

CHAPTER 2 THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND LANDSCAPE

Introduction

The form of Reading's landscape and built environment has developed since Saxon times out of its natural characteristics and its economic functions. The character of the townscape reflects times of growth and prosperity and a multiplicity of uses, some of which have almost disappeared from sight and others which are only now making their impression on the town. There is no part of Reading that has not been influenced by man's intervention.

The landscape and built form of today is complex and dynamic. The town is going through a significant period of growth and environmental enhancement within a landscape and built form of historic, ecological, cultural and landscape value. This chapter identifies those features of recognised importance which are key elements of Reading's townscape character and are therefore worthy of protection and enhancement.

An integrated approach to identifying the existing character of the town incorporating the visual, historical, cultural and ecological and landscape features will help to achieve the vision of Reading City 2020 and provide a sound basis to measure future progress.

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Legislation and Guidance

National Guidance

- **Planning Policy Guidance Note 6: Town Centres and Retail Developments (1996)**

This note outlines the plan-led approach to town centre development, encouraging diversity of use, transport and access. PPG 6 is significant in its inclusion of design as a guidance issue. Design guidance includes sections on visual clutter and local character, and notes the requirement for environmental assessment of development in particular circumstances.

- **Planning Policy Guidance Note 7: The Countryside (1997)**

Section 3.24 of this note makes reference to the problems and issues regarding the urban fringe, and looks for a positive approach to planning and management of these issues.

- **Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990**

Buildings of architectural or historic interest and conservation areas are designated and protected under this Act.

- **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, 1979**

Scheduled Ancient Monuments are designated and protected by this Act.

- **Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)**

This provides guidance to local authorities on how to protect and enhance the historic environment. It must be considered when preparing local plans and may be material to planning applications and appeals.

- **Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (1990)**

This provides guidance to local authorities on how to preserve or record the archaeological resource within the planning process.

- **Hedgerow Regulations 1997**

These Regulations were made under Section 97 of the Environment Act 1995. They introduced new arrangements enabling local planning authorities to protect and control the removal of important hedgerows through a notification system.

Regional Guidance

- **RPG9: Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (1994)**

Section 4.10 gives guidance on protecting the urban environment including the design of urban spaces and the inclusion of trees within such areas. Section 4.15 examines the urban fringe and fringe management systems, and details examples of community forests, public access and recreational facilities within these areas.

A Sustainable Development Strategy for the South East (1998)

This document produced by SERPLAN, puts forward an overall strategy for the development of the region. It will eventually result in the publication, by Government of revised regional planning guidance. The strategy recognises that the region's environment is one of its key assets. Policy EE1 states that special priority should be given to achieving a significant improvement to the physical urban environment in order to make it a more attractive place in which to live and work. A more holistic approach to improving the urban environment and financing initiatives is promoted.

Local Guidance

- **Berkshire Structure Plan 1991-2006 (November 1995)**

The overall strategy of the Structure Plan is to seek a sustainable approach to development. Policies OS1, LD1, LD3 are relevant to achieving a sustainable landscape and built form in Reading. The Countryside and Rural Development policies (Policies C2, C5, C6, C9 and C12) seek to protect areas of countryside whilst accommodating necessary change, while the Environment and Conservation policies (Policies EN1, EN4, EN5, EN6, EN7 and EN10) seek to maintain environmental interests which contribute to the landscape and built form character of towns such as Reading. Other policies with regard to other issues eg. housing, shopping, etc, will also have a significant bearing on Reading's townscape character.

- **Reading Borough Local Plan 1991-2006 (October 1998)**

The Local Plan sets out key values, Key 2A, 3 and 4 having a direct bearing on the future townscape character of Reading. The policies and supporting text in chapters concerned with 'Conservation and Urban Design', 'Leisure', 'The Town Centre', 'Natural Environment' and 'The Waterways' all provide the direction for change in the landscape and built environment.

Furthermore, policies concerned with housing, employment etc. may also influence the future townscape character.

The Local Plan identifies the importance of conserving and enhancing historical assets and the character of the town, and of achieving sympathetic and attractive new development. The Plan seeks to protect and enhance areas of open space, major landscape features, individual trees, hedgerows and woodland, and the character of the town's waterways. Policies also seek to create and conserve a town centre of high environmental quality.

- **Reading City 2020**

'Reading City 2020' sets out the council's vision for the future of Reading. The current state of the landscape and built environment provides a benchmark for the year 2000, although important aspects of the vision are already being implemented.

These include:

- Oracle development
- Pedestrianisation of the town centre
- New innovative architecture
- New urban spaces
- Enhanced setting to the waterways, and
- Restoration of valued landmarks

- **Woodlands Plan**

The council's Woodlands Plan outlines management objectives for all the woodlands in Reading. The plan identifies 8 key objectives:

- To protect and enhance all the existing woodlands in Reading
- To maintain the existing woodlands in Reading, to ensure they are kept clean, safe and accessible
- To identify what management is appropriate for each site and to carry out management to improve the diversity of woodlands
- To carry out a survey of all sites to determine their wildlife value
- To find out what the users want from the sites
- To involve the local community in decision making and practical work
- To promote Reading woodlands as places to visit, and
- To increase the amount of woodland cover in Reading.

- **Environmental Strategy**

The council's Environmental Strategy sets out 74 action points intended to deliver sound environmental practice in partnership with the whole community.

Action points 41-57 have been drafted with the intention of improving the natural and built environment for the benefit of all. In particular, action points 43, 45, 50, 51 and 54 suggest processes which could be improved, either within new development or as part of existing open or landscaped space.

- **Leisure and Arts Strategy**

The council's 1997 Leisure and Arts Strategy has identified nine major sites of public open space and waterways. The initial section of this report briefly describes each of these sites, noting development pressures and opportunities. The Strategy records the necessity for producing management plans and includes guidelines to this effect.

