

# Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

## Draft Conservation Area Appraisal



*“The local situation of Reading is such as to claim the notice of the first Metropolis in the known world, London, and being so pleasantly situated on the high road from the second Metropolis in this kingdom, Bristol, and the most elegant and fashionable City of Europe, Bath, it cannot fail to attract and become a retreat to the independent part of society.”*

*Thomas Jesse  
Castle-Hill House, Reading  
10 October 1817*

*passage from a letter to the Berkshire Mercury  
by local property developer Thomas Jesse*



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***Foreword by Councillor Tony Page, Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport and Heritage Champion for Reading Borough Council.***

*Reading is a town of many contrasts as the capital and economic centre of the Thames Valley and as a town with a rich, historic heritage going back over 900 years. The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area has played a key role in Reading's residential expansion since the 17th century.*

*The conservation area forms a substantial microcosm of residential building styles ranging from the humble artisan cottage to grand villas from each of the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods. It is this range that provides the area's unique value and context to Reading.*

*To be able to respect and preserve our historic past while providing for an exciting future for the town is a particular challenge for Reading Borough Council. During the process of this reappraisal, the Council took the decision to place the Conservation Area on the Historic England Heritage at Risk register. This move acknowledges the area's challenges over recent decades but is a proactive first step in the preservation and enhancement of the area by working in partnership with the community. Addressing the area's problems will be an incremental process and has begun with the securing of Heritage Action Zone funding from Historic England to make improvements along the Oxford Road. These funds will facilitate practical steps to future-proof the Oxford Road corridor by accentuating and enhancing its proud and diverse history. It is anticipated that this work will have a beneficial effect throughout the neighbourhood as other funds and management plans will be sought to reverse the negative issues existing within the conservation area and protect its heritage.*

*Reading has 15 Conservation Areas within the Borough, supported by written Conservation Appraisals. Many of those appraisals are now relatively old and in need of review. Reading Borough Council is very grateful that various local communities, who have the intimate knowledge and understanding of their areas and local history, have initiated the process of reviewing our Conservation Area appraisals.*

*The Review of the Russell Street/Castle Hill Area is the second appraisal to be formally reviewed under this community-led arrangement. As a local resident in the area I have seen first-hand how this review has been underpinned by the knowledge, research, hard work and enthusiasm of volunteer members of the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA) and Reading's Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC). As work progressed, they have undertaken informal consultations, and held meetings and tours of the area involving the local community. They have considered and incorporated the feedback that they have received over these several years of work. The review has also taken account of advice and assistance from officers of Historic England and Reading Borough Council.*

*Special thanks are due to those who have contributed to and written the first draft of the conservation area appraisal:*

- *Cllr Karen Rowland - Lead Member for Culture Heritage and Recreation who lives in the area; Tom Christie and Richard Rowlands of BSANA; and Mary Neale, Kim Pearce, John Nicholls of the CAAC.*
- *Photo credits to David Neale, Joe Doak, and members of the CAAC and BSANA.*

*Additional thanks go to:*

- *Evelyn Williams (CAAC Chair) and Richard Bennett (Civic Society Chair).*
- *BSANA and CAAC members who have assisted in the long process to bring this to fruition.*
- *Reading Central Library, Reading Museum, the Berkshire Record Office for their assistance in local history research and for permission to use images cited in the text.*

*Cllr Tony Page*

*Heritage Champion, Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, and Deputy Leader, Reading Borough Council*

## Initial Statement



This appraisal has been produced for Reading Borough Council by the Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee, set up to advise Reading Borough Council in regards to conservation areas, and in conjunction with the local Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA) Conservation Streets Committee.

In accordance with recommendations by Historic England, the field work has been carried out using the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit and engaging with local community groups and representatives.

The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area was last appraised in 2004 by the Council's external consultants *The Conservation Studio* of Cirencester. Their report dated April 2004 was formally adopted by the Council at that time. Much of the observation in that report remains relevant today, and is restated in the greater detail of this appraisal and its recommendations. Positively, with this analysis, there has been an increase in public awareness of what is significant in our architectural heritage and worthy of conservation. Positively, there are active volunteer-led community organisations in place which the 2004 appraisal noted was a key element to drive improvements forward.

In publishing this appraisal for public consultation, the Council also acknowledges the advice and assistance of Historic England, particularly by their providing, in February and April of 2016, training workshops in Conservation Area appraisal for Council officers and local community representatives who would be taking part in the appraisal process.

This appraisal also acknowledges that the Conservation Area was placed on Historic England's listing of "Heritage at Risk" at the end of 2018. As well as providing detail on the historic and architectural interest of the Conservation Area, it highlights those issues that have resulted in this designation and which accordingly need to be managed. The appraisal concludes with detailed recommendations for boundary changes and a management plan aimed at removing the Conservation Area from its "at Risk" status and better protecting and enhancing the character of the Conservation Area in the years ahead.



# Contents

Statement of Special Interest.....	7
<b>SS1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>SS2 Significance and Key Positive Features .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>SS3 Issues and vulnerabilities .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>SS4 Recommended measures.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>SS5 The 2019 Boundary adjustment.....</b>	<b>10</b>
OXFORD ROAD CHARACTER AREA.....	11
RUSSELL STREET AND STREETS EAST CHARACTER AREA.....	12
CASTLE HILL / CASTLE STREET CHARACTER AREA.....	13
CASTLE CRESCENT CHARACTER AREA.....	13
<b>Conservation Area Appraisal .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>14</b>
1.1 Policy Context.....	14
1.2 Sustainable development in conservation areas.....	14
1.3 Policy changes and the new Local Plan .....	15
1.4 Public Consultation.....	16
<b>2. Landscape Setting .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Setting within surrounding area .....	17
<b>3. History of the Area.....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Archaeological heritage .....	19
3.2 Development History of the Area .....	19
<b>4. Spatial Analysis.....</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1 Key characteristics and Plan form .....	20
4.2 Views into, out of and within the Conservation Area .....	23
4.3 Trees and green landscape .....	30
<b>5. Buildings and public realm .....</b>	<b>35</b>
5.1 Key positive characteristics .....	35
5.2 Building types and forms .....	35
5.3 Materials, styles and features.....	35
5.4 Buildings of local historic interest and Buildings of Townscape Merit .....	35
5.5 Public realm- Floorscape, street lighting, street furniture and local detail.....	36
5.5.1 Street lighting.....	37
5.5.2 Communications wires and electricity.....	37
5.5.3 Tarmac:.....	38
5.5.4 Granite kerbs and gutters:.....	38
5.5.5 Sections of sett stones remain in three noticeable locations: .....	39
5.5.6 Cast Iron Bollards and benches.....	39
5.5.7 Coal hole covers.....	39
5.5.8 Railings.....	39

<b>6.</b>	<b>Character Areas</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Castle Street / Castle Hill</b>	<b>42</b>
6.1.1	Significance	42
6.1.2	Materials	42
6.1.3	Views: (see section 4.2 page 23)	43
6.1.4	Area analysis:	45
6.1.5	Key positive characteristics:	52
6.1.6	Negative features:	52
6.1.7	Buildings presenting Opportunities for Enhancement	53
6.1.8	Buildings of Townscape Merit	53
6.1.9	Listed Buildings	53
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Oxford Road</b>	<b>56</b>
6.2.1	Significance	56
6.2.2	Materials	57
6.2.3	Views	58
6.2.4	Area Analysis:	59
6.2.5	Key Positive Characteristics	69
6.2.6	Negative Features	69
6.2.7	Buildings/Sites presenting Opportunities for Enhancement	70
6.2.8	Buildings of Townscape Merit:	70
6.2.9	Listed Buildings:	71
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Russell Street and streets east</b>	<b>73</b>
6.3.1	Significance	73
6.3.2	Materials	73
6.3.3	Views	73
6.3.4	Area Analysis	76
6.3.5	Key Positive Characteristics	89
6.3.6	Negative Features	89
6.3.7	Buildings presenting Opportunities for Enhancement	90
6.3.8	Buildings of Townscape Merit:	90
6.3.9	Listed Buildings	90
<b>6.4</b>	<b>Streets west of Russell Street</b>	<b>92</b>
6.4.1	Significance	92
6.4.2	Materials	92
6.4.3	Views	94
6.4.4	Area Analysis	94
6.4.5	Key Positive Characteristics	99
6.4.6	Negative Features	99
6.4.7	Buildings presenting Opportunities for Enhancement	100
6.4.8	Buildings of Townscape Merit:	100
6.4.9	Listed Buildings	100
<b>6.5</b>	<b>Castle Crescent and streets south of Castle Hill</b>	<b>101</b>
6.5.1	Significance	101
6.5.2	Materials	101
6.5.3	Views	103
6.5.4	Area Analysis	104
6.5.5	Key Positive Characteristics	109
6.5.6	Negative features:	109
6.5.7	Buildings presenting Opportunities for Enhancement	110
6.5.8	Buildings of Townscape Merit	110
6.5.9	Listed Buildings:	110
<b>7.</b>	<b>Negative features, issues and opportunities for enhancement</b>	<b>111</b>

7.1	Inclusion on Historic England’s Heritage at Risk List .....	111
7.2	Poor maintenance and intensified use of private properties.....	111
7.3	Streetscape environment and public realm .....	111
7.4	Crime and Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) .....	112
7.5	Threats to Views and Vistas in and out of the Conservation Area .....	112
7.6	Detailed Issues throughout the Conservation Area.....	112
7.7	Sites presenting Opportunities for Enhancement .....	113
<b>8.</b>	<b>Action Plan.....</b>	<b>114</b>
8.1	Community engagement with the Council.....	114
8.2	Big Picture Actions involving the “at Risk” Conservation Area .....	114
	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>124</b>
	<b>Appendix 1: Archaeology and Historical Development of the Area .....</b>	<b>124</b>
	Before the 12 <sup>th</sup> century.....	124
	Medieval and early modern settlement.....	124
	Georgian Period 1714-1837 .....	125
	Victorian Development .....	130
	Twentieth and Twenty-first century development .....	132
	<b>Appendix 2: Geology and topography .....</b>	<b>134</b>
	<b>Appendix 3. Justification for boundary extensions.....</b>	<b>136</b>
	OXFORD ROAD CHARACTER AREA.....	136
	RUSSELL STREET AND STREETS EAST CHARACTER AREA.....	138
	CASTLE HILL / CASTLE STREET CHARACTER AREA .....	139
	CASTLE CRESCENT, STREETS SOUTH OF CASTLE HILL AND THE MANSFIELD ROAD EXTENSION ..	140
	<b>Appendix 4: List of figures.....</b>	<b>134</b>

## Statement of Special Interest

### SS1 Introduction

The Conservation Area is notable for its diverse and representative collection of urban, domestic English architectural styles dating from the Georgian period through the Victorian and Edwardian periods with modest amounts of later 20<sup>th</sup> century infill. With its range of wealthy to more modest examples of each of these periods, the Conservation Area forms a microcosm of Reading's residential building during these periods.

The Conservation Area illustrates the emergence of a street pattern as the agricultural lands bordering Castle Hill and the Oxford Road to the west of the mediaeval town centre of Reading were progressively developed: first, as an elegant suburb for members of the town's elite and later with infill streets of terraced housing for employees of Reading's new manufacturing industries whose rapid growth was enhanced by the arrival of the railway.

Reading's proud heritage of brick, tile and terracotta manufacturing is exemplified in each of five separately distinctive character areas:

- **Castle Street/Castle Hill** - dominated by large Georgian housing and trees. (Section 6.1)
- **Oxford Road**- a half- mile long "regular mix" of Georgian terraced housing and Victorian retail frontages. (Section 6.2)
- **Russell Street and streets east**-well-noted for its large single-family Victorian and Georgian terraces. (Section 6.3)
- **Streets west of Russell Street**- noted for its striking views to the Caversham escarpment and a mix of low-rise fine Georgian properties to later polychrome patterned-brick artisan terraces. (Section 6.4)
- **Castle Crescent and streets south of Castle Hill**- dominated by late Victorian villas mixed with early Georgian housing. (Section 6.5)

Due to the size of the Conservation Area, this appraisal has set out each of these character areas out by reviewing each separately in detail (see Section 6). In breaking down what is a large Conservation Area in this manner, this appraisal becomes more useful to developers and planners should future development come forward in understanding the character of an immediate area.

### SS2 Significance and Key Positive Features

- The area developed largely in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an area of intense residential housing to the west of the town centre centred along the road to Bath, along Castle Street and Castle Hill, and the Oxford Road leading towards Pangbourne and Oxford. These two early mediaeval routes out of Reading defined the structure of the development of the area.
- This progressive development and infill of Reading's early market gardens given over to this housing is evident from the layout of the first north-south connector roads of Russell Street and Prospect Street.
- The Conservation Area is a microcosm of Reading's residential building styles in a concentrated area. Within its boundaries, housing spans both wealthy and more modest examples from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It encompasses a range of Georgian villas, terraces and artisan housing. The long Victorian era is evident in the development of substantial Victorian single-family terraces and the later polychrome patterned two-up, two- down terraces. Arts and Crafts influences appear in the area's large Victorian and Edwardian villas.
- The area boasts 151 addresses that are Listed properties either singly or as part of a terrace. Listed properties are mainly concentrated along Castle Hill/Castle Street, Russell Street and the Oxford Road but also dotted throughout the area.

- Buildings of Townscape Merit \*, (as defined on page 36, section 5.4) which vary from unlisted terraces to cottages, lend important highlights to each of the Conservation Area's character areas.
- The remaining large Georgian villas and terraces are concentrated along Castle Street/Castle Hill, Coley Hill, the Oxford Road, Russell Street and Baker Street, signifying the early move by the more affluent to the west of the town to take advantage of the 'salubrious air' away from local industry.
- The extensive use of Reading's famous local brick industry is exemplified in polychrome brick, tiles and terracotta throughout the area.
- The open views north from several vantage points to the leafy hills of the Caversham escarpment highlight the geographical location of the area set atop a large clay and chalk escarpment.
- The view south along Coley Avenue and its allée of trees in place along the road for over 200 years is protected as a significant heritage view for Reading.
- A number of mature trees, largely along Coley Avenue, Castle Street/Castle Hill and Bath Road, create a positive green canopy and many are protected by TPOs (Tree Protection Orders).
- The strong religious legacy of the area is manifest in the c.1826 parish church of the Holy Trinity, the only purpose-built synagogue in Berkshire on Goldsmid Road and in a number of surviving historic Nonconformist chapels and places of worship.
- 55 Baker Street was the site of "The Reading Establishment" studio of William Fox Talbot, an early photography pioneer. It was there that "The Pencil of Nature," the first mass-produced book with photographs was manufactured.
- The Grade II\* 154-160 Castle Hill, the former Kings Arms Inn, is a Reading landmark property. Throughout its life it served as an inn, a refuge for French priests during the French Revolution and was home to the local Jesse family of developers throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was also for part of its life a school, run by Jesse's wife.
- The striking streetscape of Jesse Terrace, built by the local Jesse family, is distinguished by well-proportioned terraces on both sides with decorative cast iron verandas.
- Along with 154-160 Castle Hill, Yeomanry House with its intact gatehouse, front garden and drive and 1 and 2 Bath Road remain as examples of the large "gentlemen's residences" for Reading's elite 19<sup>th</sup> century society that once populated the apex of Castle Hill.
- Oxford Road Community School is an attractive, Grade II Victorian school and well-used by the local community.

### SS3 Issues and vulnerabilities

While there are many sections of the Conservation Area which are well maintained and easily appreciated, there are several more challenged sections that have led to the area's inclusion on Historic England's "Heritage at Risk" list. Nonetheless, the area's historical interest as a microcosm of Reading's 19<sup>th</sup> century building styles still provides clear evidence of its past.

Recently, many parts of the Conservation Area have suffered from insensitive renovations and poor management, largely as a result of the intensified use of buildings as Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). These HMOs are frequently investment properties owned by remote landlords that are not always well-maintained and these properties have also changed the community balance of the area with properties originally designed to house single families. There has also been insensitive management of the public realm with poor pavement surfaces, out-of-keeping modern street lighting, excessive signage and overhead wires. The impacts of these issues are most apparent along the Oxford Road and in the streets east of Russell Street.



However, the heritage “bones” of the buildings, on even the most challenged streets, are very much in evidence and many architectural details of interest remain. It is hoped that the “at Risk” listing will galvanise Council and local community cooperation in reversing the area’s blight, enabling the special character of the area to be better revealed, protected and enhanced.

**Negative Issues and vulnerabilities:**

- The on-going degradation of property façades with the loss of historic features and detailing such as traditional doors and windows, roofing materials, and frontage treatments. This is most noticeable along the Oxford Road, Prospect Street, Russell Street and in streets to the east with Waylen Street, Zinzan Street, Howard Street, Anstey Street, Body Road, Carey Street and Baker Street.
- The intense use and ongoing replacement of original windows and doors with modern uPVC substitutes on both unlisted and listed properties badly alters façades.
- Architecturally unsympathetic extensions and alterations including poor quality dormers, loss of chimney stacks and chimney pots and the loss of front walls onto streets.
- Persistent rubbish management issues have resulted in the loss of front boundary walls for bin hard-standings in front gardens. High numbers of bins in front gardens and on pavements negatively affect streetscape views.
- The physical blighting effects of continuing population intensification into what was originally single- family housing with excessive overhead telecom wires, satellite dishes, unkempt wires and exterior pipes along property façades.
- HMO and flat conversions over many decades has threatened and altered the traditional societal and community structure of the area. On many streets, HMOs far outnumber single-family homes, which was the intent of the original development in the area.
- Modern retail signage in poor condition, loud and unsympathetic colours and lighting create an uneven grain and jarring appearance along the Oxford Road.
- Poor condition of much of the Oxford Road, including inappropriate modern shopfront conversions, metal roller security screens, wires.
- Buildings identified as “opportunities for enhancement,” frequently out-of-keeping late 20<sup>th</sup> century development, detract from heritage streetscape views. This is especially evident along portions of the Oxford Road and along the west sides of both Field Road and Coley Hill.
- Poor condition of the public realm with excessive, redundant street signage, unsympathetic street furniture and modern street lighting jar with heritage streetscapes.
- Non-policy compliant prolific estate agent signage degrades the area.
- Poor quality tarmac pavements and roads detracting from the historic setting.
- Persistent higher-than-average crime and ASB in parts of the Conservation Area creates a lack-of-desirability for positive investment and reduces the appeal of the area for some residents and families.
- High levels of traffic along the major historic thoroughfares of Oxford Road and Castle Street/Castle Hill create a distracting environment and poor air quality hotspots.
- Lack of green in the area leaves some streets with barren and bleak views.

## SS4 Recommended measures

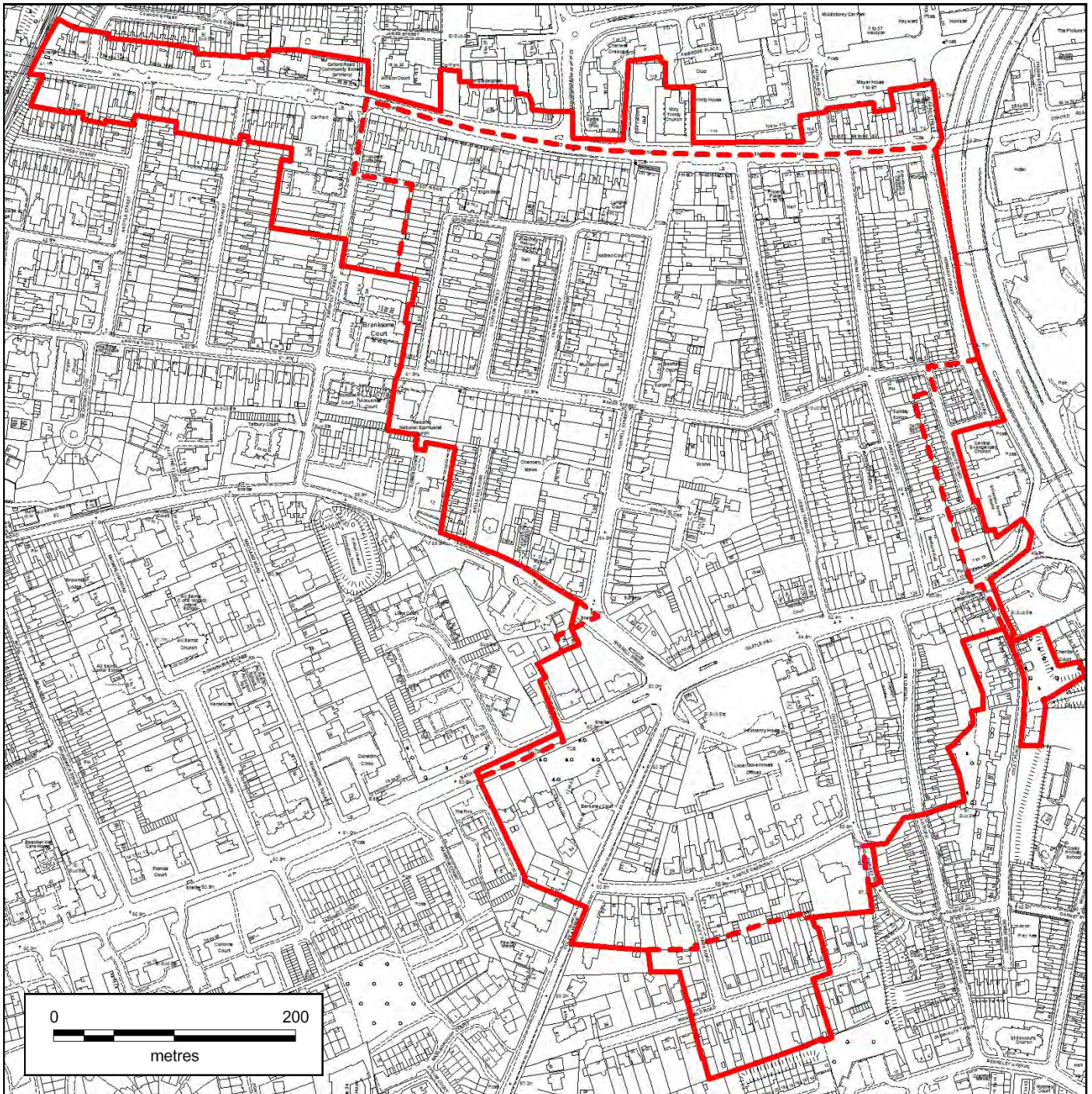
Historic England advises that the successful care, protection and enhancement of Conservation Areas cannot be provided by the local Council alone; it also needs the active goodwill and co-operation of landowners and the local community in order to be successful.

As the Conservation Area is now on the Heritage at Risk list, action to right negative situations within the area is clearly warranted. Section 8 details recommended measures aimed at the reduction of further harm to the Conservation Area and to encourage its enhancement and regeneration. The over-arching measures detailed in Section 8 are recapped in brief here:

- **A change of name to the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area**  
This would acknowledge the historical importance and actual development structure of the area.
- **Seeking funding for improvements to the public realm, streetscapes and properties**  
The area has issues that are beyond the scope of present resourcing and voluntary contributions. Funding is necessary to grapple with the larger issues present.
- **Establishing management plans with the Council and community groups**  
The 2004 appraisal and Historic England acknowledge the necessity of essential cooperation between the LPA and community groups in the care management and improvement of at Risk Conservation Areas.
- **An expansion of Article 4 Directions with Local Development Orders (LDOs)**  
Such linked policies are the leading tool for the rescue of conservation areas where there has been a noticeable and continuing loss of character.

## SS5 The 2019 Boundary adjustment

After careful review of the existing boundary of the Conservation Area, taking into account feedback from the public consultation process and a detailed study of each of the character areas within the Conservation Area, the following extensions to the Conservation Area boundary are proposed as shown on Figure SS5.1.



— Proposed Conservation Area boundary 2019

- - - 2004 Conservation Area boundary

### Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

#### Figure SS5.1: Proposed Conservation Area Boundary

November 2019



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**OXFORD ROAD CHARACTER AREA**

***The inclusion of 78 to 104A, 104, Holy Trinity Church, 120-190 Oxford Road (evens) on the north side from Alfred Street to the railway bridge and the inclusion of 205 to 283 Oxford Road (odds) on the south side of the Oxford Road from Prospect Street to the railway bridge. The inclusion of 1 to 23 Prospect Street (odds) and 2 to 14 (evens) Prospect Street.***

The largest extension proposed within the appraisal is along the Oxford Road, expanding the 2004 boundary that runs down the centre of the road between the IDR and Prospect Street. The extension includes all properties fronting Oxford Road along the south between the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) and the Reading West railway bridge and a majority of sites along the north side of that road although the most of the modern sites are excluded. The area also includes a section along Prospect Street to the south along both sides of that road.

The historical importance justifies the extension as the Oxford Road is one of the two major routes to the west out of the town centre, from which the infill residential streets of the area were developed. The special and varied early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century character of the Oxford Road extends clear to the railway bridge. This area has an evidential mix of Georgian and Victorian built environment, noting that the Oxford Road to the west of the bridge is entirely devoid of Georgian built structure.

Along this half mile stretch of the Oxford Road, a substantial proportion of the properties were built prior to 1833, and the route contains 40 listed properties. \* These factors reinforce the high value of this road both to Reading's history and the history of the area.

This proposed boundary change denotes a significant change from the 2004 appraisal in terms of understanding the Conservation Area itself and how the Oxford Road is an integral element of the area.

Additionally, within this character area, one of the first two connector roads from Oxford Road to the south was Prospect Street which was integral to the development of the grid system of residential streets laid out over the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The buildings on this street reflect strongly the same time periods of development that took place along the Oxford Road.

1-9 Prospect Street is a rare Georgian terrace of workers' cottages c.1820s, and part of the pattern of speculative housing development that extended up from the Oxford Road. Along with Prospect Mews, their contrast with the large houses of Sidney Terrace immediately to their north aids in the understanding of early housing for labourers and artisans in the area. The larger houses from 11-23 Prospect Street are also part of that earlier development phase and built prior to 1833.

On the west side of the street, the larger Edwardian semi-detached houses have attractive polychrome brick and terracotta embellishments and give a sense of historical balance to both sides of the street essential in proper conservation area designation.

*(\* listed individually or as part of a group.)*

**RUSSELL STREET AND STREETS EAST CHARACTER AREA**

***Re-inclusion of Body Road, Anstey Road and 3 to 11 Baker Street.***

These properties were removed from the Conservation Area at the last appraisal in 2004 based upon a loss of original windows, doors and front boundaries along with the detrimental presence of satellite dishes and the presence of the modern buildings of the Salvation Army and the Carey Centre. However, the housing stock within the area is to be re-included as the housing terrace's period character is very much in keeping with the character of the nearby houses within the Conservation Area especially in terms of massing, materials and age. The area contributes well to the complete picture of the residential development in the Conservation Area as a good example of well-laid-out late Victorian artisan housing and aids in substantiating the Conservation Area as a complete microcosm of Reading's residential housing history.

The removal of this area from the Conservation Area in 2004 confused and weakened the understanding of a natural boundary line to the Conservation Area within the residential street structure. The exclusion of the two large modern buildings in the centre acknowledges their lack of contribution to the historical nature of the area, but their direct responsibility to the Conservation Area surrounding them will remain should future development on those sites come forward. Notable is the Carey Centre site, which provides a very positive feeling of space and green to the immediately surrounding housing and both maintain height and massing that are appropriate to the western side of the IDR and the Conservation Area itself.

The 2004 appraisal noted that a good working relationship with residents was needed in the area. Since the last appraisal the Council has supported the creation and development of the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA) and the area lies within their remit. As a result, improved private property maintenance and public realm care in this area has been achieved, along with fostering a greater appreciation for the area.

#### **CASTLE HILL / CASTLE STREET CHARACTER AREA**

***The re-inclusion of 1 to 15 Castle Street (Castle Gate flats) and the green space at the northwest corner of the Castle Street/IDR roundabout; plus the inclusion of 3 to 7 Coley Place (odds); plus the inclusion of the open park area to the south of those houses along Coley Place.***

The Castle Gate flats were removed in the 2004 appraisal along with Anstey Road and Body Road. The necessity to re-include the Castle Gate flats and the green space on the southwestern side of the Castle Street roundabout reduces confusion about the Conservation Area's "natural" and "understood" boundary line lying just to the west of the IDR and greatly aids in establishing and confirming a proper "gateway" to the Conservation Area from the town centre. This entrance into the Conservation Area figures significantly in the views in and out of the Conservation Area (see section 4.2, views 6A and 6B).

Furthermore, such a boundary revision accords the heritage area proper value in terms of any future development in the area around the IDR roundabout which might affect the Conservation Area in terms of views and massing. It also improves the physical connection of the Conservation Area with the neighbouring St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area and the historic route west from the centre of Reading.

The small terrace of houses at 3-7 Coley Place perched along the edge of the steep chalk escarpment, are a key element of an important and noted view from Castle Street (see section 4.2, view 17). The houses, once part of a longer terrace of ten houses, are the only surviving examples of early mansard roofs in the Conservation Area. Additionally, their simple artisan style contrasts well with the grander houses of Castle Street and Castle Hill and completes an understanding of the variety of development in the streets that developed to the south off that road.

The inclusion of the green space to the south of 3-7 Coley Place that hugs the edge of the escarpment shows clearly the topographical restrictions around which the area developed. Whilst difficult to build on, the space has a place as an asset to the Conservation Area, leading to the pedestrian link bridge which replaced the historic road link to Willow Street.

#### **CASTLE CRESCENT CHARACTER AREA**

***2 to 28 Mansfield Road (evens) 1 to 29 Mansfield Road (odds); 1,2,3 Coley Park Road***

This extension acknowledges that the houses of Mansfield Road are part of the same late 19<sup>th</sup> century development phase as Castle Crescent and thus have many similarities in styling and original purpose. Only the houses along Mansfield Road from this development period are included. The high brick walls of Coley Park Road between the two streets form a pleasant connector road and its brick walls, are worthy of preservation.

# Conservation Area Appraisal

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Policy Context

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

This Appraisal describes and defines the particular historical and architectural character and interest of the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area, highlighting those features of its character and appearance that should be preserved or enhanced and identifying negative features that detract from the area's character and appearance, and issues that may affect it in future.

The Historic England Good Practice Advice Note on the Historic Environment in Local Plans clarifies advice as given by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for the management of conservation areas as designated heritage assets. It notes that the NPPF states that planning should '... be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.' It further states that local planning authorities within their Local Plan framework should "...maintain or have access to a historic environment record. This should contain up-to-date evidence about the historic environment in their area and be used to: assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment". This Appraisal is charged with providing the up-to-date evidence as needed for the establishment of the Local Plan in regard to the management of the fifteen Conservation Areas within Reading.

### 1.2 Sustainable development in conservation areas

The government has outlined a presumption in favour of sustainable development and clarifies the purpose of the planning system in achieving these goals. Sustainable development must, amongst other things, perform a role in protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment. In relation to conservation areas the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states: "Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably". This means that proposals that fail to fulfil these requirements should not be accepted and the NPPF explains that where a proposal involves harm to a designated heritage asset, it should only be allowed if the public benefit of the proposal outweighs the harm.

In order to make these judgements clear with accuracy, evidence must be laid out detailing the importance of the historical, heritage and cultural significance of the conservation area and its assets. This Appraisal provides that evidence, in as reasonably detailed manner as possible.

This Appraisal cannot hope to mention every building or feature within the Conservation Area that might be of value. Any omission should not be taken to imply that it is not of any interest or value to the character of the area.

This appraisal serves to advise the implementation of policy guidelines as established by the Historic England Good Practice Guides for the Historic Environment and the Setting of Heritage Assets which have been put in place to support the NPPF. It provides the needed background advice for the maintenance and delivery of a sustainable historic spatial vision for the area and to justify the protection and enhancement of the area. It defines the qualities and local distinctiveness that provide baseline evidence for the development of local policy with Local Plan documents, Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and Article 4 (2) Directions and Local Development Orders as needed.

Its description of the area further lays out the background evidence needed for enforcement and also serves to advise investment and development within the area. It is meant to aid in informing proposals for new development and provide the solid evidence necessary on which to base the determination of planning applications, either for new development or alterations to the existing historical fabric.

### 1.3 Policy changes and the new Local Plan

2017 was the 50th anniversary of the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 which created conservation areas in the UK. Budgets for planning departments now face their greatest financial challenge since the implementation of that Act and thus greater challenges in being able to meet the lofty ideals for the development of conservation areas set out in 1967. The Council's statutory duty under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is to identify those parts of their area that are considered to contribute positively to '... special historic or architectural interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' and to designate these as conservation areas. The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area was formally designated in 1974 as one of Reading's first conservation areas. The 1990 Act further requires the Council to have 'special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the area' when exercising its function as a local planning authority.

Unlike listed buildings, conservation areas are not assessed against national criteria standards. In accordance with the NPPF and guidance standards set forth by Historic England, the Local Planning Authority sets its own standards within its Local Plan guidelines for how their conservation areas are to be maintained, protected and enhanced. Historic England recommends a re-evaluation of a conservation area once every five years. This conservation area has not been reappraised since 2004, and is overdue for reappraisal. Much has changed since then in terms of policy on a national and local level. National planning policy changed in 2013 with the introduction of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act. This replaced Conservation Area Consent with a requirement for planning permission for the demolition of a building in a conservation area. It also relaxed other rules that have affected the Conservation Area's appearance in the intervening years such as low wall demolition.

Locally, the Reading Core Strategy was adopted as policy in 2008, the Reading Central Area Action Plan followed in 2009, and finally the Sites and Detailed Policies Document was adopted in 2012. At the time of writing, the maintenance of the Conservation Area is set out in the Core Strategy adopted in 2008 which was last altered in January 2015. Certain SPD's (Supplementary Planning Documents) such as the Residential Conversions SPD and the Sites and Detailed Policies SPD aid in the implementation of the Core Strategy.

Reading Borough Council adopted a new version of its Local Plan in November 2019 which in terms of conservation areas and the historic environment, is the overarching document that informs the Council on the management of Reading's fifteen Conservation Areas. This document enhances and makes more specific policy provisions in the fulfilment of the Council's statutory duties in regard to the protection and enhancement of conservation areas.

In Spring 2016, the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee of Reading Borough Council, following national policy guidance, endorsed the creation of the Reading

Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC), a non- statutory body formed to carry out community-led re-appraisals and provide advice on the overall protection, and enhancement, of Reading's 15 Conservation Areas and other heritage assets.

#### **1.4 Public Consultation**

This appraisal has been prepared by the Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) in association with the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA) and has engaged in numerous public consultations since 2016, engaging with residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the area. Extensive discussions have also been had with Reading Borough Council and Historic England in identifying and defining what continues to be of special significance and worthy of protection and/or enhancement.

In March 2016, following a two-day appraisal training workshop, sponsored and led by Historic England, an initial informal public consultation event was held in the Russell Street Castle Hill Conservation Area. Following an illustrated presentation on how to use the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit, a team of local residents and other stakeholders carried out a visual audit of every street in the Conservation Area along with others in the immediate and wider area that were to be considered for possible inclusion. This was a useful exercise in terms of gathering the opinions of the local community about the area. This original evaluation information was compiled into a detailed spread sheet that formed the basis of the analysis and the findings in this appraisal.

