

## Donna Williams

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**Subject:** FW: 55 Vastern Rd, Reading (200188)  
**Attachments:** Access officer correspondence.pdf; VasternRd55-200188 - natural environment obs.pdf

**From:** Markwell, Jonathan <[Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk)>  
**Sent:** 01 May 2020 14:56  
**To:** Caroline McHardy <[Caroline.McHardy@berkeleygroup.co.uk](mailto:Caroline.McHardy@berkeleygroup.co.uk)>  
**Cc:** Craig Pettit <[Craig.Pettit@bartonwillmore.co.uk](mailto:Craig.Pettit@bartonwillmore.co.uk)>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] RE: 55 Vastern Rd, Reading (200188)

Dear Ms McHardy / Mr Pettit,

Thank you for your email and I hope you are both continuing to keep well.

Regarding the viability payment, I can hopefully reassure you that there would not normally be a requirement for an additional fee for any external consultant involvement. Instead, any future external input would be part of the fee you have already paid. Additional fees would only be required if negotiations became particularly long-running (e.g. various iterations of viability assessments being required to be required - [this is referenced at p7 here](#)).

The Council's Valuer hasn't provided me with any definitive timescales for responding to me, as there are naturally multiple components to consider (and this is one of a number of assessments across the Borough under consideration at present). My colleague is however conscious of the need to provide feedback to me in a timely manner.

In the meantime, please see attached the further access officer comments and those from the Natural Environment officer. In terms of the access officer comments, please feel free to make final responses on any further comments made, should you consider it necessary. It would appear to me however that the access officer is largely satisfied from her specific perspective. In terms of the Natural Environment officer comments, there are some linkages with the EA response already fed in, and those outstanding from the Transport officer and Ecology consultant. Obviously there are matters to respond to, but you may naturally wish to wait until all officer comments have been received prior to responding yourself.

I hope that these updates are of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Markwell  
Principal Planning Officer  
Planning Section | Directorate for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

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**From:** Caroline McHardy <[Caroline.McHardy@berkeleygroup.co.uk](mailto:Caroline.McHardy@berkeleygroup.co.uk)>  
**Sent:** 24 April 2020 16:30  
**To:** Markwell, Jonathan <[Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk)>  
**Cc:** Craig Pettit <[Craig.Pettit@bartonwillmore.co.uk](mailto:Craig.Pettit@bartonwillmore.co.uk)>  
**Subject:** RE: 55 Vastern Rd, Reading (200188)

Dear Jonathan

Thank you for clarifying the position on the viability at present. I just had one query, as you know we paid a viability fee in March to instruct the viability review which I did think was for an external consultant so I must have misunderstood. Therefore, further to your email below please could advise that this fee will cover an external review of the viability if required or was this fee for your own Council Valuer i.e. if you do need external input will it cost more? I hope you can appreciate at the moment our internal budgets and cash flow are incredibly tight so I will need to allow for this if further costs are required over the next month.

In addition, please could you advise on what timescales you are working too, either for the internal and/or external review, and when we will likely receive a response?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

**Caroline McHardy**  
Land and Development Director

**Berkeley**  
Designed for life



**Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd**  
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**From:** Markwell, Jonathan <[Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk)>  
**Sent:** 21 April 2020 10:49  
**To:** Caroline McHardy <[Caroline.McHardy@berkeleygroup.co.uk](mailto:Caroline.McHardy@berkeleygroup.co.uk)>  
**Cc:** Craig Pettit <[Craig.Pettit@bartonwillmore.co.uk](mailto:Craig.Pettit@bartonwillmore.co.uk)>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] RE: 55 Vastern Rd, Reading (200188)

Dear Ms McHardy,

Thank you for your email. I can advise that the Council's Valuer is presently assessing the viability, and should input subsequently be required from an external consultant (e.g. BPS), officers would seek to incorporate this at an appropriate point in time.

I trust that this clarifies.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Markwell  
Principal Planning Officer  
Planning Section | Directorate for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

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Black text = original officer comments.

Red text = response from applicant

Blue text = reply from access officer

*“1. I appreciate that drainage will be needed, but this must be carefully thought out in terms of colour contrast – the very dark drainage strip could read as a step to someone who is visually impaired, or who has dementia or a similar condition. There are similar problems with paving. I really like the idea of the “railway lines” but these will also need to be considered carefully.”*

Unfortunately, I’m not sure where you are referring to with regards to the dark drainage strip is on the plan, if you are able to show me where you mean I will happily review and respond? To confirm drainage on the scheme will be provided through permeable paving features, gullies, slot drains and potentially rain gardens. We will ensure that material finishes match their surroundings where possible to avoid unnecessary confusion for visually impaired users. As for the ‘railway’ detail, these will be created with weathered steel and be a textured, but flush detail in the paving. Therefore, will not provide any trip risk.