The sites identified as part of the strategy are:

- Thameside Meadows: Caversham Bridge – Kennet Mouth
- Thameside Meadows: Scours Lane – Caversham Bridge
- Prospect Park
- Kennet Valley
- Rabson's Rec and the Cowsey
- Palmer Park/Reading Cemetery/ Alfred Sutton Campus
- West Reading Woodlands
- Clayfield Copse, and
- Town Centre Gardens

Appendix 1 of the strategy notes the council's decision to "encourage the provision of new works of art as part of schemes of development" and comments on the importance of art in the public realm.

- **Waterways Plan (1992)**

The Waterways Plan supersedes 'Reading Waterways: a plan for the river landscape' 1979. The earlier document however still provides valuable descriptive and historical information.

The new Waterways Plan provides a strategy to improve and promote the town's waterways with the assistance of local businesses and riverside owners, in order to preserve and enhance Reading's natural and historical heritage. It seeks to improve access to the waterways from all parts of the town with safe and attractive routes by foot or by bicycle. It also aims to improve the amenity of these locations by introducing appropriate land uses, promoting a greener ecologically valuable waterway, and by applying high design standards. Five individual riverside reaches have been identified:

- the Rural Kennet (borough boundary to Rose Kiln Lane Bridge)
- the Middle Kennet (Rose Kiln Lane Bridge to IDR/County Lock)
- the Urban Kennet (IDR/County Lock to Kennet Mouth)
- the Thames west of Caversham Bridge
- the Thames east of Caversham Bridge

The Waterways Plan sets out ten general policies within the context of which individual proposals are outlined for the reaches.

- **Reading Town Centre Action Plan 1999-2000-2001**

This document examines the town centre in commercial terms, describing seven areas in terms of development initiatives. The document includes initiatives on better signing, extensions to the landscaping programme, and the re-vitalisation of the Forbury Gardens.

- **Developing Reading's Future**

This summarises the town centre strategy, including details relating to public art, 'Reading on Thames' and green open spaces.

- **Public Art Strategy**

This strategy seeks to encourage the role and quality of public art in Reading, responding to particular characteristics of the town. It includes a vision to achieve this, and makes provision for integrating landscapes and the built form of the town.

Evolution of the Town

Saxon Origins

The first documented reference to Reading was in 870-871 when the Danish army overwintered here and built a defensive rampart at the end of a gravel spur at the confluence of the Rivers Thames and Kennet.

Until the Norman Conquest, Reading was a small settlement centred on St Mary's Church on a gravel spur between the rivers. The Thames flowed to the north, separated from the early settlement by low-lying meadows that were liable to flood. The Kennet passed close to the south of the settlement.

The town developed around the intersection of the main east-west London to Bristol road with a less direct route from Southampton to Oxford. It was focussed on St Mary's Church and the old market, now St Mary's Butts.

The Town and Abbey

Henry I founded an Abbey here in 1121. The town then expanded to fill the land between the late Saxon settlement and the Abbey. The market moved to a new location outside the Abbey gates, and Friar Street and Broad Street were laid out to link the old and new markets. The rivers were very important to the town's economy, providing safe transport routes, power for mills and a water supply for industrial processes. The economic importance of the rivers has been highlighted by recent archaeological work, including the discovery of a series of wharves at the Abbey and the excavation of a medieval mill and 16th Century tannery on the site of the Oracle shopping centre. The medieval town also served a large rural hinterland consisting of several large estates, including manors at Battle Farm, Coley Park and Southcote Manor.

Civil War and Economic Stagnation

By the 16th Century, Reading was the largest and most important town in Berkshire, with a major cloth working industry. Its position was not seriously affected by the dissolution of the Abbey and its prosperity continued until the Civil War in 1642. The war hastened the decline of the town's industries especially cloth and leather working. Maps show that the town hardly grew in size until the early 19th Century. Any increase in population was accommodated by subdividing properties into tenements.

Industrial and Urban Expansion

The completion of the Kennet and Avon Canal in 1810 revitalised Reading as a centre of communications and commerce. Industries like brewing, iron working, sail making, and brick and tile making all expanded. The town's prosperity was reflected in the practically whole-scale rebuilding of the town centre and its expansion outside the bounds of the medieval town. Kings Road and Queens Road were major new elements in this expansion. The construction of the Great Western Railway in the 1840s really boosted the town's economy. It became a major rail centre, encouraging the expansion of companies such as the "three Bs"- Simond's (beer), Huntley and Palmer's (biscuits), and Sutton's (bulbs and seeds). This period of expansion was responsible for the largely Victorian character of central Reading with its terraced housing and distinctive use of local bricks. There were also major improvements to the town's essential services during the 19th Century, including a new sewerage system, reservoir, hospital, schools and cemetery. Extensions to the town's boundaries in 1887 and 1911 owed much to the desire of those living in peripheral areas such as Caversham and Tilehurst to share in Reading's new amenities. These parishes contained ancient settlements with their own historic character. Tilehurst, as its name reflects, had a long history of brick and tile making, while Caversham is first recorded in Domesday and grew up at an important crossing point on the Thames.

Reading Today

The town has now become a major regional centre, due to its location and excellent communications. It has become one of the fastest-growing parts of one of the fastest-growing counties in the South East, with scores of major developers and businesses being attracted to

the town. Manufacturing industries have gradually been replaced by commercial and service industries, so that today they make up more than 80% of current employment in the town. The industrial structure is discussed further in Chapter 10 – Local Economic Development. The council's vision for the future is set out in the discussion document *Reading City 2020*, which aims to establish Reading as a city and the capital of the Thames Valley. This Strategy recognises that Reading will continue to be a dynamic and evolving place, but pays due respect to its past, particularly through its built and natural heritage.

The Built Environment

The Town's Built Form Today

The size and success of Reading have resulted in its status as the major town in the Thames Valley. It supports a substantial town centre and a number of smaller local centres and other areas of commercial development. The largest local centres are central Caversham, West Reading (Oxford Road), and Tilehurst. These locations support substantial mixed-use development, combining large food retail stores with smaller local shops and amenities. Three other areas also combine large food retail stores with a small amount of mixed use development, but lack the variety of Caversham, Oxford Road and Tilehurst. Two of these additional centres have been constructed relatively recently (the Waitrose complex along Deacon Way in Tilehurst, and the Rose Kiln Lane Safeway development) but the third, the Meadway Centre next to Prospect Park, is significantly older and less well maintained.

It is possible to derive a relationship between the age of development and the amount of retail infrastructure provided. Starting with the 1850s housing and progressing to current residential development, the amount and quality of retail infrastructure decreases. For example, there are high concentrations of mixed-use areas in older areas such as Reading New Town and West Reading, and local shops in the Whitley and South Reading area. The retail infrastructure in Tilehurst is by comparison significantly less extensive, especially away from the School Road shopping area.

In addition to the principal residential and commercial areas, there are several large commercial and light industrial estates in Reading. The majority of these comprise modern 'shed' type forms, easily constructed and adaptable for a range of uses. The sites can be divided into two main types:

- commercial non-food retail, such as electrical suppliers, garages and DIY stores, typically with bold paint, bunting, extensive car parking and amenity landscaping;
- light industrial areas, blue/grey/buff colour schemes, paved loading and storage space, security fencing.

The largest concentrations of such development types are between the old and new A33, around the Madjeski Stadium, along Portman Road within West Reading, and beside the River Kennet near Reading Jail. The majority of areas have principally been designed for car access and therefore provide a hostile or unpleasant environment for pedestrians.

Scale

The scale of development is fairly similar throughout the town centre. The majority of buildings are 4-storey with a mixture of architectural styles. The main commercial areas of Broad Street, Friar Street, Queen Victoria Street and St Mary's Butts include slightly taller structures. The periphery of the commercial centre contains a large number of pavilion or high rise structures which occupy significant floor space. Many of these structures are listed within the *major landmarks* section.

Within the Conservation Areas in the town centre, the scale of development reduces dramatically. This is particularly noticeable in the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street area where 2-

storey buildings are juxtaposed against the Civic Centre, police station, The Anchorage and the new Oracle shopping centre. Immediately to the south (London Street) and west (Bath Road) of the town centre, taller Regency development along wide streets creates an impression of grandeur. Development along Queens Road and London Road has similar characteristics. However, along the majority of approach roads, the scale is smaller, being represented by Victorian terraced housing developments.

A similar density is apparent in the closer suburban centres (Oxford Road etc) surrounding the town. Although the reduction in height results in a lower overall density, the activity within these areas combined with the large areas of closed frontages combines to achieve a fairly dense scale.

Beyond these centres, the scale of development is more domestic in character.

Street Pattern

The street pattern closely reflects the industrial development of the town. The town centre shows a pattern of blocks with semi-closed perimeters typical of Victorian and earlier settlements. The relatively large block layout extends to the Georgian development east and west of the town before meeting tight terraced block formations at Cemetery Junction and along the Oxford Road. This looser urban form is continued northwards into Caversham Heights and southwards into some of the earlier parts of Whitley. 1930s development follows a less structured pattern, although a variety of links are apparent. Examples of this more suburban layout are visible in Southcote and parts of Earley. The development of Tilehurst has been constrained by woodlands and open space but contains many examples of cul-de-sac systems, as found also in Caversham Park Village, and in suburban areas on and beyond Reading's boundaries such as at Beansheaf Farm (Calcot) and Lower Earley.

The dominant role of the motor car in driving planning decisions in the 1970's can be seen in the town centre. The Inner Distribution Road slices through the existing block pattern, exposing awkward and inaccessible portions of earlier, mostly Victorian, built form.

Despite continuing use of 1970s style layouts for urban development, schemes are being constructed which adhere to earlier urban forms, particularly along the canals and in housing association development. The new development builds on more traditional patterns and form, ensuring buildings front on to streets and that building heights are increased to blend with other town centre development.

Defining Space

The enclosure and definition of space as a result of buildings has not provided Reading with unique spaces as in other towns (Tunbridge Wells, York and Birmingham etc.). Spaces have been created around historic areas, such as in front of the Town Hall, around town centre churches and in the Butter Market, through the layout and placing of buildings and focal points. In more recent years, attempts have been made to produce effective public open space around the Civic Centre, and within the last few months, at the Oracle. The space around the Civic Centre, particularly the wide boulevard alongside the Renaissance Reading Hotel and the Hexagon Theatre, has been created with little regard to the effects of wind or personal security. The market area is much more vibrant, and the definition of space is better, that being the result of 'people massing' rather than of structures.

The Oracle development is yet to experience its first summer trading. The open space has been defined through several strong elements: the canal, bridges, new buildings and -unusually noticeable in a very urban situation - the sky. Despite the strong and bold enclosure, the space available is limited and cluttered on the northern side, in addition, the presence of fast food outlets created a litter problem. Subtle changes to the management of the complex could resolve some of these issues.

In general the town centre lacks large public spaces. The Forbury Gardens are popular, but quiet due to their off-centre location. A number of other spaces exist within close proximity of the Abbey, but the market place outside the Town Hall is the best example of impromptu public space in the town. The recently landscaped Broad Street has become a setting for street activities, forgoing opportunities for spontaneous casual use of the space.

Materials, Texture and Intricacy

The traditional building materials in the town are red brick and flint. Sandstone has also been used in the construction of more imposing and significant buildings. Older buildings, such as churches and those associated with the Abbey, have been constructed of natural materials, both interesting to look at and to touch. However, new structures have rarely been designed with attention to this kind of detail.

Due to the commercial pressures of modernisation, the ground floor frontages of almost all the buildings in the central shopping area have been altered, and reconstructed with new open plan window/door arrangements. However, if one looks above shop front level, it can be seen that many of these buildings are of architectural merit. For example, the Broad Street Chapel, now incorporated in Waterstone's, has interesting detailing around the gable, including a recessed balcony and carved stone lettering. Buildings occupied by Marks and Spencer and Top Man have art-deco qualities; the Top Man building also has narrow vertical windows arranged on the frontage achieving a picture house image.

Combinations of sandstone and brick can be found in the buildings along Queen Victoria Street and the major churches in the town centre. Such traditional materials have not been used in many of the more recent structures, due to the size of the buildings. There was a spate of large office block construction during the 1970s and early 1980s, giving rise to buildings such as Avco Trust, the Hexagon Theatre and Foster Wheeler House. These have been constructed with little regard for local context and material.

The use of natural stone is more common in north of Reading, towards South Oxfordshire, where flint is more easily available. Otherwise, red brick is the most frequently used material. A particular characteristic of the New Town, West Reading, Lower Caversham and the area surrounding the University Campus is the presence of terraced and semi-detached houses constructed in wire-cut yellow and blue engineering bricks. These are particularly common being used in conjunction with red and black quarry tiled paving. In Tilehurst and Caversham Park, the predominant facing brick is the typical 1970's beige and yellow Fletton.

Historic Townscape

For over a thousand years, the character and appearance of Reading has been constantly changing. Today, Reading's townscape can seem very modern because of large post-war suburban and industrial development in areas like Tilehurst, Caversham and Whitley. However, older features do survive as important elements of the landscape and have often helped shape the later developments around them.

The past is most apparent in the town centre where the medieval street pattern, medieval churches, Georgian townhouses and Victorian shops mix with modern office and shopping developments. Around the town centre are a cluster of cluster 19th Century suburbs with their own distinctive character such as The Mount and St John's. Even in the modern suburbs former rural landscape features, such as country lanes and hedgerows, have often influenced the layout and appearance of recent housing estates.

In some parts of Reading, older rural landscapes survive surprisingly untouched, particularly the water meadows of the Kennet Valley floodplain at Coley and Southcote. These remain largely as depicted on a late 16th Century map of Southcote. In Tilehurst and Caversham, large areas of Ancient Woodland, originally managed for a variety of woodland industries, still survive as prominent ridgeline features that are visible from across the town and adjacent

Districts. The parkland character of open spaces like Prospect Park and Whiteknights is a reflection of their origins as country estates that were once situated on the edge of Reading, when it was still a small market town. The Local Plan recognises the importance of preserving these diverse elements of Reading's historic landscape through a broad range of environmental and conservation policies.

Archaeology

A major aspect of Reading's cultural heritage is the buried archaeological evidence that lies beneath the town. The majority of these archaeological remains are associated with the historic town centre, although other parts of the town are also of archaeological importance. These areas include former village centres like Caversham and Tilehurst, the water meadows at Southcote and areas adjacent to the Thames, which have high potential for prehistoric remains.

A database of all known archaeological finds and sites in Reading, known as the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), is maintained by Babtie Group on behalf of the council. This can be used to identify whether a development site is of archaeological potential. Where development is proposed on a site that has potential, further archaeological evaluation may be required and this may result in excavation or the 'in situ' preservation of archaeological remains. All archaeological finds and records from investigations within Reading are deposited at the Museum of Reading, for their long-term care and public access.

The varied nature of Reading's archaeological heritage has been highlighted by recent investigations, which have identified such features as Bronze Age settlements at Green Park, the Abbey's waterfronts in Kings Road, and a mill, tannery and workhouse at The Oracle.

The true extent of the buried archaeological remains in Reading is not known. The last archaeological survey of the historic town centre was in 1978. The management of the Borough's archaeological resource would be improved through re-interpretation and analysis of existing sources, particularly as part of the English Heritage-funded Extended Urban Survey scheme.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

Reading has two Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs). They are

- Reading Abbey, The Forbury
- High Bridge, Duke Street

These sites are of national importance and are protected by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. English Heritage is currently undertaking the review of SAMs through the Monument Protection Programme, and this may eventually result in the designation of further SAMs within Reading.

The Reading Abbey SAM includes all the surviving Abbey buildings and ruins together with a large area of underground remains. A restoration programme for those sections of the ruins in Council ownership was started in 1985. It is now hoped to complete this work as part of a proposed Heritage Lottery Fund scheme for the Forbury Gardens and Abbey ruins. The proposals will include a long-term management plan for the ruins, and the restoration of the Abbey Gateway as an interpretation centre. The scheme will include all parts of the above-ground remains except for the Abbey Mill, the ruins at St James Church and the Refectory Wall.

The High Bridge is a 1788 stone bridge over the River Kennet on the site of earlier medieval bridges. It is still used by town centre traffic although heavy goods vehicles are excluded.

Local Archaeological Monuments

Reading has three earthwork monuments of local importance. These are:

- Coombe Bank, Little John's Farm. A prehistoric earthwork.
- Oxford Road linear bank. A possible prehistoric or Anglo-Saxon boundary.
- Southcote Manor moated site. A medieval manor.

These three monuments are not protected by national legislation, but contribute to the present-day environment and the town's local heritage. The Oxford Road linear bank has been threatened by development, encroachment and erosion. There is no accurate information available on the current condition of the other two sites. It may be possible to secure the future management and interpretation of these sites in co-operation with the site owners.

I. Conservation Areas

Reading has thirteen conservation areas varying in character from parts of the commercial centre of St Mary's Butts/Castle Street to the former village centres at Horncastle and St Peters, Caversham. The other Conservation Areas include the formal Georgian/Regency townscape at Eldon Square and the Victorian suburb at The Mount. Little work has been carried out on assessing the condition of these areas and identifying any necessary amendments to their boundaries. The Local Plan recognises the need to review the existing Conservation Areas and to undertake enhancement and interpretation schemes, such as town trails and interpretation panels.

