

04 February 2026

<b>Title</b>	<b>PLANNING APPLICATIONS REPORT</b>
<b>Ward</b>	Abbey
<b>Planning Application Reference:</b>	PL/22/1916/FUL & PL/22/1917/FUL
<b>Site Address:</b>	PL/22/1916/FUL – Former Debenhams Department Store, west of Yield Hall Place ('Yield Hall Place 1'), The Oracle, Reading, RG2 2AG PL/22/1917/FUL – Existing Vue cinema complex west of Yield Hall Place/London Road ('Yield Hall Place 2'), The Oracle, Reading, RG2 2AG
<b>Proposed Development</b>	<p>PL/22/1916/FUL - Mixed use development comprising part demolition of former department store and erection of new buildings comprising up to 218 build to rent residential dwellings (Class C3) &amp; 1,209sqm commercial uses within Uses Class E and/or bar (Sui Generis Use). Reconfiguration and change of use of up to 5,866sqm remaining department store floorspace (Class E) to uses with within Use Class E and/or bar (Sui Generis Use) and/or experiential leisure use (Sui Generis Use). Associated public realm, infrastructure works &amp; external alterations to shopping centre, including creation of new shopping centre entrance (amended description) (accompanied by an Environmental Statement)</p> <p>PL/22/1917/FUL - Mixed use development comprising demolition of existing buildings and erection of new building comprising up to 218no. build-to-rent residential dwellings (Class C3) &amp; up to 3,046 sqm commercial floorspace comprising cinema (Sui Generis) and ground floor commercial uses within Use Class E and/or Bar (Sui Generis Use). Associated public realm and infrastructure works (amended description) (accompanied by an Environmental Statement)</p>
<b>Applicant</b>	The Oracle Limited Partnership
<b>Report author</b>	Matt Burns, Principal Planning Officer
<b>PL/22/1916/FUL - Yield Hall Place 1 The Oracle, Reading RG2 2AG</b>	
<b>Deadline:</b>	<b>Target decision date:</b> 20 <sup>th</sup> March 2023 <b>Extension of time date:</b> 13 <sup>th</sup> February 2026
<b>Recommendation</b>	As per the 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2025 main agenda and update reports but with any changes to the s106 Heads of Terms and conditions set out below.
<b>S106 Heads of Terms</b>	<p>As per the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025 main agenda and update reports but with the following addition to the s106 Heads of Terms:</p> <p><b><u>3. Standards BtR requirements</u></b></p> <p>The following additional wording is added to this obligation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All Affordable units to be identified on plan to be attached to</li></ul>

	<p>S106 agreement [prior to permission]. No future changes other than as agreed in writing by the LPA in the submission of an annual monitoring report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable Housing Covenant period –In the event of a change from Build to Rent tenure, which includes changes to affordable units, the affected units to be offered for sale to a Registered Provider and the Council. A fair market price must be offered for the proposed affordable private housing (or equivalent). In the event that a Registered Provider or the Council do not take control of the units an equivalent financial contribution shall be made to the Council to enable Affordable Housing provision elsewhere in the Borough to be determined by a mutually agreed valuation, or arbitration.</li> <li>• In the event that in the initial 20 year period from Practical Completion, the owner of the build to rent development notifies the Council that it intends to sell or otherwise transfer some or all of the units so that they no longer qualify as build to rent, the owner/operator shall provide a valuation of the Build to Rent accommodation immediately prior to the sale/transfer and a valuation of the value following the change to non-Build to Rent. A financial contribution equal to 30% of the increase in value shall be paid to the Council within three months of sale/transfer, subject to indexation, and the value achieved for the unit(s) converted to market sale.</li> <li>• Service charges – All rents to be inclusive of service charges but exclusive of utility bills and Council Tax and 'pay for' services - hire of function room, etc</li> </ul>
<b>Conditions</b>	As per the 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2025 main agenda and update reports.
<b>Informatives</b>	As per the 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2025 main agenda and update reports.
<b>PL/22/1917/FUL - Yield Hall Place 2 The Oracle, Reading RG2 2AG</b>	
<b>Deadline:</b>	<p><b>Target decision date:</b> 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023</p> <p><b>Extension of time date:</b> 13<sup>th</sup> February 2026</p>
<b>Recommendation:</b>	As per the 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2025 main agenda and update reports but with any changes to the s106 Heads of Terms and conditions set out below.
<b>S106 terms</b>	<p>As per the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025 main agenda and update reports but with the following addition to the s106 Heads of Terms:</p> <p><b><u>3. Standards BtR requirements</u></b></p> <p>The following additional wording is added to this obligation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Affordable units to be identified on plan to be attached to S106 agreement [prior to permission]. No future changes other than as agreed in writing by the LPA in the submission of an annual monitoring report.</li> <li>• Affordable Housing Covenant period –In the event of a change from Build to Rent tenure, which includes changes to affordable units, the affected units to be offered for sale to a Registered Provider and the Council. A fair market price must be offered for the proposed affordable private housing (or equivalent). In the event that an RP or the Council do not take control of the units an</li> </ul>

