Reading Station Park, Vastern Road, Reading: Townscape and Visual Proof of Evidence of Matthew D Chard BA (Hons) Dip (Hons) MAUD CMLI

PINS Reference: APP/E0345/W/21/3289748

Application Reference: 3289748 & 200328

Prepared on behalf of Aviva Life & UK Pensions

March 2022

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BARTON WILLMORE
PLANNING / DESIGN / DELIVERY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

Introduction

1.1 My name is Matthew Dermot Chard and I am the Partner leading the specialist Townscape and Landscape Planning and Design Group of Barton Willmore LLP. I am responsible for all townscape and landscape projects undertaken throughout the UK by the London office.

1.2 I hold a Bachelor of Arts Degree and Postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture and a Master of Arts in Urban Design from the University of Greenwich. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute.

1.3 I have over 25 years post-qualification experience in townscape and landscape planning, design and environmental matters. I have provided professional advice on townscape, landscape and visual impact assessment, and detailed design of a wide variety of developments throughout the UK. These include small and strategic-scale residential, commercial, mixed use, industrial, infrastructure, mineral extraction, utilities and recreation proposals for government departments, local authorities, public and private companies. I have dealt with sites within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Parks, Strategic and Local Gaps, Conservation Areas and other local designations.

Background

1.4 An application for outline planning permission was validated by RBC on 27th February 2020 (Ref: 200328), with a subsequent amended outline application submitted on 8th October 2021 (Ref: 3289748). RBC have not provided a decision on the applications. The description of development is as follows:

> *"Outline planning permission with the details of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved for later determination. A demolition phase and phased redevelopment (each phase being an independent act of development) comprising a flexible mix of the following uses: Residential (Class C3 and including PRS); Offices (Use Class B1(a); development in Use Classes A1, A2, A3 (retail), A4 (public house), A5 (take away), D1 and D2 (community and leisure); car parking; provision of new plant and renewable energy equipment; creation of servicing areas and provision of associated services, including waste, refuse, cycle storage, and lighting; and for the laying out of the buildings; routes and open spaces within the development; and all associated works and operations including but not limited to: demolition; earthworks; provision of attenuation infrastructure; engineering operations."*

1.5 This development is referred to as the 'Appeal Scheme' throughout my evidence.

1.6 The application was accompanied by a Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (TVIA) produced by Barton Willmore. (CD 1.9.13). The findings of the original TVIA remained valid for

the consideration of the updated Appeal Scheme although a revised TVIA was submitted to take into account the changes of the updated application including additional offsets between development blocks.

1.7 An appeal was lodged on behalf of Aviva Life & Pensions UK Limited (the Appellant) on 23rd December 2021 against Reading Council for the non-determination of planning application 200328 and updated application 3289748.

1.8 I was instructed by Aviva Life & Pensions Limited to fill the role of Townscape and Visual expert witness. Prior to this I provided input into and oversaw the TVIA submitted with the original planning application and its subsequent update. I have undertaken my own assessment of the townscape and visual baseline and effects arising from the Appeal Scheme and am satisfied that I can give evidence in support of the Appeal Scheme. All conclusions are my own and based on my own professional opinion and experience.

1.9 This Proof of Evidence addresses the reasons for refusal set out within the Reading Borough Council Committee Report for the Planning Applications Committee on 15th February 2022 (CD3) as well as the Reading Borough Council Statement of Case (SoC) dated February 2022.

Scope of Proof of Evidence

1.10 I am familiar with the Appeal Site and its surroundings, having undertaken several site visits in 2021 and again in February 2022 as part of the appeal preparation; and have examined the relevant plans and documents for the purposes of this Inquiry.

1.11 The evidence that I have prepared and provide for this Inquiry in this Proof of Evidence is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution, the Landscape Institute, and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true professional opinions.

1.12 My Proof of Evidence should be read in conjunction with my plans and photographs, included within my **Illustrative Material: Document A – Appeal Scheme Plans & Drawings** and **Document B – Appeal Scheme Photographs & AVR Wirelines** and **Appendices MDC-1 – MDC5**.

Methodology

1.13 I have considered the likely effects of the Appeal Scheme on townscape character and visual amenity, using a methodology based on the principles set out in 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment), 3rd edition, 2013.

1.14 The TVIA methodology used in the preparation of this Proof of Evidence is included at my **Appendix MDC-1**. The TVIA methodology identifies the value and susceptibility of townscape and visual receptors to determine their sensitivity to the type of development proposed. The likely magnitude of effect experienced by these receptors, as a result of the Appeal Scheme is then considered and combined with the receptor's sensitivity, to identify a significance of effect.

2.0 APPEAL SITE CONTEXT

Location and Land Use

2.1 As demonstrated on my **Figure MDC-1**, the Appeal Site is located in the centre of Reading, it's south-eastern corner immediately adjacent to the Great Western mainline railway station.

2.2 The northern and western boundaries of the Appeal Site are bounded by Vastern Road and Caversham Road respectively. These are busy roads with high volumes of traffic that exacerbate the perception of a vehicle-dominated townscape within and around the Appeal Site. The Appeal Site is contained to the south and east by large-scale built forms: the former Royal Mail sorting office and the recently completed Reading Railway Station building to the south-west and south, as well as a multi-storey car park to the east. Whilst the Appeal Site is contiguous with the former Royal Mail building, it is separated from the Reading Railway Station building by the northern entrance forecourt; and from the multi-storey car park by Trooper Potts Way.

2.3 The wider townscape of the town centre comprises a mixture of significant retail, commercial and increasingly, residential development.

Topography, Hydrology and Movement

2.4 At a regional scale, Reading sits within the low-lying Thames Valley at an elevation of between 30 – 40 metres (m) above ordnance datum (AOD) as shown on **Figure MDC-2**. To the north of the urban area lie the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (approximately 2.3km at its closest point). Two localised prominent landforms within the Thames Valley, adjacent to the urban centre of Reading, rise to the south-west towards Tilehurst, at an elevation of 90m AOD; and the south-east towards Whitley and Earley, at an elevation of 80 m AOD.

2.5 Locally, the Appeal Site lies approximately 180m south of the River Thames and is broadly level, lying at an elevation of approximately 36 to 38m AOD. The land immediately surrounding the Appeal Site, lying adjacent to the River Thames, sits at approximately the same elevation. Approximately 1km north of the Appeal Site, Caversham Park and surrounding residential properties sit on a localised ridgeline at an elevation of 80-85m AOD, which extends south-west to Balmore Park before steeply falling towards Hemdean Road, which sits in a narrow valley at an elevation of 40m AOD. The topography then rises again to the north-west towards Caversham Heights (70m AOD) and onto Caversham Heath Golf Course (80m AOD).

2.6 The urban centre of Reading and focus of the historic settlement occupies a slightly elevated area of land to the south of Reading Railway Station, approximately 500m to the south of the

Appeal Site. This area sits at between 40-45m AOD and lies between the River Thames and River Kennet. The River Kennet forms a key feature that passes directly through the town centre, whereas, in contrast, the River Thames is physically and visually separate from central Reading.

2.7 As a result of the topographical pattern and the transport corridors that follow it, urban development lies predominantly on the valley floor. This is evident in the coalescence of smaller settlements as development has spread along the corridors from the urban centre of Reading. A mixture of industrial, retail and residential development has also extended north and north-west of Reading Station, infilling broadly flat land between the railway line and River Thames. However, the linkages between Reading and Caversham remain vehicle dominated and focussed around the Caversham Bridge and Reading Bridge crossing points, which are physically and visually separated from central Reading by built form and transport corridors.

2.8 The many strategic movement routes have long influenced the land use within Reading and its wider suburbs, notably areas immediately adjacent to the route of the Great Western Mainline, which are formed predominantly by large industrial, business and transport infrastructure uses.

Settlement Pattern

2.9 Surrounding the industrial/business core, in which the Appeal Site is located, the wider Reading settlement morphology includes extensive areas of residential development, interspersed with areas of open space. The latter includes Christchurch Meadows and Hills Meadow to the north-east of the Appeal Site and the playing fields of Kings Meadow to the south-east, which are accessible via the Thames Path. Small-scale two and three storey residential properties along Lynmouth Road and De Montfort Road lie to the north of the Appeal Site, north of Vastern Road. However, they are situated in an area also predominantly characterised by large scale built form, including Brighams Mead (Stantec building), riverside apartment blocks and office buildings.

2.10 As is evident from the above, the Appeal Site lies within a very well-established framework of significant large-scale built development land uses, adjacent to a significant junction and nodal point on the national rail network.

Access and Public Realm

2.11 PRoW No.1, known as the Thames Path, extends north-west to south-east following the course of the River Thames and lies 160 m to the north-east of the Appeal Site, at its nearest point. The recently constructed Christchurch Bridge connects the Thames Path to Christchurch Meadows and PRoW No. 24 to the north-east. Further PRoW and cycle routes extend throughout the urban area of Reading to the south of the Appeal Site and to the north within Caversham.

2.12 There is no direct access to the Appeal Site from the northern station entrance. Furthermore, the Appeal Site inhibits pedestrian permeability, connectivity and legibility between Vastern Road and the recently upgraded public realm at the northern station entrance, with any physical or perceptual connection between the centre of Reading and the River Thames corridor broken by the substantial raised rail corridor and vehicle-dominated Vastern Road. Routes north from the station and underpass, as proposed in the Reading Station Area Framework, would contribute to reducing this separation.

2.13 As set out in the Reading Tall Building Strategy (CD7.44/45), the Appeal Site is located within Character Area 22: Vastern Road (CA22), as shown on **Figure MDC-3.** The document notes that buildings located within CA22 do not currently contribute to the skyline in views towards the centre of Reading. In this context, I consider that the Appeal Site and existing low rise-built form within it do not contribute to the identity of the centre of Reading.

Designations

2.14 As shown on **Figure MDC-4,** there are no designations of townscape/landscape quality within or adjoining the Appeal Site. The nearest Conservation Area, (Market Place/London Street), lies in the urban centre of Reading, approximately 280m to the south-east of the Appeal Site and beyond Reading Railway Station. The Conservation Area of St Peter's in Caversham lies 480m to the north-west of the Appeal Site and includes Caversham Bridge.

2.15 There are no Registered Parks or Gardens of Special Historic Interest (RPGSHI) in the vicinity of the Appeal Site. The nearest RPGSHIs are The Forbury Gardens, approximately 270m to the south-east of the Appeal Site boundary; Caversham Court Gardens, approximately 725m to the north-west; and Caversham Park, approximately 2km to the north-east.

2.16 There are no listed buildings or scheduled monuments immediately adjacent to the Appeal Site. The nearest is the Main Building of Reading General Station (Grade II), 130m to the south which is separated from the Appeal Site by the recently-constructed northern entrance to Reading Railway Station and the overbridge concourse, railway tracks and platforms within the station. Further to the south and south-east, clusters of listed buildings are located within the Conservation Areas of Market Place/London Street and St Mary's Butts/Castle Street. Additionally, the frontage of the former power station on the Scottish Southern Electricity (SSE) (otherwise known as Berkleys or 55 Vastern Road) site immediately to the north of the Appeal Site is locally listed.

Published Character Assessment

2.17 I set out below the published character assessments within which the Appeal Site and its surroundings are located. The geographical extent of the published Character Areas as

identified in the Reading Tall Building Strategy are shown on **Figure MDC-3,** the relevant extracts of which are included in **Appendix MDC-2**.

National

2.18 At a national level, the Appeal Site is covered by NCA Profile 110: Chilterns, although as the Appeal Site is located in the centre of the urban area of Reading, this profile is of limited relevance to the Appeal Site.

County

2.19 Within the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, the Appeal Site is located within land defined as 'Urban Area' for which no further detail is provided.

Local

2.20 Entec Ltd produced the Reading Tall Building Strategy (RTBS) in 2008 (CD7.44) on behalf of Reading Borough Council. As part of the production of the RTBS, a townscape assessment was undertaken, and the Reading Central Area divided into townscape character areas. The RTBS was updated in March 2018 (CD 7.45). As identified on **Figure MDC-3**, the Appeal Site and its immediate setting fall within CA22: Vastern Road. The north-western edge of the Site immediately abuts CA12 - Caversham Road. CA1 - Station Hill abuts the boundary of CA22 to the south, whilst CA2 - Reading Station East is located adjacent to the south-eastern boundary of CA22 (both of these being located beyond Reading Station and the railway line).

2.21 It is noted on page 13 of the 2008 report that ***"there are 8 character areas which are judged to have a capacity for tall buildings. These areas are largely, but not wholly towards the edges of central Reading, adjacent to major transport routes such as the IDR and the railway line. Within these areas there is an absence of historic built form, and although the building style and heights across these areas is variable, there are characteristically occasional buildings of between 8 and 10 storeys. The buildings were largely constructed during the middle and later stages of the 20th century and have a medium sized or large block size. With the exception of character area 19 'Mallard Row to 'Fobney Street' they all have a predominantly office or industrial land use"***.

2.22 These areas include CA22 (page 44 of the updated March 2018 report and page 75 of Appendix 4: Updates to analysis of character areas of 2008 report) and CA1 and CA2 immediately to the south. The townscape sensitivity of CA22 to the inclusion of tall buildings is considered to be Low, with the rationale stated as:

> *"The large block size which exists within the character area and the absence of any key views or visual focal point makes this an appropriate location for tall buildings. However it is proposed that tall structures should not be developed along the north and western boundaries of the character area as these boundaries are shared with small scale residential areas. any proposed built form should respond in terms of height and scale to the residential area. The tallest structures should be located to the south of the character area, adjacent to the railway line. In this area the townscape features are larger scale, and adjacent to large scale features outside of the area e.g. existing station buildings, Thames Tower and Western Tower."*

2.23 The historical significance of CA22 is considered to be ***"Railway town and growth of manufacturing and commerce post 1840",*** with a High suitability for location of tall buildings, stating at Appendix 4: Updates to analysis of character areas on page 76 that:

> *"The large block size which exists within the character area and the absence of any key views or visual focal point makes this an appropriate location for tall buildings. There are no key views which could be blocked by development of tall buildings. In order for tall building development within this area to be viable in terms of market considerations, there would need to be associated public realm enhancements and enhanced accessibility to improve market perception of the area."*

3.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 I set out below a summary of the planning policies of relevance to townscape and visual matters of most relevance to this Proof of Evidence and which are referred to in the recommended reasons for refusal. All other relevant policy context is contained within **Appendix MDC-3a:** Planning Policy Summary**, and Appendix 3b:** Reading Station Area Framework Extracts.

