



Title	Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Emma Gee, Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
Report author	Mark Worringham, Planning Policy Manager
Lead Councillor	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
Council priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the Draft Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal (Appendix 2) be approved for consultation.2. That the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection be authorised to make any minor amendments necessary to the Draft Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets, prior to the start of consultation on the draft document.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Eldon Square Conservation Area was designated in 1972 under the Town & Country Planning Act 1971 (as amended), the first conservation area in Reading, and the most recent full conservation area appraisal was produced in 2007. Following discussions over the Council's approach to the historic environment, the Council agreed to support the setting up of a Reading Conservation Areas Advisory Committee (CAAC). One of the primary concerns of the CAAC was the length of time since many conservation area appraisals had been prepared and adopted. According to best practice appraisals should be updated every 5-10 years and many of these appraisals are now in need of review. It was subsequently agreed that the CAAC would lead on reviews of conservation area appraisals in consultation with local communities.
- 1.2 The Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal is the fourth review to be completed, following St Peters in 2018, Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road in 2020 and Christchurch in 2024. This report seeks approval of the draft review of the Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal. Committee is asked to approve the draft appraisal for consultation commencing in November/December 2025.
- 1.3 Appendix 2 contains a copy of the draft appraisal and associated documents including maps showing the proposed boundary extensions. The results of the consultation will feed into a revised appraisal to be adopted in 2026.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework impose a duty on local planning authorities to review

their existing conservation areas and designate as conservation areas any 'special areas of architectural or historic interest'.

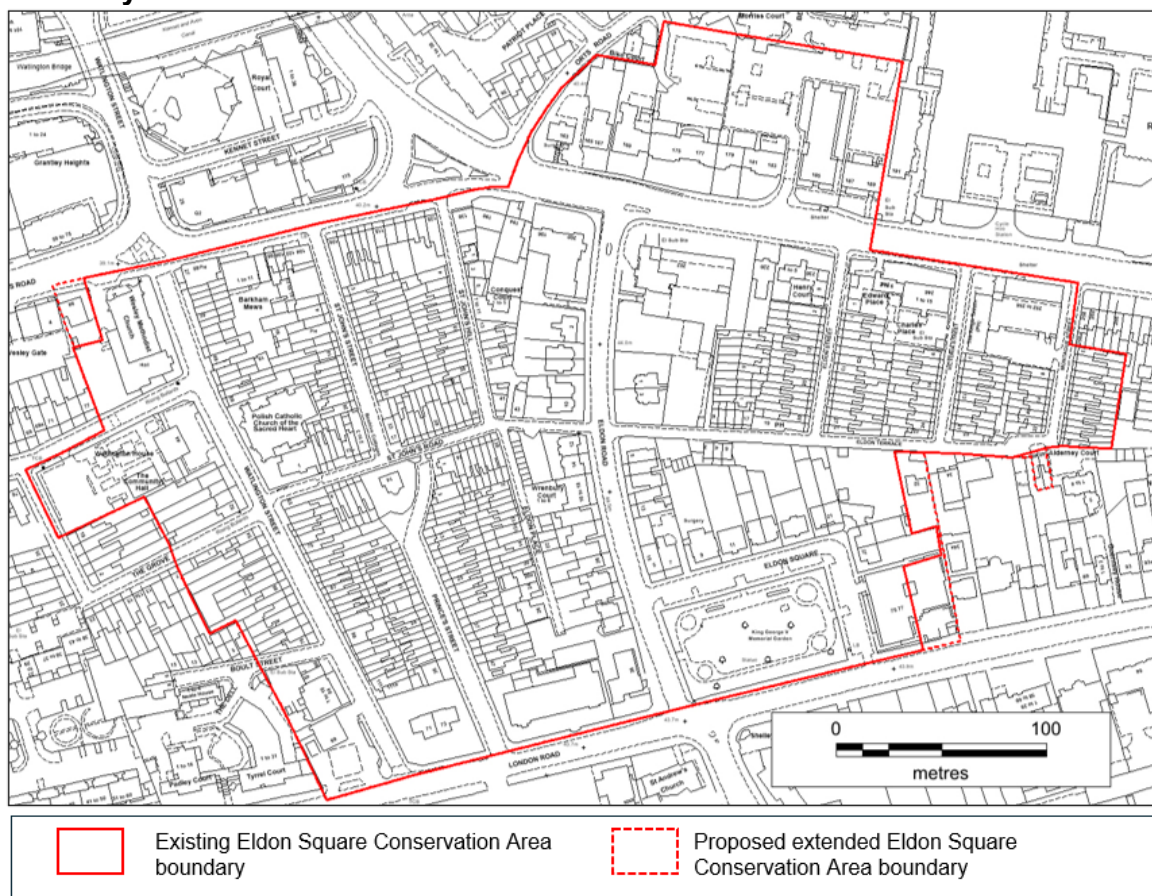
- 2.2 Although not required by law, Historic England recommends that Conservation Area Appraisals are reviewed and updated regularly, every five to ten years. Conservation Area Appraisals are material considerations in the determination of relevant planning applications and are specifically referred to as a consideration in policy EN3 of the Local Plan. They can also form a key piece of evidence for the preparation of planning policy.

