

Vastern Court Heritage Impact Assessment

Reading Borough Council

16 March 2022

LICHFIELDS

64574/01/DL/NBr
20843003v4

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6.0 Conclusions

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1.0 Methodology

- 1.1 This report seeks to provide a robust assessment of heritage impact based on a series of guidance documents:
- Historic England, GPA2 Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment, March 2015
 - Historic England, GPA3 The Setting of Heritage Assets, December 2017
 - Historic England, HEAN 4 Tall Buildings, March 2022
 - IEMA, IHBC & CIfA, Principles of Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment in the UK, July 2021
- 1.2 The NPPF requires that heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance (para 189). It defines significance as the ‘value’ of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its ‘heritage interest’. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. This broadly aligns with the heritage values outlined in Historic England’s Conservation Principles (2008), which are evidential, aesthetic, historical and communal value.
- 1.3 The NPPF confirms that significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence but also from its setting (para 194). The setting of a heritage asset is the surroundings in which it is experienced, its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive contribution or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance, or may be neutral.
- 1.4 HEAN 4 (para 5.3) and GPA 3 (para 22) both recommend the use of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility as part of the design development process. This is used here to inform the scope of the heritage impact assessment. GPA3 discourages detailed analysis of very large numbers of heritage assets (para 23) and using a ZTV supports an approach that focuses on those assets that are most sensitive to change.
- 1.5 ‘Principles of Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment in the UK’ sets out at paras A.16-A.19 that the relative importance of an asset should be identified and scaled. In doing so it echoes the recommendations of paras 7 to 10 of GPA3 which highlight the importance of understanding the nature, extent and level of any significance.
- 1.6 The approach to considering the effect of changes to setting upon significance has been carried out in accordance with GPA3 which provides a lengthy and non-exhaustive list of considerations which may be appropriate depending on the circumstances. In each case is it necessary to identify not just the change to the setting of the heritage asset but how this affects the asset’s significance.
- 1.7 This report accordingly sets out a sequence of assessment which identifies:
- The scope of heritage assets which may be affected by the proposals
 - The nature of the significance of these assets (including the contribution made by setting)

- The nature of the impact on these assets and their setting
- The extent to which this impact affects the significance of the heritage assets

Level of Significance

1.8 As indicated in GPA3 it is necessary to consider the relative level of significance of the heritage asset and this will always be a matter of professional judgement by the assessor, but any existing designation categories can provide guidance. Accordingly, the following levels of importance have been accorded to the various designation types and non-designated heritage assets. This should be seen as a starting point. There may be instances where the particular characteristics of a specific asset merit a different category and, if so, this will be set out in the assessment.

Table 1.1 Classification of importance of heritage assets

Importance	Designation types
Very High	World Heritage Sites
High	Listed Buildings (Grade I and II*) Registered Gardens and Designed Landscapes (Grade I and II*) Registered Historic Battlefields Scheduled Monuments
Medium	Conservation Areas Listed buildings (Grade II) Registered Gardens and Designed Landscapes (Grade II)
Low	Locally Listed heritage assets Non-designated heritage assets
Very Low or nil	Heritage assets with little or no surviving heritage significance.

Degree of change to significance

1.9 A large change to the setting does not necessarily mean a large change to heritage significance and vice versa. The assessment in this report therefore identifies the degree of change to the significance of each asset generated by the proposed development. This change may be beneficial or adverse (positive or negative) and will be categorised as follows:

Table 1.2 Classification of degree of effect on heritage significance

Degree of Effect	Description
Major	A change (by extent, duration or magnitude) to a heritage asset or its setting which could fundamentally change the basis for one or more of the key values that makes up the asset's heritage significance
High	A change to a heritage asset or its setting, which has a notable bearing on the asset's heritage significance
Moderate	A change to a heritage asset or its setting, which has some bearing on the asset's heritage significance
Minor	A change to a heritage asset or setting which has only a slight bearing on the asset's heritage significance. It may be difficult to discern, only apparent in very specific conditions or have little effect on any values that contribute to the asset's heritage significance.

Degree of Effect	Description
No Impact or Neutral	A change to the heritage asset or setting which has no bearing on the asset's heritage significance. (Neither beneficial nor adverse).

1.10

A Major adverse impact is likely to be considered Substantial harm under the terms of the NPPF. All other adverse impacts are likely to be considered Less than Substantial Harm.

