

CADRA comments on the appeal - ref: APP/E0345/W/21/3289748: Vastern Court, RG1 8AL

To: leanne.palmer@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Sent: Monday, 14 Feb, 22 At 15:09

Subject: Planning Inspectorate APP/E0345/W/21/3289748: Vastern Court, RG1 8AL

To the Planning Inspectorate. FOA Leanne Palmer

Planning Inspectorate APP/E0345/W/21/3289748: Vastern Court, RG1 8AL

CADRA raised concerns on this application regarding:

- THE BIG PICTURE AND SITE USE
- ALIGNMENT AND LEGIBILITY OF THE NEW PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE ROUTE FROM THE STATION TO THE RIVER, INCLUDING THE VIEW FROM THE STATION CONCOURSE
 - HEIGHTS AND MASSING
 - DENSITY AND GREEN SPACE
 - TRANSPORT AND PARKING
 - ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN QUALITY
 - FOOD RETAILER
 - CONCLUSION This application is an exercise in establishing value for the the Applicant. The design is fundamentally flawed in respect of density, satisfactory urban living standards, and many urban design principles. It holds no benefits for Reading and requires a radical rethink and redesign in coordination with the related adjoining sites.

Two documents are attached here with more detailed explanation. These valid objections have not been sufficiently addressed by the revised October 2021 proposals and we ask that the Appeal should be dismissed.

kind regards

CADRA

Attachment 1)

To: Richard Eatough <richard.eatough@reading.gov.uk>

Date: Nov 14, 2019 11:02:28 PM

Subject: Aviva site, Vastern Rd/ Hermes RMO site/ Berkeley SSE site

Dear Richard,

As you may know Aviva have recently held pre-planning public exhibitions on the outline proposals for their Vastern Rd site. CADRA have previously commented by email 4 June 2019 on the proposals for the adjoining Hermes/ RMO site, application no 182252, and we have attended several meetings with Berkeley in respect of the

various iterations of their proposals for the SSE site adjoining Aviva to the north of Vastern Road.

We are writing now to share with you our comments on the Aviva proposals which I have copied below, and which we believe raise urban design principles which should apply to all three of these interconnected and related sites. The point we make in better detail below is that we believe that the massing, heights, density, green space principles and the route from the station to the River should be considered and agreed as a whole for all three sites by RBC prior to permission being granted for any one site. We are concerned about the ad hoc and piecemeal nature of the proposals coming forward.

To take one example cited below, better design consideration needs to be given to the alignment of the new pedestrian and cycle route through the Aviva and Berkeley sites to the new Christchurch Bridge. The landscaping principles to be applied along this route should surely be considered as an entity across all three sites? We fear opportunities are being missed.

Aside from general points on heights, massing and density, another example relates to the heights and skyline directly adjacent the River Thames of the Berkeley site. The Thames is a major local and national landscape asset. Surely this is an area where RBC should be considering public design guidance for developers? For instance CADRA have indicated to Berkeley that we believe the height and distance from the Thames of the Thames Water HQ building provides a reference model that could be adopted.

On Tuesday 12 November, CADRA held an open meeting entitled 'the Changing Face of Reading.' We were grateful to Mark Worringham for attending and outlining the important aspects of the newly adopted Local Plan. Richard Bennett, Chair of Reading Civic Society gave an overview of the major schemes coming forward across Reading. The meeting was well attended with over 110 people, many from south of the Thames. There was an extensive Q and A session when many of the points we have made below were raised.

We note that Site CR 11e in the new Local Plan, which covers the Hermes and Aviva sites combined, has an indicative allocation of 640 to 900 dwellings. The total proposed however by these two developers comes to a maximum of 1600 dwellings, greatly in excess of the provision in the new Local Plan. This goes a great way to explaining why their development proposals are so unsatisfactory as set out here and we hope that RBC will apply the new Local Plan policies with rigour. With regard to the Berkeley SSE site, the still applicable Station Area Framework document gives indicative heights of 4 to 6 storeys. Even taking these as 'commercial' storeys, the 9 to 11 storeys being considered by Berkeley is excessive, not in accordance with the Plan and may damage the setting of the River Thames.

We therefore hope RBC will be able to take on board these comments and those in our letter to Aviva below. By copy we are sending this to other interested Community Groups.

with kind regards
CADRA

By email and post to:

Aviva, c/o RSSPCommunity Engagement Team,
Barton Willmore, 7 Soho Square, London W1D 3QB

Dear Sir/ Madam

Aviva site/Reading Station Park, Vastern Road, Reading, RG1 8AJ

Thank you for the recent public exhibitions of Aviva's proposals which several Caversham and District Residents Association (CADRA) Committee members were pleased to attend.

We have comments that we would like to make on these pre planning proposals, which we feel are best set out by letter rather than through the survey form made available at the exhibitions. We are therefore writing to give you our detailed comments as follows.

THE BIG PICTURE

Your site makes up part of a larger area between the railway station and the river Thames. There are 3 separate sites coming forward on slightly different timescales, the Aviva site, the Hermes/RMO site and the Berkeley/SSE site. The proposals for all three sites involve a large proportion of residential development where none exists at present. If the maximum number of residential units postulated on each site were achieved, the total number of flats/apartments may reach 1850. A number of apartments proposed are 2 or 3 bed, thus implying occupation by families. The total residential population of this new residential area may therefore be between 4000 to 5500 persons, with all the associated requirements for green amenity space, play areas, creche facilities, medical facilities and school places which are necessary for successful urban living of this nature.

CADRA accept the concept of a new, largely residential quarter between the station and the River Thames. This needs to be of appropriate density and heights with a clear and well landscaped pedestrian and cycle route from the station through to the new Christchurch bridge, and with the provision of proper ancillary facilities and green amenity space. The current proposals do not achieve these aims.

Our first concern, with respect to the current proposals, relates to the ad hoc and piecemeal nature of the proposals for each site. The overall provision of green space and play areas etc is inadequate on your site. The proposed connection through towards the river is un co-ordinated with the Berkeley SSE site and currently involves a dog leg. Consideration should be given to adjusting the position of this new pedestrian and cycle connection further to the west of Trooper Potts Way to better coordinate with the SSE site and allow views through from the existing high level glazed Station concourse. Little thought has been given as to how the substantial flows of pedestrians and cyclists will cross Vastern Rd by either Developer.

Each Developer is attempting to maximise density on their own site and to test RBC Tall Buildings policy without due thought or consideration to overall impact. CADRA will be writing separately to RBC to urge that the massing, heights, density, the route through to the River and landscaping/ green space principles be properly

considered and agreed as a whole for all three sites by RBC, prior to permission being granted for any one site.

HEIGHTS AND MASSING

We do not believe that your proposal is in accordance with the spirit of RBC Tall buildings policy. This allows for a cluster of the tallest buildings to the south/ town centre side of the Railway line. Heights then reduce northwards towards the river and RBC have an elegant diagram with a curved line setting this out which you have reproduced. CADRA believe that your proposals should be reduced in height to better reflect this policy and to be in proper scale with the buildings of the existing residential communities to the north and west of your site where they adjoin them.

DENSITY AND GREEN SPACE

Related to the points on heights and massing above, we do not think that the the current density of development, green space and distances between buildings and blocks is acceptable. The professionals present at your exhibition were indicating figures of 15 metres between blocks and buildings and 23 metres across the route towards the River. Fifteen metres between blocks or buildings, 6 to 8 storeys high and in some cases higher, will be oppressive and unacceptable. Twenty three metres across a space with a 16 or 18 storey building on one side is also inadequate and is likely to lead to wind tunnel effects.

With regard to green space, we understand that the 'planted courtyard' spaces within the blocks are in fact at first floor level. Any planting would therefore have to be on a concrete deck. This and the narrow dimensions of these areas, highlighted above, indicates to us that these areas are likely to be hard areas with limited natural light and limited planting and thus, cannot be considered as contributing effective or satisfactory amenity space.

TRANSPORT AND PARKING

CADRA do not believe that sufficient thought has been given to the principles of transport and parking on this scheme and the needs of the possible 750 to 950 flats proposed, some of whom will be families with children. We understand that no private parking is proposed, only 2car sharing spaces and no provision for visitors or short stay for retail. Advocating use of public car parks such as the station car park is unrealistic. Transport also needs to be considered in relation to school catchments.

DISCOUNT RETAILER

While discount retailing is a recent development and may not be considered a pure Planning issue, CADRA believe that the potential loss of the Aldi store on the site does need to be raised and properly considered and this has not been addressed. The Aldi store offers low cost food and household goods to the current communities in the area, many of whom may be on modest incomes. In this respect it has an important function. In addition, the overall proposals for the area postulate an increase in population of several thousand people. Where are these additional people (some of them families) to shop for reasonably priced food and household goods within walking distance, since there is no car provision proposed for this site?

CADRA hope that Aviva will be able to take on board these comments and develop a radically redesigned proposal. We will forward our comments to RBC and other interested Community groups. Finally we would like to thank Aviva for carrying out a pre planning consultation and exhibition and thus enabling us to give our views on the proposals for this important site.

CADRA

Attachment 2)

To: brian.conlon@reading.gov.uk <brian.conlon@reading.gov.uk>

Date: Apr 24, 2020 7:04:50 AM

Subject: Aviva site, Reading Station Park, Vastern Rd, Reading RG1 8AJ - Application 200328

Attachments:

view from station concourse.jpg, image0.jpeg

Dear Mr Conlon,

Further to CADRA's letter of 14 November 2019 to Richard Eatough, attaching our letter to Aviva commenting on their pre planning proposals, we are writing now with our comments on the outline application 200328 recently submitted by Aviva. Whilst there are some changes from the pre application that ameliorate the proposals, broadly speaking our previous comments remain valid. Our letter to Richard Eatough also made observations on the need for the Hermes, Aviva and Berkeley sites to be considered together as a whole by RBC in respect of their density, heights, massing, green space principles and the route from the station to the river.

THE BIG PICTURE AND SITE USE

CADRA accept the concept of a new, largely residential quarter between the station and the River Thames. We have no objection to the mix of uses incorporating residential, offices, a hotel, and retail to serve a new residential community. This needs to be of appropriate density and heights with a clear and well landscaped pedestrian and cycle route from the station through to the new Christchurch Bridge and with the provision of proper ancillary facilities and green space. The proposals for all three sites, Hermes, Aviva and Berkeley involve a high density of residential development where none exists at present. With regard to the Aviva site, the number of residential apartments appears indeterminate on the application, although a schedule in the Design and Access statement indicates 562 flats. This appears to be a welcome reduction on the 600 to 900 flats proposed at pre application stage. Nevertheless the figure of 562 flats when added to the 650 residential flats proposed on the Adjacent Hermes/ Royal Mail depot site, application no 182252, gives a total of 1212 apartments. We note that Site CR 11e in the new Local Plan, which covers the Aviva and Hermes sites combined, has an indicative allocation of 640 to 900 dwellings. The total proposed by these two developers of 1212 apartments is therefore substantially in excess of the upper range in the Local Plan and goes a great way to explaining the unsatisfactory nature of the proposals. We hope that RBC will apply the new Local Plan policies with rigour.

ALIGNMENT AND LEGIBILITY OF THE NEW PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE ROUTE FROM THE STATION TO THE RIVER, INCLUDING THE VIEW FROM THE STATION CONCOURSE

The Reading Station Area framework and the Reading Central Area action plan allowed for a direct link both visually and in landscape terms through to the river from the station. Due to the need to retain SSE equipment, only part of the SSE site has come forward for development. Berkeley have thus moved the pedestrian and cycle route west from the route intended, whereas Aviva on their site have not matched or coordinated with this alignment. There is thus now an indirect route to the river and a dog leg along the way. In addition the possibility of taking advantage of the View from the new fully glazed first floor station concourse towards the river has been lost. Plot C of the Aviva application now squarely blocks this View. This is a failure of urban design. We attach below a photograph showing the current outlook from the glazed station concourse, which indicates the potential of designing to take advantage of this View. We also enclose a marked up extract from the Applicants Design and Access statement illustrating the indirectness of the route proposed. There has not been liaison between developers on the alignment of the route. Plots D and C should be re configured to investigate providing a direct route. The future View from the glazed Station Concourse (requested from the Applicant but not forthcoming) should be a fundamental part of the design of both the Aviva and Berkeley sites. Co ordination of detailed design between developers along the route such as tree species, hard surfacing , street furniture etc would also be beneficial.

HEIGHTS AND MASSING

The proposals are not in accordance with the spirit of RBC Tall buildings policy. This allows for a cluster of the tallest buildings to the south/ town centre side of the Railway line. Heights then reduce northwards towards the river and RBC have an elegant diagram with a curved line setting this out visually. Heights on the taller southern edge of the Aviva scheme do not coordinate with those on the Hermes site and in many cases rise in height from the Hermes site rather than reduce. On the northern edge of the site, where heights should be substantially reduced, 8 to10 storeys are proposed. The proposals should be reduced in height to better reflect policy and to be in proper scale with the buildings of the existing residential communities to the north and west of the site where they adjoin them.

DENSITY AND GREEN SPACE

Related to the points on heights and massing above, the proposed density of development, green space and distances between buildings and blocks will lead to unsatisfactory living conditions. There has been some movement from the pre App stage where the applicant was proposing dimensions of 15 metres, window to window, between residential blocks and buildings 6 to 8 storeys high! 20 metres separation is now proposed, this remains unsatisfactory given the proposed heights. The width within the courtyards, window to window, of the multi storey residential blocks (including single aspect flats) appears still to be less than 20 metres.

With regard to green space, the 'podium garden' spaces within the courtyards of the residential blocks are at first floor level. Any planting will be on a concrete deck and limited. This and the narrow dimensions of these areas, highlighted above, indicates that these areas are likely to be relatively hard areas with limited natural sunlight and limited planting and cannot be considered as contributing effective or satisfactory amenity space.

TRANSPORT AND PARKING

CADRA do not believe that sufficient thought has been given at this Outline application stage to the principles of transport and parking on this scheme and the needs of the possible circa 562 flats proposed, some of whom will be families with children. Parking for adequate car sharing spaces, visitors, multiple and frequent deliveries and the disabled needs proper consideration. Advocating the use of public car parks such as the station car park is unrealistic. Transport also needs to be considered in relation to school catchments.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN QUALITY

Whilst this is an outline application, the choice of materials is unimaginative. The illustrative overall block views using these materials illustrate a blandness and mediocrity that do not bode well for any future detailed architectural treatment of the scheme.

FOOD RETAILER

While discount retailing is a recent development and may not be considered a Planning issue, the potential loss of the Aldi store on the site does need to be raised and properly considered and this has not been addressed. The Aldi store offers low cost food and household goods to the current communities in the area, many of whom may be on modest incomes. In this respect it has an important function. In addition, the overall proposals for the area postulate an increase in population of several thousand people. Food shopping within walking distance for this new car free community needs to be considered and planned for.

CONCLUSION

This application is an exercise in establishing value for the Applicant. The design is fundamentally flawed in respect of density, satisfactory urban living standards, and many urban design principles. It holds no benefits for Reading and requires a radical rethink and redesign in coordination with the related adjoining sites.

I hope these comments are useful to you in your consideration of this application,

CADRA

