

APPENDIX 3: WRITTEN STATEMENTS

a) CADRA

Dear Chair

CADRA would like to comment further to the PAC on the SSE site application 200188 which is coming before your Committee on 31st March.

Our original comments made in April 2020 on this site are largely reproduced in the Officer's report and related to :

1. The alignment, coherence and legibility of the new pedestrian and cycle route from the Station to the River
2. Building heights adjacent to the River.

However, we had previously contacted the Planning Department in November 2019, not only in respect of this site, but also the adjoining Aviva and Hermes sites. We highlighted the need for common urban design principles which should apply to these three connected and related sites which are in multiple ownership. This would include alignment of the route from the station to the river, a careful analysis of the potential for Views through from the station and the coordinated placing of buildings across the three sites, together with an integrated hard and soft landscaping approach to the public realm. This would optimise the outcome for the town. We were concerned about the ad hoc and piecemeal nature of the proposals coming forward at the pre-planning stage.

RBC's Reading Station Area Framework and the Reading Central Area Action Plan also suggest such an approach and allowed for a direct link both visually and in landscape terms through to the river from the station. These frameworks possibly assumed the availability of all of the SSE site. If this is now unrealistic, the Framework needs to be revisited. Otherwise, the SSE, Hermes and Aviva schemes will make no sense and the Planners and subsequently the PAC will find themselves in continuing difficulty. And a major opportunity for the town will be lost.

We suggest that a limited but detailed Urban Design and Public Realm brief should be urgently prepared by the Council to guide the detailed coordination of these sites, including the SSE site, in order to resolve the impasse that has been reached. We appreciate the resource limitations that the Council is under but believe this could be done quickly and effectively.

CADRA appreciates these comments widen out from the SSE site application 200188 that will come before you, but this application is a critical part of that wider picture and we hope that these comments are therefore both relevant and of use.

Kind regards,

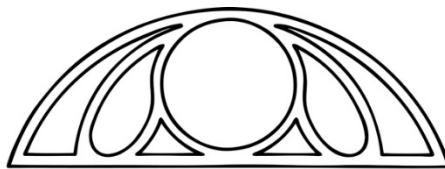
Helen Lambert

Caversham and District Residents Association

www.cadra.org.uk

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READING CIVIC SOCIETY

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28 March 2021

Planning Application 200188 55 Vastern Road

Dear Chair

My apologies about the lateness of this comment. The Planning Application has indeed been some time in processing and we had rather lost track of the position. In the circumstances the comments below seek to focus on the key points.

Summary

1. The developers' community engagement was an exemplar which others should follow.
2. We welcome development of the site. Whilst individual elements may benefit from refinement we rated the design of the overall proposal very highly.
3. We believe on balance that it deals with the constraints imposed by the SSE equipment as well as is practical.
4. The delivery of 209 homes in a central location, 20% being affordable is a significant benefit. That these will on site and "tenure blind" is in line with good practice.
5. It seems unlikely that the Substation/ SSE equipment will be removed unless RBC is able to exercise due influence. A pragmatic approach must be taken with the vision for the clear line of sight whilst also seeking a good scheme for Reading.
6. We understand from discussions with Berkeley Homes that the economics of the site are tight and do not give them the ability to significantly reduce the height on the Thames or remove a unit in the centre of the site.
7. With reluctance we judged that the loss of the Locally Listed Building is acceptable given the wider benefits of the proposed development. We recommended that the key stones from the building be incorporated into the Café building.
8. If not this then what is the alternative? If the vision continues to be "straight line" then we have the stalemate of an irresistible force meeting an immovable object and the site will continue to be undeveloped.
9. The lack of a Design Guide covering the 3 neighbouring sites has not been helpful.

The Planning Application

Consultation

Members of Reading Civic Society Committee have been regularly engaged by Berkeley Homes, and their Communications consultants, since November 2018 about

plans for this site. We have seen, and had the opportunity to participate in, the evolution of the design. We gained some understanding of the challenges faced and the constraints of the site. Other groups we know were similarly engaged in small groups. There were at least 2 well publicised, well-staffed and well attended Public Exhibitions at suitable hours. We know that many of our members took the trouble to take part. Overall it was an exemplar of good community engagement and consultation which other developers should take on board.

