



# Reading City Centre Framework

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# INTRODUCTION



*'The City Centre Framework aims to provide a vision and overall strategy for future planning, regeneration and development in Reading's central area'*

## 1.1 Reading 2020 Vision

In 1999, Reading Borough Council published its Reading City 2020 Vision. This put forward a vision of Reading as a City and capital of the Thames Valley. The vision saw a need for the centre of Reading to expand and become a true city centre. In developing this vision, the Council commissioned a City Centre Framework to promote the development of central Reading in a way that delivers the vision. This document provides an update of the City Centre Framework.

The objectives for the City Centre Framework are a progression of the Reading 2020 vision and its key themes, which focus on the creation of a vibrant urban heart to Reading.

### *The Reading 2020 Partnership Vision:*

*'By the year 2020 Reading will be established as the capital of the Thames Valley and as a gateway between the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe and the World. It will provide the highest quality services and facilities for all our residents, businesses and visitors across all of Reading's neighbourhoods.'*

*'Our vision is to maintain and improve the quality of life in Reading, embracing the challenges of a dynamic, inclusive urban community of the 21st century. Everyone will have the opportunity to benefit from all that Reading can offer. Everyone has a part to play in shaping our future.'*

This vision has since been taken up by the Reading 2020 Partnership in preparing the Reading Community Strategy.

The Community Strategy bases the delivery of the vision around a number of themes. A number of these are addressed in the City Centre Framework.

- making it connect - improving transport and access; and
- making it green - improving environments and sustainability.

The vision for 'Making it connect' is that people should be able to get around Reading easily, safely, comfortably and sustainably. This will be delivered in the central area through:

- improvements to quality and convenience of public transport, walking and cycling to promote increased use;
- implementation of a city centre access strategy that addresses the needs of all who live, work, shop in or visit Reading; including parking, public transport, service access, facilities for cyclists, pedestrianisation and access for disabled people; and
- promotion of increased train use through the redevelopment of Reading Station to increase train capacity and incorporate improved interchange facilities.

The vision for 'Making it Green' is that Reading's natural and cultural heritage will be valued, enhanced and will contribute to high quality distinctive and connected neighbourhoods that are cleaner, safer and greener. This will be delivered in the central area through:

- enhanced quality and accessibility of existing and potential public open spaces in Reading; including those associated with the waterspace of the River Thames and Kennet;

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- respecting and reinforcing local distinctiveness by identifying and valuing the diversity of the built and natural environments in Reading;
- improvements to the quality of public streets and open spaces through better design and maintenance;
- encouraging best practice in design and construction of all new development to limit the use of resources and to promote the use of renewable energy alternatives;
- ensuring that new development is sustainable, well-designed and incorporates measures that make a positive contribution to the local environment, such as sustainable drainage systems, good quality landscape and public spaces; and
- protect, manage and enhance existing natural habitats and encourage the creation of new environments that support bio-diversity.

The spatial strategy for Reading's central area will also support other themes including:

- making it safe - generally through the promotion of design and land use planning, which creates increased levels of passive policing through greater levels of activity and natural surveillance from occupied buildings; and
- making it flourish - generally through the promotion of development, which supports the continuation of Reading's urban renaissance through creation of a diverse mix of land uses and housing tenures.

Full details of the Community Strategy *Reading 2020 Making it Happen* can be found at [www.reading2020.org.uk](http://www.reading2020.org.uk)

## 1.2 Reading City Centre Framework

This framework replaces and updates the City Centre Framework Study Report, produced by Llewelyn-Davies in 2002. The main changes to this document establish and take into account:

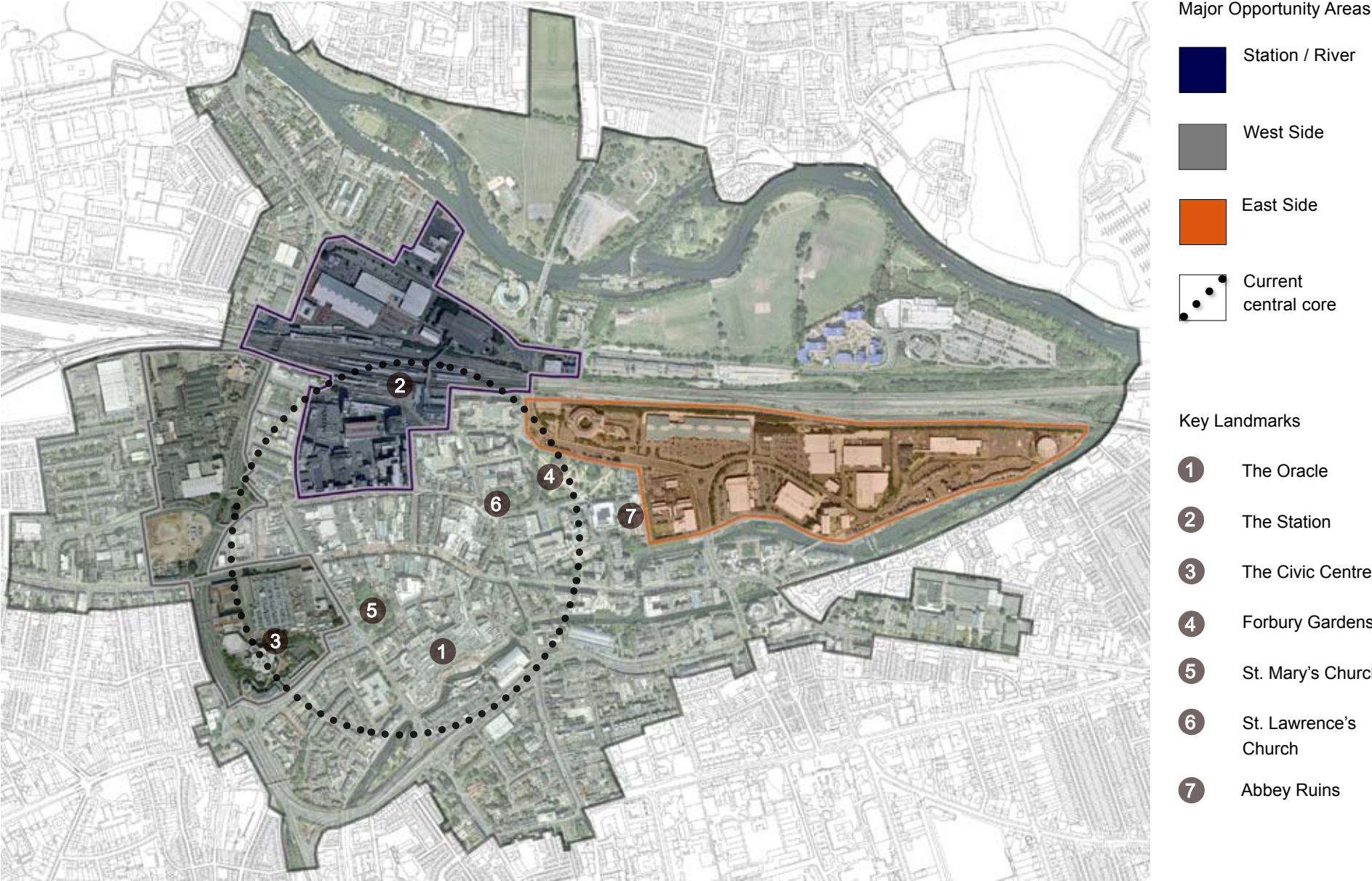
- subsequent developments in Reading;
- emerging design plans and policy, the emerging core strategy and the Reading Central Area Action Plan policies; and
- the conclusions and recommendations of the Reading Tall Buildings Strategy.

The City Centre Framework is a supporting document to the Reading Central Area Action Plan. The framework provides a spatial and design overview for the central area both to guide forth coming developments and to provide reference in the consideration of planning applications. Throughout this document the central area of Reading is considered at two levels (see Figure 1.1):

- the central core: this includes the long-established and historic town centre, the civic centre district, the station area extending along the Thames and Riverside, Forbury Gardens, and The Oracle, including the area to the south of the Kennet; and
- the wider central area: this includes three major opportunity areas identified in the Reading Central Area Action Plan as areas for long-term expansion of the central core.



FIGURE 1.1 THE WIDER CENTRAL AREA AND CENTRAL CORE



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## 1.3 How the Central Area has Evolved

The historic development of Reading town centre can be categorised into four stages:

- Anglo-Saxon foundation: cAD500-1121;
- Ecclesiastical Town: AD1121-1539;
- Post- Dissolution Reading: AD1539-1840; and
- Railway Town and growth of manufacturing and commerce: post-1840.

In the **Anglo-Saxon** period, several key features of Reading's urban form were established. These included the current line of West Street/St. Mary's Butts/Bridge Street and Southampton Street, which was probably established as a principal road at this early stage and linked the principal features of the town:

- a crossing point on the Thames in the vicinity of Caversham Bridge;
- St. Mary's Minster Church;
- the original market at St. Mary's Butts;
- wharfage extending along the Kennet; and
- provided a route south to Winchester, the capital of Wessex.

The most significant phase in the historic development of Reading is the period dating back to the formation of the **Ecclesiastical Town**, dominated and driven by the foundation of the Abbey by Henry I. 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 and established an enterprise culture that outlived the Abbey and is largely responsible for the character of the modern town. The influence of this period on the present structure of the town is illustrated in Figure 1.2 opposite.

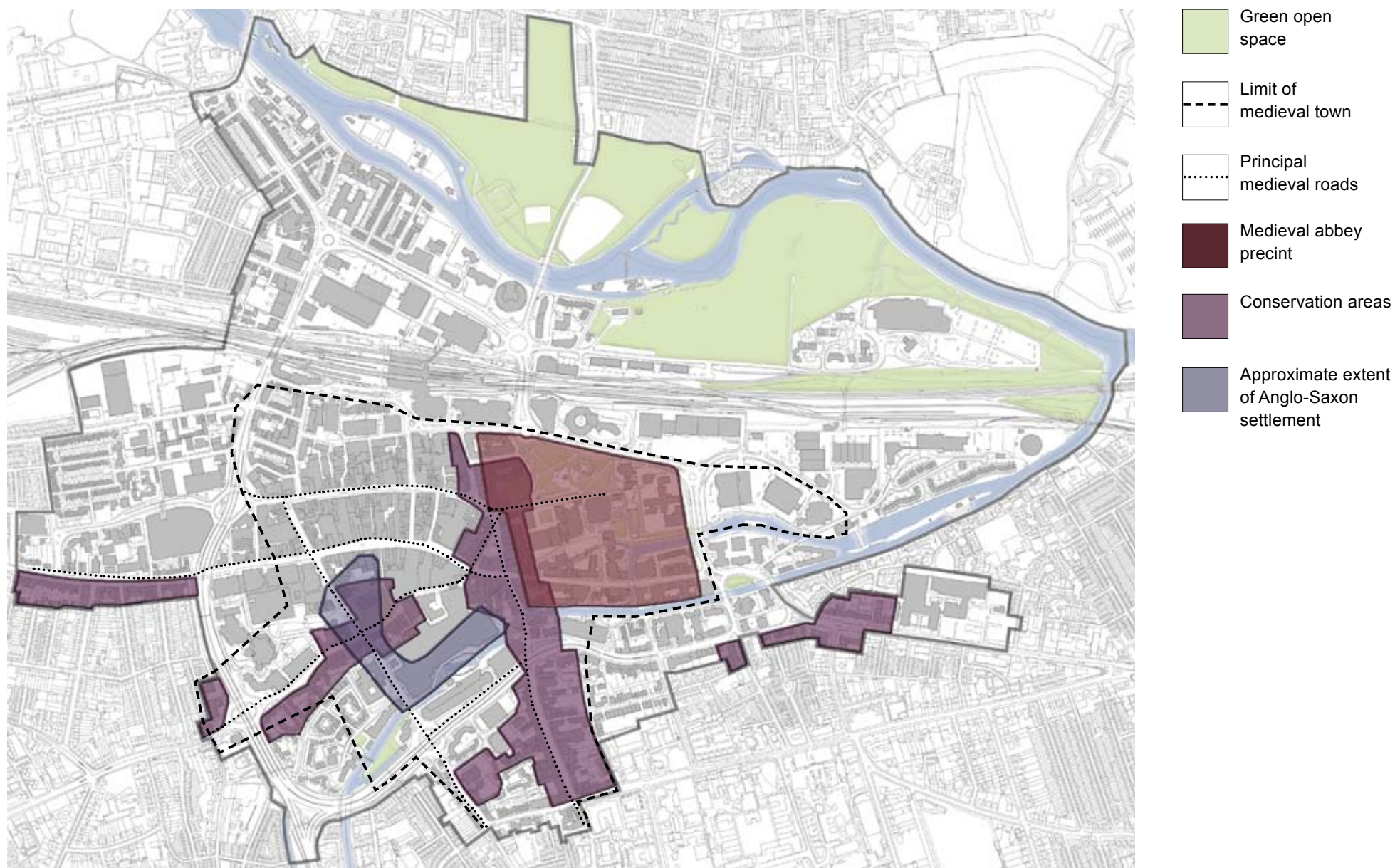
The fall of the Abbey had significant implications for the town and in the **Post-Dissolution** period greater powers of self governance were conferred to the town. Successful cloth and leather industries saw Reading expand so that by the 16th century it was the largest town in Berkshire. From the mid-18th 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. Further industries developed, helped by the completion of the Kennet Canal in 1723 and the Kennet and Avon Canal in 1810.

The construction of Great Western Railway and opening of Reading Station 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. Several civic buildings were constructed and public open space was created at Forbury Gardens, on what had previously been the outer court of the Abbey, as local governance was strengthened. This era can be characterised as the development of the **Railway Town**.

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, which started in 1969, improved traffic circulation but literally cut the town in half. More recently, the Oracle Shopping Centre has re-invigorated the town centre and further promoted the recreational use of the canal, which had become disused and impassable by the 1940s, but since 1992 has been reopened for leisure following its restoration.



## FIGURE 1.2 HISTORIC CONTEXT



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*‘Sensitive redevelopment in the core historic area’*

## 1.4 Current Regeneration Opportunities

This spatial regeneration strategy is summarised in the RCAAP and is addressed in further detail in the following section.

Today, Reading plays a leading role in the urban renaissance encouraged by government policy. Over the past twenty years the town has experienced great economic and development pressure to expand, and is still evolving from a historic country town to a vibrant city, which will reinforce its image and status as the capital of the Thames Valley.

The Borough Council has responded positively to these pressures, delivering significant improvements to the central area through partnership and dialogue with developers. The council continues to promote this approach to deliver further improvements and enhance environmental quality. This ensures that the inherent character and historical value of Reading is maintained, whilst meeting the demand for further growth.

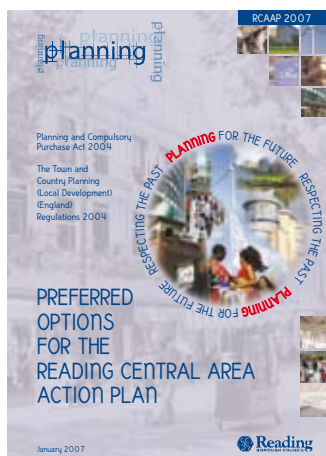
*Current opportunities and initiatives being pursued by the Council include:*

- building on the success of The Oracle retail and leisure complex;
- increasing pedestrian priority and introducing high quality floorscape schemes, notably along Broad Street, the retail spine, and around the historic Town Hall and St. Lawrence’s Church;
- building on the regeneration of Forbury Gardens to provide a connected network of streets and places; and
- supporting a series of residential and mixed use developments such as Chatham Place and the Station Area to increase the vibrancy of the central area and to bring about additional benefits such as improved access, public transport and open space.