3. The Proposal

Current position

- 3.1 The Eldon Square Conservation Area was originally designated in 1972 and was Reading's first designated Conservation Area. The area was extended to include Watlington Street, Eldon Street, Victoria Street and Montague Street in 1982. The most recent appraisal was prepared in 2007. That appraisal recommended that 84 Queens Road be considered for inclusion in the Conservation Area, but no extension resulted from the appraisal.
- 3.2 The existing boundaries of the conservation area (along with the now proposed boundary extensions) are provided in the plan below.

Figure 1: Existing and proposed extended Eldon Square Conservation Area boundary



- 3.3 The review and the updated appraisal is the result of a community-led project carried out by the CAAC, with assistance from RBC planning officers and interested local community representatives. The review made use of an adaptation of the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit, which was recommended by officers of Historic England. This provided a methodology for preparing assessments of the character of the landscape and built environment of the area, but the methodology has been adapted to local circumstances by the CAAC. The appraisal has been updated partly as a result of that assessment.

- 3.4 The review has resulted in various recommendations for boundary extensions, namely:
- The addition of 84 Queens Road, consisting of the vicarage for the Wesley Methodist Church, which is already in the Conservation Area. It forms part of the same site as the church and helps to mark the transition between the historic church and modern development further west along Queens Road.;
 - The addition of 77 London Road as this comprises half of an office building with 75 London Road which is already in the Conservation Area;
 - The addition of 32 Eldon Terrace to rationalise an eastern boundary with 75-77 London Road and the rear of 27 Eldon Square;
 - The addition of 46 and 48 Eldon Terrace as this is a pair of attractive Victorian houses, once a terrace of three.
- 3.5 The updated appraisal identifies issues and vulnerabilities (page 11), including:
- Historic streetscape and local distinctiveness are under threat from the requirements of traffic management and public amenities;
 - Loss of original architectural details;
 - Poor appearance of George V Memorial Gardens.
 - Ongoing decline in local amenities such as public houses;
 - Street clutter;
 - Traffic noise and pollution detract from the character and environmental quality of the main streets;
 - Kings Road only has two crossing points and presents a barrier to and a negative environment for pedestrians to experience the oldest and grandest character area of the CA.
- 3.6 Recommended measures (within the Action Plan, section 8) include:
- Implement the boundary extension (as shown in Figure 1);
 - Reduce number of buildings of townscape merit;
 - An Article 4 direction to prevent loss of original features;
 - Address issue of domestic bins in front gardens and obtrusive pipework on the front of buildings;
 - Improve the blight caused by main roads and residential car parks;
 - Address poor maintenance of George V Memorial Gardens; and
 - Address signage, street clutter, and materials.
- 3.7 CAAC will manage the action plan but responsibility for some of these actions can only rest with RBC. Other actions can be undertaken by local volunteer organisations and community groups (e.g. CAAC) with limited support from council officers.
- 3.8 A consultation exercise on the review of the Conservation Area, carried out by the CAAC in March 2025, attracted 13 responses.
- 3.9 Committee is recommended to approve the Draft Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal (Appendix 2) for further consultation.

