



Progress Update and Achievements
Year to 31 December 2023

1. SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

1.1 Reading CAAC continues to progress its primary objective of updating the appraisals for Reading's conservation areas. Progress this year has unfortunately been slower than we would have liked. Christchurch Conservation Area appraisal review was delivered to Reading Borough Council (RBC) planning officers for consideration and formal stages of the adoption process in August.

1.2 Consideration of planning applications that have heritage impact also represents a significant part of our role in the conservation and enhancement of Reading's heritage. We commented on planning applications/listed building consents/advertising consents for 24 (2022 – 24) buildings or sites.

1.3 Reading's High Streets Heritage Action Zone project (HSHAZ) is now approaching its conclusion. The programme continues until 31 March 2024 and it has been good to see some of the physical and public realm improvements coming to fruition.

1.4 We submitted three (2022 – five) nominations for additions to Reading's [List of Locally Important Buildings](#) one of which (The Restoration public house) was added to the local list at the end of the year. We supported the nomination of Reading Bridge by Caversham and District Residents' Association and it was added to the list in time for its 100 year anniversary on 3 October.

1.5 We met on three occasions during 2023. All our meetings are now held as hybrid meetings. Although most are ordinary business meetings we were very pleased to host speakers from Heritage Declares at our meeting in February.

1.6 In the Autumn we began a serious look at the future of CAAC, now seven years old, and ways in which our organisation could meet challenges in governance, membership numbers and skills and better reflects the diversity of Reading's residents.

1.7 We are grateful for the support that we receive from Reading Borough Council, the outgoing Conservation and Urban Design Officer and incoming Conservation Officer, planning and other officers in furthering our objectives.

2. CONSERVATION AREA (CA) APPRAISALS

2.1 The review of the Christchurch Conservation Area (CA) in south Reading was delivered to officers in August 2023. We expect that the appraisal document will go to the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee in March 2024 in advance of the start of the formal consultation public consultation process.

2.2 Work on the Eldon Square appraisal review continues slowly.

2.3 Reading has 15 CAs. Since the foundation of CAAC, updated appraisal reviews have been adopted by RBC for two: St Peter's and Russell Street/Castle Hill/Oxford Road. Significant work had begun on the two town centre appraisals, Market Place/London Street and St Mary's Butts/Castle Hill, but these were parked because of the Historic Area Appraisal, undertaken as part of the HSHAZ. Nine appraisal reviews have not started.

3. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

3.1 RBC planning department consult us on any planning applications within CAs or affecting listed buildings in the Borough. We also review the lists of planning applications for other proposals which are of interest. We are unable to comment on every proposal on which we are consulted and prioritise those that are of particular concern to our members or where we think we can make a difference.

3.2 The applications we commented on during 2021 and 2022 which remained undecided as at the time of writing last year's report as well as those we commented on during 2023 are listed below. Where the application is marked (*) we were supportive of the proposal. Applications marked (**) had some positive features but improvements were required which meant that we could not support it as it stood.

2021

- 201081 Dukesbridge House – disposed of 6 December 2023

2022

- 210537 Whitley Library (**) – withdrawn 18 April 2023
- 220409 & 220410 Caversham Park – undecided (new plans submitted during 2023)
- 220567 109b Oxford Road – (*) refused 30 March 2023
- 220922 71-73 Caversham Road (Drews) – granted subject to legal agreement 29 March 2023 planning applications committee
- 221232 1-15 Queen Victoria Street & 145-148 Friar Street (*) – GRANTED 24 May 2023
- 221235 138-144 Friar Street (*) – GRANTED 24 May 2023

2023

- 210639 Eaton Court - undecided
- 220933 35-39 Friar Street (updated plans) - undecided
- 221364 Central Club, London Street - granted subject to legal agreement 19 July 2023 planning applications committee
- 221393 81 Hamilton Road – withdrawn 21 April 2023
- 221806 & 221807 27-33 Christchurch Road – refused 5 January 2024
- 221857 20 Belle Vue Road – withdrawn 5 February 2023
- 221860 205 Oxford Road (advertisement consent) – consented 13 February 2023

- 221880 23-24 Market Place - granted subject to legal agreement 6 December 2023 planning applications committee
- 221916 & 221917 Oracle (redevelopment of Debenhams/Vue cinema blocks) - undecided
- 230014 & 230015 183a Oxford Road – granted & consented 17 March 2023
- 230075 & 230076 32 St Mary’s Butts (**) – granted & consented 7 March 2023
- 230107 & 230108 10 Gun Street - undecided
- 2300228 & 230381 St Mary’s Service Area – granted 21 July 2023
- 230259 & 230260 207 Oxford Road – granted & consented 13 April 2023
- 230319 & 230320 101 Oxford Road – granted subject to legal agreement 6 September 2023 planning applications committee
- 230454 20 Belle Vue Road – refused 1 June 2023 and appeal made
- 230462 & 230937 161 Oxford Road – withdrawn 10 August 2023
- 230479 & 230480 13-17 London Road – refused 8 September 2023
- 230640 & 230641 33 London Street – undecided
- 230816 Christchurch Green information board – consented 13 July 2023
- 231139 185a Oxford Road (**) - undecided
- 231257 2-4 Church Street, Caversham (**) – undecided
- 231423 advertising on Broad Street - undecided
- 231431 & 231432 101 Oxford Road (**) - undecided

4. HIGH STREETS HERITAGE ACTION ZONES (HSHAZ)

4.1 The end of 2022 and beginning of 2023 saw a rush of planning applications, listed building consents and advertising consents related to Reading’s High Streets Heritage Action Zone ([HSHAZ](#)) project.

4.2 This was the last full year of this four year project based on RBC’s successful funding application in 2019. We are now seeing good progress being made on improvements to buildings along Oxford Road, St Mary’s Butts and Castle Street. Works were completed on the Simeon monument, Queen Victoria’s statue, the Harrinson Testimonial Cross and the Zinzan tomb in the course of the year. The monuments are all prominent features of Reading’s public realm.

4.3 The project also includes a community engagement strand and a Cultural Programme.

4.4 We are represented on the HSHAZ project steering group by vice-chair Richard Bennett who also represents Reading Civic Society.

4.5 Historic England’s (HE) review of [Listed Building](#) descriptions in Reading town centre is now drawing to a close. We are pleased to have contributed and been consulted on the updated listings which are significantly improved.

5. PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

5.1 As frequent users of Reading Central Library, particularly the local studies section, and the Civic Offices we contributed in July to the consultation on Reading Borough Council’s plans to move the Central Library to the same site.

5.2 In July we also contributed to the Oxford Road waste management survey.

6. PLANNING POLICY

6.1 As the year drew to a close the consultation on Reading Borough Council’s Local Plan partial update was launched and we will be commenting by the 31 January deadline.

7. LOCAL LISTINGS

7.1 We submitted local listing applications for the following during 2023:

- 64 Tilehurst Road (coach house originally attached to locally listed 62 Tilehurst Road)
- The TGWU signage on 89 Southampton Street
- The Restoration public house 928 Oxford Road – added to the local list in December 2023

7.2 We supported Caversham and District Residents' Association nomination of Reading Bridge which was added to the local list in October 2023.

8. OTHER ACTIVITIES

8.1 On 14 May 2023 we participated in the inaugural Reading Walks Festival organised by the Reading Economic Development Agency REDA with a walk around the Eldon Square Conservation Area. You can read about the festival and see some images, including of our walk, here: <https://www.visit-reading.com/ideas-and-inspiration/reading-walks-festival>.

8.2 We contributed to the survey of monuments and memorials carried out by Reading Civic Society a year or so ago that prioritised cleaning and other works required. A programme of work starting in 2023 included the Spanish Civil War memorial, the Henry 1 cross and Maiwand Lion in the Forbury Gardens and the Edward VII statue by the station.

8.3 We have had positive conversations with Reading's Economic and Development Agency ([REDA](#)) covering public realm improvements in the town centre and the need for heritage and craft skills training in Reading which could also contribute to green skills to address the climate emergency.

8.4 We attend Reading Art & Heritage Forum and in November contributed to the survey of how our activities aligned with the 'intentions' of RBC's Culture and Heritage Strategy Statement of Intent which was agreed in January 2023.

9. PRIORITIES FOR 2024

9.1 To expedite the review of a list of less complex CA appraisals to be agreed with RBC.

9.2 Over and above work on appraisals, the main priority for 2024 must be to address the challenges we face going forward as a sustainable organisation into the future. We have held meetings with councillors and officers which have proved positive in supporting our activities and clearing some of the barriers that we felt we were facing. We have also taken a look at and consulted with CAACs in other areas.

Most importantly, new members on the committee are required who have an interest in the built environment of their local area or across Reading and can play an active role in meeting our objectives working with Reading Borough Council. In return membership of the committee for an individual or representative of an organisation provides a forum for mutual support and the sharing of knowledge and expertise.

9.3 The last few months of HSHAZ will no doubt be intensive for us but we hope to see the final results of some of the building rescue and public realm improvements as well as the cultural programme.

Evelyn Williams
Reading CAAC Chair
29 January 2024