

# **RUSSELL STREET/CASTLE HILL CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**

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**This document has been written by:  
The Conservation Studio, 1 Querns Lane, Cirencester, Glos GL7 1RL  
Tel: 01285 642428**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The purpose of a Conservation Area Appraisal.

This document is an “appraisal” document as defined by English Heritage in their guidance document “Conservation Area Appraisals”.

The purpose of the document is, to quote from the English Heritage document, to ensure that “the special interest justifying designation is clearly defined and analysed in a written appraisal of its character and appearance”. This provides “a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for development plan policies and development control decisions” and also forms the basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals.

This appraisal describes and analyses the particular character of the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area. This includes more obvious aspects such as its open spaces, buildings, and architectural details, as well as an attempt to portray the less tangible characteristics which make the area “special”.

## 2 PLANNING CONTEXT.

### 2.1 National policies.

Individual buildings “of special architectural or historic interest” have enjoyed a means of statutory protection since the 1950s, but the concept of protecting areas of special merit, rather than buildings, was first brought under legislative control with the passing of the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. A crucial difference between the two is that listed buildings are assessed against *national* criteria, with lists being drawn up by the government with advice from English Heritage. Conservation Areas, by contrast, are designated by local authorities on more *local* criteria, and they are therefore very varied - small rural hamlets, mining villages, or an industrial city centre. General guidance on the designation of Conservation Areas is included in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15), which sets out the government’s policies on the historic built environment in general.

### 2.2 Local Policies.

Legislation and guidance has emphasised the importance of including firm Conservation Area policies in each Council’s Local Plan. The relevant Plan for the Conservation Area is the Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted in October 1998. Conservation and Urban Design is covered in Chapter 6, which includes a number of policies which seek to conserve or enhance the Borough’s conservation areas, historic buildings, and areas or sites of archaeological importance.

### 3 LOCATION

#### 3.1 Topography and setting.

The Conservation Area lies on the west side of the medieval core of Reading, from which it is separated by the Inner Distribution Road, built in the 1970s. To the east, the land falls steeply towards the River Kennet, and the land also drops slightly across the Conservation Area to the north.

#### 3.2 Geology.

Below the Conservation Area lies a chalk hill with clay and alluvium along the line of the river valley below. In the past, this local clay has provided the raw material for brick and tile making.

### 4 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

#### 4.1 The historical development of Reading.

Reading is named after a Saxon tribe, the *Readingas*, who settled in the area in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. By the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century Reading had become part of the south-western kingdom of Wessex and a royal town. At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, Reading belonged to the king and included a small borough and two manors. The town served as a centre of royal administration, had a mint and held regular markets. A Norman castle existed but was destroyed by 1151.

Reading Abbey was founded by Henry I in 1121 and became one of the richest religious houses in England until the Dissolution in 1539. The enormous abbey church now lies under the present Forbury Garden and Abbots' walk. During the medieval period Reading developed rapidly, based on the manufacture of woollen cloth, leather goods and silk weaving. This was encouraged by its good location on the crossing of major historic land routes, and by the proximity of the two waterways - the River Kennet and the River Thames. John Leland, the 16<sup>th</sup> century traveller, wrote: '*the town chiefly standeth by its clothing*'.

In 1560 Elizabeth I confirmed the royal charter granted by Henry VIII, conferring greater powers of self-government to the town. However, the economy of the town was badly affected by the Civil War and a visitor commented in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century that '*...its houses are mean and the streets though pretty large, unpaved*'.

From the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Reading began to flourish as an important stopping-off place between Bath and London. Inns flourished and regular public coaches began in 1780. Leather tanning continued and new industries developed, most notably brewing, brick and tile making, iron-founding, and boat

building, helped by the completion of the Kennet Canal in 1723 and the Kennet and Avon Canal in 1810.

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

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the centre of Reading was redeveloped by demolishing parts of the historic core of the town to provide offices and shopping precincts. The construction of the Inner Distribution Road (the A4155), which started in 1969, improved traffic circulation but literally cut the town in half. More recently, the Oracle Shopping Centre has reinvigorated the town centre but meant the loss of a number of historic buildings including Simonds' brewery on the banks of the River Kennett. The canal became disused and impassable by the 1940s but since 1992 has been reopened for leisure following a restoration scheme by the Kennet and Avon Trust.

#### **4.2 Archaeology.**

There are no scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Conservation Area but a Norman castle existed on the south side of Castle Hill which was destroyed by 1151.

#### **4.3 The development of the Russell Street/Castle Hill area.**

The Conservation Area lies on a hill to the west of the River Kennet, above the flood plain and on the historic main route westwards (the A4) to Bath and Bristol. A Norman castle existed south of Castle Hill but was demolished in 1151. There is no evidence of medieval settlement but John Speed's map shows buildings lying along Castle Street with fields and gardens to either side. A leat (the Holy Brook), cut to provide water power to the Abbey Mill, lies along the foot of the cliff overlooking the River Kennett.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the area had established itself as an up-market residential suburb to the main town, without a church or other municipal buildings. Rocque's Map of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century shows buildings as far as Tilehurst Road, while Tomkin's map of 1802 is far more detailed and shows Back Lane and Hosters Lane, parts of which now form Baker Street. There is little development along Panghurst Road (Oxford Road). Nos. 154-160 Castle Hill are shown as King's Arms Inn, and to the south, to the rear of what is now nos. 113-121 Castle Hill, lies an area of disturbed ground labeled "Old Fortifications", presumably the site of Reading Castle. "Mrs Zinzan's Field" lies on the site of modern day Zinzan Street and Waylen Street.

The Commissioners' Map of 1834 shows how development was strung out along Castle Street, which stretched as far as the town centre around St Mary's Church. Russell Street is laid out, with development particularly along the

north-west side, and similar development along Oxford Road and Prospect Street.

To the south-west of Coley Hill, Coley Park, a detached house of some substance, is set within its own parkland close to the River Kennet. This building provided the name for many of the roads in the Conservation Area (Coley Avenue, Coley Park Road, Coley Hill)). Brick kilns are also shown, and development along Coley Hill.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the area was developed in an intensive way with the only open spaces being the gardens around Ascham House (also known as Castlehill House and now known as Yoemanry House) and an area to the east of the southern end of Russell Street. The prevailing use was residential with the occasional Non-Conformist Church - the Providence Chapel in Oxford Road (dated 1859), and the Carey Chapel in Carey Street. Jesse Terrace was built in the 1850s by Thomas Jesse, the earliest part being nos. 1-13, complete by 1853. The other terrace was built by 1871.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Field Road replaced Weston Street, necessitating the demolition of one of the older buildings in Castle Hill. Similar terraces utilising multi-coloured brickwork can also be found in Clifton Street. In 1900 the Reading Synagogue was built in Goldsmid Road, the finest religious building in the Conservation Area.

Today the Conservation Area retains many of its late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, with the best examples lying along Castle Hill, the most prestigious location. Modern development has impinged in some locations, most notably on the eastern edge of the Conservation Area, facing the Inner Distribution Road (Central Evangelist Church and the Salvation Army Citadel). New flats have also been built between Russell Street and Jesse Terrace, but these are relatively concealed from the public viewpoint.

#### **4.4 The effect of historical development on plan form.**

The oldest street is Castle Hill/Castle Street, the historic route westwards out of the medieval town centre. It possibly dates to the Saxon settlement of the area in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and almost certainly existed by the time of the Norman Conquest, as a castle was built just to the south of it during this period. Baker Street and Tilehurst Road are both shown, in somewhat altered layouts, on Rocque's map of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, but the majority of the streets in the Conservation Area date to the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the wealthy middle classes deserted Reading town centre and moved to the more fashionable suburbs to the west along Castle Hill and to the south along London Road. The 1840 map shows Castle Hill, with just Coley Walk and Coley Terrace (since demolished) to the south, and Prospect Street (Prospect Place), Prospect Hill (Tilehurst Road), Russell Street, Baker Street and Howard Street, to the north. The other grid-iron of streets are all the result of mid or late-19<sup>th</sup> century infilling.

## 5 THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE RUSSELL STREET/CASTLE HILL CONSERVATION AREA

### 5.1 General description.

The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area is defined by the following features:

- The Conservation Area is the product of late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century development
- Castle Hill is the principal street, notable for its varying width, hilly topography, and substantial Georgian buildings which lie on either side
- Front gardens and mature trees make a major contribution to views along Castle Hill
- Residential suburbs to south contain listed terraces of early 19<sup>th</sup> century terraced houses (Coley Hill) and detached or semi-detached late 19<sup>th</sup> century houses (Castle Crescent) in leafy gardens
- Residential suburbs to the north are more urban in character, with continuous terraces of early- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century houses, set on the back of the pavement
- Grid pattern of streets with Baker Street (which predates the early 19<sup>th</sup> century development of this area) cutting across this pattern
- Oxford Road is more varied with more commercial uses and the best quality listed terraces to the west

### 5.2 Activity and uses.

- Residential uses predominate
- Flat conversions predominate along eastern end of Castle Hill, Waylen Street and Zinzan Street
- Oxford Road has most of the shops, with offices or flats above
- Some offices and shops along Castle Hill/Castle Street
- Local authority offices in Yeomanry House (Register Office), Castle Hill
- New Berkshire County Record Office next to Yeomanry House
- A number of buildings in religious uses: Carey Baptist Church in Carey Street, Providence Chapel in Oxford Road, Reading Spiritualist Church in Baker Street, and Jewish Synagogue in Goldsmid Road
- Two public houses: The Oasis in Baker Street, and "120 Castle Street"

### 5.3 Noise and quiet.

- Castle Hill/Castle Street, the A4 main road to Bath and Bristol, is notable for its busy traffic
- Garden of Yeomanry House is the only semi-public open space where there are trees and planting, but also fairly constant noise from the traffic in Castle Hill

- Oxford Road is a busy shopping area, and a major route into and out of Reading, particularly for pedestrians walking into the Town Centre
- Off these main roads, activity is limited to local traffic and residents or workers
- Noise from the Inner Relief Road, to the east of the Conservation Area, is intrusive in Howard Street, Baker Street and Castle Street

#### 5.4 Townscape : morphology.

The morphology, or historic form of development of the Conservation Area, is as follows:

- Castle Street/Castle Hill: prestigious blocks of three or four storey houses built on the back of the pavement or set back from the road with landscaped front gardens
- Yeomanry House, no. 81 Baker Street (Reading Spiritualist Church), no. 2 Bath Road, and no. 3 Castle Crescent the only substantial detached villas in their own grounds
- Castle Crescent has detached or semi-detached houses set back from the road with pleasant front gardens, some now lost to car parking
- Coley Hill and Field Road both have well defined blocks of terraced houses along their eastern sides with very mixed, modern development or rear garden plots on their western sides
- North of Castle Hill, the streets are contained by continuous terraces of 19<sup>th</sup> century houses, set back slightly from the pavement, with small front gardens or yards
- Modern development, such as nos. 61-71 Russell Street, has largely followed the historic pattern of development

#### 5.5 Trees, landscape and open spaces.

This is a predominantly urban conservation area, although trees and planting are important in Castle Hill and in several parts of the Conservation Area, most notably in Castle Crescent and Baker Street. The most significant street and garden trees are marked on the Townscape Appraisal map, but of special note are the following:

- Large cedar in garden of nos. 154-160 Castle Hill
- Long avenue of trees in Howard Street, providing a vital barrier between the street and the Inner Relief Road
- Extensive trees in front garden to Yeomanry House, Castle Hill
- Trees in garden to south-west of no. 3 Castle Crescent

There are no public parks or gardens in the Conservation Area, apart from the front garden to Yeomanry House, which is roughly cultivated and only open to visitors to the Register Office. Public spaces are limited to the streets and their pavements, of which Castle Hill is the only significant example.

## 5.6 Views and vistas, including focal points

The hill topography of parts of the Conservation Area, and the grid pattern of streets, provide some notable views, marked on the Townscape Appraisal maps. The most significant are along Castle Hill, Russell Street, and Baker Street, with some interesting vistas over the modern town centre and beyond from Howard Street, Castle Street and Garnet Street.

There are several groups of buildings, or individual houses, which can be said to act as important focal points. These are:

- No. 3 Castle Crescent
- Yoemanry House, Castle Hill
- The new Berkshire County Record Office
- No. 111 Castle Hill, on the corner of Field Road
- Heritage Court, nos. 146-152 Castle Hill
- Nos. 154-160 Castle Hill
- No. 81 (Reading Spiritualist Church), Baker Street
- Jewish Synagogue, Goldsmid Road
- Providence Chapel, Oxford Road

## 5.7 Gardens and boundaries.

The majority of the buildings in the Conservation Area were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was considered desirable to mark the front boundary with decorative cast iron railings, and with other details such as cast iron balconies and verandah supports. Before World War II, when a national appeal for cast iron resulted in most of the country's railings being removed, many of the buildings in the Conservation Area would therefore have had railings to their front boundaries, apart from the Inter-War properties which utilised brick or painted render walls. However, where safety was an issue, such as where the building had a basement access, or front steps, the railings were left, and the Conservation Area therefore retains an interesting variety of original railings, which make a very positive contribution to the character of the Area. These are generally attached to listed buildings, so their future is assured, but the high cost of repair and maintenance does threaten this very special feature. The Conservation Area is also largely the result of intense, speculative 19<sup>th</sup> century development, and the majority of the buildings are therefore terraced, meaning that their gardens were largely hidden from the public viewpoint. This remains a feature into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To the north of the Conservation Area, the majority of the streets are lined with continuous terraces of three or four storey 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, hiding their gardens (Howard Street, Zinzan Street, Waylen Street, Carey Street, Jesse Terrace, Russell Street, and the south side of Oxford Road). Each house has a small front garden or front area, usually no more than two metres from the pavement, apart from Jesse Terrace, where the two terraces on either side of

the road sit back approximately eight metres from the front boundary. The buildings are therefore fronted by mature gardens, attractively landscaped, which give this part of the Conservation Area a special character. On the east side of Russell Street, late 19<sup>th</sup> century development, of generally paired rather than terraced houses, has been set back slightly more than the late Georgian terraces on the opposite side of the street. These properties therefore have some planting in their front gardens, with the occasional view through to the rear gardens. The rear gardens of some of these houses can be seen from Baker Street, which cuts across the grid pattern of roads. The western end of Baker Street, between the Russell Street junction and Goldsmid Road, is noticeably more open, with views from Baker Street to the gardens belonging to the listed buildings on the west side of Russell Street, and also to the large garden which is part of the Reading Spiritualist Church.

Boundaries in this area were traditionally provided by cast iron railings set in a stone coping, on a low brick or rendered plinth. Few of these remain, but there are some notable examples of either plain iron railings, with a beaten arrow head, or more decorative cast iron railings, with spear heads. These can be seen in Baker Street (no. 23), along the east sides of Waylen Street and Zinzan Street, and in Howard Street. In Oxford Road, a number of houses (now used for offices) retain their original, quite plain, wrought iron railings which lie on either side of the front steps. Jesse Terrace similarly retains its original cast iron verandah supports, and some railings to the entrance steps, but the front boundaries are usually defined by round-headed modern metal railings set into a low brick plinth, often with planting growing through. The front boundaries to the listed buildings in Russell Street are now provided by red brick walling, with a variety of modern metal railings.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings facing Russell Street had long gardens backing onto Franklin Street, which have now been largely developed with 20<sup>th</sup> century houses. Beyond, and facing Franklin Street and Clifton Street, lie the late 19<sup>th</sup> century houses which are less prestigious and had small rear gardens, separated by a narrow alley. Inter-War development on the west side of Clifton Street provided more long, thin gardens facing Goldsmid Road, which have remained as gardens with small, modern garages. To the rear of the mainly listed houses facing Oxford Road, the long thin gardens have been incrementally developed with modern mews houses and garages, or lost to car parking.

Castle Hill provides the greatest number of trees and front gardens within the Conservation Area, with the majority of the buildings being set back some distance from the street. Originally, the front boundaries were defined by cast or wrought iron railings but these have largely disappeared - a stone plinth wall can still be seen, somewhat damaged, outside no. no.111. There are a few examples of modern iron railings, in a traditional style, such as outside no.160. Nos. 162-166 still retain some of their original cast iron verandah supports and balcony railings in a Decimus Burton style of c.1840. Otherwise, front boundaries are very varied - low brick walls, with hedging, being particularly popular. Occasionally, these have been lost to make way for car parking, such as no. 162 and 162a.

To the south of the Conservation Area, in Castle Crescent, gardens are more evident as the buildings sit back from the road and are detached or semi-detached. Brick walls, modern railings and a variety of other treatments are evident. The loss of containment caused by opening-up some front gardens for car parking is noticeable. In Coley Hill, the listed buildings have small front areas, with some basements, so they have retained their original cast iron railings, mainly very simply detailed with an ornate spear head, sometimes triangular shaped. Field Road retains in places the original curved brick copings to the front boundary walls.

## 5.8 Public realm audit.

### *Paving.*

Whilst the majority of the paving in the Conservation Area is modern tarmacadam or concrete, many of the streets retain their 19<sup>th</sup> century granite kerbs and stone gutters, with the occasional setted crossover.

Examples include:

- Castle Crescent: 100 m.m. granite kerbs with 300 m.m. stone gutters
- Coley Hill: 150 m.m. granite kerbs with three lines of granite setts creating the gutter
- Castle Hill: 300 m.m. wide granite kerbs and 300 m.m. granite gutter, with three lines of granite setts on the corner junctions
- Russell Street: 100-300 m.m. granite kerbs and setted gutters
- Jesse Terrace: short lengths of 100 m.m. wide stone kerbs with 300 m.m. wide stone gutters
- Zinzan Street: 100 m.m. granite kerbs with some stone or setted gutters
- Oxford Road: 300 m.m. wide granite kerbs with modern cast iron bollards

Some improvements to the street surfaces at the junction of Oxford Road and Prospect Street have recently been carried out, using a variety of modern surfacing materials and cast iron bollards.

### *Street lighting.*

Street lighting is almost universally provided by slim modern steel columns, painted white, with simple glass lanterns. In Oxford Road these are tall, with shorter examples in the less busy residential streets. In Castle Crescent are some 19<sup>th</sup> century cast iron gas lights which have been converted to electricity, with modern light fittings.

## Chapter 6 CHARACTER AREAS

The Conservation Area divides conveniently into four "Character Areas" based on historical development, building type, use and layout. These are: Area 1: Castle Crescent and Coley Hill; Area 2: Castle Street and Castle Hill; Area 3:

Russell Street, Baker Street and the surrounding residential roads; and Area 4: Oxford Road.

### **6.1 Area 1: Castle Crescent and Coley Hill.**

Castle Crescent was developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with detached or semi-detached houses, with the earlier examples being stuccoed, and the later examples being built from red and blue brick, and heavily decorated. The area is characterised by the large gardens, generous planting, and the gentle curve of the street, which is lit by a mixture of modern steel street lights and converted 19<sup>th</sup> century gas lanterns.

Negative features:

- The poor state of repair of no. 3 (a listed buildings)
- Loss of front gardens for car parking.

Coley Hill was developed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and contains an almost continuous terrace of three storey listed buildings, some stuccoed and some brick, along its eastern side. Original railings, small front gardens, and the survival of the original windows and doors makes this a desirable residential area.

Negative features:

- Poor quality pavement surfaces
- Wheelie bins on pavement
- Intrusive car parking
- Modern street lighting
- Large modern telegraph pole and dangling telephone wires
- Poor quality front boundaries
- Modern development on western side of street
- No. 19 a regrettable modern intrusion

Field Road lies beyond the ends of the gardens to the listed houses in Coley Hill, it was developed c.1900 with a continuous terrace of two storey houses, built from white brick decorated with stuccoed ground floor bays and red brick patterning.

Negative features:

- Loss of original windows and front doors to modern replacements
- Loss of original slate roofs

### **6.2 Area 2: Castle Street and Castle Hill.**

This area lies along one of the oldest roads in Reading, connecting the town to the west. Castle Street once led directly into the medieval core of Reading, but since the late 1960s this connection has been severed by the Inner Relief Road.

It is the finest street in the Conservation Area and noticeable for its undulating topography and the many listed buildings, which are usually set back from the road with gardens and several very important trees. Yeomanry House, and the adjoining Berkshire County Record office, provide the visual focus, but there are also very good views along the street in either direction, and across the Inner Relief Road to the town centre. Uses are very mixed with residential properties mixed with some commercial premises.

Negative features:

- Poor quality pavement surfaces
- Modern street lighting
- Busy traffic
- Poor pedestrian links across the road
- Poor quality front boundaries
- Loss of front gardens and front boundaries to create car parking
- Cut off from the town centre by the Inner Relief Road
- Noise and traffic from the Inner Relief Road
- Loss of nos. 114-118 Castle Street (listed buildings) for new development
- Poor condition of nos. 134-144 Castle Hill (grade II)

### **6.3 Area 3: Russell Street, Baker Street, and the surrounding residential roads..**

Most of this area was developed between the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with some 20<sup>th</sup> century infilling to back gardens (Goldsmid Road, Franklin Street, small part of Russell Street). The area is characterised by tall terraces of late Georgian houses (Russell Street, Baker Street) and similar, mid or late-19<sup>th</sup> century houses, also in a terraced form (Waylen Street, Zinzan Street, Carey Street, Jesse Terrace). The buildings have small front gardens or areas, with little obvious planting or trees apart from in Jesse Terrace and the western end of Baker Street. Uses are mainly residential, with a small shop and public house in Baker Street. Jesse Terrace retains more original features than the other streets of unlisted buildings such as Waylen Street or Zinzan Street.

Negative features:

- Poor quality pavement and road surfaces
- Wheelie bins on pavement
- Loss of original windows and doors in unlisted Buildings of Townscape Merit
- Overhead telephone wires
- Modern street lighting
- Loss of front boundaries and gardens to create car parking (e.g. no. 46 Baker Street)
- Poor quality front boundaries
- Rubbish in front areas

## 6.4 Area 4: Oxford Road.

Oxford Road contains a long terrace of listed buildings, dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The terrace is divided by a shorter group of mainly late 19<sup>th</sup> century development and many of the buildings in the whole group have modern shopfronts or have been converted into offices. Nos. 169/171 have late 19<sup>th</sup> century shopfronts, somewhat altered.

Negative features:

- Busy traffic
- Poor pedestrian links across the main road
- Poor quality shopfronts, some of them in listed buildings (e.g. nos. 155 and 157)
- Poorly maintained buildings, some of them listed (e.g. no. 139)
- Plastic windows in listed buildings (e.g. nos. 171 and 177)
- Loss of chimney stacks and chimney pots (e.g. nos. 155-157 Oxford Road)

## Chapter 7 THE BUILDINGS OF THE RUSSELL STREET/CASTLE HILL CONSERVATION AREA

### 7.1 Introduction.

The buildings of the Conservation divide into three principal groups: the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century houses in Castle Street, Russell Street, Baker Street, and Oxford Road, which are all grade II listed; the unlisted mid to late-19<sup>th</sup> century houses in residential streets such as Waylen Street and Zinzan Street; and the very late or early 19<sup>th</sup> century cottage-style smaller houses such as can be seen in Belle Vue Road and Field Road.

### 7.2 Listed buildings.

These are concentrated in Castle Street, Russell Street, Baker Street, and Oxford Road. The earliest buildings are nos. 154-160 Castle Hill, which once formed one building - the King's Arms Inn. Although the external details are mainly 18<sup>th</sup> century, the building is probably earlier and certainly existed in a more truncated form in 1734. In 1796 it had developed to its present form, and was used to accommodate 200 exiled French priests. It is listed grade II\*, partly because of its very good internal features including a fine staircase and panelled room in no. 158.

Otherwise, the majority of the listed buildings in the Conservation Area date to between 1800 and the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and are listed grade II. They were all built as houses, the earlier and more prestigious properties being along Castle Street/Castle Hill. These employ the use of Bath stone, stucco, red brick, and slate, in a variety of styles. Nos. 107, 109 and possibly 111 date to c.1800 with

stuccoed fronts, and no. 107 is an especially interesting villa with four Ionic pilasters to the front elevation, supporting a moulded entablature. On the other side of the road, no. 122 (Culham House) dates to c.1840 and is three storeys high, and also built from stucco. Sash windows and a good quality doorcase decorate the front. Another noteworthy group are nos. 134-132 Castle Street, a symmetrical terrace of three storey houses, built from rendered Bath stone. Further along Castle Hill, nos. 144a-152 (Heritage Court) are also early 19<sup>th</sup> century with French windows to the ground floor, facing the front. Nos. 162a, 162-166 date to c.1840 and have attractive verandahs with curved corrugated metal roofs and cast iron balconies decorated with the honeysuckle pattern popularised by Decimus Burton.

Coley Hill provides some examples of well detailed, late Georgian houses, mainly built from red brick, whilst in Castle Crescent (no. 3) is a similarly aged villa, boarded up and seriously "At Risk". Nos. 29-31 Castle Crescent are also listed grade II, and date to c.1840. They are faced in stucco, with Italianate details.

Baker Street contains one particularly fine long terrace (Nos. 61-79) which predates 1840. Built from red brick, this group is just two storeys high, with sash windows, slate roofs, and radiating fanlights above each front door. No. 55 is another small villa of c.1840 and nos. 33-39 are unusual in that they were designed as two symmetrical pairs of two houses each. They are faced in stucco and two storeys plus a basement high.

In Russell Street are two particularly fine terraces, nos. 6-34, and nos. 36-50, which are probably the earliest group. These are all built from red brick with slate roofs and are two or three storeys high. Fanlights, moulded doors, and sash windows decorate the fronts, and stucco string courses also provide some modulation. The effect is somehow rather severe, but pleasing.

To the north, Oxford Road, which was developed at about the same time as Russell Street, contains a number of notable late Georgian houses although most of them have been adversely affected by the addition of modern shopfronts. The least altered are nos. 195-203, a three storey terrace, each three windows wide, and built from red brick without any changes to the ground or basement elevations. No. 101 (Roxborough House) is a small villa of c.1840, located on the junction with Howard Street, and no.139 retains a very good quality front door, with a circle and teardrop fanlight.

Finally, the Conservation Area also contains a grade II listed Jewish synagogue in Goldsmid Road, the only listed building in a religious use. This dates to 1900, and is a well detailed building utilising red brick with Bath stone dressings.

### **7.3 Buildings of Townscape Merit.**

This Appraisal has identified a large number of unlisted Buildings of Townscape Merit. This follows advice contained within PPG15 and in guidance provided by English Heritage, requiring the identification of such buildings as a way of ensuring their protection from demolition and unsuitable alteration.

Most of the buildings are family house of the mid to late-19<sup>th</sup> century, which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area. They are relatively unaltered, or could be reinstated to their original appearance without too much difficulty.

#### 7.4 Materials.

The earlier buildings in the Conservation Area are built from brick or stone, and rendered with stucco, as can be seen along Castle Hill. However, the predominant material is red brick, made locally, and this is the most popular material for the houses in Oxford Road, Russell Street, Coley Hill, and the intervening streets. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Reading became known for the use of differently coloured bricks, often white with red or cream, creating a variety of patterns. Examples can be seen in Belle Vue Road and Field Road.

Before 1800, roofs were covered in clay tiles but only nos. 154-160 Castle Street still use this material. Otherwise, the use of Welsh slate for roofing is universal, regrettably now replaced in places using modern concrete tiles or artificial slate.

### Chapter 8 RECOMMENDATIONS.

#### 8.1 Conservation Area boundary review.

A thorough review of the existing Conservation Area boundary was undertaken as part of the appraisal survey work, and the following amendments to the existing boundary are proposed:

- (i) Add nos. 2a and 4 Coley Avenue.

This is a well detailed, late 19<sup>th</sup> century house built from grey and red brick with original features, worthy of protection.

- (ii) Add no. 8 Bath Road (St Hilda) and part of Janson Court.

This is a substantial three storey house with a massive front chimney stack. The ground floor has stone dressings to the windows and there is a steeply pitched tiled roof. It is dated 1886. Trees in Janson Court are also proposed for inclusion.

- (iii) Add nos. 2a, 2b, 2, and 4-10 (even) Tilehurst Road, and properties in Belle Vue Road.

These are well detailed houses of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Belle Vue Road contains two terraces of well detailed terraced houses, with multi-coloured brickwork.

- (iv) Delete properties in Anstey Road, Body Road and Baker Street.

These are late 19<sup>th</sup> century houses, mostly in multiple occupation (flats) which have been adversely affected by the loss of their original windows and front doors. Other detrimental features include the addition of satellite dishes, the loss of front boundaries and the modern buildings facing the Inner Relief Road.

## 8.2 Article 4 Direction.

Certain minor works and alterations to unlisted buildings in use as family dwellings can be carried out without planning permission from the Council. Development of this kind is called "Permitted Development" and falls into various classes which are listed in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. These minor alterations can cumulatively have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of a conservation area. Powers exist for the Council to withdraw some of these permitted development rights in the interests of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

In the Conservation Area there is a high survival of original detailing in many of the unlisted family houses such as the finely detailed timber windows, panelled timber doors, patterned brickwork and slate roofs which make a significant contribution to the individual character of buildings in the conservation area. It is therefore proposed that permitted development rights are withdrawn for some of the unlisted family dwelling houses in both the existing and the proposed conservation area. This will ensure the preservation of unique architectural features and traditional materials by requiring an application for planning permission before carrying out certain alterations.

The kinds of work which it is proposed to control include:

- The installation of new windows and doors
- Alterations to the roof, including changing the roof materials and installing rooflights.
- Building a porch.
- The erection of sheds and other outbuildings
- Creating an access onto the road.
- Building a hard standing
- The erection or alteration of gates, fences or walls.
- Painting the exterior of a building.

The buildings which are proposed for this additional form of control are:

- All of the family houses in Jesse Terrace

It is proposed that the restrictions will only relate to development visible from a public highway (this includes a footpath). It will not affect residential property which is in use as flats (i.e. in "multiple occupation") which are already controlled more rigorously as they have far fewer permitted development rights than family houses.

### **8.3 Improvements to the public realm.**

It has already been noted that the majority of the Conservation Area is paved in modern materials. The reinstatement of York stone paving in certain selected areas would be welcomed, particularly along Castle Hill. Additionally, the Council should ensure that the existing granite kerbs and setted gutters are retained in any scheme for improvement or repair.

### **8.4 Pedestrian and traffic management.**

Poor pedestrian environment has been noted throughout the Conservation Area, but particularly in Castle Hill and Oxford Road. Some localised traffic management schemes, which provided improved pedestrian crossings, could be considered on an incremental basis.

### **8.5 New development.**

There are few opportunities for new development within the Conservation Area due to the terraced form of most of the buildings. However, the recent loss of the Methodist Church and Sunday School in Oxford Road, and the similar loss of a terrace of listed buildings (nos. 114-118 Castle Street) to new development demonstrate how much pressure there is for replacement buildings.

Generally, there is an automatic presumption in favour of the retention of a listed building or a Building of Townscape Importance. Gardens should always be preserved, especially where they surround a listed building or a Building of Townscape Merit. Backland development should only be allowed where there are existing buildings are of no merit, and where the replacement buildings are of a suitable scale and bulk to adversely affect the surrounding buildings. The historic form of development, with mainly terraced houses sitting close to the road, with hidden gardens behind, should be maintained and enhanced as opportunities present themselves. Whilst each scheme will be considered in its own right, the proposal must conform to policies within the Reading Local Plan and to government guidance contained within PPG15.

### **8.6 Shopfronts.**

The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area contains a number of commercial premises with a variety of modern shopfronts, sometimes incorporating elements of earlier fabric. These are located along the south side of Oxford Road. The only examples of reasonably complete historic shopfront are nos. 169-171 Oxford Road, although the fascias have been altered and both shopfronts are in poor condition.

Many of the shops in Oxford Road are small, locally owned businesses where there is little incentive to create attractive shopfronts. Rather, there has been in the past an emphasis on large signboards (to attract trade) using modern materials. Inevitably, this has meant that the appearance of many of the buildings along Oxford Road, many of which are listed, have been compromised by a variety of badly designed shopfronts. The most common problems are:

- Over deep fascias, hiding original features such as string courses, windows, window cills.
- Use of garish colours.
- Use of plastic lettering and over dominant lighting.
- The incremental loss of older historic shopfronts.
- Internally illuminated signs.

Policy CUD 16 in the Reading Local Plan refers to the Shopfronts Policy Statement, contained within Appendix 7 of that Plan. This provides a firm basis on which applications for new or altered shopfronts can be assessed, and should ensure that incrementally, the appearance of the buildings along Oxford Road will improve. Additionally, the Council should consider taking enforcement Action where work has been carried out without the necessary permissions..

Occasionally, a simple modern shopfront may be more appropriate than a reproduction 19<sup>th</sup> century design. However, these should still follow the basic principles governing the historic relationship between the fascia, glazing, pilasters and stallriser, as well as the use of colour, materials, and signage.

Security is another difficult issue which needs to be resolved. If roller shutters are to be provided, they should fit neatly between existing features, with open lattice grilles rather than solid shutters. Ideally, these shutters should be positioned internally, to avoid the flat, feature-less appearance of external shutters. Another alternative is a concertina type of shutter, which slides sideways rather than vertically. These can be used to protect recessed doorways. All such shutters should be painted or colour finished to match the decoration of the rest of the shopfront.

Simple fabric roller blinds are another traditional feature which the Council should encourage, as opposed to the modern plastic canopies, which are too reflective and detract from the historic character of the building.

The following are principles which the Council should enforce when considering applications for new or altered shopfronts:

- New shopfronts should be built from timber and painted.
- The use of uPVC or other modern materials will be resisted.
- New shopfronts should adhere to the design guidance in the Reading Local Plan.
- Traditional shopfronts are usually preferred although in some cases a modern, good quality alternative, might be acceptable.

## Chapter 9 CONCLUSIONS

This appraisal seeks to explain what is important and special about the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area and to suggest ways in which its character and appearance can be best preserved and enhanced for future generations.

Whilst the Council can initiate improvements and control new development, the co-operation and enthusiasm of local residents and business owners provides a vital constituent to the future successful management of the conservation area. This means that local residents, tenants and other property owners need to work with the Council and agree common aims and objectives. Hopefully, this appraisal will provide a framework for a positive partnership for mutual future benefit.