

## 8. CAVERSHAM AND EMMER GREEN

### 8.1 Area Context

- 8.1.1 The area covered by this section is the area of Reading Borough north of the River Thames, comprising the wards of Caversham, Caversham Heights, Emmer Green and part of Thames.
- 8.1.2 Caversham grew up as a separate settlement on the north banks of the Thames within Oxfordshire, only becoming part of the borough of Reading in 1911. For this reason, it has a distinct identity, and this history can also be seen in the presence of many road names that are also used in Reading (such as Prospect Street, South Street and Queen's Road). Emmer Green was a smaller settlement in a location at the edge of the Chiltern Hills, featuring a number of chalk mines, before becoming subsumed within the wider urban area.
- 8.1.3 Unlike other suburban parts of Reading, the urban area does not extend beyond the Borough boundaries into South Oxfordshire district, and these areas directly abut the Oxfordshire countryside. For most of its length, the northern part of the Reading Borough boundary follows the exact urban edge. To the west of Caversham, the Chilterns National Landscape adjoins the Borough boundary.
- 8.1.4 According to the 2021 Census, around 33,000 people live within this area. The area is generally the most affluent part of Reading, although there are some small focuses of deprivation, notably around Amersham Road. The lower part of Caversham is characterised by Victorian terraced housing with some new additions. To the northwest, Caversham Heights contains large homes within sizeable plots, many of which were developed between 1900 and 1930. Later 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban development is concentrated around upper parts of Caversham, Emmer Green and the Caversham Park area.
- 8.1.5 There are two conservation areas. St Peter's is centred on St Peter's Church and the historic garden of Caversham Court, on the banks of the Thames, and close to the heart of the old settlement of Caversham. Surley Row is further north, and is set out along the route from Emmer Green to the old parish church of Caversham. One of Caversham's most distinctive features is the listed manor house and 38 ha historic park at Caversham Park.
- 8.1.6 The area is defined by its topography. The low lying areas close to the Thames are prone to flooding, and flood risk continues to provide a constraint to future development. However, the ground quickly rises to the north and northwest, as the remainder of the area undulates as it meets the fringes of the Chiltern hills. The 'dry valleys' typically found in the Chilterns also extend into Caversham, and there are a number of wooded and undeveloped areas that help to link the area into the wider Chilterns landscape beyond.
- 8.1.7 The area is largely residential in nature, although there is one small industrial area at Paddock Road as well as the retail and related uses in Caversham centre, as well as a smaller grouping at Emmer Green. There are only two road crossings of the River Thames within the urban area of Reading, and this can lead to congestion within the centre of Caversham. However, the Christchurch pedestrian and cycle bridge has helped to further link the areas together. The main roads leading out of the Borough are the A4155 to

Henley-on-Thames, A4074 towards Wallingford and the B481 to the nearby village of Sonning Common and towards Watlington. Sonning Common also has a secondary school, Chiltern Edge, which is attended by some Reading residents.

## **8.2 Strategy for Caversham and Emmer Green**

8.2.1 The following represent some key principles for the area:

- a. There will be enhanced pedestrian and cycle links between central Caversham and Reading town centre;
- b. New development will provide or contribute to infrastructure to adequately support the development;
- c. New mobility hub capacity will be sought on the A4155, A4074 and B481 corridors;
- d. The Council will continue to work with its neighbouring authorities towards provision of a crossing of the Thames east of Reading;
- e. Areas of landscape and heritage importance will be preserved, including the edge of the Chilterns National Landscape;
- f. The watercourses in the area, including the River Thames and its tributaries, will be protected and enhanced as a multi-functional resource for leisure, recreation, ecology and landscape.

8.2.2 Caversham and Emmer Green have relatively little scope for additional development compared to some other areas of Reading, as virtually the whole area is covered by residential areas with some public open space. Much of Lower Caversham is subject to flood risk constraints. There remains potential for infill development and development involving residential gardens, and there is an ongoing development at the former Reading Golf Club, but this area is not likely to be able to accommodate a significant proportion of Reading's identified need.

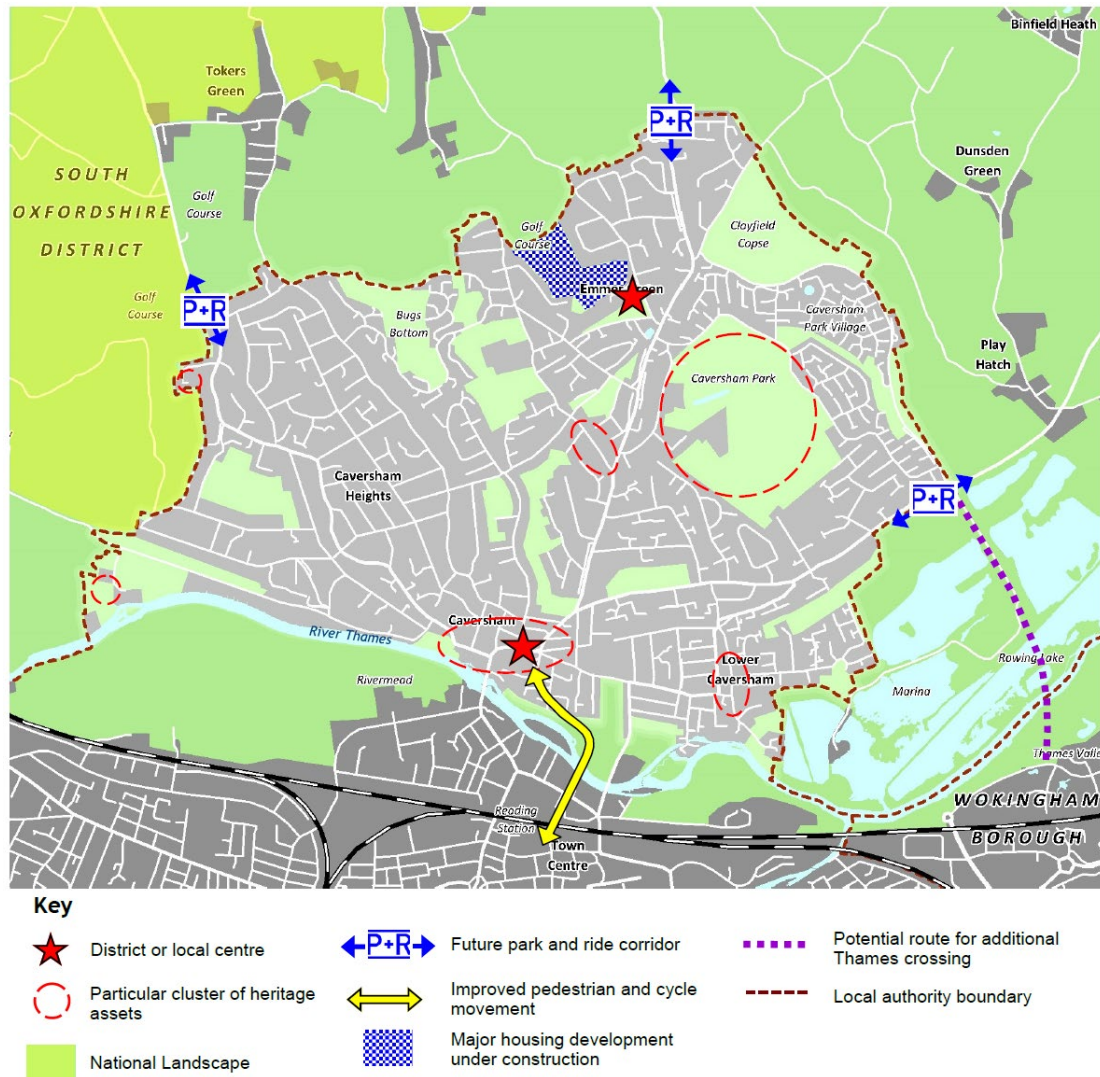
8.2.3 It is considered that Caversham and Emmer Green can accommodate around 700 homes between 2023 and 2041, around 5% of the total planned for (this includes 27 homes completed during 2023-24). There is not scope to accommodate any substantial proportion of the non-residential development needs, although development in and around central Caversham may result in additional town centre uses. It is important to note that this is an indication of potential capacity, not a policy target.

8.2.4 As a result of the limited development capacity, the overall strategy in this area is largely based around ensuring that, where development is to be accommodated, it is done in a way that prevents adverse effects on the existing areas. Of particular importance in Caversham and Emmer Green are potential effects on landscape, heritage and infrastructure. The relationship of the landscape with the Chiltern Hills and River Thames, described in paragraph 8.1.6, and of the townscape with the former separate settlements of Caversham and surrounding hamlets, will be preserved.

8.2.5 The adequacy of infrastructure to support additional development remains one of the most significant concerns in the area. In particular, transport, education and healthcare are issues that would need to be addressed in any

development. The Council is working constructively with Wokingham Borough Council, Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, local parish and town councils, Transport for the South East, National Highways and the Department for Transport to work up proposals for cross-Thames travel, although any additional crossing capacity would be likely to be largely within neighbouring authorities. An additional crossing could result in measures to increase public transport capacity on existing crossings, which would improve traffic issues. The Council continues to explore opportunities for new park and ride mobility hub sites within neighbouring authorities to help alleviate some of the issues identified.

**Figure 8.1: Area strategy for Caversham and Emmer Green**



## 8.3 Caversham and Emmer Green Site-Specific Policies

### Sites for Development and Change of Use in Caversham and Emmer Green

#### CA1: SITES FOR DEVELOPMENT IN CAVERSHAM AND EMMER GREEN

*The following sites will be developed according with the principles set out in this policy:*

#### **CA1a READING UNIVERSITY BOAT CLUB, THAMES PROMENADE**

***Development for residential. Where retention of the existing boathouse is not proposed, development will only be permitted subject to its relocation or clear demonstration that its loss is justified in line with policy RL6 or national policy.***

***Development should:***

- ***Avoid detrimental visual effects on the Thames Valley major landscape feature;***
- ***Take account of the risk of flooding, and locate development only in the portion of the site in Flood Zone 2, closest to Abbotsmead Road;***
- ***Provide for a green link across the site from Christchurch Meadows to Abbotsmead Road;***
- ***Conserve the setting of the listed war memorial;***
- ***Address air quality impacts on residential use; and***
- ***Take account of potential archaeological significance, and be supported by a desk-based archaeological assessment which should inform the development.***

***Site size: 0.56 ha***

***18-28 dwellings***

#### **CA1c LAND AT LOWFIELD ROAD**

***Development for residential<sup>130</sup>.***

***Development should:***

- ***Avoid adverse effects on important trees including those protected by TPO;***
- ***Retain areas of woodland making up priority habitat, take account of the potential for wider biodiversity interest and allow for a green link across the Lowfield Road frontage of the site;***
- ***Address any contamination on site;***
- ***Avoid detrimental visual effects on the North Reading Dry Valleys and Chilterns Escarpment major landscape feature and on Caversham Park; and***
- ***Take account of potential archaeological significance.***

***Site size: 0.93 ha***

***21-31 dwellings***

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<sup>130</sup> There is a temporary permission for 28 temporary homes for homeless households, reference 160762, with subsequent amendments. This allocation is for the longer-term future of the site.

**CA1d REAR OF 200-214 HENLEY ROAD, 12-24 ALL HALLOWS ROAD & 7 & 8 COPSE AVENUE**

***Development for residential.***

***Development should:***

- ***Be accessed from Overton Drive;***
- ***Be designed to retain important trees and groups of trees, and avoid adverse effects on important trees including that protected by TPO;***
- ***Avoid adverse impacts on adjoining priority habitat;***
- ***Provide for a green link across the site from the copse to the north of the site southwards;***
- ***Take account of potential archaeological significance;***
- ***Address air quality impacts on residential use relating to the southern portion of the site;***
- ***Address any contamination on site; and***
- ***Ensure appropriate back-to-back separation from existing residential.***

***Site size: 0.84 ha***

***17-25 dwellings***

**CA1e REAR OF 13-14A HAWTHORNE ROAD & 284-292 HENLEY ROAD**

***Development for residential***

***Development should:***

- ***Be accessed from Maytree Walk;***
- ***Avoid adverse effects on important trees including those protected by TPO;***
- ***Take account of potential archaeological significance; and***
- ***Address air quality impacts on residential use.***

***Site size: 0.31 ha***

***8-12 dwellings***

**CA1f REAR OF 1 & 3 WOODCOTE ROAD AND 21 ST PETER'S HILL**

***Development for residential.***

***Development should:***

- ***Be accessed from Symeon Place;***
- ***Retain established trees and vegetation around the edge of the site, in particular those protected by TPO;***
- ***Take account of the high potential archaeological significance and***

***be supported by assessment work which should inform the development;***

- ***Address air quality impacts on residential use; and***
- ***Ensure appropriate back-to-back separation from existing residential.***

***Site size: 0.33 ha***

***11-17 dwellings***

**CA1h HEMDEAN HOUSE SCHOOL, HEMDEAN ROAD**

***Continued education and community use of the site, or, if no longer required for education, change of use and development for residential.***

***Development should:***

- ***Contribute to providing enhanced bus priority on Vastern Road exiting the northern station interchange;***
- ***Retain those buildings that make the most significant contribution of the character of the surrounding area;***
- ***Avoid adverse effects on important trees including those protected by TPO; and***
- ***Ensure appropriate back-to-back separation from existing residential.***

***Site size: 0.93 ha***

***Continued education and/or community use, or 22-34 dwellings***

- 8.3.1 This policy identifies those sites within Caversham and Emmer Green where development and change will be appropriate. As well as contributing to meeting the identified needs of the Borough, allocation can help provide physical regeneration of sites which are in some cases vacant or underused. In addition, it allows the Council to highlight the issues which need to be addressed in developing sites, set out site-specific requirements and, if necessary, plan for the provision of infrastructure.
- 8.3.2 Where dwelling or floorspace figures are included alongside the allocations, these are intended as a guide, and usually reflect an indicative maximum capacity. They are based on an initial assessment taking into account the characteristics of each site. However, the capacity of sites will ultimately depend on various factors that need to be addressed at application stage, including detailed design and layout. The fact that a site is allocated in CA1 does not preclude the need to comply with all other policies in the local plan, including, for residential developments, the need to provide affordable housing.
- 8.3.3 Where there are significant issues that will need to be addressed in any planning applications on the specific sites listed above, these are usually highlighted in the policy, and usually correspond to other policies in the Local Plan, such as EN1, EN2, or EN11-18, where more detail is set out. However, it is not a guarantee that there are no other potential issues, and it does not

remove the need to address the usual matters that should be dealt with on all sites.

- 8.3.4 On some sites identified for housing, there may be potential for community uses, such as meeting spaces, healthcare or education to be provided which have not been anticipated by this plan. There may also be potential for specialist housing provision for specific groups, outside the C3 dwellinghouse use class. This could potentially reduce the amount of housing which could be provided on specific sites. Depending on other policies in the plan, this can be appropriate, provided that it does not harm the chances of delivering sufficient housing to meet the targets set out in local policy – this decision will be informed by the most up-to-date housing trajectory.

### **Sites with existing planning permission**

- 8.3.5 At the time of publication of the Local Plan, a number of sites in Caversham and Emmer Green in addition to the allocated sites had planning permission for ten or more dwellings or more than 1,000 sq m of non-residential development. There is not considered to be a need to identify most of these sites within a policy, as the permission establishes the principle of the development. Any future applications on these sites will be acceptable where they are substantially the same as the existing permission, subject to the policies in this Local Plan. Applications for developments will need to be considered against policies in the plan, in particular whether it would adversely impact the likelihood of meeting Reading's identified development needs.

Site	App ref	Summary of development
Chazey Farm, The Warren	030275	Development of 78-bed nursing home
Unit 1, Paddock Road Industrial Estate	100384	Development for industrial/warehouse units totalling 1,577 sq m
St Martin's Precinct, Church Street	140997	Redevelopment for retail (501 sq m net gain), restaurant (524 sq m net gain), leisure (652 sq m net gain), residential (40 dwellings) plus additional works
Reading Golf Club, Kidmore End Road	211843	Development for 223 dwellings (under construction)
205-213 Henley Road <sup>131</sup>	220189	Development for 50 retirement living dwellings

*Development progress is correct to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024*

### **Caversham Park**

#### **CA2: CAVERSHAM PARK**

***Caversham Park and Caversham Park House are key features of the heritage and landscape of Reading. Caversham Park is a Registered***

<sup>131</sup> Resolved to grant permission subject to signing of Section 106 agreement



***Historic Park and Garden, and the site contains a number of listed features. These assets will be conserved.***

***Conversion of the house from offices to residential and/or a cultural, community or heritage use, or other suitable use compatible with its heritage, will be acceptable if it sustains the significance of the listed building. It is currently estimated that up to 40-45 dwellings could be accommodated, but the figure will be dependent on more detailed historic assessment of the building and the precise mix of uses.***

***Any development or conversion proposals should open as much of the park as possible up to public access, including reinstatement of any historic public footpaths where possible and appropriate.***

***This policy does not allocate the site for additional development over and above conversion of the house. There may be scope for some limited development on previously developed land within the site, which will need to be justified at application stage. Such development must comply with the criteria below:***

- ***No development will negatively affect the significance of the heritage assets and their setting;***
- ***Development will not detract from the character or appearance of the important landscape value; and***
- ***Development will not negatively affect significant trees or areas of biodiversity importance.***

8.3.6 Caversham Park is a historic estate in Caversham totalling 38 ha, the origins of which date back to at least Norman times, with the estate featuring in the Domesday Book. It was formerly the home of the Earl of Pembroke and later the Earls of Warwick<sup>132</sup>. The site is a registered historic park. A succession of manor houses have stood within the site, but the current listed Caversham Park House dates from the Victorian era. The house and its grounds have been used by the BBC as its Monitoring Station, together with the base for BBC Radio Berkshire. Given its location at the top of a hill, it is highly prominent from a number of locations in Reading, in particular the entrance along the A329(M).

8.3.7 In July 2016, the BBC announced its decision to vacate the site<sup>133</sup>. This leaves a very large area comprised mainly of open green space, to which there has been no public access up to now. There is clearly an opportunity to secure a beneficial use of an important listed building, and also to secure access to a large area of much needed open space of significant historic interest for the local population.

8.3.8 Caversham Park is a Registered Historic Park and Garden<sup>134</sup>. The Historic England website<sup>135</sup> states that:

“The main purpose of this Register is to celebrate designed landscapes of note, and encourage appropriate protection. ... The National Planning

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<sup>132</sup> [http://www.berkshirehistory.com/castles/caversham\\_park.html](http://www.berkshirehistory.com/castles/caversham_park.html)

<sup>133</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-berkshire-36712152>

<sup>134</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000524>

<sup>135</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/registered-parks-and-gardens/>



Policy Framework defines registered parks and gardens as designated heritage assets meaning that substantial harm to, or total loss of, a registered park or garden should be 'exceptional' or 'wholly exceptional', depending on the site's grade."

- 8.3.9 A variety of uses of the existing building may be acceptable, although the extent of internal works to the listed building will have a strong influence over the form of the conversion. These possibilities include conversion to residential, a cultural or heritage use that capitalises on the heritage of the park, such as a visitor centre, or a community use that could include education. It may be possible to achieve a mix of uses within the building.
- 8.3.10 For clarity, this allocation is not for additional development. At this stage, it has not been demonstrated that significant additional development within the area will not harm the historical significance of the site or is otherwise appropriate. Any proposal that includes additional development would need to be accompanied by compelling evidence that such development will not have a detrimental impact on the many features of importance within the site, including areas of important habitat, significant trees, the House and other listed structures, views in and out of the site, and the overall significance of the park itself, as well as on considerations such as access.