2.0 Scope

2.1 The preparation of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility has been generated to assist in the scoping of heritage assets (See Appendix 1). This, combined with on-site appraisal, has established the following heritage assets as requiring assessment:

- 1 55 Vastern Road: Locally Listed (LL8)
- 2 Main Building of Reading General Station: Grade II (NHLE 1321892)
- 3 The Statue of King Edward VII: Grade II (NHLE 1113589)
- 4 Great Western House: Grade II (NHLE 1113591)
- 5 Regent Place: Grade II (NHLE 1113434)
- 6 Market Place and London Street: Conservation Area
- 7 13 and 15, Station Road: Grade II (NHLE 1113590)
- 8 29 and 31, Caversham Road: Grade II (NHLE 1113433)
- 9 Town Council Chamber and Offices with Clock Tower: Grade II* (NHLE 1113400)
- 10 The Concert Hall: Grade II (NHLE 1113401)
- 11 Former School of Art: Grade II (NHLE 1113600)
- 12 Reading Museum: Grade II (NHLE 1321990)
- 13 Forbury Garden: Grade II Park & Garden (NHLE 1000586)

2.2 The four connected buildings which form the Town Hall complex (Nos 9 to 12 above) are assessed as a group because of their close physical, functional, historic and architectural relationship. Differences between their significance are drawn out in the assessment.

2.3 Forbury Garden also forms part of the scheduled monument, Reading Abbey: a Cluniac and Benedictine monastery and Civil War earthwork (NHLE 1007932) and contains a number of listed buildings. The Abbey remains within the park are largely in the form of archaeological deposits with no visual sensitivity and the listed buildings form part of the design of the park. Accordingly, Forbury Garden is assessed here as a registered park, acknowledging its relationship with these other heritage assets.

2.4 When selecting these assets consideration has been given to a number of factors including distance from the proposed development, the relationship of the asset to its surroundings and the presence of significant views.

3.0 **Significance**

3.1 For each of the heritage assets in scope this section summarises their heritage significance, including the contribution to that significance made by setting and the role of the site of the proposed development in that setting.

55 Vastern Road: Locally Listed (LL8)¹

3.2 55 Vastern Road was built as the entrance gate lodge to the former Reading Electric Supply Co Ltd works in c.1903 to designs by F W Albury, of the Reading architectural practice Albury and Brown. It is of red brick with sandstone detailing in a free Classical/Queen Anne style. Its street frontage consists of three elements: A doorway to the left, which appears to have led to a first-floor flat; a double height projecting bay window which incorporated an entrance at ground floor; a vehicle entrance (now blocked) with a pair of windows above. It has undergone a number of changes internally and externally such as the loss of its staircase, the blocking of the vehicle entrance and the replacement of all windows with uPVC. It is a visible marker of the Victorian/Edwardian industrial expansion of Reading north of the railway line and is a pleasantly ornamented element in what has been a largely industrial part of the town. As a locally listed building, 55 Vastern Road is considered to be of Low importance.

Figure 3.1 55 Vastern Road



¹ On 17 March 2022 the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport decided not to List 55 Vastern Road under S.1 of the Planning (Listed Building and conservation Areas) Act 1990. On the same day the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities accepted the recommendations of the Planning Inspectorate to grant permission for development at 55 Vastern Road (Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/21/3276463) which will involve the demolition of this building.

- 3.3 Historically, 55 Vastern Road was surrounded by industrial buildings of a similar height, looking out across Vastern Road to the railway shunting yard. Its current immediate setting is broadly consistent with this, but the building has comparatively little presence in the streetscape, best appreciated close-up where its refined detailing can be viewed.
- 3.4 The site of the proposed development is prominent in the setting of 55 Vastern Road but makes no contribution to its significance.

Main Building of Reading General Station: Grade II (NHLE 1321892)

- 3.5 Reading General Station was built in 1865-7 as a replacement for Brunel's Up Station (c.1840). It was designed by Michael Lane (Chief Engineer of the Great Western Railway Company) in an Italianate style with buff brick and Bath-stone dressings beneath a hipped slate roof. The surviving building (following the 2014 redevelopment of the station) is 10 bays wide and 2 storeys tall with a central lantern tower incorporating a clock. The central four bays project beneath a bracketed cornice and pedimented blocking course. The first-floor windows all have console-bracketed architraves with the central four all receiving segmental or triangular pediments. A cantilevered canopy runs the length of the façade. Internally little survives of the original interior other than some of the principal structural elements.

