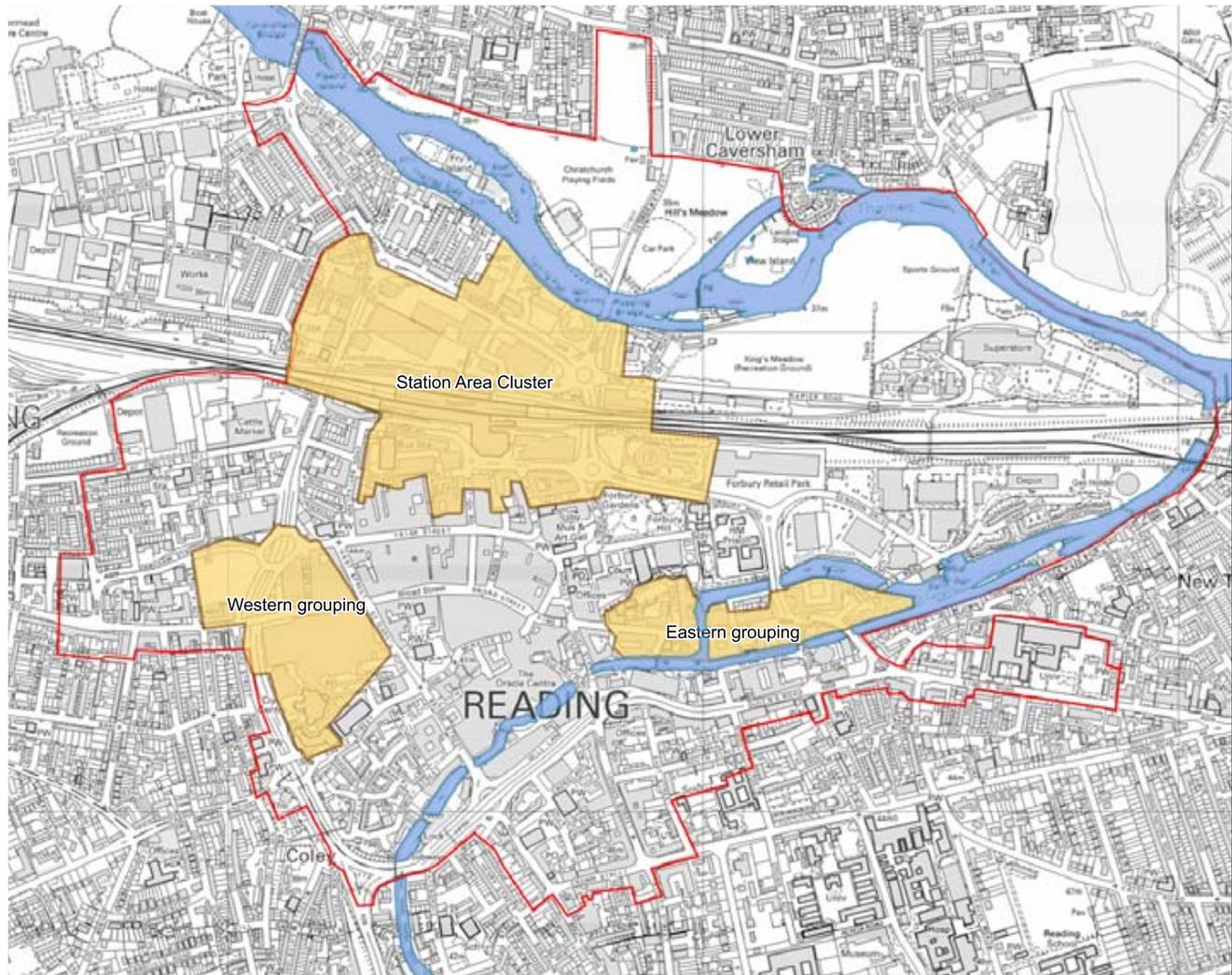
As character areas 12, 2 and 22 are adjacent to one another, and character areas 15 and 16 are adjacent to one another, there has been a grouping of character areas. The following three areas have been created as 'Preferred tall building locations'.

- Station Area Cluster
- Eastern Grouping
- Western Grouping.

Their geographical extent is shown on Figure 5.1.

Although these clusters have been defined as appropriate for tall buildings, there remain detailed design criteria to be considered during decision making processes. These criteria must be taken into consideration at all stages from the initial design phase to the planning approval phase. It would not be appropriate for the entire area to be developed with buildings over 10 storeys. It is necessary to adhere to best practice principles of urban design. General principles of good practice in designing tall buildings, and specific design principles for the 'Preferred tall building locations', are detailed in Chapter 6.

 Preferred Tall Building Locations



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**Figure 5.1: Preferred tall building locations**

# 6 DESIGN GUIDELINES

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## 6.1 Preferred Tall Building Locations

These are areas which have been reached following the extensive baseline assessment detailed in previous chapters above. They are areas which have been identified as suitable for the introduction of taller buildings. In defining these areas it should be noted that there would be a general presumption against the development of buildings significantly taller than the surrounding buildings outside of these locations.

Although these clusters have been defined as appropriate for tall buildings, it would not be acceptable for the entire area to be developed with buildings over 10 storeys. There remain detailed design criteria to be considered during decision making processes at all stages from the initial design phase to the planning approval phase. It is necessary to adhere to best practice principles.

## 6.2 Principles

The introduction of tall buildings to an area will alter the existing character. In some cases this will be advantageous as the existing townscape character is poor, but in other instances there will be existing characteristics of the townscape which are positive and should be conserved. In order to provide clear guidance on how the proposed tall buildings should be introduced to each area, principles have been developed. The principles fall into the following two categories:

- General principles – good practice which should always be adhered to when developing tall buildings; and
- Site specific principles – guidance on the proposed character of the preferred tall building locations; indicative building heights; tall building typology and building densities and urban form.

The tall building typologies which would be used are as follows:

- The Supplementary Tower within the Context of Existing Tall Development: Such developments are usually attached to high capacity infrastructure associated with the existing development and consolidate a cluster of tall development. This typology is potentially the least complicated to integrate into existing urban patterns.
- The Solitary Tower: The development of single tall buildings within the context of smaller buildings reflects some of the issues and problems associated with the residential tower block model of the 1960's. However certain sites, such as those that terminate vistas or mark distinct areas of the city and a solitary tower can contribute positively to the skyline.

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- **New Clusters of Tall Buildings:** Usually within the context of comprehensive redevelopment / regeneration projects, the creation of new clusters of tall buildings is widely accepted as the most positive means of introducing tall forms into the skyline of a city. As well as making for more efficient public transport systems, clustering tall buildings can have distinct advantages in terms of design, infrastructure, and townscape quality.

## 6.3 General principles

It is vital that new tall buildings should not merely be allowed on the basis that they do not detriment the character of Reading. Mediocre tall buildings will not be acceptable. They need to make a positive contribution to the character of the centre of Reading and to views into the centre. They will be visible from a wide area, and it is essential that they are therefore of the highest design quality.

All tall buildings proposals should:

- Afford the highest architectural design quality;
- Enhance Reading's skyline, through distinctive profile and top-quality design of the upper section of the building;
- Contribute to a human scale street environment, through paying careful attention to the lower section of the building, providing rich architectural detailing and reflecting their surroundings through the definition of any upper storey setback and reinforcing the articulation of the streetscape;
- Contribute to high-quality views from distance, views from middle-distance and local views;
- Take account of the context within which they sit, including the existing urban rhythm, local architectural style, fine grain urban detail and historic setting;
- Avoid bulky, dominant massing;
- Avoid detrimental impacts upon conservation areas and listed buildings;
- Use high quality materials that reference their physical, cultural and historic surroundings;

- Create safe, comfortable and attractive spaces around them, and avoid detrimental impacts on the existing public realm;
- Locate any car parking within the development or behind the building;
- Mitigate any wind or overshadowing effects through design and siting; and
- Avoid significant negative impacts on existing residential properties in terms of outlook, privacy, daylight, sunlight, noise, light glare and night-time lighting.

### **Skyline and views**

The influence of distance on the form of tall buildings should be considered as part of the design process:

- In distant views, the overall massing and proportion is most important. The relationship between the building's silhouette and skyline should inform the design;
- In mid-distant views, the building's overall composition and detail are perceived in balance. Here the hierarchy and articulation of elevations are particularly important; and
- The local views show the interrelationships between the building's base and its immediate setting. At this scale, the quality of materials and its detail is particularly critical.

### **Street environment**

A key failing of tall buildings in the past has been the way they meet the ground and therefore how they are perceived/experienced at the short distance. Ultimately the aim should be to create a public realm with a human scale. Human scale need not necessarily be prejudiced by high buildings, provided that these are carefully located,

designed with a top and a bottom and have regard to the effects on the microclimate. There are a number of design solutions that can be used to assist in creating a human scale street environment:

- Stepping down a large mass to its neighbours;
- Ensuring that the ground level is as active and interesting as possible;
- Ensuring that the public realm is naturally surveilled;
- Providing legible and accessible entrances;
- Providing a richness to the detailing and high quality materials;
- Mitigating against the adverse impacts a tall building can often make on the microclimate; and
- Providing a continuity of frontage and provide definition and enclosure to the public realm.

### **Built quality**

The visual prominence of tall buildings tends to demand higher standards of built quality. The intensive use of materials implied by their scale necessitates the expectation of a long lifespan. It is therefore wise to invest in their design and capital cost to generate benefits of quality. Tall buildings' relatively larger external surface area and its implicit over-exposure to natural elements place greater demands on quality of workmanship, detail and durability.

### **Public realm**

Tall buildings offer an opportunity to improve the public realm by introducing new spaces that are accessible, permeable, sheltered and providing a range of new amenities that serve the existing public as well as the new density of oc-

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cupants. Tall buildings also offer the opportunity of views of the cityscape that adds value and introduce a new perspective of the city to the public and/or occupants.

### **Sustainable transport**

The impact of tall buildings on the local transport infrastructure and particularly public transport needs to be carefully evaluated. Tall buildings, like all large developments, place significant additional demands on the transport infrastructure. Developers will have to consider the impact of their proposals and identify any measures that will be needed to remedy shortcomings in local capacity, if these are revealed.

### **Flight Paths**

Tall buildings must comply, in terms of height, with the Civil Aviation Authority's Aerodrome Safeguarding Criteria. For the city centre, this represents a maximum height of any structure, including antennae and aerial arrays of 242 metres above the Ordnance Survey Datum.

### **Sustainable Design and Construction**

Tall buildings are inherently energy intensive, so there will need to be particular efforts made to ensure that tall buildings meet the requirements of Core Strategy. Tall buildings should exploit opportunities of efficient services distribution and building energy simulation tools to reduce energy usage. Narrow span floor plates improve the availability of daylight and hence reduce dependence on artificial light. Individual control and opening of windows is challenging in taller buildings, but advances in façade technology has made this possible and allows for internal environments to be naturally ventilated at appropriate times of the year.

### **Local Environment**

Tall buildings must not have an unacceptable impact on the local environment. The design statement must consider the effect of the proposal on the local environment in terms of shadowing and microclimate. This will be particularly important if the building is to form part of a cluster of tall buildings.

#### *Orientation*

Orientation is mainly determined by prevailing winds, solar considerations and views of the building. Solar issues need to be considered in terms of:

- Solar gains when passive heating is desired (e.g. residential floors during the winter season);
- Shading from solar gains where they are undesired (e.g. in offices floors, where heat gains from people and equipment could be too high);
- Daylighting, to reduce the need of artificial lighting; and
- Renewable energy generation by e.g. PV cells, where overshadowing of part of the system would be detrimental to the function of cell arrays.

It is highly recommended that the model of a tall building or tall building cluster is simulated within its urban context for environmental performance at an early design stage so that problematic areas are resolved early.

#### *Microclimate*

It is important to minimise the negative affects of tall buildings on the adjacent microclimate. A general analysis of the potential implication of overshadowing caused by tall buildings is included

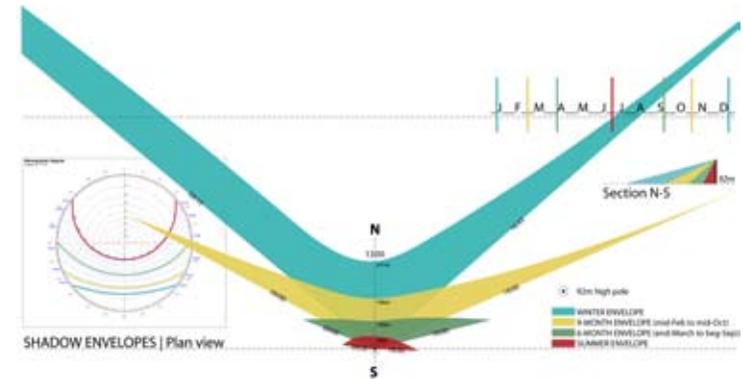
below. Overshadowing will impact the availability of solar heat and daylight of adjacent properties and public spaces so it is a factor that must influence the form, size and location of tall buildings to a large extent. Prevention of a right to light can become a legal issue and must certainly be addressed at the onset of the design process.

One must also consider less obvious factors such as glare caused by solar reflection from glazed facades as well as night time light pollution and night time light inconveniences in residential areas.

### *Overshadowing*

New developments consisting of tall buildings have an intrinsic risk of overshadowing neighbouring homes, gardens, work spaces and public areas. Apart from the association with health and wellbeing, the loss of daylight and sunlight (and also direct heat from the sun) is likely to have an impact on the energy consumption by the buildings affected.

An assessment has been made of the potential overshadowing resulting from tall buildings in each of the preferred tall building locations. The scope of the assessment is to indicate the potential impact of overshadowing by tall buildings in the 3 preferred clusters. For this purpose a 'shadow envelope' which indicatively demonstrates seasonal overshadowing within selected brackets of time for a given height of building has been created. The chosen time-span is between 09:00 and 18:00, which gives the opportunity to assess overshadowing with respect to standard generic occupancy hours of different building-types, in this case employment and residential uses.



The diagram above shows the shadows of a given height at two extremes, namely end December and end June (winter and summer, blue and red respectively) and two intermediate scenarios (autumn and spring). The green shadow envelope captures shadows cast in the warmer six months of the year approximately between April and September. The yellow envelope demonstrates the impact of overshadowing across a longer annual time span, i.e. a nine-month period between mid-February and mid-November.

The assessment assumes a building that is 23 storeys tall (or 91.4m, which is the limit beyond which notice must be given to the Civil Aviation Authority) for an understanding of potential worst case scenario overshadowing from extreme, 'buildable' point-locations in the preferred cluster areas.

The overshadowing analysis of the preferred clusters will consider the potential impact of shadows cast during the summer and spring, thus implying that areas within this envelope would be overshadowed for 12 months throughout all, or a substantial part, of the day.

The analysis only takes account of the effected areas outside the

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preferred character areas boundaries. The impact of overshadowing within the boundary is a critical factor that has to be considered as part of the building/s design process.

Details of the overshadowing assessment and the implications of this are detailed below under site specific principles.

## 6.4 Site specific principles

### Station Area Cluster

#### Townscape character

The existing commercial/business character should be further enhanced.

#### Building densities and urban form

The existing urban form is large scale. Within the existing context of Reading the buildings are tall and have large block sizes. It is proposed that tall buildings should continue to be a feature of this area, providing a focal point to views. Particular attention should be paid to creating buildings which are both distinctive and attractive as a skyline feature. The design of any built form within the character area should respond to the routes and vistas which connect to the area. Responding to the existing routes and urban grain will help to ensure a suitable block size and create a good level of permeability.

#### Policy Recommendations

A new cluster of tall buildings with the station at its heart will be created, to draw attention to the station as a major mixed-use destination and the main gateway to and most accessible part of Reading. This will include the tallest buildings in Reading, of around 30 storeys, located in the centre of the cluster, close to the station. Buildings should step down from that highest point towards the lower buildings heights at the fringes. The urban grain within the station area should respond to existing routes whilst also providing a permeable layout that offers direct routes towards any main infrastructure.

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Whilst providing additional open space along street frontages in the form of a landscaped plaza, setbacks or forecourts, the space between the buildings should accommodate cafes and retail displays.

Whilst buildings will be bulkier and closer together than in the other two clusters, there should still be adequate space between the buildings to allow for light to reach the streets and spaces and so that the buildings can be distinguished from each other when viewed from distance.

The bulkier mass of buildings, accommodating larger floor plate sizes, should be placed in the base of buildings in order to define street edges and open space that also will consider any existing and planned context for the site. Where possible, the upper, taller part of buildings should be placed away from affected streets and open space and be of a smaller floor plate that results in slender buildings which allows for more sunlight, improves views of the sky and permits better views between buildings and through the site. This could be achieved by integrating a vertical mix of uses.

Distances between buildings at lower levels must allow for enough space to make pedestrian movement enjoyable and to allow for sunlight to reach streets and spaces at most times of the year. The design should also assist the legibility of routes through any development and linkages to other parts of the Central Area.

At the upper levels boxy and slab like massing should be avoided and massing should reflect a slender and elegant form that is able to contribute to an attractive skyline as well as present a more human scale at street level. When siting buildings that have elongated slab floor plates they should normally be orientated approximately North-South to reduce overshadowing.

The cluster of buildings should complement each other, and particular regard should be given to how uppermost floors achieve a distinctive profile that is overall coherent with each individual tall building in the station area

#### Overshadowing considerations

For the Station Cluster Area, zone C which includes DeMonfort Road, Lynmouth Road and the southern parts of Caversham Road leading into Brigham Road, are susceptible to overshadowing by tall buildings in the northernmost edge of the site. They will be overshadowed throughout the whole day if tall buildings are located on both sides of zone C.

Tall buildings along the easternmost edge next to Forbury Retail Park would only overshadow a section of railway line, making this the area of least impact in the Station Area Cluster (zone E). Tall buildings on the land between George Street and

King's Meadow Road would cast afternoon shadows on King's Meadow Road and a small part of King's Meadow Recreation Ground.

Along the west edge of the cluster area, tall buildings could overshadow Swansea Road, York Road, the back gardens of residences along Addison Road and Tudor Road and Greyfriars Road further south throughout the morning (zones A and B).

Therefore, tall buildings along the northernmost and western edge of the Station Area Cluster should be planned in such a way that they do not unduly overshadow residences in zones A, B and C.

#### **Views to be protected**

Tall buildings should only be permitted within this area if their form,

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spacing and roofline design can be proved to enhance the view:

- From King George's Bridge
- From King's Meadows
- From Balmore Park
- From Caversham Park

Tall buildings as viewed from these locations must meet the following requirements:

- Built form must not appear blocky or overpowering.
- Spaces must be visible between the buildings
- A visible step down in height must be perceived from the tallest buildings down to the roofline of existing built form.

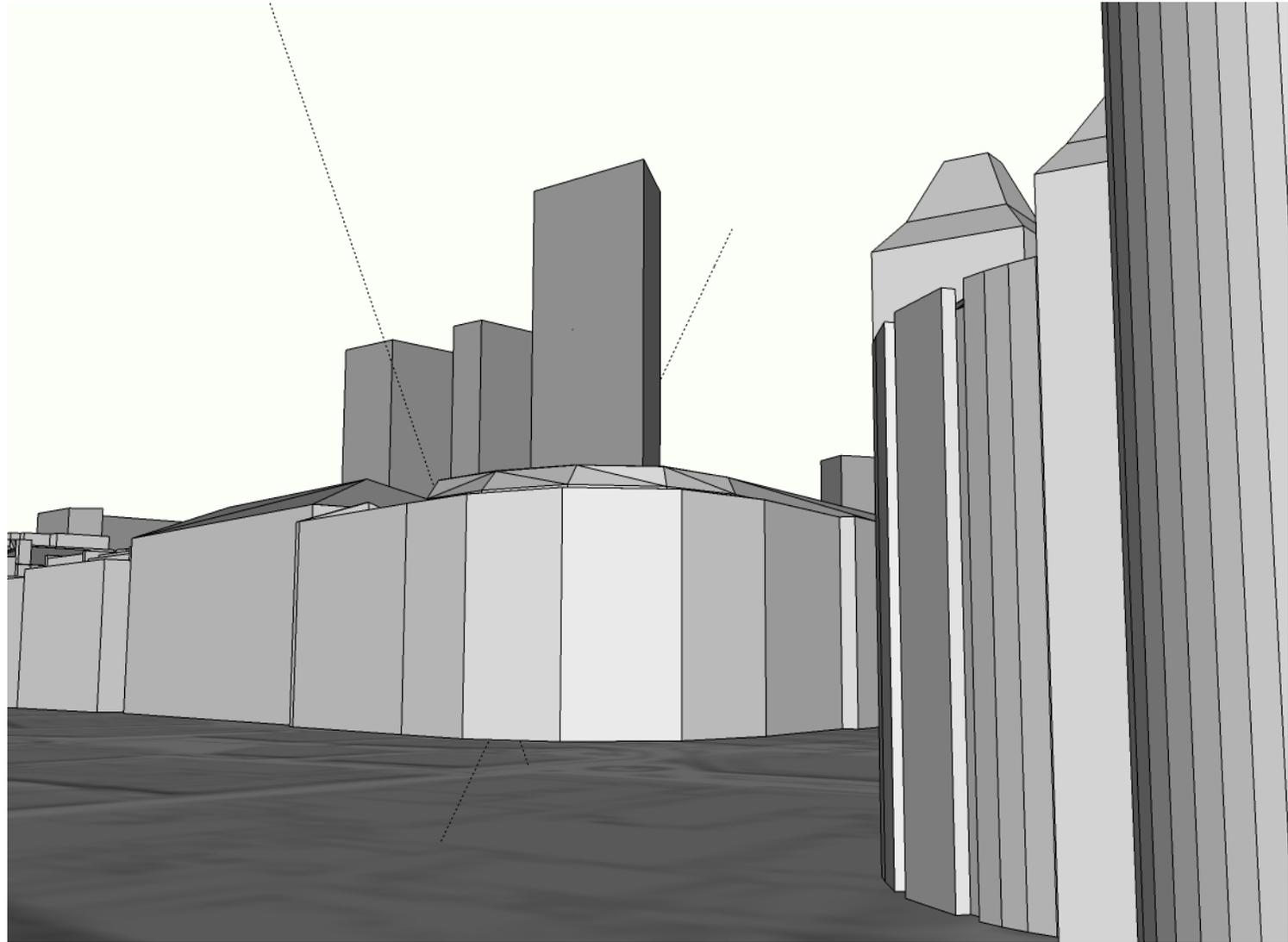
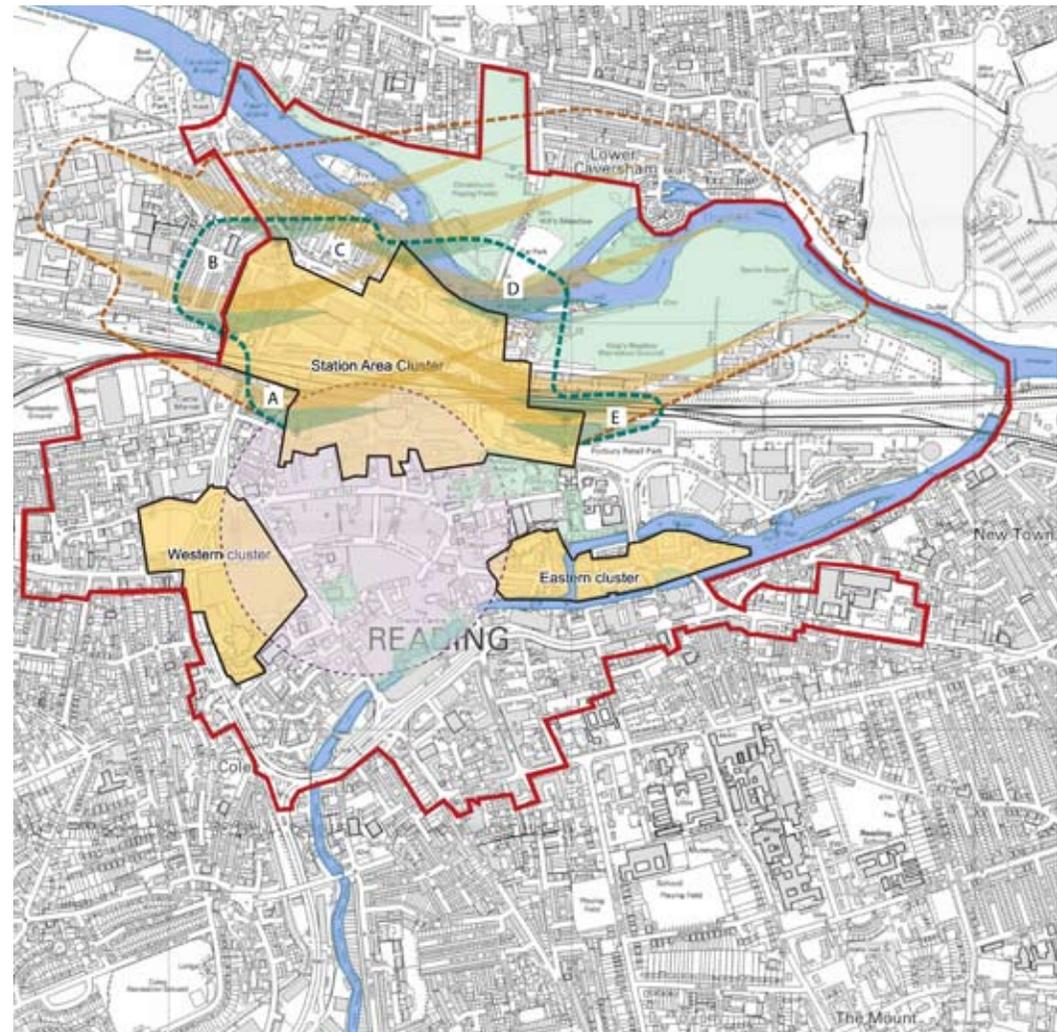