Throughout the subsequent three years, informal consultation has continued to take place with local residents. A refreshed survey of residents in the current Conservation Area boundary and in all proposed extension areas which has sought further comments has run from April to September of this year. Members of the CAAC and BSANA writing committee have continued to evaluate and take on board residents' and heritage experts' opinions. Several Heritage Open Days saw tours of the area given in 2017-2019 and opinions were also gathered at those events.



## 2. Landscape Setting

The Conservation Area lies alongside and between two historic routes leading westwards out from the mediaeval core of Reading, namely the old roads to Bath and to Oxford. For centuries the area formed the primary western entrance into the town centre.

The underlying geology consists of clay, silt and sand over chalk at the top that erodes away and is detailed further in Appendix 2.

The top of Castle Hill, at the intersection with Russell Street and Coley Avenue, is the highest point in the Conservation Area. To the north, the long, wide slope of Russell Street leads down the low hill to the parish church of Holy Trinity and the Oxford Road with its mix of shops and residential buildings. To the south west, Coley Avenue, lined with trees, leads down to Berkeley Avenue in the south. To the south Castle Crescent, Mansfield Road and Coley Hill sit on the high flat portion of the high mound of clay which slopes rapidly away towards the beds of the Holy Brook and the River Kennet below forming the western side of Coley Gorge.

### 2.1 Setting within surrounding area

The Conservation Area comprises the first residential neighbourhood area to the west of the town centre after crossing the IDR. Prior to the development of the IDR it was more connected to the town but is now separated from it, and forms its own distinct neighbourhood area sharply contrasting with the new tall towers of Chatham Place to the north.

There is still a perceptible link between Castle Street in the town centre (within the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street CA) and Castle Street on this conservation area side of the IDR. This becomes Castle Hill towards the top of the hill near the intersection with the Bath Road and Coley Avenue. The end of the street closest to the IDR still retains its Castle Street name. The east side of Howard Street was demolished to make way for the IDR in the late 1960s. The row of trees shielding the street from the IDR stands where the houses were once on the east side of the street.

The area is currently primarily within Abbey Ward but also reaches into Minster Ward south of Castle Hill/ Castle Street and into Battle Ward past Prospect Street. It is defined geographically and historically by its major east-west routes: along the north by the Oxford Road and the south by Castle Hill/Castle Street. Residential housing lies in between the two and to the south of Castle Hill.

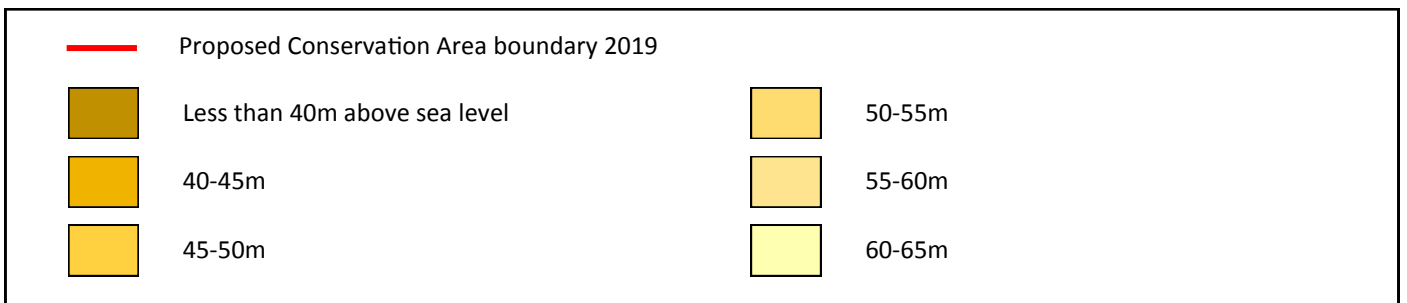
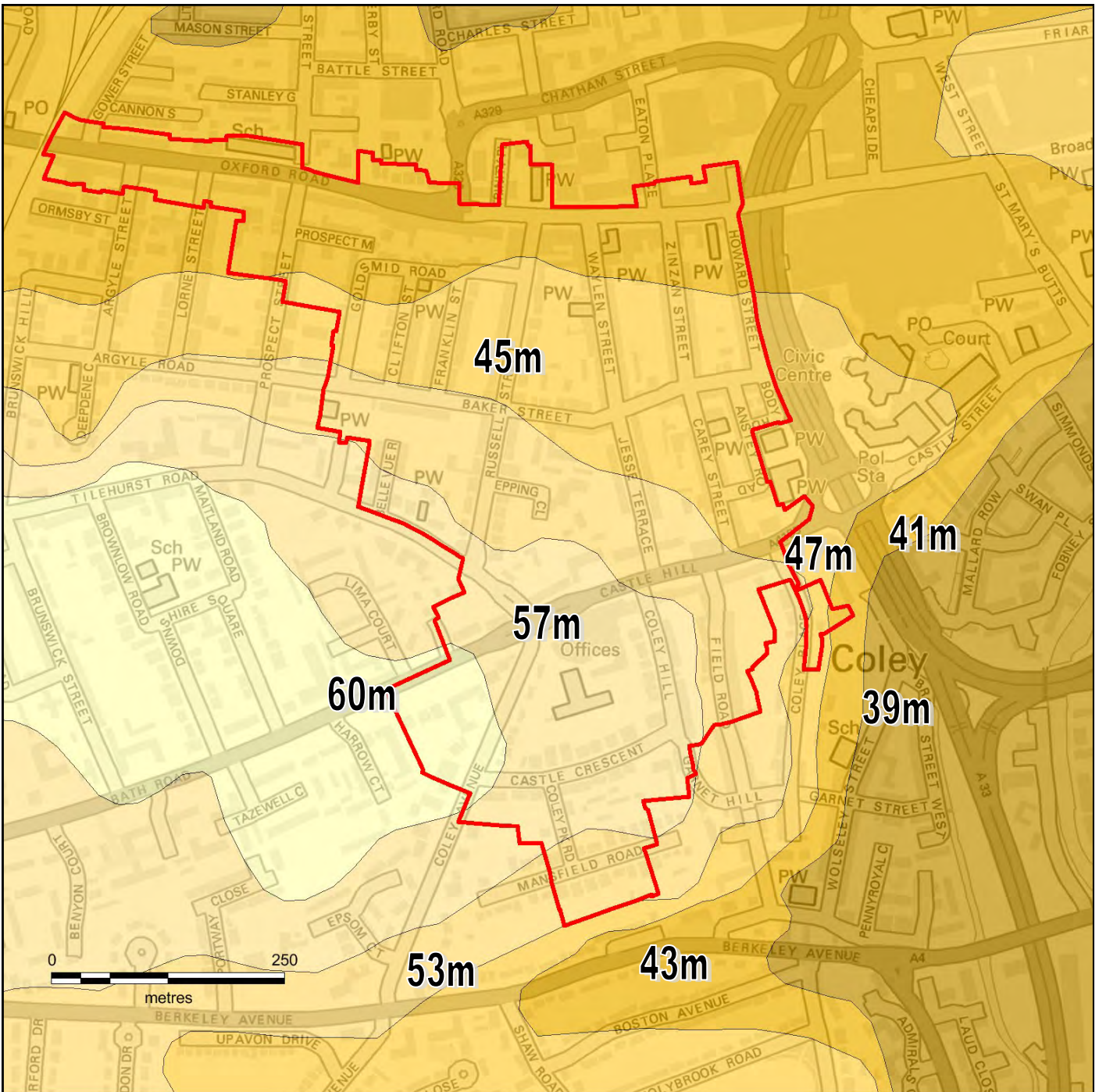
The styling of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Victorian, polychrome brick, two-up two-down, terraced housing in Clifton Street and Franklin Street continues westward along the residential streets off Oxford Road out to the Norcot roundabout.

To the west of the Conservation Area, between Tilehurst Road and the Bath Road is the late Victorian planned street development that comprises the Downshire Square Conservation Area. The two conservation areas come close to touching along the Tilehurst Road. That area is one of attractive grand polychrome brick villas in the late Victorian, and early Edwardian style, built in the late 1800s to early 1900s.

Directly to the west and just north of Downshire Square, the streets of Brunswick Hill, Argyle Street and Lorne Street have a variety of houses from the early to late 19<sup>th</sup> century that are attractively set and worthy of future protection. The area was considered for inclusion in this Conservation Area, however this would have made it very difficult to manage.

The area to the southeast of Castle Crescent and Mansfield Road is an interesting area of small terraced cottages mixed in with impressive polychrome brick villas. It is another area that could be analysed for its value as a potential conservation area, possibly being incorporated in the Castle Crescent/ Mansfield Road area.

Coley Avenue progresses out to the south and west from its intersection with Castle Hill and is notable for its allée of tree species of which lined the avenue, once the drive to the former Coley Park Estate.



Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 2.0.1: Topographical map of the Conservation Area, showing how the land falls away from the high point at the Castle Hill, Coley Avenue and Bath Road intersection.

November 2019



## **3. History of the Area**

### **3.1 Archaeological heritage**

Although legend places a Norman castle on the south side of Castle Hill, there has been limited evidence of archaeological significance in the area. Actual finds are recorded in the Historic Environment Record, held by the Borough Council.

However, any below-ground work carries the possibility of further discoveries, so all applications for such work should be referred to the Council's advisory archaeologist to consider the need for archaeological investigation before work proceeds.

### **3.2 Development History of the Area**

Castle Hill and Oxford Road are historic radial routes from the town centre, and a scattering of buildings developed along them from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, some of which survive as important elements in the Conservation Area.

The area between them was largely open until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Russell St and Prospect St were developed as suburbs of mostly large terraced properties, to be followed by the development of remaining areas as terraced housing. These areas, with sections of plain and polychrome brickwork give the Conservation Area its essential character and mark it out as an area worthy of protection.

The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have been less kind to the area. The area has become one where single-family houses have been progressively adapted to multiple occupation residences. This has resulted in or exacerbated: unsympathetic alterations; pressures on traffic and parking; unsightly bin storage; satellite dishes and social problems. These factors have somewhat affected the appetite for sympathetic investment in the area. These issues are covered more fully in Section 7, on Negative Features.

A full account of the area's rich history is at Appendix 1, which also includes more detailed history of each Character Area, of which there are five within the Conservation Area as a whole.

The Character Area analyses in Section 6 highlight those aspects of each individual character area's history which are visible in its current state, and which should therefore be taken into account in decisions about change.

## 4. Spatial Analysis

### 4.1 Key characteristics and Plan form

Key characteristics of the conservation area include:

- It is the first residential development west of the town centre commenced in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and continuing into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Individual large Georgian and early Victorian villas (Yeomanry House and No. 2 Bath Road) are set back from the wide road in grounds with some surviving mature trees still show evidence of large “prestige villas” that were situated at the top of Castle Hill at its junction with Bath Road.
- The streets south of Castle Hill have early 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian terraces of two and three storey houses in Coley Hill and detached and semi-detached houses in their own gardens in Castle Crescent. There is a large detached villa in its own grounds at No. 3 Castle Crescent, a former vicarage recently restored with further development of the site.
- There are substantial Georgian terraces of three storey houses along Castle Hill with front gardens of varying size.
- Buildings or sites of former coaching inns on the route to Bath survive: The former Kings Arms Inn with late 17<sup>th</sup> century and 18<sup>th</sup> century origins at 154-160 Castle Hill, now private housing, the Horse and Jockey now The Castle Tap at 120 Castle Street (first recorded 1699, rebuilt 1823).
- Russell Street (c.1815-1825) laid out on the eastern boundary of former market gardens is a wide main thoroughfare linking Castle Hill to the Oxford Road. There are substantial three storey Georgian terraced villas on the west side facing later three storey Victorian villas and terraces on the east side.
- Baker Street, one of the earliest streets in the conservation area, has smaller Georgian terraced houses in the section east of Russell Street and a well-preserved red brick early Georgian terrace of substantial two storey houses with basements (formerly known as Bedford Row) to the west of that junction.
- Oxford Road has a combination of diverse but frequently poorly maintained shop fronts in both early Georgian and Victorian buildings. The Oxford Road Community School, listed Grade II, was built between 1880-3 by local architects Morris and Smallwood. It is largely original with some modern additions.
- The streets to the east of Russell Street between the Oxford Road and Castle Hill (Waylen Street, Zinzan Street, Howard Street, Carey Street and Jesse Terrace) are fairly wide with sizeable brick two to three storey houses (mid- to late 19<sup>th</sup> century). Jesse Terrace is the best preserved, most attractive single street within the Conservation Area.

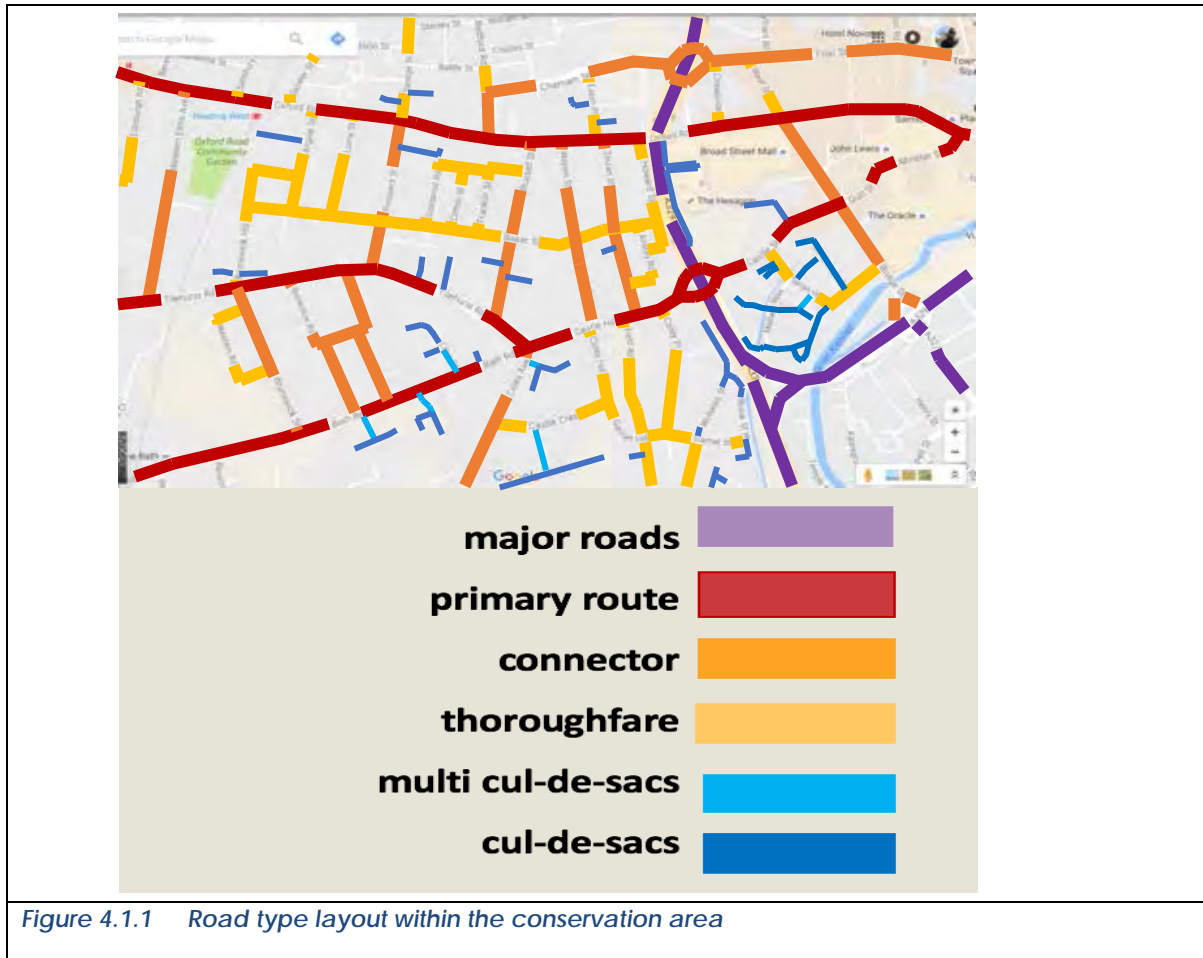
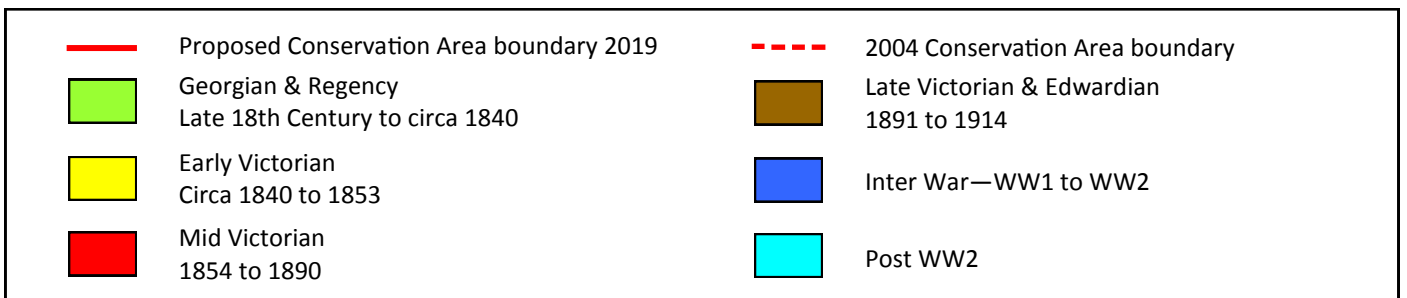
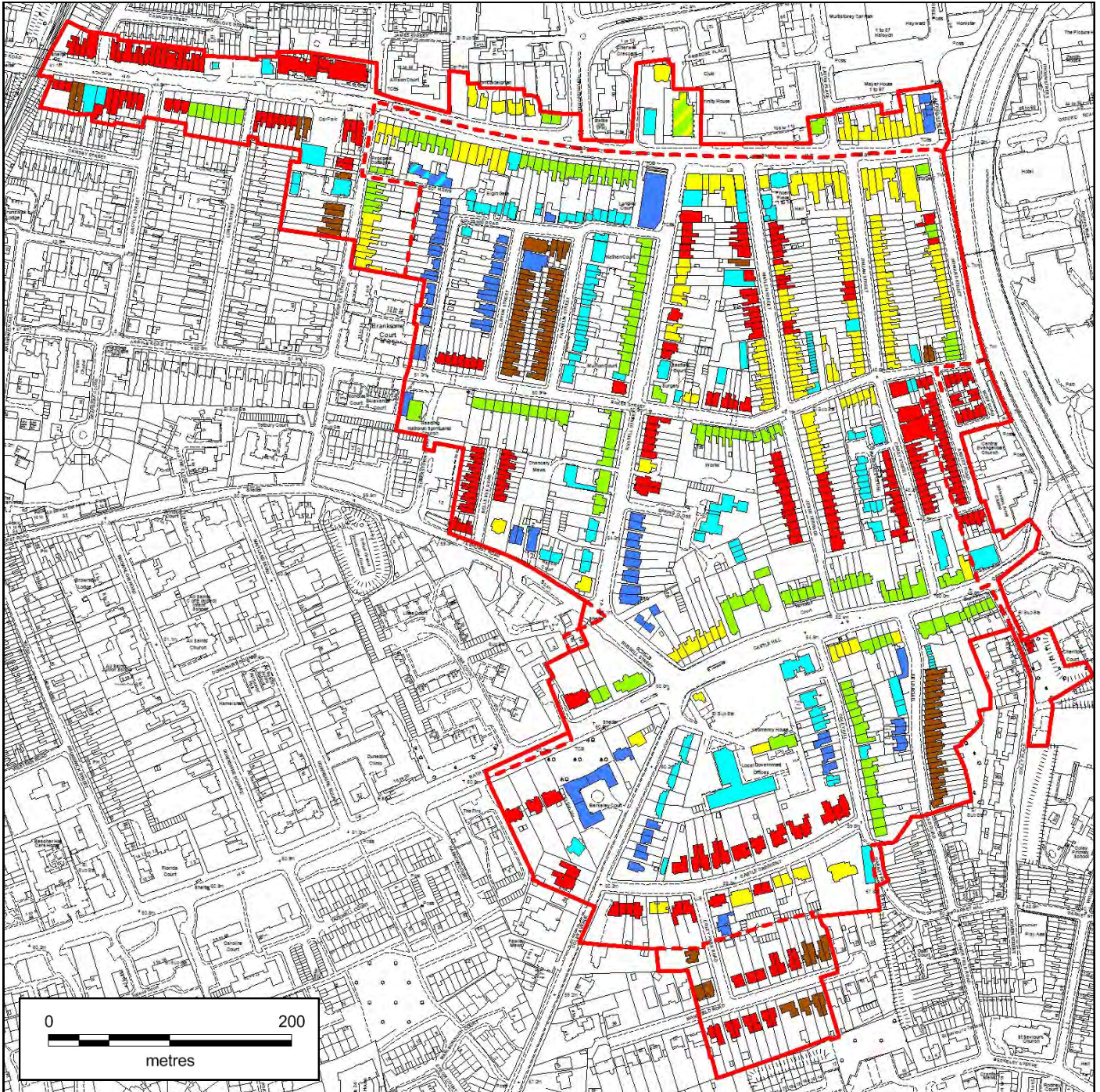


Figure 4.1.1 Road type layout within the conservation area

The layout of the Conservation Area results from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century development of a residential area first along the two major mediaeval westbound routes from the town centre and followed later by infill streets in a grid pattern on the site of former market gardens between the two routes: the current Oxford Road extending to Tilehurst Road towards Pangbourne and Oxford and the route west along Castle Hill/Castle Street to the Bath Road.

- Prospect Street and Howard Lane (now Howard Street) are the very earliest north-south connector roads between the two primary routes. Prospect Street was laid out by William Pratt Swallow and ran from the Oxford Road south uphill towards Pigs Green Lane (now Tilehurst Road). Howard Lane ran from the Oxford Road to Back Lane (parts of which became Baker Street) which in turn led into the town centre along Hosier Street.
- Russell Street (also developed by Mr. Swallow) and Baker Street were laid out c. 1815-1825 as housing began to be built on the two roads. The bend along Baker Street between Waylen Street and Russell Street shows how Baker Street joined up with the earlier layout of the former Back Lane which continued towards the town into Hosier Street.
- Waylen Street and Zinzan Street took shape c. 1830-40, as infill roads within the emerging residential area.
- The Oxford Road was formerly referred to as Oxford Street as it emerged from the town centre up to the intersection of Russell Street, and was named as such on the 1853 Sanitation Map of Reading. The Oxford Road remains a primary route out of the centre to the west and is still heavily utilised by both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. It has a distinctively different character from the remainder of the Conservation Area. It is defined by both its busy use and its diversity of cultures, which is reflected in the shops lining the main road.

- Castle Hill forms the western section of Castle Street as the main road west out of the town centre extending from the minster church of St. Mary the Virgin in The Butts. The entire road was called Castle Street until the section west of Jesse Terrace was renamed Castle Hill at some time between 1870 and 1890. Castle Street/Castle Hill remains as it has been historically; a primary route for traffic in and out of the town centre. The heavy traffic today is further exacerbated by the IDR's exit onto the road at the roundabout between the Conservation Area and the town centre. To a lesser degree, the road is also a pedestrian route to residential areas west of the centre. Its wide layout with large Georgian villas set back in grounds often with mature trees, still maintains a residential feel despite the traffic.
- Jesse Terrace to the north of Castle Hill and the streets leading off Castle Hill to the south have a similar character. The streets south of Castle Hill are quieter and do not have the same issues as the area between Castle Hill and the Oxford Road. The southern portion of the Conservation Area is centred on its relationship to Castle Hill/Castle Street as a route for residents in and out of that area into the town centre.



Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 4.1.2: Buildings by age

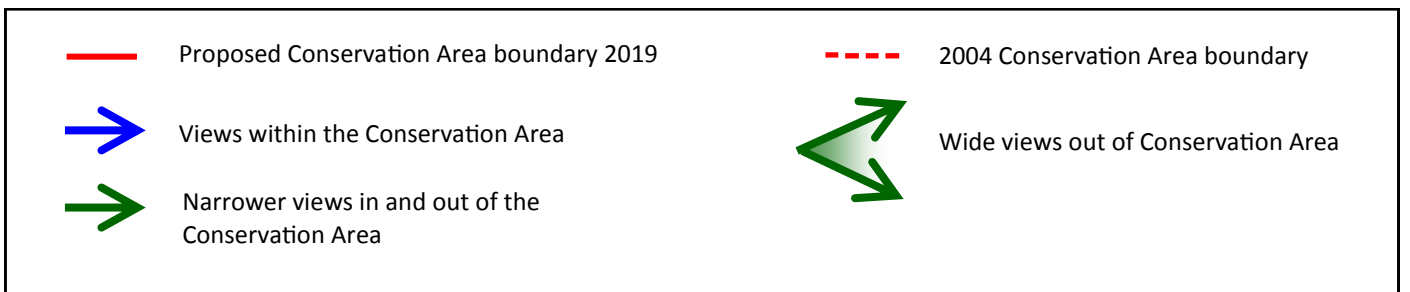
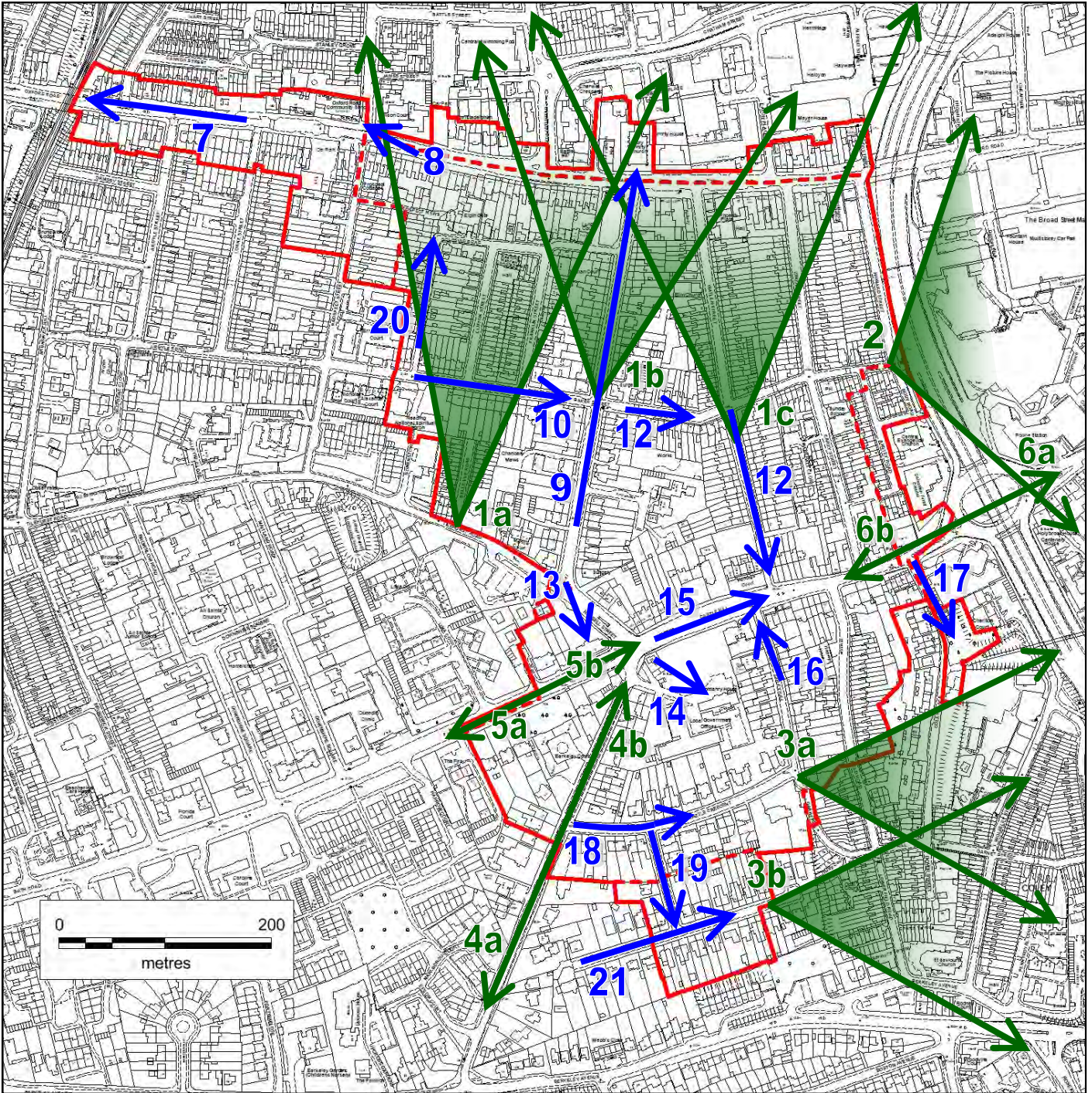
November 2019



## **4.2 Views into, out of and within the Conservation Area**

Views form a critical consideration in retaining those qualities about the conservation area that define its character and its specialness. Within Section 6, views relating to each individual character area are defined within that section.





Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 4.2.1: Views into, out of and within the Conservation Area

November 2019

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Figure 4.2.2 View 6b: The view up Castle Street to Castle Hill (Courtesy of Joe Doak)



Figure 4.2.3 View 13: The chimney view at the back of Mr Swallow's residence (2 Bath Road) and 4 Bath Road



Figure 4.2.4 View 15: Early 19<sup>th</sup> century view of Castle Hill towards the town



Figure 4.2.5 View 15: Blended view of Castle Hill and Castle Street from early 20<sup>th</sup> century with tram line overhead to today's view with the Blade in the far distance



Figure 4.2.6 View 9 towards the Holy Trinity Church along the Oxford Road from Russell Street

[To be added]

Figure 4.2.7 View from another area



*Figure 4.2.8 Views 4a and 4b: Fox Talbot's early photograph of the allée of trees along Coley Avenue*



*Figure 4.2.9 View 5a: West view along the Bath Road from the junction with Castle Hill, Coley Avenue to the left, and Russell Street to the right*

### 4.3 Trees and green landscape

While trees and planting are prominent in parts, the area is primarily urban. Most of the Conservation Area has ten percent or less canopy cover, so protecting and enhancing the area's green assets is a priority, as defined in the Council's 2010 Tree Strategy document and in line with the Council's 2019 Climate Emergency Motion.

The local Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA) and the Council have been working proactively to find sites where greening can be increased. This strategy has had recent success, notably along Baker Street and Oxford Road. Further greening is desirable throughout the Conservation Area, but is complicated by underground cables and narrow pavements.

#### TPO trees in the area

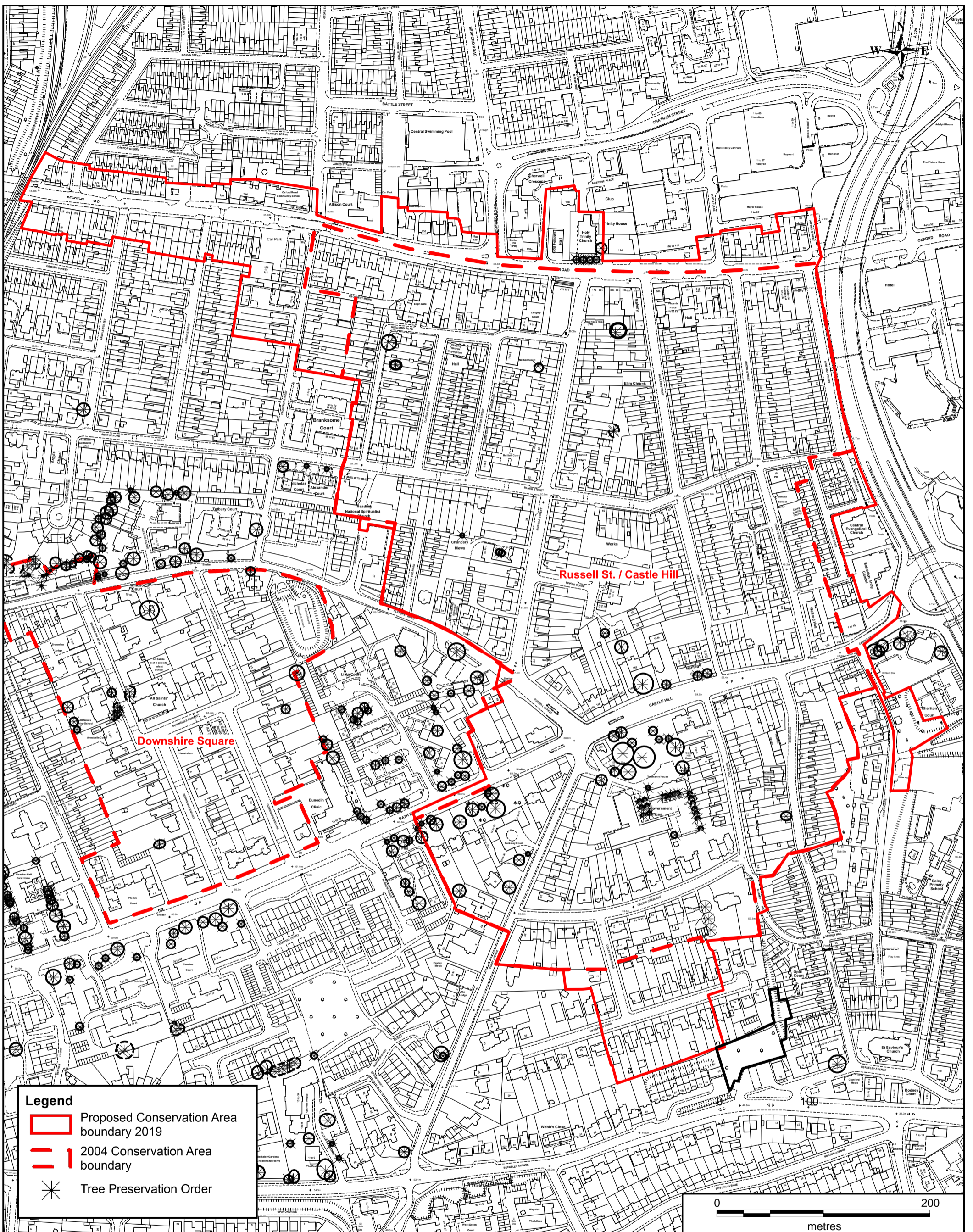
Figure 4.3.1 shows trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO). Not having a TPO does not mean a tree in the conservation area does not merit protection.

BSANA has also worked with the Council to prevent the removal of trees which make a positive contribution to the area. Due to Council resource limitations, placing a TPO on a tree is often in reaction to a threat rather than a proactive measure, but designation as a Conservation Area protects all substantial trees by requiring an application to fell them.

Trees in the public domain or owned and managed by the Council, such as those along Coley Avenue, are not TPO'd as it they are assumed to be monitored and under good care.