The key opportunities to continue the regeneration of central Reading fall into three categories:

- infill and sensitive redevelopment within the core historic area;
- more comprehensive redevelopment in parts of the central area, which have been poorly developed during the latter part of the twentieth century; and
- extension of the structure of the core area into surrounding areas to improve connections and access.

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## 1.5 Design Policy Context

As part of its Local Development Framework, Reading Borough Council have prepared a Core Strategy, which sets out the overarching spatial framework and policies relating to future development across Reading Borough. The Core Strategy views the central area as one of two primary locations for future development in Reading. The Strategy provides policies to deliver sustainable development, addressing the integration of land use and transportation, minimisation of waste and energy consumption and improved security, diversity and accessibility.

The Reading Central Area Action Plan (RCAAP) has specifically been developed to address and develop the implementation of the Core Strategy within the central area. Both the RCAAP and the City Centre Framework build on the over arching design and spatial policies contained in the Core Strategy.

Policy CS7 of the Core Strategy specifically covers Design and the Public Realm. The City Centre Framework has been organised to be consistent with Policy CS7. The policy describes four key components of urban design and five urban design objectives to be achieved in all new development:

The four key urban design components:

- Layout: Urban Structure and Urban Grain;
- Density and Mix;
- Scale: Height and Massing; and
- Landscape and Architectural Design, Details and Materials.

The five urban design objectives:

- Character - identity and sense of place;
- Continuity and enclosure - well defined streets and places;
- Quality of the public realm - attractive and accessible public spaces;
- Ease of movement and permeability - safe access and connections; and
- Legibility - clear image and easy to understand.

In addition, the policy lists other Reading centred design issues that need to be addressed in new development, including enhancing historic environments, adding value through the design of the public realm, creating secure, inclusive and accessible environments and delivering quality through building materials, public spaces and public art. These design components, objectives and issues are addressed throughout the document.

**Chapter 2** introduces the Framework Plan for the central area, presenting the key components of layout, density and mix and scale.

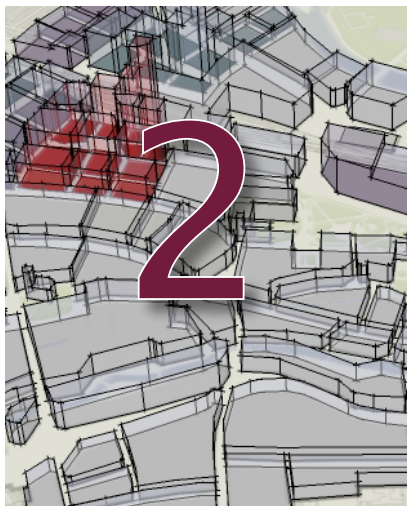
In **Chapter 3** the major opportunity areas are explored in greater detail, specifically addressing how the core urban design objectives should be achieved.

**Chapter 4** outlines an overall approach to architectural and landscape design and detailing to provide a strategy for the creation of a successful public realm within the central area.

**Chapter 5** provides an overview of the implementation strategy and planning policy relevant to the Framework Plan and provides sources for further design guidance.



# THE FRAMEWORK PLAN



## 2.1 The Overall Framework

*The framework plan illustrates an indicative spatial framework for Reading's central area, addressing:*

- *Layout: Urban Structure and Grain*
- *Density and Mix of Uses*
- *Scale: Height and Massing*

*Each component is illustrated on a separate plan (Figures 2.1 to 2.4) and accompanying text describes how Reading's Core Strategy urban design objectives are met through the framework.*

A number of exciting initiatives within Reading's central area are currently at various stages of development. Their implementation will contribute to the transformation and expansion of the centre of Reading from 'town to city'. These initiatives include a number of individual planned and committed developments and planned transportation changes:

- Chatham Place Mixed Use Development;
- The Civic Area Masterplan;
- Station Hill Development;
- Reading Station Area Improvements; and
- Planned Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) system.

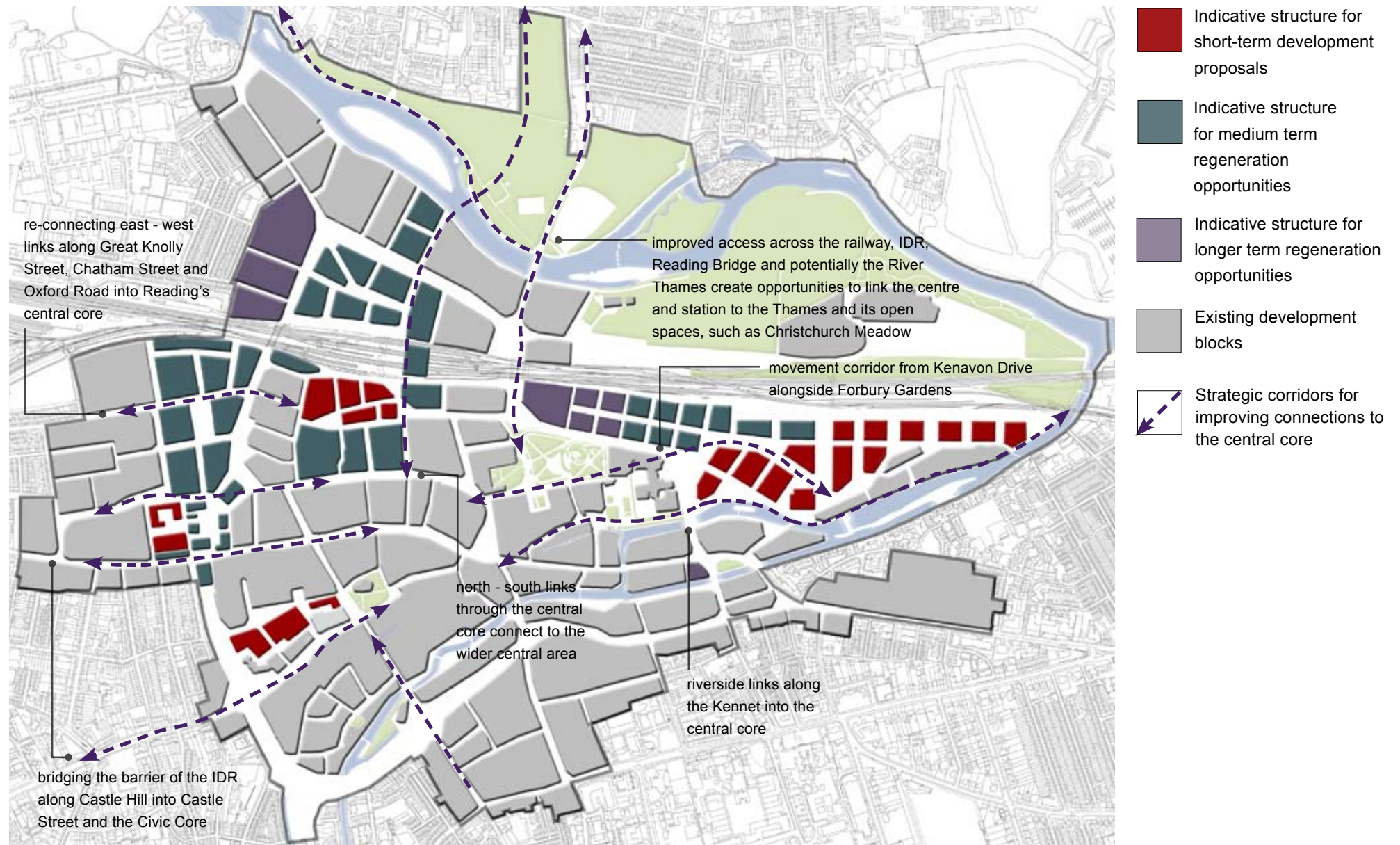
Many of these proposals are included in the three major areas of opportunity identified in the RCAAP. These areas draw together many of the planned improvements for Reading in a comprehensive framework and show how further change can be

delivered. The scope and potential for change within these areas is covered in Chapter 3.

The remainder of this chapter describes the Framework Plan, which takes into account all of these proposed developments and opportunity areas. The chapter incorporates the key recommendations of Reading's Tall Building Strategy to provide a physical framework and guidance that provides a coherent urban design structure for the central area.



## FIGURE 2.1 THE DESIGN FRAMEWORK



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# THE FRAMEWORK PLAN

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*‘The pattern of the arrangement of street blocks, plots and their buildings in a settlement’*

## 2.2 Urban Structure and Grain

In order to reinforce Reading’s existing character and identity, the layout of new development should respond appropriately to the existing urban structure and urban grain.

Historically, the urban structure of Reading has evolved as a grid of north-south and east-west routes, deriving from the original river crossing points. The grid of streets, in turn, defines a series of blocks within which buildings have been developed that front directly on to the surrounding streets. Historically, blocks have been developed over time by multiple land owners with a variety of plot sizes and for a variety of uses, resulting in an urban grain that we would recognise as ‘human-scaled’.

As the town has developed, the imposition of the rail corridors and more recently the Inner Distributor Road (IDR) has resulted in fragmentation of the grid. Within the current central core - the area south of the railway and within the IDR - the urban structure is intact and should be reinforced and respected by new development. Where the grid is less well defined - generally in the areas adjacent to the rail corridors and the IDR corridor - new development should exploit all opportunities to connect to and extend the established grid of the central area.

Generally, it is the same areas where the urban structure is least well defined that the urban grain is also least ‘human-scaled’, such as the ‘big shed’ form of development in the east side area and north of the station. The Chatham Place development is a good example of current development that provides a new connection to the central area, creating a finer grain of development. In addition to re-establishing a direct pedestrian connection between Broad Street and Chatham Street, an increased development area has

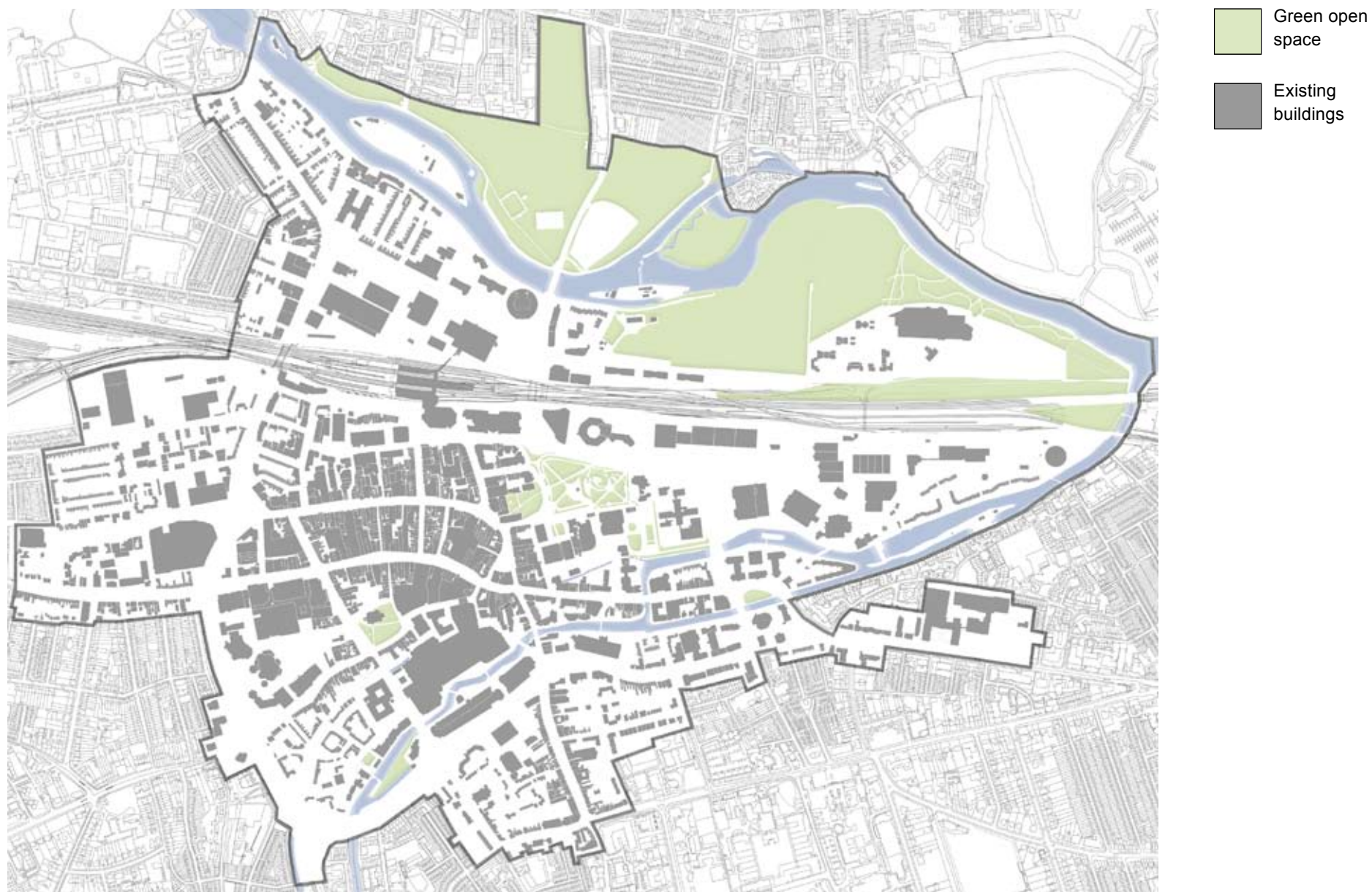
been proposed by bridging over the IDR.

The Framework Plan illustrates an approach to the extension of the central area grid into the opportunity areas that have been identified beyond the central core.

Figure 2.2 indicates the existing urban structure of Reading’s central area.



FIGURE 2.2 EXISTING URBAN STRUCTURE



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# THE FRAMEWORK PLAN

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*'A place that is easy to get to and move through'*

## Urban Structure and Grain: Key Design Objectives

### Character - Identity and Sense of Place

In order to strengthen identity and sense of place, the structure and grain of new development should reflect or respond to the relatively fine grained character of the existing adjacent areas, where large, monolithic structures should be avoided. Where there is no strong urban structure and grain, this can be achieved by linking to and extending the adjacent street structure and matching the urban grain. Urban grain is determined by the way in which building frontage relates to the street network.

The 'human-scaled' urban grain, which is characteristic of 'market town' Reading, can be complemented in contemporary development through careful articulation of building elements and frontages to create a close relationship between the windows and entrances of buildings and adjacent streets. It is generally easier to achieve a finer urban grain with a greater variety of uses and smaller scale of individual built elements within a street or block.

### Ease of Movement and Permeability - Safe Access and Connections

The structure of new development should facilitate access to and through the development for pedestrians, cycles and, if appropriate, public transport and private vehicles. Integrating new development with surrounding streets creates opportunities to connect to existing access and movement networks.

In order for the urban structure of development blocks and streets to be permeable, new development should respect natural desire-lines through the development area. Wherever possible, new

development should enable connections to be made through the site and should be oriented to overlook and provide passive 'policing' to these connections.

The layout of new development must balance the need for safe permeable access with the need to create development blocks of a sufficient scale to support a range of uses and to allow the flexibility to be incrementally developed over time without the need for energy intensive wholesale redevelopment.

