

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY HEAD OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS & LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	4 JULY 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	8
TITLE:	HIDDEN ABBEY PROJECT		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR HACKER	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE, HERITAGE & RECREATION
	COUNCILLOR PAGE		DEPUTY LEADER
SERVICE:	LEGAL	WARDS:	ABBEY
LEAD OFFICER:	JOHN PAINTER	TEL:	0118 9372797 / 72797
JOB TITLE:	PROJECT OFFICER LEGAL	E-MAIL:	John.painter@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Further to Minute 96 of Policy Committee on 11 April 2016, this report provides an update on the Hidden Abbey Project ('the Project') which was set up in 2015 to discover the extent and nature of the below-ground evidence of the Royal Abbey founded in Reading by King Henry I in 1121 and where he and other members of his family were buried. The Project is contemporary with, but not part of, the Borough Council's successful *Reading Abbey Revealed (RAR)* Project, which runs until 2020 and achieved the conservation and re-opening of both the Abbey Gateway and the Abbey Ruins in April / June 2018; and the future plans of the Ministry of Justice to dispose of Reading Gaol which was founded on part of the historic Abbey Quarter. It also anticipates the 900th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation, in 2021.
- 1.2 Reading Borough Council is coordinating the project, in tandem with the RC Diocese of Portsmouth and the Ministry of Justice, as the principal public landowners in the Abbey Quarter site, together with the Friends of Reading Abbey, Darlow Smithson Productions (DSP), and Philippa Langley (PL) of Little Marilyn Productions Ltd (LMPL). It is being taken forward by a Steering Group on which all of the above bodies are represented. Reading Borough Council is the lead partner and commissioning body for works associated with the project, and will procure, enter into, client and pay the contracts for associated works, although it will not itself provide any funding directly.
- 1.3 A plan showing the site covered by the Project is at **Attachment A**. The focus of the first phase of the Project is on the Abbey church. The land on which this was located is now owned by three landowners and their interests are as follows:

Owner	Site	Reference to Plan
Reading Borough Council (RBC)	Forbury Gardens Abbey Ruins	Site C Site D
RC Diocese of Portsmouth (DoP)	St James Church St James Presbytery Forbury Nursery	Sites A and J2
Ministry of Justice (MoJ)	Reading Gaol site	Site B1 and B2

- 1.4 The Project commissioned a Ground-Penetrating radar (GRP) survey of the above sites in the summer of 2016, funded by the RC Diocese of Portsmouth. This was undertaken by Stratascan SUMO. The survey identified some interesting anomalous features in all three sites, which the Steering Group consider to be worthy of further exploration, including by keyhole archaeology. The Steering Group has agreed a provisional exploration brief: this is at **Attachment B**.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the position be noted, the exploration brief (Attachment B) be endorsed, and the Steering Group's decision to hold discussions on next steps with the University of Reading Archaeology Department, as set out in para. 4.4, be welcomed.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 As mentioned above, the Project can be seen as complementing, and running in parallel with, the Reading Abbey Revealed Project which in 2015 was the subject of a successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid. This was reported to this Committee on 18 January 2016 (Minute 64 refers), and was the subject of a presentation to the Committee on 15 November 2017 (Minute 16 refers). The Reading Abbey Revealed Project is about the conservation of the Reading Abbey Ruins and Gateway, with an extensive interpretation and public activity programme across the Abbey Quarter. The Hidden Abbey Project is about the discovery and interpretation of the remains of the Abbey hidden below ground.
- 3.2 The Hidden Abbey Project was described in detail in a separate report to Policy Committee on 11 April 2016. This had attached the project brief (the 'Project Proposal'), which set out the (then) aim of the Project as being to use ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to locate the boundaries and extent of Reading Abbey in its current modern setting and to survey the site with a view to interpret better the Abbey Ruins and locating possible sites of archaeological interest for future investigation, with a particular interest in locating the burial site of Henry I and other burials within the Abbey complex. The Abbey Ruins have not been the subject of a comprehensive and recorded archaeological exercise for over 150 years.
- 3.3 The GPR analysis in 2016 was filmed by DSP for the purposes of producing a television documentary for Channel 4 Television. The Project Brief envisaged Channel 4 providing much of the funding, although to date this has not been the case. Philippa Langley of LMPL and DSP will have exclusive filming access to the works. This has been the subject of a separate access agreement between DSP (with LMPL) and the Borough Council and the RC Diocese of Portsmouth, as the owners of sites A, C and D. DSP have been holding separate discussions with the Ministry of Justice to gain filming access to the Reading Gaol Prison site, in particular the prison car park, which are ongoing.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Background:

- 4.1.1 The Committee will be aware of the national and international publicity generated in recent years by the discovery of Richard III's body in Leicester, and its subsequent re-burial in Leicester Cathedral. A driving force behind this project was Philippa Langley, of the Richard III Society. Early in 2014, after being approached by many residents of Reading wanting to discover more about their own royal history, Ms Langley made contact with the Council and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth to undertake

a similar project in Reading, to promote archaeological surveys of Reading Abbey, the burial place of King Henry I and Queen Adeliza. The land previously occupied by the Abbey Church is now owned by the Council (Forbury Garden and Abbey Ruins), the Diocese of Portsmouth (St James's church, presbytery and The Forbury Nursery School); and the Ministry of Justice (Reading Gaol).

4.1.2 A small project team was formed to discuss this proposal in January 2015. The then Mayor, Councillor Hacker, held a promotional meeting in the Mayor's Parlour, on 29 July 2015 which was attended by the Lord Lieutenant, together with the above-mentioned partners and representatives from Berkshire Archaeology, the University of Reading Archaeology Department, the Ministry of Justice (for Reading gaol), local businesses and other partner interests. The meeting was also attended and addressed by Ms Langley, and Emily Dalton from Darlow Smithson Productions (DSP). This meeting gave general support to the Hidden Abbey Project, and acknowledged the significant economic benefits that Leicester City had gained from the discovery of Richard III. It recognised that the project would have a cost of around £30,000, primarily to support the archaeology of the whole of the Abbey Church site. In all of the project discussions the Council has made clear its support for the project, both as community leader and landowner, but without the ability, in the current budget situation, to make a financial contribution.

4.1.3 Following this meeting, a more formal project structure and Steering Group was set up. The Steering Group held its first meeting on 21 September 2015, and has met on a monthly basis since then. The Steering Group is comprised of representatives of the following organisations:

Landowners

Reading Borough Council	Councillors Hacker and Page John Painter (Project Officer) Vic Nickless (Communications) Andrew Wood (Secretary)
Diocese of Portsmouth	Rev. Dr. Stephen Morgan Father John O'Shea (St James church)
Ministry of Justice	John and Lindsay Mullaney (local historians) Caroline Harper: Emma Thorpe (JLL)

Partners

Friends of Reading Abbey	Peter Durrant (Chairman)
Friends of Reading Museum	Richard Stainthorp
Darlow Smithson Productions	Emily Dalton, Charlotte Nicholls
Little Marilyn Productions Ltd	Philippa Langley MBE

Advisors

Matthew Williams	Reading Museum / Reading Abbey Revealed
Fiona MacDonald	Berkshire Archaeology
Reading University Archaeology	

4.1.4 The Steering Group has been chaired by Richard Stainthorp. John Painter acts as Project Officer. Andrew Wood (Councillor Services) supports the Steering Group. Vic Nickless provides communication advice.

4.1.6 In developing the specification for the GPR works, in 2016, the Steering Group was advised by Berkshire Archaeology, Historic England, and the University of Reading Archaeology Department. The survey was the subject of a licence granted by Historic

England, under Section 42 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, to commission the GPR survey.

- 4.1.7 The Abbey is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. This statutory listing covers all of the sites that are subject of the Project. Any penetrative archaeology on any of the sites will therefore require the prior consent of the Secretary of State, advised by Historic England.

4.2 Exploration Brief

- 4.2.1 As explained in Attachment B, the Steering Group has identified three primary areas for further study and exploration based on the Stratascan GPR survey, cross-referred to the desk-top survey of buried archaeology undertaken by Purcell for the Ministry of Justice in 2014, and other historic, academic and research sources, as follows:

1) Forbury Gardens

(Areas C1 and 2 - Forbury Gardens - Reading Borough Council)

The GPR surveys show two interesting anomalous features running east-west towards the western end of the nave of the Abbey Church, roughly parallel to each other, in the south-eastern corner of the Forbury Gardens (to the east of the Henry I memorial). Both are unexpected and unexplained, and possibly could relate to an earlier structure on the site. If they are connected to the Abbey church, possible explanations are that they are part of a narthex or Galilee Chapel at the western end of the church.

The location and structure of the west end of the church are not known, and the GPR surveys did not add to our knowledge.

The GPR surveys also did not identify any features which might be equated with the great ditch that was dug across the nave as part of the Reading civil war defences.

The HAP Steering Group has proposed opening two trenches in Area C:

(1) Forbury Gardens - south-eastern corner (east of Henry I monument)

- To explore the two analogous GPR features in the nave of the Abbey church
- To discover any trace of the Civil War great ditch (including C17th infill).

(2) Forbury Gardens - south-eastern corner (west of Henry I monument)

- To explore the west end of the Abbey church, to confirm its location and to gain a better understanding of its construction, including whether it may have had towers at the west end

2) Abbey Church Crossing and North Transept

(Area A - St James Precinct - RC Diocese of Portsmouth)

The GPR surveys show interesting anomalous features running north-south across the crossing of the Abbey church, in front (to the west) of The Forbury nursery

school, which are unexplained, but could be evidence of a pulpitum or rood screen.

The area adjoins Area B (Reading Gaol) where the 1970 excavations by Cecil Slade (University of Reading) uncovered the footings of the east end of the original chancel of the 1121 Abbey and also revealed possible pre-Abbey footings. The evidence of the ambulatory wall lies at the boundary between the areas A and B1 (the nursery school and prison) and if such footings exist they would extend under both sites.

The HAP Steering Group has proposed opening up trenches in the following parts of Area A:

(1) Forbury Gardens Day Nursery front (western) playground

- To explore the north-south features in the crossing and the possible evidence of a pulpitum or rood screen

(2) Forbury Gardens Day Nursery rear (eastern) playground

- To explore the northern ambulatory wall to the west of the site excavated by Slade in the 1970s
- To continue and affirm the Slade survey
- To gain a better understanding both of the original Romanesque church and of pre-Abbey footings and of Saxon-Norman Reading.

**3) Eastern End of Chancel and Ambulatory
(Area B - Reading Gaol - Ministry of Justice)**

The GPR surveys showed good evidence of underground structures for both the northern ambulatory and western end of the chancel, and possible grave pits, in the Reading gaol car park (area B1). This includes the area where Slade excavated in the early 1970s, and discovered evidence of two apsidal side chapels off the northern ambulatory.

The Project objectives for this site are set out in the Project Brief as follows:

- to map where possible the location of the eastern structures of the Abbey Church, specifically the Choir, Apse, High Altar (possible location of royal burials) and Lady Chapel (dating from 1314)
- to ascertain whether southern projecting chapels of the apse existed, matching the two found to the north in the 1970s
- to reveal the footings of the Lady Chapel and its connection with the apsidal east end of the original Romanesque church in 1314

King Henry I was buried in front of the high altar, and establishing the location of the high altar will assist understanding of where this and other royal burials in the Abbey may have taken place; what form the tomb monuments may have taken, including whether there were burial vaults; and how the tombs may have been treated following the dissolution of the Abbey in 1539 and the subsequent physical destruction of the High Altar and Choir from 1549 onwards.

There are some unsolved problems concerning the alignment of the Abbey and the Lady Chapel.

- 4.2.2 The Hidden Abbey Project Steering Group has not, at this stage, agreed to any further exploratory archaeology of the Reading Gaol car park (area B1). However, it is aware that the Ministry of Justice, in the autumn of 2016, engaged the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) Service to excavate trenches the Prison site in advance of its disposal, two of which were in this area, and the Steering Group has made clear to the Ministry of Justice, a partner member, its interest in seeing the results of the MOLA excavations across the whole site, and specifically in the prison car park (Area B).

4.3 Historic England Pre-Application Advice

- 4.3.1 The provisional exploration brief, attached at Attachment B, has been shared with the South-East team of Historic England (HE). This is because the works will be taking place within the Abbey precinct, a scheduled ancient monument, and will therefore require an application for Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) from the Secretary of State.

- 4.3.2 The HE have offered pre-application advice, which is summarised as follows:

1) Process

Any proposal for research excavation on a scheduled monument has to pass quite a high test before HE could recommend scheduled monument consent be granted by the Secretary of State. The relevant wording from the 2013 DCMS policy document is as follows:

18. In determining if requests for SMC should be granted (conditionally or unconditionally) or refused the Secretary of State gives great weight to the conservation of Scheduled Monuments.
19. In cases where works involving harm to, or loss of, the significance of a Scheduled Monument are proposed for research-related purposes, the Secretary of State has particular regard to whether:
- preservation of the monument *in situ* is reasonably practicable;
 - it is demonstrated both that the potential increase in knowledge and understanding of our past cannot be achieved using non-destructive techniques, and that it is unlikely to be achieved with less harm or loss at another place; and
 - the potential increase in knowledge and understanding is predicted to decisively outweigh the harm or loss.

HE will require submission of a full **research design** for the project that addresses these three criteria as well as demonstrating how:

- the project design seeks to further the objectives of relevant international or national research frameworks;
- use is made of appropriately skilled teams with the resources to fully implement the project design to relevant professional standards (such as those published by the [Chartered] Institute for Archaeologists);
- the project design provides for the full analysis, publication and dissemination of the results, including the deposition of reports in the relevant Historic Environment Record (HER) to a set timetable; and

- provision is made in the project design for the conservation and deposition of the site archive with a local museum or other public depository willing to receive it.

It may also be appropriate to require the conservation of any elements of the monument left exposed following the completion of consented works (DCMS policy statement, paragraph 21)

Completion of a research design does not guarantee scheduled monument consent. All cases are considered on their merits in relation to the information given above.

2) Desk-Based Assessment (DBA)

Having considered the GPRs report, HE advise that the starting point for the development of a research design should be a detailed **desk-based assessment (DBA)**. This should include:

- a full historic map regression exercise
- research and analysis of data from the Heritage Environment Record
- old photographs; and research and analysis of data from any other archives which may hold relevant material (eg Reading Borough Museum)
- consideration of previous research and archaeological work, including that carried out before the major restoration project on Forbury Gardens in 2004.

With regard to the anomalies in the Forbury Gardens, the gardens have a complex history, particularly with regard to different phases of landscaping and garden features. Desk-based assessment work is necessary to interrogate and interpret the geophysics results.

A DBA would also assist the interpretation of some features as possible graves, in an area where historic mapping clearly shows that a later prison tower was constructed.

3) Future Work

The DBA will inform the preparation of a research design for future work, and excavation work or whether any further non-intrusive investigation would be helpful, such as the use of different geophysics techniques.

Regarding excavation, HE have advised not to underestimate the technical difficulty that would arise from working in deep, complex archaeological stratigraphy in areas where space is limited. This could potentially limit what could be achieved in research terms.

4.4 Next Steps

4.4.1 The Steering Group, on 15 March and 17 May 2018, considered its position in the light of the HE pre-application advice. The Steering Group has also sought specialist advice on the project's next steps from Fiona McDonald, the Principal Archaeologist in the Berkshire Archaeological Service, who advised that HAP should develop its proposals by starting small and then testing the thinking behind them with qualified archaeologists (whose advice would be needed in order to compile a professional desktop survey and design brief) before moving on.

4.4.2 The Steering Group therefore has initiated discussions with the University of Reading Archaeology Department to support the production of a research design and desk-based assessment, to inform a future application for Scheduled Monument consent. In particular this will involve sharing the site's GPR survey results, and requesting guidance and advice on:

- developing the project’s excavation brief and research design
 - developing the project’s desk-top survey
 - what features might usefully be the subject of excavation, and the form that excavation might take.
- 4.4.3 In doing this, it is recognised that the exclusive status of the filming rights (PL & LMPL for DSP) and the name of the project (HAP) are already in place, and this will be made clear to any new partner joining the project.
- 4.4.4 The Project has had a helpful response from the Archaeology Department which has suggested various approaches that could be taken to move the Project forward. This was discussed by the Steering Group on 21 June 2017, which will be seeking a meeting with the Department to discuss the approaches and funding options.
- 4.4.5 If no or inadequate funding is not forthcoming, the Project will not proceed.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The Hidden Abbey Project has the potential to contribute directly to the following corporate priorities:
2. Providing the best life through education, early help and healthy living
 5. Providing infrastructure to support the economy;
- 5.2 The Project may also contribute to:
- Reading’s Cultural & Heritage Strategy 2015-2030;
- 5.3 In this connection, analysis done by Leicester City Council on the Richard III effect has shown that this brought almost £60M into Leicester’s economy, with 600,000 additional visitors coming to the city a result of the telling of its historic story, and more than 1,000 full time equivalent jobs created in the city.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The Hidden Abbey project is being taken forward in partnership with local interests, as indicated above. It has also engaged with the Reading Community Interest Company (CIC), the Reading town centre Business Improvement District (BID). Local businesses, in particular those based in the Abbey Quarter, will be the principal beneficiaries of any economic benefits that might accrue from the national profile to be given to the project, and in particular the discovery of Henry I’s burial place.
- 6.2 The Friends of Reading Abbey and Friends of Reading Museum are represented on the Steering Group.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 In this regard you **must** consider whether the decision will or could have a differential impact on: racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief.
- 7.3 It is not considered that an Equality Impact Assessment is necessary for this project.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council's involvement in the Hidden Abbey project, and its project support, will be under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 (the power of general competence).
- 8.2 'Reading Abbey: a Cluniac and Benedictine monastery and Civil War earthwork' is listed as a scheduled monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as amended as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance. List entry Number: 1007932. Any proposal for research excavation on a scheduled monument requires scheduled monument consent, granted by the Secretary of State on the advice of Historic England.
- 8.3 Any future research excavation will be tendered and the contract awarded by the Council, on behalf of the Project and the landowner partners, in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. The contract will permit the successful contractor to go onto the sites specified in the contract to undertake the excavation. Individual landowners may require further access agreements in respect of specific local circumstances.
- 8.4 The Council, the RC Diocese of Portsmouth, and Darlow Smithson Productions (DSP) have entered into an access agreement which grants DSP exclusive filming access to the Project and any documentation, data, reports, film and photographs produced in connection with the Project to the exclusion of any competing television programmes. The agreement also recognises that the Council, as the lead party and commissioning body for the Project, will be required to put the project archive and summary report for any work for the Project commissioned under licence from Historic England into the public domain.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The indicative cost of HAP, as suggested by LMPL to the promotional meeting in the Mayor's Parlour on 29 July 2015, was £30,000 (see para. 4.1.2 above).
- 9.2 The cost of undertaking stage 1 - the GPR analysis - in 2016 was £7,000. This was funded by the RC Diocese of Portsmouth.
- 9.3 The Steering Group has still to determine how to fund the production of a research design and desk-top assessment to support the application for Scheduled Monument consent; any subsequent excavation works; and the analysis, dissemination and preparation and deposition of the site archive with Reading Museum, should the application be successful. The assumption to date has been that Channel 4 would fund £10,000 of the excavation works insofar as they were to lead to the production of a television film that it could sell on.
- 9.4 The Council will not be committing any new funds to this project. The Council's support will be "in kind", using existing staffing and resources as set out in para. 4 above.

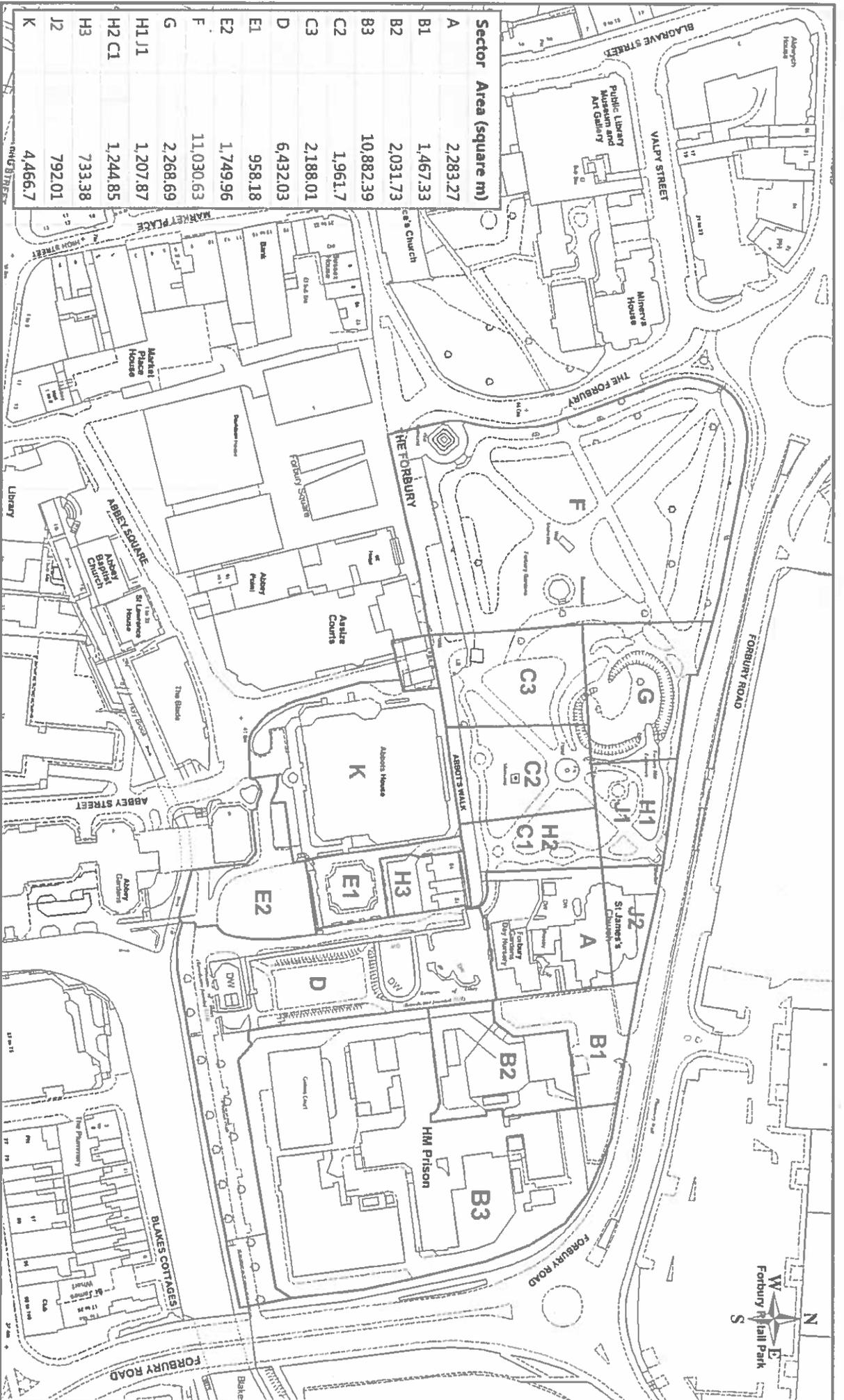
9.5 The project will not go ahead if external funding is not forthcoming.

10. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Project Proposal (attached at Appendix A to report to Policy Committee in 11 April 2016)

GPR Survey results - August 2016

Letter from Historic England offering pre-application advice, 16 February 2018



Title: Reading Abbey Plan

Produced by GIS & Mapping Services

Date: 14/03/2016 Scale at A4: 1:2000

Ref: 7223 - G:\Mapping\Data\Client datasets\Education & Community\Museum\Reading Abbey Plan\Abbey.OSMM.wor

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HIDDEN ABBEY PROJECT

PROPOSED AREAS FOR STUDY AND EXPLORATION

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Abbey quarter is potentially one of the richest areas in Reading as a source for discovering not just the history of the town but also its relevance to the historical development of the Thames Valley. There is plentiful evidence of continual human settlement from the Stone Age, Belgic Iron-Age and the Romano-British era through to, and including, the Saxon period. This was followed by the Norman occupation and the founding of the Abbey in 1121.
- 1.2 Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) analysis and specifically targeted archaeological investigation will help to reveal more about the true extent and nature of the Abbey Church. Furthermore, because of the rich history of the area, it will enhance our understanding of the different periods of human settlement in Reading, and so add to our knowledge of the history of the Thames Valley. These key investigations would, therefore, contribute to our appreciation of the role Reading played in the wider national context.
- 1.3 It should be noted that evidence of Saxon habitation was uncovered during the 1970s excavations. This is potentially of considerable archaeological and historical importance as it would indicate a significant Saxon presence in the east of Reading. There is a body of opinion that places the main Saxon settlement to the west of the town, around St Mary's Minster. However, several late 20th century excavations produced a considerable amount of archaeological evidence for Saxon habitation to the east, in the area which today we call the Abbey Quarter, but very little to the west.
- 1.4 In 2016, the first phase of the Hidden Abbey Project (HAP) was completed with the GPR survey of the Abbey Church and its environs. Its findings have identified key anomalous features that, with consent and permissions forthcoming, the Project now wishes to investigate further using clearly defined and targeted key-hole and trial trench investigation.

2. The Hidden Abbey Project

- 2.1 The Hidden Abbey Project (HAP) has been set up to discover the extent and nature of the below-ground evidence of the Royal Abbey founded in Reading by King Henry I in 1121 and where he and other members of his family were buried.
- 2.2 The first phase of the project was to use ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to locate the boundaries and extent of Reading Abbey Church in its current modern setting and to survey the site with a view to interpret better the Abbey Ruins and locate possible sites of archaeological interest for future investigation, with a particular interest in locating the burial site of Henry I and other royal burials within the Abbey complex.
- 2.3 In the summer of 2016, HAP commissioned Stratascan Sumo to undertake a GPR survey of the Abbey, covering sites in the ownership of Reading Borough Council (Forbury Gardens), the RC Diocese of Portsmouth (St James church and precinct), and the Ministry of Justice (Reading gaol car park). The Stratascan report is included at **Attachment A**.

- 2.4 The Hidden Abbey Project Steering Group has identified three primary areas for further study and excavation based on the Stratascan GPR survey, cross-referred to the Purcell desk-top survey of buried archaeology undertaken for the Ministry of Justice in 2014, and other historic, academic and research sources, as follows:

4) Forbury Gardens

(Areas C1 and 2 - Forbury Gardens - Reading Borough Council)

The GPR surveys show two interesting anomalous features running east-west towards the western end of the nave of the Abbey Church, roughly parallel to each other, in the south-eastern corner of the Forbury Gardens (to the east of the Henry I memorial). The southern feature has an arm running south at a 90 degree angle at its western end. The northern feature has evidence of an apsidal curve inwards at its eastern end. Neither feature aligns directly to the Englefield plan of the Abbey church: the northern feature runs north of the projected north wall of the Abbey church; the southern feature runs under the centre of the nave. Both are unexpected and unexplained, and possibly could relate to an earlier structure on the site. If they are connected to the Abbey church, possible explanations are that they are part of a narthex or Galilee Chapel at the western end of the church.

The Englefield map does not show the western end of the Abbey church. Hurry, based on Englefield and Coates, projected a length for the nave of 200 feet (12 bays) but there is no archaeological evidence to confirm this. The location and structure of the west end of the church are not known, and the GPR surveys did not add to our knowledge.

The GPR surveys also did not identify any features which might be equated with the great ditch that was dug across the nave as part of the Reading civil war defences.

The HAP Steering Group has proposed opening two trenches in Area F:

(3) Forbury Gardens - south-eastern corner (east of Henry I monument)

- To explore the two analogous GPR features in the nave of the Abbey church
- To discover any trace of the Civil War great ditch (including C17th infill).

(4) Forbury Gardens - south-eastern corner (west of Henry I monument)

- To explore the west end of the Abbey church as projected by Englefield, to confirm its location and to gain a better understanding of its construction, including whether it may have had towers at either end

5) Abbey Church Crossing and North Transept

(Area A - St James Precinct - RC Diocese of Portsmouth)

The GPR surveys show good evidence of the northern Choir ambulatory wall to the rear (east) of the Presbytery, and of and the southern Chancel wall to the rear (east) of the nursery school. They also show interesting anomalous features running north-south across the crossing of the Abbey church, in front (to the west)

of the nursery school, which are unexplained, but could be evidence of a pulpitum or rood screen.

The Reading Abbey Stone was discovered in Area A by Wheble in the 1830s, carefully buried in front of the High Altar at an unknown date. This is the only carved stone of its size to have been discovered in the Ruins. In 1840 it was converted into the baptismal font now standing in St. James' church.

To the north, there are some standing remains and the footings of the more southerly of the apsidal chapels of the north transept in one of the school playgrounds and in the presbytery garden. It may be possible to discover a second northerly chapel and possibly the projecting apsidal chapels attached to this which were a feature of Cluniac monastic design. The transept may also cover the tombs of other dignitaries.

The area adjoins Area B (Reading Gaol) where the 1970 Slade excavations uncovered the footings of the east end of the original chancel of the 1121 Abbey and also revealed possible pre-Abbey footings. The evidence of the ambulatory wall lies at the boundary between the areas A and B1 (the nursery school and prison) and if such footings exist they would extend under both sites.

The HAP Steering Group has proposed opening up trenches in the following parts of Area A:

(3) Forbury Gardens Day Nursery front (western) playground

- To explore the north-south features in the crossing and the possible evidence of a pulpitum or rood screen

(4) Forbury Gardens Day Nursery rear (eastern) playground

- To explore the northern ambulatory wall to the west of the site excavated by Slade in the 1700s
- To continue and affirm the Slade survey
- To gain a better understanding both of the original Romanesque church and of pre-Abbey footings and of Saxon-Norman Reading.

**6) Eastern End of Chancel and Ambulatory
(Area B - Reading Gaol - Ministry of Justice)**

The GPR surveys show good evidence of underground structures for both the northern ambulatory and western end of the chancel, and possible grave pits, in the Reading gaol car park (area B1). This includes the area where Slade excavated in the early 1970s, and discovered evidence of two apsidal side chapels off the northern ambulatory.

The pre-application advice from Historic England (February 2018) advised that the interpretation of some features as possible graves, in an area where historic mapping shows that a later prison tower was constructed, is a good example to support a desk-based assessment, which the Project undertook in March 2018¹.

¹ *The GPRE Findings in the Apse of Reading Abbey Church* – John Mullaney, March 2018

The Project objectives for this site are set out in the Project Brief as follows:

- to map where possible the location of the eastern structures of the Abbey Church, specifically the Choir, Apse, High Altar (possible location of royal burials) and Lady Chapel (dating from 1314)
- to ascertain whether southern projecting chapels of the apse existed, matching the two found to the north in the 1970s
- to reveal the footings of the Lady Chapel and its connection with the apsidal east end of the original Romanesque church in 1314

King Henry I was buried in front of the high altar (Gervase of Canterbury). Therefore establishing the location of graves may assist understanding of where the High Altar may have been located, and where royal burials in the Abbey may have taken place; what form the tomb monuments may have taken, including whether there were burial vaults; and how the tombs may have been treated following the dissolution of the Abbey in 1539 and the subsequent physical destruction of the High Altar and Choir from 1549 onwards.

There are some unsolved problems concerning the alignment of the Abbey and the Lady Chapel. The drawings of the footings for the Chapel's north wall given by Englefield (1779) and by Englefield/Coates (1802), together with evidence from an 18th century illustration of a wall that may be that of the Lady Chapel, are not in line with the pillar bases for the nave and do not match the foundations, as marked on the Englefield plan, for the supposed south wall of the Chapel.

The Hidden Abbey Project Steering Group has not, at this stage, agreed to any further exploratory archaeology of the Reading Gaol car park (area B1). However, it is aware that the Ministry of Justice, in the autumn of 2016, engaged the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) Service to excavate trenches the Prison site in advance of its disposal, two of which were in this area, and the Steering Group has made clear to the Ministry of Justice, a partner member, its interest in seeing the results of the MOLA excavations across the whole site, and specifically in the prison car park (Area B).

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 This paper proposes the first comprehensive study of Reading Abbey Church, offering a unique research opportunity for this site of national, and potentially international, importance. Its aim is to answer specific research questions using clearly defined and targeted key-hole and trial trench investigative techniques.
- 3.2 Since the late eighteenth century, modern development work has offered tantalising windows into the structure of the Abbey Church, its architecture, religious life and associated burials, but archaeological investigation has been sporadic. As a result, many questions about the Abbey Church and its environs remain unanswered.
- 3.3 Reading Abbey offers a unique study into Anglo-Norman Romanesque architecture and building techniques. Examination of the existing Abbey Quarter and historic records suggests that, unlike other significant religious foundations from this period, Reading remained largely untouched by later additional medieval building work. The only recorded extension of the Abbey Church is the construction of the Lady Chapel at its far eastern boundary in the early fourteenth century (1314). Further research may, however, prove this incorrect and this is an important part of the project.

- 3.4 The GPR survey has facilitated the mapping of the layout and structure of an almost untouched early 12th century Cluniac abbey church with significant foundations and footings; possibly also including pre-Norman architectural remains. It has also suggested what might be an important example in the UK of a narthex or Galilee Chapel, at its western end. Here too we may also be able to confirm the nature and extent of the nave itself including the presence of towers, in relation to its various contemporary images. Centrally we may now be able to uncover the potential location of the abbey's pulpitum or rood screen and explore the northern ambulatory wall to uncover more about the abbey's life as a place of significant medieval pilgrimage. In the east, we can map the key structures for which the monastery was built, including the locations of its royal burials in order to potentially reach a significant conclusion about the destruction of royal burials after the Dissolution of the Monasteries; and to better understand the layout and alignment of the Lady Chapel with particular reference to the pillar bases at the nave.
- 3.5 With this new investigative analysis, and prospect of so many key research questions answered, it is hoped to create an authentic virtual representation of Reading Abbey Church, and monastery. The proposed documentary, to be produced by award-winning Darlow Smithson Productions, would offer a platform to present the Abbey Church in 3D graphics and historical walk-through to the public and wider communities for the very first time; and could link to Reading Abbey Revealed, the current major conservation exercise of the Reading Abbey Ruins, part-financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund and actively supported by Historic England to move the Ruins out of its buildings-at-risk list.
- 3.6 As a result, the investigation offers a unique opportunity that may finally help answer many of our key research questions that have long intrigued historians, archaeologists and researchers alike. It is also possible that it may change much of what we know about Reading.
- 3.7 And by placing Reading's historical story centre-stage it will also allow this vibrant commercial hub to bring its story to life and offer it a new future as a historic royal town. The below-ground investigations on behalf of the Hidden Abbey Project have the potential to raise awareness on a national (and international) platform, and to help enhance the profile of a key Thames Valley town.

JGP
V5 - 19 March 2018