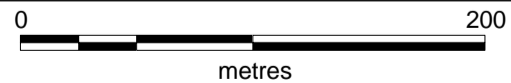
The most significance trees for residents in the area are:

- the large Cedar of Lebanon at 154-160 Castle Hill - possibly 200 years old
- the oak tree at the corner of Goldsmid Road framing the bend in the road – c.100 years old
- the small group of regularly pollarded trees at the front of the Holy Trinity Parish Church
- several of the large mature cypress trees along the Bath Road
- several of the mature specimens in the front garden at Yeomanry House, which provide a barrier between the house and the traffic on Castle Hill.



**Legend**

- Proposed Conservation Area boundary 2019
- 2004 Conservation Area boundary
- ✱ Tree Preservation Order



Title: **Russell Street/ Castle Hill Conservation Area**  
**Figure 4.3.1: Tree Protection Orders within the Conservation Area**

Drg.No.: GIS00180

Date: 29/10/2019 Scale at A3: 1:3250

Produced by GIS & Mapping Services

Ref: 7223 - G:\Mapinfo\Data\Client datasets\Environment\Planning & Transport\Conservation\Russell\_Castle\_Hill\_Proposal





*Figure 4.3.2 The large Cedar of Lebanon at 154- 160 Castle Hill and other TPO trees along the road*

### **Trees on private properties**

Many of the trees which benefit the area are on private land. The most notable green canopies in the Conservation Area are those fronting properties along the Bath Road and along Castle Hill.

There are several trees currently being considered for TPOs fronting the Yeomanry House site, referred to below.

Many back gardens on the terraced streets have smaller trees which contribute to the overall green canopy in the area and are protected from immediate felling by their Conservation Area status.



*Figure 4.3.3 Large TPO trees along the Bath Road*



### Trees in the public domain

A number of trees within the public realm add greatly to the area. The historic allée of trees along Coley Avenue contributes much to the overall green canopy of the southern part of the Conservation Area, while the substantial mature tree canopy at the beginning of the Bath Road enhances the view west from the top of Castle Hill.

The avenue of trees along Howard Street forms an essential barrier to the traffic noise from the IDR for Howard Street and Body Road.

The trees in raised planters along Body Road are poorly maintained and improvements are needed. Trees at the south east corner of the Conservation Area, at the IDR intersection with Castle Street, are also suffering from neglect.

As they mature, the newer trees planted by the Council along the Oxford Road and along Baker Street will bring a much greener feel to those roads.



Figure 4.3.4 Allée of trees along Coley Avenue looking north into the Conservation Area

### Green parks and open green spaces

Green space is at a premium within the Conservation Area. While small green areas are proposed for inclusion at the corner of Castle Street and the IDR, along the escarpment at Coley Place and a small grouping of trees at Body Road, there are no public parks or gardens within the Conservation Area.



*Figure 4.3.5 The historical, open front garden space in front of Yeomanry House*

Creative redevelopment of the area separating Body Road from the IDR could make a small green space more beneficial to the neighbourhood instead of being an area subject to antisocial behaviour.

Private green spaces are equally rare, and two of those are owned by local churches. The area of grass and shrubs at the Carey Centre near Body Road, though private to the Carey Baptist Church, provides an oasis of green for the immediate area.

The grounds surrounding the National Spiritualist Church at 81 Baker Street were the garden of York Lodge, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century house which the church now occupies. It is a welcome green open space in Baker Street, but it too, is private to the Church.

The front garden of Yeomanry House is part of the site recently sold and being changed into a nursery. It was noted in the 2004 appraisal as a much-needed green space for the area which at the time was publically accessible, although never an official "public open space." The garden is important to retain in terms of its historical relationship to Yeomanry House's original layout.

The large front gardens of the terrace of houses at 134-144 Castle Hill, together with the front gardens of Jesse Terrace, contribute significantly to the green space in the area.

## 5. Buildings and public realm

### 5.1 Key positive characteristics

The Conservation Area's strength lies in its varied built environment, which provides a remarkable microcosm of residential styling in Reading from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The area grew in response to the rapidly changing needs of Reading's population in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as the industrial revolution brought new industries to the town. The development of particular streets and areas encapsulate many of the house types common to Reading during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ranging from high-end housing for Reading's wealthy businessmen to houses for professional people, artisans and labourers and spanning the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods. For example, the Georgian period is exemplified at the high end along Castle Street and Castle Hill and at the more modest level in the early artisan cottages along Prospect Street; the higher end of Victorian houses along Jesse Terrace with more modest scales along Howard Street and Belle Vue Road; and fine, up-market late Victorian and early Edwardian villas on Castle Crescent, Mansfield Road and Russell Street with artisan houses along Anstey Road.

As well as exemplifying this variety of house styles, inclusion of a larger section of Oxford Road illustrates the development of services for local residents. Places of worship display the diversity of religions within Reading during this period, while today's shops occupy buildings that have supplied the area's needs for roughly 200 years.

### 5.2 Building types and forms

The area is predominantly residential, particularly along the infill streets of the Conservation Area, with a high proportion of typical Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian terraces with a few detached and semi-detached properties. Their 2 to 3 and a half stories height is a very notable feature of the area. Property footprints vary largely in accordance with the social status of their intended occupants.

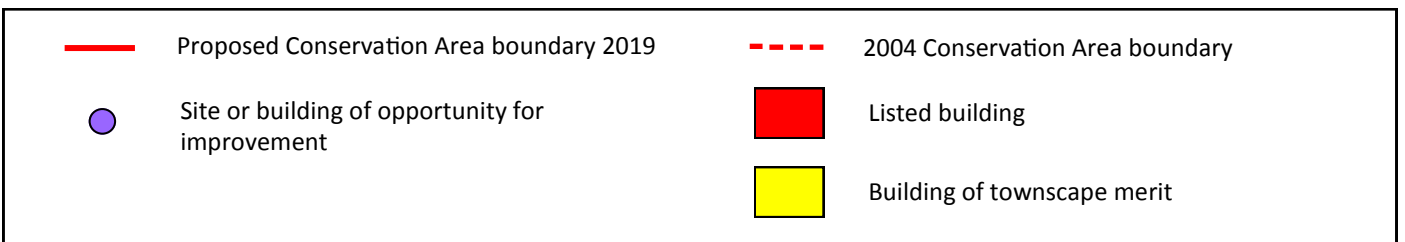
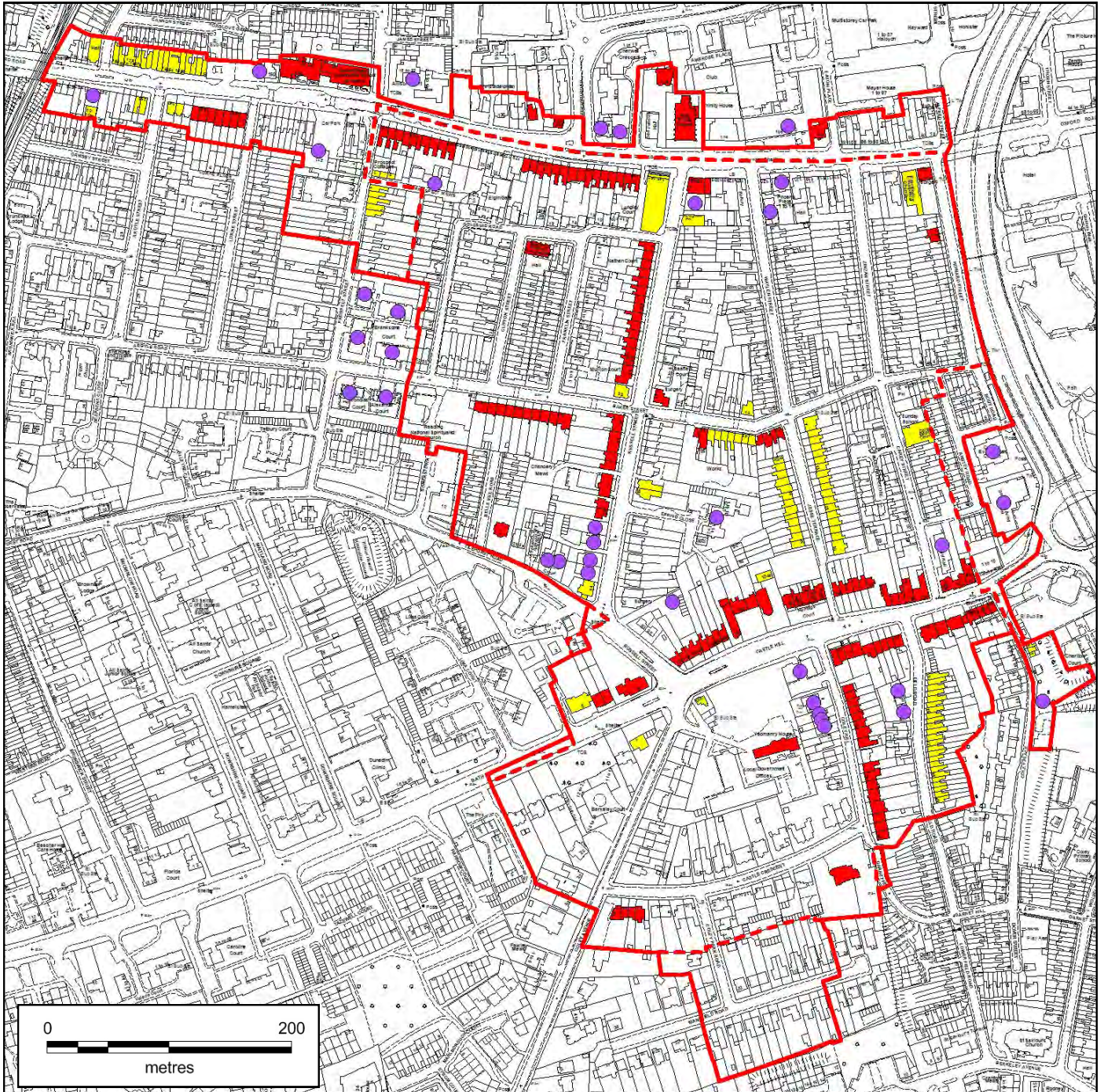
There are numerous places of worship, predominantly along the Oxford Road and in the streets north of Castle Hill, while Oxford Road exhibits a large variety of retail services for nearby residential streets.

### 5.3 Materials, styles and features

The Conservation Area shows a variety of local vernacular materials, but the common thread is Reading's famous brick and tiles; predominantly red, but displaying a full range of brick colours and finishes, used throughout all the style periods within the area. Stucco, Welsh slate, red tile, stone dressings and a smattering of Bath stone all lend character to the area. Materials for each of the individual character areas are highlighted in the Materials section of each character area in Section 6.

### 5.4 Buildings of local historic interest and Buildings of Townscape Merit

The new Local Plan for Reading defines the term of Buildings of Townscape Merit as used within the Borough. This designation denotes those those buildings within conservation areas that contribute significantly to the character of the area and are important to retain and enhance but are not Listed Buildings. To clarify, there are also no Locally Listed buildings within conservation areas and buildings are either Listed Buildings, Buildings of Townscape Merit or undesignated within a conservation area within the Borough.



Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 5.1.1: Buildings and site classification

November 2019



## 5.5 Public realm- Floorscape, street lighting, street furniture and local detail

### 5.5.1 Street lighting

Most of the area's lighting is provided by slim silver modern steel columns with simple glass lanterns. Though not particularly dominant, they are not in keeping with their Conservation Area setting and are detrimental as a whole to the area. Their bright lights, at first-floor level for many of the terraced houses, cause a harsh shine into bedrooms and living areas.

The Council's recent replacement lighting scheme has replaced lights in lampposts throughout the town with halogen. This has meant the loss of many old cast iron gas lampposts throughout the town and regrettably, the Conservation Area lost all but one on Franklin Street as a result.

The main thoroughfares have the tallest lamps with shorter ones in residential streets. Light pollution due to the proximity to the town centre and the IDR has a detrimental effect, especially in Howard Street, Body Road, Anstey Road, Carey Street and Zinzan Street.

Improving street lighting has wide potential for improvement to the local streetscape.



*Figure 5.5.1 Lights from the IDR (above left) and halogen street lights glaring into terraced housing at night along Zinzan Street*

### 5.5.2 Communications wires and electricity

Electricity, telephone and internet are delivered via wires that radiate out from telegraph poles throughout the area. In streets where there are multiple households within properties the density of wires blights the streetscape and sky views. A programme of work with service suppliers to reduce redundant wires would be welcome.



*Figure 5.5.2 Overhead wires on a street with numerous HMOs.*

### 5.5.3 Tarmac

As noted in the 2004 appraisal, the Conservation Area is mostly paved in modern tarmac, which is generally not in keeping with a Conservation Area setting and looks old and dirty very quickly.

The current patchwork appearance of much of the Oxford Road between the IDR and Prospect Street (primarily along the south side of the street) is a result of earlier concrete block paving being unevenly replaced with tarmac in sections of the street. Multiple materials and patches give the entire pavement of Oxford Road a run-down appearance, as in many parts of the Conservation Area in certain areas.

### 5.5.4 Granite kerbs and gutters

On the positive side, however, many of the streets retain their 19<sup>th</sup> century granite kerbs and stone gutters, with the occasional road mouth in granite setts. Examples noted within the 2004 appraisal, which was not a comprehensive list, include:

- Castle Crescent: 100mm granite kerbs with 300mm stone gutters
- Coley Hill: 150mm granite kerbs with three lines of granite setts creating the gutter
- Castle Hill: 300mm wide granite kerbs and 300mm granite gutter, with three lines of granite setts on the corner junctions
- Russell Street: 100-300mm granite kerbs and setted gutters
- Jesse Terrace: short lengths of 100mm wide stone kerbs with 300mm wide stone gutters
- Zinzan Street: 100mm granite kerbs with some stone or setted gutters in front of nos. 8-10 curved kerb showing an original entrance way to the back of the properties for carriages
- Oxford Road: 300mm wide granite kerbs with modern cast iron bollards, recently repainted black.

### 5.5.5 Sections of sett stones remain in three noticeable locations

Baker Street: about 1.5 sq. m of setted stones outside the basement entrance to the Oasis Community Centre.

Belle Vue Road: at the end of the road near the fencing to the back of the properties, remains a large area of setts (appx 12 sq. m ) uncovered by tarmac and with the fan pattern visible, which once may have covered much of the area.

Prospect Street at Prospect Mews: a large area (appx 4 sq. m) of large stone setts or cobbles at the entrance area to the Mews.



*Figure 5.5.3 Sett stone pavement at the end of Belle Vue Road, still displaying the fan pattern of road that was common in the area.*

### 5.5.6 Cast Iron Bollards and benches

The Oxford Road and the east side of Howard Street have rows of fairly modern cast iron bollards, which lend an attractive appearance to the area. Recently repainted they are generally a benefit to the area.

### 5.5.7 Coal hole covers

Cast iron coal hole covers are particularly in evidence on Castle Hill and Prospect Street.



*Figure 5.5.4 Coal hole cover, Castle Hill*

### 5.5.8 Railings

Although many original railings have been lost there are good examples remaining, for instance at Oxford Road Community School and some properties along Castle Hill.

## 6. Character Areas

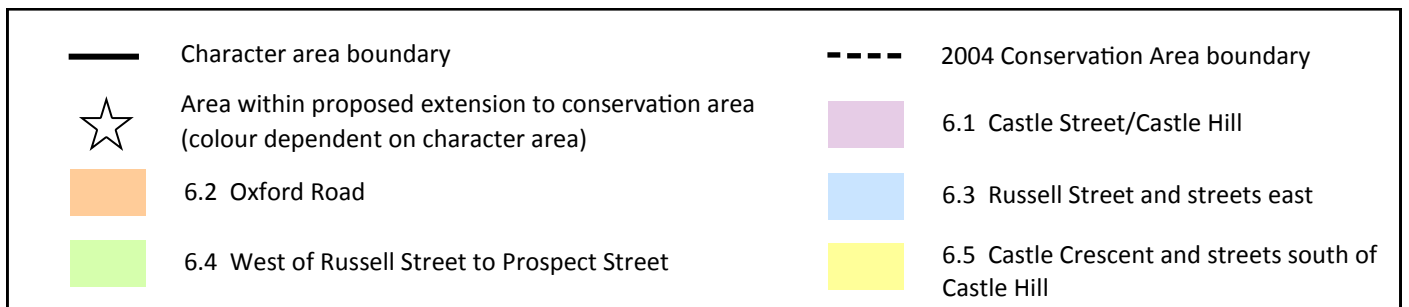
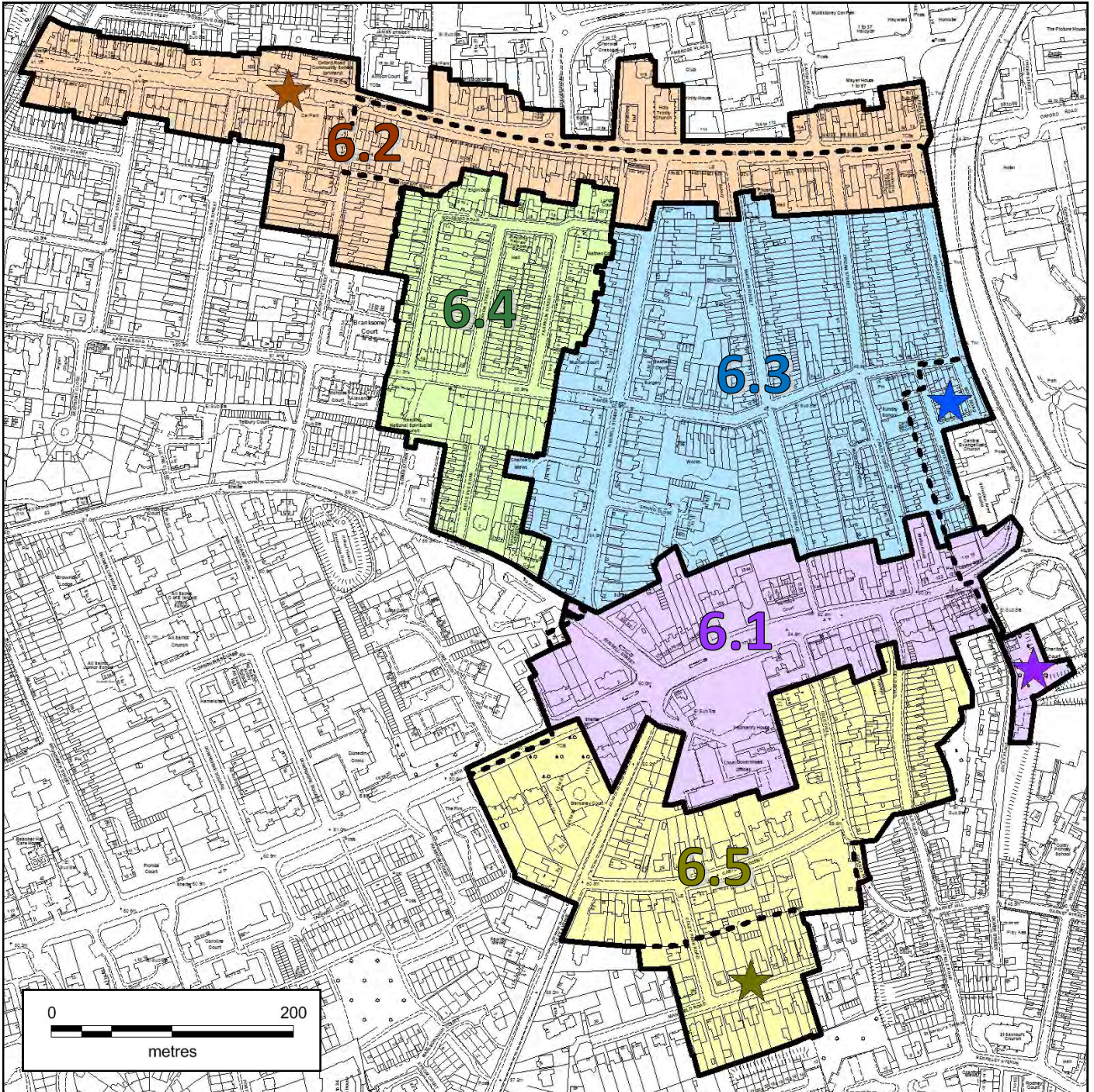
This section breaks down this large Conservation Area into geographical areas of particular and consistent character, identifying for each the factors which create that character, and which demand careful consideration whenever change is contemplated.

Because of the size of the conservation area, each character area is in many ways a micro-conservation area of its own. These 5 sections are designed to provide quick access for planners and developers to home in directly on what is important within the immediate surrounds of a site.

Within each character area appraisal a breakdown of its attributes exist as follows:

- An *overview of significance* of the character that defines the area;
- typical *materials* found within the area;
- critical and important *views* within the area are highlighted;
- an *area analysis* gives a high-level overview to critical elements of the area;
- the area's *key positive characteristics* and features;
- the area's *negative features* are defined;
- a listing of specific *Opportunities for Enhancement* highlights buildings that provide opportunities to redevelop more in keeping with the area's special character; (see map below)
- a listing of *Buildings of Townscape Merit* highlights those buildings that contribute significantly to the character of the area and are important to retain and enhance; (see Figure 5.4.1)
- the *Listed Buildings* within the area are pointed out. (Figure 5.4.1)





Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 6.0.1: Character Areas

November 2019



## 6.1 Castle Street / Castle Hill

### 6.1.1 Significance

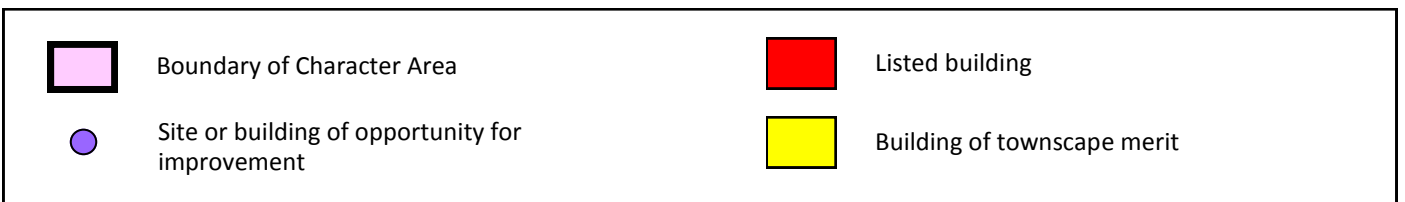
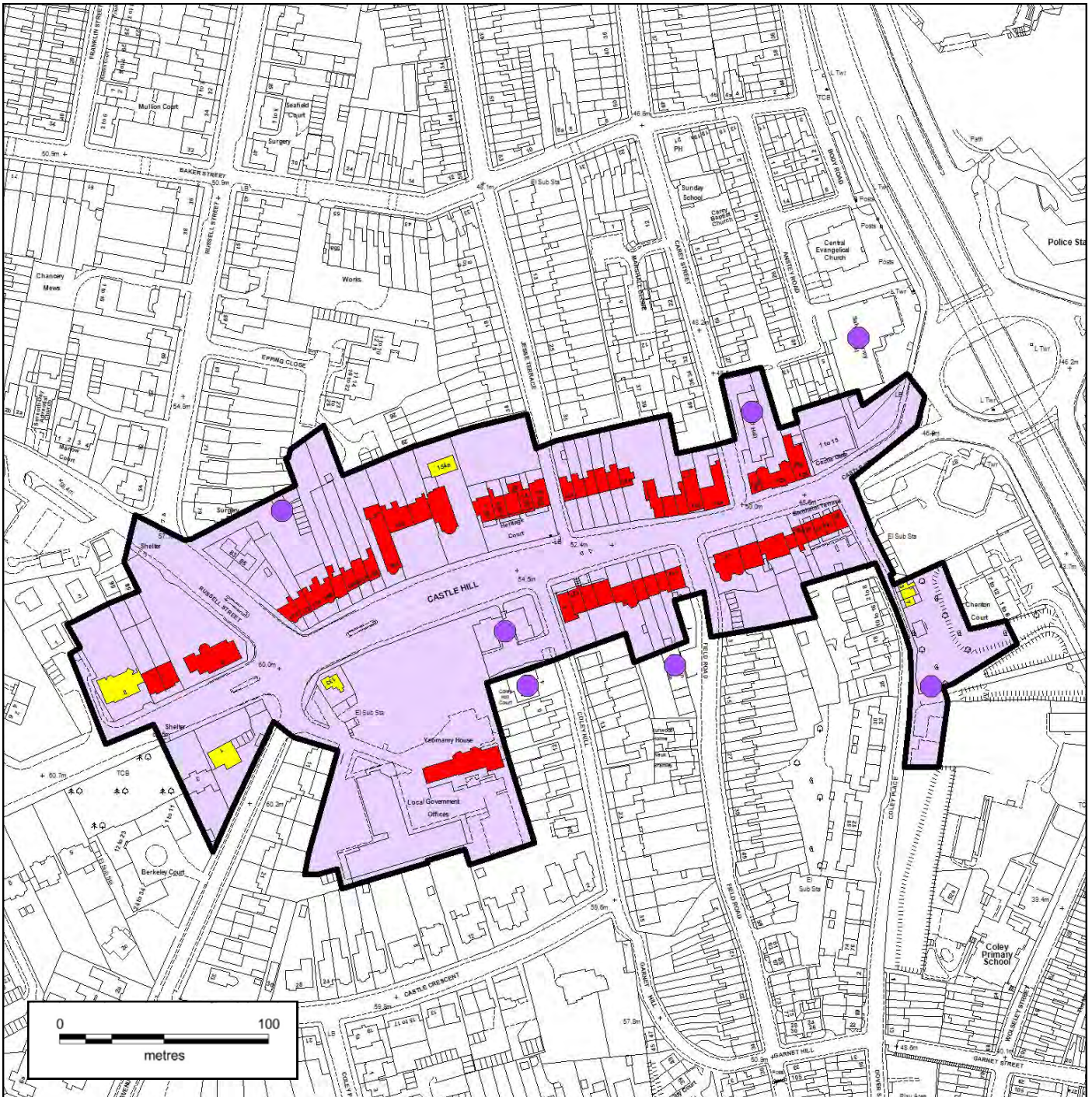
Castle Hill and Castle Street comprise one of the finest, oldest and most attractive streets within the Conservation Area. It is a wide, curving, open street that winds uphill from the town centre to the top of the chalk and clay escarpment at the junction of Castle Hill with Russell Street and Coley Avenue. This leafy street is part of the original London to Bath Road. It is notable for its large trees and imposing Georgian houses which make up part of the fine views within, into and out of the Conservation Area. The houses are mostly two and a half to three storeys tall. Largely of Georgian period construction, there are several later additions along the road, but they do not detract significantly from the grandeur of the street. The Georgian properties have large gardens set back from the pavement and leafy vistas, high quality detailing and original features. These principal characteristics contribute to its significance and justification as a separate and unique character area.

Unfortunately, the building of the IDR in 1969 divided this section of the street from the town centre with the insertion of the large roundabout, thus losing the significance of that route through the town. Reconnecting Castle Hill to the heart of the town centre, whether real or visually, would create greater understanding of the historic course of this road through Reading and its significance in influencing the development of the remainder of the Conservation Area.

### 6.1.2 Materials

Stucco rendering is the most common treatment of the façades of the Georgian houses along the street, many of which have rusticated ground floor frontages. Most of the houses are painted in neutral shades of white and off- white, though at no. 107 the yellow façade and dark green doors are believed to be the original colours of the house. Roofs are largely of Welsh slate. There are small amounts of red tile, the most notable example being the street- facing mansard roof of 160 Castle Hill.

Underlying red brick is notable only occasionally, largely seen on upper floors and to the side and rear of the properties. Regrettably, at nos. 134-144, the original Bath stone façade was removed in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and replaced by Bath stone-coloured stucco although it is still a very attractive terrace with Regency detailing.



Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 6.1.1: Character Area 6.1—Castle Street/Castle Hill

November 2019

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**6.1.3 Views: (see section 4.2 page 23)**

The most important views within the area and into and out of it are in each direction along the Castle St/Castle Hill. These views are shown as 15 (see Figure 4.2.4 and 4.2.5 and 6.1.3 below) and 6a & b (see Figure 4.2.2) on page 26. They unfold as the viewer travels along the escarpment ridge and follow the curve of the historic route to and from Reading, revealing the area's relationship with the town centre. View 6b progressively reveals the large Georgian townhouses along the route which are the focal point of the Character Area.

The views off the main route are also important. View 17 (below), looks southeast up the slight incline of Coley Place, revealing a striking row of tall terraced houses at 3-7 Coley Place, set against the trees to the rear. These contrast notably with the grander Georgian houses on Castle Hill. The small terrace is what remains of a longer terrace which once stood on this edge of the escarpment above the Holy Brook. The views off the street are also important.



*Figure 6.1.2 View 17: Looking south up Coley Place from Castle Hill*



*Figure 6.1.3 View 15: Looking east towards town from Castle Hill*

Views 13 and 14 display some of the grand houses that once dominated the Castle Hill, Russell St and Coley Avenue junction. View 13 (figure 4.2.3) looking south towards the back of nos. 2 and 4 Bath Road is of their impressive tall chimney stacks. View 14 looks southeast from

Coley Avenue into the grounds of Yeomanry House. The original house can be seen from the junction with the modern Berkshire Records Office to its side and the property's original gatehouse (no.133) on the corner.

View 5a (see Figure 4.2.9) looks west along the Bath Road towards the Downshire Square Conservation Area from the junction of Castle Hill, Russell Street, Coley Avenue and Bath Road. The view of Downshire Square Conservation Area is screened by the largest collection of fine, mature trees within the Conservation Area. Most of these mature trees are protected by TPO status.

#### 6.1.4 Area analysis:

The Grade II\* 154-160 Castle Hill, originally the Kings Arms Inn, with its striking Cedar of Lebanon tree in its forecourt, is the street's most notable and impressive building (see figure 6.1.4). Dating from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, its long history is detailed in Appendix I.



Figure 6.1.4 154- 160 Castle Hill, the former Kings Arms Inn, and Jesse family home

The Grade II former Horse and Jockey (now called the Castle Tap) was rebuilt in 1823 on the site of a 17<sup>th</sup> coaching inn and is today an active Public House listed as an Asset of Community Value.



*Figure 6.1.5 The former Horse and Jockey (The Castle Tap) rebuilt early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 120 Castle Street*

Yeomanry House, Grade II, and its associated gatehouse, at 131 and 133 Castle Hill, comprise the most significant remaining example of the grand houses built at the junction of Castle Hill, Russell St and Coley Avenue for the wealthy and prominent businessmen of Reading. It exemplifies the layout of these properties with its c.1840 gatehouse and large front garden facing directly onto Castle Hill. The footprint of its original drive is still in situ. The gatehouse is notable for its early and extensive use of salmon-coloured brick.

The modern, purpose-built Berkshire Record Office was built on the site of the Berkshire Yeomanry's Riding School (built 1911). The Record Office's minimalist design, appropriate massing and footprint allows it to fit well within the setting.



Figure 6.1.6 *Yeomanry House at 131 Castle Hill - house, front drive and garden,*



Figure 6.1.7 *Former c.1840s gate house 133 Castle Hill for Yeomanry House, with the back section recently sympathetically built.*



Figure 6.1.8 *Berkshire Record Office, on the Yeomanry House site*

The Grade II 2 Bath Road, the former home of local market gardener, William Pratt Swallow has a fine Georgian frontage and an attractive chimneyscape (also see figure 4.2.3). The busy intersection that it sits directly upon, with frequently backed-up cars and street furniture compromises its originally important setting.



*Figure 6.1.9 William Pratt Swallow's house, 2 Bath Road with busy junction in front of it*

Further early 19<sup>th</sup> century grand villas near this junction include the greatly altered 1 Bath Road, largely hidden behind a modernised high brick wall. The large fine trees (many safeguarded by TPOs) along the Bath Road heading west near the entrances to Janson Court and Lima Court are the only visible reminders of the long-demolished mansions that once stood behind them.

The houses at nos.107-111 and nos.122-132 (all Grade II), define the early building at the east end of the street. These houses are large, often rusticated and stuccoed; many with original arched windows and fanlights. The house at no.107 still retains its stable building and the footprint of its large, original garden to the rear.





*Figure 6.1.10 Large rusticated Georgian houses on the south side of Castle Street at 107-111*



*Figure 6.1.11 Large Georgian properties on the north side of Castle Street at 122-132*

The Grade II early 19<sup>th</sup> century Bath stone Blenheim Terrace, at nos. 97-105 Castle Street, is impressive in scale and its classic detailing. It is one of only two extant Bath stone properties remaining within the conservation area. No.105 is regrettably in a poor state of repair.



*Figure 6.1.12 Blenheim Terrace, Bath stone terrace, 97-105 Castle Street*

The attractive Grade II Regency detailed terrace at 134-144 Castle Hill is set back from the road in well-tended deep gardens. Its Bath stone coloured stucco façade is a replacement of its original Bath stone façade which was removed in the 1960s.



*Figure 6.1.13 Bath stone coloured stuccoed Regency style terrace, 134-144 Castle Hill*

The fine grouping of houses at nos. 113-121 (all Grade II) create a pleasing collection on the south side of the street. The terrace is attractive because of the houses' Georgian architectural variety, despite dropped kerbs for parking along most of the fronts. No. 113 forms a particularly striking end with its rusticated paired pilasters, topped with wreaths.



*Figure 6.1.14 Attractive diverse terrace of Georgian properties at 113-121 Castle Street*

Heritage Court (nos. 144A – 152) and the terrace at nos.162A- 166 (all Grade II) are the legacy of the local Jesse family of developers. The attractive verandas with concave metal roofs and Regency style metal work distinguish the families' developments along Castle Hill.



*Figure 6.1.15 Heritage Court, 144A- 152 Castle Hill, a Jesse family development*



*Figure 6.1.16 Nos. 162A-168, with Regency iron detailing, an early Jesse family development*

The trees along the street are notable and contribute well to the overall fine appearance of the road.

Nos. 168-174 Castle Hill, c. early 1840s (Grade II), displays the waning influence of late Georgian styling in the area. It is an impressively-scaled rusticated stucco and red brick terrace. Wooden sash windows remain and the surviving fanlights have an unusual styling, with a linked elongated oval pattern and a centre section for a lamp within the fanlight. One of these fanlights has been entirely retained at no. 168. The western end of the terrace is in multiple occupancy, poorly maintained and has seen the erosion and loss of original features as a result of poor maintenance by the owner. Constant estate agent signage and poor maintenance of the frontages and façades contributes negatively to the appearance of this corner terrace.

Another detraction on the street is at no. 129 Castle Hill, Ridgeborough Court. Here, the late 20<sup>th</sup> century residential building's overall design and fenestration are out-of-keeping with the rest of the street. By comparison, the modern Castlegate flats at no.114 Castle Street have better interpreted the prevalent Georgian styling along the street and as such form less of a visual detraction along the road.

