

READING

TOWN CENTRE  
VISION



DRAFT

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Central Reading is entering a period of significant transformation. Major regeneration, rapid population growth and changing patterns of work, travel and leisure are reshaping its role and identity. The town centre is the borough's most visible gateway and civic heart, defined by the station, its rivers, cultural anchors and the intensity of daily life. Success will depend on creating a centre that is more liveable, better connected, greener, culturally confident and economically resilient.

Central Reading is one of the South East's most distinctive urban areas: young (49.5% aged 20–39), internationally connected (54.9% born outside the UK), highly urban (70.7% flats) and car light (50.7% of households without a car). These characteristics shape expectations for walkability, accessibility, public spaces, health provision, housing quality and cultural life.

Central Reading's transformation is already underway. Cultural investment is reshaping the town's civic heart through the upgraded Hexagon and new Studio Theatre, while the new central library strengthens Reading's learning and community offer. At Station Hill,

new squares, workplaces and homes are already occupied, with commercial space close to fully let. These milestones together create a clear sense of momentum across the town centre.

The spatial structure of the centre is shaped by four essential elements:

- The Station–Retail Core arrival route
- Riverside links to the Thames and Kennet
- Cultural routes connecting heritage anchors such as the Abbey Quarter and Minster Quarter

- East–West connections across the Inner Distribution Road and rail barriers

Together these form the backbone of a coherent, legible and walkable town centre.



Change is focused within the **Opportunity & Character Areas**: Station & River, West Side, East Side and the Core, where regeneration can deliver new homes, public realm upgrades and stronger links to rivers and cultural destinations.

### The vision is built around seven principles:

#### 1. **Healthy & Connected**

**Communities:** Town centre living supported by accessible services, inclusive design, high quality homes and considerate long-term management and upkeep.

#### 2. **Transforming Rivers &**

**Public Spaces:** Making the Thames, Kennet and parks part of everyday life through better access, upgraded paths and climate ready design.

#### 3. **Connected & Active Travel:**

Prioritising walking, cycling and public transport by fixing barriers such as the IDR and improving station arrival routes.

#### 4. **A Greener, Climate Resilient**

**Centre:** Embedding low carbon design, greening, SuDS and cleaner mobility in all development and public realm projects.

#### 5. **Culture, Heritage & Identity:**

Strengthening links between cultural anchors, respecting and embedding heritage in development and supporting diverse, grassroots creativity.

#### 6. **Reimagining the Town**

**Centre Experience:** Creating a more welcoming day to evening environment with active streets, events, independents and a stronger riverside.

#### 7. **Supporting Growth &**

**Innovation:** Providing flexible workspace, supporting enterprise and strengthening connections with major employment and research hubs.

The vision sets clear expectations for delivery, aligning planning, transport, public realm investment, cultural partners, developers, landowners and community organisations. A dedicated **Delivery Plan** will translate these principles into coordinated projects, priorities, funding routes and responsibilities.

Overall, the vision sets out a shared direction for a town centre that functions as a liveable, green and connected neighbourhood at the heart of Reading's wider economic and cultural geography.



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# WHY THIS VISION IS NEEDED

Reading town centre is entering a defining period of change. Major regeneration, shifting patterns of work and shopping, and rapid growth in town-centre living will reshape how the centre looks, feels and functions over the coming decades.



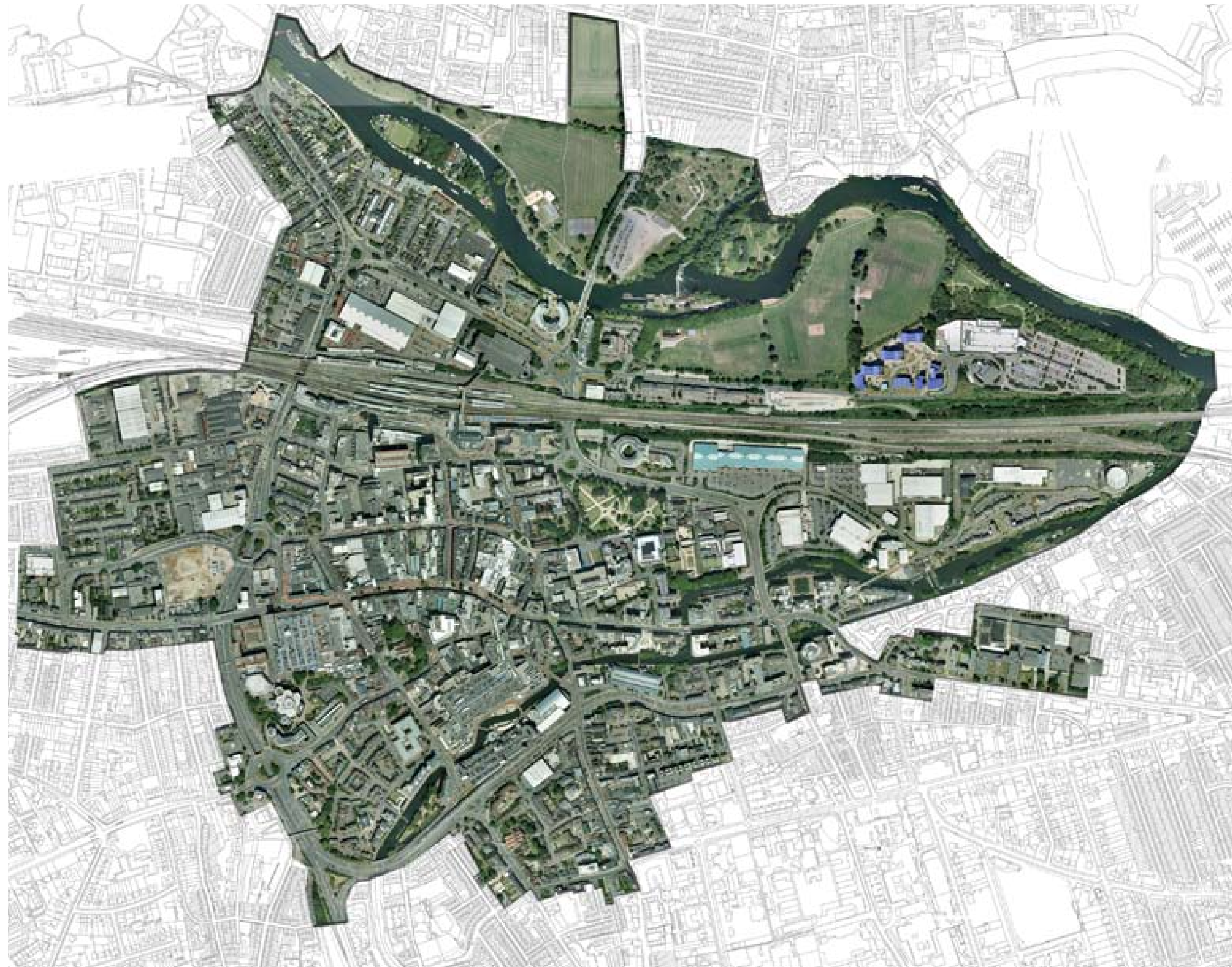
## BACKGROUND

The town centre is the borough's most visible front door, anchored by the station, the Thames and Kennet, Broad Street, The Oracle and cultural assets such as the Abbey Quarter and the Hexagon. As it grows, success will depend on high-quality streets and public spaces, strong connections, and a cultural and economic offer broader than retail alone.

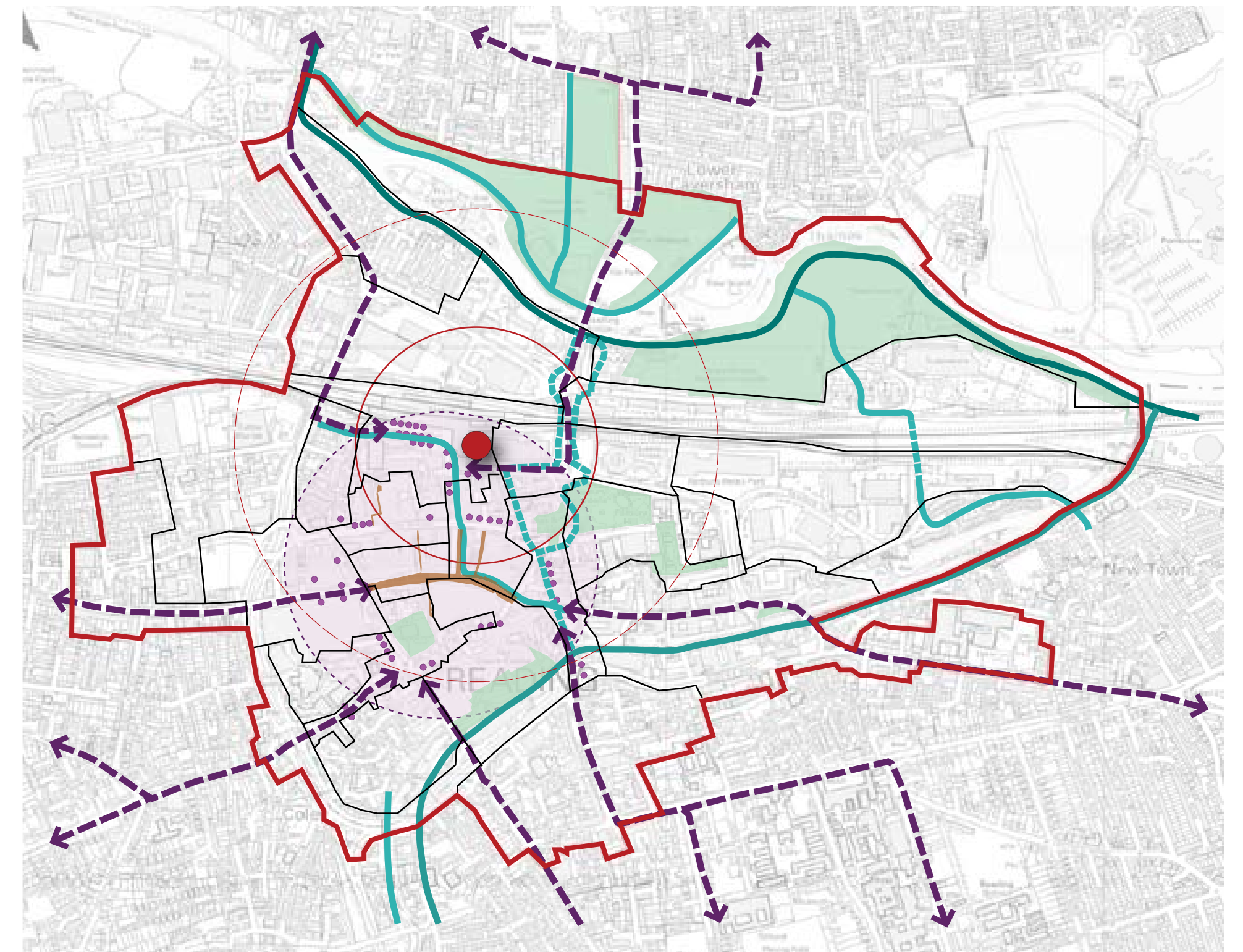
This vision provides a place-shaping framework for Central Reading, aligned with the Local Plan (Policy CR1). It is rooted in Reading's heritage, rivers, transport network and active regeneration projects, ensuring a genuinely place-specific approach. It complements wider plans such as the Local Plan and Reading 2050 Vision but is not an operational management document; instead, it sets a clear direction for shaping change and defining what a successful town centre should deliver.

The vision sets expectations for development and investment by prioritising the infrastructure needed for a growing residential population. It guides regeneration and investment decisions so individual schemes contribute to a coherent, liveable centre. A separate Delivery Plan will translate these principles into a phased programme of projects.

### LOCAL PLAN POLICY AREA - CENTRAL READING CR1



### CENTRAL READING CONTEXT



- |                            |                                      |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Reading central area       | National cycle network               |
| Railway station            | Traffic free & on-road cycle network |
| 5 minute walking distance  | Proposed future cycle route          |
| 10 minute walking distance | Open spaces                          |
| Bus stops                  | Character areas                      |
| General bus routes         |                                      |
| City centre                |                                      |
| Pedestrian area            |                                      |

# VISION STRUCTURE

The vision will be delivered in two parts, with this vision supported by a separate delivery plan. Combined, they will provide a template for delivering the town centre's regeneration.

Part 1  
Town Centre Vision

Part 2  
Town Centre Delivery Plan

## SHARED UNDERSTANDING

A clear, shared understanding of Central Reading's future is essential to shaping coordinated change. This vision draws together the many existing plans, policies and ambitions that influence the town centre into a single, accessible narrative.

Focused on the next 20 years of transformation, the vision does not replace these documents; instead, it aligns with them and provides a user-friendly blueprint that explains how their collective intent comes together for Central Reading. It signposts key frameworks so partners can see how town-centre decisions fit within wider policy direction, such as:

- Reading Local Plan Partial Update (2041) and emerging planning policies
- Reading Town Centre Public Realm Strategy
- Reading Transport Strategy 2040
- Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2025–30
- Reading Culture and Heritage Strategy 2015–30
- Reading Economic Development Framework
- Reading 2050 Vision
- Reading Council Plan – 2025 to 2028

## READING'S WIDER CONTEXT

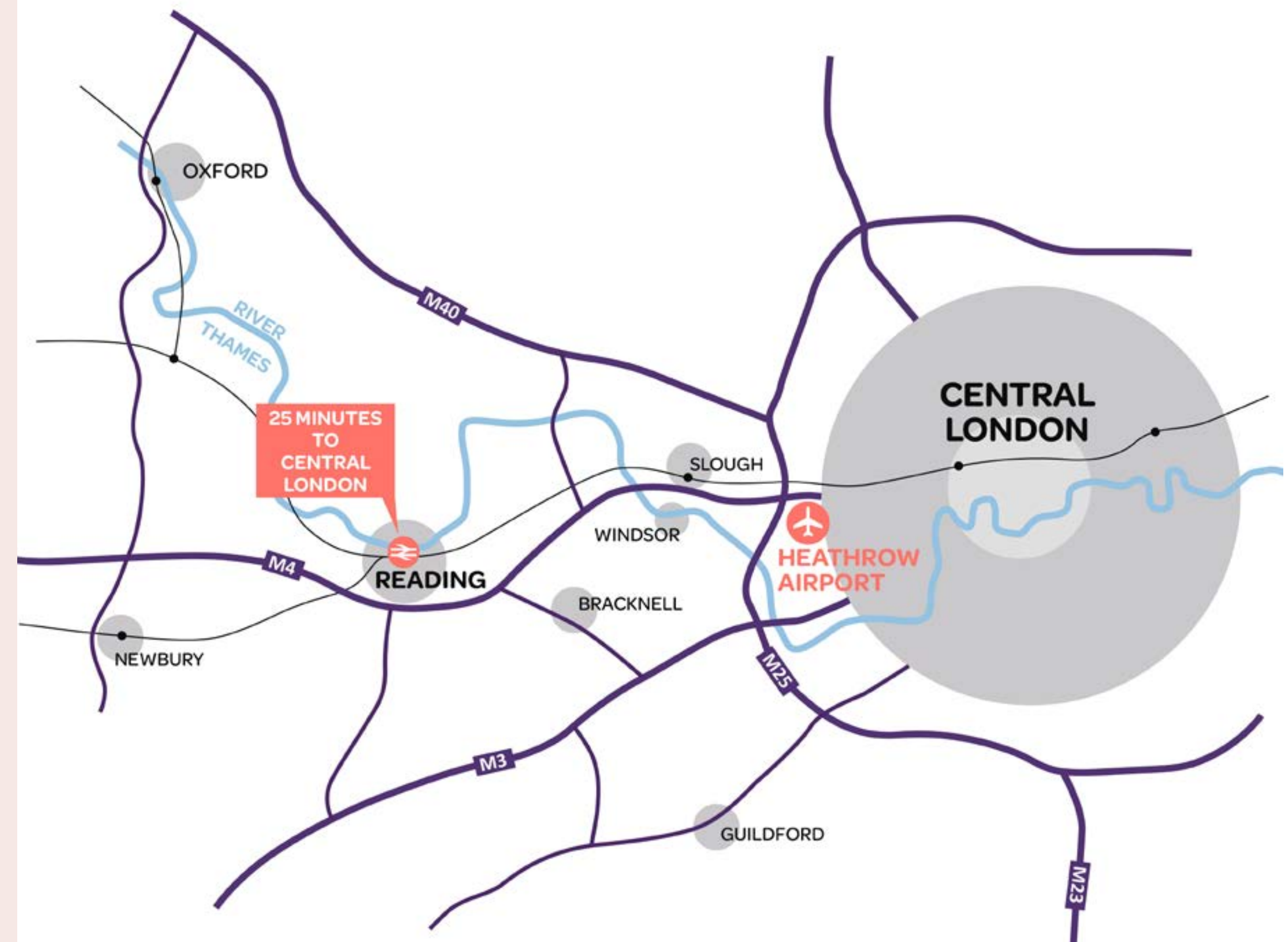
Reading's influence extends well beyond its boundary. Around 180,000 people live within the borough, but Greater Reading totals nearly quarter of a million, with daily travel for work, education, shopping and leisure routinely crossing local authority lines. This regional role brings opportunity but also concentrates pressure on homes, services, transport and public space in and around the town centre.

**Population:** The population has grown rapidly (up 12% between 2011 and 2021) and is ageing, with residents over 65 increasing by over 17%. Reading is also one of the South East's most diverse places, with nearly half of residents identifying as Global Majority.

**Economy:** Economically, Reading has shifted from an industrial base to a knowledge driven economy centred on IT, professional services and finance. It attracts a large, highly skilled workforce, but benefits are unevenly shared. Pockets of deprivation persist, and

affordability pressures continue to widen gaps in outcomes.

**Connectivity:** Connectivity remains one of Reading's defining strengths. Its position on the Great Western Main Line and the M4 corridor, alongside Reading Station's role as a major national and regional rail interchange, gives the town exceptional reach. However, car dominated infrastructure and heavy traffic on the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) still fragment walking and cycling routes, undermining air quality and the everyday experience of moving around central Reading.



# WIDER ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY

Reading's town centre anchors a network of major employment, innovation and education hubs, and its success depends on strong, sustainable links between these out of centre areas and the town centre as the primary hub.

- Green Park:** One of Reading's largest employment areas, now supported by Reading Green Park Station. Improved sustainable travel links will help workers, residents and stadium visitors access the town centre more easily while supporting employment growth.
 

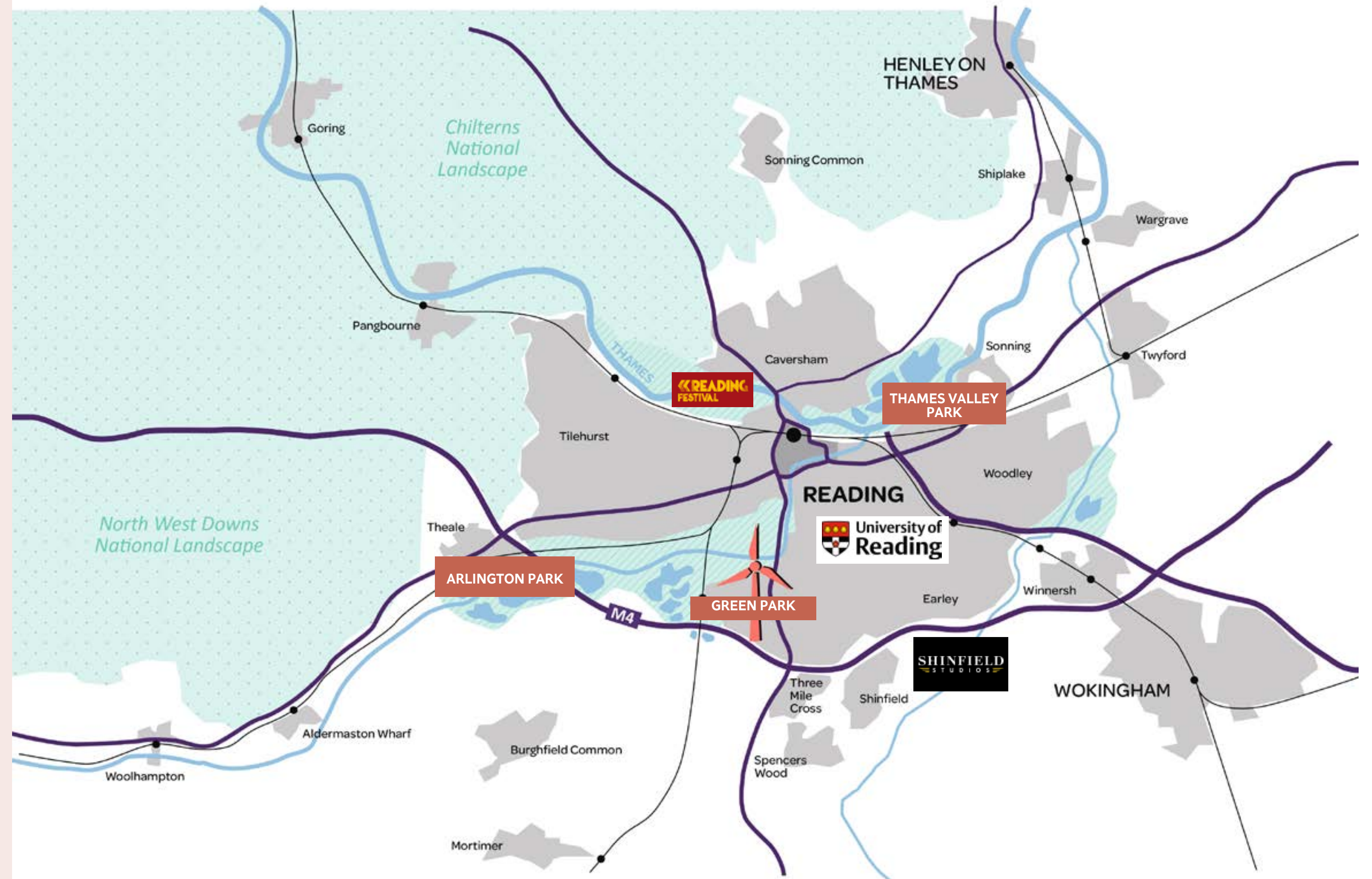
Stronger connections will broaden access to high value jobs and reinforce Reading's position in the regional science and technology corridor.
- Thames Valley Park (TVP):** Hosts global employers such as Microsoft, Oracle and Huawei, with free bus links to Reading Station. Enhanced sustainable travel will help the town centre benefit more directly from this large international workforce.
 

