

Statement of Case

Appendix 14

Design Statement of Case – prepared by
Dave Taylor of Berkeley

Statement of Case: Design

The Old Power Station, 55 Vastern Road, Reading

24 May 2021

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Berkeley
Designed for life

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been written by Dave Taylor, Design Director for Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd (BHOC). Dave has an undergraduate degree in Architecture, a post-graduate diploma in Architecture with a specialism in Urban Design, and is a practicing Architect registered with the Architects Registration Board and a Chartered Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects.
- 1.2 He has been working in the house-building industry for over 17 years, designing and delivering a wide range of projects across numerous challenging sites and buildings including, World Heritage Sites, Listed Buildings and their environs, Conservation Areas and locally-listed buildings. Notable schemes which Dave has been lead designer on include the redevelopment of Taplow Riverside – a mixed-use scheme alongside the River Thames near Maidenhead; Green Park House – high quality student accommodation set within the Bath World Heritage Site, a conservation area, and within the proximity of several Listed Buildings; and Sunningdale Park – a residential scheme within the grounds of a Listed Building and Registered Park and Gardens.
- 1.3 Dave has been involved in the Appeal scheme since BHOC inherited the scheme from Berkeley Homes (Western) Ltd in June 2019. Taking the scheme from developing the initial concept for the site, he prepared the application drawings and accompanying Design and Access Statement of January 2020 to support the Application to which this Appeal relates. In this work Dave was assisted by his colleagues Thomas Nicolas MSc, Landscape Design Manager at BHOC, and Eva Erjavec BArch (Hons) MArch ARB RIBA, Design Assistant at BHOC.
- 1.4 As well as being the lead designer for the scheme, Dave was also involved in the pre-application discussions with Reading Borough Council, key stakeholder meetings, design review panel meetings with Design South East, and several public exhibitions.
- 1.5 This statement addresses the Reasons for Refusal (RfR) relating to the design of the scheme, planning application reference 200188, as follows:
1. RfR 1 – High Quality North-South Link
 2. RfR 2 – Height and Proximity of Blocks D and E on the Thames Path
 3. RfR 5 – Retention of 55 Vastern Road
 4. RfR 6 – Comprehensive Development of the Allocated Site
- 1.6 In addition, whilst not raised as reasons for refusal, this statement will also address the following points from the Committee Report:

1. That the 'Goods Office' (Block C) "creates an oppressive character and fails to address the constraint of the [western site] boundary".^{1 2} This will be dealt with as a stand alone point.
2. There is a pinch point between the 'Goods Office' (Block C) and 'Coal Drop Building' (Block EFG) which gives a "cramped appearance".³ This will be covered under the assessment of RfR 1.
3. There is a concern that the design of the 'Goods Office' (Block C) and both the 'Generator' and 'Turbine Hall' (Block D) could make it difficult for the remainder of the sub area (i.e. SSE site) to be developed in an acceptable way.⁴ This will be covered under the assessment of RfR 6.
4. The "almost brutal design" of the buildings and constraints of the site has resulted in a poorly designed public realm.⁵ This will be covered under the assessment of RfR 1.

1.7 In what follows, any references to paragraphs or figures relate to those contained within this document unless stated otherwise.

¹ Para. 6.14, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

² Para. 4.24.13, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

³ Para. 6.15, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁴ Para. 6.16, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁵ Para. 6.18, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

2.0 The Site and Surroundings

The Site

- 2.1. The application site (Site) sits to the northern edge of the centre of Reading, with Vastern Road to the southern boundary, the River Thames to the north, electrical equipment belonging to Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSE) to the east, and residential gardens and parking courtyards to the west (see Fig. 2.1, Fig. 2.2).

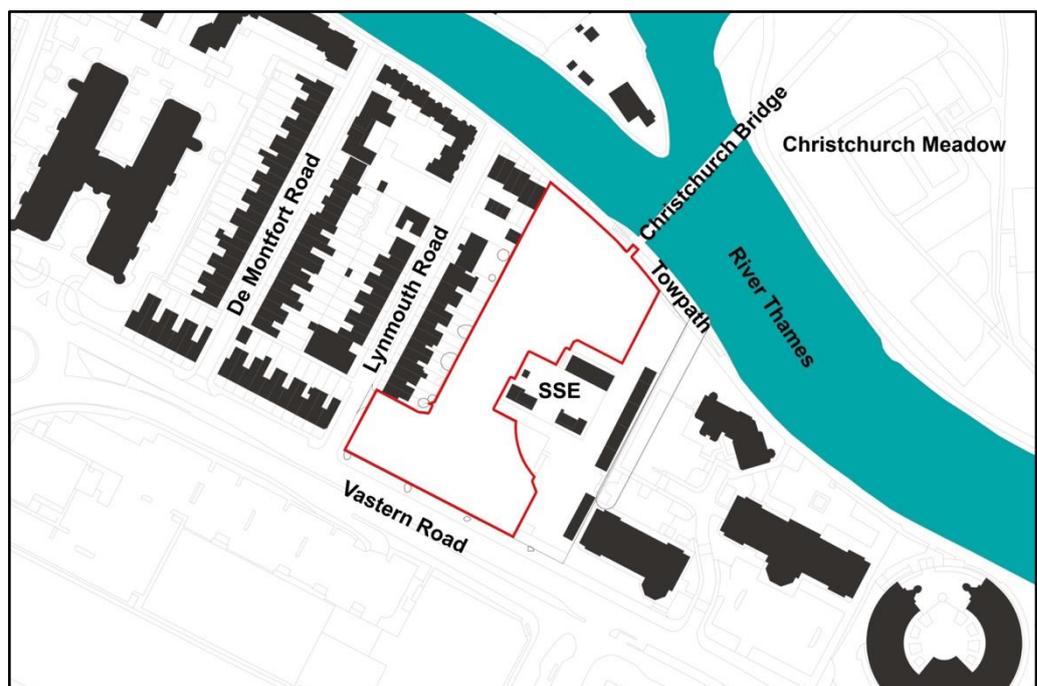


Fig. 2.1. Site Location Plan, orientation with north to the top of the plan

- 2.2. The Site measures 0.76ha and forms part of an allocated site of 1.24ha in the Reading Borough Local Plan (CR11g – Riverside) for residential and leisure uses. The full extent of the CR11g site allocation includes the neighbouring SSE site (see Fig. 2.3).
- 2.3. A single gated pedestrian/vehicular point in the south-west corner of the Site, connecting on to Lynmouth Road, will be the only existing access to the Site.



Fig. 2.2. Aerial Photograph of the Site taken from above Christchurch Meadow looking south. The application site is in the centre of the image with the River Thames and Christchurch Bridge to the bottom

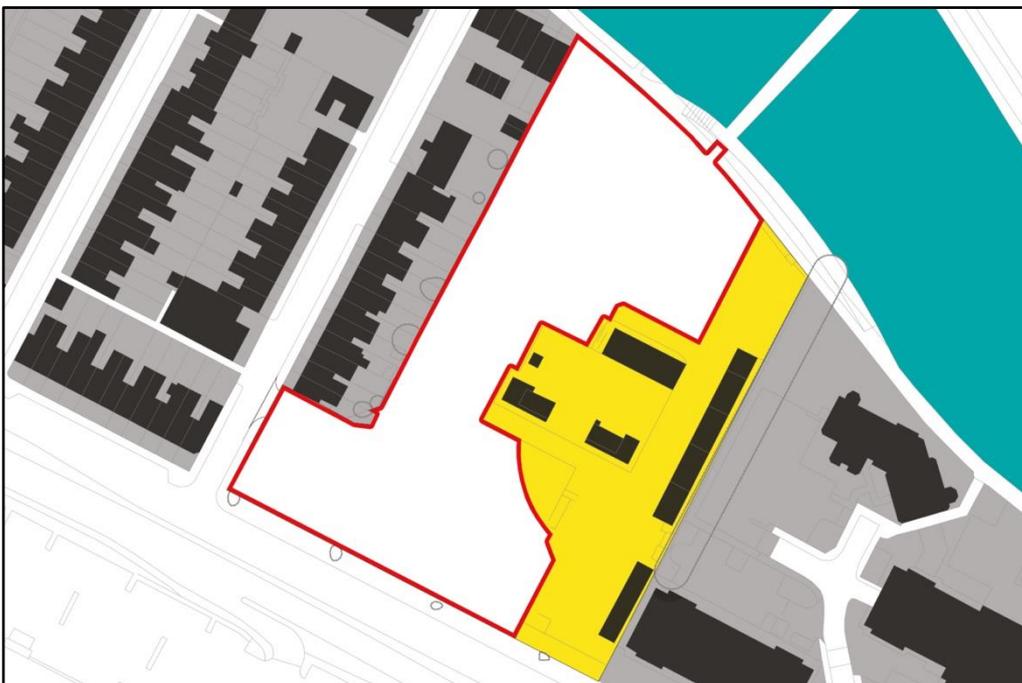


Fig. 2.3. Policy CR11g Site Allocation Plan (Application Site shown edged in red, adjacent land owned by SSE hatched in yellow)

- 2.4. The Site is predominantly flat (approx. 38.3m AOD), and mostly laid out as tarmacked surface car parking across the middle and northern parts, with a series of interconnected buildings on the southern part (see Fig. 2.4).
- 2.5. The buildings consist of a small Victorian 2-storey building with archway (locally-listed), with red-brick façade complimented with stone and brick detailing to the front elevation on to Vastern Road (see Fig. 2.5). The rear and side elevations have a utilitarian appearance with flat red brick facades, and stone heads and cills to the windows. This building has a flat roof construction.
- 2.6. Completing the frontage on to Vastern Road is a 2-storey white-rendered building with a flat roof, rising to 3-storey with pitched roof to the west of this range before dropping to a red-brick with projecting bay windows 2.5-storey element with pitched roof on the corner to Lynmouth Road (see Fig. 2.6). This part of the building has a simpler style with a factory / warehouse aesthetic of regular openings framed by projecting square pilasters. A single pedestrian access into the buildings is provided 1/3 of the way along the frontage.
- 2.7. Behind the range of buildings fronting Vastern Road is a modern 2-storey office block with rendered ground floor, glazed and grey metal framed first floor, capped with a metal pitched roof (see Fig. 2.7). The style of this building is similar to that ordinarily found on out-of-town office developments. Glimpsed views of this building are presented from the entrance on Lynmouth Road, with distance views from the elevated Christchurch Bridge to the north.



Fig. 2.4. Photo of the existing site car park, July 2019



Fig. 2.5. Photo of the locally listed building



Fig. 2.6. Photo of the existing buildings on to Vastern Road, July 2019



Fig. 2.7. Photo of the modern office block, July 2019

Boundary Conditions

- 2.8. The northern boundary consists of a 1.6m high red brick retaining wall with 1.0m metal fencing above (see Fig. 2.8). The wall manages the 0.9-1.1m level change to the towpath (set at 37.2m to 37.4m AOD) and has been vandalised with graffiti along its length. To the northern edge of the towpath sits the River Thames with a man-made edge and mainly turfed verge. There is no access from the towpath to the site.
- 2.9. Christchurch Bridge provides a shared foot/cycleway connection from the south side of the River Thames to Christchurch Meadow on the northern bank. It is expected that the bridge will connect through to the Site (a knock-out panel was included in the bridge design and construction). Due to the bridge being used for cyclists a 1.4m high fence encloses the bridge and ramp/steps which, with the bridge level being set at 40.8m AOD, encloses this stretch of the towpath and verge to 2.1-4.9m in width, with enclosure of up to 4.8m in height on the northern (bridge) side and 2.6m in height on the Site side. This results in an unwelcoming and enclosed stretch of the river which lacks in natural surveillance.
- 2.10. The eastern boundary forms the separation between the Site and SSE site (see Fig. 2.9). As SSE are in the process of consolidating the required equipment on to this area, the boundaries are in the process of being constructed with only the most significant pieces of equipment being enclosed by metal palisade fencing. This

boundary will be completed as part of the works to be approved under the Appeal application.

- 2.11. The southern boundary on to Vastern Road is set some 4.6m forward of the building frontage (see Fig. 2.10). This is laid to a tarmac finish, with the boundary delineated by concrete edging. This set-back takes into consideration a below-ground culvert whilst also allowing a gentle drop to the footpath level of 38.0m AOD.
- 2.12. The western boundary of the Site forms the enclosure to the gardens and parking courtyards to the properties along Lynmouth Road and Lynmouth Court (see Fig. 2.11). The boundary is primarily a close-board timber fence of between 1.6-1.8m in height to the rear of 2-16 Lynmouth Road, increasing to a 2.5m high brick wall to the rear of 16-28 Lynmouth Road. The remainder of this boundary consists of foliage and wall of 1.8m in height, and the blank flank elevation of Lynmouth Court.



Fig. 2.8. Photograph of the existing northern site boundary abutting the towpath, July 2019



Fig. 2.9. Photograph of the existing east site boundary and SSE site, July 2019



Fig. 2.10. Photograph of the existing frontage on to Vastern Road, July 2019



Fig. 2.11. Photograph of the boundary to Lynmouth Road gardens, July 2019

The Surroundings

- 2.13. The initial observation of the surrounding area is one of a place which lacks identity. This part of Reading is undergoing significant change, and has been for a number of years, with only the historic grain of the Victorian streets and the routing of the railway line giving reference to the history of this area of the town.
- 2.14. To the north runs the River Thames, along which the Thames towpath borders. Along the majority of this route, the towpath (footpath and verge) is generally edged with a brick retaining wall and fence enclosure to the southern side. Buildings along the southern side of the river range from 3 to 10 storeys, with a mix of residential apartments and office accommodation which are generally of buff brick facades and pitched roofs.
- 2.15. North of the riverbank is Christchurch Meadow – a large area of recreational parkland laid to grass and interspersed with mostly mature tree planting – beyond which sits Caversham, which mainly consists of terraced residential dwellings.
- 2.16. Immediately east of the Site is the retained SSE site, with exposed transformers and ancillary equipment and brick buildings of 1 and 2 storey in height. Further east sits a collection of office accommodation and residential buildings of up to 4-storeys in height. These are mostly buff/brown brick facades with pitched roofs.

- 2.17. The next main area is to either side of George Street and the crossing over the River Thames – Reading Bridge. This vehicular gateway into central Reading consists of a 10-storey concrete-clad office building to the east and a 4-6 storey office building with pitched roof to the west.

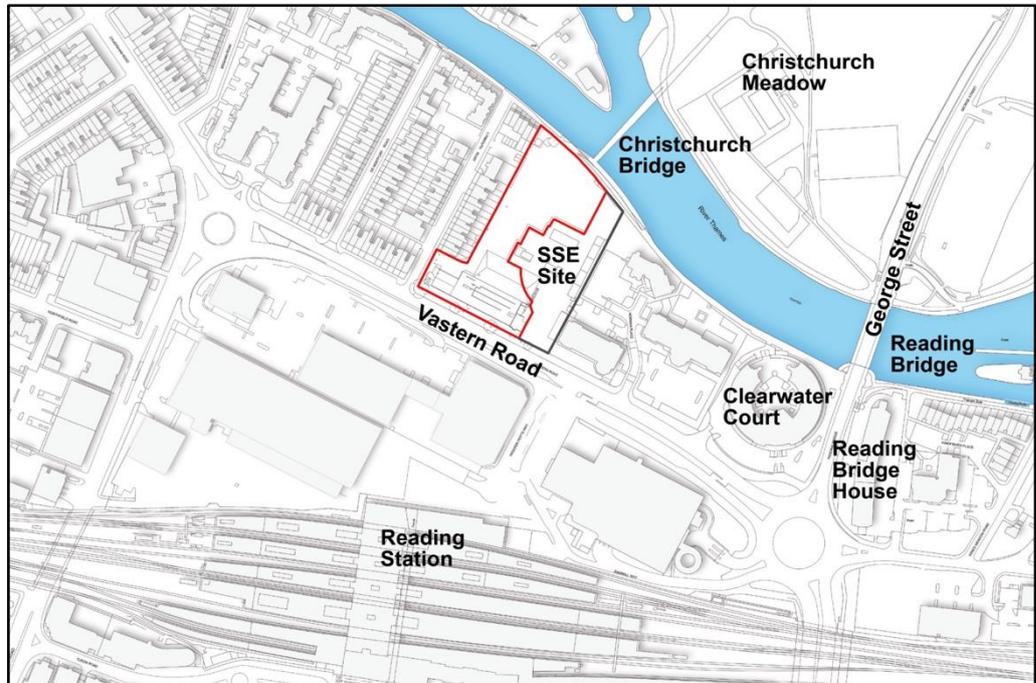


Fig. 2.12. Wider site location plan, orientation with north to the top of the plan

- 2.18. Vastern Road, running along the southern edge of the Site, is a major distributor road consisting of up to 5 lanes of traffic with a central island and inset parallel parking bays. Street lighting runs through the central island, with little-to-no soft landscaping along its length, save for some young tree planting within part of the central island and mature tree planting along the northern side of the road. The remainder of this stretch of road consists of wide footpaths in a variety of surface finishes.
- 2.19. Vastern Road presents a varied collection of building typologies and tenures, with office accommodation of 3 to 10 storeys on the northern side of the road running east of the Site, down to 2.5 to 3 storey residential dwellings running west of the Site. The southern side of the road consists of a retail park with car parking to its frontage, access to the railway station, and a 6-storey car park. The majority of this area is identified for redevelopment by RBC, with buildings of over 20-storeys currently being proposed and considered in other applications with RBC.
- 2.20. Beyond Vastern Road to the South lies Reading Station and the associated railway line which cuts off the centre of Reading beyond, save for access through/under the station, or the A329 underpass.

- 2.21. To the immediate west of the site is Lynmouth Road. This street, and the subsequent street running parallel to the west of it, is predominantly Victorian in character, consisting of 2 storey terraced housing with on-street parking to the fronts and gardens to the rear. These homes are generally red brick with buff brick detailing, or grey brick with red brick detailing, all of which have slate roofs. Towards the river end of these streets, older buildings have been demolished over the last few decades to be replaced with 3 storey apartments and housing with courtyard parking areas to the sides and rears. These buildings are simpler in detailing, in red or brown facing brick with either slate or interlocking tiled roofs. Soft landscaping along these streets is limited to very small pockets within individual front gardens.
- 2.22. Further to the west the character changes to continuous 4 storey apartment buildings with undercroft parking set out in buff brick and render facades and slate roofs, with larger-scale office accommodation behind.



Fig. 2.13. Photograph of the different building typologies along Vastern Road, May 2021



Fig. 2.14. Photograph of the varied architectural approach and scale along Lynmouth Road, May 2021



Fig. 2.15. Photograph of the towpath along the southern bank of the River Thames, May 2021

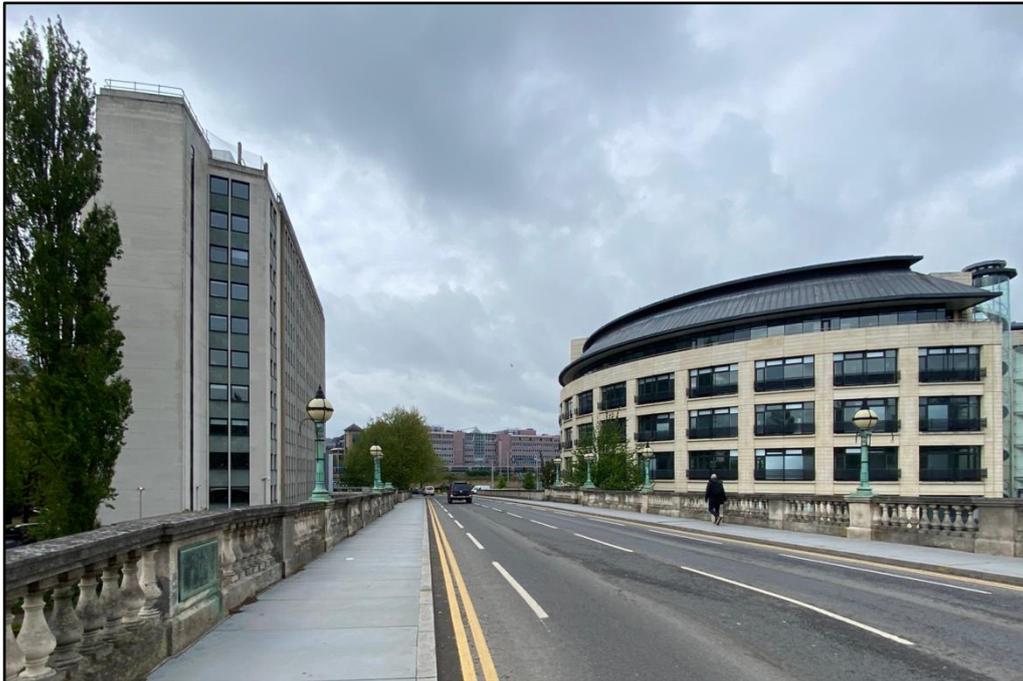


Fig. 2.16. Photograph of the gateway in to Reading from Reading Bridge, May 2021

Historic Uses

- 2.23. As part of my review of any site for which I am asked to produce designs, I would look back at the history of the site and surroundings in order to find any significant uses or designs which may influence how I would go on to develop a vision, concept and ultimately a fully considered scheme. I carried out that exercise in the present case.
- 2.24. From the late 1890's through to the 1970's, a series of buildings developed to make use of the Site's location between the River Thames to the north, and railway line and sidings to the south (see Fig. 2.17).
- 2.25. The predominant use of the Site became coal-fuelled power generation, with furnaces and turbine halls along the River Thames elevation accentuated with a tall brick chimney. These elements were demolished in 1970 as electricity generation moved out of town.
- 2.26. The central part of the Site was mainly used as a coal store in order to fuel the power station equipment. This part of the site is what would eventually become the transformers seen today.