#### 6.1.5 Key positive characteristics:

- the Grade II\* 154-160 Castle Hill, the former Kings Arms Inn, and its impressive forecourt Cedar of Lebanon tree
- attractive, well-maintained listed Georgian houses and terraces along the run of the street
- well maintained gardens east of Jesse Terrace
- Yeomanry House with its original footprint of front garden, drive and gatehouse
- Many TPO'd trees within the route and along the Conservation Area boundary
- 107 Castle Hill with its original features and original footprint of stables and back garden
- Fine unfolding streetscape views within, into and out of the Conservation Area of Georgian houses, trees and open sky

#### 6.1.6 Negative features:

- busy and heavy traffic, especially during rush hours

- identified hot spot for air pollution along Castle Hill
- poor quality tarmac pavements and surfaces
- excessive clutter of modern street furniture
- modern building at 129 Castle Hill
- a small number of poorly maintained front gardens and boundaries
- dropped kerb parking at 107-109 and at 115-121 Castle Hill
- poor pedestrian links across busy street and at mid-point along Castle Hill
- poor condition of some properties, notably at 105 Castle Street, 125-127 Castle Hill, 172-174 Castle Hill (terrace), 2 Bath Road and 1 Bath Road
- obtrusive private parking signage
- gardens given over to parking

#### 6.1.7 Buildings presenting Opportunities for Enhancement

- Ridgeborough Court, 129 Castle Hill, late 20th c. Improvement of façade or front garden to be more in keeping with the local character of the area.
- 1 Bath Road, circa 1830. Removal of unsympathetic modern additions to building and to restore former height of front boundary wall.

#### 6.1.8 Buildings of Townscape Merit

- Former Yeomanry House Gatehouse, 133 Castle Hill, circa 1840. Small gatehouse of Yeomanry House with early use of salmon-coloured brick.
- 1 Bath Road, circa 1830. One of the remaining original “grand houses” originally situated at this junction.
- 8 Bath Road, circa 1880-1890. Striking terracotta front doorway on late Victorian building.
- 3-7 Coley Place, circa 1850-1870. Lone examples of mansard roof terraced housing within the Conservation Area; originally part of 10 houses along terrace that disappeared prior to approximately 1910.

#### 6.1.9 Listed Buildings

- 97 to 105 Castle Street (S. side), Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century terrace of five houses, 3 storeys and basement. Bath stone, arched openings to ground floor, string courses and parapet. Steps to principal storey. Original cast iron railings to areas. Houses to end of terrace set slightly forward.
- 107 Castle Street (S. side), Grade II. Circa 1800 Georgian stucco house, 3 storeys and semi basement, steps to entrance. Principal floor, arched windows and rusticated stucco, four Ionic pilasters and moulded entablature to upper floors, slate roof. Poor forecourt as parking.
- 109 Castle Street (S. side), Grade II. Circa 1800 Georgian stucco house, 2 storeys plus semi basement and attic. Steps to entrance. Rusticated stucco to basement and entrance storey. Tripartite windows. Bracketed eaves and slate roof. Poor forecourt as parking.
- 111 Castle Street (S. side), Grade II. Late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century house, altered, 3 storeys and semi basement. Stucco, rusticated to ground floor and basement, cornice and parapet. Steps to entrance. Porch with slender fluted Doric columns.

- 120 Castle Street, Grade II. Public house, The Castle Tap. Mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, 2 storeys, red brick, modelled to first floor. Stone or stucco cornice and string course, slate roof. Two tall half glazed doorways.
- 122 Castle Street, Grade II. Circa 1840, 3 storey stucco house, rusticated ground floor and corner pilasters, raised surrounds to upper windows, cornice, parapet and slate roof. Central entrance door and fanlight, panelled pilasters. 2 storey extension to west.
- 124 Castle Street, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 3 storeys. Symmetrical façade with central door and fanlight, five bays wide. Stucco with, string course cornice and parapet, slate roof.
- 126 Castle Street, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 3 tall storeys and basement, set back, stucco, channelled ground floor with arches, mouldings to first floor windows, cornice and parapet. Railings.
- 128 to 132 Castle Street, Grade II. Terrace of 3 houses, early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 3 storeys, stucco. Central part projecting and pedimented with delicate wrought iron balconies to first floor. Hipped slate roofs. 132 has entrance on return western elevation with 2 storey bay.
- 134 to 144 Castle Street, Grade II. Symmetrical terrace of six houses. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 3 storeys and basement. 2 projecting gabled bays. Arched openings to ground floor. Second floor bullseye windows to four houses. Rendered Bath stone front, hipped slate roofs. A good design.
- 113 Castle Street (S. side), Grade II. 1850s on older site. 3 storeys plus basement. Rendered with heavy moulded parapet, string course, channelled pilasters, bracketed hood to door.
- 115 Castle Street (S. side), Grade II. After 1823. 3 storeys and basement. Rendered, 2 string courses, steps to entrance, radiating fanlight, slate roof.
- 117 and 119 Castle Street (S. side), Grade II. After 1823. 3 storeys and basement. Rendered, similar to 115. Wrought iron railings of the period to first floor on later support. Slate roof.
- 121 Castle Street (S. side), Grade II. After 1823. 3 storeys and basement. Rendered, cornice and parapet, arched openings to ground floor. Right hand set back. Fanlight and pilastered doorcase.
- 123 Castle Street, (S. side), Grade II. Mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. 3 storeys and semi basement, red brick, rendered and channelled lower floors and window surrounds. Steps to entrance. Slate roof. Chimneys.
- 125 and 127 Castle Street (S. side), Grade II. Mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. 4 storeys and basement, red brick with contrasting dressings, paired windows rendered surrounds. Steps to columned twin porch. Slate roof.
- 144A to 152 Castle Street, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Symmetrical terrace of six houses now flats. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 4 storeys and basement. End houses set forward. Rendered Bath stone, cornice and parapet, mouldings to windows, arched first floor. Ground floor veranda with railings. Slate roof.
- 154 to 160 Castle Street, Former Kings Arms Inn, Grade II\*. A U-shaped group of buildings, now four houses with 18<sup>th</sup> century fronts but older origins. 2 storey centre block, end blocks taller with 2 storey circular bays. Painted stucco with cornice and parapets.

Mansard roofs. Two with porches. One of the finest building groups in the Conservation Area.

- 162, 162A, to 166 Castle Street, Grade II. Early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Symmetrical terrace of four houses, end houses gabled and set forward. 3 storeys and basement. Rendered Bath stone, channelled ground floor, veranda and railings to centre houses. Slate roof.
- 168 to 174 Castle Street, Grade II. Early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Terrace of originally four houses, 4 storeys and basement. Red brick. Stucco ground floor, 2 storey end bays, cornice and parapet. Slate roof. One fanlight, at 168, retains lantern.
- 2 Bath Road, Swallow House, Grade II. Circa 1780. 2 storey and basement. Red brick, delicate wooden cornice, slate roof with end chimneys. Wings to either side of centre block. Central door surround with open pediment and Doric pillars. A fine Georgian house in some disrepair.
- 4 and 6 Bath Road, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Symmetrical pair, 3 storeys and basement. Red brick now painted. Stucco ground floor, window surrounds and parapet. Slate roof. Railings.
- Yeomanry House, Castle Hill, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Original building 2 storeys, stucco with moulded cornice and stone balustrade. 2 storey circular bay windows. Central recessed entry with wide fanlight. Slate roof. Unfortunate later 19<sup>th</sup> century extension wing to right.

## 6.2 Oxford Road

### 6.2.1 Significance

The Oxford Road is one of the earliest roads leading out of Reading, south of the River Thames, serving as the primary route to Pangbourne and on to Oxford. The Oxford Road character area consists of the Oxford Road corridor between the IDR to the east and the Reading West Railway Bridge at its western end and encompasses a small area of both Prospect Street and Argyle Street directly to the south because of the related housing styles. Today, this is a vibrant area with an active pedestrian and vehicular traffic route, well known for its array of independent shops which reflect the area's diverse communities.

The 2-and 3-storey streetscape is a mix of impressive Georgian terraces and stand-alone houses interspersed with Victorian shops and houses along the route.

Along this half-mile route of 19<sup>th</sup> century heritage buildings on the Oxford Road, forty of the addresses are listed, either singly or collectively as a terrace. Although a general neglect of retail frontages and poorly-maintained, terraced houses is very prevalent along the road, the area's early history is still strongly evident in its 19<sup>th</sup> century built environment. Solid Arts and Crafts influences are apparent in the many attractive polychrome brick and terracotta façades in the area. The Oxford Road Community School, and houses along the west side of Prospect Street display good terra-cotta embellishment. The first-floor levels above the shops and the residences opposite the retail terrace at the junction with Argyle Road are notable for their colourful polychrome brickwork.

Early 19<sup>th</sup> century mapping evidence suggests that shops with residential accommodation above them extended westward from the town centre; notably between Alfred Street and Eaton Place and also between Russell Street and Waylen Street. However, the nature of the shops and services has altered over time, reflective of incoming immigrant populations. The current speciality hair salons, grocers and bakers, along with the estate agents, key cutters, pharmacies and dentists, all serve the needs of the diverse local community and Reading's wider population. Today's businesses are a continuation of the Oxford Road's history of diverse retail services established over many generations.

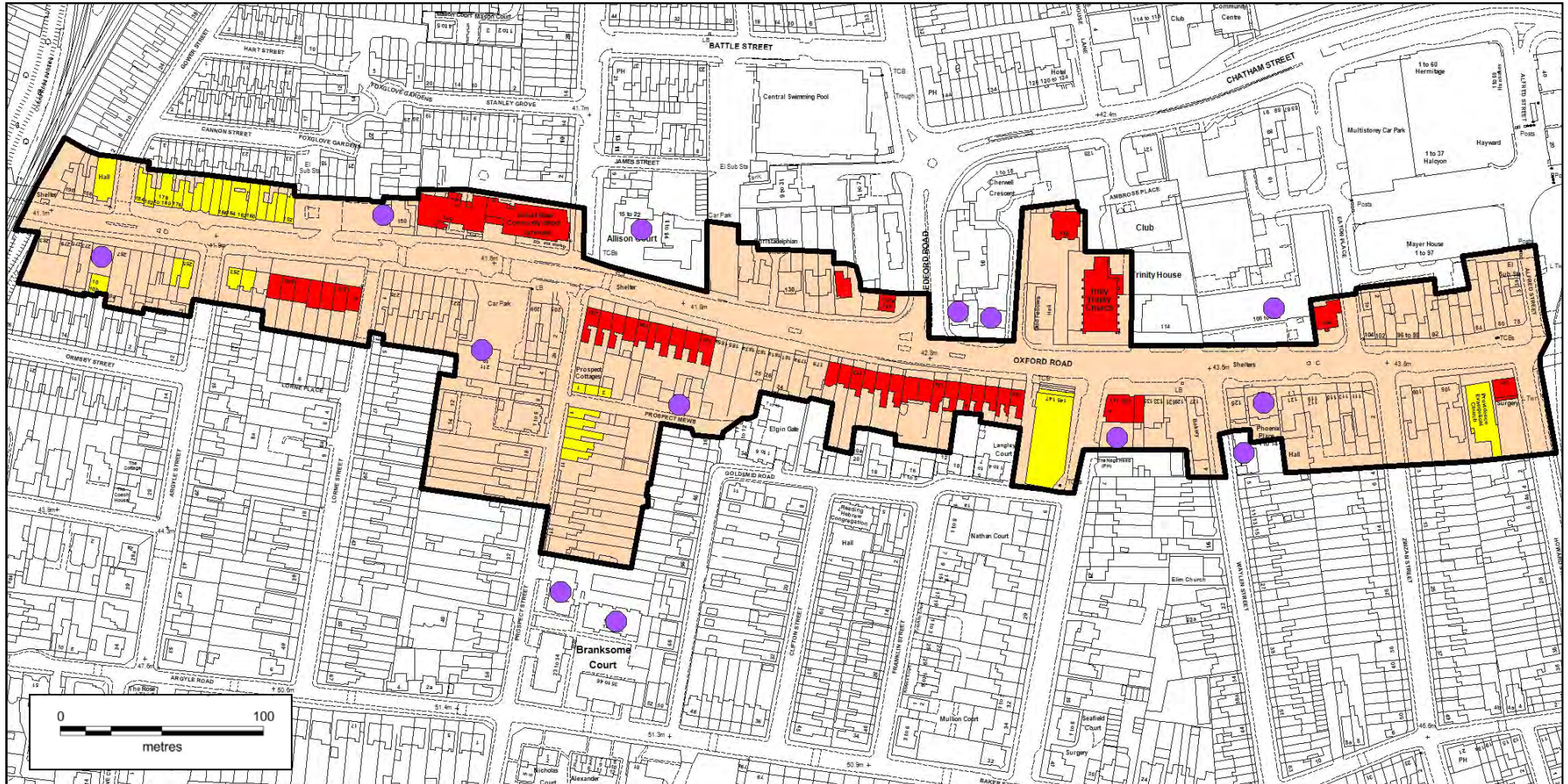
The parish church of the Holy Trinity, along with Bridge Hall, Providence Chapel and the modern Lifespring Church, evidence the conservation area's historical association with a variety of religious institutions; traditional, non-conformist and those of other faiths.





Regrettably, a combination of modern ad-hoc alterations with the poorly maintained public realm along the road strikes a distracting discordance. Many modern alterations are out of keeping with the historic environment. Some modern builds have failed to respect the Conservation Area's character. Much of the residential accommodation, including above the shops, tends to be poorly maintained. Along with the exciting and vibrant nature of the Oxford Road, the clash of modern and historic materials and poor maintenance makes it difficult to fully appreciate the street's historic character.

The public realm areas are poor in many sections. Traffic management signs should be rationalised. Trees have been planted along the route to improve the public realm and this should be extended.

To the rear of the south side of Oxford Road there have historically been many yards and businesses most of which have now been redeveloped, e.g. the stonemason's yard on Prospect Street.





-  Boundary of Character Area
-  Listed building
-  Building of townscape merit
-  Site or building of opportunity for improvement

Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 6.2.1: Character Area 6.2—Oxford Road

November 2019

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### 6.2.2 Materials

Reading's most dominant building material, red brick, is seen frequently especially along the Georgian terraced façades. Polychrome brick and terracotta embellishment is notable and impressive further along to the west of the route nearer the railway bridge with later development along the road. Stucco is also common and notable at 197-203 Sidney Terrace and on many of the retail/residential buildings. Roofs are almost entirely slate with the notable exception of the red tiled roof of the Oxford Road Community School.

### 6.2.3 Views

In view 7, looking west along Oxford Road towards the railway bridge from the eastern end, the parade of polychrome brick residential and retail buildings display their colours well, with the with the bustle of Oxford Road's pedestrians and vehicles in front. The bridge, with its faded mural of doves, designed by schoolchildren, has been a landmark for over 170 years.

View 8, looking northwest, shows the striking Oxford Road Community School, which, like the retail terrace in view 7, is brilliant in the late afternoon sun.



Figure 6.2.2 Reading West railway bridge, facing west along the Oxford Road, the iron bridge replaced an original brick design



*Figure 6.2.3 Poor condition listed Georgian housing, an acceptable modern pastiche front built onto a historic framework, varied shop façades and poor public realm all mix along the streetscape between Russell Street and Prospect Street*

**6.2.4 Area Analysis:**

The oldest buildings date to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in several long, listed terraces notably at: 149-177, 187-193, 195-197 and 197-203 Oxford Road and Prospect Terrace at 237-247 Oxford Road/ no. 2 Lorne Street.



*Figure 6.2.4 Large stuccoed Georgian Sidney Terrace, 197-203 Oxford Road*

Maps regression also shows that the shops with residential on the first floor, at the corner of Alfred Street towards Eaton Place along the north side, and shops on the south side east of Russell Street, existed prior to 1833.

Additionally, two detached Georgian houses at 101 and 104 Oxford Road remain from the earlier villas that dotted the route. They are in moderate condition and house businesses.



*Figure 6.2.5 101 Oxford Road-a detached Georgian family home with original high back garden walls*



*Figure 6.2.6 National Meteorological Society at 104 Oxford Road, a detached Georgian house with porticoed front porch surrounded by unsympathetic modern build*

Most of the early residential terraces are in poor to moderate condition, with several converted to shops at ground floor level. The Georgian terraces are largely of red brick, except for the impressive stuccoed villas at nos. 197-203. Fortunately, a majority of the listed terraces still retain original windows, doors and detailing although there are some exceptions where enforcement has failed to catch uPVC replacement window in the listed terraces. Some of the original brick walls in front of these properties, notably at nos. 149-153, need repair and re-pointing.



*Figure 6.2.7 Listed Georgian terraces along Oxford Road, in poor repair, lost behind cluttered street furniture and busy road traffic*

Prospect Terrace is a fine, Grade II Georgian terrace set back from the Oxford Road largely in poor condition and negatively impacted by the petrol station opposite and the busy road.



*Figure 6.2.8 237 and 239 Oxford Road, part of Prospect Terrace, 237-247 Oxford Road/2 Lorne Street*

The proudly diverse shops along the north and south side of Oxford Road between Howard Street and Russell Street are in some of the worst conditions along the route. Many of them originate in structures existing prior to 1833. Ad-hoc, ill-advised renovations, illuminated signage and the neglect of the building façades by individual owners have largely caused these issues. Irregular frontages and shops spill wares and storage out onto the pavement creating a disjointed, lively appearance along the roadway. Accentuation of positive historic features could improve footfall and attract trade without detracting from the character of the area.



**Figure 6.2.9** *Proudly diverse grocers and shops do business amid clutter and poor signage which mask the original early 19<sup>th</sup> century structures on Oxford Road between Russell Street and Waylen Street*

The austere Grade II Holy Trinity Parish church, built c.1826 but the stone façade to west front 1845, at the junction of Russell Street on the Oxford Road still maintains a heritage presence. The last renovation of the church was unable to fund the reinstatement of its centre spiralet which was lost in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Current development directly to the church's east will affect the church's prominence on the road and the reinstatement of its spire could help to strengthen its presence significantly. The Grade II 118 Oxford Road, a circa 1845 villa to the rear of Bridge Hall, was once the manse.



*Figure 6.2.10 The Grade II Holy Trinity parish church at the intersection of Russell Street*



*Figure 6.2.11 Holy Trinity spiralet before removal*

The rise and on-going strength of Nonconformist Churches in the area from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century is part of the story of the Oxford Road and the Conservation Area south of Castle Hill. The Providence Chapel, dating from c.1859, is evidence of this societal activity. Sadly, its modern tarmac frontage and access ramp detract from its appearance.

Bridge Hall, dating from c. 1899, was built for Reading's Open Brethren group, and is in very poor repair and in need of external improvements.

The Pavilion, originally an important cinema for Reading, opened in 1929, is now home to the non-conformist Lifespring Church. The church has carefully restored much of the original cinema's interior detailing. In recognition of the Nonconformist tradition of the area, each of these buildings have been listed as Buildings of Townscape Merit.



Figure 6.2.12 Providence Chapel, c. 1859, 103 Oxford Road (Google Maps)



Figure 6.2.13 Bridge Hall, originally built for the Reading Open Brethren Group, in poor repair





*Figure 6.2.14 The Pavilion, a former popular Reading cinema, corner of Russell Street, now well restored and home to the Lifespring Church*

The connector road of Prospect Street created early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by William Pratt Swallow is a natural extension to the Oxford Road character area in defining how residential streets came to be structured off that road. The early Georgian houses and the styling of the late Victorian infill along the western side of the Street, closely mirror the styling along the Oxford Road.

Prospect Mews (built prior to 1853) and the small late Georgian artisan terrace, nos. 1-9, (built prior to 1833) provide important historical societal context with their contrast to the grand Sidney Terrace to the north along Oxford Road.

The terrace at nos.1-9 is collectively in poor to fair condition, with the over-bearing dormer window at no.1 being a large detraction to the harmony of this rather rare, early, artisan terrace. Two of the houses, 5 and 9 Prospect Street, are stuccoed like Prospect Mews. The house at 9 Prospect Street has the original fanlight and windows, along with many original interior features and is still in use as a single-family residence.

The street also contains examples of coal hole covers and other historic ironwork.



*Figure 6.2.15 1-9 Prospect Street, a rare modest Georgian artisan terrace with the over-bearing modern dormer window at no. 1*

A rare, representative expanse of stone paving has been retained at the entrance into Prospect Mews. The modest terrace of Prospect Mews, directly behind Sidney Terrace is in fair condition, although the Mews itself is access for a car repair service at the back and the alleyway is frequently littered with fly-tipping.



*Figure 6.2.16 Prospect Mews, mews houses with an expanse of stone pavement at the entrance to the alleyway*

The much larger houses at nos. 11-23 Prospect Street were all built prior to 1853. No. 23 Prospect Street has attractive later polychrome detailed modifications which were noted positively during the initial consultation in 2016. This detailing shows the desire of residents later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to enhance their properties in line with changing styles with the later infill along Oxford Road and on Prospect Street opposite.

The houses opposite at nos. 4-26 on the west side of the street, are late Victorian/ Edwardian additions notable for their use of polychrome brick and attractive terracotta embellishments. The modern infill at nos. 8-16 replaced an historical yard. As it was built sympathetically, noting the street's materials, scale and footprints, it does not contrast unduly with adjoining heritage properties.

The striking Oxford Road Community School (c. 1880-1883) anchors the route in a positive reminder of its proud past. It is well-maintained and provides a positive and active focal point for the surrounding neighbourhood.



*Figure 6.2.17 The well-maintained Oxford Road Community School*

Further along the northern side of Oxford Road at the western end, the long terrace of c.1890 shops with residences above at nos. 152 to 180 has a vibrant, polychrome façade which largely retains its integrity and is unpainted. This terrace exhibits a high level of detail and is in better condition than other retail terraces further to the west beyond the railway bridge. Original bargeboards above centre dormers and polychromed chimneys largely remain. The colourful retail signs above modern altered retail frontages are a moderate detraction, but they also display the many diverse and long-standing local businesses that the Oxford Road is well-known for. Although many of the windows on the first floor have been converted to uPVC, and retail frontages blur an original storefront layout, the terrace is a credit to the street and deserves to be protected and enhanced where possible.

To the south opposite the retail terrace are two polychromed residential terraces at nos. 249-253 and nos. 255-261, c.1890, flanking the entrance to Argyle Street. They are in reasonable condition, although the eastern one has lost chimneys. Their rare mirrored form is worthy of further protection. The properties directly behind those on Argyle Street reflect this continued style of building onto the Oxford Road streetscape and the ghost signage of an old tailoring business at 2 Argyle Street adds clear historical context to the area and should be protected.



**Figure 6.2.18** Long retail terrace, 152-180 Oxford Road, stunning polychrome and largely intact, although incompatible signage and store fronts detract from its appearance

The terrace at nos. 225-235 is a simple two-and half storey red brick terrace with ample, deep-set gardens. The houses are in fairly good condition with front boundaries largely intact but each differently treated which reduces the harmony of the terrace. The two more exuberant Arts and Crafts influenced poly-chrome houses at the eastern end of the terrace at nos. 221-223 have front gardens converted to hard standing and the loss of a red brick front wall that detracts from the rest of the terrace.

Modern infill development from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century blights the historic streetscape, most intensely on the north side of Oxford Road. Therefore, several of these sites have been excluded from the proposed revised boundary of the Conservation Area. These exclusions are: Eaton Court at 104-112, the lot at 114 undergoing redevelopment to a large block of flats, Richer Sounds at 118A, the Royal PH on the corner of Bedford Road and Allison Court at no. 136. It should be noted however, that any future redevelopment of those sites will be controlled by policy to be respectful to the surrounding heritage of the Conservation Area. Notably, Allison Court, provides a pleasant green space and trees in its garden along the road and its recently added fencing makes a clearer boundary line. Similar thought for improved frontages amongst the excluded properties would be welcomed in order to better screen the sites from the road and contribute more positively to the surrounding Conservation Area.

The petrol station at no. 150 and Tesco Express at nos. 211-221 also disrupt the historic built line of the road. They are, however, included in the boundary due to their geographical positioning along the road and the key important heritage element of the School. Their adverse impact includes their materials, massing and set-back footprints, tarmac parking spaces and their out-of-keeping modern design. They both provide opportunities for enhancement such as improved entrances and green landscaping.

The MTC Motorcycles dealership at nos. 267-271 conceals an historic villa, Oxford Lodge, directly behind it and the lodge's roof can still be seen from Gower Street opposite, behind the retail façade. The shop's façade, scale, appearance and set back are discordant with

the remainder of the area but the dealership lends itself to the historic flavour of unique and varied businesses along the route.

The railway bridge is a prominent reminder of Reading's progress and industry in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It is currently showing signs of wear and it is being modernised, which could substantially improve the area by reducing ASB and creating a more positive conduit to the west from the Conservation Area. The appearance of the bridge, either repainted or re-built to reflect its original brickwork and architectural quality would create a desirable visual impact for the Conservation Area.

#### 6.2.5 Key Positive Characteristics

- The listed Georgian terraces of 149-177, 187-193, 195-197, 197-203 and Prospect Terrace at 2 Lorne Street/237-247 Oxford Road, though many of these properties are in poor condition.
- The early Georgian single-family residences at 101 and 104 Oxford Road
- Oxford Road Community School, which is well-maintained
- Holy Trinity Church with its sealed catacombs beneath and its Pugin chancel screen
- Bridge Hall, which is currently housing a church although in a state of poor repair
- Providence Chapel with its polychrome brick façade
- The Pavilion, a well-restored former cinema, now home to the Lifespring Church
- The impressive Gothic Revival villa at 118, set back from the road
- The unpainted polychrome terrace of shops at 152 to 180, east of Gower Street
- The twinned polychrome terraces at 249-253 and 255-261 either side of Argyle Street opposite the shops
- The rare artisan terrace at 1-9 Prospect Street
- Prospect Mews, its small stand of terraces and retained stone entrance way
- Recently repainted cast iron bollards and new tree plantings along the route
- Greyed brick end first floor at 109B Oxford Road facing the intersection with Zinzan Street

#### 6.2.6 Negative Features

- The modern intrusions along the north side of the Oxford Road, included or not within the proposed Conservation Area boundary
- Modern shop fronts have destroyed the original 19<sup>th</sup> century retail frontages in many locations
- Metal roller security doors along the route
- Garish, illuminated and irregularly sized retail signage that destroy a sense of harmony along the retail corridor notably on the north between Alfred Street and Eaton Place and on the south side of the street between Zinzan Street and Russell Street
- Poorly kept front retail spaces extending to the pavements detracting from the traditional street line and causing issues with pedestrian flow along the route (notably between Waylen Street and Russell Street)
- The poor state of repair of many of the properties along the road including redundant wires, satellite dishes and uPVC windows
- Poorly managed commercial and residential waste
- Excessive and erratic public realm street signage and estate agent signage
- Poor pavement repairs with tarmac among stone slabs especially on the south side of the street between Russell Street and Prospect Street
- Several air-quality hot-spots along the route due to traffic
- The loss of the spire at the Holy Trinity Church
- The poor decorative condition of the railway bridge over the Oxford Road

### 6.2.7 Buildings/Sites presenting Opportunities for Enhancement

- BP Service Station, 150 Oxford Road. Circa 2010s.
- Tesco Express, 211- 212 Oxford Road. Circa 2010s.
- Building of flats, 123 Oxford Road. Circa 1980-1990s
- Garages, east end of Prospect Mews, Circa mid /late 20<sup>th</sup> c
- MTC Motorcycle Dealership, 261-271 Oxford Road, Circa mid /late 20<sup>th</sup> c

### Sites just outside the Conservation Area with key impact:

- The Royal PH, 2 Bedford Road (at the corner of Oxford Road). Circa 1930s.
- Richer Sounds, 118A Oxford Road. Circa 1970s
- The Odd Fellows Hall, 118 Oxford Road. Circa 1970s
- Eaton Court, 104-112 Oxford Road. Circa 1970- 1980s
- Allison Court, 136 Oxford Road. Circa 1960s.

### 6.2.8 Buildings of Townscape Merit:

- Bridge Hall, 184 Oxford Road, 1899, one of several places of worship along the Oxford Road area that is extant and showing the area's spread of Nonconformist worship. Its use of greyed brick and Dutch-styled front pediment delineate along the street.
- Lifespring Church, The Pavilion, 143-145 Oxford Road. Circa 1926. Originally one of Reading's dominant and leading cinemas, now well-restored noting its interior audience space and its room at the front windows upstairs.
- Retail terrace, 152-180 Oxford Road. Circa 1880-1890s. Its fine and not overpainted polychrome detailing and chimneyscape is impressive and attractive.
- Mirror image terraces, 249-253 and 255-261 Oxford Road, circa 1880-1890s. The mirror-image terraces also reflect similar design to the retail terrace opposite and balance this area of the street in a nice polychrome presentation.
- Prospect Mews terrace and alley way, Prospect Mews. Circa c. 1840-1850. The modest terrace buildings are reasonably well-kept and the entrance to the alleyway maintains its stone slab floor.
- Artisan terrace at 1-9 Prospect Street, c.1820-1830. This small modest early terrace is rare because of its age. The over- sized modern dormer at no. 1 detracts but it is otherwise remarkable for the context it gives in understanding the housing styles for persons at that time that could not afford a prestigious home such as at near-by Sidney Terrace.

### 6.2.9 Listed Buildings:

- 101 Oxford Road, Grade II. 2 storey plus basement detached Georgian, early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Red brick, stone dressings, central doorway, timber cornice and slate roof. Original garden walls. Forms a good group with adjoining Chapel and 105 Oxford Road.
- 104 Oxford Road (N. side), Royal Meteorological Society, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 2 storey Georgian detached. Red brick, central stone/stucco Doric portico and cornice, slate roof.
- 139 and 141 Oxford Road, Grade II. 3 storeys, mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, painted brick. Windows replaced with uPVC, original arched doorway and fanlight to left, recorded in listing notes, lost since 2004 Appraisal. Red brick extension to side on Russell Street with poor window/wall ratio. Included as extreme example of the deterioration of listed buildings in this part of the Conservation Area.
- Holy Trinity Church (N. side), Grade II. 1826 and 1845, stone gabled façade with lancet windows and octagonal bell turret. Interior has reclaimed chancel screen by Pugin.
- 118 Oxford Road (N. side), Grade II. Circa 1845, set back, gabled 3 storey ashlar stone villa relates to Holy Trinity Church, chimneys, 2 storey bays, slate roof.
- 149 to 161 Oxford Road, Grade II. Terrace of seven houses, 2 storeys plus semi basement, early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Red brick, stucco cornice, slate roofs, steps to principal storey, two as shops.
- 163 and 165 Oxford Road, Grade II. Pair of houses, early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, 3 storeys plus semi basement, with flanking 2 storey set back entrance bays, steps to principal storey, red brick, hipped slate roofs. On axis with Bedford Road. Inappropriate advertising fascia as with others in road.
- 167 and 169 Oxford Road, Grade II. Terrace of two houses continues in the style of 149-161 Oxford Road, early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century red brick, stucco cornice, slate roofs and tall chimneys. One basement now a shop.
- 171 to 177 Oxford Road, Grade II. Terrace of 4 houses, 3 storeys plus semi basement, early 19<sup>th</sup> century, steps to principal storey, red brick, slate roofs, ridge chimneys, original railings to two.
- 120 and 122 Oxford Road (N. side)m Grade II. Pair of houses, 2 storeys plus semi basement, circa 1830–40, plain red brick with central pediment, arched windows to central bays, hipped slate roof.
- 124 Oxford Road (N. side), Grade II. Circa 1850 detached, rendered, 2.5 storeys, tripartite windows.
- 187 to 193 Oxford Road, Grade II. Terrace of four houses, 3 storeys plus semi basement, early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, steps to principal storey, red brick, stone string course, hipped slate roof, ridge chimneys.
- 195 and 197 Oxford Road, Grade II. Pair of houses, 3 storey plus semi basement, early 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian red brick, slate roof. Elegant door cases and Greek fret lintels. No loss of windows at 195.
- 199 to 203 Oxford Road, Grade II. Terrace of three houses, early- mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, 3 storeys plus semi basement. Rendered with parapet, mouldings to windows and steps to principal storey.

- Oxford Road Primary School. 1880-83 and 1894, Grade II. A complete and homogenous group of buildings, 1.5 to 3 storeys plus tower, set behind wall and railings of the period. Red brick, moulded decorative drip moulds and string courses, part tile hung. Steeply pitched tiled roofs with decorative ridge tiles.
- 237 to 247 Oxford Road, Prospect Terrace, and includes 2 Lorne Street which is the end of the terrace, Grade II. Terrace of seven houses, early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, 3 storeys plus semi basement, red brick, hipped slate roofs. Most retain elegant arched doorcases and Greek fret lintels.



## 6.3 Russell Street and streets east

### 6.3.1 Significance

Russell Street and the collection of streets to the east of it towards the IDR, exhibit the Conservation Area's wide range of Georgian and Victorian residential architecture in a mix of modest and grand properties. Reading's prosperous growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw these streets fill in with a range of building types.

The eastern portion of Baker Street contains a number of early Georgian terraces, inclusive of the house at 55 Baker Street which was briefly the studio of Henry Fox Talbot. Along the west side of Russell Street, Georgian 2 to 4 storey terraced and semi-detached housing were built for the more affluent businessmen of Reading. Prior to 1853, the long terraces of 2 and 3 storey properties were built along Waylen Street and Zinzan Street. Jesse Terrace was begun only slightly later to a more prestigious design specification. The 2 to 3 storey terraces along Body Road and Anstey Road were built c. 1880s to provide more modest housing for local artisans. Varying levels of original detailing remain throughout the area.

Unfortunately, many of the houses in the area are currently in poor repair and collectively create an overall air of neglect, despite some well-maintained exceptions. Over many years, a high proportion of the housing designed for single-family use has been adapted for multiple occupancy. Many of these unsympathetic adaptations have damaged the period character and uniformity of the terraces; blighting the streetscapes as a result.

Nevertheless, the area's architectural planform remains intact. There is the fine expanse of Russell Street and the uniform character of Jesse Terrace that remain amongst the Conservation Area's finest streetscapes. As an evidential microcosm of Reading's 19<sup>th</sup> century housing styles, these intensely developed and fine-grained streets form a unified residential neighbourhood of special character and significance.

### 6.3.2 Materials

Red brick is common in the Georgian and early Victorian houses, though sadly over-painting is common on many of the residential streets. Red brick boundary walls are important along the streets. A pleasant variety to the red brick is introduced by polychrome colours in red, tan off-white and grey amongst some of the late-Victorian/ Edwardian infill. Stucco is evident from on some of the Georgian properties. Welsh slate roofing prevails. Bath stone is minimally present on Russell Street. In some sections, cast iron railings and details remain retaining a gracious touch that was original along the streets.