Design and proposals for the site

Overall the Committee rated the final design very highly and felt it was one of the best we had seen for some time. We consider this to be a high-quality proposal which delivers significant housing benefits.

We felt that the progressive refinements in design had sought to responded to concerns about the impact on the Thames, the concerns of neighbours and the constraints imposed by the SSE equipment remaining.

The Direct Link / Clear line of sight.

We were given to understand in our first discussion with Berkeley Homes that they had initially believed the substation could be moved. When this was tested senior SSE management would not consider it because of cost and logistics. .

The aim of a direct link in the Station Area Framework and RCAAP was understandable, and supported by us. However it did not consider the practicality of the straight line on the plan being drawn directly over a significant piece of infrastructure. Unless RBC is able to convince SSE to the contrary it seems that this ambition needs to be refined and that the judgement of this planning application should be set against what is practical and achievable.

We understand that PO's comment that "***this is a one-off opportunity to secure a truly highquality link through the site to be seized***". The layout of the site means that this opportunity does not exist in the simple way set out in the Local Plan. We do not agree that the proposed route is not high quality, though discussions should continue to take all ideas and options into consideration.

The pedestrian and cycleway.

Pedestrians and cyclists currently face an indirect and weaving route from this side of the Thames to the station. Some might say that adds to the interest. These routes will still exist post development. The proposed route through the site does mix pedestrians and cyclists. The proposed route may not deliver an unimpeded and fast route some cyclists might seek. We recall however the complaints from Cycle groups that the width of Christchurch Bridge was simply inadequate and that it would not work. If some cyclists find it impedes then then they will have the option of using existing routes and a balance of flow will be struck.

Should at any time the SSE equipment be up for removal then the possibility of the more direct route would still be a possibility.

Removal of units

In the conclusions of the Officer's report it is stated that "**Officers believe that a different layout with fewer blocks would allow the north-south route to be provided directly and to the quality that the local plan policy allocation aspires to.**" Understandably this focuses on the content of the Local Plan.

Looked at in isolation the comment is probably correct. Taken to a ridiculous degree if there are no buildings on site an unimpeded route could be established.

It was clear in our discussions with Berkeley's that the balance of economics on the site was tight. It would seem inevitable that loss of the units caused by reduced height on the Thames and removal of a block in the centre of the site would challenge the development's viability significantly. "Well they would say that would they not?" True but if the economics are tight then it is important to understand the implications of such proposals e.g. on affordable housing provision.

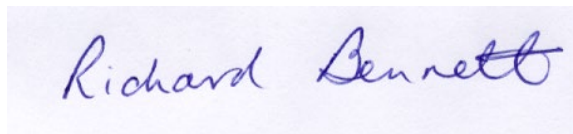
Locally Listed Building

The possibility of retaining the run of old buildings along Vastern Road, and the LLB, was explored extensively and repeatedly. We accepted that it was not practical to incorporate the old buildings on Vastern Road into a new building. With considerable reluctance we accepted that the overall benefits of the scheme outweighed the loss of the LLB 55 Vastern Road. We suggested that the key stones from the building should be incorporated into the site, ideally into the proposed café building.

A wider strategic view.

We have been in discussion with CADRA and have seen, and support, their updated comment (email 26 March) highlighting the importance of developing a holistic Urban Design guide and Public Realm brief covering; the SSE, Aviva and Hermes sites as this would assist the co-ordination of the planning of public realm and the potential for some coherent vision and be helpful for all 3 site owners. We recall this being raised by the communications team supporting the Berkeley Homes site during discussions in 2019.

Yours sincerely



Richard Bennett

Chairman

www.readingcivicsociety.org.uk

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c) Carol Goddard

Ms Frances Martin
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25 March 2021

Dear Ms Williams,

Re: Planning Application 200188 - Berkeley Homes old SSE site Vastern Road

I am writing with regard to your letter of 22 March 2022 regarding the above Planning Application.

The original planning application for this site by Berkley Homes showed flats and mews houses. The houses were sited abutting Lynmouth Road. Unfortunately these plans were rescinded and the high rise plans to enable extra flats were devised. This meant that houses in Lynmouth Road would be overlooked and their privacy would be invaded.