	<p>equivalent financial contribution shall be made to the Council to enable AH provision elsewhere in the Borough to be determined by a mutually agreed valuation, or arbitration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the event that in the initial 20 year period from Practical Completion, the owner of a build to rent development notifies the Council that it intends to sell or otherwise transfers some or all of the units so that they no longer qualify as build to rent the owner/operator shall provide a valuation of the Build to Rent accommodation immediately prior to the sale/transfer and a valuation of the value following the change to non-Build to Rent. A financial contribution equal to 30% of the increase in value shall be paid to the Council within 3 months of sale/transfer, subject to indexation, and the value achieved for the unit(s) converted to market sale.</li> <li>• Service charges – All rents to be inclusive of service charge but exclusive of utility bills and council tax and ‘pay for’ services - hire of function room etc</li> </ul>
<b>Conditions</b>	As per the 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2025 main agenda and update reports.
<b>Informatives</b>	As per the 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2025 main agenda and update reports.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Both the above applications for full planning permission were deferred at 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025 Planning Applications Committee to allow an accompanied member site visit to take place to both sites. The site visit was intended to take place on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2025 however a number of Councillors were unable attend on that date and instead the site visit took place on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026.
- 1.2 At the 3<sup>rd</sup> December meeting prior to deferral of the applications, Councillors raised some queries and questions regarding both proposed developments and this report concentrates on those matters only with the main agenda committee report and update report from the 3<sup>rd</sup> December meeting provided as appendices 1 and 2 to this report.

## 2. Representations Received

- 2.1 Since publication of the main agenda report one additional objection to both applications has been received. This is summarised below but does not raise any additional issues that are not already considered with the main agenda and update reports from 3<sup>rd</sup> December PAC:

- The appearance of the proposed development is hideous and ugly
- The owners of The Oracle should not inflict this on Reading.

## 3. Responses to Councillors' Points

### Build to Rent (BtR) Accommodation

- 1.1 At the 3<sup>rd</sup> December meeting the 20 year minimum term to provide the proposed dwellings as BtR accommodation outlined with the s106 Heads of Terms for both applications was queried, as well as what would happen to the dwellings after the 20 year minimum term and how this relates to the affordable dwellings within both developments. This relates to proposed s106 obligation number 3 (Standard BtR requirements) for both applications as set out in the Recommendation boxes in the 3<sup>rd</sup> December PAC main agenda report.

- 3.2 The nature of BtR accommodation is discussed in paragraph 7.1.30 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report. Build to Rent dwellings are defined within the glossary of the NPPF (2025) as, '*Purpose built housing that is typically 100% rented out. It can form part of a wider multi-tenure development comprising either flats or houses, but should be on the same site and/or contiguous with the main development. Schemes will usually offer longer tenancy agreements of three years or more, and will typically be professionally managed stock in single ownership and management control*'. Local Plan Policy H4 (Build to Rent Schemes) outlines various specific criteria to ensure BtR developments provided a good standard of accommodation and deliver a supply of rental housing to the market as intended, including affordable housing. This includes securing BtR development in single ownership providing solely for the rental market for a minimum 20 year term with provision for clawback of affordable housing contributions should this requirement not be met.

- 3.3 The supporting text to Policy H4 under paragraphs 4.4.29 to 4.4.32 explains why securing BtR accommodation on a long-term basis (i.e. 20 years) is needed.

*4.4.29 Build to Rent developments are long term investment vehicles that it is hoped will be attractive to financial institutions. Financial institutions will be looking for large-scale, professionally managed developments. Such developments will bring new providers into the UK housing market (financial institutions play major roles on housing provision in much of Europe and North America), thus increasing competition. They will bring higher quality and better managed accommodation and associated services to the private rental market. They will operate with longer tenancies as the model seeks to retain occupants for as long as possible.*

*4.4.30 Private rented sector (PRS) housing meets the housing needs of residents who cannot afford to buy or do not want to buy private homes or who cannot get access to social housing or subsidised housing in Reading. It can benefit the local and regional economy as it enables greater household mobility. However, there are many issues associated with private renting in the Borough revolving around poor quality and poorly managed accommodation with limited security of tenure and unjustified rent increases.*

*4.4.31 The Council wishes to encourage a private rented sector which provides high quality, professionally managed accommodation and a greater level of security for tenants than that which is offered by much of the current PRS market. We will support institutional investment in the sector where benefits are secured for residents and the economy of the Borough and where this produces high quality development with positive benefits for the Borough. Such schemes will normally be larger scale developments of more than 50 units to achieve the level of quality and facilities and to efficiently provide the high quality of management that is needed to support such accommodation.*

*4.4.32 It is accepted that as Build to Rent developments are dependent on long term rental income rather than early sales, their funding is inevitably long term, and operates to different viability models compared to for sale schemes. Government policy therefore sees a need for some flexibility, particularly in relation to affordable housing provision. Nevertheless, where such justification is being made, the Council will expect the viability appraisal to also provide information on the viability of the development as a for sale scheme.*

- 3.4 In the event that in the initial 20 year period of providing the dwellings as BtR units, the owner of a BtR development notifies the Council that it intends to sell or otherwise transfer some or all of the units so that they no longer qualify as build to rent accommodation, then the s106 heads of terms under obligation 3 include a mechanism to require that written agreement to this taking place is obtained from the Council. The obligation also secures a mechanism so that in the event this happens, the Council receives an equivalent financial contribution to share in any increase in value as a result of the dwellings changing from build to rent to general market sale dwellings. This is required because the

affordable housing proposals for the development were considered solely on the basis as the dwellings being BtR accommodation. The mechanism would not apply if the dwellings were to change from build to rent to market sale outside of the 20 year period.