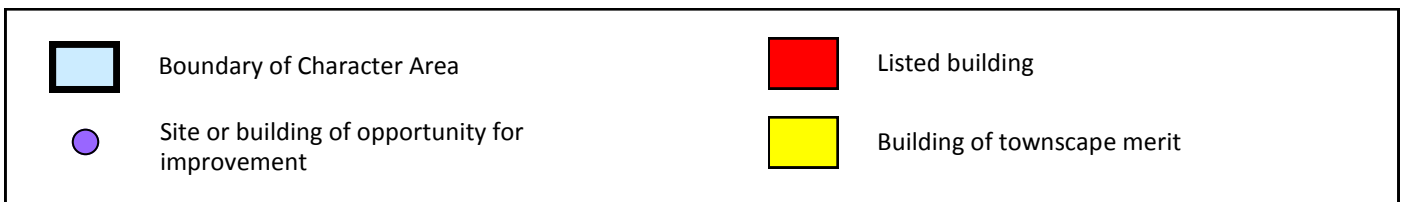
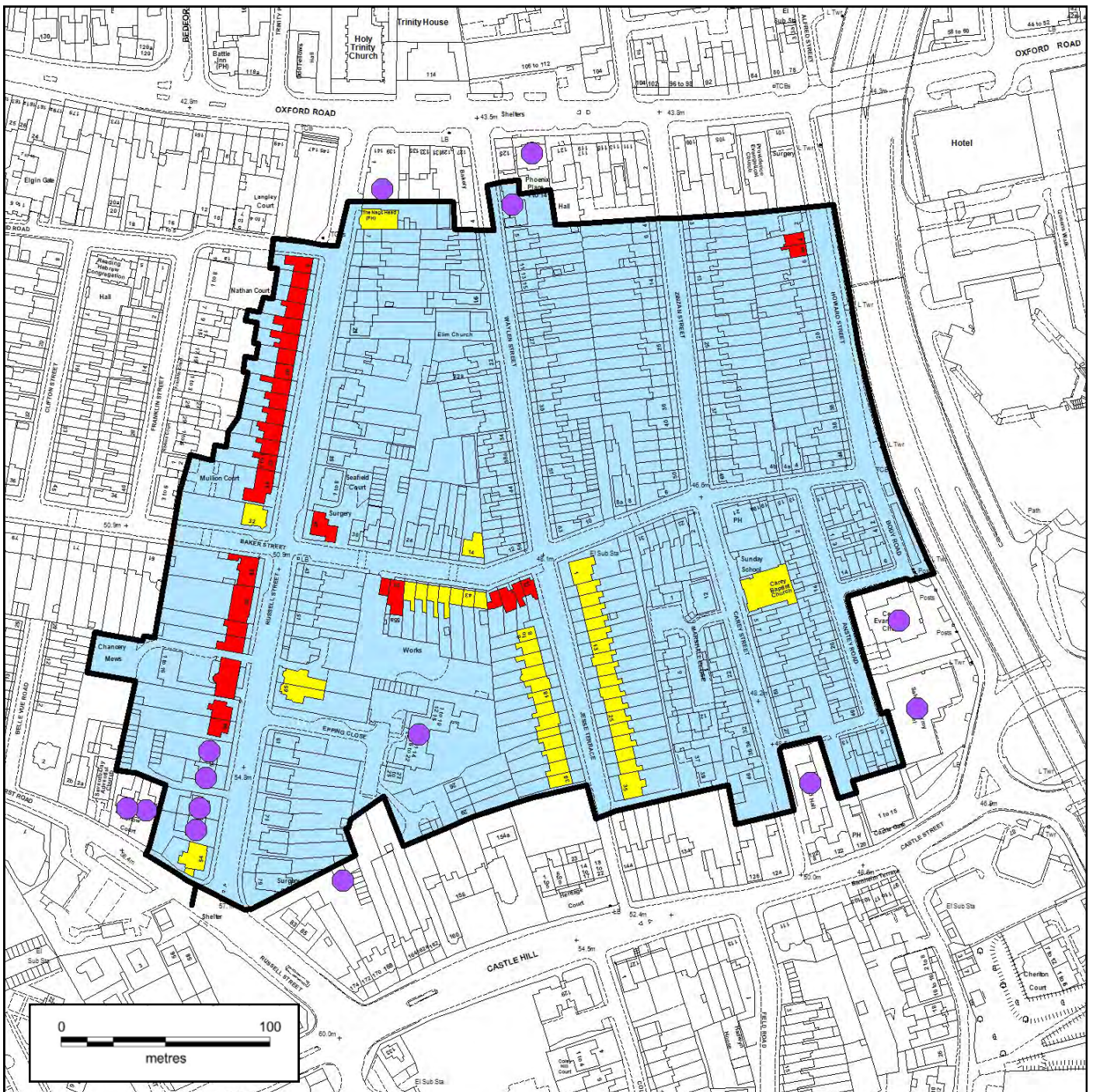
Multi-pane single glazed windows are exceedingly being lost to uPVC windows and original multi-paneled doors have been lost to uPVC doors to an overall degrading result.

### 6.3.3 Views

Views 9, 11 and 12 are located within this character area and illustrate the variety of architectural forms found within the area.

View 9, looking north towards Oxford Road from down Russell Street illustrates the prime and fortuitous positioning of the Holy Trinity parish church at the bottom of the slope. It takes in, the juxtaposition of the Georgian terraces to the west and the large late Victorian villas to the east and give a sense of how the neighbourhood developed. This view was first photographed by Fox Talbot c.1845.

View 11, looking east along Baker Street, illustrates the bend in the road that has been characteristic of this view since the development of Baker Street east of Russell Street.



Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 6.3.1: Character Area 6.3—Russell Street and streets east

November 2019

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The view takes in the long imposing three storey Georgian stuccoed terrace on the south side of the street (c.1830s). The former studio of Henry Fox Talbot is at No. 55 in this terrace at the west end. The cottage-like detached two storey house at No. 14 Baker Street and the two imposing, listed semidetached houses at Nos. 33- 39 form an attractive viewpoint. Number 1 Jesse Terrace and its high brick wall beyond begin to unfold as the viewer winds round the bend.



Figure 6.3.2 View 11, of the winding Baker Street looking east



Figure 6.3.3 View 12, looking up Jesse Terrace towards Castle Hill

The variety of houses in View 11 contrasts with the neat symmetry of matching terraced houses along Jesse Terrace, as seen in View 12. The cast iron verandas and large front gardens add interest to View 12, looking south towards Castle Hill.

#### 6.3.4 Area Analysis

The creation of the IDR in the 1960s saw the original properties on the western side of Howard Street retained whilst the houses along the eastern half were demolished. 4-4A Howard Street is a listed Georgian semi-detached house and the original rustication on the ground floor of 4A has been retained. 2 Howard Street dates from c.1850-70s, and is an attractive single-family home of substantial size with a well-tended front garden that lends itself positively to the street scene.

There are a number of original front garden cast iron railings at nos. 16-22 and two original curved stucco dividing walls at 4 and 22 Howard Street (figure 6.3.5). The modern faux-stone rendered façade at no. 8 and the irregular colours and over-painting of many of the houses are incompatible with the otherwise red brick simplicity of the rest of the houses, adding to a sense of disharmony along the street. The line of trees on the eastern side minimises the sight and noise of the IDR and provide reasonable tree coverage in the summer but affords less coverage in winter. Recently re-painted black cast-iron bollards line the street in front of the trees.



Figure 6.3.4 2, 4 and 4A (listed Georgian semi-detached) Howard Street showing the rustication on 4A



*Figure 6.3.5 Original iron railings at 16-22 Howard Street and the curved stucco dividing wall at no. 22*

The large Georgian terraces located along the west side of Russell Street contribute significantly to the street's grand appearance. Most of these are in good condition and some are still retained as single-family homes on the south end near its intersection with Tilehurst Road.



*Figure 6.3.6 Terraces along the west side of Russell Street (nos. 38-42) with Regency window balconies*



*Figure 6.3.7 Georgian terraces at nos. 6-14 Russell Street. The Holy Trinity parish church forms an impressive view at the north end of the street from the Oxford Road*

The listed 2-storey Georgian terraced properties between nos. 6-34 have been adversely affected by buy-to-let investment which has resulted in the poor maintenance of many of the properties. The removal of original windows at nos. 14 and 16 are a regrettable blight on the terrace and enforcement has been unable, to date, to get the developer to repair this damage.

Faded 'ghost signage', painted high on the side brick wall of 4 Russell Street at the junction with Goldsmid Road directs the visitor to "Junction Road" (the former name of Goldsmid Road), as "leading to Westfield Grove." This signage needs to be ensured to remain.

The detached family house at no. 54, now in multiple occupation, is notable for its light brick frontage and was built prior to 1853.

The semi-detached houses at nos. 48-50 Russell Street are striking and unique in the area with their use of Bath stone. They are the work of Nathaniel and Henry Briant whose work can also be seen in Reading's Eldon Square Conservation Area where there are numerous houses that are of almost identical structure, planform and style. The Kennet and Avon canal made Bath stone a prestigious choice for houses in the 1830-40s.



Figure 6.3.8 48-50 Russell Street, Bath stone semi- detached houses, very similar in style to those in Eldon Square in east Reading



Figure 6.3.9 54 Russell Street (c.1850s-1870s) cream coloured brick detached house

Other notable smaller red brick family homes include those located diagonally across from each other at the Russell Street and Baker Street intersection at nos. 36 and 41 Russell Street. No. 36 is in multiple occupancy and retains a very large original rear garden and attractive front entryway porch. No. 41 has been used as a local surgery for many years. With no significant extensions, the context of their size and massing sits in contrast to other houses along the street. The front garden walls have been retained in both cases.

The Parsonage at 32 Baker Street, is a fine late-Victorian house, which sides on to Russell Street. It was created as the Vicarage for the Holy Trinity parish church and dates from c.1890. It has striking polychrome brick detailing and terracotta features and its front door,

looking onto Baker Street, is set within an ornate late Victorian timber and tiled porch. Horizontal bars on the first-floor windows remain from the use of the upstairs room as a nursery. Improved landscaping could enhance the site.



*Figure 6.3.10 The Parsonage (c.1890) at the northeast corner of Baker Street and Russell Street with attractive polychrome and wood detailing*

The much larger later Victorian villas on the east side of Russell Street are in varying states of repair, from poor to very good. All are in multiple occupancy use as flats, HMOs and bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Although a few have been over-painted, much attractive polychrome detailing and original features survive.

The popular Nag's Head public house is a well-restored, faux-Tudor building and listed as an Asset of Community Value. It attracts many customers from outside the area by virtue of its multiple CAMRA awards as one of Berkshire's leading ale and cider pubs.





*Figure 6.3.11 The well-maintained Nag's Head faux-Tudor pub, Russell Street ,(c.1850-1870s) multiple CAMRA Best Pub in Berkshire awards and an Asset of Community Value*

The stuccoed, late-Georgian terrace at 37- 55 Baker Street built prior to 1833, are the oldest houses on the eastern part of that street originally named Russell Terrace in this section. Their poor condition belies their historical importance. A significant pioneer of early photography, Henry Fox Talbot had his "Reading Establishment" studio at 55 Baker Street. The site is worthy of enhanced designation.

A mirrored pair of two-storey, semi-detached houses, with side doors are at nos. 33-35 are also listed and their unusual planform singles them out amongst others.



*Figure 6.3.12 Fox Talbot's 'Reading Establishment' studio at 55 Baker Street.*

Alexandra Terrace at nos. 23-31 is a straightforward, red brick terrace with many original windows and details intact and dates from prior to c.1853. Some original iron fencing and gates remain, notably at no. 29. The property at no. 23 is in poor condition and no. 31 has seen a recent loss of its original windows.



*Figure 6.3.13 23- 31 Baker Street, Alexandra Terrace, c.1850, red brick terrace, overall well-preserved with majority of original windows and doors intact*

Other buildings of note along Baker Street include the semi-detached Rednirt Villas, which have attractive stonework and a centre plaque with its name and the date of 1904.



*Figure 6.3.14 Rednirt Villas 1904, developed by Mr. Trinder, bay windows, polychrome and stone work detailing. Rednirt is Trinder spelt backwards.*

The Oasis Community Centre dates from c.1860s. It was a public house, inn, spirits retailer and warehouse in the late 1800s. Now well-restored and maintained by the Carey Baptist Church, it serves a current benefit to the area as a community meeting place. A small section of surviving sett stones are located on the pavement in front of the cast iron door opening to the cellar. Its old Morland advertising sign along with this cellar entrance affirm its past use. Inside, the ghost image of an advertising sign from the last decades of the 1800's proclaiming "Ferguson's Pale Ale, Stouts & Porter, Wine & Spirits" is located on the first floor, along an east-facing brick wall that originally formed the exterior wall of the original building. The sign is currently covered by plasterboard. The building's well-maintained polychrome detailing and wooden original windows further reinforce its heritage context and positive value to the streetscape.



*Figure 6.3.15 The Oasis Community Centre, c.1860s Inn and Public House*



*Figure 6.3.16 Detached house at no.14 Baker Street with cottage-like Victorian frontage*

Zinzan Street and Waylen Street were developed on market gardens once owned by Mrs. Zinzan. The majority of the houses date from prior to 1853 with infill and completion of the terraces shortly thereafter. Many of the houses here have been adversely affected by intense HMO use and frequently insensitive owner alterations and management. The two streets exhibit some of the worst degradation in the area. Overhead wires lead to multiple-occupation properties and excessive satellite dishes, wires and random utility pipes, to facilitate increasing households within the properties, clutter façades. Front garden walls have been removed to create rubbish bin standings, which contributes to an uneven frontage lines along the pavement and disrupts terrace harmony. A good number of red brick façades have been painted over. The absence of green front gardens contributes to a bare streetscape view.

The regularity of the sizeable houses along Zinzan Street creates a long expanse of somewhat austere terraces along both sides of the street. The street is in almost complete multiple occupation use as either flats or HMOs. Variations of poorly constructed dormer windows on the two- storey properties are detractions to an otherwise continuous, fine-grain building line. There are still a small number of houses at nos. 19, 23, 39, 43, and at nos. 40-48 which have retained their Victorian iron railings. Nos. 39 and 45 still have original curved entrance walls that separated front gardens from next door. A dropped granite kerb outside 8-10 Zinzan Street evidences the entrance to a former coach storage in use until c.1910. A very rare crinkle – crinkle wall separates nos. 3 -5 Zinzan Street in the back garden and is worthy of heightened protection.



*Figure 6.3.17 The conditions of terraced housing along Zinzan Street with poor quality modern dormers, overhead wires, excessive bins and satellite dishes.*

Waylen Street displays more variety in its housing stock, with houses varying from 2-3 storeys in height. The terraced street displays a far greater level in the variety of their built form than along Zinzan Street. The large late Victorian detached villa at no.16 is an attractive element in the street.

Nos. 5-15 form an impressive faux-Tudor terrace with many original doors and features, although they are in overall poor condition. The remainder of the street has been adversely affected by the very poor condition of the majority of the properties; largely the result of poor maintenance by landlords with the conversion to multiple-occupation and HMOs. Like Zinzan Street, Waylen Street also has a poor reputation for higher than usual levels of crime and ASB.

The multiple occupation properties at nos. 43-61 have identically painted stuccoed façades with uPVC windows and doors that detracting from some more unusual detailing such as rusticated doorways and curved window mouldings on this terrace.



*Figure 6.3.18 Waylen Street with its overall poor conditions. The street's earliest houses, nos. 43-61, are on the right c.1840*

The small two-up/two-down houses from nos. 21- 27 are well-tended properties but the refacing of no. 21 in modern yellow stone detracts from the surrounding historic façades.

The modern Marlon housing development on the east side of the street at the Oxford Road replaced the once mighty Nonconformist Wesleyan Methodist Church. This modern development detracts from the historical understanding of the road. Its location on the plot is sited forward of the pavement lines of the historic properties and its large massing is incompatible with the scale of the rest of the street's built environment.

The well- cared for Jesse Terrace across Baker Street from Waylen Street, sits in strong contrast to Waylen Street and is arguably the Jesse family's most impressive development. The street forms one of the finest streetscapes in the Conservation Area. The terraces date from c.1853 to the mid-1870s and largely remain in single family occupation to this day. Only a few have been converted for multiple occupation as flats and HMOs, and an Article 4 Direction was put in place in 2016 which has protected the single-family balance of the street. The houses have striking, uniform metal verandas on both sides of the street and are set back from the street, most with well-tended gardens. An Article 4 direction, put in place in 2004, now protects the house façades from uncontrolled alterations and, with few exceptions, original windows, doors and chimneys remain to create a pleasing harmony along the street.



*Figure 6.3.19 Close-up of terraces and gardens in Jesse Terrace*

Like Zinzan Street, piecemeal replacement of original features with modern materials has adversely affected houses on Carey Street. Original windows have been retained in houses at no. 13, and the upper floors of no. 15. Original cast iron railings remain at nos. 13 and 25. Chimneys and pots largely remain on the east side of the street, but the west side of the street has far fewer and is an almost continuous run of over-painted brick façades. Poor frontages, rubbish bin landings and unkempt front gardens and a lack of green along the street, contribute to the rather austere appearance of the street.

The Carey Baptist Church along the street has an impressive polychrome frontage, is well maintained and provides a visual highlight along the street. Some interior details remain inside its main worship hall. The view to the backs of the large Georgian houses that front Castle Hill and the tall brick dividing wall along Carey Street is one of the more striking views from the street.

The modern building at Walford Hall that houses the Reading Association for the Blind is incompatible with the historic built environment of the area.



Figure 6.3.20 Carey Baptist Church chapel with its polychrome frontage, 1869

Anstey Road and Body Road were created prior to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, developed on open land belonging to the Carey Particular Baptist Chapel, as it was known at the time. The properties vary from poor to moderate condition but provide strong context as an intact example of Reading's housing response at the time; to provide attractive but economical accommodation for the average working family. As such, the two streets provide an interesting contrast to the other houses in the Conservation Area. Polychrome detailing in multi-coloured red, tan and grey brick has in many cases, unfortunately been over-painted.



Figure 6.3.21 6-12 Body Road, the new red tile roof was installed during the time protection of a Conservation Area did not apply, after 2004



The polychrome two-up two-down terraced houses along Anstey Road's main corridor have bay fronted windows on the ground level and are on extremely small ground footprints with a virtually non-existent front garden and only tiny gardens in the rear.

Houses along both sides of Body Road and along the southern end of Anstey Road all have identical layouts and dormers, accentuated with late Victorian era detailed bargeboards. The recent red tile roof at no. 10 Body Road is incongruous among the slate roofs and would have been caught if the area had not been removed from the Conservation Area in 2004.

Although less ornate than the rest of the Conservation Area's 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, original front garden railings remain at nos. 4, 8, 10, 14, 24, 32, 38 and 40.

Positively, the houses all face onto rare green space owned by the Carey Centre, which lends a welcome sense of green openness, rare to the Conservation Area. The trees that form a border along Body Road provide a pleasant, leafy backdrop to the edge of the conservation area and screens the area from the noise and pollution of the IDR.

### 6.3.5 Key Positive Characteristics

- A wide diversity of 19<sup>th</sup> century housing styles with impressive contributions of every style period
- Jesse Terrace is an attractive and well-maintained street with strong local historical connections to the Jesse family of developers
- Henry Fox Talbot's 'Reading Establishment' studio at 55 Baker Street where *The Pencil of Nature* (the first book with mass-produced photographs) was produced
- Red brick Georgian terraces at 6-34 Russell Street, west side
- Georgian Bath stone semi-detached villas at 48-50 Russell Street
- The pre-1833 Georgian terrace at 37-55 Baker Street
- Alexandra Terrace at 23-31 Baker Street
- Carey Baptist Church
- Oasis Community Centre at the corner of Baker Street and Carey Street, a former pub
- Nag's Head, Russell Street, an Asset of Community Value and a CAMRA award winning ale and cider pub
- Rednirt Villas, 8 and 8A Baker Street
- Parsonage at 32 Baker Street
- Original wrought iron railings at 16-22 Howard Street
- Open green space at Anstey Road and Body Road surrounding the Carey Centre
- Valuable green and shielding from the IDR as provided by trees along Howard Street and Body Road
- The rare crinkle – crinkle wall (of which there are only a handful in Reading) that separates 3 -5 Zinzan Street in the back garden.

### 6.3.6 Negative Features

- The overall poor condition of much of the housing stock; notably on Zinzan Street, Waylen Street, Howard Street, the north end of Russell Street, Carey Street, Anstey Road and Body Road
- Poor condition of the public realm; excessive over-head wires; worn street signage; tarmac pavements and streets all exacerbate a bleak street appearance.
- ASB, including drug dealing and street drinking and pervasive crime in the area
- Poor definition of frontages to the pavement, including the removal of front railings and brick walls in several streets
- The creation of hard standings for bins in front gardens
- Excessive quantities of bins causing visual blight along streetscapes

- Frequent fly-tipping
- Proliferation of satellite dishes, and excessive and redundant wires and pipes on façades
- uPVC windows and non-traditional modern uPVC doors
- Over-painted brick, frequently hiding polychrome brick detailing
- Unsympathetic rendered façades at 21 Waylen Street and 8 Howard Street
- Brownfield site behind 55 Baker Street and open area accessed next to 26 Baker Street
- Walford Hall is an out-of-keeping modern building
- Poor condition of 5-15 Waylen Street, which is a large Victorian, mock-Tudor terrace
- Incompatible architecture to the rear of 139-141 Oxford Road, facing Russell Street
- Recent red tile roof at 10 Body Road
- Non-policy compliant estate agent signage is a constant in the area

### 6.3.7 Buildings presenting Opportunities for Enhancement

- Building of flats, back of 139-141 Oxford Road, facing Russell Street. Circa 2016.
- Building of flats, Waylen Street near the Oxford Road, Circa 1990-2000.
- Reading Association for the Blind, Walford Hall, Carey Street. Circa 1960-1970.
- Epping Close flats, Epping Close. Circa 1980-1990.
- Reading Tyres Ltd, 81 Russell Street. Circa ??
- Buildings of flats, 52-54 Russell Street. Circa 1960-1970.
- 11 Baker Street, Circa 1880- (negative rendering and redevelopment).
- 50 Zinzan Street, Circa 1840- (negative rendering and redevelopment.)

outside Character Area but with direct adverse impact:

- Carey Centre, Anstey Road, Circa 1960-1970.
- Salvation Army, Anstey Road, Circa 1960-1990.

### 6.3.8 Buildings of Townscape Merit:

- 2 Howard Street, Circa 1850-1870. A fine, well-cared for single family home with intact detailing and interiors.
- 14 Baker Street. Circa 1850-1870s. A charming cottage style single- family house, only recently turned over to multiple occupation.
- Terrace at 41-55 Baker Street. Circa 1820-1830s.
- Alexandra Terrace, 23-31 Baker Street. Circa
- The Oasis Community Centre, 21 Baker Street. Circa 1850-1860s.
- 1 Jesse Terrace. Circa 1850-1860. An intact, attractive single- family home reflective of an earlier Georgian centre hall planform. Stuccoed and with a large back garden and wall that contributes nicely to the view along Baker Street.
- Jesse Terrace, east side Terrace 3-33. Circa 1850-1860s.
- 35 Jesse Terrace, circa 1850-1860.
- Jesse Terrace, west side Terrace 8-30. Circa 1850-1860s.
- 54 Russell Street, Circa 1840-1850.
- 59 Russell Street, Circa 1880-1900

### 6.3.9 Listed Buildings

- 6 to 22 Russell Street, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian, terrace of nine houses which step down Russell Street in pairs, except for 6, 8 and 10 which form a group of three. 2

storeys, plus attic and basement, red brick with stucco string course, arched ground floor windows, arched doorcases with patterned fan lights, slate roofs. 14 and 16 have recently had original windows removed.

- 24 to 34 Russell Street, Grade II. Early- mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Georgian terrace of six houses which step down Russell Street in pairs, 34 has an extra bay. 3 storeys and basement, red brick with stucco string course, arched door openings with patterned fan lights of the period, slate roofs with ridge line chimney stacks. 24 and 28 have lost original second floor windows.
- 41 Russell Street, Surgery (E. side), Grade II. Early- mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, detached red brick symmetrical façade, hipped slate roof. Arched and recessed doorcase, wide traceried fanlight.
- 33-39 Baker Street, Grade II. Early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. 2 pairs of semi-detached houses linked by porch annexe. 2 storeys and basement. Each pair is a stucco pavilion with hipped slate roof and 2 ranges of glazing bar sashes.
- 55 Baker Street, Grade II. Circa 1840 and altered. 3 storeys, stucco with parapet and shallow pediment, semi-circular bay at first floor, windows with raised surrounds. Arched front door and adjoining arched window in panel. House was pioneer photographer Fox Talbot's 'Reading Establishment'.
- 36 Russell Street, Grade II. Early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, 2 storey detached house, brick with slate roof, stucco string course. 3 bays wide. Fanlight to door and delicate wire porch of curved gable design.
- 38 and 38A Russell Street, Grade II. Early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, 3 storeys and basement, red brick with stucco string course, flat eaves to hipped slate roof. 38 is 3 bays wide, arched openings to ground floor, wide fanlight and fluted columns to central doorcase. No 38A is one bay wide, slightly set back, with parapet.
- 40 and 42 Russell Street, Grade II. Early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century pair of houses, 3 storeys and basement, red brick with stucco cornice and shallow pediment. No 40 has been recently and poorly rendered. Arched doorways with rusticated stucco recess. Elegant first floor cast iron railings.
- 44 and 46 Russell Street, Grade II. Early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century pair of houses, 3 storeys and basement, red brick, stucco string course, hipped slate roofs. Elegant wide arched door cases with fanlights and fluted Doric columns. 46 has a one bay extension in good period style.
- 48 and 50 Russell Street, Grade II. Circa 1840, pair of houses, 2 storeys with attic and basement. Bath stone, channelled ground floor, arched first floor windows, bracketed eaves and hipped slate roof. Cast iron railings of the period to ground floor. Entrance doors in set-back square bays to side.
- 4 and 4A Howard Street, Grade II. 3 storey pair of houses, early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Red brick, rendered parapet and ground floor, one with original rusticated stucco. Arched entrance doors and ground floor windows.

## 6.4 Streets west of Russell Street

### 6.4.1 Significance

The area west of Russell Street consists largely of 2-storey, terraced early Georgian housing, later polychrome-patterned Victorian and Edwardian infill and, along Goldsmid Road and the west side of Clifton Street, further 20<sup>th</sup> century infill. In Goldsmid Road is the only purpose-built synagogue within Berkshire. It is a Grade II listed and is built in the Moorish style. The area has a quiet residential character and fine highly-valued distant views of the green Caversham escarpment from along the higher ridge of Baker Street. These elements distinguish this area from other character areas.

The infill of Franklin Street and Clifton Street was developed in the area known during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Westfield Grove which surrounded Westfield House along Baker Street. These streets, sloping down northwards from Baker Street, are characterised by the terraces of Edwardian artisan housing with attractive polychrome brick patterning running the length of the terrace. The narrow rear access alley for these houses remains to this day.

Similarly, in the open garden area of Bellevue House, the polychromed artisan terraces of Belle Vue Road, c. 1880, were developed.

The impressive terrace of c.1820s Grade II Georgian houses on the south side of Baker Street retain their original details and plan forms and are well maintained. The last remaining Georgian villa of an original series of three sits to the east of this terrace and is occupied by the National Spiritualist Church which maintains its original large open garden easily viewed from Baker Street. The elevated narrow stand of tall trees adjoining its southern boundary provides an important green backdrop to the streetscape views along Baker Street.

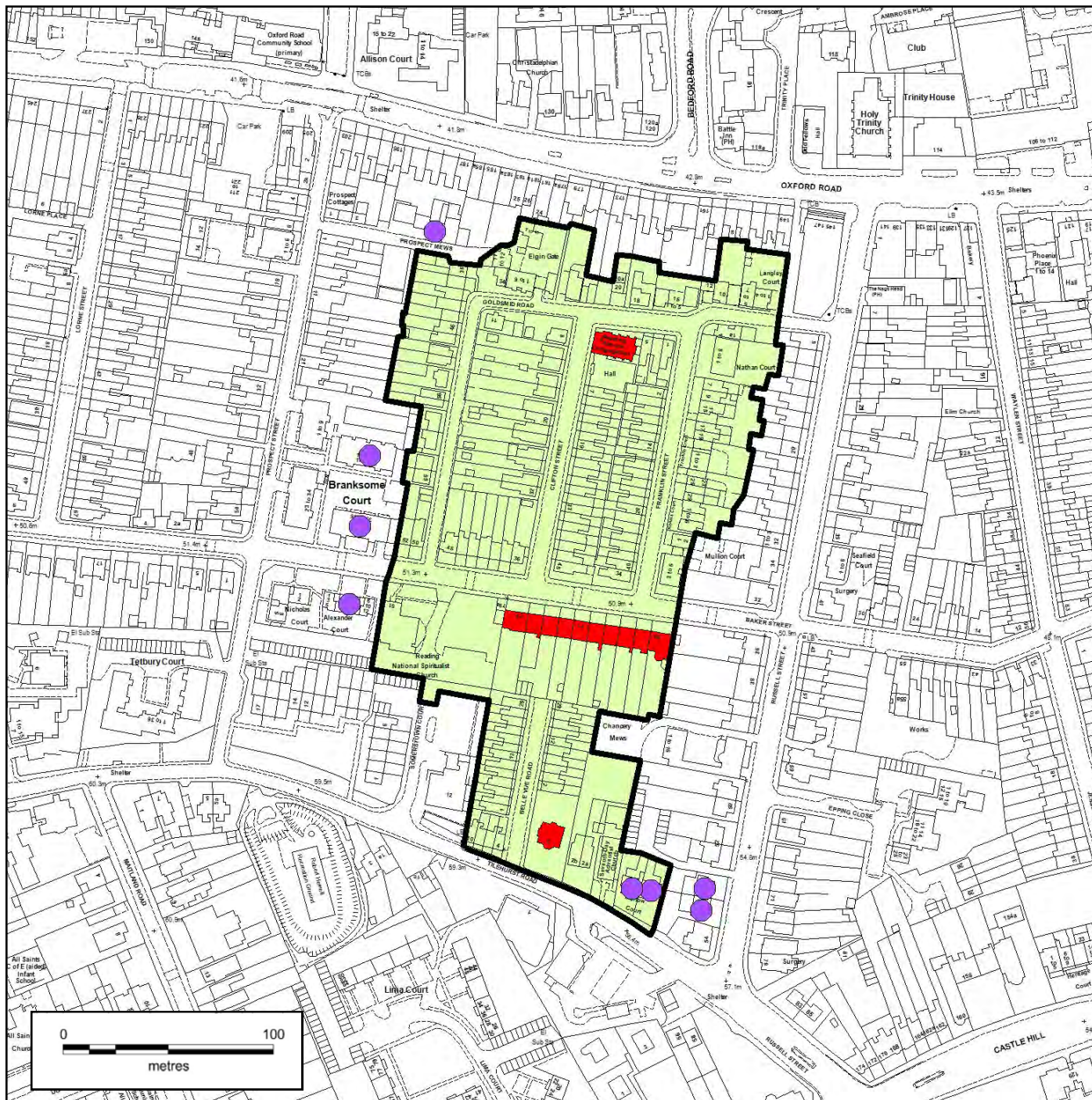
The attractive large oak at the bend in Goldsmid Road defines that corner and now has a Tree Preservation Order placed on it.





The late Victorian 3-storey terrace on the north side of Baker Street is dominant along the street front. It still retains its impressive chimneyscape along with their original back garden layout and tall brick boundary walls.

It is these notable features and details that contribute to the area's special character, which are reflective of the Conservation Area's chief attribute as a residential microcosm of Reading's building styles.

### 6.4.2 Materials

The earliest homes in the area resonate with the red brick structure that is so common of Reading's Georgian buildings. Fan-light detailed doorways and traditional multi-glazed sash windows dominate those Georgian homes. However, the polychrome pattern detailing along the Victorian and Edwardian terraces of Franklin Street and Clifton Street also gives the area its strong character.



	Boundary of Character Area		Listed building
	Site or building of opportunity for improvement		Building of townscape merit

Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 6.4.1: Character Area 6.4—West of Russell Street to Prospect Street

November 2019

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### 6.4.3 Views

Views 10 and 20 are located within the Russell Street Character Area and evidence the residential expansion and growth of the Conservation Area over the centuries. The view east along Baker Street towards Russell Street (no. 10) is enhanced not only by the fine early Georgian terrace along the south side of the street but also by the view of the back of 36 Russell Street on the right - a house originally built as a two storey detached Georgian house, not dissimilar to the two storey detached Georgian house opposite it at 41 Russell Street, built c.1840.

View 20 looks north towards the large oak tree at the bend of the road. In Goldsmid Road the view of the remarkable oak tree sets off positively what is an otherwise quiet but more modern corner (mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) of the character area.



*Figure 6.4.2 View 20, Large TPO oak at the corner of Goldsmid Road.*

### 6.4.4 Area Analysis

The Georgian terrace of houses at 61-79 Baker Street were the first buildings constructed in the late 1820s/ early 1830s. The features of the terrace are notable, with its classic and clean Georgian styling and its retention of original windows, doors and fanlights. The iron railings at no. 69 were recast from the original arrowhead railings that once existed along the terrace.

The National Spiritualist Church at 81 Baker Street, formerly York Lodge, is the only one remaining of three similarly scaled early 19<sup>th</sup> century villas. The surviving garden is a rare green space in the Conservation Area and provides a visual reminder of the unusual layout of these three villas wherein the entrance faced on to the garden and not towards the road, with a drive leading from Baker Street



*Figure 6.4.3 The listed Georgian terraced houses from 61-79 Baker Street, complete with original doors, fanlights and windows*



*Figure 6.4.4 The listed National Spiritualist Church, 81 Baker Street, originally York Lodge, one of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century group of three villas*

The Grade II Bellevue Villa is the only other remaining early estate house of this type in the character area and is located on Tilehurst Road. It functions currently as a bed and breakfast. Its exterior is reasonably well maintained, although the front garden is given over to parking and could be more sensitively landscaped. It still retains original windows and has two Regency styled Coade stone decorative urns set on the roofline at each side.

The short, quiet cul-de-sac of Belle Vue Road, was created prior to the 1890's from the side garden of Bellevue Villa. Belle Vue Road is associated with two-up, two-down, terraced polychrome houses creating a harmonious effect along both sides of the road. Regrettably, some of the façades have been painted, disrupting the once continuous polychrome detailing along the street. However, original windows have been retained on several properties and the doorways have attractive stone-arched in-set porches. There is still a fine high wall down the east side of Belle Vue Road separating the Villa from the development. At the far end of Belle Vue Road, the modern tarmacadam road surface has eroded to reveal several square metres of the original cobbles or sett stones, which were laid in a traditional fan pattern. This small bit of original paving is worthy of continued maintenance.