The very dark drainage strip I was referring to can be found on page 68 of the Access and Design Statement; Fig 2.

I realise that this is just an example, but it could easily be seen as a step rather than what it is, by some people. From a long way off I might even think the same thing seeing it from my wheelchair.

*“2. Again, with informal play features such as boulders and the like; these must be in a clutter zone to avoid people who are visually impaired or have dementia colliding with them. There was a very nasty accident in town when this happened last year.*

Play features such as boulders are located away from paths and main routes, avoiding any usages clashes within the spaces.

Noted - this is very much appreciated.

*“3. Bollards must also be thoughtfully placed.”*

Bollards will only be used to control vehicle access at the centre of the scheme (the crossing between the cycle footway and the road) These will be spaced enough to ensure cyclists and all other pedestrian users, including those with disabilities can pass safely between them.

I should also have said that the material of which the bollards are made is also important - if, for example, they are made of shiny metal and reflect then this might cause visual confusion. Also, if they are demountable then there should be some sort of cover for the resultant holes, to prevent trips and falls.

*“4. As stated before, disabled people do not like shared spaces, even with cycles. People tend to ride them very fast, even where they shouldn’t, and if you can’t hear them until the last minute (or you are deaf or hard of hearing) and can’t get out of the way, it’s very dangerous. I am pleased to see that the route is meandering, though, which may serve to slow many down. I will consult my contacts to find out what their views are – 3 metres is a very generous width, but I think that it is still a*

*concern. Maybe there needs to be some form of tactile demarcation. Kerbs are really a necessity for many people. I am pleased to see that cars and the like are not sharing this space.”*

A 3m wide route follows guidance from Sustrans where providing a shared cycle and pedestrian footway. This width allows for 1 cyclist, 1 pedestrian and 1 wheelchair used to safely use the space at the same moment. We feel that the meander and shallow gradients heavily reduce the risk of speeding cyclist's, and hope to make the space feel safe for both user groups, sharing priority.

Noted - I know that Sustrans is a very well-known and respected body. However, it might be wise, when we are back to normal, to attend a meeting of the Council's Access and Disabilities Working Group; a meeting is scheduled in June, but it is unclear whether this will take place; it may also be an idea to engage the Reading Association for the Blind

*“5. In terms of on-street parking in the central street, will there be spaces that can easily be used by disabled drivers/passengers, especially those driving Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs)? WAVs have ramps, either to the rear or the side of the vehicle, and these obviously need to be kept clear, to ensure access.”*

We have located 2 oversized on street parking bays for disabled drivers or passengers on the western side of the street. There is also 1 additional accessible bay within the southern undercroft parking area.

Noted. These look sensibly placed and there is lots of space.

*“6. If there are areas where there are steps, then it must be easy to see where the ramps are, so that people who cannot use steps don't feel marooned.”*

We agree, and have added an additional ramp to the towpath to ensure that all of our routes are accessible to all. Now, all areas of the site are accessible by both steps and ramps, to ensure all users have a way of moving around the scheme. Where possible, all gradients do not exceed 1:21, with the exception of a 3 short runs of 1:14 and 1:15 which are still within Part M regulations for accessibility.

Noted - I do appreciate the addition of the new ramp.

*“7. I'm pleased to see that the gradients have been kept as gentle as possible.”*

As noted above, we have ensured gradients are as shallow as possible throughout the scheme. This is to ease accessibility for all users and help reduce speeds for cyclists.

Noted and appreciated.

*“8. I note that inlay studs are to be used to aid navigation – will these give some form of tactile guide that people will be able to feel underfoot or with white canes?”*

Yes, the aim will be that the stud or plaque will have a form of relief on it to allow visually impaired users to recognise it, and help aid navigation.

Noted and appreciated.

*“9. I love the idea of the gateway sculpture, but again, care must be taken with the siting of it, to avoid accidents and trip hazards. Ditto signage posts.”*

All wayfinding posts and the gateway feature are to be located outside of key movement corridors, but located so that they are easily visible.

*“10. Lighting is, of course, very important – especially for those with visual impairments, and in an environment that is near to a river. I understand that lighting must not be obtrusive, but it must be effective for all. “*

Yes agreed, throughout the scheme we will use column lights and directional lights to illuminate key movement routes, supplemented with feature lighting at key junctions or within some street furniture elements.