The site will retain the SSE transformers. These transformers do emit a humming noise which can be heard by the residents living around the site. The new development will be much nearer the transformers and there has been some publicity regarding the risks of cancer caused by electricity pylons etc.

The plans show the site to be considerably overdeveloped for the area. The homes around Vastern Road are only 2, 3 or 4 storey. The retail developments on the other side of Vastern Road are also only 2 storey. The proposed development will look incongruous with the surrounding area. I can see no benefit to the local area.

A small development of houses or low level flats would be far more desirable for the SSE Site and more commensurate with the houses currently along Vastern Road and Lynmouth Road.

This area of Reading was originally deemed a flood plain. Planning Applications were refused because of the risk of flooding to homes in this area. This flood plain extended to the railway bridge on the Caversham Road.

The Environment Agency are concerned enough to be looking into the flood risk in this area. Vastern Road has a tributary running beneath the road which enters the Thames by Caversham Lock. The foundations used on the site will increase the risk of flooding in this area. Proposed further developments on the old Royal Mail building, the Station complex, the Aldi/Range site and the Drew's building will also

seriously increase the risk of flooding. I am sure the Council will not want to increase this risk to homeowners in this area by approving high rise developments.

Any of the flat dwellers with cars will overburden already limited car parking spaces in the locality. There are not enough car spaces for each flat to be allocated with one. Three bedroom flats will be intended for families but where can children play? There is already a considerable lack of medical facilities in this area of Reading. We have a 320+ block of flats erected on the old Coopers BMW site. The new occupants of these flats will require medical facilities and schooling bringing an already overburdened system on its knees. With a further 209+ flats on Vastern Road this will increase the burden even further.

A cafe on the proposed site is also a concern. The one on Vastern Road did not last the course and was sold and is now converted to housing. I am concerned about empty coffee cups littering the river bank and excess noise if it is open into the evening. The proposed walkway between Vastern Road and the Thames Path is also a real concern. I am concerned that this path will be used by drug dealers as a short cut or may be a possible danger for women walking alone at night.

The Footpath along the River Thames is narrow and footfall is quite a problem. Cyclists, runners, parents with pushchairs and walkers currently use the path. I see the proposed cafe as a further problem with additional traffic making the area prone to litter problems. We have so much rubbish ending up in the Thames with plastic bags and general litter causing untold problems to the local bird population.

The proposed siting of trees on the site will also overshadow the adjacent properties blocking out light and causing extra problems with falling leaves. Who will be responsible for their maintenance?

If permission is granted for this development along Vastern Road what is there to stop the offices selling their premises for building and further high rise dwellings being built. The houses would be dwarfed by the high risers on both sides of the road. I also pose the question how many offices will become available should home working become the norm and make the offices ripe for conversion into flats?

In my opinion this is an inconceivably bad Planning Application which will not enhance the area one iota but will cause immeasurable problems if it is permitted.

Yours sincerely.

Carol Goddard

d) Paul Goddard

Dear Sirs

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I have attended many presentations about this SSE site & while the plans seem well intentioned over scaling has always been the main issue.

Existing Buildings in the area are no more than 4 floors & in the main are sympathetic to the surrounding Victorian housing. This is not the case in the instance of this development....

The Environment Agency are right in their assertions regarding the overshadowing of the River Thames being a problem & I also think the foundations required for a high rise development so close to the River would be to the detriment of the water table & the River. Not to mention the culvert that runs along Vastern Road to the River Thames at the Lido. However, the removal of the graffiti covered wall alongside the Thames Path by Christchurch Bridge would certainly benefit the community.

The nod to community benefit by having a riverside cafe is ill conceived as other cafes in the area are largely unused & their tenancy is normally short lived. I would sight the cafe/dry cleaners on the north side of Vastern Road which has now been converted to housing & the unit in the rear of Caversham Rowing Club as examples.

I can see the unit being unadopted, & unused.

It is in an important position alongside the River Thames & Christchurch Bridge & it could well become a magnet for anti social behaviour.

It is important to recognise that cycling on the Thames Path footpath is not currently permitted. The access from the SSE site onto the Thames Path footpath should be physically restricted to pedestrian & disabled use & have the appropriate signage.

Also, I am concerned that both the submissions & the Councils comments linking To the future proposals on the Aldi & Royal Mail sites & I think the adverse effect on the community will be considerable. It is definitely not in the public interest to lose the existing retail units as this will necessitate people to drive to do their everyday shopping.

I think a sensible boundary for high rise developments in the area would be the Railway & the Station complex.

On arriving by train you are directed to the town centre or to the River Thames & Caversham it would be a shame to be confronted by high rise buildings of poor character in all directions.

The River Thames is nationally a very important River & Reading is privileged to be situated alongside it. As a community we should make more of it not blight it with overdevelopment.

It is possible that in the future there will be less travelling to offices to work & those offices can quite rightly be converted to housing. That might well reduce the need for high rise developments like this & I am, therefore, strongly opposed to these proposals.

Sincerely
Paul Goddard.

e) Paul Westcott

Mr P Westcott
16 Lynmouth Road
Reading
RG1 8DD

Members of the Planning Committee
Reading Borough Council

29th March 2021

Dear Members,

Re: Planning Application Number: 200188 – Proposed redevelopment 55 Vastern Road, Reading (Former SSE Office)

Further to my letter of objection dated June 2020, I shall be grateful if you might consider the following when discussing the application and arriving at a decision during the Planning Committee meeting on 31st March 2021. The following points are made on behalf a number of residents in Lynmouth Road and Lynmouth Court, Reading.

- We are not opposed to the principle of development on the site and would like to acknowledge the quality of the proposed design in terms of its character and proposed materials. However,
- We find the current scheme to be overly dominant which is mainly due to the height, scale and mass of the proposed buildings.
- The height and proximity of the scheme and the scale of overlooking into existing private rear gardens and rear facing rooms in Lynmouth Road and Lynmouth Court.
- Exposing the rear boundary to the houses in Lynmouth Road to a proposed public access which increases the opportunity for crime.
- It seems to us as if the primary objective has been to set out the proposed scheme to justify the purchase price/profit objective by overloading the proposed development, rather than designing a scheme which will determine a land value.
- Finally, we believe the site is capable of generating a high quality scheme and a balance can be struck in terms of scale of development and enhancing the character of the local area and providing a cohesive access link between Christchurch Bridge and Vastern Road. And we are in the main, willing to support such a scheme if one should be submitted in the future.

Many thanks,

P Westcott.

f) Steve Dore

I am all for these plans as feel the proposal provided will modernise the current site, a site which currently looks abandoned and out of keeping with the modernisation going on in and around that part of town.

More importantly, it will further improve the pedestrian link between Caversham and town centre, improving on the work the Council have already done when they put the new foot bridge in. This will further encourage people to walk into Reading town centre and Caversham rather than driving, a measure which benefits the environment and assists local business, shops etc in increasing footfall.

I note retail floorspace is also being applied for which will mean more jobs - Another huge positive.

I apologise for the late rendering of this email, however I have been away from my desk for the last couple of days so have only just seen the letter.

Kind regards,

Steve

g) Tim Moore

Firstly, thank you to the planning committee for allowing me the opportunity for me to speak at tonight's meeting. My name is Tim Moore and I currently live in Caversham and commute to Reading station. I support these proposals as this new route through the scheme will provide me with a better, direct and more safe route to and from the station. My wife has done the same commute and agrees that this will be a huge improvement providing a safe route especially in the dark winter months. The proposals also include the chance to stop off at the new café, which I see is proposed, overlooking the River Thames, and I'm sure many others feel the same way as I do that this would be a great asset for the local area.

As a relatively young resident who usually wouldn't speak out in this scenario, I felt compelled to do so today as the designs look fantastic, and I don't understand why they are being proposed for refusal. Shouldn't we be supporting this transformation, especially when it generates financial income for the Council and delivers much needed new homes. I also note that despite the site being unviable, Berkeley are proposing 20% affordable housing and the scheme will deliver valuable extra local infrastructure improvements which is great in my view, why are we not applauding this?

I would urge my local Councillors to approve this scheme. Overall the scheme looks fantastic and there seems to be good amount of landscaping proposed, with huge biodiversity benefits for our local ecology and climate. I am very much in favour of the proposals and I do hope all members of the planning committee feel the same way and that the proposals can be supported this evening for this exciting new scheme in Reading