

Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal



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ELDON SQUARE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

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ELDON SQUARE CONSERVATION AREA APPRASAL

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the appraisal

This appraisal seeks to record and analyse the various features which give the Eldon Square 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 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 the 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 provides a firm basis on which applications for development within the Eldon Square Conservation Area can be assessed.

1.2 Summary of special interest

Eldon Square was Reading's first conservation area. It was designated in 1972 and extended in 1982 by the addition of Watlington Street, to the west, and Eldon Street, Victoria Street and Montague Street, to the east.

The special interest that justifies designation of the Eldon Square Conservation Area derives from the following features:

- Eldon Square, a mid 19th century planned formal town square comprising an enclosed park surrounded on three sides by Bath stone detached and semi-detached buildings;
- Eldon Road, part of the formal arrangement of Eldon Square notable for a row of mid 19th century dwellings on its west side;
- The park at Eldon Square, known as King George V Gardens, which is enclosed by grade II listed railings and contains mature trees and other greenery and a large statue of the first Marquess of Reading, died 1935;
- Nos 163 to 189 (odd) Kings Road, a long row of prestigious Bath stone former early 19th century residences with good quality Classical and Italianate detailing;
- The architectural and historic interest of the area's buildings, including two grade II* listed buildings (Watlington House and 173-183 (odd) Kings Road);
- Two churches in unusually close proximity (Wesley Methodist Church and Church of St John the Evangelist) the spires of which are a local landmark;
- 19th century street pattern on either side of Eldon Road with traces of an earlier unrealised formal layout in the vicinity of The Oval;
- Cohesive architectural development of the mid 19th century with contrasting middle-class and working class housing;
- Lengths of historic stone kerbs and gulleys and remnants of old railings;

- Good examples of small mid 19th century terraced houses probably occupied by workers in nearby Huntley and Palmers, the largest employer in 19th century Reading;
- Trees and groups of trees in the park in Eldon Square and in the curtilage of Watlington House and The Oval;
- The prevalent use of Bath stone and local brick;
- Distinctive local details such as cast iron street name signs and old lamp posts.

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 follows guidance produced by English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the English Historic Towns Forum.

2.1 Local planning policy

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. Of particular note are Policy CUD 8 (Existing and New Conservation Areas) and CEN 1 (Town Centre Conservation Areas), as well policies CUD 6, 7 and 9 (which three outline Reading Borough Council’s approach to development in conservation areas. Copies of these policies can be found at Appendix 2 of this document.

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 and context

Eldon Square Conservation Area lies well within urban Reading on the east side of its medieval core and about 1 km south east of the town's modern shopping centre. With the exception of a row of grand 19th century dwellings on the north side of Kings Road (nos 163 to 189 Kings Road), the conservation area lies between London Road and Kings Road, two wide heavily trafficked east-west routes through Reading. Eldon Road, the north-south 'spine' of the conservation area is a major route linking Kings Road and London Road. Watlington Street was also once a thoroughfare between Kings Road and London Road but is now closed to traffic at its northern end. From Eldon Road there is a slight fall in the land westwards to Watlington Street. Throughout the area there is a general fall northwards to the River Kennet, hence the side-street named St John's Hill.

3.2 General character and plan form

The conservation area is in a wholly urban location and comprises a dense network of streets and roads of terraced, detached and semi-detached buildings. The most distinctive element of the street pattern is Eldon Square, a mid 19th century development of houses surrounding three sides of a small enclosed rectangular public park containing a lawn, trees and shrubs and a statue of the first Marquess of Reading (1860-1935) who was Viceroy of India from 1921-6. Building height is mainly two- or, less commonly, three-storey. Modern late 20th century office blocks rise to as many as 5 storeys.

4.0 Historic development

4.1 Origins and historic development

Reading is named after a Saxon tribe, the *Readingas*, who settled in the area in the 6th century. By the mid-9th 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 16th century traveller, wrote: '*the town chiefly standeth by its clothing*'.

(Illustration: John Speed's map of 1611)

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 18th century that ‘...its houses are mean and the streets though pretty large, unpaved’. However, the writer Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) called Reading ‘very large, wealthy, handsomely built’.

From the mid-18th century onwards, Reading began to flourish as an important stopping-off place between Bath and London. Inns flourished and regular public coaches began in 1780. 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.

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 the canals which by 1810 had brought London and Bristol, two major sea ports, into direct communication by water.

(Illustration: Commissioners’ map of 1834).