Local Planning Policy

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) (CD4.1)

3.2 The following policies and extracts from the Local Plan are considered relevant to the Appeal Site and Appeal Scheme with regard to townscape and visual matters.

3.3 Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) states:

> *"All development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located ... will be assessed to ensure that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to the following urban design objectives:*
>
> - *Character - a place with its own identity and sense of place;*
> - *Continuity and enclosure;*
> - *Quality of the public realm;*
> - *Ease of movement and permeability;*
> - *Legibility - clear image and easy to understand;*
> - *Adaptability – capable of adaptation over time;*
> - *Diversity – meets a wide range of needs.*
>
> *Developments will also be assessed to ensure that they:*
>
> - *Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm;*
> - *Create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion;*
> - *Address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable and easy to understand by them;*
> - *Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping ..."* (p.28).

3.4 Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) states:

> *"... New development shall demonstrate how the location and type of green space, landscaping and water features provided*

within a scheme have been arranged such that they maintain or link into the existing Green Network and contribute to its consolidation ..." (p.51).

3.5 Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) states:

"Individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended. The quality of waterside vegetation will be maintained or enhanced;

New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained" (p.55).

3.6 Policy CR2 (Design in Central Reading) states:

"Applications for development within Central Reading should demonstrate the following attributes:

a) Development will build on and respect the existing grid layout structure of the central area, providing continuity and enclosure through appropriate relationships between buildings and spaces, and frontages that engage with the street at lower levels, and contributing towards enhanced ease of movement through and around the central area;
b) Development will provide appropriate, well designed public spaces and other public realm, including squares, open spaces, streetscape, utilising high quality and well maintained hard and soft landscaped areas, and public art, that provide suitable functions and interest, sense of place and safe and convenient linkages to adjoining areas;
c) Development should consider and, where possible, include ways of providing green infrastructure designed into the development, for instance through roof gardens, green walls and green roofs, to enhance the otherwise very urban environment;
d) The architectural details and materials used in the central area should be high quality and respect the form and quality of the detailing and materials in areas local to the development site;
e) Development and any associated public realm should contribute to the diversity of the central area, be capable of easy adaptation over time to meet changing circumstances, and be designed to enhance community safety;
f) Development should be designed with consideration of adjacent development sites, and should not prevent or cause unreasonable burdens on the future development of those sites" (p.129).

3.7 Policy CR3 (Public Realm in Central Reading) states:

> *"Proposals for new development will need to make a positive contribution towards the quality of the public realm of the central area and will be assessed against the following criteria:*
>
> *ii) …Imaginative uses of open space and the public realm, which contribute to the offer of the centre, will be encouraged, and new open spaces should be of a size and shape to be flexible enough to accommodate such uses. The provision of water features, trees (including street trees) and other planting, as well as hard landscaping, to create high-quality spaces, will be encouraged;..."* (p.54).

3.8 Policy CR10 (Tall Buildings) states:

> *"In Reading, tall buildings are defined as 10 storeys of commercial floorspace or 12 storeys of residential (equating to 36 metres tall) or above. Tall buildings will meet all the requirements below;*
>
> *i) Within Reading Borough, tall buildings will only be appropriate within the 'areas of potential for tall buildings' as defined on the Proposals Map. These areas are as follows:*
>
> - *CR10a Station Area Cluster*
> - *CR10b Western Grouping*
> - *CR10c Eastern Grouping"* (p.49).

3.9 The Appeal Site falls within CR10a Station Area Cluster, which states:

> *"A new cluster of tall buildings with the station at its heart will signify the status of the station area as a major mixed-use destination and the main gateway to and most accessible part of Reading.*
>
> *Tall buildings in this area should:*
> - *Follow a pattern of the tallest buildings at the centre of the cluster, close to the station, and step down in height from that point towards the lower buildings at the fringes;*
> - *Contribute to the creation of a coherent, attractive and sustainable cluster of buildings with a high quality of public realm;*
> - *Ensure that adequate space is provided between the buildings to avoid the creation of an overly dense townscape and to allow buildings to be viewed as individual forms …"* (p.140).

3.10 Policy CR10 also lists several requirements for tall building proposals which should be of excellent design and architectural quality, which apply in addition to the area specific requirements and which should:

- *"Enhance Reading's skyline, through a distinctive profile and careful design of the upper and middle sections of the building;*
- *Contribute to a human scale street environment, through paying careful attention to the lower section or base of the building, providing rich architectural detailing and reflecting their surroundings through the definition of any upper storey setback and reinforcing the articulation of the streetscape;*
- *Contribute to high-quality views from distance, views from middle-distance and local views;*
- *Take account of the context within which they sit, including the existing urban grain, streetscape and built form and local architectural style;*
- *Avoid bulky, over-dominant massing;*
- *Conserve and, where possible, enhance the setting of conservation areas and listed buildings;*
- *Use high quality materials and finishes;*
- *Create safe, pleasant and attractive spaces around them, and avoid detrimental impacts on the existing public realm ...;*
- *Ensure adequate levels of daylighting and sunlight are able to reach buildings and spaces within the development;*
- *Avoid significant negative impacts on existing residential properties and the public realm in terms of outlook, privacy, daylight, sunlight, noise, light glare and night-time lighting"* (p.141).

3.11 Policy CR11 (Station/River Major Opportunity Area (MOA)) states the following of particular relevance to townscape and visual matters:

"Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area will:

i) Contribute towards providing a high-density mix of uses to create a destination in itself and capitalise on its role as one of the most accessible locations in the south east. Development for education will be an acceptable part of the mix;

ii) Help facilitate greater pedestrian and cycle permeability, particularly on the key movement corridors. North-south links through the area centred on the new station, including across the IDR, are of particular importance;

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

…

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

> *vi) Give careful consideration to the areas of transition to low and medium density residential and conserve and, where possible, enhance listed buildings, conservation areas and historic gardens and their settings;*
> *...*
> *viii) Demonstrate that it is part of a comprehensive approach to its sub-area, which does not prevent neighbouring sites from fulfilling the aspirations of this policy, and which contributes towards the provision of policy requirements that benefit the whole area, such as open space; …*

3.12 Furthermore, at CR11e, North of the Station, Policy CR11 goes on to state:

> *"There will be retail and leisure development on the ground floor activating the streets and spaces including the new northern station square, with other uses including residential and offices on upper floors. Retail will have good pedestrian links to, and will not have a detrimental impact on, the rest of the retail core of the centre. Public car parking will be provided. A high quality route incorporating a green link should be provided through to the Thames." …*

Evidence Base Documents

Reading Borough Council Reading Station Area Framework (RSAF 2010) (CD 7.1)

3.13 The Reading Station Area Framework (RSAF) has the status of Supplementary Planning Document, and is designed to supplement Policy RC1: Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area within the Reading Central Area Action Plan which is now superseded by the Reading Local Plan 2019. Paragraph 1.5 of the RSAF (page 9) states that:

> *"The purpose of the framework is to outline broad development principles in a supplementary planning document to guide the planned redevelopment of the area, individual sites, the public realm, and new transport infrastructure"*

3.14 The RSAF sets out six principles on pages 16-17, for guiding development within the Station Area, which should achieve '*A vital and enjoyable place, a place to work, a place to live, a well connected and accessible place, a place to value and a highly sustainable place'.* The Appeal Site falls within the Station Area Boundary as defined on Figure 2.1 (p.12) of the RSAF. The RSAF is now 12 years old and the context of the centre of Reading has evolved since its adoption, although a number of key design principles and aspirations have been carried forward into policies set out in the Local Plan.

3.15 The delivery of quality public realm within the Station Area is a key consideration of the RSAF, which sets out the following detailed aims for achieving quality public spaces at paragraph 5.4, albeit it is recognised that these aims may be difficult to achieve as a whole:

- *"'Stitching' together the various development sites within the Area, both visually and physically;*
- *Unifying the area through a coordinated design approach that utilises the best contemporary modern materials and street furniture;*
- *Creating an environment that is busy, overlooked and safe through its relationship with adjoining buildings ('passive surveillance');*
- *Contributing to the character and identity of the town centre, helping to instil a strong sense of place and underpinning investment;*
- *Creating more opportunities for sustainable forms of transport, particularly walking and cycling, by enhancing the connectivity and legibility of the area"* (p.24).

3.16 Ten public realm priorities are listed within the RSAF (page 25), eight are specific location references and two general themes, of which the Appeal Site forms a nodal point for Priority 2: Station Square North, Priority 3: Kennet-Thames Spine, Priority 5: Vastern Road, Pedestrian Grid and Landscaping and Public Art.

3.17 Priority 2: Station Square North states:

> *"The two station entrances will lead out into high quality multi functional public spaces - new 'town squares' - one to the north and one to the south of the Station. Although there will be great competition for space outside the station entrances (buses, taxis, cars etc.), public space and pedestrian movement should be prioritised"* (p.25).

3.18 Priority 3: Kennet-Thames Spine states:

> *"… The spine will extend across the Thames with a new footbridge(s) and new riverside parks, which can act as amenity space for new residents. The spine will include enhancements including wider pavements and greater pedestrian priority in Station Road. North of the railway, the spine will incorporate a 'green link' towards the river. Buildings will face onto the spine rather than away from it, and, on all parts of the spine south of Vastern Road, the frontages will be enlivened with active uses including retail and leisure"* (p.26).

3.19 Priority 5: Vastern Road states:

> *"Potential changes to Vastern Road could reduce the dominance of speeding traffic and transform the character of the road from a by-pass at the edge of the town centre into a tree lined avenue as a central element of the town centre public realm, by planting in the central reservation and creating planted verges" (p.27).*

3.20 Landscaping is listed as a priority theme for the Station Area public realm stating:

> *"Although the development of the Station Area is unlikely to result in major new areas of green space, there will be a significant opportunity to provide new landscaping ... In particular, the Council wishes to see new tree planting in the area. The Council's Tree Strategy (adopted 2010) states that the Council will seek to prioritise the protection, maintenance and planting of trees that enhance the appearance of central Reading, particularly its various public realm. There should be new tree planting along Vastern Road, for instance, including the central reservation" (p.29).*

3.21 The RSAF sets out guidance on development density, mass and height with the Site covered by individual development plots **N3 to N6**. In relation to density the document states that plot N3 should reflect a *"Medium"* density range, N4 and N5 should reflect a *"Medium to High"* density range and N6 should reflect a *"High to Very High"* density range (Figure 6.7, p.35).

3.22 In relation to area massing principles, the RSAF states at paragraph 6.11:

> *"Development in the Station Area should be characterised by high density development with an intense, fine grained urban fabric framing flexible development plots capable of adaptation to many land uses, combinations of land uses (vertical and horizontal) and many building types and forms" (p.34)*

3.23 At paragraph 6.12, the RSAF states:

> *"Tall buildings should rise up around the Station 'nexus'."*

3.24 At paragraph 6.13, the RSAF states:

> *"The approach to building massing should be dramatic with a new cluster of taller buildings forming a new and distinctive skyline for the Station Area as a centrepiece of the centre."*

3.25 At paragraph 6.14, the RSAF states:

> *"The 'dome' of development is identified with the 'crown', the area of greatest permissible height, immediately adjoining and to the south of the Station entrance."*

3.26 At paragraph 6.15, the RSAF states:

> *"The area close to the southern Station entrance has been selected as a suitable place for the tallest buildings and for a cluster of tall buildings for the following reasons:*
>
> - *The Station entrance is a major transport node at the heart of the northward extension of the town centre.*

- *A cluster will mark the Station as an important place and landmark in itself.*
- *The area marks a bluff or low hill with the ground rising from the Thames flood plain to the east, north and west. Building heights can mirror this topography. Conversely, lower buildings are to be encouraged on the lower ground.*
- *The combination of proximity to the Station and the existing core of the town, the availability of suitable sites and current development interest.*
- *The area is suitable for the formation of a cluster of tall buildings which will form a dramatic skyline in views from higher ground and open space to the north and also in views from the south east and south west.*
- *There are appropriately sized sites available for development in the short and medium term so that the setting of tall buildings can be controlled and adapted in ways which may not be possible with small or confined sites.*
- *The Council has resolved to grant the Station Hill redevelopment scheme (SH2). The redevelopment of the area will change the character of the central area by introducing a tall building cluster.*
- *The relative lack of areas sensitive to tall buildings compared to other potential locations.*

RCAAP policy RC13 requires that the tallest buildings will be located in the centre of the cluster, and gradually step down in height to the outer areas."

3.27 In terms of building heights, the RSAF uses landmark and benchmark heights, which are then applied to each individual development plot. Plot N3 is assigned a benchmark height of 6 storeys, Plot N4 7 storeys, Plot N5 8 storeys and Plot N6 a benchmark of at least 10 storeys (Figure 6.9 Scale /height guidelines, p.37).

3.28 Figure 6.5 Massing Strategy on page 34 of the RSAF indicates how a cluster of tall buildings around Local Landmark buildings should emerge to the north of the station with a cluster of tall buildings around District Landmark buildings, defining the crown of built form south of the station.

