

**BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES  
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL  
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2022**

Ward: Abbey  
PINS Appeal No: APP/E0345/W/21/3289748  
App No: 200328  
Address: "Vastern Court", Caversham Road, Reading

### **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- 1. That you note this report and confirm that an extra Planning Applications Committee will be convened for 15<sup>th</sup> February - time to be confirmed - to consider a further report setting out in more detail the description of the proposed development and to ratify the Officers recommendation which will form the Council's Case at the Public Inquiry.**

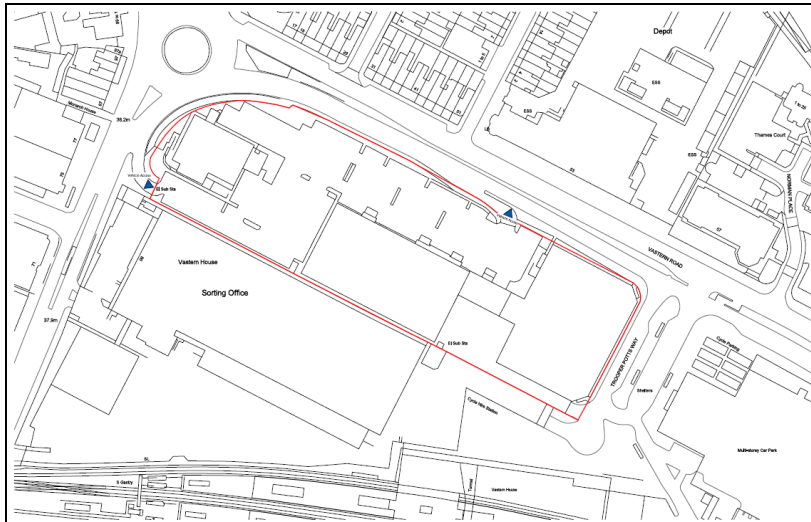
### **1. INTRODUCTION & APPEAL PROCESS**

- 1.1 The planning application was originally submitted on 26th February 2020 with amendments submitted on 8th October 2021. The amendments were substantial enough to warrant reconsulting with neighbours and internal and external consultees. The appellant had an expectation that the amended application proposal would be considered at the January 2022 Planning Applications Committee but when this did not happen exercised their right to lodge an appeal against the "non-determination" of the planning application within the statutory time period.
- 1.2 Notwithstanding that officers have delegated authority to refuse major planning applications it has always been the intention that the determination of this significant site in the town centre warrants a committee decision. However, when an appeal against non-determination is made it has the effect of removing the power of the local planning authority to make a decision.
- 1.3 PINS guidance insists that appellants know the case they have to meet. Therefore, while the Council are no longer in the position to make a decision on the application we do need to provide confirmation of the decision that the Council would have made to form part of the Council's statement of case. Our Counsel have provided advice that this is an essential step.
- 1.4 The timetable for preparing for the actual sitting days of the enquiry, due to start on 26<sup>th</sup> April is challenging. Officers have been asked to submit our initial "statement of case" by 18<sup>th</sup> February with the assumption that the Council's case has been agreed by Members of the relevant determining authority, in our case Planning Applications Committee.
- 1.5 Without significant consultee responses officers were not able to compile a report on this major site in time to be considered at this committee meeting.

This means that the only way that Officers can present a report to committee with sufficient information to enable agreement to be reached on the “reasons for refusal” is to an extra PAC meeting during week commencing 14<sup>th</sup> February. This will allow officers and appointed expert witnesses to submit the Council’s “statement of case” by the stipulated 18<sup>th</sup> February. The proposed date is 15<sup>th</sup> February with a start time to be agreed.

## 2. Background on the application site

- 2.1 The application site measures 1.77 ha and is part of an allocated site in the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 (Site CR11E - North of Station) for redevelopment for mixed use consisting of residential office and retail/leisure uses. The site is located immediately to the north of Reading Railway Station and approximately 200m south of the River Thames.



Location Plan



Application site highlighted - Looking North (Google Aerial imagery 2022)

- 2.2 The application site is occupied by a series of low rise retail units, consisting of Aldi, The Range, Majestic Wine Warehouse and a separate building to the northwest of the site occupied by TGI Fridays. A large proportion of the site is given over to surface level car parking (280 space) and service yards associated with these retail units.

- 2.3 The site is not within or adjacent to a conservation area and contains no heritage assets however to the south are Grade II listed structures: the former station ticket office (the Three Guineas pub, recently refurbished); the statue of Edward VII on the Station Approach roundabout; and Great Western House on Station Road (the Malmaison hotel/restaurant). To the north across Vastern Road, is the SSE site. The entrance building is designated (as of 22/05/2017) as a Locally Important Buildings, and is therefore a non-designated heriateg asset.
- 2.4 As mentioned above, the site is within the designated (Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 Policy CR11) Station/River Major Opportunity Area with the application site within part of site CR11e North of Station sub-area.

### **3. Proposal**

- 3.1 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.

- 3.2 The proposal would see the demolition of existing buildings and structures and the phased construction of a new mixed-use development, comprising:

A maximum floorspace of 90,850 sqm (GEA).

A maximum of 1,000 residential units/ 80,000sqm (GEA)

A maximum office floor space of 24,500sqm (GEA).

A minimum floor space of 2,000 sqm (GEA) for A1-A5 and/or D1-D2 use

### **4. The main issues**

Principle of development

- 4.1 The redevelopment of this area is captured by the site allocation in the local plan. Therefore the purpose of this outline application is to establish the principle of the specifics of their proposed redevelopment in terms of the following main issues:

Amount of development

- 4.2 Whilst the amount of residential would exceed the range expressed in the CR11e allocation, it does not itself constitute a policy conflict. However, officers need to consider if the proposed and amended scheme has demonstrated that the amount of development proposed will be acceptable.

Movement principles

- 4.3 The fundamental approach to movement through the site should be consistent with the local plan requirement and provide a satisfactory alignment for the link through the Site as a whole. The East/west alignment is also important and it is an officer preference for a shared access from Caversham Road between both the appeal site and the adjoining former RMG site to be provided.

#### Land use and density

- 4.5 The redevelopment of the application site for the proposed land uses would be acceptable in principle subject to relevant and necessary restrictions over the minimum and maximum land uses. Density must be considered in tandem with all other policy criteria which consider the existing character of the area and issues such as design, amenity and public realm. More on this issue will be provided in the report to be drafted.

#### Layout

- 4.6 A perimeter blocks approach is supported but must be consistent with allowing the north south route and its relationship to sensitive views demonstrated.

#### Scale - Height and massing

- 4.7 The proposal needs to be broadly consistent with RSAF and Local Plan which accepts tall buildings in this area and envisages a stepping down from the Station Hill 'crown' immediately south of station entrance.

#### Townscape, Views and Heritage

- 4.8 The submitted Environmental Statement includes a Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment which assessed the effects on townscape character and views. This is based on 'wireline diagrams' of the maximum parameters viewed from various key vantage points. We are seeking expert urban design and heritage advice on this matter but officers can confirm that the wireline drawings show the new structures having a strong and possibly dominating appearance within most views within the town centre. This needs to be carefully considered in terms of wider character and impact on heritage assets.

#### Affordable Housing

- 4.9 Zero percent affordable is proposed and the viability report is being considered externally. No conclusions reached as to whether the applicant's position is justified.

## 5. Conclusion

- 5.1 You are asked to consider this report and to confirm that an extra PAC will be convened with the 15<sup>th</sup> Feb the preferred date with start time to be resolved.

Julie Williams