- 3.5 The s106 heads of terms under obligation 1 and 3 require that the affordable dwellings within the development are provided in perpetuity. However, in the event that the affordable dwellings within either development are sought to be changed from BtR tenure then obligation 3 also includes a 'cascade mechanism' to ensure the units remain as affordable housing within an appropriate tenure, or in the event this is not possible and the units are to be sold on the open market, then the Council receives an equivalent financial contribution towards provision of affordable housing elsewhere within the Borough. Both this and the mechanism referred to under paragraph 3.4 will ensure that the Council receives the equivalent or more affordable housing (in the form of a financial contribution) should the development move away in full or in part from the BtR tenure in future.
- 3.6 Officer can also confirm, as set out under s106 obligation 1 that the rents for the affordable rented dwellings within both developments shall be capped at the lower of 80% Market Rent or LHA levels (or equivalent) and that this is inclusive of service charges.
- 3.7 On this matter the Applicant advises that the BtR operator will invest in the building on a long term basis which is likely to be at least 20 years and will accord with the requirements of Policy H4 and the related obligations in the Section 106 agreement. They state that it is not possible at this stage to commit to the units being retained beyond 20 years at this time, but there is no intention at the current moment for the operation of the BtR dwellings (including the affordable homes) to automatically cease at end of the 20 year period and that what happens will be dependent on market conditions / housing requirements at the time.
- 3.8 It has also been queried as to how the two month notice period referred to under s106 obligation 3 that is required to be given to end a tenancy of any BtR dwelling would work for future occupiers of affordable dwellings within both developments and whether this would allow an occupier of an affordable dwelling to move to a different home without having to 'double pay' on rent for a month. RBC Housing Officers advise that notice periods vary between registered affordable housing providers and operators. They advise that if a tenant was moving between properties and that both require two months' notice to be given, then it is possible that double payment of rent may occur, as can be the case for market dwellings as well. RBC Housing Officers also advise that the forthcoming Renters Rights Act which is to become law from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2026 sets out two months' notice as standard for all renters. The s106 Heads of Terms under proposed obligation 3 for both applications within the main agenda report sets out that the notice period required is to be agreed in writing by the LPA, therefore Officers will ensure RBC Housing Officers have input to the drafting of the s106 agreement so that a reasonable notice period can be agreed which is acceptable to all parties involved.

#### Sustainability and Energy Efficiency

- 3.9 Officers have received a query seeking to understand why different sustainability and energy efficient standards are being applied to the commercial and residential parts of the development. This is explained in paragraphs 7.8.1 to 7.8.3 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report. It was also queried why we are not holding the proposed dwellings to the updated energy efficiency standards proposed as part of the ongoing partial update to the Local Plan in relation to emerging updated Policies H5 (Standards for New Housing ) and CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction). As set out in paragraphs 6.9 to 6.11 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report, changes to the local plan update are still at an early stage so only limited weight can be afforded to any emerging policies. The RBC Planning Policy Manager advises that the relevant emerging updated Policies H5 (Standards for New Housing) and CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) should not be afforded weight at this time. However, as set out in the main agenda report, as

referenced above, both proposed developments comply with the current versions of these policies within the Local Plan 2019 and the adopted Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2021).

#### Standard of Accommodation

- 3.10 At the 3<sup>rd</sup> December meeting the level of compliance of the proposed new dwellings with the Nationally Described Space Standards was queried with concerns raised that not all dwellings would comply. This matter is discussed and explained in paragraph 7.7.31 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report and paragraphs 6.1 to 6.5 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December update report where officers conclude that the failure to comply fully with the Nationally Described Space Standards may make some dwellings less attractive to some potential occupiers (for instance medium-sized families) but that compliance with the National Standards is not required by Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) for new dwellings in the Central Area.
- 3.11 Full floor plans for both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals are attached at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December PAC main agenda report but a closer plan view showing a typical layout of 1 bed, 2 bed and 3 bed units within both developments have been provided by the Applicant and is attached at the end of this report.

#### Inclusive Access

- 3.12 Members asked how the YHP1 proposals would affect access to The Oracle for users of the Shopmobility/Readibus service given the proposal, as explained in paragraph 7.3.6 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report, to replace the existing gate with bollards at the entrance to Yield Hall Place from Minster Street.
- 3.13 Officers can advise that the proposed bollards are to be located along the kerbline in roughly the same position as the existing barrier and gate (see figure 1 below) therefore restricting access along Yield Hall Place to vehicular traffic but will provide a benefit to pedestrian and cycles as they will be able to pass between the bollards whereas the barrier/gate at present results in an obstruction.
- 3.14 The Readibus currently stops on Minster Street within the existing bus stops to allow access to the Shopmobility entrance within the Oracle via the back of the NEXT store on Yield Hall Place/Minster Street. The proposed bollards will not therefore restrict access to the existing bus stops, but by rationalising the location of the bollards around the entrance this will have a positive impact for those accessing Shopmobility via this entrance.

