

03 December 2025



Title	PLANNING APPLICATIONS REPORT
Ward	Abbey/Katesgrove
Planning Application Reference:	PL/22/1916/FUL & PL/22/1917/FUL
Site Address:	PL/22/1916/FUL – Former Debenhams Department Store, west of Yield Hall Place ('Yield Hall Place 1'), The Oracle, Reading, RG2 2AS PL/22/1917/FUL – Existing Vue cinema complex west of Yield Hall Place/London Road ('Yield Hall Place 2'), The Oracle, Reading, RG2 2AG
Proposed Development	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) & 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 & external alterations to shopping centre, including creation of new shopping centre entrance (amended description) (accompanied by an Environmental Statement) 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) & 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)
Applicant	The Oracle Limited Partnership
Report author	Matt Burns, Principal Planning Officer
PL/22/2916/FUL - Yield Hall Place 1 The Oracle, Reading RG2 2AG	
Deadline:	Target decision date: 20 th March 2023 Extension of time date: 13 th February 2026
Recommendation	<p>Subject to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmation of satisfactory details of the operation of the Deferred Payment Mechanism (DPM) terms; and Confirmation from the Local Lead Flood Authority that SuDS issues are satisfactory <p>Delegate to the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection Services (ADPTPPS) to:</p>

	<p>i) GRANT full planning permission, subject to the satisfactory completion of a s106 legal agreement and delegate to ADPTPPS to make such minor changes to conditions or such additional conditions required, make such minor changes to Heads of Terms and details of the legal agreement as may be reasonably required to issue the permission; or</p> <p>ii) Refuse full planning permission if the legal agreement is not completed by 13/02/2026 (unless officers on behalf of the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection Services agree to a later date for completion of the legal agreement)</p>
S106 Heads of Terms	<p>1. <u>Affordable Housing</u></p> <p>Not less than 22 units (10% of the total) affordable housing units to be provided on site at Discounted Market Rent level, capped at the lower of 80% Market Rent or LHA or equivalent, inclusive of service charges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not less than 9 affordable housing units to be provided in Block A before any BtR (non-affordable) units provided • Not less than 13 affordable housing units to be provided in Block B before any BtR (non-affordable) units provided • Mix of affordable housing to be 9 x 1 bed, 12 x 2 bed and 1 x 3 bed units • Affordable housing to be supplied at no more than LHA rent levels in perpetuity in accordance with Policy H4. • Layout of units within each block to be as per proposed plans <p>(Policies CC9, H3, H4 and the Affordable Housing SPD)</p> <p>2. <u>Affordable Housing Deferred Payment Mechanism</u></p> <p>The provision of affordable housing (via a commuted sum to go towards affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough), subject to a Deferred Payment Mechanism (DPM) to potentially increase the overall provision to a maximum of equivalent 30% policy compliance.</p> <p>Details to be set out in the Update Report.</p> <p>(Policies: CC9, H3, and the Affordable Housing SPD)</p> <p>3. <u>Standard BTR requirements –</u></p> <p><i>Nominations and Lettings – Discounted Market Rent (LHA)</i></p> <p>First Lets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either a typical unit, show apartment or the marketing suite will be made available for viewings • Three months before Practical Completion, the Council will be notified of expected date units will be available. • The “Marketing Period” will start two months before Practical completion and the Landlord will provide information on rents, specification, floor plans and management details. • For the first 4 weeks of the Marketing Period the affordable homes will be exclusively marketed to Council nominees, and the following will apply:

- The Council has 10 working days to advertise the properties. This includes arranging viewing days for Applicants;
- The Council then has 5 working days to confirm eligibility of the Applicants against the 'Qualifying Criteria' and then nominate those Applicants to the Landlord;
- Subject to appropriate checks by the Landlord that the Qualifying Criteria has been met, Applicants will have then have 2 working days to confirm if they wish to take the property.
- If the Landlord considers that the Qualifying Criteria has not been met, they will notify the Council who will be granted an additional 2 working days to nominate an alternative Applicant for this particular property.
- Where more than one Applicant (all of whom pass the qualifying criteria) wants the same property, priority will be as per the Priority Hierarchy:
 1. Households on the Council's Housing Waiting List
 2. Households where at least one person both lives and works in the Borough
 3. Households where at least one person either lives or works in the Borough
 4. Households where at least one person lives or works in a neighbouring local authority
 5. All other unrestricted household.
- After the initial 4-week period, any remaining available affordable homes can be marketed by both the Council and the Landlord.
- Within this period the Council may still nominate Applicants, however priority will be determined on a first come first served basis, subject to the Qualifying Criteria being met.

Subsequent Lets:

- Existing residents will provide 2 months' notice of their intention to activate a break clause, at which point the property can be marketed.
- As above, for the first 4 weeks of any marketing period for subsequent lets of the affordable homes will be ring fenced to Council nominees.

Qualifying Criteria for all tenants

1. Can afford the rents proposed and pass affordability checks (to be defined in the agreement) [affordability to include money provided through the benefits system] and
2. Are an appropriate household size for the available property (to be defined in the agreement) and
3. Suitable references & credit checks (to be defined in the agreement) and
4. Have no rent arrears or history of rent arrears and
5. No history of anti-social behaviour (to be defined in the agreement) and
6. Satisfactory face-to-face interview with the Landlord's representative (to be defined in the agreement)

Management Strategy:

3 months before Practical Completion the Landlord to submit a Management Strategy to the Council for approval (not to be unreasonably withheld) to include the following:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Details of the individual monthly rent and service charge (noting that all rents are inclusive of service charges) and - Management, maintenance and servicing arrangements for the affordable units/ occupiers (e.g. on-site presence hours, bin disposal, visitor parking etc) - Details as to how the affordable homes will be marketed to prospective occupiers (for both first and subsequent lettings) and the different forms of media proposed to be used. - No dwelling to be occupied in any part of the development until the Strategy has been approved in writing by the Council. No dwelling to be occupied other than in accordance with the approved Strategy. <p>In accordance with Policy H4.</p> <p><i>General Build to Rent Provisions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 20 year minimum as BTR from Practical Completion. - Subject to legislative changes, assured shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) offered at 3 years in length. Tenants may opt for shorter tenancy. Include 6 month tenant-only, no fee, break clause (2 month notice). [as per NPPG guidance]. Unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA. - Annual statement to RBC, confirming the approach to letting the affordable units, their ongoing status, and clearly identifying how the scheme is meeting the overall affordable housing level required in the planning permission. [as per NPPG Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 60-006-20180913] - All tenancies shall include provisions enabling all residents to have the right to access and use the Communal Facilities within all residential areas, subject to reasonable management requirements and for the avoidance of doubt the charges and other terms of use shall be the same for all residents (regardless of tenure). - To provide and manage the Communal Facilities for the lifetime of the development. Except where alternative amenity facilities of equivalent effect and a timetable for their provision and arrangements for their management have been agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority AND no earlier than the expiration of 20 years from Practical Completion. - Definition and demarcation of all communal facilities on plans. Clarification of nature/function of each to be included in the s106 agreement. <p>(Policy H4)</p> <p>4. <u>Employment and Skills Plan</u></p> <p>To secure a construction and end user phase Employment and Skills Plan (ESP) or equivalent financial contributions (construction phase - £61, 915 / end user phase - £22, 928). As calculated in the Council's Employment Skills and Training SPD (2013). Construction phase plan/contribution to be provided prior to commencement of development of each phase 1A and 1B. End user plan/contribution to be provided prior to first occupation of any commercial unit within phase 1A and phase 1B. Both contributions index linked from date planning permission is granted.</p> <p>(Policy CC9 and the Employment Skills and Training SPD)</p>
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5. Heat Network

Safeguarding for the possible connection of the development to a Reading Central Area Heat Network.

Prior to commencement of development (barring demolition) , a feasibility study for future connection to a Reading Central Area District Heat Network for consideration:

- Feasibility study to consider connection of the development to a Reading Central Area Heat Network using all up to date and relevant data to the Heat Network)
- Feasibility Study to set out the full schedule of costs for connection to a Reading Central Area Heat Network
- If a connection is considered to be feasible and no later than three months from receipt of the Study, the Council shall have confirmed whether the development is approved for connection to the heat network
- If approved for connection, the developer shall provide a scheme to ensure connection to the Reading Central Area Heat Network, and no residential unit shall be occupied until the development is connected to a working Reading Central Area Heat Network.

(Policy CC4 and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD)

6. Carbon Off Setting Contribution (residential dwellings only)

As per the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD 2019. If zero carbon is not achieved the scheme must instead achieve a minimum of a 35% improvement in regulated emissions over the Target Emissions Rate in the 2013 Building Regulations, plus provide a financial contribution of £1,800 per remaining tonne towards carbon offsetting within the Borough (calculated as £60/tonne over a 30-year period). Contribution to be index linked from the date planning permission is granted.

(Policy H5 and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD)

7. Local Health Care Infrastructure

Contribution of £188, 352 to support a solution, identified by the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) or any subsequent body that may take over the NHS ICB function for Reading Borough, to provide extra primary clinical capacity needed to mitigate the increased impact of the development on healthcare facilities within Abbey or adjacent wards. Payable on commencement of development and index linked from the date planning permission is granted.

(Policy CC9)

8. Public Realm / Open Space / Leisure

Contribution of £1.2 million towards off-site works to improve nearby public realm/open space/leisure facilities. Consisting of:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hard/soft landscaping works to Star Lane/rear of Queens Road Car Park Area referred to in the draft RBC Public Realm Strategy which includes i) provision of central amenity green space lawn area and benches, ii) new directional signage and iii) meadow and boundary planting. (£500k) - Improvements to surfacing and layout of the cycle/pedestrian routes along the river between The Oracle and Waterloo Meadows which is the closest major park and area of open space to the development containing a play area and other recreational facilities. (£500k) - Improvements, including replacement play equipment, to St Giles Play Area at St Giles Close (200k)
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Payable in full on commencement of which ever development is implemented first of YHP1 (PL/22/1916) and YHP2 (PL/22/1917). Index linked from the date planning permission is granted.

(Policies EN9, CR3 and CC9)

9. Transport/Highway Matters

Within 6 months of commencement of the development to have entered into a S278 Highways or any other agreement that maybe agreed with the Highway Authority to facilitate the delivery of the following:

- Provision of bollards with a minimum spacing of 1.5m at the junction of Yield Hall Place and Minster Street as agreed on drawing ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0103 Rev P05.

No part of the development to be occupied until the Highway works have been completed

10. Car Club

Prior to occupation of any residential dwelling to submit for approval details of a car club for two vehicles within The Oracle car park and a car club strategy. Spaces to be provided prior to occupation of any residential dwelling.

13. Public Art

Prior to commencement of development (barring demolition), submission and approval by the LPA of a scheme for inclusion of Public Art within the public realm areas of the site. Subject to an award of tender to artist(s) via an art feasibility study (of no greater value than £10,000).

RBC to agree or to reject any proposed scheme within 3 months. Completion/installation of public art no later than first occupation of any residential or commercial unit.

(Policies CC7, CR2, CR3 and CC9)

14. Monitoring fee

	<p>Contribution towards monitoring costs plus a separate commitment to pay the Council's reasonable legal costs and any further viability review costs in connection with the proposed S106 Agreement. To be payable whether or not the Agreement is completed</p> <p>15. <u>All Contributions index linked</u></p> <p>All financial contributions index-linked from the date of permission.</p> <p>16. <u>Other</u></p> <p>Completion of YHP1 in its entirety, using the phasing 1A and 1B once there has been commencement of Phase 1A (within 5 years).</p>
Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time Limit for implementation – 3 years. 2. Approved plans. 3. <u>Phase 1 A * Pre-commencement (barring demolition)</u> submission and approval of details of all external materials (including samples of all external materials and sectional mock-ups available to view on-site) 4. <u>Phase 1 B * Pre-commencement (barring demolition)</u> submission and approval of details of all external materials (including samples of all external materials and sectional mock-ups available to view on-site) 4. * <u>Pre-commencement</u> submission and approval of a demolition and construction method statement 5. *<u>Pre-commencement</u> (barring demolition), submission and approval of a habitat and ecological enhancement scheme 7. <u>* Pre-commencement</u> submission and approval of a contaminated land assessment 8. * <u>Pre-commencement</u> submission and approval of contaminated land remediation scheme 9. Implementation of approved remediation scheme 10.. Reporting of any unexpected contamination 11. * <u>Pre-commencement (barring demolition to ground level)</u> submission and approval of an archaeological written scheme of investigation and subsequent implementation 10. * <u>Pre-commencement</u> (barring demolition) submission and approval of a public realm/ landscaping scheme 12. *<u>Pre-commencement</u> (barring demolition) submission and approval of a landscape and ecological management plan 14. * <u>Pre-commencement (barring demolition)</u>, submission and approval of a SuDS scheme and subsequent implementation 16. * <u>Pre-commencement</u> submission and approval of a Security Strategy 17. * <u>Phase 1B - Pre-commencement (barring demolition)</u> submission and approval of a noise mitigation scheme (internal) to protect dwellings from noise emissions from non-residential uses at ground floor 18. *<u>Phase 1B - Pre-commencement (barring demolition)</u> submission and approval of a noise (external) and ventilation strategy to include mitigation for overheating 19. * <u>Phase 1B - Pre-commencement (barring demolition)</u> submission and approval of design stage SAP energy assessment in relation all proposed dwellings. 20. Pre-occupation of any residential dwelling submission and approval of as-built stage SAP energy assessment

21. * Phase 1A - Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of design stage certification demonstrating adherence of all non-residential units to a BREEAM Excellent standard

22. *Phase 1B - Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of design stage certification demonstrating adherence of all non-residential units to a BREEAM Excellent standard

23. Phase 1A - Pre-occupation submission and approval of as-built certification demonstrating compliance of all non-residential units to a BREEAM Excellent standard

24. Phase 1B - Pre-occupation submission and approval of as-built certification demonstrating compliance of all non-residential units to a BREEAM Excellent standard

25. * Pre-commencement submission and approval of a demolition and construction environmental management plan (CEMP)

26. * Phase 1B Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of a clean water infrastructure phasing plan

27. *Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of an air quality mitigation scheme

29* Pre-occupation of any part of the development submission and approval of scheme to provide 28 cycle parking spaces adjacent to the Bridge Street elevation of The Oracle. Provision of the spaces prior to first occupation of any commercial or residential unit. Unless already provided as part of YHP2

30. * Phase 1 A - Pre-commencement submission and approval of a site waste management plan (SWMP)

31. * Phase 1B – Pre-commencement submission and approval of a site waste management plan (SWMP)

32. * Pre-commencement submission and approval of details of external appearance of Phase 1A.

33. *Phase 1B - Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of building maintenance unit details

34. Pre-occupation of any residential unit implementation of cycle parking

35. Pre-occupation of any residential unit submission and approval of all addresses (for parking permits)

36. All occupiers to be notified of not automatic entitlement to a parking permit .

37. Pre-occupation of any commercial units submission and approval of delivery and servicing management plan

38. Pre-occupation of any dwelling revision of layout of multi-storey car parking spaces as per proposed plans

39. Pre-occupation of any dwelling implementation of parking and loading bay restrictions to east of Yield Hall Place

40. All external doors to open away from the street

41. Pre-occupation of any residential unit submission and approval of a moving in / moving out management plan

42. Parking Permits 1 (pre-occupation)

43. Parking Permits 2 (compliance condition)

44. Vehicle Loading facilities (as specified) (compliance condition)

45. Pre-occupation submission and approval of boundary treatment details (to be approved) including implementation

47. Pre-occupation of any residential dwelling, submission and approval of details of provision of a minimum of 11 'wheelchair accessible' units.

48. Pre-occupation, of any commercial unit containing kitchen or cooking facilities, submission and approval of an odour assessment and management plan

49. Pre-occupation submission and approval of details of all external lighting

51. Phase 1B - Pre-occupation submission and approval of a car park cleaning management plan

52. Noise assessment (including specific reference to structure borne noise) to be submitted and approved prior to the first occupation of any Class E(d) gym use within any 'application floor space' unit

53. Phase 1A - Pre-occupation submission and approval of vermin proofing details for all bin stores

54. Phase 1B – Pre-occupation submission and approval of vermin proofing details for all bin stores

55. Pre-occupation of any commercial unit provision of associated commercial refuse store

56. Pre-occupation of any residential unit provision of residential refuse stores

57. Phase 1A - Pre-occupation of any commercial unit submission and approval of a commercial waste management strategy (including details of bin or tow tugs)

58. Phase 1B – Pre-occupation of any commercial unit submission and approval of a commercial waste management strategy (including details of bin or tow tugs)

59. Pre-occupation of any residential unit submission and approval of a residential waste management strategy

60. Within 5 months of first occupation of any commercial unit submission and approval of a site travel plan

61. Annual review of travel plan following approval under condition 60 above.

62 . Phase 1 A - Pre-occupation of any part of the development submission and approval of a CCTV strategy

63. Phase 1B – Pre-occupation of any part of the development submission and approval of a CCTV strategy

64. Pre-occupation of any residential dwelling completion of all commercial units

65. Pre-occupation of any commercial or residential unit provision of all on-site public realm works

67. Restriction on hours of deliveries and waste collection (not to take place between the hours of 2300 and 0600 Monday to Saturday or between 2230 and 0600 Sundays and Bank Holidays)

68. Noise Assessment to be submitted and approved prior to installation of any mechanical plant

69. No flat roof area to be used as a balcony or roof terrace unless where already stated/shown

70. No piling to take place unless a piling method statement has been submitted and approved

71. Retention of all trees other than those approved for removal

72. All vegetation clearance to take place outside of the bird nesting season

73. All commercial units apart from the proposed co-working space unit to be for a use within Class E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d), E(e), E(f) and/or Sui Generis Bar Use only

74. Unit shown on approved plans as 'co-working space' to be for a use within Class E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d), E(e), E(f) and E(g)(i) only

75. Hours of use of any Class E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d), E(e), E(f), E(g)(i) and/or Sui Generis Bar Use 'application floor space' being Monday to Saturday 08:00hours – 23:00 hours and Sunday, Bank Holidays and other statutory holidays 08:00 hours – 22:00 hours

76. Restriction preventing the future inclusion of mezzanine floors / increases in floor area, unless specifically shown on the approved plans. Otherwise separate permission is required to be sought and approved.

	<p>77. No more than 20% of floorspace within the proposed flexible Class E and/or Sui Generis Bar units within the retained Debenhams floorspace to be for Sui Generis Drinking Establishment Use.</p> <p>78. Demolition/Construction hours (compliance condition)</p> <p>79. No burning of materials on site during demolition/construction (compliance condition)</p> <p>80. Mix of units restricted to 96 x 1 bed units (44%), 111 x 2 bed units (51%) and 11 x 3 bed units (5%)</p> <p>81. Pre-occupation of any residential dwelling submission and approval of photovoltaics details.</p> <p>82. Development not to be carried out other than in full accordance with the principles of the submitted fire statement. All fire safety mitigation measures to be implemented prior to occupation of any dwelling (including sprinklers)</p> <p>83. Development not to be carried out other than in full accordance with all the flood mitigation measures set out in the submitted flood risk assessment</p> <p>84. Development not to be carried out other than in full accordance with the submitted energy statement</p> <p>85. Development not to be carried out other than in full accordance with the submitted wind microclimate report. No dwelling to be occupied until all mitigation measures recommended within the report have been implemented.</p> <p>86 * <u>Pre-commencement</u> (barring demolition) submission and approval of a GSHP feasibility study</p> <p>87. Development to be carried out in accordance with submitted phasing plan</p>
Informatics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positive and Proactive Working – approval 2. Pre-commencement conditions 3. Highways 4. S106 Legal Agreement 5. Terms and conditions 6. Building Regulations 7. Complaints about construction 8. Encroachment 9. Noise between residential properties – sound insulation 10. Community Infrastructure Levy 11. Parking Permits 12. No advertisement consent granted – separate consent may be required in the future 13. Thames Water recommended informative 14. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service informative 15. Marine Maritime Organisation informative 16. Canal and River Trust informative

PL/22/1917/FUL - Yield Hall Place 2 The Oracle, Reading RG2 2AG

Deadline:	Target decision date: 20 th March 2023 Extension of time date: 13 th February 2026
Recommendation:	<p>Subject to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confirmation of satisfactory details of the operation of the Deferred Payment Mechanism (DPM) terms; and 2. Confirmation from the Local Lead Flood Authority that SuDS issues are satisfactory

	<p>Delegate to the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection Services (ADPTPPS) to:</p> <p>i) GRANT full planning permission, subject to the satisfactory completion of a s106 legal agreement and delegate to ADPTPPS to make such minor changes to conditions or such additional conditions required, make such minor changes to Heads of Terms and details of the legal agreement as may be reasonably required to issue the permission; or</p> <p>ii) Refuse full planning permission if the legal agreement is not completed by 13/02/2026 (unless officers on behalf of the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection Services agree to a later date for completion of the legal agreement)</p>
	<p>1. <u>Affordable Housing</u></p> <p>Not less than 22 units (10% of the total) affordable housing units to be provided on site at Discounted Market Rent level, capped at the lower of 80% Market Rent or LHA or equivalent, inclusive of service charges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No less than 7 affordable housing units to be provided in Block C before any BtR (non-affordable) units provided • No less than 7 affordable housing units to be provided in Block D before any BtR (non-affordable) units provided • No less than 8 BtR (non-affordable) units to be provided in Block E before any BtR (non-affordable) units to be provided • Mix of affordable housing to be 9 x 1 bed, 12 x 2 bed and 1 x 3 bed units • Affordable housing to be supplied at no more than LHA rent levels in perpetuity in accordance with Policy H4. • Layout of units within each block to be as per proposed plans
S106 terms	<p>(Policies CC9, H3, H4 and the Affordable Housing SPD)</p> <p>2. <u>Affordable Housing Deferred payment mechanism</u></p> <p>The provision of affordable housing (via a commuted sum to go towards affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough), subject to a Deferred Payment Mechanism (DPM) to potentially increase the overall provision to a maximum of equivalent 30% policy compliance.</p> <p>Details to be set out in the Update Report.</p> <p>(Policies: CC9, H3, and the Affordable Housing SPD)</p> <p>3. <u>Standard BTR requirements –</u></p> <p><i>Nominations and Lettings – Discounted Market Rent (LHA)</i></p> <p>First Lets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either a typical unit, show apartment or the marketing suite will be made available for viewings • Three months before Practical Completion, the Council will be notified of expected date units will be available. • The “Marketing Period” will start two months before Practical completion and the Landlord will provide information on rents, specification, floor plans and management details.

- For the first 4 weeks of the Marketing Period the affordable homes will be exclusively marketed to Council nominees, and the following will apply:
 - The Council has 10 working days to advertise the properties. This includes arranging viewing days for Applicants;
 - The Council then has 5 working days to confirm eligibility of the Applicants against the 'Qualifying Criteria' and then nominate those Applicants to the Landlord;
 - Subject to appropriate checks by the Landlord that the Qualifying Criteria has been met, Applicants will have then have 2 working days to confirm if they wish to take the property.
 - If the Landlord considers that the Qualifying Criteria has not been met, they will notify the Council who will be granted an additional 2 working days to nominate an alternative Applicant for this particular property.
 - Where more than one Applicant (all of whom pass the qualifying criteria) wants the same property, priority will be as per the Priority Hierarchy:
 1. Households on the Council's Housing Waiting List
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Subsequent Lets:

- Existing residents will provide 2 months' notice of their intention to activate a break clause, at which point the property can be marketed.
- As above, for the first 4 weeks of any marketing period for subsequent lets of the affordable homes will be ring fenced to Council nominees.

Qualifying Criteria for all tenants

1. Can afford the rents proposed and pass affordability checks (to be defined in the agreement) [affordability to include money provided through the benefits system] and
2. Are an appropriate household size for the available property (to be defined in the agreement) and
3. Suitable references & credit checks (to be defined in the agreement) and
4. Have no rent arrears or history of rent arrears and
5. No history of anti-social behaviour (to be defined in the agreement) and
6. Satisfactory face-to-face interview with the Landlord's representative (to be defined in the agreement)

Management Strategy:

3 months before Practical Completion the Landlord to submit a Management Strategy to the Council for approval (not to be unreasonably withheld) to include the following:

- Details of the individual monthly rent and service charge (noting that all rents are inclusive of service charges) and
- Management, maintenance and servicing arrangements for the affordable units/ occupiers (e.g. on-site presence hours, bin disposal, visitor parking etc)
- Details as to how the affordable homes will be marketed to prospective occupiers (for both first and subsequent lettings) and the different forms of media proposed to be used.
- No dwelling to be occupied in any part of the development until the Strategy has been approved in writing by the Council. No dwelling to be occupied other than in accordance with the approved Strategy.

In accordance with Policy H4.

General Build to Rent Provisions

- 20 year minimum as BTR from Practical Completion.
- Subject to legislative changes, assured shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) offered at 3 years in length. Tenants may opt for shorter tenancy. Include 6 month tenant-only, no fee, break clause (2 month notice). [as per NPPG guidance]. Unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA.
- Annual statement to RBC, confirming the approach to letting the affordable units, their ongoing status, and clearly identifying how the scheme is meeting the overall affordable housing level required in the planning permission. [as per NPPG Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 60-006-20180913]
- All tenancies shall include provisions enabling all residents to have the right to access and use the Communal Facilities within all residential areas, subject to reasonable management requirements and for the avoidance of doubt the charges and other terms of use shall be the same for all residents (regardless of tenure).
- To provide and manage the Communal Facilities for the lifetime of the development. Except where alternative amenity facilities of equivalent effect and a timetable for their provision and arrangements for their management have been agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority AND no earlier than the expiration of 20 years from Practical Completion.
- Definition and demarcation of all communal facilities on plans. Clarification of nature/function of each to be included in the s106 agreement.

(Policy H4)

4. Employment and Skills Plan

To secure a construction and end user phase Employment and Skills Plan (ESP) or equivalent financial contributions (construction phase - £51,515 / end user phase - £10,491). As calculated in the Council's Employment Skills and Training SPD (2013). Construction phase plan/contribution to be provided prior to commencement of development. End user plan/contribution to be provided prior to first occupation of any commercial unit. Both contributions index linked from date planning permission is granted.

(Policy CC9 and the Employment Skills and Training SPD)

5. Heat Network

Safeguarding for the possible connection of the development to a Reading Central Area Heat Network.

Prior to commencement of development (barring demolition) , a feasibility study for future connection to a Reading Central Area District Heat Network for consideration:

- Feasibility study to consider connection of the development to a Reading Central Area Heat Network using all up to date and relevant data to the Heat Network)
- Feasibility Study to set out the full schedule of costs for connection to a Reading Central Area Heat Network
- If a connection is considered to be feasible and no later than three months from receipt of the Study, the Council shall have confirmed whether the development is approved for connection to the heat network
- If approved for connection, the developer shall provide a scheme to ensure connection to the Reading Central Area Heat Network, and no residential unit shall be occupied until the development is connected to a working Reading Central Area Heat Network.

(Policy CC4 and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD)

6. Carbon Off Setting Contribution (residential dwellings only)

As per the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD 2019. If zero carbon is not achieved the scheme must instead achieve a minimum of a 35% improvement in regulated emissions over the Target Emissions Rate in the 2013 Building Regulations, plus provide a financial contribution of £1,800 per remaining tonne towards carbon offsetting within the Borough (calculated as £60/tonne over a 30-year period). Contribution to be index linked from the date planning permission is granted.

(Policy H5 and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD)

7. Local Health Care Infrastructure

Contribution of £188, 352 to support a solution, identified by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) or any subsequent body that may take over the NHS ICB function for Reading Borough, to provide extra primary clinical capacity needed to mitigate the increased impact of the development on healthcare facilities within Abbey or adjacent wards. Payable on commencement of development and index linked from the date planning permission is granted.

(Policy CC9)

8. Public Realm / Open Space / Leisure

	<p>Contribution of £1.2 million towards off-site works to improve nearby public realm/open space/leisure facilities. Consisting of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hard/soft landscaping works to Star Lane/rear of Queens Road Car Park Area referred to in the draft RBC Public Realm Strategy which includes i) provision of central amenity green space lawn area and benches, ii) new directional signage and iii) meadow and boundary planting. (£500k) - Improvements to surfacing and layout of the cycle/pedestrian routes along the river between The Oracle and Waterloo Meadows which is the closest major park and area of open space to the development containing a play area and other recreational facilities. (£500k) - Improvements, including replacement play equipment, to St Giles Play Area at St Giles Close (200k) <p>Payable in full on commencement of which ever development is implemented first of YHP2 (PL/22/1917) and YHP1 (PL/22/1916). Index linked from the date planning permission is granted.</p> <p>(Policies EN9, CR3 and CC9)</p> <p>Prior to commencement of development submission and approval of a public realm scheme for the IDR(Queens Road)/London Street junction. Scheme to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low level hard and soft landscaping in front of the black history mural on Mill Lane • Planting of 5 trees within the central reservation of the IDR (Queens Road) to the west of the London Street junction • Feasibility study for removal of crash barriers to crossing islands and around the IDR (Queens Road)/London Street junction and replacement with low level planters <p>Once scheme is approved Applicant to fund and enter into an agreement under s278 of the Highways Act</p> <p>All agreed public realm works to be completed prior to first occupation of any commercial or residential unit within YHP2, whichever is the sooner.</p> <p>9. <u>Transport/Highway Matters</u></p> <p>Not to commence development unless and until the area of highway to be stopped up as illustrated on drawing 332110757_5500_SK048 Rev P03 has been approved by the Secretary of State (via section 247 TCPA)</p> <p>Within 6 months of commencement of the development to have entered into a S278 Highways Agreement to facilitate the delivery of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to the IDR / London Street / Duke Street signalised junction potentially consisting of the removal of guard railings, adjustment and landscaping to islands, surface dressing to existing crossing points, a raised table on Queens Road service road and tree planting. Including those works set out under section 8 above.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relocation of existing signage as agreed on drawing 332110757_5500_SK053 Rev P01 Provision of kassel or treif kerbs along the IDR as agreed on drawing 332110757_5500_SK055 Rev P01 Removal of existing High Mast lighting column and replacement with standard street lighting columns <p>No occupation of the development until all Highway works have been completed</p> <p>10. <u>Car Club</u></p> <p>Prior to occupation of any residential dwelling to submit for approval details of a car club for two vehicles within The Oracle car park and a car club strategy. Spaces to be provided prior to occupation of any residential dwelling.</p> <p>11. <u>Public Art</u></p> <p>Prior to commencement of development (barring demolition), submission and approval by the LPA of a scheme for inclusion of Public Art within the public realm areas of the site. Subject to an award of tender to artist(s) via an art feasibility study (of no greater value than £10,000). RBC to agree or to reject any proposed scheme within 3 months. Completion/installation of public art no later than first occupation of any residential or commercial unit.</p> <p>(Policies CC7, CR2, CR3 and CC9)</p> <p>12. <u>Monitoring fee</u></p> <p>Contribution towards monitoring costs plus a separate commitment to pay the Council's reasonable legal costs and any further viability review costs in connection with the proposed S106 Agreement. To be payable whether or not the Agreement is completed</p> <p>13. <u>All Contributions index linked</u></p> <p>All financial contributions index-linked from the date of permission.</p>
Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time Limit for implementation – 3 years. 2. Approved plans. 3. <u>*Pre-commencement</u> (barring demolition) submission and approval of details of all external materials (including samples of all external materials and sectional mock-ups available to view on-site) 4. <u>* Pre-commencement</u> submission and approval of a demolition and construction method statement 5. <u>* Pre-commencement</u> (barring demolition) submission and approval of a habitat and ecological enhancement scheme 6. <u>* Pre-commencement</u> submission and approval of a contaminated land assessment 7. <u>* Pre-commencement</u> submission and approval of contaminated land remediation scheme 8. Implementation of approved remediation scheme

9. Reporting of any unexpected contamination

10. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition to ground level) submission and approval of an archaeological written scheme of investigation and subsequent implementation

11. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of a detailed hard and soft landscaping scheme

12. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition), submission and approval of a landscape and ecological management plan

13. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition), submission and approval of a SuDS scheme and subsequent implementation

14. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of a Security Strategy

16. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of a noise mitigation scheme (internal) to protect dwellings from noise emissions from non-residential uses at ground floor

17. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of a noise (external) and ventilation strategy to include mitigation for overheating

19. * Pre-commencement submission (barring demolition) and approval of a cinema noise assessment and mitigation scheme

18. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of design stage SAP energy assessment in relation all proposed dwellings.

19. Pre-occupation of any residential dwelling submission and approval of as-built stage SAP energy assessment

20. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition)_submission and approval of design stage certification demonstrating adherence of all non-residential units to a BREEAM Excellent standard

21. Pre-occupation submission and approval of as-built certification demonstrating compliance of all non-residential units to a BREEAM Excellent standard

22. * Pre-commencement submission and approval of a demolition and construction environmental management plan (CEMP)

23. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of a clean water infrastructure phasing plan

24. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of a waste water infrastructure phasing plan

24. * Pre-commencement submission and approval of an air quality mitigation scheme

25* Pre-occupation of any part of the development submission and approval of scheme to provide 28 cycle parking spaces adjacent to the Bridge Street elevation of The Oracle. Provision of the space prior to first occupation of any commercial or residential unit. Unless already provided as part of YHP1.

26. * Pre-commencement submission and approval of a scheme or retention and re-use of the Tramways Generating Station date plate.

27. * Pre-commencement submission and approval of a site waste management plan (SWMP)

28. * Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of building maintenance unit details

28. Pre-occupation submission and approval of boundary treatment details (to be approved)
including implementation

29. Pre-occupation of any residential dwelling, submission and approval of details of provision of a minimum of 11 'wheelchair accessible' units.

30. Pre-occupation, of any commercial unit containing kitchen or cooking facilities, submission and approval of an odour assessment and management plan

31. Pre-occupation submission and approval of details of all external lighting

32. Pre-occupation of any residential unit submission and approval of a car park cleaning management plan

33. Noise assessment (including specific reference to structure borne noise) to be submitted and approved prior to the first occupation of any Class E(d) gym use within any 'application floor space' unit

34. Pre-occupation provision of obscure glazing to certain dwellings within block C

37. Pre-occupation of any residential unit submission and approval of a moving in / moving out management plan

38. Parking Permits 1 (pre-occupation)

39. Parking Permits 2 (compliance condition)

40. Vehicle Loading facilities (as specified) (compliance condition)

22. Pre-occupation of any residential unit implementation of cycle parking

37. Pre-occupation submission and approval of all addresses (for parking permits)

38. All occupiers to be notified of not automatic entitlement to a parking permit .

40. Pre-occupation of any commercial units submission and approval of delivery and servicing management plan

41. Pre-occupation of any dwelling revision of multi-storey car parking space as per proposed plans

42. All external doors to open away from the street

43. Pre-occupation of any part of the development providing of 4m wide cycle route through the development as per proposed plans

44. *Pre-commencement (barring demolition) submission and approval of a lighting strategy for replacement of lighting mast with standard lighting columns around the IDR/Duke Street/London Street junction.