### Legibility - Clear Image and Easy to Understand

In order for the urban structure of development blocks and streets to be legible, new development should create a clear distinction between public and private space. By fronting streets with development and creating enclosure with buildings or well defined boundaries, the street network becomes well defined and compliments the existing urban structure. A 'human-scaled' urban grain helps to create a more distinctive and memorable place, which aids legibility.

Figure 2.3 indicates a structure for Reading's central area, which reflects these urban design objectives.



## FIGURE 2.3 PROPOSED STRUCTURE AND PHASING OF THE CENTRAL AREA



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## 2.3 Diversity and Mix

New development should seek to accommodate a viable, broad and compatible mix of land uses in order to help create a balanced and successful community. The benefits of mixed development include:

- more convenient access to facilities;
- opportunities for higher density living and intensive activity at locations with access to public transport;
- reduced car ownership and shared use of car parking;
- greater opportunities for social interactions and socially diverse communities;
- increased feeling of safety; and
- greater energy efficiency and more adaptable use of space.



*'A place with variety and choice'*

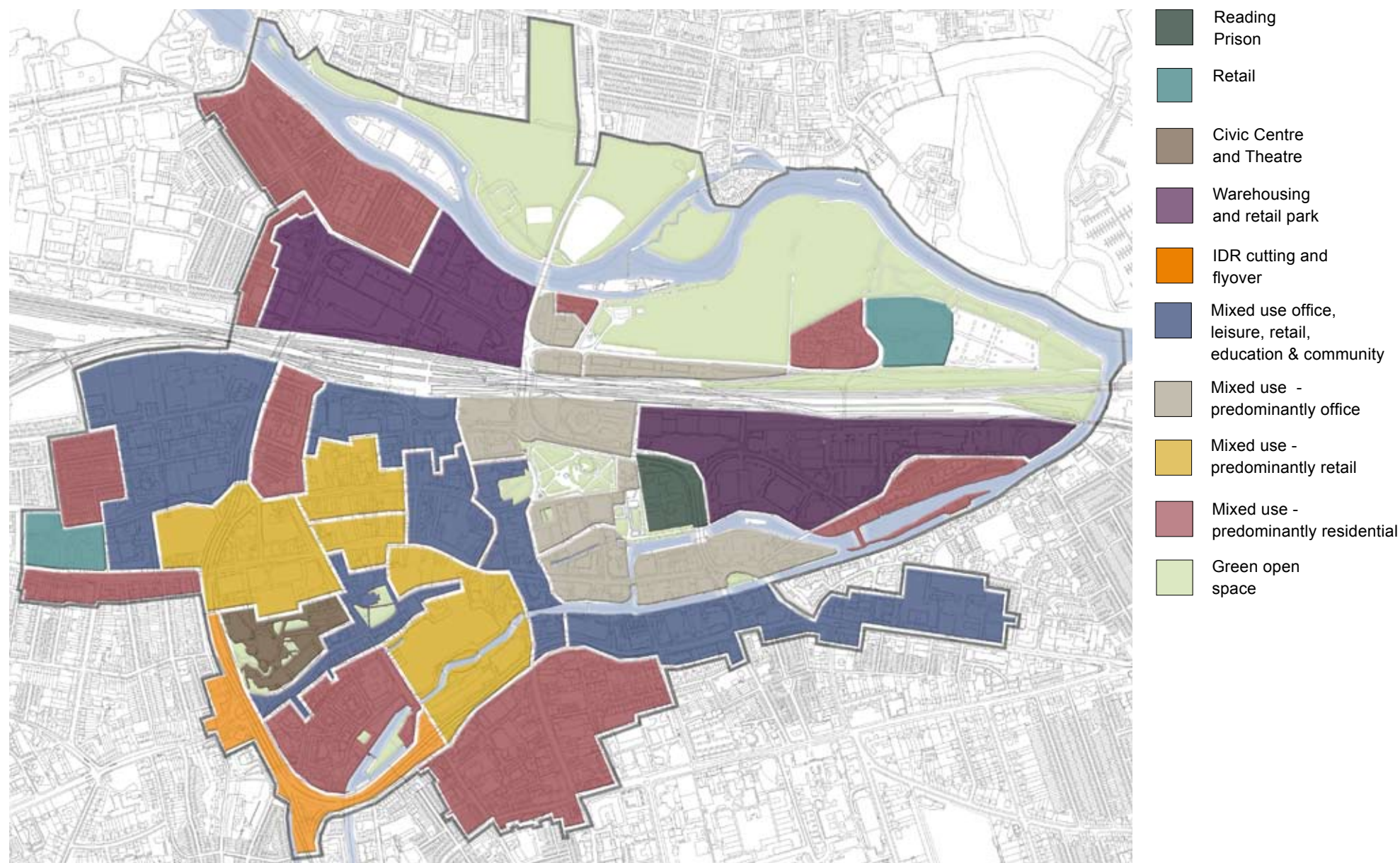
New development in Reading should integrate and connect to the existing uses in the central core and wider areas by safe and convenient routes. Land uses should complement existing town centre functions and accommodate growth in target sectors, for instance offices (B1), retail, residential and leisure, community and culture, to improve choice and enliven an already vibrant core.

Reading Borough Council continue to promote residential housing development on suitable brownfield sites within the wider central area, which includes a balanced and integrated mix of size and tenure. The strategic land use approach broadly illustrates the anticipated main uses identified for each project area, where the predominating element should be that of a mixed use environment.

Figure 2.4 broadly indicates the current range of land uses in the central area.



## FIGURE 2.4 PREDOMINANT EXISTING LAND USE



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# THE FRAMEWORK PLAN

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## Diversity and Mix: Key Design Objectives

### Character - Identity and Sense of Place

One of the key characteristics of successful urban space is a sense of identity and unique character. Figure 2.4 indicates how the central area is currently divided into a number of areas of distinct character and identity. New development should seek to reinforce this character in considering the mix of uses and density of new development.

The co-location of the multiple uses that support an urban community can contribute to this sense of place, add to the vitality and diversity of the area and increase the viability of the individual businesses. Central urban areas are the most sustainable location for high density development and the only limit to density should be its appropriateness to the character of existing, adjacent development - in respect of visual impact and protection of privacy.

### Continuity and Enclosure - Well Defined Streets and Places

The higher the density of development, the greater the opportunity to create a continuous building line around a street block. The greater the variety of uses, the more likely the building edge is to contain 'live' uses, such as shop fronts, doors directly on to the street, or residential upper floors that enable people to keep an eye on the street and make it feel safer.

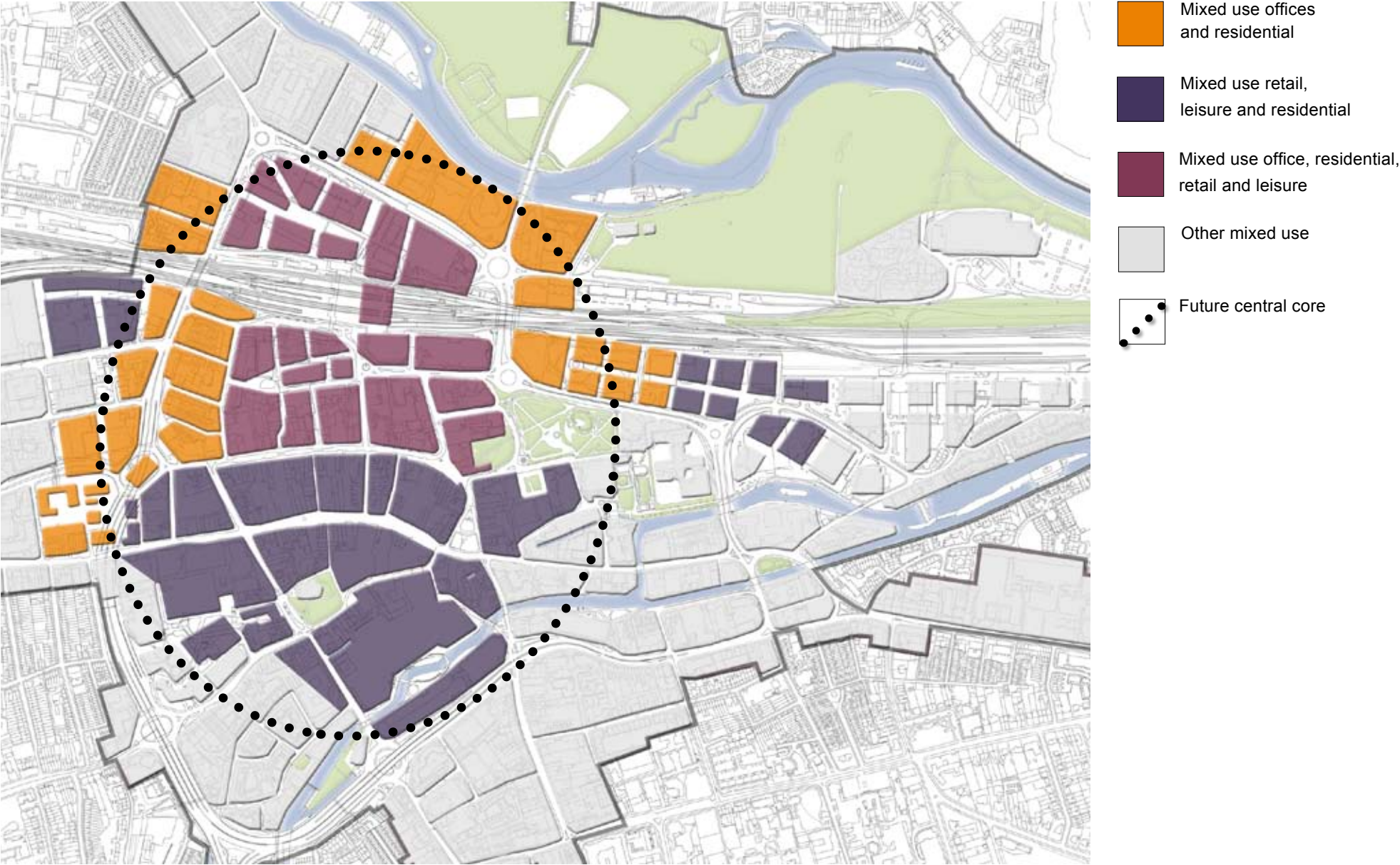
### Legibility - Clear Image and Easy to Understand

Again, a greater mix of uses and higher density of development that is appropriately designed reinforces sense of place, identity and aids legibility. The integration of public art within the fabric of new development, either within buildings, or within the design of the street, can further reinforce image and legibility.

Figure 2.5 indicates the mix of uses envisaged in the Reading Central Area Action Plan.



FIGURE 2.5 STRATEGIC LAND USE APPROACH



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*'The primary location for the development of very tall buildings is the area around the station'*

## 2.4 Scale: Height and Massing

The Reading Tall Buildings Strategy contains a thorough evaluation of the capacity of Reading's central area to support taller buildings. The key conclusion of the Strategy is the identification of a number of locations within the city centre that are suitable for the introduction of taller buildings and the definition of a number of key principles that should be addressed in the design of development within these areas.

The three locations identified create the opportunity to develop clusters of tall buildings at strategic gateways to the central area.

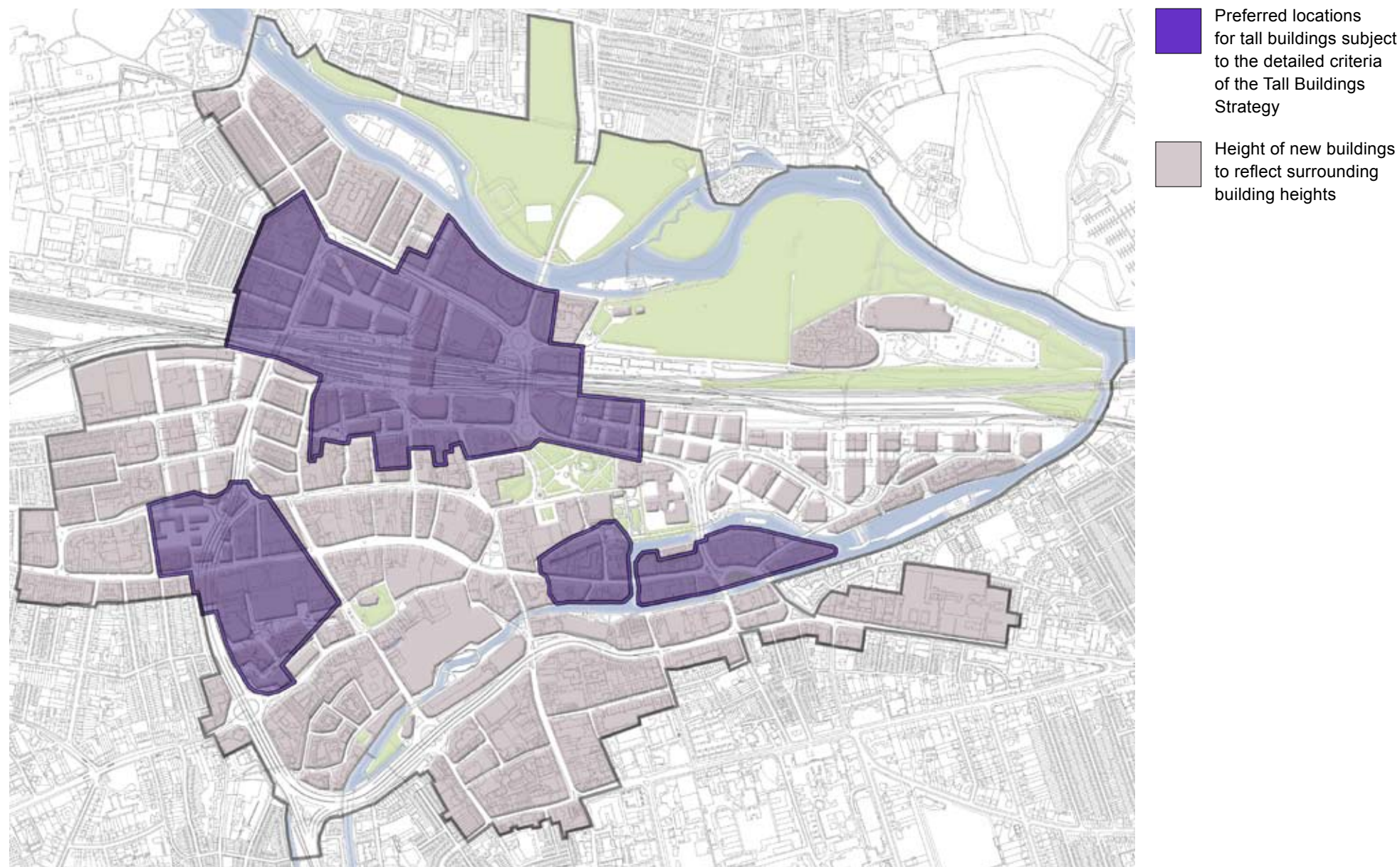
- Eastern approach adjacent to Kings Road;
- Western approach adjacent to Bath Road; and
- Station gateway.

Figure 2.6 indicates the locations within the central area that have been determined to be most suitable for the location of taller buildings. The primary location for the development of very tall buildings is the area around the station, which best meets a number of the key criteria used in the assessment for suitable locations. These criteria include:

- proximity to sustainable transport access;
- capacity of the area to meet demand for social infrastructure;
- impact on townscape and historic character;
- short and long range visual impact;
- visual impact on open spaces;
- topography and flood risk;
- market demand; and
- flight path and telecommunications constraints.



## FIGURE 2.6 PREFERRED LOCATIONS FOR TALL BUILDINGS



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*'A place that is appropriate to its context, has a clear image and is easy to understand'*

The key design principles to be addressed in the design of tall buildings are summarised below:

## **Create a Positive Relationship to Surrounding Streets**

This can be achieved by a combination of one or more of the following approaches:

- large masses should be stepped down to the scale of neighbouring buildings;
- create active street frontage at ground level;
- optimise passive policing at ground floor and upper floor level;
- provide legible and accessible entrances at regular intervals along the ground level street frontage;
- rich and varied detailing of architectural and landscape design with high quality materials, particularly at street level; and
- tall buildings create opportunities to improve and extend the public realm and provide amenities to serve both the public and occupants by introducing new spaces that are accessible, permeable and sheltered at ground floor level.

## **Create Positive Visual Impact**

This needs to be considered from a number of different perspectives:

- for distant views, consider the overall silhouette of the building mass;
- for mid-distant views, the buildings overall composition and detailed design are perceived in balance - the hierarchy of and articulation of elevations are particularly important; and
- in local views the quality and detail of architectural and landscape design are of particular importance and the impact of the building on the immediate surroundings must be considered - the scale and visual prominence of tall buildings demands particular attention to detail, quality of materials and robustness of construction design and quality.

## **Optimise Sustainability**

There are several opportunities to minimise the environmental impact of tall buildings through consideration of a range of ways to optimise sustainability:

- in evaluating the location of tall buildings - the considerable demand placed on transport infrastructure must be fully considered and mitigated if necessary;
- in the detailed design and layout of tall buildings, orientation of glazing should take advantage of solar gains where passive heating is desired, utilise shading where it is not desired and maximise daylight wherever possible to minimise the need for artificial lighting;
- shallow floor plans optimise access to daylight, minimise overshadowing and create the potential for natural ventilation; and
- the considerable surface area of tall buildings should be exploited to optimise use of photovoltaic cells and similar technologies with the aim of minimising consumption of fossil fuels in meeting the energy needs of the building.

## **Minimise Environmental Impact**

There are several aspects to the environmental impact of tall buildings on surrounding areas that need to be considered, in addition to visual impacts:

- overshadowing is a critical consideration and the impact on light access to adjacent buildings must be considered from the outset;
- the impact of tall buildings on the micro-climate should be addressed in the architectural and landscape design to mitigate the effects of wind and local overshadowing; and
- the high energy demand of tall buildings should be minimised by consideration of all possible sustainable design techniques.



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*‘Integrated transport solutions are a fundamental component of a well designed urban structure, providing a network of connected spaces and routes for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles’*

## 2.5 Improvements to Access

The proposals and objectives of Reading's Local Transport Plan are integral to the transformation and expansion of Reading from ‘town to city’ and for realising the 2020 Vision. Integrated transport solutions are a fundamental component of a well designed urban structure, providing a network of connected spaces and routes for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. The Local Transport Plan recognises this in its core objectives, requiring that new development in the central area should:

- provide routes that are designed as part of Reading's streets and places with continuous frontage development that creates definition to the street and movement network;
- provide direct, safe and high quality routes for cyclists and pedestrians that are easy to understand and well integrated into the surrounding areas;
- seek to improve the environment and safety of the centre by improving access for public transport;
- design public transport facilities and infrastructure as an integral part of new development; and
- maximise opportunities for development in sustainable locations at public transport interchanges.

This is proposed to be delivered through a combination of initiatives:

- the design of new development (together with funding);
- the introduction of the Mass Rapid Transport System (MRT);
- the implementation of plans for the Station Gateway Area as a major interchange and hub of the MRT; and
- through specific infrastructure projects, including efforts to reduce the ‘barrier-effect’ of the Inner Distributor Road and railway.

### Improvements to Public Transport

Full details of the proposed MRT are provided within the Local Transport Plan. The strategic objectives for the new MRT network are to:

- fully integrate with Station Area proposals to improve access to and efficiency of Reading Station and to support the wider regeneration of the area;
- complement existing public transport provision along the main routes;
- develop new routes as alternatives to existing corridors to the east and north of the central area; and
- develop routes that connect with the suburban areas and extend the ‘grid’ pattern of the central area to a wider area.

The MRT planning team should be consulted at the earliest opportunity to discuss the successful integration of new development proposals with the MRT proposals for the central area.

# THE FRAMEWORK PLAN

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## Reducing the Barrier of the IDR

There is great potential to improve connections across the IDR and significantly enhance access to the central area of Reading. The barrier effect of the IDR currently contributes to the segregation of communities from the central area, both physically, socially and visually.

Currently, the IDR is not an integrated part of Reading's street network, acting purely as an artery for traffic and creating a hard, unfriendly and congested environment.

All future developments should seek to address the problems of the IDR by following urban design principles that treat the IDR as a place and not simply a traffic corridor:

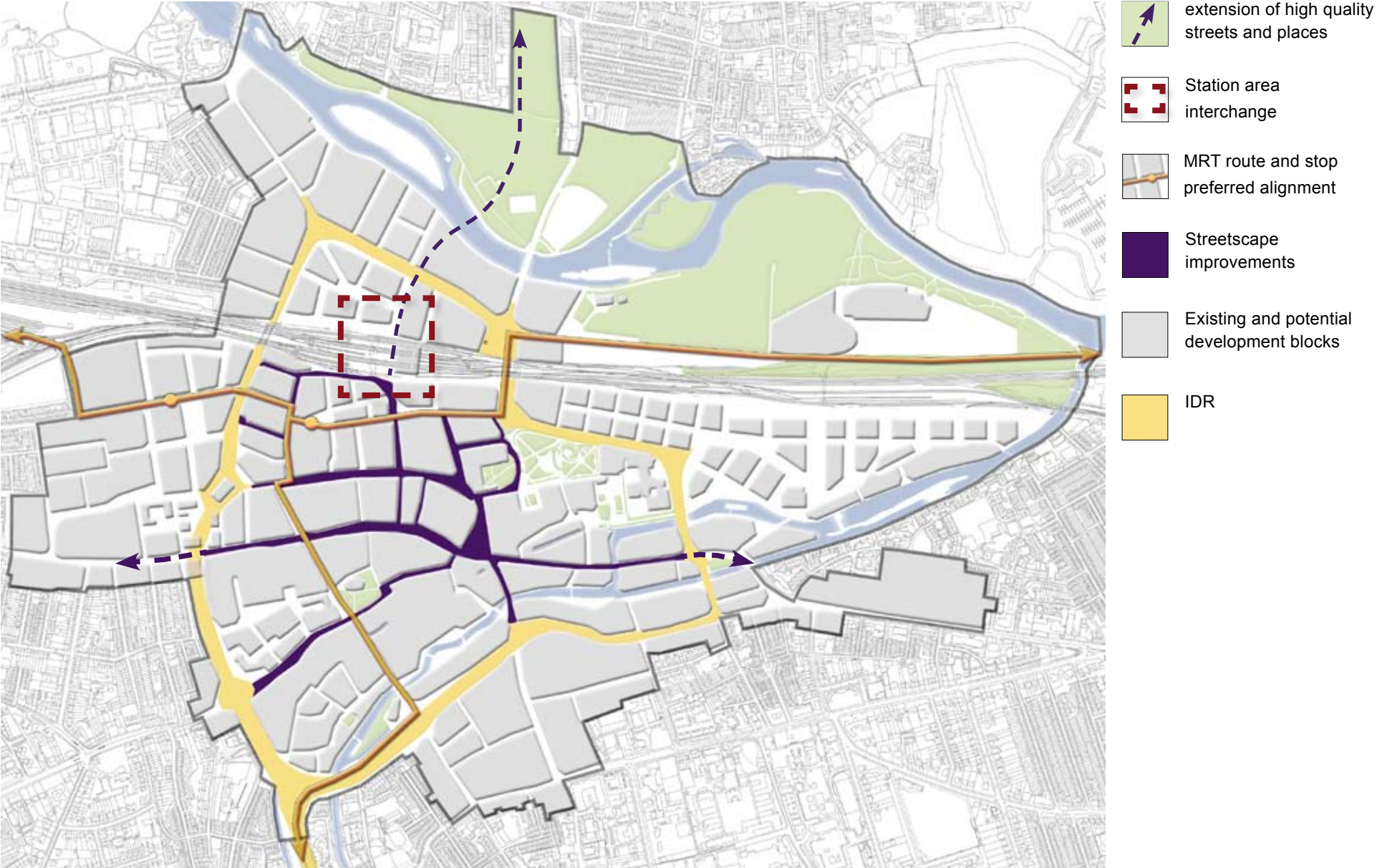
- link city centre activities into neighbouring areas;
- create space for environmental enhancement of the public realm through the creation of quality streets and places; and
- plan new development and public spaces to create a strong urban grid with active frontages along the IDR.

These principles have been followed in detailed proposals prepared for improvements to the IDR, which are currently being considered. A transport commission has been set up to consider various options for improved access to central Reading. The commission will report during 2008.

Figure 2.7 illustrates strategic access proposals in the central area.



FIGURE 2.7 STRATEGIC ACCESS



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# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS



## 3.1 Major Opportunity Areas

The Reading Central Area Action Plan identifies three major opportunity areas around the central core of Reading. These areas provide significant scope for change to accommodate the growth of the central area beyond the IDR and rail corridors.

The three areas are identified on Figure 3.1. Redevelopment within the major opportunity areas, to the west, north and east, will facilitate a natural expansion of the central core and at the same time deliver structural changes that improve access to the centre, supporting its continued regeneration.

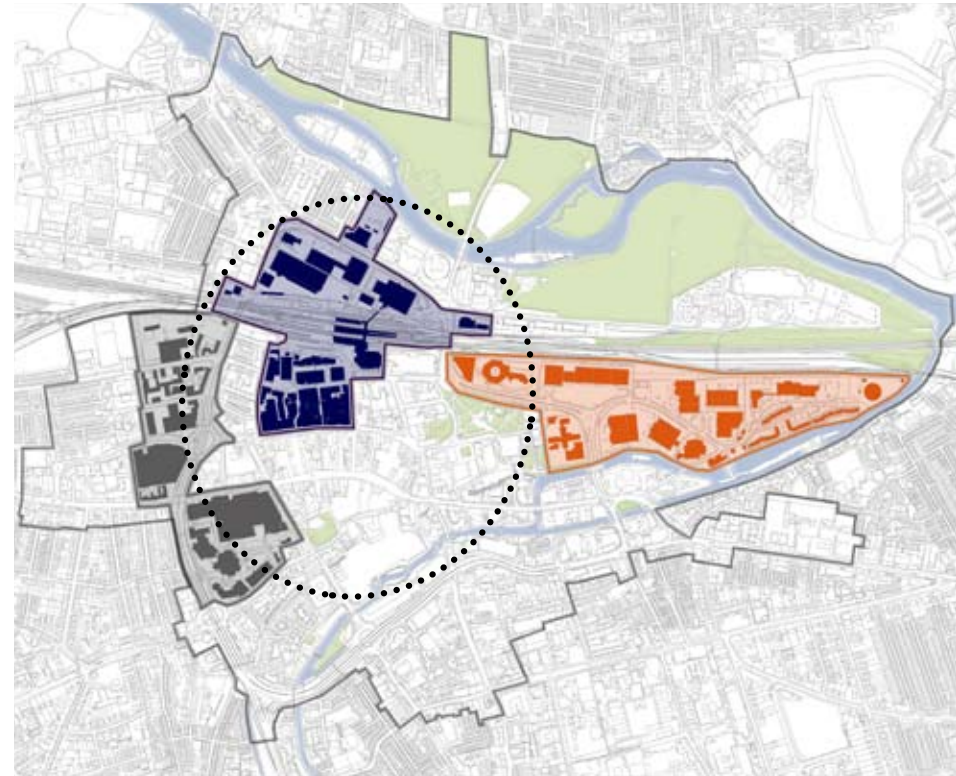
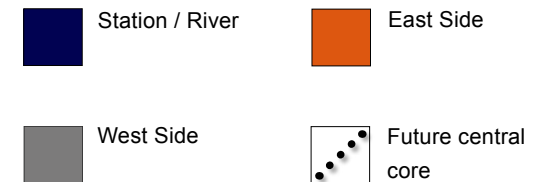
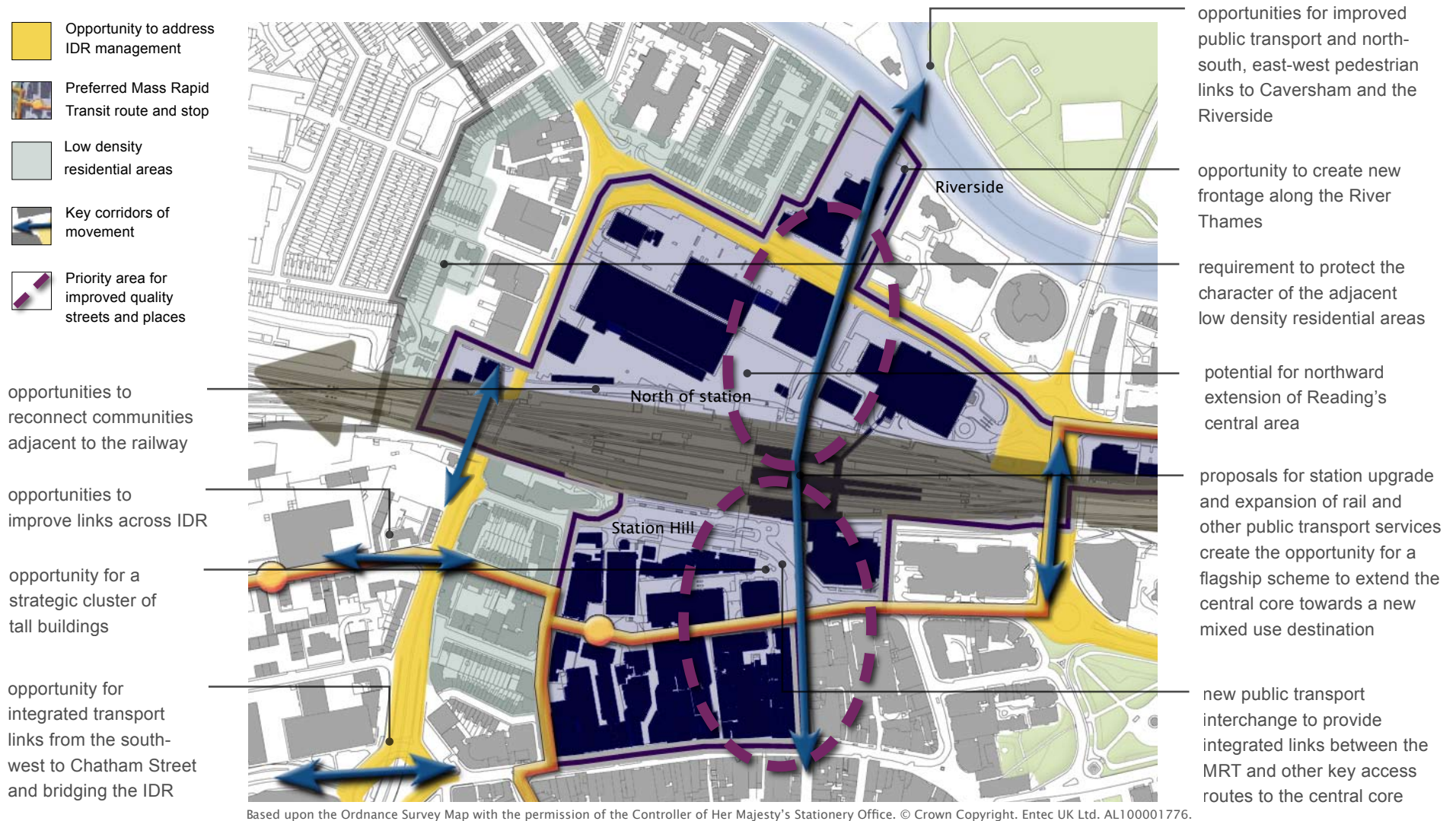


Figure 3.1 Major Opportunity Area in Relation to the Central Core



## FIGURE 3.2 THE STATION AND RIVER THAMES – ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Figure 3.2 illustrates the key issues and opportunities to be addressed in re-development of the Station and Riverside area.



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## THE STATION AND RIVER THAMES

### The Station and River Thames Area Vision

*The single greatest opportunity for Reading to fulfil its potential to create a world-class city lies in this area. Within 500m lie the under-utilised resource of the riverside, the future location of one of the best connected transport hubs in the UK and the thriving historic core of Reading.*

The vision for the area is a world-class mixed use quarter, which marks the gateway to the expanded city, seamlessly connecting both new and old Reading, the river and the city centre. Building and public realm design must be of the highest quality, reflecting this areas status as Reading's premium location and the new city heart of the borough.

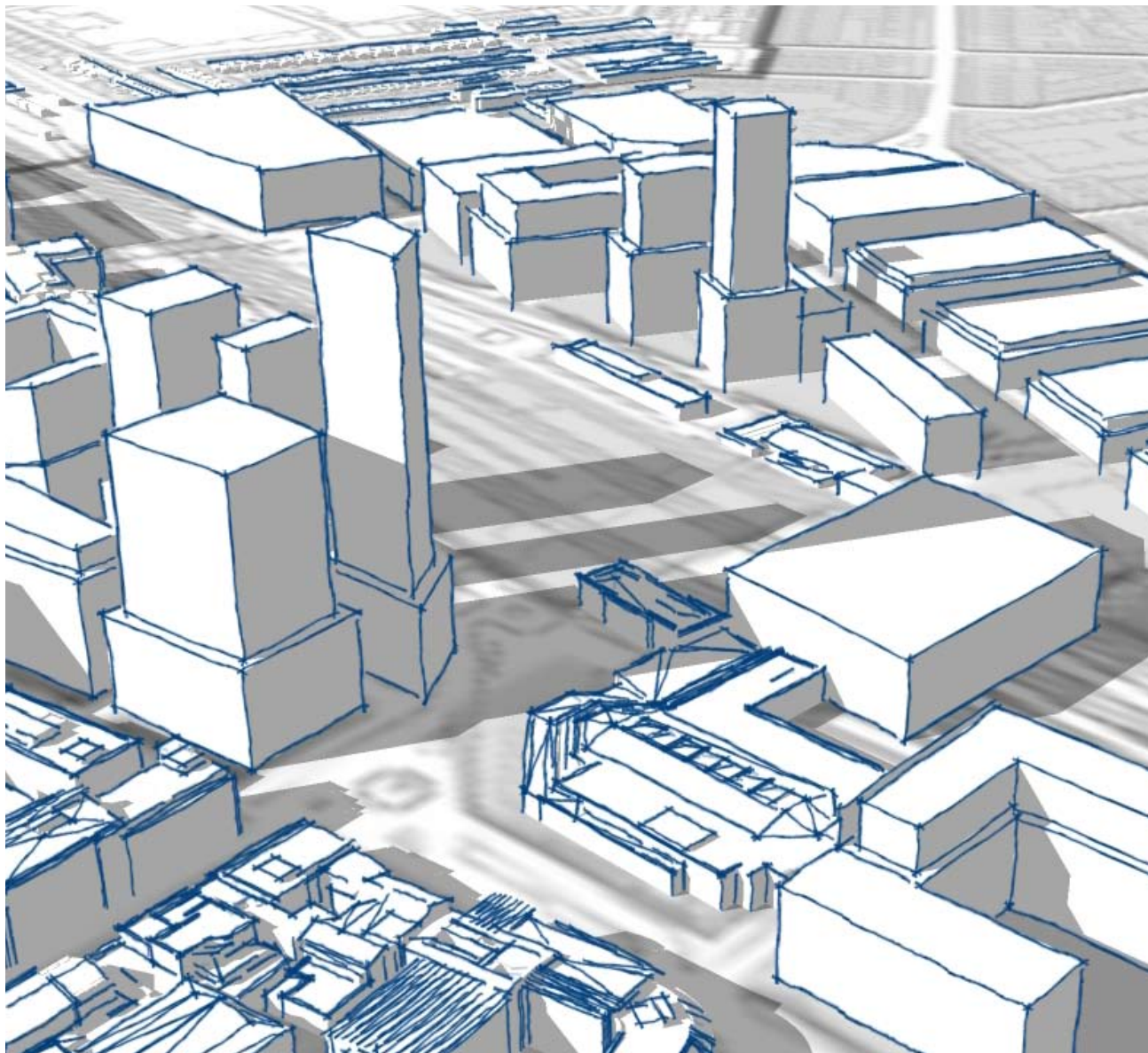
A major redevelopment of the railway station is part of plans to improve the station and transport network. Currently, Reading lacks a real 'Station Square' and focal point of arrival for the town. The area to the south provides an opportunity to redefine the Station as a flagship scheme; a transport interchange for all modes of transport and a mixed-use destination.

This area provides the opportunity for a strategic cluster of high density, tall buildings as it is well served by public transport and is one of the major interchange hubs in the country. The scheme will integrate the transport links and areas to the north, including Christchurch Meadow onto Caversham, towards the banks of the Thames and links into the heart of the centre and south-west to Chatham Street. The Station site should provide a focus of activity that encourages movement in all directions.



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## THE STATION AND RIVER THAMES



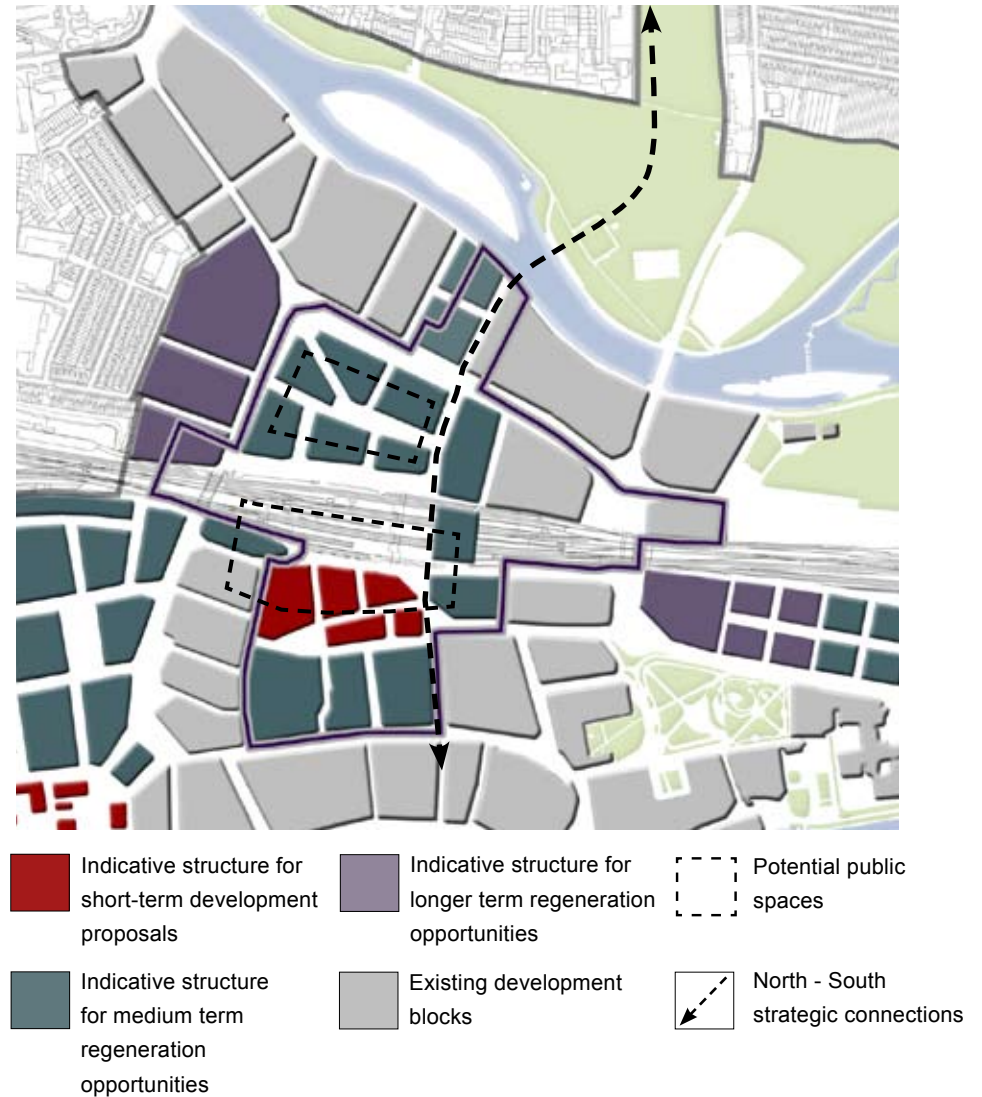
# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## THE STATION AND RIVER THAMES

### Layout: Urban Structure and Grain

#### Key features:

- a station flagship scheme on the south side of the proposed station building;
- a public square north of the station, with a focus on cultural activities and a high quality pedestrian route northwards towards the river; and
- a redefined urban landscaped park situated in the flood plain on the north side of the Thames.





# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## THE STATION AND RIVER THAMES

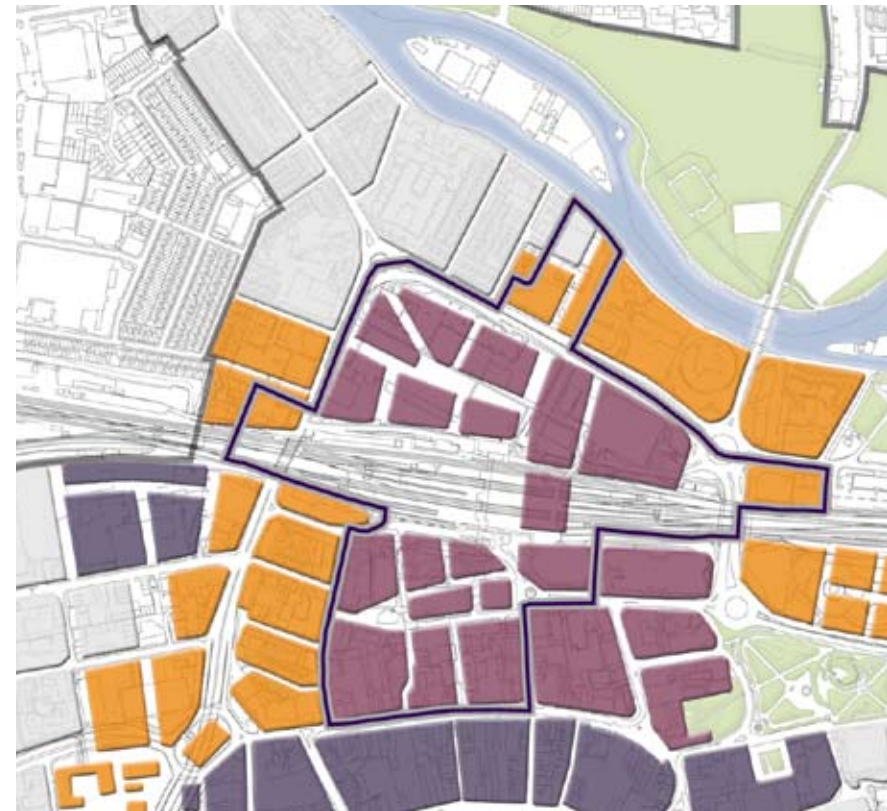
### Density and Mix

The station area should contain a wide mix of uses that will encourage this area to become an important destination and vibrant central quarter for central Reading. New retail and leisure opportunities on the lower floors of new development will provide a main element of the expansion of the centre northwards across the railway.

This area provides the opportunity for higher density and to balance and complement the development of the Oracle Centre further south. However, uses should also be suited to existing uses in the central core. This would help to develop the key north-south movement corridor through the centre of Reading and to create a viable mix of uses that encourage day and night time activities.

New leisure facilities provide the opportunity to attract a wider range of users into the central area and a mix of offices and residential facilities will ensure that this area is used at all times of the day. Major commercial development will be focused in this area as it is easily accessible by public transport, walking and cycling and forms a focal point for Reading.

The riverside area adjacent to the Thames should retain its tranquil character and provide for a mix of uses.



Mixed use offices and residential

Mixed use office, residential, retail and leisure

Mixed use retail, leisure and residential

Other mixed use



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

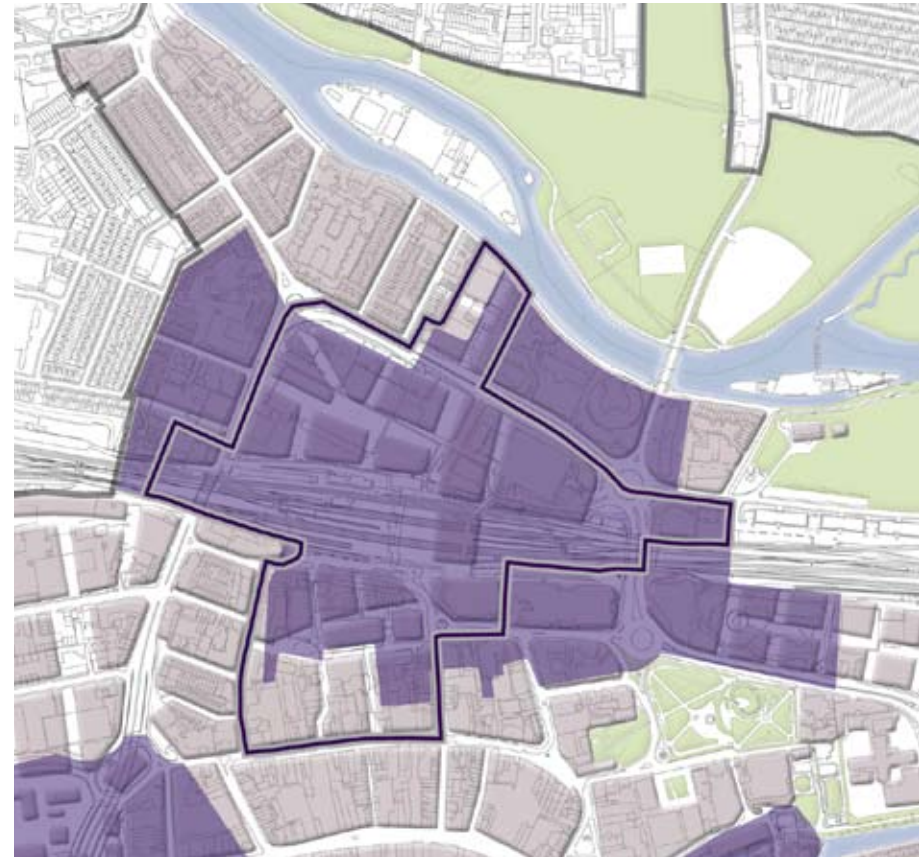
## THE STATION AND RIVER THAMES



### Scale: Height and Massing

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 the most accessible part of Reading. This will include the tallest buildings in Reading, up to 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 must respond to all existing surrounding routes, whilst also providing a permeable layout that offers direct routes towards any main infrastructure. 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.