The current list of Conservation Areas consists of:

Christchurch area
Downshire Square area
Eldon Square area
Horncastle area
Market Place/London Street area
Redlands area
Routh Lane, Tilehurst area
Russell Street/Castle Hill area
South Park area
St. Mary's Butts/Castle Street area
St. Peters, Caversham area
Surley Row area
The Mount area

The Local Plan suggests the review and creation of four new Conservation Areas:

- (i) Extension of the existing Market Place Conservation Area westwards to form a *Market Place and Victorian Quarter Conservation Area*;
- (ii) A separate *London Street Conservation Area*;
- (iii) A new *Abbey Conservation Area*;
- (iv) A new *London Road Conservation Area*.

I. Article 4 Directions

13 streets (or parts of streets) are subject to Article 4 Directions to protect their special character. In particular, they comprise terraced streets with Reading's characteristic Victorian patterned brickwork. The Directions control works such as rendering, stone cladding, the painting of external walls, and changing the style and materials of features like doors and windows.

The streets with properties currently protected by Article 4 Directions are:- Basingstoke Road; St Leonard's Terrace; Brisbane Road; Field Road; Junction Road; Katesgrove Lane; Polstead Road; Prince of Wales Avenue; Rectory Road; River Road; School Terrace; Shaftesbury Road; Wantage Road and Wokingham Road.

There are other groups of listed and unlisted historic buildings in the town that would benefit from protection by Article 4 Directions (see Listed Buildings below).

Listed Buildings

There are over 850 addresses in Reading on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. The council's Planning Service keeps details of these buildings, their location, age and any special features. Grade I and II* are considered to be of outstanding national importance and are listed below. Reading's remaining listed buildings are listed as Grade II, and are very important to the historic diversity of Reading's character and appearance.

- **Grade I Listed Buildings**

Abbey Gate, The Forbury
Abbey Ruins, Forbury Gardens
Greyfriars Church, Friar Street
Church of St Laurence, Market Place
Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts
Large Barn, South East of Chazey Farm House, The Warren

- **Grade II Listed Buildings**

Town Council Chamber and Offices with Clock Tower, Blagrove Street,
Holybrook Culvert, Rear of 1-31 Castle Street
15 Castle Street
17 Castle Street
19 Castle Street
Holybrook House, 63 Castle Street
Church of St Mary, Castle Street
154 -160 Castle Hill
Christchurch, Christchurch Road
Church of St Peter, Church Road, Caversham
Archway, Forbury Gardens to Abbey Ruins
173 -183 Kings Road
45 - 65 London Road (Albion Place)
24 - 30 London Road (St David's Hall)
Main Block and Wings, Royal Berkshire Hospital, London Road
73 - 75 London Street
The Obelisk, Market Place
78 - 84 Southampton Street
Old Grove House, Surley Row, Caversham
Chazey Farmhouse, The Warren
44 Watlington Street (Watlington House)

No information is currently available on the general condition of Reading's listed buildings, especially those listed as Grade II, as no borough-wide buildings-at-risk or condition surveys have ever been undertaken. Unfortunately a large number of the town's important Victorian and later buildings are not listed, so the Council is sometimes unable to prevent their loss by redevelopment. The threat to individual historic buildings that have no statutory protection has been highlighted by community campaigns to save buildings like the Boar's Head Pub in Friar Street, the Greyhound in Silver Street, and the former British School in Southampton Street.

The statutory list needs to be reviewed to prevent any further depletion of the potential listed building stock. Policy CUD 5 of the council's Local Plan states that it will undertake a survey of historic buildings and publish a register of those at risk and identify buildings appropriate for adding to the statutory list. The plan also states that if necessary the council will seek to protect important individual or groups of unlisted buildings using further Article 4 Directions.

The re-use and refurbishment of both listed and historic unlisted buildings would prevent their destruction. The council has recently been successful in securing the listing of the 1890 Walter Corn Stores and its conversion to a pub. Some listed buildings have also been restored as part of wider council projects. Examples include the restoration of the Town Hall (including the museum), the conversion of the Reading Cemetery Lodge into a community police station through the New Town Regeneration Scheme, and the conversion of two Georgian terraces in the Oxford Road as part of the Council's Empty Homes Strategy. There could be further opportunities to preserve and enhance listed buildings, particularly those within Conservation Areas, through the English Heritage and Heritage Lottery Fund's townscape scheme.

Historic Parks and Gardens

Four sites in Reading are on English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. These are:

- Caversham Court: a small 20th Century garden on the site of a 17th Century garden.
- Caversham Park: an 18th Century landscaped park and a 19th Century formal terraced garden, formerly over 160ha but now only 30ha.
- The Forbury Gardens: a mid-19th Century town centre public garden, occupying an area that has been open space since the foundation of Reading Abbey in 1121.
- Prospect Park: a 19th Century park, developed in the 20th Century as a 48 ha public park.

The above parks and gardens are all Grade II and collectively represent changes in English garden design since the 17th Century. Caversham Court contains elements of a 17th Century riverside garden, whilst Caversham and Prospect Parks represent 18th and 19th Century designed landscapes, and the Forbury Gardens is a good example of a 19th Century public space. All are owned by the council with the exception of Caversham Park which is owned by the BBC. There is no information available on the condition of these gardens, although plans are currently being put together for the restoration of Forbury Gardens as part of a Heritage Lottery Fund application. Local Plan Policy CUD 10 seeks to conserve and enhance these parks and gardens. The King George V Gardens, off Eldon Square, are being considered for addition to the national list.

In addition to these nationally important sites, Reading has a number of local parks and gardens of historic interest. No detailed study of these has been undertaken but sites for consideration might include:

- Whiteknights, University of Reading
- Arthur Newbery Park
- St Lawrence's Churchyard
- St Mary's Churchyard
- Highdown School Grounds
- Cintra
- Abbey Ruins/Chestnut Walk

The Landscape

Landscape Designations

Reading lies on the boundary of two landscape character areas, the Chilterns and the Thames Valley. The Countryside Commission in its 'The Character of England' map shows the area of

Caversham and north Reading abutting the lower wooded slopes of the Chilterns. The River Thames and all the land within Reading to the south lie within the central part of the Thames Valley. The gravel areas and Thames tributaries are characteristic of Reading and the Thames Valley.

Reading is largely urban in character and therefore does not contain a county designated Area of Special Landscape Importance. However, it is bordered by landscapes of recognised landscape value including the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding National Beauty to the west and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding National Beauty to the north.

Within Reading five Major Landscape Features are identified (Local Plan Policy NE4) for special protection from development.

These are:-

- The Thames Valley
- The Kennet & Holy Brook Floodplain
- The West Reading Wooded Ridgeline
- The East Reading Wooded Ridgeline
- The North Reading Dry Valleys

Relationship to the Wider Landscape

The built up area adjoins extensive areas of both open countryside and urban development, the location and form of which have been influenced by the topography and river flood plain.

North Reading is bounded by open wooded countryside on the lower plateau dry valleys of the Chilterns. Broad fingers of flat open valley landscapes extend westwards and eastwards along the River Thames and to the south and south-west along the Kennet Valley. The western, eastern and south-eastern boundaries of the Borough abut extensive urban areas, generally perceived as part of Greater Reading, but lying within West Berkshire and Wokingham Districts. The outer areas of the town therefore vary considerably in character because of these factors.

The topography allows the wider landscape setting to be seen from many viewpoints, for example the dramatic view of upper Caversham and the Chilterns from the top of Whitley Street or the Kennet Valley from the A33 Relief Road.

Topography

Reading lies within the valley basins of the Rivers Thames and Kennet at approximately 35m AOD, rising up the slopes to reach 90m AOD in the north (Emmer Green Water Tower) and 80m AOD at the University of Reading. More minor hills at Whitley Street, Prospect Park and Caversham Heights provide vantage points within the town. The hills to the north fall quite steeply down to the River Thames, creating distinctive topographical features such as the Warren Escarpment.

Within this context, there have been changes in the local landform resulting from human activities. For example, the Kennet Valley contains new man-made mounds and lakes arising from mineral extraction and landfill. Dramatic localised variations in landform have been created by man-made structures such as the IDR.

The town centre lies on the predominantly flat land between the River Thames and the River Kennet.

Vegetation Pattern

The pattern of vegetation has developed as a result of the topography, the flood plain, the rivers, and planting styles at the time of urban expansion. The key vegetation groups are:

- Trees including those covered by Tree Preservation Orders
- Woodlands
- Hedgerows
- Waterside vegetation

- ***Trees and Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)***

Reading has reasonably good tree cover, although distribution is uneven across the town. Many of the most important trees and tree-groups are protected by Tree Preservation Orders. Within the town, 426 individual trees, 112 groups of trees and 6 woodlands are protected by TPOs. These orders prohibit felling or damage to the trees without the express consent of the council.

Many trees line Reading's highways and are in the care of the council.

Trees are essential to the fabric of a town. They can be threatened by development and the provision of underground services. However, efforts are being made to ensure that the Borough's stock of trees is being continually renewed. New development is required to provide tree planting schemes and to consider their long term health. The council has initiated major replanting programmes, such as at the Warren Escarpment, some in conjunction with schools.

Street tree planting is dominated by three major tree species: London Plane, Lime and Ornamental Cherry. Whitebeams have also been used in several locations.

Legacies of unsuitable planting are presently being managed out, as can be seen in Prospect Park and within the new development on chalk grassland at Bugs Bottom.

- ***Woodlands***

These are also considered in Chapter 4: Wildlife. In addition to being valuable for reasons of nature conservation, the woodlands in Reading are significant landscape features, often sited in prominent positions. The woodlands include:

- Clayfield Copse
- Beech Wood/Highdown Wood
- Lousehill Copse
- Blundells Copse
- The Rookery
- Round Copse
- Warren Woodlands

Woodlands and copses are also important features within many of Reading's parks. They are also a significant contributor to the open landscape of the town, linking it with the wider landscape beyond, for example at Emmer Green, Reading University and Tilehurst.

The scope for new woodland planting is limited by space and community needs, however, the council seeks to reinforce existing woodland through new planting and management and new opportunities as land uses change. An example of the latter is new woodland restoration on former mineral or waste sites. The council will encourage the planting of indigenous species to create woodlands to reflect local landscape character.

- ***Hedgerows***

Hedgerows and tree belts are important local landscape features providing screening, enclosure and a sense of place. They may be old hedge lines, formal or garden planting, well maintained or growing naturally.

- ***Waterside Vegetation***

Reading's waterways support many groups of vegetation typical of waterside locations. Prominent amongst these are the hedge lines and trees of Fobney Meadows, Kennet Valley and the river bank, and water's edge planting adjacent to the Rivers Thames and Kennet and the Kennet & Avon Canal, including marginal plants. These have a significant landscape value in addition to their recognised ecological value (see Chapter 4).

Parks and gardens, grassland and meadowland are considered in the following section. Further information on the wildlife value of these habitats is considered in Chapter 4.

The Open Landscape

Reading has two major areas of open landscape, along the Kennet Valley and the Thames Valley. Other areas are generally associated with former country houses (Caversham Park), gardens (Forbury Gardens), recreation areas (Palmer Park), and remnants of older 'natural' landscapes (Clayfield Copse). Chapters 3 and 4 consider the recreational and ecological importance of these open landscapes. This Chapter covers the landscape value of these important areas.

Open landscapes have been divided into the following categories:

- Parks of local significance
- Agricultural and other productive land
- Meadow
- Amenity grassland
- Others eg. cemeteries

The Local Plan identifies the areas of open landscape of recreational value (Policies LE12 and LE14, ecological value (Policy NE2), major landscape value (Policy NE4) and registered historic parks and gardens (Policy CUD10). All these and the smaller less significant sites contribute to the landscape/townscape character of Reading.

- ***Parks of Local Significance***

Reading has a number of parks noted for their landscape interest and importance. Parks and other open spaces of recreational and sporting value are considered in Chapter 3. Other open spaces are considered below.

First and foremost a chain of parks, (the Thames-side Reaches), forms a link along the River Thames. These include, moving west to east:

- Thames Side Promenade
- Rivermead
- Christchurch Meadows
- Hill's Meadow
- View Island
- Kings Meadow
- Reading Cemetery

Other major parks of landscape importance are:

- Palmer Park
- Leighton Park School
- Rabson's Recreation Ground/The Cowsey
- West Reading Woodlands
- Mayor's Garden
- King's Road Garden

Many of the neighbourhood recreation areas (RBLP Policy LE14) and Wildlife Heritage Sites (RBLP Policy NE2) are also of landscape significance. A total of 44 parks and gardens are cared for by the council.

- ***Agricultural and Other Productive Lands***

The two main areas of open landscape, namely, the Kennet Valley and Thames Valley, are still farmed to some degree. The open fields in the Thames Valley, north of Little John's Farm on the River Thames, are a major contribution to the rural character of the western river approach to Reading, complementing the rural landscape of the Mapledurham Estate which adjoins the Borough on the northern side of the River. In the Kennet Valley, the fields flanking the Holy Brook, the River Kennet and the Kennet & Avon Canal are grazed, providing a strong rural contrast to the urban edge at Southcote and Coley and forming a precious remnant of an earlier upper Kennet Valley landscape now lost elsewhere through gravel extraction.

Reading also has a number of allotments such as at Grove Road, Emmer Green, and Goddards Farm.

- ***Meadowland***

Meadowland is an important wildlife habitat but is also of distinctive landscape value. The open natural landscape of Fobney Meadow, flooded in winter and flushed with green in summer, has a sense of tranquillity (although somewhat compromised by the new A33 Relief Road), with open skies despite the proximity of urban development.

- ***Amenity Grassland***

Open areas of grassland other than those considered above or those used for recreational or sporting activities (see Chapter 3) are included here. These include the following:

- Grass highway verges
- Minerals and waste sites restored to grassland, as at Smallmead
- Grassland setting to development, as at South Reading Business Park

The good design and maintenance of Reading's incidental grassed areas is essential to the overall appearance and health of the town landscape.

- ***Other Areas***

In addition to the above open landscapes, the town has two large cemeteries at Reading Crematorium and Cemetery Junction, and small graveyards attached to some of the town's churches. Raised and grass-covered reservoirs are found adjacent to the Bath Road.

Three earthworks of local archaeological significance are listed under *Built Environment*. These are visible as banks and mounds with grass and tree cover, and are an important part of the historic landscape.

Significant Landmarks and Important Views of Reading

To date, the council has not undertaken a specific study of the landmarks and views that characterise Reading, but many published books and articles identify those recognised by the community as being of particular significance. Landmarks and important views often epitomise a town's character for good or ill, and their protection or improvement is a key issue.

This report identifies prominent landmarks and views but a full survey and public consultation is needed to provide a complete list.

Landmarks are significant features, which are usually prominent, which may define a specific space or mark a geographical location. Their architectural and natural quality may be good or bad but they are always recognised as focuses or points of orientation. They form visual points of reference which are unique or memorable in their context.

Viewpoints are local positions providing vantage points for extensive or important views of the town.

The following features are currently identified as 'landmarks'.

Town Centre

Abbey Gateway
Abbey Ruins
African History Mural, Mill Lane
Apex Plaza
Avco Trust Office, Castle Hill Roundabout
Battle Hospital
Broad Street Mall, including Foundation House
Chatham Street Car Park
Civic Centre
Courage Brewery
Crown Courts
Eldon Square
Forbury Lion (Maiwand)
Foster Wheeler House
Fountain, St Mary's Butts
Gas Holders
Georgian Terraces : Castle Hill
Georgian Terraces : London Road
Gorge Café, Caversham Road
Greyfriars Church
Heelas
High Bridge, Duke Street
Horseshoe Bridge, Kennetmouth
Huntley and Palmers Building, Kings Road
I.D.R
Jacksons Corner
Katesgrove School Tower
King's point office block
Mary's Butts, Coffee Stall
Metal Box Building (Queens House)
Obelisk, Market Place
Police Station
Prudential Building (H & P)
Queen Victoria Statue
Queens Road Car Park
Reading College, Kings Road.
Reading Prison
Reading Station

Renaissance Hotel
Riley's Snooker Hall (former cinema) Oxford Road
Rising Sun Pub.
River Kennet
River Thames
Union Street (Smelly Alley)
St Laurence's Church
St Mary's Church, Castle Street
Statue outside station, King Edward
Tesco, Kings Meadow
Forbury Gardens
The George Hotel
The Hexagon
The Minster Church of St Mary's
The Oracle
Timber-framed buildings, Castle Street
Town Hall
Wesley Methodist Church , Queens Road
Western Tower, Station Road

Surrounding Areas of Reading

Battle Hospital
Caversham Bridge
Cemetery Junction
Central Swimming Pool
Coley Flats
Cow Lane Bridges
English Martyrs Church
Gillette Building
Holiday Inn, Caversham Road
Madejski Stadium
Mansion, Caversham Park
Norcot Water Tower
Palmer Park / Stadium
Pipers Island
Reading Boys' School
Reading Bridge
Reading West Railway Bridge
River Kennet
River Thames
Rivermead Leisure Complex
Royal Berkshire Hospital
Southcote Flats
St Agnes Church, Northumberland Avenue
St Giles Church
St Matthew's, Southcote
St Michael's Church, Tilehurst
St Peter's Church, Caversham
The Clappers Weir
The Mansion House, Prospect Park
Tilehurst Water Tower
War Memorial, Water Road

The following viewpoints are identified.

Approaches to Reading

- M4 - view up the Kennet Valley towards Tilehurst, including the water tower, and the town centre.
- M4 - view of Madjeski Stadium, Courage Brewery and South Reading Business Park
- Railway Line - view to prison and Apex Plaza
- River Thames - down the River Kennet.
- Henley Road - towards the town.
- IDR - view of Oracle and adjacent area.

The Water Environment

Several substantial water features contribute to the character of the town. The River Thames, which formed the northern boundary of Reading until the beginning of the century, has become a focus for recreation. A wide recreational path runs along the southern bank of the river, for the majority of its length. The section between the two bridges is overlooked by a mixture of residential and distribution/industrial uses. Pressures for housing are resulting in many of the commercial uses being replaced by new residential development.

Several uses are associated with the Thames as it passes through the town. The Reading Rowing Club has a boathouse located on land next to the Caversham Bridge Hotel. Fry's Island, between the two bridges, provides holiday boat hire and there are private mooring facilities at Heron Island and at Caversham Marina. The extensive meadows on both sides of the river emphasise the riparian setting.

There is limited fall on the Thames through Reading, the only lock being located next to Reading Bridge, combined with Reading Weir. The next locks to are at Sonning (downstream) and Pangbourne (upstream). The Kennet and Avon Canal, running diagonally through the town centre, changes levels three times: at Blakes Lock, Island Road Lock and at Milkmaids Bridge (Southcote).

In the town centre, the River Kennet and the Kennet and Avon Canal are the more important and locally identifiable watercourses. The Kennet runs through the centre of the Kings Road business district and along the southern edge of the town centre, where it enters the Borough from the direction of Theale.

The status of the Kennet has been enhanced with its integration into the external spaces of The Oracle shopping centre. It is now more easily perceived as part of the townscape. Interaction with the canal works on an off the water. Whereas before The Oracle development views of, or for, canal travellers were limited to the section of the Kennet alongside New Town and parallel to the Kings Road, the new development allows a different view of the town and affords visitors the perception that Reading is a canal-side town.

An additional benefit of The Oracle development is the inclusion of Holy Brook, which runs alongside the southern edge of Southcote, semi-culverted through the town centre and then past Blake's Lock Museum. The Gun Street entrance to The Oracle has incorporated the Brook and the listed brick culverts, forging a link to this previously hidden water feature.

Gravel extraction at Smallmead and in the Foudry Brook flood plain has now mostly ceased. The majority of lakes associated with gravel working have either been filled in or are outside the boundaries of Reading. According to aerial records (1996) only four lakes, located off Smallmead Road, are still being worked and flooded.

In addition to these mineral-working lakes, Reading contains a very small number of formal or natural water features, a few of which are accessible to the public. For example, there is a large, landscaped duck pond, with established weeping willows, seating and lawns behind the post office at Emmer Green. A small heart-shaped pond built by Benjamin Child (and now a wildlife reserve) is set within Prospect Park, and there is a lake within the grounds of Leighton Park School.

The most recent watercourse to be integrated into the townscape is Foudry Brook. Following the construction of the A33 Relief Road, the brook is now set within a landscaped area. Planting and a combined foot and cycle path now run alongside the brook between Rose Kiln Lane and the roundabout at Bennet Road. The brook continues upstream in a southerly direction, yet is fenced off or sufficiently removed from the footpath as not to create a riverside environment. The initial length of the brook is blighted by foam produced from the sewerage works.

Damaged or Derelict Landscapes

The results of a survey of derelict land within Reading is not yet available. However, the intense development pressures within the town mean that there is very little derelict or damaged land. The following list includes land such as tips or industrial sites empty for a short period of time and land which is significantly neglected as to be considered in visually poor condition:

- Land between Silver Street and Southampton Street (reported to be part of a future development proposal);
- Land adjacent to the River Kennet, next to the Queen's Road multi-storey car park;
- Railway land north of the River Kennet, adjacent to the gasworks;
- The area at Smallmead around the greyhound track and land surrounding Manor Farm on the A33;
- Gravel-workings at Smallmead (see Chapter 11)
- Landfill at Smallmead
- Rear servicing to properties along Portman Road and the railway yards at Cow Lane Bridges
- Former Rex Cinema/car showroom site on Oxford Road.

Main Issues:

- Reading is currently experiencing a period of considerable growth, expansion and environmental improvement. This positive change must be monitored to ensure the creation of an enhanced built environment and landscape.
- Reading's history is generally well documented, although questions remain, particularly about the origins of the town.
- Much of Reading's natural and built form character is acknowledged but not comprehensively documented. In order to provide a benchmark against which this aspect of Reading can be measured, a comprehensive character assessment is needed.
- With the growth of Reading, the town's open spaces and planted areas come under greater pressure. It is important not only to retain existing landscape features but to ensure further contributions to the town's stock of green assets.
- Reading's waterways are a key component in its historic development. More should be made of the town's water features as an intrinsic part of its present and future character.
- Two Scheduled Ancient Monuments are legally protected, but currently have no long-term management and presentation plans. However, proposals are being put together for parts of one of the sites (Reading Abbey).
- Three local earthwork monuments require further assessment to ascertain their present condition.
- The Borough contains areas of known archaeological potential, but the true extent of its buried heritage is unknown.

- Reading has a large number of listed buildings, most of which are well maintained but a significant minority may be at risk due to neglect or have been damaged through inappropriate alterations or uses.
- Important unlisted buildings, especially from the Victorian period, are being lost because they have no legal protection.
- Thirteen Conservation Areas have been designated, but changes to their character and appearance have not recently been reviewed. Four new or amended Conservation Areas have been proposed in the Local Plan.
- Four parks and gardens of historic interest are registered by English Heritage, but the condition and management of these sites is uncertain. Other sites in Reading could meet the standards for addition to the register.

Key Contact(s)

For further information, please contact Dennis Greenway on 0118 939 0286

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