44. Pre-occupation submission and approval vermin proofing details for all bin stores

45. Pre-occupation of any commercial unit provision of associated commercial refuse store

46. Pre-occupation of any residential unit provision of residential refuse stores

47. Pre-occupation of any commercial unit submission and approval of a commercial waste management strategy (including details of bin or tow tugs)

48. Pre-occupation of any residential unit submission and approval of a residential waste management strategy

49. Within 5 months of first occupation of any commercial unit submission and approval of a site travel plan

50. Annual review of travel plan following approval under condition 49 above.

51. Pre-occupation submission and approval of a CCTV strategy

52. Pre-occupation of any residential dwelling provision of all commercial units

53. Pre-occupation of any commercial unit or residential dwelling provision of all on-site public realm works

54. Restriction on hours of deliveries and waste collection (not to take place between the hours of 2300 and 0600 Monday to Saturday or between 2230 and 0600 Sundays and Bank Holidays)

55. Noise Assessment to be submitted and approved prior to installation of any mechanical plant

56. No flat roof area to be used as a balcony or roof terrace unless where already stated/shown

57. Retention of all trees other than those approved for removal

	<p>58. All vegetation clearance to take place outside of the bird nesting season</p> <p>59. All commercial units apart from the proposed cinema floorspace unit to be for a use within Class E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d), E(e), E(f) and/or Sui Generis Drinking Establishment Use only</p> <p>60. Unit shown on approved plans as cinema floorspace to be for Sui Generis Cinema use only</p> <p>61. Hours of use of any Class E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d), E(e), E(f), E(g)(i) and/or Sui Generis Drinking Establishment Use 'application floor space' being Monday to Saturday 08:00hours – 23:00 hours and Sunday, Bank Holidays and other statutory holidays 08:00 hours – 22:00 hours</p> <p>62. Hours of use of the proposed Sui Generis Use Cinema floorspace to be 0900hours – 0000hours each day</p> <p>63. Restriction preventing the future inclusion of mezzanine floors / increases in floor area, unless specifically shown on the approved plans. Otherwise separate permission is required to be sought and approved.</p> <p>64. Demolition/Construction hours (compliance condition)</p> <p>35. No burning of materials on site during demolition/construction (compliance condition)</p> <p>66. Mix of units restricted to 111 x 1 bed units (51%), 96 x 2 bed units (44%) and 11 x 3 bed units (5%).</p> <p>67. Pre-occupation of any residential dwelling submission and approval of photovoltaics details.</p> <p>68. Development not to be carried out other than in full accordance with the principles of the submitted fire statement. All fire safety mitigation measures to be implemented prior to occupation of any dwelling (including sprinklers).</p> <p>69. Development not to be carried out other than in full accordance with all the flood mitigation measures set out in the submitted flood risk assessment</p> <p>70. Development not to be carried out other than in full accordance with the submitted energy statement</p> <p>71. Development not to be carried out other than in full accordance with the submitted wind microclimate report. No dwelling to be occupied until all mitigation measures recommended within the report have been implemented.</p> <p>86 * <u>Pre-commencement</u> (barring demolition) submission and approval of a GSHP feasibility study</p>
Informatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Positive and Proactive Working – approval Pre-commencement conditions Highways S106 Legal Agreement Terms and conditions Building Regulations Complaints about construction Encroachment Noise between residential properties – sound insulation Community Infrastructure Levy Parking Permits No advertisement consent granted – separate consent may be required in the future Thames Water recommended informative Royal Berkshire Fire Service informative Marine Maritime Organisation informative

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The report considers two planning applications, each for major mixed-use residential led schemes for redevelopment of the eastern end of The Oracle. One application relates to the site of the former Debenhams department store on the north side of the river Kennet and is referred to as Yield Hall Place 1 and the other application relates to the site of the Vue cinema and restaurant units on the south side of the river and is referred to as Yield Hall Place 2. The proposals are two separate planning applications but are considered together as one report given the close relationship between the two sites which are supported by various linked areas of public realm and both form part of, and are managed as part of, the wider The Oracle shopping centre by the same operator (Hammerson). Many of the documents submitted in support of both planning applications are combined, considering both applications.
- 1.2 Each proposal would provide 218 residential dwellings towards meeting the Council's housing needs, including 22 affordable dwellings on each site. The proposals also incorporate provision of a range of commercial units within flexible uses which seek to update and diversify both sides of the shopping centre and assist in securing its existing and future important role in the overall vitality and viability of the Central Area, as well as Readings role as a key regional centre within the Thames Valley. Both applications incorporate significant public realm improvements, extensive hard and soft landscaping, tree planting and provision of significant on-site biodiversity net gain.
- 1.3 Whilst the proposals would be of high quality design resulting in a range of street-level improvements to the riverside, Yield Hall Place and the IDR (Queens Road) both applications incorporate tall building elements which as a result of their scale are found to result in incidences of visual harm to views from a variety of locations within the Central Area, as well as less than substantial harm to the setting of a wide range of listed buildings and to the historic character and appearance of both the Market Place/London Street and St Marys Butts/Castle Street conservation areas. The sites are not located within areas defined as being appropriate for tall buildings under Policy CR10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and therefore both proposals represent development that is a departure from the adopted Local Plan. As such the proposals needs to present material considerations that would justify this departure from the Development Plan. Shortfalls are also identified for both applications in terms of unit mix with an overdominance of one 1 bedroom units and in terms of standard of accommodation with some dwellings subject to sub optimal receipt of daylight, albeit these dwellings are in the minority.
- 1.4 The applications have been carefully considered by your officers, and the planning balance for both in terms of benefits and harms, is considered to be finely poised, however planning permission is recommended to be granted for both applications subject to conditions and completion of a s106 legal agreement.

2. Introduction and site description

- 2.1 The proposals subject of this report relates to two separate applications for full planning permission on two separate application sites located at the eastern end of The Oracle shopping centre on either side of the River Kennet. The separate sites are referred to as Yield Hall Place 1 or YHP1 (application ref. 22/1916) and Yield Hall Place 2 or YHP2 (application ref. 22/1917) for this purposes of this report. The Oracle shopping centre opened in September 1999 and comprises a two level shopping centre with riverside frontages located either side of the River Kennet. The Oracle is managed by Hammerson (the applicant for both these planning applications). The red line site area and location plan for each application is shown in Figures 1 and 2 below. The land outlined in blue is that within the wider shopping centre and surrounding area that is also managed by Hammerson.

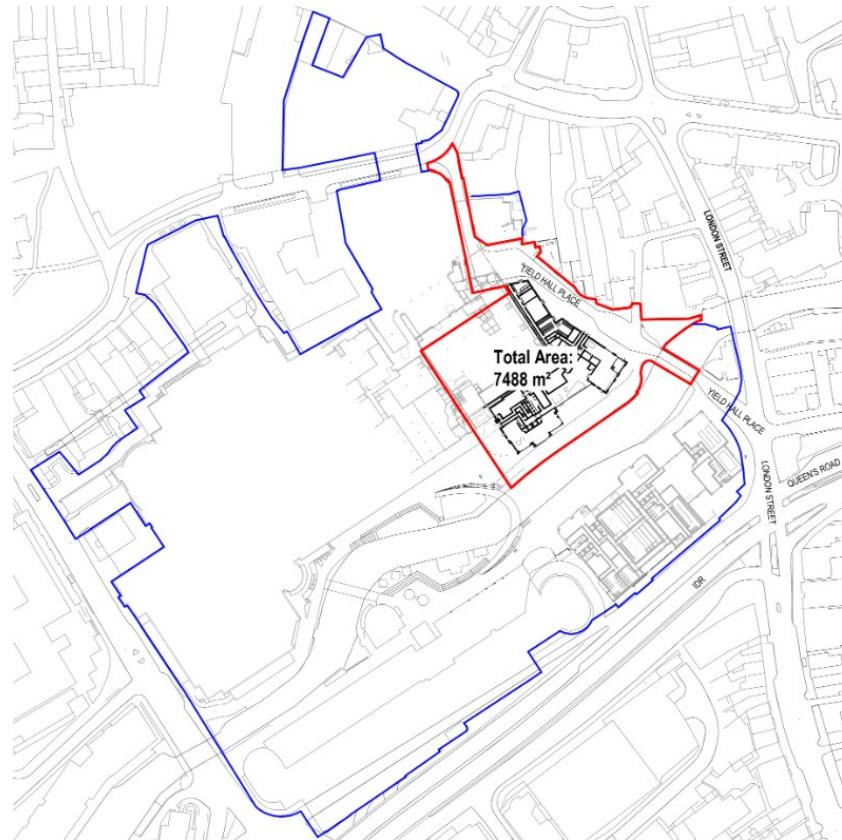


Figure 1 – YHP1 (application ref. 22/1916) - Site Location Plan (red line area)

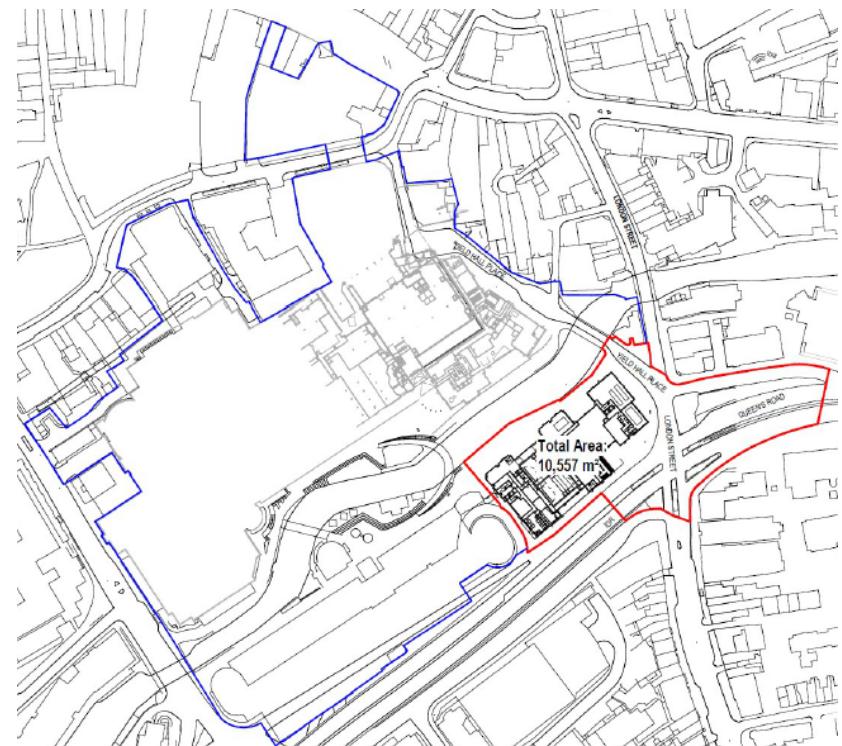


Figure 2 – YHP2 (application ref. 22/1917) – Site Location Plan (redline area).

2.2 Application ref. 22/1916 on the site referred to hereafter as YHP1 (the Yield Hall Place 1 application) relates to the eastern end of The Oracle Shopping Centre on the north side of the River Kennet, including land up to the northern edge of the river channel and areas of public realm to the north, east and south along Yield Hall Place and Yield Hall Place Bridge which crosses over the River Kennet to the south. The site currently comprises a 6-8 storey (equivalent residential storeys) building with predominantly brick and glasswork façade and operated as a Debenhams department store until 2020. The unit is now vacant following the cessation of Next Home and Beauty and two restaurant units which also operated from this part of the shopping centre at riverside level.

2.3 Immediately to the west of YHP1 are a variety of other shops, bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways that comprise the rest of The Oracle Riverside shopping centre on the north side of the river. To the north-east, beyond Yield Hall Place lies further retail and leisure activities in the form of restaurants, bars, and 'Escape Rooms' located within the Kings Walk Shopping Centre.

2.4 Yield Hall Place itself to the east provides pedestrian and service vehicle access to Minster Street further north of the site, and facilitates pedestrian flows from the town centre, providing connections to Broad Street. Public pedestrian access exists within the shopping centre as well as along the riverside frontage with connections to Bridge Street, Yield Hall Place, Minister Street and London Street. Vehicular access to the site is achieved from Yield Hall Place.

2.5 Small trees, vegetation beds and large potted plants are located along the riverside frontages with larger trees situated to the east between Yield Hall Place and London Street. Steel protected railings are positioned along the edge of the riverside pedestrian walkways where public bike racks and benches are also found.

2.6 Application ref. 22/1917 on the site referred to as YHP2 relates to the eastern end of The Oracle Shopping Centre on the south side of the River Kennet including land up to the southern edge of the river channel and areas of public realm to the east and south along Yield Hall Place, London Street and Queens Road (IDR). The site is located directly opposite YHP1 on the opposite side of the River Kennet and currently comprises a 4 storey (6-8 residential storeys equivalent) cinema complex, with a cladded grey and brick façade. This block predominately houses a Vue multiplex cinema, with further restaurant and bar units housed at ground floor level.

2.7 Immediately to the west of and adjacent to YHP2 is the Oracle Riverside multi-storey car park. The multi-storey car park comprises around 1,600 car parking spaces located over 7 floors. There are also further restaurants and hot-food takeaway units situated on the south side of the riverside frontage. To the east of the site on the opposite side of London Street is Grosvenor Casino at no. 1 Queens Road, as well as clusters of commercial buildings (mainly offices) along the IDR. London Street is across the IDR to the south via a series of pedestrian crossings and runs south up-hill and contains terraces of more modest older buildings, predominantly of between 2 and 4 storeys, with commercial uses at street level with offices and residential uses above. The IDR runs parallel along the south boundary of the site and becomes ramped to the west, rising up over the roundabout junction between Southampton Street and Bridge Street (the Oracle Roundabout) from where access to the Oracle Riverside multi-storey car park and service area is also obtained. Further west along the IDR is the John Lewis Depot warehouse building on Mill Lane and the Premier Inn Hotel building of between 4 and 6 storeys, located between Letcombe Street and Southampton Street.

2.8 Yield Hall Place to the east provides direct pedestrian access to the YHP2 site. Public pedestrian access exists within the shopping centre as well as along the riverside frontage with connections to Bridge Street, Yield Hall Place, Queens Road (IDR) and London Street.

2.9 Similar to YHP1, small trees, vegetation beds and large potted plants are located along the riverside frontage with larger trees situated on a verge to the south of Queens Road opposite Grosvenor Casino within the public realm areas in the eastern part of the application site. Steel railings are positioned along the edge of the riverside pedestrian walkways where public bike racks and benches are also found. The south bank of the Kennet is part of the Sustrans National Cycle Route 4 (NCN4).

2.10 Figure 3 below shows the existing buildings within the application sites for YHP1 and YHP2 in context.



Figure 3 – Application site buildings for YHP1 application (ref. 22/1916) shown shaded red and labelled as ‘Former Debenhams’ and application site buildings for YHP2 application (ref. 22/1917) shown shaded red and labelled as ‘Vue’.

2.11. The Reading Borough Local Plan (2019), at paragraph 5.1.4 specifies that the opening of the Oracle helped to establish Reading as one of the leading shopping locations in the UK. The application sites are subject to the following site constraints / designations:

- Within the boundary of Reading Central Area (Policies CR1-10)
- Inside the primary shopping area (Policy CR1)
- Inside the central core (Policy CR1)
- Inside the office core (Policy CR1)
- The Riverside frontage is designated as a primary frontage in Central Reading (Policy CR7)
- All of The Oracle shopping centre site on the south side of the River Kennet is allocated for development under Policy CR14g – The Oracle Extension, Bridge Street and Letcombe Street, which specifies development of the area between the River Kennet and Mill Lane for retail, with use of the site at Letcombe Street for a public car park. The site at YHP2 forms part of this site allocation area.
- The easternmost part of the site is partly within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area (Policies EN1 & EN3 are relevant). The St Mary’s Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area lies 70m north-west of the application site.
- There are no listed buildings (or other heritage assets) within the red line application site area but those nearby include (Policy EN1):

- Nos.24-52 Queen's Crescent – Grade II Listed Building
- Church of St Laurence – Grade I Listed Building
- Church of St Giles, Southampton Street – Grade II Listed Building
- Church of St Mary, St Marys Butts – Grade I Listed Building
- Telephone Exchange, Minster Street – Grade II Listed Building
- George Hotel, King Street – Grade II Listed Building
- Seven Bridges House, 19 Bridge Street – Grade II Listed Building

- Nos. 1 (Old Coroner's Court), 2-4, 33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 London Street – All Grade II Listed Buildings
- Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place – All Grade II Listed Buildings
- No.10 High Street – Grade II Listed Building
- Nos. 7-15 Gun Street – All Grade II Listed Buildings
- Culverted section of the Holy Brook to the rear of nos 1-31 Castle Street – Grade II Listed Building
- High Bridge, Duke Street – Scheduled Ancient Monument

- Within the viewing corridor of View 2 within Policy EN5 (Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest) – the view northwards down Southampton Street from Whitley Street towards St Giles Church, St Mary's Church and Greyfriars Church.
- The River Kennet is an area of identified biodiversity interest (Policy EN12) and waterspace (Policy EN11)
- A number of parts of the site are potentially contaminated land (Policy EN16)
- Within areas of Flood Zone 1, 2 and 3 (Policy EN18)
- Within an area with archaeological potential (Policy EN2)
- Within an air quality management area (Policy EN15)
- Within a British Waterways consultation area
- Within a smoke control area
- Within a licensing cumulative impact area

2.12. Both applications are being considered at Planning Applications Committee as they constitute 'major' developments, given the floorspaces involved.

3. The proposals

3.1 The information submitted in support of both planning applications sets out that the proposals are together intended to reimagine the eastern end of The Oracle shopping centre to reinvigorate the town centre offer, introduce a curated residential quarter within and create a positive outward facing gateway to the town centre from the south. The combined proposals would provide a mixed-use town centre scheme providing commercial and hospitality space, including replacement cinema, restaurants and co-working space, 436 new homes, with reconfigured retail and leisure space, and enhanced public realm through the site including to the River Kennet riverside, Yield Hall Place and IDR, intended to enhance, modernise and future proof the retail offer of The Oracle .

3.2 It is outlined that the combined proposals would ensure continued investment into The Oracle to meet the needs of residents and visitors and to contribute positively to the vitality and viability of Reading Town Centre in its role as a regional town centre, serving the Thames Valley and beyond.

Planning Application ref. 22/1916 – Yield Hall Place 1 (YHP1)

3.3 This application seeks full planning permission for a mixed use development comprising part demolition of former department store (Debenhams) and erection of new buildings comprising up to 218 build to rent residential dwellings (Class C3) & 1,209sqm of flexible 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 flexible uses within Use Class E and/or bar (Sui Generis Use) and/or experiential leisure use (Sui Generis Use). The proposals also include associated public realm,

infrastructure works & external alterations to shopping centre, including creation of new shopping centre entrance.

3.4 More specifically the proposals include:

- Part demolition of the former Debenhams department store, where it fronts onto Yield Hall Place to the east and Oracle Riverside Frontage (south elevation) (see Figure 4 below)
- Reconfiguration of retained Debenhams floorspace to create 1 x new flexible Class E unit and 1 x unit proposed for a leisure use (Class E and / or Sui Generis). The application supporting information sets out that the proposed leisure use is intended to be operated by an 'experiential' leisure operator new to the Reading and may include a bar element and as such a Class E or Sui Generis use is sought for this unit.



Figure 4 - Areas to be demolished shown shaded green and areas of retained Debenhams floor space (3 floors) shown in white

- Construction of 2 blocks of development, comprising one block of 21 storeys in height (Block A) and one block of between 8 and 9 storeys in height (Block B) connected by a single storey riverside element (see Figure 5 below)

Yield Hall Place 1 (YHP1) : Blocks A, B.

Yield Hall Place 2 (YHP2) : Blocks C, D, E.



Figure 5 - Proposed blocks of development shown shaded pink (proposals for YHP2 shown shaded orange)

- Provision of new commercial floorspace at ground (riverside) level to provide 1 x flexible Class E and / or Sui Generis unit, 1 x co-working space (Class E), new mall entrance to the retail and leisure units to be provided within the retained and reconfigured former Debenhams floor space from ground floor riverside level as well as back of house and plant rooms.

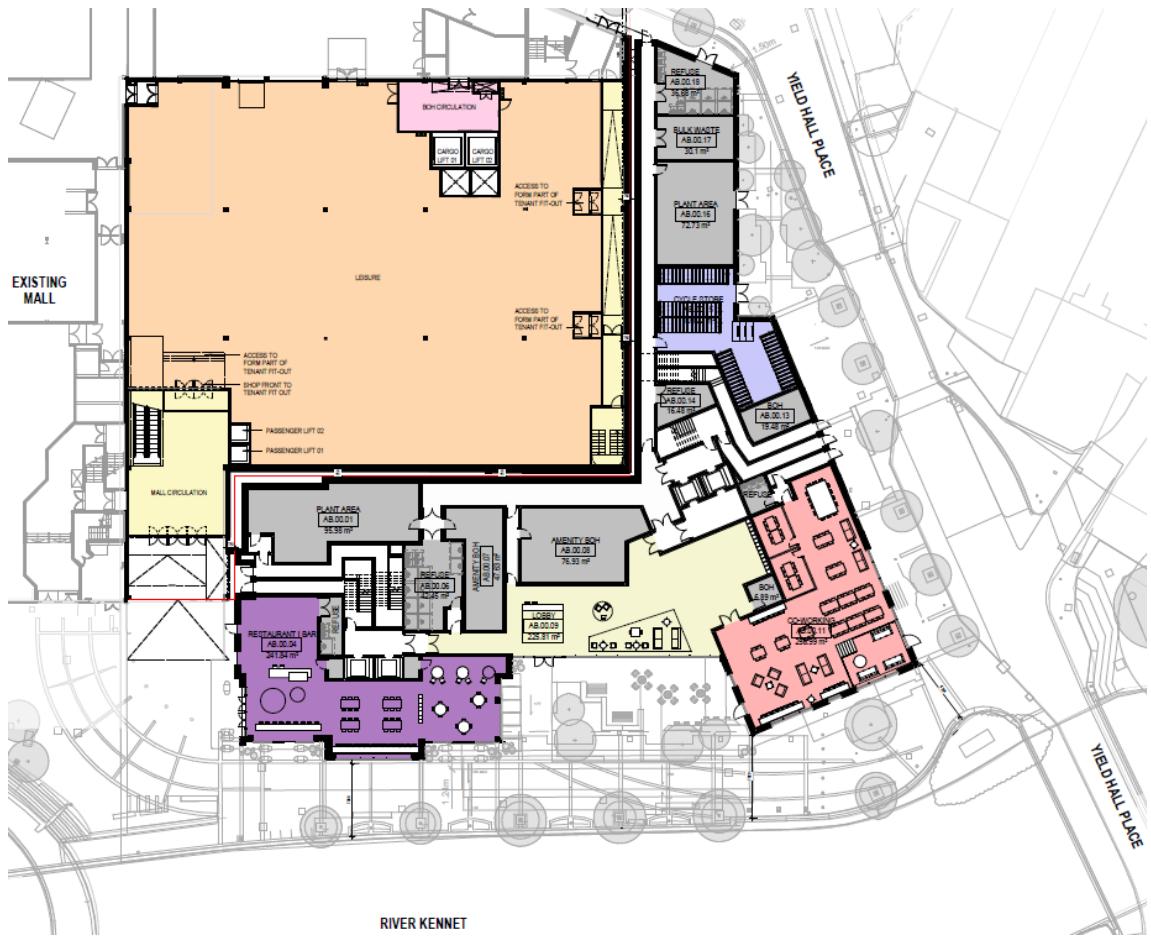


Figure 6 – YHP1 - Proposed Ground Floor Layout Plan - Large proposed leisure use unit shown shaded orange (double height unit with double height new retail unit above), proposed restaurant unit shown shaded purple, proposed co-working space shown shaded pink, new riverside entrance to the proposed leisure and retail units shown shaded yellow and back of house and plant rooms shown shaded grey

- Provision of 218 Build to Rent C3 use class residential dwellings. A mix of 111 x 1 bed units (51%), 96 x 2 bed units (44%) and 11 x 3 bed units (5%). Creation of residential lobby and access from ground floor riverside level (shown shaded yellow on Figure 6 above)
- Provision of 22 dwellings (10% of total dwellings to be provided) as affordable units – 9 x 1 bed (40%), 12 x 2 bed (55%) and 1 x 3 bed (5%) with rents capped at LHA levels.
- Internal and external private amenity space for the building residents, comprising roof terraces with both indoor and outdoor space (see Figure 7 below)

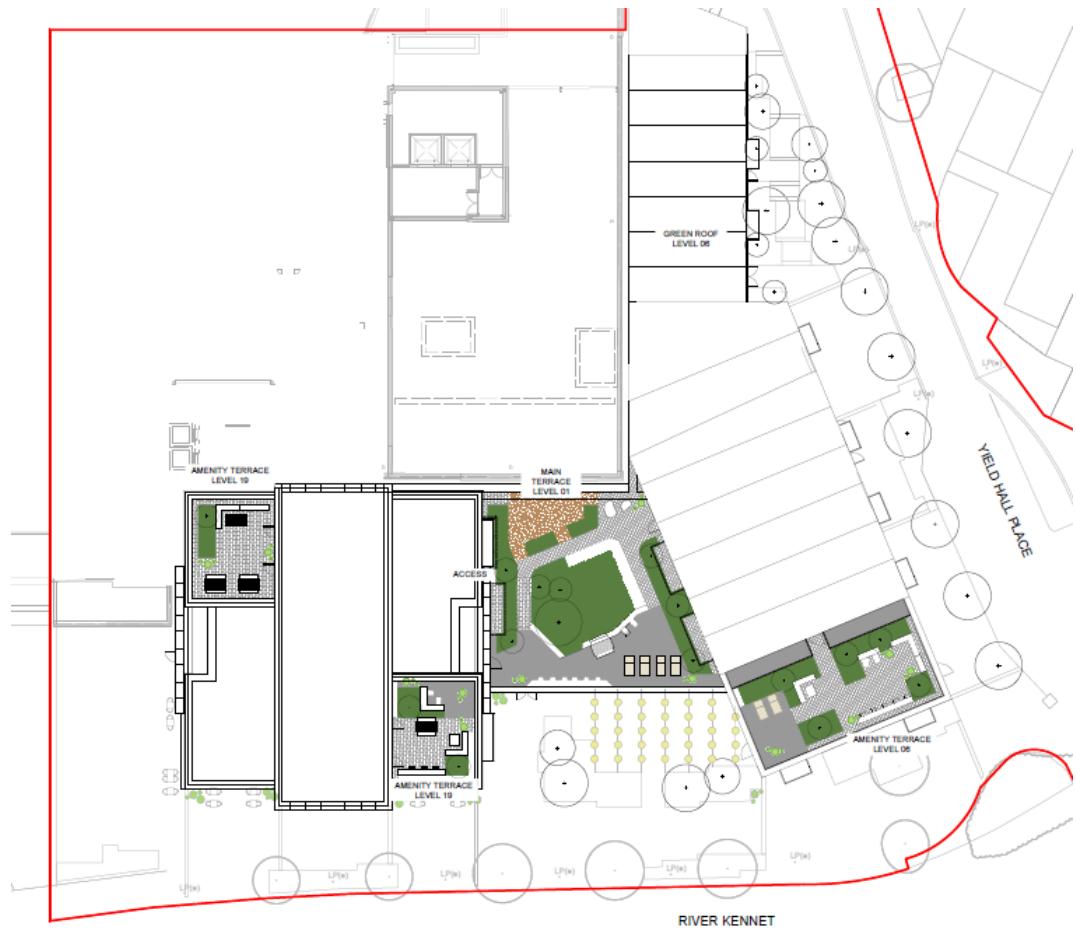


Figure 7 - YHP1 - Plan showing proposed communal roof top external amenity terraces for occupiers of the residential dwellings at 1st floor roof level, 6th floor roof level and 19th floor roof level

- Provision of 120 secure on-site residential cycle parking spaces within a ground floor level lockable store accessible from Yield Hall Place (shown shaded blue on Figure 6 above)
- Car free development proposed with no new car parking however two existing spaces will be converted to car club spaces
- Servicing for Yield Hall Place 1 to be from a combination of existing locations with the proposed leisure and restaurant use serviced directly from the main Oracle service yard under the shopping centre as the former Debenhams unit was. Servicing and deliveries for the proposed residential and co-working deliveries to be received from the existing servicing bay on Yield Hall Place. Refuse and recycling collections to be undertaken from the north of the building from Yield Hall Place (shown shaded grey on Figure 6 above).
- Landscaping is proposed to the amenity roof terraces and riverside frontage and a green roof is proposed at 6th floor level (see Figure 7 above).
- Public realm improvements, including landscaping, to the Riverside and Yield Hall Place (see Figure 8 below)



Figure 8 – YHP1 – Proposed public realm enhancements and landscaping to riverside and Yield Hall Place

Planning Application ref. 22/1917 – YHP2

3.5 This application seeks full planning permission for a mixed use development comprising demolition of the existing multiplex cinema and restaurant buildings and erection of a new building comprising up to 218 build-to-rent residential dwellings (Class C3) & up to 3,046 sqm commercial floorspace comprising cinema (Sui Generis) and ground floor commercial uses within a flexible Class E and/or Bar (Sui Generis Use). The proposals also include associated public realm, and infrastructure works to the riverside frontage, London Street and the IDR.

3.6 More specifically the proposals include:

- Demolition of existing cinema complex and restaurant units and construction of a building incorporating 16, 13 and 6 storey elements connected by single and two storey linking elements (see Figure 5 above and Figure 9 below)



Figure 9 – YHP2 – Riverside elevation (looking south)

- Replacement provision of 2,600 sqm of Cinema (Sui Generis) at ground floor and mezzanine level, alongside flexible commercial floorspace (Class E / Sui Generis restaurant and / or bar) located at ground level (see Figure 10 below). Cinema accessed from riverside and IDR frontages with commercial floor space accessed from riverside and Yield Hall Place elevations.

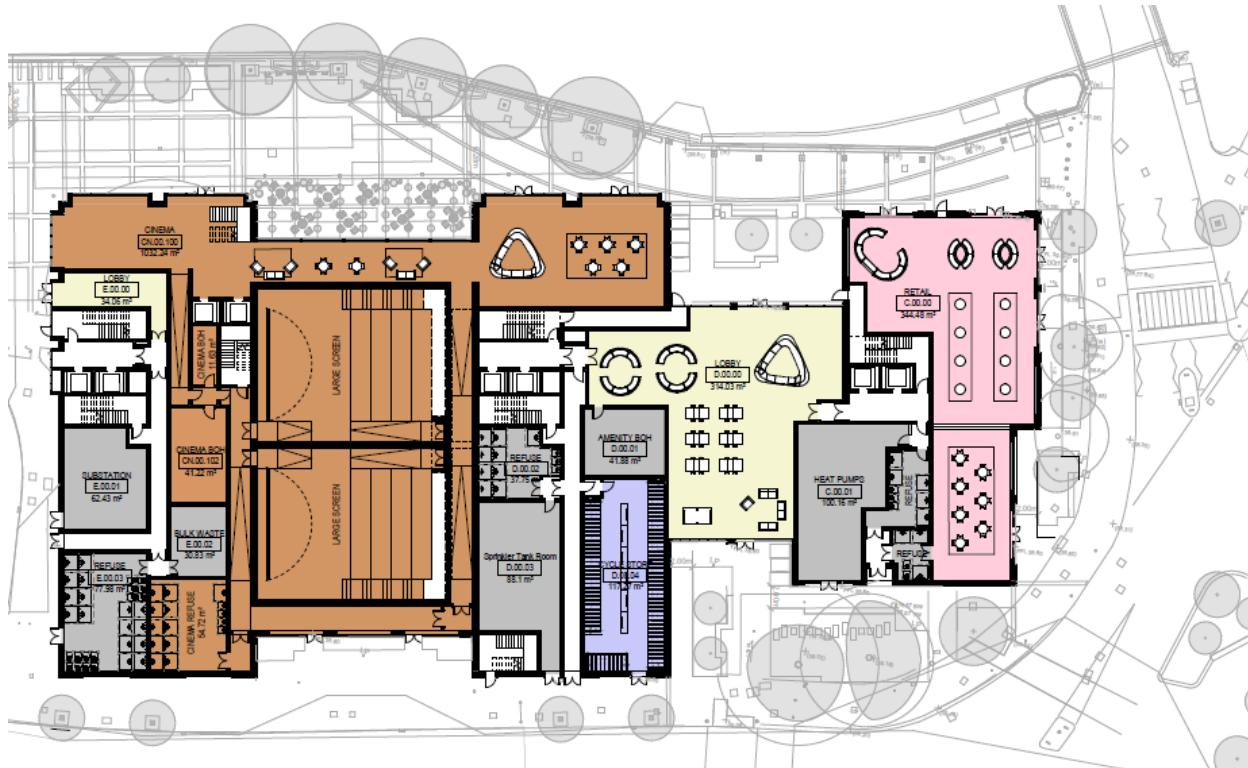


Figure 10 – YHP2 – Proposed Ground Floor Plan. Proposed cinema shown shaded orange/brown, proposed retail/restaurant/bar floorspace show shaded pink, back of house and plant rooms shown shaded grey, cycle stores shaded purple and new residential lobby and access shown shaded yellow

- Provision of 218 Build to Rent C3 use class residential units. A mix of 96 x 1 bed units (44%), 111 x 2 bed units (51%) and 11 x 3 bed units (5%). Creation of residential lobby

and accesses from both riverside and IDR at ground floor level (shown shaded yellow on Figure 10 above).

- Provision of 22 dwellings (10% of total dwellings to be provided) as affordable units – 9 x 1 bed (40%), 12 x 2 bed (55%) and 1 x 3 bed (5%) with rents capped at LHA levels.
- Internal and external private amenity space for the building residents, comprising roof terraces with both indoor and outdoor space (see Figure 11 below)



Figure 11 – YHP2 - Plan showing proposed communal roof top external amenity terraces for occupiers of the residential dwellings at 1st floor roof level, 11th floor level and 14th floor level

- Provision of 126 secure on-site cycle parking spaces within a ground floor level lockable stores accessible from the riverside and IDR elevations at ground floor level (shown shaded blue on Figure 10 above)
- Car free development proposed with no car parking proposed
- In terms of servicing for Yield Hall Place 2, bulky deliveries and refuse collections for the residential units are proposed to be undertaken from the existing The Oracle servicing area, accessed from Mill Lane off the IDR to the south. This area along with the existing adjacent service yard located under the Riverside Car Park would be used for servicing of the cinema as is the existing arrangement. An additional kerbside is also proposed to be provided adjacent to the south elevation of YHP2 on the IDR for use by smaller delivery vehicles serving the residential units.
- Landscaping is proposed to the amenity roof terraces and riverside frontage and a green roof is proposed to the floor 1 roof level above the residential lobby area
- Public realm improvements, including landscaping, to the Riverside, Yield Hall Place, London Street and the IDR (see Figure 12 below)



Figure 12 – YHP2 – Proposed public realm enhancements and landscaping

3.7 The YHP1 and YHP2 proposals are two separate standalone planning applications and, if granted, would be subject to separate planning permissions. The proposals are considered together within this report given the close relationship between the two sites which are supported by various linked areas of public realm and both form part of, and are managed as part of, the wider The Oracle shopping centre by the same operator (Hammerson). Many of the documents submitted in support of both planning applications are combined, considering both applications. The supporting documents also include a proposed phased approach to implementation of both planning applications which is as follows and as shown on the phasing plan in Figure 13 below.

