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# 55 Vastern Road, Reading: Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment Addendum

Prepared on behalf of Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd

May 2020



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<b>Project Ref:</b>	<b>28876</b>
<b>Status:</b>	Final
<b>Issue/ Rev:</b>	4
<b>Date:</b>	May 2020
<b>Prepared by:</b>	PC
<b>Checked by:</b>	PC
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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A1: Updated Verified Photomontages 1-10 (Part A: Images; Part B: Methodology)



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND KEY ASPECTS OF CUMULATIVE SCHEME

- 1.1 Barton Willmore LLP, Landscape Planning and Design group were commissioned by Berkeley Homes (Oxford & Chiltern) Ltd in March 2020 to provide an addendum to the Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (TVIA) dated January 2020, submitted in relation to the application for development for residential and public realm uses ('the Proposed Development') of land at 55 Vastern Road, Reading ('the Site'). This addendum provides more detail on assessment of potential cumulative effects, specifically in relation to the re-development of Reading Station Park ('RSP'), the application for which was submitted after that for the Proposed Development.
- 1.2 The cumulative schemes considered in the TVIA assessment were agreed with Reading Borough Council ('RBC') and are the following, which were all incorporated into the photomontages shown in Appendix 3 of the TVIA.
- Former BMW site, King's Meadow/Napier Road (application ref. 162166): part 12 storey, part 23 storey residential.
  - 29 Station Road (ref. 181930): 22 storey hotel, offices and retail.
  - Plot E and Telecom House, Station Hill (ref. 151426): mixed uses, up to 85m AOD.
  - Former sorting office, 80 Caversham Road (ref. 182252): mixed uses, up to 123m AOD.
- 1.3 The TVIA also included consideration of RSP, based on information then in the public domain. This indicated mixed use, predominantly residential built form up to approximately 20 storeys in height near to Reading Station and a series of built forms of approximately 4-10 storeys fronting Vastern Road.
- 1.4 With the benefit of the information now submitted with the RSP application, a more detailed consideration of the potential cumulative effects related to the RSP scheme in particular can be undertaken. This addendum accounts for updated cumulative scheme photomontages which include RSP (shown with a pink outline), where at the time of submission of the TVIA they did not, as the parameters information was not available. These photomontages have been prepared by Realm Communications and are included at **Appendix A1**.
- 1.5 The RSP application is in outline and based on design parameters. These parameters include for various scenarios, including mixed use, residential-only and non-residential. For the purposes of this TVIA addendum, consideration is given to the greater scale proposed for the mixed-use development as the source of maximum townscape and visual effects. Whilst there are caveats as to the extent of built development within the parameters text, Collado Collins drawing PP-105 accounts for the maximum envelope of vertical scale within which built form may be present. Collado Collins drawing PP-102 shows the maximum extent in plan of where

built form may occur. The remaining areas, beyond these limits, illustrate where open space/public realm will be evident.

- 1.6 It is noted that the RSP Environmental Statement (ES) Townscape and Visual chapter (ES Volume 2, Chapter 1) expressly excludes the potential for secondary mitigation on the basis that the scheme is outline. Furthermore, the submitted RSP Planning Application Booklet, which includes the parameters, makes no reference to more detailed design considerations. Whilst therefore a Design and Access Statement and Design Code are both provided with the RSP application, neither are relied upon for the mitigation of townscape and visual effects in the RSP ES and consequently, such details are not assumed to form part of secondary mitigation here either.

## 2.0 CONSIDERATION OF CUMULATIVE SCHEMES

### Commentary on cumulative effects on landscape features

- 2.1 As set out in the TVIA, it is noted that the RSP scheme to the south of Vastern Road includes the southern part of the proposed green link between the station and Christchurch Bridge. It is also noted that there would be a network of public realm surrounding the proposed built forms within the RSP site. In combination with the green infrastructure proposed within the Site along the green link route and at the riverside, there is potential for a notable extension and enhancement of public realm and green infrastructure in the vicinity, resulting in an even greater degree of beneficial effect on landscape features than would arise from the Proposed Development alone.

### Commentary on cumulative visual effects

- 2.2 As set out in the TVIA, in combination with the Proposed Development, the cumulative schemes, including as shown in the photomontages in **Appendix A1**, provide the perception in views from the surrounding area of a strong sense of place associated with the evolving town centre. They are part of a marked intensification of the area, planned by RBC, including an increased perception of height which will fundamentally and positively reinforce the legibility of the centre of Reading as a regionally-significant hub, as required by RBC planning documents.
- 2.3 In this context, the Proposed Development complements, but remains subservient to, these taller buildings which are located in Tall Buildings Clusters, notably the station area to the south. The clear hierarchy between the Proposed Development and the larger RSP proposals will be evident from the **river corridor and locations further to the north-east** as illustrated in: Photomontage P2, from Christchurch Meadows; Photomontage P3, from Caversham Bridge; Photomontages P6 and P6A from Reading Bridge; Photomontage P7 from the junction of Prospect Street and Peppard Road, Caversham; Photomontage P8 from The Horse Close, Caversham; and Photomontage P9 from Balmore Park, Caversham.
- 2.4 This legibility would include the progression between smaller-scale built form at the riverside within the Proposed Development, to the taller built forms nearer to the urban centre to the south. In the context of this intensification of the town centre, represented most immediately by the RSP scheme, the Proposed Development would mitigate the scale of the nearest RSP buildings along Vastern Road and would provide a more relaxed, smaller-scale interface with the Thames corridor, albeit would also provide a positive townscape frontage, befitting the meeting of the town centre and the river. Therefore, whilst there would be a slight increase in adverse change from the additional enclosure of views, this would be offset by increased

beneficial change in terms of townscape legibility and sense of place perceived in these views, such that there would be no change in the overall effects for the Proposed Development set out in the TVIA.

- 2.5 In terms of the immediate interrelationship of the Proposed Development with RSP, in views from the south-east and north-west along **Vastern Road**, as noted in the submitted TVIA, there is potential for an increased perception of enclosure along this route, as shown in Photomontages P4 (Visual Receptor Viewpoint 13) and (to a lesser extent) P5 (Visual Receptor Viewpoint 14). However, this would be balanced by the enhanced sense of place along Vastern Road, which in terms of the RSP site, currently includes a car park and retail sheds which create a vacant, unanimated and alienating appearance in views, in this town centre location. The intensity of development evident within the RSP site would be considerably larger than the blocks fronting Vastern Road within the Proposed Development.
- 2.6 In these views, blocks A and B of the Proposed Development would provide a progression in scale between the notably taller built forms in RSP to the south of Vastern Road, and the smaller-scale domestic character of the townscape to the north-west of the Site. In addition, as shown on Collado Collins drawing PP-105, the massing of RSP on the Vastern Road frontage rises up towards the south-east through Plots B to D, to the point where the Proposed Development is at its tallest (albeit still lower than the built form in RSP opposite and substantially lower than the tallest elements in RSP). This further assimilates the Proposed Development into the evolving townscape in these views – it would appear as a logical but subservient extension of the patterns of massing evident to the south of Vastern Road.
- 2.7 It is therefore considered that in Viewpoint 13 (where the RSP scheme would be most apparent) the cumulative magnitude of adverse change at year 1 would increase slightly, to Medium-Small. The magnitude of beneficial change would also increase slightly, to Large. Therefore, on balance, there would be a Medium magnitude of beneficial change, resulting in a beneficial effect of Minor-Moderate significance.
- 2.8 In views from the **south**, as represented by Photomontages P1 and P10, the RSP proposals would be prominent on the skyline and obscure the Proposed Development. As a result, effects in these views would not result from the Proposed Development.
- 2.9 In summary, as set out in the TVIA, in those views where the cumulative schemes would be seen, notably the cumulative scheme at RSP, there would be additional perception of intensification, enclosure and mass on the skyline. However, the relationship of the Proposed Development with these schemes would remain subservient and a logical and harmonious hierarchy of scale would be presented, in accordance with planning documents which are guiding the wider evolution of Reading town centre.

2.10 It is therefore considered that overall, whilst the RSP scheme would make a notably greater contribution than the Proposed Development to the changes in view in the vicinity, the balance of adverse and beneficial changes resulting from the Proposed Development with the wider cumulative schemes would broadly reflect the balance of changes resulting from the Proposed Development alone. Therefore, notwithstanding the greater magnitudes of change likely, and the exceptions noted above, the consideration of the cumulative schemes would not overall materially alter the assessment of visual effects for the Proposed Development, as set out in the TVIA.

### **Commentary on cumulative character effects**

2.11 As set out in the TVIA, the cumulative schemes to the south of Vastern Road, most notably RSP, would among other schemes, further reinforce the regeneration of **Character Area 22: Vastern Road**. Notably, RSP would provide a network of public realm including the southern part of the link between the town centre and the River Thames required by RBC policy. The progression in scale increasing along Vastern Road from the north-west, in Plots B-D of RSP, culminates at the point where the tallest elements in the Proposed Development signal the Green Link to the river and correspondingly, the tallest elements in RSP signal the Green Link to the station. This arrangement of massing adds a further dimension to the townscape legibility of the Proposed Development and of the Green Link which passes through it and through RSP. In summary, it is considered that in conjunction with the Proposed Development, the cumulative schemes would lead to more significant beneficial effects on the character of this area, of up to moderate-major significance.

2.12 The cumulative schemes to the south of Vastern Road, notably RSP, would inevitably increase the indirect influence of buildings of considerable vertical scale on **Character Area 12: Caversham Road**, which lies adjacent to the evolving town centre of Reading. As set out in the TVIA, whilst there is some progression in scale allowed for in the RSP parameters and it would replace an area of car parking and retail sheds, which makes no contribution to local distinctiveness, it would create a marked contrast with Character Area 12, principally in terms of scale. As a result, there would be a slight increase in year 1 adverse effects on the character of this area, to minor significance.

2.13 As perceived from the wider townscape, the combination of the Proposed Development and cumulative schemes would reinforce the legibility of the town centre such that whilst there may be some adverse changes from this influence on the character of the wider townscape, it would be balanced by the urban legibility benefits. The RSP scheme in particular would provide a strong definition of the intensification of land in Reading town centre, to the north of the railway line. It would also work in combination with the Hermes scheme to the south and the Proposed Development to the north, to provide a clear progression in scale and hierarchy

between the taller built forms in more central locations and the smaller scale of the Proposed Development at the riverside. Therefore, whilst presenting a positive townscape frontage to the river, in the context of the evolving town centre of Reading, the Proposed Development would be logically and legibly subservient to the larger scale further south.