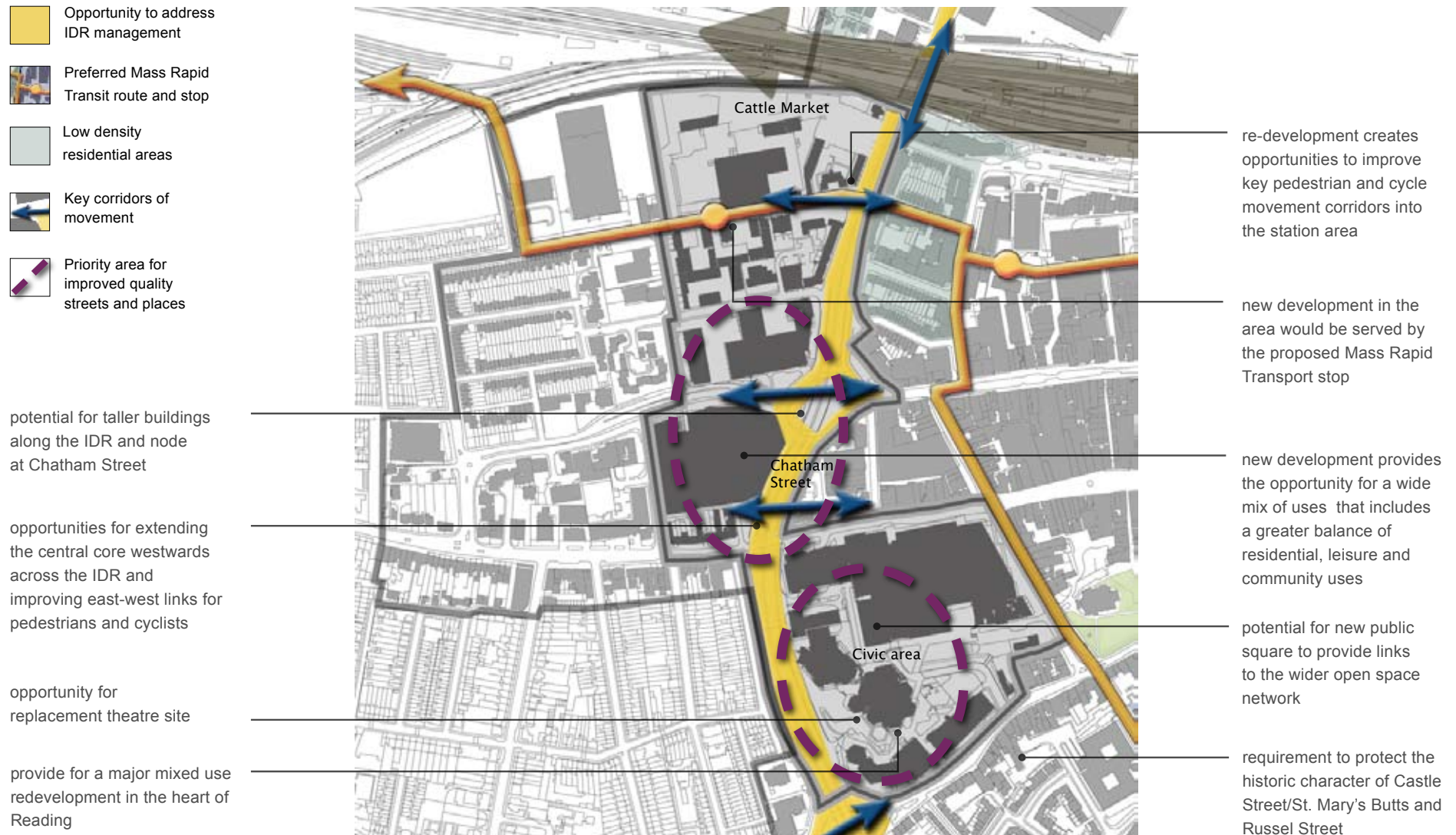
Here, buildings will be bulkier and closer together than in the other two clusters, where there should still be adequate space between the buildings to allow for light to reach the streets and spaces and so that the buildings can be distinguished from each other when viewed from a distance.



-  Preferred locations for tall buildings subject to the detailed criteria of the Tall Buildings Strategy
-  Height of new buildings to reflect surrounding building heights

## FIGURE 3.3 WEST SIDE – ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Figure 3.3 illustrates the key issues and opportunities to be addressed in re-development of the West Side area.



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# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## WEST SIDE

### West Side Area Vision

*Chatham Place and emerging proposals for the re-development of the Civic Centre set a considerably raised standard for new development within this area. Further development must meet and exceed this standard, establishing this as the cultural quarter for the growing city, contrasting the best in contemporary, sustainable design, with some of the most highly valued historic fabric of the city.*

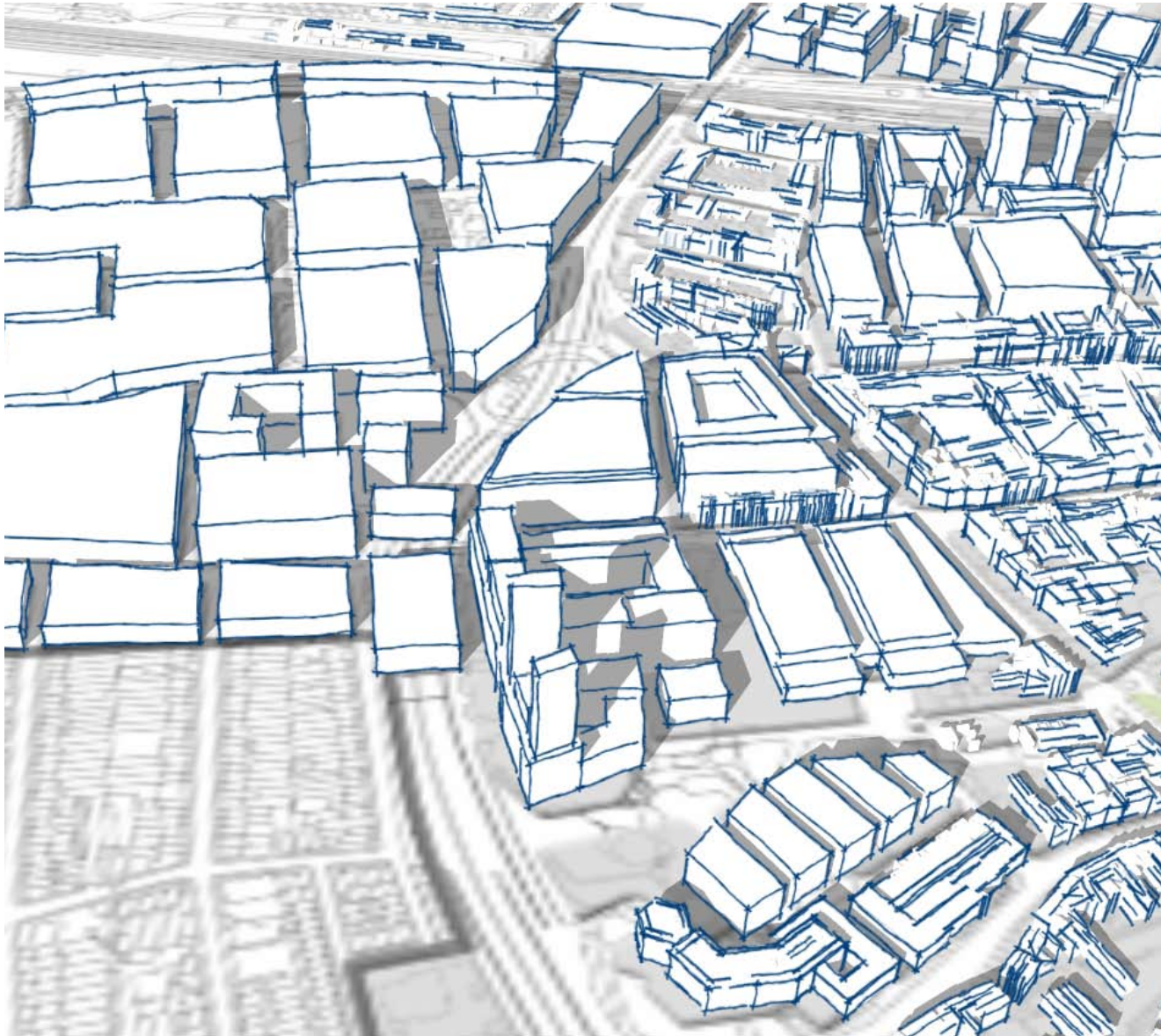
The Chatham Street car park, the IDR cutting, the Hexagon, Council office sites and rundown development along the IDR northwards provide a potential development opportunity for a new, mixed-use extension to the western side of the centre that expands the central core and overcomes the severance of the IDR.

The interface of this area through to St. Mary's Butts and The Minster make this development area important to the quality of the core and the wider area. New public spaces and accessible east-west links from the central core will re-establish the road network and provide opportunities for new focal points and increased legibility of the town.



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## WEST SIDE



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## WEST SIDE

### Layout: Urban Structure and Grain

#### Key Features:

- a linear park or area of high quality public realm along the bridged section of the IDR;
- a new focal open spaces within newly developed areas; and
- a civic square in the heart of the existing market area (Hosier Street) that incorporates the traditional market activities.



Indicative structure for short-term development proposals

Indicative structure for longer term regeneration opportunities

Potential public spaces

Indicative structure for medium term regeneration opportunities

Existing development blocks



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

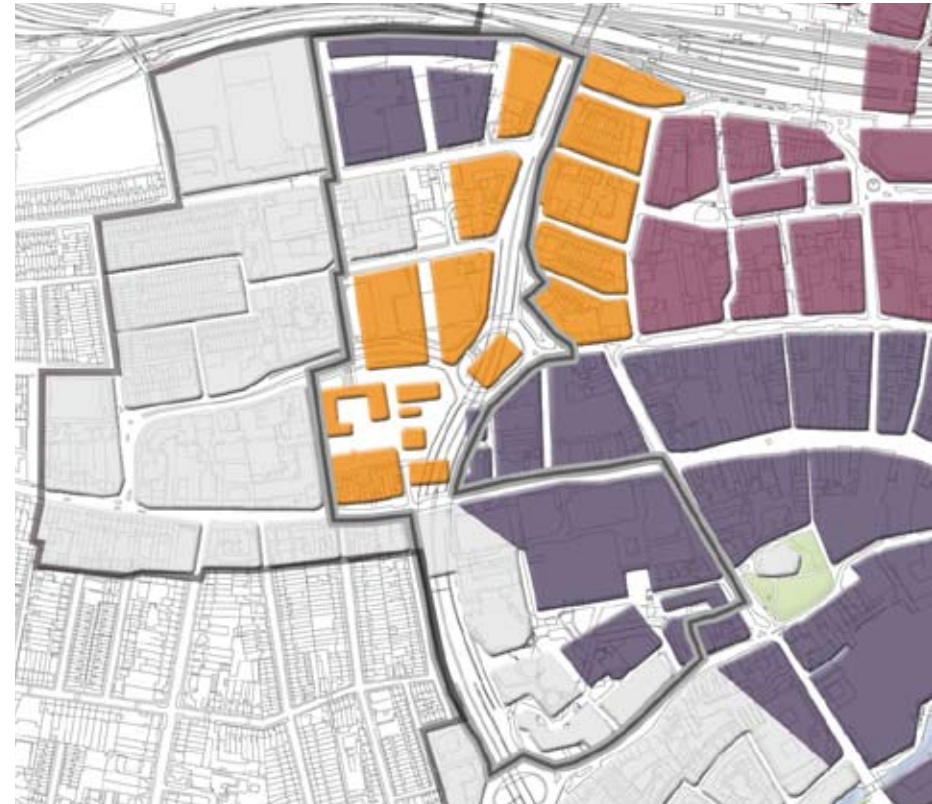
## WEST SIDE

### Density and Mix

This area will be appropriate for a wide mix of uses, with higher proportion for residential uses over offices compared to the Station area. It is important that new development is designed for robustness that will allow mixes of use to change over time and adapt to the market.

Active uses will be encouraged on the ground floor but will not necessarily extend the retail core westwards, unlike the Station area expansion north. Similarly, this area will support leisure and community activities, for example the new swimming facilities set out in the Chatham Street Development Brief and the opportunity for a replacement theatre site at the Civic Centre.

There are opportunities for new urban squares and public open spaces in the West Side that provide for informal recreation and leisure in the centre. Some small scale commercial offices may also be appropriate.



Mixed use offices and residential

Mixed use office, residential, retail and leisure

Mixed use retail, leisure and residential

Other mixed use



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## WEST SIDE


### Scale: Height and Massing


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 area. 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.

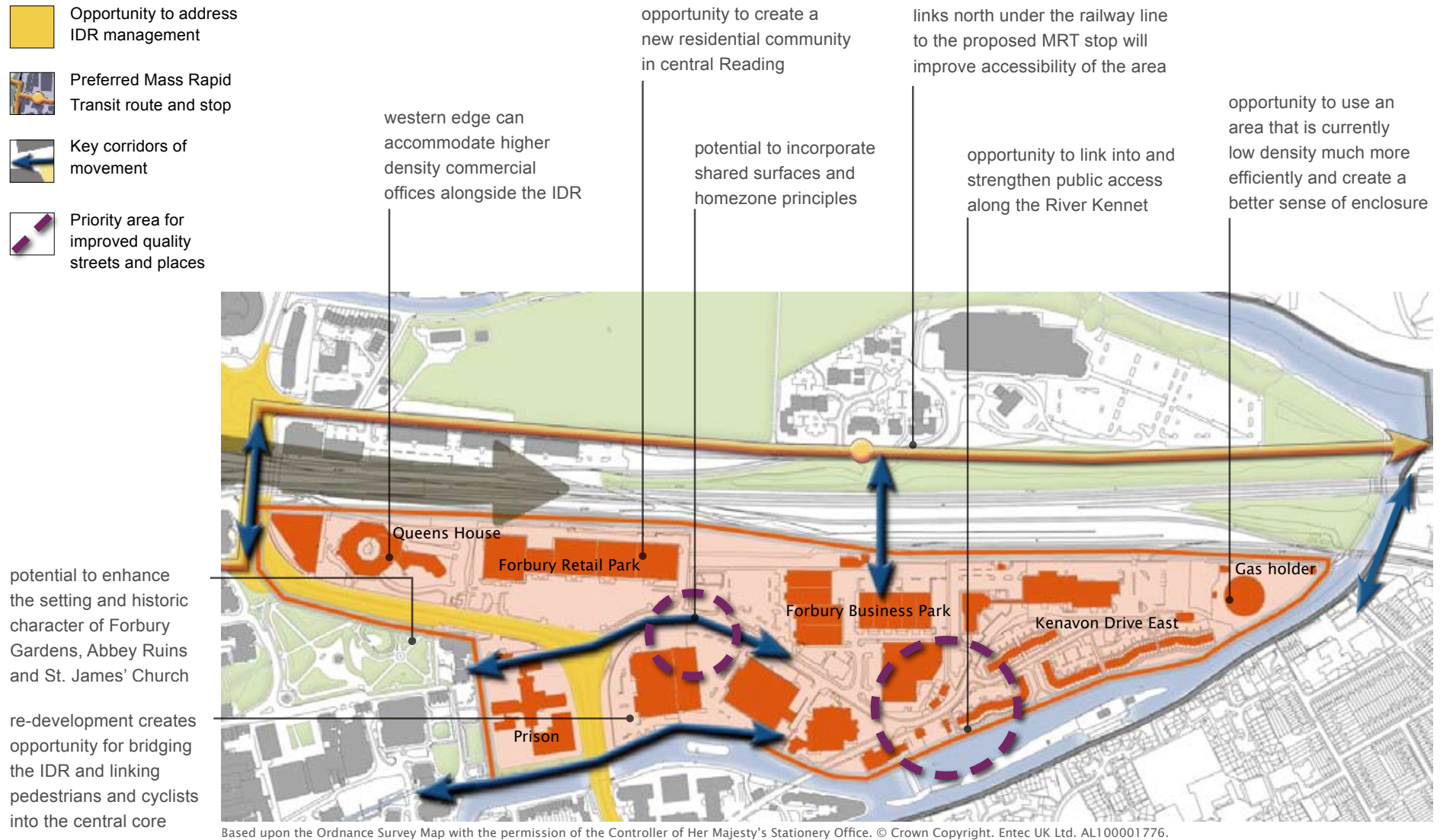


 Preferred locations for tall buildings subject to the detailed criteria of the Tall Buildings Strategy

 Height of new buildings to reflect surrounding building heights

## FIGURE 3.4 EAST SIDE – ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Figure 3.4 illustrates the key issues and opportunities to be addressed in re-development of the East Side area.