Proposed Phase 1A (area shaded yellow in Figure 4 below) (YHP1)

- Demolition of part of the existing Debenhams store up to the red dotted line cut line' (see Figure 4 below)
- Construction of external wall along the red dotted cut line.
- Reconfiguration of the retained Debenhams floor areas to provide new retail space at lower and upper mall level, leisure space at riverside level.
- Provision of Landscaping for that phase

Proposed Phase 1B (area shaded yellow in Figure 4 below) (YHP1)

- Construction of the new buildings, dwellings, front and back of house facilities and co-working space on Yield Hall Place 1 site.
- Provision of Landscaping for that phase

Proposed Phase 2 (area shaded blue in figure 4 below) (YHP2)

- Demolition of the existing cinema, restaurant space and associated service areas on the Yield Hall Place 2 site.
- Construction of the new cinema, café/restaurant space, new homes, amenity, and back of house spaces.
- Provision of Landscaping for that phase

3.8 The YHP1 and YHP2 proposals are separate planning applications and there is no linked phasing between the two applications and either or both permissions could be implemented. There is phasing proposed to the YHP1 development where demolition of parts of the building not to be re-used and then conversion of retained floor space (part of former Debenhams department store) to the proposed flexible commercial and leisure uses is proposed to take place as phase 1A ahead of the more substantial YHP1 works to provide the riverside frontage commercial units and residential units above (phase 1B).

3.9 This report will consider the two proposals separately as well as any cumulative impacts and how the various works proposed as part of both applications in and around the sites will be secured between the two applications.

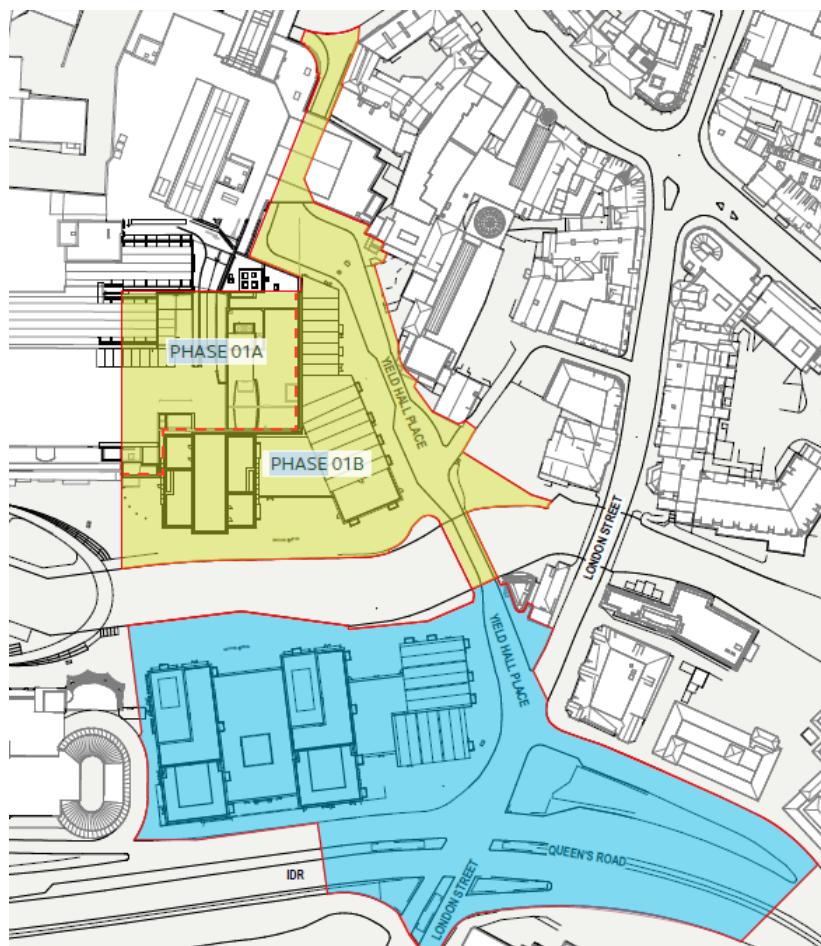


Figure 13 – Proposed Phasing Plan (Phase 1A and 1B shown shaded yellow (YHP1) and Phase 2 shown shaded blue (YHP2))

Environment Impact Assessment Matters

3.9 Both application submissions are subject to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which is used to assess the likely significant effects of the (combined, entire) proposed development upon the environment. The Environmental Statement (ES) is required to provide the LPA with sufficient information about the potential effects of the development prior to a decision being made on the planning application. The information provided as part of the ES has been taken into account in the determination of the application and was consulted on in accordance with Regulations.

Community Infrastructure Levy

3.10 In terms of the Reading Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), only the proposed residential floor space of both applications is liable for CIL in accordance with the Council's adopted CIL Charging Schedule (2015). Existing floor space to be demolished can be off-set against the proposed new floor space, but overall, it is projected that the levy due for application ref. 22/1916 at YHP1 would be approximately £2,899,933 and the levy due for application ref. 22/1917 at YHP2 would be £2,320,324. The actual levy payable for both applications may in reality be less, given - subject to the Applicant completing the appropriate forms - any floorspace provided as affordable housing would be exempt (providing the requisite exemption is correctly applied for).

3.11 The following plans have been received:

Planning application ref. 22/1916 - YHP1

- DEMOLITION & RETENTION PLANS TOR-CRL-ZZ-ZZ-DR-AR-1005000-P10
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 – EAST TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-2001001-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 – NORTH TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-2001002-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 – SOUTH TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-2001003-P12
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 – WEST TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-2001004-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - EAST COURTYARD TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-2001005-P12
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - WEST COURTYARD TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-2001006-P12
- EXISTING ELEVATION - YIELDHALL PLACE 1 TOR-CRL-ZZ-ZZ-DR-AR-2001000
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - LEVEL 00 TOR-CRL-A1-00-00-DR-AR-1001200
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 LOWER MALL TOR-CRL-A1-01-01-DR-AR-1001201
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - UPPER MALL TOR-CRL-A1-02-02-DR-AR-1001202
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 CAR PARK LEVEL 01 TOR-CRL-A1-03-03-DR-AR-1001203
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 CAR PARK LEVEL 02 TOR-CRL-A1-04-04-DR-AR-1001204
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - SECTION 1 & 2 TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-ZZ-DR-AR-1003001
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - SECTION 3 & 4 TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-ZZ-DR-AR-1003002
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - GF LEVEL TOR-CRL-A1-00-DR-AR-1201000-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - MEZZ. LEVEL TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-1201001-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 01 TOR-CRL-A1-01-DR-AR-1201002-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 02 TOR-CRL-A1-02-DR-AR-1201003-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 03 TOR-CRL-A1-03-DR-AR-1201004-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 04 TOR-CRL-A1-04-DR-AR-1201005-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 05 TOR-CRL-A1-05-DR-AR-1201006-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 06 TOR-CRL-A1-06-DR-AR-1201007-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 07 TOR-CRL-A1-07-DR-AR-1201008-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 08 TOR-CRL-A1-08-DR-AR-1201009-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 09 TOR-CRL-A1-09-DR-AR-1201010-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 10 TOR-CRL-A1-10-DR-AR-1201011-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 11 TOR-CRL-A1-11-DR-AR-1201012-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 12 TOR-CRL-A1-12-DR-AR-1201013-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 13 TOR-CRL-A1-13-DR-AR-1201014-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 14 TOR-CRL-A1-14-DR-AR-1201015-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 15 TOR-CRL-A1-15-DR-AR-1201016-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 16 TOR-CRL-A1-16-DR-AR-1201017-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 17 TOR-CRL-A1-17-DR-AR-1201018-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 18 TOR-CRL-A1-18-DR-AR-1201019-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 19 TOR-CRL-A1-19-DR-AR-1201020-P15

- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN GENERAL ARRANGEMENT - ROOF PLANTOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-1201021-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - LONGITUDINAL SECTION TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-3001001-P13
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - CROSS SECTION TOR-CRL-AA-ZZ-DR-AR-3000001-P13
- BAY STUDY 01 TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-2200001-P13
- BAY STUDY 02 TOR-CRL-ZZ-ZZ DR-AR-2200002-P13
- BAY STUDY 03 TR-CRL-ZZ-ZZ DR-AR-2200003-P13
- SITE-LOCATION PLAN_YIELD HALL PLACE 1 TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-0100006_SITE-LOCATION PLAN_YIELD HALL PLACE 1_P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE
- PROPOSED PLAN GENERAL ARRANGEMENT - SITE PLAN TOR-CRL-ZZ-ZZ-DR-AR-1200050

Highway Drawings

- 332110757_5500_SK018-P06 Mill Lane Western Loading Areas
- 332110757_5500_SK020-P04 Yield Hall Place Loading Facility
- 332110757_5500_SK043 Mill Lane Western Loading Areas
- 332110757_5500_SK046 Mill Lane Western Loading Areas
- 332110757_5500_SK049 Yield Hall Place Bin Carry Distance
- 332110757_5500_SK050 Yield Hall Place Bin Carry Distance
- 220767-P-10a Tree survey Tree Survey
- 220767-P-10a Tree Schedule Tree Schedule
- 332110757_5500_SK025 - P07 Swept Path Analysis Pumping Appliance (Sept. 2025)
- 332110757_5500_SK048 P03 Public Highway to be stopped up (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0100 Public Realm – General Arrangement Plan Key LDA (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0101 Public Realm – General Arrangement Plan Sheet 01 (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0102 Public Realm – General Arrangement Plan Sheet 02 (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0103 Public Realm – General Arrangement Plan Sheet 03 (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0121 Amenity Roof Terraces – General Arrangement (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0122 Yield Hall Place 01 Amenity Roof Terraces (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0125 Yield Hall Place 02 Amenity Roof Terraces (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0300 Softworks Key Plan (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0301 Tree Plan Sheet 01 (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0302 Tree Plan Sheet 02 (Sept. 2025)
- 332110757_5500_SK048 P03 Public Highway to be stopped up (Nov. -2025)
- 332110757_5500_SK054 P03 Yield Hall Place required area for parking/loading restriction (Nov. 2025)
- 332110757_5500_SK055 Kerb Arrangement for Mill Lane A329
- 332110757-5501-C010-P02 Cycle Parking Location (Nov. 2025)
- 1167-D330-2_Proposed South East Elevation Phase 1A Cut Line elevation
- 1167-D330-3_Proposed North East Elevation Phase 1A Cut Line elevation
- TOR-CRL-A2-02-DR-AR-1202003 Yield Hall Place 2 IEID HALL PLACE 2 – PROPOSED
- PLAN - C - LEVEL 02
- TOR-CRL-A2-03-DR-AR-1202004 YIELD HALL PLACE 2 – PROPOSED
- PLAN - C - LEVEL 03
- TOR-CRL-A2-04-DR-AR-1202005 YIELD HALL PLACE 2 – PROPOSED
- PLAN - C - LEVEL 04
- 1468-4024 Rev F01 – Studies GA Carpark Level 1 Zones E, B & G 1468-4027 Rev Q04 – Studies GA Carpark Level 2 Zones E, B & G
- TOR-CRL-A1-04-DR-AR Parking Studies Level 4
- TOR-CRL-A1-05-DR-AR Parking Studies Level 5
- 1468-4011 Rev F01 GA Riverside Level Zones E, B & G
- TOR-CRL-A1-00-DR-AR-1200001 P10 - Yield Hall Place 1 – Existing Service Yard – GF Level
- TOR-CRL-A2-00-DR-AR-1202000 P15 Yield Hall Place 2 – Proposed Plan – GF Level
- 332110757_5500_SK019_P05 Drop off Facility Mill Lane

- 332110757_5500_SK029 Swept Path Analysis Ridged Truck passing refuse Truck

Planning application ref. 22/1917 – YHP2

- DEMOLITION & RETENTION PLANS TOR-CRL-ZZ-ZZ-DR-AR-1005000-P11
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 – EAST TOR-CRL-A2-ZZ-DR-AR-2002001-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 – NORTH TOR-CRL-A2-ZZ-DR-AR-2002002-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 – SOUTH TOR-CRL-A2-ZZ-DR-AR-2002003-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 – WEST TOR-CRL-A2-ZZ-DR-AR-2002004-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - EAST COURTYARD TOR-CRL-A2-ZZ-DR-AR-2002005-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - EAST COURTYARD 2 TOR-CRL-A2-ZZ-DR-AR-2002006-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - WEST COURTYARD TOR-CRL-A2-ZZ-DR-AR-2002007-P13
- ELEVATIONS - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - WEST COURTYARD 2 TOR-CRL-A2-ZZ-DR-AR-2002008-P14
- EXISTING ELEVATION – YIELD HALL PLACE 2 TOR-CRL-ZZ-ZZ-DR-AR-2002000
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - LEVEL 00 TOR-CRL-A2-00-00-DR-AR-1002200
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 LOWER TOR-CRL-A2-01-01-DR-AR-1002201
- EXISTING - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - UPPER TOR-CRL-A2-02-02-DR-AR-1002202
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - GF LEVELN TOR-CRL-A2-00-DR-AR-1202000-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - MEZZ. LEVEL TOR-CRL-A2-ZZ-DR-AR-1202001-P15
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 01 TOR-CRL-A2-01-DR-AR-1202002-P12
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 02 TOR-CRL-A2-02-DR-AR-1202003-P12
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 03 TOR-CRL-A2-02-DR-AR-1202004-P15
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 04 TOR-CRL-A2-05-DR-AR-1202006-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 – PROPOSED PLAN - C - LEVEL 04 TOR-CRL-A2-04-DR-AR-1202005-P15
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 05 TOR-CRL-A2-05-DR-AR-1202007-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 06 TOR-CRL-A2-06-DR-AR-1202008-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 07 TOR-CRL-A2-07-DR-AR-1202009-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 1 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 08 TOR-CRL-A2-08-DR-AR-1202010-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 09 TOR-CRL-A2-09-DR-AR-1202011-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 10 TOR-CRL-A2-10-DR-AR-1202012-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 11 TOR-CRL-A2-11-DR-AR-1202013-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 12 TOR-CRL-A2-12-DR-AR-1202014-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 13 TOR-CRL-A2-13-DR-AR-1202015-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN - LEVEL 14 TOR-CRL-A2-14-DR-AR-1202016-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - PROPOSED PLAN GENERAL ARRANGEMENT - ROOF PLAN TOR CRL A2 15 DR AR 1202017-P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - CROSS SECTION TOR CRL A2 ZZ DR AR 3000002-P13
- YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - LONGITUDINAL SECTION TOR CRL A2 ZZ DR AR 3002001-P13
- BAY STUDY 01 TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-2200001-P10
- BAY STUDY 02 TOR CRL A2 ZZ DR AR 3000002-P13
- BAY STUDY 03 TOR CRL A2 ZZ DR AR 3002001-P13

- SITE-LOCATION PLAN_YIELD HALL PLACE 2 TOR-CRL-A1-ZZ-DR-AR-0100006_SITE-LOCATION PLAN_YIELD HALL PLACE 1_P14
- YIELD HALL PLACE -PROPOSED PLAN GENERAL ARRANGEMENT - SITE PLAN TOR-CRL-ZZ-ZZ-DR-AR-1200050-P12

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- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0125 Yield Hall Place 02 Amenity Roof Terraces (Sept. 2025)
- ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0300 Softworks Key Plan (Sept. 2025)
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- 332110757_5500_SK054 P03 Yield Hall Place required area for parking/loading restriction (Nov. 2025)
- 332110757_5500_SK055 Kerb Arrangement for Mill Lane A329
- 332110757-5501-C010-P02 Cycle Parking Location (Nov. 2025)
- TOR-CRL-A2-02-DR-AR-1202003 Yield Hall Place 2 Proposed Plan – C – Level 02
- TOR-CRL-A2-03-DR-AR-1202004 Yield Hall Place 2 Proposed Plan – C – Level 03
- TOR-CRL-A2-04-DR-AR-1202005 Yield Hall Place 2 Proposed Plan – C – Level 04
- 1468-4024 Rev F01 – Studies GA Carpark Level 1 Zones E, B & G
- 1468-4027 Rev Q04 – Studies GA Carpark Level 2 Zones E, B & G
- TOR-CRL-A1-04-DR-AR Parking Studies Level 4
- TOR-CRL-A1-05-DR-AR Parking Studies Level 5
- 1468-4011 Rev F01 GA Riverside Level Zones E, B & G
- TOR-CRL-A2-00-DR-AR-1202000 P15 Yield Hall Place 2 – Proposed Plan – GF Level
- 332110757_5500_SK019_P05 Drop off Facility Mill Lane
- 332110757_5500_SK029 Swept Path Analysis Ridged Truck passing refuse Truck

Supporting Documents for both applications:

- Design and Access Statement inc. Landscape Strategy (CRTKL February 2024)
- Statement of Community Involvement (Turley December 2022) (Covered within Planning Statement)
- Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Turley Heritage December 2022) (Covered within Environmental Statement)
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (HDA Consultancy/Tyler Grange December 2022) (Covered within Environmental Statement)
- Framework Travel Plan (Stantec February 2024)
- Transport Statement Stantec February 2024)
- Foul and Surface Water Drainage Strategy (Stantec February 2024)
- Fire Statement (Jensen Hughes February 2024)
- Sustainability and Energy Statement Rolton / Turley Sustainability November 2025)
- Air Quality Assessment (Hydrock December 2022)

- Daylight / Sunlight Report (GIA March 2024)
- Financial Viability (CBRE February 2024)
- Wind Report (GIA February 2024)
- Economic Statement (Turley Economics February 2024)
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment (TMA Trees) (September 2025)

4. Planning History

4.1 The shopping Centre opened in 1999. There have been numerous planning applications at the wider Oracle site since its inception which include:

4.2 97/0017/FD / 970419 – Demolition of existing buildings, redevelopment and change of use to provide: shopping centre (Class A1, A2 & A3), 41 residential units, leisure facilities including multi screen cinema (Class D2), car parking (2390 spaces) and community uses together with associated landscaping etc. Granted following the completion of a s106 legal agreement 04/04/1997.

4.3 230682/VAR - Application under Section 73 of Town and Country Planning Act (1990) to remove condition no. 62 of planning permission ref. 970419 (Demolition of existing buildings, redevelopment and change of use to provide: shopping centre (Class A1, A2 & A3), 41 residential units, leisure facilities including multi screen cinema (Class D2), car parking (2390 spaces) and community uses together with associated landscaping etc) to allow the sub-division of 'department store' floorspace. Imposition of new planning condition(s) to restrict use of 'department store' floorspace within Use Class E(a)(b)(d)(e), with a minimum unit size of 1,000 sqm (GIA).

4.4 24/0461/FUL - Installation of security fencing at Riverside car park, The Oracle. Granted 11/07/2024

4.5 24/0520/FUL - Demolition of the glass atrium at rooftop level of Holybrook carpark and infilling of opening, provision of 10 new car parking spaces and minor external alterations to former House of Fraser unit. Granted 24/07/2024.

4.6 24/0741/VAR - Application under Section 73 of Town and Country Planning Act (1990) to vary condition no. 80 (Opening Hours) of planning permission 230682 (Removal of condition 62 of permission 970419 [Demolition of existing buildings, redevelopment and change of use to provide: shopping centre (Class A1, A2 & A3), 41 residential units, leisure facilities including multi screen cinema (Class D2), car parking (2390 spaces) and community uses together with associated landscaping etc]) to allow the subdivision of 'department store' floorspace. Imposition of new planning condition(s) to restrict use of 'department store' floorspace within Use Class E(a)(b)(d)(e), with a minimum unit size of 1,000 sqm (GIA) to allow Class E(d) uses at Riverside level within the former House of Fraser department store to extend opening hours from 00:00 to 00:30 Mondays to Saturdays, from 23:00 to 00:30 on Sundays and from 23:00 to 02:30 on New Years Eve. Granted 29/07/2024.

4.7 24/1283/NMA - Non-material amendments to permission 230682 (granted on 22/11/2023) to alter the wording of condition 38 (pedestrian routes into and within the car parks) to remove the former House of Fraser escalator pedestrian entrances at Holybrook Car Park levels 6 and 7 following separate permission 240520 (granted on 24/07/2024). Granted 21/10/2024

5 Consultations

5.1 Consultees have in the main considered and commented upon both the YHP1 and YHP2 application proposals together given the similarities and close relationship between the two developments and given many of the documents submitted in support of the applications by the Applicant take the same approach. The comments summarised below relate to both proposed developments but where there are differences or particular issues relating to one of the applications identified within the consultee comments then these are specifically stated.

Statutory

5.2 Environment Agency

No objection to either the YHP1 or YHP2 applications subject to pre-commencement conditions to secure submission and approval of a Demolition and Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), detailed SuDS scheme and Landscape and Ecological Management Plans and subsequent implementation of both developments in accordance with the approved documents. A further condition is recommended to require both developments to be implemented in accordance with the approved flood mitigation measures outlined in the submitted Flood Risk Assessment.

5.3 HSE Fire Safety

Advise that they are content with the Fire Safety Measures outlined in the Fire Statement submitted in support of the YHP1 and YHP2 applications and that this is sufficient for this stage of both proposed developments.

5.4 Historic England

Object to both the YHP1 and YHP2 applications. Consider that the scale and visual dominance of the tower elements of both proposals would be harmful to the historic character and appearance of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and the St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area and to setting of various Listed Buildings within these Conservation Areas. The level of harm identified is Less than Substantial. The Council will need to assess whether this harm is justified and weigh it against the public benefits of both proposals (as required by paragraph 215 of the NPPF). As per paragraph 212 of the NPPF great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets. In determining the applications the Council should also bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess, section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

5.5 Ministry of Defence

No objection, to either the YHP1 or YHP2 applications. The proposed developments would not impact upon defence interests.

5.6 Marine Management Organisation

Provision of standing advice that the applicant may need to apply for a marine license for both the YHP1 and YHP1 proposed developments.

5.7 Canal and River Trust

Recommend that an informative is attached to planning permission for both developments to seek that the Applicant contacts the Canal and River Trust before commencing the development to ensure that demolition and construction practices comply with the Trust's code for working near canals and rivers.

5.8 RBC Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)

Object to both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposed developments.

The proposed drainage strategy includes the provision of a green roof and attenuation tanks at ground floor level that result in the run-off rate from the site reducing below the current brownfield runoff rate. However, it is noted that the micro drainage calculations provided indicate the overall discharge from different manholes than those identified on the proposed drainage design drawings and the level of attenuation appears to have been reduced in size compared to the previously proposed SuDS scheme. Therefore, an

updated micro drainage calculation is required to ensure that the proposal does not result in flooding.

Irrespective of the above the National standards for sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) which were updated on 30th July 2025 state:

3.21 For previously developed sites a 'relaxation factor' shall be applied to the target 50% and 1% AEP greenfield runoff rates where evidence is provided that demonstrates why greenfield runoff or 3l/s/ha rates cannot be achieved and this is agreed with the approving body.

3.21.1 This relaxation factor shall be no greater than 5 times the greenfield runoff rate.

The existing combined greenfield run off rate is identified as 2.85 l/s which at 5 times that amount would equate to 14.25 l/s. The proposed combined discharge rate of 46.8 l/s therefore this exceeds the maximum permitted and a revised drainage layout is required. The submitted drainage drawings do not identify the location of the green roofs on the site and therefore updated drawings should be submitted.

Both applications include private drainage within the Public Highway extent, it is appreciated that this is the same as the existing situation, but this should be relocated to within the application site unless the drainage is to be adopted by Thames Water. Again, as a redesign of the drainage scheme is required this should be incorporated within the drainage proposals for both developments.

In accordance with Policy EN18, the SuDS proposals should link into the green network across the site and whilst the proposals include green roofs, the extent of which is still to be confirmed, there are further extensive landscaped areas within the public realm which could be connected to the drainage system.

Furthermore, the above National Standards for SuDS now stipulates that the first priority is for surface water to be 'collected for non-potable uses'. This has not been included within the SuDS proposals and therefore this must be included within the design.

The applicant in response has stated that the proposed tree planters shown within the landscape design for both developments will be incorporated into the drainage strategy and that some rain water downpipes located close to the edge of the buildings and tree pits can be routed into the tree pits which will filter the surface water and allow water to be absorbed by the trees, thereby providing water treatment and storage benefits. In addition, the applicant states that an irrigation strategy will be developed further for the roof gardens which will seek to incorporate rainwater harvesting into the irrigation strategy where appropriate and feasible. The applicant wishes to undertake this at the detailed design stage via planning condition however, given that the SuDS schemes as a whole require redesigning this should be incorporated within the design now to demonstrate compliance with national and local policies and standards.

Based on the information provided to date the LLFA object to both proposed developments should the above not be addressed.

5.9 RBC Transport Strategy (Local Highway Authority)

YHP1

No objection subject to:

Completion of a s106 legal agreement to secure the following:

- Not to commence development unless and until the area of highway to be stopped along the IDR has been approved by the Secretary of State (via s247 of the TCPA)
- Within 6 months of commencement of the development to have entered into a S278 Highways or any other agreement that maybe agreed with the Highway Authority to facilitate the delivery of the provision of bollards with a minimum spacing of 1.5m

at the junction of Yield Hall Place and Minster Street as agreed on drawing ORA-LDA-RES-ZZ-DWG-PL-0103 Rev P05.

- No part of the development to be occupied until the Highway works have been completed
- Prior to occupation of any residential dwelling to submit for approval details of a car club for two vehicles within The Oracle car park and a car club strategy. Spaces to be provided prior to occupation of any residential dwelling

Conditions to secure the following:

- Pre-commencement submission and approval of a construction method statement
- Pre-occupation of any dwelling provision of all residential cycle parking
- Pre-occupation of any dwelling notification of all addresses to LPA
- Pre-occupation of any dwelling notification of occupants that no entitlement to a parking permit
- Within 5 months of occupation submission and approval of a travel plan
- Annual review of travel plan
- Pre-occupation of any commercial unit submission and approval of a delivery and servicing plan
- Pre-occupation of any dwelling revision of layout of parking spaces within existing multi-storey car park
- Pre-occupation of any dwelling implementation of parking and loading restrictions to the East of Yield Hall Place as per proposed plans
- All doors to open away from the highway/street

YHP2

No objection subject to:

Completion of a s106 legal agreement to secure the following:

- Not to commence development unless and until the area of adopted highway land to the IDR has been stopped up and approved by Secretary of State (s247 of the TCPA).
- Prior to occupation of any residential dwelling to submit for approval details of a car club for two vehicles within The Oracle car park and a car club strategy. Spaces to be provided prior to occupation of any residential dwelling
- Within 6 months of commencement of the development to have entered into a S278 Highways Agreement to facilitate the delivery of the following:
 - Improvements to the IDR / London Street / Duke Street signalised junction potentially consisting of the removal of guard railings, adjustment and landscaping to islands, surface dressing to existing crossing points, a raised table on Queens Road service road and tree planting (all off-site public realm works).
 - Relocation of existing signage as agreed on drawing 332110757_5500_SK053 Rev P01
 - Provision of kassel or treif kerbs along the IDR as agreed on drawing 332110757_5500_SK055 Rev P01
 - Removal of existing High Mast lighting column and replacement with standard street lighting columns
- No occupation of the development until the Highway works have been practically complete.

Conditions to secure the following:

- Pre-commencement submission and approval of a construction method statement
- Pre-occupation of any dwelling provision of all residential cycle parking
- Pre-occupation of any dwelling notification of all addresses to LPA

- Pre-occupation of any dwelling notification of occupants that no entitlement to a parking permit
- Within 5 months of occupation submission and approval of a travel plan
- Annual review of travel plan
- Pre-occupation of any commercial unit submission and approval of a delivery and servicing plan
- Pre-occupation of any part of the development provision of 4m wide cycle route through The Oracle as per proposed plans
- Pre-commencement submission and approval of lighting strategy for removal of high mast column and replacement with standard lighting columns
- All doors to open away from the highway/street

Non-Statutory

5.10 Sport England

Do not wish to comment on either the YHP1 or YHP2 applications given the number of dwellings proposed falls below the statutory remit for Sport England to provide comments. Advise that the proposals should be determined in accordance with the Council's Local Plan policies for social infrastructure.

5.11 Thames Water

No objection to either the YHP1 or YHP2 applications.

Advise that there is sufficient existing network capacity in terms of waste water networks and sewage treatment for the YHP1 proposals. Thames Water has been unable to obtain information from the Applicant to confirm the needs and network capacity position in respect of the YHP2 proposals and therefore Thames Water recommend a condition is attached to planning permission for that development to require submission and approval by the LPA, in consultation with Thames Water, of either confirmation that foul water capacity exists off-site to serve the development or a development and infrastructure phasing plan to ensure the development does not outpace delivery of essential waste water infrastructure.

In terms of clean water advise that there is existing network capacity to serve 50 new dwellings but beyond that upgrades to the water network will be required. Therefore, recommend that a condition is attached to planning permission for both developments to require that prior to occupation of any residential dwellings a development and infrastructure phasing plan is submitted to and agreed with the LPA in consultation with Thames Water to ensure that the proposed developments do not outpace the delivery of essential clean water infrastructure.

In addition, it is advised that the YHP1 proposals are located within 15m of a strategic sewer and therefore a condition should be attached to planning permission for this development to stipulate that no piling should take place until a piling method statement has been submitted to and approved by the LPA in consultation with Thames Water.

5.12 Berkshire Archaeology

No objection to either the YHP1 or YHP2 applications subject to a condition being placed on the planning permissions for both developments to secure submission and approval of a written scheme of archaeological investigation and its subsequent implementation.

5.13 Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Provision of standing advice in relation to both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals and advises that both proposed developments will need to obtain separate Building Regulations approval in relation to fire safety matters at the later regulatory stages for each development.

5.14 Reading's Economy & Destination Agency (REDA)

The scale and ambition of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals will add to the economic strength of Reading city centre, particularly as it provides more cultural and leisure opportunity for our day visitors. We know from research that this is the kind of experiential approach that people seek as part of their retail and leisure visit, encouraging longer dwell time and return visits as well as strengthening Reading's image as a destination.

REDA believes this is good for the economy and long term viability of the centre and the work of the Business Improvement Districts which bound the north and west of The Oracle. There is also good opportunity for this work to support the ambitions of the draft town centre strategy and the Reading 2050 vision.

Due to the extent of the redevelopment, we would expect to enter into an Employment, Skills and Training Plan with the developers, as required by the RBC Employment, Skills and Training SPD (2013) for both the construction and end user phases of both proposed developments. Such plans should include targets to deliver more low carbon skills and training in carbon literacy to enable sustainable development.

5.15 **Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce**

Support both the YHP1 and YHP2 applications for the following reasons:

- (i) We recognise the importance and value our town centres make to the economic well-being and place-shaping of the Thames Valley.
- (ii) The proposed mixed use mixed-use town schemes will enhance, modernise and future proof the retail offer of The Oracle.
- (iii) The provision of new commercial floorspace at riverside level, including restaurants and/or bars, coworking/ business space, will supplement the strong daytime and enhance the night-time economy of Reading town centre.
- (iv) The inclusion of extensive public realm improvements, along Yield Hall Place and the Riverside Frontage will build on the Council's excellent track record of opening-up this area and bring wider benefits to Reading town centre.
- (v) We welcome the proposed build-to-rent tenure residential units with integrated amenity and event spaces for use by residents. We believe this will assist in alleviating pressures on HMO and other rental properties across the Borough and in freeing up stock of family housing.

5.16 **RBC Environmental Protection**

No objection to either the YHP1 or YHP2 applications subject to conditions to secure the following being attached to the planning permission for both developments.

Pre-commencement submission and approval of:

- A noise mitigation and ventilation scheme to protect future occupiers of the residential dwellings from external noise sources
- A noise mitigation scheme to protect future occupiers of the residential dwellings from internal noise from the proposed commercial uses to the lower floor of both buildings
- An air quality mitigation scheme to demonstrate measures to mitigate for the vehicle movements resulting from the proposed developments
- A contaminated land assessment to identify any contaminants present on both sites
- A contamination remediation scheme to make both sites safe for the proposed uses
- Evidence of subsequent implementation of the remediation measures
- Demolition and Construction Method Statement to mitigate for the impacts of the demolition and construction work on existing residential occupiers near both sites

Pre-occupation of any commercial unit submission and approval of:

- An odour assessment and management plan to protect future occupiers of the residential dwellings from commercial kitchen/cooking odours
- An external lighting scheme to protect future occupiers from glare and light pollution
- Details of vermin proofing measures for all bin stores

- Car Park Cleaning Management Plan to include measures to protect future occupiers of the residential dwellings from noise resulting from cleaning of the car parks within The Oracle

Other conditions:

- No installation of any mechanical plant until an appropriate noise assessment has been submitted and approved
- Any previously unidentified contamination found during demolition and construction of the proposed developments to be report to the LPA to determine next steps
- All demolition and construction work to take pace during the Council's standard working hours (0800-1800 Monday to Friday, 0800-1300 Saturdays and not at any time on Sundays or Bank Holidays)
- No burning of demolition or construction waste on-site

For YHP2 only a further specific pre-commencement condition is recommended to secure submission and approval of a scheme of noise mitigation to protect future occupiers of the residential dwellings from noise from the proposed cinema

5.17 RBC Planning (Natural Environment) Team

No objection to either the YHP1 or YHP2 applications subject to conditions being attached to the planning permission for both developments to secure pre-commencement submission and approval of an arboricultural method statement, detailed hard and soft landscaping scheme, a landscape management plan and details of integration of proposed soft landscaping features within the SuDS design. A further condition is also recommended to secure retention of all on-site trees not identified for removal as part of either proposed development.

5.18 RBC Leisure/Parks/Neighbourhood Services

Responses received from various officers which facilitated agreement of the proposed contribution of £1.2 million towards various off-site public realm/leisure improvements within the vicinity of both application sites, to be secured by s106 legal agreement.

5.19 RBC Housing

Note that the overall amount of affordable housing proposed to be provided by both the YHP1 and YHP2 applications is below the Policy H3 requirement. Notwithstanding this consider the proposed tenure, mix and location of the affordable housing units within both developments to be acceptable.

RBC Ecology Adviser

5.20 RBC Ecology Adviser

No objection to either the YHP1 or YHP2 applications subject to conditions being attached to the planning permission for both developments to secure pre-commencement submission and approval of a demolition and construction environmental management plan, habitat enhancement, scheme of hard and soft landscaping and scheme of wildlife friendly external lighting.

5.21 RBC Conservation Officer

Object to both the YHP1 and YHP2 applications because of their scale, height, built form and massing which would detract from the character of the adjacent historic environment which is defined by the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation area and various listed buildings and their settings within these conservation areas.

The proposals would dominate and compete visually with the modest scale of numerous nearby listed buildings. They would create significant vertical and horizontal discontinuity with the conservation areas and the historic core of Reading. It is not considered that the

proposals would provide a well-defined conservation benefit or public benefit in the form of social and environmental aspects of a new built within a historic environment. The proposed architectural design of the blocks would neither integrate into the historic and modern surroundings nor bring an innovative and/or contemporary language to Reading.

Advise that both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would result in Less than Substantial Harm at a 'moderate to high level' to the character, appearance and setting of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and settings of the Grade II listed buildings at no.s 1 (Coroners Court building) and 2-4 London Street and High Bridge. Less than Substantial Harm is also identified and at a moderate level to the the setting of the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area including the setting of Grade I listed Church of St Mary's and Grade II Listed Buildings at 7-15 Gun Street and the Telephone Exchange building and George Hotel on Minster Street. Less than Substantial Harm at a low level is identified to the settings of other listed buildings within these two conservation areas, including the wider setting of the Grade II Listed St Giles Church and Grade I Listed Church of St Laurence.

Advises that both proposed developments conflict with Policies EN1, EN3, EN6 and CR14g of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

5.22 RBC Waste Services

The proposed commercial and residential bin stores for both the YHP1 and YHP2 applications are appropriate in size and location. A condition is recommended to be attached to planning permission for both developments to secure submission and approval of a waste management strategy to details how all bins will be moved between the stores and collection points.

5.23 RBC Emergency Planning Officer

No objection to either the YHP1 or YHP2 proposals.

5.24 RBC Access Officer

The proposed ground floor plan for YHP2 shows the cinema would have two screens downstairs which is an improvement in terms of accessibility compared to the existing cinema where all screens are to upper floors.

Car clubs are a good idea, but it should be borne in mind that disabled people can't always access them, as they often need adapted vehicles.

The "experiential leisure" offer, whichever form it takes, should be as accessible to all as possible.

The building operators will be responsible for staff training to assist with the evacuation of mobility impaired occupants – this should take into account what will happen to occupants' mobility aids.

The footpaths by the riverside should be accessible to all

If the proposed new entrance within YHP1 to the shopping centre requires the use of a platform lift this can cause problems if breakdowns are not dealt with promptly.

In addition to Part M of the Building Regulations, the developers should also look at the new standard, PAS 6463, Design for the Mind, Neurodiversity and the Built Environment.

5.25 Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC)

Objects to these applications. Note the need to find new uses for the sites to sustain The Oracle but the height of the proposed buildings will dwarf all that surrounding it.

The YHP2 proposals will have a very negative impact on views looking north along London Street and this part of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. Whilst the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals will have a very negative impact on views looking south from Market Place and this part of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

The warehouse style blocks within both YHP1 and YHP2 would be better replaced by smaller versions of the tower elements which have a more neutral appearance. Industrial uses for this part of Reading have disappeared and we do not wish to re-create them.

The existing IDR/London Street junction has a negative impact on the character and appearance of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. The proposals present some improvements to the area around this junction but do not go far enough.

Positive aspects of the proposals include the hard and soft landscaping works to the route along Yield Hall Place towards Minster Street.

The future of the existing Tram Depot Station sign on the part of The Oracle fronting the IDR (Queens Road) within YHP2 is not clear. (*Officer comment: the sign is proposed to be incorporated within the new YHP2 building in a similar position fronting the IDR (Queens Road) above the rear/secondary entrance to the cinema.*)

Would like to understand the whole life carbon implications of the proposed development given The Oracle was only constructed around 25 years ago.

Concerned about impact from overshadowing from the proposals on the river Kennet.

The existing paving on the south side of the Kennet was designed to reflect the former use of the site as a tram depot. This should be re-used within the YHP2 proposals. Similarly, there are slabs in the paving on the north side of the Kennet reflecting former uses of this part of the site and this should be re-used as part of the YHP1 proposals. (*Officer comment: re-use of these paving materials can be specified within the conditions requiring submission and approval of the hard and soft landscaping details for both YHP1 and YHP2.*)

Public Consultation

5.26 Four site notices advertising both applications were erected around the site on 19/01/2023, and then again on 1/05/2024 following submission of amended plans. A press notice for both applications was also published on 23/01/2023.

5.27 10 x letters of objection have been received raising the following matters:

- There is already enough flats and houses being built in the town centre and there is not enough infrastructure to cope as it is
- Traffic is already bad in the town centre, and this will make it worse
- Closing of businesses, particularly a number of popular restaurants, does not make economic sense when these units bring in business to the town and are enjoyed by the public. Footfall and incentive for people to visit The Oracle will reduce.
- A shopping centre needs shops, leisure facilities, entertainment, arts and history places and it is not a suitable place for flats either for future occupiers or the hospitality sector.
- Loss of existing facilities will negatively impact on people's social lives and cause loneliness.
- Closure of existing facilities will result in loss of jobs
- Closure of the cinema will have a negative impact as this is one of the main places in the town for events and entertainment. Without access to a car and use of expensive public transport people cannot access similar facilities. For people with autism and anxiety the cinema is a valuable facility for enjoyment and to make friends
- The existing facilities are much loved by the local community and their scaling down and replacement with build to rent residential properties is inappropriate for the local community and contrary to the RBC Local Plan and tall building policies

- The Applicant's public consultation was insufficient for the proposed development and will have wider impacts than just the immediate area surrounding the shopping centre
- The proposal to not align with the Council's climate emergency pledge
- The materials shown on the proposed visuals and the proposed elevation plans do not match, those on the visuals should be used
- The Reading Corporation Tramways Power Station sign from 1903 is shown to be retained within the design and access statement but does not appear to be shown on the proposed elevation plans. A requirement of any planning permission should be for the sign to be retained, which was the case when planning permission was first granted for The Oracle.
- The scale and appearance of the proposed building is not in keeping with the town centre and will block out light
- The proposed build to rent flats will be expensive and push up existing rents making the town less affordable.
- Insufficient doctors' and dentists' surgeries already without additional flats
- The proposals will lead to overcrowding within the town centre

5.28 2 x letters of support have been received raising the following matters:

- Public realm improvements to riverside are welcomed, similar enhancements should be provided elsewhere, particularly for pedestrians crossing over the IDR to reduce noise and air pollution
- Both developments would provide much needed high quality housing, albeit lack of amenities need for residents such as supermarkets nearby needs to be considered
- Support the provision of additional cycle parking and car free nature of the developments, however, would like to see formal cycle paths along the riverside within the development
- Provision of private amenity balconies and communal amenity terrace areas is noted but green space, such as parks nearby, are limited
- Solar panels should be considered to reduce the environmental impacts of the developments
- Consideration should be given to whether the existing large Oracle car park adjacent to the application site is still needed and whether more housing could be provided there
- The land is currently neglected and does not contribute to lives of people in Reading

5.29 1 x letter of observation have been received raising the following matters:

- The proposed buildings will dominate Reading's skyline for a long time so the design should be improved to be less generic and incorporate more arches and curved glass

Statement of Community Involvement

5.30 The application is accompanied by a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which sets out the Applicant's own public consultation undertaken in relation to both development proposals. This includes leaflet distribution to nearby businesses and dwellings (1, 323 addresses) with information about the proposals, display of posters, social media advertising, hosting of a project website, hosting of an in-person event and static exhibition at The Oracle and a live webinar.

5.31 The SCI summarises the feedback the Applicant received from the community consultation which includes:

Transport and Accessibility

- Concerns about safety of pedestrian access to The Oracle from the rear (IDR) side
- Cycle connections in and around The Oracle are poor and improved cycling infrastructure should be provided (routes and parking spaces)
- Pedestrian routes across the IDR should be improved

- Proposals would increase traffic in the town centre

Existing and Proposed Uses within The Oracle

- There should be more leisure facilities at The Oracle for both children and adults
- Reduced number of shops could reduce footfall
- Queried whether this is the right location for the proposed co-working facility
- Co-working spaces were needed within the town
- Priority for shop units should be given to small, independent local businesses
- Concern about loss of cinema, House of Fraser, Next Beauty and HMV
- Active ground floor use to riverside should be retained

Public Realm

- Riverside areas should be improved to support wildlife
- Area around Duke Street and Yield Hall Place should be improved
- More landscaping in public areas and less hardstanding
- Existing trees should be retained, not removed, and supplemented with new planting
- Better lighting to Yield Hall Place needed

Character and Appearance

- Appearance of existing building is dated, and proposals would result in a better appearance
- Queried the scale of the proposals
- Queried whether public art would be provided as part of redevelopment

Fire Safety

- Queried fire safety of proposed cladding and also evacuation routes

Housing

- Queried need for more housing in town centre and how Build to Rent tenure worked
- Larger flats needed for families
- High-density flats would detract from the character of Reading Borough Council

Sustainability

- Queried carbon footprint of the proposals and what sustainability measures would be included

Construction

- Concern about noise impact of proposals of existing and future residential occupiers
- Construction work could impact on public transport routes

Local Infrastructure

- Proposals would adversely impact on local infrastructure (schools, healthcare, police and fire services)

Other

- Benefits of the developments would not be for local people

6 Legal context

- 6.1 Section 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.
- 6.2 Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention

to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

- 6.3 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF December 2024) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).
- 6.4 In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).
- 6.5 Accordingly, the latest NPPF and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

NPPF (December 2024, incorporating changes February 2025)

Section 2 - Achieving sustainable development

Section 4 - Decision-making

Section 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes

Section 6 - Building a strong, competitive economy

Section 7 - Ensuring the vitality of town centres

Section 8 - Promoting healthy and safe communities

Section 9 - Promoting sustainable transport

Section 11 - Making effective use of land

Section 12 - Achieving well-designed places

Section 14 - Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Section 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Section 16 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

NPPG (2014 onwards)

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019, policies:

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction

CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change

CC4: Decentralised Energy

CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage

CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development

CC7: Design and the Public Realm

CC8: Safeguarding Amenity

CC9: Securing Infrastructure

CC10: Health Impact Assessments (emerging policy)

EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment

EN2: Areas of Archaeological Significance

EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas

EN5: Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest

EN6: New Development in a Historic Context

EN9: Provision of Open Space

EN10: Access to Open Space

EN11: Waterspaces

EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network

EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland

EN15: Air Quality

EN16: Pollution and Water Resources

EN17: Noise Generating Equipment

EN18: Flooding and Drainage
EN19: Urban Greening Factor (emerging policy)
H2: Density and Mix
H3: Affordable Housing
H4: Build to Rent Schemes
H5: Standards for New Housing
H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space
TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR4: Cycle Routes and Facilities
TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres
RL2: Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure and Culture Development
OU5: Shopfronts and Cash Machines
CR1: Definition of Central Reading
CR2: Design in Central Reading
CR3: Public Realm in Central Reading
CR4: Leisure, Culture and Tourism in Central Reading
CR6: Living in Central Reading
CR7: Primary Frontages in Central Reading
CR10: Tall Buildings
CR14: Other Sites for Development in Central Reading

6.7 Relevant Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) are:

Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)
Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)
Affordable Housing SPD (2021)
Employment, Skills and Training SPD (2013)
Planning Obligations Under s106 SPD (2015)
Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)
Design Guide to Shopfronts (2022)

6.8 Other relevant guidance:

Reading City Centre Framework (2008)
Market Place/London Street Conservation Area Appraisal (2007)
St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal (March 2008)
Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plan 2020-2030 (LCWIP) (November 2019)
Tall Buildings Strategy (2008)
Tall Buildings Strategy Update Note (2018)
Reading Open Space Strategy (2007)
(Draft) Reading Town Centre Public Realm Strategy (2025)
Reading Tree Strategy (2021)
Reading Biodiversity Action Plan (2021)
Historic England: Advice Note 4 "Tall Buildings" (2015).

Local Plan Partial Update

6.9 The current version of the Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) turned five years old on Tuesday 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan are considered still up to date. However, the rest need to be considered for updating to reflect changing circumstances and national policy. A consultation version of the draft update of the Local Plan was published on 6th November 2024.

6.10. Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become "out of date"

when they are five years old. It is a matter of planning judgement rather than legal fact whether a plan or policies within it are out-of-date. This will depend on whether they have been overtaken by things that have happened since the plan was adopted, either on the ground or through changes in national policy, for example. Officer advice in respect of the Local Plan policies pertinent to these applications listed above is that, other than Policy H1 (Provision of Housing) they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remain very similar in the draft updated Local Plan. Therefore, they can continue to be afforded weight in the determination of this planning application and are not considered to be 'out of date'. Policy H1 is out of date because the Council is not currently meeting its annual housing targets for general housing as calculated using the standard method in National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (as required now policy H1 is out of date) or for the provision of Affordable Housing.

- 6.11. The Local Plan Partial Update was submitted to the Secretary of State on 9th May 2025. Submission marks the beginning of a process of public examination led by an independent Inspector. Due to the stage of examination, the draft Local Plan can be afforded limited weight. Any incidences where policies relevant to these application are changing or relevance of any new policies proposed to be introduced by the draft Local Plan Partial Update will be discussed within the Appraisal section below.

7 Appraisal

- 7.1 The main considerations are:

1. **Land use matters**
2. **Design & related matters: demolition, layout, scale, massing, appearance and impact on heritage assets**
3. **Public Realm**
4. **Mix and Affordable Housing**
5. **Transport and Highways**
6. **Flooding and Natural Environment**
7. **Amenity Matters**
8. **Sustainability and Energy**
9. **Other matters**
10. **S106 matters**

Land use matters

- 7.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (February 2025) sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development (Para. 11) with three overarching objectives, economic, social and environmental. Sustainable development should therefore be approved where it accords with the development plan unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly outweigh the benefits of development.
- 7.1.2 The NPPF also states that planning policies and decisions should define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters (Para. 90). The NPPF also encourages the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed; (Para. 124), especially where that land is under-utilised, and within a settlement.
- 7.1.3 The NPPF has identified an increased need for housing across the country, including Reading. The emerging Local Plan Partial Update includes provisions for an increased housing target in Reading.
- 7.1.4 The RBC Local Plan (2019) within paragraphs 5.1.1 and 5.1.4 outlines that Reading town centre is also one of the UK's most important centres and that its importance for retail, boosted by the opening of the Oracle in 1999, is long established, but it is also significant for leisure and culture, and, increasingly, as somewhere to live.

7.1.5 Paragraph 5.2.1 of the Local Plan (2019) sets out key principles for development within Central Reading, which are:

- a. The centre will contain a broad range of different but complementary uses within an area easily accessed by foot.
- b. The centre will appeal to all sectors of Reading's population as a place to live in, work in, study in and visit.
- c. New development will exhibit an excellent, safe and sustainable quality of design that contributes to the attraction of the centre.
- d. The centre will make the most of its waterside areas as a destination for leisure and recreation, and protect and enhance wildlife habitats.
- e. Areas of designated open space within the centre will be protected and new opportunities will be sought.
- f. Access to the centre by foot, cycle and public transport will be improved.
- g. Access within the centre by foot and cycle will be improved and barriers to this improved access will be overcome, particularly in a north-south direction through the core.
- h. Development in the centre will benefit from and contribute towards forthcoming major transport improvements.
- i. Areas and features that positively contribute to the unique and historic character of central Reading will be protected and, where appropriate, enhanced.

7.1.6 Policy RL1 (Network and Hierarchy of Centres) identifies that the town centre is a Regional Centre, with a catchment extending beyond the Thames Valley, which is one of the most economically dynamic regions in the country. The policy requires that the vitality and viability of the Central Reading is maintained and enhanced, and this is the one of the key overarching requirements upon which both applications will be assessed. It acknowledges that this area will see the.

7.1.7 Policy RL1 also sets out that Central Reading will see the greatest levels of development and change and that improvements to accessibility and transport movements, the range of facilities available, provision of residential uses to upper floors and environment enhancements will be acceptable in Central Reading. The supporting text to Policy RL1 at paragraph 4.6.2 states that as other competing centres (within the Thames Valley and country as a whole) continue to enhance their offer, it will continue to be necessary to develop and adapt the town centre to maintain its position.

7.1.8 The Oracle (including both application sites) is located within the Central Core of the town centre and within the Primary Shopping Area as defined under Policy CR1 (Definition of Central Reading). In general terms, both application proposals would align with Policy CR1 which requires that new retail development should take place within the Primary Shopping Area and that proposals for other main town centre uses (such as restaurants and leisure uses) should take place within the Central Core. Notwithstanding the above the supporting text to Policy CR1 at paragraph 5.3.4 is clear that these designations do not mean that other types of development will not be acceptable and that mixing uses within the centre is at the heart of the strategy for development within Central Reading set out within the Local Plan. Policy CR1 also sets out that major office development should take place within the Office Core of the Central Area. Policy EM2 (Location of New Employment Development) states that employment uses (such industry) other than office development should take place along the A33 corridor or within designated Core Employment Areas.

7.1.9 Policy CR4 (Leisure, Culture and Tourism in Central Reading) also sets out that the Central Core is the prime focus for major leisure, cultural and tourism development and that such uses which attract a wide range of people into the centre will be encouraged, as will innovative solutions to leisure provision. Policy CR5 (Drinking Establishments in Central Reading) supports provision of complementary evening and nighttime uses within the central area, subject to these uses not giving rise to adverse impacts on the amenity of nearby residents or other town centre users.

Existing and Proposed Uses

YHP1

7.1.10 The proposals for YHP1 include part demolition and part retention of the existing former Debenhams department store at riverside, lower mall and upper mall level (Use Class E). These parts of the existing building consist of around 12,965m² of floor space. This includes two former restaurant units fronting the riverside (most recently Franco Manca and The Real Greek). It is proposed to demolish 6,633m² of the floor space, which includes the part of the building closest to and fronting the riverside to the south and Yield Hall Place to the east, including the two restaurant units. The remaining 6,323m² of floor space at riverside, lower mall and upper mall level to rear (north) part of the site, is to be retained and re-provided as part of the development proposals. The two floors of the part of the existing car park and plant rooms above upper mall level are to be retained with some minor changes to layout and configuration.

7.1.11 Within the retained floor space, it is proposed to provide two new commercial units, a 1,510m² unit at ground floor (riverside level) and a 2,916m² double storey unit to the two floors above at lower and upper mall level. The submitted plans and supporting documents suggest that the ground floor unit would be within an experiential leisure use (E(d) Use Class) and may include a bar element (Sui Generis Use Class), whilst the larger unit to the upper floors is shown as in retail use (E(a) Use Class). However, as explained above, the application seeks a flexible use of the proposed commercial units for uses within Class E and/or Sui Generis bar use.

7.1.12 There are no in principle issues with the majority of the various separate Class E uses or Sui Generis bar use which Policies CR1, CR4 and CR5 support within the Central Area. However, it is considered necessary to exclude uses under Class E (g)(i) 'Offices to carry out any operational or administrative functions', E (g) (ii) 'Research and development of products or processes' and E (g) (iii) 'industrial processes' from both of the commercial units within the retained floorspace. This is because, for the ground floor (riverside level) unit, such uses would not be appropriate within the designated Primary Frontage in accordance with Policy CR7 (Primary Frontages in Central Reading) which seeks to protect the vitality and vibrancy of such frontages within the town centre through provision of appropriate ground floor uses. For the upper floor unit (2,900m²), whilst not within a 'frontage', such uses are also not considered appropriate within the Central Core and Primary Shopping Area of the town centre for similar reasons. Furthermore, Policies CR1 and EM2 direct employment uses such as offices, research and development and industrial processes of over 2,500m² to other locations within the Borough, and the application is not accompanied by a retail sequential test to demonstrate that such uses cannot be accommodated within these preferred locations elsewhere. The Local Plan directs major office uses (Class E (g)(i)) directs towards the Office Core of the Central Area and industrial such as Class E (g) (ii) and E (g) (iii) directed towards the Core Employment Areas and A33 corridor and the YHP1 application site is not within any of these preferred locations. A condition is recommended to restrict use of the units accordingly.

7.1.13 Policy CR7 also requires that any units that front onto any of the designated primary frontages will provide an active building frontage with a display window or glazed frontage at ground floor level in order to further contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre and provide visual interest. The units proposed with the retained floor space would not front directly on the riverside frontage being accessed internally from the mall and as such no conflict with Policy CR7 in this respect is identified. However, a new double height glazed entrance to the shopping centre is proposed direct from the riverside frontage which would provide access to the units within the retained floor space and ensure appropriate activation and interest to this part of the Primary Frontage.

7.1.14 In addition to the proposed retained and re-purposed floor space, significant extensions are proposed to replace the demolished elements of the building next to the riverside and Yield Hall Place. At ground floor (riverside level) this includes a unit shown in restaurant (E (d) Use Class) / bar (Sui Generis) use of 241.84m² to the riverside frontage. However,

as discussed above, a flexible use for this unit is also proposed within any of Class E and/or Sui Generis bar use. It is considered reasonable to restrict the use of this unit on the same basis as the units within the retained floorspace by way of condition in accordance with Policy CR7 given its location within a Primary Frontage.

7.1.15 The ground floor (riverside level) of the extended part of the building is also proposed to provide a 'co-working space' (E g (i) Use Class - offices) of 251m² on the eastern corner of the development to both the riverside and Yield Hall Place frontage of the building. The YHP1 application outlines that the co-working space is proposed to provide a space for people to work and hold business meetings, reflecting the increased demand arising from the shift to home, hybrid and flexible working. The co-working space would be open to the general public and not just occupiers of the residential units within the proposed development. The provision of such office type accommodation within the Primary Frontage would conflict with Policy CR7 given, as discussed above, such a use is not considered appropriate to provide the desired vibrancy and interest for such frontages within the town centre. However, the co-working space by its nature (with a café and break out areas) is likely to be different and more front facing than private offices serving a single firm or company and officers consider such a use would provide activation and vibrancy to the Primary Frontage. The proposed co-working unit would also be served by a glazed shopfront to the riverside (and to Yield Hall Place) which from a visual perspective would also provide appropriate visual vibrancy and interest to the Primary Frontage. Furthermore, given a flexible use within Class E is sought it is possible that the space could be used for a more traditional front facing use such as a shop. It should be noted that given the use class for co-working space is Class E g (i) (offices) the unit could also end up being used as private offices of a single firm or company, albeit officers consider this would be unlikely.

7.1.16 Policy CR7 also states that proposals that result in the loss of A1 or A2 uses such that the proportion along the whole frontage falls below 50% will not be permitted. In this respect the Primary Frontage is defined as being both the riverside north and riverside south frontages within The Oracle. This policy however is now out of step with the national context, following the September 2020 changes to the Use Classes Order, which revoked Class A1/A2 and introduced the 11 part Class E. The draft Reading Borough Local Plan Partial Update proposes that Policy CR7 is amended such that the minimum proportion of any specific use is proposed to be removed. Whilst this is not yet an adopted policy approach and very limited weight can be given to this proposed policy change, it indicates an anticipated direction of travel. Set within this context, there are no concerns raised with the Class E uses proposed, subject to the controls discussed above in respect of research and development industrial process uses.

7.1.17 Elsewhere within the ground floor (riverside level) of the proposed extended part of the YHP1 building, a large residential lobby and entrance (225.81m²) is proposed to the riverside frontage between the two commercial units discussed above, providing access and communal space to the 218 residential units at the upper floors of the building. Policy CR7 is clear that entrances to upper floors are appropriate within Primary Frontages, whilst the lobby would provide a significant glazed frontage providing suitable visual interest.

7.1.18 The rest of the ground floor space within the YHP1 extensions consists of around 884m² of 'back of house space' serving the proposed retail, leisure, restaurant and residential uses to the upper floors (refuse and cycle stores, storage rooms, plant rooms and circulation space). These uses are set towards the rear of the building away from the riverside Primary Frontage and therefore are considered be suitably located and necessary to support the wider functions of the building. A proposed cycle store, plant room and bin store would front on to the Yield Hall Place frontage of the building. Yield Hall Place is not a Primary Frontage designated by Policy CR7 and therefore there is no land use conflict with such uses to this side of the building. Yield Hall Place is currently primarily used for servicing of The Oracle and other surrounding buildings and use for servicing is proposed to continue as part of the proposed development. Whether this is an appropriate function for this part of the building in terms of appearance and quality of

public realm within the town centre will be considered later in this report when matters relating to design and appearance are covered in more detail.

YHP2

7.1.19 The proposals for YHP2 include demolition of the entirety of the existing building within this site, which incorporates the existing four storey Vue cinema (6,228m²) and the riverside restaurant units (670m²) and redevelopment of the site with a larger building. The proposed new building would re-provide a cinema (Sui Generis Use) offer (2,486m²) at the western end of the building 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. The primary entrance/exit to the cinema would be from the riverside but within a secondary entrance to the other side of the building on to the pavement on the IDR.

7.1.20 Within the YHP2 development it is also proposed to provide a new ground floor retail unit (Class E a) (345m²) at the eastern end of the building which would front on to the riverside and also Yield Hall Place to the east. As with the YHP1 proposals a flexible use of this unit is sought for any use within Class E and/or Sui Generis bar use. A 313m² residential lobby would also be provided at riverside level (ground floor) which would provide communal space and access to the 218 residential units proposed to the upper floors of the building from the riverside as well as from the IDR to the south. The rest of the ground floor space within the proposed YHP2 building would consist of back of house space (refuse and cycle stores, storage rooms, plant rooms and circulation space) for the cinema, retail unit and residential units above.

7.1.21 The YHP2 proposals are located within a wider parcel of land which includes the rest of the Oracle to the west on the south side of the Kennet and the existing John Lewis Depot on the opposite side of the IDR that is allocated for development under Policy CR14g. This Policy seeks:

CR14g THE ORACLE EXTENSION, BRIDGE STREET AND LETCOMBE STREET

Development of the area between the River Kennet and Mill Lane for retail, with use of site at Letcombe Street for public car park

Development should:

- Address flood risk issues;*
- Enhance the setting of the Conservation Area;*
- Take account of potential archaeological significance; and*
- Address any contamination on site.*

Site size: 1.67 ha 1,600-2,000 sq m of retail or town centre uses

7.1.22 The YHP2 proposals do not entirely align with the type of development allocated for the wider site under Policy CR14g, which is for retail development, and in this respect are considered to be departure from the current, adopted Local Plan. As such, and as required by Paragraph 15 of the Development Management Procedure Order (2012) (as amended) the proposals were advertised as being not in accordance with the Development Plan. Whilst the proposals include provision of a retail element this is a single unit (345m²) with the majority of the floorspace proposed at ground floor level being a leisure use in the form of a Cinema (Sui Generis Use Class) and the 218 residential units to the upper floors being by far the predominant land use. It is pertinent to note that within the Local Plan Partial Update, significant changes are proposed to Policy CR14g:

CR14g THE ORACLE EXTENSION, BRIDGE STREET AND LETCOMBE STREET RIVERSIDE EAST

Development of the area between the River Kennet and Mill Lane for retail, with use of site at Letcombe Street for public car park eastern end of the Oracle Riverside for residential development with commercial development including retail and/or leisure at the ground floor.

Development should:

- Retain and increase tree planting along the Kennet and Avon Canal to enhance the tree corridor;**
- Address flood risk issues, including avoiding development in the part of the site within Flood Zone 3;**
- Avoid detrimental effects on the significance of listed buildings and the Conservation Area and their settings; Enhance the setting of the Conservation Area;**
- Take account of potential archaeological significance; and**
- Address noise impacts on residential use;**
- Address air quality impacts on residential use;**
- Address any contamination on site.**

Site size: 1.6726 ha

1,600-2,000 sq m of retail or town centre uses 250-370 dwellings, retention of retail and/or leisure on key frontages on ground floor

7.1.23 Notably the parcel of land covered by the policy allocation is proposed to be significantly amended to just include the eastern end of The Oracle on the south side of the river but now also the eastern end of the shopping centre on the north side of the river as well. Furthermore, the proposed allocated uses for the site have been amended to refer to both retail and/or leisure uses to ground floor and now with the addition of residential uses to the upper floors. The proposed amended draft of Policy CR14g under the Local Plan Partial Update therefore would broadly align with the type of development proposed for YHP2. The Local Plan update would also see the proposals within YHP1 fall under the CR14g allocation on the north side of the Kennet where the proposals would similarly align with the draft updated policy wording.

7.1.24 However, as discussed earlier in this report, given ongoing Local Plan update is at such an early stage, limited weight can be attributed to the updated Policy, albeit it indicates an anticipated direction of travel for the Policy in the future. As such the proposals for YHP2 must be assessed as a departure from the current 2019 adopted version of the Local Plan in respect of Policy CR14g and it needs to be considered whether there are material considerations that would justify this departure from the Development Plan, and this will be considered later in this report.

7.1.25 Notwithstanding the above, and more generally in broad land use principle terms, re-provision of the Sui Generis cinema use as a leisure facility, the proposed flexible Class E and/or Sui Generis bar use unit and the residential lobby would align with Policies CR1, CR4 and CR7 in terms of being an appropriate uses within the Central Core and Primary Shopping Area of the Reading Central Area and are appropriate ground floor uses within a designated Primary Frontage. As discussed above for the YHP1 proposals, it is considered reasonable to prevent use of the proposed flexible Class E and/or Sui Generis bar unit as uses falling under Class E (g)(i) 'Offices', E (g)(ii) 'Research and development' and E (g)(iii) 'industrial processes by way of condition given these are not considered appropriate for this location or to make the necessary contribution to the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre.

7.1.26 Furthermore, re-provision of the cinema use would also align with Policy RL6 (Protection of Leisure Facilities and Public Houses) which requires that existing leisure facilities or public houses will generally be retained. All the proposed ground floor uses within YHP2 would also present glazed active frontages within the Primary Frontage providing the necessary visual interest and activation at riverside level in accordance with Policy CR7.

Residential Uses to Upper Floors

7.1.27 C3 residential dwellings in the form of 218 Built to Rent (BTR) flats are proposed to the upper floors of both the proposed YHP1 and YP2 developments, a total of 436 flats across the two planning applications. Generally, the provision of new housing within both applications would comply with Paragraph 61 of the NPPF (February 2025) which outlines the Government's objective to significantly boost the supply of housing and would contribute to the Borough's housing needs. It is noted that the Council is not currently meeting its annual housing targets for general housing as calculated using the standard method in National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (as required now Policy H1 is out of date) or for the provision of Affordable Housing.

7.1.28 Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) also supports proposals for residential development within Central Reading subject to meeting specific criteria in terms of mix of proposed dwellings, affordable housing provision and demonstrating that future occupiers of new residential dwellings would not be adversely affected by noise and other disturbance from town centre uses or poor air quality, which are considered later in this report.

7.1.29 As discussed above, the proposal to provide residential uses within the YHP2 development would depart from the type of development envisaged for this site under Policy CR14g and therefore it needs to be considered whether there are material considerations that would justify this departure from the Development Plan, and this will be considered later in this report.

7.1.30 In this instance, all the residential units proposed within YHP1 and YHP2 are Build to Rent residential accommodation, which is an established and accepted form of housing provision at the national and local level. Policy H4 (Build to Rent Schemes) clearly sets out the circumstances in which such developments will be supported. This includes, but is not limited to, single ownership for a minimum 20 year term from occupation, there being minimum three year tenancies for private renters, a high standard professional on-site management and meeting RBC's voluntary Rent with Confidence Standards. All the requirements are proposed to be secured within the proposed s106 legal agreement, thereby demonstrating the full commitment of the applicant to these Borough requirements.

Vitality and Viability of the Central Area

7.1.31 Overall, apart from the proposed co-working space with YHP1, the proposed non-residential uses proposed within both YHP1 and YHP2 are considered to be appropriate uses within this location within the Central Area. However, the overarching assessment that needs to be made is whether the development and uses proposed within both applications would, as required by Policy RL1, ensure that the vitality and viability of the Central Area is maintained and enhanced. Therefore, this assessment also needs to consider the existing situation at The Oracle as well as the wider Central Area.

7.1.32 The YHP1 proposals seek to re-provide over half the commercial floor space be lost via demolition in a variety of flexible Class E and/or Sui Generis bar uses by either conversion of retained existing floor space or through new build elements. However overall, there would be quantitative loss of commercial floorspace (both retail and restaurant floorspace) within the YHP1 part of The Oracle equating to 6,633m². This relates to demolition of the floor space within the former Debenhams department store which closed in 2020. Next Home then stepped in to occupy some floor space but then also vacated the premises in

2023 along with the riverside restaurant units (Franco Manca and The Real Greek) and the former department store floor space has been vacant since then.

7.1.33 Similarly, the YHP2 proposals would re-provide around half of the commercial floor space to be lost through demolition through the proposed replacement cinema and single riverside flexible Class E and/or Sui Generis bar us unit which would all be new build elements. However, in overall terms there would again be a quantitative loss of commercial floorspace within the YHP2 part of The Oracle equating to 3,084m². This primarily results from the smaller size of the replacement cinema and replacement of the riverside restaurant units within a single flexible Class E and/or Suit Generis bar use unit.

7.1.34 There are no Local Plan policies which prevent quantitative loss of commercial floor space or town centre uses within the Central Area moreover as discussed above the pertinent assessment is whether proposals would maintain or enhance the vitality and viability of the Central Are and the contributory function of The Oracle shopping centre to Reading as a regional centre.

7.1.35 The applicant has provided a range of information to contextualise and justify the proposed development in terms of The Oracle's role and contribution to the Central Area. This highlights how there is a need for town centres to evolve to respond to market challenges and ensure they are resistant to future economic change and consumer trends. Current challenges identified include changes to the retail sector caused by a variety of factors including growth of on-line retailing, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, competition from out-of-town retailing; reduced office populations in town centres, and pressures from increased costs of living. It is identified that these challenges are already affecting town centres with increased vacancy rates with BHS, Debenhams and House of Fraser cited as examples of national retailers which operated anchor department store units within town centres which have either ceased trading on the high street or significantly rationalised their property portfolios. Reports by town centre analysts submitted by the Applicant state that between 20%-40% of UK retail space may need to be redeveloped or repurposed meaning that town centres will need to adapt to fulfil a different role in the towns and communities they serve.

7.1.36 Given the changes in the retail sector outlined above the Applicant asserts that relying solely on retail footfall can be problematic for centres with the majority of city and town centres across the UK experiencing an oversupply of retail and that the need for change is clear. Reference is also made to the changes the Government made to the Use Classes Order in 2020 which amalgamated the majority of 'town centre' uses, including retail within a single Class E, recognising the economic need for flexibility on high streets.

7.1.37 The Applicant also identifies that the role of residential uses in our town centres is becoming increasingly important given the benefits it can deliver in bringing vacant buildings into occupation, generating a critical mass of population to support shops and services, and creating 24-hour vibrancy within centres. This is recognised in Policy CR6 of the Local Plan which supports proposals for residential development in Central Reading. The supporting information also identifies examples of development taking place, approved or proposed in town centres across the UK which would result in changes to the town centres, to secure the reoccupation or redevelopment of anchor retail units / department stores. More recent schemes identified which have either been completed/commenced or have planning permission include those in Southampton, Leicester and Glasgow all of which include a significant residential element mixed in with flexible commercial uses.

7.1.38 The applicant has also provided supporting information which considers the specific situation within Reading town centre which is ranked as the 14th largest retail venue in the UK, albeit this is sited as being declining position since 2019 identified to be as a result of loss of a number of core retailers (eg. Debenhams and House of Fraser). Reading is still the dominant town centre in the Thames Valley, but retail analysis provided with the application identifies that Reading town centre has a retail floor space vacancy rate

of 21% which is higher than the national average of 13.8%. The applicant suggests that whilst Broad Street Mall is subject to redevelopment proposals which also include a significant residential element, no planning permission to date has been implemented, neither are there any major schemes comprising the repurposing or intensification of shopping centres that are currently being implemented or have been granted planning permission in Reading town centre despite the changing dynamics impacting the Central Area.

7.1.39 In terms of The Oracle itself, it is the largest retail zone within Reading Central Area. The Local Plan recognises its importance and highlights that its opening helped to establish Reading as, “*one of the leading shopping locations in the UK*” (para 5.1.4). The Applicant also highlights their commitment to providing a high quality mix of tenants within their shopping centres, mainly national retailers and mid/upper market fashion retailers and jewellers which attracts retailers over other Thames Valley shopping locations. Information provided also highlights the importance of The Oracle as an anchor to maintaining Reading’s position as the primary town centre within the Thames Valley, advising that The Oracle shopping centre draws from a more extensive catchment area than Reading town centre as a whole.

7.1.40 When the original planning permission for The Oracle was granted, its layout also comprised department stores bookending the scheme at the east and west ends (Debenhams and House of Fraser) of the shopping centre to the north of the river, given at the time department stores were seen as a necessary anchor attraction to the scheme, due to their role as a footfall generators. However, and as acknowledged during the grant of S73 planning permission ref. PL/23/0682 at The Oracle which approved the removal of the original conditions which prevented subdivision of the former department store floorspace, retailing trends and demands have now evolved and the appeal of department stores is diminished. This is identified as being due to the range of alternative shopping experiences now available, including online, and as a result of diversification of supermarkets and retail parks. A significant new leisure operator in Hollywood Bowl has since occupied part of the former House of Fraser floor space which the applicant advises is key to securing the long term re-occupation and investment in the western end of The Oracle.

7.1.41 In terms of the YHP2 proposals on the south side of the river, whilst not involving a former department store or specific retail floor space, the applicant identifies that the key commercial use on that side of the river is the Vue Cinema which has been in place since 1999 when The Oracle opened. The age of the cinema is such that it now requires significant investment to upgrade the facilities in terms of the customer environment and technological infrastructure. The smaller cinema offer is to align with customer expectations and the growing popularity of more bespoke intimate venues and higher quality viewing experiences with more luxurious seating and a better food and beverage offer. The applicant advises that at present it is also Vue, an experienced cinema operator, who are anticipated to occupy the replacement cinema and it is in coordination with them that the revised and reduced cinema offer has been created to align with their understanding of the likely future market trend for multiplex town centre cinemas.

7.1.42 The above summarises what is a detailed set of supporting information and reports submitted by the Applicant in support of both planning applications. Officer view is that the position presented by the reports is based upon appropriate evidence and analysis and is prepared by suitability qualified individuals. The findings presented in the reports are considered to reflect the trends officers see within Reading town centre and more indirectly within town centres outside of Reading and that it is clear that the role of town centres is changing. It is therefore pertinent to assess the nature of replacement commercial uses and floorspace proposed by both applications which, whilst presenting an overall quantitative reduction in floorspace, does not necessarily mean that the result would be a reduction in the vitality and viability of The Oracle and Central Area as a whole.

7.1.43 The applicant advises that their proposals have been designed to address the demand and supply imbalance that has arisen for commercial floor space, whilst ensuring a core focus of the shopping centre remains on retail. They identify that the Central Area as a whole is becoming increasingly oversupplied by mainstream retail and food & beverage uses, with limited alternative uses. Hence the proposal within YHP2 to remove the three existing riverside restaurant units. The applicant confirms that they are committed to The Oracle and Reading Town Centre and whilst the shopping centre is performing well when compared with other assets in the UK, they have identified a strong need to future-proof the centre and make it, and the town centre as whole, more resilient to market trends and changes. Key to doing this is considered to be introducing a more mixed range of uses to serve the local community and to mitigate the impact of retail market changes and provide people with more reasons to come to them and to stay for longer, including outside of normal retail hours.

7.1.45 Given both the YHP1 and YHP2 sites are located at the eastern end of the shopping centre there is also an opportunity for coordinated redevelopment either side of the river without interrupting the current customer journey or flow of shoppers with The Oracle.

7.1.46 The residential accommodation proposed by both applications is also considered to assist in supporting diversification of The Oracle by introducing permanent residents in the one of the Central Areas most important retail and commercial areas helping activate and bring footfall to The Oracle and wider town centre throughout the day on all days of the week. The Applicant states that the capital expenditure required to provide the diversification of The Oracle to both application sites, including provision of new leisure and commercial units and improvements to public realm, could not be met without the delivery of the proposed residential elements of both developments and that otherwise it would not be commercially viable for them to commit the capital expenditure required. Therefore, and whilst not specifically stated within the application the residential towers of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals appear to present enabling development to facilitate the applicant providing the proposed interventions to the existing shopping centre that they present as necessary to secure its long term success as well as delivering the public realm works. As such, conditions are recommended to be attached to both planning permissions to require the new commercial units, and public realm works to be provided prior to occupation of the residential dwellings.

YHP1

7.1.47 In terms of the YHP1 proposals officers acknowledge the overall loss of floor space within 'town centre' uses but consider that the applicant has provided suitable justification for why the contraction of retail floorspace within the shopping centre is required. Notably the floorspace to be lost is all currently vacant and has been to a large extent since 2020 and the market trends indicate little prospect of re-occupation in its current form. The proposed replacement uses which, whilst proposed as flexible uses, would facilitate a wider range of potential occupants assisting in reducing levels of vacancy and are, uses in the context of the Local Plan, considered to be acceptable in their own right within the Central Area. Reducing incidences of vacant units is likely to improve the overall perception of The Oracle and Central Area and encourage retention of existing core retail occupiers and encourage new retail occupiers to be present. The flexible nature of the uses proposed means that the units could continue to be occupied in a retail/commercial use without the delay of awaiting a specific planning permission. Information provided in support of the application explains that retail is still key element for town centre sites, just to a lesser extent than before and this provides confidence that retail would still retain an important role at The Oracle and within the wider Central Area.

7.1.48 Nonetheless, the flexible nature of and range of uses proposed, including a possible leisure use, are considered to also present opportunities for the vibrancy of The Oracle and Central Area to be enhanced through greater variety of opportunities and reasons to visit throughout the week and day. Whilst the proposed co-working space would technically be a non-conforming use at ground floor level within and the designated active

frontage, contrary to Policy CR7, but in the context of the YHP1 proposals as a whole it is not considered that introduction of such a use within the wider development would result in any significant detrimental impact to the vitality and viability of The Oracle or Central Area. Indeed, co-working space could be a footfall generator to the site during the weekdays and could complement the proposed introduction of a significant number of BtR residential dwellings at the site. The residential units would assist the Council in meeting its housing targets whilst also providing a critical mass and captive catchment of population within The Oracle to assist in supporting its continued operation as well as providing the applicant with the necessary investment to be able to deliver the proposed diversification of the shopping centre and wider public realm works that are proposed. The proximity of the residential units to both the existing and proposed retail, eating, drinking and leisure facilities within The Oracle and elsewhere within the town centre will help support those facilities to remain as well as attracting new occupiers.

7.1.49 The applicant proposes that YHP1 would be implemented in two phases. Phase 1A would consist of demolition works and conversion of the retained department store floor space and then Phase 1B which is construction of the new riverside units, residential dwellings above and public realm works. Following completion of Phase 1A and before implementation of Phase 1B the submitted plans (see figures 13A and 13B below) show that this would present significant plain brick elevations to both the riverside and Yield Hall Place enclosing the converted former department store floor space behind. The plans indicate that the large blank walls could potentially be taken up by artwork or murals. It is considered reasonable to secure via a s106 obligation that once Phase 1A commences, then Phase 1B must be completed within 5 years. This is because the temporary nature of the proposed arrangements and presentation of non-active elevations would not be an acceptable long term arrangement in terms of visual impact to what is a primary frontage within a prominent riverside location in the Central Area accordance with Policies CR3, CR7, CC7 and EN11. From a vitality and viability of the Central Area point of view, the Phase 1A proposals would seek to re-purpose existing vacant floor space to a wide range of occupiers/tenants and therefore it is considered that this phase of the proposals, from a land use perspective, would be acceptable for a temporary period and would not harm the overall vitality and viability of the Central Area.

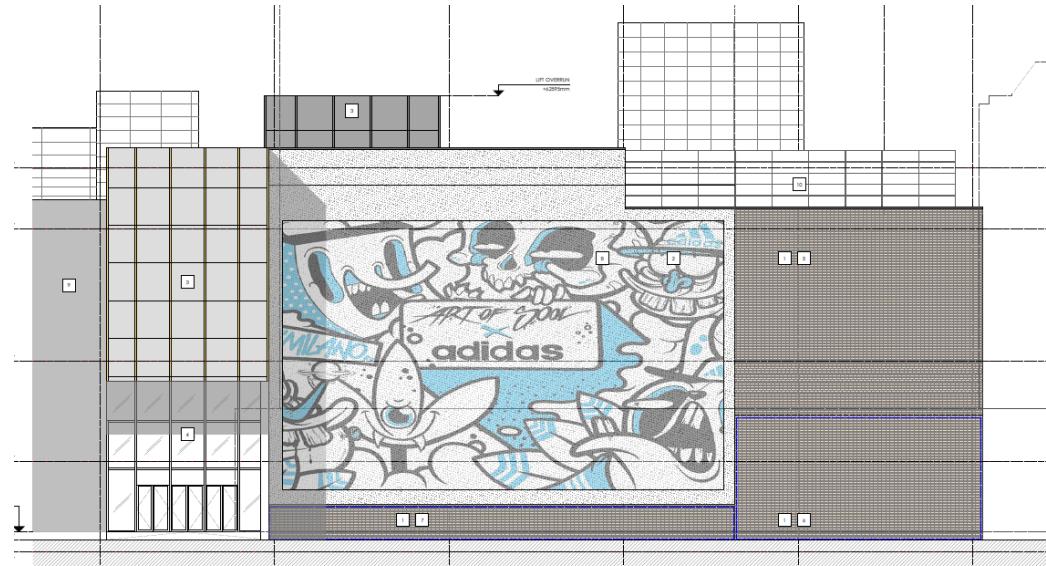


Figure 13A – Phase 1A – Proposed riverside elevation



Figure 13B – Phase 1B – Proposed Yield Hall Place Elevation

YHP2

7.1.49 With regard to the YHP2 proposals officers also acknowledge the overall loss of floorspace within 'town centre' uses and in particular the significant reduction in the leisure offer as a result of the proposed smaller cinema. However, the rationale for the smaller cinema proposal is considered sound and whilst there would be a reduction in floorspace, screens and seats the proposed offering would provide a more bespoke and modern premises in line with market demands and a likely higher quality viewing experience. The provision of a more modern, bespoke offering cinema is considered to be of more benefit to the vitality and viability of The Oracle and Central Area than a larger outdated cinema that is too big and does not align with customer expectations.

7.1.50 The applicant advises that the replacement of existing riverside restaurant units within a single flexible use unit would heighten potential for occupation of this unit and potential for a range of occupiers adding vibrancy to The Oracle's offer and help to address the existing oversupply of food and beverage premises within the Central Area as a whole. As with the YHP1 proposals the proposed YHP2 residential units would assist the Council in meeting its housing targets whilst also providing a captive catchment of population within The Oracle to assist in supporting its continued operation as well as providing the applicant with the necessary investment to be able to deliver the proposed diversification of the shopping centre and wider public realm works that are proposed. The proximity of the residential units to both the existing and proposed retail, eating, drinking and leisure facilities within The Oracle and elsewhere within the town centre will help support those facilities to remain as well as attracting new occupiers.

7.1.51 Overall, officers conclude that in terms of land use matters both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would likely at least maintain the vitality and viability of The Oracle and in turn that of the Central Area meeting the minimum requirement by Policy RL1. To fully understand the impact of both proposals on the Central Area and whether or not the proposals would go beyond this and enhance its vitality and viability, all other aspects of the proposals need to be considered, and this is discussed within the following sections of this report below.

7.1.52 Notwithstanding the above, the applicant has considered and modelled various scenarios at The Oracle in an economic assessment to obtain an understanding of what the impact would be on vitality and viability of the Central Area as a whole if i) The Oracle remained as existing with the current level of vacancy, ii) if The Oracle remained as existing but at full occupancy and iii) if the proposed developments were implemented. The results indicate that all options ultimately would have minimal overall impact upon the Reading Central Area as a whole. Option i) shows a very minor (-0.8%) negative impact on turnover of the Central Area and option iii) a very minor (+0.8%) positive impact on turnover of the Central Area. Option ii) shows the biggest (+1.7%) positive impact but as discussed above is unrealistic given the prevalent trends within the retail market and town centres. Ultimately the small difference between the modelled impact of option i) and option iii) is

because the loss of commercial floorspace that would result from the proposed developments would account for just 3% of the total commercial floor space within the Central Area. The main conclusion officers draw from this study is that whether or not both or either proposed development is implemented this would likely have minimal overall impact upon the economic performance of the Central Area as a whole. However, the assessment of vitality and viability is not a purely economic one as discussed above and the need to diversify town centre evidenced by the Applicant are considered valid.

2. Design & related matters: demolition, layout, scale, massing, appearance and impact on heritage assets

Demolition

7.2.1 The parts of shopping centre proposed to be demolished under both applications, as described in the introduction section of this report above, are not considered to be of any special architectural or historic merit to warrant retention. The proposed elements of demolition of both applications could therefore be supported, subject to the proposed replacement buildings being considered appropriate. The appropriateness of the proposed buildings for both applications will be discussed below.

Policy CR10 (Tall Buildings)

7.2.2 Both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals incorporate buildings which, in accordance with Policy CR10 are classified as being 'tall buildings'. The Local Plan defines tall buildings as being those of 10 storeys of commercial floorspace or 12 storeys of residential floorspace (equating to 36 metres tall) or above. A single taller building of 21 storeys is proposed as part of the YHP1 development whilst the YHP2 proposals include two tall buildings of 16 and 13 storeys. Policy CR10 is clear that within the Borough tall buildings will only be appropriate within defined 'areas of potential for tall buildings' which are three areas within the town centre referred to as the Station Area Cluster, Western Grouping and Eastern Grouping. Neither the YHP1 nor YHP2 application sites are located within the areas identified under Policy CR10 as having potential for tall buildings. As such, from a policy perspective both application sites are considered to be inappropriate locations for tall buildings within the Borough and in this respect are a further departure from the Local Plan. Therefore, it needs to be considered whether there are material considerations that would justify this departure from the Development Plan.

7.2.3 The supporting text to Policy CR10 sets out at paragraph 5.3.38 that the three areas identified as having potential for tall buildings are as a result of thorough analysis of the suitability of the areas for tall buildings in terms of a number of factors, including townscape character, historic context, local and strategic views, market demand, topography, accessibility and other issues. This analysis was undertaken as part of the production of the Reading Tall Building Strategy (RTBS) in 2008 and a related Update Note produced in 2018. Policy CR10 sets out a clear hierarchy between the three areas (or clusters) identified, with the Station Area Cluster being the primary location and having the most potential for high density tall buildings, and then two secondary clusters, referred to as the Western and Eastern Groupings, where the policy is clear that tall buildings should be subservient to and lower in height than the tallest buildings within the Station Area Cluster.

7.2.4 The RTBS sets out the process and assessment upon which the three areas identified as having potential for tall buildings under Policy CR10 were chosen (i.e. those of all the areas identified that were found to have the most potential to accommodate tall buildings). In doing so the RTBS does set out other areas identified as having some townscape capacity for tall buildings, albeit these are those areas which had certain constraints or potential for adverse impacts, which meant that they were not included as part of the three areas/groupings identified within Policy CR10 as ultimately having potential for tall buildings. One of the areas identified as having some capacity for tall buildings within the RTBS, but which is not included within Policy CR10 as an area ultimately being suitable

for tall buildings, is at The Oracle. The RTBS outlines that The Oracle site is considered to have low sensitivity to the inclusion of tall buildings given the existing large block size of the buildings on the site and presence of existing landmark structures (such as the spire feature on the Riverside car park roof). Accordingly, the RTBS concludes that the site has an overall moderate suitability as a location for tall buildings, noting the sensitivity of the adjacent St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area and potential impact on the skyline above St Mary's Church, which is a Grade I Listed Building, hence it was not ultimately included within the areas with potential for tall buildings set out under Policy CR10. In assessing The Oracle site, the RTBS (at that time) also identified limiting issues of low market demand for tall buildings on the site and limited sustainable transport options for access to and from the site.

7.2.5 It is also worth noting that the ongoing Local Plan Update proposes to make some changes to Policy CR10 and its approach to tall buildings within the central area. The key change proposed is the introduction of additional areas outside of the three areas that are currently identified under the policy as having potential for tall buildings, referred to as 'areas of less suitability for tall buildings'. The draft updated policy sets out that within the newly identified 'areas of less suitability for tall buildings' tall buildings will not be suitable unless a clear case can be made that the current 'cluster/grouping' approach would not be undermined when all significant views are taken into account and that all of the other aspects of Policy CR10 are compiled with. The Oracle forms part of a wider area which includes land either side of the River Kennet as far west as Willow Street which is proposed as a new 'area of less suitability for tall buildings'. Nonetheless, and as discussed earlier in this report in relation to other aspect of the ongoing Local Plan Update, the early stage of the Update is such that at the time of writing this report only very limited weight can be given to the proposed changes to this Policy and the updated Local Plan in general. Therefore, the starting point for the assessment of the proposals is as outlined above and that both application sites are an inappropriate location for tall buildings within the borough and are a departure from the Local Plan.

7.2.6 Given the above position, the principle of both applications proposing tall buildings in this location has been subject to extensive discussions between officers and the applicant during consideration of the planning applications. This includes a series of design workshops held over summer 2023 which were led and managed by an independent design and masterplanning consultant. The applications are accompanied by a Reading Town Centre Skyline Study (RTCSS), Heritage and Townscape Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA) and detailed Design and Access Statement (DAS) which sets out the applicant's rationale for proposing tall buildings in this location and which are, in part, informed by the independent review. Combined, these documents revisit and refresh much of the assessment within the RTBS based upon the current up to date context of the town centre and seek to both evidence and justify the suitability of the application sites to support tall buildings, given the policy conflict identified, and also seek to justify the proposals in their own right in terms of their overall design and appearance.

7.2.7 As per Policy CR10 and the RTBS the submitted RTCSS, HTVIA and DAS seek to justify the suitability of both application sites to support tall buildings considering townscape, skyline and visual impacts. Figure 14 below shows a map of the location of The Oracle in relation to the three areas of potential for tall buildings which are designated within Policy CR10. This shows that The Oracle (and in particular its easterly extent) has the closest and most direct relationship with the existing Eastern Grouping.

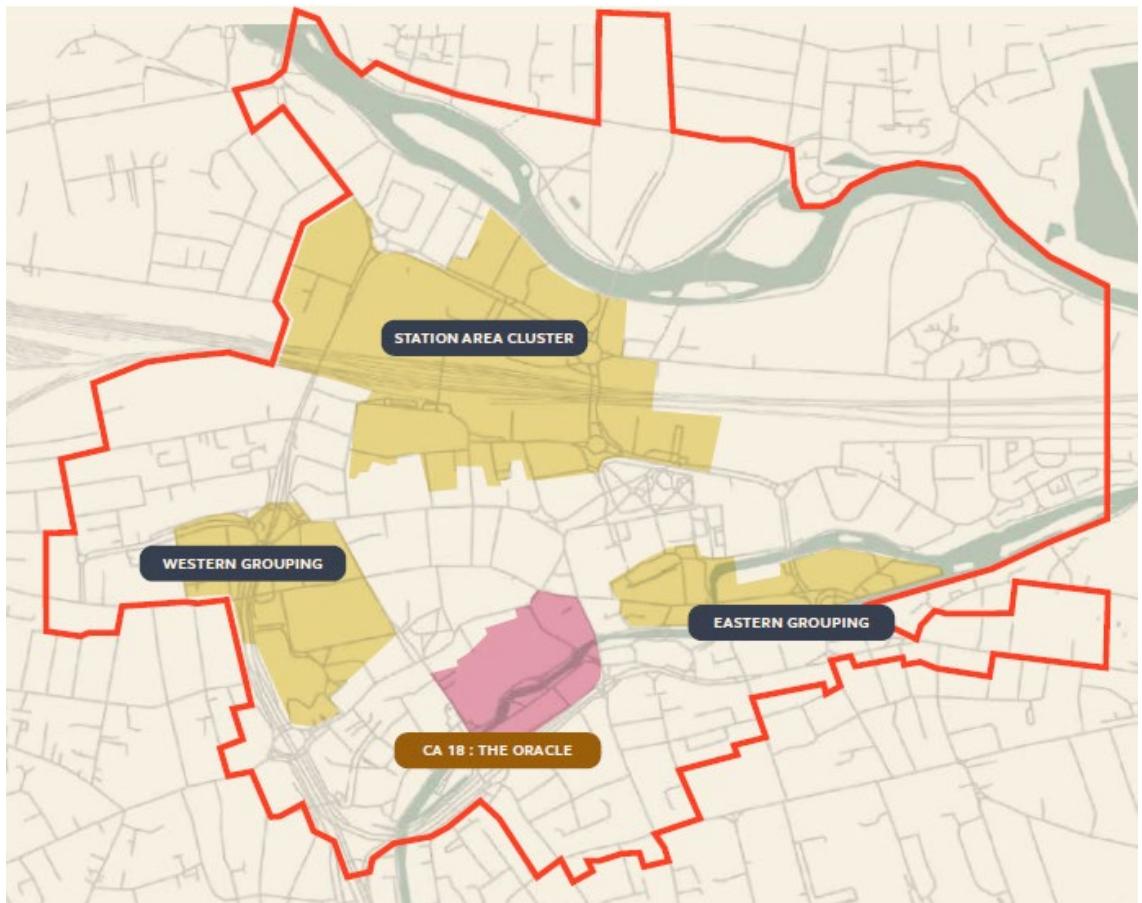


Figure 14 – Location of existing tall building clusters identified by Policy CR10 in relation to The Oracle

7.2.8 The Applicant has undertaken an up to date skyline analysis of the existing town centre and Figure 15 below shows this in a West to East direction and how The Oracle site sits between the existing Station Area Cluster and Eastern Grouping areas considered to have potential for tall buildings as defined under Policy CR10.



Figure 15 – Existing West to East Reading skyline analysis with tall buildings shown as those projecting above the red line and The Oracle site shown outlined in a red dotted box

7.2.9 Figure 16 below shows modelled existing views of the existing Reading skyline looking north and east across the town centre with the application sites position shown between the two vertical dotted lines. This and Figure 15 above incorporates all planned, approved and built tall buildings within Reading as of February 2024, the majority of those built did not exist when the RTBS was published in 2008, including The Blade and the replacement for Kings Point (now the Verto Building) within the Eastern Grouping and Thames Quarter and the currently under construction Station Hill development within the Station Cluster.



Figure 16 shows existing views of the Reading skyline looking both north and east across the town centre

7.2.10 The Applicant's up to date analysis of the town centre skyline concludes that, as per 2008 RTBS, the site still has a low sensitivity to and retains potential to accommodate tall buildings and that in skyline terms potential tall buildings at The Oracle, could- subject to appropriate heights and siting of buildings being proposed - be harmoniously seated between the existing Station Area Cluster and Eastern Grouping in terms of heights. This could effectively form a 4th or Southern Grouping area with potential for tall buildings at The Oracle. However, the applicant's assessment correctly identifies that the western portion of The Oracle towards Bridge Street lies within a Significant View with Heritage Interest as designated by Policy EN5 (Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest). The relevant View is that listed as view number 2 under Policy EN5 and relates to views northwards down Southampton Street from Whitley Street towards St. Giles Church (Grade II Listed), St Mary's Church (Grade I Listed) and Greyfriars Church (Grade I Listed). Figure 17 below shows the extent of the view in relation to The Oracle and the existing tall building groupings/cluster.

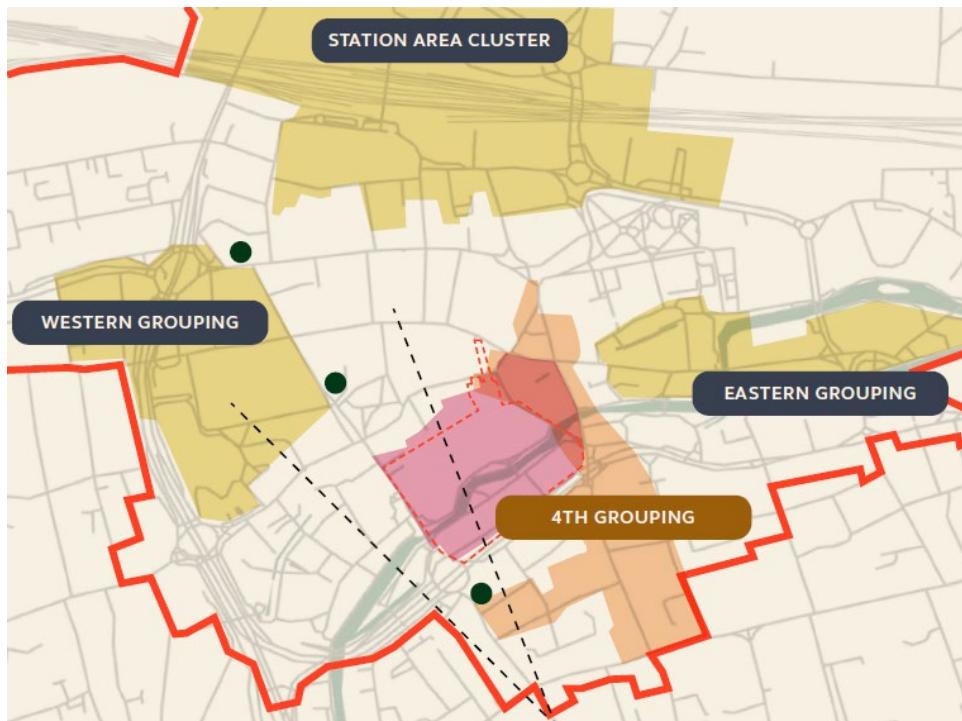


Figure 17 - Showing extent of Significant View with Heritage Interest no.2 (black dotted lines) as defined by Policy EN5 which looks north along Southampton Street towards 3 listed churches in relation to The Oracle and the existing tall building groupings/cluster.

7.2.11 Policy EN5 requires that the identified significant views with heritage interest merit special protection and that new development should not harm and where possible should make a positive contribution to the views of acknowledged historical significance. As such it is considered the potential presence of tall buildings within the western part of The Oracle would be very likely to adversely impact and fail to protect the identified significant view with heritage interest and would not be appropriate. Within the submitted DAS the Applicant states that the extent of this significant view has been key in their consideration of where to propose additional massing within The Oracle, noting that both the proposed YHP1 and YHP2 developments are located on the eastern side of the shopping centre outside of the extent of the view. Whilst the appropriateness of the scale and massing of both proposed developments within their own context will be considered later in this report it is considered that in terms of the assessment of the potential of The Oracle to accommodate tall buildings then the western part of the shopping centre is less likely to be suitable given its potential to impact upon views of 2 of the 3 listed churches identified within the view under Policy H5. This reflects the themes of the 2008 RTBS which identify the sensitivity of the skyline above St Mary's Church to tall buildings.

7.2.12 In re-visiting the assessment of the suitability of The Oracle to accommodate tall buildings, the applicant also considers that the lack of market demand for tall buildings on

the site referenced in the RTBS (2008) and RTBS Update Note (2018) is no longer the case, as evidenced by the two planning applications under consideration as part in this report. The market reasoning behind applicant's proposals and need to diversify the site in order to anchor the existing core retail function of the site is also discussed in paragraphs 7.1.31 to 7.1.52 above. Furthermore, The Oracle, having opened in 1999 was still trading well when the RTBS was produced in 2008 so demonstration of market demand for tall buildings in such a recent new development was unsurprisingly not considered to be an opportunity at that time.

7.2.13 The other key shortfall of the site in being able to accommodate tall buildings identified within the RTBS was lack of sustainable transport options, particularly in terms of distance from Reading Station. The RTBS sets out that one of the principles considered when assessing whether a location was appropriate for tall buildings in terms of sustainable transport was whether it is within a 10 minute walk the railway station. Depending upon where you are within The Oracle complex, a walk to the station is likely to take just under or just over 10 minutes, with longer walking time from the YHP2 site on the south side of the Kennet. The sustainability of the site from a transport perspective is considered in more detail later in this report, but overall all officers' view is that the length of walk to the station is not likely to deter people from using trains, whilst the site is also well served in terms of proximity to bus routes and cycle routes. Overall, the location for these developments is considered suitable in terms of the Local Plan accessibility policy, CC6.

7.2.14 Your officers' view, which aligns with advice provided by the independent design and masterplanning consultant who led and managed the design workshops with the LPA and applicant in Summer 2023, is that the analysis and assessment work undertaken by the Applicant is an appropriate site-focused update and refresh of the assessment work within the RTBS in respect of the elements of that document that are relevant to The Oracle. Moreover, the independent consultant's advice is that the application and associated supporting documents present suitable evidence and justification to support the validity that both the YHP1 and YHP2 application sites have potential to be able to accommodate tall buildings.

7.2.15 Notwithstanding the above, it is considered pertinent to reiterate that the tall building proposals would still represent a departure from the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 due to the fundamental conflict with Policy CR10. Therefore, as discussed above, the proposals would still need to demonstrate significant justification and other benefits for such a departure from the adopted Local Plan. To contribute towards providing the necessary justification for such a departure, from it is considered that the developments would need to demonstrate a high quality approach to the design and appearance of the development.

7.2.16 The next part of this report will assess whether the type of development proposed under both applications is appropriate, in respect of matters such as scale, siting and detailed architecture, whether or not the tall building elements of the proposals would integrate with the existing hierarchy of tall buildings within the Reading Central Area, impact of the proposals upon the significance and setting of nearby heritage assets and, more generally, whether the proposals are of suitable high quality design.

Scale, Layout and Appearance

7.2.17 The NPPF (February 2025) states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and is inextricably linked to good planning. In determining planning applications, local authorities should ensure developments are sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape, whilst not preventing or discouraging appropriate change.

7.2.18 Local Plan Policy CC7 states that, "*all development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area*". Policy CR2's purpose is to secure appropriate relationships between buildings, spaces and frontages

within the centre of Reading. Policy CR3 requires proposals to make a positive contribution towards the quality of public realm in the central area of Reading.

7.2.19 Policy CR10 (Tall Buildings) also specifically details criteria against which the tall building elements of the proposals should be assessed against and states that tall building proposals will be of excellent design and architectural quality, and should:

- Enhance Reading's skyline, through a distinctive profile and careful design of the upper and middle sections of the building;
- Contribute to a human scale street environment, through paying careful attention to the lower section or base of the building, providing rich architectural detailing and reflecting their surroundings through the definition of any upper storey setback and reinforcing the articulation of the streetscape;
- Contribute to high-quality views from distance, views from middle-distance and local views;
- Take account of the context within which they sit, including the existing urban grain, streetscape and built form and local architectural style;
- Avoid bulky, over-dominant massing;
- Conserve and, where possible, enhance the setting of conservation areas and listed buildings;
- Use high quality materials and finishes;
- Create safe, pleasant and attractive spaces around them, and avoid detrimental impacts on the existing public realm;
- Consider innovative ways of providing green infrastructure, such as green walls, green roofs and roof gardens;
- Locate any car parking or vehicular servicing within or below the development;
- Maximise the levels of energy efficiency in order to offset the generally energy intensive nature of such buildings;
- Mitigate any wind speed or turbulence or overshadowing effects through design and siting;
- Ensure adequate levels of daylight and sunlight are able to reach buildings and spaces within the development;
- Avoid significant negative impacts on existing residential properties and the public realm in terms of outlook, privacy, daylight, sunlight, noise, light glare and night-time lighting;
- Provide managed public access to an upper floor observatory and to ground floors where appropriate, and ensure that arrangements for access within the building are incorporated in the design stage;
- Incorporate appropriate maintenance arrangements at the design stage.

7.2.21 The above Policy CR10 criteria, as well as the other policies set out above, are considered a sound structure against which to assess both the tall building and non-tall building elements of the proposals, given the onus on the development to demonstrate a such a high standard of design.

Tall Buildings Hierarchy

7.2.22 The maximum height of the proposed YHP1 development (the taller westernmost tower) would be 21 storeys/106.1m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The maximum height of the YHP2 Development is proposed to be 14 storeys/96.5m AOD.

7.2.23 The submitted RTCSS incorporates various sectional drawings of the Central Area which show how both proposals would integrate with the existing townscape, and in particular how the tall building elements of the proposals would relate to the existing defined groupings and cluster of tall buildings within the Central Area. The sectional drawings show the townscape in relation to the 36m datum (which is the height at which Policy CR10 defines a tall building). The townscape sections also include buildings which have planning permission (or a recommendation to grant from Planning Applications

Committee but where the decision has not yet been issued) and which have not been implemented. For, example as can be seen below, the sections show the development at Broad Street Mall (ref. PL/24/0173) which PAC Resolved to grant planning permission in April 2025 but for which the decision notice has yet to be issued at the time of writing. The RTCSS considers both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals together and does not present these scheme individually.



Figure 18 shows modelled proposed views of the Reading skyline looking both north and east across the town centre

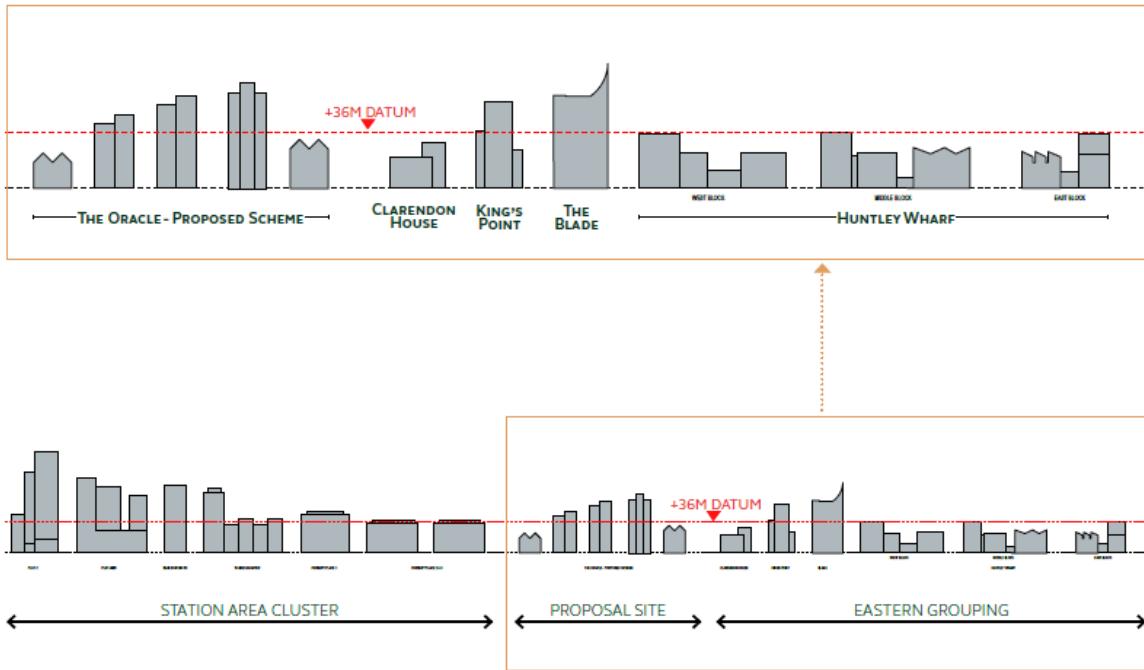


Figure 19 shows a more focused comparison of the other tall buildings groupings and cluster



Figure 20 – shows the proposals in the foreground within the context of the Western Tall Building Grouping, which can be seen in the background, including the 3 proposed tall building towers at Broad Street Mall. Buildings which are part highlighted yellow are those which are more than 12 storeys or 36m in height and therefore defined as tall buildings

7.2.24 The townscape modelling and assessments within the submitted RTCSS have been independently reviewed by the design and masterplanning consultant who led the design workshops between the Applicant and the LPA in Summer 2023. His advice is that the modelling work undertaken and how it has been presented is accurate and of an appropriate standard to help inform the LPA's assessment of the principle of the development providing tall buildings in this location and the wider townscape impacts.

7.2.25 Following a review of the RTCSS, officers conclude that the approach to tall buildings at both application sites appears sound in terms of impact on the urban skyline. Notably the scale of tall buildings proposed is not considered to prejudice the Council's adopted approach to tall buildings within the Central Area as outlined within Policy CR10 and with the RTBS. This is because the proposals would not disrupt the defined hierarchy between the existing tall building grouping and cluster. Specifically, the tallest tower of the

proposals (Block A within the YHP1 application at 21 storeys and 106.1m AOD) would sit a lower height overall than the tallest buildings within each of the existing groupings and cluster. As can be seen in the skyline sections above (Figures 18, 19 and 20) the tall building heights proposed within both YHP1 and YHP2 would ensure, as required by Policy CR10 and the RTBS, that the tallest buildings remain within the Station Cluster and this cluster retains its primacy within the Central Area tall building hierarchy. The tallest building within the Station Cluster at Station Hill is significantly higher at 163m AOD. For further reference, Thames Quarter within the Station Cluster sits at 111.7m AOD and higher than the proposed tower element of YHP1. Thames Tower, also within the Station Cluster, sits at a similar AOD height to these application proposals at 103.5m AOD, however, Thames Tower is a contributory tall building to the cluster only and there remains the opportunity for a taller building at Station Hill which is eventually likely to be taller than One Station Hill (it has outline planning permission at the time of writing). The two tall buildings proposed within the YHP2 application site would sit at lower heights of 89.8m AOD (Block E) and 87.1m AOD (Block D).

7.2.26 The proposals are also not considered to compete, in townscape terms, with the defined Western Grouping. For reference the proposals would be subservient compared to the proposed tall buildings at Broad Street Mall where the Committee has Resolved to grant permission has been determined for approval by PAC, but the decision notice not yet issued. The tallest building within the Broad Street Mall development is proposed at 142m AOD, with the smaller towers being at 130.4m AOD and 106.3m AOD, meaning the tallest building within The Oracle proposals within YHP1 would be at a lower AOD than all four of the proposed towers proposed at Broad Street Mall. For further reference Chatham Place, also within the Western Grouping, sits just below the height of the proposed YHP1 tall building at 103.5m AOD.

7.2.27 The proposed tall buildings at The Oracle would share the closest relationship with the defined Eastern Grouping of tall buildings which consists of The Blade at 127m AOD (at its highest point) and the Verto Building at 94.1m AOD. This means that the tallest element of the proposals at YHP1 would sit between the heights of these two existing buildings but significantly below the height of The Blade. The two proposed tall buildings within YHP2 would both sit below the AOD height of the Verto Building.

7.2.28 As such the proposed tall building elements of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals are not considered to compete with or confuse the tall building hierarchy with the town. The tall building heights proposed, which would effectively form a new confined 'South Grouping of tall buildings' at the eastern end of The Oracle, would sit harmoniously alongside the existing Eastern and Western Groupings. If both developments were implemented then the proposed composition of heights of the tall building elements with the tallest tower (Block A) within YHP1 and then heights gradually stepping down to the two lower tall buildings (Blocks D and E) within YHP2 is considered to be sound and to present suitable variation in height between the individual tall building elements to add visual interest to the skyline and prevent visual coalescence with other buildings and the existing defined tall buildings groups and cluster.

Layout

7.2.29 The layout of The Oracle shopping centre already has a clearly defined structure with the two parts of the shopping centre either side of the river having active primary frontages facing onto the riverside. The riverside areas incorporate existing landscaping, including trees and a variety of street furniture which provide active public realm areas to both sides of the river. The riverside areas also provide pedestrian and cycle routes which connect the site to between Bridge Street to the west and Yield Hall Place to the east. At the eastern end of the shopping centre where both application sites are located, both sites present 'back of house' and service areas to the rear, non-riverside elevations i.e. to Yield Hall Place and the IDR.

7.2.30 Both the YHP1 and YHP2 applications would build on and respect this existing defined layout of the shopping centre. Both proposals would maintain the provision of glazed active frontage to the ground floor riverside elevations. The incorporation of new residential entrances in between commercial frontages to both the riverside elevations would create an appropriate balance between the different uses within the frontage and the introduction of the residential entrances would create additional activity and footfall to the frontages at differing times of the day. The existing buildings to this part of The Oracle present straight elevations to the riverside whereas both proposals would present a more varied riverside building line with projecting and recessed elements to the building frontages providing a layout with greater visual interest. This results in elements of each the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals which project closer to the river than existing but also elements which provide a greater set back from the river. Notwithstanding this, both proposals would continue to provide sufficient overall set back from the river to allow for retention of the existing riverside pedestrian and cycle routes. The proposed layout of both application proposals in relation to the river also allows for retention of all existing riverside trees as well as enhancements to riverside public realm areas by way of new tree planting and new soft and hard landscaping.

7.2.31 The proposed co-working unit to riverside frontage of YHP1 turns the corner onto Yield Hall Place to the north presenting a glazed frontage to this street as well, before this elevation turns to less 'active' further north along Yield Hall Place where servicing and back of house areas would be located, which reflects the existing layout of the site. The glazed active frontage to the commercial unit to YHP2 would also continue and turn the corner on to Yield Hall Place to the south maintaining street level activity not just along the riverside. Furthermore, unlike the existing layout, the YHP2 proposals would also provide public entrances/exits and glazed frontages to the IDR frontage of the building to the south in the form of secondary entrances to the cinema and YHP2 residential lobby, interspersed between less 'active' service and back of house parts of the south IDR elevation of the building. This is considered to be an enhancement over the existing layout to this part of the site which effectively turns its back on the IDR and presents an entirely non-active frontage with no public entrances or glazed frontages. This aspect of the layout of the development and activation it would bring to the IDR frontage of the site is considered to be a benefit of the YHP2 development.

7.2.32 As well as maintaining and enhancing the existing pedestrian and cycle movement corridors and public realm areas along the riverside, the proposed layout to both applications incorporates additional tree planting and soft and hard landscaping works to the existing north/south movement corridor along Yield Hall Place to the east seeking to provide greater activation and visual interest to this route which connects Broad Street and the Central Core of the Central Area to the north and London Street to the south over the IDR. The new double height entrance to the shopping centre from the riverside within the YHP1 proposals would provide an alternative entrance to the main shopping mall on the north side of the river and more direct link through the shopping centre to the entrance/exit of The Oracle on Broad Street.

7.2.33 Matters relating to public realm, transport, connectivity and landscaping will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this report but in terms of layout, both the YHP1 and YHP2 applications are considered to adopt a suitable approach and to align with the broad requirements of Policy CR2 which seeks that proposals within the Central Area '*build on and respect the existing grid layout structure of the central area, providing continuity and enclosure through appropriate relationships between buildings and spaces, and frontages that engage with the street at lower levels, and contributing towards enhanced ease of movement through and around the central area*'.

Scale, Massing and Appearance

7.2.34 As has already been discussed above it is considered a 'tall building' of the height proposed as part of the YHP1 development and two 'tall buildings' of the height proposed within the YHP2 development could be accommodated in this location without confusing

or unbalancing the defined tall building hierarchy and strategy for the Reading Central Area. Notwithstanding this, the proposed tall buildings, as well as the other buildings within both developments that are below the threshold height and are not considered 'tall buildings', need to be considered in terms of their individual and group massing and appearance how they present themselves in relation to each other and the surrounding area.

7.2.35 There is a clear approach to the hierarchy for the three 'tall buildings' within both YHP1 and YHP2 with the towers proposed to be sited to the western part of both application sites and sitting centrally within the wider shopping centre site. The towers step down in scale from the tallest building within YHP1 (21 storeys) to the lowest within YHP2 (13 storeys) from north to south forming a cluster of buildings at the centre of the site. The proposed central siting of the tower elements would result in an abrupt step in scale compared to the parts of the shopping centre outside of the application sites to the west that would be retained, which sit at 6 to 7 storeys adjoining YHP1 and the 8 to 9 storey equivalent car park adjacent to YHP2. However, this approach can be accepted given the lack of architectural individuality of The Oracle as a whole and as it would allow the tall building elements of both applications to be positioned away from the edges of both sites to the east, away from the lower rise buildings of greater architectural merit along Yield Hall Place and London Street, including a number of listed buildings. The proposed tall building within YHP1 is also sited fronting the river and positioned in front of (to the south of) the existing Holy Brook car park, 40m from the north boundary of the YHP1 application site, set away from the lower rise buildings of greater architectural merit along Minster Street. This can be seen on the proposed visual below with the tallest tower on the right visible with the roof of the Holy Brook car park in the background.



Figure 21 – Proposed visual looking west at The Oracle with Yield Hall Place in the foreground

7.2.36 The two tower elements within YHP2 (left) abut the southern edge of the application site with the IDR. Given the wide and busy nature of the IDR which provides a barrier and degree of physical separation with the lower scale built form on the opposite site of the IDR to the south and to the rear of London Street rationale for a building of the scale here can be understood to some extent. As can be seen in the visual in figure 21 above, the height of the two towers within YHP2 (to the left) would also step down gradually from the centre the southern edge of the site with the IDR meaning the upper 3 floors of each of the towers would be set in around 15m from the floors below at the southern edge of the buildings assisting with centralising the bulk of the massing and providing a slimmer profile and verticality to the building 'crowns'.

7.2.37 The massing of each of the tower elements within both YHP1 and YHP2 utilises a 'steps and shoulders' approach to the upper floors with the towers narrowing towards the top to emphasise verticality and reduce the perception of bulk. Each of the towers also has a similar double height crown with the intention that they are read as a trio and cluster of tall buildings, but which are configured in a slightly different way to provide variation between them and visual interest from more distant views.

7.2.38 The proposed materiality of the each of the towers would relate closely to the existing materiality of The Oracle itself, given the towers' central location within the site and direct relationship with the retained parts of the shopping centre to the west. As can be seen in the proposed visual below in figure 22, a mix of light brown buff brick and graphite-colour metal cladding, windows and balconies is proposed which reflects the core materials of the existing shopping centre buildings. Different configurations of the buff brick and grey metal cladding is used for the elevations of the towers to differentiate between and emphasise the stepped and shoulder elements and together with double height windows to the building crowns is considered to be successful at defining the towers verticality. Where the two tower elements of the YHP2 proposals step down to the IDR, the proposed materials change to introduce red brick elements to reflect the predominance of red brick to the buildings along this part of the IDR such as the Grosvenor Casino and Central Point. The proposed tower elements are considered to demonstrate a suitably high level of design.



Figure 22 - Proposed visual looking east along the section of the Kennet that passes through The Oracle

7.2.39 The non-tall building elements of the both the proposals are located at the eastern end of both the application sites. These parts of both developments form a more direct relationship with the lower scale and more traditional character of Yield Hall Place and also London Street to the south on the opposite side of the IDR, outside of the shopping centre site and most notably are themselves included within and form the western edge of the London Street/Market Place Conservation Area. Within YHP2 a building of 6 storeys is proposed at the far eastern end of the riverside frontage with this building also fronting Yield Hall Place and the IDR to the rear (south) and presents a significant step down in scale compared to the taller elements of the proposals fronting the IDR as can be seen in figure 23 below. The same general approach is adopted within YHP1 on the north side of the river but with a building of 9 storeys located at the far eastern end of the riverside frontage which wraps around onto Yield Hall Place to the north where it would step down to 8 storeys as can also be seen in the background in the visual in figure 23 below. The application explains that the slightly lower heights to non-tall building element

within YHP2 is proposed having regard to the more notable architectural merit of buildings along London Street to the south, including a number of listed buildings.



Figure 23 – IDR (south) elevation of the YHP2 proposals with the YHP1 proposals in the background

7.2.40 Given the different context of the eastern end of the site as well has heritage sensitivities a different approach to architecture and materials is proposed to these parts of the developments which rather than focusing on the appearance of The Oracle buildings, takes more of its cues from the historic industrial use of the land upon which The Oracle was built (see figure 24 below).



Figure 24 – showing design link with historic industrial use of the site

7.2.41 The proposals present these parts of the developments as wider and 'blockier' forms with a warehouse-style character and more uniform appearance. Variation and interest are provided at roof level via warehouse style undulating pitched roofs which assist in softening the massing. Red brick is the predominant material, taking cues from both the

historic industrial use of the site but also linking in with the red brick buildings found along Yield Hall Place, around the IDR junction and along London Street. The two upper storeys of these blocks and the pitched roofs would utilise graphite-coloured metal cladding whilst graphite-coloured metal windows are also proposed which reflect elements of the materiality of the three tall building towers and provide a visual link and degree of integration between these different parts of the developments. A suitably high level of design quality is considered to be demonstrated.

7.2.42 The proposals present a logical rationale behind the heights and architectural approach to the non-tall building elements of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals. In terms of design quality these aspects of both proposals would be a significant enhancement over the appearance of the existing parts of The Oracle to be demolished which are more utilitarian in appearance. The heights proposed with blocks of 6, 8 and 9 storeys can also be understood given the existing 6 to 7 storey height of The Oracle along Yield Hall Place and given that the proposals would present a transition between the much taller tower elements of both proposals located more centrally within the shopping centre site and lower scale of buildings along Yield Hall Place to the east and London Street to the south where heights predominantly sit between 2 and 4 storeys. Figure 25 below shows a visual perspective of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals with Yield Hall Place in the foreground. The implications of the proposals in terms of heritage sensitivities will be considered in the next section of this report.



Figure 25 – Proposed visual of both YHP1 and YHP2 proposals showing the Yield Hall Place elevations

7.2.43 Both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals also demonstrate attention to detail and high quality design in relation to how they present themselves to street level at a human scale. In this respect, the tall buildings are grounded to the riverside elevations with the base defined by a double height pronounced façade framing the shopfronts and providing a consistent appearance. Buff/red brick and graphite-coloured metal cladding and window/shop front frames are proposed, integrating with the upper floors. This together with the crown and middle section of the buildings provides a well-defined bottom, middle and top to the tower elements. Shopfronts to the non-riverside elevations and non-tall building elements of both applications appear similarly grounded but given their lower scale, do not incorporate the double height façade which provided variations to the street level shopfront finishes. All shopfronts incorporate well portioned and consistent layout of pilasters, stall risers and window bar detailing in keeping with the principles outlined with the adopted Shopfronts Design SPD. All shopfronts 'turn the corner' as can be seen on the visuals in figure 26 below such that they do not present blank facades to corner projections.



Figure 26 – Proposed YHP2 shopfronts

7.2.44 The visual below in figure 27 also shows the proposed YHP2 shopfront and entrances to the south elevation fronting the IDR providing welcome visual interest and activation to this elevation at street level.



Figure 27 – Proposed YHP2 south (IDR) elevation shopfronts

7.2.45 Particular visual interest is provided within the YHP1 proposals via the new proposed double height entrance to the shopping centre forms parts of a larger glazed linking element connecting the existing parts of the shopping centre with the new proposed extensions. This can be seen in the visual in figure 28 below.

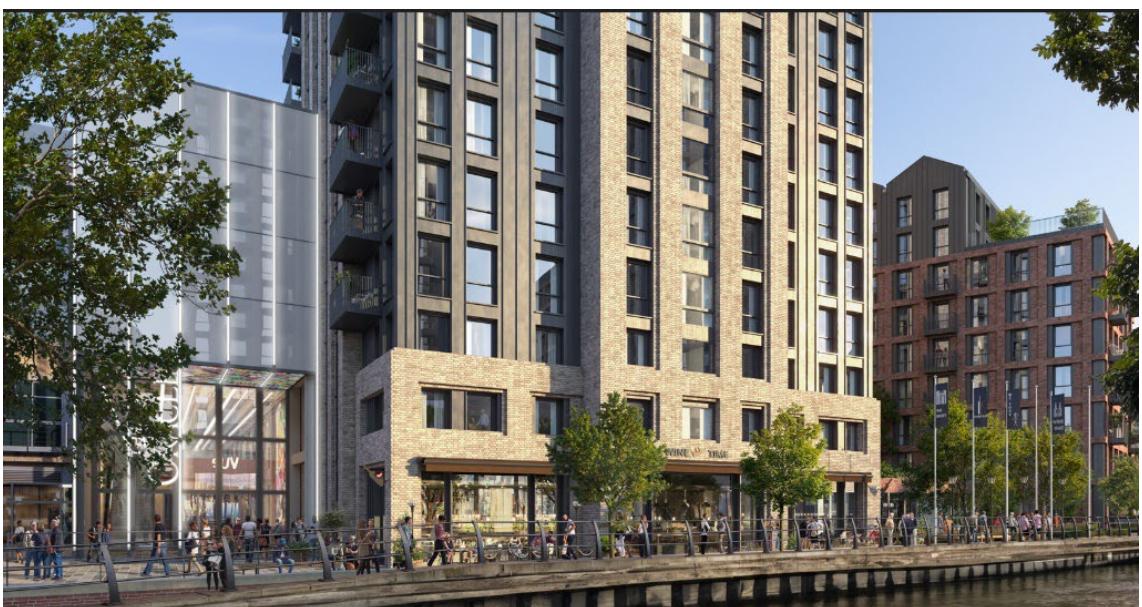


Figure 28 – Proposed YHP1 riverside shopfronts showing new shopping centre entrance and glazed linking extension

7.2.46 First or second floor level recessed podium areas (see figure 29 below) are proposed above the glazed linking elements between and connecting the tall building and non-tall elements for both applications providing elevated landscaped amenity spaces overlooking the river. These spaces assist in breaking up the massing of the different elements of the buildings from street level and their recessed nature also allows for

outdoor seating areas to be provided to the riverside ground floor commercial units further added to street level visual interest.

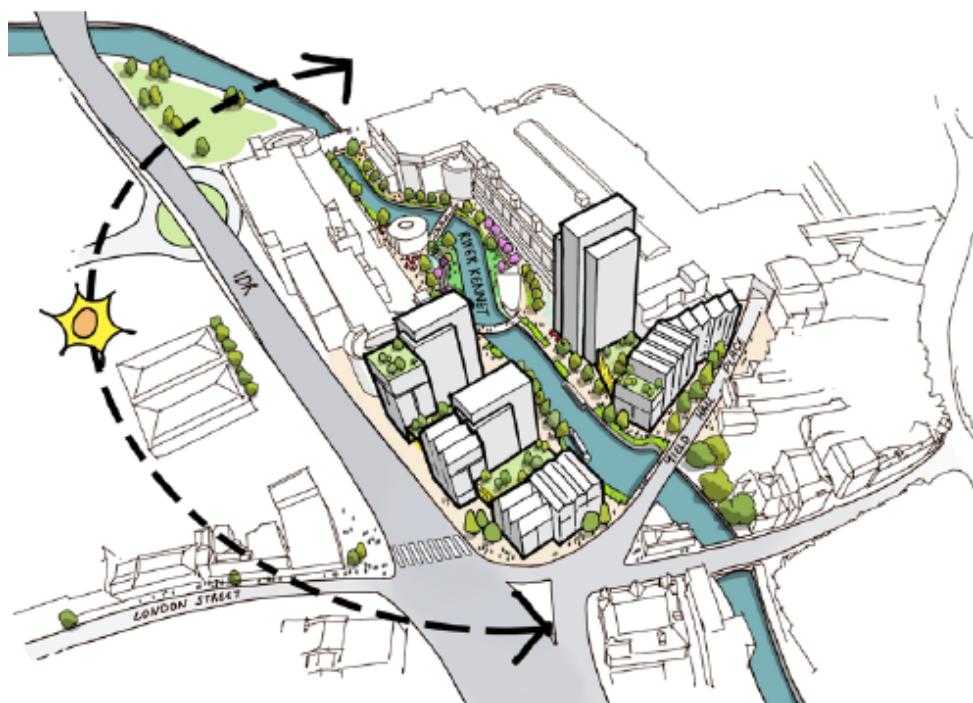


Figure 29 – showing landscaped podium areas connecting the different proposed development blocks

Views, Townscape Character and Heritage Impacts

7.2.47 To fully understand the impact of the proposals upon the surrounding area as well as medium and longer range views and heritage impacts the applications are accompanied by a Built Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA) which forms part of the Environmental Statement. As discussed above the HTVIA considers both applications together as one, as if they were a single proposed development and does not clearly distinguish between the visual or heritage impacts of the YHP1 or YHP2 proposals in isolation. This is considered to be a shortfall of both application submissions which should fully consider each proposal as a standalone development to account for the eventuality that just one of the developments is implemented.

7.2.48 In terms of medium and longer-range views, the submitted HTVIA considers those key views identified into and out of the Reading Central Area that are identified with the RTBS Update Note (2025) as having potential to be impacted by the development of tall buildings. The HTVIA concludes that the proposed developments would have a neutral impact upon longer range views identified with the RTBS Update Note (2025) as having high sensitivity to tall buildings such as those towards the Central Area from Mapledurham to the north west, Dunsden Green to the north east and Balmore Park to the north. Officers agree with this conclusion and consider that neither development would significantly nor negatively impact upon these distant views.

7.2.49 Given the scale of the proposed buildings, there is greater visibility of the proposals within a number of more medium range views identified within the RTBS Update Note (2025). The HTVIA shows that the tall building elements of both proposals would be visible looking east from the footbridge of the A329 near Coley Place. The RTBS Update Note (2025) identifies this view as having medium sensitivity to the addition of tall buildings noting a varied roofline and presence of a number of existing tall buildings, including The Blade and the Verto building within the view as well as the prominence of the St Giles Church spire within the view, with the RTBS Updated Note (2025) concluding that introduction of further variety to the roof line within the view would not likely have an adverse effect. The HTVIA identifies that the proposals would have a beneficial impact to this view, as a result of the high quality architecture and wayfinding. As can be seen in

figure 30 below the tall building elements of both proposals would be readily visible to the roofline from this viewpoint but would not interfere with the views of the existing tall buildings or of the St Giles Church spire. Officers do not identify any significant negative impacts upon this view.



Figure 1.10: Representative Viewpoint 4 - Existing

Figure 30 – Existing and proposed view looking east from the footbridge over the A329 near Coley Place



Figure 1.11: Representative Viewpoint 4 – Proposed and Cumulative

7.2.50 The proposals would also be visible from other medium range views such as from the raised vantage points at the junction of Castle Hill, Tilehurst Road and Coley Avenue looking eastwards and from the junction of Southampton Street (A327) and Waldeck Street looking northwards. Both views are identified as having low sensitivity to the tall buildings with the RTBS Updated Note (2025) and considering the verified views provided to accompany the HTVIA Officers views is that the proposals would sit appropriately within the existing skyline from these view points and would not result in a detrimental impact. The proposed view from the junction of Castle Hill, Tilehurst Road and Coley Avenue is shown in figure 31 below where the YHP1 tower would site centrally with the viewpoint.



Figure 31 – Proposed view looking east from the junction of Castle Hill, Tilehurst Road and Coley Avenue

7.2.51 In terms of more localised views, the principal areas where both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would be visible include the main roads running past the application sites boundaries, notably the IDR (Queens Road) and London Street to the south, Yield Hall Place to the east, vantage points from a number of streets and public realm / open spaces within the local area of the Site (including the riverside area of The Oracle development), river crossings and also the riverside / canal side walkways (including High Bridge, Bridge Street Bridge and others over the River Kennet). Albeit the established street pattern / orientation, density of built development in the close vicinity of the site, all serve to limit or otherwise control the number and extent of direct local views.

7.2.52 The RTBS identifies different townscape character areas and key local views with the Central Area. The submitted HTVIA considers the impact of the proposals upon any impacted key local views and also identifies other views within the Central Area where the proposals would be visible from and harmful in the context of the different defined townscape character areas. The townscape areas provide a useful tool for consideration of the visual impact of the proposals within the Central Area, which given the scale of the proposals means impacts are experienced from a variety of locations.

7.2.53 The Oracle itself forms a defined character area (Character Area 18 with the RTBS) and includes the shopping centre and other buildings between Broad Street, Mill Lane, Bridge Street and Duke Street. The shopping centre buildings dominate this character area which as described above are unexceptional in terms of appearance and present heights of between 3 and 9 storeys. Both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would fundamentally alter the appearance of The Oracle townscape character area, mainly through the sale of buildings proposed which would present an abrupt juxtaposition with the scale of existing and surrounding buildings (See figures 32 and 33 below). Given the significant scale of the proposals direct visual impacts from within the character area in terms of the height of the buildings are limited given views are largely experienced from street and river level where the height of the buildings would not be directly perceived. However, the architectural quality and design of the buildings to the lower floors is likely to be experienced and together with the wider public realm works proposed is considered that both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would result in an improvement to the street and particularly riverside level experience within the immediate surrounding areas.

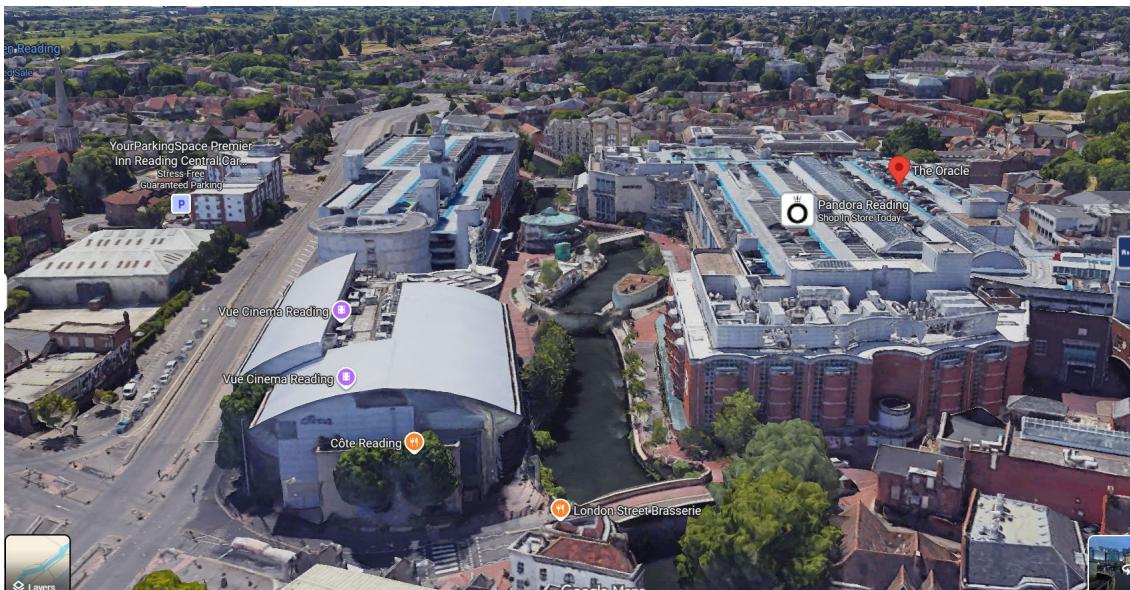


Figure 32 – The Oracle townscape character area as existing



Figure 33 – The Oracle townscape character area visual showing YHP1 and YHP2 proposals

7.2.54 However, direct views of both proposals where scale would be experienced are identified from the west looking east from Bridge Street bridge directly in-front of the western part of The Oracle as shown in figure 34 below. This scale of both proposals here adds more defined framing to the river but presents an abrupt juxtaposition between the lower scale of the retained parts of the shopping centre. Officers consider this existing view to be of limited character given the low-quality architecture to the existing shopping centre in the foreground and limited visual interest to the background of the view. Whilst an abrupt change in scale, officers attribute value to the greater visual interest of the design to the tall building elements as well as to the set back of the proposals behind the retained elements of the shopping centre such that no negative impacts to this direct local view are identified.



Figure 1.12: Representative Viewpoint 6 – Existing



Figure 1.13: Representative Viewpoint 6 – Proposed and Cumulative

Figure 34 – Existing and proposed view looking east from Bridge Street

7.2.55 Local views of the YHP2 proposals would also be possible from the immediate south west of The Oracle at the Southampton Street IDR roundabout at the south west edge of The Oracle character area (see figure 35 below). Views from here towards The Oracle are seen within the context of the IDR ramp which dominates the foreground and Premier Inn hotel building on the south east side of the roundabout such that no negative impact upon this view is identified.



Figure 1.14: Representative Viewpoint 7 - Existing



Figure 1.15: Representative Viewpoint 7 – Proposed and Cumulative

Figure 35 – Existing and proposed view looking north east from the Southampton Street/IDR junction

7.2.56 The visual impact of the proposals in terms of scale and height, particularly the YHP2 proposals, would most prominently be experienced from the wide carriage and footway areas of the IDR and Mill Lane which form the southern boundary of the character area. This view is not considered with the applicant's HTVIA, but it is clear to officers that from here looking east and west past the application site would present direct views of the 16, 13 and 6 storey blocks E, D and C proposed within YHP2. This existing view is shown in Figure 36 below. Notwithstanding the welcome activation of the IDR at street level and greater quality of architecture of the YHP2 proposals compared to the existing shopping centre buildings it is considered that the 16 and 13 storey elements would present imposing and dominant forms which would be significantly out of keeping with the scale of other buildings along this part of the IDR.



Figure 36 – View looking east along Mill Lane part The Oracle

7.2.57 The applicant's HTVIA concludes a minor to moderate beneficial impact in terms of townscape impact within The Oracle character area and immediate areas surrounding the site. Officers do not disagree within this in respect of the YHP1 proposals given the street and riverside level enhancements proposed but do not concur with this conclusion in respect of the YHP2 proposals. Whilst the limited existing townscape merit of this part of the Central Area outlined with the RTBS is acknowledged, officers cannot identify strong justification for buildings of the scale proposed in this location. It is considered that the scale of the YHP2 proposals here would be out of keeping with the local context and would fail to reinforce the character and distinctiveness of this part of the Central Area when viewed from the street level areas directly to the south of the YHP2 site. In this respect officers identify a harmful townscape impact.

7.2.58 To the east the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would affect one key view identified within the RTBS, which is View I) looking west along the River Kennet from High Bridge between Duke Street and London Street located within the Forbury South townscape character area (character area 21 within the RTBS). The RTBS sets out that the view along the Kennet is characterised by its framing by tall buildings with a large block size and has a low to medium sensitivity to the introduction of tall buildings. An existing view and proposed visual looking towards High Bridge is shown in figure 37 below, whilst figure 38 shows more distant proposed visuals looking westwards along the Kennet towards The Oracle.



Figure 1.2: Representative Viewpoint 1 – Existing



Figure 1.3: Representative Viewpoint 1 – Proposed and Cumulative

Figure 37 – Existing view and proposed visual looking west along the Kennet from Crane Warf towards High Bridge

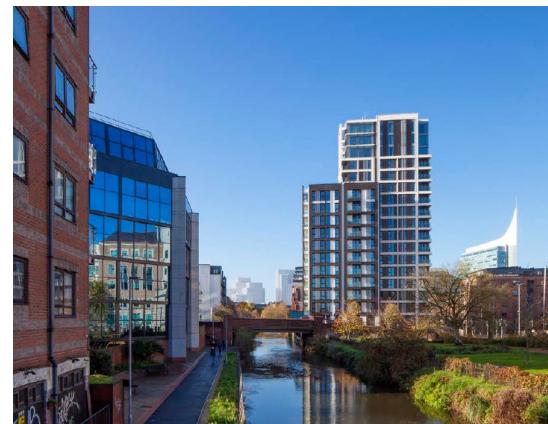


Figure 38 – More distant proposed visuals looking westwards along the Kennet

7.2.59 As can be seen on the proposed visuals above, both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would add further framing either side of the Kennet to both closer and more distant local views in this location. It is not considered that the proposals would have a negative impact upon this key view and would add interest to the townscape alongside The Blade and Verto buildings which would be visible to longer views along the Kennet as shown in figure 38 above.

7.2.60 Direct views of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals from the south of the application site are considered to be more severe. Figure 39 below shows a view looking north towards the application site along London Street located within the London Street townscape character area (character area 20 of the RTBS). London Street is located within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and slopes down towards the IDR junction and the consistent 2-3 storey building heights present a gradual lowering in the roofscape and framing of this view. Buildings along London Street are nearly all either Grade II Listed Buildings or Buildings of Townscape Merit (located within the Conservation Area). The existing YHP2 site and cinema part of the shopping centre is visible at the north end of London Street, where the view terminates but its scale does not have a significant visual impact upon the key characteristics of this view and does not compete with the Listed Buildings.



Figure 1.18: Representative Viewpoint 9 - Existing



Figure 1.19: Representative Viewpoint – Proposed and Cumulative



Figure 1.20: Representative Viewpoint 10 - Existing



Figure 1.21: Representative Viewpoint 10 – Proposed and Cumulative

Figure 39 – Existing and proposed views looking north along London Street (top from the junction with South Street and bottom shows more distance view from the junction with Crown Street)

7.2.61 The proposed 16, 13 and 6 storey blocks (C, D and E) of the YHP2 proposals would be prominent at the terminus of the view, where their scale, in particular the two taller blocks, appear dominant looming over the 2 and 3 storey Grade II Listed Buildings and Buildings of Townscape Merit along London Street and interrupting the gradual lowering of the roofscape towards the junction with the IDR as the topography of London Street slopes downwards. Whilst the 21 storey YHP1 tower is not visible within either of the representative views shown in figure 39 above and the applicant has not provided any proposed visuals showing just the YHP1 proposals in isolation (nor any showing just the YHP2 proposals in isolation) officers conclude that the YHP1 tower would be visible from the same views but are obscured by the tower elements of YHP2 for the cumulative visual of both schemes shown in figure 39. The Applicant's HTVIA does not identify any different impacts between YHP1 and YHP2 and balances the adverse impacts upon London Street resulting from the scale of the proposals with the positive benefits of the tower elements which they state includes high quality architecture and wayfinding whilst they lessen the severity of the adverse impacts of scale given the indirect nature of the impact upon views. Officers' view is that the tower elements of both YHP1 and YHP2 would not integrate sympathetically with this view looking northwards along London Street would appear dominant within and interrupt the consistent, small residential scale and architecture found within and around London Street as is identified with the RTBS. Officers find that the abrupt juxtaposition of the scale of the YHP1 and YHP2 tower elements within the views from London Street would be harmful in visual and townscape character terms.

7.2.62 There would also be views of the YHP1 tower element looking north from the south west of The Oracle from St Giles Close and Church Street also within this part of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area (as shown in figure 39A below). From here the YHP1 tower would interrupt and loom in the background of the consistent scale of the buildings (predominantly 2 storey) experienced in northward views from this location. As a result, officers identify harm to townscape character and views from this part of the Central Area.



Figure 1.16: Representative Viewpoint 8 - Existing



Figure 1.17: Representative Viewpoint 8 – Proposed and Cumulative

Figure 39A – Existing and proposed view looking north from St Giles Close

7.2.63 The Market Place/London Street Conservation Area identifies features currently present within this part of the Conservation Area that have a negative impact on its historic character and appearance. This includes modern development at the north and south extremities of London Street, adjacent to road junctions which it states spoils the overall historic appearance of the area. It is considered that the introduction of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would exacerbate this negative characteristic of the Conservation Area and further detract from its historic character and significance. Harm to the setting of the Grade II Listed Buildings and Buildings of Townscape Merit along both sides of London Street is also identified. The applicants HTVIA identifies less than substantial harm to a low level to the setting of no.s 33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 which are all Grade II Listed Buildings as a result of the visual contrast in scale between the proposals and their visibility within views of the Listed Buildings looking north along London Street, impacting upon both the setting of both the individual and group significance of these Listed Buildings. However, for the reasons identified above, officers consider the harm to be at a moderate rather than low level in respect of the YHP2 proposals the more direct relationship of these proposals to London Street. Officers concur with the Applicant's HTVIA in respect of the impact of the YHP1 proposals and that this is at a low level. As shown in figure 39 above the visibility of the proposals extends to longer range views along London Street from the junction with Crown Street and officers also identify similar harm as a result of both proposals to the settings of no.s 69, 81, 89-93, 95-97, 99, 101, 103, 90, 92, 94, 104, 108, 110 & 114 London Street (all Grade II Listed Buildings), no.s 73 & 75, 77 & 79 London Street (all Grade II* Listed Buildings) and to no.s 43-75, 55-57, 60, 78, 82-84, 83-85, 87, 106 and 107 London Street which are identified as Buildings of Townscape Merit within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area Appraisal.

7.2.64 The Market Place/London Street Conservation Area extends north across the IDR and to Duke Street. Prominent views of the both the tower and lower elements of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would also be obtained here from High Bridge to the east looking As shown in figure 40 below the lower non-tall building elements of the proposals would not significantly exceed the scale and massing of the existing shopping centre buildings to be demolished but the tower elements would present a very significant step up in scale.



Figure 40 – Proposed visual looking west from High Bridge

7.2.65 The proposed tower elements are considered to be significantly out of scale with the prevailing scale of buildings either side of High Bridge. The view looking the other way (east) from High Bridge is shown below in Figure 41 which shows buildings which form the immediate character of this area are between 4 and 6 storeys.



Figure 41 – Existing view looking east from High Bridge

7.2.66 The scale of the proposed tower elements within both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would appear visually dominant from High Bridge and out of keeping with and harmful to the lower scale character of the area. Harm to the character of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area is also identified from this location with the most affected views being from the two bridges over the Kennet identified as positive features of the Conservation Area within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal. The scale of the tower elements of both YHP1 and YHP2 would also appear dominant from here within the setting of High Bridge itself which is a Grade II Listed Building and a Scheduled Ancient Monument, as well as the setting of no. 2-4 London Street (the London Street Brasserie) as can be seen in Figure 41 above and also no. 1 London Street (the former Coroners Court building) as also can be seen in Figure 41 (the white building) all of which are also Grade II Listed Buildings. The Applicant's HTVIA identifies less than substantial harm at a low level to the setting of no. 2-4 London Street and a neutral impact upon High Bridge and no. 1 London Street. However, officers identify less than substantial harm to the setting of these Listed Buildings to a high level given the direct relationship with and scale of the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals.

7.2.67 Further views of the proposals and in particular the upper floors of the YHP1 tower element would also be experienced from further north within the Market Place / London

Street Conservation Area along Duke Street around the junction with King Street and Minster Street where this would rise above the scale of the surrounding buildings. This includes views within the setting of the George Hotel and Restaurant Grade II Listed Building at no. 10-12 King Street as indicated in figure 42 below. The Applicant's HTVIA refers to a Zone of Theoretical Visibility Study (ZTV) and concludes that the narrow street pattern to this part of the Central Area is such that there be very limited visibility from vantage point albeit no representative view has been provided. Officers' view is that the height and proximity of the YHP1 tower element is such that there would be visibility from this location and without evidence to demonstrate otherwise conclude that the YHP1 proposals would result in less than substantial harm to the setting of this Listed Building to a moderate level.



Figure 42 – Photograph looking south from the George Hotel and Restaurant at the junction of King Street and Minster Street.

7.2.68 The Market Place / London Street Conservation Area extends further north across King Street and into Market Place itself. From here views of the upper parts of the tower elements of both YHP1 and YHP2 would be visible from the wide triangular public open space area of Market Place.



Figure 43 - Existing view looking south from Market Place



Figure 44 – Proposed visual looking south from Market Place

7.2.69 This area forms part of the St Lawrence and Market Place townscape character area (character area 6 of the RTBS). The townscape character of this part of the Central Area reflects many of the characteristics of London Street with small scale buildings including clusters of Listed Buildings although but in many cases set around a number of small areas of open space such as Market Place and Town Hall Square rather than along a street pattern layout. As shown in figures 43 and 44 above, the upper floors of the proposed tower elements of the YHP1 and YHP2 would be present within views from Market Place looking south from near St Laurence Church, visible above the 3-6 storey building heights which surrounding Market Place. The tower elements present an abrupt juxtaposition with the consistent and lower scale of buildings present within Market Place and would appear prominent to views within and through the square looking south. The Applicant's HTVA again identifies this abrupt juxtaposition of heights but off-sets any harm against their perceived benefits of architectural quality and wayfinding to a 'neutral' townscape character impact. Your officers' view is that the visual impact of the tower elements is significant such that a harmful townscape character impact is identified from within Market Place.

7.2.70 Officers also identify harm to this part of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. The RBC Conservation Area Appraisal highlights the positive contribution Market Place, as large public open space surrounded by a number of listed buildings, makes to the historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The proposals, namely by way of the scale of the three tower elements, would appear dominant within and impinge upon the setting of Market Place and loom in the background of a number of the Grade I and II Listed Buildings which surround the square which are: Church of St Laurence (Grade I Listed), no.s 23-26, 27-28, 29-31, 32, 33-14, 48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place and no. 10 High Street (Grade II Listed). Officers identify less than substantial harm to these Listed Buildings at a moderate level acknowledging the distant nature of the views within the context of the Central Area but also the significant scale of the proposals when compared to the Listed Buildings individually but also as groups and their group value as different groups of Listed Buildings of similar scale and appearance set around Market Place.

7.2.71 As discussed above both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would be highly visible from a number of locations within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. The Applicant's HTVA concludes less than substantial harm to a low level upon the character and appearance of the conservation area primarily as a result of the scale of both proposals. However, for this reason and given the high level of visibility of the proposals from various parts of the conservation area and the abrupt juxtaposition in heights between the proposal and scale of buildings that make up the Conservation Area and its character, officers conclude that the proposals would result in less than substantial harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area but at a moderate level.

7.2.72 Both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would also have a visual impact to views from Queens Road within the Central Area to the south east of the application site. This part of the site is located within the Kings Road townscape character area (Character area 26 within the RTBS). This part of the Central Area is characterised by building of a medium to large size of buildings, including a number of more modern blocks of flats and offices. Scale of building range from 3 to 5 storey at the western end of Queens Road towards the junction with London Street and the YHP1 and YHP2 application sites increasing to 10 plus storeys further east towards the junction with Watlington Street. Figure 45 below shows the existing and visual of the proposed view looking west along Queens Road from outside no. 52 London Street.



Figure 1.22: Representative Viewpoint 11 - Existing



Figure 1.23: Representative Viewpoint – Proposed and Cumulative

Figure 45 – Existing and proposed view from looking west along Queens Road

7.2.73 As can be seen in figure 45 above the proposed tower elements of both YHP1 and YHP2 would be prominent in the background of views west along Queens Road. The Applicants HTVIA concludes a negligible impact upon townscape character of this part of the Central Area. Officers conclude that there would be an adverse impact to townscape character from this location given the significant scale of the YHP1 and YHP2 tower elements which would interrupt the relatively consistent heights looking towards the Central Core of the Central Area. The Applicant's HTVIA also concludes a neutral impact upon the setting of nos 24-52 Queens Road, a crescent of Grade II Listed Buildings whose significance is derived from their group value and special architectural interest as continuous crescent of Bath stone town houses given the more distant nature of the relationship, as can be seen on the left in figure 45. However, your officers' view is that whilst there are larger and blockier buildings already within the setting of the crescent the scale of the proposed YHP1 and YHP2 tower elements is so significant that these appear prominent within and impinges upon views of the listed crescent when experienced looking west along Queens Road such that officers identify less than substantial harm to a low level to the setting of nos. 25-52 Queens Road.

7.2.74 Both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would also be visible from views from the west and north west of the application site within the Central Area. Primarily views would be obtained from St Marys Butts and Minster Street looking eastwards where the upper floors of the tower elements of both YHP1 and YHP2 would be visible above the terrace of Grade II Listed Buildings at nos of 7 to 15 Gun Street as shown from the Hosier Street junction with St. Mary's Butts in figure 46 below. The part of the Central Area from where the views would be obtained is located within the St. Mary's and Castle Street townscape character area (character area 17 of the RTBS). The character of this area is of low rise buildings retail and office buildings many of which are historic, the character area focus is around St. Mary's Butts and the Churchyard and tombs of St. Mary's Church which are Grade II Listed whilst the church itself is a Grade I Listed Building. The Church and the area around St Marys Butts and Gun Street also form the eastern end of the St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area. The presence and views of the Church and Churchyard as well as the traditional shop frontages to Gun Street are identified within the St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal (2008) as features that contribute positively to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area. Features identified as contributing negatively to the historic character and appearance of

the conservation area include the visual dominance of Broad Street Mall to the north and the existing The Oracle shopping centre to the east behind Gun Street.



Figure 1.8: Representative Viewpoint 4 - Existing



Figure 1.9: Representative Viewpoint 4 – Proposed and Cumulative

Figure 46 – View looking east from the junction of Hosier Street and St Marys Butts showing St Marys Church

7.2.75 The applicant's HTVIA identifies that the proposals would result in less than substantial harm to the setting of the Grade I Listed St Marys Church and Grade II Listed Church Yard at a low level as a result of the visibility and presence of the proposed modern tower elements which would detract from the positive visual presence of the Church within this part of the conservation area but considers that the architectural quality of the tower elements and screening from the Gun Street buildings and mature trees to the Churchyard to all but the very top of the tower element assist in mitigating the level harm. For similar reasons the applicant's HTVIA also concludes that the proposals would not have neutral impact upon and sustain the historic character and appearance of the St Marys Butts/Castel Street Conservation Area. Officers conclude that harm to the setting of the Church, Church Yard and also no.s 7-15 Gun Street would more significant than stated by the applicant, given the scale of the tower elements which would dominate views eastwards and the setting of these buildings and as such conclude a moderate level of less than substantial harm. For similar reasons, officers also identify a moderate level of less than substantial harm to the setting of the St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area.

7.2.76 Sited just outside of the northern boundary of the St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area, Officers also identify harm to the setting of the Grade II Listed Telephone Exchange building at 41-45 Minster Street which sits directly south of The Oracle. The significance of this building is derived from its own architectural interest and as an example of historic civil infrastructure within visibility largely limited to direct views along Minster Street. The applicant's HTVIA identifies a neutral impact on this Listed Building identifying that their TZV study considers both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would not have visibility from within the buildings setting. However, proposed visuals or a view from this location to demonstrate that this would be the case have not been provided within the HTVIA. Given the YHP1 site sits directly adjacent to the southern edge of the existing shopping centre and the scale of the tower element proposed, officers have concern that the proposals would impact upon views of and the setting of the Listed Telephone Exchange, in particular looking south past the building along Earley Place (see figure 47 below). Officers identify this to be less than substantial harm at a low level.



Figure 47 – Photograph of Telephone Exchange building looking south along Earley Place

7.2.77 As discussed earlier in this report under paragraph 7.2.11 the proposed tower elements of both YHP1 and YHP2 would be visible to some longer range views of the Grade II Listed St Giles Church, in particular looking north downhill along Southampton Street. However, the proposals, located at the eastern end of the shopping centre site, would not interfere with or appear dominant in respect of the Church and its spire and would assimilate with the already varied roofscape and skyline of the Central Area. As such officers concur with the applicant's HTVIA in this respect and identify a neutral impact upon the setting of St Giles Church.

7.2.78 Overall, it is considered that the proposed architecture and appearance of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals, would at street level by way of the treatment of the lower floors of the buildings, in particular the shopfronts to the tower elements and warehouse-style architecture to the non-tower parts of the proposals present a significant enhancement over the existing street level visual experience around the shopping centre Yield Hall Place, the riverside frontage and the IDR.

7.2.79 The scale of the proposals, and particularly the tower elements to both YHP1 and YHP2 is such that they would be visible to a variety of locations within the Borough. Officers identify the longer and medium range views the proposals would not present any significant visual harm and that the architecture of the tower elements assists in assimilating the proposals within the Reading townscape and skyline.

7.2.80 Both of the application proposals are, as a result of their scale, considered to have significant impacts upon the appearance of the Central Area and views within it. However, officers can identify areas where both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals, including tower elements and despite their scale, are considered to integrate adequately with the existing character and townscape. This primarily relates to views and character to the west and south west of both applications site such as from Bridge Street and from the IDR junction with Southampton Street junction, as well as views from the east looking along the Kennet from Crane Wharf and more distantly from the Verto building on Kings Road.

7.2.81 Officers also identify harmful townscape impacts of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals where the scale of the tower elements would fail to integrate with character and views within the Central Area. This includes to views and the character of areas to the south of the site from the IDR and Mill Lane and more significantly from London Street for the YHP2 proposals, as well as from more direct views from the Kennet to the east around High Bridge in relation to both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals. Harmful impacts are also identified to the north of the site around Duke Street, Minster Street in relation to YHP1 and to the north east from Market Place as well as from the north west and views from the junction of St Marys Butts with Hosier Street and the area around the St Marys Church in relation to both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals.

7.2.82 Considering advice from Historic England and the RBC Conservation Officer, which is summarised in paragraphs 5.4 and 5.21 of this report and who both object to the applications, officers also identify a range of harmful impact upon surrounding heritage assets. Notably Historic England conclude that the proposed tower elements of the applications would harm the historic setting of both the Market Place/London Street and St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation Areas through 'dominantly tall and bulky buildings' whilst in addition to this, the RBC Conservation Officer also identifies resultant harm to the setting of a variety of listed buildings.

7.2.83 Officers conclude that the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would both individually and cumulatively result in less than substantial harm at a high level to the setting of no. 2-4 London Street (London Street Brasserie), no.1 London Street (Grade II Listed Buildings and High Bridge (a Grade II Listed Building and Scheduled Ancient Monument) and less than substantial harm at a moderate level to the setting of St Laurence Church (Grade I Listed), no.s 23-26, 27-28, 29-31, 32, 33-14, 48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place, no. 10 High Street, no.s 7-15 Gun Street and to the character, appearance and setting of the St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area and the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

7.2.84 The YHP1 proposal is considered to result in less than substantial harm to a low level to the setting of no.s 33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 69, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 81, 86, 88, 89-93, 95-97, 99, 101, 103, 90, 92, 94, 104, 108 and 110 & 114 London Street (all Grade II Listed Buildings), no.s 73 & 75, 77 & 79 London Street (all Grade 2* Listed Buildings), no.s 43-75, 55-57, 60, 78, 82-84, 83-85, 87, 106 and 107 London Street all Buildings of Townscape Merit). The same buildings are considered to be impacted by the YHP2 proposals but to higher level and as such a moderate level of less than substantial harm is identified as a result of the YHP2 development. The cumulative impact of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals is considered to be less than substantial harm to a moderate level to the buildings identified.

7.2.85 Both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals are considered to both individually and cumulatively result in less than substantial harm to a low level to the setting of St Marys Church (Grade I Listed Building) and Grade II Listed St Marys Churchyard and no.s 24-52 Queens Road. The YHP1 proposals are also considered to result in less than substantial harm at a low level to the setting of the Telephone Exchange building at 41-45 Minster Street and the George Hotel and Restaurant at 10-12 King Street (all Grade II Listed Buildings).

7.2.86 As per paragraphs 215 and 216 of the NPPF (December 2024) and Policy EN1 of the RBC Local Plan 2019 less than substantial harm to the significance of heritage assets and non-designated heritage assets (such as Buildings of Townscape Merit), including their setting, must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals. This together with the harmful impacts upon the character and appearance of the parts of the Central Area identified and other harmful impacts of both proposals identified elsewhere within this report will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals in the conclusion of this report.

3. Public Realm/Open Space/Leisure

7.3.1 Policy CR3 requires proposals to make a positive contribution towards the quality of the public realm in the central area of Reading. The Policy sets out that the contribution proposals make to the public realm will be assessed against criteria including provision of new public open space and improvements to existing public realm and imaginative use of open space and public realm, including provision of hard and soft landscaping. Where adjacent to watercourses, the policy requires that continuous public access along the watercourse is provided as well as provision of active functions and uses to areas adjacent to watercourses and that areas of public realm should conserve and enhance heritage assets in the Central Area, including their setting.

7.3.2 The existing shopping centre site is focused on the Kennet where pleasant and functional public realm areas are provided along the public routes either side of the river including hard and soft landscaping, tree planting, seating and public art and from where access to the existing ground floor shop units associated outdoor seating areas are provided. This produces a suitably attractive setting to the riverside areas within the shopping centre. Other public realm areas within the vicinity of both application sites are currently less well finished and appear more utilitarian, service orientated, dominated by hardstanding and feel very separate to and poorly integrated with the more pleasant riverside public realm areas. This includes Yield Hall Place which runs to the east of both YHP1 and YHP1 and the area around the IDR/Queens Road/London Street junction to the south of YHP2.

YHP1 Public Realm Proposals



Figure 48 – YHP1 Public Realm Strategy

7.3.3 A landscape and public realm strategy accompanies both applications. An overview of the public realm strategy for the YHP1 proposals is shown in figure 48 above. To the riverside frontage, the YHP1 public proposals retain focus on this area as a public pedestrian route connecting to Bridge Street and the rest to the shopping centre to the west and to Yield Hall Place to the east and continuous public access is provided. The greater set back of the proposed YHP1 buildings compared to the existing buildings here (see figures 49 and 50 below) allows for provision of more riverside public open space and creates variation in width of the riverside area compared to the linear nature of the existing YHP1 riverside space. This additional space facilitates provision of two small squares or arrival areas around the proposed new retail entrance and at the entrance to the proposed co-working space where an outdoor spill out seating area is also proposed. Creation of this additional space is considered to have benefits in terms of creating more usable space for both residents and visitors as a destination rather than a purely transitional riverside space. Traffic bollards to the east end of the riverside area where it adjoins Yield Hall Place would be re-provided as part of the proposed development.



Figure 49 – showing existing YHP1 riverside frontage layout

7.3.4 Along the YHP1 riverside the proposals facilitate retention of 6 existing trees (1 x young White Willow tree and 5 x Lime trees) which sit directly on the edge of the river channel whilst 4 new trees and a series of soft landscaped raised herbaceous planters are proposed around the arrival square and spill out outdoor seating area in-front of the co-working space unit. The riverside proposals also include variations in block paving pattern and bond which will change subtly to accentuate between areas to walk through and areas to dwell. The proposals allow for retention of existing riverside bollard lighting along the entirety of the YHP1 riverside frontage whilst overhead lighting is proposed to the co-working space outdoor seating spill out space. The riverside public realm proposal also includes provision of timber benches and tables along the frontage whilst a sculptural lighting feature is proposed in front of the new mall entrance which would also act as a wayfinding feature. Together with the high quality shop front designs discussed in paragraphs 7.2.43 to 7.2.46 of this report it is considered that the YHP1 proposals would provide an enhanced high quality riverside public realm area and pleasant environment for both future residential occupiers and visitors to the site and would align with Policy EN11 (Waterspaces) in creating a high quality public realm area adjacent to the river Kennet.



Figure 50 – YHP1 Public Realm Masterplan

7.3.5 The YHP1 proposals include welcome changes to the public realm areas along Yield Hall Place, extending up to the junction with Minster Street. Here, as per the proposals to the riverside, variations in paving are proposed to help differentiate between more active areas, such as those to the eastern elevation of the co-working space and more functional service areas given servicing will remain a key function of Yield Hall Place. Existing lighting bollards would be retained along this route and new ones added. There is currently very limited soft landscaping to this part of Yield Hall Place with just 4 trees present. Whilst the proposed siting of the eastern elevation of the YHP1 building would necessitate removal of 2 of these existing trees (1 x young Himalayan Birch categorised as a C quality tree of poor quality and 1 x early mature London Plane tree categorised as a B quality tree of moderate quality) it is proposed to plant 21 trees along the northern part of Yield Hall Place as can be seen in figure 50 above. This includes a proposed 'Woodland Walk' which is an 18m long part of the pedestrian route along the west side of Yield Hall Place which is set between low raised planters, with multi-stem birch trees and understory planting (see figure 51 below). The Applicant explains that this area is intended to provide a feeling of landscape intimacy within what is otherwise an urban streetscape environment. Together with enhancing the visual experience of the public realm area the proposed tree planting would also assist in the development meeting its requirements in terms of combating the effects of climate change (Policy CC3 Adaptation to Climate Change) and meeting the aims of the RBC Tree Strategy (2021) and the paucity of canopy cover in Abbey Ward that the strategy identifies.

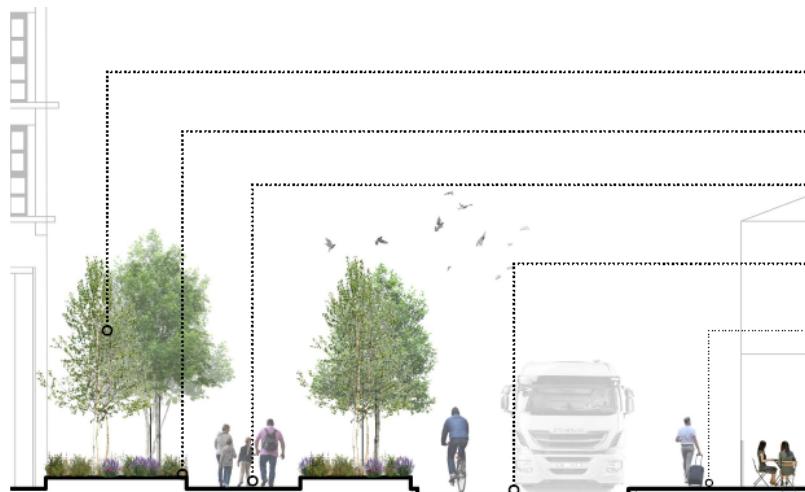


Figure 51 – Proposed YHP1 'Woodland Walk'

7.3.6 The YHP1 proposals also include an interactive light art installation to the roof of the underpass which connects Yield Hall Place to Minster Street which is to be retained as part of the proposed development. This public art, together with the lighting sculpture to the riverside area, is considered to provide additional visual interest to the public realm in accordance with Policy CR2 (Design in Central Reading) which supports provision of public art within developments. In addition, it is also proposed to replace the existing low gates at the entrance to Yield Hall Place from Minster Street with a line of bollards to provide greater permeability for cyclists and pedestrians compared to the existing situation. Figure 52 below shows the existing gate to be replaced and the underpass.

7.3.7 The proposed public realm works to Yield Hall Place are considered beneficial in terms of linking and integrating this area with the riverside public realm whereas currently Yield Hall Place feels separate and less well addressed in terms of hard and soft landscaping and street-furniture providing visual interest. This also assists in linking The Oracle with the Central Core of the Central Area to the north and improving and encouraging pedestrian and cycle permeability and connectivity to Minster Street and Kings Walk.



Figure 52 - Existing underpass at gate at the junction of Yield Hall Place and Minster Street

7.3.8 The proposals also include creation of a 180m² riverside 'Pocket Park' area of public open space (see Figure 53 below) on the north bank of the river accessed from the eastern side of Yield Hall Place. The 'Pocket Park' includes terraced concrete seating overlooking the river, set around gravel surfacing two herbaceous planters. This land is under the ownership of the applicant and currently consists of a small area of amenity grass and two trees but aside from providing a welcome area of soft landscaping within the hardstanding dominated environs of Yield Hall Place does not have a clear purpose or use. The creation of the 'Pocket Park' would necessitate loss of 2 of 4 existing trees on this parcel of land (2 x mature White Willows – categorised as B quality trees of moderate quality) to facilitate provision of the terraced seating however the proposals include planting of a replacement tree within the park. The 'Pocket Park' is considered to be an inventive use of this space and positive addition to the public realm area around The Oracle and Yield Hall Place.

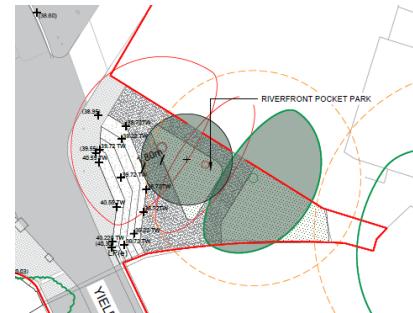


Figure 53 – Photograph of land to be used as 'Pocket Park', proposed layout of the 'Pocket Park' and proposed visual

7.3.9 As is the case with many high density developments within the Central Area there is often limited open space on site for residents, including space for provision of play facilities. The supporting text to Policy CC3 explains that increasingly new and improved town squares or similar public realm spaces such as this or creation of wider streets that can have multiple functions present the main opportunities for additional and improved open space in the Central Area, unlike traditional parks and open green spaces that are more common outside of the Central Area. Commonly open space provision within

developments within the Central Area is in the form of courtyards or roof terraces which are generally for residents only and not accessible to the public. This is the case for the YHP1 proposals where a series of roof level communal amenity terraces are proposed for residents only. These spaces, particularly that to 1st floor (podium level) are good sized and are proposed as high quality spaces that would be well served in terms of hard and soft landscaping, including seating and tables and ornamental tree planting as shown in figure 54 below.

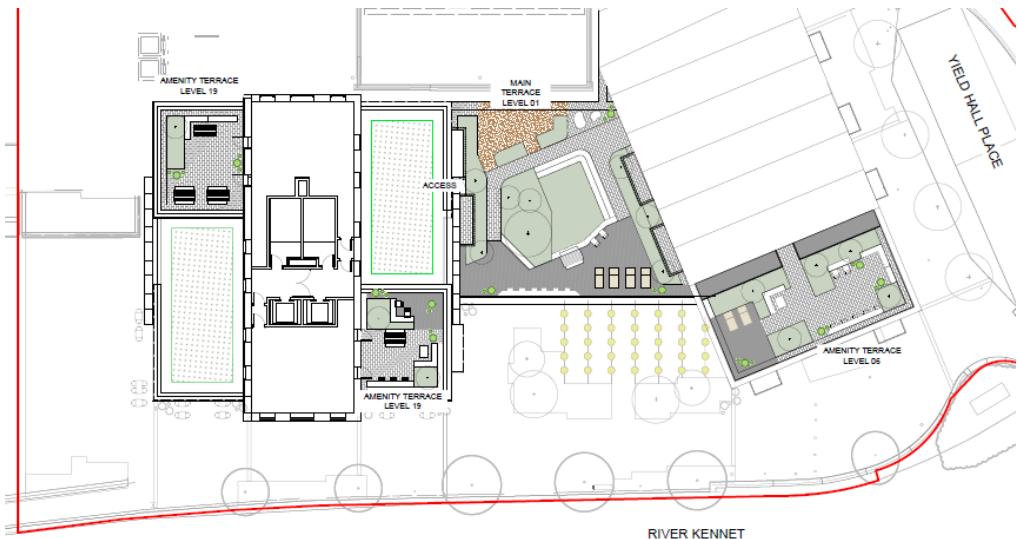


Figure 54 – Proposed YHP1 communal amenity roof terrace areas for residents located at 1st (podium level), 6th and 19th floors.

7.3.10 Policy EN9 (Provision of Open Space) is clear that public open space should be publicly accessible so whilst communal roof terrace spaces provide a good facility for residents their function is limited in terms of recreation, and the development is also expected to provide and contribute to publicly accessible open space. More specifically Policy EN9 requires that new development makes provision for appropriate open space based on the needs of the development, either through on or off-site provision, contributions or improvements to existing leisure and recreation facilities, and that for developments of the scale proposed (50+ dwellings) this should include new provision of open space and satisfactory provision of children's play areas and neighbourhood parks.

7.3.11 Whilst the works proposed to the riverside, Yield Hall Place and provision of the pocket park are considered to be enhancements to the public realm areas around the site and to contribute to the open space provision of the proposals, this work relates primarily to enhancements to existing public realm which serves the current commercial use of the site. With the proposed introduction of a significant residential use, additional public realm and open space provision beyond the small pocket park and slightly wider riverside public realm area is considered to be necessary to serve the needs of the development and proposed residential occupiers. Such wider open space provision or improvements is also required to mitigate for the failure of the YHP1 proposals to provide any children's play facilities, whilst the balcony strategy for the proposals also explains that due to prevailing westerly winds private balconies are primarily only provided for flats to the eastern elevation elevations of the development (see figure 55 below) which as per Policy H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) heightens the importance of alternatives to the proposed private roof terraces for future occupiers in terms of access to open space. The significant visual impacts of the development, which as explained in the previous section of this report extend to other parts of the town centre rather than just those areas surrounding the application site, also exacerbates the need for more extensive and high quality public realm and open space provision to provide visual mitigation for these impacts and provide appropriate setting for the scale of the proposed development. Officers have negotiated with the developer to secure proposals for off-site public realm and open space mitigation which is discussed later in this report.



Figure 55 – Proposed YHP1 balcony strategy (highlighted yellow and orange)

YHP2 Public Realm Proposals



Figure 56 – YHP2 Public Realm Strategy

7.3.12 An overview of the YHP2 public realm proposals is shown on in figure 56 above. In relation to the on-site riverside public realm proposals a very similar approach to that for the YHP1 riverside is proposed with the development also presenting a more staggered frontage and building line to the riverside creating variation in the width of the riverside public realm and facilitating provision of additional public open space compared to the existing situation. As with the YHP1 proposals, this includes creation of arrival areas or mini squares of public open space, including outdoor seating areas with feature lighting, in front of the proposed entrances to the cinema and residential lobby. Similar variations in paving materials and pattern are proposed to signify the different functionality of the riverside public realm spaces. Creation of these additional spaces is again considered to have benefits in terms of creating more usable space for both residents and visitors as a destination rather than a purely transitional riverside spaces. Traffic bollards at the east end of the riverside space when it adjoins Yield Hall Place would be re-provided as part of the proposed development. The proposals facilitate continuous pedestrian and cycle access along the riverside frontage in accordance with Policies EN11, CR3 and TR4.



Figure 57 – Proposed YHP2 Public Realm Masterplan

7.3.13 Along the YHP2 riverside the proposals facilitate retention of all existing trees of which there are 5 (all early mature Lime trees) which sit directly on the edge of the river channel, whilst 4 new trees and a soft landscaped raised herbaceous planter is proposed around the arrival square in front of the entrance to the residential entrance lobby. The on-site public realm proposals also extend along Yield Hall Place to the south around the junction with London Street and Queens Road and then westwards along the south elevation of the building which fronts the IDR. Continuous pedestrian access would be retained along Yield Hall Place and the IDR frontages of the buildings. To Yield Hall Place, 2 existing trees (2 x early mature London Plane trees categorised as being B quality trees of moderate quality) are proposed to be removed due to their close proximity to the east elevation of the existing building, such that they would not survive its demolition nor construction of the proposed large building in this location (see figure 57 above). There are two further existing trees within the YHP2 site located on the corner of the Yield Hall Place and IDR junction (2 x early mature London Plane trees) both of which would be retained whilst 19 trees are proposed to be planted spread along the IDR frontage, Yield Hall Place and also to the highway crossing island at the junction of London Street and the IDR (Queens Road) (see figure 58 below).



Figure 58 – Photograph of highway crossing island at junction of London Street and the IDR (Queens Road) where soft and hard landscaping is proposed.

7.3.14 The footway areas along Yield Hall Place, the IDR (Queens Road) and the above mentioned traffic island also include provision of timber benches and tables, bollard lighting, a series of soft landscaped herbaceous planters and new tactile paving at highway crossing points. The proposed staggered footprint of the YHP2 building also facilitates provision of a wider area of public realm than existing to the public footway at the corner of the IDR (Queens Road) and Yield Hall Place where a further small square/arrival space is proposed in front of the rear secondary entrance to residential lobby with timber benches and set around soft landscaped planters and new and existing trees (see

proposed visual in figure 59 below). Within this square/arrival space a 'play on the way' route within a larger planter set into the ground containing balancing logs/ boulders with bark play surface is proposed.



Figure 59 – Proposed visual of arrival space/small square public open space around the secondary entrance to the YHP2 residential lobby adjacent to the IDR (Queens Road)

7.3.15 The proposed YHP2 on-site public realm proposals are considered to be a benefit of the proposed development and would result in an improved street-level experience within the public areas around this part of The Oracle for both visitors and future occupiers. The significant increase in tree planting and soft landscaping would contribute to the proposals combating the effects of climate change in accordance with Policy CC3 (Adaptation to Climate Change) and meeting the aims of the RBC Tree Strategy (2021) and the paucity of canopy cover in Abbey Ward. Furthermore, the improvements to the public areas around the south elevation of the building fronting the IDR at around the junction with Yield Hall Place are particularly welcomed in terms of activation of this area and available open space which currently lacks visual interest and purpose in terms of wayfinding and in encouraging and enhancing the pedestrian and cycle permeability across the IDR from London Street to the south and Yield Hall Place to the north.

7.3.16 Whilst the on-site public realm proposals for the YHP2 site are welcomed and considered to be a benefit of the proposals, for the same reasons as discussed above in relation to YHP1, in accordance with Policy EN9 (Provision of Open Space) further open space provision/enhancement is considered to be required to serve the needs of the proposed development, particularly given the proposals to introduce a significance level of residential use to the site. As with the YHP1 proposals, residential occupiers of YHP2 would be served by a series of landscaped communal roof terraces (see figure 60 below) which would not be accessible to non-residents so are not considered to contribute to public open space provision of the development. Private balconies are also again limited to those flats to the eastern elevations only due to the prevailing wind conditions at the site heightening the importance of alternative forms of open space provision for future occupiers (see figure 55 above). Similar to the YHP1 proposals, the level and extent of visual impacts identified as a result of proposals also exacerbates the need for more extensive and high quality public realm and open space provision to provide visual mitigation for these impacts and provide appropriate setting for the scale of the proposed development. Officers have negotiated with the developer to secure proposals for off-site public realm and open space mitigation which is discussed below.



Figure 60 - Proposed YHP2 communal amenity roof terrace areas for residents located at 1st (podium level), 11th and 14th floors

Off-Site Public Realm/Open Space/Leisure Provision/Enhancements

7.3.17 As part of consideration of both planning applications officers have held discussions with the Applicant in terms of off-site public realm/open space/leisure provision or enhancements to serve the needs of the proposals and to provide necessary visual mitigation. Advice provided to the Applicant at pre-application stage was clear that very significant enhancement to public realm surrounding the site and beyond would be required to mitigate the impact of the scale of developments proposed. The existing public realm areas around the junctions of London Street and Yield Hall Place with the IDR (Queens Road) and at the crossing points over the IDR at these junctions were identified as significant poor quality areas of public realm where there is scope for significant improvement to be provided in a location that would directly relate in both visual and functional terms to The Oracle and both the YHP1 and YHP2 application sites. Notably this area is identified as part of the Central Area which would benefit from changes and improvements to its public realm within the draft Reading Town Centre Public Realm Strategy (RTCPRS) (2025), which identifies, amongst other issues, a cluttered and unpleasant pedestrian experience, particularly in crossing the IDR, a dominance of hardstanding and lack of celebration of the Black History Mural amongst others as key existing issues. Figure 61 below shows an extract from the draft RTCBS, and details existing issues identified around this junction. Whilst the RTCPRS is still in draft form it is still provides useful reference guide for future vision of the Central Area of which The Oracle forms a key part.