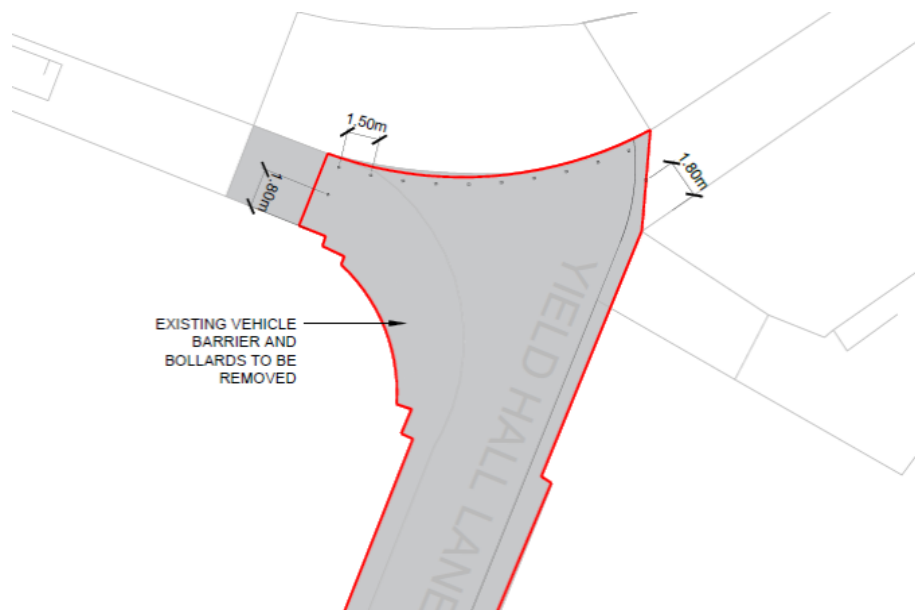


Figure 1— proposed bollards to Minster Street/Yield Hall Place junction

- 3.15 Members have requested further information on the layout, mix accessibility of the 11 wheelchair user dwellings proposed within both YHP1 and YHP2 (overall total of 22 wheelchair user dwellings for both developments combined) as well as the layout and accessibility of blue badge parking spaces proposed to be provided within The Oracle.
- 3.16 Recommended condition 47 for YHP1 and condition 29 for YHP2 require full details of the location and layout of all the wheelchair user dwellings to be submitted and agreed with the LPA prior to first occupation of any dwelling within each development. Paragraph 7.7.32 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report outlines the accessible elements to be incorporated within both developments. The highlighted orange area shown on floor plans in figures 2 and 3 below show the residential lobby areas for both YHP1 and YHP2, both with level access from the riverside (and from the IDR in respect of YHP2) and the orange lines show the location and most direct route to the lifts and stairs up to the residential units to the upper floors of both proposed developments.

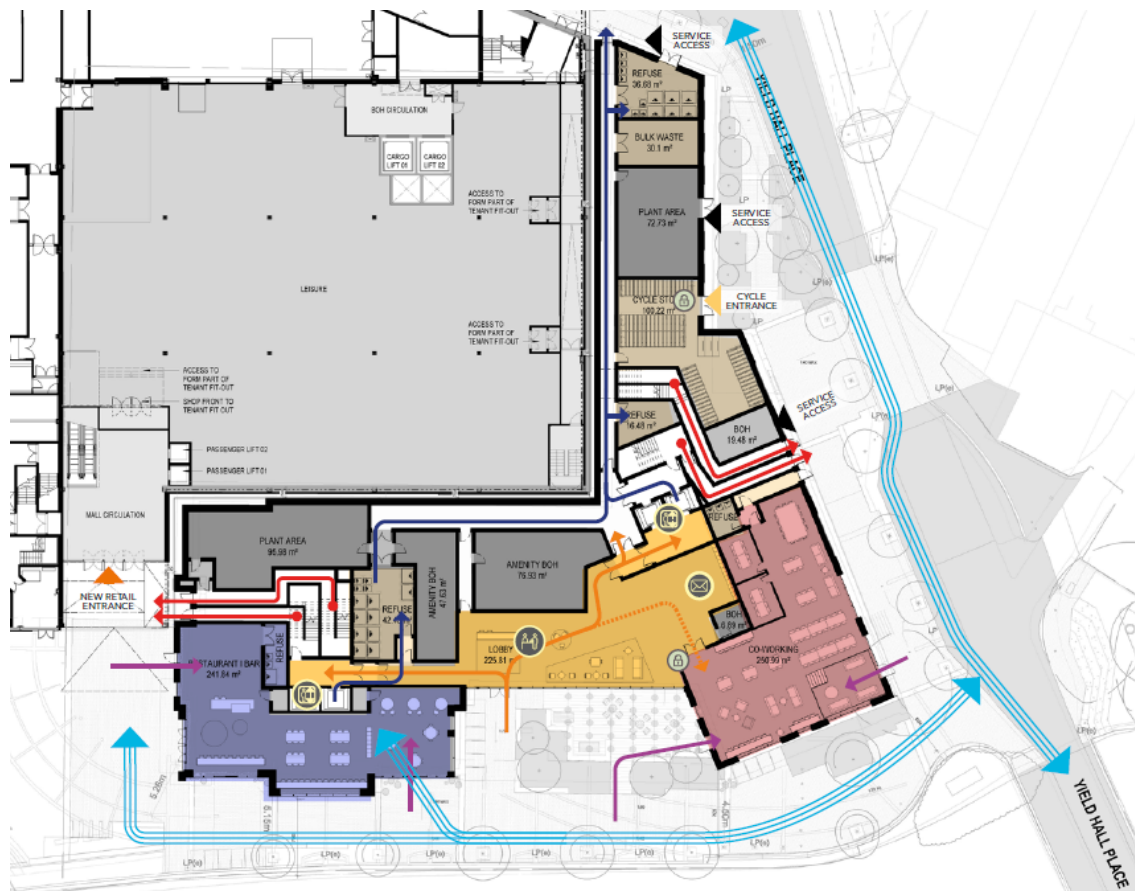


Figure 2 - YHP1 – Proposed ground floor plan showing access to the building



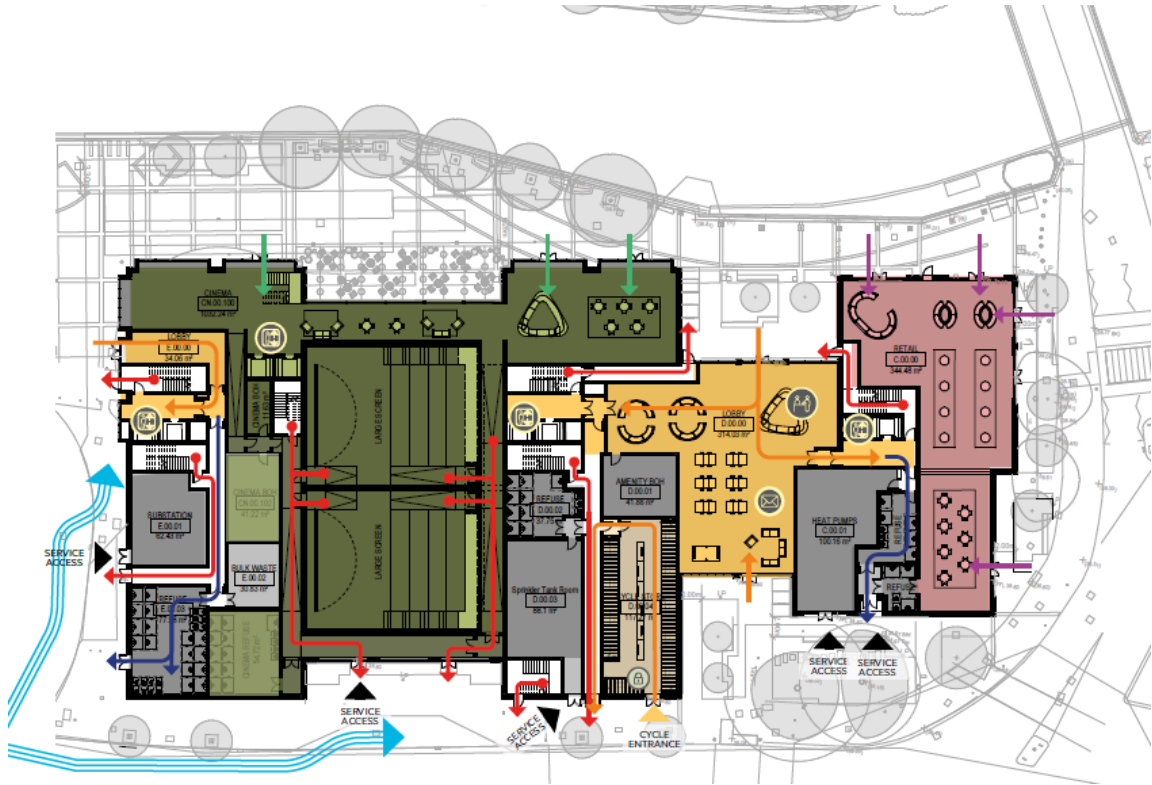


Figure 3 - YHP2 – Proposed ground floor plan showing access to the building

- 3.17 Officers have asked the applicant to confirm if detailed location of the wheelchair user dwellings within both developments and mix of units is able to be confirmed at this stage of the proposals and any further information in respect of this will be provided in an update report.
- 3.18 Paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December update report outline how blue badge parking for the occupants of the accessible dwellings within both developments is to be provided within the existing car parks at The Oracle and references s106 obligation 17 for YHP1 and 14 for YHP2 which require full details of the location and access arrangements for 11 blue badge parking spaces to be provided for each development. Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> December meeting, the applicant has submitted proposals for blue badge parking for both developments. This information is being reviewed by officers and an update on this matter will be provided in an update report.

Number of dwellings proposed in relation to emerging Policy CR14g (The Oracle Riverside East)

- 3.19 Members have asked how the number of dwellings proposed within both YHP1 and YHP1 combined (418) is justified given emerging Policy CR14g allocates the applications sites for between 250-370 dwellings.
- 3.20 Paragraphs 7.122 to 7.1.26 outline the position in respect of emerging Policy CR14g. Paragraphs 6.9 to 6.11 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report are also relevant here which are clear that only very limited weight can be attached to emerging policies. In this respect Policy CR14g of the current Local Plan is the relevant policy against which to assess the current application as explained in the paragraphs referenced above.
- 3.21 Notwithstanding the above, it should be noted that the supporting text to emerging Policy CR14g states under paragraph 5.4.33 of the Draft Local Plan Update 2025 that, *“Where dwelling or floorspace figures are included alongside the allocations, these are intended as a guide, and usually reflect an indicative maximum capacity. They are based on an initial assessment taking into account the characteristics of each site. However, the capacity of sites will ultimately depend on various factors that need to be addressed at application stage, including detailed design and layout”*. The 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda



and update reports have considered the characteristics of both applications sites and relevant material planning considerations and policies in detail in reaching the proposed officer recommendations.

- 3.22 Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> December meeting, a query was raised as to how overshadowing and visual dominance to the riverside area have been considered. Paragraphs 7.7.10 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report considers overshadowing impacts on the public realm areas surrounding the site, including the riverside. Visual impacts of both proposed developments are discussed within section 2 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report in terms of both local and local range views and section 3 of that report also considers public realm works proposed both on and off-site as part of both applications and the settings within which the developments would be viewed and experienced.
- 3.23 The applicant agrees that the quality of the riverside area is important as an area for visitors to travel through and dwell and from a commercial perspective given there are external seating areas for the restaurants / cafes along the riverside. They advise that throughout the design process, careful consideration has been given to any overshadowing from the buildings onto the riverside area, to ensure the Riverside remains a high quality area of public space within the town and that an overshadowing assessment was submitted with the application which demonstrates a suitable relationship.

- 3.24 Since the meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December officers have received a query as to what is proposed to the London Street/IDR (Queens Road) junction. This is set out within paragraphs 7.3.13 to 7.3.15 and 7.3.17 to 7.3.20 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report, listed under s106 obligation 8 for YHP2 and figure 4 below shows the soft and hard landscaping works proposed around this junction. Paragraph 7.5.21 sets out that the proposed developments, either individually or cumulatively would not result in any increase in vehicle trips compared to the existing uses at both sites. This is due to the fact that retail floorspace creates more traffic movements (trips) than residential. Full proposed plans showing the on-site hard and soft landscaping for both proposals are also attached at the end of this report.