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## EAST SIDE

### East Side Area Vision

*The East Side area is set to become Reading's most desirable residential quarter. Benefiting from being a natural enclave - but with excellent access to both main rivers and potentially significantly improved links to the city centre - this place has the potential to become a vibrant city quarter - accommodating a wide range of homes and local services to support the growth of a sustainable community.*

The opportunity presented by the areas location benefits should be fully realised by providing a range of densities, increasing from the peaceful eastern corner of the site towards the city centre. A structure of strongly articulated blocks and broad, well defined streets will create a new legible network for this area and create a buffer between the railway and existing riverside homes.

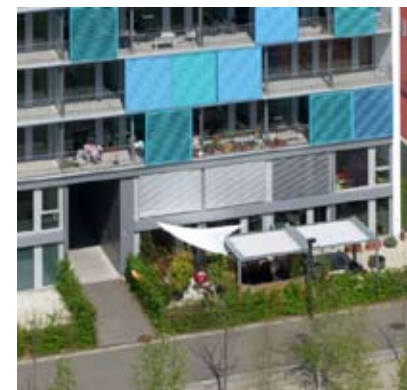
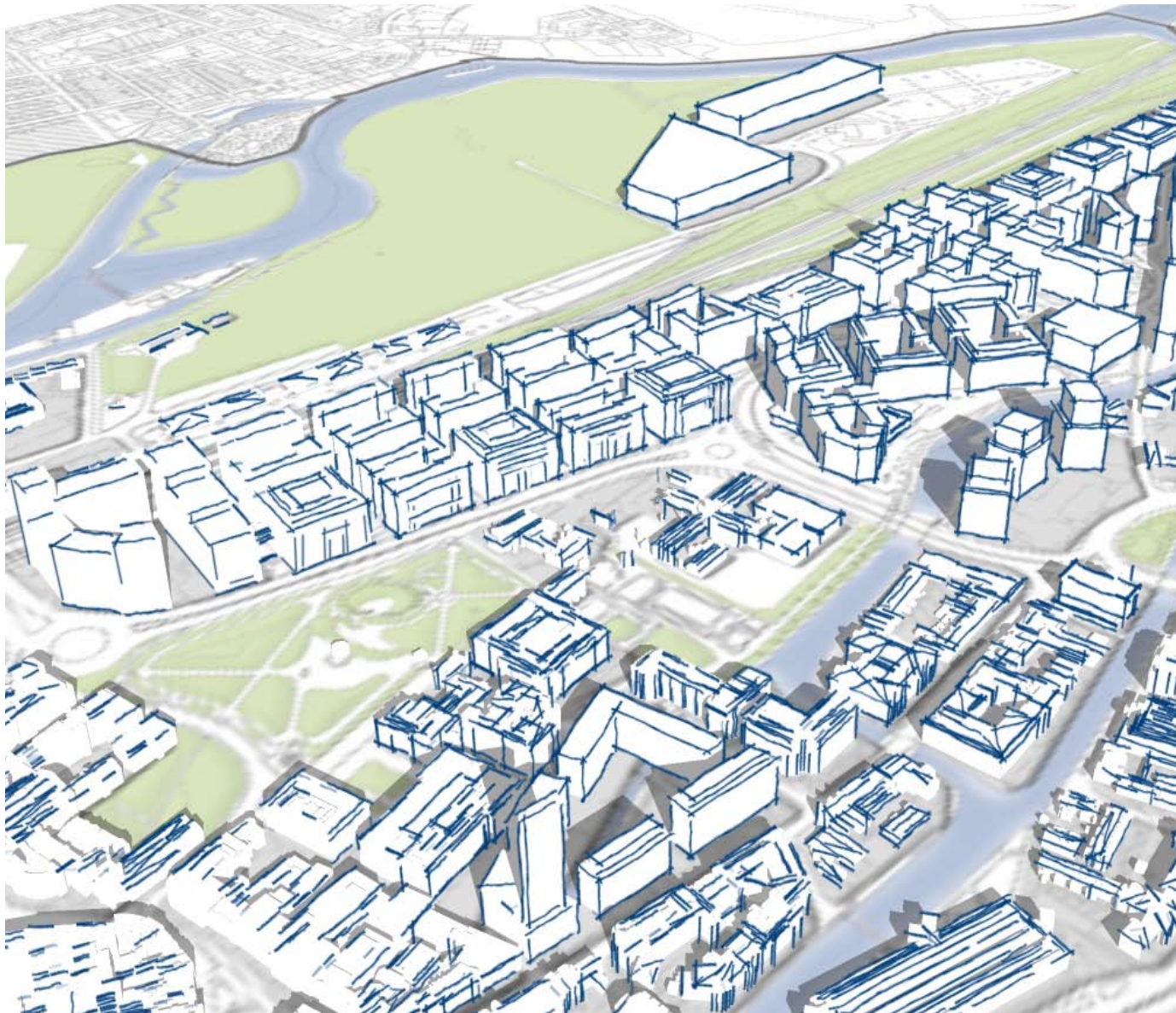
Vacant sites, life expired commercial buildings and drive-in retail uses provide another area for potential expansion. This area has the potential to become an integral part of the town centre providing an ideal opportunity for centrally located homes and potential for commercial uses along the railway edge.

In the future, the prison site could become a key gateway site through Forbury Gardens with creative re-use, becoming a focal link between the East Side and the wider central area. This would encourage a unique waterside quarter that is already being recognised by new residential projects.



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

EAST SIDE



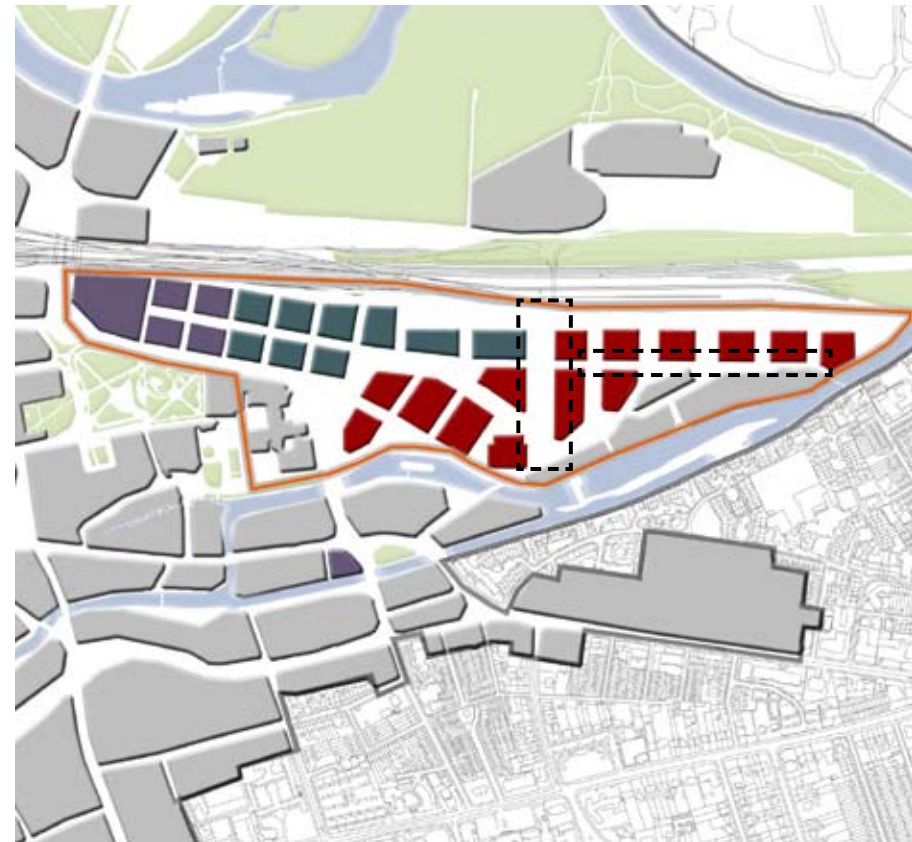
# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS






## EAST SIDE

### Layout: Urban Structure and Grain

#### Key Features:

- an extension of the open space of the Forbury gardens eastwards that connects with a new urban park that provides a local focus for residents;
- an informal, local square that provides local community and leisure activities near to Blake's Lock and the riverside walkways. This square provides access to the route northwards that crosses the railway line; and
- a generous riverside promenade on the north side of the Kennet linking the Abbey to Blake's Lock.



- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|  Indicative structure for short-term development proposals       |  Indicative structure for longer term regeneration opportunities |  Potential public spaces |
|  Indicative structure for medium term regeneration opportunities |  Existing development blocks                                     |   |



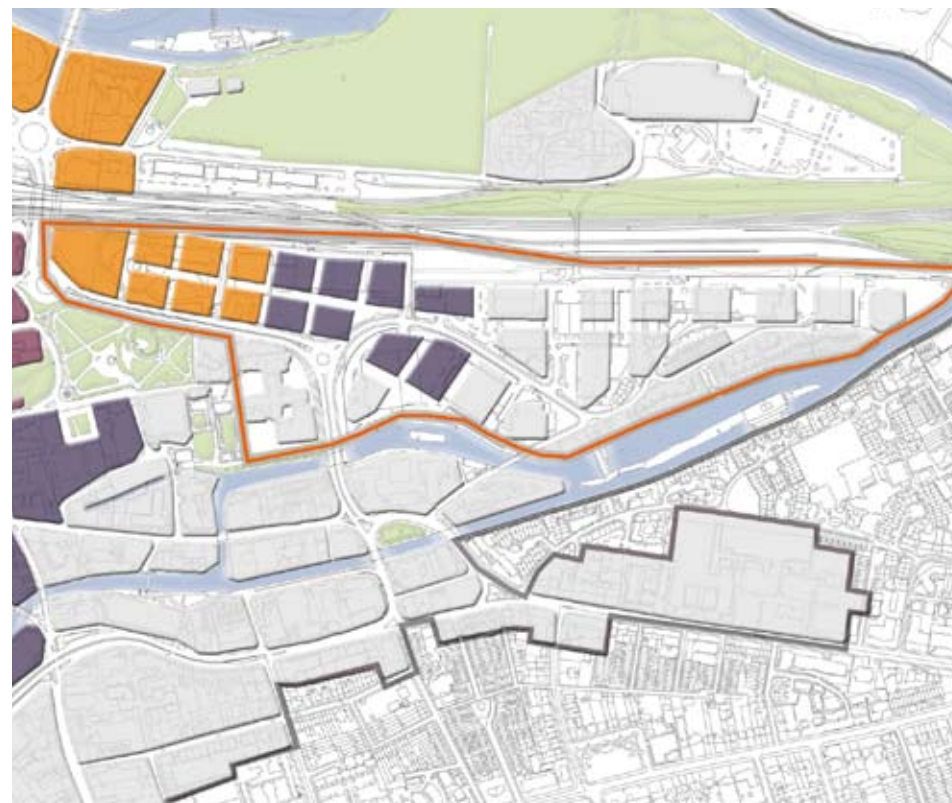
# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## EAST SIDE

### Density and Mix

The main use for the East Side area will be residential, with associated community facilities. These community facilities will support the residential uses and should be located in one area within the site that is easily accessible to all. This will create a new central community for Reading.

This area can support a higher density mix of uses and there is scope along the western edge and alongside the IDR to provide commercial offices.



Mixed use offices and residential

Mixed use office, residential, retail and leisure

Mixed use retail, leisure and residential

Other mixed use



# MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## EAST SIDE

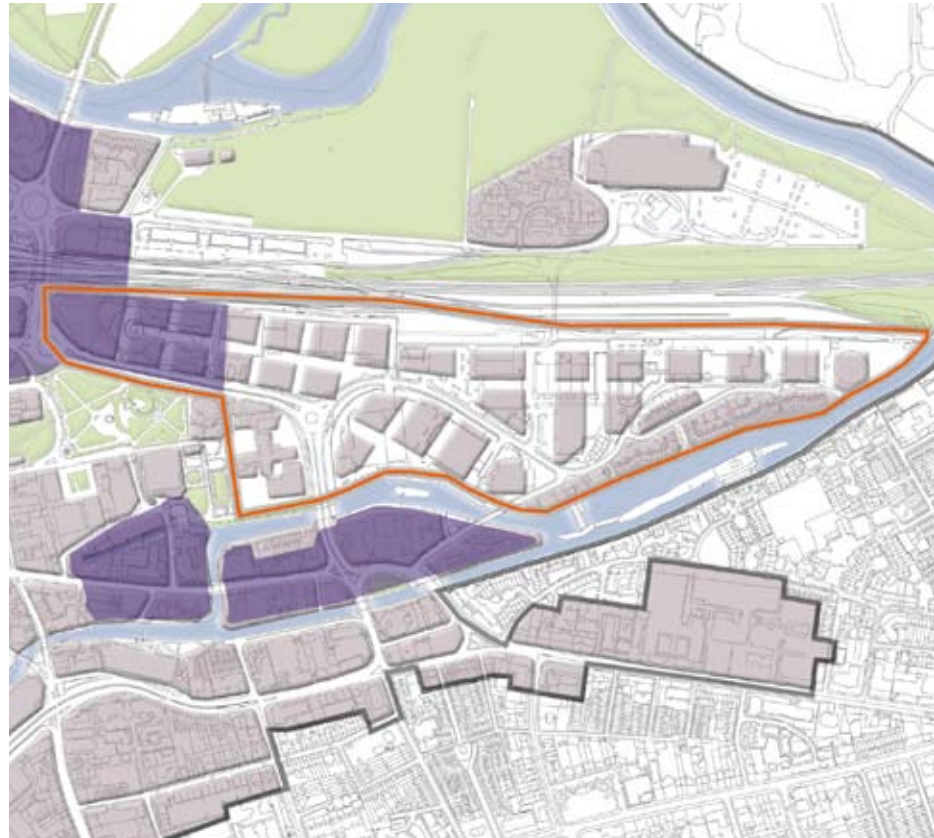
### Scale: Height and Massing



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.