Stronger connections will broaden access to high value jobs and reinforce Reading's position in the regional science and technology corridor.
- University of Reading:** Contributes around £1 billion annually to the UK economy, with almost half retained locally. Better transport and cultural links will reinforce collaboration and strengthen the town centre's role in innovation and learning.
 

Stronger connections will broaden access to high value jobs and reinforce Reading's position in the regional science and technology corridor.
- Thames Valley Science Park (TVSP):** Home to around 80 knowledge based companies and major research facilities.
 

Stronger connections will broaden access to high value jobs and reinforce Reading's position in the regional science and technology corridor.
- Shinfield Studios:** The UK's largest new film and TV studio complex; improved transport and cultural connections will help the town centre capture more value from this high growth sector.
 

Stronger connections will broaden access to high value jobs and reinforce Reading's position in the regional science and technology corridor.



# CENTRAL READING CONTEXT

Central Reading is **compact, intensely used and highly visible**. It is where local life meets a much wider catchment and where opportunity and pressure are most concentrated. This activity gives the centre its energy but places **high demands on space, movement and design quality**.

Its character is long established and layered. The Abbey Quarter, founded in 1121, established Reading as a place of national importance and continues to shape its identity. Victorian expansion added commercial frontages, arcades and street patterns that still guide how people move through the centre.

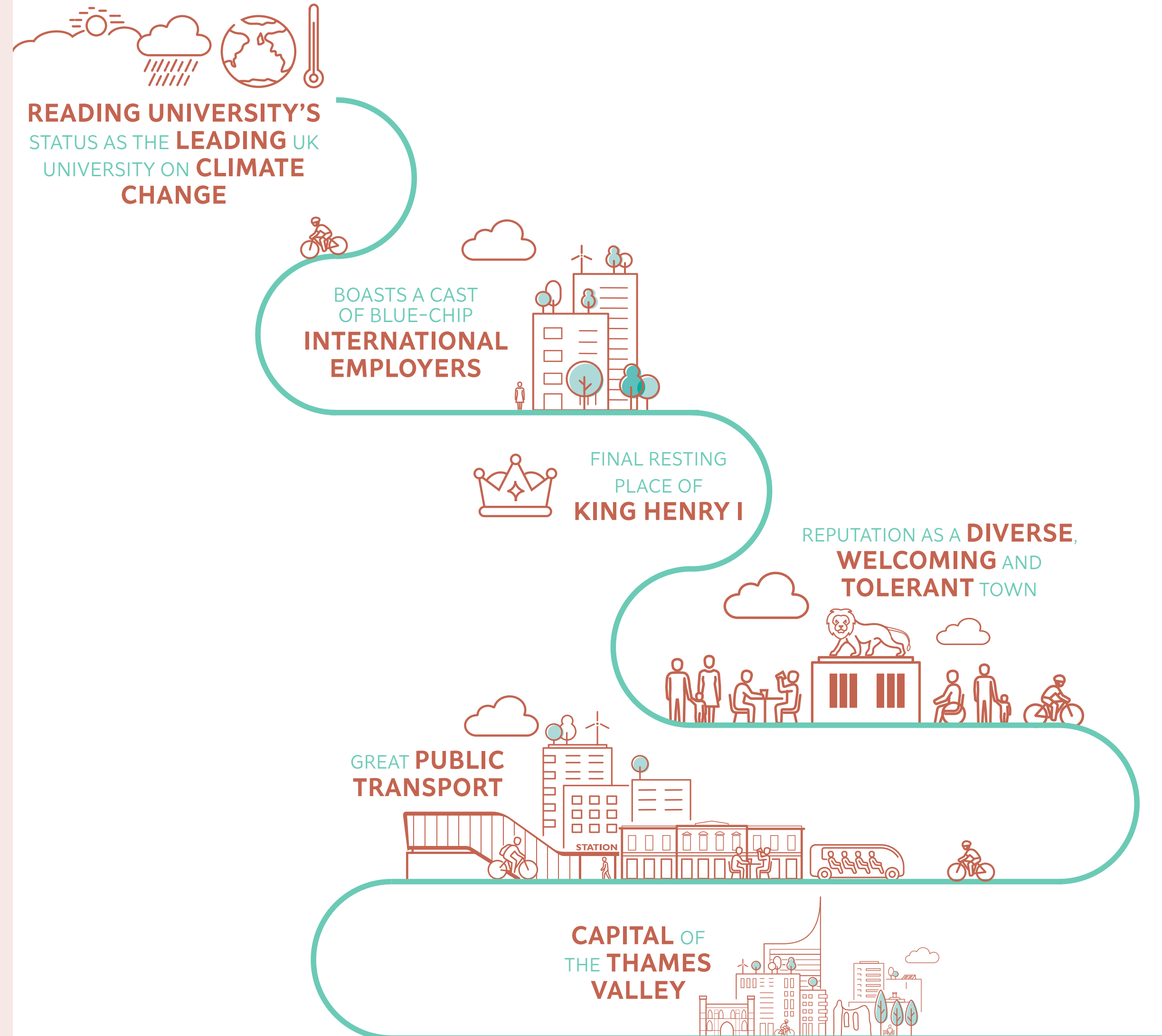
Recent decades have brought major interventions. Broad Street Mall and The Oracle reshaped the retail offer and improved access to the rivers, while investment in Reading Station redefined the town as a national transport hub. Current regeneration, including Station Hill, is strengthening Central Reading as a place to work and live. The mix of

medieval landmarks, Victorian streetscapes and contemporary development is a defining strength, but also raises expectations for architectural quality, heritage sensitivity and well designed public spaces.

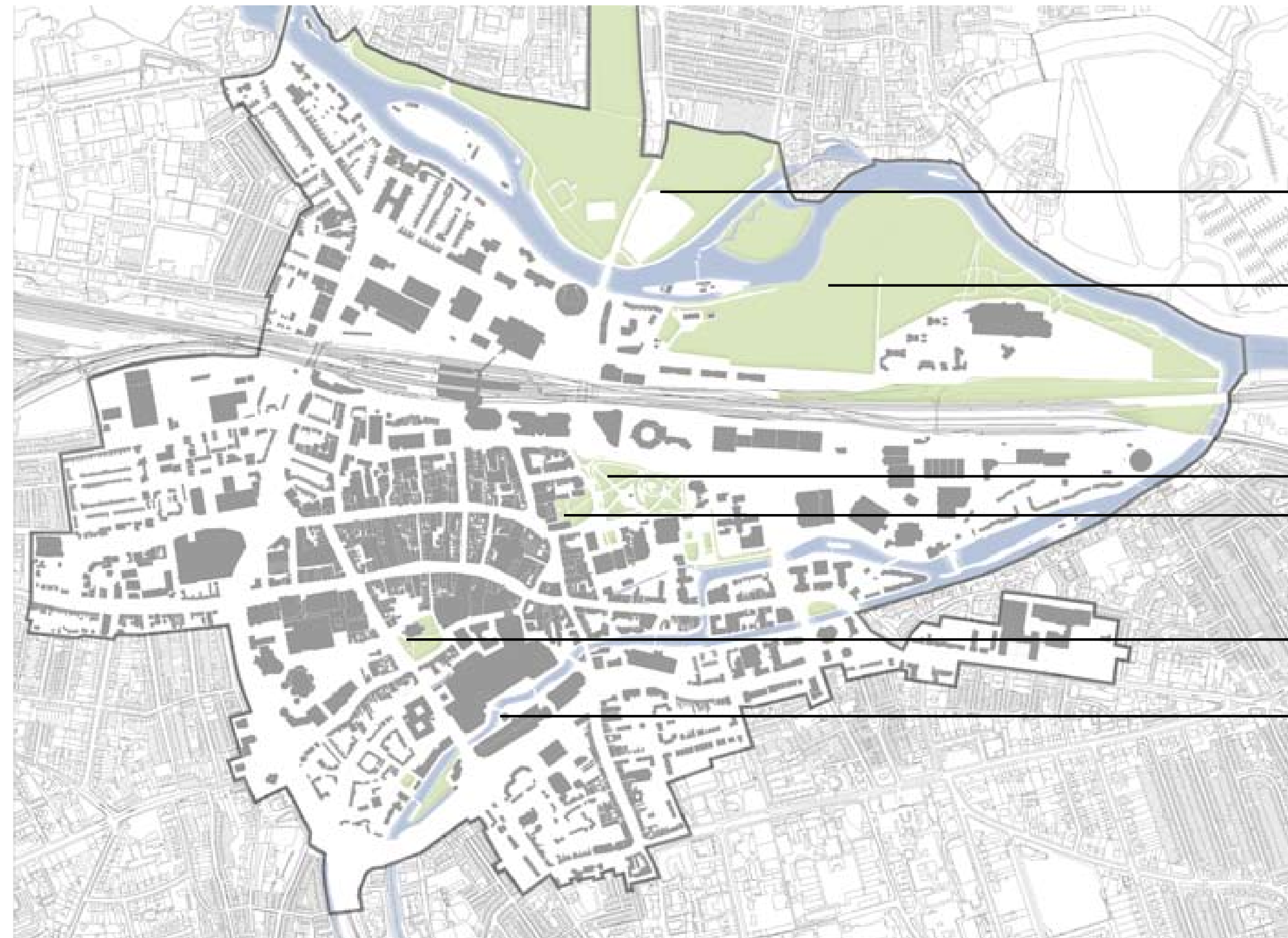
The town centre is also shaped by its rivers. Sitting between the Thames and Kennet, it benefits from riverside walking and cycling routes, opportunities for nature and quiet, and valued green spaces such as Forbury Gardens and Kings Meadow. As the residential population grows, the accessibility and quality of these spaces become a key test of liveability.

Reading Station and the routes linking it with shops, workplaces,

venues and rivers provide a critical first impression. Because these are among the busiest public spaces in the borough, targeted improvements here can significantly enhance how welcoming and easy to navigate the town centre feels.



### OPEN SPACES IN CENTRAL READING



Open space

Christchurch Playing Fields

King's Meadows

Forbury Gardens

St Lawrence's Churchyard

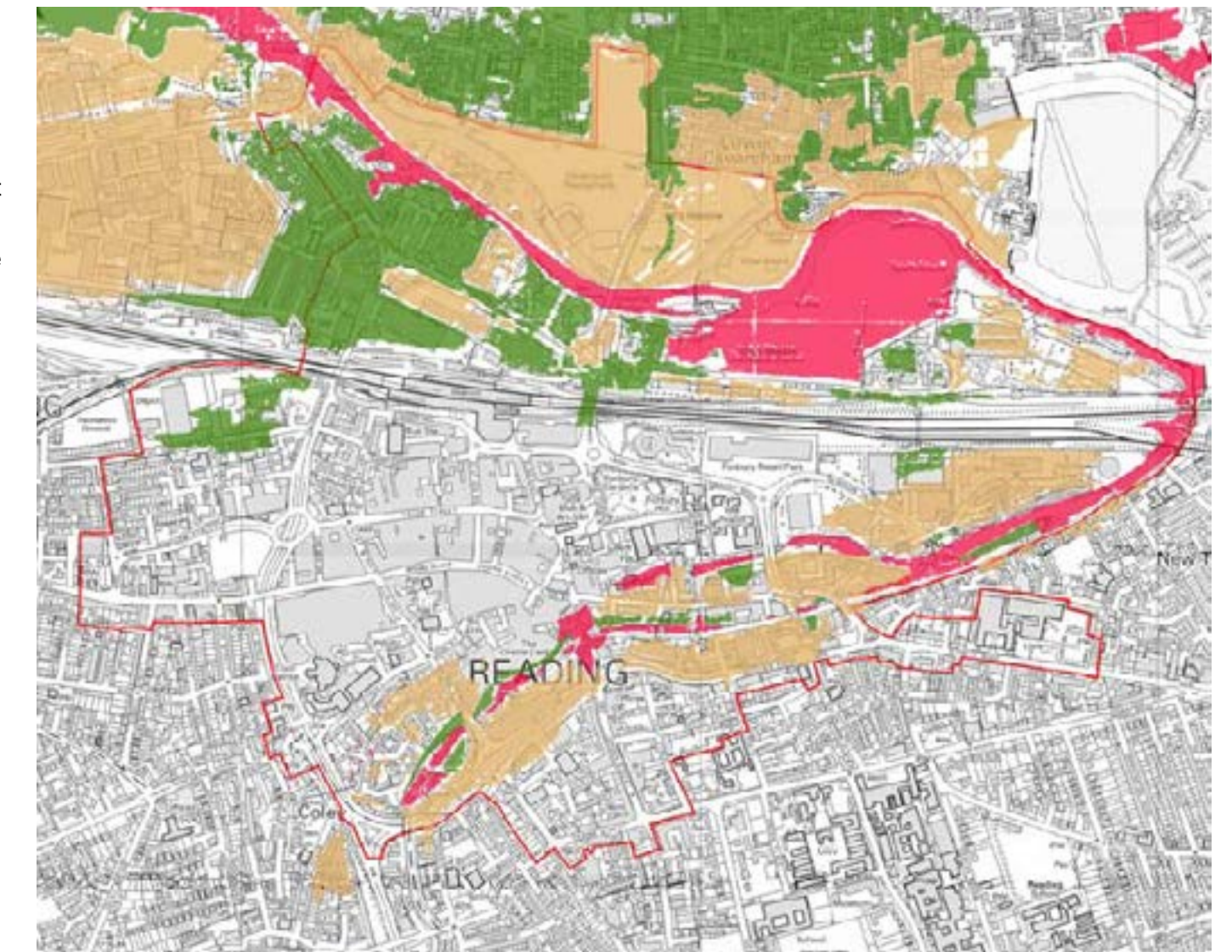
St. Mary's Churchyard

Kennetside/Oracle public realm

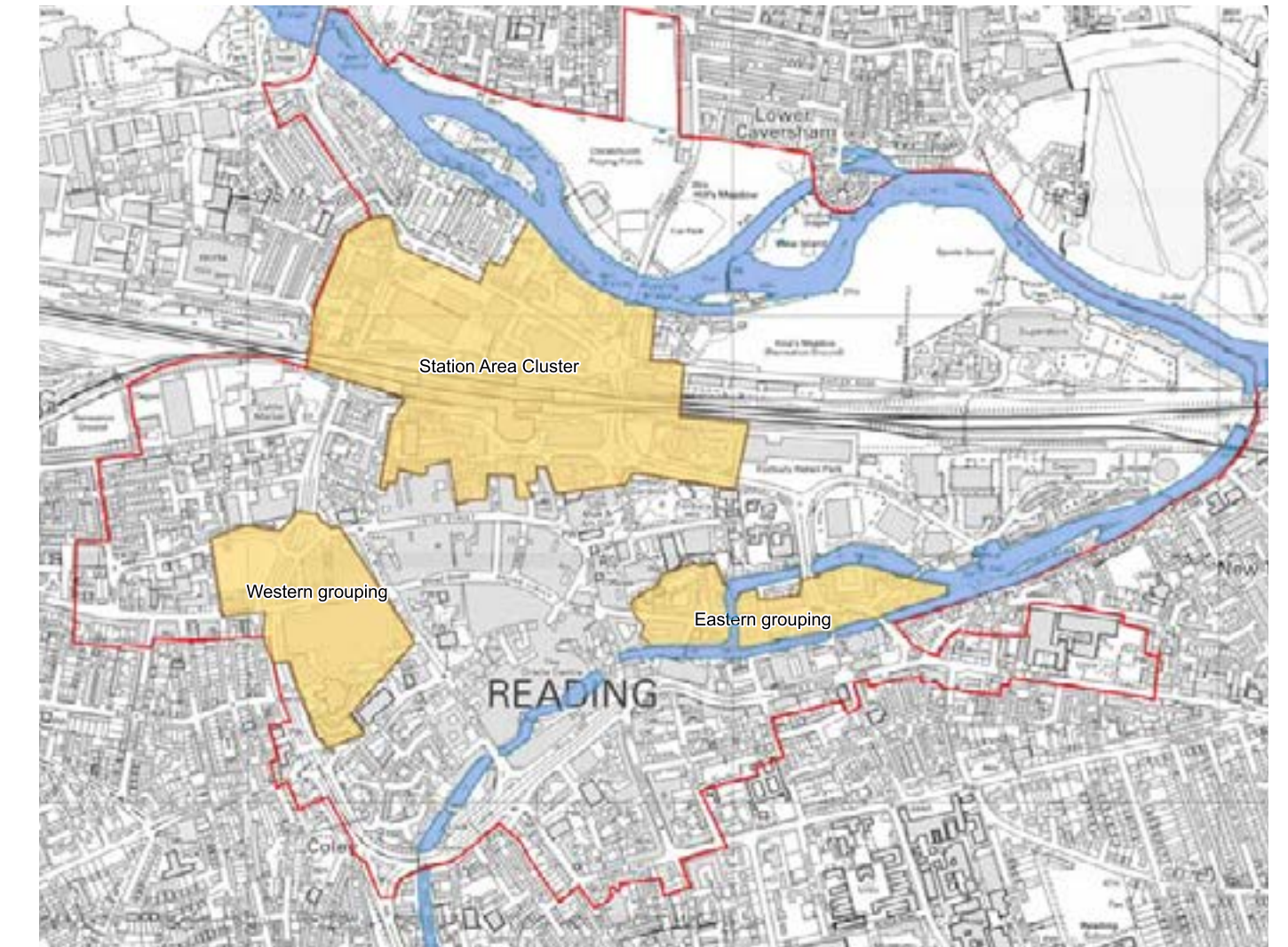
- Zone 3b Functional Floodplain
- Zone 3a High Probability
- Zone 2 Medium Probability

Reference should be made to the Draft Strategic Flood Risk Assessment completed by Jacobs (2007) for accurate flood risk zone boundaries

### CENTRAL READING FLOOD ZONES



### CENTRAL READING TALL BUILDING CLUSTERS

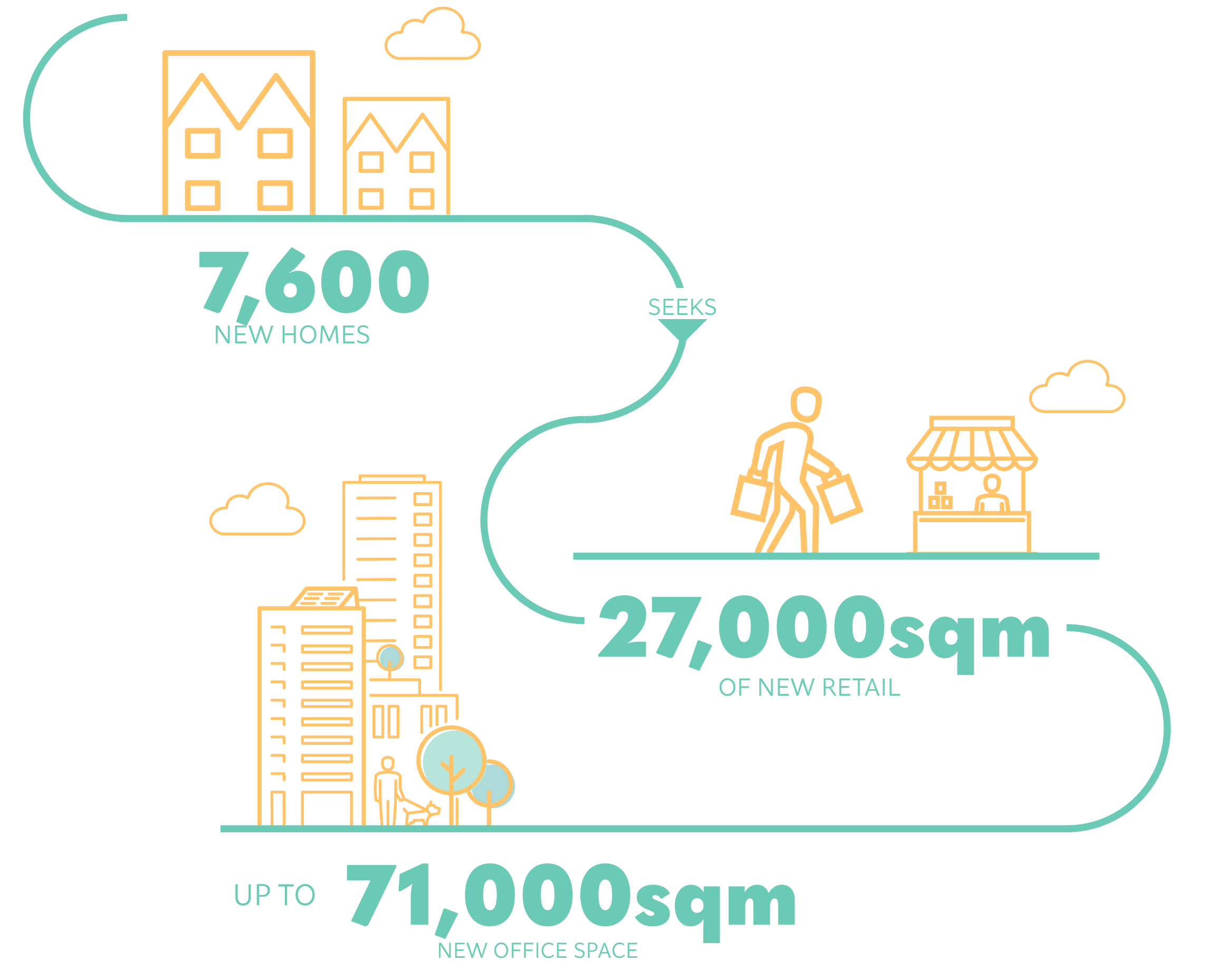


# FUTURE TOWN CENTRE GROWTH

Reading's transformation will accelerate dramatically over the next two decades. The number of homes in Central Reading is projected to **more than double by 2041** according to the Local Plan, the fastest growth anywhere in the borough. Major developments such as Station Hill, Minster Quarter Central, Oracle and Broad Street Mall will redefine Reading's centre as a high-density, mixed-use neighbourhood.

Demographic change will follow. Young adults will continue to dominate, drawn by the benefits of central living and connectivity, while older residents increasingly seek accessible urban homes. This shift will heighten demand for compact, flexible housing, walkable streets, amenities and health and community services within easy reach.

The seven principles outlined later in the vision define how this growth should be shaped.



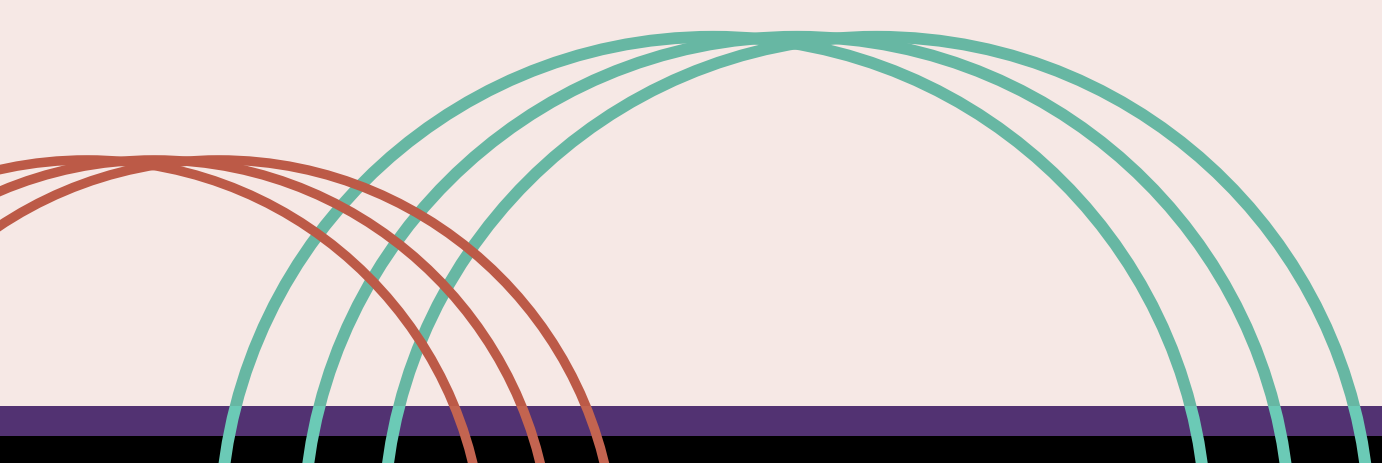
(FIGURES ARE FOR CENTRAL READING)

# CENTRAL READING POPULATION & LIVING PROFILE

Central Reading has a distinctive and fast-changing residential profile. This table summarises the key characteristics of the town centre population, what these patterns mean for how the centre functions, and what this requires from future design and investment.

(See Appendix A for additional statistics and comparators)

KEY STATS (Source: ONS 2021)	WHAT THIS IMPLIES ABOUT CENTRAL READING	DESIGN AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS
20,546 residents live in Abbey + Thames wards	A sizeable, dense town centre community already exists and is growing.	Plan for everyday community infrastructure (health, childcare, advice, community hubs).
70.7% of homes are flats	High-density, apartment-led living is the norm; limited private outdoor space.	Provide high-quality shared amenity, play, rooftop/communal spaces, and noise/overlooking mitigation.
59.2% privately rented	High mobility households without long-term anchors.	Ensure strong long-term estate management, secure cycle storage and welcoming communal areas.
49.5% aged 20–39 (very young population)	High demand for accessible amenities, social spaces, active lifestyles and hybrid-working environments.	Support co-working spaces, active ground floors, flexible public realm and everyday recreation.
54.9% born outside the UK	Extremely diverse population with varied linguistic and cultural needs.	Provide multilingual wayfinding, inclusive design, culturally relevant programming, and accessible information.
50.7% of households have no car	Town centre residents rely on walking, cycling and public transport.	Prioritise walking comfort, crossings, cycle storage, bus reliability, legibility and stepfree design.
50.5% work mainly from home	Weekday life is local; demand for nearby services, cafés, third spaces and daytime vibrancy.	Strengthen weekday economy, improve public realm comfort, support workfriendly venues.
38.9% one-bed homes	Families are present but underserved; limited space for children.	Deliver family friendly play, pushchair-friendly routes, childcare access, and larger unit mixes in new schemes.



# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Reading is starting from a strong base. Connectivity, skills attainment and disposable income levels are high in the town, but there is a recognition that equality of opportunity does not reach everyone.

## CHALLENGES

### Pressure on infrastructure and services

Rapid population growth is increasing demand on healthcare, community facilities and youth provision, with infrastructure needing to keep pace.

### Ensuring inclusive growth

Not all communities currently feel connected to the town centre's success, highlighting the need to share benefits more widely.

### Public realm quality and gateways

Some key spaces, including station approaches and civic areas, feel cluttered and dominated by vehicles.

### Barriers to movement

The IDR and rail lines create severance, limiting safe and attractive walking and cycling connections.

### Riverside accessibility gaps

Parts of the Thames and Kennet remain difficult to access and are not fully integrated into the town centre experience.

### Retail transition and town centre vitality

Structural changes in retail are leading to uneven activity and a need to strengthen evening and leisure uses.

### Housing mix imbalance

A predominance of smaller flats limits options for families and long-term residents.

### Land constraints and delivery challenges

Limited large sites, underused assets and stalled developments require more coordinated and innovative approaches.

### Environmental and climate pressures

Flooding, overheating and air quality issues require continued investment and adaptation.

### Energy and infrastructure transition

Moving to low-carbon systems will require upgrades to energy capacity and supporting infrastructure.

### Impact of permitted development

Variable housing quality and loss of employment space risk undermining long-term place quality.



## OPPORTUNITIES

### Leverage exceptional connectivity

Build on Reading's status as a major rail hub, including the Elizabeth Line, to support sustainable growth and car-free living.

### Support a vibrant, diverse community

Respond to a young and growing population with well-designed homes, services and public spaces.

### Deliver a wider choice of homes

Provide a broader mix of housing, including family and affordable homes, close to jobs and transport.

### Harness regeneration momentum

Maximise the impact of major developments such as Station Hill

### Strengthen the local economy

Build on key sectors while enabling growth in creative, science and innovation industries, supported by aligned skills and training.

### Create great public spaces

Transform streets, squares and gateways into greener, more welcoming and pedestrian-focused environments.

### Unlock the riverside

Enhance access to and along the Thames and Kennet, creating continuous, active and inclusive waterfront spaces.

### Enable sustainable, compact growth

Build on strong walking, cycling and public transport use to reduce car dependency and support a low-carbon town centre.

### Use land creatively

Unlock constrained and underused sites through land assembly, mixed-use development and co-location of services.

### Deliver accessible local services

Provide healthcare, education and community facilities in convenient, central and well-connected locations.

### Enhance culture and heritage

Build on Reading's historic assets and cultural venues to strengthen identity and attract visitors.

### Strengthen regional leadership

Position Reading as the Thames Valley's leading economic and cultural centre, attracting investment and talent.



# HERITAGE & CULTURAL ANCHORS

Reading town centre contains a rich concentration of heritage, cultural and civic assets that define its identity and sense of place. These anchors span the medieval Abbey Quarter, Victorian civic buildings and contemporary cultural institutions, forming the foundation for cultural activity, everyday wayfinding and placemaking.

## KEY HERITAGE ANCHORS

### ABBEY QUARTER

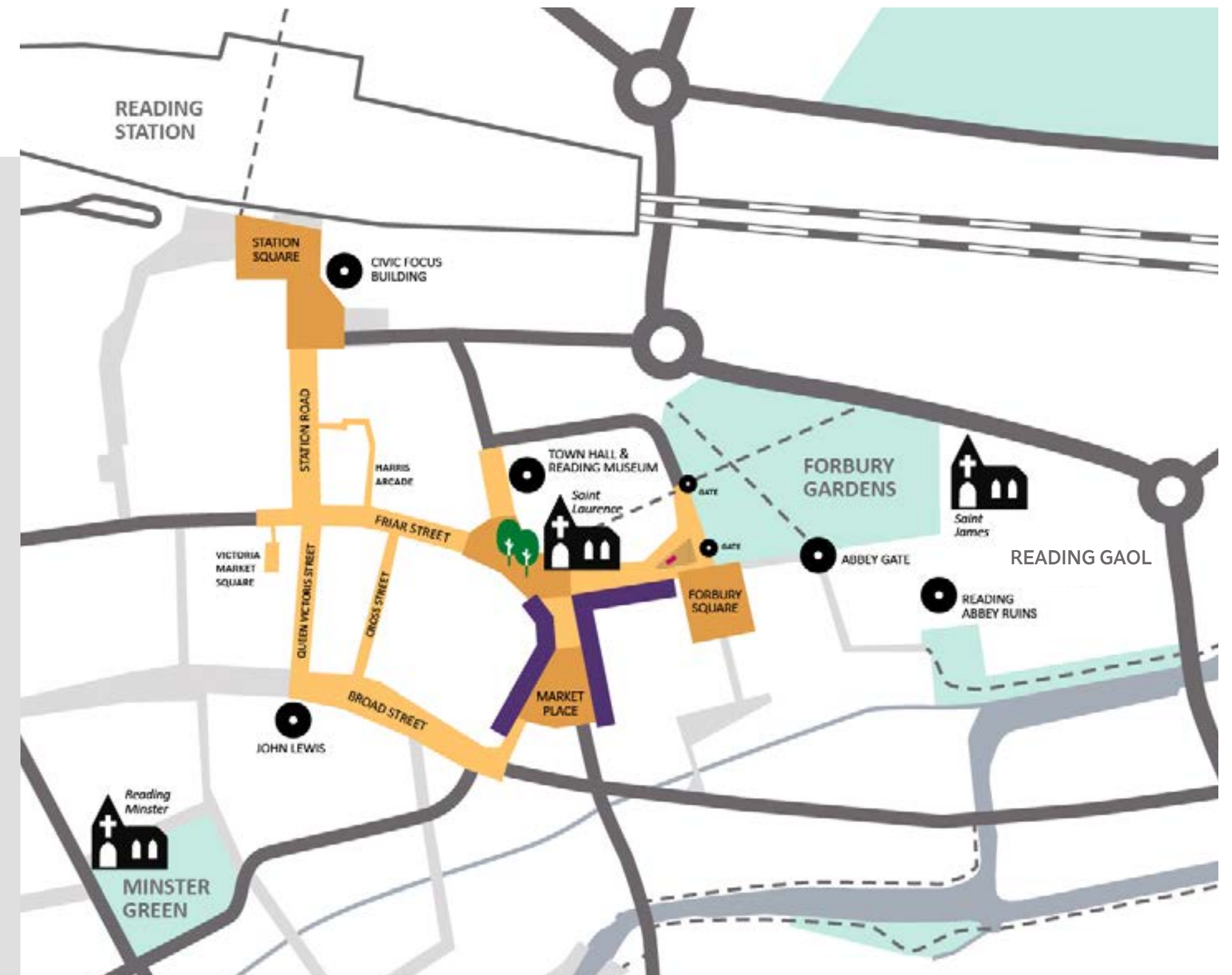
- A nationally significant heritage cluster containing Reading's most important historic assets, including:
  - internationally known for its association with Oscar Wilde and central to plans for a culture led future for the site.
- Abbey Ruins (Grade I, Scheduled Ancient Monument): A major medieval site, conserved and reopened in 2018, now used for events and cultural activity.
- Abbey Gateway (Grade I): The historic entrance associated with Jane Austen's schooling.
- Reading Gaol (Grade II): A landmark Victorian gaol
- Forbury Gardens (Grade II, Park and Garden): A Victorian park forming part of the wider Abbey Quarter setting and supporting heritage and recreation.



### HISTORIC CHURCHES

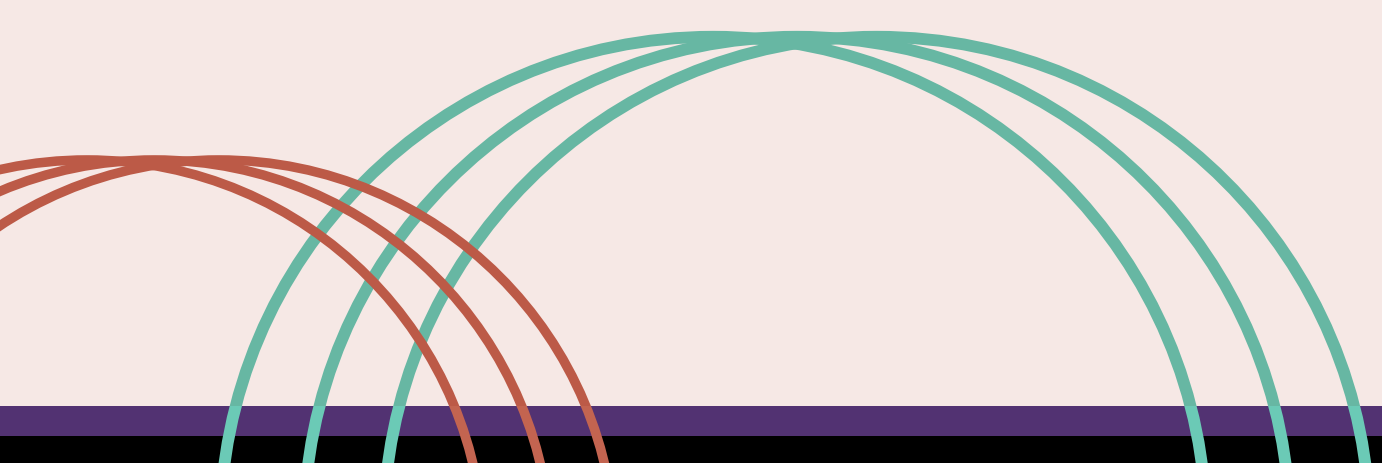
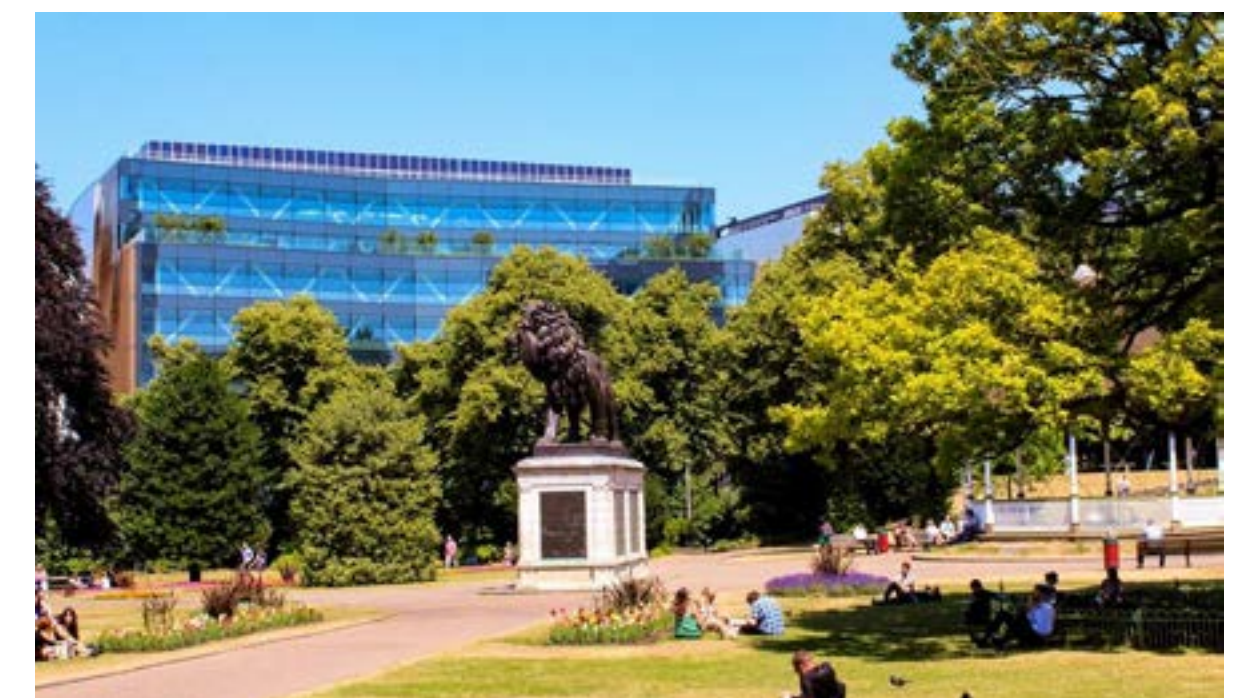
- St Laurence's Church (Grade I)
- Reading Minster (Grade I)
- Greyfriars Church (Grade I)

Together form a prominent group of medieval anchors shaping the historic townscape.



## KEY CULTURAL ANCHORS

- **Reading Museum and Town Hall:** A civic and cultural hub home to the full-size Victorian Bayeux Tapestry copy.
- **The Hexagon and new Studio Theatre:** Major cultural venues supporting events, performance and creative participation.
- **Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations** such as CultureMix, Jelly, Museums Partnership Reading and Readipop providing diverse cultural programming.

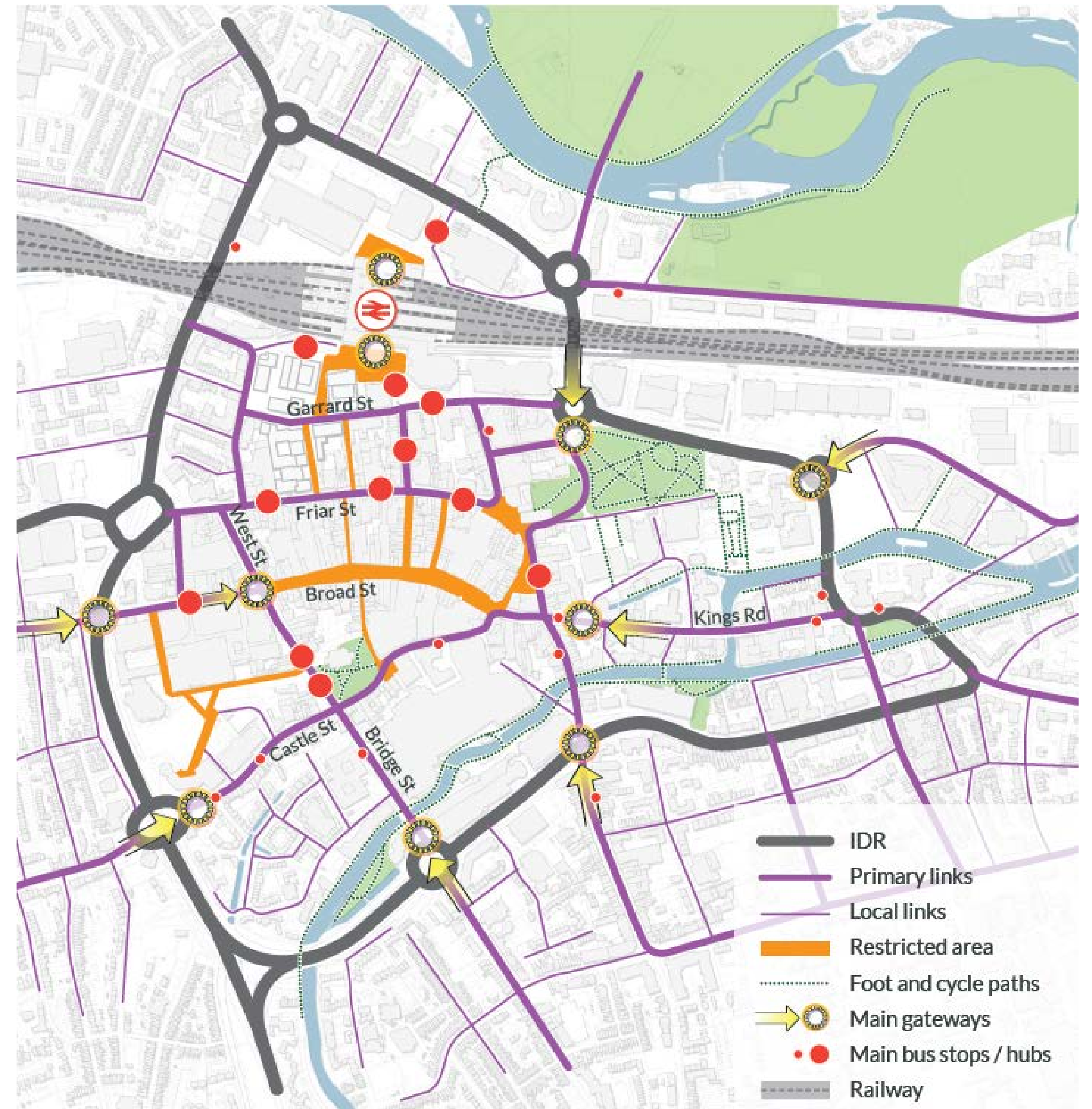


# HOW PEOPLE MOVE THROUGH CENTRAL READING

Central Reading relies on movement patterns that support a **dense, young, largely car-free population** and one of the busiest transport hubs outside London. Its compact form, high levels of walking and position between the Thames and Kennet mean everyday travel depends heavily on the quality of connections, crossings and public spaces. However, **the IDR and Great Western rail line create barriers** that make short trips feel longer and less intuitive.

## GATEWAYS AND ROUTES

ROUTE TYPE	FUNCTION
<b>Arrival</b> <i>(Station ↔ Retail Core)</i>	The primary gateway where arrival is experienced. Focus includes clear sightlines, connected footways and active frontages that reinforce the station-to-centre routes.
<b>Riverside Links</b> <i>(Core ↔ Thames / Core ↔ Kennet)</i>	Routes that connect the town centre to the rivers, requiring visible signage and generous access points.
<b>Cultural Routes</b> <i>(Abbey Quarter ↔ Town Hall/Museum ↔ Minster/Hexagon)</i>	Legible connections between historic and cultural anchors, supporting identity and wayfinding.
<b>East-West/North-South Routes</b>	Corridors that cross IDR and rail severance, where improvements to crossings, pinch points and continuity are most impactful.

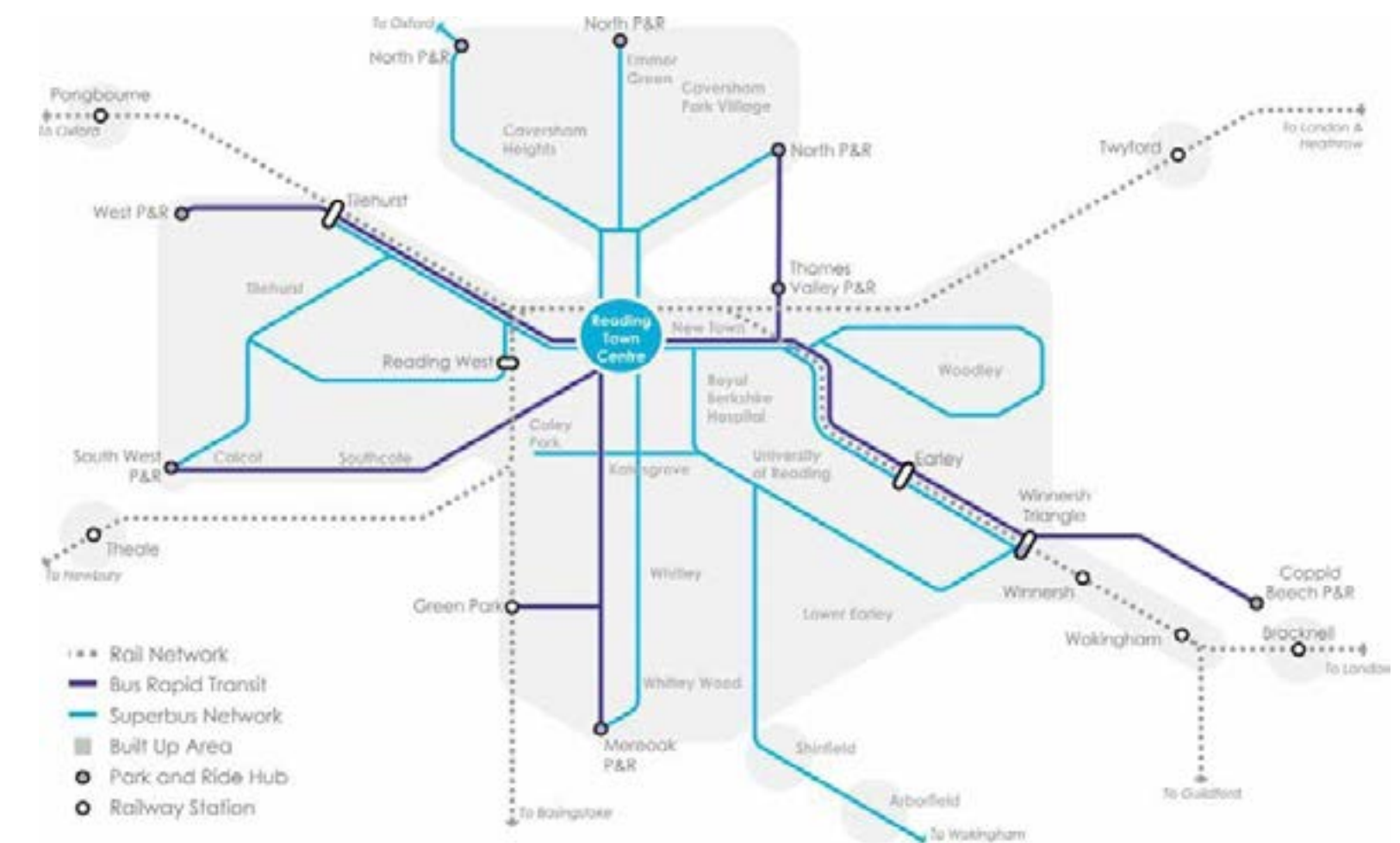
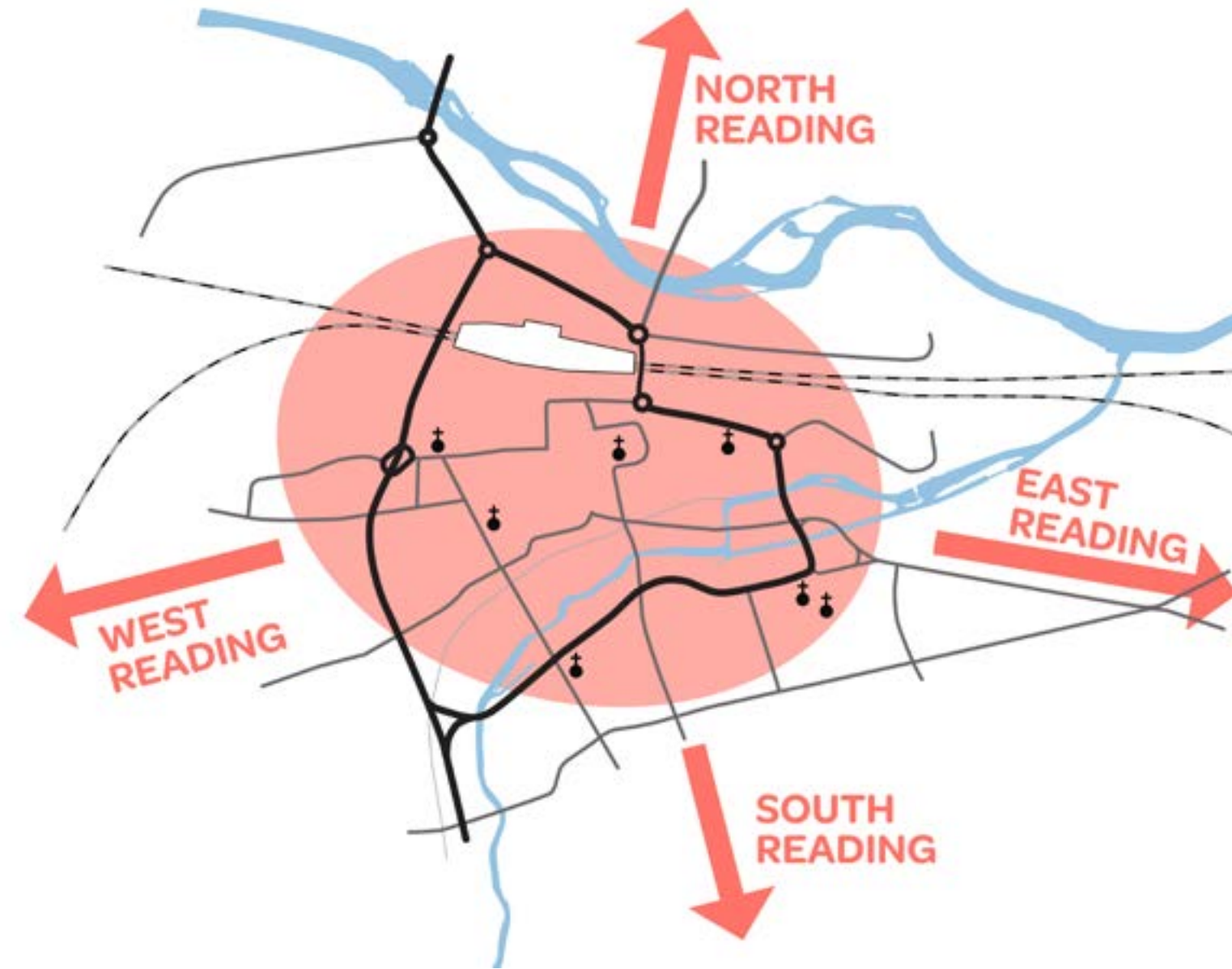


# NEIGHBOURHOOD TO TOWN CENTRE ACCESS

To support inclusive access and reduce car dependency, neighbourhoods such as Caversham, South Reading, Tilehurst, Whitley and Earley should be connected via:

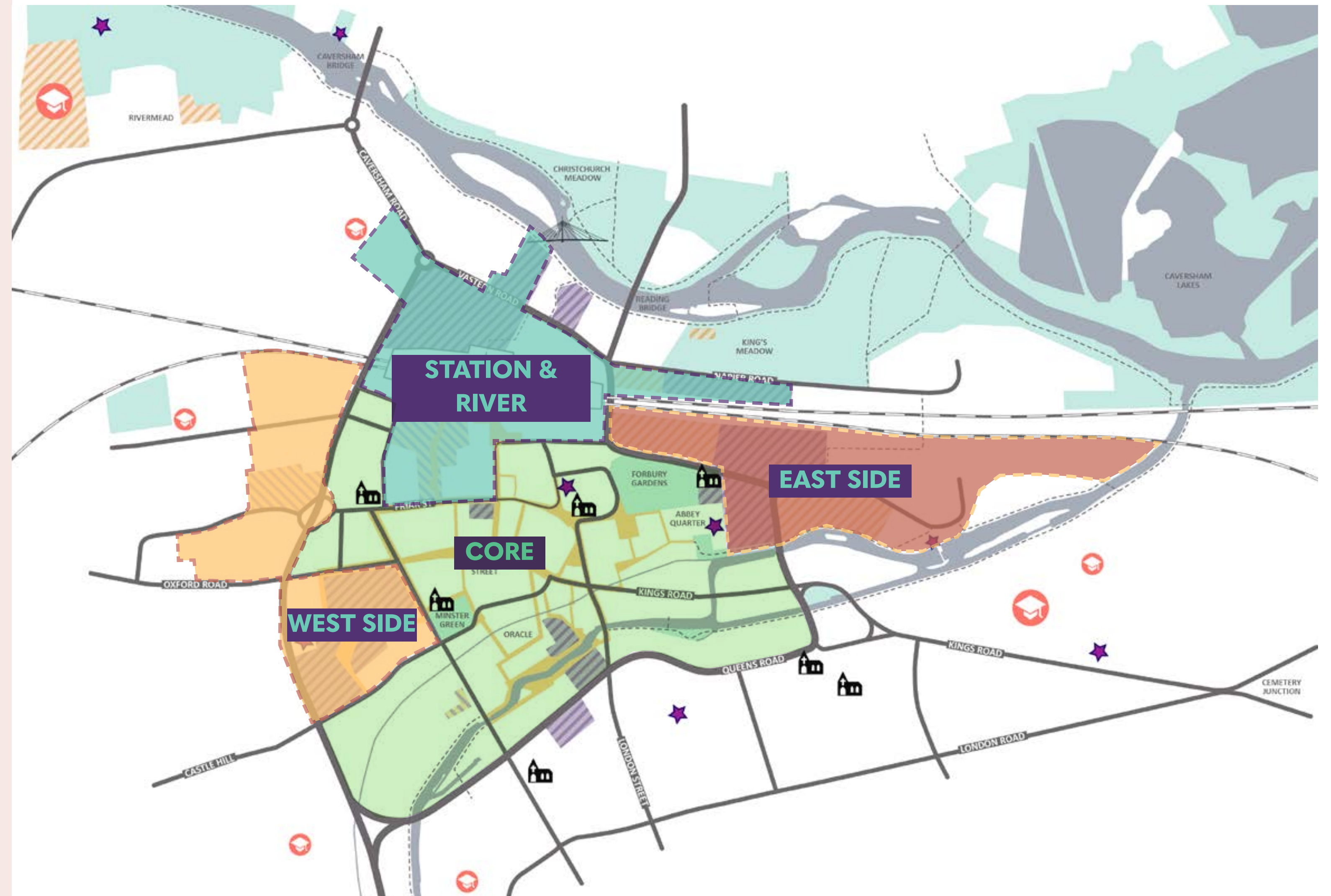
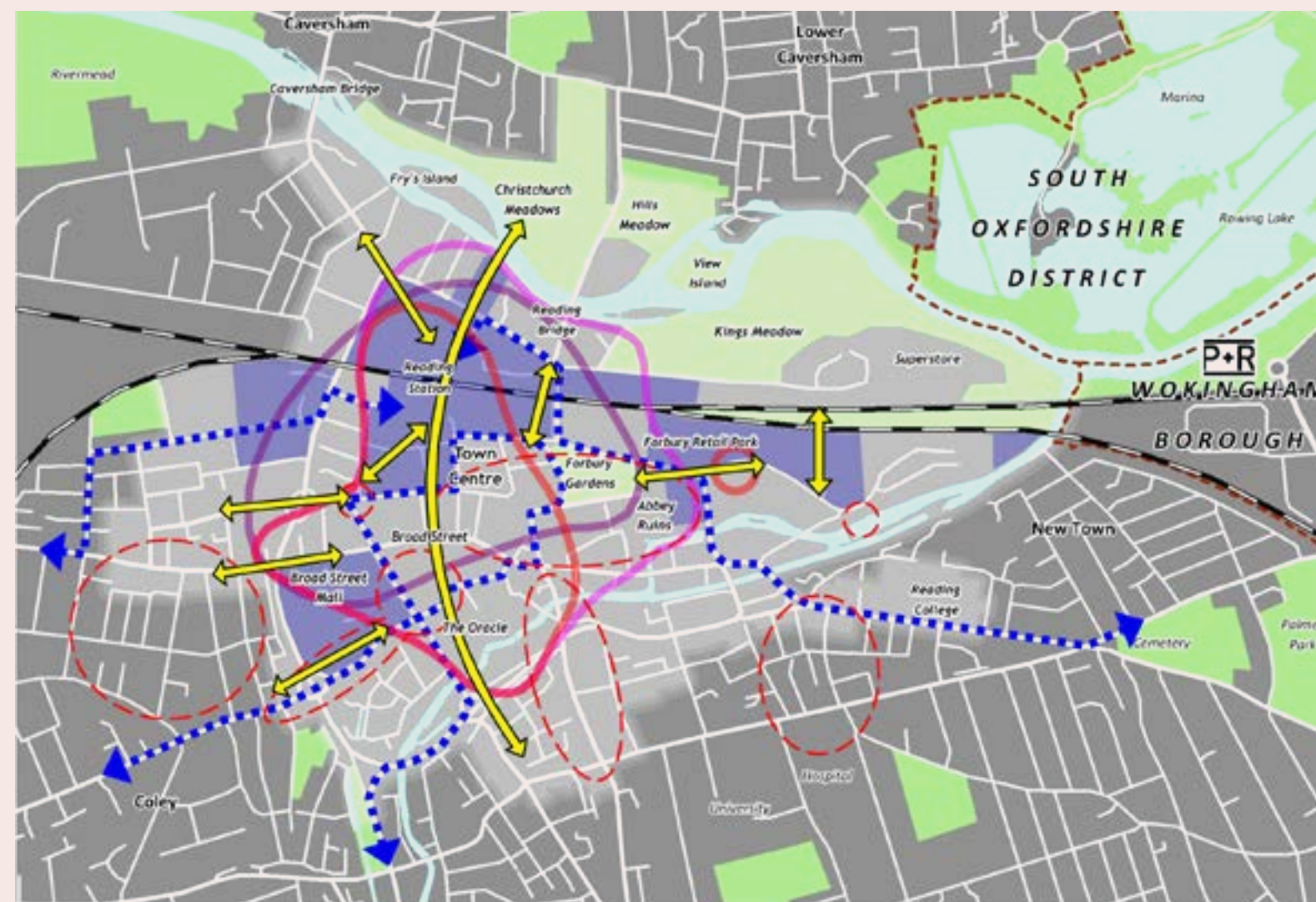
- **High quality public transport corridors** (Bus Service Improvement Plan/Bus Rapid Transit routes and Reading Station interchange improvements).
- **Continuous walking and cycling networks** with improved footways, crossings and cycle parking.
- **Great placemaking at key interchanges such as the station and bus stop clusters** enables easy movement between transport options, prioritising comfort, legibility and safe movement.

- **Inclusive access for all communities**, including mobility hubs, safer routes, School Streets and well maintained surfaces.
- These links enable local trips without relying on the centre, while ensuring that journeys through the town centre are safe, legible and welcoming.



# OPPORTUNITY AREAS

Central Reading will change most visibly in three Opportunity & Character Areas identified in the Local Plan: **Station & River**, **West Side**, and **East Side**. These areas have the scale to deliver new homes and workplaces, upgraded public spaces, and stronger links to the Thames and Kennet, supporting Reading's evolution as a walkable riverside town centre. These all centre around the 'Core' of Broad Street and the Oracle.



# STATION & RIVER AREA

<p><b>Role</b></p>	<p>Reading's most prominent gateway, defined by the station and high levels of people arriving on foot, bike and public transport.</p>
<p><b>Strengthens</b></p>	<p>The Station–Core Arrival Route, Riverside Links, and the Station Gateway.</p>
<p><b>Top Priorities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coherent, high-quality station-to-centre arrival sequence (Station Road/Queen Victoria Street <u>or</u> Friars Walk/Union Street → Broad Street → Oracle)</li> <li>• Reduce conflict between vehicles and pedestrians; improve legibility and stepfree access</li> <li>• Strengthen north–south access across the rail line to unlock Thames links</li> <li>• Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridors will prioritise bus travel along certain routes to the town centre and station</li> </ul>
<p><b>Case Study</b></p>	<p><b>Station Hill</b> — New squares, pocket parks, active ground floors, and a more welcoming station arrival.</p> <p><b>Reading Riverworks</b> - Unlock high quality public access to the Thames while strengthening the town centre's riverside identity</p>



**Key**

- Sub-area boundary
- Major Opportunity Area
- Footprint of existing building in Major Opportunity Area
- Existing building
- Recent building or building under construction
- Nearby sensitive location—low-rise residential
- Nearby sensitive location—heritage assets
- New area of open space
- Vehicle access point
- Key movement corridor (pedestrian and/or cycle)
- Location of transport interchange
- Proposed Bus Rapid Transit route
- Retained or new public access along waterways
- Activation of key routes and spaces with town centre uses

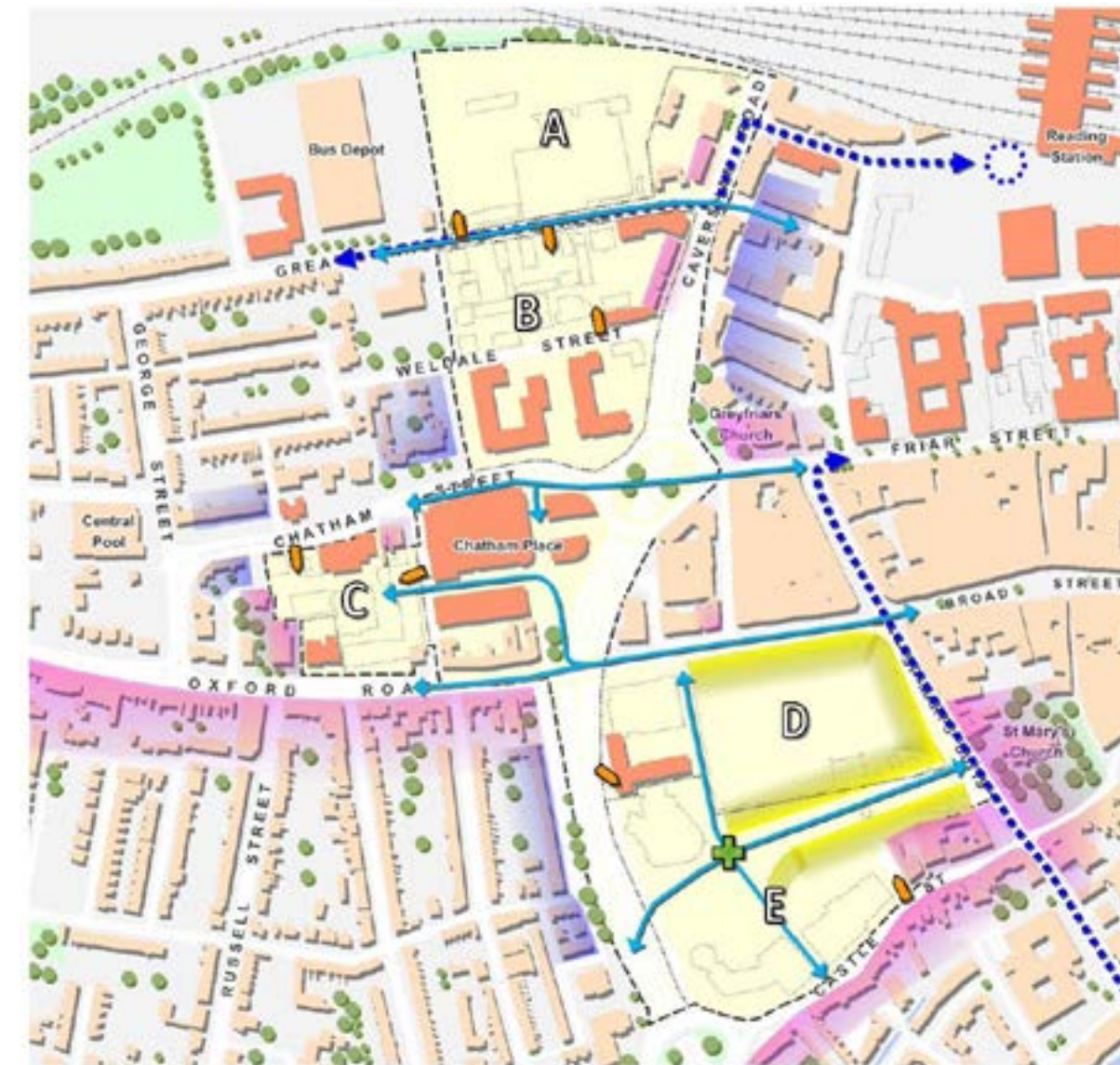
**Sub-Areas**

- A CR11a: Friar Street and Station Road
- B CR11b: Greyfriars Road Corner
- C CR11c: Station Hill and Friars Walk
- D CR11d: Brunel Arcade and Apex Plaza
- E CR11e: North of the Station
- F CR11f: West of Caversham Road
- G CR11g: Riverside
- I CR11i: Napier Court



# WEST SIDE

<b>Role</b>	A major regeneration opportunity capable of becoming a coherent neighbourhood with homes, community uses and people friendly streets.
<b>Strengthens</b>	East–west routes across the IDR, and Cultural Routes connecting the Minster, Hexagon and town centre destinations.
<b>Top Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safer east–west crossings to reduce IDR severance and improve arrivals from neighbouring communities</li> <li>• Balanced mix of uses, strong civic/community offer and high quality public realm</li> <li>• Heritage sensitive regeneration around Castle Hill, Minster and St Mary’s Butts</li> </ul>
<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Minster Quarter regeneration</b> — Heritage sensitive redevelopment providing new civic space, cultural links and hundreds of new homes.



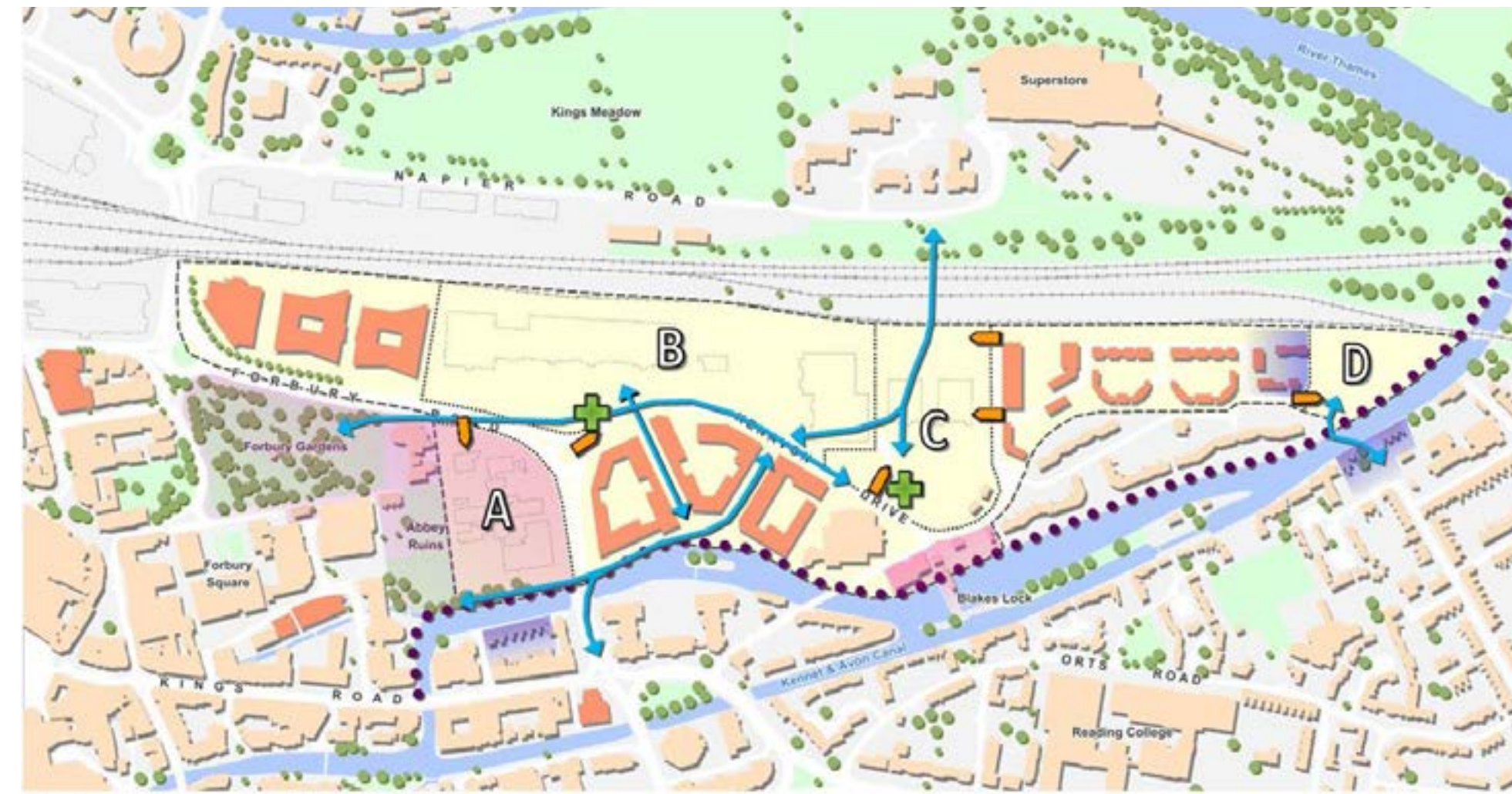
**Key**

Sub-area boundary	Nearby sensitive location—heritage assets	Activation of key routes and spaces with town centre uses
Major Opportunity Area	New area of open space	<b>Sub-Areas</b>
Footprint of existing building in Major Opportunity Area	Vehicle access point	<b>A</b> CR12a: Cattle Market
Existing building	Key movement corridor (pedestrian and/or cycle)	<b>B</b> CR12b: Great Knollys Street & Weldale Street
Recent building or building under construction	Location of transport interchange	<b>C</b> CR12c: Chatham Street, Eaton Place & Oxford Road
Nearby sensitive location—low-rise residential	Proposed Bus Rapid Transit route	<b>D</b> CR12d: Broad Street Mall
		<b>E</b> CR12e: Hosier Street



# EAST SIDE

<b>Role</b>	An emerging riverside quarter centred on heritage, culture and the River Kennet.
<b>Strengthens</b>	Riverside Links, Cultural Routes, and key east–west links across rail and IDR edges.
<b>Top Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver continuous, fully public riverside space along the Kennet</li> <li>• Strengthen cultural connections to the Abbey Quarter and heritage settings</li> <li>• Improve underpass/bridge connections to integrate East Side into the centre</li> <li>• Support a culture led future for Reading Gaol</li> </ul>
<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Huntley Wharf</b> — Demonstrates how new homes and public realm animate the Kennet and create a welcoming riverside environment.



**Key**

Sub-area boundary	Vehicle access point	Existing building
Major Opportunity Area	Key movement corridor (pedestrian and/or cycle)	Recent building or building under construction
Footprint of existing building in Major Opportunity Area	Retained or new public access along waterways	Nearby sensitive location—low-rise residential
New area of open space		Nearby sensitive location—heritage assets

**Sub-Areas**

- A** CR13a: Reading Prison
- B** CR13b: Forbury Retail Park
- C** CR13c: Forbury Business Park & Kenavon Drive
- D** CR13d: Gas Holder



# CORE

<b>Role</b>	The retail and pedestrian heart of Reading — Broad Street, Friar Street, The Oracle and primary pedestrian network.
<b>Strengthens</b>	All major routes
<b>Top Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive public realm with comfort, shade, seating, and clear sightlines</li> <li>• Strengthen day to evening activity and active frontages</li> <li>• Improve wayfinding and heritage legibility within Victorian street patterns</li> <li>• Reduce clutter and enhance crossings on key shopping streets</li> </ul>



# RECENT AND EMERGING PROJECTS

Central Reading is experiencing one of the most significant periods of transformation in its recent history. A coordinated pipeline of civic, cultural, regeneration and infrastructure projects delivered by the Council and partners, is reshaping how the town centre looks, feels and functions. Individually, these projects are delivering new homes, workplaces, public spaces, cultural facilities and green infrastructure. Collectively, they represent clear momentum that this vision seeks to channel into a coherent, long term strategy.

These projects reflect the delivery roles set out in the Delivery Plan, with the Council focusing its resources on high impact, high visibility interventions, and collaborating with partners where major regeneration or infrastructure can be unlocked through partnerships or private delivery.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Together, these projects demonstrate that Reading's town centre transformation is already well advanced. They collectively deliver:

- new homes and growing mixed use neighbourhoods
- strengthened cultural infrastructure
- investment in public realm, green streets and family friendly spaces
- better connections to the Thames and Kennet
- improved gateways and movement corridors
- climate ready energy and infrastructure
- enhanced heritage settings and independent business environments



## HEXAGON STUDIO THEATRE & CULTURAL UPGRADES

Council Led  
West Side Opportunity Area

Investment in Reading's cultural heart is modernising its key public venues and strengthening the evening economy. The Hexagon upgrade and the new Studio Theatre introduce flexible, accessible spaces that support performance, community use and cultural programming. These improvements reinforce the Minster Quarter as a connected cultural cluster that can host activity throughout the day and into the evening.



# DEVELOPMENTS

Recent award-winning developments have enhanced the quality of facilities across the town centre, including the Thames Lido and mixed-use developments such as Huntley Wharf.

The new Civic Centre enhancements and Hexagon

Studio Theatre are fully funded, while the prominent Minster Quarter, Station Hill and Broad Street Mall developments are progressing. Market appetite is strong for re-purposing sites such as the Oracle and Reading Gaol, with further capacity on town centre retail sites.

## BUILT

1. Reading Station & Elizabeth Line
2. Forbury Place
3. Thames LIDO
4. Thames Quarter
5. Rivermead Leisure Centre
6. Palmer Park Leisure Centre
7. Green Park Station & Reading West Station
8. Blue Collar
9. Huntley Wharf
10. Weldale Street
11. River Academy
12. Station Hill (Phase 1 & 2)
13. Civic Centre Upgrades

## ACTIVE INITIATIVES

14. Reading Metropolitan
15. Vastern Court
16. Reading Riverworks
17. Broad Street Mall redevelopment
18. Minster Quarter Central
19. Oracle East
20. Reading Gaol
21. Queen Victoria Street and Friar Street
22. Hexagon Studio Theatre
23. Norman Place
24. John Lewis
25. Kings Meadow View
26. Napier Road



Figure 1. Map of indicative development locations

# DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDIES

## STATION HILL

Partner Led: Delivered [Phases 1-2] & Ongoing [Phase 3]  
Station & River Opportunity Area

Phased regeneration to redefine the station gateway. As a new mixed use quarter, Station Hill is already contributing to an active, employment rich, residential and leisure destination.



## HUNTLEY WHARF

Partner Led – Delivered  
East Side Opportunity Area

Redevelopment along the Kennet has activated the riverside with new homes, leisure uses and a welcoming waterfront environment. The site exemplifies how high quality residential development can unlock access, routes and placemaking along Reading's waterways.



## MINSTER QUARTER

Joint Led  
West Side Opportunity Area

A major opportunity site in the heart of Reading, Minster Quarter will integrate new homes, community spaces and a civic square, connecting the Hexagon, Minster Street and Broad Street Mall.



## CIVIC CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS // CENTRAL LIBRARY

Council Led  
The new library delivers a modern civic anchor focused on learning and digital access. As part of wider Civic Centre enhancements, it establishes a welcoming and coherent civic gateway and supports the shift toward a more inclusive, accessible town centre.

# DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDIES

## READING RIVERWORKS

Partner Led  
Station & River Opportunity Area

Riverworks represents a step-change in how Reading connects with the Thames. The project aims to deliver high quality access, new routes and riverside activation, strengthening the east-west Thames corridor and reinforcing Reading's identity as a riverside town.



## ORACLE RIVERSIDE

Partner Led  
Core Opportunity Area

Emerging proposals will open up the riverside, introduce improved public realm, broaden leisure and hospitality uses, and create new routes along the Kennet. These enhancements support a stronger waterside economy and re position the Oracle as a more diverse destination.



## STATION ROAD, FRIAR STREET, BRUNEL ARCADE AND STATION ARRIVAL

Joint Led  
Station & River Opportunity Area

Phased upgrades will create a clearer, safer and more attractive station gateway. This includes exploring changes to bus routing, public transport interchange improvements and enhanced walking environments that reflect Reading's role as a regional hub.



## UPGRADES TO ARCADES, UNION STREET AND HISTORIC ROUTES

Partner Led  
Core Opportunity Area

Enhancements to characterful routes such as Harris Arcade, Union Street (Smelly Alley), Queen Victoria Street and Reading's historic passages will support independent businesses and reinforce heritage character.

# CENTRAL READING PRINCIPLES

The opportunity areas set out where the greatest change and investment is expected to take place. The principles below explain how that change should be shaped. These principles are supported by a delivery plan that sets out early actions, medium-term projects and longer-term opportunities to shape investment decisions.

This vision is built around seven principles:

## OUR PRINCIPLES

### 1. BUILDING HEALTHY AND CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Supporting wellbeing, accessibility and belonging through inclusive streets, services and shared spaces.

### 2. TRANSFORMING READING'S RIVERS AND PUBLIC SPACES

Making the Thames, the Kennet and the town centre's parks, squares and streets central to daily life.

### 3. ENABLING CONNECTED AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

Prioritising walking, cycling and public transport so the town centre is easy to reach and get around without relying on a car.

### 4. BUILDING A GREENER, CLIMATE-RESILIENT TOWN CENTRE

Embedding climate resilience into design and day-to-day management so the town centre is lower carbon, greener, cooler in summer, and better adapted to rainfall.

### 5. CELEBRATING READING'S CULTURE, HERITAGE AND IDENTITY

Protecting and showcasing Reading's heritage assets, supporting a strong cultural offer, and reinforcing what makes Reading unique.

### 6. REIMAGINING THE TOWN CENTRE EXPERIENCE

Evolving Reading's historically strong retail core by strengthening the wider mix of leisure, food and drink, culture, services and experiences.

### 7. SUPPORTING GROWTH AND INNOVATION

Supporting business growth and new ways of working by creating high-quality workplaces and the right mix of spaces.

# Principle 1

## Building Healthy and Connected Communities

### WHY?

Thousands of new homes have already been delivered in the town centre, with many more planned. This growth offers a major opportunity to set a benchmark for high quality urban living, but only if new housing is matched by the services, spaces and amenities that make daily life work.

Reading's town centre population is diverse, young and largely car free. For many residents who experience the centre on foot, the quality of streets, public spaces, healthcare access, community facilities and everyday services directly affects wellbeing and social connection. Without coordinated planning, increased density risks putting pressure on already busy facilities, widening inequalities in access, and creating isolated developments rather than places that function as part of a community.

This principle recognises that building homes must go hand in hand with building community. Growth should be supported by investment in accessible healthcare, education and advice services, childcare, inclusive public spaces, and homes that are genuinely affordable, high quality and liveable over the long term. By embedding these expectations in future development, Reading can create a stable, healthy town centre community rooted in the town's character, not just new housing.



# WHAT

## 1.1 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

- Provide community spaces within walking distance of major growth areas such as Station Hill, Minster Quarter Central and the Oracle, ensuring town centre residents can access early help, advice, learning, youth support and health services without crossing the IDR.
- Work with health partners to expand local capacity around new residential developments such as at Broad Street Mall, Local Plan development sites such as Cattle Market and explore co-located healthcare hubs in redevelopment areas.
- Use temporary units in locations like Friar Street, Broad Street, Oxford Road or Broad Street Mall to host outreach clinics, ESOL sessions and social prescribing programmes to keep space active while major sites evolve.



## 1.2 DESIGNING FOR ALL GENERATIONS

- Ensure the centre's busiest walking routes such as Station Road, Broad Street, Friar Street, Kings Road, Oxford Road include shaded seating, places to pause and step free continuity so older residents, families and people with mobility needs can move comfortably.
- Support mixed communities in new developments such as Minster Quarter Central and Station Hill by requiring communal gardens, rooftop spaces, rooms for resident events and flexible ground floor spaces for clubs, classes and community gatherings.
- Strengthen family friendly provision by creating a visible network of "play on the way" spaces on routes between homes, schools, the Hexagon, Forbury Gardens, Kennet riverside and the Abbey Quarter and identify a site for a flagship town centre play space accessible from the core.

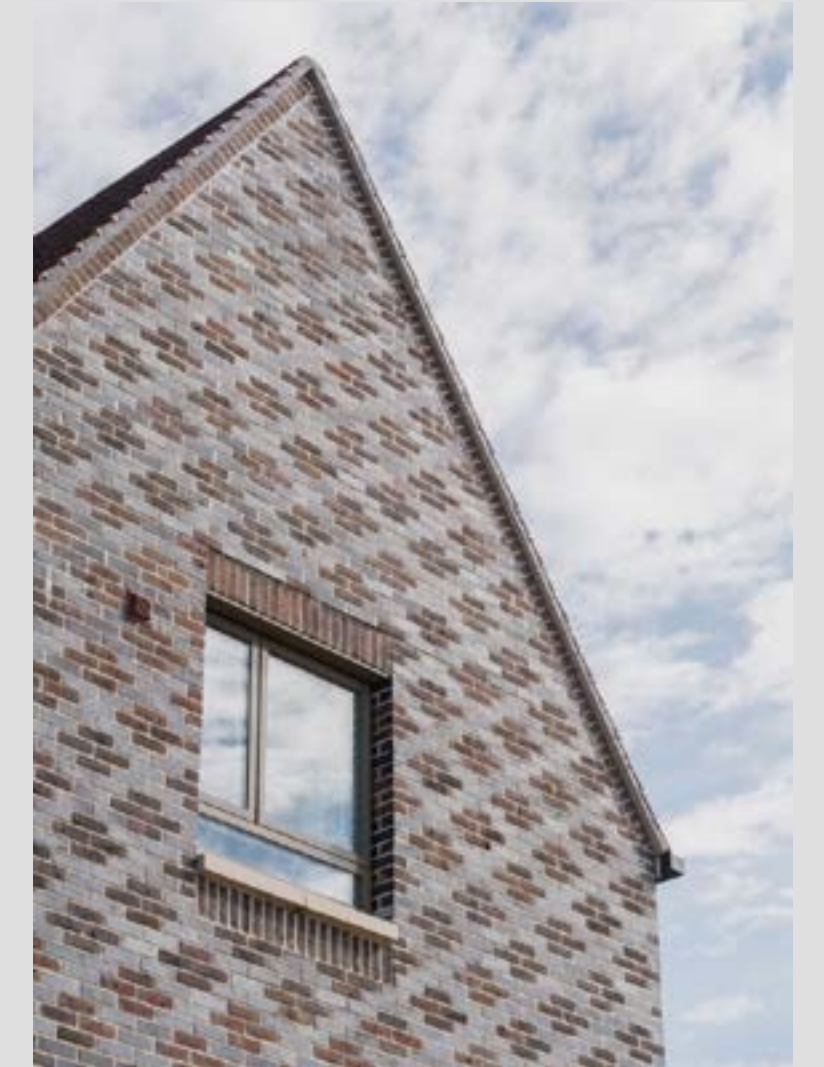
## 1.3 INCLUSIVE DESIGN

- Prioritise inclusive design on high stress routes such as IDR crossings and Station approaches, ensuring clear wayfinding.
- Use lighting and materials that support sensory comfort in spaces like Hexagon Square, and the Abbey Quarter, creating quieter zones away from the busiest streets.
- Expand multilingual wayfinding across key walking routes, riverside paths and cultural anchors to reflect Reading's highly international population (55% born outside the UK). Work with groups such as CultureMix, Jelly and community ESOL providers to co design inclusive information.
- Embed Reading's cultural identity from the Abbey ruins to the town's long history of migration and creativity, through public art, heritage interpretation, cultural routes and community led commissions.

# WHAT

## 1.4 DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY TOWN CENTRE HOMES

- Ensure new development demonstrates high-quality, place-specific architecture that draws on Reading's Victorian, medieval and industrial heritage, reinforcing the town centre's distinctive character.
- Ensure new homes in Opportunity Areas (Station & River, West Side, East Side) deliver private balconies, accessible communal courtyards or roof terraces. This is essential in a town centre where around 70% of homes are already flats, and that proportion will continue to increase.
- Call for dual aspect homes along constrained town centre sites to maximise daylight and reduce overheating.
- Align new homes with Reading's need for a broader mix: more two and three-bed units for families, accessible homes for older residents and high quality studios or 1 beds for young renters.
- Ensure layouts, ventilation and noise strategies respond to the centre's vibrant cultural scene by balancing comfort with the needs of venues around Friar Street, Gun Street, the Hexagon and the riverside.
- Require robust, long term management plans for shared spaces, landscaping, rooftops and resident facilities especially in large mixed use schemes such as Minster Quarter Central, Broad Street Mall and Station Hill to ensure safety, pride and long term stewardship



# GUIDANCE PROJECT CHECKLIST

This checklist sets out the key expectations for residential development in Reading Town Centre. It is designed to help shape proposals that align with the ambitions of this vision, supporting a vibrant, inclusive and high-quality place to live.

This is a practical guide to inform design, viability discussions and delivery from the earliest stages. It highlights core principles, ranging from affordability and design quality to long-term stewardship that reflect best practice and local priorities.

PROJECT CHECKLIST		✓
<b>Affordable and Mixed</b>	Minimum 30% affordable housing, with a tenure mix reflecting local needs and integrating affordable homes seamlessly.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Provide homes for a broad range of households including key workers, older residents and families to support a balanced community.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Ensure affordable homes match market units in design quality, specification, access and amenity.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>High-Quality Design</b>	Prioritise dual-aspect homes and minimise north-facing single-aspect units unless exceptional quality is demonstrated.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Exceed BRE daylight standards, particularly in taller buildings.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Provide private outdoor space (balconies, winter gardens) and high-quality shared spaces such as courtyards or roof gardens.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Maintain appropriate privacy and overlooking distances using massing, orientation and façade design.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Deliver generous, functional layouts that meet or exceed national space standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Balanced, Practical and FamilyReady</b>	Ensure design responds to Reading’s industrial and riverside character.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Provide a balanced mix of 1, 2 and 3-bed homes, with a meaningful proportion designed for families.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Ensure noise and ventilation strategies support comfort while enabling evening and cultural venues to operate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Long-Term Care and Stewardship</b>	Offer easy access to play space, green space, schools, health services, local shops and safe walking/cycling routes.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Set clear expectations for management, maintenance, servicing, waste and recycling.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Design communal areas to feel welcoming and genuinely shared.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Provide long-term management strategies for shared spaces including planting, rooftops, play areas and public realm.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Support community-building through shared facilities and active resident engagement.	<input type="checkbox"/>



**PRECEDENT:  
SOUTH GARDENS, ELEPHANT PARK,  
LONDON**

This integrated landscape design of 3 courtyards and 2 communal roof gardens was a finalist in the Landezine International Award and delivers a 'liveable, engaging, playful and beautiful residential landscape with intrinsic ecological value'. The roofscape covers an area of just under 0.5 hectare which is larger than the surrounding ground landscape.

[www.landezine-award.com/south-gardens-elephant-park](http://www.landezine-award.com/south-gardens-elephant-park)



**PRECEDENT:  
PORTOBELLO SQUARE, KENSINGTON, CATALYST HOUSING**

This 1,000 home super-density development in the west of London comprises a mix of 1 and 2 bedroom apartments, 3 bedroom mews houses and 4 bedroom family homes.

Inspired by London's most successful housing typologies, the mews and the mansion block, the scheme borrows heavily on this part of London's Victorian heritage, (something it shares with Reading) to create a mixed tenure and varied scale of neighbourhood, blending family living with smaller starter units.



# Principle 2

# Transforming Reading's Rivers and Public Spaces

## WHY?

Reading town centre is shaped by its rivers. The **Thames**, **Kennet** and **Holy Brook** meet at its heart, creating a distinctive landscape that has supported trade and industry for centuries and now offers major benefits for quality of life, climate resilience and economic vitality.

As the centre grows denser, access to high quality public space and everyday contact with nature become increasingly important. More residents, workers and visitors place greater pressure on streets and parks, while hotter summers and heavier rainfall require public spaces that can provide shade, comfort and resilience. In this context, rivers and parks must function not only as leisure spaces but as essential urban infrastructure.

Yet many riverside corridors remain hard to find, disconnected or lacking the comfort, lighting and activity needed for regular use. Parks such as **Forbury Gardens**, **Christchurch Meadows** and **King's Meadow** are valued but often operate as isolated destinations rather than part of a joined up network. As a result, rivers and green spaces are still experienced as edges, not integral elements of the town centre.

This principle responds to that challenge by positioning Reading's rivers and public spaces as a connected system that cools streets, manages surface water, supports biodiversity, enables cultural activity and provides everyday places to spend time. Transforming these assets into a coherent, welcoming network will strengthen wellbeing, civic pride and the overall appeal of the town centre.



# WHAT

## 2.1 A PARKS AND RIVERS NETWORK

- Create a seamless network linking the Thames, Kennet and Holy Brook to town centre parks (Forbury Gardens, Kings Meadow, Christchurch Meadows), cultural anchors (Abbey Quarter, Town Hall/Museum) and key routes (Station–Core via Union Street or Station Road), Minster Quarter, Oracle Riverside).



unlocked while strengthening Reading's riverside identity and creating new walking and leisure opportunities.

## 2.2 IMPROVED ACCESS TO OUR RIVERS

- Strengthen everyday access between the station area and Thames via Vastern Road, Christchurch Bridge and Norman Place, and between the Core and Kennet through the Oracle Riverside, Kings Road, and Huntley Wharf. Reading Riverworks demonstrates how high quality public access to the Thames can be

- Prioritise upgrades along Napier Road, Reading Bridge, King's Meadow connections, and fragmented stretches of the Kennet so rivers become natural destinations for residents, workers and visitors.
- Provide seating, shading, clear wayfinding and event ready spaces along riverside routes such as Oracle Riverside, Chestnut Walk, Abbey Wharf and Huntley Wharf.





**PRECEDENT:  
POCKET PARK  
PROGRAMME,  
LONDON**

The Mayor of London's Pocket Park Programme saw the delivery of over 100 'parklets' in 26 London boroughs. £2m of seed funding was utilised by communities to deliver a programme of orchards, edible bus stops and small public spaces to provide "relief from the hustle and bustle of city streets".

[www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/parks-green-spaces-and-biodiversity/pocket-parks-map](http://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/parks-green-spaces-and-biodiversity/pocket-parks-map)



**PRECEDENT:  
PLAY ON THE WAY, FEN  
COURT, CITY OF LONDON**

Neither a sculpture nor a traditional playground, this project brings an element of unexpected play into the city, inviting people to interact with one another and their surroundings in new ways and shifting perceptions of public space.

By looking at design from an unusual perspective – that of a child's – the architects saw the opportunity for bringing in a more playful or even contemplative atmosphere to the spaces in the heart of the business area which can engage families, visitors and city-workers alike.



Ref 1

**PRECEDENT:  
GENERAL EXAMPLES  
OF GREEN  
PLACEMAKING**

Increased urban greening and biodiversity should be an inherent aim of any development or public space improvement scheme.

Linking to RBC's existing Tree Strategy, doorstep greening can be accommodated on walls, roofs, and in the street.

Opportunities can be found everywhere and can lead to additional spaces to reflect, dwell and provide a platform for community stewardship.



**PRECEDENT:  
OPEN SPACE INSTEAD OF  
PARKING**

The German town of Siegen shared similar difficulties to Reading in that much of its urban water space was land locked and without meaningful access. In 2013 the municipality ran a European landscape design competition to remodel a 230 space car park along the River Sieg and re-purpose this as a quality new promenade and waterfront access. Completed in 2015, the re-profiling of the urban watercourse has become a destination for waterfront retail and recreation.

[www.zukunft-mobilitaet.net/116021/urbane-mobilitaet/siegplatte-abriss-siegeberkrugung-siegen-zu-neuen-ufern](http://www.zukunft-mobilitaet.net/116021/urbane-mobilitaet/siegplatte-abriss-siegeberkrugung-siegen-zu-neuen-ufern)



# WHAT

## 2.3 HISTORIC GATEWAYS, CIVIC SQUARES AND PARKS

- Transform civic gateways such as St Mary’s Butts, Market Place, the approaches to the Abbey Quarter, and the Minster Quarter, so they feel welcoming, heritage led and easier to navigate.
- Reinforce Forbury Gardens as Reading’s central green space for events, gatherings and cultural programming, linked more visibly to the Abbey Quarter and Town Hall.
- Ensure new squares at Station Hill and Minster Quarter Central provide high-quality, flexible public space with clear heritage connections (e.g., views to the Minster, Abbey, or reflect historic street patterns).

**PRECEDENT:  
FISHERGATE, PRESTON**  
The project, funded by £1.38m from the European Regional Development Fund and £2m from Lancashire County Council, aimed to improve key gateways into the city.  
[www.preston.gov.uk/media/2300/Preston-City-Transport-Plan-2019-/pdf/preston-ctp.pdf?m=637079473620800000&ccp=t rue#cookie-consent-prompt](http://www.preston.gov.uk/media/2300/Preston-City-Transport-Plan-2019-/pdf/preston-ctp.pdf?m=637079473620800000&ccp=t rue#cookie-consent-prompt)



before



after



before



after (proposal stage)

**PRECEDENT:  
GLASGOW  
AVENUES, BY URBAN  
MOVEMENT**  
The Glasgow Avenues project is a key initiative proposed as a catalyst to dramatically improve the quality of the city centre environment. This would be achieved through rethinking the city’s main streets.  
[www.urbanmovement.co.uk/glasgowavenues](http://www.urbanmovement.co.uk/glasgowavenues)



**PRECEDENT:  
GREY TO GREEN, SHEFFIELD**  
This innovative environmental and economic development strategy undertaken by Sheffield City Council delivers on 3 objectives:

- re-connecting the Castlegate area with the rest of the city centre;
- finding a more efficient use for large areas of underutilised highway land; and
- mitigating the severe impact that the floods in June 2007 had on Castlegate.

As a consequence of its completion in summer 2020, the project has become a catalyst for environmental and economic regeneration.  
[www.greytogreen.org.uk](http://www.greytogreen.org.uk)

# WHAT

## 2.4 POCKET PARKS AND PLAY

- Introduce small green moments and playful elements along the most-used walking desire lines such as Station Road to Broad Street; Oxford Road corridor; Gun Street/Minster Street; Kings Road; Kennet towpaths, especially near schools, youth spaces, and high-density housing on the East and West Sides.



## 2.5 SAFE AND RESILIENT

- Strengthen town centre safety and resilience by integrating Martyn's Law-aligned measures into public realm and venue design including clear sightlines, reduced clutter, well lit transitions, and proportionate hostile vehicle mitigation in busy areas such as Broad Street and St Mary's Butts, ensuring safety enhancements support (rather than conflict with) accessibility and the creation of welcoming streets.



## 2.6 INTEGRATED GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

- Embed nature-based design in all upgrades to Friar Street, Oxford Road, St Mary's Butts, Kings Road and IDR crossings, using rain gardens, green verges, shade, trees and habitat links.
- Align with Reading's climate and biodiversity goals so new development delivers measurable gains in the town centre.



# Principle 3

## Enabling Connected and Active Travel

### WHY?

Movement defines the experience of Central Reading. The town centre is a major transport hub, with one of the country's busiest rail stations and the western terminus of the Elizabeth line. Tens of thousands of people arrive daily on foot, by bike, bus and train, while others pass around the centre via the IDR and Thames crossings.

This connectivity is a strength, but it creates pressure. Key streets, crossings and gateways can be busy, uncomfortable or confusing, and wide roads and complex junctions make short walking trips feel longer and less inviting. Through traffic also contributes to congestion, poor air quality and competition for limited street space.

As the town centre accommodates more homes, jobs and activity, these pressures will grow unless movement is rebalanced. Reading cannot deliver a high quality, liveable centre if walking, cycling and public transport remain secondary to car movement, or meet its climate and health ambitions without making sustainable travel the easiest, most attractive choice.

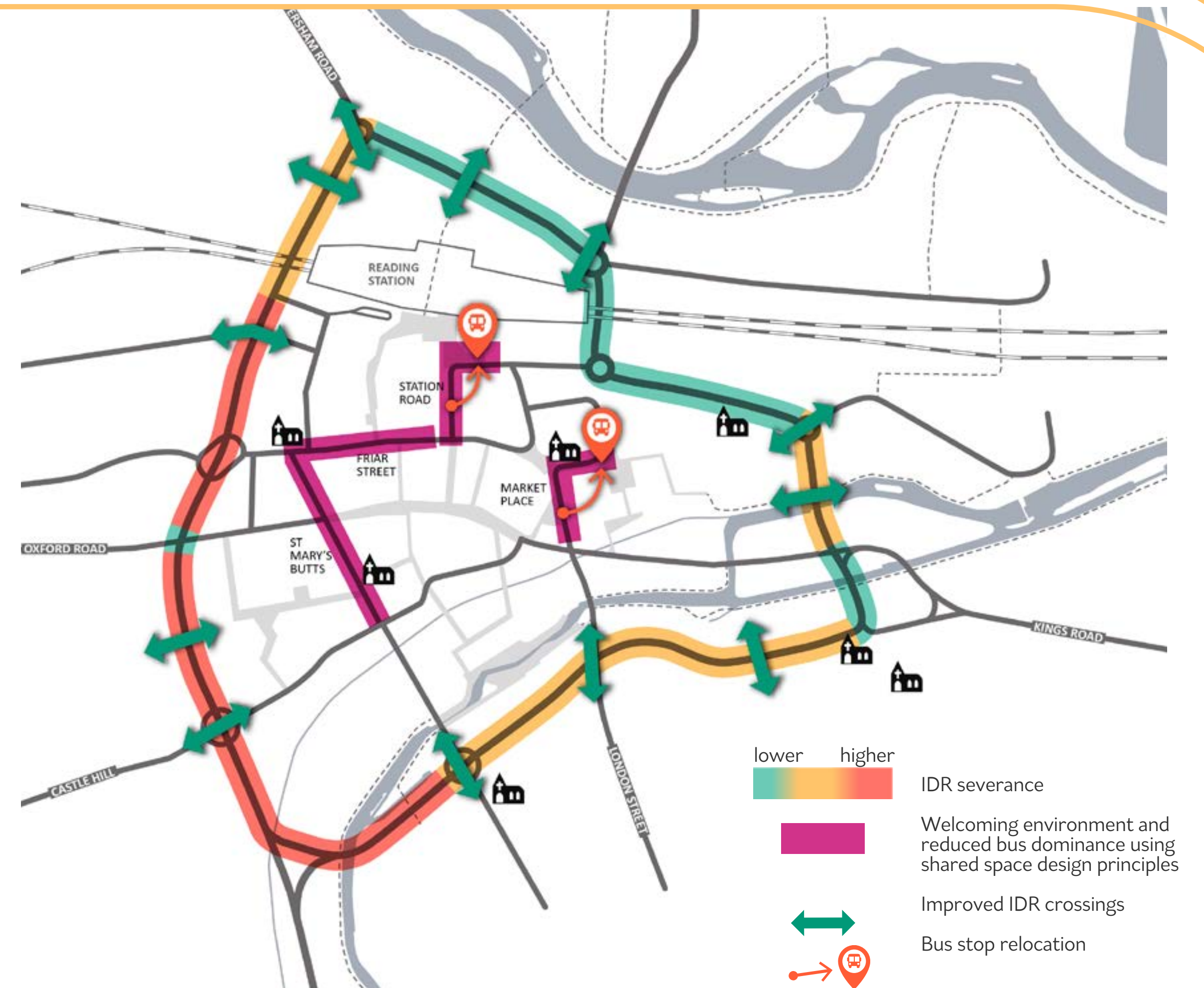


Figure 2. Improvements to IDR severance and bus dominance

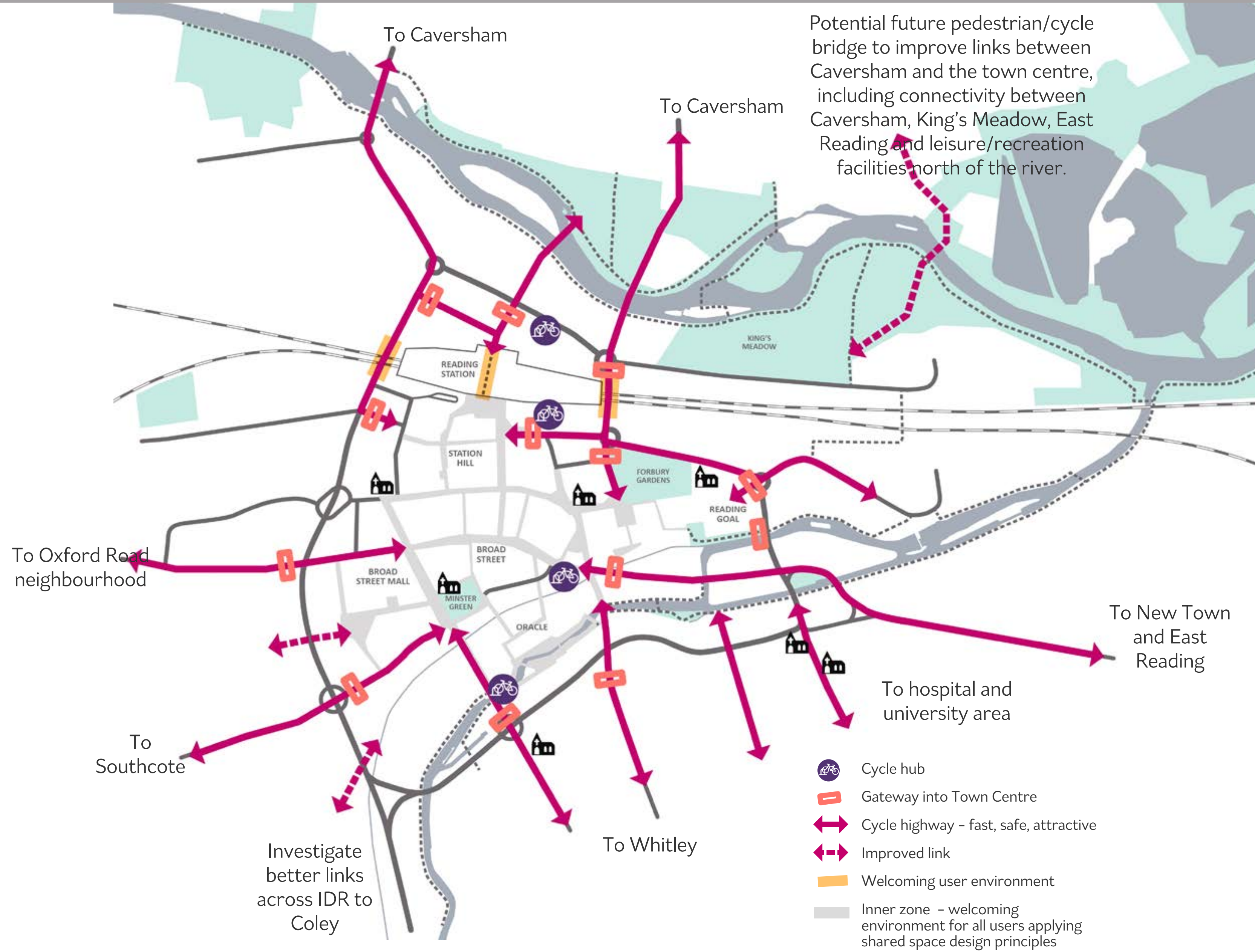


Figure 3. Modal shift towards walking and cycling

# WHAT

## 3.1 A COHERENT, WELCOMING STATION GATEWAY

- Transform the Brunel Arcade area and Station Road into a legible, low stress gateway that clearly guides people to Broad Street, Abbey Quarter, the Thames and the retail core. As one of the town centre's most significant arrival points, the Arcade should evolve into a welcoming, well designed public environment that matches the scale of footfall and the strategic role it plays. Upgrading this space as part of a coordinated gateway approach will be critical to delivering a station arrival that reflects Reading's ambitions for a modern, accessible and people focused town centre
- Reduce conflict between buses, taxis and pedestrians at the station approaches, especially the Station Road bus cluster and the north-south links between the

station and Vastern Road.

- Enhance a consistent station-to-core walking route via Station Road, Queen Victoria Street and Broad Street, with high-quality paving, planting, seating, lighting and active frontages.
- Enhance alternative station-to-core walking routes through Station Hill, Friar Street and Union Street (Smelly Alley) with high quality animated uses and attractive shop frontages.

## 3.2 FIXING BARRIERS

The IDR remains a major barrier to walking and cycling due to high traffic volumes and difficult crossings; bridges and junctions also undermine safety and legibility. Actions include:

- Upgrade the highest-stress IDR crossings at Castle Hill, Queens Road, Oxford Road, Chatham Street/ West Side approaches with better lighting, visibility,

green infrastructure and simplified junctions.

- Improve underpasses and bridge approaches including Queens Road, Vastern Road underpass, Reading Bridge, and connections between the East Side and Kings Road.
- Developing long term cross Thames improvements with neighbouring local authorities to reduce vehicular congestion in the town centre.

These changes reconnect communities such as Caversham, West Reading and east side neighbourhoods to the town centre.

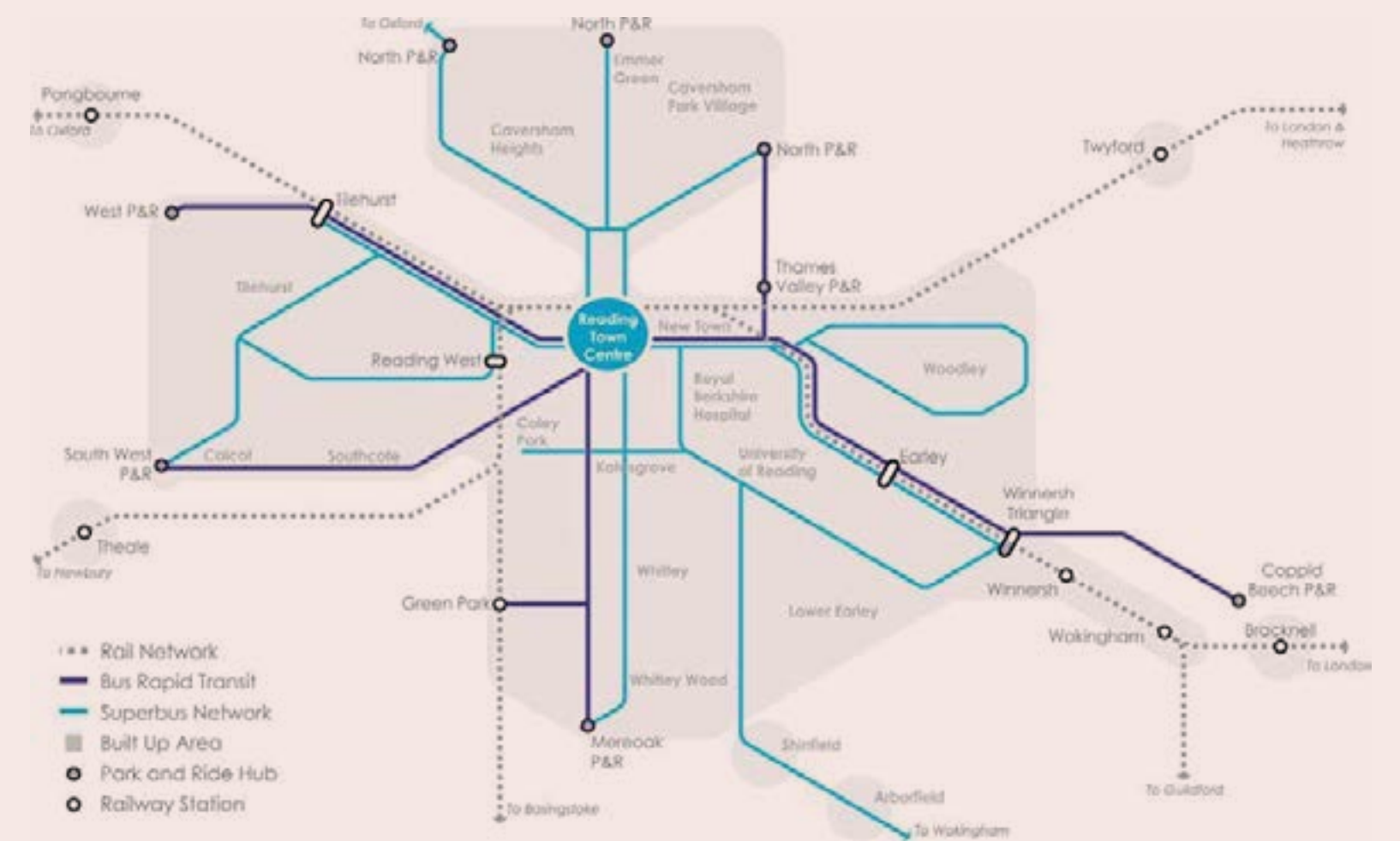
## 3.3 COMPLETING CONTINUOUS WALKING AND CYCLING ROUTES

Low car lifestyles depend on safe, direct, comfortable routes along priority corridors. This means:

- Deliver continuous,

uncluttered pedestrian and cycling routes linking the station with the Core, Thames, Kennet, Abbey Quarter, Minster Quarter, West Side and cultural anchors.

- Expand high-quality cycle hubs near the station (including on both north and south sides) and at key destinations such as the Oracle, Broad Street Mall and Minster Quarter.
- Upgrade riverside paths so they support everyday commuting as well as leisure, with safer surfaces, lighting and wayfinding.
- Highlighting national trails (Thames Path and St James' Way) as part of Reading's identity.



# WHAT

## 3.4 MAKING PUBLIC TRANSPORT THE RELIABLE ALTERNATIVE

Public transport must remain the most convenient way to reach and move through the centre. Key actions include:

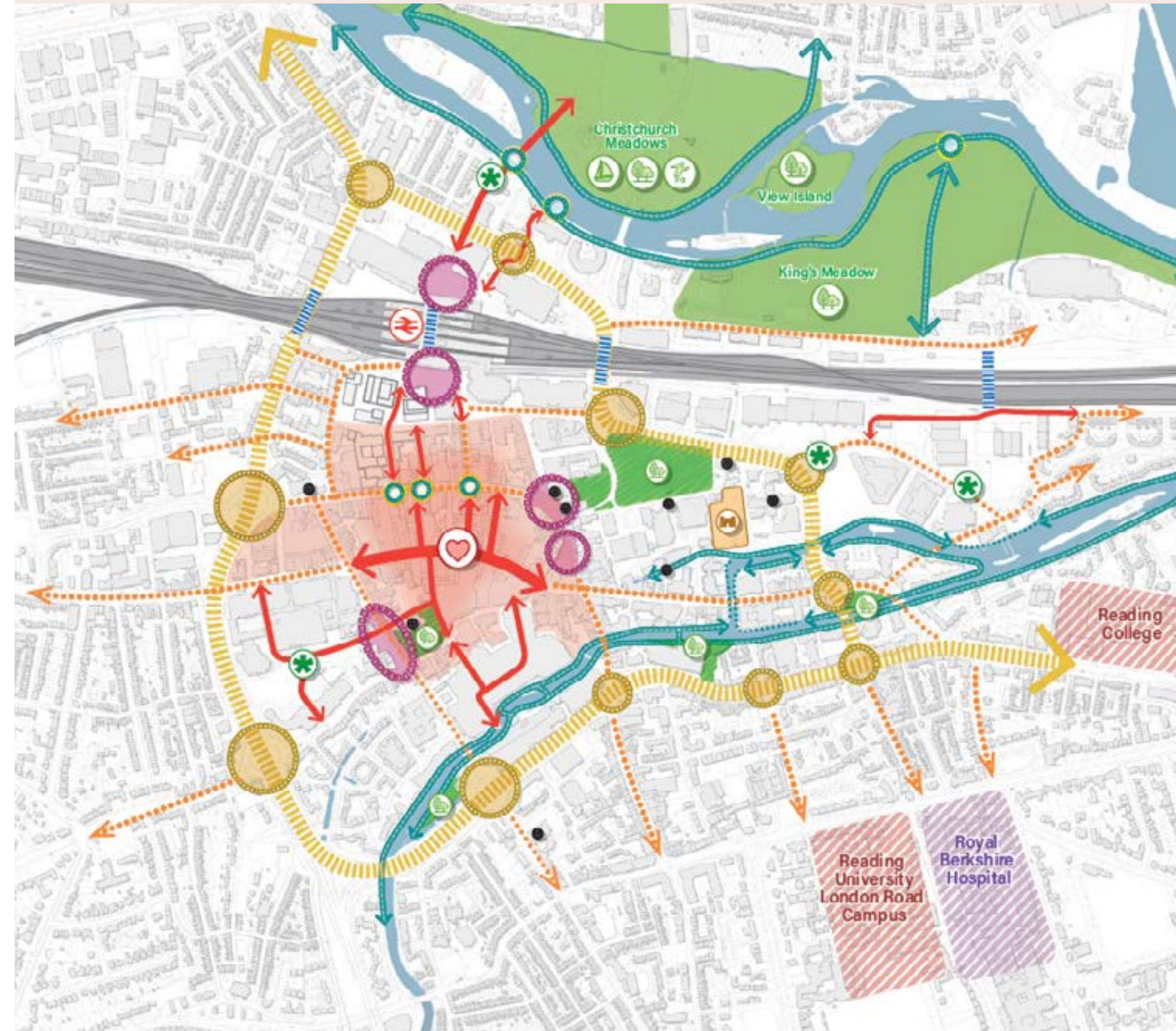
- Delivering Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridors and Park & Ride capacity.
- Strengthen town-centre bus priority at key pinch points (Friar Street, Kings Road), ensuring smoother links to neighbourhoods and employment hubs.
- Improve clarity and wayfinding at the station so passengers can easily connect between train, bus, taxi and cycle modes.

This supports the shift to sustainable travel, improves air quality and provides inclusive access.

## 3.5 SMARTER MOBILITY

Smart technology and shared mobility can reduce pressure on streets and parking, especially in a low car town centre. These measures support households without cars while enabling occasional vehicle access:

- Expand car clubs and mobility hubs around major residential clusters such as Station Hill, Chatham Place, Minster Quarter/Broad Street, Huntley Wharf, or edge of town to reduce parking pressure.
- Integrating real time public transport information, journey planning and smart traffic management in key locations.



This diagram presents an aspirational layout for the town centre, with extended pedestrian and cycle networks, good linkages, quality civic and green spaces and good access to the rivers Thames and Kennet.

- Key primary pedestrian and cycle only network through the core of the town centre. These links should be preserved, enhanced and extended
- Enhanced secondary and tertiary links to extend the reach of the town centre and encourage walking and cycling to overcome the severance generated by the IDR
- Existing and future public and civic spaces. These should be inviting, allow gatherings and events and be at the heart of the town's life
- Transformed IDR through the introduction of green infrastructure, SuDs and carriageway width reduction where possible
- Enhanced nodes to allow better pedestrian & cycle connectivity
- Sub nodes / decision making points for pedestrians
- New areas of open space (as identified in Local Plan)
- Enhanced and safe underpasses for pedestrians & cyclists
- Continuous long distance cycle and pedestrian routes
- Enhanced urban green spaces to include community amenity spaces, good linkage and biodiverse planting
- Extensive green space with clear and inviting pedestrian access from the town centre
- Key town centre landmarks

# Principle 4

## Building a Greener, Climate-Resilient Town Centre

### WHY?

Reading has declared a climate emergency and committed to a net zero, climate resilient future for the town. Central Reading, with its density, connectivity and concentration of activity, is where these commitments must be most visibly delivered.

The town centre already faces the impacts of a warming climate: hotter days intensified by hard surfaces, surface water flooding after heavy rainfall, and poorer air quality on the busiest corridors. Many buildings and infrastructure are older and require retrofit rather than replacement.

Embedding climate resilience into everyday decisions is therefore not just about new development. It means creating streets and buildings that are comfortable, healthy and affordable to run, and using investment to demonstrate that low-carbon approaches to heating, cooling and energy generation can be practical and trusted by residents, businesses and developers.



# WHAT

## 4.1 CLEAN ENERGY FOR HEAT AND BUILDINGS

- Enable low-carbon heat solutions through planning, including heat-network readiness and decentralised energy where appropriate. Ensure large schemes in opportunity areas are heat network ready, especially where concentrated demand exists (Minster Quarter, East Side riverside) to reflect emerging government policy.
- Apply a fabric-first approach in new developments and integrate renewables where feasible, particularly on large sites with high solar exposure.
- Expand retrofit programmes for existing and heritage buildings to improve comfort, efficiency and insulation while respecting Reading's unique historic character.

## 4.2 GREENING THE CENTRE (COOLING, BIODIVERSITY AND COMFORT)

- Use trees and planting to cool the busiest walking routes including Broad Street, Friar Street, Station Road, Kings Road, Oxford Road, and the IDR crossings.
- Strengthen access to nature by treating the Thames, Kennet and parks as the backbone of Reading's green identity.

## 4.3 WATER MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE (SUDS)

- Integrate high-visibility SuDS (rain gardens, planters, permeable surfaces) into upgrades on Kings Road, St Mary's Butts, Minster Quarter, and the Oracle riverside area

to manage surface water.

- Use redevelopment and public-realm projects to deliver visible, well-maintained SuDS features that also enhance character and comfort.

## 4.4 CLEANER MOBILITY AND AIR QUALITY

- Build on Reading's low-emission bus investment by prioritising clean fleets for the most congested corridors around the IDR and Kings Road.
- Accelerate the shift to lower-emission travel through cleaner fleets and charging infrastructure, ensuring EV measures support, rather than undermine, wider aims to reduce car dependency.
- Embed air-quality improvements in all public-realm redesigns, focusing on Station Road, Friar Street and

Kings Road where footfall and bus movement are highest.

## 4.5 LOW CARBON OPERATIONS AND GREEN JOBS

- Continue to support local businesses to reduce energy and encourage participation in local energy and sustainability initiatives as they develop through town-centre climate programmes such as the Reading Climate Change Partnership.
- Explore opportunities for expanding green skills and climate research linked to the University of Reading.
- Promote the town centre as a focal point for low carbon services through workspace clusters, particularly in the Station & River area.



# Principle 5

## Celebrating Reading's Culture, Heritage and Identity

### WHY?

Reading's identity is shaped by its rivers, rail, industry and strong Victorian legacy, reflected in its buildings, streets and civic institutions. New growth should strengthen this character, so development feels rooted in the town's history rather than diluting it.

Reading's story is layered. From its abbey and medieval core to its industrial heritage, diverse communities and contemporary cultural scene. Culture and heritage are not just assets to protect; they drive community life, wellbeing and economic growth and help distinguish Reading from competing centres.

As the town centre grows, there is a risk that local character is weakened unless heritage, culture and local stories are deliberately embedded in design and programming. Major anchors, the Abbey Quarter, Town Hall and Museum, the Hexagon and Minster, remain under-connected and less

visible than they could be. Recent developments such as Station Hill show the importance of weaving Reading's heritage and identity into new public spaces so they feel rooted in place rather than generic.

This principle ensures culture and heritage are woven into everyday town centre life, reflecting Reading's long tradition of openness and the many communities who have shaped it, creating a centre that feels welcoming and familiar to everyone who arrives here.



# WHAT

## 5.1 CONNECTING CULTURAL ANCHORS

- Strengthen legible, heritage-led routes linking Abbey Quarter, Minster Quarter and riversides using wayfinding, storytelling and public realm cues.
- Make cultural journeys visible from the busiest arrival routes such as the Station, Oxford Road and Oracle through signage, lighting and active frontages.

## 5.2 EMBEDDING CULTURE IN REGENERATION

- Secure cultural and creative spaces as part of major regeneration particularly at Minster Quarter Central, Station Hill and emerging development sites, supporting rehearsal, small performance, community arts and learning

activities with the new Hexagon Studio Theatre providing a benchmark.

## 5.3 SUPPORTING GRASSROOTS CREATIVITY

- Treat heritage context as a design asset, especially around Reading Gaol, where culture and heritage should shape future proposals.
- Grow community-led arts, music, markets and maker activity through affordable units in Station Hill, Harris Arcade, Queen Victoria Street and Broad Street Mall.
- Support meanwhile cultural uses in vacant units during large regeneration phases.

## 5.4 ANIMATING PUBLIC SPACES

- Ensure new and existing civic spaces such as Hexagon Square, Station Hill squares, Market Place and Forbury Gardens are event-ready with power, lighting and flexible layouts.
- Use riverside spaces (Chestnut Walk, Oracle Riverside, Kennet towpath, Kings Meadow, Christchurch Meadow) as outdoor stages for cultural activity.



