
Final

53-55 Vastern Road, Reading, RG1 8BU

Planning and Affordable Housing Statement

Prepared by Barton Willmore LLP on behalf of
Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd

January 2020

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement and Affordable Housing Statement has been prepared on behalf of Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd ('The Applicant') in support of a full planning application for the redevelopment of 53-55 Vastern Road, Reading, RG1 8BU ('The Site').
- 1.2 Berkeley Homes are one of the largest and best-known developers of new homes in London and the South East. Berkeley are experienced in regenerating complex sites to deliver fantastic places for people to live, work and socialise in. Berkeley have built 19,000 homes in the last five years, across London, Birmingham and the South of England. Their developments range in size from a few dozen homes to complex, mixed use urban regeneration programmes of over five thousand new dwellings.
- 1.3 The proposal within this application is for a new residential community of 209 new high quality homes supported by approximately 17.9sqm of leisure floorspace (café), including a new north-south pedestrian link, connecting Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road and on towards Reading Station.
- 1.4 The proposal has been designed following extensive pre-application discussions with Reading Borough Council ('RBC') and statutory consultees, together with responding to feedback received at a series of public consultation events and other engagement exercises. Two independent Design Review Panel meetings have also taken place and the proposals have sought to respond to comments received both during the meeting and in the written advice which was subsequently issued by Design South East.
- 1.5 This statement seeks to demonstrate how the proposal has been considered in light of the context of the Site and relevant development plan policies. This statement should be read in conjunction with the associated application form, cover letter, drawings, and the following supporting documents:
- Design and Access Statement (including material details)
 - CIL form
 - Draft Heads of Terms for s106 agreement
 - Landscape Principles (included within DAS, Landscape General Arrangements and Tree Report and Arboricultural Impact Assessment)
 - External Lighting Strategy
 - Fire Strategy (included within the DAS)

- Open Space Statement
 - Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment
 - Heritage Statement
 - Archaeological Assessment
 - Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment
 - Ecology Assessment
 - Daylight & Sunlight Assessment
 - Contaminated Land Survey and Report
 - Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment
 - Statement of Community Involvement
 - Energy Statement
 - Sustainability Statement
 - Transport Statement
 - Flood Risk Assessment (including Sustainable Drainage System Proposals)
 - Utilities Statement
 - Superfast Broadband Strategy Statement
 - Air Quality Assessment
 - Wind Assessment
 - Viability Appraisal
- 1.6 An EIA Screening Direction received from the Secretary of State on 14th May 2019 confirmed that the proposals do not constitute EIA development, thus an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required for this application (see **Appendix 1**).
- 1.7 Berkeley's commitment to this site includes a number of significant benefits, not only for the new community that will live at Vastern Road, but also for surrounding residents. The site at Vastern Road presents a wonderful opportunity to work with the Council to redevelop the site into a thriving community, which integrates the sites heritage and leaves a long-lasting legacy.
- 1.8 The public benefits associated with the proposal are considered to be significant. A full summary of the public benefits is set out within chapter 7 of this report, however in summary they include:
- i) Facilitation of strategic link from Central Reading to Christchurch Bridge and across the River Thames;
 - ii) Contribution to Reading's housing need for the borough;

- iii) Provision of a range of housing types to accord with the needs of the borough and reflect adopted policy;
 - iv) High quality and sustainable design to reflect the strategic objectives of the station/river major opportunity area and the vision with the Local Plan that this will be a 'flagship scheme';
 - v) Significant biodiversity improvements when compared to the current use of the Site to accord and assist with the wider objectives of the Local Plan in relation to wildlife corridors and habitats; and
 - vi) Economic benefits as a result of the development, through job creation, job opportunities, supply chain and an increase in the residential population of Central Reading, for weekend trading.
 - vii) Contribution to the amenity value of Christchurch Bridge and strategic 'link' location of the Site, via the provision of attractive open space and a new riverside café.
- 1.9 The scheme will also include many other benefits for the wider area, which will include;
- i) Improved local infrastructure delivering better public connectivity between Caversham and Reading Station;
 - ii) Delivery of a dedicated 3m wide footway / cycleway through the site;
 - iii) Provision of a new café overlooking the River Thames and providing activity along the new public route;
 - iv) A place making led approach to create a distinctive and vibrant new community;
 - v) Retain the legacy of the Old Power Station site and ensure its past is recognised in its next chapter.
 - vi) Delivery of high quality homes and a place where people feel safe and proud of where they live.
 - vii) The development will provide new job, training and apprenticeship opportunities
 - viii) Increased access to the River Thames with a direct link from the development to the Thames towpath;
 - ix) Enhancements to the ecological quality of the site with native planting along the River Thames;

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The proposal submitted with this application is a result of a considered pre-application engagement process, of structured and regular dialogue between RBC and various statutory consultees. Below is a list of the pre-application feedback/meetings undertaken with RBC in advance of this submission:

- 9th November 2018 - Initial Scoping meeting;
- 21st November 2018 - with Jonathan Markwell (case officer), Jonathan Mullis (Historic Buildings Consultant for RBC), Darren Cook (Transport Development Control Manager) and Sarah Hanson (Natural Environment Officer);
- 29th January 2019 - with Jonathan Markwell (case officer), Jonathan Mullis (Historic Buildings Consultant for RBC) and Sarah Hanson (Natural Environment Officer);
- 27th March 2019 - with Jonathan Markwell (case officer), Jonathan Mullis (Historic Buildings Consultant for RBC), Darren Cook (Transport Development Control Manager) and Sarah Hanson (Natural Environment Officer);
- 23rd April 2019 - with Jonathan Markwell (case officer);
- 3rd October 2019 - with Jonathan Markwell (case officer), Darren Cook (Transport Development Control Manager) and Sarah Hanson (Natural Environment Officer); and
- 25th November 2019 with Jonathan Markwell (case officer), Darren Cook (Transport Development Control Manager) and Sarah Hanson (Natural Environment Officer).

2.2 In addition to the formal pre-app meetings, separate standalone meetings/discussions were undertaken with statutory consultees including the Environment Agency and Secure by Design.

2.3 On 24th April 2019 and 20th November 2019, the scheme was presented and reviewed by members of Design South East. The panel comprised an expert team of architects, urban designers and engineers. A full site visit was conducted by the Panel ahead of the review in April. Verbal feedback was given during the meeting, which was followed up with a written advice note.

3.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 3.1 The site extends to a total of 0.76 hectares, consisting of two/three storey office buildings and a car park. The site is located adjacent to the A329 to the south, the River Thames to the north, residential two storey properties to the west and commercial offices of three to four storeys to the east. The existing vehicle entrance is from Vastern Road to the south with the vehicle egress to the west on Lynmouth Road.
- 3.2 With regard to the long term history of the site, the site was formerly the local power station in Reading from the turn of the twentieth century, owned and operated by Reading Electric Supply Co. Ltd. The Electricity works evolved over time and extended backward towards Vastern Road. A roller-skating rink was also constructed on the Vastern Road frontage, which became a Depository in 1936 and later SSE's offices.
- 3.3 Following a drive to regularise electricity production across the country, the site was transitioned from a full electricity generation site to a distribution facility in 1943. The chimney and wharf buildings were demolished in 1970 and replaced with other uses, including a car showroom, before SSE's major operations were relocated to a new site in Reading, leaving an office and HV electrical equipment on site.
- 3.4 The wider site extends to a total of 1.24 hectares and is currently owned by Scottish and Southern Energy ('SSE'). The site contains a substantial amount of strategically important electricity infrastructure, comprising several substations. The electricity infrastructure is likely to qualify as 'essential infrastructure', representing a very important element in the power transmission network, not just for Reading but also for the wider Thames Valley.
- 3.5 Due to the operational risk and prohibitive costs of moving the infrastructure, coupled with the lack of available land in SSE's ownership to relocate the facility, SSE have confirmed that the technical apparatus, comprising substantial cabling and transformers must remain on the site
- 3.6 The requirement to retain the infrastructure on the site therefore results in a developable site area covering a total of 0.76 hectares. The retention of the SSE infrastructure presents constraints within the red line boundary itself, owing to the need to ensure appropriate No Build Zones and incorporate certain design features into the new buildings.

- 3.7 The site contains a non-designated locally listed building at 55 Vaster\ a n Road. It was the former main entrance to the Electricity Works. The site also currently has 150 demarcated parking spaces and 30 unofficial parking spaces. The site is situated within Flood Zone 2 and is also within an Air Quality Management Area.
- 3.8 The River Thames runs to the north of the site across which there is an existing pedestrian footbridge which links Christchurch Meadows to the southern side of the river. In a wider context, the footbridge connects Caversham to Reading town centre and the station. The Christchurch footbridge lands just to the north of the site boundary in a central location. Stairs down from the footbridge connect it to the Thames Path from which people can walk along and cut down existing side roads to get through to the station and town centre. There are no existing public rights of way through the site itself.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 This section of the Planning Statement details the relevant planning history for the site:

Reference	Description	Decision	Date
05/0310	Development of existing garage/warehouse to form office accommodation.	Granted	11/07/2005
03/0902	Application of render finish to front elevation and replacement windows.	Granted	30/07/2003

5.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The proposal within this application is for the demolition of the existing structures and the construction of a new residential community. The residential offering will comprise 209 new homes of various sizes and types. The new residential community will be supported by approximately 17.9 sqm (NIA) of leisure use (café). The proposals also include a new north-south pedestrian link, connecting Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road towards Reading station.

5.2 Full planning permission is sought. The formal description of development is:

'Demolition of existing structures and erection of a series of buildings ranging in height from 1 to 11 storeys, including residential dwellings (C3 use class) and retail floorspace (A3 use class), together with a new north-south pedestrian link, connecting Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road.'

5.3 A breakdown of the proposed residential unit types is shown in the table below:

Unit Type	No. of Units	Percentage
1 Bed	60	28.7
2 Bed	137	65.6
3 Bed	12	5.7
Unit Total	209	100

5.4 A breakdown of the proposed leisure floorspace is shown in the table below:

Unit no.	Use proposed	GEA	NIA
Cafe	Café	28sqm	17.9sqm

5.5 The proposed development would be split into 7 blocks. Blocks A and B would be located on the Vastern Road frontage, Blocks D and E would be located on the River Front, Block F and G are set back from the River front behind Block E and Block C would be located in the centre of the site adjacent to Christchurch Way, the new link connecting the Vastern Road blocks and River Front blocks.

- 5.6 Through the centre of the site, it is proposed to provide a new north-south pedestrian link, connecting Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road. The site is a key element of the broader strategic aspiration of linking the town centre, station area, the river and Caversham. Improving north-south pedestrian links is one of RBC's key priorities for the area and the site is therefore of strategic importance.
- 5.7 Connectivity between Reading town centre to the River Thames and Christchurch Meadows is the cornerstone of the landscape strategy. The thoroughfare through the centre of the development is proposed to connect the riverside and town centre. The route would be appropriately landscaped to give a green boulevard effect.
- 5.8 The proposed pathway would connect to Christchurch Bridge via a landscaped podium courtyard with outdoor seating and a café spill out area. Landscaping to the north of the site between the development and the river would consist of terraced banks for flood alleviation, comprising swathes of naturalistic planting. To the southern boundary of the site fronting Vastern Road, ornamental hedge and shrub boundaries would be created.
- 5.9 Each dwelling will have its own private amenity space, complemented by high quality public realm. Private amenity space is provided in the form of balconies or courtyards at ground floor level.
- 5.10 In response to comments received during the consultation period, a café space of approximately 17.9 sqm (NIA) has been incorporated into the proposals aimed at an independent occupier. The proposed café would be situated where the Christchurch footbridge lands on the Podium Gardens. The proposed opening hours for the café are to be agreed with the Local Authority.
- 5.11 The proposed development would provide 43 undercroft and 12 on-street car parking spaces, including 3 disabled spaces, as well as secure covered cycle stores for each building providing a total of 122 cycle parking spaces. In addition, the proposed development would include ancillary plant space and bin stores.

- 5.12 Vehicular access would be provided to the site via Lynmouth Road, in the existing egress to the site, to the north of Block A. The proposed pedestrian entrance through the site is from a gateway on Vastern Road between Block A and Block B. It is proposed that a new Toucan crossing would connect the pedestrian gateway to the southern side of Vastern Road and a contribution will be provided to facilitate this new connection.

6.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

6.1 This section of the Statement summarises the relevant planning policy context within which the proposal has been prepared and against which it will be considered.

National Planning Policy Framework

6.2 The revised National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF'), published in February 2019, provides the relevant national planning policies for the proposed development. The NPPF is accompanied by the National Planning Practice Guidance ('NPPG'), which was last updated in October 2018.

6.3 One of the key objectives of the NPPF is "to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes" in the form of sustainable development thereby "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

6.4 The NPPF requires the delivery of a variety of homes, based on current and future demographic trends, to meet the needs of different groups in the community. The NPPF also promotes an effective use of land, giving substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs.

The Development Plan

6.5 Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning decisions to be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Reading adopted a new Local Plan on 4th November 2019 which now forms The Development Plan for Reading Borough Council.

The Reading Borough Local Plan (Nov 2019)

6.6 The following Local Plan policies are considered relevant to this proposal and are referred to later within this statement:

- Policy CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- Policy CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
- Policy CC3: Adaption to Climate Change
- Policy CC4: Decentralised Energy

- Policy CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage
- Policy CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
- Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- Policy CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
- Policy EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
- Policy EN4: Locally Important Heritage Assets
- Policy EN7: Local Green Space and Public Open Space
- Policy EN9: Provision of Open Space
- Policy EN10: Access to Open Space
- Policy EN11: Waterspaces
- Policy EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
- Policy EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
- Policy EN15: Air Quality
- Policy EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
- Policy EN18: Flooding and Drainage
- Policy EM3: Loss of Employment Land
- Policy H1: Provision of Housing
- Policy H2: Density and Mix
- Policy H3: Affordable Housing
- Policy H5: Standards for New Housing
- Policy H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space
- Policy TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
- Policy TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-related Matters
- Policy TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
- Policy CR2: Design in Central Reading
- Policy CR3: Public Realm in Central Reading
- Policy CR4: Leisure, Culture and Tourism in Central Reading
- Policy CR6: Living in Central Reading
- Policy CR10: Tall Buildings
- Policy CR11: Station/River Major Opportunity Area

6.7 The Proposals Map identifies the site as being located within the 'Station/River Major Opportunity Area', forming part of an allocated development site known as CR11g.

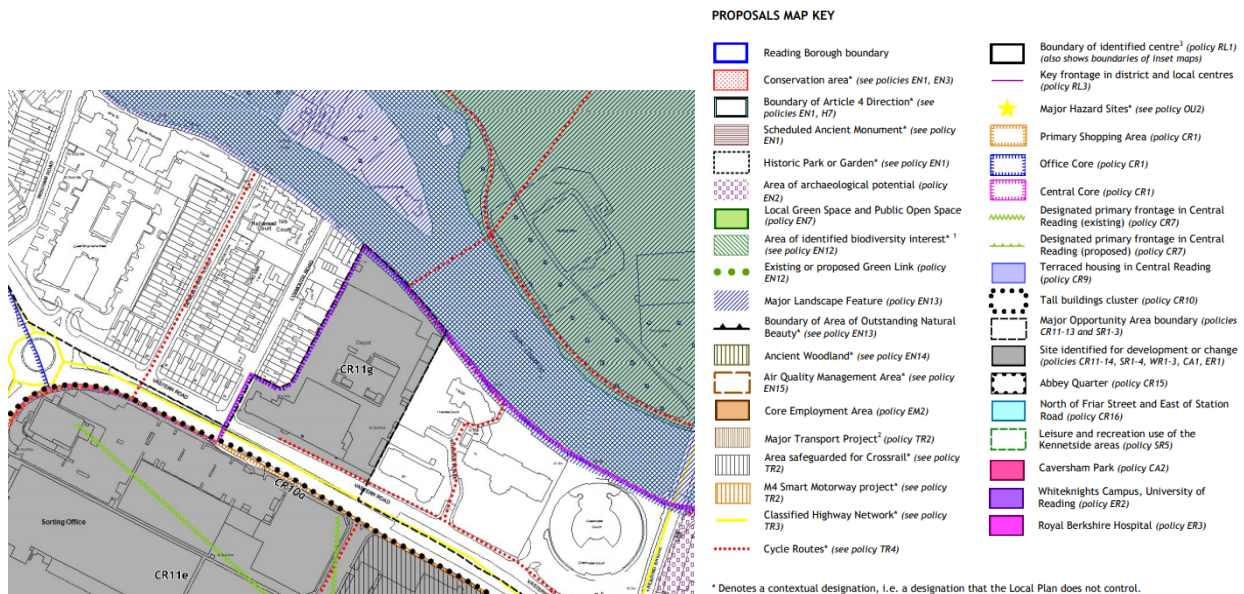


Figure 2 - Extract from RBC Local Plan Proposals Map (Map H)

6.8 Policy CR11g allocates the site for the following:

CR11g, RIVERSIDE:

Development should maintain and enhance public access along and to the Thames, and should be set back at least ten metres from the top of the bank of the river. Development should continue the high quality route including a green link from the north of the station to the Christchurch Bridge, with potential for an area of open space at the riverside. The main use of the site should be residential, although some small-scale leisure and complementary offices will also be acceptable. Development should take account of mitigation required as a result of a Flood Risk Assessment.