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 a distance.

Tall buildings 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.



-  Preferred locations for tall buildings subject to the detailed criteria of the Tall Buildings Strategy
-  Height of new buildings to reflect surrounding building heights



# QUALITY STREETS AND PLACES

This chapter outlines an overall approach to architectural and landscape design and detailing to provide a strategy for the creation of a successful public realm within the central area.

## 4.1 Streets

Streets are the primary form of shared, public open space within urban areas. Their design should suit the local context, avoiding the use of standard solutions. This is the shared job of the urban designer, landscape architect, and traffic engineer. There is no 'engineering-only' solution to a street design issue: it always has an urban design aspect.

- design the street for low speeds so that pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles can mix safely. This does not mean high kerbs and railings, which effectively allow cars to move faster;
- main vehicular routes should be designed or adapted to minimise the negative impact of the area through which they pass and to allow their safe, pleasant and convenient use by pedestrians and cyclists;
- footpaths should follow pedestrian desire lines. Pedestrians should not have to deviate from their path of travel to cross streets in favour of unhindered flow of traffic. At junctions and crossings, the use of raised surfaces and tight radii make it easier for pedestrians to cross;
- where major traffic routes (IDR) cross major pedestrian routes, a solution is wide, well landscaped crossings, with the floorscape and lighting used to define the crossing area. Major routes should be seen as urban avenues, which people walk along and cross regularly in safety and convenience; and
- generally, the resurfacing of streets in the core should be done with a simple, integrating quality surface.

### *Guidelines for Design:*

- use elements like light masts more efficiently, for more than one purpose (signage, traffic lights and lighting) to avoid excessive clutter;
- remove the superfluous and obsolete; establishing a visual logic, with clear messages for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers;
- design the space so that the function of its parts are clear and the need for signs, barriers and the like is minimised. The design of a place should enable people to have a sense or knowledge of where they are, how the place works, and where to go to from there. This legibility can be achieved with design of the place rather than reliance on the superficial method of signs only;
- either hide it or flaunt it. Certain elements, such as service inspection boxes, are unavoidable but visually dull and frequently situated where they impede the pedestrian. They are best hidden in the landscape or building edge. If it is essential that it be positioned in the open, for example a lamppost, then its design, height and level of illumination should be selected carefully for the particular place. Treat the artefact as art; and
- produce a comprehensive and co-ordinated strategy of elements for each space, carefully selecting them according to context. Both 'special' and 'off-the-shelf' designs are possible. Designers should be encouraged to use the best of modern design rather than relying upon the 'heritage' range, which all too often equals pastiche.

# QUALITY STREETS AND PLACES

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## Signage and Legibility

There is a programme under way to improve signage and legibility in Reading. The key principles for these improvements are:

- consistent and coordinated design of these elements over a wide area;
- making the structure of the place legible so as to minimise the need for signs, especially those concerned with traffic direction and control;
- concentrating pedestrian signage in a designated locality at specific nodal points;
- implicit routing defined by the paving type rather than automatic reliance on signage; and
- installing art in the floorscape and as sculptural elements to give visual pointers.

## Lighting

Much of Reading's lighting has been selected for highway illumination purposes, and often does not address human scale. By designing places that are well lit for pedestrians, with particular care given to vehicle/pedestrian conflict points, streets are made safer and unthreatening. However, care needs to be taken to avoid unnecessary light pollution.

- lighting can be provided by overhead street lamps, sometimes best mounted on buildings, as well as from bollards, uplighters, feature lights, building and façade lights and shop windows;
- through a composition of all available sources, a desirable level of lighting can be produced, bringing attention to some components but hiding others;
- the shape and colour of light can also generate three-dimensional sculpture, transforming the perception of a place and dramatically painting its night landscape; and
- good lighting at night-time increases safety and encourages activity.



# QUALITY STREETS AND PLACES

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## Public Art

Public art can make a major contribution to giving a place character and identity, bringing people through and into places, and enhancing and giving focus to existing public spaces. An extra layer of quality can be obtained for a small proportion of the total project budget. Reading is fortunate to have secured 'Art at the Centre' funding and is continuing to develop its art strategy. It is important that this strategy is fully integrated into the overall design strategy for public spaces and streets.

Public art should not be seen as something that is inserted once a space or street has been designed. Its conception should be at the preliminary stages of design and be seen as an integrated component of the space. Public art is also not necessarily art objects within a space. While these objects can act as a focus, public art can also have a more interactive role for example by providing places for people to sit or congregate.



## Buildings and Frontages

New and altered buildings and frontages need to be of good intrinsic quality themselves and to respect the qualities that already exist. Reading does have its own unpretentious yet characteristic styles and forms - the handsome nineteenth century floridity of Queen Victoria Street, the cottagey intimacy of Merchant's Place, the historic and well used laneways like Union Street:

- buildings should define and enclose public spaces and have active frontages to add interest, life and vitality to the public realm;
- open space, including streets, should be positive, with clear definition and enclosure, and no ambiguity or left-over space;
- frontages should be kept rich, from near and afar, to maintain visual quality and interest;
- shop fronts are generally of low quality and need specific design guidance and careful control; and
- frontages should be used to celebrate the termination of vistas or important entrances and routes.

# QUALITY STREETS AND PLACES

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## 4.2 Open Spaces

There is an objective within the 2020 Vision for Reading to increase the amount of open space within the central area. Each new development proposal presents an opportunity to improve the surrounding streets and potentially introduce new public open space within the central area. Strategically, opportunities to introduce significant areas of open space within the central area are limited. More potential lies in improving access to and connections between Reading's existing open spaces. The extent of existing open space within the central area is considerable when the water courses are taken into account. Figure 4.1 indicates the extent of existing open space.

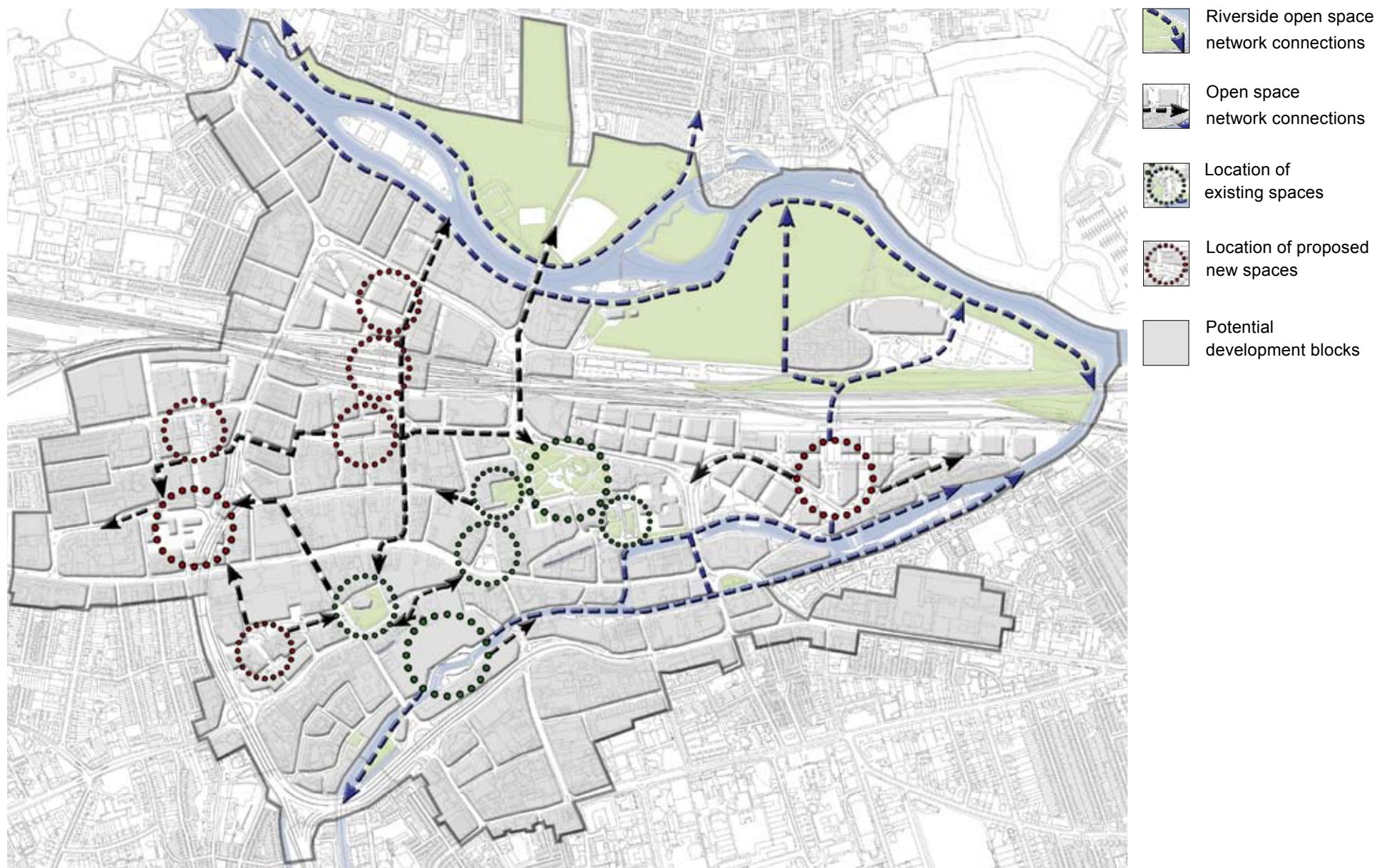
The concept of open space should include all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs and waterfronts, which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can also act as a visual amenity. Reading's waterways are a part of the fabric of the town and a significant asset. The waterways and riverbanks have several functions, including water-related recreation and leisure, bio-diversity, ecology and contributions to local character and distinctiveness. The waterways are also established transport corridors with a navigation function, facilitating sustainable access and movement to and within the town.

In the Framework Plan, guidance on the re-development of the major opportunity areas identifies strategic locations for the introduction of additional focal open spaces. Figure 4.1 highlights the location of these new focal open spaces.

Figure 4.1 also indicates the potential for linking together existing open spaces with proposed new spaces to create a coherent, city-wide open space network, allowing access from all parts of the city centre to a range of recreational open spaces.



FIGURE 4.1 STRATEGIC OPEN SPACE NETWORK



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# IMPLEMENTATION AND REFERENCES



## 5.1 Introduction

The Reading Central Area Action Plan is the primary vehicle to guide and deliver change in the city centre. The City Centre Framework is an important supporting document to the RCAAP as it provides articulation of the spatial and design requirements.

The Framework is intended to be used as a tool for discussion with developers to illustrate the overall vision, scope and direction for change within the central area and also to provide site-specific design parameters. As such this is intended to streamline the pre-application process and enable proposals to be developed from the outset which are fully in accordance with the vision of the Reading 2020 Partnership.

The overall framework provides:

- indication of areas for major change - in terms of streets, development blocks and land-use; and
- indication of vision for an improved network of connected streets and open spaces.

At a site specific level the framework pulls together key parameters for re-development based on existing policies and initiatives including:

- tall buildings guidance;
- existing design and development briefs; and
- urban design guidance.

## 5.2 Other References

The objectives and principles of the City Centre Framework are supported by a number of national, regional and local policies and guidance documents that provide further background. Those of most relevance to the City Centre Framework are set out below:

- PPS 1: Delivering Sustainable Development;
- PPS 3: Housing;
- PPS 6: Planning for Town Centres;
- PPG Note 13: Transport;
- PPG 15: Planning and the Historic Environment;
- PPG 22: Renewable Energy; and
- PPG Note 25: Development and Flood Risk.

*By Design – Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice (2000) DETR/CABE*

This guide is intended as a companion to the Planning Policy Guidance and Planning Policy Statements listed above and aims to stimulate and encourage better design. The guide is relevant to all aspects of the built environment, from the design of buildings, spaces and landscapes, to transport systems; and for planning and development at every scale, from streets and their neighbourhoods, villages and cities, to regional planning strategies.

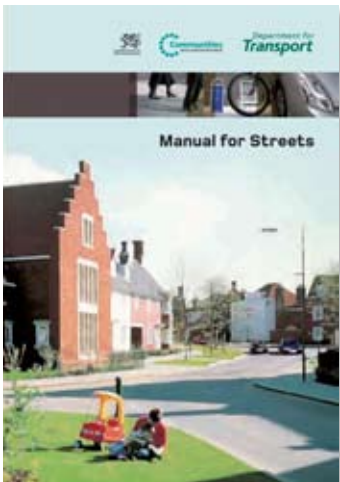
# IMPLEMENTATION AND REFERENCES



*By Design – Better Places to Live: A Companion Guide to PPG 3 (2001) DETR/CABE*

This guidance document aims to promote deeper thought and greater flair from those entrusted with creating better places in which to live. It follows on from By Design – Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice and draws together the principles of good urban design.

This document focuses on the attributes that underlie successful residential environments in order to provide guidance on implementing the new approach to planning for housing set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (PPG 3), now superseded by Planning Policy Statement 3, published in November 2006.



*Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide (2003) ODPM*

The primary objective of this guide is to ensure that the planning system successfully and consistently delivers inclusive environments that can be used by everyone, regardless of age, gender or disability as an integral part of the development process.

*Safer Places – The Planning System and Crime Prevention (2004) ODPM*

This focuses on seven aspects of sustainability that are particularly relevant to crime prevention. The guide is not prescriptive, intended to be used to stimulate thought on crime prevention and to promote community safety through the planning system.

*PPS 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005) ODPM*

This document explains the Government's intention to commit to the principles of sustainable high quality development through the planning system. PPS 1 lists the principles that form the basis of other PPSs. PPS1, states that good design is indivisible from good planning and planning policies should 'promote high quality inclusive design ...Design which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted.'

*Urban Design Compendium 1 (2000) and 2 (2007) English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation*

Compendium 1 provides guidance on good urban design, outlining the factors that make neighbourhoods active and stimulating places. Its aim is to be an accessible document for all those involved in the place making process and the development and regeneration of urban areas.

The update to the Compendium sets out strategies for creating quality places and promoting community cohesion in the light of project delivery. It provides technical and best practice advice on delivering and maintaining high quality urban design. It aims to promote mainstreaming of best practice in urban design by detailing how to deliver the aspects of urban design set out in the original compendium, along with practical examples from the UK and abroad that can be used as an evidence resource.

# IMPLEMENTATION AND REFERENCES



## *Manual for Streets (2007) CLG and Department for Transport*

This guidance document aims to assist in the creation of high quality residential streets that are at the heart of sustainable communities. Various examples of street design are given with a number of supporting case studies.

### **Local Policy Context**

- The Reading Borough Local Plan 1991 – 2006 (Adopted October 1998);
- The Reading Borough Local Development Framework (LDF); and
- The LDF is made up of a number of useful documents:  
Core Strategy Document, Adopted (see Policy CS7), January 2008;  
Reading Central Area Action Plan, Submission Document, February 2008; and  
Second Local Transport Plan 2006 - 2022.

### **Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)**

- Sustainable Design and Construction SPD;
- Sustainability Appraisal of the Draft Sustainable Design and Construction SPD;
- Caversham Lock Area Development Principles;
- Chatham Place Re-development;
- Kenavon Drive Urban Design Concept Statement; and
- Station Hill South Planning and Urban Design Brief.



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