Figure 6.1: Indicative- Station Area Cluster. View from Market Place

-  Site boundary
-  Central Reading
-  Open spaces
-  Preferred character areas
-  Max shadow cast in 6 months
-  Max shadow cast in 9 months
-  Approximate area effected by overshadow of tall buildings (6 months)
-  Approximate area effected by overshadow of tall buildings (9 months)



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**Figure 6.2: Overshadowing considerations- Station Area Cluster**

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## Western Cluster

### *Townscape character*

Create a new townscape character. Replace the existing enclosed, blocky, dated townscape character with a new contemporary style of design.

### *Building densities and urban form*

The current built form is blocky and large scale. It is proposed that the design of new tall buildings should create a sense of a finer grained, lighter townscape scale which responds to and enhances the historic character of St Mary's Butts/castle Street Conservation Area.

### *Policy recommendations*

Up to three tall buildings would be appropriate, focused along the line of the IDR, to mark the area as the civic heart of Reading and a gateway to the centre.

Tall buildings should be distinctive and iconic and of a similar design. Building heights should generally be lower than the tallest buildings around the station. Building heights should reduce towards the conservation area in the South and the lower topography in the East and North.

The area should generally continue the larger block structure that exists along Broad Street and Friars Street and also integrate its permeability through direct North-South pedestrian routes. Tall structures in tower form should be sited along the IDR and combined with lower structures that should seek to reinforce the alignment on the street (IDR). Tall buildings should create a sense of a fine grained, light townscape scale by introducing a small number of slim

and elegant towers that are spaced generously apart

Transition in scale should be achieved by including angular planes which ensure that tall buildings step away from the lower scaled neighbouring buildings and the use of setbacks that are aligned with surrounding building heights.

Tall buildings proposed in isolation will not be appropriate, as they should be linked to the physical regeneration of a wider area.

### *Overshadowing Considerations*

The most significant overshadowing impact by tall building developments in this cluster is considered to be afternoon shadows over the west half of Friar and Broad Street in the pedestrianised Central Reading area. This would be cast by buildings along the easternmost edge and should therefore be limited in height or receded to mitigate this impact. This would also affect property along West Street, St. Mary's Butt, Gun Street and the east end of Castle Street.

Tall buildings along the westernmost edge of this cluster could overshadow property in zones A and B throughout the morning hours. This mainly includes property along Chatham Street, Euton Place and Howard Street.

### *Views to be protected*

Tall buildings should only be permitted within this area if their form, spacing and roofline design can be proved to enhance the view:

- From St. Mary's Butts to Greyfriar's Church;
- From Hosier street to St. Mary's Butts.
- In addition, consideration should be given to how proposed

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tall buildings within this area would be viewed from elevated positions within the surrounding landscape e.g. Balmore Park and Caversham Park. Tall buildings as viewed from these locations must meet the following requirements:

- Proposed built form must not appear blocky or overpowering.
- Spaces must be visible between the buildings;
- A visible step down in height must be perceived from the tallest buildings down to the roofline of existing built form;
- Building materials must complement the existing brick, half timber and rendered structures which are characteristic of the Castle Street Conservation Area.

*Views to be enhanced*

An opportunity exists to use a cluster of tall buildings to focus views from the east e.g. channelled views along the Oxford Road.

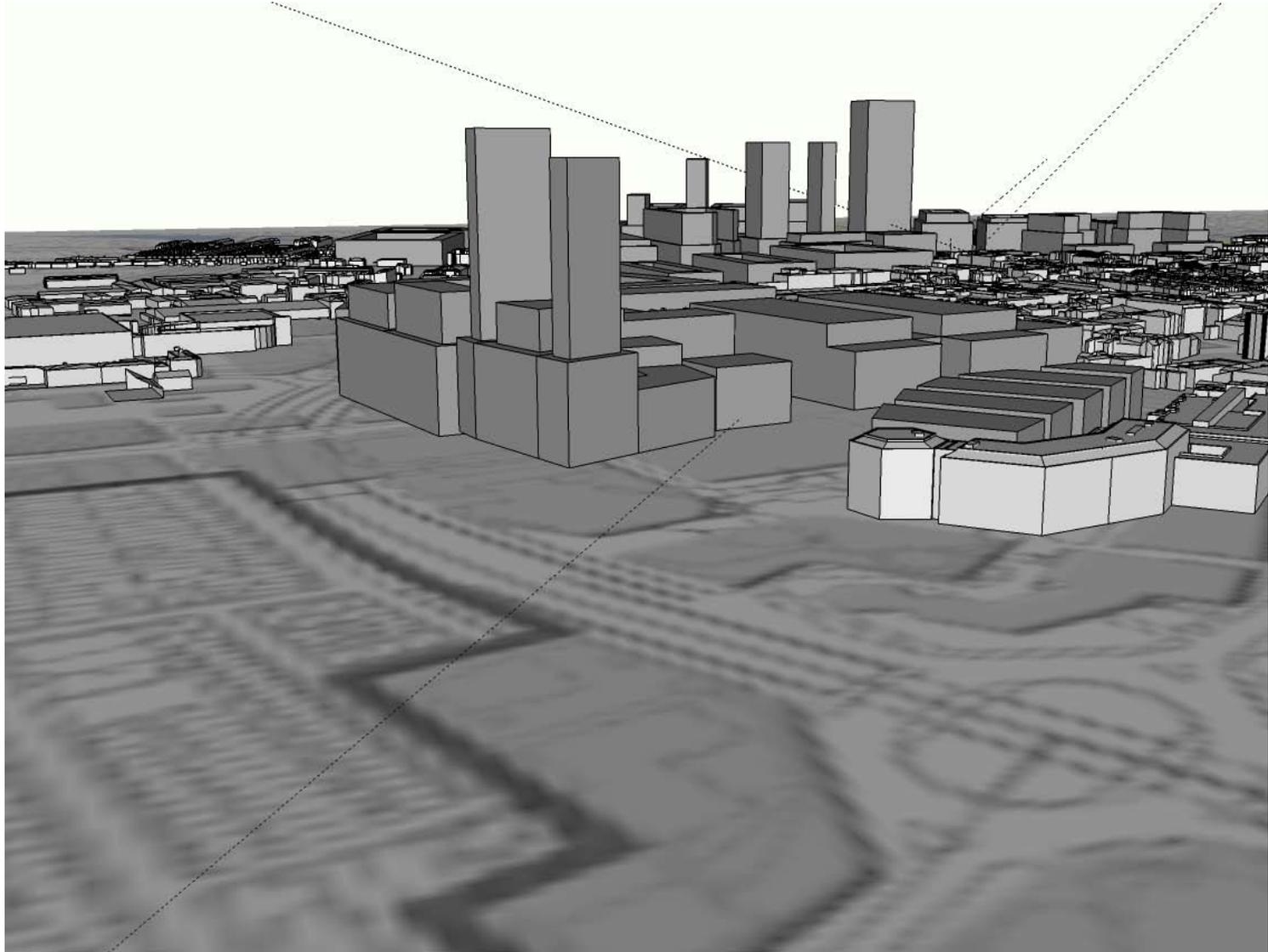
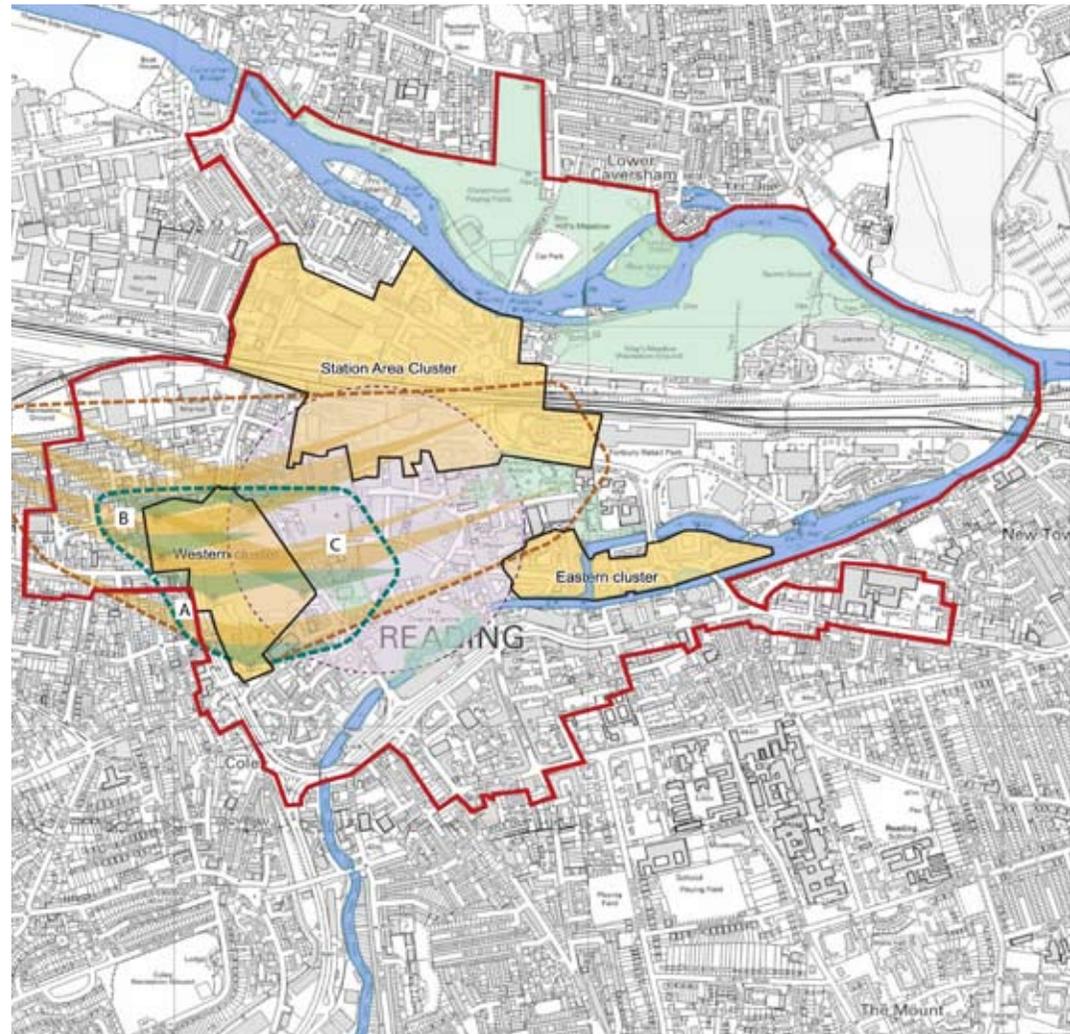


Figure 6.3: Indicative- Western Cluster. Aerial view from the south west

-  Site boundary
-  Central Reading
-  Open spaces
-  Preferred character areas
-  Max shadow cast in 6 months
-  Max shadow cast in 9 months
-  Approximate area effected by overshadow of tall buildings (6months)
-  Approximate area effected by overshadow of tall buildings (9 months)



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**Figure 6.4: Overshadowing considerations- Western Cluster**

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## Eastern Cluster

### *Townscape character*

The existing commercial/business character should be further enhanced.

### *Building densities and urban form*

The existing urban form within this section of Reading is large scale, composed of office blocks of variable heights, but all taller than is standard for Reading. It is not proposed that this characteristic should be altered, although given the proposed role of tall buildings within this location, as a focal point to views from the east e.g. from the Kings Road, Queens Road, particular attention should be paid to creating a building which is both distinctive and attractive as a skyline feature.

### *Policy Recommendations*

One or two landmark buildings situated at street corners or other gateway sites are appropriate, of a smaller scale than the tallest buildings around the station. Buildings will be slim and elegant in nature and avoid dominant massing.

Tall buildings should become a landmark feature of long distance views. They should therefore be of a slim and elegant point tower form that avoids dominant massing when viewed from distance.

Tall building should be of an appropriate design that acknowledges the existing narrow land shape. Building setbacks along Kings Road should be avoided in order to align strategic views into and out of the centre and to frame the edge of the commercial business area.

One tall building is already under construction, and if the permitted tall building at 120 Kings Road is constructed, there will no longer be

scope for additional tall buildings in this area.

### *Overshadowing Considerations*

Tall buildings within the western end of the Eastern Cluster Area could overshadow the back of buildings along Market Place during the first half of the day. Buildings around Abbey Square and the north end of Abbey Street will also be affected by tall buildings in this area.

In the central part of the cluster area before the A329, tall building could overshadow the south side of the prison area and the adjacent remains of the Abbey. At the East end of this cluster area, the impact would be on properties along Gas Works Road.

For the above reasons, tall buildings located in the north half of this cluster should be limited in height with taller buildings located along the southern length.

### *Views to be protected*

A key view of Blake's Cottages has been identified from Wallington Road. Tall buildings should only be permitted in this area if it can be proved that the form, spacing and roofline design respond to the existing Blake's Cottages. In addition, consideration should be given to how proposed tall buildings within this area would be viewed from elevated positions within the surrounding landscape e.g. Balmore Park and Caversham Park. Tall buildings as viewed from these locations must meet the following requirements:

- Proposed built form must not appear blocky or overpowering;
- Building materials must complement the existing brick and render used on Blake Cottages;
- Building mass and density must respond to the existing small

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scale block size and not become visally overbearing;

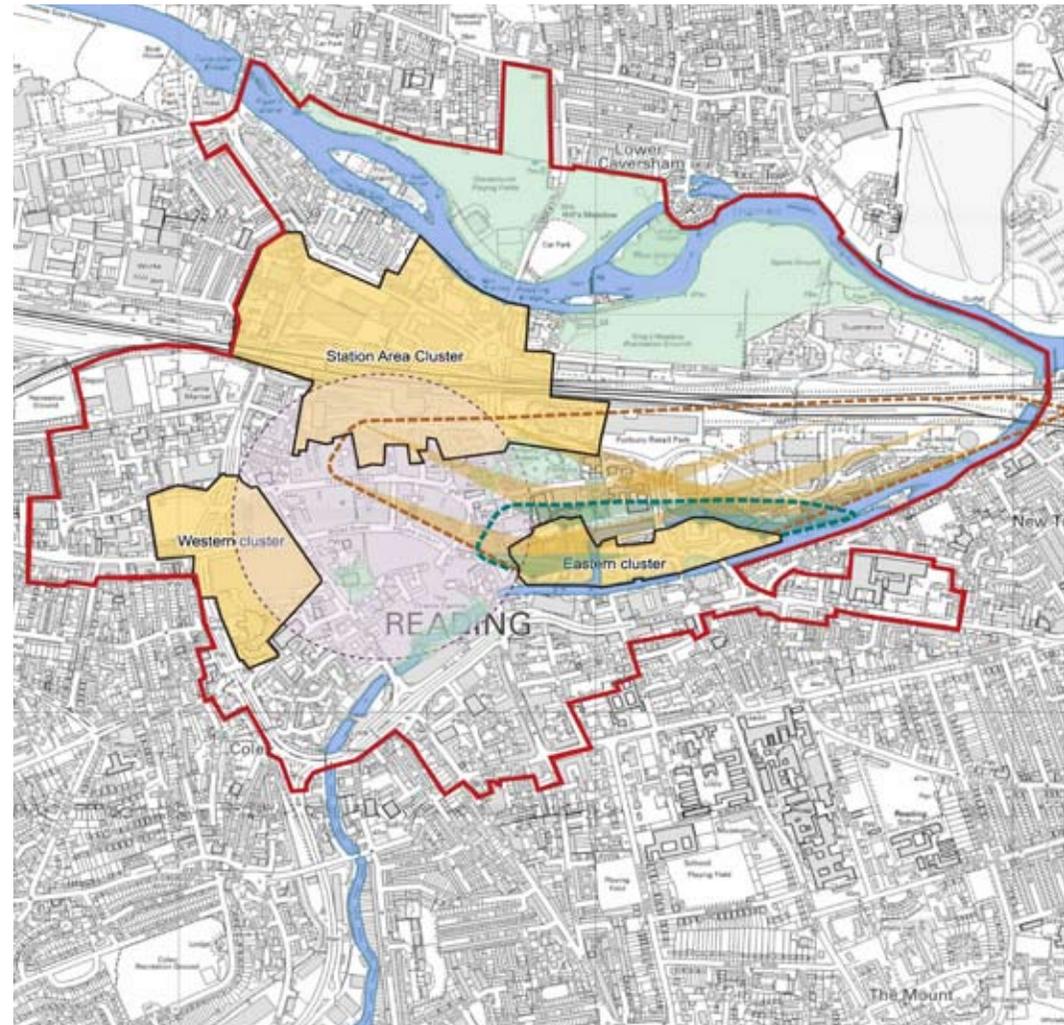
- Spaces must be visible between the buildings;
- A visible step down in height must be perceived from the tallest buildings down to the roofline of existing built form.

Views to be enhanced

An opportunity exists to se a cluster of tall buildings to focus views from the east e.g. channelled views along the A329.



Figure 6.5: Indicative- Eastern Cluster. Aerial view from above Kings Road



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**Figure 6.6: Overshadowing considerations- Eastern Cluster**

# 7 STRATEGIC CONCLUSIONS



## 7.1 Reading Tall Building Policy

The findings of the Reading Tall Building Strategy have been developed into a tall building policy which forms part of the Reading Central Area Action Plan (RCAAP). This policy will guide the future development of tall buildings in Reading. The policy forms the conclusion to the assessment work detailed in this report.

An aim of the RCAAP is to build on the status of central Reading as the dynamic and creative capital of the Thames Valley. The vision is to establish Reading as a modern and exciting 21st century city which is a top-class location for business. Tall buildings have a key role to play in developing this vision. They have a symbolic role in marking the centre as a regionally-significant hub of activity, and a practical role in accommodating the level of development that the visionary status entails. Within this context, proposals for tall buildings have markedly increased in recent years.

It is therefore essential that there is a strong and clear policy on tall buildings, based on an analysis of the effects of and opportunities for such buildings.

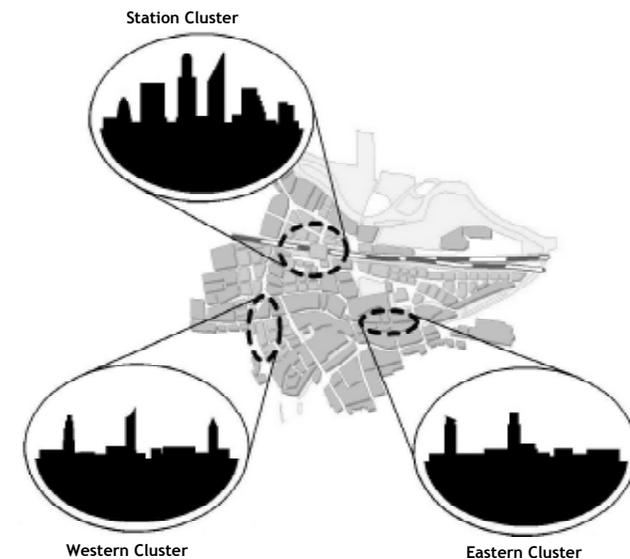
Within Reading Borough, tall buildings will only be appropriate within the 'areas of potential for tall buildings' as defined on the Proposals Map. These areas are as follows:

- RC13a Station Area Cluster
- RC13b Western Cluster
- RC13c Eastern Cluster

The approach of three clusters of tall buildings with differing characteristics will act as a definition of the business core of the centre. The heart of the business area, the station area, will be

signified by the highest buildings and the densest cluster. The western and eastern clusters are located at the extents of the business area, and these will be identified by smaller groupings of iconic buildings. This approach has been subject to a thorough analysis of the suitability of the areas for tall buildings in terms of a number of factors, including townscape character, historic context, local and strategic views, market demand, topography and other issues.

The figure below particularly shows the differences between the areas in terms of massing and spacing between buildings and heights. It should not be taken as a prescriptive guideline for the skyline, merely a diagrammatic representation of the direction of the policy.





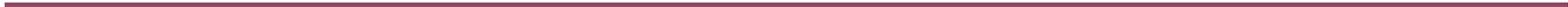
# Reading Tall Building Strategy

Appendix 2: Cultural Heritage

**Entec**

*Creating the environment for business*





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## National Policy and Guidance for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

The importance of cultural heritage remains is recognised in legislation as well as national and local policy. Historic remains that are deemed to be of particular importance are given legal protection. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 provides for a schedule of monuments which are protected. Similarly, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides for the definition and protection of a list of buildings or areas of architectural and historical interest.

Planning policy guidance on how cultural heritage should be treated is given in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) 15 and 16.

PPG15 deals with the historic environment, and sets out policy for the protection of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas and their setting under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (PPG15, paragraph 2.16). PPG15 also gives guidance on other aspects of the historic environment for which there are no specific statutory controls; namely World Heritage Sites, historic parks and gardens and historic battlefields.

PPG16 sets out policy on archaeological remains, their importance and the handling of archaeological matters in the planning process. It describes archaeological remains as a 'finite and non-renewable resource that should not be thoughtlessly or needlessly destroyed'. PPG16 also states that there is a presumption in favour of preserving in situ archaeological sites of national importance and their settings (paragraph 8).

PPG16 advises that planning applications that may affect the setting of Scheduled Monuments or Listed Buildings should be referred to English Heritage. According to Environment Circular 14/97, paragraph 8, the LPA is only required to notify English Heritage of changes in setting of Listed Buildings listed at Grades I and II\*.

## CABE/English Heritage Guidance on Tall Building

As recommended in the recently revised guidance (Consultation Draft January 2007) local planning authorities should, as a matter of good practice, carry out a detailed urban design study in order to identify locations where tall buildings would and would not be appropriate. This should take into account historic context through the use of historic characterisation methods of the wider area. This aspect of the Strategy addresses this requirement and, as advised, follows the model provided by English Heritage's extensive urban surveys.

### Desk Study

The study reappraises and synthesises existing information and evidence from various sources, including those relating to historic buildings and conservation areas. It includes information held in the local Sites and Monuments Record, but is principally based on historic maps and plans. This information is collected and mapped to assist in an analysis of the town plan and the definition of major historic topographic units within the town.

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This process of reappraisal generates a clearer picture of how the central area has evolved through time. The study considers and describes:

- the extent of original historic core areas;
- the extent and location of different periods of expansion;
- the location of past and surviving commercial or industrial areas;
- the survival of historic street patterns and plot boundaries;
- identification of historic areas which may have been significantly re-modelled in recent times;
- the likely patterns of preservation and survival of archaeological remains and other historic elements throughout the town centre.

Consequently the study provides a historical development model of the central area, highlighting the features that are characteristic of the different zones of historic interest and potential, which informs the more detailed townscape assessment, where individual character areas are considered.

### **Geology, Topography and Setting.**

Central Reading is located on Quaternary River Terrace Gravels capping a low ridge formed by an outlier of Tertiary deposits (London Clay and Lambeth Group deposits) overlying chalk, at the point where the southern edge of the Chilterns dip slope meets the Thames Valley.

This ridge is largely enclosed by the Thames and the confluences of its southern tributary valleys, the Pang and the Kennet. Further river terrace gravels and Holocene alluvial deposits occur within these relatively shallow river valleys.

Whilst the River Pang lies some distance to the west of the Central Area, both the Thames and the Kennet have a close, if contrasting, relationship with Reading. A relatively wide Thames floodplain creates a buffer between the urban edge and the river, whilst, the Kennet is fully incorporated into the urban space and had a major influence on the development of Reading as a historic river port. The Kennet cuts a narrow gap through the ridge to reach the Thames flood plain, constricting the width of the floodplain, a situation that was favourable for the development of early wharves and the harnessing of water power.

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## Historical Development

The central area largely includes the entire historic core of Reading, which is understood in broad terms as comprising four main phases:

### Anglo-Saxon foundation: cAD500-1121

Reading is believed to be named after the Reading as, Saxon followers of Reada, 'the Red', who settled in the 6th century. Saint Birinus, commissioned by Pope Honorius I to convert the West Saxons was made Bishop of Dorchester after the conversion of King Cynegils, subsequently became an active evangelist in the region. As well as reputedly founding churches at Westminster and Abingdon, amongst others, it is also claimed that he may have founded a 7th century chapel on the site which later became Reading Minister.

By the mid-9th century Reading was a royal town, part of the south-western kingdom of Wessex, the last surviving independent Saxon kingdom - Mercia, Northumbria and East Anglia having already fallen to the Vikings. The first documented mention of Reading is in AD 871, when the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and Asser's Life of King Alfred record Danish efforts to invade Wessex, identifying Reading as the Viking base for the period described as 'Alfred's year of battles'.

Both sources record how the Danish Vikings established a defensive stronghold at Reading, as a base for their campaign against Saxon Wessex. Asser locates the Danish defences as being 'on the right hand side of the royal vill', which is generally taken to mean across the spur of land where Reading Abbey was later built.

Whilst they lost an early skirmish at nearby Englefield, the Danes successfully repelled the Saxon siege on their camp. The Danes continued to pursue their campaign, suffering a further defeat at

Ashdown, but enjoying success in subsequent battles at Marden, Basing and Wilton, with the result that Alfred, who succeeded to the crown of Wessex in April AD 871, upon the death of his brother Ethelred I, was forced to agree terms, securing a short period of peace.

*A.D. 871. This year came the army to Reading in Wessex; and in the course of three nights after rode two earls up, who were met by Alderman Ethelwulf at Englefield; where he fought with them, and obtained the victory. There one of them was slain, whose name was Sidrac. About four nights after this, King Ethered and Alfred his brother led their main army to Reading, where they fought with the enemy; and there was much slaughter on either hand, Alderman Ethelwulf being among the skain; but the Danes kept possession of the field. And about four nights after this, King Ethered and Alfred his brother fought with all the army on Ashdown, and the Danes were overcome.....Within a fortnight of this, King Ethered and Alfred his brother fought with the army at Basing; and there the Danes had the victory. About two months after this, King Ethered and Alfred his brother fought with the army at Marden. They were in two divisions; and they put them both to flight, enjoying the victory for some time during the day; and there was much slaughter on either hand; but the Danes became masters of the field; .....After this fight came a vast army in the summer to Reading. And after the Easter of this year died King Ethered. He reigned five years, and his body lies at Winburn-minster. Then Alfred, his brother, the son of Ethelwulf, took to the kingdom of Wessex.*

Subsequently the Danes turned their attentions again to Mercia, abandoning Reading during the following campaign season, in favour of a location in London.

*A.D. 872. This year went the army to London from Reading, and there chose their winter-quarters. Then the Mercians made peace with the army.*

<sup>1</sup> 'The Life of King Alfred by Asser Bishop of Sherborne': Online Medieval and Classical Library Release #26, URL <http://omacl.org/KingAlfred/part1.html>. Date Accessed 12 September 2007

<sup>2</sup> 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (Everyman Press, London, 1912).  
URL <http://omacl.org/Anglo/part2.html>. Date Accessed 12 September 2007

<sup>3</sup> 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (Everyman Press, London, 1912).  
URL <http://omacl.org/Anglo/part2.html>. Date Accessed 12 September 2007

Whilst hostilities between Wessex and the Danes reopened in AD874, culminating in Alfred's defeat of Guthrun in AD 878, Reading was spared further deprivations at this time.

In AD 979, Queen Elfrida, wife of King Edgar of England ('the Peace-maker') founded a royal nunnery, which included what was to become St Mary's Minster, as an act of repentance for the murder of her stepson, Edward (St Edward The Martyr) at Corfe Castle. Shortly after, the Danes, under Sweyne I, King of Denmark, are again recorded as occupying Reading.

*A.D. 1006. .... When winter approached, then went the army home; and the enemy retired after Martinmas to their quarters in the Isle of Wight, and provided themselves everywhere there with what they wanted. Then, about midwinter, they went to their ready farm, throughout Hampshire into Berkshire, to Reading. And they did according to their custom, -- they lighted their camp-beacons as they advanced. Thence they marched to Wallingford, which they entirely destroyed, and passed one night at Cholsey. They then turned along Ashdown to Cuckamsley-hill, and there awaited better cheer; for it was often said, that if they sought Cuckamsley, they would never get to the sea. But they went another way homeward. Then was their army collected at Kennet; and they came to battle there, and soon put the English force to flight; and afterwards carried their spoil to the sea.<sup>4</sup>*

During this stay the Danes apparently sacked Reading, destroying Elfrida's nunnery. It appears that the nunnery was not rebuilt, but St Mary's Church survived, as it was apparently held by Abbess Leveva of Shaftesbury prior to the Norman Conquest. The lands formerly held by the nunnery were subsequently given to Battle Abbey by William the Conqueror<sup>5</sup>.

At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, Reading belonged to the king and included a small borough and two manors. The town, with an estimated population of 600 served as a centre of royal administration, had a mint, held regular markets, contained a church and operated six mills.

### Topography

It is not possible to precisely reconstruct the extent of Saxon Reading around the time of the Norman Conquest, although various elements can be reasonably conjectured and provide a broad definition of key aspects of the early urban topography.

Both the Thames and the Kennet had a significant influence providing:

- a potential source of power;
- means of communications and transportation (notably the town is located approximately 11km north of the Roman road that ran between London and Weymouth via Silchester);
- potential barriers to the movement of goods, people and service via land.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (Everyman Press, London, 1912) URL <http://omacl.org/Anglo/part3.html>. Date accessed: 12 September 2007

<sup>5</sup> 'The Borough of Reading: Churches' A History of the County of Berkshire: volume 3 (1923) pp 367-78 URL <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=43228>. Date accessed :22 August 2007

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The Kennet, which was both a manageable navigation, giving easy access to the Thames, and a ready source of power, provides an early commercial focus for the town. However, it was also necessary to access the town by land, which required a means of crossing both the Kennet and the Thames. The current line of West Street, St Mary's Butts/Bridge Street/Southampton Street was probably established as a principal road at this early stage, presumably bridged where it crossed the Kennet. By the 15th century this road was already described as 'a certain street ex antiquo [of old] called Olde Street'<sup>6</sup> It linked the principle features of the town, including:

- an early crossing point on the Thames in the vicinity of Caversham Bridge;
- the former site of Nunnery and the St Mary's Minster Church;
- the original market at St Mary's Butts;
- wharfage extending along the Kennet, probably between what is now Bridge Street and High Bridge, and
- provided a route south to Winchester, the capital of Wessex.

Asser's 'royal vill' and the nucleus of the town prior to the founding of Reading Abbey, therefore, was probably located in the vicinity of St Mary's Butts, extending to the south and east along the principal road and the north bank of the Kennet. The site of the former Viking encampment was probably located east of this small Saxon town.

Apart from the route of the principal street and fragments of the Saxon church, that survive as part of the fabric of St Mary's, there are no extant remains of the Anglo-Saxon settlement. However, buried remains, notably preserved timber structures located alongside the Kennet, may still be present, albeit in fragmentary condition. The prospect of surviving remains of the Viking camp seems less probable, in part due to the likely ephemeral form of engineering

used in its construction, but principally due to the impact of later development, especially if it was located at the site of the later Abbey, as suspected.

### **Ecclesiastical Town: AD1121-1539**

In 1121 Henry I selected Reading as the site of a new royal abbey, to be a burial place for his family, perhaps also as an act of piety and commemoration for his lost heir, William Adelin, who died in the sinking of the White Ship in 1120. The first abbot was Hugues de Boves, formerly the Prior of St. Pancras, Lewes, who subsequently became the Archbishop of Roen. It was intended to house up to 100 monks, initially drawn from the Cluniac order, but at some time in the 13th century it was attached to the general Benedictine order. The chosen location lay to the east and north of the Saxo-Norman town, on 30 acres of apparently undeveloped land.

The choir of the church must have been complete by January 1136, when Henry was buried there, followed in 1156 by Henry II's son William. The Abbey was dedicated by Archbishop Thomas Becket in the presence of Henry II in 1164, by which time it was probably substantially complete. A Lady Chapel was added at the east end in 1314 by Abbot Nicholas of Whaplode (1305-28).

During its construction the Abbey became indirectly embroiled in the civil war known as The Anarchy (1139-53), a successional dispute between Henry I's daughter, Matilda (Empress Maud) and his nephew, Stephen. The Thames Valley was in the middle of the conflict and whilst Matilda's main support came from the West Country, she held Wallingford, from which her forces were a persistent threat. Stephen put Wallingford castle under siege three times and

<sup>6</sup>The borough of Reading: Introduction', A History of the County of Berkshire: volume 3 (1923), pp. 336-42. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=43225>. Date accessed: 22 August 2007

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constructed a castle at Reading in 1150, one of a series designed to cut off lines of relief. This castle was apparently built within Abbey's land, an infringement prompting an edict from Pope Eugenius III. However, the castle was short-lived, being destroyed by Matilda's son, the future Henry II, sometime in 1151 or 1152, shortly before the civil war drew to a close, in 1153.

Despite the local impact of this political turmoil, Reading Abbey, having been endowed by Henry I with extensive lands and the revenues raised from the town, quickly became one of the richest religious houses in England. The Abbey was further endowed with relics, including those of St James given by Matilda, which attracted many pilgrims, further enriching both the Abbey and the town.

Addition ecclesiastical foundations highlight the rapid expansion of the town under the influence of the Abbey. In addition to the Saxon St Mary's Church, which is described as a parish church by 1129, two further parishes were created to serve the growing population, each with its church:

- St Leonard's Church, intended to serve the people in the eastern part of the town, is first mentioned in 1121;
- St Giles' Church, serving the townspeople located south of the Kennet, is first mentioned in 1189-1193.

The Greyfriars, who sought to administer to the town's poor, attempted to establish a presence from 1233, eventually building a small priory in 1311, which saw the founding of the present Greyfriars Church.

The founding of the Abbey, therefore, had a transforming effect on the town, which was now largely under the authority of the Abbott. This challenged the townspeople's right to manage their affairs as a borough, giving rise to persistent disputes between the Abbey and

the Merchant Gild. The Gild is first mentioned in 1253, but was likely to have evolved from institutions that go back as far as Reading's status as a Borough, i.e. at least to 1086. The Domesday reference to a 'borough of Reading, formed the basis of the Gild's argument that the town had long held liberties, which were not subject to the authority of the Abbot. From 1301 the chief officer of the Gild, selected by the Abbott from candidates put forward by the Gild, held the title of mayor, identifying the Gild as the principal municipal institution until the granting of a charter of incorporation in 1540, which left it the sole authority after the fall of Reading Abbey.

Despite the disputes the merchants and the Abbey shared broadly common interests in developing commerce. The cloth trades, including drapers, dyers, weavers, fullers and tailors, were prominent amongst the Gild members as early as the 13th century. This industry became so dominant that John Leland, the 16th century traveler, wrote: 'the town chiefly standeth by its clothing'. Other medieval trades known to have been practiced in Reading include vintners, tanners, shoemakers and goldsmiths. In addition there are records of mints operating at Reading during the reigns of Stephen, Henry II, Richard I, John and Edward III.

During its four hundred year history the Abbey played host to major events. Henry I held his court at Reading in 1175 and 1177. On three occasions, the Papal Legate summoned ecclesiastical councils at the Abbey. Parliament also met there when London faced the threat of plague, notably in 1453 when the House of Commons met in the Chapter House and the Lords in the Refectory.

At the Dissolution Hugh Cook of Farringdon, the last Abbot of Reading, along with the abbots of the two other leading monasteries, Glastonbury and Colchester, refused to submit to closure.

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This final act of resistance caused all three to be martyred, Hugh Farringdon being executed for high treason in front of the Abbey Church.

### Topography

The construction of the Abbey created a pre-eminent focal point, the dominant feature of Reading, one of the great English pilgrimage destinations of the medieval period. Notwithstanding the changes brought about through the authority vested in the Abbott, simply the physical presence of the Abbey resulted in fundamental change to the urban morphology. The Anglo-Norman settlement located around St Mary's Butts stretched eastward, responding to the need to articulate with the Abbey, and eventually expanded well south of the Kennet, to cater for the growing population.

The 30 acre enclosed Abbey precinct was surrounded on three sides by a great wall with four gateways, one of which, the western or compter gate, served as the town prison. The southern boundary was formed by the Holy Brook and the River Kennet. The outer precinct walls enclosed a large area of open land immediately adjacent to the Abbey Church, known as the Forbury, which was the outer court of the Abbey. The Abbey was entered through an inner gatehouse which contained the principal monastic buildings, including the Abbots Lodge, Chapter House, Cloister Garth, Kitchen, Infirmary, Bakehouse, Stables and Dormitory.

Today little survives of the Abbey, but various traces allow the layout to be reasonably well understood:

- The enormous abbey church now lies under the present Forbury Garden and Abbots' Walk. The church was 450 feet long and 95 feet broad, with transepts (200 ft.), a Lady-chapel (75 by 50 ft.) built in 1314, and a square central tower with spire.

- The Abbey's Inner Gateway is one of the few remnants still standing today. It was the original home of the Reading Ladies Boarding School, briefly attended by Jane Austen.
- The monastic buildings were on a similar scale to the Church, including the chapter-house, an apsidal, vaulted hall (79 by 42 ft.);
- The pilgrims' hospitium or guesthouse of St. John the Baptist is located next to St Leonard's Church, to which it was once connected. This originally had a guest hall (120 ft.), a dormitory (200 ft.) and provision for twenty-six poor pensioners. Part of the building, the dormitory, still exists and for many years was in use as the Royal Grammar School of King Henry VII
- The abbey water mills were located across the Holy Brook, which is still spanned by the original arch of the Abbey Mill.

Also located within the outer court is Forbury Mound, often regarded as the motte on which Stephen's castle would have stood, but there is no evidence to support this. It has alternatively been suggested that the castle stood on the south-east corner of the Forbury, where the Victorian Prison was later constructed.

Immediately outside the Abbey the town developed an extended pattern of streets, which seem to have largely emerged in the 12th/13th centuries. This is based on the presumption that streets are broadly contemporaneous with the known date of associated buildings i.e. London Road corresponding with the date of construction of St Giles Church; Friars Road (formerly known as New Road) corresponding with the date of foundation of the Greyfriars Priory, etc.

Two streets formed the main north-south axis, the original 'Olde Street' to the west and to the east the High Street, comprising Market Place/Duke Street, which continued south along the line of

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the present London Street/Silver Street/Mount Pleasant. Both roads converged south of St Giles Church, extended the medieval town to the south of the Kennet. Streets connecting these two include, from the north, Friars Road, Broad Street, Castle Street/Gun Lane/Minster Road, and to the south of the Kennet, Mill Lane and possibly Crown Street.

The re-location of the market from St Mary's Butts to its present position became a matter of dispute between the Abbot and the Guild when it was first proposed in the mid-13th century. However, it would appear that the Abbey eventually succeeded in establishing a new location outside the west gate of the Abbey at sometime in the 14th century.

The commercial success of the medieval town involved an intensification of activity along the Holy Brook and the Kennet. Bridge Street was formerly known as 'Seven Bridges Street', in recognition that it crossed numerous branches and leats on the Kennet. Similarly the High Street crossed Holy Brook via the 'small bridge' and crossed the Kennet by the High Bridge, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The north bank of the riverside, between the separate crossing points, formed the main commercial area, where various medieval riverside industries and crafts were practiced, and the common wharf, wharf-house, Minster Mill and the Gildhall were located.

Therefore, Reading's medieval street layout represented a composite form of urban development, principally responding to the topography and the influence of the Abbey. This contrasts with the planning displayed at 12th/13th century towns built on new sites elsewhere along the Thames, such as nearby Henley-on-Thames. This basic urban form, including its size and layout was probably complete by

the 14th century. This remained largely unchanged, apart from the significant loss of the Abbey, until the mid 19th century. Even following the subsequent dramatic expansion of Reading, the principal medieval street layout is encapsulated in the modern town, although numerous minor streets and open spaces are no longer extant.

In addition to the principal medieval street and surviving fragments of the Abbey, the most notable extant remains of this period is the medieval fabric found within the three parish churches and the Greyfriars church. Secular buildings of the period are not well represented, but recent archaeological investigations have revealed the presence of buried remains. Whilst large scale development during the last decades of the 20th century have resulted in the loss of significant archaeological deposits, there remains the significant potential for the presence of preserved timber structures located alongside the Kennet.

#### **Post- Dissolution Reading: AD1539-1840**

Successful cloth and leather industries saw Reading expand, so that by the 16th century it was the largest town in Berkshire. However Reading's commercial success and its principal source of prestige was dependent not only on its clothing trade. The Abbey was a crucial element and its fall was one of a number of factors which were to have significant implications for the town in the period following the Dissolution.

At the Dissolution the Abbey property and its obligations, including such matters as maintenance of the town's bridges, passed to the Crown. In 1560 Elizabeth I confirmed the royal charter granted by Henry VIII, conferring greater powers of self-government to the town.

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However, the economy of the town was badly affected by the English Civil War (1642-1651) and a visitor commented in the early 18th century that ‘...its houses are mean and the streets though pretty large, unpaved’.

