

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	21 NOVEMBER 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	8
TITLE:	REVISED HOSIER STREET AREA DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	ABBEY
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks approval of the revised Hosier Street Area Development Framework, following consultation that took place during July-September 2018 on the published draft framework. The draft Framework was approved by the Strategic Environment Planning and Transport Committee in July 2018.
- 1.2 The area covered by the framework includes the Broad Street Mall, the now vacant site of the former Civic Offices, the Thames Valley Police headquarters, the Magistrates Courts and the Hexagon Theatre, along with adjoining streets; St Mary's Butts, Oxford Road, Queens Walk and Castle Street. In the light of the multiple ownerships in the area, it was decided that a draft framework should be produced to guide future development. The draft framework has been produced by the Council (with the assistance of an urban design consultancy). The draft framework was published in July 2018 and was subject to formal consultation undertaken during July, August and September, finishing on 28th September 2018.
- 1.3 This report describes the consultation undertaken; provides a summary of the representations and matters raised as part of the consultation and proposes a Revised Development Framework for approval and adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document.

2. Recommended Action

- 2.1 That the results of the consultation on the Draft Framework, undertaken during July to September 2018, as set out in the Statement of Community Involvement at Appendix 1, be noted.
- 2.2 That the draft officer responses to individual representations, as set out in the Statement of Community Involvement at Appendix 1, be approved
- 2.3 That the Hosier Street Area Development Framework (Appendix 2) be approved and adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The former Civic Offices were vacated during 2014/15 and, subsequently, carefully demolished. In order to develop proposals for the eventual disposal and development of the site, the Council entered into a partnership arrangement with Kier Construction.
- 3.2 At the same time, Thames Valley Police have been reviewing their headquarters buildings with redevelopment of the site being one option. Thames Valley Police has recently confirmed that vacating their current site remains their preferred option although they are still some way from achieving that aim. The Council and its partner Kier have been involved in discussions in relation to possible future redevelopment of this site.
- 3.3 In the meantime, the new owners of Broad Street Mall have been evolving ambitious plans for the remodelling and development of the Broad Street Mall which includes incorporating a significant level of new residential development in various buildings above the roof of, and adjacent to, the current building, along with various improvements to the Mall and other property in the vicinity. The owners (Moorgarth) are currently discussing their proposals with officers as part of a process of pre-application advice. They propose to submit planning applications in the near future.
- 3.4 Planning policy for the future development of the area is provided in the Reading Central Area Action Plan. This has now been updated in the Submission Draft Local Plan that was approved by Committee in March 2018 for submission to the Secretary of State. Draft Policy CR12 deals with the West Side Major Opportunity Area. CR12d covers the site of the Broad Street mall and indicates that,

“The site will be used for continued retail and leisure provision, maintaining frontages, with uses including residential, with some potential for offices, on upper floors.”

- 3.5 CR12e, which covers the Hosier Street /Civic Offices, Thames Valley Police and Magistrates Court sites, indicates that,

“Development on this site will result in a new residential community centred on an improved area of public open space and a high quality environment, with an improved entrance to the site from St Mary’s Butts. The edges of the open space will be activated with retail, leisure and/or other main town centre uses such as hotel use, and development may also include some limited offices uses. The Hexagon theatre will only be developed if a replacement facility for Reading is provided, and approaches to the theatre will be improved. Development will also include a replacement site for the street market. The car parking below ground level will be retained and incorporated into the development.”

- 3.6 Policy CR10, along with Figure 5.2, provides the policy for the development of tall buildings in central Reading noting their role in marking the centre out as a regionally-significant hub of activity and a practical role in accommodating the level of development that this status entails in this highly accessible location. Sub policy CR10b provides guidance for the Western Grouping which envisaged a cluster of tall buildings within the grouping. Chatham Street provides one tall building and the Broad Street Mall and the site of the former Civic Offices are the only other locations where the cluster of tall buildings can be achieved.

- 3.7 The policy wording and associated text provides a very broad basis for considering the future development and use of land. However it is of limited value to promoting the most appropriate form of development of a large complex site in multiple ownerships. A more detailed masterplan or framework which has been subject to public consultation would normally be sought for a site such as the Hosier Street Area. The Hosier Street Area Development Framework fulfils that function. Once adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document, it will carry weight in the determination of planning applications within the area to which it applies.

4.0 Development Framework

(a) Current Position

- 4.1 Consultation was carried out during July, August and September 2018. A longer than normal period of consultation was provided to allow for the fact that consultation was taking place over the summer holiday period. Details of the consultation were sent by email and letter to all those who are registered with the council for planning policy related consultations. As part of the consultation exercise, 2 exhibitions/drop-in events were held in the Hexagon theatre. These were both well attended. An interactive event, led by the Council’s

urban design consultants was also held on 13th September 2018, again at the Hexagon Theatre. Invitations were sent to community groups and other interested parties to take part in the event. Approximately 45 people attended. Further detail on the consultation process is provided in the Statement of Community Involvement attached at Appendix 1.

4.2 The Statement of Community Involvement attached at Appendix 1 also records the responses to the consultation. This includes summaries of all the formal written comments that have been received via the Webform on the Council's website or via letters and emails sent into the Planning Policy Team. It also includes separate records of matters raised in the exhibitions/drop-in events and at the interactive event.

4.3 Written comments were received from 18 separate groups or individuals. These have been summarised in The Statement of Community Involvement which is attached at Appendix 1. The statement divides up the summaries of written responses under the following main headings:

- Uses and Response to Context;
- Townscape, Massing and Tall Buildings;
- Landscape and Public Realm.

4.4 Under **uses and response to context**, representations have raised the following concerns:

- Concerns over the high density and high population that will result from the development and questions as to how sustainable such development will be. Asks whether the introduction of such a large population into the area can be supported by appropriate health, leisure, education and other infrastructure;
- The area lies within an area of high deprivation and high levels of anti-social behaviour. New development could potentially exacerbate existing problems in the area if not properly planned. Questions whether the area is an appropriate location for social housing;
- The need for this council owned opportunity to be used to encourage the provision of additional leisure facilities and a supermarket as part of the development;
- Questions over the need, and market, for more fast food restaurants and whether the framework can ensure healthy food offers;
- Issues about the market including a call for more ambitious plans for upgrading the market;
- Concerns that the document lacks clarity about the future of the Hexagon;

- Concerns about the suitability of the existing podium to accommodate new development and changes to its structure and the need for proper planning of the areas under the podium to ensure that they are attractive, safe and well supervised;
- Existing artwork (cartwheeling boys, the clock, etc.) should be retained and the Jubilee drinking fountain should be repaired.
- Need for careful maintenance and management of the site so that it doesn't become a run-down no-go area;
- The document fails to refer to the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area and to consider the adverse effects the proposals will have on that Conservation Area. It could also do more to enhance some parts of the area's historic character;
- Issues related to the need for sufficient provision for car parking for all uses;
- Transport officers have various concerns in relation to parking, servicing, proposals for St Mary's Butt's and Oxford Road in relation to bus use, non-car transport, etc. the need to consider how pedestrians and cyclists access the site including whether, a bridge or decking over the IDR, should be provided, and the form of such provision.
- The time frame in which this development is being pushed through is far too aggressive for such an important development.

4.5 Under the heading, **Townscape, Massing and Tall Buildings**, representations have raised the following concerns:

- The contrast between the generally low-rise, generally Victorian buildings in the area, and the proposed 20-storey tall buildings that will be visually jarring and totally unacceptable;
- Tall buildings will affect sunlight/daylight and lead to overlooking of properties in the area;
- Tall buildings will fail to preserve and enhance the setting of conservation areas and listed buildings. The potential harm to these areas has not been given adequate consideration;
- Tall buildings should not be restricted in height to a maximum of 20 storeys;
- Concerns about the position, height, massing, orientation and wind tunnel effect of the tall buildings and blocks.
- The layout should provide a greater degree of north - south alignment to allow more sunlight into the site;
- Dusseldorf Way seems too narrow in the new scheme;
- there appear to be no specific proposals to improve the Castle Street, Castle Hill IDR junction, which is shown as within the development area and is in need of improvement;
- Castle Street should be identified as a separate character area in Figure 11 and a vision should be developed for the development in this area;

- it would be helpful to see how the proposed cluster of tall buildings will appear in some of the long distance views, including those identified as key views in the Tall Buildings SPD, as well as, some closer ‘neighbourhood level’ views from within the town centre

4.6 Under the heading, **Landscape and Public Realm**, representations have raised the following concerns:

- Provision of open space will significantly shrink compared with the existing area of open space. Such loss is unacceptable;
- Insufficient mitigation for such a dense development in terms of the size of open space;
- The proposed development and lack of open space has a significant impact on views across the site;
- Private amenity space should be transferred to the public open space and better use made of roof top space for providing for private amenity space;
- Differing views on the provision of a bridge or decking across the IDR and the form such provision should take;
- Various heritage features within the site (cartwheeling boys) should be retained as part of any new development;
- Dusseldorf Way seems too narrow in the new scheme;

4.7 The main matters raised in the two exhibitions and the Interactive Event are largely covered by the above listings.

(b) Proposed Option

4.8 Officers have considered the various representations summarised in the Statement of Community Involvement. Officer responses have been made in relation to each of the points made in written submissions indicating any actions resulting from consideration of the representation. Those responses are set out in the Statement of Community Involvement attached as Appendix 1. Committee is asked to agree those draft responses.

4.9 The proposed development framework for the area has been revised with the assistance of the retained urban design consultancy, in accordance with the officer responses. The revisions to the Framework therefore seek to take account of the representations and other feedback as appropriate. The revised version of the Framework attached at Appendix 2 shows the main changes to the document.

4.10 The starting point in considering the Council’s response to the representations is the development plan policies, both the current adopted policies and those policies in the emerging plan that has recently been the subject of a Local Plan Examination. As there were no substantive objections to the relevant policies outlined in Section

3 above, it is reasonable to assume that the Inspector will not be recommending any substantive changes to these policies and that they will be taken forward into the new local plan which is programmed to be adopted during 2019.

- 4.11 Under the development plan, therefore, the Broad Street Mall and the Hosier Street Areas are allocated for high density mixed use development including residential development. Such residential development will contribute to the challenging level of new residential development (including affordable housing) that needs to be provided in the Borough in the period up to 2036. This is a highly sustainable location for such high density development. The development plan also provides for the development of tall buildings in accordance with Council's Tall Buildings Strategy. The current Reading Central Area Action Plan which was adopted, following independent examination, in 2009, identified a Western Grouping for tall buildings as follows, "*A small number of tall buildings would be appropriate to create a distinctive grouping, focused along the line of the IDR, to mark the area as the civic heart of Reading and a gateway to the centre.*" The principle of providing tall buildings in this area is not, therefore, a new proposal and forms a long standing commitment in the development plan for the area.
- 4.12 While a tall building on the site is therefore acceptable in policy terms, any proposed tall building will have to meet the various criteria for the development of a tall building set out in the local plan. Additional advice on the design of any tall building has been added to the Framework to reflect these various criteria and to ensure a building of high quality design.
- 4.13 In response to some of the criticisms of the provision for tall buildings within the development framework, further work has been carried out to assess the most appropriate location and form of a new tall building. As a result, some adjustments have been made to the Framework. Details of the options considered in that work is also provided in an appendix at the end of the Framework. The Framework proposed for adoption does not dictate the final layout for the site including the position of the tall building; this will be confirmed via a more detailed planning application for the site.
- 4.14 Further work has been undertaken to address the criticism over the amount of open space proposed and the loss of specific areas of open space under the framework. A detailed analysis of the proposed open space provision, compared with the existing open space within the site before the Civic Offices were demolished, demonstrates that there will be a small net gain in the overall amount of open space within the area following the development of the area. Some areas of existing open space will be lost. However, the framework proposes a significantly enlarged central area of open space adjacent to the Hexagon which will provide an improved setting for the Hexagon, a

focal point for the wider development and a space large enough to accommodate a range of open space uses to serve residents of the development and those visiting the town centre. It will be an area with a high level of surveillance. The development will avoid small unsupervised areas which can be the focus of anti-social behaviour.

- 4.15 In response to concerns about the width of Dusseldorf Way following development, the framework includes, in an appendix, examples of streets of similar width with high buildings on either side. These are mostly examples in London. However, the width of 18m minimum is very similar to the width of Broad Street in Reading in the area between John Lewis and the HSBC Bank on the opposite side of the street. This is also an example of a primarily pedestrian environment with large mature trees which is the intention for Dusseldorf Way within the redeveloped area.
 - 4.16 Further studies are being undertaken to consider options for a bridge or decking to be provided over the IDR, although it should be noted that this is a very expensive infrastructure item.
 - 4.17 The revised framework responds to issues raised over the mix of uses and provides additional encouragement to further leisure and retail uses to be provided on the ground floors of the development blocks, creating active frontages.
 - 4.18 The revised framework makes reference to the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area both in text and on context plans. It includes the Conservation Appraisal Plan as an appendix to the document. It explicitly seeks the retention of the existing Cartwheeling Boys, clock, water feature and Jubilee Drinking fountain artwork. It makes reference to the existing Tea Hut in St Mary's Butts. It provides additional wording in relation to aspirations for an upgraded market within the area. The introduction is also being expanded to note the role of the Framework in informing the preparation of future planning applications, noting that there will be considerable further consultation in relation to pre-application and planning application proposals for the development of different parts of the site.
- (c) Other Options Considered.
- 4.19 No development is not a realistic option as there is broad agreement that this valuable town centre site needs to be regenerated and advantage taken of its highly sustainable location through high quality development.
 - 4.20 Clearly, there are other options that would involve lower density development. However, these would not be in accordance with the development plan policies outlined above (nor national policy which seek to maximise the development of urban land in sustainable locations). It would fail to make best use of this highly sustainable

location. The viability of such a form of development would be significantly reduced which might become a barrier to the development of the area.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 Adoption of the development framework will guide future development of the site in a way that will contribute to achieving the Council's priorities set out in the Corporate Plan through:

- Securing the economic success of Reading and provision of job opportunities;
- Ensuring access to local housing to meet local needs;
- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe.

This development framework and the subsequent development will contribute to generating job opportunities both in construction and the use of the development. It will provide much needed affordable housing as well as other market housing to meet local needs. It will enable regeneration and improvement of an area that has now become tired and which is in need of high quality new development. It will provide a mix of uses that provides new facilities, attractions and public realm in the central area while ensuring that the historical and architectural character is preserved and enhanced.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 The Council's consultation process for planning policy is set out in the adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI, adopted March 2014), and seeks to allow the community a genuine chance to influence the document.

6.2 A formal consultation led by the Council was undertaken starting in mid-July and lasting for a period of ten weeks (to allow for the summer holiday period) until the end of September. Responses received have been considered in preparing the revised framework for adoption. The consultation was e-based around making the document available for comment, and through 2 exhibition/drop-in events and an interactive event led by the Council's Urban Design Consultants. Full details of the consultation are set out in Appendix 1 to this report, the Council's Statement of Consultation.

7. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

7.1 In line with assessments undertaken for the local plan it is not expected that there will be any significant adverse impacts on specific groups due to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religious belief. An equality scoping assessment is included in Appendix 2 of this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising from the report. The framework will be published as a Supplementary Planning Document under the Planning Acts. It will be subject to statutory consultation and a requirement to take account of representations. It will be adopted by the Council and will hold weight in the determination of planning applications for any development that occurs in the Hosier Street Area.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The framework has involved costs for employing specialist consultants and carrying out consultation including various events. These costs fall under the budget of the Planning Section. The Council is a significant land owner of the site. The adoption of the Framework as a supplementary planning document will have an impact on land values for all owners.

Value for Money (VFM)

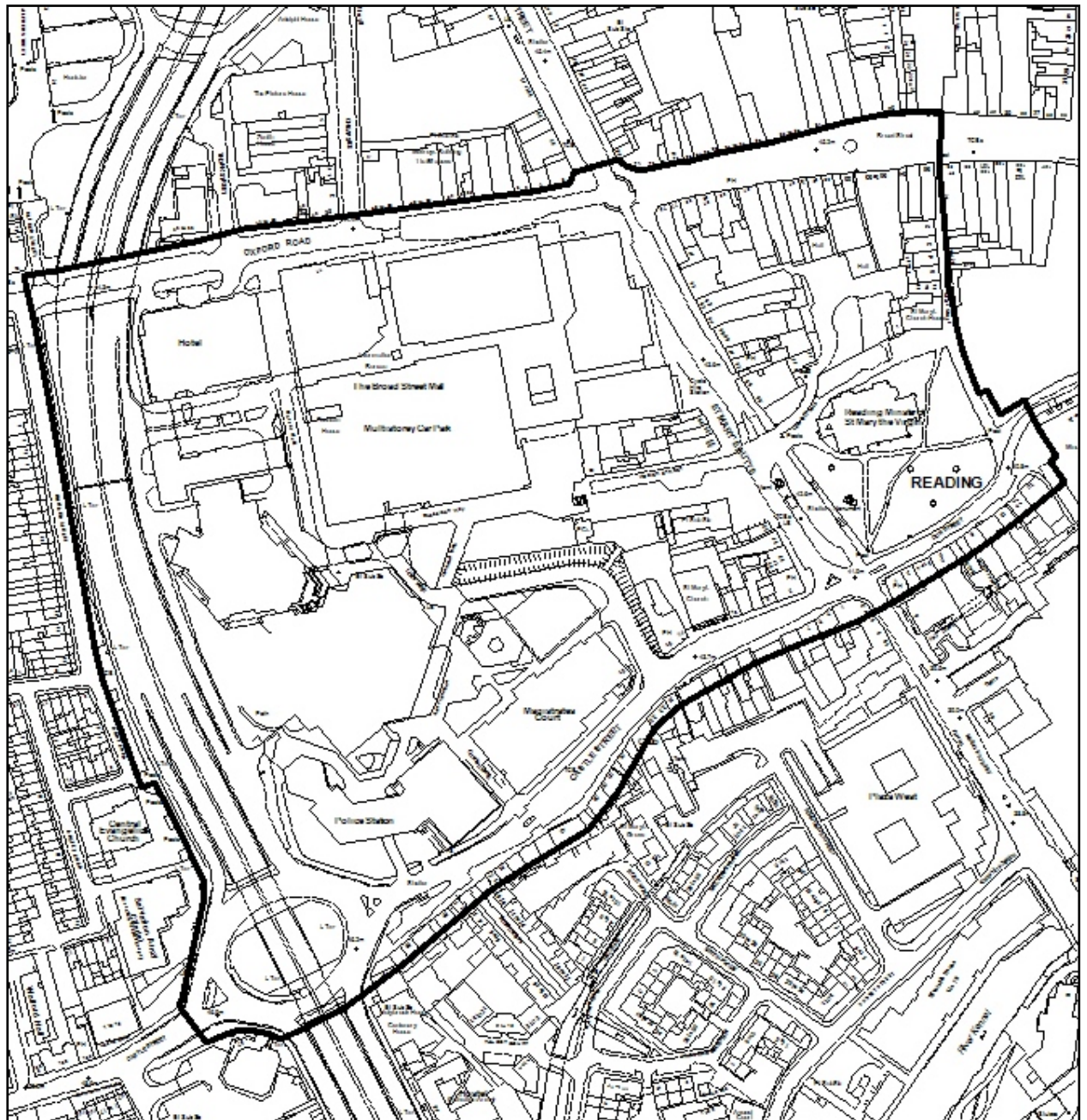
- 9.3 The preparation of framework will ensure that developments are appropriate to the area, that significant effects are mitigated and that harmful effects are minimised. Production of a Supplementary Planning Document for a complicated site such as the Hosier Street Area is in line with best practice and therefore represents good value for money.

Risk Assessment

- 9.4 There are no direct financial risks associated with the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- National Planning Policy Framework;
- Reading Borough Core Strategy;
- Reading Borough, Reading Central Area Action Plan;
- Draft Reading Borough Local Plan



Extent of Hosier Street Area

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