Figure 3.2 Main Building of Reading General Station



- 3.6 The 1860s rebuilding of the station responded to the need for improved facilities as the railways grew ever more popular. There was also pressure from the Reading Corporation about the condition of the original station and a degree of rivalry from the South Eastern

Railway Company who had built their own Reading (Southern) Station to the immediate south east in 1849.

- 3.7 Historically, the rebuilding of Reading General Station fits into the consolidation phase of the British Railway network. Earlier phases of development had seen considerable innovation some of which (such as Brunel's single-side stations as here at Reading) were later abandoned. The current station building should be seen as part the maturing of the network and the full incorporation of the railways as an established part of civic life, rather than the disruptive force they had first been. In this regard the new station building was given a far more commanding presence over the station forecourt than its predecessor. This was achieved by the formality and quality of the architecture but also by the use of a vigorous silhouette. The existing clock tower was accompanied by 10 carefully detailed chimneys and a pair of finials either side of the main pediment which gave it the increased presence befitting a key public building. As a Grade II listed building, the Main Building of Reading General Station is considered to be of Medium importance.
- 3.8 Reading General Station's role as a key public building is both enhanced by and illustrated by its close visual and historic relationship with two other listed buildings:
- Statue of King Edward VII (Grade II Listed)
 - Great Western House (Grade II Listed)
- 3.9 Key views of the station are from the South; from the existing station square and looking north, up Station Road which frames Reading General Station. The recent redevelopment of the station and the Thames Tower has been carefully designed to ensure that the historic station building (now the Five Guineas public house) retains its status as the focal point of the public space. In views along Station Road the listed building remains as the terminating building but its impact diminishes further south along the street; partly because of the comparatively modest scale of the station building and partly because of the busyness of the street which distracts from an appreciation of the station.
- 3.10 The site of the proposed development is a neutral feature in the setting of the Main Building of Reading General Station, separated by the modern platform structures.

The Statue of King Edward VII: Grade II (NHLE 1113589)

Figure 3.3 Statue of King Edward VII



- 3.11 The statue of Edward VII was erected in 1902, facing Reading General Station, greeting those arriving into the town by train. Reading's statue of Queen Victoria (listed Grade II NHLE 1113483) already occupied a location in front of Town Hall, and the choice of this location is a mark of the civic status accorded the station area. This, in effect, created a new space for civic display defined by the railway buildings and overseen by the monarch which resulted in the station being used for pageantry such as marking VE Day or the 1953 Coronation. The statue is a characteristic example of Edwardian monumental sculpture; accomplished yet exhibiting little innovation. The statue has historical value as a reflection of the growth of status of Reading. Its 19th-century growth had been partly derived from its rail connections so the positioning of this statue of the king, effectively greeting visitors arriving off the train, is apposite. As a Grade II listed building, the statue of King Edward VII is considered to be of Medium importance.
- 3.12 The statue stands where it was erected in 1902 but this now forms the centre of a roundabout. It has always been in a busy thoroughfare and appears to have been deliberately placed there so that the statue could "preside" over the busy station forecourt. While views from the rear of the statue help to take in the forecourt and the station beyond, the statue is best appreciated from the north, the direction that Edward VII is facing.
- 3.13 The site of the proposed development is a neutral feature in the setting of the listed statue, separated from it by the station.

Great Western House: Grade II (NHLE 1113591)

Figure 3.4 Great Western House



- 3.14 Great Western House was built in 1844 and is thought to be the World's oldest surviving purpose-built Station Hotel. It was built within sight of the original stations constructed a few years before, offering good quality accommodation aimed at train travellers. The Italianate styling of the hotel may have influenced the choice of a similar style for the rebuilding of Reading General Station. While the building largely retains its external form, the addition of a mansard roof and the loss of the interiors due to a fire in the 1960s has reduced its architectural value. As a Grade II listed building, Great Western House is considered to be of Medium importance.
- 3.15 It has a historic functional relationship with the stations to its north and, along with the statue of Edward VII, helps to define the forecourt. This visual relationship would have been stronger had the hotel faced over the forecourt but its north façade is well detailed and clearly intended to present a public face. The visual relationship has been eroded by the gradual loss of other 19th-century railway buildings.
- 3.16 The site of the proposed development is a neutral feature in the setting of the listed statue, separated from it by the station.

Regent Place: Grade II (NHLE 1113434)

Figure 3.5 Regent Place



- 3.17 Regent Place was built in 1847 as a terrace of six 3-storey and basement townhouses. Built in red brick in a Neo-Classical style with a roof hidden by a parapet, the houses at either end project forward. They have slightly more elaborate architraves and doorcases than the other houses. A plaque naming the building and the date of its construction is placed in the centre of the façade between the second floor windows. Since the 18th century, combining houses into symmetrical “palace” blocks had been a popular way of giving added grandeur to terraced houses. While the restrained detailing on Regent Place lends a slightly austere character to the building, the intended effect is still evident. As a Grade II listed building, Regent Place is considered to be of Medium importance.
- 3.18 Despite the impressive façade, Regent Terrace was built at the edge of Reading, opposite a brewery and with a cattle market and abattoir to the east. Its relationship with Caversham Road, realigned following the arrival of the railways makes a small contribution to its significance despite the dualling of the road. Neighbouring buildings are all modern and, while they generally respect the scale of Regent Terrace, make little contribution to its significance.
- 3.19 The site of the proposed development is separated from Regent Terrace by the viaduct of the railway line and later developments. As such it is a neutral feature in the setting of the listed building.

Market Place and London Street: Conservation Area

Figure 3.6 Market Place and London Street Conservation Area



- 3.20 The spine of the Market Place and London Street conservation area is one of Medieval Reading's two key North-South routes. Emerging from the 12th century, it is a later route than Bridge Street/Southampton Street but reflects the influence of Reading Abbey in moving the focus of the medieval settlement east with the new Market Place next to St Laurence's church. As described in the Conservation Area Appraisal² "*the conservation area is, generally speaking, a tightly knit urban area composed of continuous frontages of two-, three- and four-storey buildings beside streets of varying length and width*". This is particularly true of the area north of the Kennet which retains an essentially medieval street-plan populated by later buildings.
- 3.21 Key landmarks include the tower and spires of the Town Hall complex and the churches of St. Laurence and St Giles. Views of significance for the conservation area are generally along the streets. These tend not be broad vistas but closely contained, often with glimpsed or framed views of key buildings. The view north down London Street is more open with views of Thames Tower and the Blade in the distance with shorter views terminated by the modern roof of the cinema at Oracle Riverside.

² <https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Market-Place-London-St-Original-CAA.pdf>

Figure 3.7 View of Town Hall from Friar Street



3.22 The Character Appraisal divides the area into four character areas:

- London Street: while of medieval origin it retains a more Georgian character in its buildings and its breadth lends it a more suburban air than the narrow streets further north.
- Church Street: a quiet enclave between the busy routes into town with attractive two-storey 18th and 19th century character and green spaces around St Giles' church and the Quaker Meeting House.
- Duke Street, Jacksons Corner and the River Kennet: while the Oracle Centre to the west has disrupted the character of the area, it is markedly more commercial than the more residential area to the south with a greater variety of ages and styles of building.
- Market Place and environs of St Laurence's Church and Town Hall: this area contains the key public buildings at the core of the town adjacent to the historic market place.

3.23 The conservation area is focused on the historic route from the south to the Market Place and abbey. It contains some of Reading's most significant historic buildings. The tight, informal street plan combined with buildings of hugely varying dates, is illustrative of Reading's long history. As a conservation area it is considered to be of Medium importance. However, with an area designation such as a conservation area, some parts will be more important than others, particularly around key buildings and spaces.

3.24 The setting of the conservation area can be thought of in terms of key views in and out of it. Views along Friar Street frame the Town Hall and the view south down Blagrave Street

gives the opportunity to take in the complexity of the civic buildings' complex but, generally, other than retaining an urban character of a compatible scale, the setting of the conservation area only makes only a small contribution to its significance.

- 3.25 The development site is set beyond the railway line to the north of the conservation area. It is not visible in any views from the conservation area and can be considered to be a neutral feature in its setting.

13 and 15, Station Road: Grade II (NHLE 1113590)

Figure 3.8 13 and 15, Station Road



- 3.26 Nos. 13 and 15 Station Road is believed to have been built c. 1903 to designs by Joseph Morris or possibly his son Francis Edward Morris with whom Joseph had a professional partnership. The building's architectural interest is almost entirely confined to its exuberant façade; a heavily enriched 3-storey and attic owing much to Flemish precedents and something also to the late Victorian enrichment of London mansion-house blocks and the polychromy of Norman Shaw. While the ground floor façade has been replaced, the building remains strikingly vigorous. As a Grade II-listed building Nos. 13 and 15 Station Road is considered to be of Medium importance.
- 3.27 Nos. 13 and 15 have always been part of a busy street, the replacement of buildings around mean that, at best, they are a neutral feature in its setting. The key contribution of setting is the character of this busy but comparatively narrow street.

3.28 The site of the proposed development is not visible in views of Nos 13 and 15, partly because of distance, partly because of the intervening railway and partly because the building is not easily appreciated in oblique views looking north along Station Road. It is therefore a neutral feature in the setting of the listed building.

29 and 31, Caversham Road: Grade II (NHLE 1113433)

Figure 3.9 29 and 31, Caversham Road



3.29 This pair of semi-detached houses was built c.1847. They are Italianate in style, built of red brick under a pyramidal slate roof. The east (front) façade is of two bays, separated by a recessed vertical band with two windows to each of the three storeys and basement. The entrances are recessed in single-storey porches, each one marked with an urn. Like Regent Place, 29 and 31 Caversham Road were built as part of the expansion of Reading following the realignment of Caversham Road. Also like Regent Place, they appear to have been intended to be more dignified than standard housing. The recessed entrances were a design technique often used in early semi-detached houses to give each resident a greater degree of privacy from their neighbour. As a Grade II-listed building, 29 and 31, Caversham Road is considered to be of Medium importance.

3.30 Nos. 29 and 31 Caversham Road sits within a short run of 19th-century terraces (6 houses to the north and 3 to the south). The southern houses have been heavily refurbished (now rendered and missing their chimneys) but this context makes a contribution to the significance of the listed building. The relationship of the building with Caversham Road also makes a small contribution to the building but this is largely undermined by the blight

caused by the dualling of Caversham Road and the sliproads as it enters a cutting beneath the natural street level.

- 3.31 The site is not visible in from No.29 and 31 Caversham Road because of the intervening railway line and other development. It is a neutral feature in the setting.

Town Hall Complex

Figure 3.10 Town Hall Complex facing Blagrove Street



- 3.32 The buildings of the Town Hall complex comprise four listed buildings:
- Town Council Chamber and Offices with Clock Tower: Grade II* (NHLE 1113400)
 - The Concert Hall: Grade II (NHLE 1113401)
 - Former School of Art: Grade II (NHLE 1113600)
 - Reading Museum: Grade II (NHLE 1321990)
- 3.33 These buildings have a close historical relationship and have been designed to form a coherent grouping.
- 3.34 The Town Council Chamber and Offices with Clock Tower is the earliest of these three elements; the Council Chamber at its core dates from 1786 (the Small Town Hall) but was reworked under the instruction of Alfred Waterhouse in 1872-5 when he added the offices and towers facing east and south. The Concert Hall (also incorporating a museum and library) was added in 1879-82 to designs by Thomas Lainson, making a conscious effort to continue the Waterhouse's Gothic polychromy. The Art School opened in 1879 as the

School of Science and Art and in 1894 the corner of Blagrove Street and Valpy Street was filled by new art galleries (now Reading Museum) to designs by W. R. Howell.

Figure 3.11 Town Council Chamber and Offices with Clock Tower



- 3.35 Collectively these buildings form a powerful group of civic buildings unified by their Gothic style and their liberal use of red brick and terracotta detailing against blue brick walling. The tone was set by Waterhouse, one of the leading architects of his day, skilfully creating a landmark building wrapped around the existing Council Chamber. The position of the towers and the curve between them creates a distant landmark at the end of vistas as well as defining new public space. It does this while complementing the existing Medieval Church of St Laurence and allowing the space to flow into, but not merge with the Market Place.
- 3.36 Lainson's Concert Hall façade is, if anything more elaborate than Waterhouse's Council offices with a greater depth of modelling of the façade and a more impressive entrance leading to the enormously impressive concert hall itself; decorated in a contrasting Italianate style, it is dominated by the Father Willis organ, has a horseshoe balcony and is top-lit from glazed coving.