Figure 4 – Hard and Soft Landscaping proposed for YHP2 around the London Street/IDR (Queens Road) junction

### Cycle Parking

- 3.25 Clarification has been sought in respect of the total cycle parking provision for future residential occupiers of both proposed developments. This is discussed in paragraph 7.5.22 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report which sets out that 246 cycle parking space are proposed across both the YHP1 and YHP2 developments. To clarify further, this is in excess of the standards within the RBC Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011) which require 0.5 cycle spaces per 1-2 bed flat and 1 cycle space per 3 bed flat. With the total mix of dwellings across both developments providing 414 x one and two bedroom flats (requiring 207 cycle parking spaces) and 22 x three bedroom units (requiring 22 cycle parking spaces) resulting in a total of 229 cycle parking spaces required for both developments in accordance with the SPD standards. The proposed total provision of 246 cycle parking spaces across both developments is therefore in excess of RBC's adopted standards.

### Materials

- 3.26 Following the meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December a query was received regarding the proposed materials to be used within both developments. The proposed materials for the different parts of both developments is discussed in paragraphs 7.2.38 to 7.2.46 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report. Conditions 3 and 4 of the YHP1 recommendation and condition 3 of the YHP2 recommendation require that full details of the materials for all external finishes of both developments, including materials samples, are to be submitted to and agreed with the LPA prior to the commencement of either development. This also includes a requirement for sectional mock-ups of the façades of the different elements of the proposed buildings to be made available to view on site prior to approval.

### Replacement cinema within YHP2

- 3.27 Members asked what justification has been put forward with the YHP2 application for the small size of the proposed replacement cinema compared to the existing cinema at The Oracle. This is discussed in paragraphs 7.1.41 and 7.1.49 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report. However, the following further explanation as to the rationale behind the proposed changes to the cinema offer of The Oracle can also be provided.
- 3.28 The Vue cinema opened alongside the shopping centre in 1999 providing an 11-screen multiplex cinema with 1,800 seats over four storeys. The cinema is now over 20 years old and the Applicant advises is in need of significant investment to upgrade the existing facilities, both in terms of physical environment for customers and technological infrastructure. The Applicant states that the cinema is facing increased competition from more modern facilities within the Thames Valley including the Showcase in Wokingham and Cineworld at the Lexicon, Bracknell whilst markets trends overall show cinemas experiencing lower footfall as a result of the growth of home streaming services and cost of living challenges.
- 3.29 The proposed YHP2 development would re-provide the cinema (Sui Generis Use) at the western end of the building, similar to existing, but on a smaller scale over two storeys offering 7 screens and 511 seats compared to the 10 screens and 1,800 seats provided by the existing cinema. Whilst a replacement cinema in terms of use it would incorporate an upgraded physical environment and technological infrastructure provide an enhanced offer in terms of the quality of the cinema experience.
- 3.30 The Applicant's economic assessment of the impact of the proposals upon the vitality and viability of the town centre states that whilst the cinema is to be redeveloped to create a smaller premises, employment levels at the cinema are not expected to be affected with no net job losses. This is because the proposed new premises will be providing the occupier with a building of the right size better suited to its current needs. It is therefore assumed, for the purposes of this assessment, that the economic impacts currently generated by the Vue Cinema will remain unchanged and therefore any associated

employment and productivity impacts have been discounted from the assessment of net additional impacts.

- 3.31 The Applicant recognises that the proposals would see the capacity of the cinema will decrease significantly but explains that this is in response to the operator requirements (currently Vue), existing usage levels of the cinema and market trends as discussed above and to reflect the configuration of more modern competing cinema facilities. The cinema will continue to be operated by Vue as a multiplex cinema, providing a choice of films across seven screens.
- 3.32 The Applicant also advises that within their shopping centres throughout the UK they have experience of cinema operators engaging in 'surrender discussions' on units which were too large and that the cinema at The Oracle would fall into this category and is considered oversized for a town centre. From the applicant's discussions with Vue, an experienced cinema operator, they understand that a smaller cinema offer, with a widened food and beverage offer and more luxurious seating is expected to generate a greater demand for cinema at The Oracle.
- 3.33 The Officer conclusion remains as per the main agenda report which concludes that overall, the YHP2 proposals would preserve and enhance the vitality and viability of the Reading Central Area.

#### Cycle Hub

- 3.34 At the meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December it was queried whether or not a cycle hub could be provided at The Oracle as part of either proposed development.
- 3.35 The Council has been seeking a location for a Cycle Hub within the Town Centre, and this is identified in the adopted Reading Transport Strategy 2040 (June 2024). Policy TR4 (Cycle Routes and Facilities) of the RBC Local Plan 2019 requires that development makes full use of opportunities to improve access for cyclists to, from and within development and to integrate cycling through the provision of new facilities. Paragraphs 7.5.6 to 7.5.18 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report outlines how both YHP1 and YHP2 will integrate with and enhance the cycle network in and around The Oracle.
- 3.36 Adopted Policy TR4 does not make specific reference to the need for a cycle hub, however this is referenced under the changes within emerging Policy TR4 (Cycle Routes and Facilities) of the draft Local Plan partial update (2025) which refers to a number of projects and facilities that development could incorporate, contribute to or provide to improve access for cyclists to, from and within new development. The supporting text to this emerging policy under paragraph 4.5.20 sets out that potential cycling projects include, "*Cycle parking mobility hubs and facilities*" and that this includes "*provision of secure, covered cycle hubs at transport interchanges, with the potential for manned security. Hubs can provide a large number of secure spaces with double height racks and include facilities such as CCTV, lighting, electric charging points, bicycle repair stands and pumps. This project also involves the establishment of residential cycle parking facilities, particularly in areas of terraced housing*".
- 3.37 Provision of a cycle hub is not proposed as part of either application. As discussed in paragraphs 6.9 to 6.11 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December main agenda report only very limited weight can be attached to emerging policies given the early stages of the draft Local Plan partial update and therefore provision of a cycle hub has not formed part of negotiations with the applicant with RBC Transport Officers satisfied that the proposals already satisfy the requirements of Policy TR4, as discussed above.
- 3.38 In relation to this matter the Applicant has advised that they consider cycle parking around the wider Oracle complex falls outside of the scope of these applications. The Applicant is however commencing on a separate wider scheme of works reviewing the public realm