A further boost to the development of Reading 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, biscuit makers, and Suttons Seeds, which provided work for a rapidly increasing population. The terraced streets in the conservation area east and west of Eldon Road were among the many terraces built during Reading’s rapid expansion in the second half of the 19th century

The partnership between Thomas Huntley and George Palmer was forged in 1841, and five years later the firm moved into a failed silk-mill in King's Road. Expansion followed, year on year, until by the end of the century, Huntley & Palmer's employed over 5,000 people.

Terraced houses in the Eldon Road Conservation Area served the employees of Huntley and Palmers whose factory was a short walk away on the north side of the Kennet and Avon Canal.

In the first national census, in 1801, the population of Reading was about 9,400. By 1851 the population had more than doubled, to 21,500, and at the end of the century, it stood at around 59,000.

(Illustration: OS map of 1898).

In the mid-20th century the centre of Reading was redeveloped by demolishing parts of the historic core of the town to provide offices and shopping precincts. The construction of the Inner Distribution Road (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 uses following a restoration scheme by the Kennet and Avon Trust.

4.2 The effect of historical development on plan form; settlement pattern

One of the catalysts for the expansion of the Eldon Square district was the decision of the Crown Estates to sell off much of their land to the east of the town centre. Since the dissolution of the abbey, much of the land which had belonged to the abbey had been taken over by the King's (Crown) Estate. The first stage of the development was the building of two new roads across this land in 1834, King's Road (named after King William IV) and Queen's Road (after Queen Adelaide). High class houses were built on some of this land, at Eldon Square and in King's Road, built out of Bath Stone brought to Reading by the Kennet and Avon Canal. The prestigious new houses were to become popular with doctors at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, the first stage of which was completed in 1839.

(Illustration: Map of Reading 1840)

Eldon Square is named after Lord Eldon (1751-1838) who started life as John Scott of Newcastle, entered Parliament in 1783, was created Lord Eldon in 1799 and became Lord Chancellor in Addington's Government in 1801. After the loss of his wife in 1831, he is said to have spent much time at Erleigh Court in Sonning in Berkshire with his brother, Lord Stowell and he was a great patron of Reading's Royal Berkshire Hospital. Newcastle, his birthplace, also has a town square in his name.

As noted above, the stimulus to the creation of Eldon Square and subsequent development of its surroundings was the construction of Queen's Road and King's Road in the 1830s. The Commissioners' 'Map of the Borough of Reading' (1834) illustrates these two roads together with Eldon Road and Eldon Square annotated with the words "*ELDON SQUARE &c. No 5 Completed*". Both this 1834 map and 'A New Plan of the Borough of Reading' (1840) suggest a formal cruciform layout of streets around a central circus in the area west of Eldon Road. The proposed layout was never realised and the area is now occupied by the humble terraces of St John's Street, St John's Hill, St John's Road and Prince's Street. All that remains of the proposal is a large brick house known as The Oval (grade II listed) which is located in the centre of the area beside a dog-leg bend at the north end of Prince's Street which might be interpreted as the south-eastern quadrant of the proposed circus.

Watlington Street, named after Robert Watlington, a 17th century clothier, roughly follows the course of what was formerly known as Ort Lane or Abbey Lane, part of a historic north-south trackway (including today's Redlands Road) leading to the Abbey. Watlington House is a grade II* listed building dating from 1688.

(Illustration: Plan of the Town of Reading 1861).

By the time of the 'Plan of the Town of Reading and Village of Caversham' (1861), Eldon Square and much of the west side of Eldon Road had been developed. Watlington Lane

(sic), St John's Street, St John's Hill, St John's Road and Eldon Place are in place but Prince's Street is absent. East of Eldon Road, the area of Eldon Street, Victoria Street and Montague Street has yet to be built up. Fourteen years later, the OS First Edition map (1875) shows the plan form of the conservation area to be very much as it is today.

Whilst the street pattern has not been altered, except for works to prevent vehicular access to certain side-streets, there has been a limited amount of rebuilding in the late 20th century, particularly along London Road and Kings Road.

5.0 Spatial analysis

5.1 Key views and vistas

The most prominent landmarks in the conservation area and surrounding locality are the spires of the Wesley Methodist Church (1872) and the Church of St John the Evangelist (1872), now known as the Polish Church of the Sacred Heart. Both churches have a presence in Watlington Street and the two spires, only a few hundred metres apart, are a positive feature of the conservation area and further afield. The spire of the Wesley Methodist Church, being located on the corner of Watlington Street and Queen's Road is more publicly known and recognized.

The Oval, no. 14 St John's Road, is a detached mid 19th century brick building. Old maps indicate that it was probably the focal point of a planned cruciform layout of streets which never came to pass. Today, The Oval sits incongruously in an area of modest terraced house but it looks directly down St John's Street and, similarly, to the south, it is directly aligned with Prince's Street. Trees in The Oval's rear garden soften the urban streetscene in the view northwards along Prince's Street. Looking southwards along Prince's Street, there is a fine, but off-centre, view of the façade of the Royal Berkshire Hospital, built in 1839.

Nos 163 to 189 Kings Road are set well back from the road. Because of a slight bend in the road and its unusual width, these large stone houses, elevated above semi-basements, are prominent in views along Queen's Road and Kings Road. Northward views along Eldon Road and Eldon Street are enhanced by a glimpse of the stone facades of no. 169 and no. 187/189 respectively.

5.2 The character of spaces within the area

The conservation area is a generally close-knit urban area with few areas of open space except for car parking and private rear gardens. The park in Eldon Square is the only formal public open space. It was part of a planned design of the 1840s and is enclosed with metal railings (listed grade II). Similar railings can be found in Eldon Road and enclosing The Oval in St John's Road. The park, known as King George V Gardens, is a traditional style urban town garden with mown grass, formal ornamental flower and shrub beds. Mature trees including red oak, yew cherry and cedar border the square. Unfortunately the ambience of the area is spoiled by the noise and pollution of traffic on London Road.

To the rear (south) of The Oval is an enclosed private garden separated by historic railings from an open public area paved with setts and containing a tree at the north end of Prince's Street. This public/private area adds to the spacious feeling of Prince's Street which, anyway, is an unusually wide urban street considering the modest terraces on either side.

Other notable private/public spaces are the forecourt of Watlington House, unfortunately used as a car park, and the wide verge of Kings Road. Nearly all of the conservation area's terraced houses have a small front 'garden' between building line and pavement. The main exception is nos 16-30 (even) and nos 13-21 (odd) St John's Hill which are built directly up to back-of-pavement line. More prestigious detached and semi-detached properties in Kings Road, Eldon Road and Eldon Square were built with large rear gardens but increasingly these are being lost to car parking. The private rear garden of Watlington House contains several trees and is a green oasis within this dense urban area.

6.0 Definition of the special interest of the conservation area

6.1 Definition of character areas

The conservation area can be divided into 3 character areas according to building type and period. Area 1 contains large prestigious stone residences including Eldon Square whilst Areas 2 and 3 contain humble brick terraces. Areas 2 and 3 have many similarities but the terraces east of Eldon Road are more uniform, smaller in scale and of a slightly later date than the terraced development west of Eldon Road. The three character areas are as follows:

- Area 1: Kings Road, Eldon Road and Eldon Square;
- Area 2: Terraced streets west of Eldon Road i.e. Watlington Street, St John's Street, St John's Road, St John's Hill, Prince's Street, Eldon Place, Queen's Road (south);
- Area 3: Terraced streets east of Eldon Road i.e. Eldon Terrace, Eldon Street, Victoria Street, Montague Street, Town End.

Area 1: Kings Road, Eldon Road and Eldon Square

This area contains the majority of the conservation area's listed buildings and is characterised by tall detached or semi-detached residences faced with Bath stone and set back from the highway with long rear gardens. Many of these former houses have been converted to flats, offices or professional uses. Nos. 163 to 189 Kings Road form an almost continuous row of buildings of architectural interest enriched by large stone porticos, rusticated ground floors and pairs of full height bows. They rise to three storeys with basement and are approached up a flight of stone steps. Eldon Square is a formally planned composition (c1840) of houses around three sides of a park, unique in Reading. A row of 19th century buildings lies on the west side of Eldon Road, nearly all are listed and date from the same period as Eldon Square, but nos 20/22 and 24/26 do not appear on a map of 1879. The east side of Eldon Road is less intensively developed and contains a large brick pair (nos 1/3) and a large stucco pair (nos 11/13) on either side of a c1900 row of three terraced houses built in Bath stone.

Character Area 1: Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- The high concentration of listed buildings;
- The architectural cohesion of prestigious mid 19th century residential development;
- The formal planning of Eldon Square;
- King George V Gardens and railings in Eldon Square;
- Grandeur of nos 163 -189 Kings Road;
- Good quality townscape;
- Prevalent use of local stone;
- Areas of historic stone paving and kerbs/gutters in Eldon Square;
- The green open space of King George V Gardens bordered by mature trees.

Character Area 1: Features that have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Loss of 19th century buildings that stood on the site of present day no. 36 Eldon Road and nos 75-77 London Road;
- Intrusive traffic noise spoils the ambience of the park in Eldon Square;
- Poor quality paving around Eldon Square;
- Insensitive alterations to listed buildings e.g. garage door in basement of no. 2 Eldon Road;
- Continual disturbance, noise and pollution of traffic;
- Modern developments on south side of Kings Road;
- No. 36 Eldon Road, in a prominent corner location, is out of character with the prevalent architectural cohesion of Eldon Road and Eldon Square;
- Loss of rear gardens to parking and garages;
- Loss of original front boundary walls and railings.

Area 2: Terraced streets west of Eldon Road i.e. Watlington Street, St John's Street, St John's Road, St John's Hill, Prince's Street, Eldon Place, Queen's Road (south)

This character area is predominantly residential with some houses in multiple occupation. There are five shops (two currently empty, October 2005), two places of worship and three public houses. A petrol station and shop serves London Road at the south end of Watlington Street. The Oval, a detached building located in the centre of the linear street pattern, is the focal point of St John's Street.

Watlington Street is the primary street within this character area with larger scale development than can be found in the adjacent streets to the east. Its street frontage of short rows of two- and three-storey houses is punctuated by two significant places of worship and Watlington House, a 17th century clothier's mansion, now offices. The southern end of Watlington Street is flanked by nos 71/73 London Road, a grade II listed 3 storey stucco house, and a single storey modern petrol station and shop. The west side of the street

contains short rows of predominantly three-storeys, for instance nos 60-68 and nos 74-78. Both are brick, the latter has stucco window and door surrounds.

The other side-streets in this area are narrower and have a more intimate feel than Watlington Street. Two storeys is the norm. St John's Street, St John's Road, St John's Hill, Prince's Street and Eldon Place are characterized by short rows of modest two-storey terraced housing, typical of working class housing built to accommodate Reading's expansion in the mid/late 19th century.

Character Area 2: Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Two grade II listed churches with landmark quality spires;
- Trees in front of Watlington House soften the urban landscape;
- Open space to rear of Watlington House is a valuable 'breathing space' within the town;
- Old brick and flint boundary wall (grade II) to curtilage of Watlington House (grade II*);
- Variety of terraced houses;
- 19th century street pattern typical of Reading;
- Vestiges of a mid 19th century planned formal layout around The Oval (grade II) and Prince's Street;
- Historic stone kerbs and gulleys;
- Areas of historic setts in Eldon Place and St John's Street;
- Historic lamp posts in Prince's Street;
- Lively roofscape of brick chimneys and clay pots.

Character Area 2: Features that have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Modern petrol station is completely out of character with the historic street;
- Litter and rubbish on the street and in front gardens is unsightly;
- Car parking in front of Watlington House detracts from the setting of the building;
- Loss of front gardens for car parking e.g. no 80 Watlington Street;
- Loss of original windows and front doors to modern replacements;
- Loss of original slate roofs and other architectural features such as gates, railings and boundary walls;
- Wheelie bins on pavement;
- Front boundary fence to The Oval is inappropriate to the quality of the listed building;
- Boarded up shop at 102 London Road;
- The addition of porches e.g. no. 19 St John's Street;
- Intrusive traffic noise from London Road and Queen's Road.

Area 3: Terraced streets east of Eldon Road i.e. Eldon Terrace, Eldon Street, Victoria Street, Montague Street, Town End.

Area 3 is primarily residential but also contains a shop and two public houses. Eldon Terrace, like Eldon Place, was built as a narrow service road to the rear of properties in Eldon Square but now provides access to four streets that run northwards onto Kings Road. Town End is a row of 9 houses with long front gardens that can only be reached by a footpath, an unusual 19th century backland development

Eldon Street, Victoria Street and Montague Street are three short streets with terraced houses on either side. They have small gardens to the front and larger gardens to the rear. The terraces do not extend as far as Kings Road because the area now occupied by modern housing and offices was formerly the site of terraced houses facing Kings Road of which only no. 220 (formerly Nelson Place) remains. The Kings Tavern public house and adjacent modern multi-storey block was the site of a brewery and inn.

Character Area 3: Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Rectilinear grid pattern of streets;
- 19th century brick terraced houses typical of Reading;
- Good quality brickwork;
- Flint wall on south side of Eldon Terrace;
- Historic stone kerbs.

Character Area 3: Features that have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Modern development along Queens' Road;
- Poor state of repair of no. 23 Eldon Terrace;
- Loss of original windows and front doors to modern replacements;
- Loss of original slate roofs and other architectural features such as iron gates and railings;
- Loss of front gardens;
- Unsightly concrete boundary walls.

6.2 Eldon Road Conservation Area: Activities/uses

Historically, the conservation area was developed as a residential area that contained various communal facilities such as church and Sunday school, shop, public houses, park and small scale industrial activity (e.g. the northern end of Montague Street and Victoria Street contained a brewery and there is evidence of a workshop at the north end of St John's street). The main working class source of employment would have been Huntley and Palmers.

Today, the area is still predominantly residential but some of the larger houses are now in multiple occupation or converted into, for instance, surgeries (e.g. no. 9 Eldon Square, no. 10 Eldon Road) or offices (e.g. Watlington House, nos 173-183 Kings Road). A few shops remain, notably two general stores, an upholstery shop and a sandwich bar. Within the conservation area there are two active places of worship (Wesley Methodist Church and the Polish Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart) and five public houses (The County Arms, The Lyndhurst, Eldon Arms, The Retreat, The Kings Tavern). There are purpose-built late 20th century office blocks in Kings Road and a small car cleaning business operating in Eldon Terrace.

Kings Road, Eldon Road and London Road are busy with traffic throughout the day. Away from these highways, traffic is discouraged by means of artificially created cul-de-sacs and blockages that prevent ‘rat-runs’. Noise and disturbance from vehicles is low in the internal terraced streets.

6.3 Eldon Road Conservation Area: Architectural and historic character

The Eldon Square Conservation Area contains, for the most part, 19th century housing built during a 40 year period between c1835-1875. Apart from individual building such as the two churches, Watlington House and The Oval, there are two distinctively different architectural styles within the conservation area: large detached and semi-detached stone houses for those working in the professions e.g. medical professionals working in the Royal Berkshire Hospital, and narrow-frontage brick terraced houses for those working in local factories, most likely Huntley and Palmers.

The large houses in Kings Road, Eldon Road and Eldon Square mostly date from the 1830s and 1840s and are built in the Classical style favoured in the first half of the 19th century. Several are listed.

Of the more humble brick terraces in the conservation area, the most typical are characterised by a narrow frontage with, at ground floor, a door within a round arched brick door surround and a single window beside. Above is a single matching window. A brick dentilled eaves course is common. Brick chimney stacks protrude through the slate roof well below the ridge with the effect that the lively roofscape created by a row of chimney stacks and red clay pots is highly visible from the street. The street frontages, though terraced, are not uniform and do not always follow a regular building line but are made up from short rows of differing design reflecting the piecemeal development of the area. Two storey is the norm but three are three storey terraces in Watlington Street and a fine row at nos 118-128 Queen’s Road.

6.4 Key unlisted buildings - Buildings of Townscape Merit

A large number of unlisted buildings have been noted on the Townscape Appraisal map as being “Buildings of Townscape Merit”.

Buildings identified as having “townscape merit” will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered 19th century 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. Any proposals for the demolition of a Building of Townscape Merit in the Eldon Square Conservation Area will need to be supported by a Justification Statement, similar to that required for the demolition of a listed building.

Of particular note are no. 3 Prince’s Street, a former Mission Hall and Reading Room, nos 118-128 Queen’s Road and nos 13-21 St John’s Hill.

6.5 Building methods, materials and local details

The principal building materials to be found in the conservation are Bath stone, local brick and slate. The conservation area’s prestigious buildings in Kings Road, Eldon Road and Eldon Square are faced with Bath stone possibly from the digging of Brunel’s Box tunnel as part of the Great Western Railway line from London to Bristol which reached Reading in 1840. Before the railway the stone would have been transported along the Kennet and Avon Canal which is only a short distance away. The smooth honey coloured ashlar stone, also to be found in the Royal Berkshire Hospital, is one of the defining characteristics of the core of Eldon Square 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 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. These provided the red bricks (red, grey or yellow) which are the most prevalent building material for the terraced houses in the Eldon Road Conservation Area. Red brick is by far the most common but there are a small number of buildings built with yellow (e.g. nos 52-54 Watlington Street) or grey (e.g. no. 102 Queen’s Road) bricks.

Two brickwork techniques are common in the area. The first is a decorative ‘chequerwork’ effect created by the use of grey, or burnt black, headers with red stretchers in the Flemish bond brickwork in which most of the houses are constructed. The prime examples of this are Watlington House and The Oval in St John’s Road but the same technique can be seen,

for instance, at nos. 29-41 (odd) Watlington Road, no. 1 Prince's Street and nos 16-28 (even) St John's Road.

Another decorative effect is created by a mix of brick colours. No. 17 St John's Street and no. 73 Watlington Street have grey brick frontages with red brick dressings to windows and doors, and red brick quoins. In St John's Hill, nos 13-21 (odd) form a short row with a similar pattern of grey and red brick which is carried on into the tall brick chimney stacks. The gable wall of no. 102 Queen's Road is built with grey brick whilst its frontage is red brick. A short row in Montague Street is built with grey brick and yellow brick dressings. The Wesley Methodist Church has restrained decoration with contrasting colours of brick but the technique stops well short of the riotous polychromatic brickwork seen elsewhere in Reading.

Stucco, a form of render, is not common but many brick buildings have, in the 20th century, been rendered, pebbledashed or painted – to the detriment of the conservation area's historic appearance.

Historically, slate was the prevalent roofing material, brought to the town first by canal but later by the railway. Nowadays, many slate roofs have been re-roofed with concrete tiles or artificial slate. The County Arms (dated 1936) has a clay tile roof but this is unusual. No. 27 Prince's Street has a slate roof with a 'fishscale' effect created by alternate use of straight and rounded slates.

6.6 Public realm: Floorscape, street lighting and street furniture

Although carriageway and pavements are paved in modern tarmac or concrete slabs, there are many examples of natural stone roadside kerbs and gutters which, like the brick chimney stacks and clay pots of the roofscape, add to the conservation area's special character and appearance. Watlington Street has long thin kerbstones with two lines of granite setts forming the gutter. In Eldon Place the kerb and gutter is formed by long wide granite stones. Paving and kerbstones in Eldon Square are concrete, to the detriment of the character of the area, but the gutter is formed by lengths of stone grooved with a wide channel to contain the flow of water. Eldon Place retains two areas of stone setts in the carriageway and there are further paved areas of setts outside The Retreat and a former workshop in St John's Street.

Street lighting in the area is almost exclusively modern and unremarkable. There are, however, a small number of historic fluted iron lamp posts in the conservation area; two are in Prince's Street, outside nos 10 and 47, another at no. 9 Town End, and others (some re-used) in Eldon Square.

6.7 Green spaces, trees and other natural elements

With the exception of King George V Gardens in Eldon Square and private gardens, there is little green space in the conservation area.

Trees are few and because of their scarcity they make a significant contribution to this urban conservation area's special character and sense of identity. Trees or tree groups in the following localities are of special note: the park in Eldon Square, Watlington House (especially beside Watlington Street), around The Oval, around nos 1/3 Eldon Road and roadside trees along London Road (north side) and Kings Road.

The most significant street and garden trees are marked on the Townscape Appraisal map. It has not been possible to identify every notable tree and lack of a specific reference does not imply that it must not be of value.

6.8 Historic associations

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), the French Decadent poet, lived as a French tutor at 165 Kings Road, from August to December 1874. While there he wrote most of 'Illuminations' generally considered his greatest work.

Henry Briant (1813-1884) and his brother Nathaniel Briant (1813-39) were local architects. Henry Briant was responsible for the Royal Berkshire Hospital, houses in Eldon Square (reputedly with his brother) and the ornate Italian Palazzo style town-centre bank in King Street. Nathaniel Briant (1813-39) was probably responsible for the layout of Reading Cemetery.

6.9 Local details and features

Eldon Square Conservation Area's local identity is enhanced by a number of small details and features that cumulatively help to give the conservation area a sense of place. The following are some of the small but not insignificant elements that contribute to the conservation area's special interest: cast-iron street name signs (e.g. Eldon Terrace, St John's Road, South Street), stone channels to help the run-off of rainwater (e.g. The Grove), remnants of historic railings (e.g. nos 50-52 Watlington Street), coal hole cover at no 66 Watlington Street, hand painted *Eldon Road* sign on no. 30 Eldon Road.

6.10 The extent of loss, intrusion or damage i.e. negative factors

Details of specific negative factors are given in the character area assessments. The following are the principal damaging factors:

Traffic noise and pollution

The core streets of the conservation area (Queen's Road, Kings Road, Eldon Road, London Road) are part of the principal traffic circulatory routes through Reading. As a result, the character and environmental quality of these streets are spoiled by noise and pollution.

Loss of original architectural details

Many of the unlisted, and some of the listed, buildings in the conservation have been adversely affected by the use of inappropriate modern materials or details. Common faults include:

- the replacement of original timber sash windows with uPVC or aluminium;
- the loss of original panelled front doors and their replacement with stained hardwood, uPVC or aluminium doors;
- loss of chimney stacks and clay pots;
- the replacement of stone slate or Welsh slate roofs with concrete tiles;
- loss of front boundary walls.

Street clutter

Historic streetscape and local distinctiveness is under threat from the needs of traffic management and public amenity bodies.

6.11 General condition of the area

The general condition of properties in the conservation area is good with only one building, no 23 Eldon Place, in a notably poor state of repair. No. 102 Queen's Road is boarded up. Empty properties may fall into disrepair unless a new and viable use is found. The Oval appears to need of remedial works.

6.12 Problems and pressures

In addition to the problems of traffic and the loss of architectural detail noted above, street parking is an issue in the area and may lead to an increase in pressure for off-street parking, particularly in Watlington Street.

7.0 Areas for further work

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

It is recommended that consideration be given to the inclusion of no. 84 Queen's Road within the conservation area.

No. 84 Queen's Road dates from c 1900. It is a two storey brick building with bands of contrasting white brick, Welsh slate roof, brick stacks with clay pots. The east door (facing the Wesley Methodist Church) is recessed within a porch with a pointed arch and a faintly ecclesiastical appearance. The building appears to have historic connections with the adjacent church and helps to mark the transition between the historic church and modern development further west along Queen's Road.

7.2 Opportunities for enhancement

Repair and maintenance of the railings around The Oval and the small public space at the north end of Prince's Street would improve the appearance of this part of the conservation area.

The concrete paving slabs in Eldon Square are not appropriate to the high quality environment of the historic buildings and formal square. Repaving with natural stone would be a definite enhancement, perhaps aided by outside funding such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The conservation area contains a number of streets paved with stone setts or flags, which must be protected. This appraisal has identified the most important examples of these surfaces and they should be protected and repaired as necessary, using traditional techniques and materials.

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 conservation 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 - Bibliography

<i>The Story of Reading</i>	Daphne Philips, Countryside Books, 1999
<i>Victoria County History</i>	Berkshire vol. III, 1972
<i>Reading Streets and Their Names</i>	Adam Sowan, Two Rivers, 2000
<i>Buildings of England – Berkshire</i>	N Pevsner, Penguin, 1988
<i>Reading History Trail</i>	website
<i>History of Reading</i>	Reading Borough Council website
<i>Royal Berkshire History</i>	www.berkshirehistory.com .

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 ITS 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.

POLICY CUD 8: EXISTING AND NEW CONSERVATION AREAS

THE COUNCIL REAFFIRMS ITS COMMITMENT TO THE BOROUGH'S EXISTING CONSERVATION AREAS AS LISTED IN APPENDIX 3 AND SHOWN ON PROPOSALS MAP AND WILL WHERE APPROPRIATE WILL REVIEW ITS EXISTING CONSERVATION AREAS AND DESIGNATE NEW CONSERVATION AREAS. WHERE SUCH AREAS ARE IDENTIFIED, THE COUNCIL WILL ALSO PROTECT OR WHERE APPROPRIATE ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENTS OF SUCH CONSERVATION AREAS.

POLICY CUD 9: OTHER MEASURES TO PROTECT BUILDINGS

THE BOROUGH COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO PROTECT BY APPROPRIATE MEASURES INDIVIDUAL BUILDINGS OR GROUPS OF BUILDINGS PARTICULARLY WORTHY OF PROTECTION TO PREVENT THEIR ALTERATION.

POLICY CEN 1: TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREAS

THE BOROUGH COUNCIL PROPOSES TO REVIEW AND EXTEND EXISTING TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREAS, AND WILL EXPECT DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS PRESERVING OR ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT AND CHARACTER OF THESE AREAS.

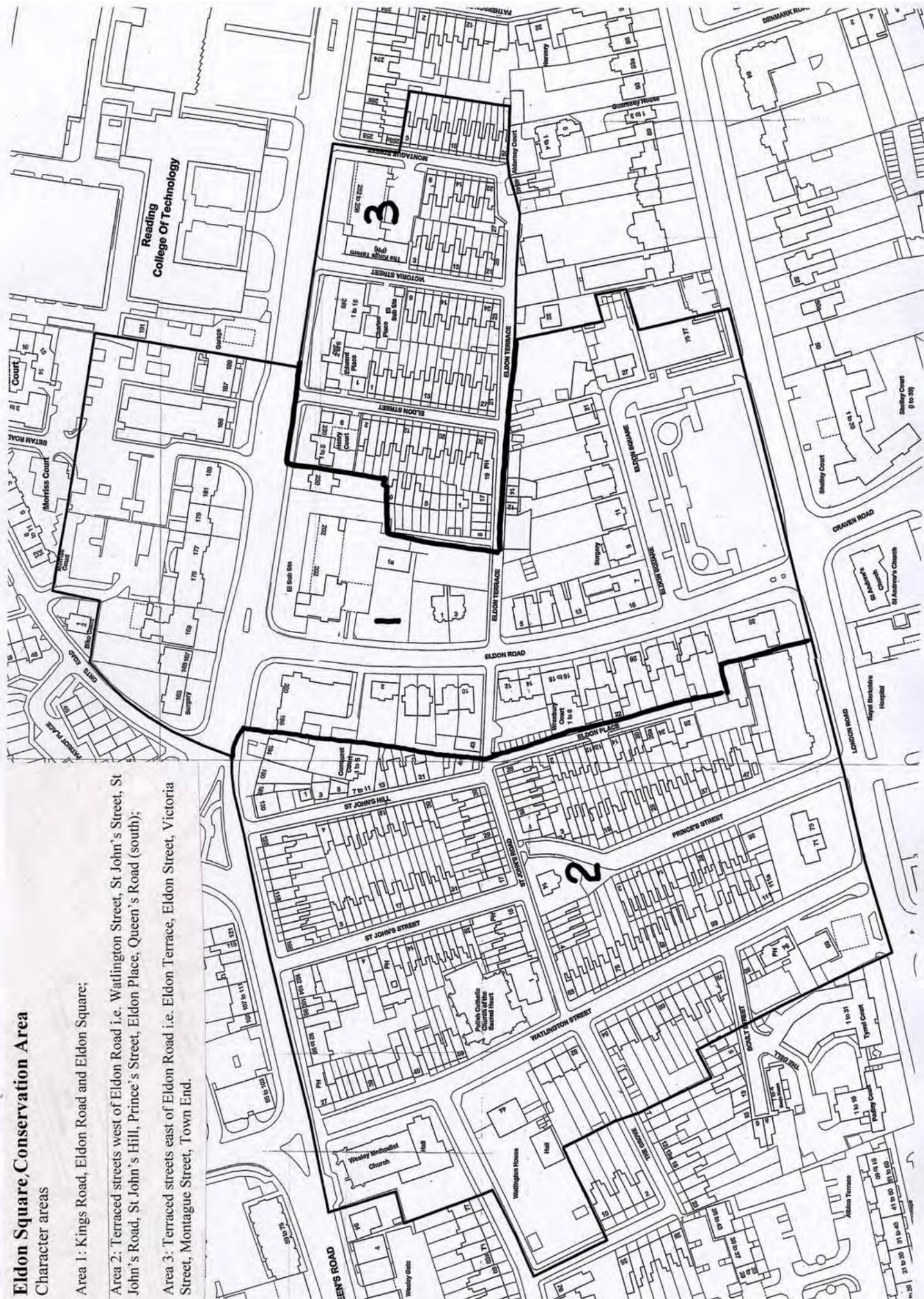
Eldon Square Conservation Area

Character areas

Area 1: Kings Road, Eldon Road and Eldon Square;

Area 2: Terraced streets west of Eldon Road i.e. Watlington Street, St John's Street, St John's Road, St John's Hill, Prince's Street, Eldon Place, Queen's Road (south);

Area 3: Terraced streets east of Eldon Road i.e. Eldon Terrace, Eldon Street, Victoria Street, Montague Street, Town End.



Eldon Square Conservation Area

Key to townscape appraisal map

-  Conservation area boundary
-  Proposed additions
-  Listed Buildings
-  Buildings of Townscape Merit
-  Important views
-  Important trees
-  Important tree groups
-  Focal buildings
-  Significant open space

Eldon Square Conservation Area

Possible Extension



Wesley Gate

Wilmington House

Hall

THE GROVE

BOULT STREET

Albion Terrace

1 to 16

1 to 31

Kennet and Avon Canal

Royal Court

KENNET STREET

85 to 103

105 107 to 111

92 to 98

102 104

100 98

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WATLINGTON STREET

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PATRIOT PLACE

ORTS ROAD

Biko Court

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Conquest Court

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Morris Court

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Wesley Gate

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