Site size: 1.24ha. Indicative potential: 250-370 dwellings, 1,000-2,000 sqm of leisure, no significant net gain in offices.

Reading Station Area Framework (2010) Supplementary Planning Document (RSAF)

6.9 The Local Plan references 'Site-related Supplementary Planning Documents' at paragraph 10.1.5 (page 215) and states that "many of the existing planning briefs that relate to development allocations in this document will remain in place, for instance the Station Area Framework and Battle Hospital and Meadway Centre planning briefs".

- 6.10 Whilst it is clear therefore that the RSAF SPD is linked to the new Local Plan, it was adopted under the previous Development Plan and indeed states at paragraph 1.8 that “the framework has the status of a Supplementary Planning Document, supplementing policy RC1 of the RCAAP, and as such it is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications for developments in the area” (BW emphasis). Whilst it could be considered that policy RC1 (Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area) within the RCAAP, has been directly replaced by policy CR11 (Station/River Major opportunity area) of the new Local Plan, due to the number of references to outdated policy within the RSAF SPD, it would need to be updated to reference current policy in order to be considered ‘refreshed’. Moreover, the RSAF SPD was adopted prior to the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 6.11 Whilst it is therefore considered that the RSAF SPD is a material planning consideration, its age is evident. The new Local Plan references a map from the RSAF SPD at figure 5.3 and comments at paragraph 5.4.9 that this shows “...the broad strategy for the Station/River Major Opportunity Area, which indicates some of the elements that need to be taken into account in developing this area”. Concept maps and aspirations therefore within the RSAF SPD could be considered indicative only and certainly not reflective of current land use/ownership constraints.
- 6.12 Notwithstanding the comments above, it is accepted that the aspirations of the RSAF are afforded weight in the determination of planning applications. Accordingly and for the avoidance of doubt, we would note the following sections of the RSAF SPD for clarity:
- Page 13 – the Southern Electric site is listed as one of the four existing developments dominating the area. Although further information is provided in relation to the other three sites in the ‘consents and proposals’ paragraph, no further information is provided in relation to the Southern Electric site. This represents the lack of information known about the Site when the RSAF was written.
 - Page 14 – paragraph 2.18, “...the enclosed electricity board site which blocks direct access from the Station to the riverside footpath and cycle way”, is considered ‘a major barrier to pedestrian movement’. The proposal has satisfied this aspiration with the incorporation of a pedestrian/cycle link, removing this barrier and therefore complying with the RSAF.

- Page 18 – paragraph 3.6 – “The redevelopment of large sites provides the opportunity to secure landscaped public space and to extend public access”. As above the proposals extend public access from Central Reading to Christchurch Meadow and beyond. The proposed pedestrian/cycle route has also been designed in a landscaped manner with enhances landscaping throughout and adjacent to the Thames River and is therefore considered to comply with these aspirations of the RSAF.
- Page 20 – “This document is a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which means it supplements and expands upon higher level policy. A SPD should therefore be linked to a ‘parent’ policy in an adopted higher-level Development Plan document (DPD)...The Station Area Framework supplements Policy RC1 (Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area) in the Reading Central Area Action Plan and development decisions should be made against that policy as supplemented by this Framework” (BW emphasis). It is considered that this represents a key area of text from the RSAF, which highlights that the SPD is not up to date with current adopted local planning policy.
- Page 25 – Public realm priorities – ten key public realm priority projects are proposed, and riverside open space is noted as number 8. The proposals can demonstrate conformity with is aspiration of the RSAF.
- Page 26 – “North of the railway, the spine will incorporate a ‘green link’ towards the river. Buildings will face onto the spine rather than away from it, and, on all parts of the spine south of Vastern Road”. The proposals ensure that this link is provided, as noted above, and moreover ensure that in the central area of the Site buildings face onto the pedestrian/cycle link to provide natural surveillance. It is therefore considered that the proposals comply with these aspirations of the RSAF.
- Page 45 – Figure 8.2 illustrates the framework structure presented by the RSAF and it is considered that proposed scheme complies with these principles. For example, a public space/square/important intersection is shown to the north of the Site as it meets the river; this is the area where there is a proposed café and seating/meeting area. A major path/pedestrian link is also shown through the Site, linking to the footbridge to the north; this aspiration is also met with the proposals, via the central link proposed through the Site.
- Finally, Page 54 – Active Frontages – figure 9.3 notes an active frontage to the north of the Site where it meets the river. This is complied with in the proposals via the inclusion of an outdoor café in this location.

6.13 In summary therefore, the comments above in relation to the key aspirations for this area of Central Reading contained with the RSAF, confirm that the scheme is in compliance with the aspirations which were set out for this area of Central Reading and the role the Site was intended to play in these.

7.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

7.1 The key planning issues to assess when determining this planning application are:

- Whether the principle of development is acceptable and that the proposal accords with the Site Allocation listed under policy CR11g;
- Whether the proposal complies with the wider criteria of policy CR11 - Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area;
- Whether there are any Heritage impacts as a result of the proposal;
- Whether the proposed design approach is considered acceptable;
- Whether the amenity of both existing and future residents will be satisfactorily protected; and
- Whether the proposed development adheres to the wider planning policies of the Council's Development Plan.

7.2 This section considers each of these elements in turn.

Principle of Development

7.3 The NPPF requires Councils to facilitate the delivery of a wide choice of high quality homes based on current and future demographic trends and the needs of different groups in the community.

7.4 Policy CC1 states that the Council will take a positive approach to considering development proposals that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the NPPF. Where appropriate, the Council will work proactively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.

Current Housing Need

7.5 Policy H1 of the Local Plan states that provision will be made for at least an additional 15,433 homes (averaging 671 homes per annum) in Reading Borough for the period 2013 to 2036.

- 7.6 As a result, RBC need to radically change the way that developments come forward within the Borough to address this significant change in housing need. Increasing densities on brownfield sites, within sustainable locations (i.e. town centres, close proximity to transport links and infrastructure etc) is critical if RBC are to deliver appropriate levels and types of housing for its current and future occupants.

The Reading Central Area

- 7.7 The Local Plan identifies the Site as falling within Central Reading. The Central Reading area is the most accessible location in the Western Corridor Sub Region, making it the principal location for a range of major development opportunities. At Figure 5.1 (Area Strategy for Central Reading) of the Local Plan, the Site is noted within an 'opportunity for major development' area.
- 7.8 The Local Plan sets out that development in Central Reading will typically be medium to high-density, accessible mixed use schemes, incorporating housing and public spaces of an excellent and sustainable standard of design that will improve the quality of life of those who live, work or visit Reading. Three key areas of opportunity are identified in the Centre, namely: the West Side, the East Side and the Station/River area in which the Site is located.

Station/River Major Opportunity Area

- 7.9 The Station/River Major Opportunity Area is detailed within chapter 5.4 of the Local Plan. The Local Plan vision for the Station/River Major Opportunity Area is as follows:

'The station/river area will be a flagship scheme, extending the centre and providing a mixed use destination in itself and centred on a redeveloped station and new public transport interchange. It will integrate the transport links and areas northwards toward the river and into the heart of the centre'.

- 7.10 The Station/River Major Opportunity Area is broken down into a series of sub-areas, with the application site falling within the sub-area G entitled 'Riverside'. Figure 3 below is an extract from the Local Plan which shows the 9 sub-areas and the broad strategy for the area:

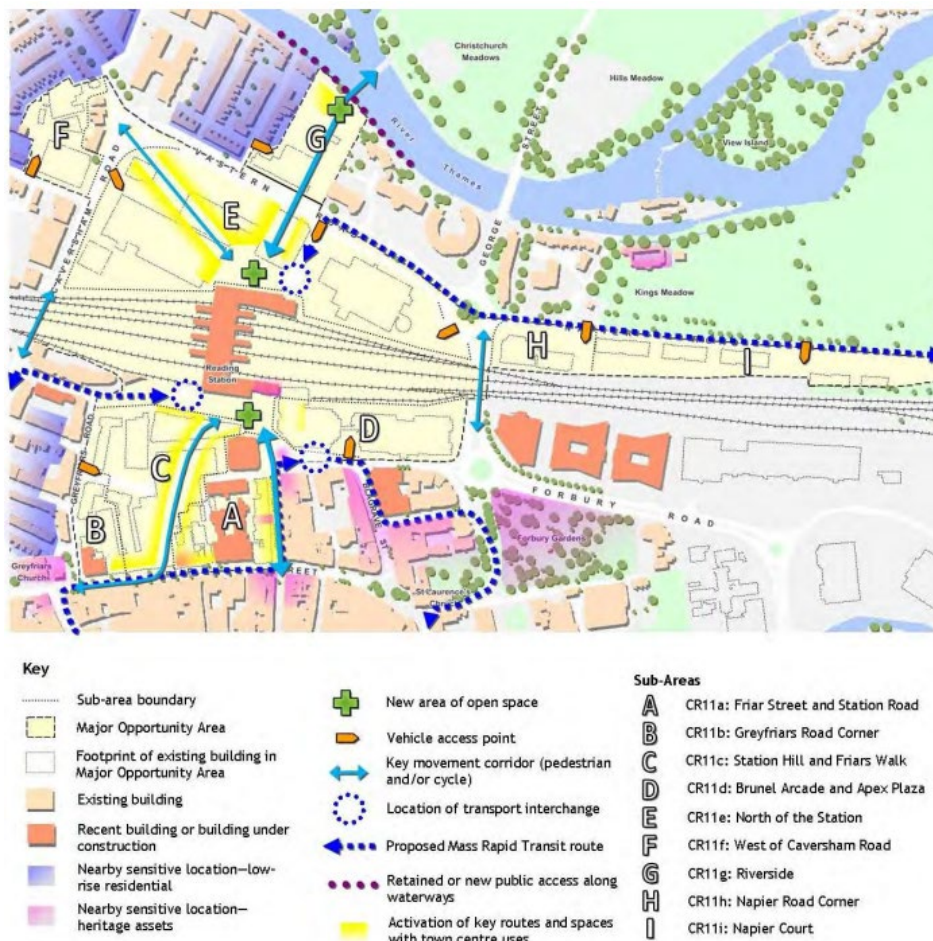


Figure 3 – Extract from RBC Local Plan (Figure 5.3) 'Station/River Major Opportunity Area Strategy'

The Application Site

7.11 As shown in Figure 3, the redevelopment of the SSE site is identified as one of the key elements of the overall strategy for Central Reading. Links across the railway and the River Thames have been enhanced in recent years and this site is a further piece of important land in linking the town centre, station area, river and Caversham. Consequently, the site is allocated for development under Policy CR11g which states the following:

CR11g, Riverside: Development should maintain and enhance public access along and to the Thames, and should be set back at least ten metres from the top of the bank of the river. Development should continue the high quality route including a green link from the north of the station to the Christchurch Bridge, with potential for an area of open space at the riverside. The main use of the site should be residential, although some small-scale leisure and complementary offices will also be acceptable. Development should take account of mitigation required as a result of a Flood Risk Assessment.

Site size: 1.24 ha. Indicative potential: 250-370 dwellings, 1,000-2,000 sqm of leisure, no significant net gain in offices.

- 7.12 The amplification text associated with site allocation CR11g is clear that achieving the north south link is the main priority for the Site, and this should be given 'substantial weight' in development management (paragraph 5.4.6 of the Local Plan).
- 7.13 The proposal set out within this application succinctly aligns with site allocation Policy CR11g, providing a residential development accompanied by 17.9sqm (NIA) of leisure use (NIA), and delivering the critical green link from the north of the station through to the other side of the river which is a key priority for the future of this Site.

Loss of the Existing Office Use/Floorspace

- 7.14 Policy EM3 is clear that in the Core Employment Areas the overall level of employment land should be retained. The SSE site falls outside of the Core Employment Areas.
- 7.15 Outside the core employment areas, policy EM3 prescribes that a loss of employment land for other uses may be acceptable, depending on whether the land is still needed for employment purposes. Each application will need to be assessed on its merits, and the criteria to be considered are set out in (i) to (vi), which should 'inform a balanced decision, not be used as a checklist where every criterion is fulfilled' (paragraph 4.3.14 of the Local Plan). Factors which may be taken into account in assessing these criteria include:
- i) is access by a choice of means of transport, including access to the strategic road network, poor or likely to remain poor?;
 - ii) is the continued use of the site for employment, including the potential for redevelopment for employment uses, viable?;
 - iii) is there a surplus of a similar size and type of accommodation in Reading?;
 - iv) would continued employment use of the site detrimentally affect the amenity and character of a residential area?;
 - v) is the need for alternative uses stronger than the need for the retention of employment land?; and
 - vi) would the proposal result in a piecemeal loss of employment land where there is potential for a more comprehensive scheme?

- 7.16 The existing office is no longer needed for its original purpose and is now closed. SSE occupied the building as their local administrative centre before it moved to newly built offices at 1 Forbury Place. The loss of the existing office use outside of the Core Employment Areas has already been established as part of the Local Plan process, by virtue of the Site's allocation within the Local Plan for a principally residential use. The loss of the existing office should therefore not be resisted in principle.
- 7.17 Of even greater importance is the need to successfully deliver the key components of the site allocation and the wider Station Area regeneration objectives. The retention of the now redundant office accommodation would unnecessarily restrict the delivery of the much needed north-south link, thus hindering the successful comprehensive redevelopment of the wider 'Station Area'.
- 7.18 Due to the site's current allocation for a primarily residential use, its strategic importance in fostering the north-south link and the evidence that the facility is no longer needed for employment purposes, it is considered that the loss of the existing office is entirely appropriate and acceptable.

Policy CR11 Compliance

- 7.19 Sites within the Station/River Major Opportunity Area are primarily guided by a number of design principles set out within Policy CR11 of the Local Plan. This next section sets out the guiding principles, together with how it is considered the Site responds to each principle:

CR11 i) - Contribute towards providing a high-density mix of uses to create a destination in itself and capitalise on its role as one of the most accessible locations in the south east. Development for education will be an acceptable part of the mix.

- 7.20 The development has been designed to provide a high-density residential scheme with 17.9 sqm (NIA) of leisure floorspace. Policy CC6 requires the scale and density of developments coming forward within the Borough to be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities. The site is in a Town Centre location and therefore a minimum of 100dph should be applied in accordance with policy H2. The proposed 209 units across 0.767 hectares equates to a density of 272 dph, a proposed density considered entirely suitable and appropriate for such an urban, sustainably located site.

CR11 ii) - Help facilitate greater pedestrian and cycle permeability, particularly on the key movement corridors. North-south links through the area centred on the new station, including across the IDR, are of particular importance.

- 7.21 An integral component of the proposals is to provide a new connection and route through the site to increase permeability in the area and link the town centre with Caversham. A new north-south pedestrian link is created between Vastern Road and Christchurch Bridge and a contribution towards the new Toucan crossing on Vastern Road will be provided to assist with the delivery of this link.

CR11 iii) - Provide developments that front onto and provide visual interest to existing and future pedestrian routes and open spaces.

- 7.22 The proposed development would front on to existing and future pedestrian routes and open spaces. Blocks A and B would front on to the pavement along Vastern Road and a new gateway has been created between the two blocks with new public art providing the entrance to a new pedestrian/cycle route, linking Vastern Road, and thus Central Reading, to Christchurch Bridge. The apartments in block C would also front onto the new pedestrian link to provide natural surveillance. To the rear of the development, apartments in blocks D and E would front the Thames Path along with the new centrally located café. All buildings would have a view of the Christchurch Bridge and Christchurch Meadows beyond, thus providing visual interest to those looking towards the site from the North.

CR11 iv) - Safeguard land which is needed for mass rapid transit routes and stops.

- 7.23 The site itself is not considered to be located on land which is safeguarded for improvements to Reading station, Reading station interchange or mass rapid transit routes and stops.

CR11 v) - Provide additional areas of open space where possible, with green infrastructure, including a direct landscaped link between the station and the River Thames.

- 7.24 Policy EN9 requires all new development to make provision for the open space needs of the development through appropriate on or off-site provision, or through contributions towards the provision or improvement of leisure or recreational facilities, including open space. The policy states that on sites of 50 dwellings or more, new provision will be

sought. However, the policy also notes that in areas not identified as deficient in the provision of open space, new open space, improvements or enhancements will be sought, including through appropriate contributions.