*“11. I would be interested to know the gradients around the site. “*

As noted above, the gradients across the scheme are at their steepest 1:14, but the majority are at 1:21. Please refer to the attached drawing for levels and gradient information. BHOC.448.LA.101 Landscape General Arrangement.

*“12. Household welcome packs should be offered in different formats if possible, such as large print, or available via email, etc. “*

We have Customer Relations Managers who guide purchasers through the process and they will perform a home introduction when the purchasers move into their property. We can adapt and cater for all users to make this experience as beneficial and simple as possible. We also provide Living Guides which can be emailed.

*“13. On looking at the elevations, there are big changes in level, and I can't see how they will be overcome if you're a wheelchair user. “*

All external gradients are designed to in line with Part M Category 2. Please refer to BHOC.448.LA.101 Landscape General Arrangement for details on how these gradients are distributed through the scheme.

*“14. I can't easily assess the interiors, as I don't have the necessary equipment. However if Part M Category 3 is used for the any accessible dwellings, then this should suffice.”*

All accessible dwellings are designed in accordance to Part M Category 3 guidelines, following space standards and specified furniture layout.

I don't have any further comments; I am very pleased that these things have been taken into consideration. I do hope that my clarification is of use. Please do pass on my thanks.

# Memo

**To:** Jon Markwell, Planning

**From:** Sarah Hanson, Natural Environment Officer, Planning

**CC:** Giles Sutton, GS Ecology; Darren Cook, RBC Transport DM

**Re:** Consultation on an Application

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**Application No: 200188/FUL**

**Address: 55 Vastern Road, Reading**

With reference to the DAS, Tree Survey and AIA document dated November 2019, Illustrative Masterplan Rev A, Landscape Planting Framework Plan Rev A, Landscape GA plan Rev A and to the EA's comments of 14 April 2020, I have the following comments which incorporate many given at pre-application:

As you know, any development on this site should meet various landscape design principles, as indicated in the attached email. In addition, a number of natural environment related policies are applicable:

**Policy EN11 Waterspaces states:**

*'Reading's waterspaces will be protected and enhanced, so that they can continue to contribute to local and regional biodiversity and ecology, flood mitigation, local character, heritage and visual amenity, the provision of accessible leisure and recreational opportunities and, where appropriate, navigation. There will be no adverse impact on the functions and setting of any watercourse and its associated corridor'*

**Policy EN12 Biodiversity and the Green network states:**

*'On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible. Development should: • Protect and wherever possible enhance features of biodiversity interest on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable; and • Provide new tree planting, wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements (such as wildlife ponds, bird and bat boxes) wherever practicable'*

The River Thames is designated in the Local Plan as a Major Landscape Feature under **policy EN13: Major landscape features and areas of outstanding natural beauty**. The policy states that:

*'Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would detract from the character or appearance of a Major Landscape Feature. The following areas, as shown on the Proposals Map, are defined as Major Landscape Features'*

**Policy EN14: Trees, hedges and woodlands states that:**

*'Individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended. The quality of waterside vegetation will be maintained or enhanced.'*

New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained.'

The site is within the AQMA, therefore **Policy EN15 Air Quality** applies which states:

*'Development should have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality'*

**EN18: Flooding and sustainable drainage systems**

*Wherever possible, SuDS provision should maximise ecological benefits, link into the existing Green Network, incorporate tree planting and landscaping and avoid damage to existing significant trees, including through changes to the site hydrology. All new developments in areas of flood risk should give priority to SuDS*

**Policy CR11g, RIVERSIDE** relates specifically to this site, stating:

*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.*

**SPD Sustainable Design and Construction**

This, amongst other things, reiterates the importance of considering incorporation of brown and green roofs, green walls and natural SUDs.

**Tree Strategy 2010 & 2020**

The site is within a 10% or less canopy cover area and on a designated 'treed corridor' hence tree retention and planting is vital, especially on the frontage and should provide an increase in canopy cover overall on the site. The forthcoming revised Strategy will also expect a net gain in tree number, particularly as the site is in Abbey Ward which has a lower than 12% canopy cover; 12% being the minimum target for all wards by 2030.

The development results in the loss of the locally listed building, which Jon Mullis has provided comment on. The DAS document aims to justify the loss of this mainly as a result of the use of No. 55 for the entrance to the site having a number of cons, including 'No direct pedestrian route or views of Christchurch Bridge'. I note that the current proposal does not successfully provide this anyway. A 'treed avenue' (or more accurately, a route with sporadic tree planting) has been provided but there is no direct visual link from Vastern Road to the river as a result of building layout. I appreciate that the shape of the site does make this more difficult but it would appear that some measures, such as the 'shaving off' of corners of Blocks B & C could assist this. I note the EA comment that *'The corridor leading from Vastern Road to the river should be greener and more biodiverse than is currently shown to benefit people and wildlife'* hence there is work to be done on this route.

When viewed from both Vastern Road and Christchurch Meadows, the proposal presents a large scale of building frontage that is not in scale with adjacent houses or office buildings. The visuals provided within the DAS illustrate how imposing the proposal is from those viewpoints, albeit the design is much improved on the Vastern Road frontage in terms of appearance by omission of the originally proposed upper story building link between Blocks A & B. I note the EA have expressed concern about the height of the buildings and detrimental impact on the river. Whilst an offset has been provided from the river this has only resulted in a 5m buffer strip in front of the buildings which limits meaningful tree planting in terms of large canopy species, which is what should be provided in this location to be in line with objectives of our Tree Strategy (the river being a designated treed corridor) and to enable planting to adequately soften the buildings. The EA's comments emphasise the need to increase the width of this buffer to include the 10m from the river edge and greater space for landscaping which I agree with.

The landscape design principles include the need to consider green walls and roofs. It appears that, with the exception of the café, these are not included on any of the buildings. Even with the café, it is unclear as visuals in the DAS indicate a green roof but the roof plan does not. I note the inclusion of PV on the roof of Block A, D and somewhere on Blocks E, F & G and I acknowledge that these also have a place on developments. However, given our policy backing for green roofs, it would be helpful to have a statement as to why these have been omitted and why green walls are not proposed anywhere. As you are aware, in terms of responding to the Council's climate emergency and global biodiversity loss, maximum greening of every site is vital and is especially important for this site for the reasons mentioned in my attached email & to meet with policy requirements.

I previously indicated (in view of biodiversity and maximum greening) that natural SUDs provision should be the default position and I note that the Landscape GA plan (Rev A) mentions potential 'rain gardens' in one location, that being in front of Block C. However, I note that the plan associated with the submitted drainage strategy shows only cellular storage tanks, which should be the last resort. Tree pits and water storage can be designed together to be mutually inclusive and in turn provide biodiversity benefits. Further thought on this is required in view of Policy EN18 and the Sustainable Design & Construction SPD.

With reference to Landscape Planting Framework Plan 448.LA.102 A, there have been some changes to tree species proposed as a result of comments given at pre-app – I note that the key and plan do not match in terms of tree species included. In relation to the species proposed there are some changes required (EA comments noted on this):

Prunus should be avoided due to over-representation in the Borough, large canopy trees should be considered in front of the café (riverside), the internal Betula nigra should be substituted with a native Birch and instead of the riverside Q.palustris proposed a Q.robur should preferentially be considered if waterlogging is not likely to be a significant issue or a Swamp cypress could be considered as that would complement those planted on the riverside at Thames prom. Whilst the latter would not meet the EA's native requirements, there is sometimes also a place for ornamental planting on development sites. I note the EA's concern about the use of Alder in terms of disease spread and understand that planting Alder on river banks that are liable to flooding and where the disease occurs presents a high risk of the disease spreading. Betula pubescens could be utilised and Populus nigra (native Black poplar) both of which are native and moderately tolerant of waterlogging. The EA's comments on other planting proposals (non-tree) should be taken into account. Detailed landscaping could be secured via condition, but I think it is appropriate given the extent of concerns for amended details to be provided prior to a decision.

The tree pit provision and design will be extremely important on this site to ensure long term successful establishment of tree planting. Given the level changes through the site and the inevitable need for services, demonstration of the provision of suitable underground space (soil volume provision) for tree planting should be provided now. This should include indicative service routes.

Darren Cook and I emphasised the need to ensure that tree planting within the development would not conflict with vehicle movement, particularly larger vehicles (refuse trucks, emergency vehicles, delivery lorries). I couldn't find a vehicle tracking drawing – has one been provided?

The Contents of the Tree Survey and AIA document are acceptable. As is recommended, an Arboricultural Method Statement will need to be secured to ensure appropriate protection of off-site trees.

Whilst the principle of redeveloping the site is supported and there are no existing tree issues that can't be addressed, there are a number of concerns that need further consideration in order for the application to be supported in tree and landscape terms, i.e. to comply with our policies.