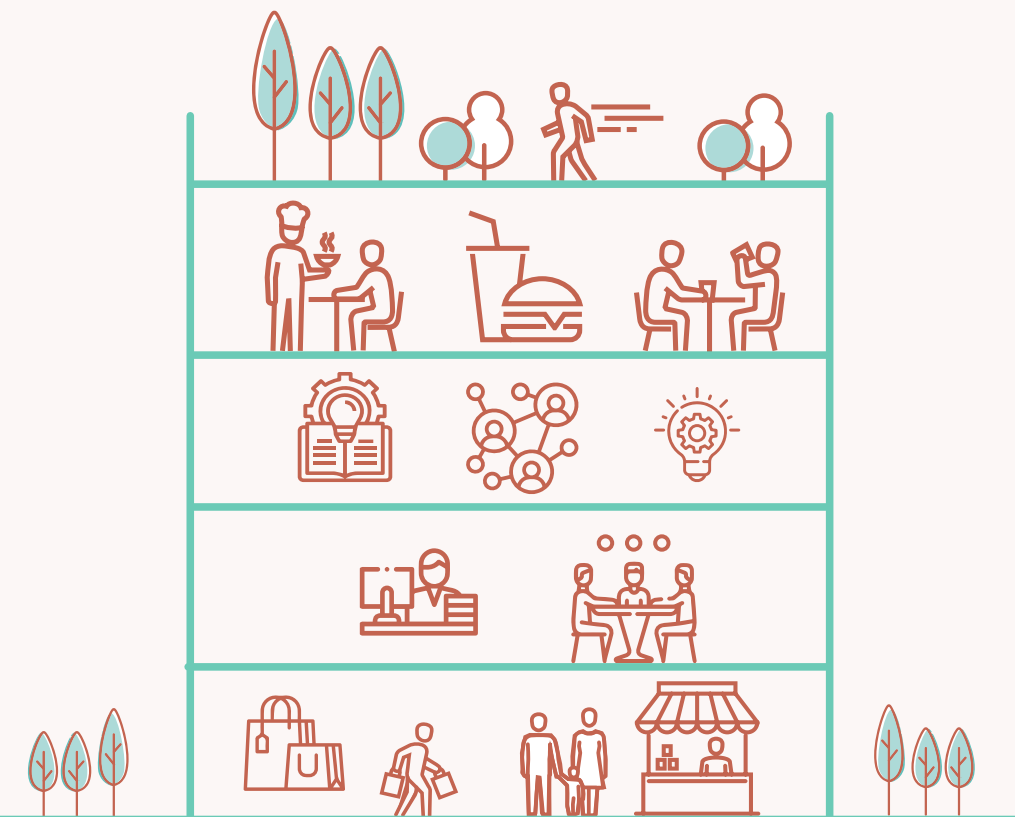
# Principle 6

## Reimagining the Town Centre Experience

### WHY?

Reading has long been a strong retail destination, but national trends mean retail alone can no longer sustain vitality. The town centre's future depends on the quality of its overall experience; the mix of uses, the comfort of its streets, and a welcoming atmosphere across the day and evening.

Although the centre remains busy and economically strong, some streets feel dominated by movement or single uses, and certain areas struggle with vacancy or weaker evening activity. This principle strengthens the reasons to spend time in the centre, stay longer and return more often, while supporting local businesses and a balanced evening economy.



ADAPTABLE FLOORPLATES AND LAYERED ASSETS

OPPORTUNITY FOR MIXED USE INCLUDING F&B, EDUCATION, COMMUNITY, WORKSPACE, RESIDENTIAL, HEALTH AND LEISURE



#### PRECEDENT: CRATE, WALTHAMSTOW

Former council car park developed into a micro retail and leisure hub. Affordable micro space let to a blended mix of occupiers within retail, F&B and workspace. Increased activity throughout the day and local retailer increased sales. Business mentoring and collaborative tenant workshops provided by Crate to support occupiers.

[www.stjamesstreet.crateuk.com](http://www.stjamesstreet.crateuk.com)



# WHAT

## 6.1 A DISTINCTIVE RETAIL EXPERIENCE

- Strengthen and support Reading's retail anchors (Oracle, Broad Street Mall, Broad Street) while enhancing characterful arcades and streets (Harris Arcade, Queen Victoria Street, Cross Street, Union Street) to support independents and a future Heritage Retail Quarter.
- Keep smaller units available in key areas, learning from the Station Hill approach along Friars Walk to support future independents in areas such as Union Street, Harris Arcade, Chain Street and Queen Victoria Street.

## 6.2 REBALANCING KEY STREETS AND SPACES

- Improve lighting, shade, seating and crossings along Broad Street, Friar Street, Oxford Road and Kings Road, and reduce clutter to

enhance comfort and appeal.

- Work with transport partners to make streets and intersections such as Market Place more balanced between vehicle movement and pedestrian activity.

## 6.3 SUPPORTING FLEXIBLE USES

- Activate quieter streets (Gun Street, Cross Street, King's Road edges, Oxford Road east end) with short-term leases, pop-ups, creative uses and food markets.
- Use flexible licensing for street food, micro-events and makers' markets to build activity during regeneration cycles.

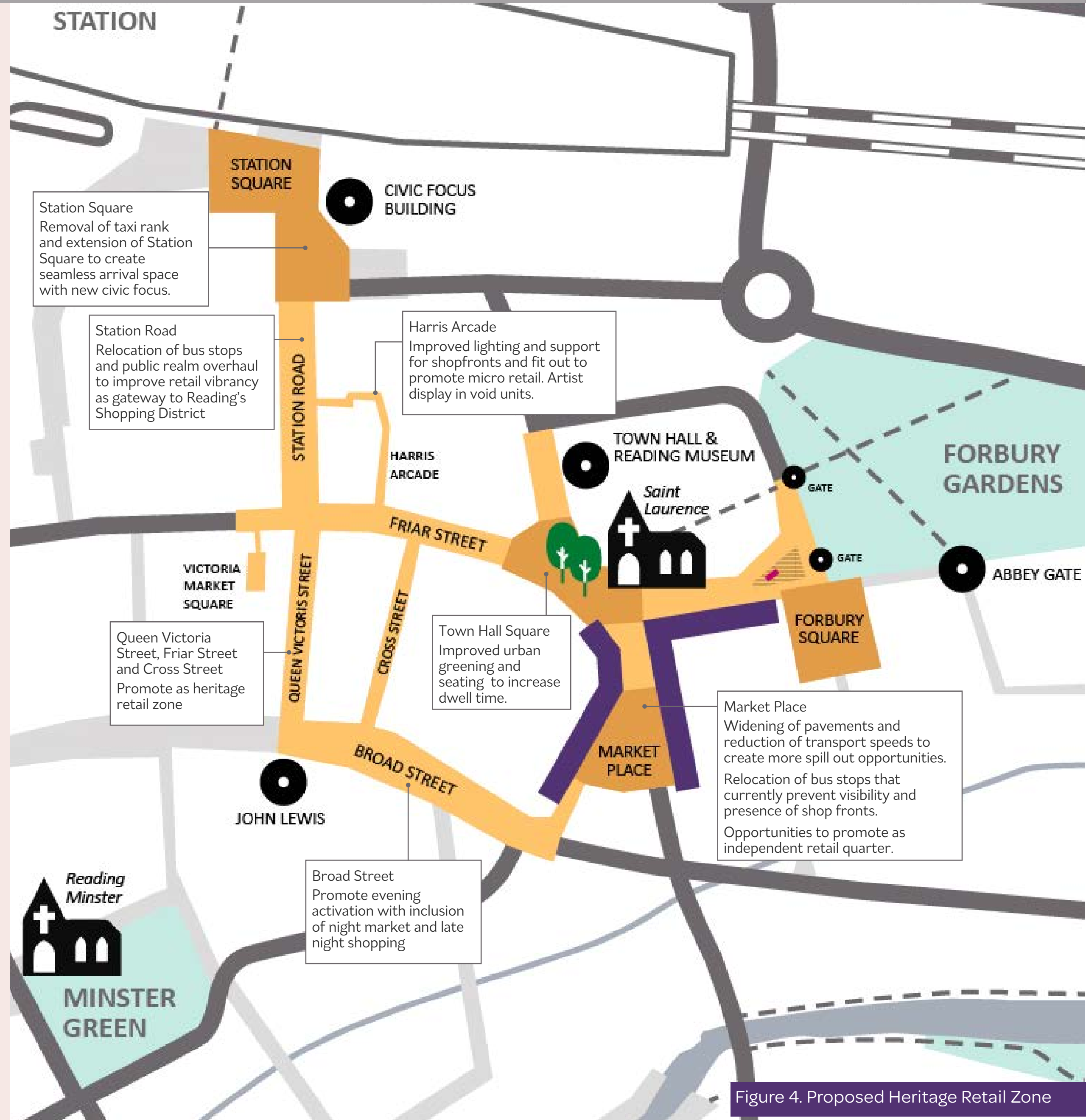


Figure 4. Proposed Heritage Retail Zone

# WHAT

## 6.4 A THRIVING WATERSIDE ECONOMY

- Build on major sites already reshaping the riverside. Oracle proposals introduce new public realm along the Kennet; at Huntley Wharf, a riverside square animated the water's edge. Existing destinations such as Thames Lido show how high quality leisure uses can anchor a stronger waterside economy.
- Work with waterways partners to support appropriate leisure, activity and culture on and beside the water, and ensure the town centre is welcoming to people arriving by boat.
- Improve the visibility of the Thames Path and Kennet from the retail core so riverside time becomes part of the town centre experience.

## 6.5 A VIBRANT AND SAFE EVENING ECONOMY

- Diversify evening activity around the Hexagon, Station Hill, Oracle Riverside and Friar Street, Castle Street and Gun Street, supporting later cafés, family-friendly events and cultural programming.
- Coordinate safety improvements with the Community Safety Partnership to improve lighting, visibility and confidence at night.

## 6.6 MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT THAT STRENGTHENS EXPERIENCE

- Secure active, welcoming ground floors in major schemes such as Station Hill, Broad Street Mall and Minster Quarter Central, ensuring day-to-evening vibrancy.
- Support grassroots operators through continuity spaces such as Blue Collar markets and Blue Collar Corner during redevelopment phases.



# Principle 7

## Supporting Growth and Innovation

### WHY?

Reading has long been a strong retail destination, but national trends mean retail alone can no longer sustain vitality. The town centre's fuReading is one of the UK's most productive economies, with strong growth in tech, professional services and knowledge-based sectors. The town centre must continue to support this success while remaining accessible and inclusive.

Successful town centres provide space not only for major employers but also for startups, creatives and small businesses that benefit from proximity, visibility and collaboration. In Reading, this is reinforced by exceptional connectivity, a strong skills base and close links to major employers and institutions.

This principle ensures Central Reading can support innovation at different scales, strengthening long-term

competitiveness and opportunity.

Reading competes in a high-performing, highly connected region. Evidence shows that it is already one of the UK's most productive places, with forecasts identifying it as a leading location for near-term growth. The town centre plays a specific role in this story: town-centre clusters are where knowledge-based businesses grow. To stay attractive to skilled workers, the centre must offer the right mix of workspaces, services and public spaces for modern working patterns, especially for smaller businesses, startups and creative or tech activity that benefits from proximity and networking.

Creating room for innovation also broadens access to good jobs for local people, helping Reading sustain its economic advantage.



# WHAT

## 7.1 AFFORDABLE AND FLEXIBLE WORKSPACES

- Build a pipeline of flexible workspace around Reading's major regeneration and opportunity areas, including incubators where feasible.
- Support maker and creative spaces (e.g., Reading Hackspace) through small format ground floor units that help ideas grow into longer term town centre enterprises.
- Re-use suitable vacant units for co-working, studios and small business space in locations that support footfall and safety.

## 7.2 SUPPORTING HIGH GROWTH SECTORS

- Build on Reading's strengths in tech and professional services by fostering meet-ups, grow-on space and digital innovation around Station Hill and the station's north-south interchange. This is an

emerging hub that connects the town centre directly to Thames Valley Park, Green Park and wider regional employment networks.

- Support creative and digital production linked not only to Shinfield Studios, Hexagon and the new Studio Theatre, but also to Reading Biscuit Factory, South Street Arts Centre and independent content studios across the town centre, strengthening a connected system of places where creators can produce, rehearse and innovate.
- Explore opportunities for town-centre footholds in science and health-adjacent activity, creating space for training, community outreach and innovation showcases connected to the Royal Berkshire Hospital and the University's health and life-sciences strengths.

## 7.3 FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND "STREET LEVEL INNOVATION"

- Secure small and flexible ground-floor units in new developments so independents and startups can enter the town centre.
- Use meanwhile spaces across the town centre such as underused units to incubate early-stage businesses, testing new food, retail, cultural and creative concepts. Popular high potential routes to Broad Street such as Union Street, Queen Victoria Street and Cross Street provide ideal environments for local independents.
- Work with local business networks including the Central and Abbey Quarter BID, and Reading's Economy & Destination Agency (REDA) to link enterprise support and events with on the ground opportunities.

## 7.4 PUBLIC FACING ANCHORS FOR GROWTH

- Strengthen civic anchors such as the new Civic Library, Reading Museum, Hexagon Studio Theatre, and emerging community hubs to increase footfall, participation and learning in the heart of Reading.

## 7.5 EVIDENCE LED MANAGEMENT

- Track vacancies, footfall, evening activity, riverside use, and the impact of interventions across the town centre
- Use data to prioritise quick wins (e.g., temporary pedestrian space trials on Friar Street, or wayfinding improvements identified in the movement audit) and guide long-term decisions on workspace, retail balance and access to skills.

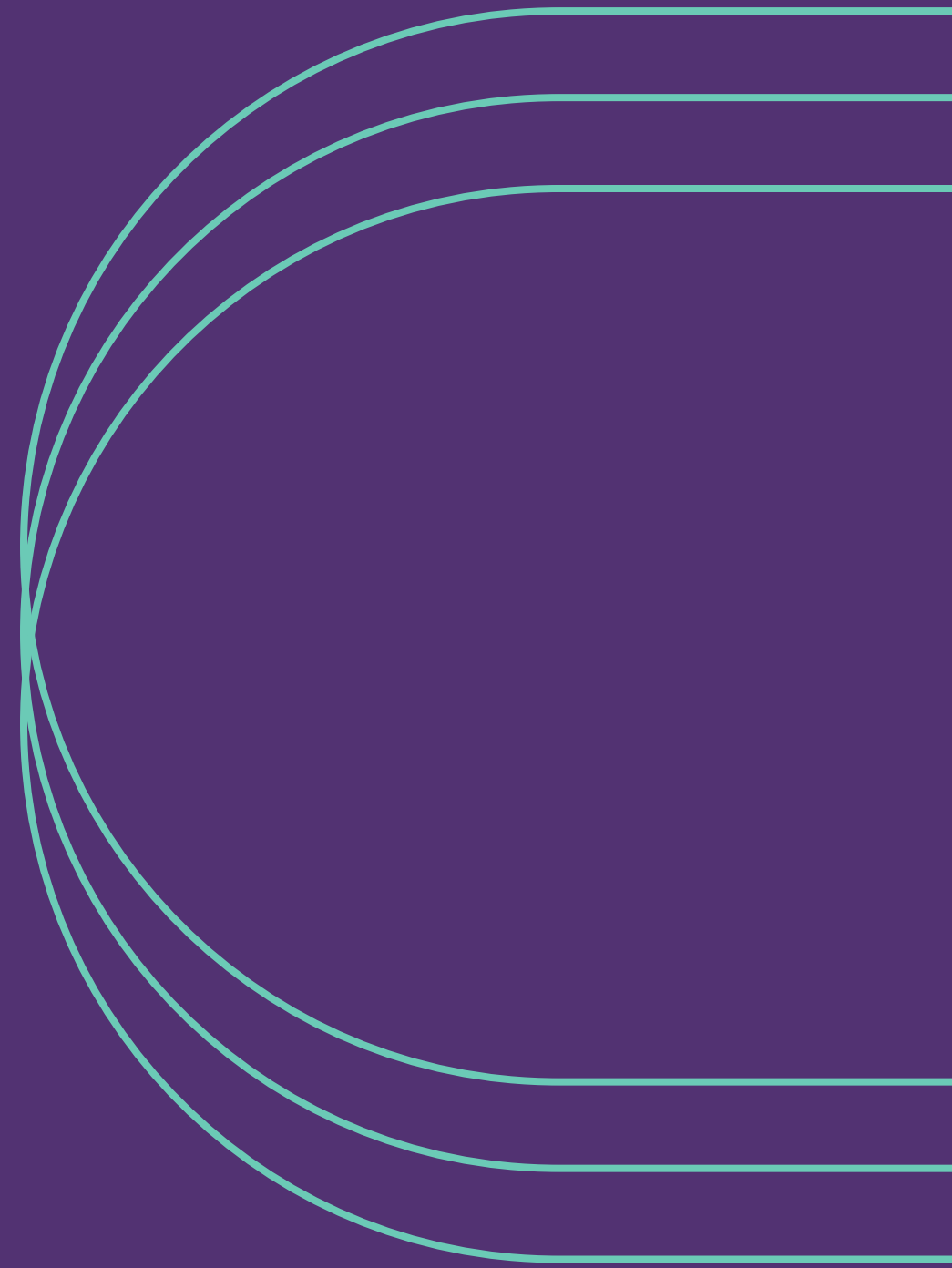


# NEXT STEPS FROM VISION TO DELIVERY PLAN

This vision sets the direction for Reading town centre. The next stage is a Delivery Plan that turns the principles into a coordinated programme of projects, priorities, funding routes and responsibilities. It will show what happens, when, by whom, and how progress will be measured.

SECTION	ACTION/DETAIL
<b>1. What Happens Next</b>	→ Translate the principles into a structured set of projects.
	→ Set out short, medium and long term priorities.
	→ Identify ownership (Council lead, partners, joint delivery).
	→ Clarify dependencies (transport, land, approvals).
	→ Establish funding routes (Council capital, external grants, developer contributions, partnerships).
<b>2. How the Delivery Plan Will Be Developed</b>	→ Build a single programme – combine all existing commitments and identify gaps.
	→ Map principles to workstreams – group the principles into a deliverable set of workstreams.
	→ Prioritise using clear criteria (impact, deliverability, Value for Money, inclusion, climate resilience, ability to unlock regeneration).
	→ Confirm delivery routes and responsibilities.
	→ Define measures of success — establish a small set of indicators for consistent tracking.
<b>3. Partnership Working and Engagement</b>	→ Coordinate across: landowners/developers; cultural organisations/venues; businesses and the BID; transport partners/neighbouring authorities; health, education and community partners; voluntary and resident groups.
<b>4. Governance, Accountability &amp; Reporting</b>	→ Define governance: named leads and partners.
	→ Produce annual reporting: progress and risks.
	→ Maintain the vision as the overarching framework while the Delivery Plan is in development.
	→ Ensure proposals demonstrate improvements in: public realm quality; riverside/green connections; evening safety; cultural identity; inclusive economic growth; liveability.
	→ Adopt the Delivery Plan as the primary tool for coordinating investment and monitoring progress across the town centre.

# APPENDICES



# APPENDIX A

## TOWN CENTRE DATA

KEY METRICS	CENTRAL READING (ABBEY+THAMES WARD)	READING BOROUGH	ENGLAND	SOURCE / YEAR
Population (people)	<b>20,546</b>	182,907	58,620,101	ONS Mid-year est. 2024
Age 20–39 (%)	<b>49.5%</b>	34.3%	26.5%	ONS MYE 2024
Born outside UK (%)	<b>54.9%</b>	33.5%	17.4%	Census 2021
Non-UK passport (%)	<b>44.2%</b>	22.9%	10.2%	Census 2021
<5 yrs in UK (%)	<b>27.7%</b>	11.5%	4.2%	Census 2021
Level 4+ quals (%)	<b>54.7%</b>	40.4%	33.9%	Census 2021
Professional occupations (%)	<b>34.7%</b>	25.6%	20.3%	Census 2021
Flats (%)	<b>70.7%</b>	33.4%	22.2%	Census 2021
1-bed homes (%)	<b>38.9%</b>	16.7%	11.6%	Census 2021
Private rent (%)	<b>59.2%</b>	32.1%	20.6%	Census 2021
No car households (%)	<b>50.7%</b>	28.4%	23.5%	Census 2021
Work mainly from home (%)	<b>50.5%</b>	39.3%	31.5%	Census 2021
Walk to work (%)	<b>14.4%</b>	11.4%	7.6%	Census 2021
Drive to work (%)	<b>18.0%</b>	31.4%	44.5%	Census 2021
EPC B+C (%)	<b>72.6%</b>	51.6%	48.4%	EPC FY 2024

# TOWN CENTRE DATA

## YOUNGER, INTERNATIONAL, HIGHLY EDUCATED CORE

- Half of residents (49.5%) are aged 20–39, creating a notably youthful base.
- Over half (54.9%) were born outside the UK, reflecting a globally connected population.
- More than a quarter (27.7%) are recent arrivals indicating high mobility.
- Level 4+ qualifications reach 54.7% aligning with knowledge–economy roles.

## COMPACT, RENTAL-LED, APARTMENT LIVING

- Flats and maisonettes dominate (70.7% vs 33.4% Reading, 22.2% England).
- One-bedroom homes account for 38.9% (Reading 16.7%, England 11.6%).
- Private renting (incl. rent-free) at 59.2%, is almost double Reading (32.1%) and triple England (20.6%), with correspondingly low owner-occupation.

## CAR-LIGHT AND HYBRID WORK PATTERNS

- Half of households (50.7%) have no car
- Driving to work is just 18% (Reading 31.4%, England 44.5%), while walking (14.4%) and train use (5.2%) are higher than both comparators.
- Work-from-home stands at 50.5%, well above England (31.5%), signalling strong demand for amenity-rich local work settings even when accounting for COVID pandemic effects in 2021.

## HEALTHY OUTCOMES AND PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS

- Very good/good health reported by 87.6% (England 82.2%).
- Professional occupations account for 34.7%, compared to 20.3% nationally, with a strong higher managerial/professional presence.

## STRONG ENERGY PERFORMANCE

- Energy efficiency is strong: 72.6% of homes are EPC B or C (Reading 51.6%, England 48.4%).