*Figure 6.4.5 Bellevue House, 2 Tilehurst Road, built prior to 1839, listed, with decorative urns possibly of Coade stone.*



*Figure 6.4.6 Belle Vue Road, (c.1880-90) diminutive polychrome terraces with a high brick wall to the right separating the development from the original Bellevue Villa. The view is north to the backs of the listed 61-79 Baker Street and the Caversham escarpment beyond*



Both Franklin Street and Clifton Street were developed near the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, created from the site of the former Westfield Villa and its surrounding gardens of Westfield Grove.

The terraces on the west side of Franklin Street and the east side of Clifton Street are separated by a small access alleyway that is still in situ today. These terraces exemplify the style of polychrome brick terraced housing that formed part of the rapid growth along the residential streets to the west of the railway line in order to house the increasing populations employed in local industries. Regrettably, some of the brickwork on the houses has been painted, breaking the harmony of the polychrome detailing along the terrace's façade. The remaining polychrome needs to be placed under the protection of an Article 4 Direction and Local Development Order in order to protect it.

The circa 1980s housing along the east side of Franklin Street was built in the back gardens of the properties along Russell Street and on a former stables, but the massing is overall in keeping with the scale of the area along with reasonable use of similar materials found in the rest of the character area. Multi-coloured brick embellishment on most of these modern buildings pays homage to the polychrome detailing on the west side of the street. However, front gardens turned over to parking have created a poorly defined irregular pavement line and a heavily tarmacked appearance to east side of the street that could be improved with landscaping.

The west side of Clifton Street is largely mid-20<sup>th</sup> century terraced and semi- detached housing, with many that are attractive and well-cared for. Here, intact front walls and regular pavement lines preserve the finer street grain better than the irregularly fronted east side of Franklin Street does.



*Figure 6.4.7 Terraced polychrome houses along Clifton Street, the ones to the south with double bay fronts*



*Figure 6.4.8 Matching terrace on Franklin Street facing east behind the one on Clifton, The small gate mid-way is the access to the extant back passageway*

The 3-storey terrace at 36-48 Baker Street, between Clifton Street and Goldsmid Road, was built c.1880-90. The terrace has subtle grey end brick linear detailing to the front and sides. The high brick walls of the back gardens and the tall chimney stacks are attractive and remarkably intact, thus worthy of retention and protection. Regrettably, uPVC windows, satellite dishes, antennas and painted trim proliferate and detract from the front facing street view of the large terrace block.

Reading Synagogue in Goldsmid Road is Grade II listed in recognition of its significance and high quality. It dates from 1900 and is a fine expression of Moorish design in polychrome brickwork and stone, topped with a wood and lead cupola. Whilst the original synagogue is one of the Conservation Area's finest buildings, the modern Sir Herman Gollancz Hall attached to the original building, facing Clifton Street is out-of-keeping stylistically, and if redevelopment were to take place on the site, a building more respectful of the impressive structure that it is attached to would be advised.



*Figure 6.4.9 Listed Moorish style synagogue with fine brick and stone detailing and bell tower, Goldsmid Road at the corner of Clifton Street*

The largest and finest tree in the character area is located at the right-angle bend in Goldsmid Road. It is a large oak, safeguarded by a TPO, which provides attractive green and shade at the corner and anchors the corner bend of Goldsmid Road with its restrained, well-maintained 20<sup>th</sup> century housing.

The lone remaining original gas lamp post that once lined the area's streets remains on Franklin Street, now converted to LED lighting. Regrettably, the other two of the three original cast iron gas lamp posts in the area were removed in 2018 along Goldsmid Road.

#### **6.4.5 Key Positive Characteristics**

- Listed Moorish style Synagogue in Goldsmid Road
- Listed Georgian terrace at 61-79 Baker Street, in fine condition
- Views to the Caversham escarpment from Baker Street
- Georgian period artisan houses at 1-9 Prospect Street and at Prospect Mews
- York Lodge, National Spiritualist Church, and its large front garden at 81 Baker Street
- BelleVue Lodge on Tilehurst Road with its Regency urns at the top of the building
- Polychrome patterned terraces on Clifton Street and Franklin Street
- Belle Vue Road with its polychromed houses, intimate feel and patch of exposed sett stones
- Large oak tree at the bend of Goldsmid Road, safeguarded by a TPO
- High intact brick garden walls of the back gardens behind 36-48 Baker Street
- Original alleyway behind the Clifton Street/ Franklin Street polychrome terraces
- Converted original gas lamp post on Franklin Street; the only one remaining

#### **6.4.6 Negative Features**

- Modern meeting hall attached to the Synagogue
- Overpainting of polychrome houses destroying the brick patterning on Franklin Street, Clifton Street and Belle Vue Road
- Overall poor condition of 1-9 Prospect Street and the larger dormer at no. 1

- Poor condition of 48 Baker Street and overpainting and dropped kerb front parking at 46 Baker Street
- Overhead wires blight the view towards Caversham
- Crime and ASB along Prospect Street in the immediate area of Oxford Road
- Rubbish bins, which block pavements on Franklin Street and Clifton Street
- Poor tarmac pavements and poor condition of the streets

#### **6.4.7 Buildings presenting Opportunities for Enhancement**

- Four semi-detached houses. 1 Tilehurst Road, Circa 1970, whilst recessed back from the road, the houses are entirely out-of-keeping with the local heritage
- Seventh-Day Adventist Church, modern frontage hiding an older church behind it, this front could be done more sympathetically to the area

outside Character Area but with direct adverse impact:

- Nicholas Court, Baker Street, Circa 1970s.\*
- Alexander Court, Baker Street, Circa 1970s.\*
- Branksome Court buildings, Baker Street/Prospect Street, Circa 1970- 1980.\*
- BP petrol station, Tilehurst Road

#### **6.4.8 Buildings of Townscape Merit:**

- Terrace, 1- 9 Prospect Street. Circa 1820-1830.
- Mews houses, Prospect Mews. C. pre- 1853.

#### **6.4.9 Listed Buildings**

- Reading Synagogue, Goldsmid Road, Grade II. 1900, red brick with decorative brick, stone dressings and window columns, slate roof, gabled ends. In a Byzantine style, some elements such as coloured glass and cupola have arts and crafts influence.
- 61 to 79 Baker Street, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian terrace of nine houses, 2 stories and basement, set back from road with front gardens. Red brick with slate roofs, arched doorcases with radiating fanlights. A complete and homogenous group.
- 81 Baker Street, York Lodge, part of the Reading National Spiritualist Church, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century detached house set back from road, 2 storeys, red brick with hipped slate roof. Semi-circular porch with Ionic columns.
- Belle Vue House, 2 Tilehurst Rd, Grade II. Circa 1839 stucco villa 2.5 storeys plus basement. Bay to south elevation and a grander north elevation, both with pedimented gabled roof. Two decorative Regency period urns on south elevation, possibly of Coade stone. Grounds entirely gravelled over with UPVC canopy and other modern additions.

## 6.5 Castle Crescent and streets south of Castle Hill

### 6.5.1 Significance

The leafy suburban environment of the character area consists of a wide variety of housing styles. Castle Crescent, Mansfield Road and Bath Road are defined by late Victorian and Edwardian villas in large gardens. However, the Georgian terraces of Coley Hill and the Edwardian polychrome terrace along Field Road contribute to the varied mix of the area. The houses throughout the character area are attractive and generally well- cared for. Additionally, the red brick walls throughout the area contribute significantly to the character of the area.

The area benefits from its elevated location atop the chalk escarpment above the Holy Brook to the south east which gives it an open, airy feeling. The area is confined geographically by limited access points into and out of the area. This provides a sense of seclusion from the more intensively developed and busier parts of the Conservation Area. Consequently, the area has an overall tranquil, pleasant and unified appeal. These characteristics contribute to its significance as a distinctive and separate character area.

The avenue of trees along Coley Avenue originates from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and provides a notable historic green boundary to the area. The Avenue has been noted as a protected heritage view within the new Local Plan (adopted in 2019 by Reading Borough Council).

The large polychrome villas for which the area is noted are primarily along Castle Crescent and Mansfield Road and together make up a striking and discrete locality.

Along Castle Crescent, these villas sit within a number of large Georgian houses. One of these, is 3 Castle Crescent which has recently been restored. The restoration has maintained the original garden footprint, albeit with the addition of some slightly over- sized, but rather sympathetically designed, mews- style additions in that garden.

Along Coley Hill, there are several attractive Georgian terraces along the east side of the street, some of which enjoy fine views from their rear windows and gardens from the height of the escarpment to the town to the east. The east side of Field Road has an impressively long late- Victorian terrace exhibiting several differently coloured polychrome designs along its length. Along the west sides of both of these streets, there is late 20<sup>th</sup> century business and residential infill that is somewhat jarring to the heritage settings of these streets.

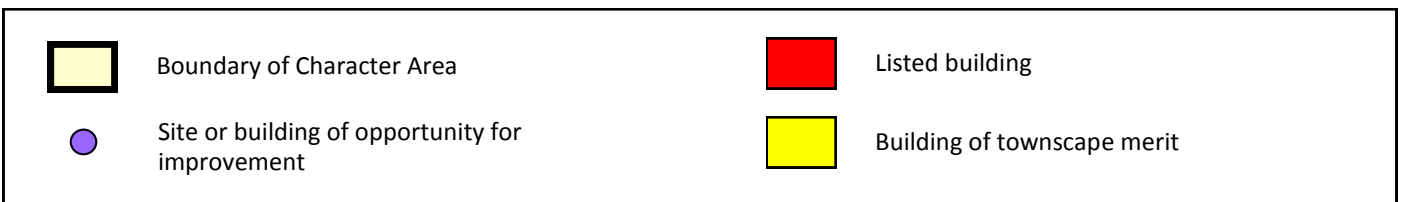
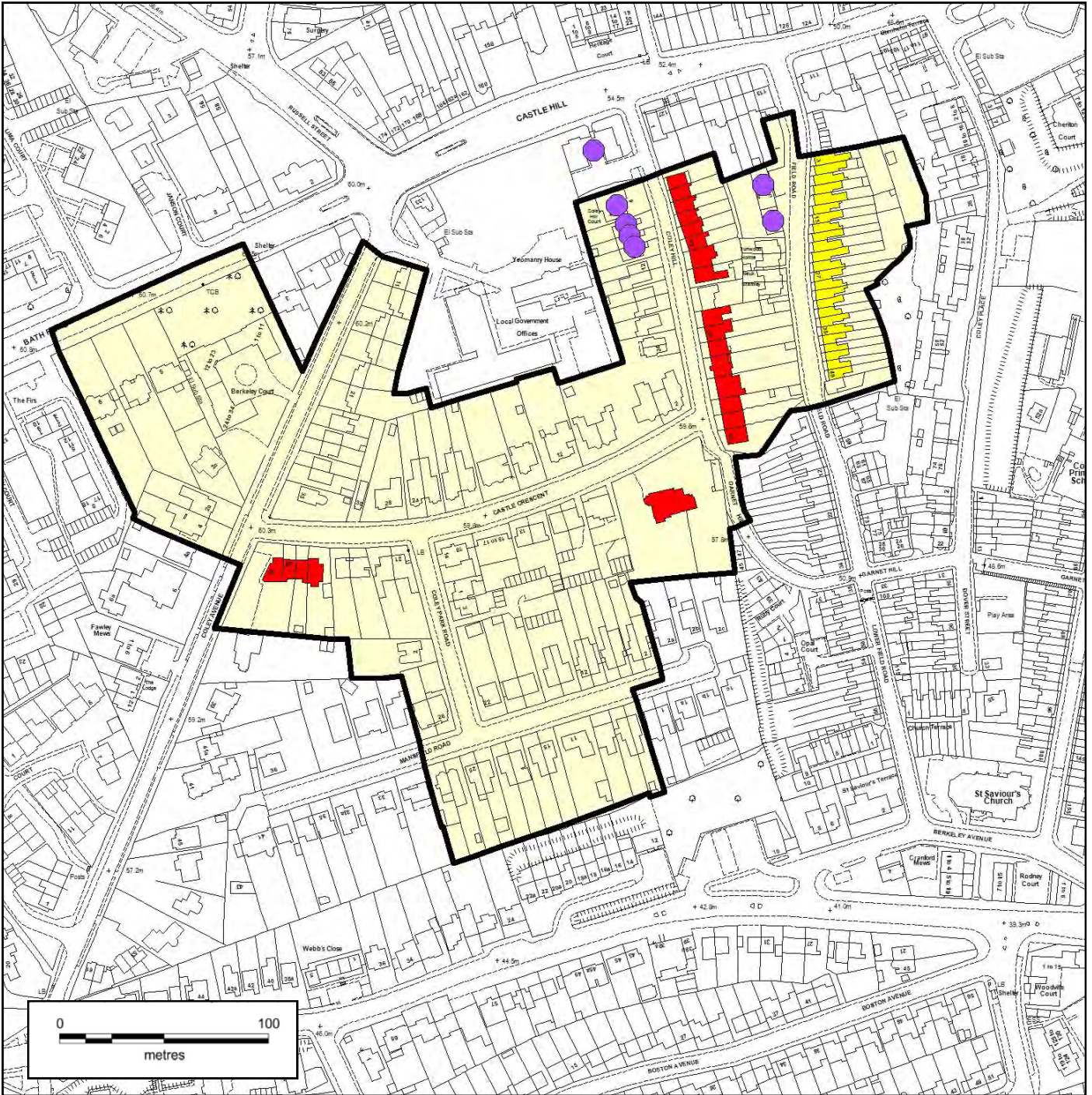
Nonetheless, the area still has a distinctive air about it with some fine views afforded it by its geographical positioning at the top of the escarpment, that that help to identify this as a distinct and separate character area.

### 6.5.2 Materials

Traditional red brick is dominant along the tall walls lining Coley Avenue and in the Georgian terraces of Coley Hill. Polychrome brickwork in grey, blue, tan and red is used throughout the area in the late Victorian and Edwardian residences. This polychrome brickwork is particularly notable along the villas of Castle Crescent and Mansfield Road. The polychrome terraces along the east side of Field Road are notable for their condition and worthy of further protection.

Stucco is the more dominant facing material on houses along the southern side of Castle Crescent and on some of the Georgian period terraces on Coley Hill. Stone detailing for doors and window sills are common throughout the character area no matter the time period of the property. Modern infill properties are often faced with stucco and exposed red brick combinations, which are at least materially in-keeping with the area's traditional material usage.

Roofing materials are predominantly and traditionally slate, as notable especially on the area's Georgian properties although the later Victorian villas exhibit the occasional red tile roof.



Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area

Figure 6.5.1: Character Area 6.5—Castle Crescent and streets south of Castle Hill

November 2019

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### 6.5.3 Views

View 4A and B, to both the north and south along Coley Avenue, into and out of the Conservation Area, is now a protected heritage view in the new Local Plan. The avenue once formed the private drive to Coley House and the Coley Park Estate and exhibits the same line of trees along the route as shown on the Coates' map of 1802 and as photographed by Henry Fox Talbot (see Figure 4.2.8 page 29). The current trees along the route were planted in 1905 and replaced the same historical allée of trees.

Views 16, 18, 19 are located within Castle Crescent and Streets South of Castle Hill Character Area, which evidence some of the most architecturally interesting buildings in the Conservation Area. The area is noteworthy for its Georgian terraces and Victorian villas.

View 16, looking north down to Castle Hill from Coley Hill, includes the Georgian terraces on the east of the side street to the larger Georgian Heritage Court property on Castle Hill. This view helps to understand the early relationship of Coley Hill to Castle Hill.

View 18 is a kinetic view travelling east along Castle Crescent from Coley Avenue. As the view unfolds along the curve in the road it takes in the attractive large Victorian villas lining the north side of the street which contrast with the large Georgian villas on the south side of the street.

View 19 from Castle Crescent down Coley Park Road and towards the villas of Mansfield Road continues to display these large villas and provides an attractive view into this turn-of-the-century suburban development.

Wide vistas at Coley Hill and Castle Crescent should be maintained for the future.

Views 3a and 3b are wide, sweeping easterly views from the higher point along the escarpment area over Coley Gorge to the Katesgrove area and its two historic church spires. Tall, private boundary fencing currently limits these views and ultimately it would be desirable if these views to the east could be made more easily accessible to the public. These views, both illustrate a strong sense of openness, together with leafy green and expansive open sky, punctuated with the Victorian spires of the mediaeval St. Giles Church and Christ Church. This was a sight line for defensive positions during the siege of Reading in 1643 from Fort Royal to the fleche at the end of what is now Edgehill Street and back.

Also, from the high escarpment area, view 21 is a kinetic view from along the entirety of Mansfield Road looking east, from which the spire of St. Giles can be seen. This aids in understanding the correlation of the high escarpment ground to the town below in the east. Similarly to views 3A and 3B, the view to the east of St Giles Church from along Mansfield Road should be protected.



*Figure 6.5.2 View 4a and 4b, The 220 plus year old allée of trees along Coley Avenue with old high brick walls, (View north from Castle Crescent)*

#### 6.5.4 Area Analysis

Coley Avenue was originally the private route to the impressive Coley House, the remains of which are located to the south of today's Berkeley Avenue. Coley Avenue's impressive allée of trees lining the road dates back to at least the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. After having been replanted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the striking tree lines survive today. The avenue of trees, the attractive high brick walls, and detached houses within large front gardens define Coley Avenue within the character area.

Coley Hill dates to circa 1820, with a grouping of fine, varied Georgian terraces along the east side of the street. These terraces are predominantly red brick, though some have stuccoed façades. Many of the houses have original railings, doors and arched windows that add to the heritage significance of these buildings. The survival of some of these details is at greater risk as several of these large buildings, subdivided into flats for multiple-occupation use, are showing signs of poor maintenance.

The presence of a lone modern, two-storey detached house at no. 19, between two Georgian terraces, jars otherwise with the architectural harmony along this side of the street. The modern infill along the west side of the street leaves the street rather unbalanced and is quite incongruous with the Georgian side. Should properties on this side of the street come up for re-development, sensitivity to the Georgian character of the street could significantly improve the street's overall streetscape.





Figure 6.5.3 31-35 Coley Hill, stuccoed lower ground floor and later Victorian trimmed windows, 1820-30s



Figure 6.5.4 Arched windows and fanlights on two storey Georgian houses, Coley Hill

Number 3 Castle Crescent which dates from c. 1835-1840, is notable for the size of its intact original garden area. Several TPO trees screen the southwestern perimeter at the rear of the site. Despite recent renovation, additions to the main house and large mews-style building additions to the plot layout, it remains one of only a few substantial detached villas within the Conservation Area whose grounds reflect their large original garden layout.



Figure 6.5.5 3 Castle Crescent after recent renovations



Figure 6.5.6 Stucco 3-storey houses- south side of Castle Crescent near Coley Avenue, c. 1840

The later Victorian properties, c. 1880-1900, on Castle Crescent and Mansfield Road date from a single wave of development and are noted as an impressive collection of villas. Each is individually detailed with polychrome, stone, and tile embellishments and many maintain their brick boundary walls. Many are in multiple occupancy and numerous front gardens have been hard-surfaced to provide off-street parking which is detrimental to the original

layout of the sites. However, the properties are otherwise well-managed and maintained, which contributes to the streets' still grand appearances.

Coley Park Road links Mansfield Road to Castle Crescent and the attractive high red brick walls along the road link the two streets together in a unified appearance. The modern infill along this short road is of a sensitive design in terms of massing, materials and detailing and the brick walls help to harmonise with historic built environment. In the same way as the red brick walls located along Coley Avenue, Castle Crescent and Mansfield Road unify the appearance of the entire area, the red brick walls of Coley Park Avenue are worthy of further protection.



*Figure 6.5.7 Polychrome houses along the north side of Castle Crescent*



*Figure 6.5.8 Attractive stone and tile house at the corner of Mansfield Road and Coley Park Road*

The small, artisan terraces along the east side of Field Road date to circa 1900 and their façades are decorated with three distinct polychrome colour patterns. The terrace is unpainted, attractive and well maintained, despite an almost total loss of original windows. The

polychrome brick patterning is worthy of further protection. These features of 3-49 Field Road are subject to an Article 4 direction, dating from January 1986. The modern housing and business premises detract from this view along the west side of the street. There are fine views from Field Road below, up to the gardens and backs of the large Georgian terraces along Coley Hill along the edge of the chalk and clay ridge.



Figure 6.5.9 Field Road polychrome terrace

5, 7 and 9 Bath Road, date from c.1880-90 and were incorporated into the Conservation Area in the 2004 Appraisal. Each has a similar appearance to the villas of the same time period on Castle Crescent. The houses are set back from Bath Road, following a similar alignment to the grand housing present on the road earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These polychrome brick properties have attractive, deep front gardens with striking trees that are safeguarded by TPO's.



Figure 6.5.10 Large polychrome villa set back amongst striking TPO trees, Bath Road

The listed building at the south east corner of the junction of Castle Crescent and Coley Avenue functions as a bed and breakfast but is poorly maintained. The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Berkeley Court opposite, is set well back in an attractively kept garden. Its rear portion is the former entrance of an earlier manor house on the site. Newer windows detract from its otherwise attractive mid-20<sup>th</sup> century design, which is unique to the area.



Figure 6.5.11 The mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Berkeley Court, Coley Avenue

#### 6.5.5 Key Positive Characteristics

- The historic allée of trees and the brick walls along Coley Avenue
- The villas of Castle Crescent and Mansfield Road, which date from c.1880-1900
- The Georgian terraced housing along the east side of Coley Hill
- The unpainted, well-maintained polychrome brick terrace on Field Road, east side
- Notable historic brick walls around the area, both tall boundary walls and lower frontage walls notably on Coley Avenue, Coley Park Road, Castle Crescent and Mansfield Road
- The large trees, TPO safeguarded, in front of the late Victorian villas at 3-7 Bath Road
- The view out over Katesgrove from the corner of Coley Hill and Castle Crescent
- The view out to the spire of St. Giles Church from Mansfield Road
- mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Berkeley Court

#### 6.5.6 Negative features

- Incompatible modern development along the west sides of Field Road and Coley Hill
- Tarmac pavements throughout the area
- Poor public realm: street lighting and erratically placed street furniture
- Poor quality front garden boundaries and bins at 3, 5, 21 and 23 Coley Hill
- Bins in front gardens on the east side of Field Road
- Loss of front gardens for parking along Castle Crescent and Mansfield Road
- Excessive and redundant overhead wires detracting from open sky views
- Loss of original slate roofs and chimneys, replacement of original doors and windows by uPVC windows and doors in some properties

#### 6.5.7 Buildings presenting Opportunities for Enhancement

- Coley Hill Court, Coley Hill, Circa 1980-1990.

#### 6.5.8 Buildings of Townscape Merit

- Terraces, 3-49 Field Road, Circa 1880-1890.

#### 6.5.9 Listed Buildings:

- 3 to 13 Coley Hill, Grade II. Circa 1840. Stepped terrace of six houses. 3 storeys and basement. Red brick. Stucco cornice, string course and window surrounds. Slate roof. Some railings. 3 and 5 have lost details and been rendered since the listing notes were prepared.
- 15, 15A, 17, 17A Coley Hill, Grade II. Circa 1840. An irregular, elegant pair of 2 storey buildings. Red brick with stucco string, slate roof, arched openings to ground floor.
- 21 to 25 Coley Hill. Circa 1840, Grade II. Terrace of three houses, 3 storeys and basement. Red brick terrace, 21 and 23 painted. Slate roof. Arched ground floor windows with ogee pattern glazing.
- 27 Coley Hill, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Symmetrical 3 storey house. Red brick, stucco strings, slate roof. Arched ground floor openings. Later porch.
- 29 Coley Hill, Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century. 2 storeys. Red brick, slate roof. Arched openings to ground floor.
- 31 to 35 Coley Hill, Grade II. Mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Terrace of three houses, 3 storeys and basement. Red brick. Ground floor stucco also first floor window surrounds. Hipped slate roof. Blind boxes.
- 3 Castle Crescent, Grade II. Mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. 2 storey villa. Stucco with quoins, mouldings to windows. Doric portico. 2 storey wing to left, bay to right. Hipped slate roof. Grounds developed.
- 29 to 35 Castle Crescent, Grade II. Circa 1840. Terrace of four houses. 35 now a hotel with loss of original windows. 3 storeys, end houses gabled and set forward. Stucco with slate roof. Parapet to Coley Avenue side of 35. Forms a group with 21 to 27.

## **7. Negative features, issues and opportunities for enhancement**

### **7.1 Inclusion on Historic England's Heritage at Risk List**

In November of 2018, the Conservation Area was listed on Historic England's Register of Heritage at Risk. The primary reasons for its inclusion were the ongoing loss of character through the degradation of the housing stock and the poor condition of the public realm. These issues are in common across the country with inner city/town conservation areas. Whilst all character areas within the Conservation Area have issues which have contributed to this listing, the Oxford Road Character Area 2 and the Russell Street and Streets East Character Area 3 have the most serious issues.

There will need to be an action plan established to address the issues that promoted its inclusion on the list. However, the Council's resources are currently limited as to how to immediately address the steps that need to be taken to remove the area from the list. Community buy-in of interested groups such as the Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC), the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA) and the Civic Society will play a critical role in working with the Council to put action in place remove the area from the list. On-going conversations are being had by the Council with Historic England to look for funding and resourcing to assist in this. The following items (7.2- 7.5) detail the primary issues that need to be addressed.

### **7.2 Poor maintenance and intensified use of private properties**

A large number of the period properties in the area are privately rented and over the years this has seen an increasing imbalance of a community that was once a predominantly single-family area. In common with other parts of the Borough, the Council has established policies to maintain the community balance as detailed in the new Local Plan. A great many, but not all, of the properties show signs of neglect, overcrowding or unsympathetic management. This manifests itself in:

- loss of architectural detail and original features (front walls, railings, chimneys, doors and windows, etc.)
- inappropriately rendered and over-painted brick façades
- satellite dishes, often multiple dishes, erected on street-facing façades
- untidy or excessive cabling, wiring and pipework on façades to maximise the number of "households" within a site
- high numbers of household waste bins exceeding the capacity of front gardens, frequently overflowing, unsightly and being kept on public pavements.
- fly-tipping of bulky items from the transient rental population and from outside the area

### **7.3 Streetscape environment and public realm**

As noted in the last appraisal in 2004, many streets in the Conservation Area retain their 19<sup>th</sup> century granite kerbs and stone gutters. It was also noted that the majority of the paving was of modern tarmac and this continues to be the case today. The replacement of concrete stone slabs along the Oxford Road from a past improvements programme have led to a particularly unattractive patchwork effect along the road with tarmac replacing stone slabs as they've been pulled out for repairs. As with any heritage area, tarmac has an overall blighting effect on a conservation area as it is not a heritage material.

Street furniture includes many recently re-painted cast iron bollards, notably in Howard Street and along Oxford Road. However, the design and quality of modern public lamp posts and

litter bins in the Conservation Area is unsympathetic and tends to clutter and detract from the local character rather than harmonise with it. Additionally, in the past year, the area lost two of the last three remaining cast-iron lamp posts in the area, with the lone cast iron lamp – post now in Franklin Street.

Excessive and unsightly telecommunications wires overhead blight streetscape views. The wires appear in many cases to be redundant. This is especially notable in streets where there is heavy HMO occupation.

#### **7.4 Crime and Antisocial Behaviour (ASB)**

Parts of the Conservation Area, most prevalent in Character Areas 6.2 and 6.3, continue to have higher than average levels of crime and ASB. Notably, this long-standing pressure is evidenced with the following issues:

- Repeated offensive graffiti and tagging on telecom cabinets, private walls and buildings is a consistent visual manifestation of this issue.
- Open and frequent drug-dealing and drug-taking on the streets adds an additional visual blighting effect to the area's street scenes.
- Vandalism to front gardens, front brick boundary walls, piers and railings in the area is a consistent issue.
- Good quality contractors frequently refuse to work in the area due to the levels of crime and white van theft. This has led to the common hiring of cash-only, cheaply-priced contractors with little understanding or concern in the use of heritage-appropriate techniques for repairs and conversions.
- The overall levels of crime and ASB have given the area a seemingly unshakeable reputation as an undesirable area to move into. This, together with the run-down presentation of the housing stock (as detailed in section 7.2) continues to be off-putting to a wide range of potential residents.

As is common with other inner- city/town conservation areas throughout the country, the area's crime and ASB has had a sustained detrimental effect on the Conservation Area itself.

#### **7.5 Threats to Views and Vistas in and out of the Conservation Area**

The hilly topography of parts of the Conservation Area, and the grid pattern of the streets, provide some notable views to the north and east into the town centre. Future development along the Caversham Road and IDR corridor could alter and affect important heritage views out of the Conservation Area. Mitigation of this needs to be considered wherever feasible in terms of potential negative impact to views out of the Conservation Area.

#### **7.6 Detailed Issues throughout the Conservation Area**

Throughout the entire Conservation Area opportunities should be taken to address, prevent and reduce the following blights which are superficial in many cases and have the ability to be improved upon and reversed.

- excessive cabling/satellite dishes/pipework on house façades (e.g. to accommodate multiple households within the building)
- insensitive painting/rendering/cladding of house fronts
- replacement of original doors and windows by uPVC substitutes



## Negative features, issues and opportunities for enhancement: Sites presenting Opportunities for Enhancement

- loss of front boundary railings, walls and fences to increase rubbish bin storage and accessibility
- loss of chimney stacks on residential and commercial properties (e.g. due to the removal of interior fireplaces)
- unkempt waste management on domestic and commercial properties
- bins on public pavements and high numbers of domestic and commercial waste bins kept in front gardens, blighting streetscape views
- frequent fly-tipping of large items due to high turn-over of residents and landlords lack of assistance in removals
- unduly prolonged and excessive display of estate agents' signage
- excessive/redundant overhead wiring by telecom utilities
- use of tarmacadam for surfacing street pavements
- uneven, patchworked appearance of pavements and streets
- redundant, excessive and worn street signage
- unsympathetic street lighting fixtures
- poorly maintained and graffitied appearance of brick and stucco walls and telecom cabinets

These blights, common throughout the Conservation Area, are addressed in the Action Plan set out in Section 8.

### **7.7 Sites presenting Opportunities for Enhancement**

Sites throughout the Conservation Area that negatively affect the character of the area are individually listed at the end of each character area section in Chapter 6. These sites are identified as currently having a negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area, and each presents an "opportunity for enhancement" to contribute positively to the character of the area. When opportunities present themselves, mitigation measures such as improved landscaping, sympathetic signage and in-keeping redevelopment should be taken. In the case of these sites coming forward for redevelopment, policy guidelines for the protection and enhancement of conservation areas should be strongly adhered to.

## 8. Action Plan

### 8.1 Community engagement with the Council

The 2004 appraisal concluded with this call for community engagement:

*'Whilst the Council can initiate improvements and control new development, the co-operation and enthusiasm of local residents and business owners provides a vital constituent to the future successful management of the conservation area. This means that local residents, tenants and other property owners need to work with the Council and agree common aims and objectives. Hopefully, this [2004] appraisal will provide a framework for a positive partnership for mutual future benefit.'*

During the intervening years since 2004, the Council has been seeking to develop that positive partnership with local property owners and neighbourhood community groups. In 2012, Abbey Ward councillors encouraged the formation of the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association [BSANA] which promotes and coordinates community engagement in the Conservation Area's most blighted streets, lying to the north of Castle Hill in Character Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4.

In 2016 the Council endorsed the setting up of the Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee [CAAC] whose aims include making proposals for the enhancement and the protection of Reading's Conservation Areas.

Although community engagement measures have proceeded since 2012, this alone has not been the universal cure to reversing the issues which have led to the Conservation Area's decline. It has become clear that special measures are necessary to protect the historic environment from further decline.

By listing the site with Historic England on its 'Heritage at Risk' register, the Council has taken the first significant step towards righting the situation. This has opened opportunities for funding and increased community and business engagement with a view to rectifying many of the existing issues in the area.

The action plan in the 2004 appraisal consisted of recommendations relating to removal of permitted development rights by Article 4 Direction, improvements to the public realm, and the application of existing policies to secure gradual improvement to shop fronts along the Oxford Road. Those recommendations have been reviewed and carried forward more extensively in the Action Plan set out in Tables 1 and 2.

### 8.2 Big Picture Actions involving the "at Risk" Conservation Area

#### **A change of name to the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area**

With the proposal of new boundary changes for the area and the inclusion of a large portion of the Oxford Road up to the railway bridge, this appraisal has acknowledged that the history of the area. The area's history was defined by the layout of both the Castle Street/Castle Hill route and the Oxford Road as they formed the structure for the later residential infill in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is the understanding of this development pattern and the relationship of the residential streets to these two major routes that is the reason for the renaming of the conservation area. With the proposed name, the area's history would be more immediately apparent to residents, businessmen and visitors in understanding the development of this first residential suburb to the west of Reading's town centre. It would be hoped that the requisite sign changes could be enabled by outside funding streams designated to improve the Conservation Area.

### **Proposed expansion of Article 4 Directions and Local Development Orders (LDO)**

Since the last appraisal, the implementation of the 2013 Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act has relaxed planning restrictions in Conservation Area. This relaxation has contributed to intensified and noticeable harm to the Conservation Area (e.g. the loss of front garden boundary walls for the creation of hard standings for bins). It is highly likely that without additional measures, the Conservation Area will be at greater risk from the continuing loss of detail and an erosion of the harmonious terraced character that makes it special.

The use of Article 4 Directions is recommended where there are acknowledged, sustained and on-going issues with loss of character, detailing or community balance. This appraisal reaffirms and builds upon the recommendation of the use of Article 4 Directions as in the 2004 appraisal. The two subsequent Article 4 Directions placed in Jesse Terrace (protecting the façades in July 2004 and controlling small HMOs in January 2016) have had a positive effect on protecting the character and balance of the street. As such, this has had the effect of creating a notable dichotomy between that street and Waylen Street lying just opposite it on Baker Street which had no Article 4 Direction put in place.

In 2018, the Government also announced the allowance of fee collections to be paid to the LPA for planning applications within Article 4 Direction areas. This has relaxed to some degree, the financial and resourcing pressures for LPAs in implementing Article 4 Directions.

In other towns and cities the use of Article 4 Directions, linked to Local Development Orders (LDOs), have been effective in the restoration of character within blighted conservation areas. Reading's new Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) has recommended the possible use of such linked-up documents. LDOs exempt the need for planning applications within the Article 4 Direction area, if the renovation meets certain criteria of character standards within an area. As LDOs are general, it is sensible that there would need to be several LDOs for the area; likely stipulating standards for buildings of a different housing period or style.

The use of LDOs can greatly lessen the amount of planning applications that would come forward in an Article 4 area. (e.g. the replacement of a 4 -panelled wooden front door would not need permission in streets where they are considered to be in-keeping with the character of the area.) The results would not be immediately apparent, and their effectiveness would take many years to become apparent, depending upon when people chose to renovate. However, the restoration of original character would gradually become noticeable.

Due to the loss of character and the imbalance of a single-family community that was once dominant in the area, it is evident that there are many streets that could benefit by the application of Article 4 Directions/LDOs.

It is the purpose of this appraisal to recommend solutions for the management of the Conservation Area that would enhance and regenerate it, ultimately removing it from the “at Risk” register. Article 4 Directions remain the primary tool that planning law provides to retain and restore character in conservation areas. As such, this appraisal recommends the application of Article 4 Directions and LDOs at this time for the following streets:

Howard Street, Body Road, Anstey Road, Carey Street, Zinzan Street, Waylen Street, sections of Baker Street, Russell Street, Clifton Street, Franklin Street, Tilehurst Road, Belle Vue Terrace, Prospect Street, Oxford Road and Field Road.

### **Seeking funding for Improvements to the Public Realm, Streetscapes and Properties**

In listing the Conservation Area on the Heritage at Risk listing, funding streams not otherwise available become possibilities. Funds from Historic England's Heritage High Streets programme, Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas (PSICA) and Capacity Building Grants are all funding possibilities.

In November 2018, the Council allocated £50,000 of neighbourhood CIL funding to the improvement of “conservation areas within the town centre,” much of which could potentially be used as match funding for this Conservation Area.

Along Oxford Road, improvements to the public realm and retail shop frontages and signage could have a positive impact on the road. Furthermore, such improvements are likely to have a positive knock-on effect for the streets directly off of the Oxford Road. Other initiatives which would benefit the area would include satellite dish/antennae amnesty programmes and rubbish bin management schemes.

#### **Establishing Management Plans with Council and Community Groups**

The Conservation Area is one that should be able to continue to enhance the understanding and appreciation of Reading's 19<sup>th</sup> century residential growth and development into the future. However, in acknowledging the Conservation Area as the asset that it is, this appraisal also acknowledges its current problems and vulnerabilities. Without the mutual corporation of the LPA and engaged community groups improvements to its current “at Risk” state will not be possible.

Nottingham, in recent years, has placed the majority of its conservation areas on the “at Risk” register as a proactive step in their improved care and management. They have found that the formation of a structured working plan with engaged community groups and Council officers has been beneficial in actioning steps needed for conservation area improvement.

The following action plan has been set out as a starting point for future work. By necessity, it will evolve and need regular review and adjustments as funding and programmes are put in place.

## Action Tables

Policies and actions need to be applied to all of Reading's Conservation Areas if the remaining historic character of the town's 15 conservation areas is to be appropriately protected and enhanced.

The actions in Table 1 were spelled out in the St Peters Conservation Area and were agreed to be necessary actions for all conservation areas within the town, particularly with regard to the prudent protection of architectural detail and character in building alterations or redevelopment.

**TABLE 1 – All Conservation Areas (a Borough wide response for all Conservation Areas)**

ISSUE	ACTION
Loss of original architectural features and details (see 7.1). Insensitive change and development not requiring planning permission, permitted development	<p><b>Guidance:</b> Provide guidance document on 'approved' methods for common small-scale alterations.</p> <p><b>Awareness:</b> Provide householder information on the added value of 'period detail' and detail on economic alternatives for energy efficiency savings</p>
Loss or change to original boundary features (walls and railings see 7.2)	<p><b>Awareness:</b> Provide householder information document on the added value and visual importance of boundary walls and railings</p>
Insensitive development undertaken without permission (see 7.1 e.g. window replacement in listed buildings)	<p><b>Guidance:</b> Provision of property owner guidance on legal requirements for alterations/development/treeworks in conservation areas.</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> Legal enforcement by RBC to secure reversal of changes</p>
Redevelopment within or adjoining the Conservation Area should respect the general height, massing and alignment of existing buildings and use a palette of materials which reflect its existing character (see 7.6)	<p><b>Guidance, Policy:</b> Supplementary Design guidance planning document for development in historic areas. <b>Support:</b> Use CAAC to gain informed comment on planning applications affecting Conservation Areas</p>

ISSUE	ACTION
Poor street furniture, clutter and surfacing (see 7.3 and 7.5)	<b>Training/Awareness:</b> Council officers responsible for street signage, furniture and repair should have appropriate guidance on their impact on the Conservation Area and take this into account in planned maintenance

Noting however the far greater pressures and current situations within this Conservation Area and the resourcing needed to affect a turn-around of the situation, responsible agents and timetables are only suggested in the tables below and not agreed upon at this time. It is hoped that through grant funding and future funding schemes that time-tables and agents can be identified to right the most egregious issues within the Conservation Area.

**Table 2 – The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area specifically:**

ISSUE	ACTION
<b>Overarching Recommendations:</b>	
The Conservation Area should be extended in accordance with the recommendations in this reappraisal.	<b>Adoption:</b> Approve extension of Conservation Area
Risk of neighbouring tall building development adversely impacting views and character of the Conservation Area	<p><b>Consultation:</b> Public consultation, Environmental Surveys, Historic England input (Historic Places Panel), Design Review Panel</p> <p><b>Mitigation:</b> Where possible and in-line with the Local Plan steps should be taken to mitigate damage to the views within and out of the area.</p>
Need for improved enforcement for Listed Building and Conservation Area infractions	<b>Enforcement:</b> Increased detection and enforcement, funding for Council resourcing

Action Plan: Big Picture Actions involving the “at Risk” Conservation Area

ISSUE	ACTION
<b>Maintenance issues with private premises- domestic and retail</b>	
Loss of architectural detail and features (windows, doors, chimneys, etc.)	<b>Development Control:</b> Article 4 Direction with Local Development Orders (LDOs) need to be put in place in multiple areas of the Conservation Area
The over-painting and covering up of original brickwork, especially noting polychrome patterned brickwork	<b>Development Control:</b> Article 4 Directions plus LDOs
The building or alteration of a front porch or weather-shield	<b>Development Control:</b> Article 4 Directions and enforcement
The creation of hard standing surfaces for rubbish bins in front gardens and/or the removal of front garden boundary walls	<b>Development Control:</b> Article 4 Directions plus LDOs and improved detection and enforcement
Removal or loss of front and side boundary walls and railings	<b>Development Control:</b> Article 4 Directions plus LDOs
Installation of uPVC windows and uPVC primary entrance doors	<b>Development Control:</b> Article 4 Direction plus LDOs and improved detection and enforcement
Multiple façade satellite dishes, redundant cabling and pipes on street-facing façades	<p><b>Community Involvement:</b> Improved detection</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> improved enforcement of the existing regulations</p> <p><b>Development Control:</b> Article 4 to remove PD rights for façade blighting elements visible from a public highway, including footpaths</p>
Creating unconsented access onto a road or public highway	<p><b>Community Involvement:</b> Improved detection</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> improved enforcement of the existing regulations</p>
The erection or alteration of gates, fences or walls	<b>Development Control:</b> Article 4 Directions plus LDOs and improved detection and enforcement

Action Plan: Big Picture Actions involving the “at Risk” Conservation Area

ISSUE	ACTION
Prolonged and persistent poor maintenance of properties detrimental to local character	<p><b>Community Involvement:</b> Communication with landlord and tenants</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> Enforcement; including in the most severe cases, where detrimental to the surrounding quality of life the issuance of Community Protection Notice (CPNs)</p>
Prolonged and persistent poorly maintained façades: painting, rendering using out-of-keeping materials, redundant wires, excessive pipes detrimental to local character	<p><b>Community Involvement:</b> Communication with owners;</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> Enforcement; including in the most severe cases, where detrimental to the surrounding quality of life the issuance of Community Protection Notice (CPNs)</p>
Prolonged and persistent poorly maintained boundaries, hedges, fences, and gates detrimental to local character	<p><b>Communication</b> with landlord and tenants</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> Enforcement; including in the most severe cases, where detrimental to the surrounding quality of life the issuance of Community Protection Notice (CPNs)</p>
Prolonged and persistent poor management of rubbish detrimental to local character	<p><b>Enforcement:</b> Enforcement; including in the most severe cases, where detrimental to the surrounding quality of life the issuance of Community Protection Notice (CPNs)</p>
Reduction of green canopy in gardens	<p><b>Community involvement:</b> improved detection</p> <p><b>Awareness:</b> Create and provide householder information document on the added value and visual importance of green canopy in gardens</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> of existing regulations</p>
Non-compliant estate agent signage; unduly prolonged time period for signage presentation and use; projection beyond boundary onto public highway	<p><b>Enforcement and detection:</b> Improved detection and enforcement. Adherence to and enforcement of RBC's policy on estate agent signage,</p>



Action Plan: Big Picture Actions involving the “at Risk” Conservation Area

ISSUE	ACTION
<b>Shop fronts</b>	
Lack of knowledge by shop-owners about the policy and suggested design parameters within the conservation area	<p><b>Education:</b> of shop-owners</p> <p><b>Policy:</b> to review and reinforce the policy on shop-fronts and retail signage</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> improvement schemes for shop fronts</p>
Unsympathetic retail signage, hiding of string courses, windows, window sills; use of garish colours, plastic lettering, over dominant lighting, internally illuminated signage	<p><b>Policy update:</b> Update Council SPD policy for signage, issues.</p> <p><b>Enforcement</b> of current policies</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> seek and implement funding to work with retailers to improve frontages</p>
Loss of historic shopfronts and replacement of key heritage details	<p><b>Policy creation:</b> Article 4 Direction plus LDOs</p> <p><b>Detection and enforcement:</b> of current policies</p> <p><b>Secure funding:</b> seek and use funding to improve issues</p>
Metal roller security shutters	<p><b>Policy creation:</b> Article 4 Direction plus LDOs</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> and improved detection;</p> <p><b>Secure funding:</b> seek and implement funding to work with retailers to improve issues</p>
Parking on retail frontages and forecourts	<p><b>Policy creation:</b> Article 4 Direction plus LDOs</p> <p><b>Enforcement:</b> where appropriate</p>
Excessive freestanding sale boards and advertising flags	<p><b>Detection and enforcement:</b> to improve</p>
Prolonged and habitual storage of goods beyond curtilage and on public pathways	<p><b>Detection and enforcement:</b> to improve</p>
Permanent storage of rubbish on forecourts	<p><b>Detection and enforcement:</b> to improve</p>

Action Plan: Big Picture Actions involving the “at Risk” Conservation Area

ISSUE	ACTION
<b>Public Realm</b>	
Tarmacadam pavements and patched pavements	<b>Secure funding:</b> Seek and implement funding for improved pavements within Conservation Area
Retention of granite kerbs and setted gutters	<b>Repair:</b> and improved detection and reporting
Unconsented drop kerbs in the Conservation Area	<b>Community detection:</b> improve <b>Enforcement</b> of current policies
Out of keeping modern lamp posts	<b>Seek funding:</b> and implement to install more character- appropriate lamp posts
Redundant and excessive street signage	<b>Survey of streets:</b> community-led and Council adoption <b>Reduction and improvement:</b> where possible
Unsympathetic street litter bins- free- standing and on poles	<b>Seek funding:</b> and implement to install more character- appropriate bins
Redundant, excessive and unsightly overhead wires	<b>Survey of area:</b> community-led <b>Removal and reduction:</b> where possible in conjunction with Council and utility companies
Household bins on public pavements	<b>Enforcement:</b> and improved detection
Fly tipping of bulky items	<b>Communication</b> with landlords and tenants <b>Enforcement:</b> and improved detection

Action Plan: Big Picture Actions involving the “at Risk” Conservation Area

ISSUE	ACTION
Lack of green canopy cover in area	<p><b>Funding:</b> sought through private benefactors and RBC</p> <p><b>Location:</b> of appropriate sites and programmes for increased canopy cover</p>
<b>Crime and ASB</b>	
Graffiti on public and private realm walls and units	<p><b>Detection and removal:</b> to be improved. Enable communities to be able to remove graffiti</p>
Open drug dealing and use of drugs	<p><b>Enforcement:</b> and improved detection.</p> <p>This also links to much wider strategies to combat these issues, not within the remit of this Action Plan.</p>
Antisocial behaviour	<p><b>Enforcement:</b> and improved detection</p>

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Archaeology and Historical Development of the Area

#### Before the 12<sup>th</sup> century

There is limited evidence within today's Conservation Area of pre-12<sup>th</sup> century activity in the form of a small number of Prehistoric and Roman finds and a single feature. These discoveries are recorded on the local Historic Environment Record.

([http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/advanced\\_search.aspx](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/advanced_search.aspx))

Chance finds are simply referenced to Castle Hill as the exact location is unknown. Hunting and gathering tools consist of a flint arrowhead and a bronze arrowhead, spearheads and an axehead and may represent casual loss rather than occupation. A Bronze Age pit containing worked flint was discovered at 1-3 Castle Crescent during an archaeological evaluation. Finds indicating other forms of subsistence are evidenced by coins and sherds of hand-made pottery.

#### Mediaeval and early modern settlement

The Conservation Area is defined by the ancient route from London to the west (now Bath Road) and by a route from points south to Oxford, which was called Pangbourn Road (now Oxford Road). The roads intersected near the site of St Mary's Minster.

There is conjecture about whether Castle Hill was the site of a castle possibly built by King Stephen during the civil wars of 1135-53 with Empress Matilda. Although no archaeological evidence has proved that a castle did exist, it may have been a motte and bailey castle constructed of wood and earth.

The eastern part of the Conservation Area between what is now Oxford Road and the southern end of Coley Hill was on the edge of Reading and was occupied in the 1540s, but most of the land was open country.

The area was too far west to be included on John Speed's 1611 map of Reading and the first map to show the land of the Conservation Area is a plan of the defences of Reading from the English Civil War.

Reading changed hands several times during the Civil War but at the end of 1642 was garrisoned by Royalist troops. The governor, Sir Arthur Aston, constructed defences around the town consisting of bastions linked by earth banks. The siege of Reading took place in April 1643 with Parliamentary forces under the Earl of Essex first setting up a position facing the Forlorn'd Hope (at the top of Castle Hill) and Fort Royal (between Castle Hill and Castle Crescent), the major Royalist defensive positions on the west of Reading. Coates map of 1802 marks the area 'Old Fortifications' which indicates that at that time they were still visible.



Figure A1.1 Part of Burt's etching of a plan of Civil War defences looking South



Figure A1.2 Part of Coates Map 1802 showing 'Old Fortifications'

### Georgian Period 1714-1837

The Bath Road between Reading and Punfield (just west of Theale) was turnpiked by an Act of Parliament in 1715. A toll gate was erected at the top of Castle Hill on the western outskirts of the town, immediately to the east of the drive to the estate of Coley House. A further Act in 1729 extended the jurisdiction of the turnpike trustees westward beyond Punfield as far as Speenhamland at Newbury. The toll gate was moved westward c.1830 about half a mile, to where the town's outskirts had then expanded.

From the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Reading's location meant it became an increasingly important coaching and wagon stop between Bath and London. Inns, such as the Kings Arms Inn (now 154-160 Castle Hill) and public houses such as the Horse and Jockey (now The Castle Tap at 120 Castle Street) rebuilt in 1823 on the site of the 17<sup>th</sup> century inn, flourished on the road heading west out of town. Baker's and Gilder's London to Newbury coaches advertised a stop here from 1825.

John Rocque's map of 1761 shows plots on the north side of what is now Castle Hill were occupied with southern views across Coley Gorge. Most of those buildings were subsequently demolished or redeveloped.



Figure A1.3 Extract from Rocque's Map of Reading 1761

The Grade II\* 154-160 Castle Hill, the former Kings Arms Inn, is one significant building which remains from that period. 158-160 Castle Street/Castle Hill was constructed in 1734 and an additional wing was added before 1796 to achieve today's footprint. 2 Bath Road, the home of the locally prominent Swallow family, dates from c.1780.

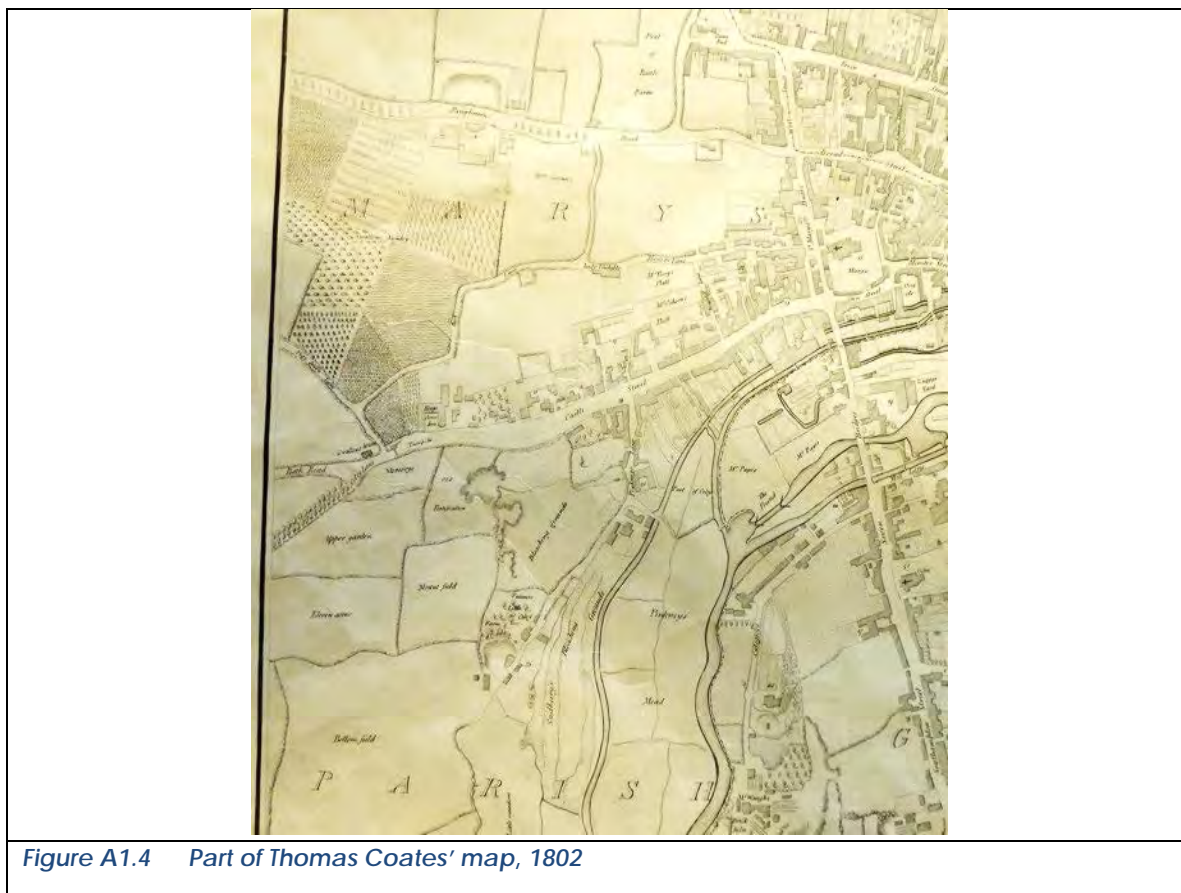
The handsome house at 107 retains the structure which many of these houses may have had with its stable buildings and original back garden footprint still intact.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a succession of large properties for the wealthier families of Reading were built along the two main roads from the centre. During the century the land between the roads, which had been market gardens and nurseries, was also developed with a range of properties to house wealthy businessmen, artisans and labourers. However, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Reading's elite had moved away from the area and plots began to be subdivided or large houses demolished to make way for new developments of smaller properties.

On the streets south of the Castlehill House on the eastern side of Coley Hill are further evidence of that early development. Castle Crescent also saw the building of several large homes in the 1830s and 1840s. Yeomanry House, early 19<sup>th</sup> century, is the finest remaining example of the grand houses surrounded by large gardens built for the wealthy and prominent businessmen of Reading.

York Lodge at 81 Baker Street, now part of The National Spiritualist Church, was built at this time as one of three villas with entrances that faced to the east and away from Baker Street, with drives up to the fronts of the houses and their gardens surrounding them. The other two houses were called Lancaster Lodge and Tudor Lodge, but were later demolished and the site is now occupied by flats dating from the late 1960s/ early 1970s, Alexander and Nicholas Courts. Bookseller Arthur Lee Humphreys, friend and publisher of Oscar Wilde, lived at York

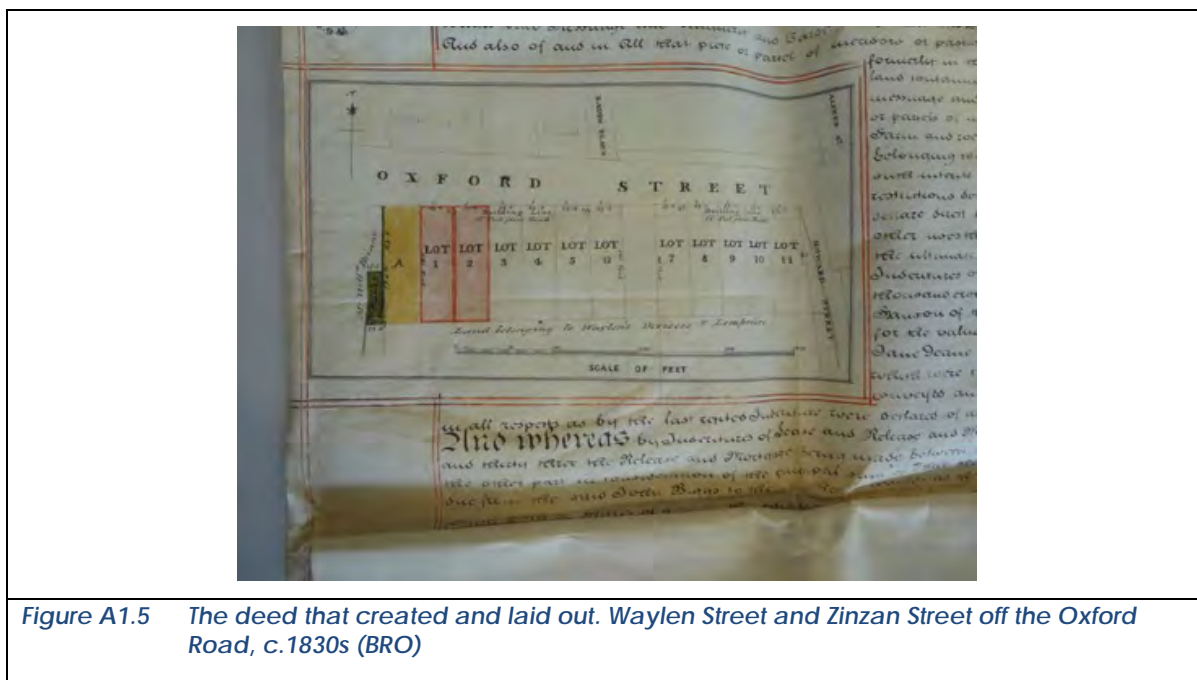
Lodge from c.1899-1946 and his initials and the date 'ALH 1925' can be seen over the gateway to the street. (<https://whitleypump.wordpress.com/2018/07/22/a-reading-bookseller-publisher-and-author-extended-article>)



A thriving market gardening business developed in the area to the south of the present-day Castle Hill and Tilehurst Road area. Swallows' Nurseries was run by James Swallow with his son William Pratt Swallow. They are known to have supplied plants and shrubs to various local estates, most notably, in the mid 1790's, to Purley Park which at that time was being landscaped by Humphry Repton.

Archaeological investigation around Yeomanry House, known during part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Castlehill House, identified several ditches and discrete post-medieval features. These ditches could have been related to the documented nursery and market gardening on the site prior to the building as shown on Coates' map of 1802 or they may be military defensive ditches.

Mrs. Zinzan's fields are also noted on Coates' map located in the area between today's Waylen Street and Howard Street. They were part of the sizeable local nursery industry in the area supplying vegetables and fruit to the town. The fields were sold off in the 1830s and Waylen Street and Zinzan Street were laid out after that sale. There was another plant nursery named Victoria Nursery just north of the Oxford Road located between the railway and Mason Street and shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1877).



**Figure A1.5** The deed that created and laid out. Waylen Street and Zinzan Street off the Oxford Road, c.1830s (BRO)

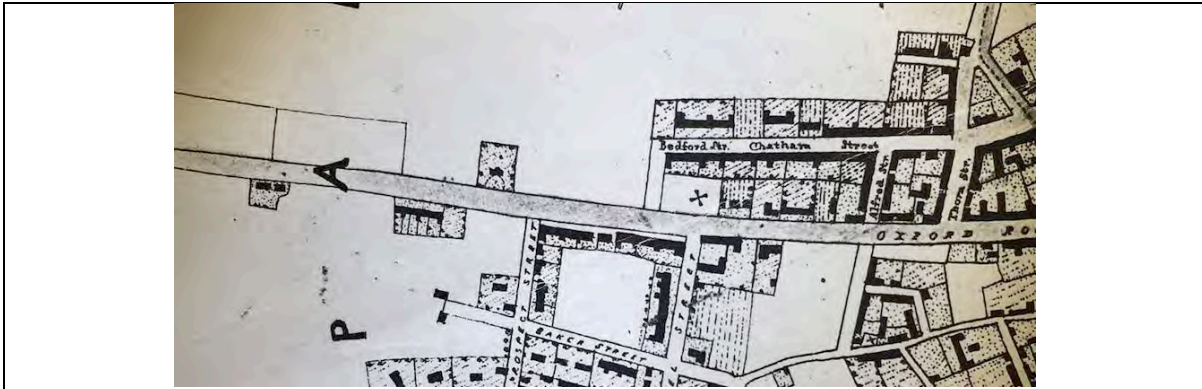
William Pratt Swallow was also a land surveyor and in the 1820s, possibly sensing the need for housing would be a more profitable venture, he sold large parts of his nurseries for private housing. This marked the beginning of rapid change. Mr Swallow 'founded' Prospect Street and Russell Street, the first two early connector routes from the Oxford Road in the north to the Bath Road and Pigs Green Lane (later Tilehurst Road) routes to the south. Russell Street was laid out along the eastern boundary of former nursery garden plots. These two streets were integral in setting out the grid system for the development of the rest of the streets in the area throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Baker Street was continued west of Russell Street during this time directly to the west of Back Lane (later an extension of Baker Street) along other east-west boundaries of Swallow's former fields. The bend in the road created by this development can still be seen in Baker Street today just to the west of its junction with Waylen Street. Some of the earliest development was the listed Georgian terraced housing on the south side of Baker Street (61-79) c.1820s.

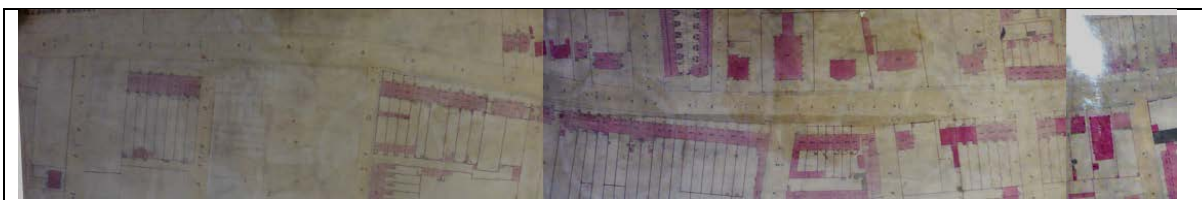
Along Oxford Road there was a similar pattern of development, spreading from the town centre to Argyle Street in the west. Georgian houses and terraces line the route and several long terraces dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century are listed. Many of the 2-storey properties, with ground floor shops and residential accommodation above, along the Oxford Road between Alfred Street in the east and Russell Street were also built by 1833. However, with the exception of Prospect Terrace between the present-day Lorne Street and Argyle Street, building along the Oxford Road ended near Prospect Street for the early part of the century. When the railway was built in 1847, building continued for the rest of the century to the west towards and then beyond the railway bridge. By the early 1850s 2-storey shops mixed with earlier residential terraces had largely filled the Oxford Road frontage between Howard Street and Prospect Street.

Speculative development began in Prospect Street in the 1820s with housing built along the east side. The terrace of artisan houses at 1-9 Prospect Street are rare exemplars of housing for the working man at the time.





**Figure A1.6** Oxford Road, Dormer Map 1833 showing residential terraces and street front shops already in existence to Prospect Street and Prospect Terrace beyond to the west



**Figure A1.7** Oxford Road, Sanitation Map 1853 showing development west to Prospect Street with Prospect Terrace still separate to the west

Among the historic churches and places of worship in the area Holy Trinity parish church stands on Oxford Road at the intersection with Russell Street. In 1826 the Reverend George Hulme purchased the site to build a proprietary chapel over the gravel pits in that location in order to construct catacombs. He counted on the high fees which Reading's wealthiest citizens would pay to use the church's burial vaults. Proprietary chapels were not compelled to follow the rules of the traditional orientation of altars facing east. Thus, there is a striking view down Russell Street to its front entrance. The catacombs were sealed off in 1858, due largely to the fact that they kept filling with water but were later used during the Second World War as an air raid shelter.



**Figure A1.8** Holy Trinity Parish Church, Oxford Road, late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hulme's Villas sit to its east on the right

### Victorian Development

The railway reached Reading in 1840 and the line through Reading West station was opened in 1847 but the station itself did not open until 1906. The railway and the bridge were placed at a distance from the edge of town which was near Prospect Street. The railway bridge divides the eastern end of the Oxford Road where the properties are a mix of Georgian and Victorian building from the more commercial, largely late Victorian and Edwardian shops further to the west. The bridge, while not the original brick bridge, is a reminder of the industry that arrived to Reading in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and the success that it brought along with it.

Answering the housing needs that Reading had at the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century larger estates began to be sold off, for the establishment of housing for Reading's rapidly increasing population. There was a movement westward from the town for the development of much needed housing for the many people now working in local industries.

As the population increased, further places of worship were built for the community and those in the Conservation Area mainly date from this period. A number of Nonconformist churches were built among them the Providence Chapel on Oxford Road built c.1859. Carey Baptist Chapel was built in 1869 and named after George Carey, the founder of the Baptist Missionary Society. Towards the end of the century, Bridge Hall was built near the railway bridge for Reading's Open Brethren group. The Grade II Reading Synagogue (1900), in Goldsmid Road is of Moorish design and is the only purpose-built synagogue in Berkshire.

The Victorian pioneer of early photography, Henry Fox Talbot had a studio, 'The Reading Establishment', at 55 Baker Street (then 8, Russell Terrace) from 1844-47. It was from this studio that the mass production of his invention, the calotype, or 'talbotype' print, was used to produce 'The Pencil of Nature', the very first mass-produced book which contained photographs. It is due to the presence of the studio in the town that Reading has some of the earliest photographs of the built environment in existence.

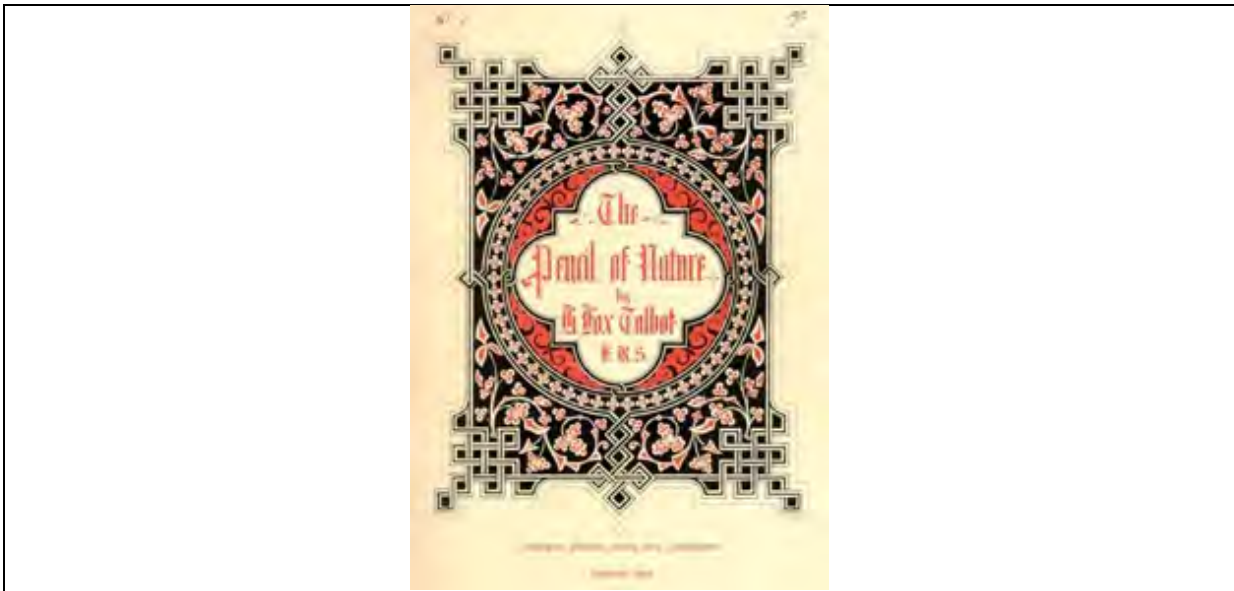


Figure A1.9 *The Pencil of Nature, the first mass-produced book containing photographs, published during Fox Talbot's time in Reading*



**Figure A1.10** Fox Talbot and his workers at the rear of his studio at 55 Baker Street. To the far right are the houses of 33- 35 Baker Street. (Met public domain, downloaded)

The Jesse family's contribution to the development of Victorian housing in Reading was considerable. Three generations of the Jesse family lived at 154-160 Castle Hill and while they developed sites throughout Reading, they figured most notably in the development of the Conservation Area. All three generations included developers, each generation passing the business down from an uncle to a nephew.

The family built Jesse Terrace in groups of approximately four at a time, with only the earliest group (1-13) being in place prior to 1853. The Terrace was largely completed by the mid 1870s and there are subtle differences in each of the groups that are notable to this day. The large single family homes have a trademark concave metal-roofed veranda, a look repeated on Heritage Court and at 162-164 Castle Hill, properties along Castle Hill which the Jesse family also developed.

In 1880 they purchased what was then known as Castlehill House (now Yeomanry House) and its surroundings, an approximately six acre site, with hopes of turning the entire area into a succession of streets with housing and a grand square of prestigious properties. This was never built as fashions were changing with the coming of the railways and the decline of the Bath Road. (A drawing of this scheme is in the collection of Jesse family papers at the BRO.) The house was then used as a school between 1888 and 1905/6.