3.29 The guidance does include for a degree of flexibility in benchmark heights, subject to specific criteria, as stated in paragraph 6.23:

> *"Benchmark heights may be modified upwards in order to realise certain urban design or other major planning benefits, or where applicants have demonstrated convincingly that the potential impact of higher buildings on the surroundings can be mitigated" (p.36).*

3.30 Paragraph 6.24 states:

> *"Benchmark heights are not guarantees and may be modified downwards where it becomes clear that proposed*

> *buildings will harm residential amenity or affect the setting of listed buildings, important views or open spaces."*

3.31 Paragraph 6.26 states:

> *"Landmark buildings may exceptionally 'puncture' the benchmark heights and the general 'dome' massing pattern in order to create emphasis and to mark important places. It is not envisaged that every potential landmark location in figure 6.9 will necessarily provide a landmark building."*

3.32 Paragraphs 6.28 and 6.29 make specific recommendations concerning building heights that relate to the Appeal Site and its immediate context:

> *"Whilst encouraging high density generally, the Framework does not necessarily advocate the provision of tall building across the area. Much of the surrounding area consists of fairly low density, low rise residential areas. High-density development can also be achieved through lower-rise compact development forms and this will be particularly appropriate immediately adjoining low rise residential areas to the west of Caversham Road and the residential streets leading from Vastern Road northwards towards the Thames (e.g. Lynmouth Road);*
>
> *A transition zone (buffer zone) should be formed towards adjacent areas (particularly the historic core of the town and low-rise residential areas to the west and north) with heights stepping down so that they relate appropriately to surrounding development and residential areas. Development should respect the amenity, privacy and light requirements of these properties ..." (p.37).*

3.33 Figure 6.10 (p.38) considers sensitive receptors within the Station Area and identifies properties along Lynmouth Road and De Montfort Road, which lie to the north of the Appeal Site and separated by Vastern Road, as within an area of ***"particular sensitivity to the effects of tall buildings".***

4.0 APPEAL SITE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

Townscape Appraisal

4.1 The Appeal Site is approximately 1.9 hectares (ha) in size and is currently occupied by the Reading Station Shopping Centre which comprises a series of retail units set within extensive areas of surrounding surface car parking and associated infrastructure such as fencing, signage and lighting columns as shown on Figure MDC-5: Site Appraisal Plan.

4.2 The existing built forms on the Appeal Site comprise a series of substantial retail sheds, constructed predominantly in red brick with corrugated metal cladding. The rear and side facades of the retail units generally lack articulation or fenestration, resulting in a blank inactive façade. The front facing aspects of the buildings in contrast feature doors, windows, canopies, recesses and signage, resulting in a more active and articulated façade to serve as a frontage to the car parking around which the land use is structured. Overall the existing built forms are large-scale blocks of utilitarian massing and appearance which, along with the extensive surface car parking, diminish townscape character and the visual amenity experience.

4.3 The Appeal Site is largely devoid of vegetation, although the following on and off-site trees are noted in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment Report prepared by Tim Moya Associates submitted with the application (January 2020 (ref 190314-PD-11a)):

- Four small apple trees within the car parking area adjacent to the restaurant within the western part of the Appeal Site (T2-T5);
- A single Norway maple tree located within the Appeal Site to the south, adjacent to the western end of the retail units (T1); and
- A line of mature street trees along the northern and western Appeal Site boundaries (i.e. the Vastern Road frontage and the Caversham Road frontage) including Rowan (T6 and T13), Norway maple (T7 – T11 and T18) and Common alder (T14) London plane (T16 and T17).

4.4 The public realm treatments within the Appeal Site and along its periphery are heavily influenced by the large swathe of tarmac and car parking which is interspersed with a variety of different street furniture including lighting columns, bollards, fencing and surface treatments. The boundary features on the Appeal Site include low brick walls topped by a stainless steel guard rail, a concrete haunch lined by stainless steel guard rail, a timber picket fence, a timber knee rail over purple slate chippings, and large yellow steel gates. These public realm features combine with bollards and trolley storage areas to create a cluttered townscape experience that is further reinforced by the variety of signage ranging from small post mounted signs to large totem signs. The public realm is only softened to a very small

extent by small pockets of shrub vegetation located within the planting beds of trees, predominantly along Vastern Road. The sense of clutter created by the public realm is reinforced by the large set back of the built form from Vastern Road, creating a low enclosure ratio along the wide boulevard.

Visual Appraisal

4.5 A visual appraisal was undertaken to determine the relationship of the Appeal Site with its surroundings and its approximate extent of visibility within the wider landscape from publicly accessible locations. The Visual Appraisal is supported by Appeal Site Context Photographs 1–26. All views for assessment within the TVIA ES Chapter were agreed with RBC via email correspondence on 17th October and 28th November 2019 **(Appendix MDC-4)**.

4.6 The potential visibility of the Appeal Site is largely determined by the relationship of the area with its surroundings, the visibility of the Appeal Site within the wider townscape and provides a basis for consideration of the effects that the Appeal Scheme will have on views and the townscape and visual characteristics of the area.

4.7 In order to represent the nature of identified views, Appeal Site Context Photographs 1–23 were selected from those photographs taken during the visual appraisal fieldwork from near (0- approximately 250 m), middle (approximately 250-750 m) and long (approximately 751 m+) distances. A further three viewpoints (Appeal Site Context Photographs 24, 25 and 26) were requested by Brian Conlon (Principal Planner) at RBC via email on 17 October, all of which were near-distance views from the south and south-east.

4.8 The locations from which these photographs were taken are illustrated on **Figure MDC-5**, and included within my Illustrative Material Document B. The extent and nature of views obtained towards the Appeal Site are considered below, with reference to these representative views.

4.9 The Visual Appraisal demonstrates that the Appeal Site and the existing built form is only readily visible from a limited number of locations in the surrounding townscape, owing to containment provided by intervening built form, landform and/or vegetation. The low rise built form on the Appeal Site that is set within large areas of surface level car parking and circulation does not feature in views beyond those along Vastern Road or streets off Vastern Road. The horizontal and indistinct nature of the buildings on the Appeal Site are therefore seen as a single mass in views where they appear below the townscape skyline in the centre of Reading.

Near-Distance Views

4.10 Views of the Appeal Site are obtained from the adjoining roads to the north-west, north and north-east. This includes from Caversham Road to the north-west (Appeal Site Context

Photograph 4); and Vastern Road to the north (Appeal Site Context Photograph 1) and north-east (Appeal Site Context Photograph 2). Where visible, the Appeal Site appears as a set of utilitarian-built forms set within surface car parking, vehicles and roadway infrastructural clutter, providing limited visual amenity.

4.11 Glimpsed/channelled views are also available where roads are aligned towards the Appeal Site, such as along De Montfort Road (Appeal Site Context Photograph 5) and Lynmouth Road to the north (from both of which the detracting features set out above are evident in the view); and along Northfield Road to the west (Appeal Site Context Photograph 7).

4.12 From other locations in close proximity, near-distance views towards the Appeal Site are partially restricted by intervening built forms, although views towards the Appeal Site are available above and beyond these, including views from Reading Bridge to the east (Appeal Site Context Photograph 8); from Caversham Road to the south-west (Appeal Site Context Photograph 6); from the southern forecourt of Reading Station to the south (Appeal Site Context Photograph 25); along Greyfriars road to the south-west (Appeal Site Context Photograph 24); and along Blagrave Street to the south-east (Appeal Site Context Photograph 26).

4.13 Although from these locations the Appeal Site itself is not visible due to existing built form on intervening land, views towards it are available, albeit in the context of existing large scale built forms in the central Reading area. Many of these built forms are visible against the skyline, notably the 12-storey Reading Bridge House, the 5-storey multi-storey car park on Vastern Road, No.3 Forbury Road, Apex Plaza and Thames Tower.

Middle-Distance Views

4.14 Glimpsed middle-distance views from the south are obtained from limited locations in the central area of Reading. These views are invariably dominated by substantial built form which channel views along busy urban roads, subject to the strong influence of associated traffic and infrastructure, as demonstrated by Appeal Site Context Photograph 10, which is focussed north along Station Road towards the Grade II listed Reading Railway Station Building. Similarly, glimpsed views are also obtained from Forbury Gardens to the south-east (Appeal Site Context Photograph 13), albeit the foreground is defined by public open space with numerous mature canopy trees, which filter views.

4.15 In contrast, middle-distance views from the west are predominantly along streets lined with residential properties of a domestic scale or low-rise commercial/industrial properties, and therefore have either a suburban and/or edge of town centre visual character, albeit large-scale built forms in central Reading are visible in the background, as demonstrated by Appeal Site Context Photograph 12.

4.16 Middle-distance views obtained from the north-west, north, north-east and east are generally from green open spaces along the River Thames, as demonstrated by Appeal Site Context Photographs 9,11,14 and 15. Whilst these views are defined by the open river corridor and/or green open spaces containing large amounts of mature vegetation, the large-scale built forms of central Reading are visible and dominate the background of views, including Thames Quarter, 'Thames Tower', 'The Blade' and 'Reading Bridge House'.

Long-Distance Views

4.17 Long-distance views are obtained from elevated areas to the north and north-east, as demonstrated by Appeal Site Context Photograph 16, 18 and 19. Similarly, long-distance glimpsed views are available from certain locations to the south, such as where street orientation allows channelled views north towards the Appeal Site, for example Appeal Site Context Photograph 17, which demonstrates the views obtained along Mount Pleasant; and Appeal Site Context Photograph 21, which demonstrates the views obtained along the A33. From these location points, views towards the Appeal Site are seen in the context of larger scale built forms in central Reading visible on the skyline, notably The Blade, Thames Tower and Reading Bridge House as well as clusters of tall buildings including the eastern cluster and Thames Quarter.

4.18 Views towards the central area of Reading are also available from elevated locations further afield, such as the Warren Footpath in the vicinity of Chazey Wood within the Chilterns AONB to the north-west (Appeal Site Context Photograph 20); Dunsden Way to the north-east (Appeal Site Context Photograph 23); and from London Road, Shepherds Hill to the east (Appeal Site Context Photograph 22). In these views the Appeal Site is not discernible and the indistinct built form on it is not visible, owing to intervening topography, built form and vegetation, although several existing tall buildings within central Reading are visible on the skyline such as The Blade and Thames Tower.

4.19 It is anticipated, through the aspirations of the RSAF and Local Plan, as well as emerging development such as that at station Hill and recent approvals such as the Former SSE Site on Vastern Road, that the central area of Reading will change significantly from the current baseline in order to realise the ambitions envisaged within the policy and guidance.

5.0 DEVELOPMENT DESIGN PROPOSALS

Development Proposals

5.1 The Parameter Plans for the Appeal Scheme include the following:

- Plan PP-100_P1 Development Footprint
- Plan PP-101_P1 Access & Movement Corridor
- Plan PP-102_P2 Building Plots
- Plan PP-103_P3 Building Heights
- Plan PP-104_P2 Basement Footprint

5.2 The Appeal Scheme will comprise four development plots (A-D) running west to east across the Appeal Site, separated by three north-south routes, integrating the Appeal Site with the surrounding area. The Appeal Scheme will comprise a mix of commercial and residential floorspace, with activating uses at ground floor level. The Appeal Scheme will have a maximum height of 112.9 AOD (Plot D only) equating to 23 storeys. Access to the Appeal Scheme will be provided via Caversham Road and egress onto Vastern Road, as is presently the case.

5.3 New public realm spaces will be created within the scheme, including a pedestrian/cycle link through the Site between Plots C and D, linking the train station and underpass with Vastern Road and beyond to the River Thames. The application was accompanied by an illustrative masterplan which showed how a detailed scheme for this beneficial public realm feature could come forward, in accordance with the Appeal Scheme Parameters.

5.4 The Design Code builds upon the principles of the parameters to refine aspects of any development on the Appeal Site that the Appellant is prepared to commit to at this stage subject to suitably worded conditions. The illustrative scheme design has evolved following a collaborative process between design, townscape and heritage consultants to inform the illustrative scheme solution. The illustrative scheme presented within the Design and Access Statement, along with the Design Code show how compliance can be achieved to deliver a high quality scheme that is beneficial to townscape character and visual amenity.

6.0 LIKELY TOWNSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

6.1 This section summarises the likely effects of the Appeal Scheme on the Appeal Site in respect of townscape and visual matters. The detailed commentary on these townscape and visual effects is set out in the TVIA that accompanied the planning application and also included within my **Appendix MDC 5a:** Townscape Effect Tables**, Appendix 5b:** Visual Effect Tables and **Appendix MDC 5c:** Cumulative Effect Tables**.**

Townscape Effects

6.2 The design of the block locations within the Appeal Scheme will facilitate the increased integration of the northern entrance of Reading Railway Station into the surrounding urban grain where it will benefit from the improved legibility and wayfinding that the Appeal Scheme would provide. The enhanced public realm between the northern side of the station and Vastern Road, contributes to the opportunity for the improved legibility of a connection between the expanding town centre and the River Thames corridor.

6.3 This more legible and inviting townscape layout and connectivity of key townscape elements within Reading, will represent a noticeable improvement to the existing urban grain. This will form part of the expansion of the Reading town centre across the Appeal Site which currently detracts from the townscape.

6.4 The Design Code (CD 1.47) ensures that the Appeal Scheme will provide built form reflecting locally-distinctive characteristics such as the materiality of buildings along Station Road and pitched roofs on the lower elements of the Appeal Scheme, as well as variety in massing and heights, urban public realm and wayfinding to the north of the railway line, reflecting the aspirations of increased development height and density anticipated within the RSAF and Local Plan.

6.5 The Appeal Scheme will contribute to the identity of the centre of Reading by consolidating development in the vicinity of the Reading Railway Station while respecting the existing character of the domestic scale development north of the Appeal Site within CA12: Caversham Road, providing a transition in scale and townscape character to the expanding urban centre. The Appeal Scheme building heights will step up from the existing residential edge to the north of Vastern Road, progressively increasing in height south and eastwards towards the station, providing a strong transition between the largely two storey development within CA 12, and the recognisable centre of Reading.

6.6 This progression of increasing scale of development will improve wayfinding and legibility by signifying the station at the centre of Reading. This would help to create a strong sense of

place for not only the Vastern Road CA, but contribute to the definition of the town centre as a whole amid the wider conurbation of Reading. Furthermore, the use of varied materiality on both the horizontal and vertical axis would break up the perceived massing, contribute to a perception of progression in scale, increase visual interest and contribute to defining the strong sense of local identity.

6.7 The Appeal Scheme, including illustrative landscaping scheme and associated public realm improvements will create a much more positive frontage along Vastern Road as well as forming a landmark in views that are channelled south-east along Caversham Road towards the roundabout.

Appeal Site Character

6.8 The overall form, layout, mass and scale of the introduced built form will provide Appeal Site wide improvements to the quality of built form and townscape character. Whilst the Appeal Scheme will increase the mass of building on the Appeal Site, this will replace the existing vehicle-dominated utilitarian land use with a coherent, people-focused, residential townscape. The Appeal Scheme will create a positive built frontage to Vastern Road and the roundabout as well as forming a transition in townscape character and scale from the buildings north of the Appeal Site, to the town centre beyond the railway line to the south of the Appeal Site ('the crown' as shown on RSAF Figure 6.5). The Appeal Scheme will also provide improvements to the legibility of the public realm that will relate well to the key townscape features of the northern station entrance, creating a coherent townscape element that positively contributes to the local area. The block arrangement of the Appeal Scheme will allow a much clearer legibility of public realm with respect to the northern entrance to the station where improved sightlines will strengthen the relationship between the Appeal Site and key townscape elements such as Reading Station. The increased building mass along with improvements to legibility and built form through creation of a landmark building by virtue of its scale will constitute a Large magnitude of impact to the Low sensitivity Appeal Site. This will result in a Moderate Beneficial effect.

RTBS CA22: Vastern Road

6.9 The introduced built form of the Appeal Scheme will fundamentally alter the fabric of a large part of this CA, helping to establish a strong local identity in the townscape which the RTBS currently describes on page 37 as having *"absence of any key views or visual focal point"*. The Appeal Scheme will replace the functional and unattractive retail buildings and associated car parking areas which have a detracting influence on the wider CA. The change from the retail shed development and large areas of tarmac to a coherent development in four distinct blocks will increase the perception of an inhabited town centre townscape from an expansive,

utilitarian one in the vicinity of the northern station entrance. The overall form, layout, mass and scale of the introduced built form will provide improvements to the quality of built form in the CA which is noted in RTBS on page 44 under 'Townscape condition' to be *"an unexceptional area of townscape which does not respond to the surrounding residential land use. Although the buildings are occupied and function well for their purpose, their design is unattractive and creates a weak and uninspiring area of townscape"*. In addition, under 'Landmark Structures and Existing Tall Buildings', it is identified that *"The large warehouse structures create a consistent and unexceptional townscape"*.

6.10 Whilst the Appeal Scheme will increase the mass of building in the CA, it will introduce improved architectural form, creating landmark buildings by virtue of their height and scale, both as a focal point on the Caversham Road approach to the roundabout and at the railway station to the south-east where they will provide positive identifying features for the station area through the massing and height being focused closest to the station entrance and railway line. The considered cluster of built form will rise in height towards the northern entrance of Reading Station with the rhythm of architecture creating a coherent character across the Appeal Site where, as specified in the Design Code, pitched roofs are delivered on the lower elements adjacent to Vastern Road, responding to the character of existing housing north of Vastern Road.

6.11 Height would step down through the Appeal Scheme to smaller built forms forming part of the transition (along with the major road corridors) to the adjacent existing residential properties north and north-west of the Appeal Site. This variety of building heights will be sympathetic to the more domestic scale of the 2 storey residential properties north of Vastern Road as they step down in height away from the railway line. The considered progression of height across the Appeal Scheme will enhance the sense of legibility in the vicinity of the station, reinforcing the connection between the River Thames corridor and the centre of Reading.

6.12 The legibility of the connection between the Thames corridor and the centre of Reading will be further strengthened by the considered block arrangement of the Appeal Scheme which will allow a connection from the subway that passes under the railway station through the Appeal Site as far as Vastern Road, to link with the connection envisaged in RBC planning documents between the Thames Path and Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road. The accessibility and legibility of the northern entrance to the station will be much clearer with improved sightlines leading towards the station from Vastern Road.

6.13 The Appeal Scheme will create a strong building frontage with clear interactions and legibility between the built form and public realm along Vastern Road and Caversham Road through the increase in legible built form that will contribute positively to the sense of place. At ground

level, the benefits that the block structure would bring to wayfinding and legibility will be enhanced through a reduction in vehicle dominance that will result from the ground floor frontages, to create a more inviting and activated space with greater visual amenity value. The Appeal Scheme will also provide improvements to the public realm that will relate well to the buildings through the delivery of a 23m wide corridor between Plot C and Plot D that contains human scale elements such as vegetation and street furniture, creating a coherent townscape of both built form and the public realm spaces between them, that contribute positively to the local area and reinforces sense of place and local identity.

6.14 For these reasons, the Appeal Scheme would constitute a Large magnitude of impact to the low sensitivity CA, resulting in a Moderate Beneficial effect.

Visual Effects

6.15 The Appeal Scheme will alter both the visibility of the Appeal Site and visual amenity in the vicinity. As committed to in the Design Code, the improvements to the quality of built form and public realm on the Appeal Site, combined with improved legibility and wayfinding brought about by the contribution of the Appeal Scheme to the cluster of tall buildings that identify the location of the station will enhance the experience that visual receptors receive in the vicinity of the Appeal Scheme, as well as in views from further afield.

Near-distance views

6.16 The Appeal Scheme will be seen at close range, where the development blocks will occupy large amounts of views south towards the northern station entrance. The new built form and visual interest of the Appeal Scheme will create a new positive development frontage along the Vastern Road edge of the Appeal Site. The buildings will form a progression in scale of built form away from the smaller scale of development to the north-west and north-east, to the higher parts of the Appeal Scheme located intentionally in the vicinity of Reading Station and the railway line. Clear views of the Appeal Scheme will be available from the immediate vicinity of the Appeal Site, such as the adjoining roads of Caversham Road to the north-west (Appeal Site Context Photograph 4); and Vastern Road to the north (Appeal Site Context Photograph 1) and north-east (Appeal Site Context Photograph 2) all of which will include enhancement in views of ground level public realm. Views towards the Appeal Scheme from De Montfort Road (Appeal Site Context Photograph 5) and Lynmouth Road to the north; and from Northfield Road to the west (Appeal Site Context Photograph 7), will feature the built form in the Appeal Scheme as focal features in the tightly framed views along the street corridors.

6.17 In other near-distance views towards the Appeal Scheme, views will be partially screened by intervening built forms. Views along Greyfriars road to the south-west (Appeal Site Context Photograph 24), and along Blagrave Street to the south-east (Appeal Site Context Photograph

26) will channel views towards the top of the Appeal Scheme, while the lower parts of the development including the improvements to the public realm will be largely screened from view. The most elevated parts of the Appeal Scheme will be partially visible from these viewpoints, as well as in those views from Reading Bridge to the east (Appeal Site Context Photograph 8), from Caversham Road to the south-west (Appeal Site Context Photograph 6) and from the southern forecourt of Reading Station to the south (Appeal Site Context Photograph 25).

6.18 Where the Appeal Scheme is visible, it will be seen in the context of existing built forms in the central Reading area that are already seen against the skyline, as well as other schemes in the vicinity forming part of the MOA. The Appeal Scheme will contribute positively to this skyline through the creation of increased vertical elements that compliment taller built form in the planned-for cluster around Reading Station, reinforcing the sense of identity of this part of the centre of Reading. The cluster of built form on the Appeal Site will create an appropriate rhythm of development that progresses in height and scale away from the more domesticated built form on Vastern Road, as set out within the Design Code such that the legibility of Reading Station at the heart of the centre of Reading is reinforced, as perceived in these views and in accordance with policy intent.

Middle-distance views

6.19 The lower parts of the Appeal Scheme including the legibility of the public realm improvements, will be screened from view by existing development. Where visible, the taller parts of the Appeal Scheme will be seen in views that are channelled along busy urban roads, where traffic and infrastructure occupy large proportions of the view available (as seen for example in Appeal Site Context Photograph 10). The existing large scale built forms that provide an element of visual screening to the Appeal Scheme, create an existing urban character to views within which the new built form will be seen as part of a coherent cluster signposting the station.

6.20 In the main though, the Appeal Scheme will be largely screened from view by existing large scale built forms such as Apex Plaza and Forbury Place (Appeal Site Context Photograph 13) for visual receptors to the south-east. Views of the Appeal Scheme from the west will be largely obtained along residential streets, or those with a more domestic scale of built form, where the Appeal Scheme will appear above the foreground elements (Appeal Site Context Photograph 12). In views from the north-west, north, north-east and east; the taller parts of the Appeal Scheme will appear within the context of views from green open spaces along the River Thames, such as in Appeal Site Context Photograph 9, 11, 14 and 15.

Long-distance views

6.21 The higher parts of the Appeal Scheme will be visible from elevated ground (Appeal Site Context Photographs 16, 18, 19, 20, 22 and 23), or where street orientation channels glimpsed views towards the site (Appeal Site Context Photographs 17 and 21). From these locations the Appeal Scheme will be seen in the context of larger scale built forms in central Reading that are already visible on the skyline, notably The Blade, Thames Tower and Reading Bridge House as well as recent and emerging development such as the former BMW site and Station Hill, providing a juxtaposition between the existing residential scale of development along Vastern Road and the aspirations of Local Landmark buildings adjacent to the station.

6.22 In summary, views of the Appeal Scheme will give rise to larger changes where they are anticipated to occupy a larger proportion of views available, such as close range views which is inevitable in any event. However, few significant adverse visual effects will arise as a result of the Appeal Scheme where it will appear within the context of views that are already characterised by the existing built-up area of central Reading and in a location planned for a prominent cluster of taller buildings, where the council want a marked distinction between the town centre and lower rise residential areas. The cluster of buildings on the Appeal Site to the north of Reading Station will, through application of the Design Code, create a coherent townscape element that contributes positively to legibility of the movement hub in this part of Reading town centre, where the council anticipate a marked distinction. The consistent high quality detailing of built forms, as set out within the Design Code, will enable the individual plots within the Appeal Site to be delivered separately, whilst tying the buildings together to create a visually cohesive collection of buildings. However, the considered offsets between the parcels at ground level (minimum A-B 20m, B-C 20m & C-D 23m) will allow visual permeability between built form on the different parcels, allowing them to be viewed as distinctly separate buildings, thereby articulating the mass, scale and height of the cluster as a whole, as perceived in views from the surrounding area, where differences in height and designs of existing and emerging development will be apparent even in longer distance views.

7.0 KEY TOWNSCAPE AND VISUAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 While the application is in Outline, the illustrative scheme set out within the Design and Access Statement demonstrates that the Appeal Scheme proposals will result in a scheme sensitively designed in relation to townscape and visual considerations, maximising opportunities for townscape enhancement where commitments within the Design Code provide certainty on materials and appearance that will be delivered on the Appeal Site, albeit that these may not be exactly as the illustrative scheme depicts. The Appeal Scheme proposals are set out in Development Parameters, which provide scope for suitable compliance at the reserved matters stage, allowing the Council to exert control over the detail of the Appeal Scheme at Reserved Matters. The Design Code builds upon the principles of the parameters to refine aspects of any development on the Appeal Site that the Appellant is prepared to commit to at this stage. The Design and Access Statement and Design Code show how compliance can be achieved to deliver a high quality scheme that is beneficial to townscape character and visual amenity.

7.2 The commentary below responds to the case set out by the Council in their report to the Planning Applications Committee of 15th February 2022 (CD3), which included reference to 12 intended Reasons for Refusal that would have been used in the event that the Council had been in a position to determine the application. Those of relevance to townscape and visual considerations are covered below under the relevant headings.

- 1. Scale, height and massing;
- 2. Tall buildings;
- 3. Views and townscape;
- 4. North-South Link;
- 6. Public realm;
- 9. Landscape, trees and green network; and
- 10. Failure to provide appropriate public open spaces.

7.3 My commentary also responds to the Council Statement of Case (SoC) and relevant appendices submitted in February 2022, notably Appendix J, that of Mr Michael Doyle, on 'Design and Townscape' matters.

7.4 The Committee Report and SoC both refer heavily to the RSAF Supplementary Planning Document. At paragraph 1.5, the RSAF states that:

> *"The purpose of the framework is to outline broad development principles in a supplementary planning document to guide the planned redevelopment of the area, individual sites, the public realm, and new transport infrastructure"*

7.5 However, the Committee Report and Mr Doyle's SoC are utilising the RSAF as a prescriptive document, the deviation from which by any development proposals is not considered acceptable. Whilst the RSAF is a Supplementary Planning Document, Mr Doyle's references to its explicit application extends beyond its use as guidance and pertains to its use to set all development parameters for the area which it covers, leaving only detailed design elements to be determined.

Scale, Height and Massing

7.6 The maximum height parameters for the Appeal Scheme that are represented within the Appeal Site AVR Wirelines as set out in my Document B are appropriate to the Appeal Site context and aspirations of relevant planning policy (as I have set out under the heading 'Policy Considerations' below). The maximum building height parameters (as displayed within the verifiable wirelines) identify how the Appeal Scheme will enable residential buildings of over ten storeys and a commercial building of over twelve storeys to come forward at reserved matters stage, in accordance with the RSAF aspiration to deliver local landmarks for plot references N4, N5 and N6 in Figure 6.9 on Page 37, by reducing the height of built forms across the Appeal Site (east to west) and locating the lowest elements of each development block along the Vastern Road frontage, to respect and relate to, the existing residential properties on the northern side of Vastern Road. Overall, the massing provides a legible progression in scale from the height desired by the Council in the vicinity of the station, reducing in height towards the adjacent townscape to the north and west, whilst maintaining legibility of key nodal points at the Caversham Road junction and on the green link between the station and River Thames.