Figure 3.12 Concert Hall



- 3.37 The Former School of Art is the least elaborate element of the complex but still retains the use of blue and red brick with a more subdued (but by no means plain) Gothic styling. Situated on Valpy Street it occupies a less prominent position in the town. One of many schools of art founded in the 19th Century, it was responding to a commercial interest that good design could improve the quality of British manufactured goods. This was given particular impetus with the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the founding of the Museum of Manufactures (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) the following year.
- 3.38 The final element in the complex, Reading Museum, completes the complex with a flourish. With the Blgrave Street façade Howell was faithful to the pattern established by Lainson for the Concert Hall but he turns the corner to Valpy Street with a polygonal tower whose elaborate dormers clasp a steep saddle roof echoing those introduced by Waterhouse. The success of the tower is such that it effectively distracts from the entirety of the first floor being blind to create top-lit gallery space.
- 3.39 Individually these building have considerable architectural and historic interest. They represent the late 19th-century ambitions of the civic authorities in Reading to display and contribute to the energy and success of the growing town. They are highly accomplished examples of Gothic Revival secular building with the first pattern set by one of the leading architects of the day.
- 3.40 Individually the buildings are listed at Grade II, other than the Town Council Chamber and Offices which is listed at Grade II*. The Former Art School is considered to be of Medium

importance on this basis. However, the combined achievement of the three elements facing Blagrove Street justifies considering them all to be of High importance.

Figure 3.13 Form Art School and Reading Museum



- 3.41 As prominent public buildings, setting is clearly of relevance to these buildings but not equally. The Former Art School faces a more minor street midway along the block. It has surprisingly little presence on the streetscape. While its surroundings give it a setting of appropriate scale they add little the significance of the building.
- 3.42 For Reading Museum and the Concert Hall setting makes a greater contribution, partly because of the corner location of the Reading Museum and its elaborate corner tower. Views South along Blagrove Street are important in this regard. In views north, the presence of modern office blocks contributes little to the setting of the listed buildings even though they have been careful to ensure that the change in scale is handled thoughtfully. However, in views South along Blagrove Street the corner tower of the Reading Museum is prominent and the consistent façade of the complex lead the eye down to the projecting tower of the Town Council Chamber
- 3.43 The Town Council Chamber and Offices is the element where setting makes the greatest contribution. Waterhouse’s building is meant to be read as the pin that marks the centre of the town. It is conspicuously framed at the end of Friar Street and Blagrove Street, presiding over the medieval core of the town in the form of the Market Place and presenting a secular response to the dignity of the medieval tower of St Laurence’s. As noted in the Market Place and London Street Conservation Area Character Appraisal, the clock tower is framed in views from the south along Duke Street long before the church or the rest of the

Town Council Building comes into view. This may be fortuitous (although one should be careful not to underestimate an architect of Waterhouse's skill) but it gives an indication of the way in which the visibility of the Town Hall echoes and reinforces its civic role.

- 3.44 The site of the proposed development is separated from the Town Hall complex by intervening development and the railway line. It is a neutral feature in their setting.

Forbury Garden: Grade II Park & Garden (NHLE 1000586)

- 3.45 Forbury Garden was opened as a public park in 1856, laid out to designs by Charles Clacy. It expanded to the west (its current extent) in 1861 and the wall dividing the two parts (the former inner and outer courts of the Abbey) was removed in 1873.

Figure 3.14 Forbury Garden



- 3.46 As an urban park, Forbury Garden was designed as “breathing space” for the town. This is reflected in its design which defines the boundaries of the park with perimeter planting of large trees. Within this perimeter straight walks connect the main entrances, encouraging the use of the park from all directions, and a perimeter path encourages more relaxed sauntering. The park has been furnished with numerous features to add interest: Forbury Hill, thought to have originated as a Civil War earthwork, provides views over the wider park. Seats, ornamental flower beds, a bandstand, a fountain, memorials to Henry I and the Battle of Maiwand and features such as the domed apse incorporate fragments from Reading Abbey add further interest to the park. Forbury Garden is a small but well preserved Victorian urban park reflecting a mid-19th-century interest in providing

opportunities for healthy recreation within towns and cities. As a Grade II registered park, Forbury Garden is of Medium importance. While the scheduled monument designation, reflecting the archaeology of Reading Abbey, might suggest greater importance, within the park these are buried deposits. Therefore, for the purpose this assessment a classification of Medium importance is more appropriate.

- 3.47 Forbury Garden has always been designed to be a sheltered enclave of greenery. It contains no key views out from beyond its perimeter which has been designed to screen the town. The relationship with the nearby abbey ruins makes a positive contribution to the gardens. To the north west particularly, the emergence of larger office buildings appearing beyond the trees makes it clear that the park is an enclave within an urban centre but this has always been part of its character.
- 3.48 The site is not visible from the Forbury Garden, hidden by intervening development. It makes a neutral contribution to the setting of the registered park.

4.0 **Proposals**

4.1 The proposed development, as set out in the description of development, is for:

Outline planning permission with the details of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved for later determination. A demolition phase and phased redevelopment (each phase being an independent act of development) comprising a flexible mix of the following uses: Residential (Class C3 and including PRS); Offices (Use Class B1(a); development in Use Classes A1, A2, A3 (retail), A4 (public house), A5 (take away), D1 and D2 (community and leisure); car parking; provision of new plant and renewable energy equipment; creation of servicing areas and provision of associated services, including waste, refuse, cycle storage, and lighting; and for the laying out of the buildings; routes and open spaces within the development; and all associated works and operations including but not limited to: demolition; earthworks; provision of attenuation infrastructure; engineering operations

4.2 As an outline scheme, the parameters of the scheme are the essential information against which the heritage impact needs to be assessed. These are set out in the following documents:

- Development Footprint Drawing Ref: PP-100_P1
- Site Access & Egress Drawing Ref: PP-101_P1
- Building Plots Drawing Ref: PP-102_P2
- Plot Heights Drawing Ref: PP-103_P2

4.3 The application has also been accompanied by a series of visualisations produced for a Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (ES, Volume 2, Chapter 1a).

5.0 **Impact**

- 5.1 In addressing the impact on these heritage assets consideration has been given to not just the nature of change to the setting of these assets but, more importantly, how this affects their significance.

55 Vastern Road: Locally Listed (LL8)

- 5.2 The proposals represent a major change of scale in the immediate surroundings. The contrast with No. 55 across the road will be marked but, since No. 55 derives little of its value from its setting, this will not affect the appreciation of the building. The impact on its significance will be neutral.

Main Building of Reading General Station: Grade II (NHLE 1321892)

- 5.3 The proposal will result in large new buildings appearing in a direct line of sight behind Reading Station. The station's architectural presence is partly derived from its silhouette dominated by the clock tower. Although this has been diminished by the loss of the building's carefully detailed chimneys it remains an important part of the building's appreciation. As shown in the TVIA visualisations, the new buildings (particularly blocks C and D) will reduce the listed building's prominence harming this aspect of the station's significance as a noteworthy public building. The fabric of the building itself will, clearly, be unharmed and its relationship with the Statue of King Edward VII and Great Western House will, essentially, be unchanged. Its physical and functional relationship with the station forecourt will remain but its prominence looking over this space will be reduced by the mass of tall buildings rising behind it. On this basis the changes should be seen as representing a moderate adverse impact on the significance of the building; a moderate degree of less than substantial harm.

The Statue of King Edward VII: Grade II (NHLE 1113589)

- 5.4 The proposed development will be visible from the listed statue, rising behind Reading Station. While the statue has a strong relationship with the station and its forecourt, the statue, facing north derives little significance in views from the south. The new buildings will be a significant new feature in the setting of the statue but will not interrupt its relationship with the station or its role "welcoming" rail travellers. The proposals will have a neutral impact on the significance of the listed statue.

Great Western House: Grade II (NHLE 1113591)

- 5.5 Great Western House retains a visual and historic relationship with Reading Station although the visual relationship has been eroded by the gradual loss of 19th-century railway buildings. The proposed development will be clearly visible in views from Great Western House but this will not interrupt the relationship between the listed buildings or the overall appreciation of the building. The proposals will have a neutral impact on the significance of the listed building.

Regent Place: Grade II (NHLE 1113434)

- 5.6 Regent Place derives little significance from its setting which is dominated by the busy Caversham Road and more modern developments. Block A will be visible in views from Regent Place beyond the railway line, but the other parts of the development are likely to be screened by existing buildings to the north of Tudor Road. The development will have a neutral impact on the significance of the listed building.

Market Place and London Street: Conservation Area

- 5.7 The parts of the conservation area which are closest to the site of the proposed development derive little of their significance from their setting to the north. Block D in particular will be clearly visible in views north along Blagrove Street, but this view already demonstrates the change in character to more modern office blocks and the railway beyond. However, one key view from within the conservation area is affected, the view north from Duke Street frames the clock tower of the Town Council Chamber. The proposed development (particularly Block D) will appear directly behind the tower when it first comes into view on this historic route, representing an intrusion of a tall building into a view which is characterised by buildings of a more traditional scale on medieval street plan. This is only one view in the conservation area and the impact needs to be considered in the context of the conservation area's overall significance. On this basis the impact will represent a minor degree of less than substantial harm to the conservation area.

13 and 15, Station Road: Grade II (NHLE 1113590)

- 5.8 This building derives little significance from its wider setting. While the proposed development may be visible in oblique views of the façade this will have a neutral impact on its significance.

29 and 31, Caversham Road: Grade II (NHLE 1113433)

- 5.9 This building derives little significance from its wider setting. As indicated by the ZTV, the proposed development is unlikely to be visible in views from Nos. 29 and 31 or in views of the building. The proposed development will have no impact on its significance.

Town Hall Complex

- 5.10 Block D will be visible at the north end of Blagrove Street from the Town Hall complex but this view, already characterised by modern office development, makes little contribution to the significance of the complex. The impact of the proposed development on the component parts of the development is discussed below.

Town Council Chamber and Offices with Clock Tower: Grade II* (NHLE 1113400)

- 5.11 This Grade II* listed building was designed to fulfil a key role in the townscape of Reading. As a consequence, it derives considerable significance from its setting. As discussed above (in relation to the impact on the Market Place and London Street Conservation Area) the view from Duke Street will see Block D of the proposed development appear directly behind the clock tower. This is not one of the primary views of the Town Council Chamber but

does contribute to its significance. As with the impact on the conservation area, the impact needs to be considered in the context of the overall significance of the asset; the change will be seen in the streetscape of Duke Street, from a position where it is not possible to appreciate the Town Council Chamber building other than the clock tower as a landmark. In this regard the impact is considered to represent a minor adverse impact; more harmful to the significance of the conservation area than to that of the Grade II* listed building.

The Concert Hall: Grade II (NHLE 1113401)

- 5.12 The visibility of Block D of the proposed development in oblique views along Blagrove Street will have a neutral impact on the significance of the Concert Hall.

Former School of Art: Grade II (NHLE 1113600)

- 5.13 The proposed development will not be visible in views of or from the Former School of Art and will therefore have no impact on its significance.

Reading Museum: Grade II (NHLE 1321990)

- 5.14 The visibility of Block D of the proposed development in oblique views along Blagrove Street will have a neutral impact on the significance of Reading Museum.

Forbury Garden: Grade II Park & Garden (NHLE 1000586)

- 5.15 As shown in the ZTV, the proposed development will in theory be visible across a considerable part of the park. The ZTV does not take tree cover into consideration so this visibility will be reduced by the existing park planting. The buildings, particularly Block D, will be visible rising behind the existing modern offices to the north west. However, as an urban park designed to be contained within a landscaped perimeter, the existence of the town beyond makes little contribution to its setting and the addition of the proposed development will represent a neutral impact on the significance of the park.

6.0 Conclusions

Table 6.1 Summary of importance and impact

Asset	Importance	Impact
55 Vastern Road: Locally Listed (LL8)	Low	Neutral
Main Building of Reading General Station: Grade II (NHLE 1321892)	Medium	Moderate Adverse
The Statue of King Edward VII: Grade II (NHLE 1113589)	Medium	Neutral
Great Western House: Grade II (NHLE 1113591)	Medium	Neutral
Regent Place: Grade II (NHLE 1113434)	Medium	Neutral
Market Place and London Street: Conservation Area	Medium	Minor Adverse
13 and 15, Station Road: Grade II (NHLE 1113590)	Medium	Neutral
29 and 31, Caversham Road: Grade II (NHLE 1113433)	Medium	No Impact
Town Hall Complex		
Town Council Chamber and Offices with Clock Tower: Grade II* (NHLE 1113400)	High	Minor Adverse
The Concert Hall: Grade II (NHLE 1113401)	High	Neutral
Former School of Art: Grade II (NHLE 1113600)	Medium	No Impact
Reading Museum: Grade II (NHLE 1321990)	High	Neutral
Forbury Garden: Grade II Park & Garden (NHLE 1000586)	Medium	Neutral

6.1 This assessment has not identified any positive heritage impact arising from the proposals which might be considered to enhance the significance of the heritage assets.

6.2 This assessment has identified;

- a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the Main Building of Reading General Station (Grade II)
- a minor degree of less than substantial harm to the significance of Market Place and London Street Conservation Area
- a minor degree of less than substantial harm to the significance of and the Town Council Chamber and Offices with Clock Tower (Grade II*).

6.3 These adverse impacts need to be considered as part of the planning balance to judge whether this harm is justified by other public benefits, placing great weight on the conservation of designated heritage assets.

Appendix 1 Zone of Theoretical Visibility