Other options considered

- 3.10 The two alternative options considered are;

- Not to progress the draft conservation area appraisal; and
 - To undertake a lighter-touch review of the appraisal that does not result in an extension.
- 3.11 To not progress the appraisal at this stage would fail to capitalise on the good work done by volunteers of the CAAC, and would mean that the appraisal for the conservation area is somewhat out of date and is of less use for decision making on planning applications, as well as failing to take the opportunity to protect the character and interest of a wider area not currently falling within the conservation area.
- 3.12 The lighter touch review could pick up on some of the recent changes in the area but would not be able to include any substantive changes to the boundary, meaning that the significant heritage interest outside the conservation area boundary would have no recognition in planning documents, or statutory protection.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1 The Eldon Square CAA, through identifying areas of particular heritage importance and their significance, will contribute to the following priority in the Council Plan 2025-2028:
- Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce Reading's carbon footprint: The CAA will contribute to the objective to 'Further improve the physical environment of Reading by improving air quality, access to green space, and the quality of public spaces' by offering enhanced protections and identifying improvements to one of Reading's most historic and characterful areas.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 There are a variety of ways in which the appraisal could have environmental and climate implications.
- 5.2 Bringing more buildings within the conservation area exercises greater control over demolition, which in turn makes it more likely that buildings will be reused rather than demolished and redeveloped, albeit that this will be a matter to consider site by site through the planning application process.
- 5.3 Extending the conservation area, and providing an updated appraisal, will give further protection to the trees within the area, which play an important role in terms of air quality and adapting to climate change.
- 5.4 The inclusion of new areas within the extended conservation area could have implications in terms of the ability of those premises to make physical alterations to improve their environmental performance without needing planning permission. In particular, there are greater restrictions on solar panels and equipment, wind turbines, air source heat pumps and flues associated with biomass heating or combined heat and power where they would face the highway or be closer to the highway than the existing building. This would need to be addressed on a site by site basis through the planning application process, taking account of policies in the Local Plan.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1 The Council's consultation process for planning policy, as set out in the adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI, adopted June 2025), is that the widest and most intensive community involvement should take place at the earliest possible stage, to allow the community a genuine chance to influence the document. Although the SCI deals mainly with development plan documents, the general principles are useful for documents such as a Conservation Area Appraisal. Community involvement exercises have been undertaken by the Conservation Area Advisory Committee as part of undertaking the review. Details of community involvement on the initial stages are set out in Appendix 1 of the appraisal document. These included a public consultation event on 24 March 2025, community walks, and an online questionnaire also available in hard copy at Central Library.

- 6.2 A formal consultation led by the Council will be undertaken on the Draft Conservation Area Appraisal. Responses received will be considered in preparing a final draft appraisal for adoption. The draft Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal consultation will be based around making the document available for comment.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1 It is not expected that there will be any significant adverse impacts on specific groups due to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religious belief. An equality scoping assessment is included in Appendix 1 of this report.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 There are none.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1 Areas within the Conservation Area, including the proposed extensions if agreed, will benefit from the controls set out within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The legislation would control the demolition of buildings as well as ensure a closer control over new development in the area.

- 9.2 The following would apply:

- a. In the exercise of planning powers the Secretary of State and planning authorities are under a duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character or appearance of the area;
- b. the demolition of buildings within the conservation area requires planning permission;
- c. "Permitted Development" rights are more restricted in Conservation Areas, and Article 4 Directions restricting "permitted development" rights in Conservation Areas do not (as is the case elsewhere) have to be referred to the Secretary of State for consent;
- d. more controls exist in relation to works to any trees, not necessarily just TPO trees;
- e. more exacting standards of advertisement control should be applied to advertisements in the Conservation Area, so long as the authorities are sensitive to the needs of businesses within the Conservation Area;
- f. development proposals within conservation areas should either make a positive contribution to the preservation of the character or appearance of the area, or leave the character or appearance unharmed.

- 9.3 Dave Anthony, Solicitor, has cleared these Legal Implications.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1 Existing budgets are sufficient for the publication of the final documents and to notify occupiers affected. The bulk of the work on the draft has been undertaken by CAAC members on a voluntary basis.
- 10.2 Consultation exercises can be resource intensive. However, the Council's consultation process is based mainly on electronic communication, which helps to minimise resource costs, and costs of the consultation exercise for the Conservation Area Appraisal will be minimal and met from existing budgets.
- 10.3 Some of the actions within the Action Plan fall to the Council to undertake. Some would be accommodated within existing budgets, albeit would be reliant on officer time, such as progressing an Article 4 direction. Where additional resources may be required, e.g. on maintenance of the gardens, the action plan identifies alternatives including support of voluntary groups.

- 10.4 Stuart Donnelly, Financial Planning & Strategy Manager, has cleared these Financial Implications.

10 Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1 The expectation is that, subject to the results of consultation on the draft, a report will be submitted to a future meeting and a final version of the Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal will be adopted in March 2026.

11 Background Papers

- 12.1 There are none.

Appendices

1. Equality Impact Assessment
2. Draft Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal