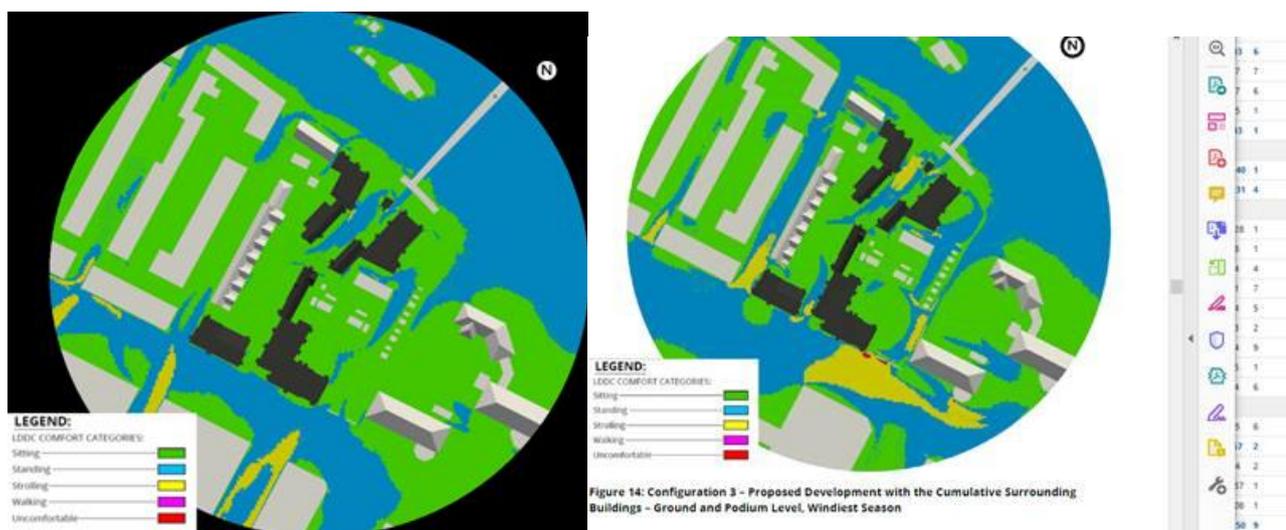


From: Breeze, Gordon <Gordon.Breeze@bregroup.com>
Sent: 16 September 2020 10:16
To: Markwell, Jonathan <Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk>
Cc: Blackmore, Paul <Paul.Blackmore@bregroup.com>
Subject: 53-55 Vastern Rd, Reading (200188) BRE Project P117633 (BRE response to RBC)

Dear Mr Markwell

I have discussed the matters below with my colleague (Dr Paul Blackmore, the author of the review), and together we have prepared the responses below to issues A, B, and C.

Issue A) We were unaware that the main doorway is located on the East façade of the Sovereign House south hemispherical extension. Given this main doorway location, we agree with the RWDI comments about this doorway, and we also think a comment in their report would be appropriate to clarify this matter. As well as this matter there is a small location to the south of the aforementioned extension which is shown as red (unsuitable for walking and all other more sedentary activities). Our concern is that this location is not suitable for any pedestrian activity and should be mitigated. The discussion of the windy area outside Sovereign House is only relevant to Configuration 3.



Configuration 3
 19th May, reviewed by BRE)

Configuration 4 (Report dated

with Cumulative Surrounding Buildings (including 182252 – Court Schemes).

- Configuration 4: Proposed Development
 80 Caversham Road and 200328 – Vastern

As can be seen from the image above, if the development is as per configuration 4 then there are no wind issues at this location. Furthermore, if Configuration 3 is built first followed by Configuration 4, then the Configuration 3 windy areas (shown above) would only exist temporarily until Configuration 4 is constructed.

We think that this issue should also be commented upon by RWDI in their report and if Configuration 3 will be built then it should be demonstrated that the proposed mitigation measure will ameliorate the windy conditions at the 'red' location near Sovereign House.

Issue B) The fact that "[the RWDI] approach has been widely accepted by numerous London boroughs and peer reviewers" does not make it correct. A precedent being set should not thereafter be used to justify the unjustifiable.

I personally agree with RWDI "that occupants at height would be expected to be more tolerant of windier conditions due to the exposure this location inherently incurs. Additionally, the use of the balcony will also be constrained by the prevailing weather conditions on any given day and would therefore be expected to be used when appropriate weather conditions prevail.", because I think people will trade good views for windy conditions. But this is not the point. The purpose of a wind microclimate assessment is just that – i.e. to identify windy conditions and to bring them to the attention of the LPA. Using this information, the LPA then makes an informed decision based upon that information. To repeat a point, we (BRE) believe that as a minimum requirement, the wind conditions on balconies should be suitable for long-term sitting during the summer months. RWDI clearly disagrees with our opinion, as they are entitled to do.

The issue about balconies being used as amenity space is important, because amenity space is a material consideration of the planning process. Each LPA might not have the same amenity space requirements as RBC. As I understand it RBC requires amenity space locations to be suitable throughout the year - this requirement therefore means that those locations must be suitable in winter. In this regard RBC require more onerous restrictions than other LPA's. There is nothing wrong nor untoward about this. Nevertheless, if this is an RBC requirement, then RBC should tell the Applicant (and RWDI) in clear English that this is a requirement (a "requirement" is not an aspiration, nor a vague wish, nor an intention) for planning approval to be granted. If RBC require that balconies should have conditions suitable for long-term sitting in summer, then that is what should be assessed. It needs to be stated that there is no guidance given by Lawson (which is the assessment criteria that RBC want used). Therefore it is a matter of judgement whether the conditions are suitable or not. Looking at the RBC planning requirements for not creating unpleasant wind conditions, etc, it is our opinion that these balconies that are unsuitable for sitting in the summer fail this test. Nevertheless, it is up to RBC to make the final decision.

Issue C)

The café is at podium level overlooking the river but the mitigation is at ground level. Previously RWDI just stated that the ground level mitigation measures would be adequate – it is this unjustified statement which is what we were disagreeing with. RWDI have now stated that a wall and balustrade to provide wind mitigation will be incorporated. We are happy for professional judgement to be used now that they have specified mitigation measures. Therefore we consider that the windy café area has been resolved because of proposed mitigation measures.

Summary:

The only outstanding matter of dispute between relates to the windy balconies/roof terraces. We have laid out the arguments, and we have provided RBC with our opinions and position; having done this, we believe that this matter is now down to RBC to resolve with the Applicant.

Having reached the above position, from BRE's perspective we do not think that a meeting is necessary. That is, unless the scheme and/or RWDI's positions change, we do not believe that there are matters of uncertainty to be clarified, or that a meeting will take the process further. As we see it, the decisions that need to be made now reside with RBC.

Please do not interpret the above as meaning that BRE are deserting RBC. Nor does it mean that if requested by RBC we will not attend and/or participate in meetings. It is simply that (perhaps, apart from a need for political reasons) we do not think that further such meetings are necessary.

Having considered the issues discussed above, if RBC would like BRE to prepare a Contract Variation that would include further correspondence, and/or attending/participating in meetings, we would be very happy to do so (just ask!).

Yours sincerely

Gordon Breeze

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For and on Behalf of BRE

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