- 2.27. Along the southern boundary, facing Vastern Road, buildings appeared from around 1913 onwards, used as a skating rink, depository, and later offices for SSE. These buildings have mostly survived.



Fig. 2.17. Photo of the site taken in 1948 from above the River Thames, looking south towards the site, Vastern Road and the sidings. The generator buildings, turbine halls, furnace and chimney are noticeable in the foreground.

3.0 The History of the Planning Application

Pre-Submission

- 3.1. In June 2019, BHOC inherited the Site from Berkeley Homes (Western) Limited (BHW) with the benefit of a design proposal by Broadway Malyan in conjunction with Macfarlane + Associates.
- 3.2. Our first assessment of the scheme included a review of the inherited design proposals (see **Error! Reference source not found.-Error! Reference source not found.**) alongside the feedback from 4 pre-application meetings with Reading Borough Council (December 2018 to June 2019), and a Design Review conducted by D:SE (May 2019). Prior to BHW involvement, there has been no relevant planning history on the Site.
- 3.3. Whilst welcoming changes which had been made by the BHW team to date, feedback from D:SE, and shared by RBC, from this stage of the design evolution still raised a number of concerns with the proposals. These were set out in the final pre-application meeting held between RBC and BHW in June 2019. For the purposes of this document, on this and the following summaries, I will focus on the points which relate to the design of the scheme, with the main issues being as follows:
 1. The designs did not yet deliver an “effective” way of “finding the Thames”.
 2. A rethink being required of the “compromised” foot/cycleway.
 3. A more legible gateway to the river from Vastern Road being required, implying that the current proposal for a segregated (and elevated) route was not attractive nor safe which “tends to recall schemes of the 60s and 70s... a concept both outdated and inappropriate here”.
 4. The scheme should relate better to the river, certainly offering a connection at towpath level.
 5. A single, ground-level route could have entrances and blocks on to it and hence create a more street-like feel – “the ramp shown seems lifeless”.
 6. The route should have some combination of landscape, art, active frontages, openings etc. so that it appears a public, not a private, route.
 7. The scale and massing “did not trouble” the panel, but the river frontage should be less dominant – at present it seems “heavy and abrupt”.
 8. Doubt was cast over the warehouse typology working well at the scales proposed, with the pitched roofs on the tall blocks of particular concern.



Fig. 3.1. Proposed Site Plan. Broadway Malyan, June 2019



Fig. 3.2. View of the frontage on to Vastern Road, with the scale of buildings increasing towards the site entrance. Broadway Malyan, June 2019.



Fig. 3.3. View of the proposed central street with mews houses to the western boundary and a separate ramp with green blast wall against the boundary to the SSE equipment. Broadway Malyan, June 2019



Fig. 3.4. View of the development frontage on to the River Thames with connection from Christchurch Bridge. Broadway Malyan, June 2019.

- 3.4. In June 2019, RBC were notified that BHW would be transferring the scheme to BHOc. With the benefit of the numerous meetings which had been held with BHW, we had a good understanding of the key issues which needed to be addressed. Coupled with a fresh look at the site and its constraints, we used these as guidance when redesigning the scheme. Significant issues which we believed should be addressed in the revised scheme, and which informed the evolution from concept to the presented scheme, were as follows:
1. The creation of a 'street' through the Site, rather than the at-grade road adjacent to an elevated foot/cycleway, to encourage integration of new residents into the place we will create as well as provide the accompanying benefits of active frontages and natural surveillance.
 2. Integration of the connection to and from Christchurch Bridge, rather than the divorced routes of the previous scheme, using gently meandering paths to negotiate the significant differences in levels between the bridge, towpath and Site whilst still delivering the proposed active street from point 1.
 3. A wider, more inviting space created to the River Thames, rather than the enclosed square of the previous proposals, using buildings to create a 'funnel' opening up to the north and introducing a softer edge on to the River Thames with a gently tapering landscaped frontage.
 4. The use of buildings to provide a visual and acoustic buffer to screen the retained SSE equipment, rather than a high wall, as well as then removing accommodation along the boundary to the Lynmouth Road properties and thereby improving the distances from the existing terraced homes to the new accommodation.
 5. Creating an open entrance on to Vastern Road so that the scheme offers a more public route, rather than the bridged building design on the previous proposals which appear less inviting.
 6. The introduction of a café within the opening on to the River Thames to provide a destination at the foot of the connection on to the existing Christchurch Bridge and deliver a space for people to meet and enjoy elevated views over the river and meadow.
 7. Creating a design language which reflected the history of the Site, using power station, warehouse and railway concepts to develop a narrative.
- 3.5. Our proposals were developed to include a new vision statement for the site, acknowledging the Site's rich history as a former power station and the railway connections to the south, as well as addressing the points covered above. A booklet⁶ was prepared which presented the revised scheme with comparison images of the new proposals against the scheme last presented by BHW (see **Error! Reference source not found.-Error! Reference source not found.**). In addition to the booklet, 3 sketch options were prepared showing various alternatives on how the central part

⁶ Pre-Application Design Booklet, 3 October 2019, Berkeley Homes

of the site could work, with particular reference to the segregation of vehicles and the foot/cycleway.



Fig. 3.5. Proposed site plan with shared surface central street. Berkeley Homes, October 2019.



Fig. 3.6. View of the frontage on to Vastern Road with a change to the design approach and scale of buildings, and removal of the linked connection between the buildings. Berkeley Homes, October 2019.



Fig. 3.7. View of the central shared street as it opens out towards the river and Christchurch Bridge. Berkeley Homes, October 2019.



Fig. 3.8. View of the frontage on to the River Thames with wharf and power station inspired elevations and wider public space on to the river. Berkeley Homes, October 2019.

3.6. These proposals were presented to RBC in pre-application meeting 5 (3 October 2019). It was noted that significant changes had been made, specifically to the north-south route, which RBC noted sought to address a number of the previous concerns raised in terms of connecting to the river and providing a more legible, public, route. However, a number of concerns and comments were identified as follows:

1. There were a number of “pinch points” where distances appeared insufficient, suggesting that the removal or narrowing of the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) could ease this.⁷
2. The shared surface through the middle of the Site was not considered acceptable and should be replaced with a “3m [wide] dedicated [foot/cycleway] route” and separate vehicular carriageway.⁸
3. RBC Transport advises that the foot/cycleway should be direct, avoiding the switch-back, but if this were still to be proposed a technical justification as to why this approach was necessary should be provided.⁹
4. Additional material was presented at the meeting with various options of how a separate 3m wide foot/cycleway could be achieved but requested that the carriageway was increased to 4.8m in width to allow for sufficient vehicle movement.¹⁰
5. The turning-head required to the south of the ‘Coal Drop Building’ (Block EFG) resulted in infrequent reversing of vehicles over the foot/cycleway and this point should be resolved.¹¹
6. Details were requested on the vehicular crossing points over the foot/cycleway.¹²
7. The introduction of a connection to the towpath was welcomed, but RBC requested this should be ramped, not a stepped access.¹³
8. The levels of landscaping south of the ‘Coal Drop Building’ was considered “sporadic” rather than being “a fully integrated aspect of the scheme’s design”.¹⁴
9. Further supporting information was requested in order to assess the massing.¹⁵
10. The design approach linking back to the historic uses of the site would broadly be considered appropriate.¹⁶

⁷ Pg. 2, Para. 5, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁸ Pg. 3, Para. 2, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹ Pg. 3, Para. 3, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁰ Pg. 3, Para. 5, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹¹ Pg. 3, Para. 6, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹² Pg. 4, Para. 1, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹³ Pg. 4, Para. 2, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁴ Pg. 4, Para. 6, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁵ Pg. 5, Para. 1, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁶ Pg. 5, Para. 5, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

11. It should be demonstrated that the proposed scheme would not preclude comprehensive development of the sub-area.¹⁷
12. Front doors should be considered throughout the site to increase active frontages.¹⁸
13. Conflicting advice was received on the treatment of the rear of the 'Coal Drop Building' and 'Christchurch Wharf' (Blocks EFG), suggesting that closing off this private area would give the impression of a "gated community" before going to say that there was "concern... for this to become a cut-through".¹⁹
14. We would need to demonstrate the scheme would not impact on neighbouring properties or future occupiers with regards to daylight/sunlight and overlooking.²⁰
15. The loss of the locally-listed building was a concern, but this would form part of the "planning balance".²¹
16. The introduction of the café was a welcomed and potentially "attractive benefit" of the scheme.²²
17. Various technical matters in relation to highways were requested to be confirmed or provided.²³
18. Landscape comments on lighting, the introduction of large canopy tree where feasible, and a request for native planting along the riverside.²⁴

3.7. The scheme evolved following the feedback from RBC with significant changes made to the scheme. These amendments formed the basis of the presentation to the Design Review Panel²⁵ and subsequent pre-application meeting²⁶ with RBC (see **Error! Reference source not found.-Error! Reference source not found.**). Changes to the proposals, and additional information provided, were as follows:

1. In response to point 3.6.1, the building footprints were amended, most notably creating a widening to the entrance to Vastern Road by 0.8m, a narrowing of the 'Goods Office' (Block C) by 1.0-1.6m, and a reduction in the length of the 'Coal Drop Building' (Block EFG) to increase the gap between this block and the 'Goods Office' by 4.4m.
2. In response to point 3.6.3, the angles of the switch-back route were opened up, and the width of the route increased on bends to 5m in order to improve movement.
3. In response to points 3.6.2, 3.6.4 and 3.6.5, a 3m wide foot/cycleway and 5m carriageway was introduced with parking spaces now parallel to the

¹⁷ Pg. 6, Para. 4, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁸ Pg. 6, Para. 6, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁹ Pg. 7, Para. 3, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

²⁰ Pg. 7, Para. 5, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

²¹ Pg. 9, Para. 2, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

²² Pg. 9, Para. 3, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

²³ Pg. 9-10, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

²⁴ Pg. 10-11, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 7 October 2019, Reading Borough Council

²⁵ Design Review Panel Presentation, 20 November 2019, Berkeley Homes

²⁶ Pre-Application Design Booklet, 25 November 2019, Berkeley Homes

carriageway rather than at 90 degrees. This, in turn, improved the tracking of vehicles such that only refuse vehicles (which would be guided by banksmen) would then need to reverse over a single point of the foot/cycleway.

4. In response to point 3.6.6, it was confirmed that the foot/cycleway would be raised and in contrasting materials to demonstrate priority to this route.
5. In response to point 3.6.8, through the changes made as per point 1 and 2 the amount of landscaping was significantly increased in this area. Additional information on the landscape character was included in the revised submission to satisfy this point and point 3.6.18.
6. In response to point 3.6.9, a heights plan was presented as well as wider context elevations covering the River Thames and Vastern Road elevations.
7. In response to points 3.6.12 and 3.6.13, plans were included to demonstrate the locations of the additional doors and windows through the Site, as well as clarifying public and private areas.
8. In response to point 3.6.11, a plan to demonstrate how the adjacent SSE site could come forward was included in order to demonstrate comprehensive development of the sub-area could be achieved.
9. In addition, following technical feedback part of the 'Railway Warehouse' (Block A) was reduced from 6 to 2 storeys in order to improve the daylight/sunlight to existing properties in Lynmouth Road.



Fig. 3.9. Site plan with separated foot/cycleway and road, and changes to the building footprints. Berkeley Homes, November 2019.



Fig. 3.10. View of the Vastern Road frontage with blue brick plinth to the 'Goods Warehouse' to pick up on materials from the loss of the locally listed building. Berkeley Homes, November 2019.



Fig. 3.11. View of the central street with separate carriageway. Berkeley Homes, November 2019.

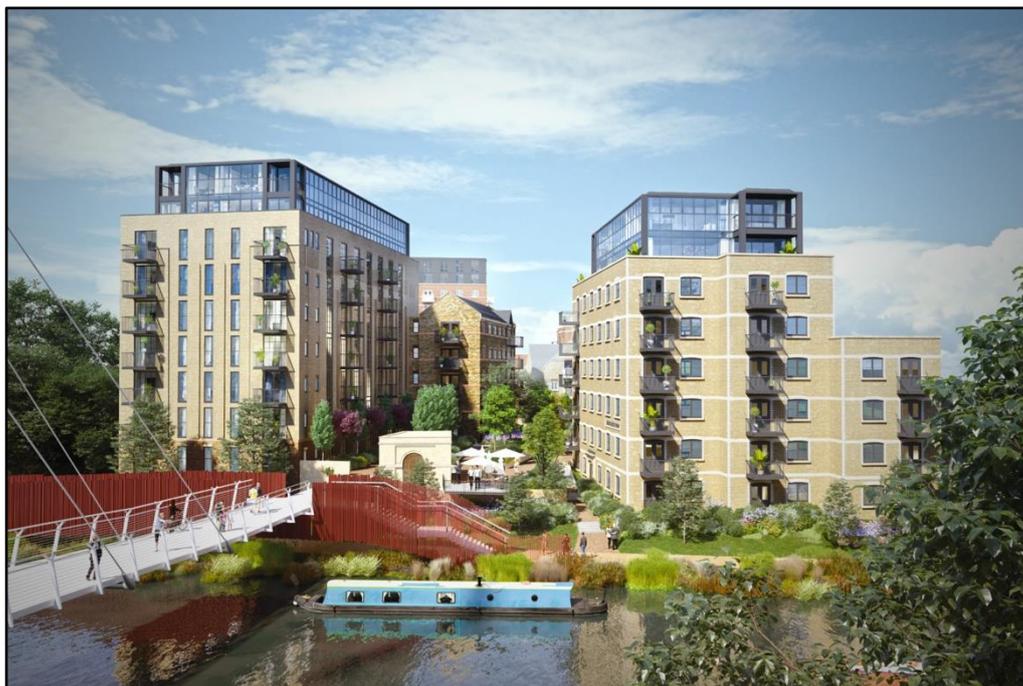


Fig. 3.12. View of the river frontage with amended detailing and massing of 'Christchurch Wharf' to reflect the rhythm of the neighbouring Lynmouth Court. Berkeley Homes, November 2019.

3.8. On 20 November 2019, the scheme was presented to the Berkshire Design Review Panel (D:SE) who were broadly supportive of the scheme, use, quantum, height and massing.²⁷ Comments raised for consideration were as follows:

1. The route for cyclists and pedestrians needed to be clearer and safer, whilst accepting that the switch-back handles the change in levels and “moderates cycle speeds that might otherwise be dangerously high southbound”.²⁸
2. Buildings in the middle of the site should be stronger and more distinctive.²⁹
3. The scheme relates better to the river and the connection to the towpath is welcome but suggested this could be more inviting.³⁰
4. The architectural language and naming of buildings, relating back to the history of the site, worked better than previous proposals but could be more contemporary.³¹

²⁷ Pg. 5, Para. 1, Report of the Berkshire Design Review Panel 1345/201119, 20 November 2019, D:SE

²⁸ Pg. 6, Para. 2.5, Report of the Berkshire Design Review Panel 1345/201119, 20 November 2019, D:SE

²⁹ Pg. 5, Key Recommendation 3, Report of the Berkshire Design Review Panel 1345/201119, 20 November 2019, D:SE

³⁰ Pg. 5, Para. 3, Report of the Berkshire Design Review Panel 1345/201119, 20 November 2019, D:SE

³¹ Pg. 5, Key Recommendation 5, Report of the Berkshire Design Review Panel 1345/201119, 20 November 2019, D:SE

5. The consideration of how the scheme relates to the remainder of the SSE site was welcomed.³²
- 3.9. Pre-application meeting 6 was held on 25 November 2019, and as such the material which was reviewed in this meeting was the same as that presented to D:SE 5 days earlier. Notwithstanding the comments from D:SE, RBC provided the following additional commentary:
1. It was acknowledged that the changes to the switch-backs and increased amenity areas were an improvement. However, RBC stated it was still a “strong intention” of Policy that the route should be “direct”.³³
 2. A “more legible gateway” to the river should be formed from Vastern Road, and that the removal of the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) “could alleviate this concern”.³⁴
 3. The ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) should be reduced in width by a further 2m or removed in order to provide “a suitable north-south link – without switchbacks”.³⁵
 4. The increased gap between the ‘Railway Warehouse’ (Block A) and ‘Goods Warehouse’ (Block B) was not considered sufficient.³⁶
 5. It was acknowledged that additional planting had been included and this was a positive but questioned whether further planting could be incorporated.³⁷
 6. Acknowledging that D:SE had no major issues with the height and massing, RBC continue to be of the opinion that insufficient information had been provided to justify this.³⁸
 7. Alternative options for the tops of buildings should be explored, and the presentation material to accompany the submission should be considered.³⁹
 8. The provision of the comprehensive development plan was welcomed in principle, but raised questions over open space, frontage to the river and connections between the Site and adjacent SSE land.⁴⁰
 9. The introduction of front doors along the north-south route was welcomed.⁴¹
 10. Clarification on the public/private areas were confirmed as being “suitable in principle”.⁴²

³² Pg. 5, Key Recommendation 7, Report of the Berkshire Design Review Panel 1345/201119, 20 November 2019, D:SE

³³ Pg. 2, Para. 3, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

³⁴ Pg. 2, Para. 3, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

³⁵ Pg. 3, Para. 2, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

³⁶ Pg. 3, Para. 6, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

³⁷ Pg. 4, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

³⁸ Pg. 5, Para. 5, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

³⁹ Pg. 5, Para. 6, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁴⁰ Pg. 6, Para. 2, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁴¹ Pg. 6, Para. 7, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁴² Pg. 6, Para. 8, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

11. RBC did not agree that the front-to-front distances with appropriate landscaping were sufficient between 'The Generator' (Block D) and the 'Coal Drop Building' (Block EFG).⁴³
12. The connection to the towpath was seen as a positive, although this should be accessible to all people and a ramped access should be provided.⁴⁴

3.10. In response to the comments received during the pre-application process, further design amendments were made to the scheme prior to submission to RBC. These proposals, incorporating amendments captured during the application, are discussed in Section 4. This included:

1. Redesigning the external elevations to reflect a more traditional approach, with a completely different approach to the design and detailing to the bottom and top two floors of the 'Goods Warehouse' (Block B), whilst also including additional detailing in a nod to the locally-listed building being removed.
2. A revised approach to the elevational treatment of the 'Goods Office' (Block C) to create a stronger and more distinctive architectural language.
3. Improvements to the landscape scheme to provide a stronger square on to Vastern Road, and a ramped connection to the towpath, as well as changes to the planting specification.
4. Widening of the steps within the north south route to 3m in width.
5. Provision of a ramped access to the towpath.

Post Submission

3.11. The application was subsequently submitted to RBC and validated on 16 March 2020 with a target determination deadline of 15 June 2020.

3.12. In response to comments received from officers (3.6.14) and local residents following our public exhibition, a design addendum⁴⁵ was produced and submitted to RBC on 9 April 2020, as well as local councillors and residents, to demonstrate how we had considered the relationship of the 'Goods Office' (Block C) in relation to the existing dwellings on Lynmouth Road.

3.13. In response to the consultee responses submitted to RBC a number of adjustments were made to the proposals during the application, including:

1. A change from projecting balconies to Juliet balconies to some of the dwellings on the 'Railway Warehouse' (Block A), the 'Goods Warehouse' (Block B) and 'Goods Office' (Block C), and an increase in the amount of glazing to plots within the 'Goods Warehouse' (Block B) in order to improve internal daylight levels in response to daylight/sunlight and wind comments.

⁴³ Pg. 7, Para. 2, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁴⁴ Pg. 2, Para. 4, Pre-Application Meeting 181724/PREAPP, 12 December 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁴⁵ Design and Access Statement Addendum, April 2020, Berkeley Homes

2. The layout and quantum of cycle parking was amended, creating separation between cycle and refuse stores where appropriate in response to highways comments.
- 3.14. The first post-submission meeting with RBC was held on 14 September 2020, where the following design-related points were discussed:
1. RBC were still of the opinion that a “straight” route be provided through the site, not one with switch-backs. It was agreed that BW and BHOC would provide a note to demonstrate the Policy and design assessment of the proposed route and alternatives.⁴⁶
 2. RBC advised they were “relatively comfortable” with the proposed scale of the buildings, with the only caveat being the objection from the Environment Agency / RBC Ecology on the impact on the River Thames.⁴⁷
 3. RBC advised that with regards to comprehensiveness, the Design and Access Statement demonstrates that adequate allowance has been made in the design process for future development on the SSE land.⁴⁸
- 3.15. In response to 3.14.1, a design addendum⁴⁹ was produced to demonstrate that it is not possible to deliver a straight route; that the proposals delivered a direct route; how the scheme compares to Policy; that the reduction or loss of buildings in the middle of the Site would not significantly affect the north-south route (other than with a resultant loss of dwellings); before going on to explain the technical components of the scheme, an option to remove the switch-backs, and an option to remove the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) along with the merits and impacts of each. This was submitted to RBC on 12 November 2020.
- 3.16. A subsequent meeting was held with RBC on 2 December 2020, with the following design points discussed:
1. RBC confirmed that whilst there was a requirement for a direct route, they did not expect the route to be straight. There should be a series of stages with appropriate wayfinding.⁵⁰
 2. RBC agreed that the alternative options presented were not viable, and/or had disadvantages in landscape terms. The footprint of the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) was noted as RBC’s main concern and RBC offered to send us a plan of what they thought would be considered acceptable.^{51 52}
 3. Officers stated that they liked the northern part of the route and how it opened out with the landscaping and café.⁵³

⁴⁶ Paragraph 2.5-2.6, Meeting Notes 28876/A7/EF, 16 September 2020, Barton Wilmore

⁴⁷ Paragraph 2.18, Meeting Notes 28876/A7/EF, 16 September 2020, Barton Wilmore

⁴⁸ Paragraph 2.21, Meeting Notes 28876/A7/EF, 16 September 2020, Barton Wilmore

⁴⁹ The Old Power Station Design Addendum, 12 November 2020, Berkeley Homes

⁵⁰ Paragraph 2.1, Meeting Notes 28876/A7/KC/slh/dw, 4 December 2020, Barton Wilmore

⁵¹ Paragraph 2.2, Meeting Notes 28876/A7/KC/slh/dw, 4 December 2020, Barton Wilmore

⁵² Paragraph 2.4, Meeting Notes 28876/A7/KC/slh/dw, 4 December 2020, Barton Wilmore

⁵³ Paragraph 2.3, Meeting Notes 28876/A7/KC/slh/dw, 4 December 2020, Barton Wilmore

Planning Committee

- 3.20. The Committee Report and subsequent Update Report sets out RBC’s position on a number of matters, alongside justification for the reasons for refusal. Dealing with these reasons for refusal, and the other design related points discussed previously (see 1.6), the following paragraphs extract key statements from these reports.

North South Link

- 3.21. The planning policy team suggest that the proposed north-south link is not the most direct link possible, with the “main problem” being the presence of the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C). They also state that the extent of the ‘Goods Warehouse’ (Block B) and the switch-backs also contribute to this problem.⁵⁶ However, with reference to the part of the site where the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) is located it is accepted in the officer’s appraisal that having to deal with the “often noisy or annoying and unattractive SSE plant” will have an impact on the eastern boundary of the site.⁵⁷
- 3.22. Planning Policy also raised concern with the quality of the route, notably with regards to the width being a minimum of 3m, citing examples such as Chain Street (generally in excess of 4m in width) and Union Street (generally up to 4m in width) as examples of routes which could be considered “actively dangerous”.⁵⁸ This point is supported in the officer’s comments, adding that the width of the path is narrower than the one crossing the Thames.⁵⁹
- 3.23. Officers agree that the designs of the buildings are “clever and interesting” and that they are happy with the approach taken, but it is the constraints of the layout of the site which result in a “poorly designed public realm” made worse by the “almost brutal” design of the buildings.⁶⁰
- 3.24. Reading Civic Society comment that they believe the proposals “deal with the constraints imposed by the SSE equipment as well as is practical”.⁶¹
- 3.25. The quality of the designs and proposals for the site were rated “very highly and... one of the best [they] had seen for some time” by Reading Civic Society, going on to consider this to be a “high-quality proposal” and that they do not agree with the officer’s comments that this isn’t a high-quality route.^{62 63}

⁵⁶ Para. 4.39-42, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁵⁷ Para. 6.12, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁵⁸ Para. 4.48, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁵⁹ Para. 6.19, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁶⁰ Para. 6.18, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁶¹ Para. 1.9, Committee Update Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁶² Para. 1.11, Committee Update Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁶³ Para. 1.13, Committee Update Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

- 3.26. The commentary from the Highways team, focuses on the lack of a direct pedestrian cycle route.⁶⁴ This goes on to reference paragraph 7.10 of the Reading Station Area Framework which states “...of particular significance are views along the direct north-south link... where there should be an unbroken line of sight” .⁶⁵ The officer supports this, stating that “the position of Block C and its proximity to Block F closes off views” through the Site.^{66 67}
- 3.27. The planning policy team, however, suggest that a single visual link from the Station to the Thames is difficult to achieve, but that “visual fragmentation” should be kept to a minimum.⁶⁸
- 3.28. Highways officers do not agree that the route to the towpath should be pedestrian only, and as such this route should be designed at gradients of 1:21 or less.⁶⁹

Height and Proximity of Blocks D and E to the Thames

- 3.29. Officers argue that the height of the ‘Turbine Hall’ (Block D) and ‘Christchurch Wharf’ (Block EFG), which are 4-8 and 10 storeys high respectively, impact on the appearance and character of this section of the River Thames, whilst also arguing that the river itself could provide this setting. It is suggested that the existing buildings along this stretch of the river are either low level or set back so far from the towpath that they would not compete with the character of the river.⁷⁰
- 3.30. In contrast, where the officers assess the heights of the buildings fronting on to Vastern Road, which are 6 and 9-11 storeys high, it is accepted that the heights of these blocks should be seen in the wider context, noting Clearwater Court (6 storeys, commercial), the Reading Bridge Building (10 storeys, commercial), and almost complete Thames Quarter (23 storey, residential) as comparable buildings, and taking into consideration that this is a “sustainably located” site, that the proposed scale and design of these buildings are acceptable.⁷¹

Loss of the Locally Listed Building

- 3.31. RBC’s heritage consultant accepts that where the Local Authority accept that retention is not important, replacement buildings should draw upon the heritage

⁶⁴ Para. 4.13.22, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁶⁵ Para. 4.13.45, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁶⁶ Para. 6.15, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁶⁷ Para. 6.19, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁶⁸ Para. 4.45, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁶⁹ Para. 4.13.50-54, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁷⁰ Para. 6.13, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁷¹ Para. 6.17, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

elements, incorporating qualities that made the building significant.⁷² Noting that recommendations were made during the pre-application process to explore façade retention, it is accepted that various options were considered and discounted within the Design and Access Statement, and the industrial heritage has been used to inform the design.⁷³ In conclusion, “the bespoke proposals are considered to be a good quality response” with the quality of the design going some way to mitigate impacts.⁷⁴

- 3.32. The officer believes that “not enough thought” has been given to exploring options for a viable re-use.⁷⁵ Accepting that the loss of the building would have been acceptable if the application were otherwise acceptable,⁷⁶ “efforts to include it in the redevelopment are not clear and the overall benefits of the scheme not sufficiently justified”.⁷⁷
- 3.33. Reading Civic Society judge that “loss of the Locally Listed Building is acceptable given the wider benefits of the proposed development”⁷⁸, adding that the retention “was explored extensively and repeatedly” before accepting “it was not practical to incorporate the old buildings”.⁷⁹

Comprehensive Development

- 3.34. Little is mentioned within the committee report with regards to comprehensive development other than the officer’s assessment that there is a concern that the designs for the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) and ‘Generator’ and ‘Turbine Hall’ buildings (Block D) could make it difficult for the remainder of the allocated site to be developed in an acceptable way.⁸⁰
- 3.35. Further commentary is provided within the update report which acknowledges that section 3.9 of the Design and Access Statement demonstrates how the remainder of the allocated site could come forward, going on to conclude that the proposals adequately demonstrate that the proposed development “would not prevent the remainder of the sub-area from fulfilling the CR11 aspirations”.⁸¹

⁷² Para. 4.1.20, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁷³ Para. 4.1.29, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁷⁴ Para. 4.1.30, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁷⁵ Para. 6.38, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁷⁶ Para. 6.41, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁷⁷ Para. 6.42, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁷⁸ Para. 1.9, Committee Update Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁷⁹ Para. 1.16, Committee Update Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁸⁰ Para. 6.16, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁸¹ Para. 7.2, Committee Update Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

Privacy and Overlooking

- 3.36. Whilst not a reason for refusal in the decision notice, a separate point raised by objectors which is under consideration is in regard to the alleged loss of privacy and the overlooking nature of the 'Goods Office' (Block C). It is noted that the height of this building, the "front-to-back" relationship with existing properties and gardens to Lynmouth Road, and whether the proposed trees and gaps between would provide significant privacy.⁸²
- 3.37. In the officer's assessment, it is accepted that the layout of this building protects residents from the sight and sounds of the SSE installation but would present an overbearing development for the existing dwellings 24m to the west, failing to address the western boundary through addressing the eastern boundary.⁸³

⁸² Para. 4.24.13, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

⁸³ Para. 6.14, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

4.0 An Outline of the Scheme

- 4.1. The scheme consists of 209 new homes and cafe, arranged either side of a new north-south link which will connect Vastern Road through to Christchurch Bridge and the Thames towpath.
- 4.2. A mix of new homes are provided, including 61 1-bed dwellings, 136 2-bed dwellings and 12 3-bed dwellings. 50 car parking spaces are provided of which 12 are on-street and the remainder within undercroft parking areas, and 3 of these are disabled spaces. 156 secure cycle spaces are provided across the buildings, with an additional 8 visitor spaces adjacent to the Café.
- 4.3. Drawing reference from the three historic components of the Site, with power generation to the northern third on to the River Thames, fuel storage in the central third, and railway / warehouse use in the southern third on to Vastern Road, the architectural language, design approach and detailing, and naming of each of the buildings all take influence from this.



Fig. 4.1. Proposed Site Plan

- 4.4. The 'Railway Warehouse' (Block A) and 'Goods Warehouse' (Block B) frame the entrance to the Site from Vastern Road with the 11-storey scale of the latter designed to act as a legible marker to the gateway into the Site and beyond. The former transitions between the 'Goods Warehouse' (Block B) down to the residential

scale of the properties along Lynmouth Road with the height being 2-6 storeys. These buildings provide 27 and 78 new homes respectively.



Fig. 4.2. CGI of the proposals taken from Vastern Road looking north

- 4.5. At a more human scale, a square is created at this entrance with the 'Goods Warehouse' (Block B) stepping back from the building frontage and dropping to 4 storeys in height. Painted lettering on the decorative brick wall announces 'The Old Power Station' to add to the legibility and wayfinding. Detailing to reflect the existing building is replicated within the Vastern Road frontage to reference back to the locally listed building.
- 4.6. From the Vastern Road entrance to the Site, views continue as far as the 'Coal Drop Building' (Block EFG) whose angled arrangement deflects views towards the opening on to Christchurch Bridge and the river. The use of a deflected vista at the mid-point of the scheme is a common tool to suggest the continuation of the route through the narrative of a series of events. In this case, creating memorable events at this point with views which open up either through to Vastern Road – if heading south – or to the river and Christchurch Bridge – if heading north.
- 4.7. Further enhancing the wayfinding, contrasting surface materials are accompanied by inset contrasting 'tracks' which sweep from the south into the site as a reference back to the time when Vastern Road was mainly faced by railway sidings. These tracks lift from the pavement to provide a sculptural piece with designs and illumination to echo the mast of Christchurch Bridge at the river end of this journey.

- 4.8. The architectural design of these buildings also takes cues from the historic uses along Vastern Road, with the red-brick facing materials and detailing – taking cues from the Victorian heritage of the site – enhanced with design elements replicated from the loss of the locally-listed building, such as blue brick quoining to openings, alternating stone and brick archway, and stone string courses with matching heads and cills.
- 4.9. Utilising the existing vehicular access on to Lynmouth Road, vehicles will enter the site to the northern face of the ‘Railway Warehouse’ (Block A) before turning northwards as far as the ‘Coal Drop Building’ (Block EFG).
- 4.10. The roadway provides access to on-street parking, a limited number of undercroft parking spaces to the ‘Goods Warehouse’ (Block B) and ‘Turbine Hall’ (Block D), as well as offering servicing for refuse, fire and deliveries.



Fig. 4.3. CGI of the proposals along the central street looking north

- 4.11. The dedicated 3m wide foot/cycleway runs parallel to the access road alongside the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C). A densely planted hedgerow interspersed with new tree planting provides a soft edge and defensible space to the gardens of Lynmouth Road properties and provides a buffer to the parallel parking spaces and roadway.
- 4.12. Between the road and foot/cycleway sits another landscape strip with additional tree planting and low-level landscape breaking up access points and additional on-street parking.

- 4.13. Along the eastern side of the foot/cycleway a denser strip of planting increases the soft landscape offering whilst also providing defensible space to the 'Goods Office' (Block C).
- 4.14. The 'Goods Office' (Block C) provides a transition to a different scale of buildings, sitting 3.5 storeys high with accommodation within the roofspace. This building provides a continuation of activity and frontage through the central part of the Site whilst also delivering the benefit of visually and acoustically screening the retained SSE equipment. The scale of this building is a considered response to the existing residential properties to the west along Lynmouth Road.

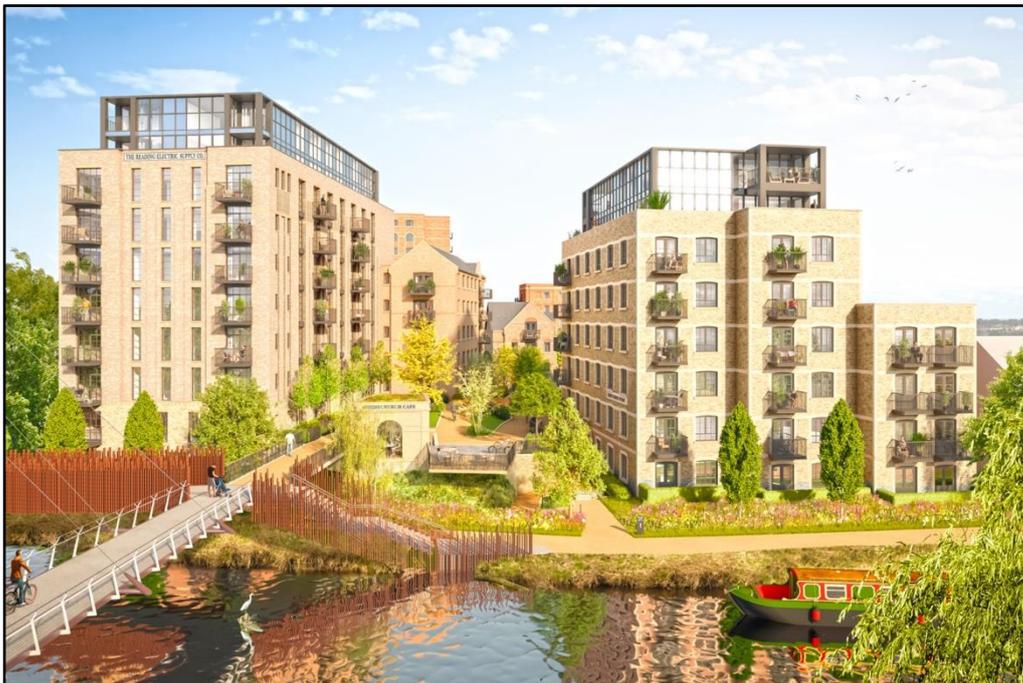


Fig. 4.4. CGI of the proposals taken from over the River Thames looking south

- 4.15. The 'Generator' (part Block D) transitions the scale up to 6 storeys with pitched roof, directly connected to the 'Turbine Hall' (part Block D) which sits as an 8-storey brick building with a further 2-storey glazed element inset above.
- 4.16. The design of this building takes reference from Victorian riverside power stations such as Bankside and Battersea in London, with the material choice of a lighter buff brick to reflect most other existing buildings along this stretch of the River Thames. The glazed top two floors deliver a different product with penthouse accommodation benefitting from the increased glazing to enjoy long distance views, and the inset nature providing substantial external amenity space.
- 4.17. To the north-west corner of the Site sits 'Christchurch Wharf' (Block E), a buff-brick building taking cues from Victorian riverside wharf buildings, whilst sharing design

details such as the glazed penthouse-level accommodation as the 'Turbine Hall'. The river frontage of this building follows the same stepped approach as Lynmouth Court to the west, offering broken build-lines and opportunity to step this building down in scale from 8 storeys through to 4 on the western element.

- 4.18. The buildings deliberately fan-out towards the river to address the alignment of the connection on to Christchurch Bridge whilst also producing a more open and inviting approach from the north and widening views to the river and beyond from within the Site. The scale of the buildings signifies a gateway into the site and Reading town centre beyond. In addition, buildings are set back from the river's edge by between 10.0m and 11.9m in order to provide a softer edge to the setting of the River Thames and towpath.
- 4.19. The resultant public space uses landscape features and a combination of 3m wide direct pedestrian stepped routes and gently meandering ramped routes of between 3m and 5m in width to negotiate the tensions between the level of Christchurch Bridge (40.8m AOD), the towpath (37.4m AOD) and the minimum finished floor levels of the residential accommodation as derived by the Flood Risk Assessment (38.6m AOD).



Fig. 4.5. CGI of the proposals looking north towards the river and bridge

- 4.20. As a centrepiece to this part of the Site, a new single-storey café is provided alongside a projecting terrace overlooking the River Thames. Coupled with the soft and hard landscaped areas between the 'Turbine Hall' (Block D) and 'Christchurch Wharf' (Block E), and the generous tapering soft landscaping along the river and

towpath edge, this area is intended to create a new and exciting destination on the southern side of the river for all to enjoy.

- 4.21. Finally, along the western side of the Site is the 'Coal Drop Building' (Block FG), a 2-3 storey block of 7 homes in total. The frontage of this building draws on the Victorian character of the other smaller-scale pitched roof buildings in the middle of the site, with a wharf-inspired regular pattern of windows. The elevations facing west are mostly blank with the exception of ground floor openings or high-level windows to kitchens.
- 4.22. Each of the buildings has been carefully designed with appropriate and authentic architectural detailing, the use of high-quality facing materials, and the introduction of site-specific landscape detailing and public art to enhance the public realm and the route through the scheme.

5.0 Design Assessment

- 5.1. The scheme has been conceived and the design developed, mindful of the relevant Local and National Planning Policies. A full assessment of the scheme against all relevant policy will be undertaken in the Statement of Case by Barton Wilmore.

Planning Documents and Policies Relevant to Design

- 5.2. When considering the proposals, of particular importance to the design of the Site are the specific design related policies taken from the Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted November 2019, as below:

POLICY CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

POLICY CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

POLICY EN4: LOCALLY IMPORTANT HERITAGE ASSETS

POLICY H2: DENSITY AND MIX

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 CR11: STATION/RIVER MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREA

- 5.3. The key aims of the above policies in relation to the design of the scheme, can be summarised as follows:
- a. To create high-quality developments which are visually attractive, maintain or enhance the character and appearance of the area, and reinforce local character and distinctiveness.⁸⁴
 - b. To not cause a detrimental impact on new or existing properties.⁸⁵
 - c. To conserve heritage assets, and where they cannot be retained any replacement buildings draw upon heritage elements of the previous designs.⁸⁶
 - d. To provide high-density dwellings of an appropriate mix, whilst giving consideration to the transition to existing low and medium density residential areas.^{87 88 89 90}
 - e. To provide appropriate, high-quality public realm where possible which are permeable and legible to pedestrians and cyclists, with active frontages, green

⁸⁴ Policy CC7, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁸⁵ Policy CC8, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁸⁶ Policy EN4, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁸⁷ Policy H2, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁸⁸ Policy CR11 i), Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁸⁹ Policy CR6, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹⁰ Policy CR11 vi), Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

infrastructure and high-quality architectural materials and detailing.^{91 92 93 94 95}
⁹⁶

- f. To make a positive contribution towards public realm, retain access along watercourses, and enhance the appearance along such watercourses including the provision of active frontages.⁹⁷
- g. To create places which are safe and accessible.^{98 99}
- h. To add to or maintain the setting and character of the Thames.¹⁰⁰
- i. To demonstrate the proposals for part of a comprehensive approach to its sub-area.¹⁰¹

5.4. The Site forms part of the area identified as an allocated site sub-area 'G', also known as sub-area CR11g. This is highlighted at figure 5.3 in the Local Plan. Policy CR11g allocates the Site as follows:

*POLICY CR11g, RIVERSIDE:
READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN, ADOPTED NOVEMBER 2019*

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 sq m of leisure, no significant net gain in offices.*

5.5. Whilst not specifically expressed within each of the policies discussed above, there are further paragraphs from the Local Plan which are also of some relevance when assessing the proposed scheme. Points of note are as follows:

⁹¹ Policy CC7, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹² Policy CR2, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹³ Policy CR3, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹⁴ Policy CR11 ii), Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹⁵ Policy CR11 iii), Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹⁶ Policy CR11 v), Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹⁷ Policy CR3, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹⁸ Policy CC7, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

⁹⁹ Policy CC8, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁰⁰ Policy CR4, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁰¹ Policy CR11 viii), Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

- a. Improved permeability, and in particular a new north-south route, is the main priority for the site, and active frontages along this route will assist in this becoming an attractive link.¹⁰²
 - b. Development of the allocated sites should be undertaken in as comprehensive a manner as possible, though it is acknowledged that as some of these sites are in different ownerships they may come forward in different timescales. Proposals should be accompanied by supporting information to show how any application would relate to the neighbouring sites.¹⁰³
- 5.6. The Local Plan references 'Site-related Supplementary Planning Documents'¹⁰⁴ stating ones which relate to development allocations within the Local Plan will remain in place. The document which is relevant to the Site is the Reading Station Area Framework (2010) SPD (RSAF). It is accepted that the aspirations from the RSAF are afforded weight in determining applications.¹⁰⁵
- 5.7. In relation to the Site, the key aims of the RSAF are:
- a. To create a vital and enjoyable place to live and work.¹⁰⁶
 - b. To create a mixed-use area incorporating a substantial number of residential dwellings in a high-density format which is not dependent on car travel.¹⁰⁷
 - c. To provide well connected and accessible places with landscaped public space and an extension of public access.¹⁰⁸
 - d. To create a place of value with outstanding architecture and a unique sense of place responding to the character of the historic town and adjacent areas.¹⁰⁹
 - e. To improve public realm through design, natural surveillance, instilling character, and creating opportunities for sustainable transport.¹¹⁰
 - f. To knit into existing street patterns, noting the railway and changes in levels makes this a more challenging proposition.¹¹¹
 - g. To provide a 'green', direct pedestrian route connecting to the river and footbridge with buildings facing on to the route.¹¹²
 - h. To improve the riverside path along the south side of the Thames, with potential for pocket parks.¹¹³

¹⁰² Para. 5.4.6, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁰³ Para. 5.4.10, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁰⁴ Para. 10.1.5, Reading Borough Local Plan, November 2019, Reading Borough Council

¹⁰⁵ Para. 6.12, Planning and Affordable Housing Statement, January 2020, Barton Wilmore

¹⁰⁶ Para. 3.4, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹⁰⁷ Para. 3.5, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹⁰⁸ Para. 3.6, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹⁰⁹ Para. 3.7, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹¹⁰ Para. 5.4, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹¹¹ Para. 5.5, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹¹² Para. 5.9, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹¹³ Para. 5.11, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

- i. To create high quality public realm at the connection with the Thames, noting this would not be of a large size due to space constraints.¹¹⁴
- j. To provide a new cycle connection between Vastern Road and Christchurch Bridge.¹¹⁵

Design Assessment

- 5.8. I consider that the proposals comply with the relevant design policies set out above as well as the requirements set out in NPPF paragraph 127. An assessment of the scheme, framed around the statements contained within NPPF paragraph 127, will be considered in the following paragraphs. The National Design Guide also encapsulates the principles of the NPPF, to which I make reference below where appropriate. Specific policy compliance in relation to the reasons for refusal considered in this statement will be covered within Section 6.

Creating a Place Which Will Function Well and Add to the Quality of the Area

- 5.9. The first statement of paragraph 127 of the NPPF focuses on the quality, function and longevity of the development.
- 5.10. By inference, NPPF paragraph 130 adds that developments should take advantage of the opportunities to improve the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account local design standards or supplementary planning documents.
- 5.11. The National Design Guide defines a well-functioning place as one which provides a well-designed movement network for walking, cycling, access to facilities and so on.¹¹⁶
- 5.12. Local Plan policies seek to maintain or enhance the character of the area (see 5.3.a) including that of the Thames (see 5.3.h), creating permeable and legible public realm through the use of high-quality materials and detailing (see 5.3.e). This permeability, and in particular the provision of a north-south route, is deemed to be the most important aspect of the site in the supporting policy text (see 5.5.a).
- 5.13. In addition, the RSAF SPD covers the Site and surrounding areas requiring development to well-connected and accessible spaces (see 5.7.c), responding to and instilling character (see 5.7.d, 5.7.e), whilst noting the existing levels make knitting-in to existing street patterns challenging (see 5.7.f).

¹¹⁴ Para. 5.16, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹¹⁵ Fig. 11.11, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹¹⁶ Para. 75-77, National Design Guide, 2021, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

- 5.14. I consider that the local character of the site and its surroundings are varied and lacking in a coherent structure (see 2.13) and are currently undergoing significant change through the applications coming forward (see 2.19). It is therefore difficult to draw significant character from what currently exists.
- 5.15. The existing site character is not of a high quality and detracts from the surrounding area by virtue of the open car park, exposed SSE equipment and the mostly low-quality buildings fronting on to Vastern Road (see 2.4-2.7, 2.16).
- 5.16. However, the proposals take cues from the neighbouring Victorian buildings to the west, and the history of the Site, to develop a site-specific response in order to enhance the character of the area (see 4.3), and the use of high-quality and site-specific detailing and materials to ensure the scheme remains contextually appropriate and will stand the test of time (see 4.22).
- 5.17. The eastern and western boundaries of the site provide no opportunity for connections into the wider street pattern (see 2.10, 2.12), save for the existing connection on to Lynmouth Road which is to be retained and reused (see 4.9).
- 5.18. A new route is made through the Site running north-south, connecting Vastern Road to the south through to Christchurch Bridge and the towpath to the north (see 4.6, 4.11, 4.18, 4.20). These new connections provide a more direct route to Christchurch Bridge whilst also improving connectivity on to the towpath, even though existing levels and the site constraints make this difficult to achieve (see 4.19). Opening up the Site with a publicly accessible route and open spaces introduces permeability where there currently is none.
- 5.19. Legibility is added to the scheme through the provision of taller buildings at gateway points on the northern and southern edges of the route (see 4.4, 4.8), with smaller scale wayfinding introduced through the use of public art, landscape detailing and directional signage (see 4.5-4.7, 4.20).
- 5.20. In summary, I consider that the proposals deliver on the aims of the RSAF SPD in providing a high-quality north-south route, with the design approach to the scheme taking reference to the unique character and history of the site to improve the quality of the area.

Creating a Place Which is Visually Attractive

- 5.21. Paragraph 127 of the NPPF states that the creation of a place which is visually attractive is a result of delivering good architecture, the layout of the scheme, and effective landscaping.

- 5.22. Local plan policy take this point further, stating that the architecture and layout should be of a high quality (see 5.3.a, 5.3.e) and this is reinforced within the RSAF (see 5.7.d).
- 5.23. In addressing this point, it is helpful to establish how one defines the terms “visually attractive” and “high-quality”. The National Design Guide Section 12 considers that visually attractive places and buildings are those which are designed well and appeal to all our senses.¹¹⁷
- 5.24. The design of the scheme has been carefully designed against the aims and objectives of local policy, through the delivery of site-specific designs which will be constructed in high quality materials (see 5.16). The use of brickwork to all buildings, for example, fits in with the surrounding buildings giving a texture which is tactile and human in scale.
- 5.25. The designs of the buildings have also been considered to be “clever and interesting” by the officer (see 3.23) and of a very high quality by the Reading Civic Society (see 3.25). RBC’s heritage officer also adds that the proposals are of a good quality (see 3.31).
- 5.26. The layout of the scheme provides a landscaped route from Vastern Road through to the river with opportunity for tree planting, hedgerows and smaller scale planting in addition to hard landscape features to give a variety of textures, smells and sounds and colours to the soft landscape in order to appeal to users senses as they move through the spaces (see 4.11-4.13, 4.19-4.20).
- 5.27. In summary, I consider that through the design approach taken the scheme delivers well designed and high-quality buildings and public realm which in turn will provide a visually attractive place.

Creating a Place Which is Sympathetic to Local Character and History

- 5.28. The third statement under paragraph 127 of the NPPF seeks developments which are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities).
- 5.29. Local planning policy asks that developments reinforce local character, maintaining or enhancing the current conditions (see 5.3.a), and where heritage assets are lost, they are referenced in replacement buildings (see 5.3.c). New buildings must be considerate of existing neighbouring low and medium density residential

¹¹⁷ Para. 54-55, National Design Guide, 2021, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

development (see 5.3.d). With regards to landscape setting, policies ask that development enhances the appearance along the Thames (see 5.3.f) maintaining or adding to the character along this frontage (see 5.3.h) with buildings being set back 10m from the edge of the river (see 5.4).

- 5.30. The quality and character of the area is addressed in other relevant sections and paragraphs of this document where I consider that the surrounding area lacks a coherent character (see 5.14) and it is therefore difficult to draw from that in developing the design approach.
- 5.31. One area from within the current Site which does influence the proposals is the locally-listed building on Vastern Road. Whilst it has been demonstrated that the existing locally-listed building was unable to be retained in any form (see 3.31), policy states that “replacement buildings should draw upon heritage elements of the previous design” (see 5.3.c). As such, detailing from the existing building is replicated within the frontage of the ‘Goods Warehouse’ (Block B) in order to reference the recent history of the site (see 4.5).
- 5.32. In addition, the design of the proposals draws reference from the historic use of the site as a power station, and the neighbouring uses to the south which were historically railway sidings (see 2.23-2.27) in order to create a scheme of unique and site-specific character which relates back to the former uses to serve as a reminder of the history of this part of Reading.
- 5.33. There are cues which have been taken from the surroundings which allow the proposals to integrate into their respective street scenes such as the use of buff brick to riverside buildings (see 4.16) to match neighbouring blocks (see 2.14), and the transition to red brick facades (see 4.8) to the south to match properties along Vastern Road (see 2.21).
- 5.34. The NPPF states that developments should not be stifled by local character in delivering increased densities, with local policy asking that schemes are considerate of neighbouring low and medium density dwellings. The Site’s western boundary is the only part of the Site which adjoins existing residential dwellings, which are 2-3 storey in height (see 2.19, 2.21).
- 5.35. The scheme positively responds to these neighbouring dwellings with frontages aligned or stepped to replicate existing building lines, and the scale of buildings reducing to 2-6 storey on the ‘Railway Warehouse’ (Block A) (see 4.4), 3.5 storey on the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) (see 4.14), 2-3 storey on the ‘Coal Drop Building’ (Block FG) (see 4.21), and dropping to 4 storey on ‘Christchurch Wharf’ (Block E) (see 4.17).
- 5.36. The immediate existing character of the northern boundary to the towpath, and the neighbouring condition along the same edge to the river, presents a narrow strip of land of between 3-6m in width, generally flanked by retaining walls along the

southern edge (see 2.8, 2.14). As such, little opportunity currently exists for landscaping or amenity of any scale along this frontage.

- 5.37. The proposals remove this retaining wall along the entire river frontage with buildings set back up to 11.9m from the edge of the river (see 4.18). This allows for a landscaped edge to this stretch of the river to provide space for tree planting and native low-level landscaping which will deliver a significant improvement to the current and surrounding conditions (see 4.20).
- 5.38. The NPPF does not discourage an appropriate change to the density of a development. This point is addressed in the following paragraphs (see 5.48-5.50).
- 5.39. In summary, I consider that the proposals create a place which is sympathetic to local character and the history of the site through creating buildings which have been designed to reflect the lost heritage of the site, taking cues from surrounding buildings particularly with regards to use of materials, tapering the scale of development to be considerate of neighbouring residential properties whilst not allowing this to discourage an increased density, and providing a setting to the River Thames which enhances and exceeds the current relationship of the existing condition and that of neighbouring frontages on to the river.

Establishing a Strong Sense of Place

- 5.40. A positive sense of place can be derived from developing a narrative to the scheme which is unique to the Site and its surroundings, creating an attractive and welcoming place for people to live, work and enjoy.
- 5.41. Whilst there are no local plan policies which expressly seek the creation of a sense of place, the RSAF highlights this as one of the key aims of developments coming forward (see 5.7.d).
- 5.42. The National Design Guide highlights that a positive sense of place is derived from a sound understanding of the site and context, integrating the proposals into the surroundings, and being influenced by and responding to context, history, culture and heritage.¹¹⁸
- 5.43. An understanding of the site, context and history has been discussed in detail in previous paragraphs (see 2.1-2.27) and as such, for brevity will not be repeated here.
- 5.44. The layout of the scheme responds to the unique characteristics of the Site, with carefully designed, bespoke buildings arranged along a new north-south route (see 5.16-5.18). Buildings have been located along the route to maximise activity and

¹¹⁸ Para. 39, National Design Guide, 2021, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

natural surveillance along the route, whilst also providing a visual and acoustic barrier to the SSE equipment in order to create a pleasant environment for those who live and visit the scheme (see 4.14).

- 5.45. The building arrangement presents openings on to Vastern Road and on to the river with physical connections, design detailing and landscaping integrating the public route into the surroundings (see 4.5, 4.18-4.20). This is further reinforced through the provision of the café and river terrace as a destination inviting and welcoming people into the scheme to enjoy (see 4.20).
- 5.46. As discussed in previous paragraphs (see 5.32), the narrative to the proposals have been derived from the rich history of the Site as a former power station and its frontages on to the river and former railway sidings.
- 5.47. In summary, I consider that through an understanding of the site, surrounding context and history, the proposals deliver a strong sense of place rooted in a bespoke, historically-inspired form of architecture and a layout which provides a welcoming place with new connections and public realm.

Optimising the Site Potential

- 5.48. The potential of the Site is a combination of the delivery of an appropriate amount and mix of development and public spaces, and the supporting role it plays in local facilities and transport networks.
- 5.49. Local planning policy expects that the proposals should deliver a high-density scheme of an appropriate mix whilst being mindful of the transition in scale to existing residential dwellings (see 5.3.d) and this is echoed in the RSAF (see 5.7.b). The site-specific policy CR11g details that the allocated site could deliver 250-370 dwellings (see 5.4).
- 5.50. The Site forms 61.3% of the allocated site (see 2.2). This would equate to a pro-rata range of 153-227 dwellings from the identified potential within CR11g. Given that the proposals deliver 209 dwellings, this is within the range expected under policy and also ensures optimum use of this sustainably located brownfield site.
- 5.51. The proposals should also demonstrate an appropriate mix of dwellings, for which policy CR6 specifies that developments within this area of Reading should deliver no more than 40% 1-bed dwellings, no limit to 2-bed dwellings, but no less than 5% of 3-bed+ dwellings.
- 5.52. With the proposed scheme delivering 29%, 65% and 6% respectively (see 4.2), an appropriate mix of dwellings are provided for this Site.

- 5.53. In addition to providing development, the site potential is also derived from the provision of public spaces and the integration of facilities and transport networks.
- 5.54. It is expected that the Site should provide public realm on to the River Thames connection, although the RSAF notes¹¹⁹ that due to the constraints of the site it would most likely be small in size (see 5.7.i). This would be in addition to the provision and enhancement of transport networks, namely a new north-south link connecting Vastern Road to Christchurch Bridge (see 5.3.e, 5.4, 5.5.a, 5.7.c, 5.7.f, 5.7.g) and maintaining or enhancing the Thames towpath (see 5.3.f, 5.7.h).
- 5.55. The scheme has been designed with buildings opening out on to the River Thames and Christchurch Bridge in order to create an appropriate space, combining hard and soft landscape features and an elevated terrace adjacent to the proposed café which will overlook the river to provide a new destination and focal point to users of the route. The stepping back of the buildings from the edge of the river also provides opportunity for a more natural landscaped edge to the towpath, providing additional amenity of a less formal quality (see 4.18-4.20).
- 5.56. The north-south pedestrian and cycle link provided through the spine of the development, connecting Vastern Road through to Christchurch Bridge and the River Thames towpath deliver (see 4.5-4.7, 4.11-4.13, 4.18-4.19).
- 5.57. In summary, I consider that the proposals deliver a mix and amount of development, in addition to site-specific public spaces and the integration of a key north-south route, which optimises the site potential and complies with local policy.

Creating a Place Which Is Safe, Inclusive and Accessible

- 5.58. The final consideration under NPPF paragraph 127 is the creation of places that are safe, inclusive and accessible. Developments should promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.
- 5.59. The National Design Guide defines places which are safe and accessible as having well-designed movement networks and streets¹²⁰ with priority given to pedestrians and cyclists in order to encourage walking and cycling.¹²¹ Well-designed places should have spaces which feel safe, secure and attractive.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Para 5.16, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹²⁰ Para. 77, National Design Guide, 2021, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

¹²¹ Para. 82-83, National Design Guide, 2021, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

¹²² Para. 100, 104-105, National Design Guide, 2021, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

- 5.60. Local plan policies require developments to not cause a detrimental impact on new or existing dwellings, and to create places which are safe and accessible (see 5.3.b, 5.3.g, 5.7.c).
- 5.61. Health and wellbeing are promoted by the sustainable location of the Site in relation to the facilities within the town centre, Reading Station to the south, and the outdoor amenities north of the Site on Christchurch Meadows (see 2.14-2.15, 2.20).
- 5.62. To encourage sustainable modes of transport in support of health and wellbeing, cycle storage is provided in excess of the local authority requirements, with reduced vehicle parking (see 4.2). In addition, the new north-south link provides pedestrian and cycling connections to the towpath, Christchurch Bridge and on to Vastern Road with the wider connections that these routes bring (see 5.61).
- 5.63. Routes have been provided within the scheme with ramped and stepped alternatives providing users with varied accessible choices to move within the site and manage the changes in site levels and connections to the towpath and Bridge (see 4.19).
- 5.64. In accordance with policy H5, 5% of the new homes have been designed in accordance with Part M4(3) of the Building Regulations in order to provide a mix of accessible homes within the proposals.
- 5.65. It is demonstrated in the Design and Access Statement that the scheme achieves the aims set out in 'Safer Places – The Planning System and Crime Prevention'.¹²³
- 5.66. Natural surveillance is provided along the entirety of the scheme.
- 5.67. In summary, I consider that through the promotion of sustainable forms of transport and the provision of the north-south foot and cycleway, the inclusion of accessible dwellings and routes within the scheme, and the provision of a naturally surveyed place with active frontages throughout, the scheme delivers a place which is safe, inclusive and accessible.

¹²³ Section 3.11, Design and Access Statement, January 2020, Berkeley Homes

6.0 Response to Case

- 6.1. The following section of this statement reviews the reasons for refusal and my professional opinion on each of the points raised. The issues are dealt with in the same order as the decision notice.

RfR 1 – High Quality North South Link

The proposed development fails to provide a high quality north-south link through the site by virtue of related public realm, safety and directness concerns, largely due to the alignment of the site and overprovision of proposed buildings, primarily contrary to Policies CR11ii and CR11g of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and guidance within the adopted Reading Borough Supplementary Planning Document Reading Station Area Framework (2010), and also Policies EN11, CC7, CR2, CR3, TR3 and TR4 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

- 6.2. The first reason for refusal, states that the proposals fail to provide a high-quality north-south link by virtue of public realm, safety, directness, alignment and overprovision of buildings.
- 6.3. Of particular note are the specific policies from the Local Plan which the RfR states that the proposals are contrary to, which are:
- a. CR11 ii) developments will “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”, and
 - b. CR11g (part) “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”.
- 6.4. However, of note are the relevant policies from the Local Plan which are not referenced in the RfR, from which it could be inferred that officers were satisfied with the proposals with regards to the following points:
- a. CR11 iii) “provide developments that front onto and provide visual interest to existing and future pedestrian routes and open spaces”,
 - b. 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”
- 6.5. Officers state that the presence of the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) is the main problem in relation to this reason for refusal – although accepted that dealing with the SSE boundary will impact on the site – whilst also stating that the ‘Goods Warehouse’ (Block B) and the switch backs contribute to this problem (see 3.21).

- 6.6. The highways team argue that there should be a direct pedestrian and cycle route through the site, with unbroken lines of sight. Officers support the second point, noting that there is a pinch point between the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) and ‘Coal Drop Building’ (Block EFG) which closes off views (see 3.26), though it is stated elsewhere that the visual link would be difficult to achieve but visual fragmentation should be kept to a minimum (see 3.27).
- 6.7. The quality of the route appears to primarily be of concern to the planning policy team who cite the width of the route at 3m being less than of other examples within the town centre, and this is supported by officers in regard to the width of the adjoining Christchurch Bridge (see 3.22).
- 6.8. The above points are in stark contrast to the submission from Reading Civic Society who rated the proposals very highly and did not agree with officers’ comments that the route wasn’t of high quality (see 3.24).
- 6.9. Nonetheless, it will be demonstrated that the proposals comply with each of the points raised in the reason for refusal, which will be explored as follows:
- a. That the route is direct.
 - b. That the alignment of the Site does not conflict with Policy.
 - c. That the route is safe.
 - d. That there is not an overprovision of buildings.
 - e. That the north-south link, and therefore public realm, is of a high quality.
- 6.10. In relation to the final point, the assertions that and the “almost brutal design” of the buildings and site constraints have produced poor public realm, will also be covered in this section.
- 6.11. This document should be read alongside the Statement of Case by Barton Wilmore, and the Transport Statement of Case by Stantec.

Providing a Direct Route

- 6.12. The policies from the Adopted Local Plan stated within the RfR do not make reference to the north south route being direct, only that it should be of a high quality. The guidance within the RSAF refers to a direct green link¹²⁴, a direct pedestrian route¹²⁵, and a direct and unbroken line of sight between the Station and the River Thames¹²⁶.

¹²⁴ Policy RC1, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹²⁵ Para 5.9, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹²⁶ Para 7.10, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

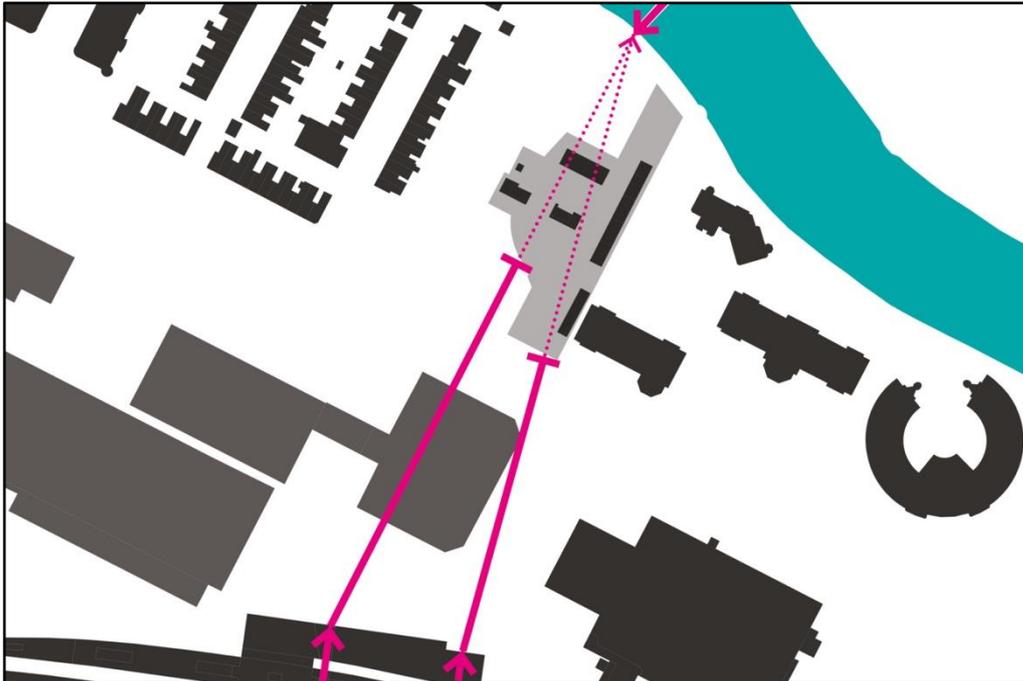


Fig. 6.1. Plan to demonstrate inability to achieve a direct line of sight between Christchurch Bridge (top) and Reading Station (bottom)

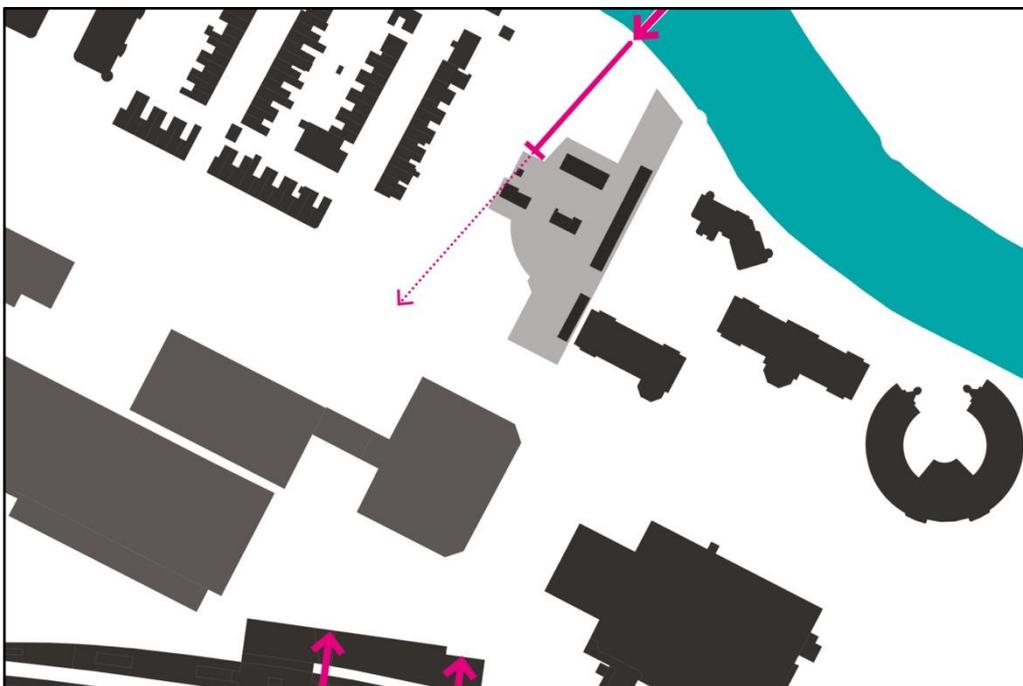


Fig. 6.2. Plan to demonstrate inability to achieve a direct line of sight from Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road

- 6.13. A design addendum¹²⁷ was produced and issued to RBC which demonstrated compliance against the relevant policies in relation to the provision of the north south route. For ease of reference, the main points are covered again here.
- 6.14. As demonstrated in Fig. 6.1 and Fig. 6.2, due to the presence of the SSE equipment (shaded in light grey), a direct line of sight and therefore a direct route cannot be achieved between Reading Station and Christchurch Bridge, or between Vastern Road and Christchurch Bridge.
- 6.15. However, the diagrams within the RSAF both show either a curved route¹²⁸ or a route with two changes in direction¹²⁹, suggesting that the “direct” route does not necessarily need to be straight.
- 6.16. Due to the nature of the SSE equipment, in addition to a wall around the central boundary against the principal equipment, a 2m offset needs to be provided between the boundary and any built form or tree planting. Fig. 6.3 demonstrates the extent of the boundary offset along with the proposed route corridor, widening on the approach to both the river to the north, and to the Station to the south.

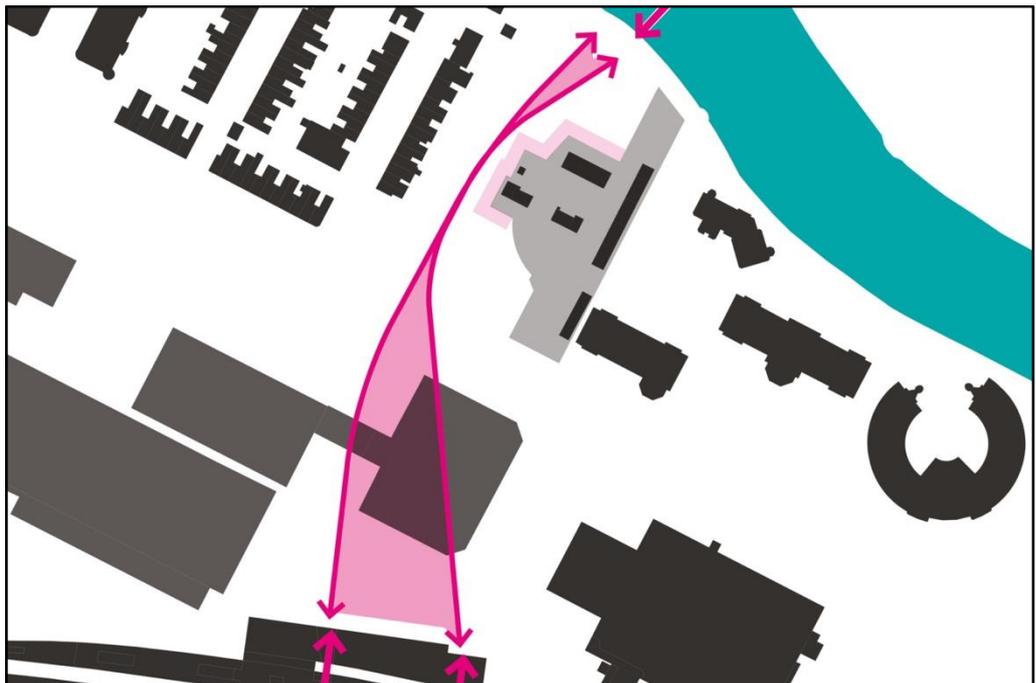


Fig. 6.3. Plan to demonstrate a direct, arched corridor between the Station and Bridge, arching around the retained SSE equipment with 2m offset (shown light pink)

¹²⁷ Design Addendum, 12 November 2020, Berkeley Homes

¹²⁸ Plan 4.1, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

¹²⁹ Plan 11.11, Reading Station Area Framework, 2010, Reading Borough Council

- 6.17. Taking Fig. 6.3 further, Fig. 6.4 overlays the proposed development with the arched corridor principles of a straight route from Vastern Road deflecting into an opening on to the river with one route connecting to Christchurch Bridge (right) and the second route connecting to the towpath (left).

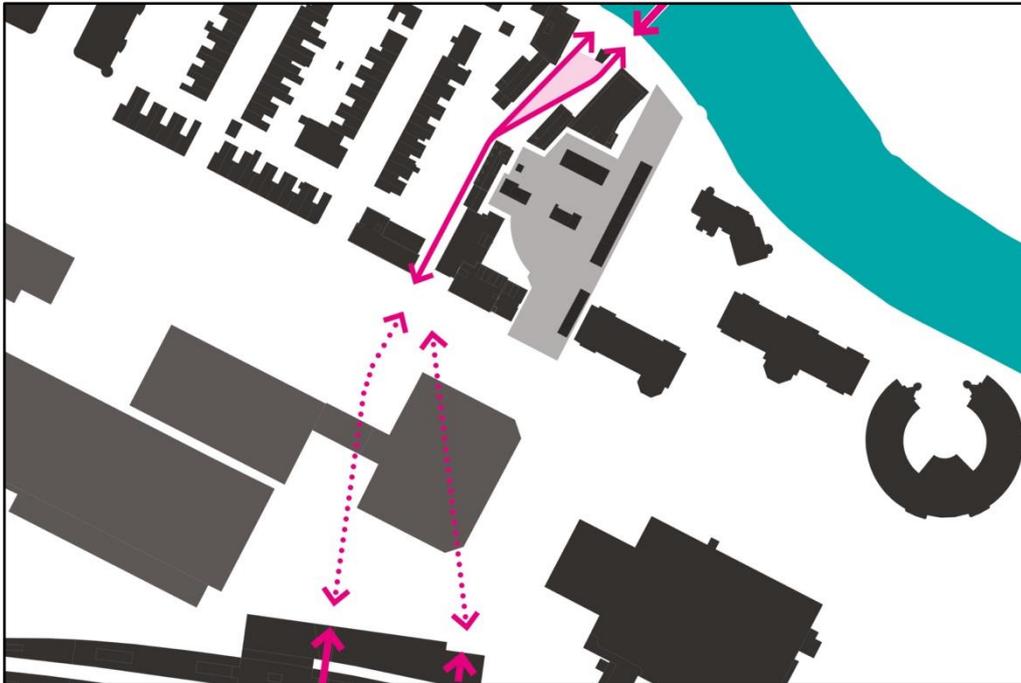


Fig. 6.4. Plan to demonstrate the “direct” route between Vastern Road and the river frontage.

- 6.18. With the proposed alignment set out above, the scheme provides a direct route between Vastern Road and the connections to Christchurch Bridge and the towpath with a single deflection in the route at the mid-point of the development, thus keeping visual fragmentation to the absolute minimum (see 3.27).
- 6.19. At the central point of the scheme, officers assert that there is a “pinch point” created through the proximity of the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) and ‘Coal Drop Building’ (Block EFG). The distance between the two buildings measures 12.6m which compares well with typical street dimensions.
- 6.20. However, the proposals deliberately introduce a series of narrowing and widening spaces, of which this is one, in order to create a series of ‘memorable events’ as people pass through and enjoy the scheme (see 4.6).
- 6.21. For acoustic and visual reasons, as well as providing continuity of natural surveillance and active frontage in accordance with policy CR11 iii), which are discussed later (see 6.100), I consider that the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) is an important and integral part of the scheme.

- 6.22. However, addressing the comments made by officers (see 3.17, Fig. 3.13), an additional plan was produced within the design addendum¹³⁰ which demonstrated that the loss of the 'Goods Office' (Block C) did not result in a significant change to the alignment of the route, with a single deflection still being present.



Fig. 6.5. *Plan demonstrating loss of 'Goods Office' (Block C) resulting in a negligible change to the alignment or views through the scheme*

- 6.23. Though not specifically mentioned within the reason for refusal, officers state within the committee report that the switch back up to Christchurch Bridge also detracts from the directness of the route through the site (see 3.21), contrary to advice received from officers in December 2020 (see 3.17.4).
- 6.24. As highlighted previously, planning policy and supplementary guidance only refer to the provision of a direct pedestrian route, not a direct cycling route (see 6.12). The RSAF highlights a requirement for a new cycle connection through to Christchurch Bridge, but this is not expressly a direct route (see 5.7.j).
- 6.25. In considering the switch back element, it is also important to note the difference in levels which need to be incorporated into the designs in order to access the lower level of the towpath, the higher level of the bridge and the required site level dictated by the FRA (see 4.19).

¹³⁰ Design Addendum, 12 November 2020, Berkeley Homes

- 6.26. Fig. 6.6 demonstrates the routes from the central part of the site (bottom) down to the towpath (left) and up to the connection to Christchurch Bridge (right). Both of these routes provide direct pedestrian access through level or gently ramped segments and stepped sections. Additional routes have been included to provide level or ramped access and these are shown dashed. These routes also provide access to the proposed café and external seating area overlooking the Thames.

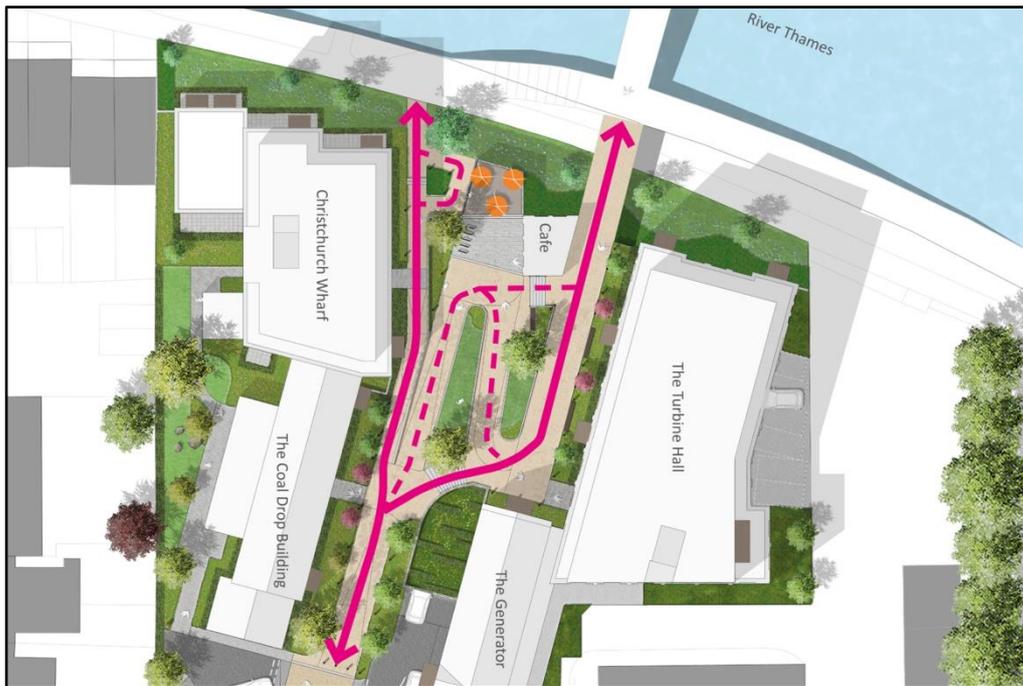


Fig. 6.6. Plan demonstrating “direct” pedestrian routes to the towpath and Christchurch Bridge (solid line) in addition to ramped / alternative routes which also connect to the café (dashed line).

- 6.27. The 3.0-4.0m connection through to Christchurch Bridge is designed to provide a ramped route for cyclists in accordance with the width (3.0m minimum) and gradient (1:21 for lengths no greater than 30m) requirements set out in the Cycle Infrastructure Design document, noting that this document was published after the submission of the application.¹³¹ The 2m wide pedestrian connection through to the towpath has been designed with widths (0.9m minimum) and gradients (1:15 for lengths no greater than 10m) in accordance with the Building Regulations.¹³²
- 6.28. The appeal scheme utilises a switch-back to the route to Christchurch Bridge in order to condense the extent of the Site which needs to be ramped, maintaining active frontages throughout the scheme, and minimising the extent of separation between the routes connecting the higher bridge level and lower towpath level.

¹³¹ LTN 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design, Department for Transport, July 2020

¹³² Approved Document M, Building Regulations, 2016 Edition

- 6.29. In order to remove the switch back element and thereby provide a straight ramp, to connect the finished floor level of the pedestrian entrance to the 'Turbine Hall' (Block D), which is 41.175m AOD, and the FRA Site level of 38.600m AOD, a straight ramp of 54.075m in length would be required at a gradient of 1:21. In accordance with the Cycle Infrastructure Design guidance, ramps can be no greater than 30m in length without a landing of at least 5m in length, subsequently meaning the overall ramp in this instance would be at least 59.075m long. If the ramp commenced descending from adjacent to the Café, the end of the ramp would then be at the mid-point of 'The Goods Office' (Block C).
- 6.30. The key issues in relation to this approach are the impact on the relationship to the properties on Lynmouth Road and the segregation and reduction of permeability and connectivity between the routes to the towpath and to the bridge.
- 6.31. In the first point, extending the ramp would result in the point at which it connects with the site level of 38.6m AOD pushing further south. Therefore, the levels south of the 'Coal Drop Building' (Block EFG) (which would be against the ramped section in this instance, rather than the foot of the ramp as per the appeal scheme) would increase by around 475mm. This would create a greater difference in the relationship between the site levels and that of the existing gardens to the Lynmouth Road properties.
- 6.32. In the second point, with the ramp to the bridge extending further south the point at which this ramp (which ascends from the site levels) and the ramp to the towpath (which descends from the site levels) intersect would also shift further south resulting in greater separation between the two routes (due to the retaining structures and railings required because of the differences in levels) and thereby reducing connectivity within the site. The extension of this ramped route would also result in the entrance, and therefore finished floor level and overall building height, to the 'Coal Drop Building' (Block EFG) increasing to suit the point at which the entrance aligns with this extended ramp to the towpath.
- 6.33. As such, I consider that the switch back design element improves connectivity within the site to the benefit of the public realm and permeability as well as the relationship to the Lynmouth Road properties.
- 6.34. Whilst it is not a policy requirement, nor is it a requirement within the supplementary planning guidance, officers consider that the route to the towpath should be a cycle path and therefore in accordance with the guidance contained within the Cycle Infrastructure Design document (see 3.28). This was not required in pre-application discussions, where the connection to the towpath was seen as a positive, but it was requested that the route was ramped rather than stepped, with no mention of this being a cycle route (see 3.9.12).

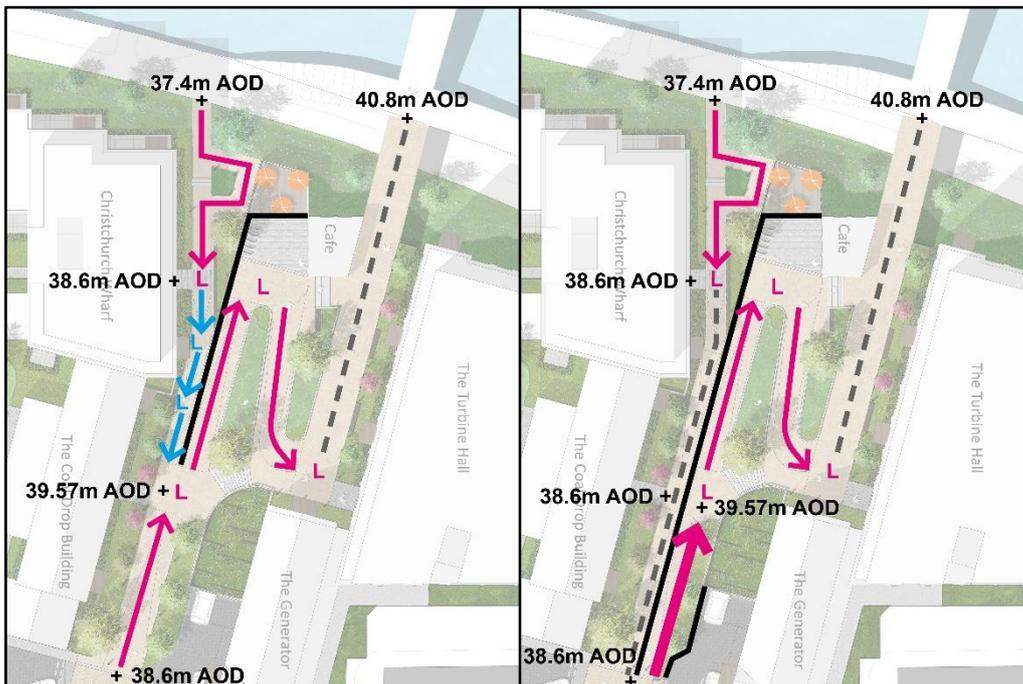


Fig. 6.7. Plans to show the current arrangement of ramps (left) and impact of creating a level, and therefore Cycle Infrastructure Design compliant, access to the towpath (right). Key: Pink = gradient at 1:21, Blue = gradients at ca. 1:15, Dashed Grey = level routes, Solid Black = retaining wall and railings, L = landings.

- 6.35. Introducing a gradient which would be compliant with cycle guidance would result in providing routes no greater than 1:21. Fig. 6.7 shows the proposed sections of ramp in accordance with the cycle guidance (shown pink) with landings (annotated 'L'), the sections of ramps in accordance with Building Regulations for pedestrian ramps (shown blue), and extent of retaining walls and railings (shown black). The left-hand diagram demonstrates the appeal scheme, whilst the right-hand diagram shows the impact of providing a route with gradients in accordance with cycle guidance.
- 6.36. In the appeal scheme, whilst the entrance to 'Christchurch Wharf' (Block EFG) is at the same level as the remainder of the site from the mid-point through to Vastern Road to the south, in order to keep the segregation of the towpath and bridge routes to a minimum the proposals continue a ramp ascending from the towpath until such point as the two routes meet (at 39.57m AOD – incidentally, this is adjacent to the entrance to the 'Coal Drop Building' (Block EFG)). The left hand plan in Fig. 6.7 demonstrates this with a pedestrian route to the towpath in accordance with the gradients set out in the Building Regulations.

- 6.37. The right hand plan in Fig. 6.7 demonstrates a level route, connecting the finished floor levels of 'Christchurch Wharf' (Block EFG) and the central and southern parts of the site (which are all set at 38.6m AOD). This diagram demonstrates a level, and therefore cycle-compliant gradient to the route to the towpath, as well as Christchurch Bridge. As shown, this would result in a segregation of routes, and reduced permeability for residents and users of the scheme, for approximately 20m further south due to the increase in retaining structures and railings between the western side of the site ('Christchurch Wharf' (Block EFG)) and the eastern side ('Turbine Hall' (Block D)). Also through these changes, the primary route connecting to Christchurch Bridge would also become 'off-centre' to the route through the southern half of the scheme and, through the segregation of routes and requirement for fire appliance access, there would be a loss of landscaping and tree planting to accommodate the additional width of two routes.
- 6.38. The above demonstrates a level route from the entrance of 'Christchurch Wharf'. Providing a ramped route at a gradient no greater than 1:21, with landings of at least 5m in depth, would extend the point of segregation of the two routes by approximately 10m further south than the appeal scheme. This would still present the same issues as a 'level' route albeit for a lesser distance.
- 6.39. In the above scenarios (see 6.35-6.38) the route to the towpath would remain at 2m in width, rather than increasing to 3m to suit the Cycle Infrastructure Design guidance, as any increase in width to this route would result in a loss of accommodation to 'Christchurch Wharf' (Block EFG).
- 6.40. As such, I consider that the appeal scheme delivers the most balanced solution in providing permeability to all users of the site whilst delivering a cycle-compliant route to Christchurch Bridge and pedestrian access to the towpath in accordance with policy.

Whether the Site Alignment Conflicts with Policy

- 6.41. The reason for refusal states that the proposals are principally contrary to policies CR11 ii) and CR11g which require greater cycle and pedestrian permeability and a high-quality green link with potential for an area of public space at the riverside.
- 6.42. I consider that the proposed development delivers greater pedestrian and cycle permeability through the inclusion of a new north-south route, and an area of public open space alongside the river. The quality of the route is discussed in the paragraphs below (see 6.47-6.52), but I do not think the proposals conflict with policy by reason of the alignment of the north-south route.

Providing a Safe Route

- 6.43. An assessment of the safety of the scheme, and the north south route, has been discussed in detail in previous chapters (see 5.58-5.67) and as such, for brevity, will not be repeated in detail here.
- 6.44. In summary, I consider that the proposals deliver a safe environment and route through the consistent natural surveillance provided by buildings along the north south route.

Delivering an Appropriate Provision of Buildings

- 6.45. The proposed quantum of development has been discussed in detail in previous chapters (see 5.48-5.57) and as such, for brevity, will not be repeated in detail here.
- 6.46. In summary, the proposals deliver a quantum of development in accordance with the range set out within policy CR11g, provides the north south link through the site and the public realm at the juncture with Christchurch Bridge, and as such I consider that the proposals provide an appropriate quantum of buildings.

Delivering High Quality Proposals

- 6.47. The quality of the proposals are assessed in previous paragraphs at great length (see 5.9-5.47), and as such, for brevity, this will not be repeated in detail again here.
- 6.48. The quality of the route has been deemed by the Council's planning policy team to be linked to the width of the route (see 6.7) with officers comparing the proposals with Union Street and Chain Street in central Reading as comparable (poor quality) examples with further commentary that the width of the proposed route is less than that of Christchurch Bridge, which the scheme will connect on to (see 3.22). It should be noted, the 3m width was specified by officers in pre-application discussions (see 3.6.2).



Fig. 6.8. Photograph of Union Street, Reading¹³³



Fig. 6.9. Photograph of Chain Street, Reading¹³⁴

¹³³ Google Earth, 10 May 2021

¹³⁴ Google Earth, 10 May 2021



Fig. 6.10. Photograph of Christchurch Bridge¹³⁵



Fig. 6.11. CGI of the proposed central route within the scheme

¹³⁵ Google Earth, 10 May 2021

- 6.49. Dealing with the street examples first (see Fig. 6.8, Fig. 6.9), these are narrow streets generally around 4m in width with shop frontages and regular doorways set within 2 to 3 storey buildings on each side. Whilst the footpath runs the full width between building frontages, ground and wall signage narrow the route further. Approximating the scale of the buildings, the eaves appear to be around 6m in height, giving a height to width ratio of 1.5 : 1.
- 6.50. In comparison, the proposed scheme through the middle of the site (see Fig. 6.11) presents a street of no less than 15.2m in width with occasional doors to apartment entrances set within 3 to 3.5 storey buildings to one side of the street only. At this point in the scheme a dedicated 3m wide foot/cycleway sits 0.9-1.3m from the face of buildings with a landscape strip providing a buffer. To the opposite side lay additional belts of landscaping and tree planting and a low-trafficked road with vehicle parking. The buildings at this point are 9.7m to the eaves, giving a height to width ratio of 0.7 : 1.
- 6.51. Christchurch Bridge (see Fig. 6.10), at the points closest to the site and on to Christchurch Meadow gives a clear width between handrails of 3.5m, with the handrails being 1.4m in height to prevent falls cyclists falling from their cycles.
- 6.52. The route through the scheme is 3m in width from Vastern Road to the mid-point of the scheme (see 4.11) before widening up to 5m on changes in direction along the switch backs and then to 4m in width as the route connects to Christchurch Bridge (see 4.19). With no handrails required, and soft landscaping to either side of the whole route proposed, I think this is a route of ample width which will feel convenient and appropriate.

Summary

- 6.53. In summary, I consider that the proposals are in accordance with the policy objectives for the site by providing a high-quality public route with associated public realm which is both direct and safe. I also consider that the provision of buildings is appropriate for the site, and that the alignment of the site does not prevent the policy aspirations from being delivered.

RfR 2 – Height and Proximity of Blocks D & E to the Thames

The combination of the proposed height and proximity of the proposed Blocks D & E to the Thames Path will harm the setting and character of the path and The River Thames and thus harm the quality of the public realm in this area to the detriment of the value of this part of the Thames, an identified Major Landscape feature and leisure and tourism destination. The proposal is therefore primarily contrary to Policies CR4, CR11v) and CR11g of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and

guidance within the adopted Reading Borough Supplementary Planning Document Reading Station Area Framework (2010), and also Policies CC7, CR2, CR3 and EN11 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

- 6.54. The second reason for refusal asserts that the height and proximity of both the 'Turbine Hall' (Block D) and 'Christchurch Wharf' (Block EFG) in relation to the towpath will harm the setting, character and public realm along this part of the River Thames.
- 6.55. The relevant sections of the policies referenced within the within the reason for refusal are as follows:
- a. CR4 (part) Innovative solutions to leisure provision will be encouraged, particularly those that make best use of available (often limited) site area... Development or improvements in this area will be expected to add to or maintain the setting and character of the Thames.
 - b. 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.
 - c. CR11g (part) 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.
- 6.56. During the application process, officers were comfortable with the proposed heights of the buildings (see 3.14.2). This was also supported by the design review panel (see 3.3.7).
- 6.57. A change in the officers' position was not noted until the issue of the committee report (see 3.29) where it is argued that the height impacts on the appearance and character of this stretch of the river. This opinion appears to contradict the officers' view prior to committee, where it was noted that officers approved of the northern part of the route and how it opened out with landscaping and the cafe (see 3.16.3).
- 6.58. Nonetheless, in considering this reason for refusal, it will be demonstrated that the proposals:
- a. Are an appropriate height in the context of key gateways in to Reading.
 - b. Are an appropriate height in relation to the proximity of the river.
 - c. Deliver an improvement to the quality of public realm to this part of the River Thames.
- 6.59. This section should be read alongside the Statement of Case by Barton Wilmore, and the Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment Statement of Case by Barton Wilmore.

Design Response

- 6.60. In order to address the first point, it is helpful to understand the design rationale for the scale of these buildings. As a key gateway into the centre of Reading, it is important to utilise urban design tools such as a change in scale in order to make this entrance legible. As is the case with the approach over Reading Bridge, where the scale of buildings increases in relation to their surroundings (see 2.17), the same approach is taken with the increased scale of development with 'Christchurch Wharf' (Block EFG) and the 'Turbine Hall' (Block D) (see 4.18).
- 6.61. The buildings on to the river frontage step up from 4 storeys to 8 storeys to 10 storeys (see 4.15, 4.17) as they move further east from the existing dwellings at Lynmouth Court in order to provide a sympathetic relationship to these properties whilst still achieving the gateway appearance described above. This elevation is read in the context of Lynmouth Court, Clearwater Court and Reading Bridge House.
- 6.62. In contrast, the scale of the buildings on to Vastern Road, namely the 'Railway Warehouse' (Block A) and the 'Goods Warehouse' (Block B) which range from 6 storeys to 11 storeys, are considered to be of an acceptable height in relation with the wider context (see 3.30), which for clarity referred to both Clearwater Court and Reading Bridge House, and the future development at Reading Station Park.
- 6.63. The scale of the proposed development was assessed in the Design and Access Statement through storey height plans and context sections.¹³⁶ It is also worth noting that D:SE did not have any concern over the scale and massing of the proposed buildings (see 3.9.6).
- 6.64. To understand the relationship of the proposed buildings to the river and towpath, and therefore address whether the proposals maintain or enhance the current condition, it is helpful to compare the heights and relationships of both the current buildings (see Fig. 6.12 – (l-r) Reading Bridge House, Clearwater Court, Norman Place and Thames Court; Fig. 6.13 – (l-r) Lynmouth Court, Isis Court and Regents Riverside) and proposed buildings along this stretch of the River Thames. The heights of these buildings, distance from the river, ratio of height to width, and the width of the public realm alongside the river at these points, are detailed in Appendix A.
- 6.65. In order to assess the heights of the buildings in relationship to the River Thames, the heights are assessed against the set-back from the edge of the river to give a height to width ratio. The taller the building in relation to the width (i.e., set back), the greater the ratio.

¹³⁶ Section 3.7, Design and Access Statement, January 2020, Berkeley Homes



Fig. 6.12. Relationship of buildings to the river, east of the Site¹³⁷



Fig. 6.13. Relationship of buildings to the river, west of the Site¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Google Earth Pro, 10 May 2021

¹³⁸ Google Earth Pro, 10 May 2021

- 6.66. From the information gathered, buildings along this stretch of the River Thames range in height to width ratios from 0.9 : 1 through to 4.3 : 1, though the lower range is an isolated occurrence with ratios otherwise in excess of 1.6 : 1. This is in comparison to the proposed scheme which ranges from 1.4 : 1 through to 3 : 1. As such, from this assessment alone it should be considered that the relationship of the proposed buildings to the edge of the river is within the range of existing buildings and therefore acceptable.
- 6.67. The frontages of buildings along this length range in width from 40.6m through to 67.8m, with the only exceptions being Reading Bridge House (14.5m) and Lynmouth Court (25.2m). Gaps between the existing buildings are generally limited to existing roads of circa 13m in width. In comparison, the proposed scheme presents building frontages of 16.5m and 21.5m in width with the landscaped opening on to the River Thames of some 26.1m in width.
- 6.68. This assessment shows that the height, relationship from the River Thames and width of building frontage on to the river of the 'Turbine Hall' (Block D) is comparable to that of Reading Bridge House, which is also a key 'gateway' building adjacent to a bridge crossing over the river. It also shows that 'Christchurch Wharf' (Block EFG) is a comparable width to that of the adjacent Lynmouth Court.
- 6.69. In addition to this assessment, it is also worth noting the relationship of the existing buildings to the river and the towpath. As is also demonstrated from the information within Appendix A, the existing buildings are raised from the level of the towpath with a brick retaining wall and fence above. As such, the width of public realm is generally between 3.9m and 6.0m. This is in contrast with the proposed scheme which delivers at least a 10m set back from the river, all of which is graded down to towpath level with no retaining structure or fence enclosing the route along the towpath.
- 6.70. I consider that the quality of the existing public realm is poor, and to a certain extent non-existent, as addressed in the above points and as demonstrated within the photographs in Appendix A. At present, the southern stretch of the river consists mainly of a tarmacked footpath against brick retaining walls and metal fences, with sporadic planting and very few trees along its length.
- 6.71. Along the immediate boundary to the Site, the condition is much worse owing to the increased height of the Site boundary and the additional enclosure formed by Christchurch Bridge (see 2.8-2.9). This section of wall has been vandalised due to a lack of natural surveillance.
- 6.72. The proposed northern boundary to the scheme provides a soft-landscaped edge with regular tree planting addressing the towpath and natural surveillance provided by the new homes along this stretch of the river. A 26.1m wide landscaped public open space will negotiate the changes in levels, connecting Christchurch Bridge, the

Site and the towpath, with a new café and river-view terrace further improving the public amenities at this point (see 4.18-4.20).

- 6.73. As discussed previously (see 6.68), I consider that the scale of the proposed buildings along the northern boundary is important in order to create a 'gateway' in to Reading, as is the case with Reading Bridge and Reading Bridge House. Of course, Reading Bridge and Christchurch Bridge are different. However, the buildings at that bridge illustrate the principle of marking a gateway, and in addition they are part of the urban context for the appeal proposals.
- 6.74. Affecting the height or set-back of these buildings will significantly impact on the design response. From an urban design perspective, a reduction in height would reduce the extent to which these buildings act as a legibility marker and thereby impact on the significance of this entrance to Reading.
- 6.75. Also, in architectural terms, the site boundary would prevent the 'Turbine Hall' (Block D) being pushed back, and so a set back from the river would result in the form of the building being more tower-like in massing terms. This would prevent this building being expressed in a power station typology, and result in a loss to the historic former use.

Summary

- 6.76. In summary, I consider that the proposals are in accordance with the policy objectives for the site by virtue of the heights of the buildings being appropriate in providing a landmark feature and gateway in to the centre of Reading; the heights and proximity of the proposed buildings in relation to the river and towpath enhancing the relationships provided by existing buildings along this stretch of the Thames; and the quality of public realm is greatly improved over the current situation – and that provided by existing buildings – as well as through the provision of the landscaped open space and café as a landmark feature and destination.

RfR 5 – Retention of 55 Vastern Road

The proposal would result in the complete loss of 55 Vastern Road, a Non-Designated Heritage Asset and building of local significance. The proposal has failed to demonstrate adequately that retention and reuse of the building has been explored fully. In this regard, the benefits of the proposal are not considered to significantly outweigh the harm caused to the asset's identified significance. Therefore, the development is contrary to Policies EN1 and EN4 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).

- 6.77. The fifth reason for refusal asserts that the proposals failed to demonstrate adequately that the retention of the locally-listed building has been fully explored.
- 6.78. Two policies are referenced in the reason for refusal as follows:
- a. Policy EN1 seeks to protect and enhance heritage assets, with any harm or loss being accompanied by clear justification, “usually in the form of public benefits”.
 - b. Policy EN4 add to the above point stating that any replacement buildings should draw upon the heritage elements of the previous design.
- 6.79. With regards to policy EN1, as this point is in relation to the provision of public benefits, this will be addressed in the Statement of Case by Barton Wilmore. This document should also be read alongside the Heritage Statement of Case by The Built Heritage Consultancy.
- 6.80. This reason for refusal is against the opinion of Reading Civic Society (see 3.33), who accepted that the retention of the locally-listed building had been explored and discounted and that the proposals were a good quality “bespoke” response.
- 6.81. The officer’s appraisal concludes that the loss of the locally-listed building would have been accepted if the remainder of the application had been considered otherwise acceptable (see 3.32), suggesting that the scheme was in accordance with Policy EN4, but not in accordance with Policy EN1.
- 6.82. Nonetheless, it will be demonstrated that:
- a. The proposals have considered and demonstrated that the retention and reuse of the locally listed building has been explored, and
 - b. The replacement buildings draw upon the heritage elements of the previous design.

Design Response

- 6.83. The Design and Access Statement explores various options for the retention in full or in part of the locally-listed building¹³⁹ including:
- a. Looking at retaining the full street scene on to Vastern Road. This option was discounted due to a reduction in development, poor entrance into the site, increased views of the retained SSE equipment and a poor relationship to the river and Christchurch Bridge.
 - b. A further 4 studies explored integrating the existing building within new built-form. These options were discounted on the basis of a reduction in homes and an awkward relationship between the retained and new elements.

¹³⁹ Section 2.7.1-2.7.3, Design and Access Statement, Berkeley Homes

- c. Another 2 options looking at retention of the building as a stand-alone structure. Whilst this option retained the building fully, it is considered that this would also lead to a reduction in new homes, increased views of the retained SSE equipment, and a difficult relationship with the site and Vastern Road.
- d. A final 2 proposals exploring façade retention only. These were discounted due to the retained element lacking cohesion with the scheme and having limited architectural meaning.

6.84. Policy CR11g also highlights the need for proposals to take account of flood mitigation. The existing finished floor level of the building is 300mm below required level from FRA, and this was also explored and discounted within the Design and Access Statement due to the required elevational adjustments to the façade in order to make this compatible with the changes in internal levels behind.¹⁴⁰

6.85. As it is considered that the existing building was not able to be successfully retained whilst achieving the other objectives of the site, in accordance with policy EN4 heritage elements were assessed and considered as part of the proposals.

6.86. The assessment of the local character within the Design and Access Statement¹⁴¹ explored the features of the locally listed building identifying the key features and detailing. This included the use of red brick facades with blue brick detailing, stone banding and stone heads, cills and keystones, and flat roofing.

6.87. These elements were then referenced in the designs of the replacement building, 'The Goods Warehouse' (Block B) with blue brick detailing and quoining, stone heads, cills and string courses, flat roofs, and a reinterpretation of the archway from the locally-listed building.¹⁴² As identified previously, the designs have been considered by others to be a bespoke, good quality response (see 6.80).

Summary

6.88. I consider that the application fully considered and discounted the retention of all or part of the locally-listed building on the grounds of not achieving the wider objectives of the site, providing a reduction in the number of homes which could be delivered, causing conflict with the levels required under the FRA, exposing views of the retained SSE equipment, and presenting a disjointed frontage on to Vastern Road. It has been supported by Reading Civic Society that this has been sufficiently demonstrated in the application.

6.89. I consider that the proposals for the replacement buildings have successfully drawn upon the heritage elements with the design and key detailing elements. Again, this

¹⁴⁰ Section 2.7.4, Design and Access Statement, Berkeley Homes

¹⁴¹ Section 2.6.5, Design and Access Statement, Berkeley Homes

¹⁴² Section 3.4.2-3.4.8, Design and Access Statement, Berkeley Homes

has been supported by the local authority's heritage consultant that these "bespoke" designs were of a good quality.

- 6.90. As such, I consider that the proposals are in accordance with the design related objectives of the appropriate policies and the reason for refusal should be overturned.

RfR 6 – Comprehensive Development

The proposed development, by virtue of its proposed layout, massing and detailed design, has failed to adequately demonstrate that it is part of a comprehensive approach, i.e. how it would enable the remainder of the sub-area site allocation to come forward in accordance with the policy expectations of CR11g and would not cause unreasonable burdens on its future development, contrary to Policies CR2, CR11viii and CR11g of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and guidance within the adopted Reading Borough Supplementary Planning Document Reading Station Area Framework (2010).

- 6.91. The sixth reason for refusal states that the proposals have failed to adequately demonstrate that they are part of a comprehensive approach, causing unreasonable burdens on the future development of the SSE site.
- 6.92. In addition to the RfR, the Committee Report¹⁴³ says that there is a concern that the designs of the 'Goods Office' (Block C) and 'Generator' and 'Turbine Hall' (Block D) could make it difficult for the remainder of the allocated site could be developed in an acceptable way.
- 6.93. This is contrary to the supporting statement from the design review panel, who welcomed the consideration of how the scheme would relate to the SSE site (see 3.8.5), and the officers' conclusion that we had adequately demonstrated that the proposals would not prevent the remainder of the allocated site from fulfilling the policy aspirations (see 3.35).
- 6.94. Nonetheless, it will be demonstrated that the proposals allow for the remainder of the allocated site to come forward in an acceptable way.

Design Response

- 6.95. The Site forms part of the allocated site referred to under policy CR11g (see 2.2). However, it is acknowledged and accepted that parts of allocated sites may be developed with different timescales (see 5.5.b) as is the case here.

¹⁴³ Para 6.16, Committee Report, 31 March 2021, Reading Borough Council

- 6.96. The site presents a number of constraints within which the scheme has been designed. Relevant to this point is the presence of the sub-stations, transformers and other such equipment on the neighbouring SSE land to the east of the site.
- 6.97. The SSE equipment detracts from the Site, both visually and from a noise perspective, as well as presenting other technical constraints. These include the requirement for no buildings to be placed within 2m of the boundary to the central part of the SSE site, and the requirement for a 3m high “blast wall” boundary condition around the central part of the scheme (i.e., along the boundary to the south of ‘The Generator’ (Block D), east of the ‘Goods Office’ (Block C) and the northernmost element of the ‘Goods Warehouse’ (Block B).
- 6.98. In addition, it was a contractual requirement in the purchase of the Site from SSE that no openable windows were to be provided along these parts of the site.
- 6.99. Alongside these technical and contractual constraints, we were also aware of the requirements to provide activity and interest along the proposed north-south route in accordance with policy CR11 iii).
- 6.100. The width of the site at the point adjacent to the main pieces of SSE equipment is 25.2m, which limits the design approaches we can take. The options which we explored at the initial design concept stage were:
- a. To provide no buildings in the central part of the scheme. This would lead to a reduction in the number of dwellings on site and exposing the SSE equipment (thereby detracting visually from within the Site as well as not producing any acoustic benefits). A loss of buildings would also reduce activity along this part of the scheme (as is required by CR11 iii) and natural surveillance.
 - b. To introduce buildings which would back on to the Lynmouth Road properties. This would provide some dwellings along this boundary, albeit that they would be 1.5 storeys in height with blanked facades along the boundary to prevent overlooking. Whilst this would provide visual and acoustic benefits to the residents of Lynmouth Road, these benefits would not be seen from within the Site as the noise and visual impact of the SSE equipment would not be screened. The introduction of buildings would provide activity along this part of the scheme (as is required by CR11 iii) and natural surveillance.
 - c. To introduce buildings which would back on to the SSE site. This would provide the most dwellings as the building could be up to 3.5 storeys in this location, and therefore a building of this height would provide the most significant acoustic and visual barrier from the SSE site. This would benefit residents of Lynmouth Road, users of the route through the Site, and residents of the proposed scheme. As with option b above, the introduction of buildings would also provide activity along this part of the scheme (as is required by CR11 iii) and natural surveillance.

- 6.101. In delivering a balanced decision on the best approach to designing the scheme, we are of the opinion that screening the SSE equipment provides visual and acoustic benefits to the existing residents along Lynmouth Road, pedestrians and cyclists using the new north-south link, and future residents of the development. We believe that using buildings, rather than landscaping along this route, provided the most significant benefit to the development and existing residents whilst meeting the technical and planning policy requirements set out above.
- 6.102. As the designs for the scheme evolved and further assessments were carried out by our acoustic consultant, it also became apparent that providing buildings along this boundary would further improve the acoustic conditions within the Site as well as for residents of Lynmouth Road (as the proposed buildings would be taller than the blast wall, and therefore deliver additional mitigation).
- 6.103. Whilst minor adjustments were made during the pre-application stage, and during the application process, the principles of this approach were constant throughout.



Fig. 6.14. Plan demonstrating active frontages and the SSE equipment

- 6.104. Through the detailed design of the scheme, we were mindful of ensuring that all faces of the development provided active frontages as far as possible within the constraints around the SSE equipment. Fig. 6.14 demonstrates the limited extent of blank walls (i.e., walls without fenestration) as highlighted with the orange edging. As shown by the green edging, the majority of the scheme – including where it faces the SSE land – contains active frontages. For clarity, the concentric circles highlight the centre of the main pieces of the SSE equipment

- 6.105. As such, where the proposed development “turns its back” on the SSE site, this is limited only to where it is required to do so under the terms of the contract with SSE. Whilst the contract only stipulates no openable windows along these boundaries, in order to enable comprehensive development of the neighbouring site these elevations have been designed with blank facades to allow future development to sit up against the appeal scheme, thereby maximising development potential.



Fig. 6.15. Plan demonstrating comprehensive development of the allocated site

- 6.106. Addressing the requirements of policy CR11 paragraph viii), a plan was produced and included within section 3.9 the Design and Access Statement along with accompanying statement to explain how a scheme could come forward on the SSE land, should this site be made available at a future date. A copy of the plan from this document is included in Fig. 6.15.
- 6.107. This plan demonstrates a comprehensive approach, with linear buildings along the eastern boundary, and interlocking blocks against the proposed buildings to the application site. A series of courtyard spaces would then be provided to ensure separation between building frontages, linked together with a connection from Vastern Road through to the River Thames and towpath to the north (orange route). A link is also provided between the Site and SSE scheme in order to provide connectivity (magenta route).



Fig. 6.16. Plan demonstrating active frontages within the comprehensive scheme

- 6.108. Utilising the same graphical representation as Fig. 6.14, Fig. 6.16 demonstrates how the comprehensive plan – particularly with the interlocking blocks – would then have the potential to provide active frontages throughout. Through these new blocks backing on to the proposed buildings, this would remove the blank facades from this comprehensive approach.

Summary

- 6.109. In summary, I consider that the proposed approach works with the existing constraints of the site and neighbouring SSE equipment to deliver a high-quality scheme whilst allowing for, and being considerate of, any potential future development of the remainder of the allocated site.

Overbearing

- 6.110. The final point to address is in relation to consultation comments regarding the alleged loss of privacy and overlooking nature of the 3.5 storey 'Goods Office' (Block C) in relation to the existing 2 storey dwellings on Lynmouth Road (see 3.36).
- 6.111. Officers considered that whilst the building protected Lynmouth Road properties from the noise and visual impact of the SSE equipment, in doing so it produced an overbearing relationship (see 3.37).

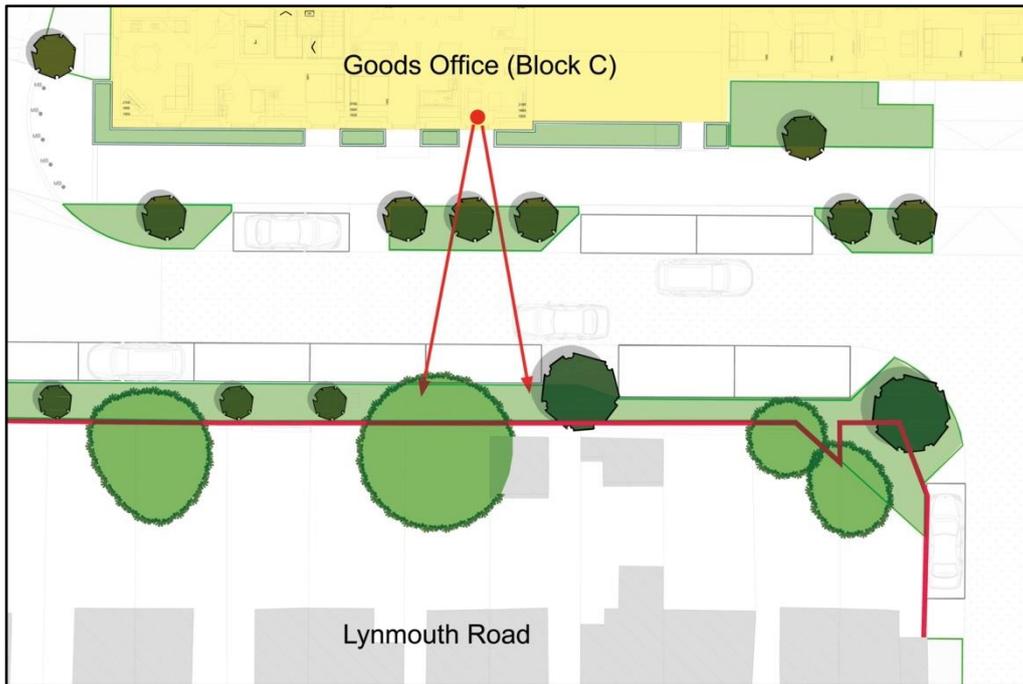


Fig. 6.17. Plan demonstrating the relationship between the 'Goods Office' (Block C) (top) and properties to Lynmouth Road (bottom)

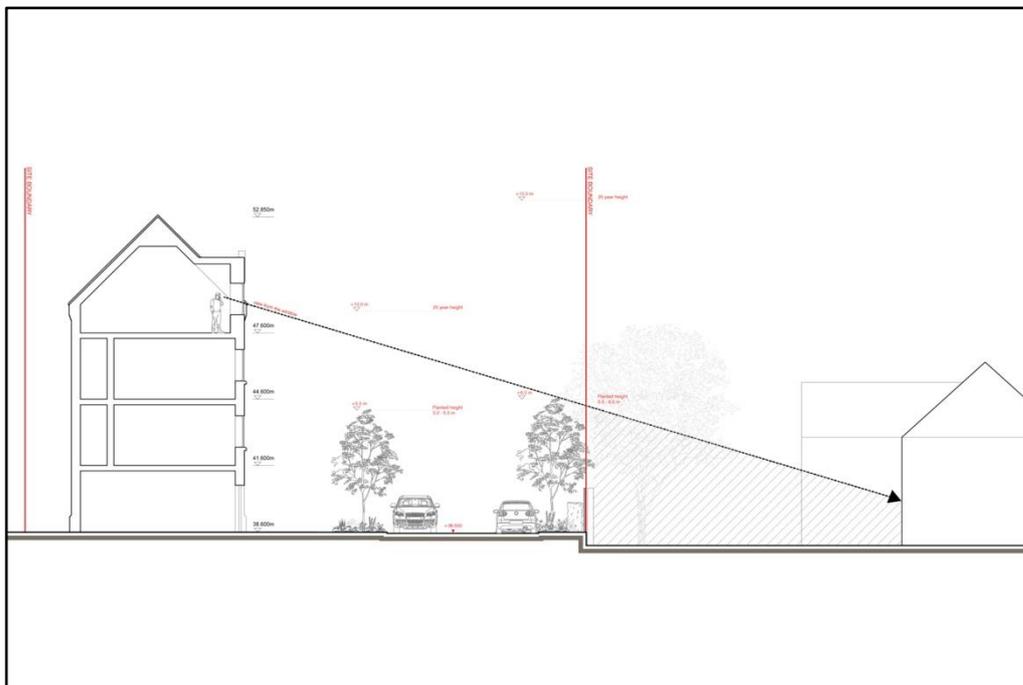


Fig. 6.18. Section through the 'Goods Office' (Block C) (left), public realm including two banks of landscaping, and the gardens and properties along Lynmouth Road



Fig. 6.19. CGI of the proposed view from inside the top floor apartment within the 'Goods Office' (Block C), looking towards Lynmouth Road

- 6.112. An addendum to the Design and Access Statement was submitted in April 2020 (see 3.12, Fig. 6.17-Fig. 6.19) which demonstrated the careful consideration of the internal layout of this building to ensure living rooms aligned with existing or proposed tree planting of an appropriate scale, thereby minimising the potential for overlooking existing dwellings and gardens.
- 6.113. In the accompanying email¹⁴⁴ it was also explained that the distance from the façade of the 'Goods Office' (Block C) to the boundary of Lynmouth Road gardens was approximately 15.5m, with the distance between the proposed building and the rear of the Lynmouth Road properties being between 25.0m and 29.4m. This was compared against the width of Lynmouth Road and De Montfort Road of 12.3-13.3m (see Appendix A, Isis Court, Site Plan). It was not subsequently raised as an issue in dialogue with RBC thereafter.

Summary

- 6.114. In considering the information submitted to RBC, I consider that the proposals do not present an overbearing relationship to the existing Lynmouth Road properties by virtue of an acceptable distance between buildings, considered locations of habitable rooms, and appropriate landscape mitigation.

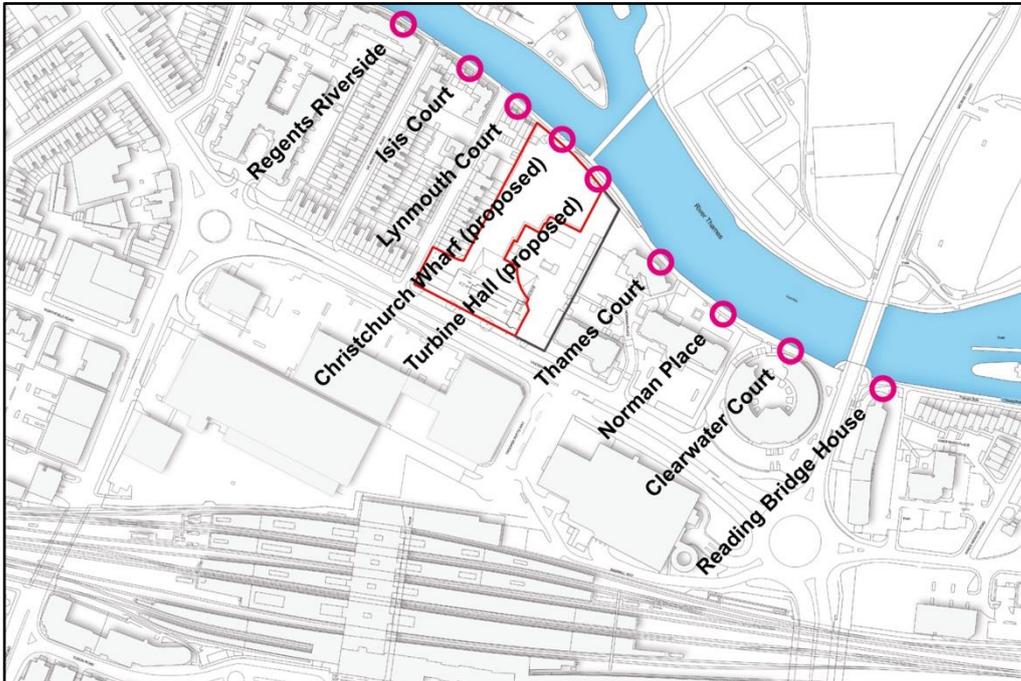
¹⁴⁴ Email to RBC, 9 April 2020 (Document 10.123)

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1. I consider that the proposals clearly deliver a high-quality and well-designed scheme which successfully addresses the constraints and opportunities of the Site, responds to the existing and historic context, and provides a policy compliant scheme.
- 7.2. The appeal scheme delivers a north-south route with publicly accessible spaces, including an opening on to the River Thames, which is considered to be high quality, direct and safe. It has been demonstrated that the alignment of the Site allows policy aspirations and objectives to be met.
- 7.3. The heights and proximity of the buildings 'Turbine Hall' and 'Christchurch Wharf' are shown to be comparable with the height, set-back and frontage widths of other buildings along the River Thames, with the scale of the buildings being appropriate for a 'gateway' river crossing entrance to Reading.
- 7.4. The retention and re-use of the locally-listed building has been adequately explored and discounted, with the appeal scheme successfully drawing on heritage element and detailing.
- 7.5. It has been demonstrated that the proposals allow for, and actively consider, the comprehensive development of the allocated site, should the neighbouring land come forward for development in the future.
- 7.6. I consider that the positioning of buildings, elevational approach and window positioning, and the appropriate location of habitable rooms provide an acceptable relationship to both new and existing properties in and adjacent to the Site.
- 7.7. As such, it is my overall conclusion that the reasons for refusal set out in this statement are not justified in relation to design.

8.0 Appendix A – Relationships to the River Thames

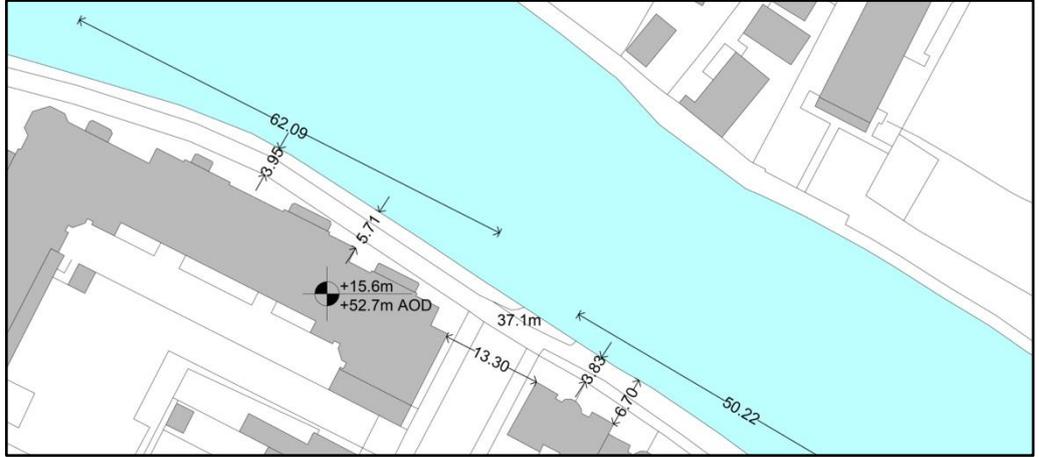
Location Plan



Site Plan, not to scale

The above plan highlights the points along the River Thames where the relationship between the buildings and river edge are assessed in terms of the relative heights of the buildings to the towpath, the distance from the building frontage to the river's edge, and the associated height to width ratio. In addition, the width of the publicly-accessible river frontage is measured, as well as the width of each of the buildings. With the exception of the proposed scheme, all other measurements are taken from Ordnance Survey information.

A. Regents Riverside



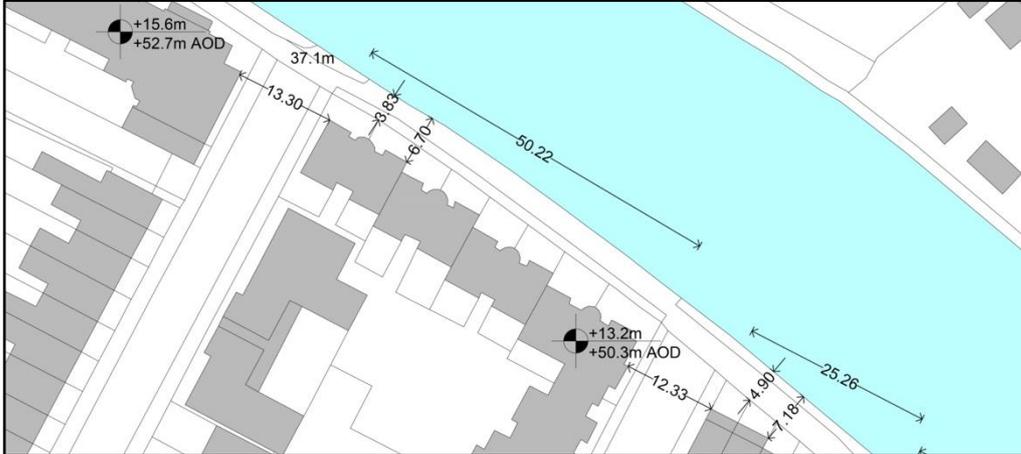
Site Plan, 1:1000



Photograph taken alongside Regents Riverside, May 2021

Height of building relative to towpath	15.6m
Distance from the river to building frontage	5.7m
Height to width ratio	2.7 : 1
Width of publicly accessible space	4.0m
Building frontage width	62.1m

B. Isis Court



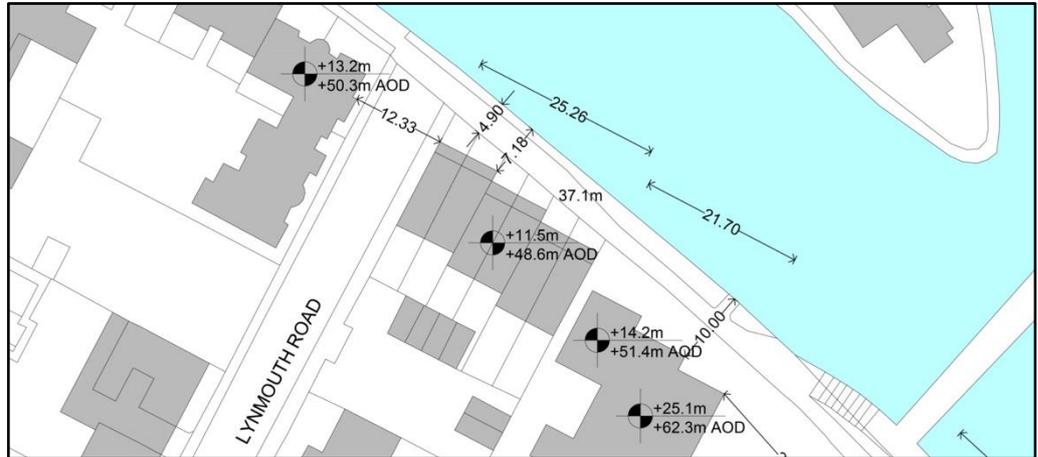
Site Plan, 1:1000



Photograph taken alongside Isis Court, May 2021

Height of building relative to towpath	13.2m
Distance from the river to building frontage	6.7m
Height to width ratio	2 : 1
Width of publicly accessible space	3.8m
Building frontage width	50.2m

C. Lynmouth Court



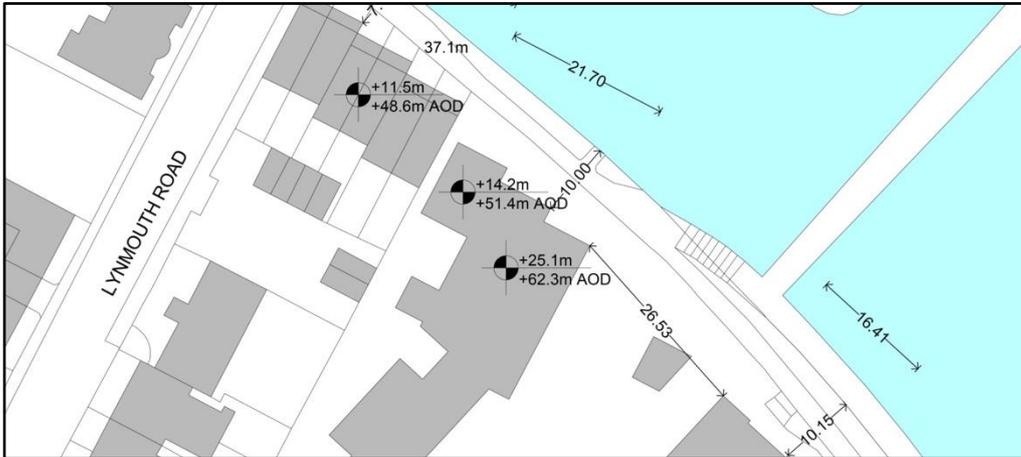
Site Plan, 1:1000



Photograph taken alongside Lynmouth Court, May 2021

Height of building relative to towpath	11.5m
Distance from the river to building frontage	7.1m
Height to width ratio	1.6 : 1
Width of publicly accessible space	4.9m
Building frontage width	25.2m

D. Christchurch Wharf (Block EFG)



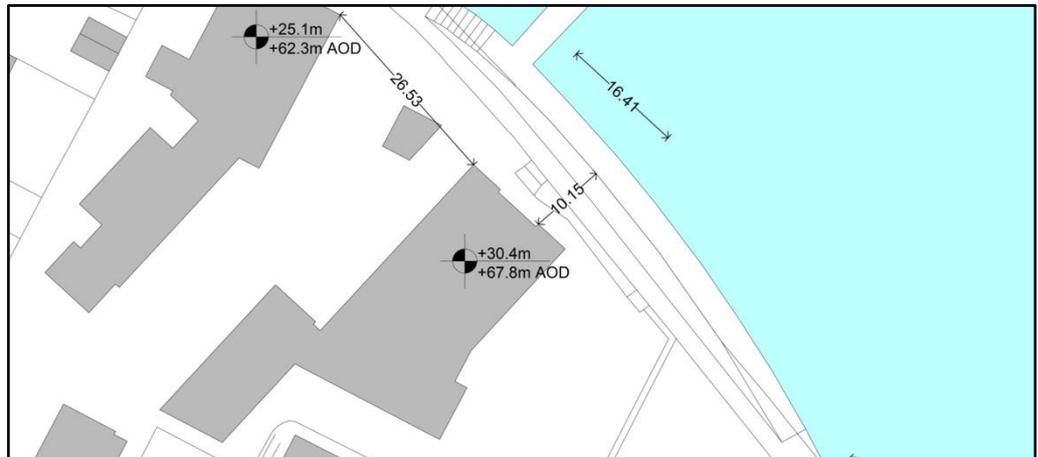
Site Plan, 1:1000



Photograph taken at the point of the proposed Christchurch Wharf, May 2021
 Note, existing wall will be removed in the proposed scheme.

Height of building relative to towpath	14.2-25.1m
Distance from the river to building frontage	10.0m
Height to width ratio	1.4-2.5 : 1
Width of publicly accessible space	10.0m
Building frontage width	21.7m

E. The Turbine Hall (Block D)



Site Plan, 1:1000

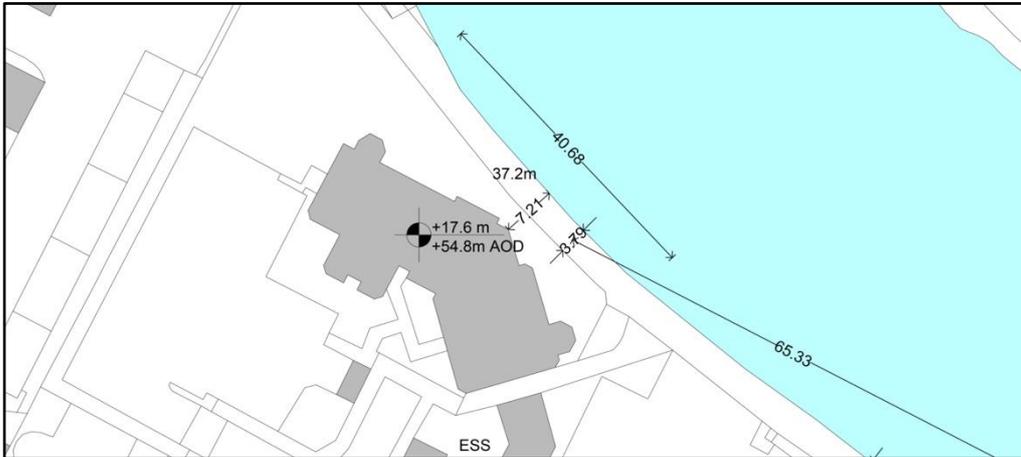


Photograph taken at the point of the proposed Turbine Hall, May 2021

Note, existing wall will be removed in the proposed scheme.

Height of building relative to towpath	30.4m
Distance from the river to building frontage	10.2m
Height to width ratio	3 : 1
Width of publicly accessible space	10.2m
Building frontage width	16.4m

F. Thames Court



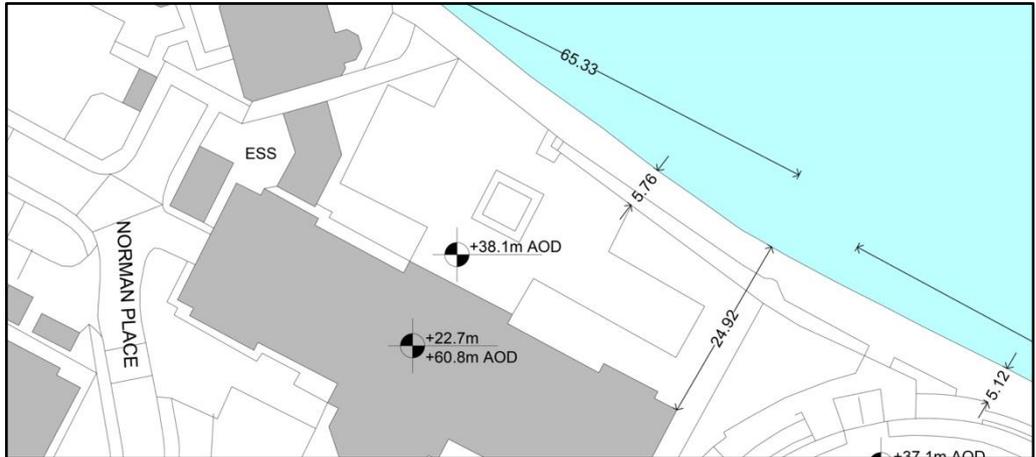
Site Plan, 1:1000



Photograph taken alongside Thames Court, May 2021

Height of building relative to towpath	17.6m
Distance from the river to building frontage	7.2m
Height to width ratio	2.5 : 1
Width of publicly accessible space	3.8m
Building frontage width	40.7m

G. Norman Place



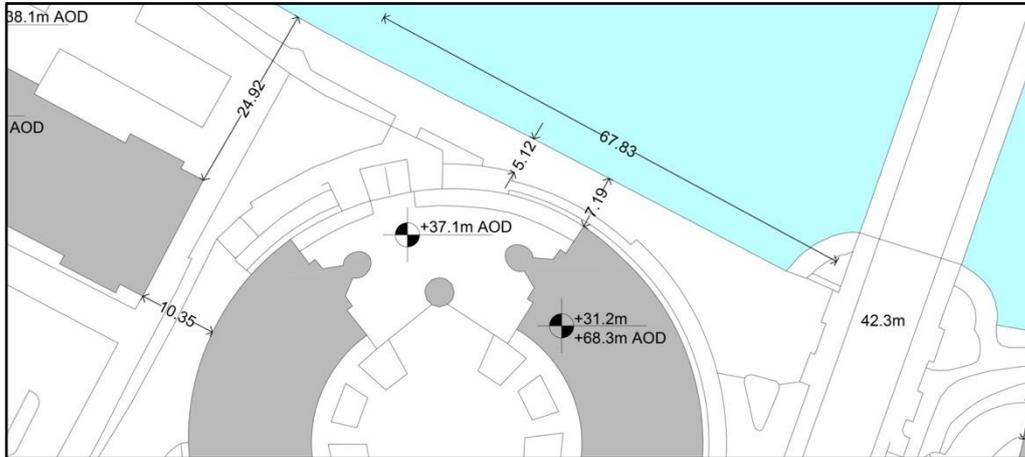
Site Plan, 1:1000



Photograph taken alongside Norman Place, May 2021

Height of building relative to towpath	22.7m
Distance from the river to building frontage	24.9m
Height to width ratio	0.9 : 1
Width of publicly accessible space	5.7m
Building frontage width	65.3m

H. Clearwater Court



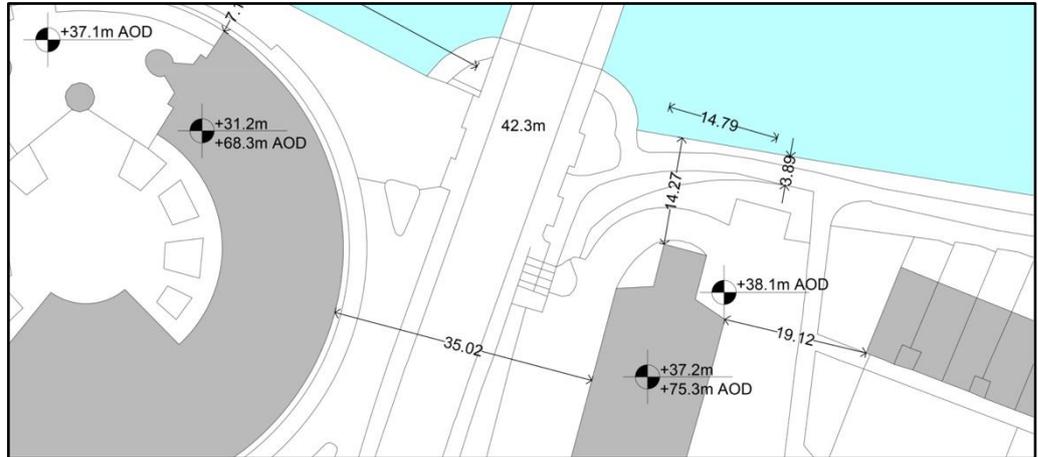
Site Plan, 1:1000



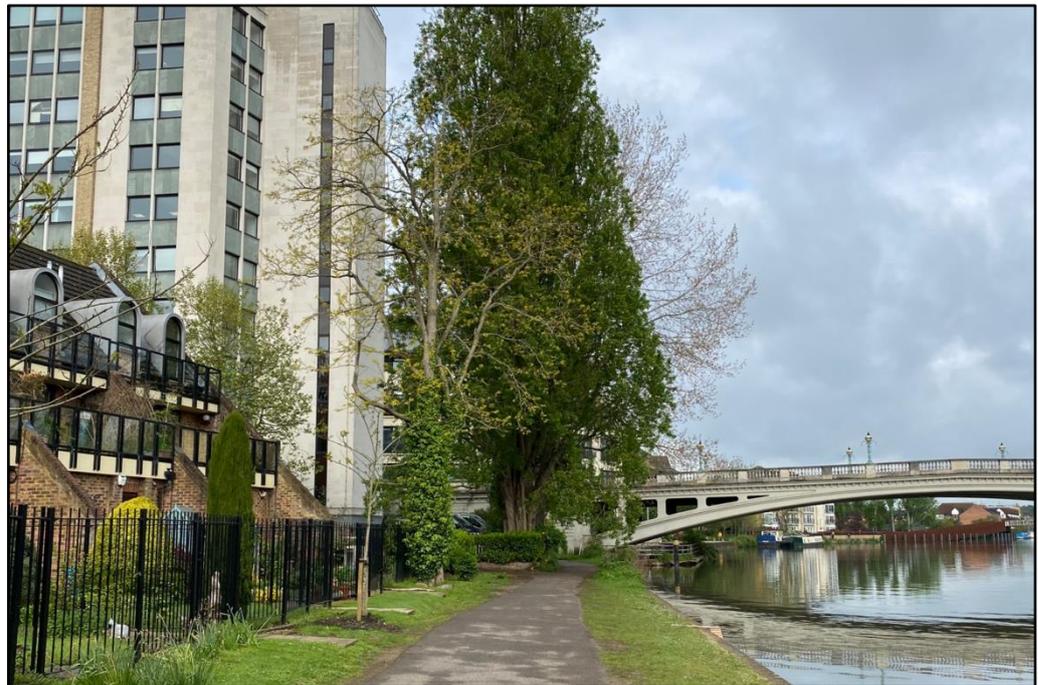
Photograph taken alongside Clearwater Court, May 2021

Height of building relative to towpath	31.2m
Distance from the river to building frontage	7.2m
Height to width ratio	4.3 : 1
Width of publicly accessible space	5.1m
Building frontage width	67.8m

I. Reading Bridge House



Site Plan, 1:1000



Photograph taken alongside Reading Bridge House, May 2021

Height of building relative to towpath	37.2m
Distance from the river to building frontage	14.3m
Height to width ratio	2.6 : 1
Width of publicly accessible space	3.9m
Building frontage width	14.8m