

ST PETERS CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



Reading Borough Council

April 2009

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ST PETERS CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the appraisal

This appraisal seeks to record and analyse the various features which give the St Peters Conservation Area its special architectural and historic interest. The area's buildings and spaces are noted and described, and marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map (Appendix 1) along with listed buildings, buildings of townscape merit, significant trees and spaces, and important views into and out of the conservation area. There is a presumption that all of these features should be "preserved or enhanced", as required by legislation.

This appraisal builds upon national policy, as set out in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG 15) - Planning and the Historic Environment*, and local policy, as set out in the *Reading Borough Local Plan 1991-2006* and the emerging *Reading Borough Local Development Framework*. It provides a firm basis on which applications for development within the St Peters Conservation Area can be assessed. It also forms a basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals for the area.

This appraisal follows the suggested format contained in Appendix 2 of the English Heritage document "Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals" August 2005.

1.2 Summary of special interest

The St Peters Conservation Area lies about one 1km north of Reading town centre and to the west of Caversham village centre. It is centred on St Peters Church, Caversham Court and St Peters Rectory and properties fronting Church Road, Caversham and St Peters Hill. Its southern boundary is marked by the River Thames. The boundaries of the area are indicated on the Appraisal Map appended to this report (Appendix 1). It was formally designated on 28 April 1988 following a period of public consultation. The history and character of the area are inextricably tied up with the history of St Peters Church and Caversham Court. This is discussed in more detail in Section 4 below.

There are several listed properties within the Conservation Area as follows:

- 43 Church Rd (Banksfoot). 2-storey early to mid C18. Colour washed brick. Old tile roof.
- 14 Church Road (Valentine Cottage). 1 1/2 storey late C17. Red brick. Old tile roof (hipped).
- 16 Church Rd. 2 storey. Timber framed. Pebble dash front. Old tile roof.
- Buckside, Church Rd. 2 storey. Mid c18. Painted and rendered brick. Old tile roof.
- Buckside Cottage, Church Rd. 2 storey. C16. Timber framed. Colour washed. Brick infilling. Old tile roof.

- 20 Church Rd (The Rectory). Including garden walls. c1700. 2 storey detailed villa. Red brick, stone details. Slate roof (hipped).
- NE end Caversham Court. Screen wall. Early to mid C19 flint on ashlar/.brick base. About 10ft high. Stone coping and occasional pinnacles.
- Caversham Court Stables, Church Road. Mid to late C17. Once part of now destroyed Caversham Court. 2 storeys. Brick. Old tile roof. Cobbled courtyard surrounded by flint wall with ashlar/flint gate piers.
- Riverside Garden Pavilion, Caversham Court (The Gazebo). Early to mid C17. Reached by raised walk. 2 storey square plan. 1st floor timber framed. Ground floor brick. Early example of flemish bond. Hipped old tile roof.
- Retaining walls to raised walk to Riverside Garden Pavilion. C17. Mostly brick. Part flint with brick banding and buttresses. Intermittent.
- Retaining walls of east-west terrace walk, Caversham Court. C17. Probably rebuilt C18. Supports yew hedge behind wall. Red brick. Stone gate piers to steps, incorporating stone corbel heads from Reading Abbey.
- Retaining wall of St Peters Churchyard. C18/early C19 red brick. Interesting design of piers linked with concave sections. 14 bays.
- Church of St Peters, Church Road. Grade II*. Of various dates from C12. Principally C15 and High Victorian. Flint with stone dressing and old tile roof.
- St Peters Churchyard, Church Road. 11 tombs. Irregular layout against side of hill. Numerous head and slab stones. C17 to mid C19.
- I St Peters Hill (lodge to The Warren). Early C19. Picturesque "cottage ornee". Lint/ashlar details. Tiled roof (formerly thatched).