- 7.25 Policy EN9 sets out that the amount and type of publicly accessible open space to be provided shall be as detailed in the most up-to-date Open Spaces Strategy. The current Open Spaces Strategy (OSS) was published in 2007 and in line with the Local Plan preparation, an update note was issued in January 2018. Despite changes in all associated policies since the publication of the 2007 OSS, as noted by the 2018 update, the 2018 document confirms that the policy context remains valid. Accordingly, the 2007 OSS remains in effect. Paragraph 6.1 of the 2018 update concludes that the total amount of public open space remains broadly in line within the national guidelines but is unevenly distributed.
- 7.26 Paragraph 4.2.35 of the Local Plan notes that people in and around the town centre are still further away from public open space than guidelines recommend. Paragraph 4.2.36 of the Local Plan reiterates the main issues outlined within the 2007 OSS; access, quality, links to public open space and wildlife. In terms of access the Local Plan notes that in Central Reading, public open space is where residents are not. In terms of quality, the Local Plan notes some of the existing parks and open spaces are of poor quality and lack facilities. In terms of links to public open space, the Local Plan states that these are fragmented and not linked by pedestrian infrastructure to homes. Finally, in terms of wildlife the Local Plan notes that habitats are incomplete and would benefit from wildlife corridors.
- 7.27 The proposals include a direct green link between the station and River Thames. In addition, a podium courtyard with outdoor social seating and a café spill out area is provided. Other areas of green landscaping are provided as part of the proposals, including natural planting structured in terraced banks next to the river and green courtyards to the front of blocks A and B on Vastern Road.
- 7.28 The proposed development is linked to Christchurch Meadow via Christchurch Bridge, which provides residents with access to a vast area of public open space which includes: informal areas, a swimming pool, tennis courts and a play park. It is considered that not only would the link facilitated by the proposed development improve access to from Central Reading to one of the main public open space areas, but moreover that Christchurch Meadow would effectively serve the new development.

7.29 Accordingly the proposals achieve the aim of policy EN10 (access to open space), address access to public open space concerns contained within the 2007 OSS, repeated in the Local Plan, and in line with policy EN9, allow for appropriate off-site contributions, improvements or enhancements to be sought if required. For full details of the open space/amenity space proposed, please see section 3.69 of the accompanying Design and Access Statement, detailing the open space and landscape proposals and the accompanying Open Space Statement. The Open Space Statement additionally demonstrates the Site's proximity to Christchurch Meadow (noted in the Local Plan as EN7Ca – Local Green Space), the future relationship the Site will have with this Local Green Space, by virtue of the link to Christchurch Bridge and the suggested improvements noted in the Local Plan for Christchurch Meadow. At paragraph 2.28 the Open Space Statement outlines the opportunity for S106 contributions to be made in this regard, pursuant to this application.

CR11 vi) - Give careful consideration to the areas of transition to low and medium density residential and conserve and, where possible, enhance listed buildings, conservation areas and historic gardens and their settings.

7.30 The existing context surrounding the site consists of two storey residential houses to the west and three to four storey commercial properties to the east. The proposed scheme seeks to respond to this context, being lower to the west and stepping up towards the east of the site. Along the western boundary of the site, which backs on to the gardens of houses on Lynmouth Road, the provision of landscaped parking areas with an adjacent 3 and 3.5 storey apartment building to the east aids the transition between two storey residential properties and the taller elements of the development. In addition, blocks A and B are of a stepped nature, being lower towards the western boundary of the site and stepping up in height towards the east of the site.

7.31 There are no statutory listed buildings on or in close proximity to the site which may be affected. The site is also not located within a conservation area. The former entrance part of the SSE office building has however been added to RBC's List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures. Paragraph 7.42 below notes the small area of the existing building which this local listing relates to. The supporting Heritage Statement explains that policies EN1 and EN4 state that where development proposals include harm or the loss of a locally listed building, consent can be granted provided there is sufficient justification, usually in the form of public benefits which outweigh the harm. The Heritage Statement also states at section 4.5 that the locally listed building has a certain local value, however does not possess the same level of importance as other locally listed buildings. Moreover, the Heritage Statement confirms that during pre-

application discussions it has been accepted by RBC officers that the loss of this locally listed building would be acceptable, provided sufficient public benefits are provided by the proposed development. For clarity the public benefits of the proposed development are listed at paragraph 7.42 of this statement, and the Heritage Statement confirms at its section 5.0, that these would outweigh the balance of harm and allow the loss of the locally listed building.

CR11 vii) - Give careful consideration to the archaeological potential of the area and be supported by appropriate archaeological assessment which should inform the development.

7.32 An Archaeological Assessment has been submitted with the application. The Archaeological Assessment identifies that the site is considered likely to have a modest archaeological potential for below-ground geoarchaeological deposits associated with the mid-Prehistoric period. Therefore, a staged programme of geoarchaeological investigation is likely to be required prior to development. This can be secured through an appropriately worded condition.

CR11 viii) - Demonstrate that it is part of a comprehensive approach to its sub-area, which does not prevent neighbouring sites from fulfilling the aspirations of this policy, and which contributes towards the provision of policy requirements that benefit the whole area, such as open space.

7.33 The proposed development is laid out in a way which allows other sites in the area to come forward in parcels. The development is not solely inwards-facing and provides links such as the new north-south pedestrian link to connect the proposed development with other potential future development areas. The proposed development is part of a comprehensive approach to its sub-area and contributes toward the provision of policy requirements (such as the north-south link) which will benefit the whole area.

7.34 It is considered that the proposal 'contributes towards the provision of policy requirements that benefit the whole area', due to the important role it plays in relation to the strategic pedestrian/cycle link from Caversham to Central Reading, as explained within this report.

- 7.35 Regarding ensuring that the Site 'does not prevent neighbouring sites from fulfilling the aspirations of this policy', it is noted that the Site is not being delivered to the full extent of the allocation at this juncture. Berkeley Homes provided a letter to the case officer on 12th March 2019 which responded to this query in detail, reflecting comments from SSE (please see **Appendix 2**). The letter confirmed that SSE are unable to release the remaining element of the Site due to the prohibitive cost involved in relocating the existing transformers within the substations, and indeed a suitable alternative site has not yet been found. SSE have also confirmed that building over the existing transformers is not possible, due to safety and maintenance requirements. Crucially, the letter notes that SSE confirm they have not made any representations in relation to this element of the Site for the last 8 years and it is therefore considered that there is no ambiguity regarding its availability.
- 7.36 The position of SSE is therefore clear, and Berkeley Homes consequently have no opportunity to control any further elements of the wider allocation at this time. Focus should therefore be centred on the element of the allocation which is deliverable now and which can help deliver the aspirations of Policy CR11g in the immediate future.
- 7.37 It is considered that for the current proposals on the Site to effectively 'turn its back' on the adjacent SSE element of the Site, would be an inappropriate design response. Therefore, in order to successfully integrate the two parts of the Site in the future, eastern facing windows have been proposed to the north and south of the site, which provide good amenity for future residents and an element of natural surveillance for the existing uses, and those proposed/anticipated in the future across the two sites. This enables elements of the adjacent SSE site to replicate this relationship, by potentially introducing western facing windows to the centre of that site, where there is the larger proportion of developable land. An illustrative plan showing how in the fullness of time, the site can be comprehensively redeveloped is included within the DAS (Section 3.9).
- 7.38 It is considered therefore that the proposals, as put forward, enable the allocation under Policy CR11 (CR11g) to achieve the aspirations of the policy, whilst ensuring that the adjacent site retains the development potential to be able to align with the policy aspirations of CR11 in the future.

CR11 9 - Give early consideration to the potential impact on water and wastewater infrastructure in conjunction with Thames Water, and make provision for upgrades where required.

- 7.39 The accompanying Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) confirms at section 8 that the Site falls within Flood Zones 1 and 2 and is considered 'more vulnerable' development due to the residential use. A more vulnerable use however is considered appropriate in Flood Zone 1 and in Flood Zone 2, subject to satisfying the Sequential Test. The FRA notes that by virtue of the Site's allocation with the Local Plan, both the Sequential Test and the Exception Test have already been undertaken and passed.
- 7.40 The FRA confirms that modelling obtained from the Environment Agency (EA) reveal that the majority of the Site is situated beyond the floodplain, however areas of flooding do occur along the northern boundary and the south-west area of the site, to depths of up to 300mm. Through the following five mitigation measures the FRA confirms that the proposed development would be safe for future occupants and there will be no detrimental impact on third parties:
- i) Ground floor levels are set at 38.60m AOD or above, providing a 300mm freeboard above the design 1 in 100 annual probability +35% allowance for climate change flood level;
 - ii) Compensatory floodplain storage is provided through removal of the current masonry wall along the northern boundary of the site, and re-grading of the land to provide a landscaped buffer along the River Thames, resulting in a gain in storage of 120m³. In addition, further storage is provided around the southern boundary of the site as the site access points grade down to meet adjacent road and footpath levels.
 - iii) Safe access is available during the present day 1 in 100 annual probability event. Provision of a 'Flood Management and Evacuation Plan' will ensure that residents of the proposed development can receive sufficient warning to evacuate the site before flooding begins to affect the area in a more severe climate change scenario in accordance with the Reading Borough Council (RBC) Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).
 - iv) Incorporation of a continuous crest level running east-west across the north side of the site at a minimum of 38.60m AOD, which will tie in to the wider flood defence proposals of the EA Reading and Caversham Flood Alleviation Scheme; and
 - v) A surface water drainage strategy has been produced for the site and is provided within a separate report, demonstrating the proposals provide a betterment in terms of surface water runoff rates.

- 7.41 As at point (v) above, the accompanying Drainage Strategy states in section 8 that the ground conditions are not suitable for infiltration and therefore the Drainage Strategy proposes to split the discharge of surface water to the River Thames and the culverted Vastern Ditch watercourses. The Drainage Strategy further confirms that this strategy has been designed to attenuate surface water from the development to provide more than 50% betterment, when compared to the existing conditions for the 1 in 1 year, 1 in 30 year and 1 in 100 year flood events, within an allowance for climate change events.
- 7.42 With reference therefore to the commentary above the proposal adheres to points 1-9 set out within policy CR11. The proposal also aligns with the land uses proposed in site allocation CR11g. Redeveloping the site in the manner proposed is therefore considered wholly acceptable in principle.

Heritage Impacts

- 7.43 The entrance building part of the Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) building has recently been added to RBC's List of Locally Important Buildings and Structures. This is only a small element of the building, below is the associated map:



- 7.44 Despite this element of the building being locally listed in May 2017, the Local Plan submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2019 did not list this Asset as a planning constraint within the then draft site allocation CR11g, nor did it prescribe its retention. This is different to other allocations in Reading that do specifically list a requirement for retention.

- 7.45 In the preparation of the proposals, consideration has been given to the locally listed building at 55 Vastern Road, which was the former main entrance to the Electricity works. In heritage terms, as set out within the supporting Heritage Statement and noted at paragraph 7.31 above, No. 55 Vastern Road has a certain local value, but does not possess the same level of importance as some locally listed buildings. Pre-application discussions with RBC have established that it is only the Vastern Road façade of the property which has heritage value.
- 7.46 A number of façade retention options have been explored; however, it is not considered that any of the façade retention options would be appropriate for this site. In addition, retaining the locally listed building would have a significant detrimental impact on ability to deliver the key objectives of the site allocation and most significantly, the ability to deliver the north south link which would be compromised by the legibility of its route. Further information on the options explored and conclusions drawn with regard to the locally listed building can be found in the Design and Access Statement.
- 7.47 It is therefore considered that it is not feasible to retain the locally listed building as part of the proposed development and its demolition is proposed in order to be able to redevelop the whole site comprehensively. Although the proposed loss of the locally listed building is unfortunate, this harm should be weighed up against the benefits of the proposals in the planning balance. This is set out in paragraph 135 of the NPPF, and policies EN1 and EN4 of the Local Plan.

Public benefits of the proposed development

- 7.48 The public benefits associated with the proposal are considered to be significant. A full summary of the public benefits is set out below, which include, but are not limited to:
- i) Facilitation of strategic link from Central Reading to Christchurch Bridge and across the River Thames;
 - ii) Contribution to Reading's housing need for the borough;
 - iii) Provision of a range of housing types to accord with the needs of the borough and reflect adopted policy;
 - iv) High quality and sustainable design to reflect the strategic objectives of the station/river major opportunity area and the vision with the Local Plan that this will be a 'flagship scheme';

- v) Significant biodiversity improvements when compared to the current use of the Site to accord and assist with the wider objectives of the Local Plan in relation to wildlife corridors and habitats; and
- vi) Economic benefits as a result of the development, through job creation, job opportunities, supply chain and an increase in the residential population of Central Reading, for weekend trading.
- vii) Contribution to the amenity value of Christchurch Bridge and strategic 'link' location of the Site, via the provision of attractive open space and new riverside café.

New Pedestrian Riverside Link

7.49 The amplification text associated with site allocation CR11g is clear that achieving the north south link is the main priority for the Site, and this should be given '**substantial weight**' in development management. It is understood, that the development of this site is critical to the overall strategy for the Reading Centre, which hinges on a north-south axis. Links across the railway and the River Thames have been enhanced in recent years and this site is a key element of the broader strategic aspiration of the linking the town centre, station area and river and Caversham. The site is therefore considered to have a strategic importance way beyond its own boundaries.

7.50 The proposed development introduces a direct link through the site for both pedestrians and cyclists, linking Caversham to the Town Centre, through a clear and visually legible route, which incorporates strong wayfinding as a key element of the proposals. It is considered that this public benefit alone is enough to mitigate the loss of the locally listed building. Details of the link from Central Reading and its interaction with the Site are contained within section 3.8 of the accompanying Design and Access Statement.

Housing

7.51 The scheme would deliver a significant number of new homes in a sustainable location, optimising an unsightly brownfield site. Due to viability reasons, as detailed within the accompanying financial viability statement, the proposed scheme is not able to offer the provision of affordable housing on site. Please see chapter 8 of this report for further information and how this approach conforms with the requirements under policy H3 of the Local Plan.

Range of Housing Types

- 7.52 RBC requires all proposals for residential development within the Central Area to contribute towards a mix of different sized units within the development. Ideally, a mixture of one, two and three-bedroom units should be provided. The proposed scheme will incorporate a full range of housing typologies, adhering to the Council's current housing mix policy which requires 5% of the total units to be delivered as 3-bed accommodation (see paragraph 5.3 of this report).

High Quality and Sustainable Design

- 7.53 The scheme is of high quality, exemplary design, in a form that will improve the overall character, appearance and townscape setting of this area of Reading. The buildings will be constructed to be energy-efficient and sustainable, minimising the potential contribution to climate change resulting from the Proposed Development (see section 3.13.1 of the accompanying Design and Access Statement).

Biodiversity Improvements

- 7.54 Berkeley Homes is committed to improving the ecological merit of the site, through creating a range of suitable habitats, including a 10m buffer adjacent to the river's edge to allow for landscaping/ecological enhancements. A considered approach to the development's planting design will optimise opportunities for promoting existing ecological relationships present on site. Planting proposals will develop a mix of ornamental, flowering and naturalistic planting to support local wildlife and encourage use of the development. The design will also integrate specific ecological features to accommodate Priority Species targets listed in Reading's Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 7.55 The accompanying Ecology Report confirms in chapter 5 that there are no likely impacts to any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation sites, no UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) priority habitats are present within the Site and no evidence of roosting bats was noted. However, the Ecology Report also notes that there is the opportunity for the creation of new habitats and thus a net gain in biodiversity. Accordingly, correspondence has been sought with the Council in relation to tree species and an agreed range of native species are proposed, representing a more improved and diverse biodiversity position for the Site.

Economic Benefits

- 7.56 The proposed development will also interact with the existing socio-economic fabric of the area in a number of ways, playing an important role as a local business and employer, and having a positive impact on the local economy by generating expenditure through the supply chain.
- 7.57 The Proposed Development would complement the local labour market, supporting the construction industry with significant links to the local working population, contributing to employment containment and creating further job opportunities. The proposed development will also have a positive impact on the local economy by generating expenditure through the supply chain, positively impacting local suppliers by providing a consistent and reliable income stream.
- 7.58 In conclusion and in light of the above, it is considered that the significant planning benefits of the proposal, which include the provision of the key piece in the north-south pedestrian and cycle link through Reading town centre into Caversham, significantly outweigh the harm caused through the proposed loss of the locally listed building. Consideration has however been given to the site's industrial heritage which the overall design of the scheme has sought to reference through the warehouse and wharf inspired forms proposed.

Character and Design

- 7.59 The principle design policies for Reading are: Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm); EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment); CR2 (Design in the Centre/Design in Central Reading) and CR10 (Tall Buildings).
- 7.60 Policy CC7 sets out that all development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located, with policy EN1 seeking to protect and enhance the boroughs heritage assets and their settings.
- 7.61 Policy CR2 requires applications for development within Central Reading to build on and respect the existing grid layout structure of the central area, providing continuity and enclosure through appropriate relationships between buildings and spaces. The policy states that development should provide appropriate, well designed public spaces and other public realm. The architectural details and materials used in Central Reading

should be high quality and respect the form and quality of the detailing and materials in areas local to the development site.

- 7.62 The proposed development is a result of comprehensive and collaborative pre-application discussions with Reading Borough Council and Design South East. We believe the scheme represents a well-considered development of a high quality architectural design, layout, detailing and materials, which is mindful of the site's former heritage as a power station, but also facilitates the important north-south link between Christchurch Bridge and Vastern Road, connecting the river/Caversham with Reading station and the town centre. Details of how the proposals have incorporated these discussions are contained at section 2.7 and within chapter 3.0 of the accompanying Design and Access Statement.
- 7.63 The architectural approach to the design of the scheme references the industrial heritage of the site with regard to the Victorian Power Station/turbine halls/furnace house, chimneys and the river-side location. Warehouse and wharf inspired forms are therefore proposed.
- 7.64 Policy CR10 set out that in Reading, tall buildings are defined as 10 storeys of commercial floorspace or 12 storeys of residential floorspace (equating to 36 metres tall) or above. Within Reading, tall buildings will only be appropriate within the 'areas of potential for tall buildings' as defined on the Proposals Map. These areas are as follows: CR10a Station Area Cluster; CR10b Western Grouping and CR10c Eastern Grouping.
- 7.65 The site does not fall within an 'area of potential for tall buildings' and therefore a maximum policy compliant building height of 11 storeys is proposed. A single 11 storey tower marks the entrance to the site and references the former chimney of the power station. This tower would function as an urban marker, signalling the direction of the river from the town centre. This tower is the tallest part of the development.
- 7.66 The accompanying Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (TVIA) notes in section 7 that the Reading Tall Buildings Strategy describes the locality of the Site (Character Area 22) as 'an unexceptional area of townscape which does not respond well to the surrounding residential land use...[building design] is unattractive and creates a weak uninspiring area of townscape'. The TVIA notes further observations for this locality:
- i) River Thames is physically and visually separated from Central Reading;

- ii) Vastern Road is a dominant vehicle route acting as a barrier to prevent appreciation of Christchurch Bridge and the areas beyond, which have an emerging role in supporting Central Reading;
- iii) There is a notable contrast between the examples of positive built form frontages and the townscape void of the Site. The Site detracts from the impression created along the River Thames in this locality and has an obvious lack of any relationship with the town centre; and
- iv) A number of taller buildings are present in the surrounding townscape, with further tall buildings planned or under construction.

7.67 The TVIA confirms that the proposals have been informed with regard to townscape and visual considerations and these have been incorporated into the scheme wherever feasible. In terms of the beneficial changes to townscape and visual optimisation factors, the TVIA details these elements within section 7 which are in summary:

- i) Legibility of the River Thames at the interface with the expanding town centre;
- ii) Linkage across the river; and
- iii) Distinctiveness of the setting.

7.68 In terms of mitigating factors, the TVIA notes the positive elements of the proposed development in section 7, which are in summary:

- i) Avoidance of taller built form in the centre of the Site, to accentuate the legibility of the taller elements at either end of the link;
- ii) Height focussed to the south-eastern area of the Site, away from small scale residential properties to the north-west;
- iii) The provision of a transition between the requisite height of the legible townscape and the intimate domestic scale of residential development to the west, including progression in scale and varied roof articulation;
- iv) Tree planting on the boundary with the Lynmouth Road properties, to assist with the progression in scale and soften the appearance of the proposed facades;
- v) Varied façade treatments, on both the horizontal and vertical axis, to break up the massing and create a strong sense of place;
- vi) Varied use of windows and balconies creates further interest in the facades, as well as human usage of the built form; and
- vii) Proposed Development would create visual interest and an intimacy in the public realm at street level and soften the scale of adjoining built form.

- 7.69 In summary, the TVIA submits that the Proposed Development would result in beneficial effects on townscape features; beneficial or neutral effects on townscape character; and beneficial effects on the majority of views of the Proposed Development. The TVIA also notes that cumulative schemes are likely to result in further potential for enhancement of townscape features and character, therefore the visual effects of the proposed development with the wider cumulative schemes would be broadly balanced. Finally, the TVIA considers that the proposed development would respond positively to policy directions, notably in relation to the creation of a distinctive sense of place, linkage between Central Reading and Christchurch Meadow and the sensitive mitigation by design of the scale of built form.
- 7.70 In conclusion therefore, the proposed development is considered to be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The benefits of the scheme outweigh the harm caused by the proposed demolition of the locally listed building. The proposed design and character of the development is considered to be acceptable and in accordance with policies CC7, EN1, CR2 and CR10.

Residential Amenity

- 7.71 Policy CC8 states that development will not cause a significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing or new residential properties. This next section explores whether the amenity of both new and existing residents will be protected as a result of the development proposal.

Privacy and Overlooking

- 7.72 Policy CC8 state that a back-to-back distance of 20 metres between dwellings is usually appropriate, although the circumstances on individual sites may enable dwellings to be closer without a detrimental effect on privacy.
- 7.73 The proposals adhere to this principle in the main. In one instance (between The Generator and The Coal Drop buildings) there is a 14.9m distance between the properties within the proposed development, however this relates only to two flats. In this scenario, the two flats do not look directly into one another and have been designed to stagger views across the pedestrian link, showing no detrimental effect on privacy. Indeed, elsewhere in the Borough it is noted that in a suburban environment,

7.6m back-to-back and 11m front-to-front distances have been recently consented, for example in Green Park Village.

- 7.74 It is therefore considered that a reduction on the 'appropriate' distance within the Local Plan is acceptable, particularly where this is minimised and accordingly relates to a small portion of the proposed development. Moreover, paragraph 4.1.36 of the Local Plan explains that the aim of policy CC8, is to ensure that existing and additional residential properties provide an acceptable living environment. The 14.9m distance between these two residential properties retains acceptable living environments and therefore it is not considered that there is any resultant harm, and policy CC8 is satisfied in this regard.

Daylight/Sunlight

- 7.75 Policy CC8 states that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of access to sunlight and daylight.
- 7.76 The accompanying Daylight and Sunlight Report notes at section 8 that the proposed development has been purposefully designed to ensure the tallest elements of the scheme are situated to the north and south of the site, where they are largely offset from residential windows. Moreover, Block A, which is situated to the south of the Site, has been designed to include a lower element, allowing light penetration to the neighbouring windows and amenity spaces.
- 7.77 Section 8 of the Daylight and Sunlight Report concludes that the assessment has shown that the proposals cause minor reductions in daylight to the surrounding residential properties. However, the report also notes that currently these properties have a view over an open car park and low rise buildings, causing these properties to experience unusually high light levels for this urban context. The report concludes that as a result of the proposed development, the retained levels will remain in line with those expected for this context and consequently in line with the overall intensions of the BRE criteria.
- 7.78 Regarding internal amenity to the proposed development, the report firstly notes that the results demonstrate high levels of internal daylight, with 93% of rooms achieving ADF levels in line within the targets. Moreover, the report notes that the results of the

APSH analysis demonstrate the vast majority of south facing living rooms would achieve sunlight levels in line with the BRE criteria.

- 7.79 Regarding overshadowing, the report concludes that the studies indicate a small number of deviations from the BRE targets. The report explains that these deviations are to particularly constrained amenity spaces, which are therefore sensitive to change. However, as the report notes, the transient overshadowing study concludes that the proposal has little effect on these spaces in the summer months, when the gardens would be most used.
- 7.80 Overall the scheme has been designed to respond to its context and any effects to neighbouring properties limited where possible. Moreover, as noted, a high level of amenity is delivered within the scheme. The Daylight and Sunlight Report concludes that the BRE guidelines do permit a degree of flexibility where other factors should be considered. For example, the Site is currently comprised of a car park and relatively low rise building use, causing surrounding properties to enjoy high amenity levels and, as per the BRE criteria, the report submits that any impacts should be considered a proportional change.
- 7.81 With regard to policy CC8 it is noted that the Local Plan states that the policy aims to ensure that existing and additional residential properties provide an acceptable living environment. The policy further states that substantial levels of development are planned for Reading in coming years and the increasing concentration on different types of development, may give rise to some tensions between uses (paragraph 4.1.37). It is therefore concluded that the proposal respects the aims of policy CC8, whilst also ensuring that it delivers the requirements of the allocation (CR11g).

Wind

- 7.82 Policy CC8 states that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of wind, where the proposals involve new development of more than 8 storeys.
- 7.83 The accompanying Pedestrian Level Wind Microclimate Assessment concludes that overall, wind conditions around the majority of the Proposed Development would be suitable for the intended use. Initial landscaping and entrance mitigation measures have

been introduced at ground level which would address the proposed intended use, however there would be locations at both ground and at elevated levels that would be windier than suitable, requiring wind mitigation measures which can be addressed via an appropriately worded condition.

7.84 The report notes that the assessment of wind conditions at the Site has been conducted with models devoid of landscaping or wind mitigation measures to present a worst-case scenario. Moreover, as noted above, wind mitigation measures have been suggested within section 7 of the report to enhance the proposed landscaping scheme and improve wind conditions in areas of the site which indicate windier conditions in the worst case scenario.

7.85 The following wind mitigation measures are suggested within the report to improve wind conditions identified at ground level, balconies and terrace level areas around the proposed development:

- i) The addition of at least two trees which are at least 5m in height, at the south-east corner of Building B;
- ii) The addition of a 50% porous screen of at least 2m in height and 2m in width placed perpendicular to the southern facade of Building B at the south-east corner;
- iii) Solid balustrades at least 1.5m in height at terrace levels and balconies expected to experience adverse wind conditions;
- iv) 1.8m tall side screens that are no more than 50% porous at balconies that are expected to have unsuitable wind conditions;
- v) Strategically placed planting of at least 1.5m in height in terrace level areas with unsuitable wind conditions; and
- vi) Strategically placed planted trellises or porous screens of 2m in height in terrace level areas with unsuitable wind conditions.

7.86 The accompanying Design and Access Statement demonstrates that the above mitigation measures have been incorporated and consequently it is concluded that the proposed development accords with policy CC8 in relation to wind.

Air Quality

7.87 Policy EN15 state that development should have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality. The site is situated within an Air

Quality Management Area (AQMA) due to elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide. Development that would detrimentally affect air quality will not be permitted unless the effect is to be mitigated.

- 7.88 The accompanying Air Quality Assessment concludes in section 7 that the construction works have the potential to create dust and therefore during construction it is recommended that, in accordance with the Institute of Air Quality Management's (IAQM's) guidance, a package of mitigation measures is put in place to minimise the risk of elevated PM10 concentrations and dust nuisance in the surrounding area. This is something which can be secured by condition. The report confirms that with mitigation in place the construction impacts are judged as not significant.
- 7.89 The report further notes that predicted annual mean concentrations of NO₂, PM10 and PM_{2.5} at proposed receptor locations within the site are below the relevant NAQOs. The site is therefore considered suitable for the proposed redevelopment without the need for on-site specific mitigation in relation to air quality.
- 7.90 In summary the report concludes that the proposed development is considered to be in accordance with the requirements of relevant local and national guidance, policy and legislation in relation to Air Quality. Accordingly, the requirements of policy EN15 are deemed to have been satisfied.

Noise and Vibration

- 7.91 Policy CC8 states that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of noise and disturbance and vibration.
- 7.92 Road traffic noise is the dominant noise source for the site, in particular noise from the A329 (Vastern Road) to the south of the site. External sound levels on Vastern Road are high and as such sound control forms an integral part of the site layout.
- 7.93 The accompanying Noise Impact Assessment notes at section 7 that the site is affected by noise from road traffic using Vastern Road, from aircraft and train movements and from the SSE transformer substation which neighbours the proposed development site. Therefore in order to assess the noise impact on the site detailed noise surveys and acoustic calculations have been undertaken between September 2018 and December

2019. The report also notes that following this, feedback has been provided to the design team to optimise the design of the site to minimise noise impact.

7.94 Measures have been taken to ensure that the noise levels both externally and internally within the proposed new development will be acceptable. This will involve detailed acoustic design post-planning and will require alternative means of ventilation and design measures to prevent excess thermal build up to allow residents to occupy their dwellings with windows closed (if they so wish). The report concludes that on this basis it is considered that an acceptable noise environment can be obtained within the proposed development and it is considered that there are no noise grounds for refusal of planning consent. Accordingly, it is submitted that the requirements of policy CC8 are satisfied in relation to acoustic levels.

7.95 With reference to the evidence outlined above in relation to residential amenity, privacy and overlooking, daylight/sunlight, wind, air quality and noise and vibration, it is submitted that this application demonstrates that the development will not cause a significant detrimental impact on the living conditions of existing or new residential properties. The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accordance with the requirements of policies CC8 and EN15.

Other Relevant Development Plan Policies

Housing Mix

7.96 Policy CR6 require all proposals for residential development within the Central Area to contribute towards a mix of different sized units within the development. Ideally, a mixture of one, two and three bedroom units should be provided. As a guide, in developments of 15 dwellings or more, a maximum of 40% of units should be one bed and a minimum of 5% of units should be at least three bed, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would render a development unviable.

7.97 The table below details the proposed housing mix:

Unit Type	No. of Units	Percentage
1 Bed	60	28.7%
2 Bed	137	65.6%
3 Bed	12	5.7%
Unit Total	209	100%

7.98 The proposed split which stays below the maximum of 40% one bed units, and exceeds the 5% minimum for three bed units complies with policy CR6.

Sustainability and Energy

7.99 Policy CC2 sets out that proposals for new development, including the construction of new buildings and the redevelopment and refurbishment of existing building stock, will be acceptable where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change.

7.100 The accompanying Energy Statement details the proposed energy strategy for the Site, which will provide the following:

- a. High standards of fabric efficiency, going significantly beyond the requirements of Part L 2013.
- b. This includes low air permeability rates and targeted thermal bridges;
- c. MVHR systems to all blocks with the exception of one, providing heat recovery & cooling whilst contributing further to the overall CO₂ reduction of the development;
- d. Efficient & simple systems for residents to use;
- e. High levels of control for resident comfort;
- f. Greater tariff flexibility for residents to reduce their heating costs;
- g. Application of PV panels to all suitable roof areas, providing generating potential for the overall development.

7.101 The Energy Statement confirms that the proposed development will obtain heat from low carbon electricity. The Energy Statement notes that this delivers significant CO₂ savings to the development when assessing against the more accurate SAP 10.1 CO₂ emissions factors, with CO₂ continuing to decrease for the lifetime of the development as the electricity grid decarbonises further. The scheme will also incorporate low and zero carbon technologies to further reduce site wide CO₂ emissions as well as providing a source of on-site electricity generation.

7.102 In summary, the Energy Strategy concludes that the development is expected to achieve a 54.2% reduction in Regulated CO₂ emissions. This goes significantly beyond the requirements of the new RBC Local Plan for on-site reductions and for clarity, the

report further confirms that the strategy still enables compliance with Part L 2013 of Building Regulations, when assessed under SAP 2012 emission factors. Accordingly, it is considered that the requirements of policy CC2 are met.

Trees and Ecology

7.103 Policy EN12s seek to ensure that developments retain, protect and incorporate features of biodiversity or geological interest. Where applicable, developments should be designed to protect, consolidate, extend and enhance the network of wildlife links and corridors in and adjoining the Borough.

7.104 Policy EN14 states that individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal, and the Borough's vegetation cover will be extended. Policy EN14 also set out that new development shall also make provision for tree planting within the application site.

7.105 There are no European or nationally designated sites within or in close proximity to the site. The section of the River Thames adjoining the site is however categorised in RBC's Proposals Map as a Green Link under policy EN12. The majority of the site comprises buildings and hardstanding, which are of negligible ecological importance.

7.106 An Arboricultural Impact Assessment has been carried out by Greengage and submitted with this application. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment has confirmed that one Category B tree and one Category C tree (T5 and T6) located to the north of the site would need to be removed to facilitate the scheme. There would be no adverse impact on other existing trees as a result of the proposals, so long as the recommendations set out in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment are followed. Furthermore, the landscaping proposals will bring about a net gain in tree stock on the site (please see paragraph 7.49 of this report where discussions with the Council's tree officer are noted).

Access, Parking and Waste

7.107 Policies TR1 and TR5 require the submission of a Transport Assessment, a commitment to sustainable travel and the provision of appropriate car parking standards and cycle parking requirements. In addition, policy TR3 consideration of the effect on safety, congestion and the environment when assessing access, traffic and highway-related matters.

- 7.108 The vehicular access to the proposed development is situated on Lynmouth Road. The existing junction will be widened to accommodate two-way vehicle movements. The existing vehicle accesses on Vastern Road are situated outside the red line boundary of the application site, and will be retained in conjunction with the existing SSE infrastructure.
- 7.109 Pedestrian access to the site is from Vastern Road to the south and from Christchurch Bridge to the north. A direct ramp link is proposed to connect Christchurch Bridge with the new podium, whilst a contribution towards the provision of a new Toucan crossing is proposed on Vastern Road to support ease of pedestrian passage from the site toward the station and town centre. Through the centre of the site the proposed pedestrian/cycle link would connect the podium with Vastern Road.
- 7.110 Cycle parking is proposed in accordance with RBC's Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD 2011. The proposed development will provide 122 cycle parking spaces. Two tier racks are proposed in secure, covered and lit cycle stores.
- 7.111 A total of 55 car parking spaces are proposed as part of the new development. The majority of these spaces (43) are located in the podium undercroft with 12 on-street parking spaces proposed.
- 7.112 The sites servicing and delivery requirements will be carried out from within the site boundary. The proposed layout provides suitable access for servicing, refuse and emergency vehicles. Bin stores are proposed within the development.
- 7.113 The Transport Consultants agreed with highways development control officers, during the scoping stages of the application requirements, that a Transport Statement was deemed acceptable given the Site's previous use as an office and associated car park. Therefore, a Transport Statement accompanies this application, rather than a Transport Assessment, as outlined within section 1.2 of the Transport Statement. Additionally, it was also agreed with Council officers that, in light of the above, no specific policy review was required.
- 7.114 Drawing 47500/5500/SK, which accompanies the submitted Transport Statement, demonstrates via vehicle tracking that sufficient space is provided, to accommodate approved Council refuse and 10m HGV vehicles.

7.115 The Transport Statement concludes that the impact of the proposed development on the surrounding highway network will result in an overall reduction of two-way car trips across both the AM and PM peak hours compared to its current use. The suitability of the development proposals, in terms of access for pedestrian and cyclists with associated parking and refuse servicing is deemed appropriate and access and movement can be achieved for all modes. Accordingly, it is considered that the proposed development satisfies all policy requirements in this regard.

8.0 AFFORDABLE HOUSING STATEMENT

- 8.1 Policy H3 requires all sites of 10 or more dwellings to provide 30% of the total dwellings in the form of affordable housing.
- 8.2 In determining residential applications policy H3 states that the Council will assess the site size, suitability and type of units to be delivered in relation to the current evidence of identified needs. The Council will seek an appropriate tenure mix of affordable housing to include social rented, affordable rent, intermediate rent and shared ownership affordable units.
- 8.3 The supporting text to policy H3 indicates that a tenure split of 70% social rented and 30% intermediate or shared ownership is currently required pending the publication of an affordable housing SPD.
- 8.4 The supporting text to policy H3 also notes the following:

In all cases where proposals fall short of the policy target as a result of viability considerations, an open book approach will be taken and the onus will be on the developer/landowner to clearly demonstrate the circumstances justifying a lower affordable housing contribution.

- 8.5 A Viability Appraisal has been prepared by Berkeley Homes (Oxford & Chiltern) to accompany this application (submitted under separate cover due to confidentiality), which clearly sets out the affordable housing position of the scheme.
- 8.6 The viability appraisal was prepared in line with current practice including the NPPF Viability Guidance (Updated May 2019) and the RBC Affordable Housing SPD (July 2013). The viability appraisal uses a Land Cost based on an Existing Use Value, plus a premium for the office premises, as presented in the formal valuation by Romans. Additionally, market values and build costs are supported by independent reports and take account of the high quality landscaping and product that Berkeley Homes are proposing, as part of the comprehensive redevelopment of the Site. The results demonstrate that the proposed development produces a substandard return (0.53% of GDV). It is therefore concluded that the site, in its current form, produces an unacceptable return and is unable to support any level of affordable housing.

9.0 S106 CONTRIBUTIONS / COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

Draft Heads of Terms

9.1 Reading's Supplementary Planning Document on Planning Obligations under Section 106 (April 2015) confirms that Section 106 agreements will be required for affordable housing provision and for site related infrastructure requirements, both of which fall beyond the remit of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The SPD further comments that some of these requirements might be physically off site, but clearly linked to the development site and needed to make the development acceptable in planning terms. Accordingly, it is proposed that the draft heads of terms are as follows:

- **Highways, Access and Transport:**
 - Provision of a new north-south link connecting Vastern Road to Christchurch Bridge
 - Financial contribution of £50,000 towards the new crossing on Vastern Road
 - Provision of transport mitigation measures including:
 - Residential Travel plan
 - Electric Vehicle Charging Points
 - Car Club
- **Leisure and Culture:**
 - Provision of new public art sculpture
- **Economic Development Services and Infrastructure:**
 - Contribution towards the Construction Phase ESP.
- **Affordable Housing:**
 - Provision of affordable housing (subject to viability)
- **Open Space and Green Infrastructure:**
 - Financial contribution towards the investment in new facilities at Christchurch Meadows and/or Hills Meadow

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

9.2 Reading's adopted Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule (January 2015) confirms that the Site is located within Central Reading. Moreover, according to the charging schedule detailed on page 2, it is confirmed that the residential use of the Site is subject to a £120/m² levy and the A3 retail is zero rated.

- 9.3 The collected levy will be used to fund non site related improvements within the borough, which are not listed in the above draft heads of terms.

10.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 Reading Borough Council's ambition to redevelop the site is enshrined within the Local Plan (Nov 2019) and the formal allocation of the site in policy CR11g. The proposals succinctly align with the allocation set out in policy CR11g, providing a residential development accompanied by 17.9sqm of leisure use, and provide a green link from the north of the station through to the other side of the river which is a key priority for the future of this site.
- 10.2 Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd have been working collaboratively with key parties / stakeholders to produce a development proposal which we believe meets the ambitions of Reading Borough Council, Statutory Consultees, the local community and other interested groups.
- 10.3 The proposal represents the complete redevelopment of a sustainably located urban site, creating a significant quantum of new homes to assist Reading Borough Council in delivering enough housing to meet its objectively assessed housing need.
- 10.4 We believe the scheme represents a well-considered development of high quality architectural design, layout, detailing and materials which is mindful of the site's former heritage as a power station, but also facilitates the important north-south link between Christchurch Bridge and Vastern Road, connecting the river/Caversham with Reading station and the town centre. The proposed development maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located.
- 10.5 It is concluded that the proposed development aligns with site allocation CR11g, as well as meeting the various criteria of policy CR11 and adhering to the other relevant policies within the Council's Development Plan.
- 10.6 The table below summaries the associated benefits of the proposed scheme:

Category	Associated benefit
Placemaking	High quality and sustainable design to reflect the strategic objectives of the station/river major opportunity area and the vision with the Local Plan that this will be a 'flagship scheme'.

Pedestrian/Cycle public benefit	Facilitation of strategic link from Central Reading to Christchurch Bridge and across the River Thames.
Amenity/strategic open space	Contribution to the amenity value of Christchurch Bridge and strategic 'link' location of the Site, via the provision of attractive open space and new riverside café.
Townscape	Legibility of the River Thames at the interface with the expanding town centre, linkage across the river and distinctiveness of the setting.
Biodiversity	Significant biodiversity improvements when compared to the current use of the Site to accord and assist with the wider objectives of the Local Plan, in relation to wildlife corridors and habitats. Including a 10m buffer adjacent to the river's edge to allow for landscaping/ecological enhancements.
Housing need	Contribution to Reading's housing need for the borough and provision of a range of housing types to accord with the needs of the borough, reflecting adopted policy.
Housing mix	The proposed scheme would promote a wide range of housing within a sustainable community by delivering a mixed scheme. The scheme would deliver a significant number of new housing units in a sustainable location, optimising an unsightly brownfield site.
Trees and ecology	In addition to ecology benefits with and north of the Site, the scheme further proposes a vast increase in planting, within and adjacent to the pedestrian/cycle link.
Economy	Economic benefits as a result of the development, through job creation, job opportunities, supply chain and an increase in the residential population of Central Reading, for weekend trading.

Leisure/active riverside	The proposals includes a café to the north of the Site, which increases activity in this area of the river and promotes greater footfall along this important link through the site.
Wayfinding	Berkeley are committed to ensuring that there is sufficient wayfinding to enable to link from Central Reading through the Site, easy to find and navigate; according with strategic objectives.

10.7 For the reasons provided within this statement and the application as a whole, it is respectfully requested that the application is approved.

APPENDIX 1A

Town & Country Planning (EIA) Regulations 2017
Secretary of State Screening Direction – Written Statement

Application name:	Land at 55 Vastern Road Reading (Vastern Road proposal)
SoS case reference:	PCU/EIASC/E0345/3224129
Schedule and category of development:	Schedule 2: 10(b) ii) the development includes more than 150 dwellings

Full statement of reasons as required by 5(5)(a) of the 2017 EIA Regulations including conclusions on likeliness of significant environmental effects.

The Secretary of State has considered whether the above proposal is likely to have significant environmental effects. He has undertaken this screening taking into account the criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. In doing so he considers the main matters to be addressed are:

Schedule 3 selection criteria for Schedule 2 development refers:

1 (a) – (f) regarding characteristics of development

Having regard to the scale and nature of the proposed development, the Secretary of State does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of physical changes in the location; production of waste; use of natural resources or the risks of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the development concerned.

In terms of pollution and nuisance, the Secretary of State has had regard to the cumulation with other existing development and/or approved development. Planning Practice Guidance states that there are occasions when other existing or approved development may be relevant in determining whether significant effects are likely as a consequence of a proposed development. While the Secretary of State accepts that the proposed development is likely to result in some additional traffic movements. He is aware that the site is in an air quality management area, but he is not persuaded that the impact of development on this scale, when viewed cumulatively, would be of the magnitude necessary to justify an environmental statement. He considers that this matter could be dealt with by way of normal planning practice.

2 (a)-(c) (i) – (viii) regarding location of development

The Secretary of State notes that the site is not in a sensitive area and there are no statutory designated sites within 10 km, and no non-statutory ecologically designated sites within 3km of the development. The Secretary of State has regard to the Council's concern as to the effect on the River Thames priority habitat and has consulted with Government's specialist advisors on ecological and Flooding matters. Having had due regard to the specialist comments of the Environment Agency and Natural England, the Secretary of State does not consider that significant environmental effect is likely in terms of any impact on the special features which led to their designation.

The Secretary of State has had regard to issues concerning flooding and pollution. He has carefully considered advice and specialist comments from the Environment Agency and concludes that these matters could be dealt with by way of normal planning practice.

3(a) –(e) regarding characteristics of potential impact

The Secretary of State considers that the magnitude and spatial extent of the proposal would be mainly experienced in the immediate locality. Having regard to the scale and nature of

the proposals, he does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of the intensity and complexity of the impact.

Conclusion

The Vastern Road proposal involves the development of 240 dwellings on a 0.73 ha site and falls within the threshold and criteria set out in schedule 2:10 (b):- urban development projects of the Regulations.

In assessing whether the proposal constitutes EIA development the Secretary of State has consulted the Environment Agency, the Government's specialist advisers on flood risk and contamination issues. Having had due regard to their comments and the evidence submitted by the applicant, the Secretary of State has concluded that the potential environmental effects on these issues are not so significant as to justify the proposal constituting EIA development. The Secretary of State has also consulted Natural England, the Government's specialist advisers on ecological and landscape issues. Having had due regard to their comments and the evidence submitted by the applicant, the Secretary of State has concluded that the potential environmental effects on these issues are not so significant as to justify the proposal constituting EIA development.

In reaching this conclusion, the Secretary of State has also considered the measures to mitigate the potential environmental impacts. He has concluded that the proposed measures are sufficient to obviate the need for an environmental impact assessment.

Is an Environmental Statement required?	No
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Name	Gerry Carpenter Senior Planning Manager
Date	14 May 2019

APPENDIX 1B



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Neil Purvis
Senior Environmental Planner
Barton Willmore
7 Soho Square,
London,
W1D 3QB

By email: Neil.Purvis@bartonwillmore.co.uk

Please ask for: Kevin White
Tel: 0303 44 48163
Email: Kevin.white@communities.gov.uk
Your ref:
Our ref: PCU/EIASCR/E0345/3224129

Date: 14 May 2019

Dear Mr Purvis

**Request for a Screening Direction
Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations
2017**

Proposal for: Proposed development of up to 210 dwellings with a max height of 11 storeys (up to 36m above ground level) including a new north south pedestrian link, connecting Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road towards the station as well as drainage infrastructure and landscaping.

I refer to **your request** dated 5 March 2019, made under 6(10) of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017(S.I. 2017/571) ("the 2017 Regulations") for the Secretary of State's screening direction on the matter of whether or not the above development is 'EIA development' within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations.

The above development falls within the description at paragraph 10(b) ii) the development includes more than 150 dwellings of Schedule 2 to the 2017 Regulations. Since the proposal exceeds the threshold in column 2 of the table in Schedule 2 of the 2017 Regulations, the Secretary of State considers your client's proposal to be 'Schedule 2 development' within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations.

However, having taken into account the selection criteria in Schedule 3 to the 2017 Regulations the Secretary of State does not consider that the proposal is likely to have significant effects on the environment, see the attached written statement which gives the reasons for direction as required by 5(6) of the EIA Regulations.

Accordingly, in exercise of the powers conferred on him by regulation 7(5) of the 2017 Regulations the Secretary of State hereby directs that the proposed development described in your client's/your request and the documents submitted with it, is not '**EIA development**' within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations.

Planning Casework Unit
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
5 St Philips Place
Colmore Row
Birmingham B3 2PW

Tel: 0303 44 48050
Email: pcu@communities.gov.uk

Any permitted development rights which your client's proposal may enjoy under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (SI 596) as amended are therefore unaffected.

You will bear in mind that the Secretary of State's opinion on the likelihood of the development having significant environmental effects is reached only for the purposes of this direction.

I am sending a copy of this letter and the written statement to Reading Borough Council.

Yours sincerely

Gerry Carpenter

Gerry Carpenter
Senior Planning Manager
(With the authority of the Secretary of State)

APPENDIX 2

Jonathan Markwell
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

12 March 2019

Dear Jonathan Markwell,

Vastern Road – Red line/ SSE Retained Land

Further to your pre app 2 response dated 15 February 2019 where you raised query as you why the red line boundary of the site cannot be increased, we have sought to understand more about the history of the policy allocation of the SSE site on Vastern Road.

SSE has confirmed that in the past eight years they have not made any formal representations to the local plan regards the allocation of this site. The last formal representations were made back in 2009 and 2010 by Steven Walters of BNP Paribas on behalf of SSE. I attach a copy of those representations. The 2010 representations make clear that:

The substations would need to be retained within a redevelopment or re-provided off-site to bring this site forward. The costs of re-provision (land acquisition and plant) would need to be met by the redevelopment of the site or grant towards relocation. There may be contamination costs associated with remediation given the existing former uses of the site.

The site is allocated (Policy RC1g, RIVERSIDE) in the current adopted Core Strategy, the current Local Plan. It is understood the site was also allocated within the Local Plan 1991-2006 under policy CEN 13 for mixed use development. It is unknown whether the site was allocated in earlier versions of the adopted Local Plan.

Regards the emerging Local Plan, no formal representations have been made by SSE or agents representing SSE. However, the site was independently assessed as part of the Reading Housing Land Availability Assessment, Nov 2017. This document provides an assessment of each potential housing site in terms of its, Suitability, Deliverability, Availability and Achievability. The SSE site is given reference AB005. It is noted that the site has been categorised as “Potentially Available” rather than “Available”. Similarly when assessed against Achievability, the site is assessed as “Potentially Achievable”. In both cases uncertainty over the ability of SSE to relocate the plant are documented.

The Reading Housing Land Availability Assessment, Nov 2017 forms the evidence base for the draft emerging Local Plan. Taking into account that evidence base, the site received a positive draft allocation (Ref CR11g, RIVERSIDE). In allocating the site in the emerging Local Plan, the Council have considered appropriate policy wording. This would have been informed by the evidence base and uncertainty over the ability for the SSE transformers to be relocated would have been duly noted

by policy officers. The current policy wording does not make specific reference to the site coming forward comprehensively, nor does it include wording which precludes part of the site coming forward.

As such, the current red line of the proposed development is not considered to be in conflict with the adopted or emerging policy. Perhaps more importantly, the supporting text to Policy Ref CR11g states:

“...In particular, on the Riverside site (CR11g), achieving this north-south link is the main priority for the site, and this should be given substantial weight in development management.”

The current scheme achieves this priority objective within the confines of the current red line.

Notwithstanding this, Andy Fraser SSE Commercial Property Manager has confirmed:

‘The SSE Vastern Road site includes a 132kV/33kV electricity substation, as well as 33kV/11kV substation forming critical electricity infrastructure to supply Reading town and outlying towns and villages, supplying over 25,000 customers. These substations form a hub in Reading, taking supplies from Bramley and Fleet National Grid bulk supply points, thus ensures resilience of Reading’s electricity supplies.

The substations consists of two 132kV/33kV transformers, four 33kV/11kV transformers, and 33kV & 11Kv switchrooms . The cost of relocation would be prohibitively expensive even if a suitable site could be found.

Building over the existing 132kV/33kV transformer is not feasible. The existing configuration comprises of two 132kV exposed bus bar bays. Consideration has to be given to the safety clearance of any adjacent structure for day to day operation, maintenance and future replacement. One of these two bays will need to remain live at all times to ensure the electricity supply to the area is continuous. The option of building over has been reviewed, and other sites in the UK considered, but ruled out with the existing infrastructure.

The existing 132kV transformers are bushing connected which means they have live, exposed terminals on the top . Therefore clear airspace above the existing transformers is essential. Even if a structure could be provided above a clear airspace minimum height, it could only be a structure not accessible by the public as HSE regulations are very strict on publically accessible spaces within identified live and blast zones. Consideration also has to be given to working adjacent to the live bay, noise, cooling, vibration, earthing, and erection/maintenance/ replacement methods of the structure. These units weigh in excess of 40 tons, and require use of flatbed trailers and cranes to facilitate replacement.’

Berkeley Homes has confirmed that their ownership extends to the red line as set out in the pre application documents presented to date and that no option is available to secure additional land. A copy of the title can be provided in due course if required.

With the above in mind, it would be unreasonable for Officers to maintain that the red line could or should be extended. Any application should be considered on its merits on the basis of the scheme submitted.

I trust this is sufficient to draw a conclusion to this matter. However, do not hesitate to come back to me should you require anything further.

Yours Sincerely



Katy Walker
Senior Land & Planning Manager

Enc:

- 2010 Record Sheet For Contact With Developers/ Owners of Housing Sites (SHLAA) – Allocations
- BNP Paribas Representations - Site Allocations Development Plan Document on Behalf of SSE, Nov 2009

RECORD SHEET FOR CONTACT WITH DEVELOPERS/ OWNERS OF HOUSING SITES (SHLAA) - ALLOCATIONS

Section 1: General questions/ information

Site/ Allocation reference RC1g

Site address

Riverside (Vastern Road)

Contact name & telephone/ Email

Steve Walters, Director, BNP Paribas Real Estate (agent)
0207 338 4062; steven.walters@bnpparibas.com

Company

BNP Paribas Real Estate is the agent for SSE

Address

90 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1EU

Date of contact

15/12/09

Are you still the owner/ agent of the site? If not do you know who is?

SSE is the owner of the site, their company address is

55 Vastern Road, Reading RG1 8BU

If you are the owner/agent, do you/ your client have any plans to sell the site in the near future?

Whilst the site does not have an immediate (0-5 years) delivery timeframe, it has a *potential* medium to long term availability.

Section 2: Availability

When do you think the site will be available for development - *either year of anticipated commencement or broad period of start?*

1-5	5-10	10-15
X	Potential	Potential

Are there any legal or ownership problems? E.g. ransom strip, multiple owners etc - If so what are these?

N/A

Are there any plans to submit a planning application in the near future?

SSE has no immediate plans to submit a planning application for the redevelopment of the site - see above.

Section3: Achievability - judgement of economic viability

Are there any market or financial constraints (e.g. site preparation costs, constraints, obligations etc) to bringing this site forward? Are there things which may mean this site may not be able to come forward or are there issues which can be overcome, but require finance?

The Vastern Road site is located on the northern side of Vastern Road. It measures 1.24 hectares (3.06 acres) and fronts both Vastern Road and the River Thames, which runs behind it (to the north).

Our client occupies the site, with SSE staff occupying the three-storey office building that extends almost the full width of the Vastern Road frontage. A vehicle access runs parallel to the site's eastern boundary. This access road leads to car parking alongside (east of) the building and a large area of car parking to the rear of the site. Two substations are located behind (to the north) of the office building, with a further four substations located to the rear of the site, along the eastern boundary.

The substations would need to be retained within a redevelopment or re-provided off-site to bring this site forward. The costs of re-provision (land acquisition and plant) would need to be met by the redevelopment of the site or grant towards relocation. There may be contamination costs associated with remediation given the existing former uses of the site.

What do you consider the delivery of the site will be in terms of phasing, realistic build out rates etc.?

A mix of uses could be incorporated. Subject to the re-provision of the substations and the development option, the site could be delivered in a single phase or multiple phases. Due to the size of the site, the latter is more realistic, especially if it is all or primarily residential.

Overcoming Constraints (if applicable)

What needs to be done to overcome constraints? such as new infrastructure, environmental improvement

The primary issue is securing an alternative site for relocation of the existing plant - and to deliver this in a viable way. Further, site demolition and clean-up is likely to be required together with securing detailed planning permission. In this regard, we also comment as follows:

The site falls within the Station/River Major Opportunity Area. The vision is for the station/river area as a flagship scheme, extending the centre and providing a mixed use destination in itself and centred on a redeveloped station and new public transport interchange. The vision further states that the opportunity area will integrate the transport links and areas northwards towards the river and into the heart of the centre.

The site's potential for redevelopment would be improved, from a viability point of view, when the above come forward.



LDF Team
Planning Section
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Our ref: SYW/BGV/092865/E/001

13 November 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

REPRESENTATIONS TO THE SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

We write on behalf of our client, SSE (formerly Scottish and Southern Energy), to submit representations for the above document.

1 BACKGROUND – SSE

SSE's core purpose is to provide the energy people need in a reliable and sustainable way.

■ Generation

SSE owns around 10,700MW of electricity generation capacity, including its share of joint ventures and associates. This makes it the second largest electricity generator across the UK and Ireland. The capacity comprises 4,500MW of gas- and oil-fired capacity, 4,000MW of coal-fired capacity (with biomass 'co-firing' capability), and over 2,200MW of renewable capacity.

■ Energy Supply

SSE supplies electricity and gas to over 9 million customers within the UK's competitive electricity and gas supply market, with growth continuing in the current financial year. It is the second largest supplier of energy in the UK.

■ Electricity Networks

SSE is responsible for around 127,000km of overhead lines and underground cables, distributing electricity to 3.5 million homes, offices and businesses in the north of Scotland and central and southern England. SSE also owns and maintains the 132kV and 275kV electricity transmission network in the north of Scotland.



- Gas Networks

SSE holds 50% of the equity of Scotia Gas Networks plc, which owns and operates the Scotland and the Southern gas distribution networks. The networks comprise some 74,000km of gas mains, delivering gas to around 5.7 million industrial, commercial and domestic customers.

- Telecoms Networks

SSE Telecoms and Neos Networks operate a 10,300km UK-wide telecoms network, providing services to other telecoms providers, companies and public sector organisations.

- Contracting

SSE's Contracting business has three main areas of activity: industrial, commercial and domestic mechanical and electrical contracting; electrical and instrumentation engineering; and public and highway lighting. It is one of the largest mechanical and electrical contracting businesses in the UK.

- Connections

SSE's Utility Solutions business provides a one-stop solution for multi-utility infrastructure requirements by building, operating and maintaining 'out-of-area' embedded electricity networks, and gas, water, and commercial energy services.

- Energy and Home Services

SSE's energy and home services team offers a range of maintenance and protection services for customers' gas and electrical systems, electricity and gas appliances, telecoms services and community-focused renewable energy schemes.

- Gas Storage

SSE owns and operates the UK's largest onshore gas storage facility at Hornsea in East Yorkshire. Nine salt caverns have been leached into a salt layer 1.8km below the surface, creating 325 million cubic metres (mcm) of gas storage capacity.

We wish to promote our client's Vastern Road site as a new site to be included in your draft Site Allocations Development Plan Document (referred to in your 'Site Allocations: New Site and Progress Update' document dated October 2009 as the draft Sites and Detailed Policies Document).

We set out our representations below.

2 SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

We understand that you are at an early stage in preparing its Site Allocations Development Plan Document, which will allocate land for a range of uses to support the spatial strategy for the Borough. Specifically, we understand that work on deciding which of the initial list (of over 100 suggested sites suggested for development or another designation by the development industry, community or voluntary groups and members of the public) are to be included in your draft Sites and Detailed Policies Document is ongoing. We also understand that a result of the 2008 consultation, a number of new site have been suggested and, alongside consulting on these sites, you are now highlighting your suggested approach to development in South Reading and the progress on sites already nominated.

With the 'Site Allocations: New Sites and Progress Update' document, dated October 2009, part of the process of identifying sites for development and for other designations needed



between now and 2026, we wish to promote the Vastern Road site as suitable for a range of uses and, specifically, as follows:

- office development;
- residential development ; and
- mixed-use development .

3 VASTERN ROAD SITE

3.1 Background

3.1.1 The site

The Vastern Road site is located on the northern side of Vastern Road. It measures 1.24 hectares (3.06 acres) and fronts both Vastern Road and the River Thames, which runs behind it (to the north).

Our client occupies the site, with SSE staff occupying the three-storey office building that extends almost the full width of the Vastern Road frontage. A vehicle access road runs parallel to the site's eastern boundary. This access road leads to car parking alongside (east of) the building and a large area of car parking to the rear of the site, as can be seen in Figure 1 below. Two substations are located behind (to the north) of the office building, with a further four substations located to the rear of the site, along the eastern boundary.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph showing the Vastern Road site
(Source: Google Maps UK)



3.1.2 Reading Borough Local Plan 1991 – 2006

The site falls within the Town Centre under the Reading Borough Local Plan 1991 – 2006, which was adopted in October 1998. The Reading Town Centre Plan Map labels the site as C40 and shows the site as being subject to the following policies:

- Policy CEN 13: Major Development Sites in the Town Centre;
- Policy WAT 10: Waterways – Site Specific Proposals; and
- Policy CEN 8: Public Open Space.

Policy CEN 13 states that the site, described as the Southern Electricity Board, Vastern Road, is allocated for “Mixed scheme comprising residential and B1 business use fronting Vastern Road”. The Borough Council will normally expect proposals for each site to be in accordance with the principles set out in the policy. The policy also states that, where appropriate, development will be required to provide or meet the direct costs of necessary infrastructure, services and environmental improvements.

Proposals for sites next to waterways in the town centre appear in Chapter 11. The relevant policy identifies the site as a priority for improvement and states that the Borough Council will favourably consider improvements consistent with the broad principles set out in the policy and with the specific land use policies contained elsewhere in the Plan. Policy WAT 10 also states that development of the site will be the subject of detailed consultation with the Environment Agency.

Policy CEN 8 seeks the provision of new public open spaces at the site according to the principles outlined.

3.1.3 Reading Central Area Action Plan

The site falls within the Reading Central Area Action Plan (Reading Central AAP), which was adopted in January 2009.

The Reading Central AAP states that the centre can make an immense contribution to meeting the overall vision for Reading, being to establish Reading as the capital of the Thames Valley and as a gateway between the UK, Europe and the world; to provide the highest quality services and facilities for all who live in, work in and visit Reading; and to maintain and improve quality of life for everyone. It also states that significant change in the centre will be vital in taking the centre to this next level.

In order to grasp this opportunity the Reading Central AAP forms a comprehensive basis for managing change in the central area up to 2026.

Station/River Major Opportunity Area

The site falls within the Station/River Major Opportunity Area. The vision is for the station/river area as a flagship scheme, extending the centre and providing a mixed use destination in itself and centred on a redeveloped station and new public transport interchange. The vision further states that the opportunity area will integrate the transport links and areas northwards towards the river and into the heart of the centre.

RC1g, Riverside

The site is identified as RC1g, Riverside.

Policy RC1: Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area states that development of the site,



“...will be in line with the following provisions...”

Development should maintain and enhance public access along and to the Thames, and should continue the green link from the north of the station, with potential for an area of open space at the riverside. The main use of the site should be residential, although some small-scale offices and leisure will also be appropriate.

A new or improved pedestrian and cycle crossing over the River Thames will be provided at a point between Frys Island and Reading Bridge. This may be either a new crossing or cantilevered onto the existing bridge.”

Proposals Map

The Proposals Map shows the site as falling within:

- the boundary of the Reading Central AAP;
- the boundary of a Major Opportunity Area;
- a Major Opportunity Area Sub-Area;
- the central core; and
- the office core.

3.2 Proposed Options

As stated above, we wish to promote the Vastern Road site as suitable for a range of uses and, specifically, as follows:

- office development
- residential development ; and
- mixed-use development.

Office development

We consider that the site offers the opportunity for an office development given its existing use and adjacent existing office development to the east, as well as a major opportunity for ‘mixed-use development’, as discussed below. In addition, we note that the site falls within the office core under the Reading Central AAP. However, we consider that the Reading Central AAP places too little emphasis on the opportunity for further office development of this site, with the potential for office development even in a mixed use scheme to be far greater than “small-scale” as referred to under RC1g.

Residential development

The site equally offers the opportunity for residential development on previously developed land. It would assist the Council in promoting “...housing development on suitable brownfield sites wherever they appear across the entire central area” (Paragraph 5.8 of the Reading Central AAP). In addition, the redevelopment of the site for residential development would also assist the Council to meet the national target in PPS3 of 60% of new housing being delivered on previous developed land. This would also accord with “A flexible, responsive supply of land – managed in a way that makes efficient and effective use of land, including re-use of previously-developed land, where appropriate”, being one of the specific outcomes that PPS3 states the planning system should deliver.

It is important in sustainability terms that sites such as the Vastern Road site are developed and delivered for residential use in advance of greenfield sites. Previously developed sites benefit from existing infrastructure, services and transport networks that are already in place. This site is adjacent to existing residential development to the west and east (1 to 25 Norman



Place) and is well located in relation to existing infrastructure including access via the public and private transport networks. The site is also in close proximity to bus routes and also Reading station, which the Reading Central AAP proposes be redeveloped and improved. We further note that the Reading Central AAP proposes significant improvement of north-south links through the centre.

Mixed-use development

The site also offers the opportunity for mixed-use development by reason of:

- being in office (B1a) and substation (sui generis) use at present;
- being adjacent to existing residential development to the west and east (1 to 25 Norman Place);
- being adjacent to existing office development to the east;
- falling within the central core under the Reading Central AAP; and
- falling within the office core under the Reading Central AAP.

Residential and office development

Given the above, we consider that a mixed-use development proposing (at minimum) residential and office accommodation would be acceptable in principle.

That Paragraph 5.8 of the Reading Central AAP states in part that “housing will often be part of a wider mix of uses” provides further support for a mixed-use scheme.

A mixed-use development of the site would, if residential-led, also be in accordance with Reading Central AAP Policy RC1 which, as set out above, states that “The main use of the site should be residential, although some small-scale offices and leisure will also be appropriate”.

Residential and office development with retail and/or leisure floorspace

In light of the above, we consider that in addition to residential and office accommodation the site offers the opportunity for retail and/or leisure development. Whilst we recognise that the areas within the Station/River Major Opportunity Area that also make up part of the primary shopping area and central core will have a particular emphasis on delivering much of the identified retail and leisure need, we submit that the site could assist Reading Borough Council in meeting its identified retail and leisure need.

As noted above, the Reading Central AAP (Policy RC1: Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area) proposes, in respect of the Vastern Road site (RC1g, Riverside), a new or improved pedestrian and cycle crossing over the River Thames at a point between Frys Island and Reading Bridge. Provision of small-scale retail and/or leisure use would, in our view, complement public access to, along and across the River Thames. Provision of small-scale retail and/or leisure use would, therefore, support the successful development of this area.

Option drawings

We enclose option drawings prepared by architects Scott Brownrigg for the following mixed-use development options:

- Option 1, a mixed-use commercial-led option proposing commercial/retail uses at ground floor with commercial above;
- Option 2, a mixed-use commercial and residential option that incorporates, fronting Vastern Road, some small retail uses at ground floor with commercial above, with the



remaining buildings providing commercial/retail uses at ground floor with residential above; and

- Option 3, a mixed-use residential-led option proposing an office building fronting Vastern Road with the remaining buildings providing residential accommodation.

The enclosed indicative site layout plans, aerial massing studies and perspectives for these three options demonstrate the site's potential for redevelopment. Whilst for indicative purposes only they are useful in demonstrating the ability of the site to provide development and, it should be noted, not only mixed-use development as the drawings show.

Whilst for indicative purposes only, the three options demonstrate the ability of the site to make a more efficient use of the site. As shown in the table below, the site has the ability to provide more than 15,000 square metres of accommodation, with more than double this (32,265 square metres) able to be delivered under Option 1.

Table 1: Areas for the options prepared by architects Scott Brownrigg

Option	Retail/ Commercial (sq m)	Commercial sq m)	Commercial/ Residential (sq m)	Residential (sq m)	Retail/ Residential (sq m)	Total (sq m)
1	7,310	24,955	-	-	-	32,265
2	4,462	-	12,806	4,487	-	21,755
3	-	-	-	11,028	4,165	15,193

These options show indicatively how the mix of uses could be incorporated and how the quantum of space identified could be accommodated. These demonstrate that the site has more potential for offices than RC1g indicates. However, the site does offer significant potential for a range of uses and ways of delivering these as the options show. All three options provide a new pedestrian route to the River Thames, in accordance with Policy CEN 8: Public Open Space in the Reading Borough Local Plan 1991 – 2006 and Policy RC1: Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area in the Reading Centre AAP.

The site could also provide some open space around the site, including an area of open space at the Riverside, which also takes Planning Policy Statement 25 (PPS 25): Development and Flood Risk advice and the PPS 25 Practice Guide into account.

In this way and more generally (e.g. through a reduction in site coverage), they demonstrate the opportunities offered by new development to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding, notwithstanding that the site sits above the towpath (i.e. with land raising already reducing the risk of flooding). SSE advise, anecdotally, that they have no knowledge of the site flooding in the past 20 years.

All three options also give careful consideration to adjacent existing residential development. For example:

- under Option 1, the buildings are broadly aligned as fingers projecting west to east and step up in height moving from west to east;
- under Option 2, the buildings form two groups, with those on the western half of the site broadly aligned as the letter 'J' and the sweep of the buildings away from the site's western boundary, with suitable amenity space for residents created as a result; and
- under Option 3, car parking is proposed as the buffer to the Lynmouth Road properties.



The contributions that tall buildings can make to views, particularly in creating a strong reference point, allowing greater urban legibility and way-finding to the River, are best demonstrated under Options 1 and 2. Both options propose increased height towards the River and would also contribute towards providing a high-density of development.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, whilst the site does not have an immediate (0-5 years) delivery timeframe it has a *potential* medium to long term availability and we nominate it as suitable for a range of uses and, specifically, as follows:

- office development;
- residential development; and
- mixed-use development.

With the site large enough to have a net gain of more than 10 dwellings within the densities in the Core Strategy and not already having planning permission for any of the uses we have suggested, we consider that there is no reason to exclude it on a procedural basis.

Whilst Policy RC1: Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area in the Reading Central AAP identifies the site as a sub-area (RC1g, Riverside), we consider that the site should be allocated in your Site Allocations Development Plan Document so as to address issues in greater detail.

With Policy RC1 also stating that development in the area will contribute towards providing a high-density mix of uses to create a destination in itself, but with provisions for the RC1g, Riverside stating that the main use of the site should be residential, we also consider that the allocation of the site for a range of uses including, but not limited to, residential would help to ensure the development of this underused site. Further, the opportunity for office development is not and should not be limited to small-scale.

We trust that our comments will be given full consideration and that the Vastern Road site will be progressed for the range of uses we have nominated in your draft Site Allocations Development Plan Document (referred to as the draft Sites and Detailed Policies Document in your 'Site Allocations: New Site and Progress Update' document, dated October 2009).

We would be grateful if you would acknowledge receipt of these representations.

Should you have any queries, please contact Steve Walters or Burnetta Van Stipriaan at the above address.

Yours sincerely

BNP Paribas Real Estate

BNP Paribas Real Estate



Scottish and Southern Energy

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 010



Key :- Residential option

1. Commercial / retail at ground with residential above
2. New pedestrian avenue gives access to the river front from the station
3. Buildings bridge over the avenue
4. landmark tower to mark pedestrian access to the river
5. Access to Car-parking below each residential block

Option 1 Site Layout Plan

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 101

0 10 20 30 40 50m SCALE 1 : 1000 @ A3

© Scott Brownrigg Ltd





Massing Study;-

Indicating heights and footprint only

Option 1 Aerial massing study

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 102

© Scott Brownrigg Ltd



Massing Study;-

Indicating heights and footprint only

Option 1 Perspectives - A

55 Vestern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 103



Key :- Mixed Use Option

1. Retail at ground with commercial above
2. Commercial / retail at ground with residential above
3. New pedestrian avenue gives access to the river front from the station
4. landmark tower to mark pedestrian access to the river
5. Access to Car-parking below the entire development

Option 2 Site Layout Plan

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 201

0 10 20 30 40 50m SCALE 1 : 1000 @ A3

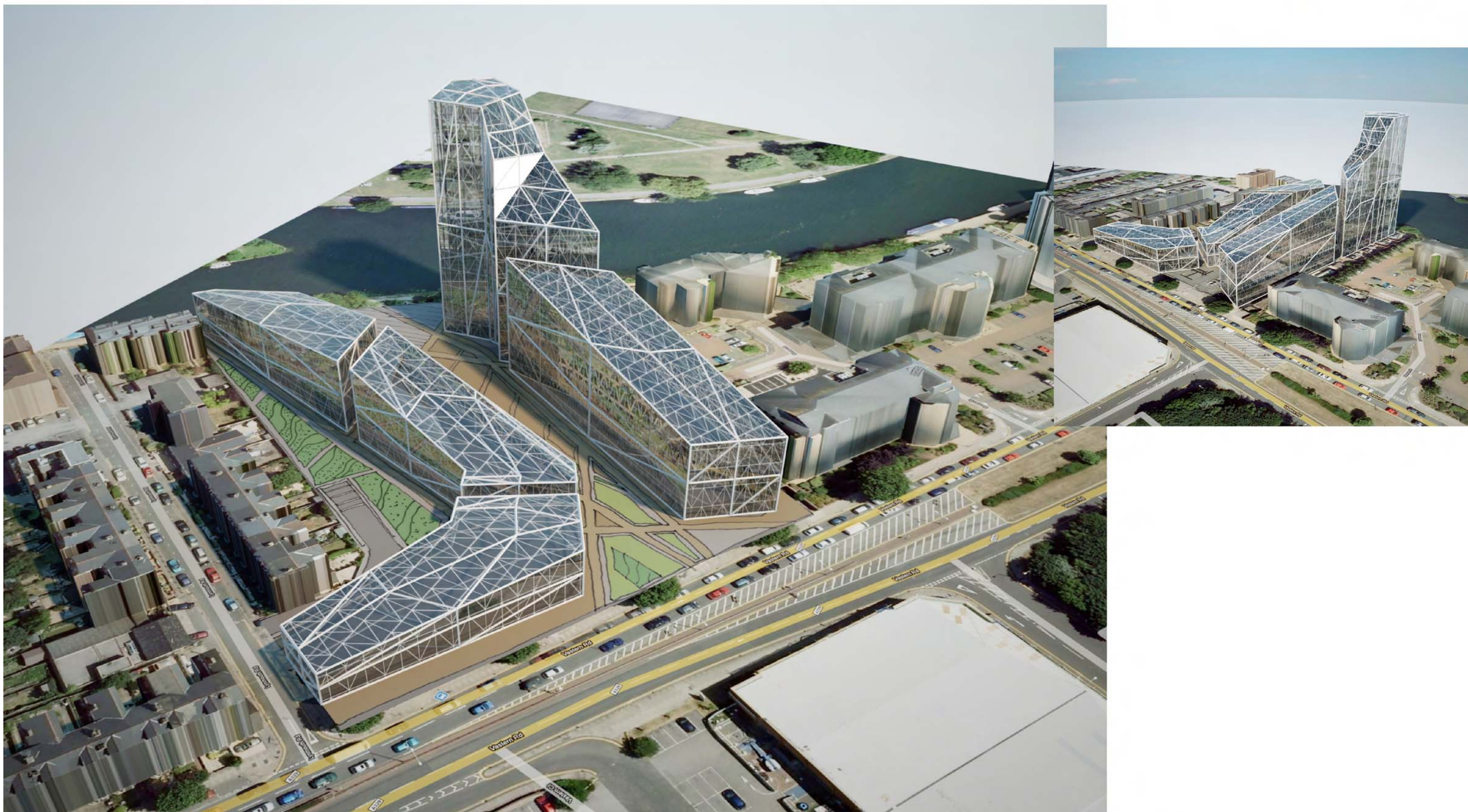
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Option 2 Aerial massing study

55 Vastern Road
11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 202



Option 2 Perspectives - A

55 Vastern Road
11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 203



Key :- Coomercial / Residential option

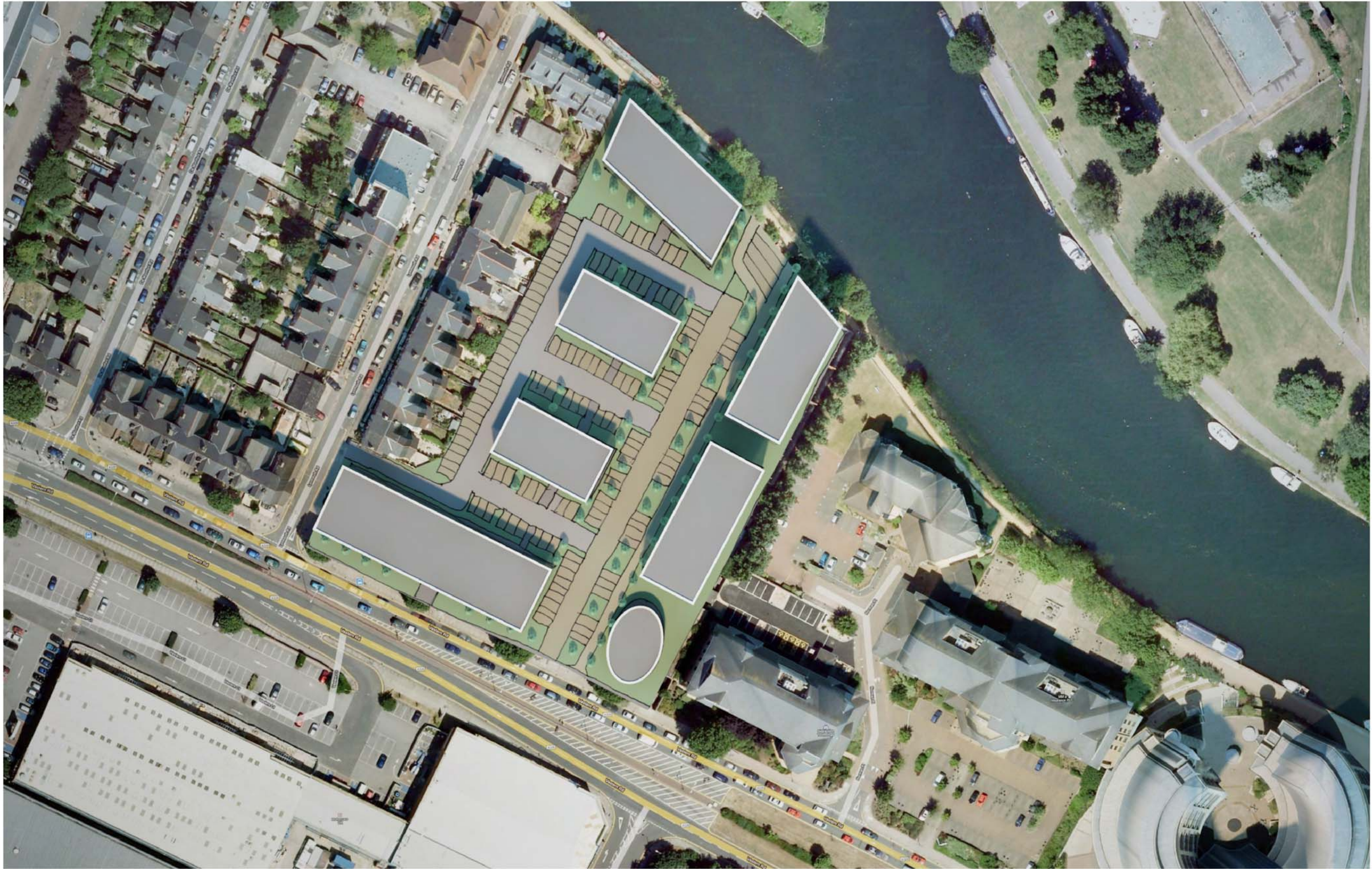
1. Commercial office development
2. Residential buildings
3. New pedestrian route gives access to the river front from the station
4. landmark retail unit to mark pedestrian access to the river
5. Limited Car-parking at ground level.

Option 3 Site Layout Plan

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 301

0 10 20 30 40 50m SCALE 1 : 1000 @ A3
© Scott Brownrigg Ltd



Massing Study;-
Indicating heights and footprint only

Option 3 Aerial massing study

55 Vastern Road
11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 302





Massing Study;-

Indicating heights and footprint only

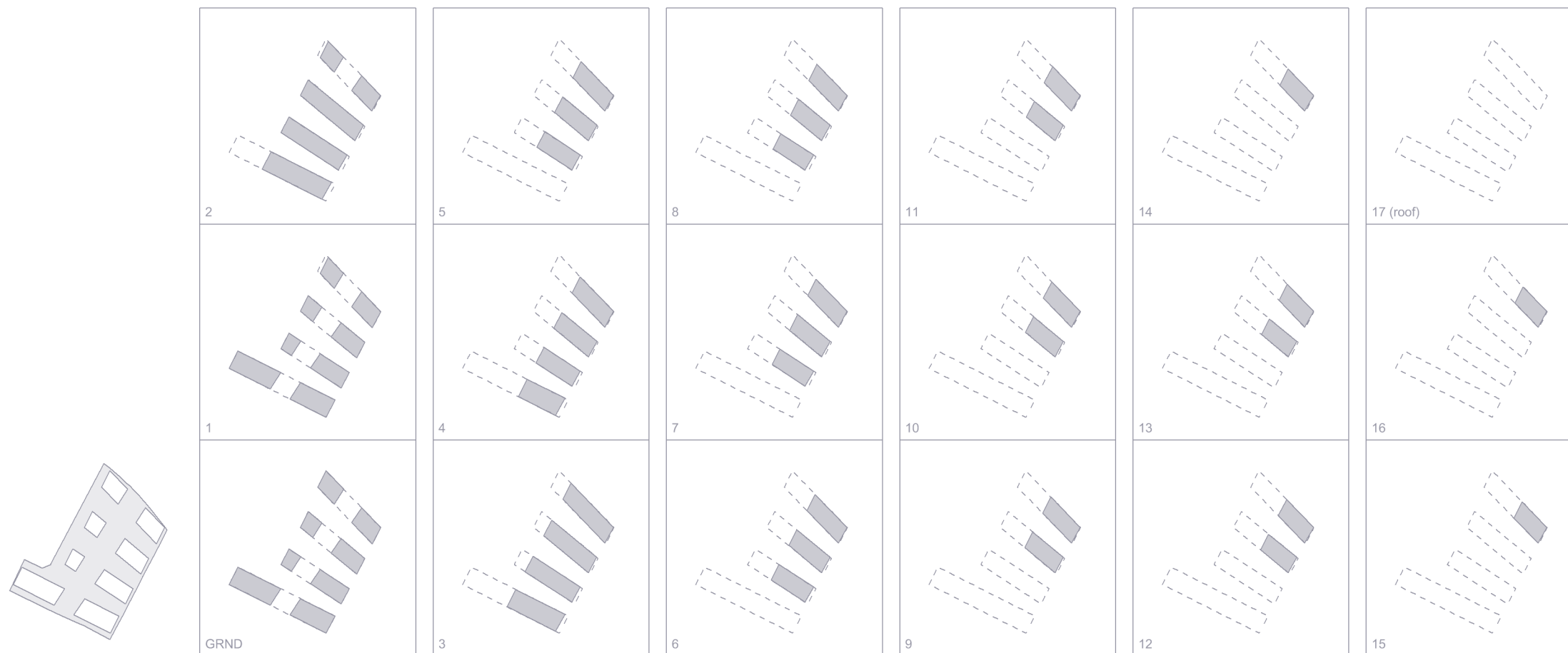
Option 3 Perspectives - A

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 303

© Scott Brownrigg Ltd



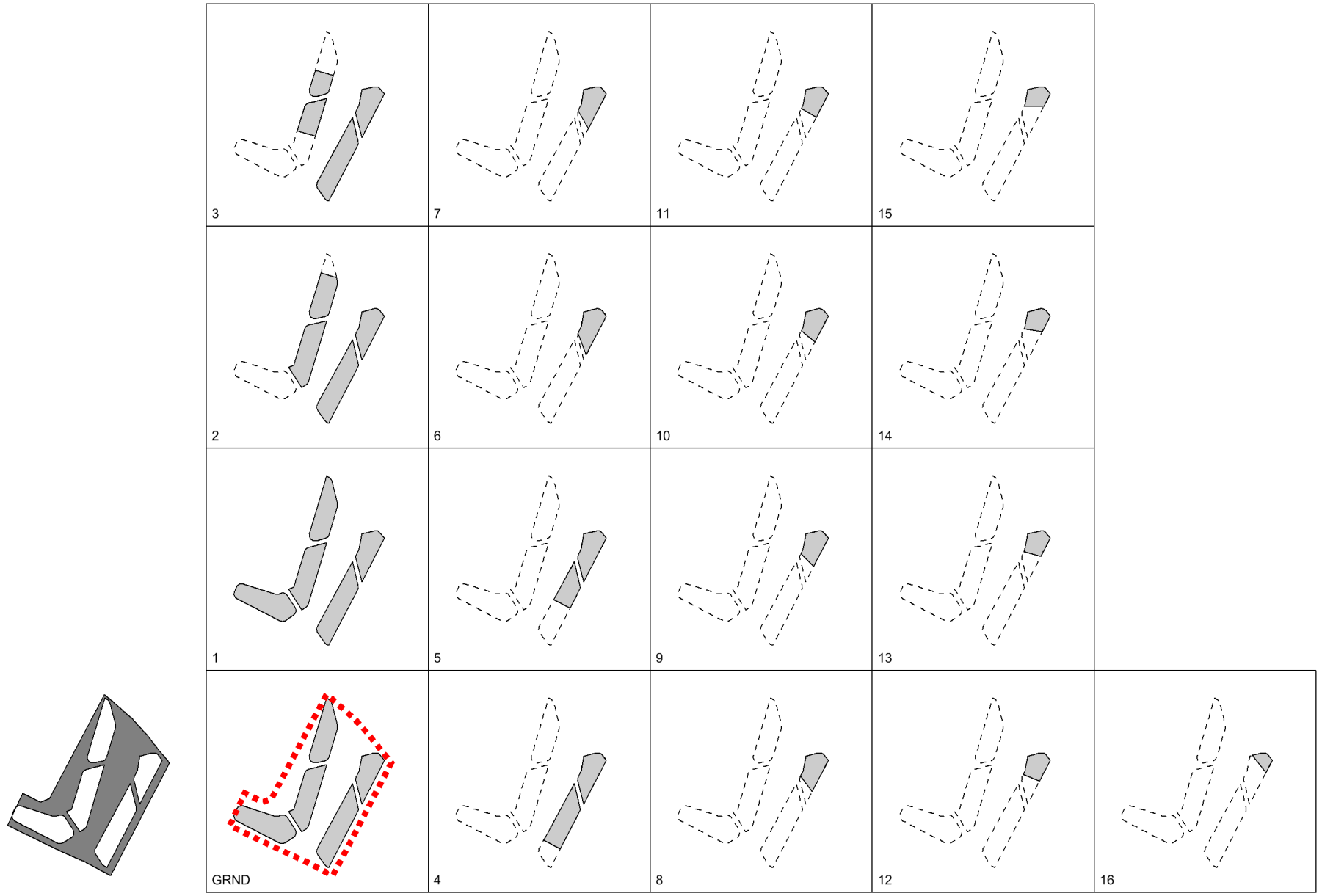


Option1			
use	Floor Level	GEA m2	GEA ft2
Retail/ Commercial	grnd	3680	39612
Retail/ Commercial	1	3630	39074
commercial	2	3928	42282
commercial	3	3509	37772
commercial	4	2712	29193
commercial	5	1964	21141
commercial	6	1914	20603
commercial	7	1864	20064
commercial	8	1814	19526
commercial	9	1205	12971
commercial	10	1172	12616
commercial	11	1142	12293
commercial	12	1106	11905
commercial	13	1071	11528
commercial	14	535	5759
commercial	15	518	5576
commercial	16	501	5393
		m2	ft2
	Total Area	32265	347307
Site area		11334	122001
Open Space on site		7654	82389

Option 1 Areas

55 Vastern Road

12 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 104



Option2			
use	Floor Level	GEA m2	GEA Ft2
Retail/ Commercial	grnd	4462	48030
Residential/Commercial	1	4462	48030
Residential/Commercial	2	3280	35307
Residential/Commercial	3	2554	27492
Residential/Commercial	4	1413	15210
Residential/Commercial	5	1097	11808
residential	6	563	6060
residential	7	525	5651
residential	8	493	5307
residential	9	463	4984
residential	10	440	4736
residential	11	417	4489
residential	12	394	4241
residential	13	369	3972
residential	14	343	3692
residential	15	315	3391
residential	16	165	1776
		m2	ft2
	Total Area	21755	234175
Site area		11334	122001
Open Space on site		6871	73961

Option 2 Areas

55 Vastern Road
12 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 204

RECORD SHEET FOR CONTACT WITH DEVELOPERS/ OWNERS OF HOUSING SITES (SHLAA) - ALLOCATIONS

Section 1: General questions/ information

Site/ Allocation reference RC1g

Site address

Riverside (Vastern Road)

Contact name & telephone/ Email

Steve Walters, Director, BNP Paribas Real Estate (agent)
0207 338 4062; steven.walters@bnpparibas.com

Company

BNP Paribas Real Estate is the agent for SSE

Address

90 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1EU

Date of contact

15/12/09

Are you still the owner/ agent of the site? If not do you know who is?

SSE is the owner of the site, their company address is

55 Vastern Road, Reading RG1 8BU

If you are the owner/agent, do you/ your client have any plans to sell the site in the near future?

Whilst the site does not have an immediate (0-5 years) delivery timeframe, it has a *potential* medium to long term availability.

Section 2: Availability

When do you think the site will be available for development - *either year of anticipated commencement or broad period of start?*

1-5	5-10	10-15
X	Potential	Potential

Are there any legal or ownership problems? E.g. ransom strip, multiple owners etc - If so what are these?

N/A

Are there any plans to submit a planning application in the near future?

SSE has no immediate plans to submit a planning application for the redevelopment of the site - see above.

Section3: Achievability - judgement of economic viability

Are there any market or financial constraints (e.g. site preparation costs, constraints, obligations etc) to bringing this site forward? Are there things which may mean this site may not be able to come forward or are there issues which can be overcome, but require finance?

The Vastern Road site is located on the northern side of Vastern Road. It measures 1.24 hectares (3.06 acres) and fronts both Vastern Road and the River Thames, which runs behind it (to the north).

Our client occupies the site, with SSE staff occupying the three-storey office building that extends almost the full width of the Vastern Road frontage. A vehicle access runs parallel to the site's eastern boundary. This access road leads to car parking alongside (east of) the building and a large area of car parking to the rear of the site. Two substations are located behind (to the north) of the office building, with a further four substations located to the rear of the site, along the eastern boundary.

The substations would need to be retained within a redevelopment or re-provided off-site to bring this site forward. The costs of re-provision (land acquisition and plant) would need to be met by the redevelopment of the site or grant towards relocation. There may be contamination costs associated with remediation given the existing former uses of the site.

What do you consider the delivery of the site will be in terms of phasing, realistic build out rates etc.?

A mix of uses could be incorporated. Subject to the re-provision of the substations and the development option, the site could be delivered in a single phase or multiple phases. Due to the size of the site, the latter is more realistic, especially if it is all or primarily residential.

Overcoming Constraints (if applicable)

What needs to be done to overcome constraints? such as new infrastructure, environmental improvement

The primary issue is securing an alternative site for relocation of the existing plant - and to deliver this in a viable way. Further, site demolition and clean-up is likely to be required together with securing detailed planning permission. In this regard, we also comment as follows:

The site falls within the Station/River Major Opportunity Area. The vision is for the station/river area as a flagship scheme, extending the centre and providing a mixed use destination in itself and centred on a redeveloped station and new public transport interchange. The vision further states that the opportunity area will integrate the transport links and areas northwards towards the river and into the heart of the centre.

The site's potential for redevelopment would be improved, from a viability point of view, when the above come forward.



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The Vastern Road site is located on the northern side of Vastern Road. It measures 1.24 hectares (3.06 acres) and fronts both Vastern Road and the River Thames, which runs behind it (to the north).

Our client occupies the site, with SSE staff occupying the three-storey office building that extends almost the full width of the Vastern Road frontage. A vehicle access road runs parallel to the site's eastern boundary. This access road leads to car parking alongside (east of) the building and a large area of car parking to the rear of the site, as can be seen in Figure 1 below. Two substations are located behind (to the north) of the office building, with a further four substations located to the rear of the site, along the eastern boundary.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph showing the Vastern Road site
(Source: Google Maps UK)



3.1.2 Reading Borough Local Plan 1991 – 2006

The site falls within the Town Centre under the Reading Borough Local Plan 1991 – 2006, which was adopted in October 1998. The Reading Town Centre Plan Map labels the site as C40 and shows the site as being subject to the following policies:

- Policy CEN 13: Major Development Sites in the Town Centre;
- Policy WAT 10: Waterways – Site Specific Proposals; and
- Policy CEN 8: Public Open Space.

Policy CEN 13 states that the site, described as the Southern Electricity Board, Vastern Road, is allocated for “Mixed scheme comprising residential and B1 business use fronting Vastern Road”. The Borough Council will normally expect proposals for each site to be in accordance with the principles set out in the policy. The policy also states that, where appropriate, development will be required to provide or meet the direct costs of necessary infrastructure, services and environmental improvements.

Proposals for sites next to waterways in the town centre appear in Chapter 11. The relevant policy identifies the site as a priority for improvement and states that the Borough Council will favourably consider improvements consistent with the broad principles set out in the policy and with the specific land use policies contained elsewhere in the Plan. Policy WAT 10 also states that development of the site will be the subject of detailed consultation with the Environment Agency.

Policy CEN 8 seeks the provision of new public open spaces at the site according to the principles outlined.

3.1.3 Reading Central Area Action Plan

The site falls within the Reading Central Area Action Plan (Reading Central AAP), which was adopted in January 2009.

The Reading Central AAP states that the centre can make an immense contribution to meeting the overall vision for Reading, being to establish Reading as the capital of the Thames Valley and as a gateway between the UK, Europe and the world; to provide the highest quality services and facilities for all who live in, work in and visit Reading; and to maintain and improve quality of life for everyone. It also states that significant change in the centre will be vital in taking the centre to this next level.

In order to grasp this opportunity the Reading Central AAP forms a comprehensive basis for managing change in the central area up to 2026.

Station/River Major Opportunity Area

The site falls within the Station/River Major Opportunity Area. The vision is for the station/river area as a flagship scheme, extending the centre and providing a mixed use destination in itself and centred on a redeveloped station and new public transport interchange. The vision further states that the opportunity area will integrate the transport links and areas northwards towards the river and into the heart of the centre.

RC1g, Riverside

The site is identified as RC1g, Riverside.

Policy RC1: Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area states that development of the site,



“...will be in line with the following provisions...”

Development should maintain and enhance public access along and to the Thames, and should continue the green link from the north of the station, with potential for an area of open space at the riverside. The main use of the site should be residential, although some small-scale offices and leisure will also be appropriate.

A new or improved pedestrian and cycle crossing over the River Thames will be provided at a point between Frys Island and Reading Bridge. This may be either a new crossing or cantilevered onto the existing bridge.”

Proposals Map

The Proposals Map shows the site as falling within:

- the boundary of the Reading Central AAP;
- the boundary of a Major Opportunity Area;
- a Major Opportunity Area Sub-Area;
- the central core; and
- the office core.

3.2 Proposed Options

As stated above, we wish to promote the Vastern Road site as suitable for a range of uses and, specifically, as follows:

- office development
- residential development ; and
- mixed-use development.

Office development

We consider that the site offers the opportunity for an office development given its existing use and adjacent existing office development to the east, as well as a major opportunity for ‘mixed-use development’, as discussed below. In addition, we note that the site falls within the office core under the Reading Central AAP. However, we consider that the Reading Central AAP places too little emphasis on the opportunity for further office development of this site, with the potential for office development even in a mixed use scheme to be far greater than “small-scale” as referred to under RC1g.

Residential development

The site equally offers the opportunity for residential development on previously developed land. It would assist the Council in promoting “...housing development on suitable brownfield sites wherever they appear across the entire central area” (Paragraph 5.8 of the Reading Central AAP). In addition, the redevelopment of the site for residential development would also assist the Council to meet the national target in PPS3 of 60% of new housing being delivered on previous developed land. This would also accord with “A flexible, responsive supply of land – managed in a way that makes efficient and effective use of land, including re-use of previously-developed land, where appropriate”, being one of the specific outcomes that PPS3 states the planning system should deliver.

It is important in sustainability terms that sites such as the Vastern Road site are developed and delivered for residential use in advance of greenfield sites. Previously developed sites benefit from existing infrastructure, services and transport networks that are already in place. This site is adjacent to existing residential development to the west and east (1 to 25 Norman



Place) and is well located in relation to existing infrastructure including access via the public and private transport networks. The site is also in close proximity to bus routes and also Reading station, which the Reading Central AAP proposes be redeveloped and improved. We further note that the Reading Central AAP proposes significant improvement of north-south links through the centre.

Mixed-use development

The site also offers the opportunity for mixed-use development by reason of:

- being in office (B1a) and substation (sui generis) use at present;
- being adjacent to existing residential development to the west and east (1 to 25 Norman Place);
- being adjacent to existing office development to the east;
- falling within the central core under the Reading Central AAP; and
- falling within the office core under the Reading Central AAP.

Residential and office development

Given the above, we consider that a mixed-use development proposing (at minimum) residential and office accommodation would be acceptable in principle.

That Paragraph 5.8 of the Reading Central AAP states in part that “housing will often be part of a wider mix of uses” provides further support for a mixed-use scheme.

A mixed-use development of the site would, if residential-led, also be in accordance with Reading Central AAP Policy RC1 which, as set out above, states that “The main use of the site should be residential, although some small-scale offices and leisure will also be appropriate”.

Residential and office development with retail and/or leisure floorspace

In light of the above, we consider that in addition to residential and office accommodation the site offers the opportunity for retail and/or leisure development. Whilst we recognise that the areas within the Station/River Major Opportunity Area that also make up part of the primary shopping area and central core will have a particular emphasis on delivering much of the identified retail and leisure need, we submit that the site could assist Reading Borough Council in meeting its identified retail and leisure need.

As noted above, the Reading Central AAP (Policy RC1: Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area) proposes, in respect of the Vastern Road site (RC1g, Riverside), a new or improved pedestrian and cycle crossing over the River Thames at a point between Frys Island and Reading Bridge. Provision of small-scale retail and/or leisure use would, in our view, complement public access to, along and across the River Thames. Provision of small-scale retail and/or leisure use would, therefore, support the successful development of this area.

Option drawings

We enclose option drawings prepared by architects Scott Brownrigg for the following mixed-use development options:

- Option 1, a mixed-use commercial-led option proposing commercial/retail uses at ground floor with commercial above;
- Option 2, a mixed-use commercial and residential option that incorporates, fronting Vastern Road, some small retail uses at ground floor with commercial above, with the



remaining buildings providing commercial/retail uses at ground floor with residential above; and

- Option 3, a mixed-use residential-led option proposing an office building fronting Vastern Road with the remaining buildings providing residential accommodation.

The enclosed indicative site layout plans, aerial massing studies and perspectives for these three options demonstrate the site's potential for redevelopment. Whilst for indicative purposes only they are useful in demonstrating the ability of the site to provide development and, it should be noted, not only mixed-use development as the drawings show.

Whilst for indicative purposes only, the three options demonstrate the ability of the site to make a more efficient use of the site. As shown in the table below, the site has the ability to provide more than 15,000 square metres of accommodation, with more than double this (32,265 square metres) able to be delivered under Option 1.

Table 1: Areas for the options prepared by architects Scott Brownrigg

Option	Retail/ Commercial (sq m)	Commercial sq m)	Commercial/ Residential (sq m)	Residential (sq m)	Retail/ Residential (sq m)	Total (sq m)
1	7,310	24,955	-	-	-	32,265
2	4,462	-	12,806	4,487	-	21,755
3	-	-	-	11,028	4,165	15,193

These options show indicatively how the mix of uses could be incorporated and how the quantum of space identified could be accommodated. These demonstrate that the site has more potential for offices than RC1g indicates. However, the site does offer significant potential for a range of uses and ways of delivering these as the options show. All three options provide a new pedestrian route to the River Thames, in accordance with Policy CEN 8: Public Open Space in the Reading Borough Local Plan 1991 – 2006 and Policy RC1: Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area in the Reading Centre AAP.

The site could also provide some open space around the site, including an area of open space at the Riverside, which also takes Planning Policy Statement 25 (PPS 25): Development and Flood Risk advice and the PPS 25 Practice Guide into account.

In this way and more generally (e.g. through a reduction in site coverage), they demonstrate the opportunities offered by new development to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding, notwithstanding that the site sits above the towpath (i.e. with land raising already reducing the risk of flooding). SSE advise, anecdotally, that they have no knowledge of the site flooding in the past 20 years.

All three options also give careful consideration to adjacent existing residential development. For example:

- under Option 1, the buildings are broadly aligned as fingers projecting west to east and step up in height moving from west to east;
- under Option 2, the buildings form two groups, with those on the western half of the site broadly aligned as the letter 'J' and the sweep of the buildings away from the site's western boundary, with suitable amenity space for residents created as a result; and
- under Option 3, car parking is proposed as the buffer to the Lynmouth Road properties.



The contributions that tall buildings can make to views, particularly in creating a strong reference point, allowing greater urban legibility and way-finding to the River, are best demonstrated under Options 1 and 2. Both options propose increased height towards the River and would also contribute towards providing a high-density of development.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, whilst the site does not have an immediate (0-5 years) delivery timeframe it has a *potential* medium to long term availability and we nominate it as suitable for a range of uses and, specifically, as follows:

- office development;
- residential development; and
- mixed-use development.

With the site large enough to have a net gain of more than 10 dwellings within the densities in the Core Strategy and not already having planning permission for any of the uses we have suggested, we consider that there is no reason to exclude it on a procedural basis.

Whilst Policy RC1: Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area in the Reading Central AAP identifies the site as a sub-area (RC1g, Riverside), we consider that the site should be allocated in your Site Allocations Development Plan Document so as to address issues in greater detail.

With Policy RC1 also stating that development in the area will contribute towards providing a high-density mix of uses to create a destination in itself, but with provisions for the RC1g, Riverside stating that the main use of the site should be residential, we also consider that the allocation of the site for a range of uses including, but not limited to, residential would help to ensure the development of this underused site. Further, the opportunity for office development is not and should not be limited to small-scale.

We trust that our comments will be given full consideration and that the Vastern Road site will be progressed for the range of uses we have nominated in your draft Site Allocations Development Plan Document (referred to as the draft Sites and Detailed Policies Document in your 'Site Allocations: New Site and Progress Update' document, dated October 2009).

We would be grateful if you would acknowledge receipt of these representations.

Should you have any queries, please contact Steve Walters or Burnetta Van Stipriaan at the above address.

Yours sincerely

BNP Paribas Real Estate

BNP Paribas Real Estate



Scottish and Southern Energy

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 010



Key :- Residential option

1. Commercial / retail at ground with residential above
2. New pedestrian avenue gives access to the river front from the station
3. Buildings bridge over the avenue
4. landmark tower to mark pedestrian access to the river
5. Access to Car-parking below each residential block

Option 1 Site Layout Plan

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 101

0 10 20 30 40 50m SCALE 1 : 1000 @ A3

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Massing Study;-

Indicating heights and footprint only

Option 1 Aerial massing study

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 102

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Massing Study;-

Indicating heights and footprint only

Option 1 Perspectives - A

55 Vestern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 103



Key :- Mixed Use Option

1. Retail at ground with commercial above
2. Commercial / retail at ground with residential above
3. New pedestrian avenue gives access to the river front from the station
4. landmark tower to mark pedestrian access to the river
5. Access to Car-parking below the entire development

Option 2 Site Layout Plan

55 Vastern Road

11 November 2009 SD-101 • SK 201

0 10 20 30 40 50m SCALE 1 : 1000 @ A3

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