around the shopping centre and a review of cycle provision would fall within that scope of works. In terms of a cycle hub, they advise that they understand there is an ongoing Council aspiration to deliver a cycle hub within the town centre. This is not, however, a policy requirement of this scheme. Initial liaison with the RBC Transport Development Control Manager has identified that the eastern most proposed commercial unit within YHP2 may present an appropriate location for such a Hub given this sits directly adjacent to the existing cycle network. The applicant states that they have not engaged in marketing of this units at this time given the stage of the project but that at the relevant time they will review all commercial interest in the units and would consider any applications from cycle hub operators at that time.

#### Heritage and Townscape Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA)

- 3.39 At the meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December some of the views shown of the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals within the Heritage and Townscape Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA) were questioned with regard to their clarity given the proposed buildings were shown to be faded into the background/sky whereas some views showed the buildings including their elevation details. A number of these views are shown and discussed in paragraphs 7.2.47 to 7.2.86 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December PAC main agenda report.
- 3.40 The applicant advises that the visuals provided accompanying the HTVIA comprise a mix of fully 'rendered' (photomontage) views which show elevational detail but also some 'wireline' views which show an outline and shaded massing infill for some longer range views. They advise that and these wireline images are intentionally shown in this way with wirelines being a typical approach for longer range views.

#### Unit Mix and Affordable Housing

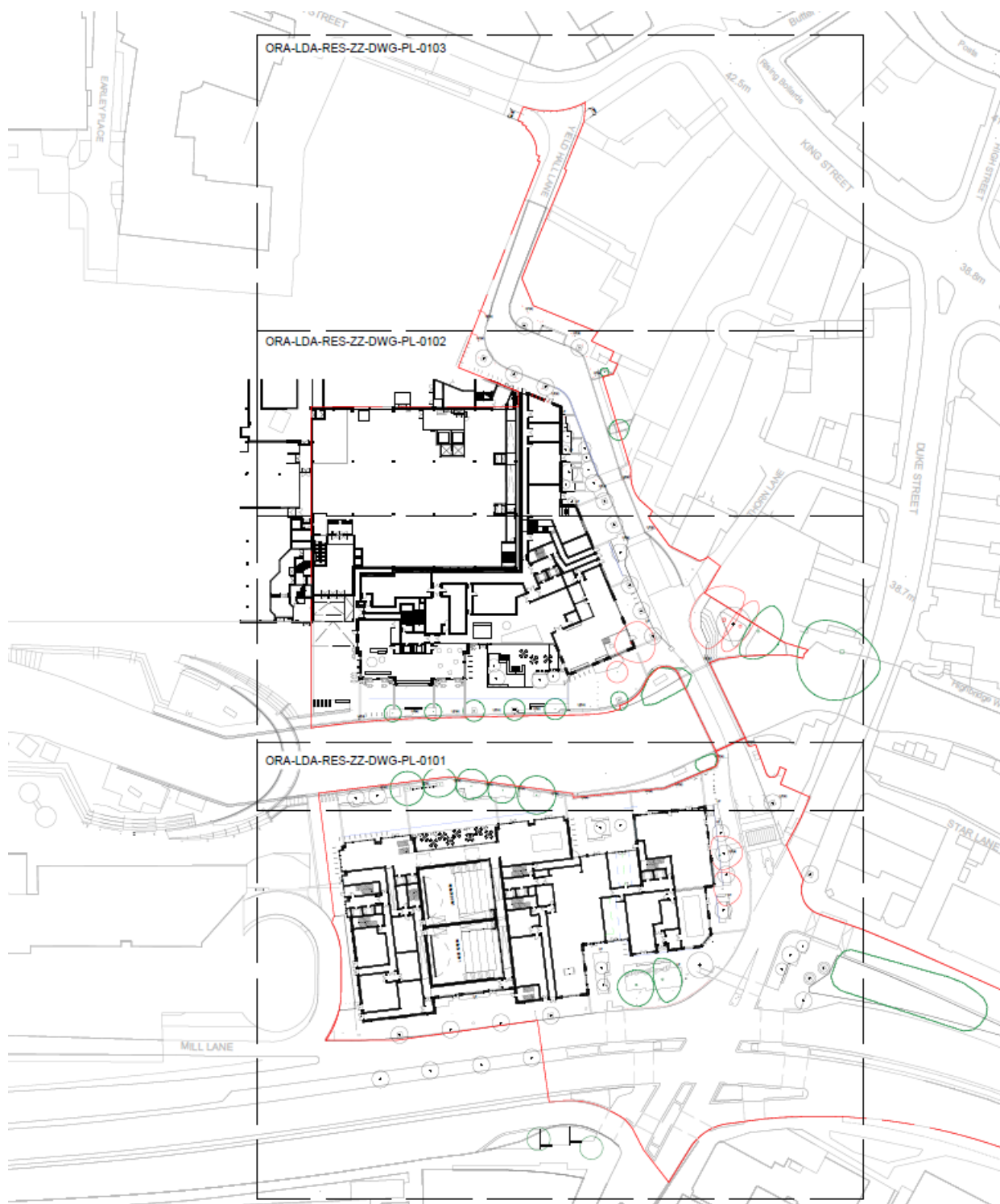
- 3.41 The mix and overdominance of one bedroom dwellings was of concern for members, as well as the proposed level of affordable housing provision. These matters are covered in paragraphs 7.4.1 to 7.4.11 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December PAC main agenda report.
- 3.42 In relation to unit mix, the applicant states that Policy CR6 is a guide, with the overall intention of the policy to provide a mix of units. Whilst the applications provide a greater number of one bedroom properties than suggested by the policy, a genuine mix of units is proposed across both schemes and these will be dispersed throughout the blocks, ensuring choice for future residents. The applicant also considers that whilst the proportion of one bedroom properties exceeds the policy guide, this does not necessarily equate to an overdominance. YHP2 will provide 44% one bed properties, 4% above the guide and YHP1 will provide half of all units as one bed properties. This mix is considered by the applicant to be reflective of market demands, informed by commercial advice, operator experience and viability considerations and they wish that it be noted that the affordable housing unit mix within both proposals aligns with the Policy CR6 guidance.
- 3.43 In terms of the level of affordable housing provision within both proposed developments the applicant confirms they are satisfied that the viability assessment review undertaken as part of the applications demonstrates that increasing the affordable housing level in either application is not viable and would prejudice delivery of the developments. They advise that the 10% provision proposed at Local Housing Allowance rent levels is considered to already go beyond that which the scheme can viably accommodate, and this is agreed by RBC's viability advisors. As such, they remains committed to providing 10% affordable housing across both schemes, at Reading Local Housing Allowance levels recognising the identified need for affordable housing within the Borough. The applicant is also committed to a deferred payment mechanism obligation, which will enable further affordable housing units to be provided if the viability of the scheme improves.

- 3.44 The applicant also advises that it should be noted that challenging viability and the impact upon affordable housing delivery is not just a matter affecting Reading but is being experienced nationally. Viability of schemes in recent years has been adversely affected by the growing cost of construction, uncertainty around fire regulations, high interest rates, and increased (and at times competing) policy requirements. This affects housing delivery, particularly on brownfield sites, and has implications on affordable housing delivery. They note that in October 2005, the Mayor of London announced emergency measures to increase housebuilding in the capital, recognising the significant constraints to viability. They state that this will in turn ensure that a degree of affordable housing is delivered in the capital, contributing to meeting housing need and that providing increased affordable housing on the proposed YHP1 and YHP2 schemes will prejudice the delivery of development, which could ultimately resulting in zero affordable housing being delivered for Reading if the developments do not come forward.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 The above report responds to the clarifications and questions raised at the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025 PAC meeting in relation to both applications. There have been no changes to the proposed development since the 3<sup>rd</sup> December meeting and the officer recommendations for both application remain as per that set out in the Recommendation boxes at the top of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December PAC main agenda and update report but with reference to the additional s106 Heads of Terms proposed as part of this report.

## Plans and drawings



Proposed hard and soft landscaping overview (YHP1 and YHP2)





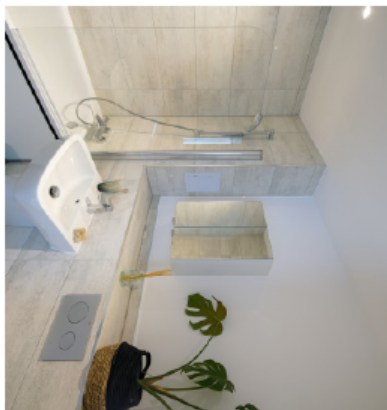
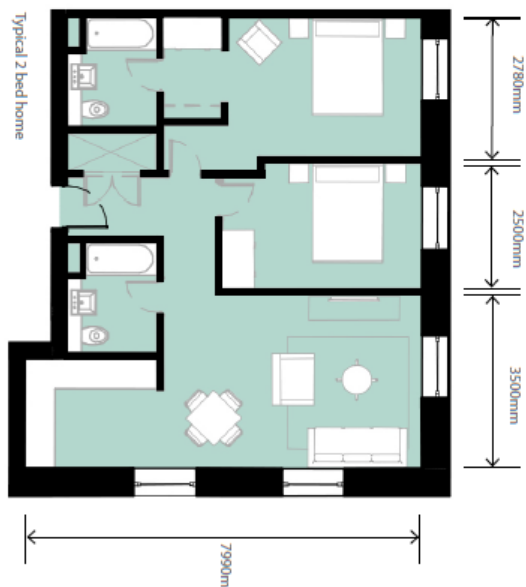
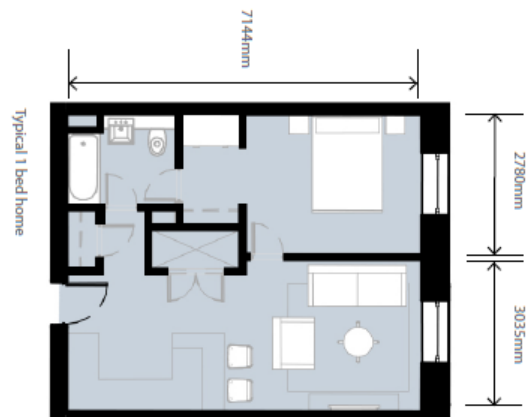






Proposed hard and soft landscaping (YHP2)

## Unit Typologies



Typical 1, 2 and 3 bed unit layouts for both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals