
Reading Station Park, Vastern Road, Reading:
Townscape and Visual
Summary 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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1.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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).
- 1.5 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.

- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 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.
- 1.8 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.
- 1.9 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.
- 1.10 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.

- 1.11 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.
- 1.12 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.
- 1.13 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.
- 1.14 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, very few 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, 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.

- 1.15 The Appeal Scheme allows the maximum scale of development to be agreed, through which, RBC will have the 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.
- 1.16 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.
- 1.17 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.
- 1.18 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.