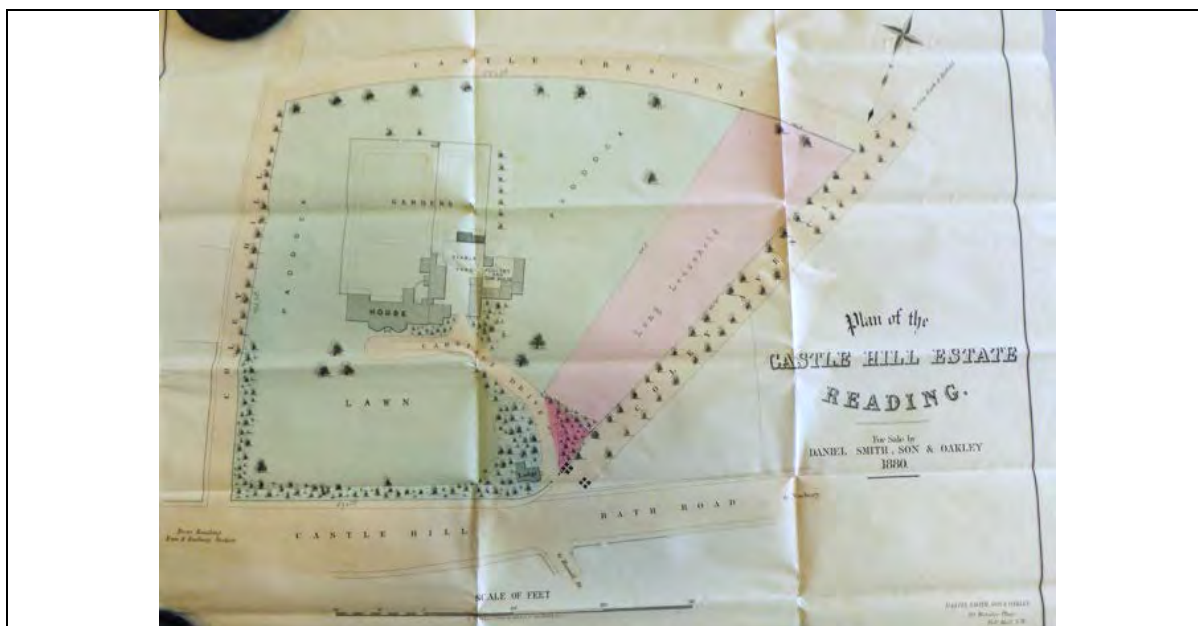


Figure A1.11 The Yeomanry House site map for its sale in 1880

### Twentieth and Twenty-first century development

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most of the development of housing in the Conservation Area had been completed. However, some housing continued to be built, and Rednirt Villas, in Baker Street, dated 1904 on a central plaque, is an example of the turn of the century small villa, continuing the established style of polychrome brick with terracotta detailing. (The name is amusingly the owners' name Trinder spelt backwards.)

Castle Hill House became the home of the Berkshire Yeomanry (1907-1968). It was purchased from Jesse, a riding school added (1911) and the house renamed accordingly. Purchased by RBC in 1968. The Berkshire Record Office was built on the site of the Riding School. The Pavilion, once a well-attended cinema which opened in 1929 is now home to the Lifespring Church since 2013 who have restored much of the original cinema's interior detailing. The Carey Centre and the Salvation Army citadel are on the site of an older terrace of houses facing east into an area called Pine Court, poor quality housing for local factory workers at the nearby Coach Manufactory.

Some of the terraced houses near Jesse Terrace did not have bathrooms, as they did not form part of the original design. Many of the houses were served by communal baths. The nearby slipper baths were located to the rear of Jesse Terrace, behind Castle Street and were constructed in the 1940s or 1950s and demolished c.2003.

The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen some buildings constructed which are not in keeping with the rest of the Conservation Area while others fit well with their surroundings and are modern assets to the area.

Notably, Castle Gate at 114 Castle Street fits well within its setting in terms of material design and massing. The modern Berkshire Record Office (2000) was built on the site of the riding school using modern materials and a design that strikes the right balance on the site. The new build at 179 Oxford Road combined elements of the two older buildings on the site and in turn, subtly enhanced the immediate street scene. Regrettably, though, there are a few buildings along the north side of Oxford Road and the occasional modern build on streets south of Castle Hill and scattered throughout the area that have impacted negatively on their settings. Structures that are out of keeping with the Conservation Area are listed in each individual character area section as Opportunities for Enhancement.

Later 20<sup>th</sup> century and current developments have responded to Reading's housing demand with the conversion of many of the larger family homes that had been built in the area to Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

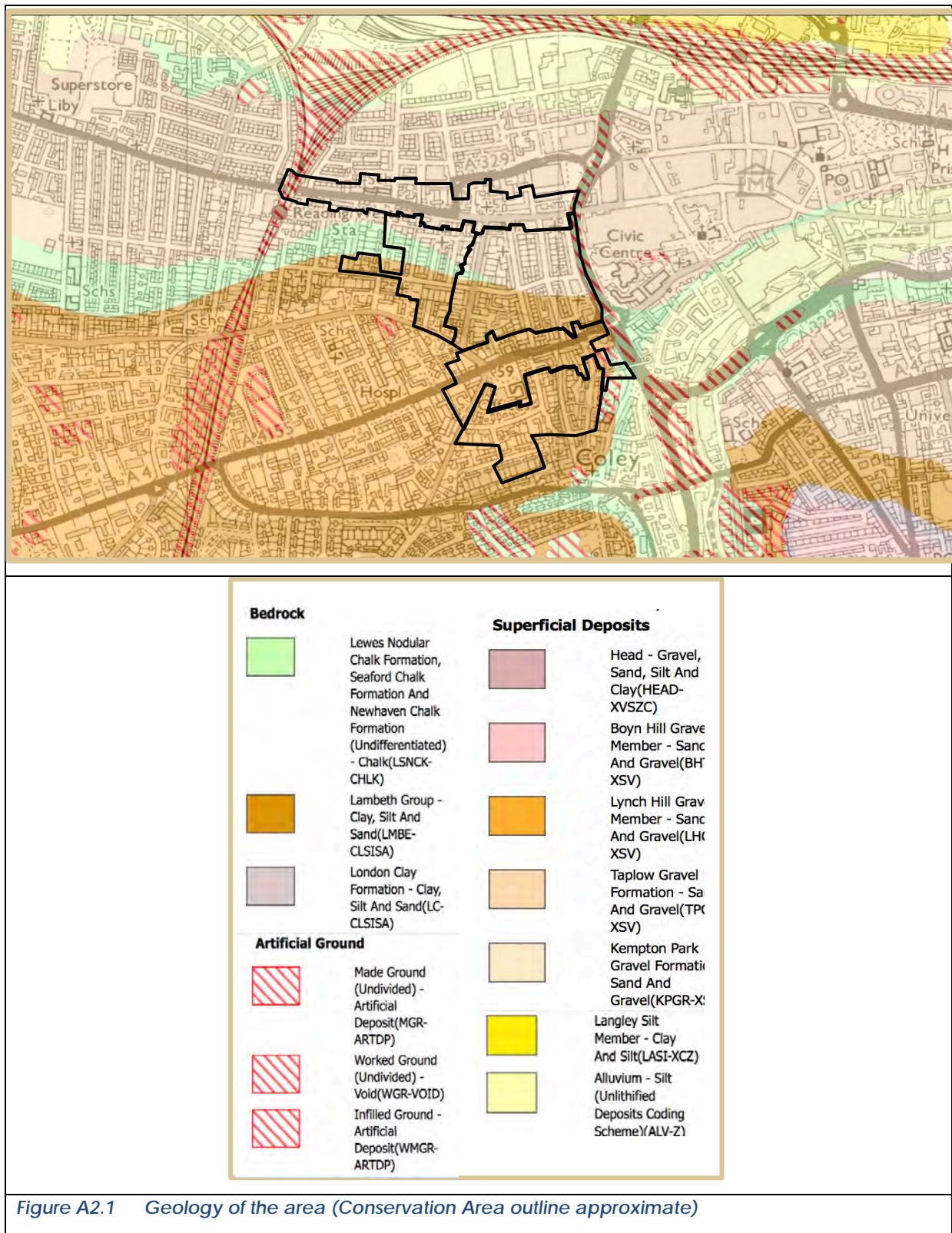
The IDR which was constructed through the eastern end of the Conservation Area in the late 1960s had a significant impact on the character of the area, severing the neighbourhood's direct access from the town centre. The east side of Howard Street was demolished and it also divided Castle Street and Castle Hill in two at the roundabout, thus losing the context of the long road to Bath and the west that went through the town centre at St. Mary's Butts. Significant buildings on Castle Street were lost as well as some substantially older properties to the east of Howard Street and Body Road.

In 1974 the Conservation Area was created, in recognition that the residential neighbourhood to the west of the IDR held a varied and special collection of Reading's range of housing from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Figure A1.12 Finches Buildings- demolished for the IDR. The side of 3 Baker Street at the far right*

## Appendix 2: Geology and topography



The area sits atop a high mound of clay, silt and sand covering most of the southern portion of the conservation area. Castle Hill sits along the high ridge of that clay. As the land falls away from this ridge towards the north and to the south east, the clay ridge gives way to underlying chalk. The northern most part of the conservation area is made up of sand and

gravel deposits which continue northwards to the alluvial deposits of the River Thames beyond. As the higher ground slopes down towards the River Kennet and the Holybrook in the southeastern portion of the conservation area south of Castle Street, the alluvial silt deposits of the river bed are present.

It was the alluvium silt, sand and clay that was the basis for the famous brick manufacturing in Reading, exemplified widely throughout Reading in the famous red brick and polychrome brickwork on buildings of the 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The gravel and alluvium make-up of the area led to the development of a local gravel pit site that figures interestingly in the area to this day. The Holy Trinity parish church (circa 1830, completed and with the western front added in 1845) at the bottom of Russell Street on the Oxford Road was built on top of a gravel pit that had been used for the making of the Oxford Road. The site was chosen so that catacombs were easy to create underneath the church.

### Appendix 3. Justification for boundary extensions

The proposal for the extension of the Conservation Area is the result of joint working between the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA), Reading's Conservation Area Advisory Committee, Reading Civic Society and Historic England. The evaluation took on board the use of the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit in an extensive community consultation exercise and comments received via other consultations.

This appendix sets out the conclusions of that work in the way suggested by Historic England Advice Note 3- 'The Setting of Heritage Assets'. The following sections therefore justify each proposed extension in terms of its historic and its architectural interest. They identify spatial relationships, collective interest, local distinctiveness and identity, rarity and community value.

#### OXFORD ROAD CHARACTER AREA

**The inclusion of 78 to 104A, 104, Holy Trinity Church, 120-190 Oxford Road (evens) on the north side from Alfred Street to the railway bridge and the inclusion of 205 to 283 Oxford Road (odds) on the south side of the Oxford Road from Prospect Street to the railway bridge. The inclusion of 1 to 23 Prospect Street (odds) and 2 to 14 (evens) Prospect Street.**

##### A) WESTERN END

Historic interest of the Character Area

Oxford Road, originally called Pang Lane, was one of the two major historic routes westward from Reading. When the railway bridge was built, it marked the western limit of Reading's growth. The part of Oxford Road between it and Prospect Street to the east comprised open areas, on which some development had started during the Georgian period. It became a suburban idyll, with villas in large gardens, which was infilled progressively by large Victorian terraces. Terminating the boundary of the Conservation Area at the bridge reflects the distinctiveness and identity created by these mixed historic origins, whereas beyond the bridge is entirely Victorian.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century extension of commercial activity from the town centre westward along Oxford Road is the ancestor of its current vibrant, multicultural environment. This part of Oxford Road continues to experience intense speculation, rapid change and frequent ad hoc renovations, reinforcing the threat to its character and the need for protection. This is best provided by including both sides of the road, as far as the bridge, within the Conservation Area, which also tells the story of Georgian and Victorian development most clearly.

Architectural interest of the Character Area

With 40 buildings listed individually or as part of a group, this extension recognises the entire half mile of Oxford Road as an architectural time capsule of this phase of Reading's growth, with its gentle mix of Georgian and Victorian shops and homes. The Character Area's western boundary reflects how the railway bridge closes the view along the street and from Reading town centre. The presence of important buildings, both listed and those of Townscape Merit, enhances this spatial relationship. For example, the use of mirror image terraces, at 249- 253 and at the junction with Argyle Street, is a rare example of the use of symmetry and space to create impact.

The mix of Georgian and Victorian Buildings of Townscape Merit create group interest, linking the western extension with the eastern end of Oxford Road. In particular, they are linked by the similarities (and some contrasts) in scale, massing and architectural detailing between the south side of Oxford Road (249-253) and the north side (170-180). There is similar group



interest in the Buildings of Townscape Merit on the both sides of Oxford Road. On the north side, working west to east, is the architectural exuberance in the small scale buildings of 186-190 and Bridge Hall, 184 Oxford Road; and the differences and similarities in scale, massing and architectural detailing at 152-180 Oxford Road. The south side includes a little series of terraces between Prospect and Lorne Streets. The greater exuberance in the detailing of the Victorian terraces 205-209 and 221-223 contrasts with the simple aesthetic of the Georgian styles at 225-235, juxtaposed with the listed terrace of 237-247 Oxford Road and the remarkable mirror image terraces at 249-253.

One of the most striking community buildings along this half mile is the Oxford Road Primary School. With its strong Victorian aesthetic, it provides a landmark building of communal value, in terms both of to its aesthetic and its spatial relationship with George Street. This location and the surrounding green lends a rare openness to the enclosed nature of the Street, which the public consultation showed to be much valued by the local community.

## B) NORTHERN SIDE

### Historic interest of the Character Area

The area between Alfred Street and Eaton Place evidences the early 19<sup>th</sup> century link between the town centre and Oxford Road, and with the south side of Oxford Road between Howard Street and Russell Street. The local distinctiveness of this commercial corridor includes significant buildings, such as the Providence Chapel and the Pavilion, a former Cinema (now Lifespring Church) on the south side, and Holy Trinity Church on the north side of Oxford Road. These churches provide historic and community links and are larger buildings in wider plots than the surrounding terraces. They broaden the finer grain of the retail terraces and their high architectural quality, community connections and historical value add to the area's distinctiveness. Dotted further to the south, within the residential streets, are other non- conformist places of worship including the Carey Baptist Church on Carey Street and the Synagogue on Goldsmid Road, evidencing the importance of religion in the area during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Another important spatial relationship is that between Holy Trinity Church and Russell Street. The church provides an end view in a panorama looking north along Russell

### Architectural interest of the Character Area

The buildings in this Character Area are a mix of residential and retail terraces: listed, Buildings of Townscape Merit or unlisted. They create the area's collective interest of and illustrate its past use and development. Within the extension, the mix of Georgian and Victorian listed buildings have collective interest, especially in the architectural links between the north side of the Street (120-122) and the south sides (163-165). In addition, there is a group interest in the subtle chalet-styling of the 2 1/2 storey stucco buildings on the north side of Oxford Road. Number 124 is listed and the other, 134, is a Building of Townscape Merit. The little group of detached and semi-detached buildings between Bedford Road and the entrance to the Central Swimming Pool car park are rare survivors of the more suburban scatter of villas in large gardens that characterised the early development of Oxford Road.

Some large scale modern developments which are out of character with the area's historic scale and quality have coarsened the finer historic grain of the terraces. While the set-back within such larger plots echoes large community buildings like the historic cinema, their architecture and non-community functions, such as flats or commercial units, are incongruous with the rest of the street. These sites provide opportunities for enhancement.

Extending the boundary to include the north side is consistent with Historic England's advice that boundaries should not run down the centre of a road, as both sides contribute to its character and need care in any change.

### C) PROSPECT STREET

Historic interest of the Character Area

Oxford Road was a mediaeval route from Reading town centre, and that spatial relationship was reinforced by the gradual expansion from the centre of houses and shops. Prospect Street and Russell Street form connecting roads between Oxford Road and Castle Hill and reflect the foresight of Mr Swallow, who created them in the 1820s

Architectural interest of the Character Area

Prospect Street contributes to the architectural interest of the Oxford Road Character Area by adding to the earlier Georgian terraces and later Victorian infill. It illustrates different architectural responses to the expansion of housing by mixing larger and smaller homes, unlike elsewhere in the Conservation Area. This mix of architectural styles creates local distinctiveness and identity, separate from but connected with Oxford Road. For example: 1-9 Prospect Street are rare examples of Georgian artisan cottages and are of Townscape Merit; 11-23 Prospect Street are larger, Georgian terraces; and 4-26 Prospect Street are late Victorian/Edwardian properties, with distinctive architectural detailing. Architectural detailing became more important over time, evidenced by the addition of later architectural features at Number 23, directly influenced by the Victorian/Edwardian infill opposite.

### RUSSELL STREET AND STREETS EAST CHARACTER AREA

#### **Re-inclusion of Body Road, Anstey Road and 3 to 11 Baker Street.**

Historic interest of the Character Area

The relationship between the Conservation Area and Reading town centre began as historic routes along Oxford Road and Castle Street/Castle Hill and developed into a suburban, and then urban, extension with shared architectural features. This Character Area reflects the cumulative historic and architectural interest of the wider Conservation Area, as a microcosm of Reading's housing history from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

3-11 Baker Street provides an historic streetscape of tightly arranged, high quality terraces on small plots, built in multi-coloured bricks with bay windows to create compact, attractive and affordable housing.

The housing on Anstey and Body Roads, built in the 1890s, echo the earlier design of Baker Street terraces but are larger. Body Road (both sides), 1-3 Anstey Road and the southern (east- west length) of Anstey Road (5- 13) share a similar built form with a centre dormer, all of which still exist. This design difference is readily appreciated from the open area at the Body Road / Anstey Road junction.

The 2004 appraisal removed these properties from the Conservation Area, commenting: *"These are late 19<sup>th</sup> century houses, mostly in multiple occupation (flats) which have been adversely affected by the loss of their original windows and front doors. Other detrimental features include the addition of satellite dishes, the loss of front boundaries and the modern buildings facing the Inner Relief Road."*

These concerns remain, but the current appraisal strongly supported reinclusion, noting that these concerns apply equally elsewhere in the Conservation Area and contribute to its being listed as At Risk; that there is architectural merit in the houses, which are integral to the Conservation Area's housing history from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; that public consultation supported its re-inclusion and valued the avenue of trees on Body Road, screening the IDR below; and that BSANA is actively supporting improvement. It also provides

a more logical and readable Conservation Area boundary and unifies the eastern side of the Conservation Area with the

Architectural interest of Character Area

The proposed extension reflects the distinctive 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century responses to Reading's population growth, with small, high quality houses in small plots.

Early residential development of this Conservation Area took place in three waves: large houses along Oxford Road and Castle Hill; large Georgian terraces along Russell Street; and later infill of smaller terraces as Reading continued to grow. Anstey and Body Roads are tertiary roads, connected with the secondary roads between Oxford Road and Castle Hill. Characteristic of these small terraces are their high quality construction; they were built to fit within the remaining space available along tertiary roads at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in small plots with small gardens.

The local distinctiveness and identity of the terraces along Anstey and Body Roads echo the small terraces on Belle Vue Road and Franklin and Clifton Streets. They share the same two-up, two-down scale and architectural features such as bay windows, open porches and polychrome brick detailing seen on the west side of Anstey Road. Identical architectural features occur on the small terraces along the north side of Body Road and the south side of Anstey Road. The enclosed and compact nature of these small terraces with tiny gardens creates local distinctiveness and shared identity. This is reinforced by detailing on the façades of the larger terraces, 1-3 and 5-13 Anstey Road and Body Road.

#### **CASTLE HILL / CASTLE STREET CHARACTER AREA**

**The re-inclusion of 1 to 15 Castle Street (Castle Gate flats) and the green space at the northwest corner of the Castle Street/IDR roundabout; plus the inclusion of 3 to 7 Coley Place (odds); plus the inclusion of the open park area to the south of those houses along Coley Place.**

Historic interest of the Character Area

The spatial relationship between Castle Hill and the historic town centre developed through the slow expansion of residences along Castle Hill, particularly the fashionable villas centred initially on the Castle Hill, Coley Avenue and Bath Road junction. This connection slowly expanded with the development of further road networks and the infill of large and small terraces, until the centre and this former suburb became conjoined. This historic connection was severed by the construction of the IDR.

The revised boundary provides a clear entrance into this Character Area and reflects the road before it was severed from the town by the IDR. The harsh boundary of the IDR is softened a little by the green space at the roundabout, which contributes to the protected views into and out of the Conservation Area (Views 6A and 6B). Behind the green space, 1-15 Castle Street replaced a listed building. Whilst not historic, its materials and massing do not detract from the Conservation Area and it forms part of the balance between the large historic houses and the wide, sweeping curve of Castle Hill.

Including 3-7 Coley Place in the Conservation Area emphasises the escarpment as an edge of the Conservation Area. 3-7 Coley Place are the last surviving houses of what was originally a ten-house terrace at the edge of the escarpment, typifying the development of smaller terraces off Castle Hill and growth along secondary residential streets. 3-7 Coley Place also contributes to a protected view at an entry-point into the Conservation Area (View 17) and the open space to its south, which softens the hard edges of the IDR, is an opportunity for enhancement. The boundary change also helps re-kindle the linkage between this area and Castle Hill, across the

#### Architectural interest of the Character Area

3-7 Coley Place formed part of the westward expansion of town, until severed by the construction of the IDR. They show the contrast between the large town houses along Castle Hill, and smaller, later infill development. Their unique mansard roof terrace with dormers and their design on the edge of the escarpment create local distinctiveness: their basements are open to the back gardens, which slope steeply from the road down the hillside. They evidence the pressure to build houses in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even on the edge of a steep hillside.

#### **CASTLE CRESCENT, STREETS SOUTH OF CASTLE HILL AND THE MANSFIELD ROAD EXTENSION**

##### **2 to 28 Mansfield Road (evens) 1 to 29 Mansfield Road (odds); 1,2,3 Coley Park Road**

#### Historic interest of the Character Area

Mansfield Road is contemporary with Castle Crescent (c1890-1910) and shares its scale and "grain". The houses retain many original features, with Victorian tiles and polychrome detailing, and are generally well-cared for, despite many being converted to HMOs. Its buildings group into a suburban idyll and reflect the early development of this fashionable part of town. Coley Park Road was the only connecting road with it, creating a quiet and exclusive cul-de-sac, which is rare in developments of this period in Reading. A gap was retained in the plots to the south of Castle Crescent to accommodate the connecting road. Such relationships between the roads create their historic and architectural interest. In particular, 23-25 was situated to provide an end view along Coley Park Road from the junction with Castle Crescent.

#### Architectural interest of the Character Area

Most buildings on Mansfield Road are of Townscape Merit. Collectively they share formal design principles with villas in the Castle Crescent Character Area: pairs of semi-detached villas in large gardens. Their variety of architectural form is distinctive to this Character Area, though their polychrome, stone, and tile details are seen elsewhere in the Character Area. There are fine distant views toward St Giles Church.

## Appendix 4. List of figures

Figure SS5.1	Proposed Conservation Area boundary .....	11
Figure 2.0.1	Topographical map of the Conservation Area, showing how the land falls away from the high point at the Castle Hill, Coley Avenue and Bath Road intersection .....	18
Figure 4.1.1	Road type layout within the conservation area .....	21
Figure 4.1.2	Buildings by age .....	23
Figure 4.2.1	Views into, out of and within the Conservation Area .....	25
Figure 4.2.2	View 6b: The view up Castle Street to Castle Hill (Courtesy of Joe Doak).....	26
Figure 4.2.3	View 13: The chimney view at the back of Mr Swallow's residence (2 Bath Road) and 4 Bath Road .....	26
Figure 4.2.4	View 15: Early 19 <sup>th</sup> century view of Castle Hill towards the town.....	27
Figure 4.2.5	View 15: Blended view of Castle Hill and Castle Street from early 20 <sup>th</sup> century with tram line overhead to today's view with the Blade in the far distance .....	27
Figure 4.2.6	View 9 towards the Holy Trinity Church along the Oxford Road from Russell Street .....	28
	[To be added]28	
Figure 4.2.7	View from another area .....	28
Figure 4.2.8	Views 4a and 4b: Fox Talbot's early photograph of the allée of trees along Coley Avenue .....	29
Figure 4.2.9	View 5a: West view along the Bath Road from the junction with Castle Hill, Coley Avenue to the left, and Russell Street to the right.....	29
Figure 4.3.1	Tree Protection Orders within the Conservation Area .....	31
Figure 4.3.2	The large Cedar of Lebanon at 154- 160 Castle Hill and other TPO trees along the road.....	32
Figure 4.3.3	Large TPO trees along the Bath Road.....	32
Figure 4.3.4	Allée of trees along Coley Avenue looking north into the Conservation Area .....	33
Figure 4.3.5	The historical, open front garden space in front of Yeomanry House.....	34
Figure 5.1.1	Buildings and site classification.....	36
Figure 5.5.1	Lights from the IDR ((above left) and halogen street lights glaring into terraced housing at night along Zinzan Street .....	37
Figure 5.5.2	Overhead wires on a street with numerous HMOs. ....	38
Figure 5.5.3	Sett stone pavement at the end of Belle Vue Road, still displaying the fan pattern of road that was common in the area. ....	39
Figure 5.5.4	Coal hole cover, Castle Hill .....	39
Figure 6.0.1	Character Areas.....	44
Figure 6.1.1	Character Area 6.1—Castle Street/Castle Hill.....	44
Figure 6.1.2	View 17: Looking south up Coley Place from Castle Hill.....	44
Figure 6.1.3	View 15: Looking east towards town from Castle Hill.....	44
Figure 6.1.4	154- 160 Castle Hill, the former Kings Arms Inn, and Jesse family home.....	45
Figure 6.1.5	The former Horse and Jockey (The Castle Tap) rebuilt early 19 <sup>th</sup> century, 120 Castle Street.....	46
Figure 6.1.6	Yeomanry House at 131 Castle Hill - house, front drive and garden, .....	47
Figure 6.1.7	Former c.1840s gate house 133 Castle Hill for Yeomanry House, with the back section recently sympathetically built. ....	47
Figure 6.1.8	Berkshire Record Office, on the Yeomanry House site.....	47
Figure 6.1.9	William Pratt Swallow's house, 2 Bath Road with busy junction in front of it.....	48
Figure 6.1.10	Large rusticated Georgian houses on the south side of Castle Street at 107-111.....	49
Figure 6.1.11	Large Georgian properties on the north side of Castle Street at 122-132 .....	49
Figure 6.1.12	Blenheim Terrace, Bath stone terrace, 97-105 Castle Street .....	50
Figure 6.1.13	Bath stone coloured stuccoed Regency style terrace, 134-144 Castle Hill.....	50
Figure 6.1.14	Attractive diverse terrace of Georgian properties at 113-121 Castle Street.....	51

Figure 6.1.15	Heritage Court, 144A- 152 Castle Hill, a Jesse family development .....	51
Figure 6.1.16	Nos. 162A-168, with Regency iron detailing, an early Jesse family development .....	52
Figure 6.2.1	Character Area 6.2—Oxford Road.....	57
Figure 6.2.2	Reading West railway bridge, facing west along the Oxford Road, the iron bridge replaced an original brick design .....	58
Figure 6.2.3	Poor condition listed Georgian housing, an acceptable modern pastiche front built onto a historic framework, varied shop façades and poor public realm all mix along the streetscape between Russell Street and Prospect Street .....	59
Figure 6.2.4	Large stuccoed Georgian Sidney Terrace,197-203 Oxford Road .....	59
Figure 6.2.5	101 Oxford Road-a detached Georgian family home with original high back garden walls .....	60
Figure 6.2.6	National Meteorological Society at 104 Oxford Road, a detached Georgian house with porticoed front porch surrounded by unsympathetic modern build .....	60
Figure 6.2.7	Listed Georgian terraces along Oxford Road, in poor repair, lost behind cluttered street furniture and busy road traffic .....	61
Figure 6.2.8	237 and 239 Oxford Road, part of Prospect Terrace, 237-247 Oxford Road/2 Lorne Street.....	61
Figure 6.2.9	Proudly diverse grocers and shops do business amid clutter and poor signage which mask the original early 19 <sup>th</sup> century structures on Oxford Road between Russell Street and Waylen Street.....	62
Figure 6.2.10	The Grade II Holy Trinity parish church at the intersection of Russell Street .....	63
Figure 6.2.11	Holy Trinity spiralet before removal .....	63
Figure 6.2.12	Providence Chapel, c. 1859, 103 Oxford Road (Google Maps) .....	64
Figure 6.2.13	Bridge Hall, originally built for the Reading Open Brethren Group, in poor repair.....	64
Figure 6.2.14	The Pavilion, a former popular Reading cinema, corner of Russell Street, now well restored and home to the Lifespring Church .....	65
Figure 6.2.15	1-9 Prospect Street, a rare modest Georgian artisan terrace with the over- bearing modern dormer window at no. 1 .....	66
Figure 6.2.16	Prospect Mews, mews houses with an expanse of stone pavement at the entrance to the alleyway .....	66
Figure 6.2.17	The well-maintained Oxford Road Community School .....	67
Figure 6.2.18	Long retail terrace, 152-180 Oxford Road, stunning polychrome and largely intact, although incompatible signage and store fronts detract from its appearance.....	68
Figure 6.3.1	Character Area 6.3—Russell Street and streets east .....	74
Figure 6.3.2	View 11, of the winding Baker Street looking east.....	75
Figure 6.3.3	View 12, looking up Jesse Terrace towards Castle Hill.....	75
Figure 6.3.4	2, 4 and 4A (listed Georgian semi- detached) Howard Street showing the rustication on 4A.....	76
Figure 6.3.5	Original iron railings at 16-22 Howard Street and the curved stucco dividing wall at no. 22.....	77
Figure 6.3.6	Terraces along the west side of Russell Street (nos. 38-42) with Regency window balconies .....	77
Figure 6.3.7	Georgian terraces at nos. 6-14 Russell Street. The Holy Trinity parish church forms an impressive view at the north end of the street from the Oxford Road.....	78
Figure 6.3.8	48-50 Russell Street, Bath stone semi- detached houses, very similar in style to those in Eldon Square in east Reading.....	79
Figure 6.3.9	54 Russell Street (c.1850s-1870s) cream coloured brick detached house .....	79
Figure 6.3.10	The Parsonage (c.1890) at the northeast corner of Baker Street and Russell Street with attractive polychrome and wood detailing .....	80

Figure 6.3.11	The well-maintained Nag's Head faux-Tudor pub, Russell Street ,(c.1850-1870s) multiple CAMRA Best Pub in Berkshire awards and an Asset of Community Value .....	81
Figure 6.3.12	Fox Talbot's 'Reading Establishment' studio at 55 Baker Street.....	82
Figure 6.3.13	23- 31 Baker Street, Alexandra Terrace, c.1850, red brick terrace, overall well-preserved with majority of original windows and doors intact.....	82
Figure 6.3.14	Rednirt Villas 1904, developed by Mr. Trinder, bay windows, polychrome and stone work detailing. Rednirt is Trinder spelt backwards.....	83
Figure 6.3.15	The Oasis Community Centre, c.1860s Inn and Public House .....	83
Figure 6.3.16	Detached house at no.14 Baker Street with cottage-like Victorian frontage .....	84
Figure 6.3.17	The conditions of terraced housing along Zinzan Street with poor quality modern dormers, overhead wires, excessive bins and satellite dishes. ....	85
Figure 6.3.18	Waylen Street with its overall poor conditions. The street's earliest houses, nos. 43-61, are on the right c.1840 .....	86
Figure 6.3.19	Close-up of terraces and gardens in Jesse Terrace.....	87
Figure 6.3.20	Carey Baptist Church chapel with its polychrome frontage, 1869 .....	88
Figure 6.3.21	6-12 Body Road, the new red tile roof was installed during the time protection of a Conservation Area did not apply, after 2004 .....	88
Figure 6.4.1	Character Area 6.4—West of Russell Street to Prospect Street.....	93
Figure 6.4.2	View 20, Large TPO oak at the corner of Goldsmid Road.....	94
Figure 6.4.3	The listed Georgian terraced houses from 61-79 Baker Street,complete with original doors, fanlights and windows .....	95
Figure 6.4.4	The listed National Spiritualist Church, 81 Baker Street,originally York Lodge, one of an early 19 <sup>th</sup> century group of three villas.....	95
Figure 6.4.5	Bellevue House, 2 Tilehurst Road, built prior to 1839, listed, with decorative urns possibly of Coade stone.....	96
Figure 6.4.6	Belle Vue Road, (c.1880-90) diminutive polychrome terraces with a high brick wall to the right separating the development from the original Bellevue Villa. The view is north to the backs of the listed 61-79 Baker Street and the Caversham escarpment beyond .....	96
Figure 6.4.7	Terraced polychrome houses along Clifton Street, the ones to the south with double bay fronts .....	97
Figure 6.4.8	Matching terrace on Franklin Street facing east behind the one on Clifton, The small gate mid-way is the access to the extant back passageway.....	98
Figure 6.4.9	Listed Moorish style synagogue with fine brick and stone detailing and bell tower, Goldsmid Road at the corner of Clifton Street .....	99
Figure 6.5.1	Character Area 6.5— Castle Crescent and streets south of Castle Hill .....	102
Figure 6.5.2	View 4a and 4b, The 220 plus year old allée of trees along Coley Avenue with old high brick walls, (View north from Castle Crescent) .....	104
Figure 6.5.3	31-35 Coley Hill, stuccoed lower ground floor and later Victorian trimmed windows, 1820-30s .....	105
Figure 6.5.4	Arched windows and fanlights on two storey Georgian houses, Coley Hill ....	105
Figure 6.5.5	3 Castle Crescent after recent renovations.....	106
Figure 6.5.6	Stucco 3-storey houses- south side of Castle Crescent near Coley Avenue, c. 1840 .....	106
Figure 6.5.7	Polychrome houses along the north side of Castle Crescent .....	107
Figure 6.5.8	Attractive stone and tile house at the corner of Mansfield Road and Coley Park Road.....	107
Figure 6.5.9	Field Road polychrome terrace .....	108
Figure 6.5.10	Large polychrome villa set back amongst striking TPO trees, Bath Road.....	108
Figure 6.5.11	The mid 20 <sup>th</sup> century Berkeley Court, Coley Avenue .....	109
Figure A1.1	Part of Burt's etching of a plan of Civil War defences looking South .....	125
Figure A1.2	Part of Coates Map 1802 showing 'Old Fortifications' .....	125
Figure A1.3	Extract from Rocque's Map of Reading 1761 .....	126

Figure A1.4	Part of Thomas Coates' map, 1802 .....	127
Figure A1.5	The deed that created and laid out. Waylen Street and Zinzan Street off the Oxford Road, c.1830s (BRO) .....	128
Figure A1.6	Oxford Road, Dormer Map 1833 showing residential terraces and street front shops already in existence to Prospect Street and Prospect Terrace beyond to the west.....	129
Figure A1.7	Oxford Road, Sanitation Map 1853 showing development west to Prospect Street with Prospect Terrace still separate to the west .....	129
Figure A1.8	Holy Trinity Parish Church, Oxford Road, late 19 <sup>th</sup> century. Hulme's Villas sit to its east on the right.....	129
Figure A1.9	The Pencil of Nature, the first mass- produced book containing photographs, published during Fox Talbot's time in Reading .....	130
Figure A1.10	Fox Talbot and his workers at the rear of his studio at 55 Baker Street. To the far right are the houses of 33- 35 Baker Street. (Met public domain, downloaded) .....	131
Figure A1.11	The Yeomanry House site map for its sale in 1880.....	132
Figure A1.12	Finches Buildings- demolished for the IDR. The side of 3 Baker Street at the far right .....	133
Figure A2.1	Geology of the area (Conservation Area outline approximate) .....	134