7.7 The Appeal Site lies immediately to the north of the recently constructed northern Reading Station entrance. The Appeal Site lies within a very well-established framework of significant large-scale built development land uses, at the heart of a major urban area which has a key strategic location in the east-west movement corridor of the Thames Valley and most notably provides an important hub in the national rail network, immediately to the south of the Appeal Site. The Appeal Site lies within an area denoted as suitable for tall buildings in Figure 6.2 on Page 33 of the RSAF, forming the station cluster.

7.8 Furthermore, the RSAF Guidelines on page 33 set out in paragraph 6.6:

> *"Tall buildings and high density developments are an integral part of the vision for central Reading. The Framework therefore provides guidance on density, mass and scale of new developments."*

7.9 At paragraph 6.12 on page 34, the RSAF sets out Area Massing Principles and states:

"Tall buildings should rise up around the Station 'nexus'"

7.10 With regard to skyline, at paragraph 6.13 the RSAF states:

"The approach to building massing should be dramatic with a new cluster of taller buildings forming a new and distinctive skyline for the Station Area as a centrepiece of the centre."

7.11 The siting of the Appeal Scheme building plots A, B, C and D broadly align with the overall footprint of development set out within the RSAF and Local Plan aspiration. This is noted within the Committee Report at paragraphs 7.41, 8.21, 8.29, 8.52, 8.55, 8.65, 9.5.

7.12 Whilst the Appeal Scheme is taller than the benchmark heights set out within the RSAF for Plot references N3, N4, N5 and N6; the RSAF accepts the delivery of local landmark buildings above the benchmark heights on Plot references N4, N5 and N6 as set out in Figure 6.9. As such, the tall buildings are in accordance with the aspirations of both the RSAF and Local Plan. Furthermore, the height of the Appeal Scheme reduces towards the north and west across the Vastern Road and Caversham Road frontage respectively, such that they create a transition between the existing scale of development north and west of the Appeal Site, through the Appeal Scheme to the 'crown' of the cluster, as shown in Figure 6.5 of the RSAF. These taller buildings will be seen in conjunction with the railway station, where they mark its location.

7.13 Parameter Plan PP-103: Building Heights, sets maximum heights for each plot within the Appeal Scheme, securing this progression in scale across the Appeal Site to the tallest element in the south-east corner of the Appeal Site adjacent to the railway line.

	Plot A	**Plot B**	**Plot C**	**Plot D**
Max height on Vastern Road Frontage	71.1	64.4	79.1	87.9
Max height at southern extent of Plot	94.4	92.8	94.4	112.9

7.14 This facilitates the aspiration to define a crown of development to the north of the station by creating a cluster of tall buildings that represent a local landmark adjacent to the railway line in the south-east corner of the Appeal Site and within which, the station buildings will be set.

7.15 The Appeal Scheme presents an Outline Application for built form within the boundaries of Plots A, B, C and D. The tallest parts of the Appeal Scheme on each Plot are located furthest from Vastern Road and steps down in height towards Vastern Road. The illustrative scheme presented within the DAS details how a scheme delivered within these parameters could come forward and is supported by the Design Code, which prescribes for the reduction of height across the Appeal Site, with the lower elements of the built form exhibiting pitched roofs to

relate strongly to the existing scale and character of development north and west of the Appeal Site.

7.16 Views of the Appeal Scheme and how it will appear within the context of the existing townscape are considered within the submitted TVIA, where the scale, height and mass of the Proposed Development is considered in short, medium and long range views, as well as in the context of the aspirations set out within the RSAF to define the crown of built form in the vicinity of Reading Station, with district landmarks south of the Station such as the emerging Station Hill development, and local landmarks to the north on plot references N4, N5 and N6. Kinetic views gained within the vicinity of the station will recognise the Appeal Scheme as part of the cluster of tall buildings that signal the location of the station through the delivery of markedly taller buildings in the town centre than the wider townscape, whilst still being subservient to the taller built forms (such as the Station Hill development currently under construction) on the south side of the station.

7.17 The separation between the individual development blocks is secured through the parameters. The greater degree of detail in the submitted Design Code will further facilitate visual permeability between the blocks within the cluster through the considered offsets of each block (minimum A-B 20m, B-C 20m & C-D 23m at ground level) materiality and articulation, ensuring that they appear distinctly separate from each other.

7.18 The parameters of the Appeal Scheme have been considered as part of a full TVIA which has been conducted in accordance with relevant guidance and best practice, determining effects of the Appeal Scheme upon townscape and views against a robust and fit for purpose methodology.

7.19 At paragraph 2.14.1, Mr Doyle's SoC purports to the presentation of evidence that proves the scale, height and mass of the Appeal Scheme as inappropriate, causing unacceptable detrimental effects on townscape and public spaces. As yet, these judgements appear to be unsubstantiated as Mr Doyle has not undertaken an assessment of likely Townscape or Visual effects that may arise as a result of the Appeal Scheme. Neither has Mr Doyle substantiated the considerations presented within the SoC by reference to the methodology and findings presented within the submitted TVIA.

7.20 Mr Doyle goes as far as to note in paragraph 2.20.1 of his SoC that *"because the proposed heights exceed Local Plan and RSAF height and massing guidance. This will result in unacceptable detrimental effects on the townscape, the surrounding area and the setting of adjacent public spaces."*

7.21 First, this is illogical: there cannot be unacceptable detrimental effects on the townscape simply because height and massing guidance has been exceeded. Effects on townscape have to be

considered not in terms of whether or not they accord with documented prescriptions; but through detailing the nature of change and the sensitivity of receptors to come to a significance of effect. Mr Doyle has provided no evidence to suggest that he has undertaken such an assessment of effects, or any methodology that might enable him to do so robustly.

7.22 Second: the effects are not unacceptably detrimental as is set out in the TVIA consideration of townscape and visual effects, which I have summarised in my section 6 above. In fact, through careful consideration of the changes in view and townscape character, I conclude that the Appeal Scheme will introduce substantial but sensitively designed built form to the local area that will improve the overall appearance and functionality of the townscape and visual resource through well designed and sympathetic development that provides a progression in scale that positively contributes to the sense of place and arrangement of spaces.

7.23 The design takes account of guidance set out within Policy CR10: Tall Buildings, with the tallest part of the Appeal Scheme located on the south-east corner of the site, closest to the station, stepping down in height towards Vastern Road. The Appeal Scheme will enhance the skyline in views towards the centre of Reading and is designed to fit within the wider aspirations to improve physical and visual connections between the centre of Reading and the Thames corridor by marking the station and the pedestrian/cycle route through the Appeal Site that connects the two.

7.24 The submitted TVIA considers the magnitude of effect that the Appeal Scheme will have on views in the centre of Reading as well as from further afield, with the Appeal Scheme replacing views of car parking and the cluttered brick facades of existing retail units resulting in beneficial effects ranging between Negligible and Minor due to its positive contribution to the character of the Reading townscape and identification of the station as an important location that is identifiable in both static and kinetic views.

7.25 As such, it is considered that the Appeal Scheme complies with NPPF Section 12, National Design Guide as well as Local Plan Policies CC7, CR2 CR10, CR10a, CR11 and CR11e. I provide further detail in relation to these policies under the heading of 'Policy Considerations' below.

Tall Buildings

Siting

7.26 The Appeal Scheme will contribute to a cluster of built form around Reading Station which will signify the station area as a major destination and gateway to Reading. The Appeal Scheme will locate taller buildings closest to the station in accordance with Policy CR10 and the four plots of the Appeal Site will combine to form a coherent cluster of buildings with an improved and legible public realm. However, the considered offsets between the building plots of a

minimum 20m between A-B and between B-C, and 23m between C-D (accentuated by articulation secured via the Design Code) will result in the individual buildings being clearly distinguished as separate forms, contrary to Mr Doyle's unsubstantiated assertion in paragraph 2.20.12 of his SoC that they will appear as a 'single slab' of towers.

7.27 The separation of Plot A from existing development on the opposite side of Caversham Road and Vastern Road is greater than other parts of the Site due to the width of the highway accommodating the roundabout. The Committee Report recognises this at paragraph 8.50 where it states:

> *"It must be recognised Caversham Road is wide and forms an important part of the IDR, and provides a significant man-made barrier between the application site and these existing properties to the west. THEREFORE, the IDR creates a strong physical and visual break between the proposed height and massing of these plots and the inherent differentiation in character that the proposed development will create…"*

7.28 It also goes onto say:

> *"However, the proposed relationship is far from harmonious. The lack of transition as required by the RSAF on Plot A results in a very stark transition to the proposed development that is disproportionately out of scale with these more historic and low rise residential areas to the north and west."*

7.29 I consider that Plot A and properties on the opposite side of Vastern Road are also afforded this level of physical and visual separation due to the similar road layout and width (up to 5 active lanes in addition to slip-lanes and parking bays). The scale and character of the roadway provides a notable distinction in character between the Appeal Scheme to the south and east; and the wider townscape to the north and west. As such, the combination of a distinct separation and the deliberate siting of lower elements adjacent to Vastern Road, constitute a definite progression in scale away from the existing lower built form north of Vastern Road and the tallest elements of the Appeal Scheme forming a cluster of tall buildings marking the station 'nexus', in accordance with the RSAF.

Height

7.30 Whilst the Committee Report notes at paragraph 8.52, that Plot B equates to RSAF Plot N4 and states that no landmark buildings are proposed in the RSAF it also states that:

> *"Part of B exceeds the Reading Tall Building Strategy threshold and includes landmark buildings where none are proposed in the RSAF."*

7.31 However, I note that Figure 6.9 on page 37 of the RSAF, identifies that Local Landmark buildings are appropriate across Plot references N4, N5 and N6, which equate to Plots B, C and D.

7.32 The Committee Report identifies at paragraph 8.65, that Plot D broadly equates to Plot reference N6 from the RSAF, and states that:

> *"The density guidance is 'High to very High (Plot ratio of 500-1000% plus) with Local Landmark buildings encouraged. Plot D generally accords with RSAF guidance on density and height. However, this is conditional upon other guidance on tall building policies and guidance."*

7.33 As such, Plot D would mark the northern station entrance effectively. The Committee Report therefore contradicts itself at paragraph 8.69 in going on to state that the mass of the tall building on Plot D will be too great and that the mass and width will cause the towers to merge with adjacent buildings so that they become insufficiently distinct from one another, and crowd views with a crowded and overly bulky massing. Appeal Site wirelines 5, 9 and 11, included in my Illustrative Material Document B, demonstrate this would not be the case.

7.34 Mr Doyle, in his Statement of Case (paragraph 2.10.3) makes the unsubstantiated assertion that:

> *"The Appeal Scheme scatters tall buildings across the site rather than contributing to a distinct cluster of tall buildings in the vicinity of the Station to 'signal the status of the station area'"*

7.35 However, the progression in height across the Appeal Site from Plot A to Plot D is a considered approach to identifying the location of the northern entrance to Reading Station while creating a cluster of tall buildings that enable visual permeability between development blocks. These views through the Appeal Scheme allow the visual continuity of the townscape to be reinforced through application of the Design Code.

7.36 The individual development plots, the materiality and aspects of the Appeal Scheme secured through the Design Code such as pitched roofs on the lower elements will create a clear definition between development blocks. Furthermore, shadows and distance between the development blocks will mean that they appear as entirely separate due to the depth of field available in views that digital models do not replicate appropriately.

7.37 The overall massing pattern of the Appeal Scheme is concentrated in the south-east corner of the Appeal Site, adjacent to the railway line, where the tallest 23 storey element has been clearly designed to reinforce the legibility of the station. Plots, A, B and C, of the Appeal Scheme reflect that they are sited slightly further from the railway line by reducing in height

to the north-west, where they will appear suitably subservient to the Hermes scheme (also known as 80- Caversham Road and referred in Mr Doyle's SoC as the 'RMG' scheme) between the Appeal Site and the railway line at this point, stepping down to the Appeal Scheme which then in turn steps down towards the outer areas, in line with paragraph 6.15 of the RSAF.

7.38 The RSAF and Local Plan policies CR10, CR10a, CR11 and CR11e have identified the Appeal Site as a location for high density development that includes for a cluster of tall buildings to reinforce the locational importance of Reading Station, positively contributing to the legibility of the townscape through the creation of buildings that are considered to represent local landmarks.

Likely Massing

7.39 The Appeal Scheme is an Outline Application for development parameters, within which a scheme such as the illustrative one presented within the DAS could be delivered in accordance with the prescribed controls set out within the Design Code to safeguard the commitment of a reduction in scale of built form towards Vastern Road is achieved. The future detail on design and appearance of the Appeal Scheme will be controlled by the Council through Reserved Matters Applications. However, the illustrative scheme presented within the DAS highlights one way in which development could be delivered on the Appeal Site and the positive contribution that buildings, at this scale, will bring to the townscape as identified within the submitted TVIA which considers the likely effects of the Appeal Scheme in line with a robust and fit for purpose methodology.

7.40 Contrary to Mr Doyle's assertions in section 1.5 of his SoC, the outline application only seeks to establish key principles and is supported in the planning process by the potential for more detailed applications, within the control of RBC. Refinement of the design principles towards such applications is provided in the Design Code to which the Appellant has committed. Therefore, Mr Doyle's suggestion, that insufficient assurance of details of the scheme has been given to date, I consider to be spurious. This Appeal does not consider specific and definite details of the scheme as permission for these is not what is being applied for and neither policy, nor guidance requires detailed schemes to be put forward at outline stage.

Views and Townscape

Siting

7.41 The illustrative scheme identified within the DAS and the Design Code, that provides refinement of the Appeal Scheme Parameters, set out how the townscape characteristics of the Appeal Scheme will enable it to be successfully integrated into the existing townscape, providing enhancement to the character and legibility and wayfinding of central Reading by reinforcing

local identity and a distinct sense of place in line with the RSAF guidance which identifies tall building clusters with Local Landmark buildings north of the station.

7.42 Locating the tallest element of the Appeal Scheme closest to the railway station entrance and new connection through the Site to south of the Station will enable the creation of a Local Landmark, marking the station as a focal point within Reading and reinforcing a clear sense of place. The gradual stepping down of development height across the Appeal Site will be lowest on Plot A at the north-western end of the Appeal Site, rising up to a maximum height on Plot D of 119m AOD or 23 storeys on the south-eastern end of the Appeal Site, adjacent to the railway station and in line with Policy CR10a which stipulates that the lower buildings should be located at the fringes of the Station Area Cluster.

Maximum Heights

7.43 The building heights within the Appeal Scheme are appropriate for its location adjacent to the station where the RSAF states that *"tall buildings should rise up around the Station 'nexus'".* The creation of Local Landmark buildings on plots B, C and D is identified within Figure 6.9 of the RSAF where they will form part of the emerging townscape where tall buildings within the centre of Reading build towards a crown of development south of the station. The Appeal Scheme will contribute to a cluster of tall buildings north of the station, in accordance with the RSAF and Policy CR10a of the Local Plan, whilst remaining suitably subservient to the crown of development south of the station, contrary to what Mr Doyle asserts in his SoC.

7.44 The Appeal Scheme recognises the aspirations of the RSAF to deliver landmark buildings above the benchmark heights on Plot references N4, N5 and N6 which reduce towards the Vastern Road and Caversham Road frontages to create a transition in scale between the existing scale of development north and west of the Appeal Site, and the Appeal Scheme. As such, the tall buildings are in accordance with the aspirations of both the RSAF and Local Plan.

Likely Massing

7.45 The illustrative design for the Appeal Scheme presented within the DAS will create built forms of coherent character that nevertheless have a clear articulation that defines a top, middle and base to each element; and ensuring that ancillary elements are integrated into the frontages and roof lines. A coherent design of materials, colour, proportion, or graphic elements will create unity from the varied elements throughout the scheme that will deliver a coherent scheme that contributes to sense of place north of the station. Pitched roof lines on the lower building elements to the north, along Vastern Road, will associate built forms more closely with the pitched roofs on adjoining residential streets. The illustrative design presents one possible design approach for how development on the Appeal Site could come forward within the parameters of the Appeal Scheme.

7.46 The taller elements of the Appeal Scheme will have an elegant appearance as opposed to creating a more horizontal and indistinct built form, such that they appear as a coherent element within the Appeal Scheme while being distinctive in response to scale and height, with a greater proportion of glazing representing commercial uses.

7.47 The materials used for the facades of the Appeal Scheme will be consistent with the local character of Reading, responding to the existing built forms and be complementary to the wider and local contextual character of Reading, with the main materials palette to be agreed through condition with the key elements repeated throughout the scheme on all four plots to ensure continuity of design.

7.48 Furthermore, the massing of the Appeal Scheme at this stage is indicative in nature due to the scheme being an Outline application with the refinement of massing details within the parameters able to be controlled through input to detailed applications, in order to address any concerns surrounding the bulk of the Appeal Scheme. The parameters divide the Appeal Scheme into four individual plots with offsets at ground level and greater offsets at the top of buildings (minimum A-B 36m, B-C 50m & C-D 51.6m), in order to ensure the blocks of development appear as distinctly separate elements in views where they appear on the skyline.

Impact on Skyline

7.49 In longer distance views towards the centre of Reading, the Appeal Scheme will appear as a coherent part of the emerging townscape in the urban centre, helping to mark the location of the station, as shown in Appeal Site AVR Wirelines 16, 17, 22 and 23. In closer range views, the public realm and block layout of the Appeal Scheme will improve the visual amenity in the vicinity of the Appeal Site, as well as improve the non-vehicular access to the northern entrance of the railway station due to the defined sightlines towards the station from Vastern Road, where an improved frontage would help to reduce the perception of a townscape dominated by vehicle movement.

7.50 The Appeal Scheme meets the aspirations for the skyline of Reading that are set out within the RSAF and Local Plan policy CR10a to deliver high density development and tall buildings in the vicinity of the station. Local Plan Policy CR10a states:

> *"A new cluster of tall buildings with the station at its heart will signify the status of the station area as a major mixed-use destination and the main gateway to and most accessible part of Reading."*

7.51 While the Appeal Scheme will form part of a cluster of tall buildings in the station area, indicated within Figure 6.5 of the RSAF, and stated at paragraph 6.6:

> *"Tall buildings and high density developments are an integral part of the vision for central Reading."*

7.52 In longer views, the Appeal Scheme will be viewed against the skyline as part of a cluster of tall buildings which positively identify the location of Reading Station, identifying it as an important place and landmark, in accordance with aspirations of the RSAF. The illustrative scheme and commitments set out within the Design Code set out how development on the Appeal Site will positively contribute to the skyline in these longer views and the coherent development of the Appeal Scheme will be visually distinct from the wider tall building cluster south of Reading Station.

7.53 The emerging townscape in the vicinity of Reading Station, the clear guidance set out within both the RSAF and the Local Plan to consolidate development around Reading Station, along with the continued ambitions from RBC for Reading to achieve city status, highlight a clear aspiration for tall buildings to be located on the Appeal Site.

7.54 The Appeal Scheme considers the existing and emerging identity of the town centre location, within which the Appeal Site is located, with offsets between the development plots reflecting the aspirations of the RSAF to create a sense of identity north of the station, improving movement and kinetic views in the vicinity of the Appeal Scheme by creating physically and visually permeable development blocks. The new built form will facilitate the identification of the station as an important location in the town centre, improve the quality and legibility of built form and rationalise interrelationships between the buildings and street spaces at ground level.

7.55 The visual envelope for the Appeal Scheme is limited by the location of the Appeal Site which is situated in the centre of a large urban area already featuring a number of large and tall buildings and intended to include more, larger and taller buildings as part of well-established policy intent. Where any views of the Appeal Scheme are available, it will be seen within the context of other tall built form within this area. I consider that the Appeal Scheme will improve the overall appearance and functionality of the townscape and visual resource through well designed and sympathetic development, with high quality materials and fenestration that provides a progression in scale that positively contributes to the sense of place and arrangement of spaces, in line with paragraph 130 of the NPPF. The four blocks of development will represent a progression from the residential character of Caversham Road increasing in height, where the tallest element of the Appeal Scheme will mark the location of Reading Station, thereby providing additional legibility to this location from further afield where the accessible route between Plots C and D facilitates a direct visual connection between Station Square north and Vastern Road.

Short and Medium Distance Views

7.56 As I have set out in my consideration of Visual Effects, the Appeal Scheme will improve the visual amenity in the vicinity of the Appeal Site as well as in longer views towards the centre of Reading. Furthermore, the public realm and block layout will improve the non-vehicular access to the northern entrance of the railway station, not least as a result of the defined sightlines towards the station from Vastern Road, where an improved frontage would help to reduce the perception of a townscape dominated by vehicle movement.

7.57 With regard to views of the station clocktower as a characteristic feature in views, the Committee Report states at paragraph 8.95, that the RSAF fully recognises that the setting of the station building will be altered by the station redevelopment and goes on to state that the station concourse and new station entrance safeguards the setting of the clocktower by nature of their offset from the station building and clocktower.

7.58 In paragraph 3.5.21 of Mr Doyle's SoC, it is stated that views along Station Road and from Station Square South are considered to be of 'paramount concern' in this Appeal. However, plot references N5 and N6 within the RSAF (which broadly correspond to Plot C and Plot D of the Appeal Scheme) are identified as appropriate for Local Landmark buildings in Figure 6.9. The location of plot reference N6 directly north of the Station building and Station Square South is identified on a number of figures within the RSAF, including Figures 6.6 and 6.9.

7.59 Additionally, Figure 6.5 within the RSAF shows local landmark buildings of approximately 18 stories adjacent to the scale of the station building which will appear in the backdrop of station clocktower. This is supported by Figures 14.1, 14.2, 14.5, and 14.7 of the RSAF and Figures 16 and 17 of the Committee Report.

7.60 Furthermore, the Committee Report (including static views presented in Figures 16 and 17) and Mr Doyle's SoC fails to recognise that views of the station building are kinetic in nature so the setting and backdrop of the clocktower are altered as receptors move through the townscape and gain a series of views within the urban environment rather than a planned vista. The setting of the foreground of the station building has been dramatically altered through the implementation of poorly located public realm furniture such as bollards and other townscape features, including a large advertising screen. I therefore consider that in the context of the intense re-development of the station area, the Appeal Scheme does not harm the appearance of the station, Station Square and other surrounding buildings and structure.

7.61 The height of built form in the vicinity of the station area intended by the Council through the RSAF and Local Plan policies mean that the context of the townscape is inevitably going to change, with the entire character of views towards the station modified as these policies and development principles are realised. The Council has control of reserved matters applications

in any event, to determine how the final and detailed design of the built forms maximise the opportunities for legible, elegant, and visually interesting townscape in these views.

7.62 The Committee Report and Mr Doyle's SoC also fail to recognise that the clocktower of Reading Station is already backdropped by a tall building in views from the pedestrian bridge between Christchurch Meadows and the Thames Path, where Thames Tower is seen behind the building. Therefore, the visual experience of the station clocktower in the townscape is already one of being set amid or against substantial built form and this context is subject to further intensification of substantial built form planned by the Council, including to the north of the railway line.

7.63 The Committee Report also notes at paragraph 8.139, that google earth modelling and imagery are considered consistent with the rigorous and methodical production of Verified Views which I do not consider to be the case as it does not comply with best practice, or guidance presented within Technical Guidance Note 06/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals; is not verifiable and is not accompanied by survey data or a methodology.

7.64 The Appeal Scheme aims to realise the aspiration for the Appeal Site of the RSAF and policies within the Local Plan to deliver high density and tall buildings on the Appeal Site, creating local landmarks (Figure 6.9 of the RSAF) and reinforcing the location of Reading Station as an important place (paragraph 6.15 of the RSAF) by locating tall building around the station 'nexus' (paragraph 6.12 of the RSAF).

7.65 The profile and design of the Appeal Scheme, including refinement of the upper, middle and lower sections of the buildings (as part of managing progression in scale from the streetscene) will be controlled through the Reserved Matters Application. The illustrative scheme presented within the DAS highlights an indicative type of development that could be delivered and highlights the positive contribution that buildings on the Appeal Site, at this scale, will deliver to the townscape. Additionally, whilst the Appeal Scheme provides space to deliver a human scale street environment that provides improvements to close range views within the townscape as well as improving legibility and wayfinding by marking the location of the station, the details of the materiality and landscape design will also be controlled through Reserved Matters Applications.

7.66 At paragraph 3.12.5 of Mr Doyle's SoC, it is indicated that the Appeal Scheme AVR Wirelines may not be appropriate for the most demanding and sensitive contexts. As established within the TVIA, Reading is not subject to any national or regional landscape or townscape designations and the existing context of the Appeal Site and wider townscape is such that it is not considered a particularly sensitive or demanding context. Furthermore, the Appeal Scheme is an outline application, for which the type of visualisation produced and supported by a

verifiable methodology, complies with guidance and best practice as a Type 4 visualisation in line with Table 2 on page 11 of TGN 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals.

7.67 Paragraph 3.12.6 of Mr Doyle's SoC identifies that:

> *"the current Appeal must be determined on the assumption the development may be built out to the maximum amount indicated in the Parameter Plans to be approved at outline stage."*

7.68 However, it should also be accepted that the Appeal Scheme allows the maximum scale of development to be agreed, through which, RBC will have opportunity to control the scale and appearance of the development delivered within the maximum parameters, at any Reserved Matters application. The RSAF also notes at paragraph 6.7, that:

> *"The guidance does not address the detailed design of tall buildings which should be individually assessed on their design merits and in the context of other policies and considerations, including those on design, amenity, sustainability and other matters."*

North South Link

Direct alignment:

7.69 The Appeal Scheme allows for a 23m wide corridor between Plot D and Plot C which will enable a direct connection between Station Square at the northern entrance to Reading Station, and Vastern Road. The pedestrian and cycle connection through the Appeal Site will deliver a wide physical and visual connection along a green corridor from the northern station entrance, through the Appeal Site to Vastern Road. This connection will be fundamentally obvious to anyone leaving the northern side of the station. The onward connection to the River Thames will be delivered through the development of the land to the north of Vastern Road, outwith the scope of the submitted application and of this Inquiry.

7.70 The delivery of the green corridor as a high quality north-south pedestrian and cycle route as part of a direct route from Caversham to the centre of Reading, is not however determined by a direct visual connection between the northern station entrance and the River Thames. The width of the route through the Appeal Site and its obvious legibility will benefit pedestrian and cycle permeability through the townscape that connects to both existing links from Vastern Road to the River Thames (it will be almost equidistant between the existing pedestrian and cycle connections along Lynmouth Road to the north-west and through Norman Place to the east); as well as potential future links through the site to the north.

7.71 The Committee Report notes at paragraph 8.28, that the alignment of the route between Plot C and Plot D reflects the aspirations of the RSAF:

> *"Whilst the Application offers a minimum 23m wide corridor through the site between Plots C and D and the alignment and dimension broadly accord with the RSAF, there remains a significant impediment in that the route requires coordination between the application site and the adjoining allocated SSE site."*

7.72 Policy CR11e and CR11g of the Local Plan do not prescribe that the North-South pedestrian and cycle route is required to have a direct visual connection between the station and the river. I consider that the delivery of the green corridor as a high quality north-south pedestrian and cycle route as part of a direct route from Caversham to the centre of Reading, is not dependent on direct visual connection between the northern station entrance and the River Thames. Even if a direct visual link to the River Thames cannot be obtained from the northern station entrance, I do not consider that this precludes the creation of a clear and accessible route. The delivery of the accessible green corridor thereby accords with and supports the aspirations of the RSAF and policies within the Local Plan to deliver a North-South Link that 'stiches' together development sites through the delivery of public realm (paragraph 5.4 of the RSAF)

7.73 Figure 1 on page 45 of Mr Doyle's SoC highlights that the Appeal Scheme facilitates the direct alignment aspiration of the RSAF, where the accessible route through the Appeal Site safeguards the route on land within control of the Appeal Scheme. At paragraph 4.9.2 of Mr Doyle's SoC, it is indicated that the failure to comply with the North-South Link aspiration relies entirely on the refusal of 55 Vastern Road and at paragraph 4.9.6, states that RBC position may need to be reconsidered dependant on the decision of the 55 Vastern Road Appeal. I note that the appeal for Vastern Road has now been upheld and permission granted on 17th March 2022. Furthermore, Policy CR11 and the RSAF as well as paragraph 4.11.1 to 4.11.3 of Mr Doyle's SoC do not consider the long term requirements of the electricity substation on the former SSE Site north of Vastern Road, which limits the delivery of aspirations for a visual connection between the northern station entrance and the River Thames in any event. The diagram at Figure 9 of the Committee Report appears to demonstrate the Council's lack of understanding or acceptance of the obstacle formed by the ongoing use of the SSE electricity substation.

7.74 At a broader scale, paragraph 4.5.2 of Mr Doyle's SoC identifies the importance of the longer Kennet-Thames Spine being a public realm priority for the RSAF (paragraph 5.6 and Figure 5.1). This longer route through the centre of Reading does not provide continuous or direct visual links due to the existing built form within Reading and the RSAF does not account for the lack of deliverability of this aspiration (for example, to the south of Broad Street there is no direct link on the 'Spine' to the Kennet at all, with forward visibility severely restricted by buildings such as John Lewis and the Oracle as well as angled building frontages deflecting views, thereby fundamentally undermining the overall conceptual basis set out in the RSAF).

It also fails to recognise the lack of visual connection from Station Square South and Station Square North, where the underpass is barely visible from Station Square South due to the significant level change, the cluttered townscape experience and the confusing public realm arrangement. There is no suggestion from Mr Doyle that this is not effective as a linkage route and therefore, it is unclear why Mr Doyle and the RSAF, which he authored, set such importance on the need for visual connectivity. I consider that direct visual linkage is not a prerequisite to a legible, functional and inviting public realm link. The approved scheme at 55 Vastern Road would not occupy the entirety of forward views from the Station Square north, and visibility towards the river would be provided by the unfolding townscape.

7.75 I note in this respect that Mr Doyle states in paragraph 4.10.2 of his SoC that *'extension of the Reading Grid requires the grid axes to be aligned across the Station/River MOA'.* In reality, the townscape pattern of Reading has evolved over many centuries from a medieval origin and is influenced in its varied patterns by topographic features, curving alignments of historic routes, staggered alignment of streets, the mainline railway, the IDR and then peripheral development of blocks and streets in a range of alignments. I therefore consider Mr Doyle's logic to be flawed as the basis for this 'grid' does not exist on the ground. This is confirmed by the Inspector's Decision to the 55 Vastern Road Appeal at paragraph 23 which states:

> *"Central Reading exhibits a loose grid structure, though there is a high degree of distortion to this. Some main streets are reasonably straight and broadly parallel, with loosely connecting streets running north to south. However, beyond this are many winding routes, in which forward views are often deflected by angled building frontages…"*

7.76 The lack of a regular grid in central Reading results in a lack of direct visual links across the townscape, but this does not undermine the quality of the townscape and indeed is part of its distinctive townscape character which exhibits a loose grid structure that exhibits a high degree of distortion.

7.77 In conclusion, the legibility of that part of the north-south link extending through the Appeal Scheme is strong and clear and contributes positively to the overall goal of the Kennet-Thames Spine.

High Quality Design:

7.78 I consider that the Appeal Scheme, to the extent that it can control the alignment of the north-south green link, provides an entirely legible, inviting and functional linkage through the Appeal Site that can contribute positively to the public realm in this vicinity.

7.79 The detailed design of this link is subject to reserved matters, within the Council's control. Based on the indicative designed in the DAS, I do not see any reason why this should not be implemented to provide a design of demonstrably high quality including, among other points, active, well-overlooked public realm, softened by planting which provides an intimacy of scale at street level, as well as a progression in scale to the buildings flanking the route. The public realm could readily provide space for outdoor seating and gathering to provide further animation. The illustrative scheme presented within the DAS provides sufficient detail to satisfy the requirements for identifying the direct and legible connection through the Appeal Site, contrary to section 4.12 of Mr Doyle's SoC.

7.80 As such, the delivery of the accessible green corridor through the Appeal Site contributes to the successful delivery of the North-South Link, and accords with Local Plan Policies CC7, CR1, CR2, CR3, and CR11 as well as sub policies CR11e and CR11g.

Townscape Character and Public Realm

7.81 The Appeal Scheme will reinforce a strong sense of place as well as introduce a positive townscape frontage along Vastern Road, where the built form will represent an improved relationship between built form on the Appeal Site and the visual experience of pedestrian and vehicle users along the road and towards the station. The introduction of a comprehensive, coherent and legible public realm with improved access between the northern station entrance and Vastern Road will also contribute positively to the townscape and visual amenity experience of the public realm.

7.82 The four blocks of development will represent a progression from the residential character of Caversham Road that increases in height towards the centre of Reading, where the tallest element of the Appeal Scheme will mark the location of Reading Station, thereby providing additional legibility to this location, significant in the townscape as a major nodal point on the national rail network and a key element of Reading's townscape identity.

7.83 I consider that the character and setting of the wider townscape as well as the immediate Appeal Site will be enhanced as a result of the Appeal Scheme which will contribute positively to the character of Reading, extending the town centre north of the station and providing improved connectivity whilst meeting policy requirements and creating a strong identity for the northern entrance to Reading Station and its approach. The Appeal Scheme provides an opportunity to unlock a significant part of the desired green pedestrian/cycle route between the Kennet Canal and River Thames through the provision of a 23m wide public realm corridor between plots C and D, linking the railway underpass and Station Square North to Vastern Road and the River Thames beyond.

7.84 The Development Parameters allow for the expansion of Station Square North, to include part of the Appeal Site, to the South of Plot D, such that Station Square North ties into the new pedestrian/cycle route between the station and Vastern Road.

7.85 Careful consideration has been given to the relationship between the Appeal Scheme and the residential properties along Vastern Road in terms of development offsets, materiality and development frontage. In the context of the substantial infrastructural corridor of Vastern Road which provides notable physical and perceptual separation between north and south, the Appeal Scheme will provide a positive and harmonious townscape composition where the expanding town centre meets an edge-of-centre residential area.

7.86 The materiality and proportions of the Appeal Scheme are designed to reflect both contemporary and older examples of local development precedents within Reading and have informed the design of the Illustrative Scheme which aims to achieve a contemporary architectural language, responding to articulation, materiality, coloration, and proportions of the local context. Much of the reference for the Illustrative Scheme is taken from Queen Victoria Street due to its iconic character in Reading's visual identity.

7.87 The separation between development blocks will allow the creation of human scale public realm that will create a strong relationship between the Appeal Scheme and the ground floor interface within the Appeal Site and within adjacent parts of the townscape such as along Vastern Road. The Appeal Scheme will create a distinctive sense of place by providing the connection of Station Square North to Vastern Road, improving the identity of this part of Reading, facilitating movement and delivering an improved arrangement of built form that reflects the emerging context of the townscape and aspirations of the RSAF.

7.88 Mr Doyle's SoC states at paragraph 5.6.7, that it is disputed the Appeal Scheme will provide an improved frontage to Vastern Road than the current situation. Mr Doyle offers no description of the existing frontage or recognition of the cluttered and unstructured nature of the transition between the boulevard of Vastern Road and the broad swathe of surface level car parking that currently occupies the Appeal Site.

Landscape, Trees and Green Network

7.89 The Appeal Scheme delivers a 23m wide connection between the northern station entrance and Vastern Road, which will create a central green linear park. The primary vehicular access route for the Appeal Site will be from Caversham Road to the west. The illustrative scheme presented within the DAS and secured through commitments within the Design Code include the use of a rich mix of trees and shrubs and the creation of new lawns and tree lined routes, all within the sunniest parts of the Appeal Site, to provide open space for both active and passive recreational activities. The detail of the landscape design, tree retention, tree planting and shrub planting

will all be set out within the Reserved Matters Application but the illustrative scheme presented in the DAS identifies how a landscape scheme on the Appeal Site will enhance the existing green infrastructure of the Appeal Site and extend the network of Green Infrastructure in the wider townscape.

7.90 The Council SoC Appendix L, Ms Hanson' SoC states at paragraph 3.10:

> *"The primary issue with regards to landscaping is the insufficient buffer allowed on the Vastern Road frontage to provide space for the required large canopy trees."*

7.91 The illustrative scheme presented within the DAS shows how a comprehensive landscape strategy could come forward within the development parameters and secured with condition at the Reserved Matters application.

Retention of Protected Trees:

7.92 The committee report confirms at Paragraph 10.20 that the Natural Environment Officer is of the view that it is possible to address concerns with suitably worded conditions such that the tree retention and protection and an appropriate landscaping scheme would be secured at Reserved Matters.

7.93 As such, the Appeal Scheme is able to meet CC7, EN12, EN14, CR3, CR11 and CR11e through retention of existing vegetation and delivery of a landscape strategy such as the illustrative landscape masterplan shown in the DAS, in accordance with the Design Code.

Failure to Provide Appropriate Public Open Spaces

7.94 The block layout of the Appeal Scheme at ground level will address the street facades on all sides with the Appeal Scheme creating an active frontage along the primary pedestrian routes such as Vastern Road, where the architecture of the built form will respond to the public realm, where the gaps between buildings within the Appeal Scheme define the feel of the spaces that people will pass through and use on a day-to-day basis. This edge of the Appeal Site will provide a positive setting to the Appeal Scheme where it faces the main roads, delivering pedestrian and cycle routes alongside soft planting to form a positive gateway experience to Reading Station.

7.95 The creation of a priority space between the railway station and Vastern Road will deliver a new strategic connection between the town centre and the River Thames that will provide a car free route from the railway station to Vastern Road, which when crossed will lead to the Thames Path (including east to King's Meadow) and over the new pedestrian footbridge to Christchurch Meadow.

7.96 This will comprise a central green linear corridor using a rich mix of trees and shrubs as well as new lawns, within the sunniest part of the Appeal Site, to provide open space for both active and passive recreational activities. Within the corridor, a variety of colours and patterns has potential to help define a hierarchy of spaces with different activities, including spill-out space for commercial properties on the ground floor.

7.97 The primary vehicular access route for the Appeal Site will be from Caversham Road to the west and will provide additional permeability for pedestrians and cyclists. This tree-lined route will allow access to building services, deliveries, emergency access and access to car parking.

7.98 The materials palette for the public realm will include a robust palette of paving and surfacing materials suitable to the urban setting while also reflecting the local character. A variety of textures, patterns and sizes will help denote a clear spatial hierarchy within the street scene, assisting with wayfinding across the Site. This will address points raised within the Council SoC Appendix M, Dr Jenkins' SoC which highlight at paragraph 3.5, the need for a positive transition between the Northern Station Square and the North-South Link.

7.99 Reference is made in the Committee Report paragraph 8.70, and at paragraph 3.6 of Dr Jenkins' SoC to the Appeal Scheme oversailing the public realm. However, built form of the Appeal Scheme will be contained within the area identified on Parameter Plans PP-102: Building Plots and PP-103: Building Heights and will not extend into the areas identified as publicly accessible routes and open spaces that are also set out within Parameter Plans PP-102.

Policy Considerations

7.100 A number of evidence-based documents support and reinforce the case for the Appeal Scheme including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Reading Borough Local Plan (RBLP), Reading Tall Building Strategy (RTBS), and Reading Station Area Framework (RSAF), albeit noting that the 12-year old RSAF is based on some questionable observations and assumptions, as noted above. The iterative process of scheme design has been a collaborative process with liaison in particular between the architect, townscape and heritage consultants as well as other members of the team to inform the optimum scheme solution.

7.101 The Appeal Scheme takes regard of the NPPF, and RBC planning policy documents, some of which relate specifically to development within Reading town centre and provide guidelines for development with the Appeal Site included as an allocation under Policy CR11 'Station/River Major Opportunity Area', specifically CR11e 'North of Station', within which, the Appeal Site falls. The Local Plan sets out a vision for the area which is primarily that the station/river area will be a 'flagship scheme' which links to the centre and the new station and transport interchange. The Site is one of 9 allocated sites to fall under Policy CR11 which sets out the aspirations for all development within the Station/River Major Opportunity Area. The principle

of re-development of the Site is therefore established through the Site's allocation within the Local Plan, as part of the Policy CR11e area.

7.102 Of the policies within the RBLP, Policy 'CR10 - Tall Buildings' is of particular relevance, which sets out that tall buildings are identified as 10 storeys of commercial floorspace or 12 storeys of residential floorspace and equivalent to 36m tall. The Appeal Site is located within the area covered by Policy 'CR10a - Station Area Cluster'.

7.103 The design of the built forms of the illustrative scheme presented in the DAS and detail provided within the Design Code takes account of guidance set out within Policy CR10: Tall Buildings. The tallest part of the Appeal Scheme located on the south-east corner of the Appeal Site, closest to the centre of the Station Area Cluster and closest to the station, stepping down in height towards existing residential properties along Vaster Road. The Appeal Scheme will enhance the skyline in views towards the centre of Reading and is designed to fit within the wider aspirations to improve physical and visual connections between the centre of Reading and the Thames corridor. This comprehensive design consideration also reflects the aspirations of Policy CR11: Station/River Major Opportunity Area.

7.104 The utilitarian nature of the existing built form on and adjacent to the Appeal Site represents a limited contribution to the sense of place exhibited in this part of Reading. This is exacerbated by the declining quality of public realm including large areas of surface level car parking. Neither the Appeal Site, nor land adjacent to it are occupied by 'tall buildings' as defined by RBC's tall buildings policy CR10, but the Appeal Site is located within CR11e of the RBLP, which accepts the principal of tall building development through provision of indicative development densities for the Appeal Site.

7.105 The Appeal Scheme responds positively to Policy CR11e through provision of the Design Code, which prescribes for a development that will create a transition between the existing built form to the north and west of the Appeal Site, through the provision of the tallest buildings located adjacent to the railway line in the south-east corner of the Appeal Site, with a general reduction in scale and height across the Site towards Caversham Road to the west and Vastern Road to the north. Furthermore, the Design Code prescribes for lower built form with pitched roofs along Vastern Road. Parameter Plan PP-103 demonstrates how the general progression in height across the Appeal Site from Plot A to Plot D occurs.

7.106 The RSAF sets out benchmark heights for re-development of the Appeal Site, which range from 6 storeys in the north-western corner to a landmark building of at least 10 storeys in the south-eastern corner. However, it is noted at paragraph 6.23 that:

- *"Benchmark heights may be modified upwards in order to realise certain urban design or other major planning*

> *benefits, or where applicants have demonstrated convincingly that the potential impact of higher buildings on the surroundings can be mitigated."*

7.107 Entec Ltd produced the RTBS in 2008 (updated 2018) on behalf of RBC, in order to inform the development of a tall buildings policy and specific guidelines for individual sites. As part of the production of the RTBS, a townscape assessment was undertaken, and the Reading Central Area divided into townscape character areas.

7.108 Notwithstanding the reduced status of the RTBS as a guidance document since adoption of the Local Plan, the Entec townscape character assessment contained within it remains relevant as it provides the only assessment of townscape character for Reading. It also considers sensitivity to tall buildings.

7.109 The RTBS sets out that CA 22: Vastern Road, within which the Appeal Site is located, is considered to have a Low townscape sensitivity to tall building development due to the absence of any key views or visual focal points. The document states that development should respond in terms of height and scale to the adjacent residential area, with the tallest structures being located to the south of the character area, adjacent to the railway line.

7.110 At paragraph 2.7.2 of Mr Doyle's SoC, the RTBS is referenced with Mr Doyle drawing attention to the text on 75 of the RTBS (2018), part of which has been emphasised and states:

> *"… that tall structures should not be developed along the north and western boundaries of the character area"*

7.111 The Appeal Scheme does not locate tall buildings along the north and western edges of the character area, the height of buildings progresses away from the northern and western edges, increasing in height towards the south-east corner where the tallest building is located on Plot D. Additionally, Mr Doyle's SoC highlights and emphasises the word **adjacent** at paragraph 2.7.3, that the RTBS details:

> *"tall buildings should be located adjacent to the railway"*

7.112 Mr Doyle mis-represents the text. In fact, the RTBS 2018 states on page 44 that the ***"tallest"*** buildings should be located adjacent to the railway line:

> *The tallest structures should be located to the south of the character area, adjacent to the railway line. In this area the townscape features are larger scale, and adjacent to large scale features outside of the area e.g. existing station buildings, Thames Tower and Western Tower."*

7.113 As such, the Appeal Scheme complies with the guidance. The tallest element of the Appeal Scheme is located on Plot D in the south-east corner of the Appeal Site, corresponding to

aspirations within the guidance of the RTBS, more recent Local Plan Policy CR10, and guidance within the RSAF.

7.114 This includes CA22 and CA1 and CA2 immediately to the south.

7.115 In addition to the considerations of policies within the RBLP, the Appeal Scheme has had due regard to the RSAF, which sets out priorities for the connection of the River Kennet and River Thames, as well as changes to the Vastern Road corridor, Pedestrian Grid and Landscaping.

7.116 The RSAF sets out benchmark heights for the re-development of the Appeal Site, which range from 6 storeys in the north-western corner to a landmark building of at least 10 storeys in the south-eastern corner. While the Appeal Scheme will represent an increase in these figures, the progression in height across the site offers a gradual and sympathetic increase rather than a more dramatic step change to a landmark building at the station entrance.

7.117 With regard to policies within RBLP, the Appeal Site is not located within or adjacent to any green spaces, the Appeal Scheme will not directly impact upon Policy EN7: Local Green Space and Public Open Space. It will however improve the legibility and orientation of the public realm at the northern entrance of Reading Station that will positively contribute to an improved connection between the centre of Reading and the Christchurch Meadows Local Green Space.

7.118 By extending the existing grid layout structure of the Reading's central area in so far as is possible for a medieval town where evidence of any grid structure is limited, (as has been acknowledged by the Vastern Road Inspector), as well as providing quality public realm, softened by a landscape scheme that will introduce Green Infrastructure into the area, the Appeal Scheme will have due regard to Policy EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network, Policy EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodlands, and Policy CR2: Design in Central Reading. The built form will be of high architectural quality that takes reference from and responds to, existing built form within the centre of Reading. The limited grid structure of Reading is recognised within Figure 5.3 of the Local Plan which clearly does not intend for Reading or future development to create a rigid grid structure.

7.119 The inclusion of public realm that connects key townscape features and improves wayfinding for non-vehicular traffic as part of the Appeal Scheme will provide further benefits to the Appeal Site that respond positively to Policy CR3: Public Realm in Central Reading.

8.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8.1 The Appeal Site is located in the centre of Reading, it's south-eastern corner immediately adjacent to the Great Western mainline railway station. The northern and western boundaries of the Appeal Site are bounded by Vastern Road and Caversham Road respectively. These are busy roads with high volumes of traffic that exacerbate the perception of a vehicle-dominated townscape within and around the Appeal Site. The Appeal Site lies within a very well-established framework of significant large-scale built development land uses, adjacent to a significant junction and nodal point on the national rail network. Overall the existing built forms within the Appeal Site are large-scale blocks of utilitarian massing and appearance which, along with the extensive surface car parking, diminish townscape character and the visual amenity experience.

8.2 The public realm treatments within the Appeal Site and along its periphery are heavily influenced by the large swathe of tarmac and car parking which is interspersed with a variety of different street furniture structures including lighting columns, bollards, fencing and surface treatments.

8.3 The Appeal Site falls within the Station Area Boundary as defined in Figure 2.1 (p.12) of the RSAF. However, the RSAF is now 12 years old and the context of the centre of Reading has evolved since its adoption, although a number of key design principles and aspirations have been carried forward into policies set out in the Local Plan. Much of the Committee Report and Reasons for Refusal are founded on aspirations set out within the RSAF.

8.4 The Appeal Scheme presents an Outline application with indicative massing where refinement of massing details within the parameters are able to be controlled through input to detailed applications, in order to address any concerns surrounding the bulk of the Appeal Scheme. The parameters divide the Appeal Scheme into four development plots (A-D) running north-west to south-east across the Appeal Site, separated by three north-south routes, integrating the Appeal Site with the surrounding area (minimum offsets at ground level of 20m between plots A-B and B-C and 23m between plots C-D, with greater offsets at the top of buildings in order to ensure the blocks of development appear as distinctly separate elements where they appear on the skyline).

8.5 New public realm spaces will be created within the scheme, including a pedestrian/cycle link through the Site between Plots C and D, linking the train station and underpass with Vastern Road and beyond to the River Thames. The application was accompanied by an illustrative masterplan which showed how a detailed scheme for this beneficial public realm feature could come forward, in accordance with the Appeal Scheme Parameters.

8.6 The individual development plots, the materiality, and aspects of the Appeal Scheme that are secured through the Design Code will create a clear definition between development blocks with additional distinction created by the depth of field available due to the scale of separation between blocks.

8.7 The design of the block locations within the Appeal Scheme will facilitate the increased integration of the northern entrance of Reading Railway Station into the surrounding urban grain where it will benefit from the improved legibility and wayfinding that the Appeal Scheme would provide. The enhanced public realm between the northern side of the station and Vastern Road, contributes to the opportunity for the improved legibility of a connection between the expanding town centre and the River Thames corridor.

8.8 The Design Code ensures that the Appeal Scheme will provide built form reflecting locally-distinctive characteristics such as the materiality of buildings along Station Road and pitched roofs on the lower elements of the Appeal Scheme, as well as variety in massing and heights, urban public realm and wayfinding to the north of the railway line, reflecting the aspirations of increased development height and density anticipated within the RSAF and Local Plan.

8.9 The Appeal Scheme will contribute to the identity of the centre of Reading by consolidating development in the vicinity of Reading Railway Station while respecting the existing character of the domestic scale development north of the Appeal Site providing a transition in scale and townscape character to the expanding urban centre. Furthermore, the use of varied materiality on both the horizontal and vertical axis will break up the perceived massing, contribute to a perception of progression in scale, increase visual interest and contribute to defining the strong sense of local identity.

8.10 The overall form, layout, mass and scale of the introduced built forms will provide Appeal Site wide improvements to the quality of built form and townscape character. Whilst the Appeal Scheme will increase the mass of building on the Appeal Site, this will replace the existing vehicle-dominated utilitarian land use with a more coherent, people-focused residential townscape. The Appeal Scheme will create a positive built frontage to Vastern Road and the roundabout as well as forming a transition in townscape character and scale from the buildings north of the Appeal Site, to the town centre beyond the railway line to the south of the Appeal Site ('the crown' as shown on RSAF Figure 6.5). The Appeal Scheme will also provide improvements to the legibility of the public realm that will relate well to the key townscape features of the northern station entrance, creating a coherent townscape element that positively contributes to the local area. The block arrangement of the Appeal Scheme will allow a much clearer legibility of public realm with respect to the northern entrance to the station where improved sightlines will strengthen the relationship between the Appeal Site and key townscape elements such as Reading Station.

8.11 Effects of the Appeal Scheme are not unacceptably detrimental as set out in the TVIA which identifies that the Appeal Scheme will introduce substantial but sensitively designed built form to the local area, that will improve the overall appearance and functionality of the townscape and visual resource through well designed and sympathetic development, that provides a progression in scale that positively contributes to the sense of place and arrangement of spaces. The design takes account of guidance set out within Policy CR10: Tall Buildings, with the tallest part of the Appeal Scheme located on the south-east corner of the site, closest to the station, stepping down in height towards Vastern Road providing a strong transition between the largely two storey development within CA 12, and the recognisable centre of Reading. The Appeal Scheme will enhance the skyline in views towards the centre of Reading and is designed to fit within the wider aspirations to improve physical and visual connections between the centre of Reading and the Thames corridor by marking the station and the pedestrian/cycle route through the Appeal Site that connects the two.

8.12 The Appeal Scheme considers the existing and emerging identity of the town centre location, within which the Appeal Site is located, creating a sense of identity north of the station, improving movement and kinetic views in the vicinity of the Appeal Scheme by creating physically and visually permeable development blocks. The new built form will facilitate the identification of the station as an important location in the town centre, improve the quality and legibility of built form and rationalise interrelationships between the buildings and street spaces at ground level.

8.13 The visual envelope for the Appeal Scheme is limited by the location of the Appeal Site which is situated in the centre of a large urban area already featuring a number of large and tall buildings and intended to include more, larger and taller buildings as part of well-established policy intent. Where any views of the Appeal Scheme are available, it will be seen within the context of other tall built form within this area.

8.14 In summary, views of the Appeal Scheme will give rise to larger changes where they are anticipated to occupy a larger proportion of views available, such as close range views which is inevitable. However, few significant adverse visual effects will arise as a result of the Appeal Scheme where it will appear within the context of views that are already characterised by the existing built-up area of central Reading and in a location planned for a prominent cluster of taller buildings, where the council want a marked distinction between the town centre and lower rise residential areas. The cluster of buildings on the Appeal Site to the north of Reading Station will, through application of the Design Code, create a coherent townscape element that contributes positively to legibility of the movement hub in this part of Reading town centre. The consistent high quality detailing of built forms, as set out within the Design Code, will enable the individual plots within the Appeal Site to be delivered separately, whilst tying the buildings together to create a visually cohesive collection of buildings. However, the considered

offsets between the parcels at ground level, as set out above, will allow visual permeability between built form on the different parcels, allowing them to be viewed as distinctly separate buildings, thereby articulating the mass, scale and height of the cluster as a whole, as perceived in views from the surrounding area, where differences in height and designs of existing and emerging development will be apparent even in longer distance views.

8.15 The Appeal Scheme allows the maximum scale of development to be agreed, through which, RBC will have opportunity to control the scale and appearance of the development delivered within the maximum parameters, at any Reserved Matters application. This Appeal does not consider specific and definite details of the scheme as permission for these is not what is being applied for and neither policy nor guidance requires detailed schemes to be put forward at outline stage.

8.16 I consider that the character and setting of the wider townscape as well as the immediate Appeal Site will be enhanced as a result of the Appeal Scheme, which will contribute positively to the character of Reading, extending the town centre north of the station and providing improved connectivity whilst meeting policy requirements and creating a strong identity for the northern entrance to Reading Station and its approach. The Appeal Scheme provides an opportunity to unlock a significant part of the desired green pedestrian/cycle route between the Kennet Canal and River Thames through the provision of a 23m wide public realm corridor between plots C and D, linking the railway underpass and Station Square North to Vastern Road and the River Thames beyond.

8.17 Careful consideration has been given to the relationship between the Appeal Scheme and the residential properties along Vastern Road in terms of development offsets, materiality and development frontage. In the context of the substantial infrastructural corridor of Vastern Road which provides notable physical and perceptual separation between north and south, the Appeal Scheme will provide a positive and harmonious townscape composition where the expanding town centre meets an edge-of-centre residential area.

8.18 In conclusion the separation between development blocks will allow the creation of human scale public realm that will create a strong relationship between the Appeal Scheme and the ground floor interface within the Appeal Site and within adjacent parts of the townscape, such as along Vastern Road. The Appeal Scheme will create a distinctive sense of place and reinforce local identity by providing the connection of Station Square North to Vastern Road, improving the identity of this part of Reading, facilitating movement and delivering an improved arrangement of built form that reflects the emerging context of the townscape and aspirations of the RSAF and Local Plan policy CR10a to deliver high density development and tall buildings in the vicinity of the station.