28876/A3/EF/CP 24th September 2020

POLICY ASSESSMENT NOTE: NORTH/SOUTH SHARED PEDESTRIAN CYCLE ROUTE

53-55 VASTERN ROAD, READING (RBC PLANNING APPLICATION REFERENCE 200188)

1. Introduction

1.1. Following a meeting held on Monday 14th September 2020, with Jonathan Markwell (Case Officer – Reading Borough Council) and Darren Cook (Highways Officer – Reading Borough Council), some concerns were noted in relation to the proposed north/south shared pedestrian/cycle route, which extends through the above site. These concerns raised by RBC are summarised as follows:

A. There is potential for conflict between cyclists and pedestrians (some of whom would use the steps proposed while others would not), including, as a result of limited visibility near to the proposed switchbacks.
B. There is potential for abuse of the route by cyclists taking shortcuts.
C. The route is not straight and therefore not in accordance with policy which requires a direct route.
D. It is not legible and lacks a clear vision of where users need to go/get to.
E. The route may not be attractive and well used.

1.2. As a result, it was agreed that a detailed note setting out an explanation of how the design of the route was conceived and how it is considered to accord with adopted policy and guidance, would be created to aid further assessment. This note has therefore been prepared by Barton Willmore on behalf of Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd (BHOC) to summarise the rationale and policy justification for the proposed pedestrian/cycle route at 53-55 Vastern Road, Reading ("the Site") as part of planning application reference 200188 submitted to Reading Borough Council (RBC) in February 2020.

1.3. For ease of reference, structure of this note is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Planning Policy context
3. Design Rationale
4. Technical Assessment
5. Policy Assessment

2. Planning Policy Context

2.1. RBC's Development Plan comprises the Local Plan adopted in November 2019, supported by 'other main planning policy documents', 'supplementary planning documents – topics' and 'supplementary planning documents – sites'. For completeness, Local Plan policies considered relevant to the proposed development are identified within Section 6 of the submitted Planning Statement.

For the purposes of this note which responds to concerns relating to the north/south pedestrian/cycle link, only the policies that are directly relevant are considered. In addition, although adopted in 2010 and therefore superseded by both the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the adopted Local Plan, the Reading Station Area Framework (RSAF) is afforded some weight by the current Local Plan and is included within the 'supplementary planning documents – sites' section of the Development Plan. Reference is therefore made below to relevant policies/sections of both the Local Plan and RSAF. In addition, it is noted that the RBC Highways Officer has referred to the new government guidance 'Local Transport Note 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design' (July 2020), therefore this document has also been reviewed and relevance references included below.

Local Plan

2.2. The Local Plan policies specifically of relevance to the proposed north-south pedestrian/cycle are noted below, namely Policies CR2, CR3 and CR11.

2.3. Part b of Policy CR2, Design in Central Reading, states:

> **Development will provide appropriate, well designed public spaces and other public realm, including squares, open spaces, streetscape, utilising high quality and well-maintained hard and soft landscaped areas, and public art, that provide suitable functions and interest, sense of place and safe and convenient linkages to adjoining areas.** (BW emphasis)

2.4. Policy CR3, Public Realm in Central Reading, requires that proposals for new development make a positive contribution towards the quality of the public realm of the central area. Proposals will be assessed against criteria including:

> **i. All proposals on sites of more than 1 hectare will need to provide new public open space or civic squares integrated with surrounding development;**
> **ii. Imaginative uses of open space and the public realm, which contribute to the offer of the centre, will be encouraged, and new open spaces should be of a size and shape to be flexible enough to accommodate such uses. The provision of water features, trees (including street trees) and other planting, as well as hard landscaping, to create high-quality spaces, will be expected, where appropriate;**
> **iii. Development proposals adjacent to or in close proximity to a watercourse will retain and not impede existing continuous public access to and along the watercourses, and will provide legible continuous public access to and**

along the watercourses where this does not currently exist;

iv. **The design of developments adjacent to a watercourse, including the refurbishment of existing buildings, will be required to enhance the appearance of the watercourses and to provide active elevations facing the watercourses. Development that turns its back on the watercourses and results in blank or mundane elevations facing the watercourses will not be permitted;**

v. **The public realm should conserve and enhance the historic environment of the centre and the significance of heritage assets therein and their setting, including through layout, materials, hard and soft landscaping. There may be opportunities for areas of public realm to provide improved access to and visibility for heritage assets.**

2.5. Policy CR11, Station/River Major Opportunity Area, states that development will:

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

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

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

CR11g, Riverside:

Development should maintain and enhance public access along and to the Thames … 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

2.6. Figure 5.3 illustrates the Station/River Major Opportunity Area. The Strategy identifies a key movement corridor through the Site, as well as a desired new area of open space and 'activation' area, as shown below. It is noted that paragraph 5.4.6 of the Local Plan 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.

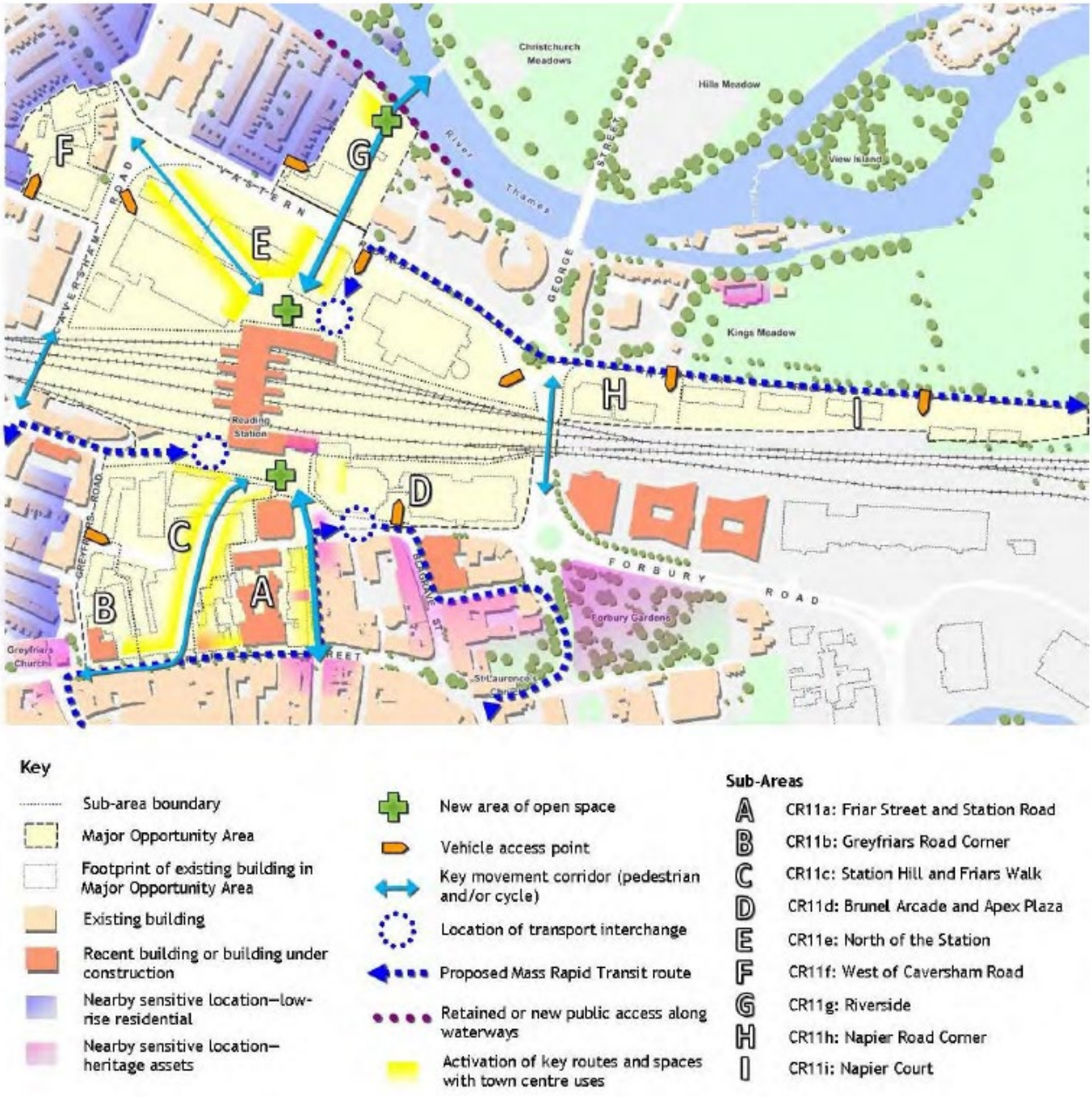

Figure 5.3: Station/River Major Opportunity Area Strategy

Reading Station Area Framework (RSAF)

2.7. Paragraphs 5.4.9 and 10.1.5 of the Local Plan set out that existing planning briefs such as the RSAF will remain in place, it is however noted that the RSAF contains a number of references to outdated policy. As noted above, it is accepted that the aspirations of the RSAF are afforded some weight in the determination of planning applications, given its status as a supplementary planning document.

2.8. Paragraph 2.18 of the RSAF identifies the enclosed electricity board site (the application site) as a major barrier to pedestrian movement in the Station Area, blocking direct access from the Station to the riverside footpath and cycle way.

2.9. Paragraph 3.6 of the RSAF states that:

> **The redevelopment of large sites provides the opportunity to secure landscaped public space and to extend public access. The layout of these will incorporate east-west and north-south routes <u>to enhance movement and linkages across the area</u>, whilst the construction of a pedestrian/cycle bridge linking the Area to Christchurch Meadows will further integrate and ensure good accessibility to adjoining open spaces.** (BW emphasis)

2.10. Figure 4.1 of the RSAF, informed by a now outdated policy context, illustrates the strategy for the area. It includes a strategic-scale key corridor of movement which passes through the Site, as shown below:

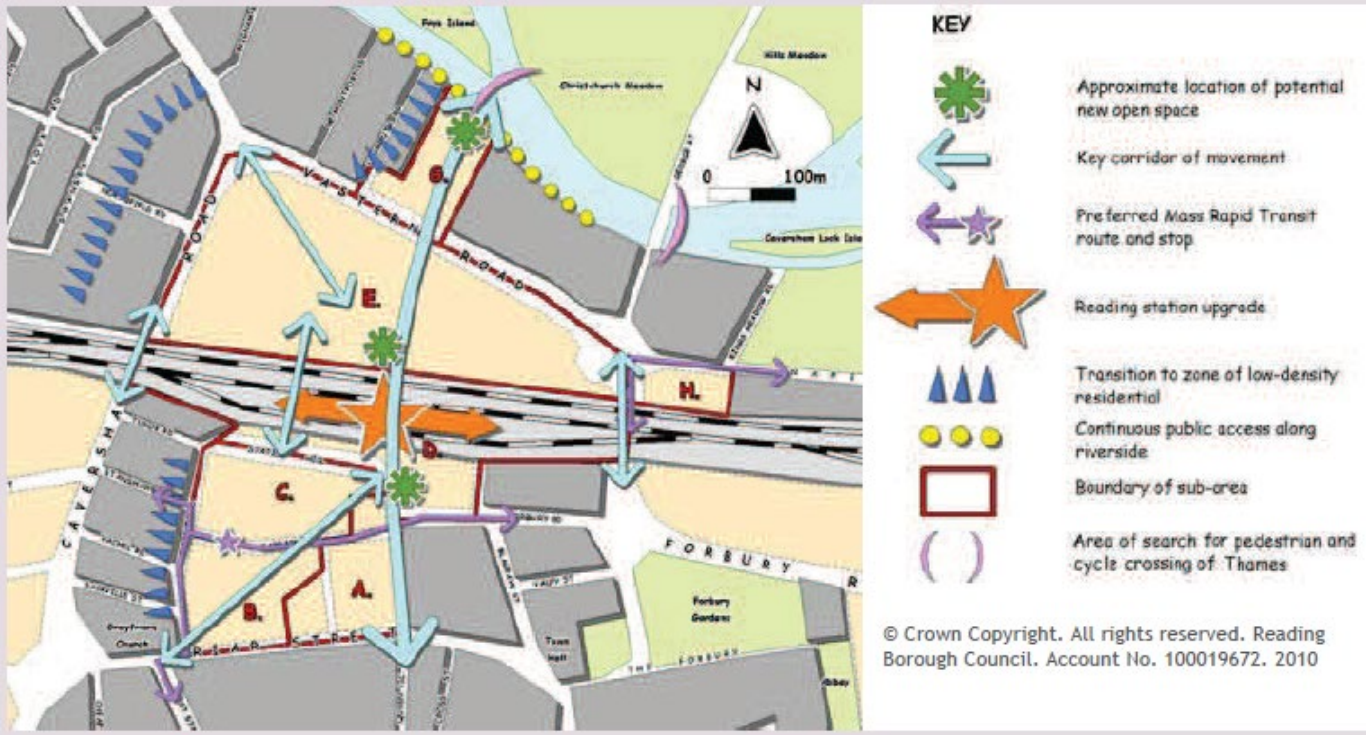

Figure 4.1 Station/River Major Opportunity Area Strategy

2.11. Paragraph 5.4 of the RSAF states that the overall aim is 'to improve the Station Area public realm by creating, improving and connecting public spaces' and identifies more detailed aims including:

- **'Stitching' together the various development sites within the Area, both visually and physically;**
- **Unifying the area through a coordinated design approach that utilises the best contemporary modern materials and street furniture;**
- **Creating an environment that is busy, overlooked and safe through its relationship with adjoining buildings;**
- **Contributing to the character and identity of the town centre, helping to instil a strong sense of place and underpinning investment; and**
- **Creating more opportunities for sustainable forms of transport, particularly walking and cycling, by enhancing the connectivity and legibility of the area.**

2.12. Paragraph 5.5 of the RSAF recognises that 'these aims may be difficult to achieve as a whole. Whilst it is possible for new developments to be carefully knitted into the existing street pattern, traversing the railway tracks and negotiating the many changes in level is a more challenging proposition. Nevertheless, development should seek to achieve this as far as is possible'. (BW emphasis)

2.13. Paragraph 5.6 of the RSAF identifies ten key public realm priority projects, including the Kennet-Thames Spine. Paragraph 5.9 comments on the proposed Kennet-Thames Spine as follows:

> **A major 'city spine' – a direct pedestrian route – is proposed through the historic core, the Station Area and through to the Thames. This spine is based on the north-south link which is the most significant movement corridor in the RCAAP, and is vital to the success of development in this area. The spine will extend across the Thames with a new footbridge(s) and new riverside parks, which can act as amenity space for new residents. The spine will include enhancements including wider pavements and greater pedestrian priority in Station Road. 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 frontages will be enlivened with active uses including retail and leisure.** (BW emphasis)

2.14. Paragraph 11.10 of the RSAF sets out in respect of transport that:

> **High-density mixed-use development in the Station Area will maximise the potential for local walking and cycling trips. The framework will help to secure high quality pedestrian and cycle facilities to include routes that are direct, well lit, naturally surveilled and safe.**

2.15. Paragraph 11.24 states:

> **Reading Borough Council's Cycling Strategy seeks to improve cycle links to Reading Station and interchange and to improve cycle crossings of and travel on the IDR. Development in the Station Area provides an excellent opportunity to achieve these aims. In particular, the development of the Northside area can provide new cycle links approaching the northern Station entrance, potentially separated where necessary.**

Local Transport Note 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design (July 2020)

2.16. In addition to the above policy and guidance it was noted during the meeting that Darren Cook referred to the above Government guidance released in July. Whilst this post-dates the submission of the application, we have considered the relevant sections of this guidance below.

2.17. The guidance identifies 5 core design principles: Networks and routes should be coherent, direct, safe, comfortable and attractive. Summary principles include:

- 1) Cycle infrastructure should be accessible to everyone.
- 10) Schemes must be legible and understandable.
- 11) Schemes must be clearly and comprehensively signposted and labelled.
- 18) Cycle routes must flow, feeling direct and logical – Users should not feel as if they are having to double back on themselves, turn unnecessarily, or go the long way round.
- 19) Schemes must be easy and comfortable to ride – Cycling is a physical effort. Schemes should not impose constant stopping and starting or unnecessary level changes.

2.18. With reference to summary principle 18, paragraph 4.2.7 provides more clarity in relation to 'directness':

> **Directness is measured in both distance and time, and so routes should provide the shortest and fastest way of travelling from place to place. This includes providing facilities at junctions that minimise delay and the need to stop. Minimising the effort required to cycle, by enabling cyclists to maintain momentum, is an important aspect of directness. An indirect designated route involving extra distance or more stopping and starting will result in some cyclists choosing the most direct, faster option, even if it is less safe.**

2.19. With reference to summary principle 19, paragraph 4.2.14 of the guidance provides more clarity in relation to 'comfortable conditions':

> **Comfortable conditions for cycling require routes with good quality, well-maintained smooth surfaces, adequate width for the volume of users, minimal stopping and starting, avoiding steep gradients, excessive or uneven crossfall and adverse camber. The need to interact with high speed or high-volume motor traffic also decreases user comfort by increasing the level of stress and the mental effort required to cycle.**

2.20. The guidance also provides clarity in relation to 'attractiveness' at paragraphs 4.2.17 – 4.2.19:

> **Cycling and walking provide a more sensory experience than driving. People are more directly exposed to the environment they are moving through and value attractive routes through parks, waterfront locations, and well-designed streets and squares…**
> **The environment should be attractive, stimulating and free from litter or broken glass. The ability for people to window shop, walk or cycle two abreast, converse or stop to rest or look at a view, makes for a more pleasant experience…**
> **Cycle infrastructure should help to deliver public spaces that are well designed and finished in attractive materials and be places that people want to spend time using.**

2.21. Minimising cycling effort is noted within table 4.1 of the guidance and it is noted that:

> **Routes that are direct and allow cyclists to maintain a steady speed are the most appealing. Designers should avoid layouts which make cyclists stop, slow down, or deviate unnecessarily from their desired route.**
> **Directness of route may need to be balanced with avoiding steep gradients.**

2.22. Finally of note is paragraph 8.2.11 of the guidance, wherein it states:

> **It may be necessary to encourage cyclists to slow at certain points, such as the access to cycle tracks, areas of high localised pedestrian activity, steep gradients and locations where there is the potential for conflict such as junctions and the entrances to subways and bridges, particularly if visibility is constrained.**

Summary of adopted Local Plan and RSAF aspirations for the north/south pedestrian/cycle link

2.23. For clarity, the table provided below consolidates the above references within both the Local Plan and the RSAF, which set out the aspirations for the north/south pedestrian/cycle link, according to adopted policy and guidance:

Policy/Guidance	**Aspiration for pedestrian/cycle route**
Local Plan Policy CR2	- Well designed space - Public art - Suitable functions and interest - Safe and convenient linkages to adjoining areas
Local Plan Policy CR3	- Open space integrated with surrounding development - High quality space with trees and other planting
Local Plan Policy CR11	- Facilitate greater pedestrian and cycle permeability

	- Development to front onto and provide visual interest for route - Direct landscaped link between the station and river
RSAF paragraph 3.6	- Enhance movement and linkages across the area
RSAF paragraph 5.9	- Direct pedestrian route - Incorporate a green link towards the river - Buildings to face onto the route with frontages enlivened with active uses including retail and leisure
RSAF paragraph 11.10	- Direct, well lit, naturally surveilled and safe route for pedestrians and cyclists
Local Transport Note 1/20, core design and summary principles	- Safe - Attractive - Accessible - Legible and understandable - Clearly and comprehensively signposted and labelled - Flow, feeling direct and logical - Easy and comfortable to ride

3. Design rationale for the Proposed Pedestrian and Cycle Route

3.1. The submitted application material sets out the design rationale and technical justification for the proposed pedestrian/cycle route, taking account of the policy context above. For the purposes of this note the rationale for the proposed route is summarised below.

3.2. The proposed pedestrian/cycle route is the product of a considered design evolution process taking account of the context of the Site as well as relevant technical standards.

3.3. Initial designs included a straight pathway through the Site. However, the straight route failed to achieve the policy aspirations in relation to attractiveness, activation and safety as set out in section 2 of this note as well as technical standards. The route would have been elevated above the remainder of the Site in order to achieve acceptable gradients, which inhibits the creation of attractive, integrated and useable public realm. The route would have therefore become dislocated from the development and unable to achieve several of the Local Plan Policy requirements and as a result, a straight cycleway was rejected at an early stage of the design process

3.4. Further evolution of the route design, taking account of the flaws of the initial straight route, has identified that a route including two switchbacks provides the most appropriate, well-integrated and direct route from Vastern Road to the River.

3.5. BHOC submitted a 'Strategic Cycle Footway' booklet (ref: 448.LAND.RP.001RevA) which details the evolution of the route at page 14 (attached for ease of reference). At section 1.3 of the booklet the technical design guidance is specified, which should be read in conjunction with the Technical Note prepared by Stantec (ref: 47500-TN003 Proposed Ramp Design Justification), which is submitted with this note. With reference to this material, the design of the proposed route has been informed by the following considerations:

i. Route width of minimum 3m;
ii. Activated route through the scheme with active frontage such as front doors and residential entrances;
iii. Clear wayfinding strategy;
iv. Ensure the route is accessible to all user groups;
v. Provide a shared space route;
vi. Provide a safe cycle environment through safe geometric design, ensuring the route maintains appropriate widths, minimal street furniture clutter and appropriate gradients (Max 5%);
vii. Appropriate surface finishes for combined cycle and pedestrian use;
viii. Cycle and pedestrian priority at vehicular junctions;
ix. Appropriate landscape treatments;
x. Clear stem trees to remove low branches and compact shrub planting to reduce vegetation encroaching onto route;
xi. Good visibility throughout the route, especially at junctions and corners; and
xii. Appropriate measures to naturally control cycle speeds to ensure a safe environment for all is provided.

3.6. To this end a dedicated 3m wide cycle footway runs through the central part of the Site, flanked by landscaped elements and tree planting aspiring to the 'direct green link' which is sought. This route connects the town centre from Vastern Road, through to the Thames Towpath and Christchurch Bridge to the north in accordance with Policy CR11g as noted above.

3.7. Given the changes in level between the Site, towpath and Christchurch Bridge, as noted in paragraph 5.5 of the RSAF, gentle deviations are introduced to the route to maintain a DDA-compliant route at 1:21 or less throughout the Site. To ensure the route is appropriate and desirable for all users, the route is supplemented by shorter and more direct, stepped pedestrian routes that provide a more convenient pedestrian journey. These more direct pedestrian routes should also reduce the number of pedestrians using the cycle footway through the section which includes switchbacks.

3.8. Two switchbacks have been introduced into the route, which we understand to be the principle area of concern for the Council. The switchbacks themselves widen to 4m to provide safe manoeuvring space for all users and moreover stepped pedestrian routes within the switchbacks, will reduce the number of pedestrians using the cycle footway through the switchback section. It should be noted that without the introduction of these switchbacks, the route would have been unable to maintain a DDA complaint gradient and therefore not be suitable for all users as intended. It should be noted that the introduction of the switchbacks was endorsed by the Councils Disabled Access officer.

3.9. The scheme is proposing to use a combination of wayfinding tools, including a landmark sculpture at the entrance to Vastern Road, signage, route markers and design details, to aid navigation through the Site. Whilst commuters and local residents will quickly become familiar with the new route, it is important that visitors are able to also navigate this strategic route from the station to the river.

3.10. The space provides a safe cycle footway environment from the bridge level into the Site. The route allows front door access from all proposed buildings to ensure the route is animated.

3.11. The route weaves through pockets of grass slopes and terraces that provide resting points and small areas of informal recreation, as advocated by Policy CR11.

Technical Justification

3.12. The route has been designed to comply with relevant standards and incorporates the following:

- 3m width provides adequate space for the route to be shared by cyclists, pedestrians and wheelchair users;
- Route gradient is 4.76% (1:21) which is shallower than the recommended maximum cycle gradient outlined within CD 195: Designing for Cycle Traffic;
- 3m wide stepped sections are provided to create spacious direct routes for pedestrians;
- Wide stepped route reduces number of pedestrians using ramped sections;
- Lengths of ramped sections are also below the recommended maximum lengths of 30m;
- Ramped sections are supplemented by minimum 5m length flat sections to ease use and naturally reduce cycle speeds creating a safe environment for all users;
- Route width widens at corners to reduce conflicts between users and ease cycle manoeuvring; and
- Route is shared to reduce conflicts between user groups and risks of conflicts at front doors and building entrances.

4. Policy Assessment

4.1. As set out above, the proposed north-south pedestrian/cycle route has been designed taking account of the adopted policy context and other guidance. An assessment of the proposal against policy is provided below.

Facilitating connectivity and permeability

4.2. The Local Plan and RSAF identify aspirations for greater connectivity to the north of the Station. A specific requirement for a link through the Site is identified in Policy CR11g and paragraph 5.9 of the RSAF. The proposal has satisfied the aspiration of improved connectivity and specifically, a 'direct pedestrian route' with the incorporation of a pedestrian/cycle link, removing the barrier to travel between the River and Station and therefore complying with Policy CR11g and the RSAF.

4.3. Wayfinding will be an important element to the strategic route as pedestrians and cyclist journey from the station to Christchurch Bridge. It is not possible to look down the entire route from the station given the urban form across the two development sites and such a route was not envisaged as part of the RSAF or Local Plan. Therefore, clear and visually legible wayfinding will be provided as a key element of the proposals, increasing permeability in the area.

4.4. In doing so, the proposals help to create more opportunities for sustainable travel due to enhanced connectivity and legality, consistent with the aspiration noted in paragraph 5.4 of the RSAF.

Providing visual interest

4.5. Policy CR2 requires the provision of well-designed public spaces that provide suitable functions and interest, sense of place and safe and convenient linkages to adjoining areas. Figure 5.3 identifies a desire for new open space and 'activation' within the Site. The proposed route has been designed as an integral part of the development, providing a convenient and naturally surveilled route linking Vastern Road to the River Thames and Caversham beyond. A high-quality podium courtyard with outdoor social seating and a café spill out area is provided, creating a suitable function for the riverside open space with all the buildings within this area facing on to the proposed route. In this regard, the proposed route is consistent with Policy CR2 as well as Figure 5.3.

4.6. Policy CR11iii) seeks developments that front onto and provide visual interest to existing and future pedestrian routes and open spaces. The proposed development would fulfil this requirement as the development fronts onto the route, provides enhanced landscaping, provides areas of public open space and areas for interaction, including a café.

4.7. A 'gateway' is proposed between Blocks A and B with new public art providing the entrance to the new pedestrian/cycle route, along with wayfinding and the potential for a water feature, linking Vastern Road, and thus Central Reading, to Christchurch Bridge. The route is therefore consistent with and achieves the aims of Policy CR11ii.

4.8. In addition, paragraph 5.9 of the RSAF sets out that buildings will face onto the spine rather than away from it. As noted above, the development fronts onto the proposed route through blocks that have been designed to interact with the route through the site and will incorporate design features to assist wayfinding and provide visual interest.

4.9. RSAF Paragraph 5.9 also states that the spine will include a green link towards the River. The proposed pedestrian/cycle route has also been designed in a landscaped manner with enhanced landscaping throughout the Site and adjacent to the River Thames and is therefore considered to comply with Policy CR11 and the aspirations of the RSAF.

Safety

4.10. Policy CR2 requires the provision of open spaces that provide safe linkages to adjoining areas. Paragraph 11.10 of the RSAF seeks well lit, naturally surveilled and safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists. The route has been designed to ensure safe access for all users, with adequate space provided for the route to be shared by cyclists, pedestrians and wheelchair users. Buildings will face onto the pedestrian/cycle link to provide natural surveillance. It is therefore considered that the proposals comply with the aspirations of the RSAF as well as policies with the adopted Local Plan.

4.11. In addition, a further query raised by RBC was in relation to cyclists potentially taking shortcuts across the route. Within the switchbacks, structured planting has been proposed within certain areas to ensure that there is no abuse by cyclists, ensuring that the route remains safe and useable by all.

Directness

4.12. RSAF paragraph 5.9 requires the provision of direct pedestrian route from the Station, through the Site to the River. As illustrated within figure 5.3 of the Local Plan (see paragraph 2.7 above), this is clearly a macro level aspiration for a key movement corridor, to connect the different areas of central Reading with the northern areas. It is important however to understand the meaning of 'direct', which it is considered to mean the shortest and fastest way from one place to another, as noted within the Government Transport Note (see paragraph 2.19 above). For completeness, reference to 'directness' meaning 'straight' has not been found within any of the key policies or guidance. Regardless, it is considered that the route has been designed to be as straight as possible given site constraints.

4.13. The concept of this route from the station to the river was to provide a direct link for pedestrians and cyclists that did not otherwise exist, as demonstrated on the various plans within the Local Plan and RSAF which show current, convoluted routes. Conceptually therefore the desire line for this route, in other words the line considered to be the most 'direct', was introduced into the RSAF and later the Local Plan, as discussed within the policy section of this note and shown on all of the supporting figures.

4.14. The delivery and facilitation of this route along this desire line, cannot therefore be considered to be anything other than 'direct', particularly from the strategic scale at which it was conceived. Looking at the micro scale of the route, the introduction of the proposed switchbacks is not considered to obstruct the route, slow pedestrians or cyclists down to an unacceptable level, or impact the route's directness. It is noted that on the northern side of Christchurch Bridge a route which is not entirely straight at the micro scale, due to the provision of switchbacks and junctions, has been considered appropriate. This evidently does not impair the directness of the route from Christchurch Bridge to Caversham.

4.15. Notwithstanding the above, it is also important to note that this is a pedestrian/cycleway not solely a cycleway. It is relevant therefore for the route to cater for both users, including disabled users and a great level of care has been taken to ensure this is the case.

4.16. The proposals therefore ensure that this link is provided in a way that is consistent with adopted policy and the RSAF, and that the route is as direct as possible given the nature of the Site and its surrounding context. The proposed route remains consistent with the strategic aspiration for a direct route from the Town Centre to Christchurch Meadows and also provides opportunities for new open space and active frontages to the route, in line with Policy CR11 and the RSAF.

4.17. In the context of technical design a single ramped section to provide a straight route for cyclists would be inappropriate. Policy conflicts of this approach notwithstanding, this route would lead onto Vastern Road and it would not be possible to achieve a shallow enough gradient and a maximum ramp length of less than 30m, to avoid speeding/safety concerns which would conflict with the interchange with Vastern Road.

4.18. Given the variety of challenges, it is additionally noted that paragraph 5.5 of the RSAF acknowledges challenges in achieving all of the identified aspirations relating to the public realm, particularly due to level changes (see paragraph 2.13 above). Moreover, paragraph 8.2.11 of the Government's Local Transport Note (see paragraph 2.22 above), notes the need to encourage cyclists to slow at certain points in (inter alia) areas of high localised pedestrian activity. Given the dual nature of the route, in needing to cater for both cyclists and pedestrians, this is an important part of the route, which the switchback design adequately provides without the need for cyclists to come to a stop. The design is therefore considered appropriate and consistent with the policy context, and is therefore considered to be entirely policy compliant.

5. Summary

5.1. This note has been prepared on behalf of Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd and assesses the pedestrian/cycle route proposed as part of the development of the Site against adopted planning policies.

5.2. The policy assessment demonstrates that the proposed route is entirely consistent with adopted policy and relevant guidance.

5.3. Returning to the concerns raised by RBC Highways Officer:

A. There is potential for conflict between cyclists and pedestrians (some of whom would use the steps proposed while others would not), including, as a result of limited visibility near to the proposed switchbacks.
B. There is potential for abuse of the route by cyclists taking shortcuts.
C. The route is not straight and therefore not in accordance with policy which requires a direct route.
D. It is not legible and lacks a clear vision of where users need to go/get to.
E. The route may not be attractive and well used.

5.4. With regard to point A – It is considered that there is no potential for conflict between cyclists and pedestrians. The switchbacks maintain a direct route, as direct by policy, but encourage cyclists to slow marginally due to high pedestrian activity, which is supported by government guidance. Pedestrians are also provided with direct stepped access through the switchbacks, further limiting the conflict in this section of the route.

5.5. With regard to point B – It is considered that there is no opportunity for abuse by cyclists, as there are no shortcuts to be taken. In accordance with policy aspirations, the route proposed represents the most direct link from the station to Christchurch Bridge.

5.6. With regard to point C – It is considered that the policy intention of directness was not envisaged to be interpretated as 'straight', indeed nowhere within adopted policy or supporting guidance could the term 'straight' be found as the meaning of the term 'direct'. As covered in detail within this note, directness is measured in distance and time. The proposed route complies with the strategic route noted within the Local Plan and RSAF, so conceived for its directness, and also provides the shortest route for pedestrians and cyclists to access Christchurch Bridge or the Town Centre, when travelling to and from Reading Station. The proposed route is therefore entirely direct and in accordance with policy aspirations and requirements.

5.7. With regard to point D – It is considered that the proposed route is legible. It would never be possible for users to see from one end of the route to the other, for a variety of reasons, nor would they conceivably expect to. For the infrequent user therefore, wayfinding will assist in understanding where users need to get to, which as discussed within this note is proposed as part of the scheme. The simplistic nature of the route, as conceived by policy aspirations and without deviation from this, combined with the level of wayfinding proposed will ensure the route is entirely legible and accessible to a range of users.

5.8. With regard to point E – Given the route through the site is an integral part of the proposed scheme, a great level of care and detail has been expended in ensuring it achieves the urban design requirements of our client and indeed of the attributable Local Plan polices and associated

guidance. This relates to (inter alia) the landscaping of the route, its legibility, the way the buildings front onto it and the café proposed fronting onto the river, all of which are explained in detail within this note. The scheme as a whole has taken on board the advice received from Design South East as part of the Design Review Panel process undertaken by our client to ensure the creation of an attractive and well-designed place.

5.9. The proposed development will provide a direct route to/from Christchurch Bridge to/from Reading Station, as envisaged by policy. This is considered a vital link and by virtue of its directness will be well used by commuters and visitors. For those users who are visitors unfamiliar with the area, a clear and comprehendible wayfinding strategy has been proposed which will facilitate greater pedestrian and cycle permeability not only within the site, but also to the adjoining areas. Moreover, the attractiveness of the green route and its response in terms of public realm will ensure that it is well used by casual walkers and cyclists delivering the strategically important landscaped link between the station and the river.