From the mid-18th century onwards, Reading began to flourish as an important stopping-off place between Bath and London. Inns flourished and regular public coaches began in 1780. Leather tanning continued and new industries developed, most notably brewing, brick and tile making, iron-founding, and boat building, helped by the completion of the Kennet Canal in 1723 and the Kennet and Avon Canal in 1810.

#### **Railway Town and growth of manufacturing and commerce: post-1840**

This reverse in the economic decline and prolonged period of stagnation during the 17th century, was given dramatic impetus after 1840s with the construction of the Great Western Railway. This led to a major expansion of the town, which is largely responsible for the estates of brick built terraces that characterise much of the town today.

During the 19th century key Reading industries included iron working, and brick and tile making. Well known firms established their factories in the town: Sutton’s seeds, Huntley and Palmer’s biscuits and James Cock’s Reading Sauce. In 1840 the construction of the Great Western Railway, and opening of Reading Station, led to large housing estates being built for the rapidly expanding population.

Concurrent with this expanding economy, there was a strengthening in local governance. The construction of civic buildings, in particular and the creation of public space within the Forburys, on what had

previously been the outer court of the Abbey and the extension and new frontage to the Town Hall designed in Victorian Gothic style by the architect Alfred Waterhouse (also responsible for the Natural History Building) in 1875, followed by further extensions in 1883 to house a museum and three art galleries added in 1897.

In the mid-20th century the centre of Reading was redeveloped by demolishing parts of the historic core of the town to provide offices and shopping precincts.

The construction of the Inner Distribution Road (the A4155), which started in 1969, improved traffic circulation but literally cut the town in half. More recently, the Oracle Shopping Centre has reinvigorated the town centre but meant the loss of a number of historic buildings including Simonds’ brewery on the banks of the River Kennet. The canal became disused and impassable by the 1940s but since 1992 has been reopened for leisure following a restoration scheme by the Kennet and Avon Trust.

As Reading has grown, its suburbs have spread in three directions:

- to the west between the two rivers into the foothills of the Berkshire Downs,
- to the south and south-east on the south side of the Kennet, and
- to the north of the Thames into the Chiltern Hills.

#### **Statement of Significance**

The town was originally part of the Royal estate of the Saxon kings of Wessex and is particularly notable for the part it played in the conflicts with Viking invaders that formed the context in which King Alfred the Great established a strengthened Saxon kingdom in the 9th/10th century. Alfred established his authority as a war leader during battles with Viking forces who established their campaign

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headquarters at Reading. Stories based on these events and Alfred's subsequent achievements, in many instances recorded as contemporary histories, have endured as part of national identity and remain widely popular.

However, the historic development of Reading is principally notable for the ecclesiastical town founded by Henry I, which was dominated by the Abbey. Not only did this establish the extent of the historic core of Reading, which survived largely unchanged until the mid-19th century, but it also gave rise to institutions and traditions of local governance that can be directly traced to the current Borough Council and established an enterprise culture which outlived the Abbey and is largely responsible for the character of the modern town.

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## Implications for Tall Buildings Strategy

An historic core area can be defined as the extent of the medieval ecclesiastical town. Buildings of historic character, and in some instance importance, may occur beyond this core area, in areas that formed part of later phases of urban expansion, but which do not reflect the time depth that is a characteristic of the historic core area.

The historic core, therefore, forms a discrete part of the central area and its sensitivity is recognized by the presence of two scheduled monuments, a registered historic park and two conservation areas, along with numerous Listed Buildings. These designations place restrictions on the form of development that might be regarded appropriate and are governed by policies that seek to protect and enhance the historic character.

The analysis of the development of the town set out in this report describes the dynamics that have been largely responsible for the historic character, which is described in detail in the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area appraisal, but can also be taken as representative of the wider historic core area. Notably the road layout reflects the medieval urban form, but the architectural qualities are largely derived from the latter phases. In particular the extent of the medieval town is no longer readily discernable as its principal architectural focus, the Abbey only exists as fragments, which are often ruinous, and the other principal expression, the road layout, is encapsulated within the 19th and 20th century expansion. In this context Reading's historic environment, whilst clearly expressing its later historic and architectural qualities largely fails to articulate the most significant aspect of the local cultural heritage, and as a consequence those elements that are extant, such as the parish churches and ruined remains of the Abbey lack cohesion and

context.

The prospect of locating tall buildings within the central area will clearly need to be mindful of the sensitivity of the historic core area, but there is an opportunity to consider locations in close proximity in order to re-establish an architectural focus that might contribute to efforts to more clearly express the significance of the poorly expressed surviving medieval urban form. Such an arrangement would clearly reference the character of the original medieval town form, which was a direct response to the presence of a building which contrasted in mass, scale and height to its surroundings. Clearly this would be a challenging prospect, however, if integrated in a fashion that engaged with and helped articulate the historic core area, it could play a significant role in sustaining the local historic environment.



# Reading Tall Building Strategy

## Appendix 1: Townscape and Visual Assessment

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Figure 2.1 Townscape Character Areas

Figure 2.2 Townscape Capacity for tall buildings

Figure 3.1 Mid range views into central Reading

Figure 3.2 Long range views into central Reading

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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As proposed in the CABA document 'Guidance on Tall Buildings'<sup>1</sup> a townscape character assessment and a visual analysis of the Central Reading Area has been undertaken.

The purpose of the townscape assessment is to understand how the urban fabric has developed and how the central reading area differs in terms of architectural style, density of development, building height, building block size, architectural style and building materials. Differences in all of these factors result in varying townscape character and different capacities for the inclusion of tall buildings. It is essential to gain a clear understanding of the existing townscape character and how it is created to ensure that further development does not destroy any areas of valued townscape or areas with a strong, intact character.

A visual assessment has been undertaken in order to understand how the natural topography and built form combine to create the visual context of Reading. Views of certain townscape features are integral to the understanding of townscape character, and have a strong influence over the creation of a distinctive sense of place. It is essential that these views are identified in order that any future tall buildings do not block the view and result in a degraded townscape character. Conversely it is important to assess existing views and determine which locations may benefit from the inclusion of tall structures.

<sup>1</sup>'Guidance on tall Buildings,' CABA and English Heritage, July 2007

## 2. TOWNSCAPE ASSESSMENT

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### 2.1 Method

A study area of the Reading Central Area as defined in the Reading Central Area Action Plan was defined.

The assessment has been guided by:

- Guidelines for landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA);
- Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland, 2002; and
- Guidance for Tall Buildings (CABE).

The GLVIA in particular are widely regarded by the landscape profession as the 'industry standard'. In considering the quality and value of the local townscape, reference has also been made to common urban design assessment principles in order to provide a judgement on the current integrity and vitality of the urban fabric and spaces. The DETR and CABE publication "By Design" sets out a number of urban design objectives that can be used in analysing the performance of an area in terms of urban design .

#### 2.1.1 Desk study

The following sources were consulted to gain information on the existing townscape and visual resource.

- Magic web site ([www.magic.gov.uk](http://www.magic.gov.uk)) to gain information on landscape and townscape designations;
- Aerial Photography;
- Conservation Area Statements;
- 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey mapping of Reading.

#### 2.1.2 Site Walkover

In addition to the desk based assessment, a site visit was

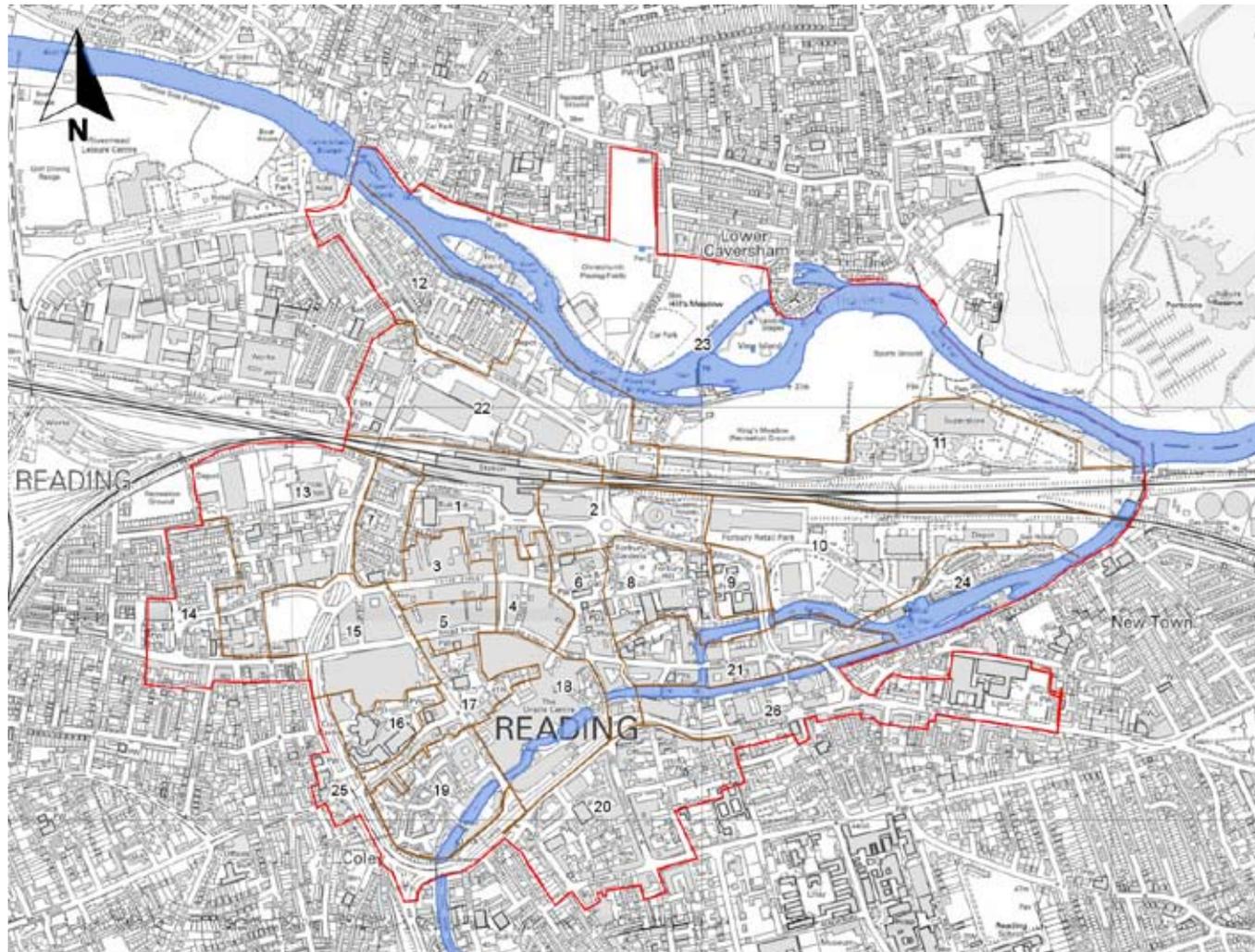
undertaken during August and September 2007. The Reading central area was visited with comprehensive notes and photographs being taken.

#### 2.1.3 Character Areas

Following the desk and site based assessment twenty six character areas have been defined. The geographical extent of each character area is shown on Figure 2.1. The character areas have been defined due to similarities in the following criteria:

- Architectural style
- Urban grain and townscape scale
- Presence of townscape designations;
- Townscape condition; and
- Key views.

Descriptions of each of the townscape character area are given within this chapter. Each of the character areas has been attributed a sensitivity to the development of tall buildings. As stated in the main body of the 'Reading Tall Buildings Strategy' document, buildings over 10 storeys are considered tall. The sensitivity of the townscape resource and its respective components has been determined by reference to the baseline assessment of the existing townscape and is classified as high, medium or low. The manner in which these considerations are evaluated to derive a sensitivity category is set out in Table 2.1. The evaluation of criteria and thresholds is primarily based upon professional judgement or by reference to national and local designations.



1. Station Hill
2. Reading station east
3. Friar Street
4. Station Road
5. Broad Street
6. St. Lawrence and Market Place
7. Reading Station West
8. Forbury Gardens
9. Reading Prison
10. Forbury Retail Park
11. Napier Road
12. Caversham Road
13. Cattle Market and Chatham Place
14. Oxford Road and surroundings
15. Cheapside
16. The Civic Centre
17. St Mary's and Castle Street
18. The Oracle
19. Mallard Row to Fobney Street
20. London Street
21. Forbury South
22. Vastern Road
23. King's Meadow
24. Kennet Walk
25. IDR
26. King's Road

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Figure 2.1 Townscape Character Areas



**Table 2.1 Townscape character sensitivity**

Townscape features	Sensitivity
<p>Designated townscapes (conservation areas) and non-designated townscapes in good condition and a high degree of uniformity with strong, positive character and/or valued features.</p> <p>A low rise skyline where any taller structures are historic structures and a focal point of the view.</p> <p>A fine grained, small scale townscape where large, tall block sizes would be uncharacteristic.</p> <p>A low rise skyline (either designated or non designated) where the inclusion of a tall or very tall building would be an overbearing and uncharacteristic addition to the skyline in terms of height and block size.</p>	High
<p>Non-designated townscapes with less defined character in reasonable condition with some valued features, but exhibiting signs of erosion or dilution of character as a result of some intrusive elements.</p> <p>A non designated area of townscape with a low rise, cohesive roofline which includes occasional taller structures which detract from the existing townscape character.</p> <p>An unexceptional townscape which forms the setting of a designated area of townscape.</p> <p>An area where sensitive re-design of certain parts of the townscape could complement the overall character.</p>	Medium
<p>Non-designated townscapes with poorly defined character in poor condition/repair which may have occasional valued features but also many detractive elements. There would be higher scope for landscape change in the form of development, mitigation and/or enhancement.</p> <p>An unexceptional townscape which does not form the setting of a designated area of townscape.</p> <p>An area where tall or very tall buildings are a key characteristic feature.</p>	Low



## 2.2 Character Areas

### Character Area 1: Station Hill

Land Use	A mixture of offices and retail land uses
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce: post 1840. The Station building, Edward XVII statue and Great Western House (now Malmaison) are all listed.
Architectural style	The architectural style is predominantly 1970s. Concrete is a widely used material. Ramps and staircases navigate the awkward spaces and level changes.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The large block size and occasionally tall buildings, the tallest being Thames Tower (11 storeys) and Western Tower (17 storeys) create a large townscape scale.
Townscape condition	The buildings are occasionally derelict and all are either of a poor condition or an unexceptional design quality. The spaces between the buildings are awkward shapes and sizes and poorly maintained. The overall effect is of a poor quality townscape.
Key views within the character area	-
Key views into the character area	Views of current buildings within the character area are possible from the A4, A327 and A33 when travelling into the city. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	Thames Tower and Western Tower both form localised focal points to views.
Tall buildings planning applications	The 2007 application for the Station Hill site proposes residential units together with The proposed development at the Station Hill site would comprise no less that 577 and no more than 624 residential units together with office, retail, cultural and leisure land uses. The tallest building would range from 150-161 metres. There are two planning applications for tall buildings which have been approved.
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The large townscape scale, the absence of historic townscape features and the precedence for tall structures, all contribute to this area having a high capacity for the development of further tall buildings in terms of townscape character.



## Character Area 2: Station Area East

Land Use	Offices
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce: post 1840 Adjacent to Forbury Gardens
Architectural style	1970s - late 20th century office blocks.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The individual buildings within the character area e.g Apex Plaza and Queens House are large and blocky structures which create a sense of large scale townscape.
Townscape condition	The buildings within the character area are of an unexceptional design and quality.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been defined for this area.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	Apex plaza is a local landmark due to its height and distinctive pink colour. The Energis/Metal box is a local landmark due to its prominence and distinctive shape.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The high density of development within the character area, the characteristic large block size and the absence of historic townscape features within the area ensures a low sensitivity to the development of further tall buildings. The absence of any key views also contributes to this being an appropriate location when judged against townscape character criteria.



### Character Area 3: Friar Street

Land Use	Friar Street is a shopping street
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	The street has been redeveloped over many decades and as such the building frontage line has not been retained consistently and the architectural style is very varied. Some Victorian facades remain above the shop frontages but in many cases the architecture is undistinguished.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The tightly packed buildings and the relatively low skyline (generally 4-6 storeys) creates a medium scale townscape .
Townscape condition	The buildings and public realm along the street is generally in good condition
Key views within the character area	Views along Friar Street eastwards towards the Market Place and St. Lawrence's church.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	The Ibis hotel is 14 storeys high Greyfriar's Church (at the western end of Friar Street)
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Medium: There is a fairly consistent, low rise roof line which is occasionally punctuated with views of taller structures e.g. Ibis hotel. Where the tall structures are visible, they detract from the cohesive character of the shopping street and are overbearing features of an uncharacteristically large scale. Therefore further tall buildings would exacerbate this characteristic further.



#### Character Area 4: Station Road

Land Use	Predominantly retail, administrative and leisure use
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.
Architectural style	The architectural styles are representative of the variety of historical periods during which buildings were erected. The row of Victorian, sandstone buildings on Queen Victoria Street are a notable townscape feature.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The building pattern is fine grained creating a sense of a high density of development, although the buildings are generally only 3 storeys. The townscape scale is medium.
Townscape condition	The buildings are generally in a good condition, notably on Queen Victoria Street. The public realm differs between Station Road and Queen Victoria street, the later being pedestrianised.
Key views within the character area	Key townscape features provide focus to views both to the north and south along Station Road and Queen Victoria Street. To the north the original station building is visible. To the south the façade of the John Lewis building is a focus to the view.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	The sandstone buildings on Queen Victoria Street and the façade of the John Lewis building.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: Due to the positioning of the character area adjacent to the Market Place and London Street Conservation Area, tall buildings would not be an appropriate land use. They would be an uncharacteristically large scale feature and would become a prominent feature on the skyline. This would detract from the open skyline which is a fundamental feature of the historic character of the conservation Area. In addition, tall buildings along Queen Victoria Street would detract from the consistent architectural style and the roofline.



### Character Area 5: Broad Street

Land Use	Broad Street is a main shopping street in Reading town centre, containing many primary shopping outlets.
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to the St. Mary's Butts/Castle Hill Conservation Area and the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.
Architectural style	At street level the character of the frontages is determined by the branding of the retail outlets. Above, there are examples of Victorian and Georgian frontages together with examples of redeveloped frontages from various decades.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The consistent built form on either side of the road is composed of medium sized shop units. In addition, the relatively low roofline creates a medium scaled townscape.
Townscape condition	The buildings and public realm along the street is generally in a good condition.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been identified for this character area.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	There are no landmark features within the character area.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Medium: The existing block size and scale of buildings on Broad Street ensures some capacity for the development of tall structures. However, the positioning of the character area adjacent to two Conservation Areas provides some constraints. Any tall buildings should be located in a position which ensures it will not become a dominant feature of the skyline above either Conservation Area.



### Character Area 6: St Lawrence and Market Place

Land Use	Predominantly retail, administrative and leisure use.
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840.
Architectural style	The architectural styles are representative of the variety of historic periods during which buildings were erected. Notable features are the cluster of buildings which surround the market place, particularly the Town Hall and St Lawrence's Church.
Urban grain and townscape scale	This is a small scale area of townscape. The building pattern is fine grained, the roofline is low and although there are areas of open spaces in front of the church, Town Hall, and at Market Place, these are also small in scale and contained by the surrounding built form.
Townscape condition	The cluster of historic buildings focused around the market place is in a good condition and create a strong townscape character.
Key views within the character area	View across Market Place to the Town Hall and St Lawrence's church.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	St Lawrence's Church and the spire of the Victorian Town Hall.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: There is no capacity to develop tall structures in this character area as a result of the fine grained, small scale nature of the built form and the low rise, open skyline above the buildings which is a fundamental element of the historic character.



### Character Area 7: Station Area West

Land Use	Residential land use
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading; AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840.
Architectural style	Victorian 2-3 storey terraced residential properties interspersed with more recent small scale office/commercial development.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The low rise, terraced housing creates a fine grained, small scale townscape.
Townscape condition	Buildings on Tudor Road are largely derelict creating a degraded character. To the south of the character area the terraced housing is in good condition and creates an area of strong residential character as the backdrop to views of Greyfriar's Church.
Key views within the character area	Views towards Greyfriar's church.
Key views into the character area	Views along west street to Greyfriar's Church which creates an attractive focal point. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	Greyfriar's Church is located in this character area.
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: The small scale, low rise and residential character of this area makes it inappropriate for the development of tall buildings.



### Character Area 8: Forbury Gardens and Surroundings

Land Use	The gardens comprise a Victorian formal garden, partially walled with a pond, bandstand and Maiwand Lion Statue. To the east of the gardens are the remains of Reading Abbey.
Historical significance	Anglo Saxon Foundation: AD 500-1121 Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	The remains of the abbey in the east of the character area date from 1121. To the south of the character area the building style and age is variable, including the 5 storey, glass fronted office buildings on Forbury Square.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The park is the largest area of open space within the centre of Reading. The surrounding built form is visually prominent and has a large block size. These factors combine to create a large scale townscape.
Townscape condition	The well maintained gardens and surrounding built form is well managed and in good condition.
Key views within the character area	Glimpsed views of Western Tower and Thames Tower above the vegetated skyline. View from Forbury Gardens towards Abbey Gate
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	There are no landmark structures within the character area.
Tall buildings planning applications	A proposal for a 19 storey tower on what is now Forbury Square was refused in October 2000.
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: There is no capacity to develop buildings of this scale within the majority of the character area due to the townscape designations. Any tall buildings must consider the potential impact upon views to and from the designated townscapes/landscapes and must not dominate views of the Abbey and Forbury Gardens.



**Character Area 9: Reading Prison**

Land Use	Reading prison
Historical significance	Anglo Saxon Foundation: AD 500-1121 Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to the remains of Reading Abbey and Forbury Gardens, both designated sites.
Architectural style	The main body of the prison is red brick and was constructed during the Victorian period
Urban grain and townscape scale	The buildings within this character area have a large block size, although are separated by paved areas which creates a sense of openness.
Townscape condition	The buildings are intact and occupied.
Key views within the character area	View from Kenavon Drive to the red brick wall and facade of Reading Prison.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	The prison buildings themselves are a landmark structure, locally visible from character areas in the east of the study area.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Medium: The existing Victorian buildings are attractive townscape features which create a localised historic character. The development of tall buildings would detract from the historic character.



### Character Area 10: Forbury Retail park

Land Use	Land use includes recent large scale office developments, retail warehouses, car parks and commercial/office developments.
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840.
Architectural style	Buildings are predominantly late 20th century, corrugated iron and plastic clad retail units.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The block size is large and there are numerous large warehouse buildings. This creates a large scale townscape.
Townscape condition	All of the buildings are intact and occupied, but the scattered building, separated by expansive parking areas creates an indifferent townscape condition.
Key views within the character area	From Kenavon Drive to the red brick wall and facade of Reading Prison.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	Although a number of tall warehouses are present within the character area, their frequency results in none of them being particularly discernible as a landmark structure.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Medium: The area is characterised by large blocky structures. Therefore a tall building would not appear uncharacteristic in terms of urban grain and townscape scale. There are few key views which characterise the area and therefore tall buildings would not jeopardise the visual experiences of the area. However, there are no buildings over 10 storeys within the area. A significantly taller building would become visually prominent, although assuming careful consideration is given to the design and placing, the building could provide focus to the area.



### Character Area 11: Napier Road

Land Use	Residential and retail (Tesco's) .
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840.
Architectural style	Late 20th century/early 21st century .
Urban grain and townscape scale	The buildings are fairly tightly packed and wedged between the railway line, Napier Road and the River Thames. Although the built form is tall, the individual block sizes are not very large. The numerous medium sized blocks separated by parking and landscaped areas creates a medium scale townscape.
Townscape condition	The position of the character area squashed between the railway embankment and Napier Road creates the sense of this being a forgotten area. The combination of building heights and style, none of which are distinctive townscape elements, creates a weak townscape character.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been defined for this character area.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	The 10 storey apartment blocks of Luscinia View.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Medium: Existing 10 storey apartment blocks are prominent features and ensures that buildings of a similar height would not appear uncharacteristic. However, the consistent height of the existing roofline and the residential character of the area ensure that significantly taller buildings would appear uncharacteristic in townscape terms.



**Character Area 12: Caversham Road**

Land Use	Residential
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	Two storey, red brick, terraced housing
Urban grain and townscape scale	The low rise, terraced housing creates a small scale townscape.
Townscape condition	The buildings are in good condition. The consistent architectural style create a strong townscape character.
Key views within the character area	View from Caversham Bridge westwards
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	There re no landmarks structures within the character area.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: There is a low capacity for the development of buildings of this scale due to the low rise, small scale residential character which predominates. Taller buildings would dilute the townscape pattern and would be uncharacteristic. The area is also inappropriate in terms of market demand and transport connections.



**Character Area 13: the Cattle Market**

Land Use	Mixed use
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	The Architectural style is variable including the large sheds and expansive car parking on the site of the Cattle Market and depot which is to the north of the character area and 3 storey residential blocks along Weldale Street
Urban grain and townscape scale	Buildings are of a variable height and block size but cumulatively create a medium scaled townscape.
Townscape condition	The variety of building styles, block sizes and materials creates a weak townscape character.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been defined for this area.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	There are no landmarks structures within the character area.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Medium: The existing large block sizes of built form at the cattle market site and the degraded townscape condition all contribute to a high capacity for the development of tall buildings. However, despite the suitability of this area, the height would be restricted by the surrounding small scale residential areas. Consideration should be given on a case by case basis to the appropriateness of tall building height in relation to these areas of strong residential character.



**Character Area 14: Oxford Road and Surroundings**

Land Use	Residential and some retail on Oxford Road
Historical significance	Russell St./Castle Hill Conservation Area Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	Red brick, low rise terraced housing
Urban grain and townscape scale	The low rise, terraced housing forms a small scale townscape
Townscape condition	The consistent architectural style and use of red brick creates a strong townscape character. The individual buildings are generally in good condition, although the signage associated with some of the units on Oxford Road clutters the townscape.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been defined for this area.
Key views into the character area	Views along the Oxford Road to Fountains House From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	Fountains House acts as a focal point to views from Oxford Road.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: There is a high sensitivity to the development of tall buildings within the character area which has a small scale, low rise, and residential townscape character. Tall buildings outside of the area are currently visible (Fountains House) and highlight the location of the central area. Tall buildings within this area would weaken this relationship.



**Character Area 15: Chatham Place**

Land Use	Retail
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to St. Mary's Butts Conservation Area
Architectural style	1970s concrete blocks
Urban grain and townscape scale	The block size is large, incorporating the covered Broad Street Mall shopping centre. Above the Broad Street Mall shopping centre is a 12 storey tower. These features combine to create a large scale townscape
Townscape condition	Currently the character area is intersected by the IDR. The individual townscape elements are either large, blocky buildings or construction sites. There are no notable townscape features.
Key views within the character area	Along West Street to Greyfriar's Church
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	Fountains House acts as a focal point to views from Oxford Road.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The existing built form is large scale and blocky, ensuring that tall buildings would not result in a significant change to the urban grain. The absence of notable townscape features ensures a suitability for re-development. However, careful consideration should be given on a case by case basis to how tall buildings would impact upon key views along West Street to Greyfriar's Church and to how they would be viewed from and impact upon views of St. Mary's Church. It is proposed that new building directly abutting St. Mary's Butts should not be tall structures. Any tall buildings should be set back from this road and the Conservation Area.



### Character Area 16: The Civic Centre

Land Use	The area is dominated by large scale buildings including the Civic Centre, the Hexagon Theatre and Fountain House
Historical significance	Anglo Saxon Foundation: AD 500-1121 Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area
Architectural style	1970s concrete blocks
Urban grain and townscape scale	The cluster of buildings with a large block size, and the elevated roofline created by Fountains House forms a large scale townscape.
Townscape condition	The large concrete blocks which characterise this area are unexceptional in terms of design and quality. This creates a poor townscape character.
Key views within the character area	Views from the Civic Centre to St Mary's Church and Conservation Area
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	Fountains House acts as a focal point to views from Oxford Road.
Tall buildings planning applications	A planning application is expected to be submitted for a new civic centre and mixed use development in this area during 2008. Previous consultations on the masterplan for this area have included one or two tall buildings (up to 30 storeys), but proposals are still evolving.
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: Due to the large scale of the individual elements of the character area, a tall building would not appear uncharacteristic. A tall building could provide structure and focus to the character area which is currently composed of poor quality, undistinguished buildings which creates a weak townscape character. However, careful consideration should be given to retaining glimpsed views to St. Mary's church and the surrounding Conservation Area and it is essential that the building does not become an intrusive and dominant feature of the skyline of views towards St. Mary's Conservation Area.



### Character Area 17: St. Mary's and Castle Street

Land Use	The building uses are varied, but mainly comprise retail and small offices creating predominantly active frontages.
Historical significance	Anglo Saxon Foundation: AD 500-1121 Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Within St. Mary's/Castle Hill Conservation Area
Architectural style	Varied including red brick and half timbered
Urban grain and townscape scale	The low rise skyline and tightly packed buildings create a fine grained, small scale townscape.
Townscape condition	The cluster of historic buildings is in good condition and creates a localised area of strong historic character.
Key views within the character area	Views along Castle Street eastwards View along St. Mary's Butts to St. Mary's church
Key views into the character area	View from Character area 16 (the civic Centre) towards St. Mary's Church Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	St. Mary's Church
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: The Conservation Area designation makes this an inappropriate area for the development of tall buildings. The tall buildings would detract from the historic character.



### Character Area 18: The Oracle

Land Use	The Oracle is a single development that fills the space between Broad Street, Mill Lane, Bridge Street and Duke Street. It provides a major shopping centre for Reading town centre, with the main access from Broad Street. The Kennet and Avon canal flows through the centre of the development. It is a key feature of the site and forms the focus of a civic space which includes seating, play spaces and cafes.
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to the Russel Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area
Architectural style	Late 20th century. Buildings materials are variable including concrete, brick and glass.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The large expanse of covered shopping centre and occasionally tall structures creates a large scale townscape.
Townscape condition	Although the design of the Oracle building is unexceptional, the public realm along the River Kennet is an attractive and well used resource which is in good condition.
Key views within the character area	Views along the Kennet and Avon canal eastwards
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	The general roofline of this character area is 3/4 storeys, with occasional taller buildings up to 9 storeys. The rooflines of these taller buildings are designed in such a way that their design, as well as their height stands out from the surrounding roofscape. For example the angular, glass structure which is located on the roof above the Oracle on the south side of the Kennet and Avon Canal.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The large block size and existing landmark structures (e.g. spire on the car park) create a high capacity for the development of tall buildings. However, consideration should be given on a case by case basis to how the development would impact on the skyline above St Mary's church and the surrounding Conservation Area.



### Character Area 19: Mallard Row to Fobney Street

Land Use	Predominately residential apartments which are located on the north and south banks of the Kennet and Avon Canal although there is also some office use.
Historical significance	Anglo-Saxon Foundation: AD 50-1121 Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840 Adjacent to the St. Mary's Butts Castle Street Conservation Area
Architectural style	The buildings are predominantly late 20th century, brick structures.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The apartment buildings separated by small blocks of ornamental planting create a medium scale townscape.
Townscape condition	The Buildings within the character area are occupied, functioning buildings. They do not either contribute to a sense of good quality townscape or detract from it.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been identified for this area.
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	Although the apartment buildings are taller than those in some of the surrounding areas such as the St Mary's Butts Conservation Area, the consistent rows of apartment blocks, and their location immediately to the west of the Oracle, ensures that the apartment buildings blend into the general elevated roofline, and are not in themselves distinctive features.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The area is characterised by apartment block buildings which are taller than the average residential built form in Reading. The apartment blocks create a medium sized townscape scale and urban grain. Buildings up to 10 storeys would not appear uncharacteristic in townscape terms. However, should built form taller than 10 storeys be proposed, careful consideration should be given to how the increased scale and density of development would impact upon St. Mary's Butts Conservation Area.



## Character Area 20: London Street

Land Use	Residential
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading: AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	Red brick, low rise terraced housing
Urban grain and townscape scale	The fine grained residential area has a small townscape scale.
Townscape condition	The buildings within the character area are fairly consistent in architectural style creating a strong, residential townscape character. The townscape is generally in good condition, although the busy A327 and associated road signage and advertising boards create a localised cluttered character.
Key views within the character area	No key views have been identified for this area.
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	St. Giles Church is a key feature of views both within the character area and from surrounding areas.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: The small scale, residential nature of this character area makes it inappropriate for the development of tall buildings. tall buildings in central reading are visible from parts of the area as a skyline feature. The development of tall buildings within the character area would weaken this relationship.



### Character Area 21: Forbury South

Land Use	Predominantly large office use interspersed with smaller scale buildings such as Blake's cottages and a pub.
Historical significance	Ecclesiastical Town; AD 1121-1539 Post-Dissolution Reading; AD 1539-1840 Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	Predominantly 1970s - late 20th Century concrete blocks.
Urban grain and townscape scale	The large block size of the buildings creates a large scale townscape.
Townscape condition	The variable building style, heights and materials creates a weak townscape character. The busy A329 intersects the area and creates a disjointed character. There are a number of vacant buildings along the Kings Road which creates a slightly degraded character.
Key views within the character area	View along Wallington Street to the twin spires of St John's Church and the Methodist Chapel.
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	King's Point is a 7 storey building which is visually prominent feature on Wallington Street.
Tall buildings planning applications	Abbey Mill House is a 15 storey building with planning permission. Planning permission has been granted for a building of up to 14 storeys on the site of the existing King's Point building.
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The existing large block size and the presence of buildings up to 7 storeys and construction of a building up to 15 storeys ensures that a building of up a similar height would not be uncharacteristic. However, due to proximity to Reading Abbey, careful consideration should be given on a case by case basis to potential visual impacts which may result.



**Character Area 22: Vastern Road**

Land Use	Warehouses and retail park
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	The predominant material is coloured, metal cladding
Urban grain and townscape scale	The building blocks have a large floor space, although the buildings are not high rise and there is extensive car parking adjacent to the buildings. These features combine to create a medium scale townscape.
Townscape condition	The large, blank faces of the warehouses create an unexceptional area of townscape which does not respond well to the surrounding residential land use. Although the buildings are occupied and function well for their purpose, their design is unattractive and creates a weak and uninspiring area of townscape.
Key views within the character area	There are no key views defined for the character area.
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	The large, warehouse structures create a consistent, unexceptional townscape. There are no landmark structures. Although the warehouses create a roofline which is elevated above the surrounding residential buildings, there is no one structure which is notable as a tall building.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Low: The large block size which exists within the character area and the absence of any key views or visual focal point makes this an appropriate location for tall buildings. However it is proposed that tall structures should not be developed along the north and western boundaries of the character area as these boundaries are shared with small scale residential areas. any proposed built form should respond in terms of height and scale to the residential area. The tallest structures should be located to the south of the character area, adjacent to the railway line. In this area the townscape features are larger scale, and adjacent to large scale features outside of the area e.g. existing station buildings, Thames Tower and Western Tower



**Character Area 23: King's Meadow**

Land Use	Sports ground and river meadows
Historical significance	-
Architectural style	N/A
Urban grain and townscape scale	The large expanse of open meadows creates a large townscape scale.
Townscape condition	The meadows are a well maintained recreational resource and contribute positively to the townscape character.
Key views within the character area	The open views across the meadows to the wooded skyline created by bankside vegetation, has been identified as a key view.
Key views into the character area	From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	-
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: The majority of the site is protected open space and therefore inappropriate as a location for tall buildings.



**Character Area 24: Kennet Walk**

Land Use	Residential
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	Late 20th century apartment buildings
Urban grain and townscape scale	The apartment buildings separated by small blocks of ornamental planting create a medium scaled townscape. the quiet, narrow roads create a 'homezone' type character.
Townscape condition	The Buildings within the character area are occupied, functioning buildings. They do not either contribute to a sense of good quality townscape or detract from it.
Key views within the character area	There are no key views defined for the character area.
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	The gas storage facility in the east of the character area.
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	High: There is a high capacity for the development of buildings of ten storeys as the existing skyline is composed of a number of buildings of this scale. However, the residential 'homezone' character make this an inappropriate location for a very tall building which would dominate and become an iconic structure.



**Character Area 25: IDR West**

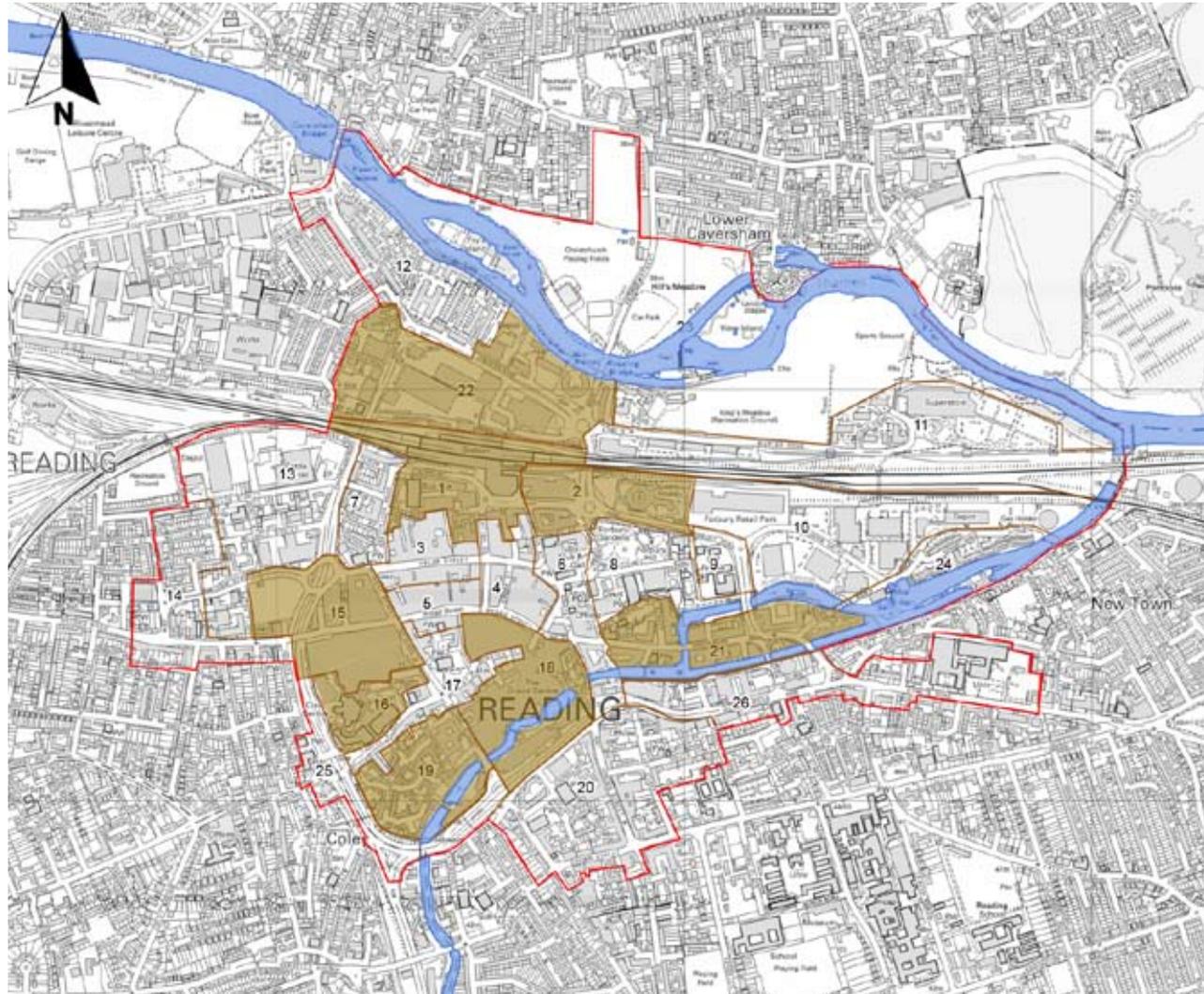
Land Use	The IDR and immediately adjacent buildings which include an office building and two churches
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	The IDR is the dominant feature of the character area. The office building is of mid to late 20th century design
Urban grain and townscape scale	N/A
Townscape condition	The IDR is an overpowering feature which detracts from the quality of the townscape.
Key views within the character area	There are no key views defined for the character area.
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	The most dominant feature of views is the IDR
Tall buildings planning applications	-
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Medium: The built form to the western side of the IDR is small scale, low rise residential. Any tall buildings developed on the western side of the IDR would overshadow this land use and would be uncharacteristic in terms of height, block size and building materials.



**Character Area 26: King's Road**

Land Use	Office buildings
Historical significance	Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840
Architectural style	Predominantly late 20th century design
Urban grain and townscape scale	The large block size of the buildings and the wide A329 create a large scale townscape
Townscape condition	The building within the character area are generally occupied, functioning buildings. They do not either contribute to a sense of good quality townscape or detract from it.
Key views within the character area	There are no key views defined for this character area
Key views into the character area	Buildings within the character area contribute to the skyline visible from Oxford Road when approaching Reading from the west. From the elevated position of Caversham Park, Balmore Park and Horse Close, built form within the character area contributes to the view of central Reading.
Landmark structures and existing tall buildings	There are no notable key landmark features
Tall buildings planning applications	There are no known tall building applications for this area.
Townscape sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings	Medium: The large block size of existing built form ensures that a tall building would not be uncharacteristic in terms of townscape scale, or detract from the existing urban grain.

Figure 2.2 demonstrates those character areas which are judged to have a low sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings, and therefore have some capacity for buildings over 10 storeys. Although all of the areas shown have some capacity, this figure should be read alongside the description of townscape character in the tables above, in order to understand the sensitivities within each area.



1. Station Hill
2. Reading station east
3. Friar Street
4. Station Road
5. Broad Street
6. St. Laurence and Market Place
7. Reading Station West
8. Forbury Gardens
9. Reading Prison
10. Forbury Retail Park
11. Napier Road
12. Caversham Road
13. Cattle Market and Chatham Place
14. Oxford Road and surroundings
15. Chatham Place
16. The Civic Centre
17. St Mary's and Castle Street
18. The Oracle
19. Mallard Row to Fobney Street
20. London Street
21. Forbury South
22. Vastern Road
23. King's Meadow
24. Kennet Walk
25. IDR
26. King's Road

 Areas with some townscape capacity for tall buildings

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**Figure 2.2: Townscape capacity for tall buildings**

## 3. VIEWS AND VISUAL EXPERIENCE

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### 3.1 Methodology

#### 3.1.1 Assessment of existing visual envelope

A desk study of topography, built form and woodland blocks was undertaken to define a preliminary visual envelope and study area. Field studies were then undertaken to verify the visual envelope. The field study involved an assessment on foot of the central Reading area, and assessment by car of the wider Reading borough.

#### 3.1.2 Identification of key views

In addition to identifying the visual envelope, key views were identified. Key views include the following:

- Views within central Reading of designated townscapes or townscape features which are integral to the creation of character;
- Views within central Reading which, by virtue of the townscape pattern and topography are of a pleasing composition e.g. well framed, panoramic or are focused by a large scale, distinctive feature;
- Views of central Reading from the wider Reading Borough, which are tunnelled along roads or river valleys;
- Panoramic views of Central Reading from the wider Reading Borough;
- Attractive, rural views where the absence of large scale built form is a characteristic feature.

The key views have been described and assessed under two headings. These are 'views within the city centre' and 'views into central Reading'. In the case of the short range views within central

Reading a description is given of the composition of the view which covers the main components and the characteristics of the foreground, middle ground and background. Descriptions of the view are given below in Section 3.2.

Each of the key views has been attributed a sensitivity judgement. This is a judgement of the sensitivity of the view to the addition of a tall building. The criteria for making the sensitivity judgement are given below in Table 3.1.

In identifying the sensitivity of each view, and highlighting the key characteristics of each view, information is provided as to whether an additional tall building would be an appropriate addition. There is a general presumption that all views judged to have a high sensitivity would not be suited to the addition of a tall building. The location of each high sensitivity view has been taken into consideration when defining the 'preferred tall building locations' (see main text). However, a decision regarding the appropriateness of each tall building proposal should be made on a case by case basis. Information given below on the key components of each view, and the character of the view should be used when making decision as to whether the tall building in question would have an adverse impact.



**Table 3.1: Visual sensitivity**

<b>Visual Characteristics</b>	<b>Sensitivity judgement</b>
Rural view with no/little built form Townscape with a strong and intact historic character	High
Suburban style view with no tall buildings Urban view which is not to or from a designated townscape but is a well composed view of a good quality townscape Tall buildings could be introduced assuming they respect and respond to the existing surroundings A view which includes townscape designations as a background feature and poor quality features in the foreground detract from the view.	Medium
View of townscape features which are of a poor quality and have a weak character. A view which could be enhanced by the addition of a tall buildings to add focus and definition.	Low

## 3.2 Key Views

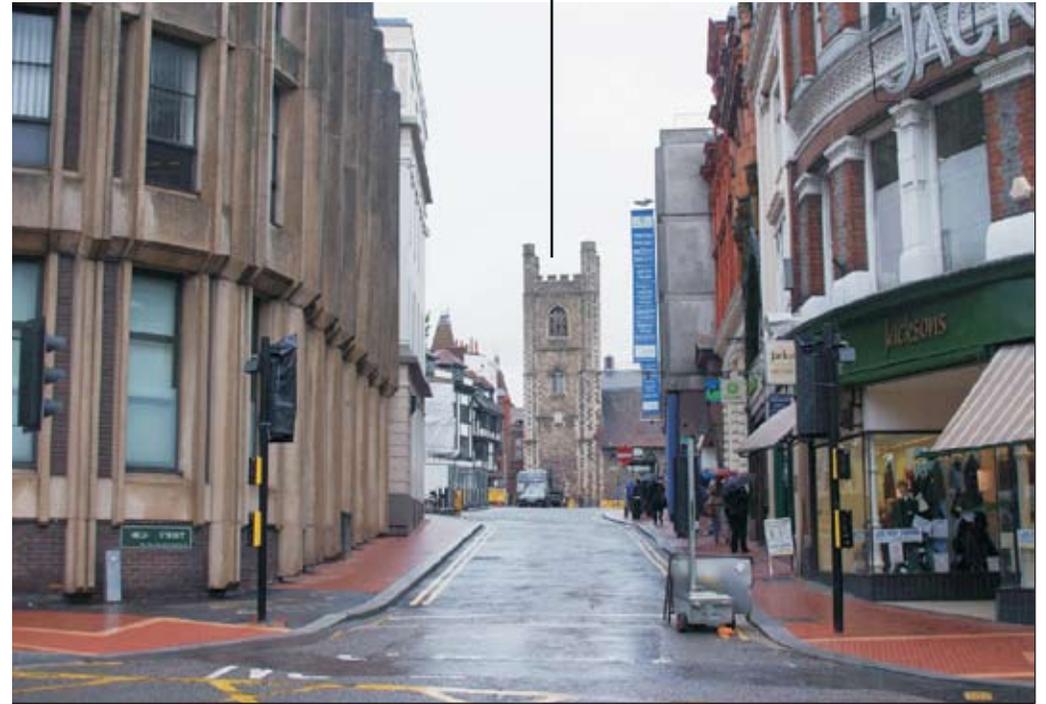
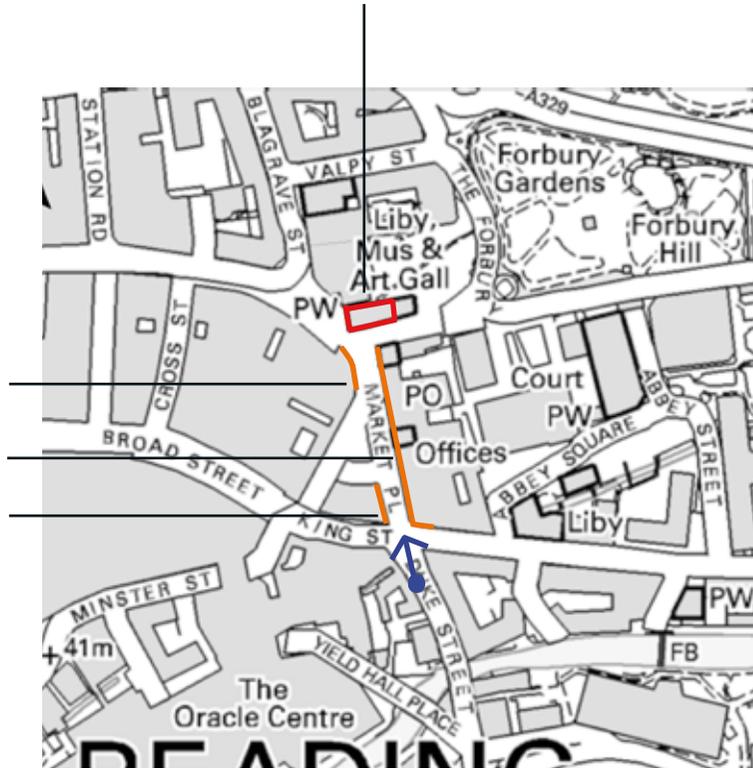
### 3.2.1 Views within central Reading

The location of each of the key views identified within central Reading and the view experienced are detailed below.

St. Lawrence's Church

St. Lawrence's Church

Low rise built form on market Place frames the view



**Viewpoint A: View along Market Place towards St Lawrence's Church**



Key feature of the view



Secondary feature of the view



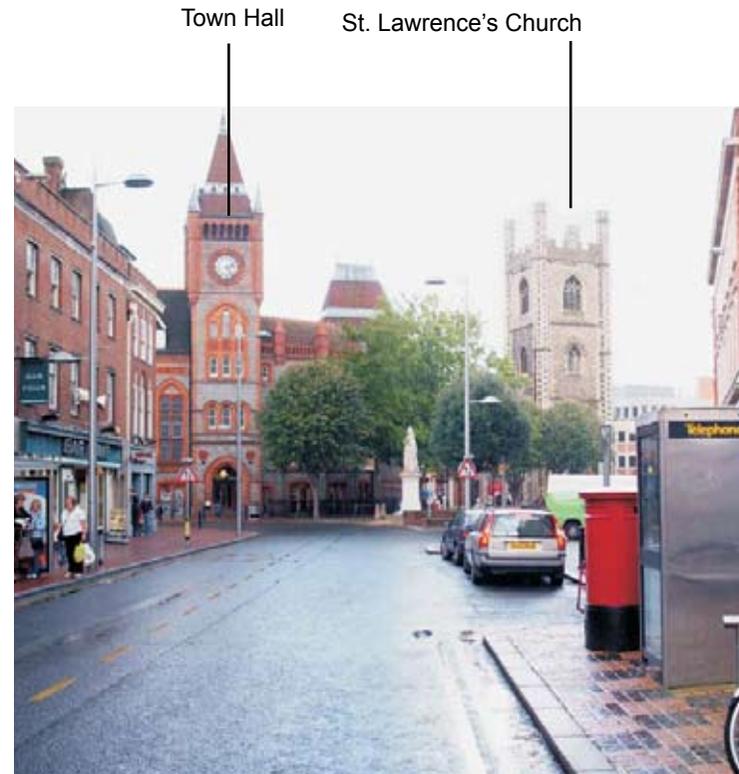
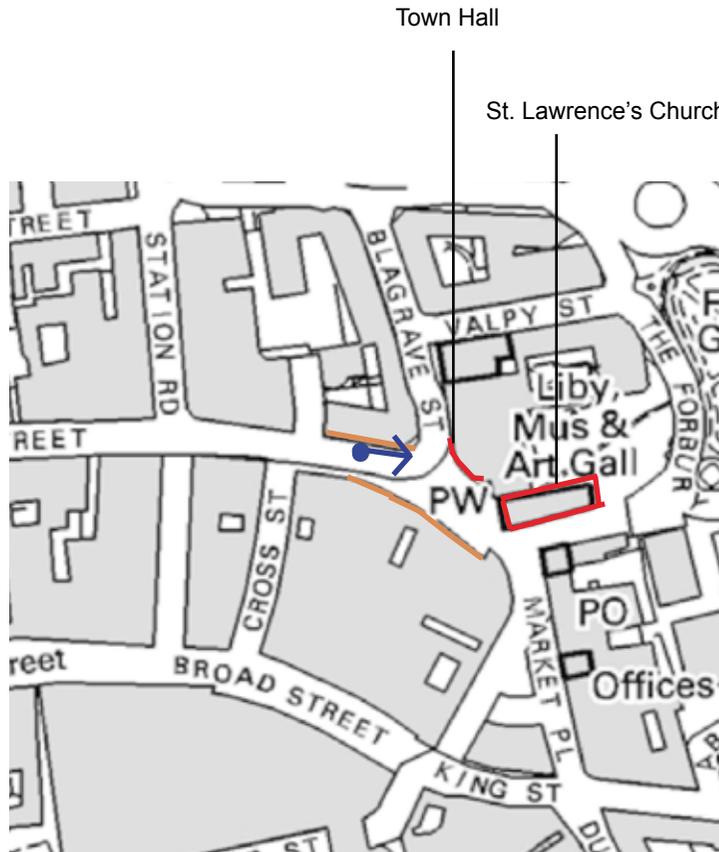
Viewpoint location

Key features of the view to be protected

- Channelled view of St Lawrence's church;
- Open skyline above the church tower
- Low rise nature of the buildings which frame Market Place

The focus of the view is St. Lawrence's church. The view towards St. Lawrence's Church is framed by two and three storey buildings of various architectural styles. In the background of the view, immediately in front of St. Lawrence's church, three storey half timber buildings within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area are visible and contribute to the historic character of the view. The skyline above St. Lawrence's church is open and is not interrupted by any vertical features.

The viewpoint has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings as a result of the low rise skyline in which St. Lawrence's church is the focal point.

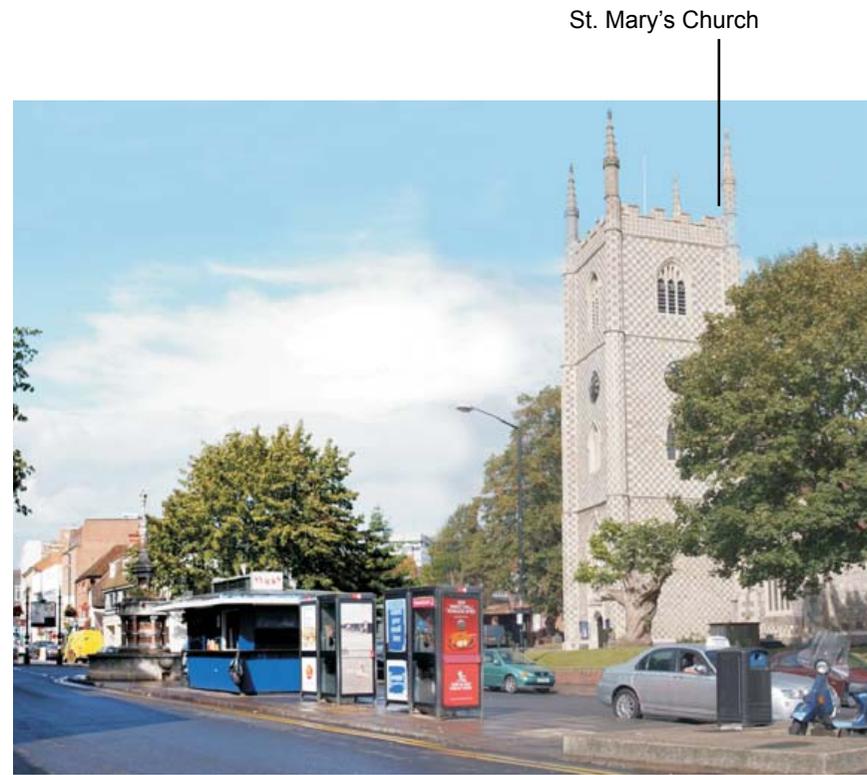


**Viewpoint B: view along Friar Street to St. Lawrence Church and the Town Hall**

	Key feature of the view		Secondary feature of the view		Viewpoint location
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- Key features of the view to be protected
- Channelled view of St Lawrence's church and the Town Hall
  - Open skyline above the town Hall and St Lawrence's Church

The tower of St. Lawrence's church and the tower of the town hall are the tallest structure in the view and form the focal point. These two structures are flanked on either side by three and four storey buildings. Friar Street, and the trees and statues in the Market Place are visible in the foreground. The prominent position of the two towers and the surrounding lower rise skyline has a high sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings.



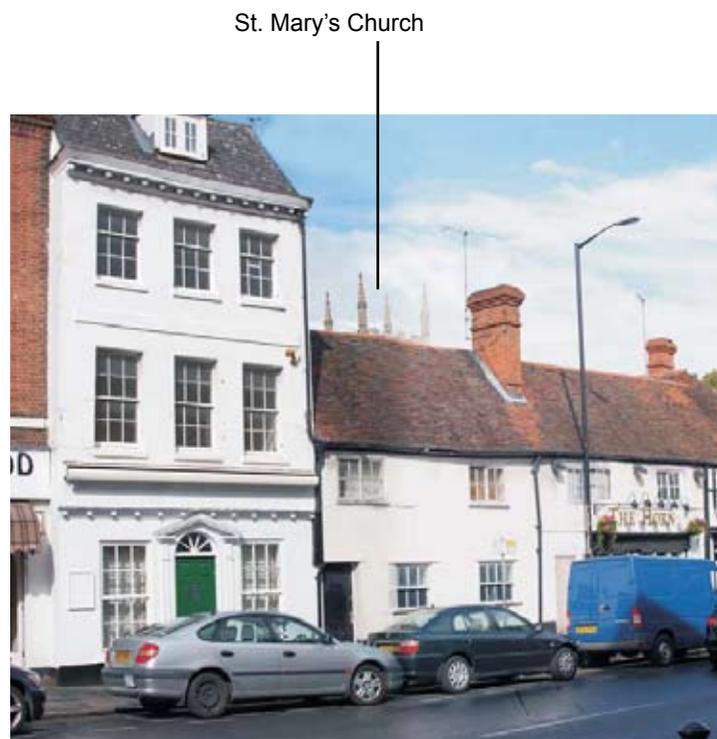
**Viewpoint C: View of St Mary's Church and churchyard from St. Mary's Butts**

- Key feature of the view
- Secondary feature of the view
- Viewpoint location

Key features of the view to be protected:

- Open skyline above the church tower;
- Low rise nature of buildings to the north west of the tower;
- The space given to views of the church by the cemetery.

The main component of the view is St. Mary's Church which is the tallest building on the skyline. The low rise buildings on St. Mary's Butts, trees within the graveyard and the street furniture are all secondary elements of the view. All of these features are of a significantly smaller height and scale than the church tower. The view has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings which would detract from the visual prominence of the church tower.



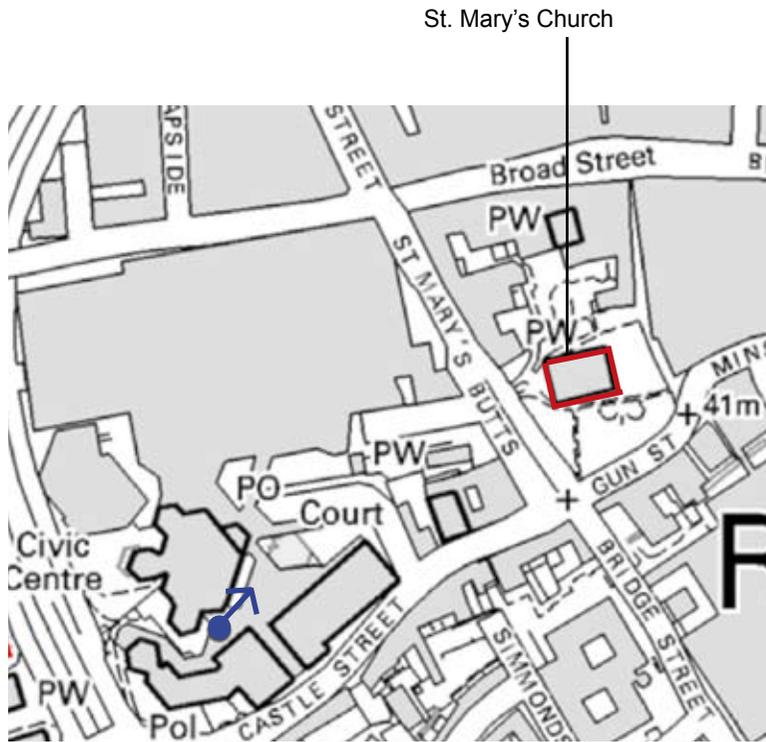
**Viewpoint D: the tower of St Mary's from Castle Hill**

	Key feature of the view		Secondary feature of the view		Viewpoint location
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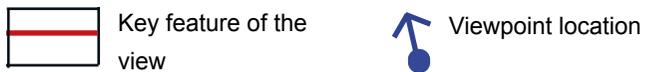
Key features of the view to be protected:

- The two and three storey white rendered buildings in the foreground which establish a historic character to the view;
- Glimpsed views of St. Mary's Church tower over the roofline;
- The open skyline above the church tower.

This glimpsed view of St. Mary's church tower provides a rare opportunity to experience views from a location other than St. Mary's Butts. The dense development of the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area contains most views outwards to buildings of the scale of St. Mary's Church. The two and three storey white rendered buildings in the foreground of the view add a historic context. The viewpoint has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of a tall building.



**Viewpoint E: view from the civic centre towards St. Mary's Church and Conservation Area**



Key features of the view to be protected:

- Framed views of St. Mary's Church Tower;
- The open skyline above St. Mary's Church

Open views towards St. Mary's church tower and buildings within the surrounding St. Mary's/Castle Hill Conservation Area are possible across the open, largely undeveloped area of townscape to the east of the Civic Centre. Trees and ornamental planting occasionally interrupted, but St. Mary's church remains a focal point within the view. The large concrete structure of the Civic Centre structure frames the western edge of the view and the building style and block size forms a marked contrast to the small scale, fine grained urban form of the Conservation Area in the background. The view of St. Mary's church is a pleasing focus, and provides a rare opportunity to view the feature at a distance. However, the exact composition of the view is not of the highest quality, the civic centre buildings in the foreground are a detracting feature. It is judged that the glimpsed view of the church has a medium sensitivity as there is room for improvement of the foreground.



**Viewpoint F: From Forbury Gardens towards Abbey Gate**



Key feature of the view



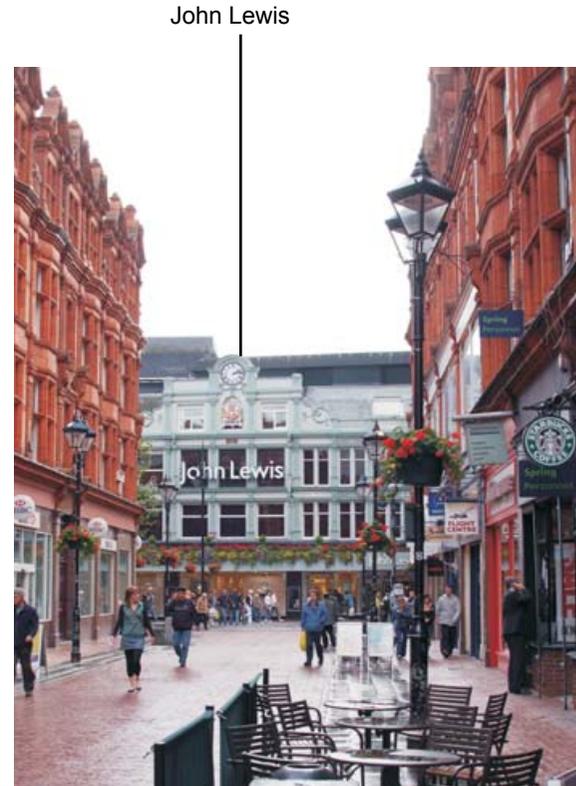
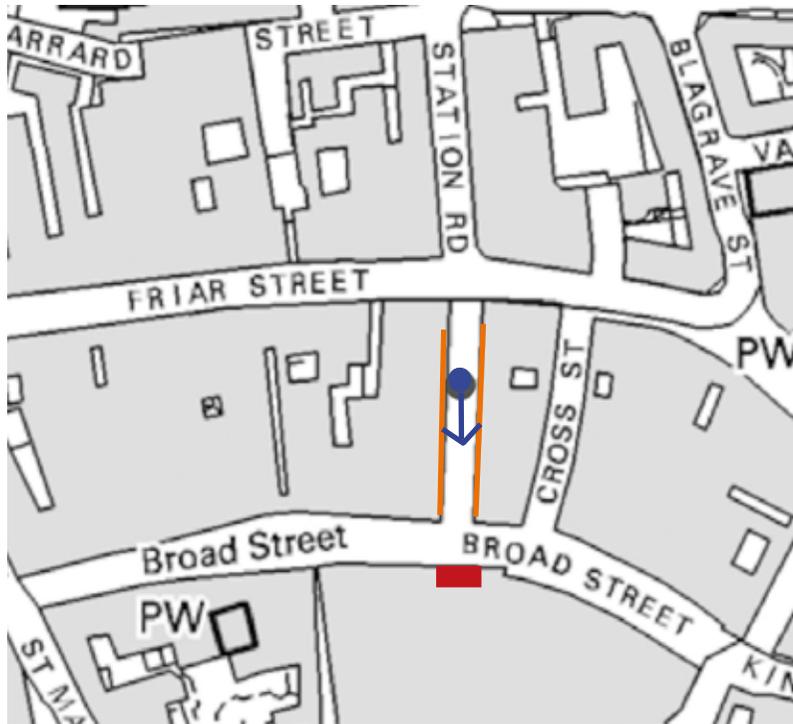
Viewpoint location

Key features of the view to be protected:

- The open skyline above Abbey Gate
- The open aspect to the view provided by Forbury Gardens

The landscaped setting of Forbury Gardens creates an open area of townscape which facilitates views towards the buildings which line 'The Forbury'. These include the 5 storey, brick office buildings and the Abbey inner Gateway. The view is experienced from a designated landscape; the mature trees and the abbey gateway create a historic character. These features combine to create a high sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings to the view.





**Viewpoint G: view along Queen Victoria Street towards John Lewis building**



Key feature of the view



Secondary feature of the view



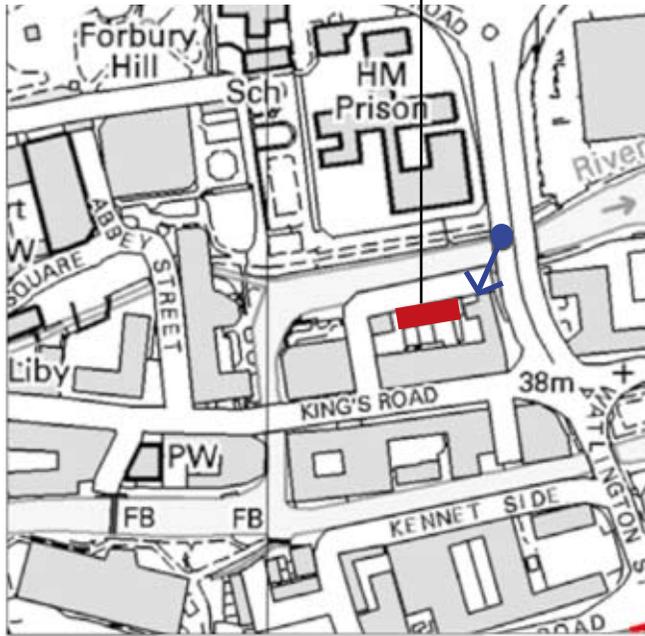
Viewpoint location

Key features of the view to be protected:

- Framed views of the John Lewis building frontage;
- The open skyline above the John Lewis building;
- The consistently four storey, red brick buildings which frame the view.

The four storey red brick facades on Queen Victoria Street, frame views of the John Lewis frontage on Broad Street. Although the John Lewis building is the focus of the view, the red brick, Victorian structures are also an attractive townscape feature. The view has a strong structure. The buildings within the view are listed and are attractive townscape features. These views combine to create a high sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings.

Blake's Cottages



Blake's Cottages



**Viewpoint H: view along Kennet and Avon Canal towards Blake Cottages**



Key feature of the view

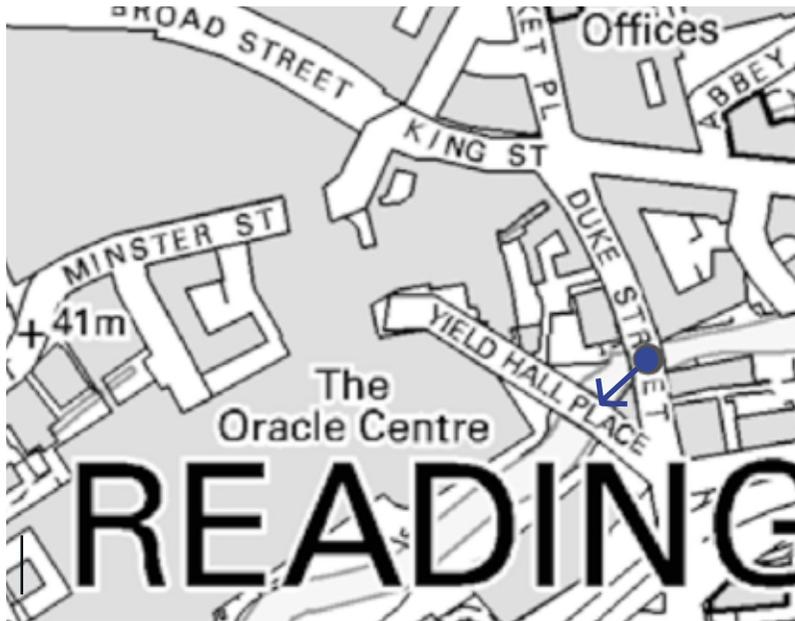


Viewpoint location

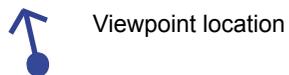
Key features of the view to be protected:

- Open views across the canal towards Blake's cottages;
- A roofline which steps down to Blake's Cottages

The canal creates an open aspect, facilitating views of the low rise terraced structures of Blake's Cottages. Late 20th century office structures to the west overlook Blake's Cottages, although there is a marked 'stepping down' of the skyline from the tallest buildings to the roofline of the cottages. The view has a medium sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings.



**Viewpoint I: view along the Kenet and Avon Canal from Duke Street westwards**



Viewpoint location

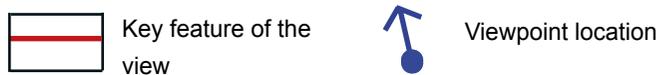
Key features of the view to be protected:

- Framed views along the canal

Views along the canal form a localised area of open views; the view is flanked on either side by a well defined edge, created by the tall, blocky structures within the Oracle development. Long range views along the canal are restricted by a bridge in the foreground. The view has a low sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings. A key characteristic of the view is the manner in which it is framed by tall buildings with a large block size; further tall buildings would enhance this characteristic.



**Viewpoint J: view along the Kennet and Avon Canal from Duke Street eastwards**



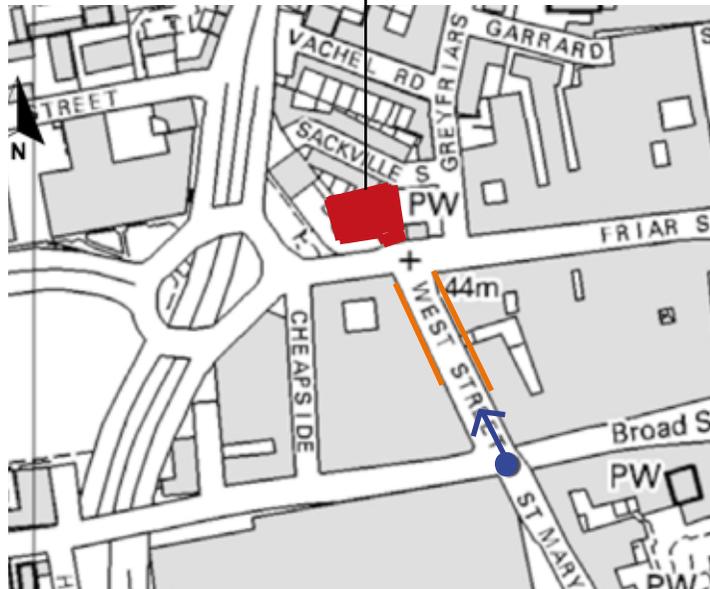
Key features of the view to be protected:

- Framed views along the canal

As in viewpoint I, views along the canal form a localised area of open views; the view is flanked on either side by a well defined edge, created by the tall, blocky structures which line the canal. The view has a low sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings. A key characteristic of the view is the manner in which it is framed by tall buildings with a large block size; further tall buildings would enhance this characteristic.

Greyfriar's Church

Greyfriar's Church



**Viewpoint K: view along West Street to Greyfriars Church**



Key feature of the view



Secondary feature of the view



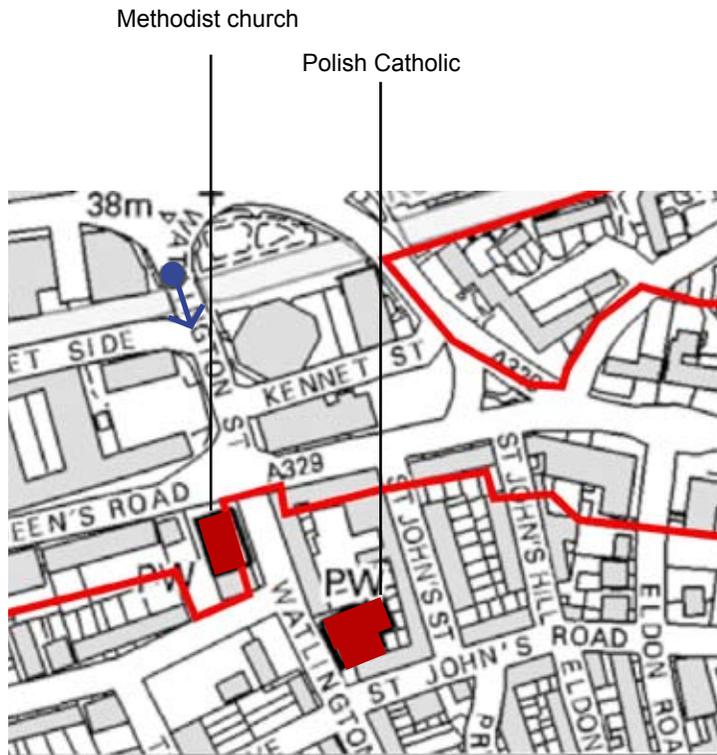
Viewpoint location

Key features of the view to be protected:

- The open skyline above Greyfriar's Church which draws attention to the historic townscape feature;

The consistent height of buildings along west Street which creates an uncomplicated foreground to the view.

Greyfriar's church is the focus of the view. Views towards the church are framed by three storey buildings along West Street which are of variable styles and form a weak townscape character to the foreground of the view. The tower of Greyfriar's church is the tallest building within the view and provides a focus which would be weakened if taller buildings were introduced to the surrounding skyline. The view has a high sensitivity.



**Viewpoint L: view along Wallington Street to the twin spires of St. John's and the Methodist Church**



Key feature of the view



Secondary feature of the view

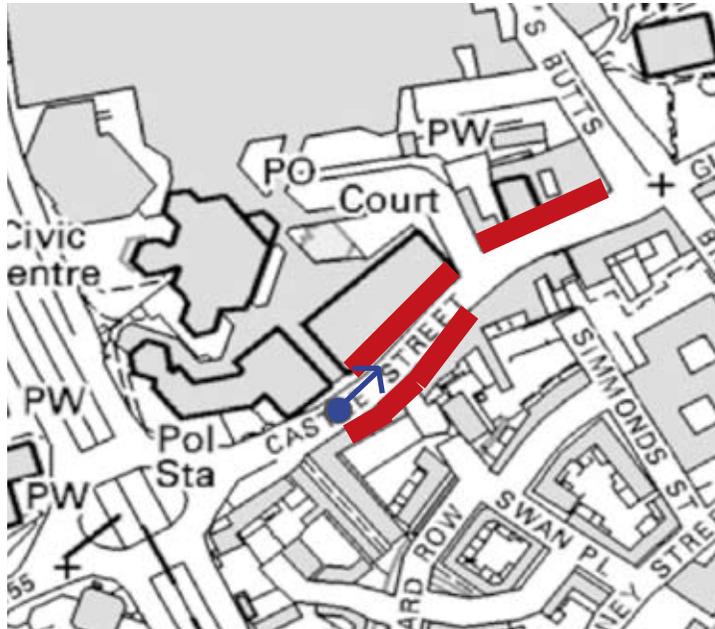


Viewpoint location

Key features of the view to be protected:

- Channelled views of the two spires

The focus of the view is the twin spires of the Polish catholic church and the Methodist church. Although intervening buildings interrupt views of the spires, they remain the tallest element of the view. Although designated features form an element of the view, they are background features. The wide road and road signage dominate the foreground of the view and creates a degraded character. The view has a medium sensitivity to the inclusion of tall structures.



**Viewpoint M: view eastwards along Castle Street**



Key feature of the view

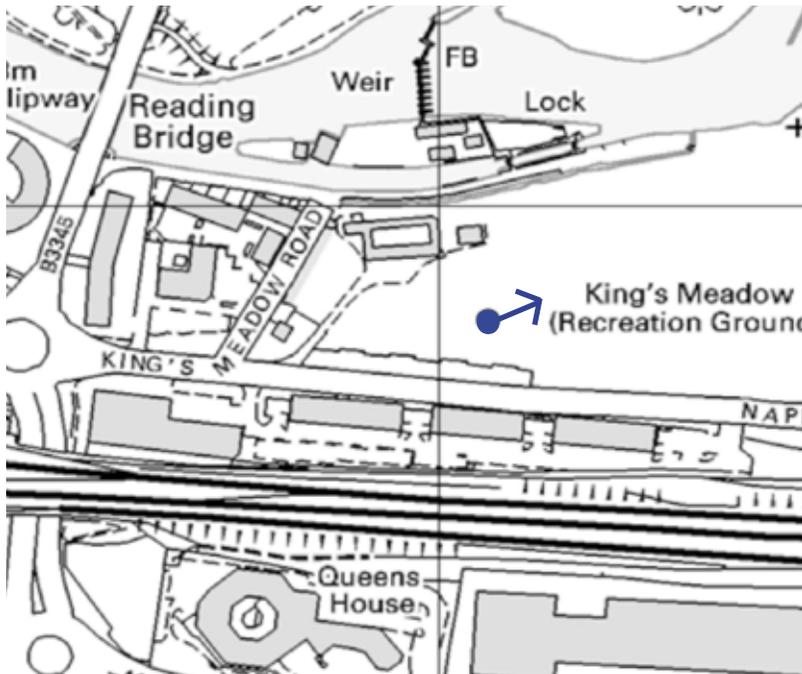


Viewpoint location

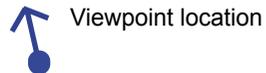
Key features of the view to be protected:

- Channelled views into central Reading which are framed by a combination of historic buildings

The two and three storey structures which line Castle Street are of a variety of ages and architectural styles. However, a number of the buildings are listed and are attractive townscape features. No buildings puncture the skyline above the historic buildings on Castle Street and this contributes to the historic character of the view. As the view is experienced from a Conservation Area and is composed of low rise buildings of a small scale, it has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings.



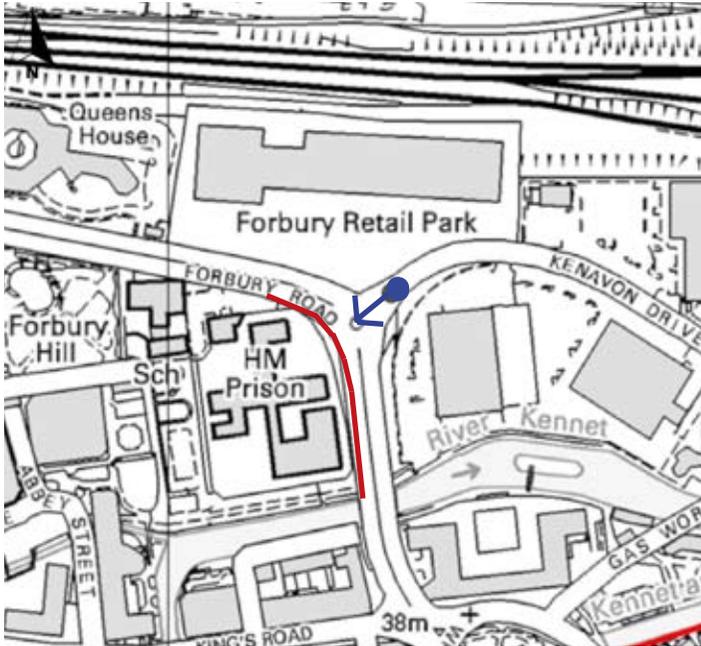
**Viewpoint N: view north westwards across Kings Meadow**



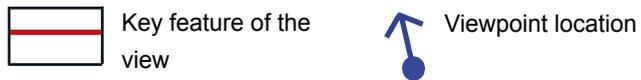
Key features of the view to be protected:

- Open views across the meadows;
- The almost completely uninterrupted wooded skyline

The wide expanses of flat meadows create open and extensive views towards a wooded skyline composed of mature trees. The wooded skyline is only interrupted by glimpsed views of the ten storey apartment blocks on Napier Road. The defining feature of the view is the expansive views of a tranquil, largely undeveloped landscape. The view of the largely undeveloped, wooded skyline is experienced from a local landscape designation (Major Landscape Feature). The inclusion of further tall buildings above the wooded skyline would result in a significant change to the character. The view has a high sensitivity to the development of tall buildings.



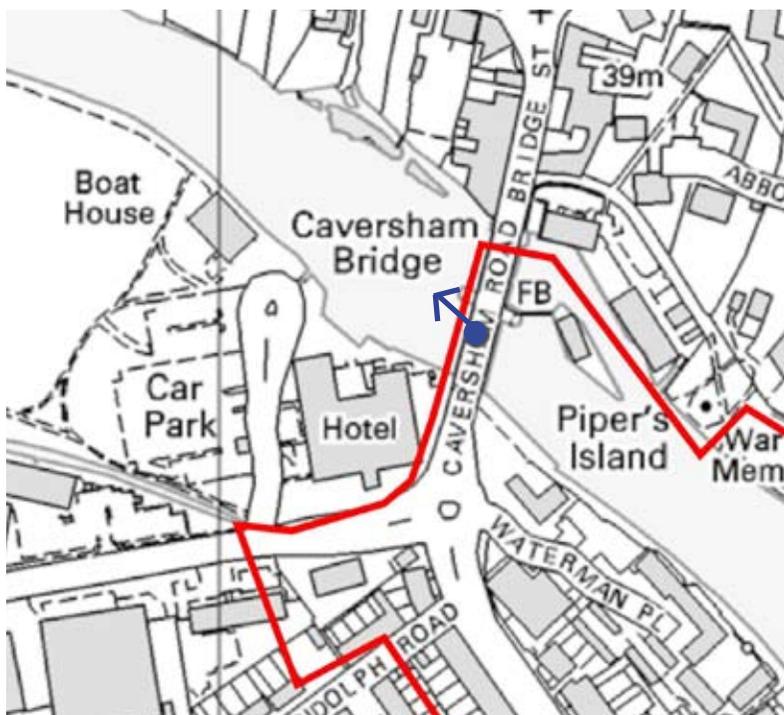
**Viewpoint O: View from Kenavon Drive towards Reading Prison**



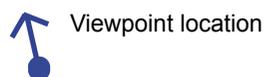
Key features of the view to be protected:

- Open views across Forbury Road to Reading Prison

The listed, Reading prison is the focus of the view. The imposing, red brick structure dominates views from Kenavon Drive, partly as a result of the architectural style and the building mass, but also due to the open skyline which surrounds the structure. The view has a medium sensitivity to the inclusion of further tall buildings which would detract from the prominent setting of the prison.



**Viewpoint P: View westwards from Caversham Bridge**



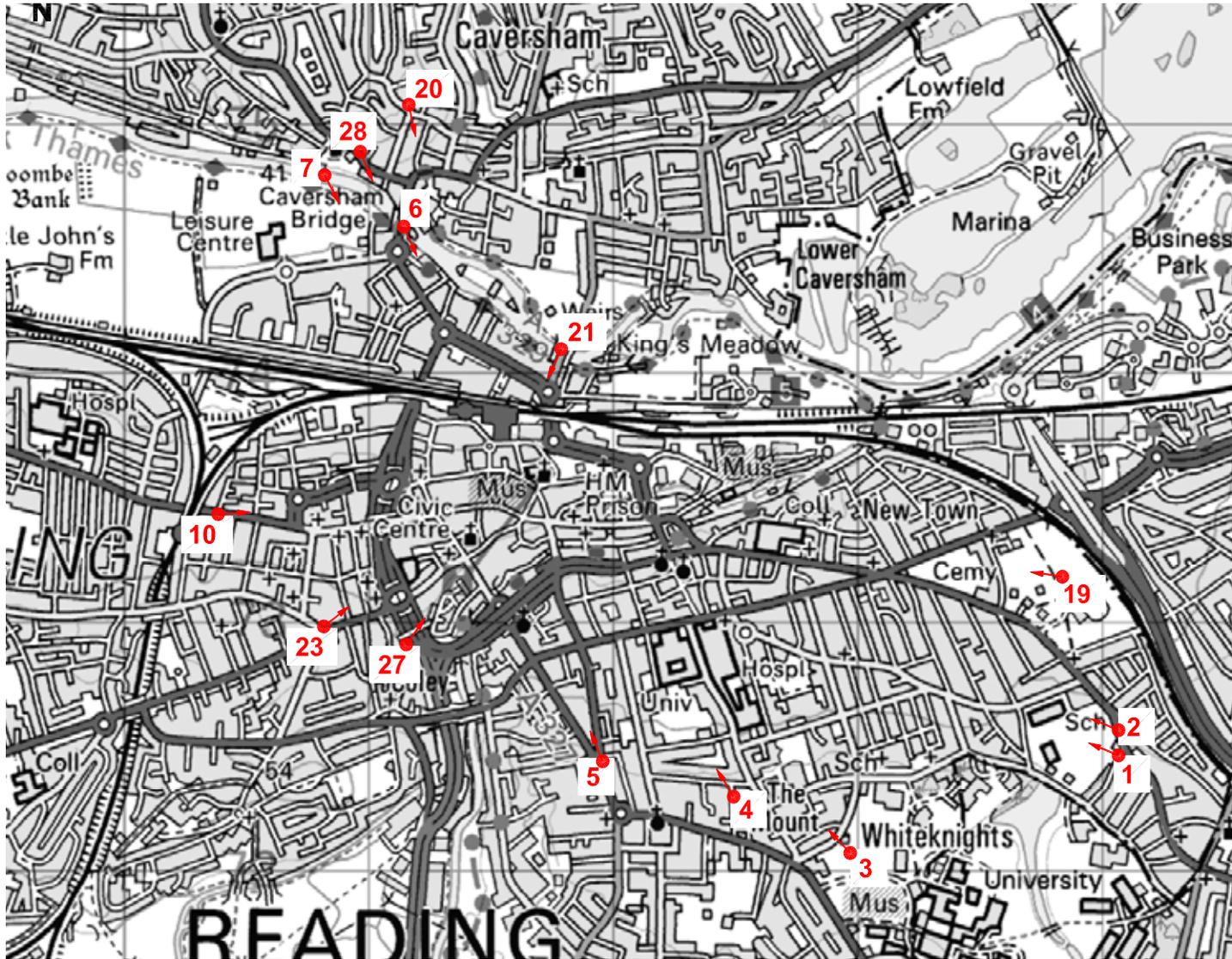
Key features of the view to be protected:

- Open aspect across the river and adjacent flood plain;
- Views of an uninterrupted wooded skyline;
- Foreground views of the stone balustrades of Caversham Bridge

The stone balustrades of Caversham Bridge are an attractive foreground feature of the view. Beyond the bridge views of the river course and the adjacent woodland are the main features, creating a tranquil character with few intrusions by man made structures. The view towards the largely undeveloped skyline which forms part of the locally designated Thames Valley landscape has a high sensitivity to the development of tall structures.



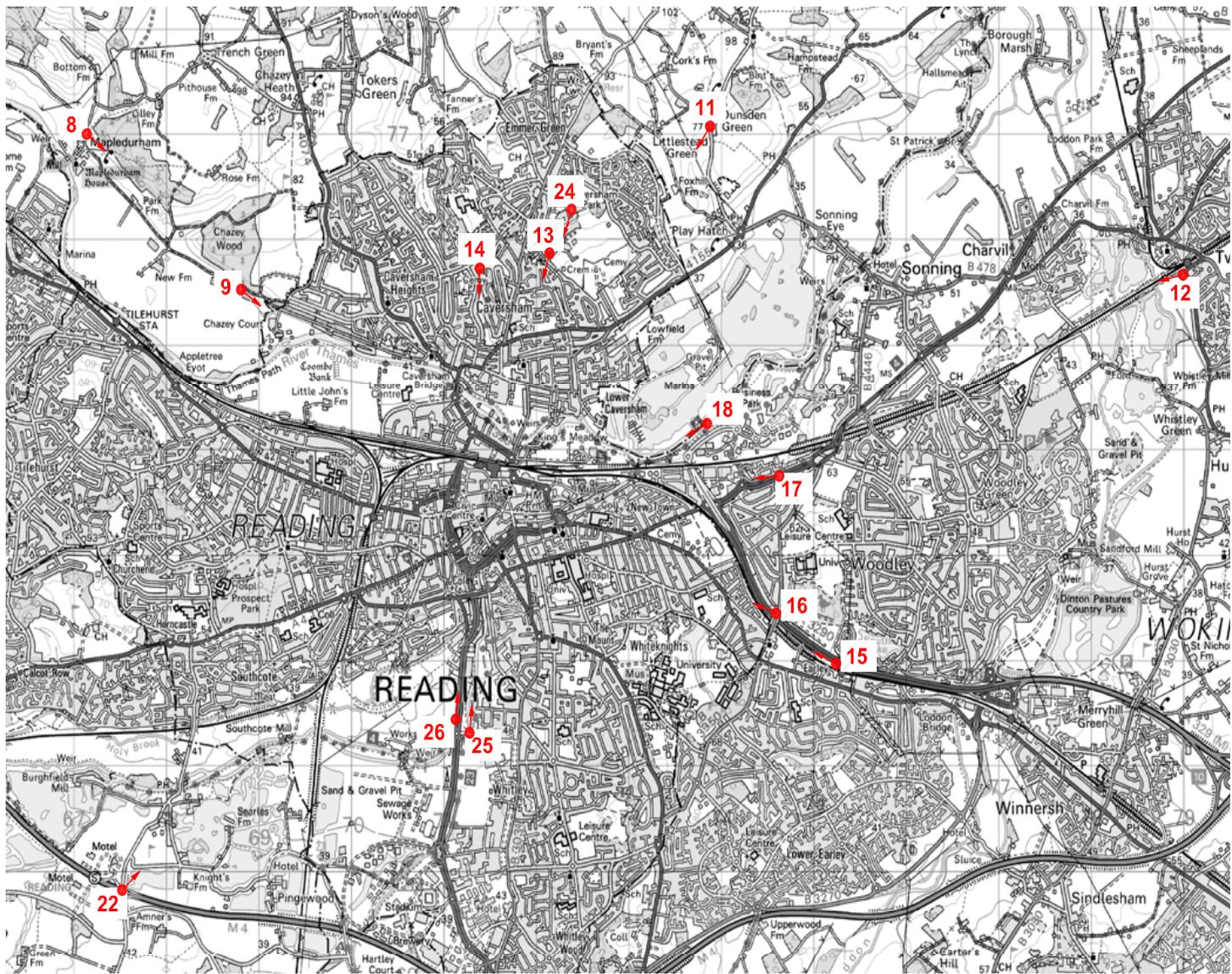
### 3.2.2 Views into central Reading



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Figure 3.1: Mid range views into central Reading

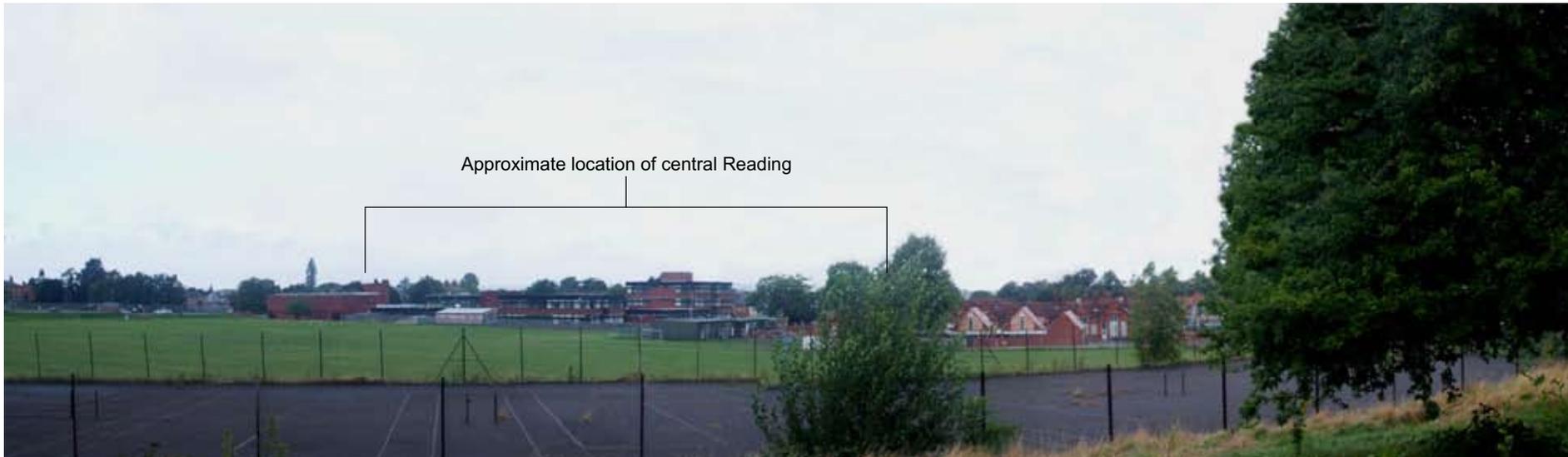
 Viewpoint location



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 Viewpoint location

Figure 3.2: Long range views into central Reading



**Viewpoint 1: From Green Road, south west of central Reading overlooking playing fields**

The view is across sports fields to a developed skyline which is occasionally interspersed with woodland. The development is suburban in character being low rise and including the roofs of terraced and semi detached housing and school buildings. This view has a medium sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings in central Reading. The tall buildings would be a background feature to the view, although would be notable as an uncharacteristic feature, contrasting with the fine grained and low rise nature of the built form within the foreground of the view.



**Viewpoint 2: From the A329, south west of central Reading**

The view is channelled along the downwards sloping A329.

Views to the north-west, down the slope are facilitated by gaps in roadside vegetation. These views are across the roofline of residential buildings to the gas storage structure in eastern, central Reading. The suburban, residential character of the view creates a medium sensitivity to built form in central Reading becoming a visible feature on the skyline. Although the buildings would be a background feature to the view, they would be notable as an uncharacteristic feature, contrasting with the fine grained and low rise nature of the built form within the foreground of the view.



**Viewpoint 3: From the ground of the University of Reading, Whiteknights Campus**

The view is across a large expanse of manicured sports fields to a wooded skyline created by the trees which form the sports field boundary. The skyline is occasionally punctuated by built form to the south. Where buildings are visible they are two and three storey red brick structures. Although there is a very open aspect across the sports field the wooded boundary and the sloping topography to the north west ensures that no views beyond the immediate edge of the sports field are possible. Due to the very low density of built form, the view would have a high sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings in central Reading as a visible skyline feature.



**Viewpoint 4: From the Mount towards Caversham Park**

The view down the steeply sloping road, which is lined by residential, detached housing, creates a tunnelled, long range view towards Caversham Park on the northern Thames valley sides. The combination of the residential character of the view and the inclusion of Caversham Park as a focal point of the view, ensure that the view would have a high sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings.



**Viewpoint 5: From the A327, south of central Reading**

The A327 and adjacent residential development creates a framed and tunnelled view towards central Reading. The sloping road facilitates views down to the Oracle buildings which are a visible feature at the end of the road and form the focal point of the view. Although the buildings in the foreground are residential and low rise, the existing visibility of buildings in central Reading as a focal point creates a low sensitivity to further tall building developments.



#### **Viewpoint 6: From Caversham Bridge**

The banks of the River Thames as viewed from Caversham Bridge are developed, largely with low rise residential and leisure usage. Exceptions include Thames Tower and Western Tower which are visible in the background of the view. None of the buildings visible in this view are of a high quality; the combination of late 20th century architectural styles creates an uninteresting and indifferent character. The view has a medium/low sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings on the skyline. Although the skyline is currently dominated by low rise development, the inclusion of a tall building would add focus to the view and provide an opportunity to add character and focus.



#### **Viewpoint 7: From the Thames Path west of Reading**

The view is across an open, largely undeveloped river floodplain landscape, although the tranquil character is partially eroded by views of leisure uses on the floodplain e.g. the fairground. Expanses of floodplain and recreational grassland are interrupted by views of riverside vegetation and individual clumps of trees. The skyline is also interrupted by the upper floors of Thames Tower in the background of the view. The introduction of further tall buildings to the skyline would further erode the tranquil character. There is a high sensitivity to the inclusion of further tall buildings to the view.



**Viewpoint 8: From rural road north of Maple Durham**

The view is of a pastoral landscape interspersed with parkland trees and woodland clumps. Maple Durham House is the only visible built form. The rural character of the view and the undeveloped nature of the skyline results in a high sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings to the view. Although tall buildings within central Reading would be a background feature of the view, the block size, height and architectural style would be at odds with the rural character.



**Viewpoint 9: From footpath east of Maple Durham**

Views across the sloping pastoral fields in the foreground are to a wooded skyline. The roofline of housing at the western end of 'The warren' is visible in the middle distance. In the background of the view more extensive built form on the slopes of the southern River Thames valley sides (Purley on Thames) is visible. Although occasional built form is a feature, the built form is residential and low rise. The rural view has a high sensitivity to the development of tall or very tall buildings.



**Viewpoint 10: From A329 adjacent to Gower Street**

The row of terraced, 3 storey red brick structures which include retail and residential use, frame views along the A329 towards central Reading. The tower on Broad Street Mall forms the focus of the view. Although the buildings in the foreground of the view are low rise and with a small block size, the Broad Street Mall tower forms a positive feature of the view, providing a focus. There is a low sensitivity to the inclusion of additional tall buildings to the skyline as they could provide further focus to the view. However, careful consideration must be given to the placing of further tall buildings and the pattern which this will create on the skyline.



**Viewpoint 11: From Dunsden way, south of Dunsden Green**

Gently undulating, large arable fields form the dominant feature of the view. The fields are interspersed with overhead power lines and electricity pylons. The skyline is occasionally wooded, but the woodland does not significantly contain view which are long ranging. The wind turbine at Green Park is a feature of the view in the far distance. Although large scale man made features are a feature of the view, a strong rural character remains. The introduction of further built form, particularly tall, large blocks would further erode the rural character. The view has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings to the skyline.



**Viewpoint 12: From Hurst Road, east of Reading**

An open aspect across the allotments creates long range views south westwards to a wooded skyline. Other than residential use along Hurst Road, there is no built form within the view. This undeveloped, suburban view has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings as visible skyline features.



**Viewpoint 13: From 'The Horse Close', Caversham**

Horse Close is a southwards sloping road on the upper valley sides of the River Thames. The sloping landform facilitates long range views southwards, between the houses towards central Reading. Western Tower and Fountain House in central Reading are visible skyline features. Due to the sloping topography, clear views would be afforded of any further tall structures in central Reading. The height and block size of the tall buildings would be at odds with the suburban, low rise land uses which characterise the foreground of the view. As existing tall built form is a feature of the view, further tall buildings would not be completely uncharacteristic, and therefore the view has a medium sensitivity. However, consideration should be given to how any proposed tall buildings respond to the existing tall buildings, and to how the skyline would be viewed as a whole. Although true of all viewpoints, this is particularly true in this instance due to the elevated and panoramic nature of the view.



#### **Viewpoint 14: View from Balmore Park**

This is a long range panoramic view of central Reading. Views down the grassy slope, across the residential roofline, to central Reading are possible. Thames Tower, Western Tower and Fountain House are visible on the skyline, while other tall commercial buildings in the east of Reading town centre are screened by existing vegetation. Views of Reading from this position are panoramic and are experienced from a recreational resource. It is judged that the viewpoint has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings. They would draw further attention to the central area and further detract from the tranquil nature of the view. Consideration should be given to how any proposed tall buildings respond to the existing tall buildings, and to how the skyline would be viewed as a whole. Although true of all viewpoints, this is particularly true in this instance due to the elevated and panoramic nature of the view.

Approximate location of central Reading



**Viewpoint 15: From the footbridge over the A329, north of Earley Station**

This is a very simple view. It is dominated by the course of the A 329 and woodland to the north west between the A329 and the railway create a wooded skyline which is uninterrupted by built form. Although new tall buildings within central Reading would be a background feature of the view, the view would have a medium sensitivity to such a feature which would be uncharacteristic in terms of land use and scale of development.



**Viewpoint 16: From the B3350 at the bridging point of A329**

This is a very simple view. It is dominated by the course of the A 329 and woodland to the north west between the A329 and the railway create a wooded skyline which is uninterrupted by built form. Although new tall buildings within central Reading would be a background feature of the view, the view would have a medium sensitivity to such a feature which would be uncharacteristic in terms of land use and scale of development.



**Viewpoint 17: From the A4 west of Reading**

The A4 slopes downwards into central Reading, facilitating long range views over the rooftops to the gas cooling towers in eastern central Reading. The foreground of the view is suburban in character; semi detached and detached housing along the A4 being the dominant visual feature. However, as large structures within central Reading are an existing feature of the view, there is a low sensitivity to the introduction of further tall built form.



**Viewpoint 18: From the Thames Path, east of Reading**

The course of the River Thames is the dominant feature of the view. It is lined with riverside vegetation and woodland which creates a largely wooded skyline which is frequently interrupted by man made structures such as the 10 storey apartment blocks on Napier Road, the gas storage structures and the water sports centre. The river and riverside vegetation creates a tranquil character which is only partially eroded by the visible man made structures. The inclusion of tall buildings to the skyline would further erode the tranquil character. The view has a high sensitivity.



**Viewpoint 19: from Palmers Park**

Views from Palmers Park are contained by the row of mature trees which form the boundary. The suburban, residential land use along the boundary of the park does not penetrate the wooded skyline. Due to the location of the park within a suburban setting this view has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings.



**Viewpoint 20: From Herndean Rise, Caversham**

Herndean rise slopes southwards, facilitating views over the rooftops of the red brick, terraced houses which characterise the foreground. The gas storage towers in western central Reading and ten storey apartment blocks on Napier Road are visible above the roofline. Views of further tall buildings would be at odds with the fine grained, low rise, suburban land uses which characterise the view. The view has a medium sensitivity to the inclusion of further tall structures.



**Viewpoint 21: From Reading Bridge**

Reading Bridge forms the foreground of the view. Numerous large blocks of between five and ten stories, constructed during the late 20th century, line the banks of the Thames on the southern side of the bridge. None of the buildings are distinctive or of high townscape value. The view has an urban and slightly degraded poor quality character. The view has a low sensitivity to the inclusion of further tall structures.



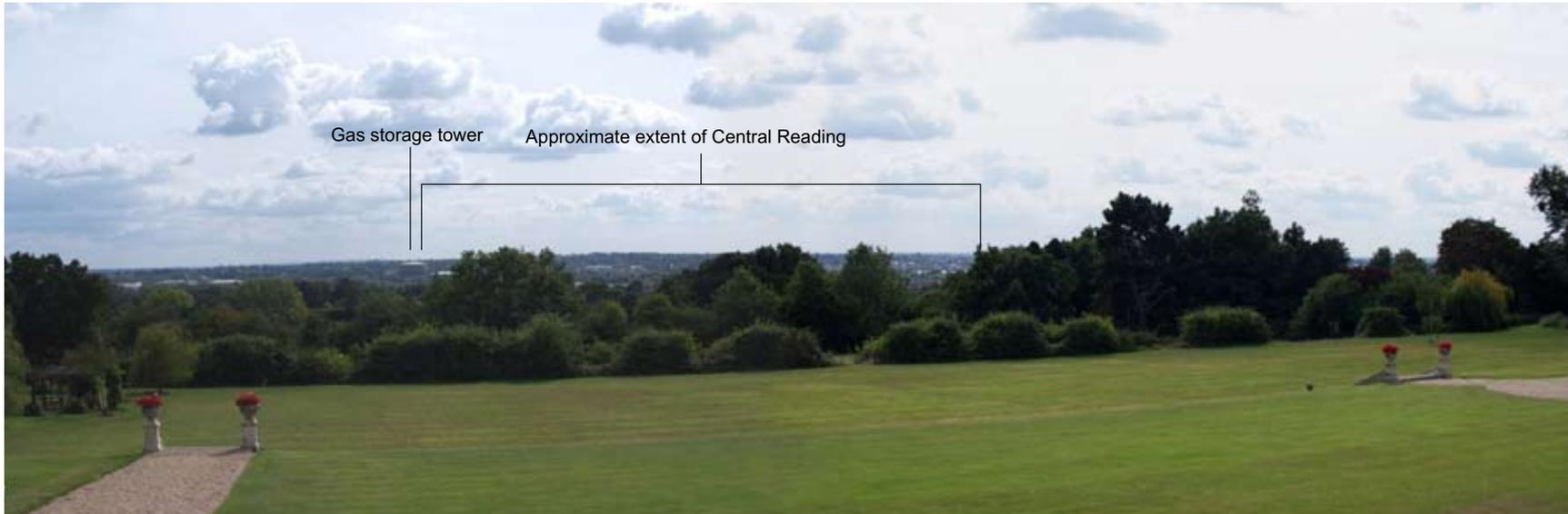
**Viewpoint 22: From footbridge over the M4**

The M4 is the dominant feature of the view, but to the north east the view is across a pastoral landscape which includes a large flooded gravel pit. Hedgerow boundaries, small woodland blocks and scrub vegetation adjacent to the flooded gravel pits contribute to a vegetated skyline. The only built form visible (with the exception of the M4) is occasional farm buildings visible against the vegetated skyline. The view has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of further built form on the skyline.



**Viewpoint 23: From the A4155, adjacent to Coley Hill**

The view is framed by built form and boundary vegetation on both sides of the A4155. The A4155 is a key route into Reading and this shot is representative of views experienced at a key gateway into the town. The road slopes downwards towards central Reading, and buildings within central Reading, including the gas storage structures in eastern central Reading are a focus to the view. The view has a low sensitivity to the inclusion of further tall structures and could benefit from the addition of a tall structure to further focus the view.



#### Viewpoint 24: From Caversham Park

The elevated position of Caversham Park and the open aspect provided by the sloping topography and parkland land use, facilitate long range views across to the southern side of the Thames Valley. Views into central Reading are also a feature; St. Giles' Church and the Chatham Place development are visible. Although views of central Reading are already a feature, due to the distance of the receptor, central Reading does not appear a significantly different scale to the surrounding residential development. However, should tall structures with a significantly larger block size, be developed then they would become a highly visually intrusive and uncharacteristic feature of the view. As panoramic views across the whole of central Reading are possible, the receptor would also be highly sensitive to a cumulative visual effect resulting from experiencing views of tall buildings in various locations. Due to the tranquil, parkland character of the view, it has a high sensitivity to the inclusion of further tall buildings within central Reading.



**Viewpoint 25; From bridge over the Kennet and Avon canal, east of the A33**

The view looks over the floodplain and wetlands associated with the River Kennet and the Holy Brook to the west of the A33. Industrial estates to the east and north are visible in the middle ground. Reading town centre is barely visible beyond, with the Thames Tower and Western Tower barely visible on the distant horizon. The view has a degraded character as a result of the scrub like vegetation and occasional views of warehouse buildings. The introduction of a tall building would add focus to the view. The view has a low sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings.



**Viewpoint 26: View along the A33, towards Reading**

The view towards central Reading is channelled along the A33. Views are framed by the roadside trees and vegetation. Thames tower and Western tower are distinctive features on the skyline, visible above the otherwise undeveloped, wooded skyline. The view has a low sensitivity to the introduction of a tall building. There are no townscape features of high quality, and the framed nature of the view would benefit from the addition of a focal point.



**Viewpoint 27: View from Coley Place towards central Reading**

From this close range, elevated position, panoramic views across south west Reading are possible. Views across the residential land use in the foreground are to a developed skyline. St. Giles Church spire, the roof of the Oracle and the cranes at Chatham Place are distinctive skyline features. The view has a medium sensitivity to the addition of a tall structure. The roofline is currently of variable height and further variety in itself would not have an adverse effect. However consideration should be given to how specific tall building proposals would respond to the surrounding roofline context. This is particularly true in this instance as a result of the panoramic nature of the view.



**Viewpoint 28: View towards Reading and Caversham Bridge from Caversham Gardens**

Open views to the southern banks of the Kennet are facilitated by the flat, open river course. Individual trees set within the river meadow land use, on the southern banks of the Kennet combine to create a wooded skyline which is infrequently punctuated by built form. Built form includes the Rivermead Leisure Centre and Caversham Bridge. The wooded skyline and river meadow land use creates a tranquil, undisturbed character. The view has a high sensitivity to change.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

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The townscape and visual appraisal has highlighted a number of opportunities and constraints to the development of tall buildings. These shall be concluded below.

### 4.1 Townscape

There are character areas which by virtue of their townscape condition, urban grain, existing building height and absence of historic designations, have been determined to have some capacity for the development of tall buildings. Although the character area boundaries have been drawn around areas with similar character, in terms of suitability for the development of tall buildings (with respect to townscape character) there are localised variations in appropriateness. These localised variations are highlighted within the character area descriptions. It is therefore key that Figure 1.2 is read alongside the character area descriptions.

### 4.2 Visual

Assessment of views within central reading has highlighted 10 views which have a high sensitivity to the inclusion of inappropriately designed tall buildings. The high level of visibility highlights the great necessity for tall buildings to respond well to the surrounding townscape context in terms of height, block size and buildings materials. This is not to say that the tall buildings should mimic the exact same conditions, but should complement the surroundings. As detailed within the visual assessment text, the impact of each proposed tall building on the key views, should be assessed on a case by case basis.

### 4.3 Taking the assessment forward

The conclusions of this assessment have been used to inform the 'Reading Tall building Strategy'. This assessment only forms one layer of baseline information, and areas highlighted as being appropriate in townscape character terms, are not necessarily found to be appropriate in other baseline assessments (e.g. floodrisk).

