



Progress Update and Achievements **Year to 31 December 2019**

1. Conservation Area (CA) Appraisal Updates.

The Russell Street/Castle Hill CA re-appraisal was approved for public consultation at the Strategic, Environment, Planning and Transport Committee (SEPT) in November. It was one of the first priorities for the CAAC when it was formed in 2016. This CA is the biggest in Reading and was placed on Historic England's Heritage at Risk list in 2019. Producing the re-appraisal was a significant challenge due to the complexity of the area and also as a significant boundary extension has been proposed. The consultation will close on 7 February 2020.

Work continues after a pause on the Market Place / London Street re-appraisal. The St Mary's Butts/ Castle Street re-appraisal is expected to commence in the New Year. Both these re-appraisals are key to the future development of the town centre.

Eldon Square CA re-appraisal continues.

2. Local Areas of Special Character (LASC)

We believe that at the moment two areas in Reading are worthy of consideration as LASCs, Belltower and Northcourt Avenue. Using these examples, a draft framework document was produced for the designation of LASCs in Reading. Following the adoption of the New Local Plan a few updates are required.

We are now looking for it to be presented to SEPT at the earliest possible opportunity and have been liaising with councillors and officers about when there may be a suitable opportunity in the timetable.

3. CAAC Terms of Reference

CAAC has redrafted its terms of reference in the light of experience of the last three years. Changes have been made in particular to incorporate the proactive initiatives CAAC can take in relation to heritage. We anticipate that it will be submitted for approval to the March 2020 SEPT.

4. Celebrating Heritage

Two walks around the Russell Street/Castle Hill CA were organised by Reading Civic Society and Terry's Walkabouts over the Heritage Open Day period 13-22 September.

CAAC members use the opportunities they have to network and raise heritage awareness with other Reading organisations that they are involved with.

CAAC welcomes the recognition by RBC councillors and officers of the additional resource and expertise which the CAAC brings in conserving Reading's heritage.

5. Planning Applications

CAAC has submitted comments on a number of planning applications over the course of the year and are very pleased to have been consulted by officers on those affecting Conservation Areas.

We have also met developers at an early stage in their planning process and believe our comments have been helpful in shaping eventual submissions.

We have been able to comment positively on one application within the Market Place/ London Street CA and another within the St Peters CA in Caversham. In general, we have submitted objections.

With finite resources, priority is given to those applications which most impact on the heritage of the town.

6. The Local Plan

Reading's New Local Plan has now been adopted and Reading CAAC welcome the additional protection given to Reading's heritage including conservation areas and nationally and locally listed heritage assets.

The CAAC is particularly proud of its achievement in producing the evidence base for the heritage views included the document.

7. Reading Transport Strategy

We commented during the consultation on Reading's Transport Strategy, highlighting the impact of the transport system and signage on heritage. We also commented on the need to conserve Reading's transport heritage and infrastructure.

8. Locally Listed Buildings and Structures

We have been pleased to assist in the provision of information which has supported the addition of buildings to the Local List. There are now 13 buildings on the list however two of these were demolished in summer 2017 (Oaklands Hall and Rotherfield Grange).

9. Work with conservation groups in other towns

We have developed a relationship with a conservation group in Fleet, Hampshire who have attended two CAAC meetings to understand how we go about things.

We attended St Albans Civic Society 'Conservation 50' conference which was a good opportunity to network with other groups and explain the work of Reading CAAC. A member of St Albans Conservation 50 group attended the October CAAC meeting.

(Video of the Q & A at the conference here: <http://conservation50.org> with the Reading CAAC contribution at about 45 minutes in.)

10. **Minster Quarter (Hosier Street) Development Framework**

We commented on the draft Hosier Street Development Framework which will have a significant impact on two CAs, Russell Street/Castle Hill and St Mary's Butts Castle Street.

Arising from those deliberations, we put forward a suggestion that Historic England's Historic Places Panel could be asked to visit to report on the proposals (see below).

11. **High Streets Historic Action Zone (HSHAZ)**

We supported RBCs successful application for HSHAZ funding and look forward to participating in the project going forward.

12. **Visit of the Historic Places Panel (HPP)**

HPP visited Reading at the end of November. The CAAC presented an overview of their role and contribution to the conservation of Reading's heritage and the planning process. We also supported, by providing planning and historic context, the walkabout through the town centre and along Oxford Road and the evening dinner at the Lido.

The report based on the visit is expected to be available in early 2020 and will be published on the Historic England website: <https://historicengland.org.uk/about/who-we-are/committees-and-panels/historic-places-panel/review-papers/>.

13. **Heritage lamp posts**

We were asked to select 20 cast iron lighting columns (without doors) to be retained in RBC's project to upgrade to LED lighting.

Although we lost some that we would have liked to keep, on balance we were pleased that a significant concentration of columns from four different foundries were retained in the Bell Tower area, three columns along Chestnut Walk (Oscar, Henry and Matilda), three in Eldon Square CA and others in Reading's historic streets such as Wantage Road

Evelyn Williams
CAAC Chair
6 January 2019