16 Church Road

Apart from 47 Church Road which dates from the late C19, all the other buildings in the area are inter war or later, but those on the south side of Church Road display an architectural style and materials which generally maintain the original character of the area. Properties on the north side and within the conservation area, although

generally more recent developments, do show some sensitivity to the conservation area, including Woodrow Court and its wooded setting and 2 St Peters Hill (Treetops). The area generally also retains linking features such as flint walls and tree cover essential to the overall character and appearance of the area. As a result of public consultation at the time of designating the conservation area, numbers 29-37 Church Road were added to the conservation area. These are largely unaltered Victorian-Edwardian houses, with a sympathetic infill development at number 31A. Number 29 has benefited from improvement and conversion from a run-down corner shop unit to a house following designation of the conservation area.

There is therefore an architectural and historical unity to this part of Church Road/St Peters Hill, which has a spacious village feel to it. This is enhanced by the winding nature of the road and a variable building line along the road. The use of red brick and flint as main building materials, including boundary walls, and a preponderance of old tile roofs also serve to unify the area.

However, it is the presence of St Peters Church and Caversham Court at the very heart of the Conservation Area which dominate the conservation area both now and historically. The local authority controlled Caversham Court is also included in the National Register of Parks and Gardens and is currently subject of extensive renovation work as a result of a successful bid for National Lottery Grant funding.

St Peters Church and Caversham Court also represent a significant area of open space forming the very heart of the conservation area, which is enhanced by its location immediately adjoining the River Thames, which is only marred by the less sympathetic Warren Canoe Club building in the south west corner of the area. This space is however also enhanced by substantial tree cover, including some specimen trees within Caversham Court. Several individual properties on the south side of Church Road also benefit from a location immediately adjoining the River Thames. A solid core of listed buildings within the conservation area also adds considerable interest to the area.

2.0 The planning policy context

Conservation areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. A conservation area is defined as *"an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance"*. It is the quality and interest of an *area*, rather than that of individual buildings, which is the prime consideration in identifying a conservation area.

Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas. Section 72 specifies that, in making a decision on an

application for development in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. This document should be read in conjunction with national planning policy guidance, particularly PPG 15 - Planning and the Historic Environment. The layout and content of this conservation area appraisal follows "Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals" published by English Heritage in February 2006.

2.1 Local planning policy

The Reading Borough Core Strategy was found to be "sound" in December 2007 and was adopted in January 2008. Policy CS33 provides a strategic level policy that indicates that the historic environment including their settings will be preserved and enhanced. This policy will, in part, replace the Reading Borough Local Plan policies, including some of the saved policies discussed below. Proposals will have to have regard to the provisions set out in PPG15.

The Local Plan policies which seek the preservation and enhancement of archaeological sites, historic parks and gardens, listed buildings and conservation areas are set out in Chapter 6 of the *Reading Borough Local Plan 1991-2006* which was adopted on 14th October 1998. The majority of policies of which were "saved" by Direction of the Secretary of State on 24 September 2007 (with effect from 27 September 2007). The saved policies of particular note are Policies CUD 6 (Demolition of Unlisted Buildings in Conservation Areas) and CUD7 (New Development in Conservation Areas), which outline Reading Borough Council's approach to development in Conservation Areas. Copies of these policies can be found at Appendix 2 of this document. With regard to listed buildings in the Conservation Area, Policies CUD 1 (Works Affecting Listed Buildings), CUD 2 (Change of Use of Listed Buildings), CUD 3 (Maintenance of Listed Buildings) and CUD 4 (Setting of Listed Buildings) also apply. Policy CUD 10 (Historic Parks and Gardens) also applies in respect of any proposals for Caversham Court.

The Local Plan's conservation objectives are stated as:

- (i) to conserve or enhance the Borough's stock of listed buildings and other buildings of architectural quality or historical significance;
- (ii) to identify protect or enhance areas of character;
- (iii) to identify and conserve areas of archaeological significance and to protect or enhance finds and sites for the education and enjoyment of Reading residents.

3.0 Location and setting

3.1 Location, topography and setting

The boundaries of the St Peters Conservation Area are shown at Appendix 1. The area lies some 1km north of Reading town centre on the north side of the River Thames to the west of Caversham village centre. The northern boundary is marked by Church

Road, Caversham, and St Peters Hill, which comprise the southern end of the main A4074 road to Woodcote, Wallingford and Oxford. This is now, and was historically, an important south-north local distributor road linking Reading and Caversham centres with towns and villages to the north. It is also an important bus route in to and out of Reading town centre. The conservation area is however considered to be within walking distance of Reading town centre (including Reading train station). The conservation area is even more accessible to the facilities of Caversham village centre. The area therefore has a high level of accessibility to local amenities, Reading town centre and points farther afield by non-car modes of transport.

Adjoining the River Thames and at its eastern end, the conservation area is generally flat but the land rises to the north and west, such that St Peters Church occupies a fairly prominent position at the eastern end of the Warren escarpment, which extends westwards along the full length of The Warren. The escarpment represents a foothill of the Chiltern Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which extends into South Oxfordshire. St Peters Church therefore represents a significant landmark building when seen from the south (from the River Thames itself and the south bank) and from the east along Church Road and from the bottom of St Peters Hill.



Caversham Court with St Peters Church in the background

The area surrounding the conservation area tends to be much more mixed in character and much altered in appearance. At the time of its designation, consideration was given to extending the area to the east towards Caversham village centre and to include properties on the west side of Bridge Street. The Church Road/Church Street area to the east was considered to be a distinctly different entity and character to the St Peters Conservation Area, but in any event, the best of the buildings here were (are) listed in their own right and therefore benefited from that protection. The properties on the west side of Bridge Street were not considered to contribute to the

character and appearance of the conservation area, with the buildings themselves being of little merit to warrant inclusion in the conservation area.

More recently, consideration was given to a request to extend the St Peters Conservation Area to the north/west to include parts of St Peters Avenue. The merits of including The Warren and St Peters Hill/Woodcote Road on either side of it were also considered at the same time. However, although the area was considered to have an interesting range of dwellings, there are a number of similar streets in Reading and Caversham which display a similar mix, meaning that the area does not possess a uniqueness to consider it worthy of conservation area designation. There is also no essential unity of layout or special character and appearance to warrant its designation as a conservation area either in its own right or as an extension to the existing St Peters Conservation Area (with which it has no historic or architectural connection).

In short, the St Peters Conservation Area stands out as an attractive exception to the varied and often redeveloped character of the wider area which surrounds it.

4.0 Historic development

4.1 History

Reading is named after the Readingas, Saxon followers of Reada, 'the Red', who settled in the spit of land in the fork of the Thames and Kennet in the 6th century. At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, Reading belonged to the king and included a small borough and two manors. Reading Abbey was founded by Henry I in 1121. The abbey dominated the town and became one of the richest religious houses in England making Reading a wealthy place, and a centre of religion and pilgrimage.

Wool and leather were Reading's principal trades in the 16th and early 17th centuries, making good use of the town's road and river links. In the 18th century Reading was an important market and coaching town; new industries developed, notably brewing, iron-founding and brick and tile making.

Early 19th century maps show the town had hardly extended beyond its medieval core but a fast town expansion was stimulated by the development of new transport links. The Kennet and Avon Canal was opened in 1810 bringing London and Bristol, two major sea ports, into direct communication by water. Of much greater significance, however, was the construction of the Great Western Railway which reached the town in 1840. The coming of the railway resulted in a rapid growth of major industries, notably Huntley & Palmers and Suttons Seeds, which provided work for a rapidly increasing population.

Between 1850 and 1900 the population of the Borough more than trebled from 21,456 to 72,217 and the housing stock increased accordingly.

The history of the St Peters Conservation Area is inextricably tied up with St Peters Church itself.

St Peters Church dates from Norman times and, until the dissolution of the monasteries with the reformation, it was tied to the Abbey of Notley, Buckinghamshire and was run by Augustinian monks (Reading Abbey was Benedictine which appears to rule out any link between the two).

Caversham Court once housed the Rectory to St Peters Church. The original Rectory was built in the C17 and remains of the house and grounds, inter alia, include: (1) the Garden Pavilion/Gazebo, (2) the stable block and (3) the yew hedge along the raised east-west walkway. A later rectory was built on the site of the original rectory in the C19 and incorporated some of the original features but this was demolished in 1933. Part of the restoration works currently being undertaken at Caversham court is intended to expose the foundations of the original buildings and to provide interpretative material to explain the history and development of the site.



Works in progress at Caversham Court

It is possible that Number 1 St Peters Hill was once tied to the St Peters as servants' quarters. It is apparently of the same architectural style as the second (demolished) Rectory at Caversham Court, which was known as "The Striped House" (i.e. a framed house with the timbers exposed).

C18 maps show that St Peters Hill itself was once a farm track, which lead to farm (attached to St Peters) called Toots Farm. The original Toots Farm farmhouse no longer exists, although Numbers 2 and 4 Woodcote Road, at the top of St Peters Hill indicate the remains of original farm workers cottages. Number 16 Darrell Road slightly to the east, is a later replacement for the original Toots Farm farmhouse, and

bears its name. Cowsheds at 40-42 Highmoor Road and a (listed) granary in Darrell Road, all now demolished, were also evidence in living memory of the farm.

There is photographic evidence that the area near the River Thames - Buckside and Bucks Eyot - was a location for eel traps ("bucks") and further evidence that eels and fish were sold outside "The Griffin", although the current building on the site is not the original on site. The current building dates from about 1906, replacing an original thatched village inn on the site. Altogether therefore this part of Caversham has historically formed part of a thriving village community set alongside a country lane.

The south side of Church Road/St Peters Hill in particular has seen little recent change compared with the north side where the offices at 13-17 Church Road, Auburn Court, Woodrow Court and 2 St Peters Hill (Treetops) are all clearly more recent developments. Only Woodrow Court and Treetops on St Peters Hill are considered worthy of inclusion in the conservation area because here the developments are more sensitive to the original buildings on the site and the character of the conservation area generally. The Woodrow Court site also retains a wooded setting attractive to the character of the conservation area. Treetops is a more recent redevelopment, but important "linking" boundary walls and trees on the site have been retained to try and maintain the character of the site as seen from within the conservation area. The new buildings on the site have sought to echo the scale and materials used on the previous buildings on the site. The Treetops development was allowed on appeal against a number of competing, and much larger, proposals for the site.

The south side of Church Road/St Peters Hill, which generally defines the character of the St Peters Conservation Area, therefore retains much of its historic character and to date has resisted proposals for redevelopment.

4.2 The effect of historic development on plan form

The designated Conservation Area demonstrates the characteristics of an old village street and remnants of a country lane out of Caversham village centre. It is essentially defined by the informal layout of properties on the south side of Church Road/St Peters Hill and is an intrinsic part of the historical development of this part of Caversham village centre. It exhibits a variety of architectural styles reflecting the time scale over which the properties therein were built, but clearly it is St Peters Church and Caversham Court which provide the historical focus and define the character of not just the conservation area itself but a wider (farming) hinterland.

5.0 Spatial analysis

5.1 Key views and vistas

As seen from the south, St Peters Church stands above the general level of the River Thames, giving key views of it from the River Thames and its south bank, as well as

from the east and west along the river. However the bend in the river and extensive tree cover on the north bank limit these views to “glimpses”. The view of Caversham Court Gardens is also particularly attractive from the south. St Peters Church is also prominent when viewed from Church Road and St Peters Hill, where views from the road(s) are in the nature of a “surprise” because of the curved alignment of the road. St Peters Church and the gates to Caversham Court are the key focal points from within the area, although the current rectory at 20 Church Road and its walls does form quite a substantial presence as part of the same view on the inside of the bend at the bottom of St Peters Hill. Views in to Caversham Court from the road are limited by the presence of its boundary walls, but are attractive “looking down” from St Peters Churchyard. The redeveloped number 2 St Peters Hill (Treetops) also continues to dominate views towards the top of St Peters Hill, especially views from the south and east within the conservation area.



Treetops

The most open views from the conservation area both at ground and higher levels are towards and along the River Thames and towards its south bank. Indeed the original Garden Pavilion/Gazebo was built to take advantage of such views. Although the Thames-side Promenade presents an attractive and well-used recreational facility on the south bank of the River, this bank also houses less attractive and more utilitarian buildings beyond - the Richfield Avenue Leisure Complex, the Richfield Avenue Industrial Estate beyond, and the hotels at the eastern end of Richfield Avenue. None of these are strictly river-related uses, and arguably only the Reading Rowing Club Boat House presents an attractive, busy, river related outlook on the south bank nearest the conservation area. Immediately abutting the site of Caversham Court to the west lies the Warren Canoe Club Building, which blocks off views to and from that direction, but also represents a visually detrimental presence and “setting” within the conservation area.

5.2 The character of spaces within the area

The conservation area has something of a country lane feel with a mixture of mostly two storey cottage scale properties defining the approach to the more dominant New Rectory, Caversham Court and St Peters Church.

The defined area is not one which has generally been subject to pressures for significant (re)development in recent years. Although areas immediately outside the defined conservation area have experienced more development pressures, only three sites within the conservation area - Woodrow Court, Treetops and the Warren Canoe Club - have experienced redevelopment. The first two have sought to retain the spacious wooded scale and character of the area, as well as retaining other key linking features, in particular boundary wall details, but the Canoe Club building, whilst retaining important boundary walls, is less respectful of the character and appearance of the area in design terms. This in part may however be a reflection of the function of the building.

The area exhibits a variety of building lines, with no real formality to the layout of the dwellings within it, and in general terms the area has a spacious, almost "rural" feel to it. Some alterations and extensions to original dwellings have taken place but these reflect the character and appearance of the original buildings by using compatible materials and retaining important boundary wall details.

These properties have varying depths, but retain substantial rear garden spaces, with those on the south side of Church Road adjoining the River Thames, another feature which adds to the spacious character and appearance of the area, and one which should be preserved. As previously stated there has been little pressure for redevelopment here.

Caversham Court is clearly the most important (public) open space in the area. Enclosed on the Church Road/St Peters Hill/The Warren roadsides, it is open to full views from the River Thames (but only very rarely accessible from it), exception where the warren canoe Club building intervenes. It shares a common boundary with St Peters Churchyard (and there is a pedestrian link between the two).

Throughout the area, front boundaries are defined by brick and flint walls and some railings and a significant tree cover. These also provide a good setting for individual properties and the character of the conservation area as a whole.

6.0 Definition of the special interest of the conservation area

6.1 Definition of character areas

The Conservation Area is a tightly drawn area centred on the Grade II* listed St Peters Church and Caversham Court. The area is not defined by one clear historical period,

but represents elements from a number of periods reflecting the generic development of this historical village street/country lane immediately at the west end of Caversham Village centre. It has generally resisted pressure for (re)development, and in this respect must be considered to be quite unique. The character of the area therefore remains strong. The area can be divided into the following three character areas:

Area 1: St Peters Church and churchyard.

The church is approached from Church Road to the east and is situated half way up St Peters Hill where it dominates the local view. St Peters Church is Grade II* listed and has Norman origins, but the present church on site is mostly C15 and High Victorian. It is essentially built of flint with stone detailing and an old tile roof. There are a number of C17-C19 tombs in the churchyard. St Peters Church could easily be described as an "typical village church". Features linking the church to its surrounds are historic flint and brick walls, including an interesting "crinkle-crankle" retaining brick wall on its boundary with Caversham Court Gardens.

Area 2: Caversham Court.

Once housing not one but two different Rectories, Caversham Court is now effectively a formal public open space idyllically situated on the north bank of the River Thames. Remnants do remain of the of the original C17 Rectory on the site - the garden pavilion, the raised walkway to it and the east-west raised walkway with its yew hedge. All of these are in need of repair and restoration. Works are currently under way to address this with the help of a National Lottery Grant funding. Remnants of the later rectory survive in Caversham Court Stables, its cobbled courtyard and the boundary walls and entrance gates fronting Church Road. It is owned and managed by the local authority. The Warren Canoe Club building is situated adjacent to the south west corner of Caversham Court.

Area 3: The south side of Church Road.

The properties on the south side of Church Road show a generally domestic scale, although the properties are of varied dates, architectural styles and building lines, given extra character by the winding road in front of them and their situation on the north bank of the River Thames. This part of the conservation area has a genuine village feel about it. Common building materials are again brick and flint (including boundary walls), with mainly old tile roofs.



South side of Church Road looking east

Area 4: The north side of Church Road/St Peters Hill.

The properties on the north side of Church Road/St Peters Hill have been subject to some redevelopment. Redevelopment within the conservation area has however respected and preserved the character and appearance of the conservation area by the use of compatible building scales and materials, and the retention of important linking features such as boundary walls and tree cover. In this way, the spacious, verdant feel of the area has been maintained.



North side of Church Road looking west

The Area generally.

Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Retention of original buildings and their settings with few detrimental changes by way of new development and/or addition of non-traditional materials;
- Retention of original brick and flint walls and/or railings (original and replacement) throughout the area;
- Good tree cover within the grounds of individual properties and throughout the area;
- Street trees in parts of Church Road.

Features that have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Heavily trafficked route through the centre of the conservation area
- Some (limited) use of non-traditional materials: e.g. upvc windows;
- Some (limited) loss of original brick and flint walls and/or railings e.g. replacement of railings with newer brick walls and/or timber fencing;
- Some walls in need of repair;
- Whilst not inherently unattractive in itself, some overgrowth of railings with hedges;
- Lack of traditional street furniture, including street lighting;
- Over-reliance on individual telegraph poles throughout the area with attendant wires radiating out to the houses within it;
- Some views in to and of the Conservation Area to modern, sometimes poor quality developments.

Surrounded by much more modern buildings opposite and immediately outside it, the conservation area itself, and the buildings within it, have generally retained their spacious character. Although there has been some pressure for redevelopment in the past, these have generally respected the prevailing character and appearance of the conservation area. However there is clearly scope to redress some quite modest failings apparent in the foregoing list.

6.2 Activities and uses

Notwithstanding the presence of St Peters Church, the area has historically and currently been an essentially a residential area fronting what has been described elsewhere as a country lane out of Caversham village centre. Even Caversham Court, in its different incarnations has essentially been a rectory and/or country house, although it is now a public park with the remaining buildings housing local authority and/or related uses.

Residential properties in the area appear to very much in demand and therefore generally fully occupied and in a good state of repair.

There have been some institutional uses in the area, including 2 St Peters Hill (once a Council-run Children's Home but now private housing). Woodrow Court provides accommodation for the Elderly. "The Griffin" public house is now the only commercial premises in the area, but the Warren Canoe Club premises also represent a further non-residential use in the area.

Any sense of a quiet (residential) atmosphere is however clearly affected by the routing of the main A4074 through the area. This is a very busy local distributor road and bus routes, which is heavily congested at during the morning and evening rush hours. However, apart from double yellow lines to prevent car parking, there appears to be little opportunity to solve this particular problem.

6.3 Architectural and historic character: building methods and materials

The conservation area contains properties from several periods, but, as previously argued, retains a "village" character and has a special architectural interest, the most significant elements of which are St Peters Church and Caversham Court.

With the exception of some rendered and half-timbered cottages, and St Peters Church itself, the buildings in the Conservation area are generally of brick, which is one of the distinguishing features of Reading's architecture and there are examples of good quality brickwork throughout the conservation area. Brick was a popular building material in the 19th century and the ready availability of different coloured bricks provided the opportunity for the lively polychromatic brickwork found throughout this part of Victorian/Edwardian Reading. The town had several brickworks, the most notable being S & E Collier Ltd at Water Road and Elgar Road and two brick works in Tilehurst area.

Old tile roofs tend to prevail in the area, and there is much use of flint throughout the area in boundary walls.

6.4 Buildings of Townscape Merit

Buildings identified as having "townscape merit" will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered 19th century and later buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provides the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, they make a positive contribution to the special interest of a conservation area.

Buildings of Townscape Merit help create a conservation area's distinctive and interesting historic townscape. As recommended in Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment, the general presumption should be in favour of

retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area.

Clearly, all the buildings within the Conservation area are important to its "townscape", but it is generally unlisted corner buildings which strictly have a more commanding presence.

The following, although not visible from any great distance, would be considered to be fall in to this category, but are all listed in their own right.

- St Peters Church;
- Caversham Court Gates;
- The Rectory, 20 Church Road;
- 2 St Peters Hill.

6.5 Public realm. Floorscape, street lighting and street furniture.

Road and footway surfaces are predominantly modern i.e. tarmac and concrete kerbs. Whilst generally in average condition (there is evidence of repairs by "utilities" throughout the area), these surfaces are not attractive and not "traditional" in conservation area terms.

Street lighting columns, signage and street furniture are modern, and this is another area with considerable potential for improvement. There are no examples of traditional lighting in the Area.

Properties in the Conservation Area rely on individual telegraph poles throughout the area with attendant wires radiating out to the houses.

Street trees are an important element of the character of the conservation area. Brick and flint walls and railings are to be found throughout the area and are clearly an essential part of the public realm and character of the Conservation Area.

6.6 Local details and features

The pre-eminent local detail throughout this Conservation Area, and "unifying" it, is the presence, with few exceptions, of brick and flint walls some including railings, on property boundaries.

6.7 Historic associations

Much of the history of St Peters Church and Caversham Court is linked to housing clergy associated with the running of the church. From the latter part of the C18, the Rectory at Caversham Court was leased to lay preachers, of which the Loveday family were some of the earliest. However in 1799 William Blackhall Simmonds took over

the original rectory on the site, although he had the house rebuilt not long afterwards, reportedly to a design by Pugin. The family sold the rectory in 1909, and it was eventually demolished in 1933.

6.8 Green spaces, trees and other natural elements

Caversham Court, which appears on the National Register of Parks and Gardens of National Interest, represents the main significant area of formal “green” space in the conservation area. Its importance has been recognised in a successful bid for National Lottery Grant funding for extensive improvements which are currently taking place. The importance of this open space to the setting of the conservation area is reinforced by its location adjacent to the River Thames, providing views in to and out of the conservation area.

St Peters Churchyard, not least by its juxtaposition to Caversham Court, also enhances the very open character of this part of the conservation area.

Elsewhere, the conservation area comprises mature properties situated in mature gardens, with extensive tree cover throughout, which together with street tree planting also gives a general verdant feel to the area of buildings and trees in harmony.

Trees therefore make a significant contribution to the conservation area’s special character and sense of identity. Significant tree groups are shown on the Appraisal Map at Appendix 1.



Trees at the Rectory (20) Church Road

Because of their importance to the character and appearance of a Conservation Area, where they are not already protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), it is necessary to give the local planning authority 6 weeks notice of any intention to cut down, top or lop any tree in a Conservation Area, which also enables a local planning authority to consider whether the trees should be formally protected by the making of a Tree Preservation Order. Currently, there appear to be five TPOs in the area: at Buckside (Bucks Eyot Islands); 16 Church Road; 20 Church Road (The Rectory); 47 Church Road & Woodrow Court; and 2 St Peters Hill (Treetops). In addition, street trees and trees in Caversham Court are in local authority control.

6.9 General condition of the area: The extent of loss, intrusions or damage i.e. negative features.

The general state of repair of the properties in the Conservation Area is good with properties not remaining vacant for any length of time.

The open space at Caversham Court is currently undergoing much needed restoration with the help of National Lottery Grant funding.

St Peters Churchyard is generally well maintained.

However, in common with many of Reading's conservation areas, the area is lacking in the quality, if not the state of repair of the of the highway environment (roadways, footways and street furniture).

All of these areas would benefit from continued monitoring, and the seizing of opportunities for improvement as they arise.

The main negative feature of the area is however the presence of the heavily trafficked main A4074 through the heart of it the area and the noise, pollution, disturbance and visual intrusion which this brings (see "*Traffic noise and pollution*" in 6.10 below).

6.10 Problems, pressures and issues

Design of new development

Within the conservation area itself there are few recent developments, but, with the exception of the Warren Canoe Club building, these have generally respected the character, scale of buildings and materials used in the conservation area, thus maintaining its character and appearance. A small number of minor elements within the conservation area detract from its character. However, it is the larger developments immediately outside the conservation area which pay least heed to their context adjoining or near the conservation area and have a notably negative

effect on its character and appearance. The design of new development within and adjoining/near the conservation area therefore remains a major issue.

Loss of original architectural details

In general terms the loss of original features, particularly front elevation and boundary features is fairly limited. There are examples of non-traditional windows in the buildings in the conservation area. There is a clear issue here in terms of respecting the setting of individual buildings as well as enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area, in accordance with advice contained in PPG15 and policies contained in the Reading Borough Local Plan.

Because of the variety of building types and uses in the area and the significant presence of listed properties therein, it is not considered necessary for the local planning authority to consider using its powers to withdraw permitted development rights which affect the external appearance of dwelling houses in the conservation area, namely alterations to doors, windows, roofs and frontages (including boundary walls), as this can here be controlled through normal planning, listed building and conservation area controls.

Traffic noise and pollution

The character and environmental quality of the conservation area is spoilt most by noise and pollution of traffic using the main A4074 Church Road/St Peters Hill running through it, particularly during the rush hours. Currently there appears to be no obvious solution to this problem, save for possible traffic management aligned to the building of a Third Reading Bridge across the River Thames. This possibility however still does not appear imminent.

Street clutter

This is not generally an issue with regard to the overall character and appearance of the conservation area as a whole, except at the junction of Church Road/St Annes Road and of the main road junction of Church Road/Church Street/Bridge street to the east of the conservation area.

Attention has also been drawn to the detrimental impact of individual telegraph poles and wires radiating out from them.

7.0 Areas for further work

7.1 Consideration of conservation area boundary changes (to be the subject of a public consultation exercise)

Given that there are no real changes in circumstances since the Conservation Area was originally designated, and the generally more modern developments adjoining the Conservation Area, no changes are recommended to extend the boundaries of the conservation area (see the penultimate paragraphs of Section 3.1).

7.2 Opportunities for enhancement

Floorscape and street furniture improvements should be considered in this area, including replacing telegraph poles.

7.3 Monitoring and review

This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:

- A survey of the area to identify changes in its character and appearance;
- An assessment of whether the various recommendations detailed in this document have been acted upon, including proposed enhancements;
- A building condition survey;
- The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and any necessary action;
- Publicity and advertising.

Appendix 1 - Townscape Appraisal Map

Appendix 2 - Relevant Local Plan Policies

The following policies from the Reading Borough Local Plan (1991-2006) are relevant to the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area:

POLICY CUD 6: DEMOLITION OF UNLISTED BUILDINGS IN CONSERVATION AREAS

CONSENT TO DEMOLISH IN A CONSERVATION AREA WILL NORMALLY ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT IT IS WHOLLY BEYOND REPAIR, INCAPABLE OF REASONABLY BENEFICIAL USE, OF INAPPROPRIATE STRUCTURE OR DESIGN, OR WHERE IT'S REMOVAL OR REPLACEMENT WOULD BENEFIT THE APPEARANCE OR CHARACTER OF THE AREA. DEMOLITION WILL BE MORE FAVOURABLY ASSESSED WHERE THERE ARE APPROVED DETAILED PLANS FOR REDEVELOPMENT AND A CONTRACT FOR CARRYING OUT THE WORKS HAS BEEN ENTERED INTO.

POLICY CUD 7: NEW DEVELOPMENT IN CONSERVATION AREAS

AS APPROPRIATE NEW DEVELOPMENT IN CONSERVATION AREAS SHOULD MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE AREA BY RESPECTING OR ENHANCING ITS ARCHITECTURAL AND VISUAL QUALITIES AND ACHIEVING A HIGH STANDARD OF DESIGN. DEVELOPMENT WITHIN CONSERVATION AREAS WILL NORMALLY BE PERMITTED ONLY WHERE THE PARTICULAR HISTORIC OR ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF THE AREA WILL BE PRESERVED AND THERE IS NO LIKELIHOOD OF HARM BEING CAUSED TO THE AREAS CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE. THE BOROUGH COUNCIL WILL AS APPROPRIATE SEEK TO PRESERVE THE EXISTING BALANCE OF USES IN CONSERVATION AREAS.

Because of the high percentage of listed buildings in the Conservation Area. Policies CUD 1 ((Works Affecting Listed Buildings), CUD 2 (Change of Use of Listed Buildings), CUD 3 (Maintenance of Listed Buildings) and CUD 4 (Setting of Listed Buildings) also apply. Policy CUD 10 (Historic Parks and Parks and Gardens) also applies in respect of the Caversham Court, which is "listed" in the national register of Parks and Gardens.