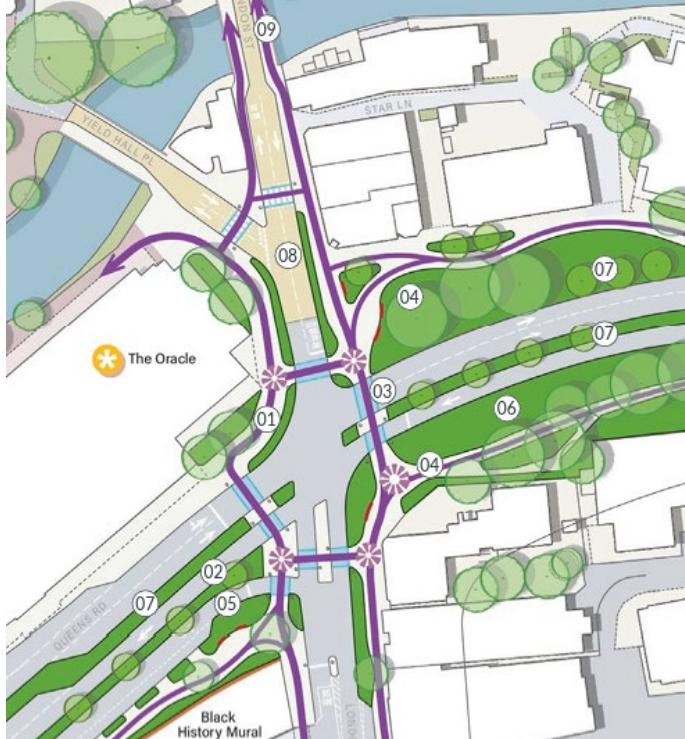


- ① Generally hostile, unpleasant environment due to the junction scale, difficulty to navigate as a pedestrian or cyclist, clutter, vehicular speed and dominance
- ② Narrow footpaths that result unpleasant for pedestrians, North-South link severed by the roadway
- ③ Aesthetically unpleasant handrails, clutter that impedes natural pedestrian movement, inappropriate for a town centre
- ④ Multiple stage staggered crossings, low pedestrian comfort, long crossing distances forcing vulnerable pedestrians to cross in two goes
- ⑤ Lack of celebration of the Black History Mural and wider historic environment on London Street, very poor context
- ⑥ Unwelcoming environment for future developments both sides of Queens Road
- ⑦ Underused hard surfaced space, no purpose or structure

Figure 61 – Extract from draft Reading Town Centre Public Realm Strategy (2025)

7.3.18 The northern side of this junction falls within the red line application area of the YHP2 proposals and as discussed above, the on-site public scheme proposed incorporates works which seek to combat issues no. 02, 06 and 07 referred to in figure 61 above, through improvements to the footway and public realm along the Yield Hall Place and IDR (Queens Road) elevations of the building and proposed hard and soft landscaping improvements to the traffic crossing island at the junction of London Street and the IDR (issue 07 above). Officers held detailed discussions with the developer to try to ensure that the proposals could deliver works to address more of the issues referred to within the draft RTCPRS as shown in figure 61 above and in particular works of a more substantive nature to provide more fundamental changes to the junction and to the pedestrian address

and cyclist experience. Figure 62 below shows a further extract from the draft RTCPRS which outlines a potential future vision for the junction and proposals to address the issues outlined in figure 61 above. The vision for the junction within the draft RTCPRS shows proposed significant greening, wider footways, reductions to the number of carriageway lanes and simplified (more linear and less staggered) pedestrian crossings routes over the IDR (Queens Road).



- 01 Increase footpath width along the Oracle future redevelopment site to give more space to pedestrians
- 02 Carriageway reduced to one lane westbound on Queens road
- 03 Realign all pedestrian crossing to achieve 1 or 2 stages crossing points. Consider implementing sufficient green light time for vulnerable users to cross safely and comfortably.
- 04 Remove left turn lanes both sides of the junction, to reduce carriageway, increase footpaths width, give more space to pedestrians and public realm enhancement schemes, as well as shorten crossing distance.
- 05 Tighten existing lane to gain valuable public realm space in front of the Black History Mural, including interpretation, whilst retaining the parking spaces
- 06 Introduce green verges along pedestrian footpaths and in central medians
- 07 Introduce tree planting in central median and verges where distance to carriageway allows to do so
- 08 Create a positive 'apron' across the carriageway using a different surfacing to celebrate the gateway into the town centre, slow vehicles down and increase pedestrian comfort, Enhance National Cycle Route 4 as it crosses from Star Lane to the Oracle Riverside
- 09 Reduce carriageway width to one lane on the bridge to give more space to pedestrians at this key gateway to the town centre

Figure 62 - Extract from draft Reading Town Centre Public Realm Strategy (2025)

7.3.19 Disappointingly, having reviewed and costed a scheme for implementation the proposed vision for the junction within the draft RTCPRS the Applicant advised that the costs associated with this work were significant and would not have been deliverable within the financial viability of the scheme, a position verified by RBC Valuations Officers. The applicant's review of the proposed works to deliver the vision for the junction also concluded that delivering some parts of the work and not others also made little sense from a practical and implementation perspective given the significant disruption that would result to this busy junction and would also result in provision of significant works that would have to be re-done if, in future, other parts of the vision for the junction were to be brought forward. From Officers' perspective these conclusions are disappointing given the proximity of the junction to both application sites is considered to provide a clear justification for public realm enhancements in this location and that this position was made clear to the Applicant at pre-application stage.

7.3.20 Notwithstanding the above, a less extensive scheme of off-site public realm works to the junction is proposed as part of the YHP2 proposals to be secured as part of the s106 obligations for this application, as set out in the YHP2 application recommendation box at the top of this report. This includes provision of a new small, landscaped area of open space and public realm on Mill Lane in-front of the black history mural. The proposed scheme of works here includes retention of two existing trees and creation of additional space by realigning the kerb line of the Mill Lane footway to provide some low level herbaceous planters and timber benches looking towards the mural. The landscaping proposed would be low level to avoid obstructing views of the mural. In addition to this it is proposed that 5 fastigiate trees would be planted within the central reservation of the IDR (Queens Road) to the west of the London Street junction to provide some additional

greening to the junction and carriageway and that some of the crash barriers to the crossing islands over the IDR would be replaced with low level planters and new surfacing applied to the crossing islands. Removal of the crash barriers would be subject to full agreement with the Local Highway Authority.

7.3.21 Whilst the above off-site public realm works would provide some, albeit limited, improvements to the pedestrian experience around the IDR (Queens Road) and London Street junction in terms of softening from additional landscaping, this is considered to be insufficient in context of the scale of both proposed developments, introduction of significant residential use at the site and extent of harmful visual impacts identified.

7.3.22 In addition to the off-site works referred above and following discussion with the Applicant and the RBC Parks and Street Works Officer, a contribution of £1.2 million is proposed to be secured as part of the s106 obligations for both application towards wider public realm/open space/leisure works and enhancements. This includes a contribution of £500,000 towards works to existing underutilised green space on the riverside to the rear of the multi storey car park on Queens Road, directly to the east of The Oracle. This is also an area of the Central Area identified with the draft RTCPRS where the public realm is currently deficient and where there are opportunities to make improvements. The RTCPRS refers to poorly maintained green areas with no purpose or amenity value, overgrown vegetation and lack of rationale and coordination to pedestrian and cycle routes as some of the key issues around this existing area of open space. Similar to the area around the IDR (Queens Road) and London Street junction discussed above the draft RTCPRS includes a proposed vision and schematic proposal for enhancements to this area of the Central Area. This is shown in figure 63 below.



- ① Simplified movement with a wide shared cycles / pedestrians path (orange) and a pedestrian only path (blue)
- ② Strengthened arrival / orientation points with signage
- ③ Flexible pocket hardstand space with play opportunity, seating around the space and opportunity to have a coffee van or similar to encourage passive surveillance and ownership
- ④ Central amenity green space with lawn to sit down, dwell, have lunch and enjoy the river setting
- ⑤ Informal playful trail/path through the green space
- ⑥ Meadow and boundary planting with no barrier and views to the brook
- ⑦ Planting with seating facing the space bordering secondary amenity lawns
- ⑧ Existing mature trees set in green areas with set back pedestrian path and seating below
- ⑨ Rationalised movement, removal of redundant handrails and extended planted area
- ⑩ Enhanced setting and visual access to the brook

Figure 63 – Extract from the draft Reading Town Centre Public Realm Strategy (2025)

7.3.23 The proposed £500,000 contribution would be to secure a scheme of hard and soft landscaping to be carried out by RBC Parks and Street Works Officers to provide an amenity lawn area, including benches and tables, new directional signage and meadow and boundary planting, which refers to points 02, 04 and 06 from the draft RTCPRS as shown in figure 63 above. The proposed works to this area would provide an enhanced greening of public open space in a location that directly relates to The Oracle and both application sites, located a 3 minute walk away along the riverside in an accessible location for future occupiers of the development as well as for the general public. The extract of the draft RTSPRS shown in figure 63 under point 03 refers to opportunity for play provision within this area of open space. A proposal to contribute towards a new play facility in this location was also put forward by the Applicant however, following discussions with RBC Parks Officers their advice was that this location would not be suitable for a play area given its close proximity to the river and also given the limited available space which would mean very limited play equipment could be provided such that usability of the area would likely be very limited. As such, Officers have worked with RBC Parks Officer to identify an alternative nearby location to both application sites where the proposals could contribute towards enhanced play facilities. In this respect a contribution of £200,000 is proposed to be secured towards improvements to an existing RBC play area at St Giles Close, including replacement play equipment. St Giles play area is located under a 10 minute walk from both application sites and is the closest public play area to The Oracle for future residential occupiers.

7.3.24 In addition to the above and as a result of discussions with RBC Parks Officers, a further contribution of £500,000 is also proposed to be secured via s106 obligation towards improvements to the surfacing and layout of the cycle and pedestrian routes along the river between The Oracle and Waterloo Meadows which is the closest major recreationally equipped park and area of open space within the Borough to The Oracle and contains a children's play area, hard surfaced pitch, basketball court, playing field, seating and BMX track. There is a direct pedestrian (20 minute walk) and cycle route to Waterloo Meadows along the Kennet riverside, and the proposals would enhance access to this park for future occupiers of the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals and for the general public. Both the works to the area of open space to the rear of the Queens Road car park and to the riverside cycle and pedestrian pathways would also provide enhancement to the riverside in terms of function and appearance in accordance with Policy EN11 (Waterspaces).

7.3.25 The contributions discussed above are considered to present public realm/open space/leisure mitigation for the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals. The provision of the proposed enhanced public realm/open space/leisure facilities are considered necessary to mitigate for the impact of each application individually if one or the other came forward but would also be sufficient as to provide such appropriate mitigation for the eventuality that both developments were to be implemented. In this respect, as set out in the recommendation boxes for both applications at the top of this report, Officers are recommending that the s106 agreements for both applications would be worded such that these contributions are provided by whichever application is implemented first. The off-site scheme of works proposed to be carried out by the Applicant around the IDR (Queens Road) and London Street junction naturally relate more to the YHP2 proposals and in terms of delivery it is accepted that these works would be required to be delivered with the YHP2 proposals only. This would also prevent repeated major disruption to this busy junction and the eventuality that if the works came forward with the YHP1 proposals instead, then the public realm works could have to be undone to facilitate the construction of the YHP2 scheme or would at least be detrimentally impacted by construction of the YHP2 scheme. Given the YHP1 proposals - unlike those for YHP2 - include creation of the pocket park, Officers are satisfied that the balance and split of public realm/open space/leisure provision would be appropriate to mitigate the impacts of both developments individually but also cumulatively.

7.3.26 Officers conclude that the proposed on and off site public realm/open space/leisure provision and enhancements proposed as part of the YHP1 and YHP2 applications are extensive and would provide appropriate and high quality provision of such spaces that would directly relate to the scale of developments proposed in terms of their extent, nature and location. The public realm proposals would also align cumulatively and complement each other in terms of the relationship between the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals ensuring that the identified enhancements would not become redundant or diminished if both schemes were implemented. The public realm/open space/leisure proposals are considered to comply with Policies CR3 (Public Realm in Central Reading), EN9 (Provision of Open Space), EN11 (Waterspaces) and CC9 (Securing Infrastructure). Whether or not the extent of public realm and open space provision and enhancements proposed are sufficient to provide appropriate mitigation for the extent of the harmful visual impacts of both identified to result of both proposals, including to that to conservation areas and listed buildings within the Central Area, will be considered within the planning balance in the conclusion section of this report.

Design, Appearance and Public Realm Conclusions in respect of Policy CR10 (Tall Buildings)

7.3.27 In terms of compliance with the specific detailed requirements of Policy CR10 (Tall Buildings) referred to in paragraph 7.2.19 of this report officers find that both proposals fall short of satisfying a number of the criteria of this policy. Based upon the assessment above officers conclude that the proposals fail to satisfy the following criteria:

- *Contribute to high-quality views from distance, views from middle-distance and local views;*

Whilst the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals, both individually and cumulatively, are considered to demonstrate that distant and middle distance views of the proposals would be high quality, the same cannot be said for local views from within the Central Area where a number of harmful impacts are identified, primarily as a result of the scale of the proposed tower elements.

- *Take account of the context within which they sit, including the existing urban grain, streetscape and built form and local architectural style;*

The YHP1 and YHP2 proposals, both individually and cumulatively, primarily as a result of their scale are not considered to sufficiently take account of the context within which they site.

- *Avoid bulky, over-dominant massing;*

The YHP1 and YHP2 proposals, both individually and cumulatively, are considered to appear bulky, and to present over-dominant massing to views from a number of locations within the Central Area.

- *Conserve and, where possible, enhance the setting of conservation areas and listed buildings;*

The YHP1 and YHP2 proposals, both individually and cumulatively, are considered to harm the setting of conservation areas and listed buildings within the Central Area.

7.3.28 Failure of both the proposals to comply with the above-mentioned parts of Policy CR10 will also be considered as part of the planning balance assessment for both applications in the Conclusion section of this report.

4. Unit Mix and Affordable Housing

7.4.1 Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) seeks as a guide that residential developments within the town centre area should incorporate a maximum of 40% of 1 bedroom units and a minimum of 5% of 3 bedroom units.

7.4.2 Of the 218 dwellings proposed within YHP1 there would be a mix of 111 x 1 bed units (51%), 96 x 2 bed units (44%) and 11 x 3 bed units (5%) and of the 218 dwellings proposed within YHP2 there would be 96 x 1 bed units (44%), 111 x 2 bed units (51%) and 11 x 3 bed units (5%).

7.4.3 The proposed residential unit mix for both application does not meet the guideline in Policy CR6 with both proposals presenting an over-provision of 1 bedroom units. Both proposals do satisfy the Policy CR6 guidance in terms of 3 bedroom units and provide the minimum 5% provision. The applicant's justification for overprovision of 1 bedroom units is that the type of accommodation proposed, being rental units located within the Central Area in close proximity to retail and leisure uses and the night time economy is such that they consider here would be greater demand for smaller units in this location rather than family units. However, the supporting text to Policy CR6 is clear under paragraph 5.3.23 *that developments within the Central Area should not be dominated by one-bedroom units....* Whilst the suggested unit mix under Policy CR6 is only a guideline for developments, the proposed unit mix and overdominance of 1 bedroom units is considered to be a disbenefit of both proposals given the greater need for 2 and 3 bedroom units within the Borough as set out under Policy H2 (Density and Mix) and overdominance of existing 1 bedroom dwellings within the Central Area . This disbenefit will fall to be considered as part of the planning balance assessment for both proposals within the conclusion section of this report.

7.4.4 Notwithstanding the above it is proposed that 5% of the dwellings within each application would be wheelchair accessible dwellings in accordance with Part M4(3) of Building Regulations satisfying the requirement of criterion f. of Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing).

7.4.5 Policy (H3 Affordable Housing) requires developments to make an appropriate contribution towards affordable housing to meet the needs of Reading Borough. For both the YHP1 and YHP2 as Major category developments, 30% of the total dwellings are expected to be provided as affordable housing, in the form of on-site provision, and this requirement has been continued and augmented in the emerging Local Plan Partial

Review. If proposals present an offer which falls short of the 30% policy requirement, then the developer must clearly demonstrate the circumstances justifying a lower contribution through an open-book viability assessment. Additionally, the supporting text to Policy H4 (Build to Rent Schemes) (at para. 4.4.31) clarifies that “*The Council will expect rental levels for the affordable housing or Affordable Private Rent housing to be related to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate levels (including service charges) and be affordable for those identified as in need of affordable housing in the Borough. The Council will expect such housing to remain affordable in perpetuity*”.

7.4.6 Both applications were accompanied by a viability assessment which concluded that it was unviable for either application to incorporate any affordable housing. The viability assessments have been independently reviewed and reviewed by RBC Valuations Officers whose advice is that it is unviable for either proposal to incorporate any affordable housing.

7.4.7 Notwithstanding the above it is proposed that both applications would incorporate some on-site affordable housing. Figure 64 below shows the amount and mix of affordable dwellings to be provided:

Units	YHP 1		YHP 2
	Affordable		
1 bed (40%)	9		9
2 bed (55%)	12		12
3 bed (5%)	1		1
Total	22		22

Figure 64 – Proposed YHP1 and YHP2 on-site affordable housing provision

7.4.8 The level of provision proposed equates to 10% of the total dwellings to be provided within each development. All of the affordable dwellings would be rented at no more than the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) cap and would be spread throughout both schemes. The mix of the affordable dwellings proposed would also accord with the guideline mix for dwellings within the Central Area set out under Policy CR6 as referred to above. RBC Housing Officers consider the proposed dwelling size mix and spread of units to be acceptable and support capping of rents at LHA levels. The spread of units across the various blocks and floors within both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals is shown in figure 65 below and plans showing the proposed location of all the affordable units are included with the plans attached at the end of this report.

YHP 1	Block	Floor	Number of Affordable Dwellings
A	A	2	2
	4	2	2
	5	2	2
	6	2	2
	13	1	1
	B	1	4
	2	2	2
	4	2	2
	5	2	2
Total	6	2	2
	7	1	1
		22	
YHP2	C	Mezz	2
	1	1	1
	2	2	2

	3	2
D	2	2
	3	2
	4	2
	5	1
E	2	2
	3	2
	4	2
	5	2
Total		22

Figure 65 – Spread and Layout of Affordable Dwellings

7.4.9 Planning Viability guidance (Policy H3, including as proposed to be updated in the Partial Review and as set out in the adopted Affordable Housing SPD) does not require the LPA to dispense with affordable housing provision but allows greater flexibility to agree a position which would maximise delivery of affordable housing and support delivery of a development which would give wider economic benefits. Despite highlighting concerns with the Applicant over the level of affordable housing proposed to be provided as part of both applications, the Applicant's position is that given the agreed lack of viability for the scheme to provide affordable housing, then it is this offer which they wish to be considered as part of the wider determination of both planning applications.

7.4.10 Given the amount of affordable housing proposed falls short of the policy requirement a deferred payment mechanism (DPM) is also proposed to be secured as part of the s106 agreement for both applications which would ensure that in the future, if any positive gains were made in viability due to for instance, lower construction costs and/or an expected uplift in values, the developer would be required to make a further financial contribution towards the provision of affordable housing within the Borough. The 'cap' for these contributions would be the equivalent financial contribution of providing 30% of the dwellings as affordable housing which is the policy compliant level of provision set out under Policy H3 within the current and emerging Local Plan.

7.4.11 The level of affordable housing proposed for both applications follows from a full and detailed review of the viability position for the proposed developments. Given the confirmed position of both developments as non-viable within the context of Planning Viability policy and guidance, the LPA is justified in accepting lower than policy compliant affordable housing for important development schemes. Whilst the level of affordable housing proposed to be provided as part of both developments is disappointing, particularly given the critical need for affordable dwellings within the Borough that is identified in the support text (paragraph 4.4.19) to Policy H3, Officers consider the offer to be adequate given the verified unviable nature of both proposals in respect of providing affordable housing and also taking into account the deferred payment mechanism that means the Council would share in any positive change in the viability position of both developments. At the time of writing, the precise nature of the DPM is still being discussed and agreed with the applicant and this matter will be covered in the Update Report.

5 Transport and Highways

7.5.1 Policies TR1 (Achieving the Transport Strategy), TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway related matters), TR4 (Cycle Routes and Facilities) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking related matters for new development.

7.5.2 A Transport Statement has been submitted with both planning applications.

7.5.3 Both the YHP1 and YHP2 application sites are located to the south of Reading Town Centre. Reading Station is an less than a 10 minute walk to the north of the site and Yield Hall Place to the east provides access to London Street and the IDR/A329 (Queens

Road). The existing The Oracle shopping centre has access to two public car parks, the Riverside Car Park (1611 Spaces) and the Holy Brook Car Park (595 Spaces), which are directly adjacent to the application sites.

Sustainable Travel

Walking Accessibility

- 7.5.4 Both application sites are situated in the Reading Central Area and are ideally located to encourage walking from a large population catchment for retail and leisure activities as well as providing access to town centre jobs for residents. The extent of the Reading Central Area is largely accessible within a 10-minute walk from both sites, while areas of Caversham, Coley, and East Reading are within a 20-minute walk, along with access to multiple transport hubs including bus stops and Reading Railway Station.
- 7.5.5 The site is surrounded by footways on all surrounding streets, along the river and users of the site will also be able to walk through The Oracle shopping centre when open.

Cycling Accessibility

- 7.5.6 There are several signed cycle routes located on the roads surrounding the YHP1 and YHP2 application sites. The NCN 422 and town centre route consists of a shared footway/cycleway and intersects the site running along the southern side of the River Kennet and riverside area to the north of the YHP2 site. To the south of Yield Hall Place 2 adjacent to the site along Mill Lane and the IDR the northern footway is also a shared footway/cycleway. These routes connect to the extended cycle network of Reading which consists of a mixture of traffic-free cycle routes and on-road cycles routes. This network connects the site to Reading Town centre and key destinations including Reading Railway Station.
- 7.5.7 Beyond the immediate centre of Reading, some dedicated cycle routes are present on the main routes into Reading, including along Oxford Road and Portman Road to the west; A33 to the south; and routes through Caversham and across Caversham Bridge and Christchurch Bridge to the north. The Transport Statement submitted with the applications illustrates that the majority of the Borough is within a 20-minute cycle of the site, assuming a cycle speed of 16 kph. This therefore confirms that the site can be reasonably accessed from Caversham, Southcote, Whitley Wood, and Woodley by bicycle.
- 7.5.8 The Oracle shopping centre as a whole as existing has cycle parking provision able to accommodate 230 bicycles as is confirmed via a cycle audit undertaken by the Applicant as part of their Transport Statement. These are located around The Oracle site and would be available for visitors of the proposed development to utilise, with photos within the Transport Statement confirming that there is ample spare capacity. It should however be noted that 8 of the cycle parking spaces are associated with the former residential flats within The Oracle and as per the original planning permission for the shopping centre are required to be retained and therefore cannot be counted towards the commercial parking provision. Some of the cycle parking areas are not ideal and this is reviewed further within the cycle parking section of this report below. It is also noted that as part of planning application 230682 that the planning conditions for the original development of the site were reviewed and condition 68 that deals with cycle parking specifies that 230 cycles parking spaces are to be provided for visitors and 30 for staff.
- 7.5.9 As part of the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals the Applicant has provided details of how the proposals will deal with this current shortfall of 38 cycle parking spaces which includes the provision of a further 10 cycle spaces within the public realm areas around YHP2, details of which are considered to be acceptable by RBC Transport Officers. In addition to this a further 28 cycle spaces are proposed along the Bridge Street elevation of the Oracle which would be in addition to those required as part of the wider Oracle provision.

After an on-site assessment by RBC Transport Officers there is considered to be scope in front of the Bridge Street elevation of The Oracle to provide these spaces and therefore Officers are satisfied that details of this can be secured by way of planning conditions for both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals, with the additional cycle parking spaces provided as part of whichever development is implemented first. The land to the Bridge Street elevation where the cycle parking spaces would be located are within the 'blue line' application area and land under the control of the Applicant and therefore securing these details by way of condition is considered to be an appropriate method.

Bus Accessibility

7.5.10 The Oracle is located within a short walking distance of numerous strategic bus routes which connect the town centre with destinations across Reading Borough and beyond. There are multiple bus stops within walking distance of the site on Minster Street, Bridge Street and Kings Road etc. These services provide access to the wider region, including Newbury and Wokingham, along with other transport nodes such as Reading Railway Station.

Rail Accessibility

7.5.11 The site is located close to the Reading Railway Station which is a national transport hub. Reading Railway Station is used by approximately 17 million passengers per year (2019 figures) and is the ninth busiest station outside London and second busiest 'interchange station' outside of London. Reading Railway Station underwent a phase of expansion and modernization between 2009 and 2014, adding five new platforms and improving the station facilities and interchanges.

7.5.12 It is concluded that both application sites are located in a location which would facilitate sustainable travel.

YHP1 - Pedestrian and Cycle Access

7.5.13 The Transport Statement sets out that the proposals have been designed to take advantage of its existing location adjacent to the River Kennet, with principal entrances located on the riverside connecting to the existing footpaths within The Oracle. Additional points of access for YHP1 are also provided directly onto Yield Hall Place which facilitates access to the cycle parking. A new entrance into The Oracle from the riverside is also proposed which will enhance the connectivity through the shopping centre to other parts of the town centre.

7.5.14 RBC Transport Officers consider that the existing location of the service entrance to The Oracle on Yield Hall Place does not aid those pedestrians that are partially sighted or completely blind. As part of the proposals, servicing to YHP1 is proposed to take place from this section of Yield Hall Place with turning also being undertaken more frequently creating more potential conflict with pedestrians and cyclists. As a result, the proposals include provision of a widened footway along Yield Hall Place. Although street trees are proposed within the scheme to this part of the public realm, an acceptable footway width between the trees and cycle parking would still be provided which is in excess of the minimum 2m. The scheme therefore facilitates a safe alternative for pedestrians away from vehicle movements which satisfies the Highway Authority.

7.5.15 At the junction of Yield Hall Place and Minster Street, the proposed YHP1 on-site public realm scheme includes an alteration to remove the existing gate barrier and instead provide bollards at the entrance to this junction. The Highway Authority considers this to be an acceptable change given that the existing infrastructure makes movement for pedestrians and cyclists problematic. The alignment of the proposed bollards has been reviewed to ensure a continuous 1.8m wide footway in line with the footways to the east and west is provided with the bollards set back 450mm from the kerb edge which is deemed acceptable. It should be added that Yield Hall Place does permit cycling and as

such the proposed bollards have been provided with a minimum spacing of 1.5m, this would also aid those in wheelchairs or have other mobility aids and as such is compliant with adopted highway design standards.

YHP2 – Pedestrian and Cycle Access

7.5.16 As with YHP1, the proposals have been designed to take advantage of the sites existing location adjacent to the River Kennet, with principal entrances located on the riverside connecting to the existing footpaths within The Oracle. Additional points of access for YHP2 are also provided directly onto Mill Lane/the IDR which facilitates secondary access to the residential as well as cycle parking, plant and refuse storage for the most easterly proposed commercial unit. The proposed YHP2 on-site public realm works include the planting of new trees along the footway to the south of the site fronting onto the IDR. The location of these proposed trees is considered to be acceptable from a technical Highways perspective and all trees to the carriageway edge would be fastigiate (upright) to avoid conflict with vehicles. The pedestrian access arrangements for the proposed residential and commercial units is considered to be acceptable.

7.5.17 Access to the residents' cycle parking within YHP2 has been redesigned by the Applicant to provide two cycle stores, one accessed from the Riverside and another from the IDR. This has resulted in provision of 126 cycle parking spaces (112 stacked + 14 Sheffield spaces) which exceeds the minimum required provision of 115 cycle parking spaces for the proposed development. These cycle spaces are distributed approximately 50/50 between the stores and advice from RBC Transport Officers is that this is acceptable .

7.5.18 An existing shared footway/cycleway is located through The Oracle along the northern riverside boundary of YHP2. The Transport Statement and technical assessments submitted with the application demonstrate that the proposed public realm works to the riverside area of YHP2 would ensure that compliant widths to the shared footway/cycleway are retained. The existing cycle route along the southern IDR boundary of YHP2 is currently in the region of 2.4m wide and does not comply with adopted standards which require a width of 3m. The Transport Statement submitted with the application states that the proposals would facilitate a wider minimum width of 3.5m for this cycle route. RBC Transport Officers do not agree with this statement given the presence of existing and proposed trees and street furniture either side of the route reduce the usable width of the route. However, the majority of the route within the application site exceeds 4m in width, sufficient to accommodate a shared footway/cycleway, with narrowing below 3.5m for short distances only resulting in an overall improvement compared to the existing situation and as such is considered to be acceptable to facilitate a shared cycle/pedestrian route. All doors for buildings adjacent to the cycle routes within the site, apart from fire doors, would open inwards so as to not interfere with movement.

YHP1 and YHP2 - Vehicular Access / Car Parking

7.5.19 Vehicular access to The Oracle is not proposed to change from its existing arrangement. Visitors to the site (mainly shoppers) will continue to use the Riverside or Holy Brook public car parks. The Transport Statement identifies that the YHP1 proposals would result in a reduction of 38 car parking spaces to the Holy Brook Car Park. This reduction is considered to be acceptable given the remaining level of on-site visitor parking at The Oracle within both the Holy Brook and Riverside Car Parks. Plans have been submitted which demonstrate that there would be no detrimental impacts in terms of vehicle circulation, tracking and pedestrian routes around the car park as a result of the proposed reduction in spaces.

7.5.20 All the residential units within both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals would be car-free and not allocated with car parking. However, to ensure that residents still have access to a car should they wish, four spaces within the existing car parks will be converted to car-

club spaces in accordance with adopted RBC Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011) to serve both sites. This will allow residents to use a car when needed for trips that are not possible by other modes of transport. As per the recommendation boxes for both applications at the top of this report it is proposed that the location and details of the future car-club bays and details of car club provider can be secured via the s106 agreements for both applications. Whilst the provision of car clubs will likely result in the reduction of further parking bays this is deemed to be acceptable by RBC Transport Officers given the overall level of parking available.

YHP1 and YHP2 Trip Generation

7.5.21 The applicant has modelled the trip generation of both proposals for all the proposed residential and commercial uses and the Highway Authority is satisfied that the proposals either individually or cumulatively will not result in any increase in trips or detrimental impact across the transport network.

YHP1 and YHP2 - Cycle Parking

7.5.22 The cycle parking provision for the development has been informed by the Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011). Residential cycle parking is provided within both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals in the form of double-tier josta bike racks and Sheffield stands with 120 spaces within YHP1 and 126 spaces within YHP2 which is in excess of the Council's required standards. No additional parking cycle parking is proposed for the commercial uses within both proposed developments which is considered to be acceptable given the significant existing provision at The Oracle (158 spaces).

7.5.23 The existing public realm areas around YHP1 currently accommodate 29 external Sheffield cycle parking stands for visitors and 22 similar spaces exist within the public realm areas of the YHP2 site in various locations. The same level of provision is proposed to be re-provided for both proposed developments in the form of new Sheffield stands. Based upon the RBC Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011) 94 staff cycle parking spaces are required across both developments. Given the existing provision of cycle parking far exceeds this and that the proposals result in an overall reduction in commercial floor space at both sites no additional cycle parking is considered to be required as a result of the proposed developments.

YHP1 - Delivery, Servicing & Refuse Strategy

7.5.24 The commercial elements of the YHP1 proposals are proposed to be serviced from a combination of existing service locations as set out below:

- Refuse collection and deliveries for the proposed uses within the retained floor space is to take place from the main servicing area on site as per the previous Debenhams store.
- Refuse for the proposed flexible commercial unit is to be collected by the onsite management team and transported to the main servicing area as per the current arrangement for the adjacent Comptoir Libanais restaurant. Deliveries would take place from the loading bay on Yield Hall Place.
- Refuse collection for the proposed co-working space is to be stored in an adjacent dedicated refuse store and collected from the adjacent loading bay on Yield Hall Place from where deliveries for the co-working space would take place.
- Refuse collection and deliveries for the proposed residential units would also take place from the adjacent loading bay on Yield Hall Place

7.5.25 The application is accompanied by plans to demonstrate that the loading bay on Yield Hall Place is acceptable to the Highway Authority in terms of size and location and that it can accommodate access by vehicles of appropriate sizes for both small and bulky

deliveries and collections, including refuse collection vehicles. The proposed refuse collection and servicing arrangements for YHP1 are considered to be acceptable.

YHP2 - Delivery, Servicing & Refuse Strategy

7.5.26 It is proposed that the YHP2 proposals would be serviced from two dedicated areas. Bulky deliveries and refuse collections for the proposed YHP2 residential units will be made from the existing servicing area, accessed from Mill Lane adjacent to the western façade. This bay, as well as the adjacent service yard located under the Riverside Car Park will continue to be used by the proposed cinema and restaurant units for refuse collections as is the case with the current occupiers.

7.5.27 The refuse stored within the eastern and central residential stores and the eastern retail store would have to be transported 90m-100m and 5m-60m along the Mill Lane footway/cycleway to the collection point. The bins are proposed to be transported by way of a pedestrian bin tug or tow tug. This method could create conflict with pedestrians and cyclists; however, given that the proposals facilitate for provision of an improved compliant pedestrian / cycle route along the IDR to the south of the YHP2 building then the Highway Authority has confirmed that this method of transport the bins to the collection point would be acceptable. This is on the basis that the tug is pulled manually and is not a mechanically driven tug, the details of which can be secured through a condition.

7.5.28 Technical drawings have been submitted with the application which demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Highway Authority that the servicing bay and refuse collection point to the west elevation of YHP2 are acceptable in terms of size and location and can be suitably accessed by vehicles of the necessary sizes, including refuse collection vehicles.

7.5.29 All servicing and deliveries for YHP2 will be accommodated in the western loading bay. To ensure that the western loading bay can accommodate servicing for all of YHP2, a capacity modelling exercise has been completed by the applicant. This has been reviewed by RBC Transport Officers who confirm that they are satisfied that the loading bay has capacity to service all of YHP2. It is noted that in the scenario that the western loading bay is fully occupied, when a servicing vehicle arrives, there is a holding area, to the west under the car park exit ramp, where vehicles can wait and loop around once space has become available.

7.5.30 The YHP2 proposals originally incorporated an additional kerbside drop off bay on the IDR to the south of the YHP2 building intended to facilitate smaller/quick deliveries associated with the proposed residential dwellings. However, this bay was considered unacceptable by RBC Transport Officer due to concerns that there were insufficient measures to dissuade larger vehicles for more substantial deliveries from using the bay which would not be appropriate. As such this kerbside drop off bay has been removed from the proposed plans. However, removal of this bay as created potential for ad hoc vehicles mounting the kerb and unsafely parking in this location. The Applicant has put forward a proposals to combat this which includes provision of kassel or terif kerbs to prevent mounting of the kerb. The principle of this is accepted by the Highway Authority with detailed plans and agreement to a s278 highway works agreement to provide the works to be secured as part of the s106 agreement for the YHP2 development.

7.5.31 Fire tender access for both YHP1 and YHP2 is considered to be acceptable.

YHP1 and YHP2 - Delivery, Servicing & Refuse Strategy Trip Generation

7.5.32 The applicant has undertaken an assessment of the proposed trip generation relating solely to the servicing of both developments which concludes that such trips would not have a detrimental impact upon operation of and can be accommodated by the existing highway network. This assessment has been reviewed by RBC Transport Officers who consider it to have been carried out to an appropriate standards and that the findings are acceptable.

Highway Landscaping

7.5.33 The location and type of all proposed street trees have been confirmed and as these are to be fastigate. The applicant has assessed the impact of the trees alongside the surrounding Highway infrastructure and considers that trees would not detrimentally impact the visibility to any of the highway signage or signal heads apart from the directional signage located along the southern boundary of YHP2. The Applicant has submitted a drawing which proposes that this directional signage could be relocated west of its current position so that it is no longer obstructed by the proposed trees and this has been deemed an acceptable proposals by the Highway Authority. A requirement for the applicant to enter a s278 highway works agreement to carry out this works it proposed to be secured as part of the s106 agreement for YHP2.

7.5.34 The low level herbaceous planters proposed to the crossing Island at the junction of London Street and the IDR (Queens Road) are shown on the proposed plans to be set back 450mm from the kerb edge and to be flush to the ground (i.e. not a raised planter edge). Subject to a condition to secure that planting to this planter is low level only, it is not considered that this planter would adversely impact upon visibility of pedestrians and cyclists using the adjacent uncontrolled crossing.

7.5.35 All landscaping on the Highway would be handed over to the Highway Authority to maintain and as such this will incur appropriate fees through a S278 Agreement (secured via the s106 agreement for both applications).

YHP1 and YHP2 Travel Plan

7.5.36 A Framework Travel Plan has been submitted for both applications which outlines appropriate measures to encourage sustainable and non-car modes of travel for visitors to both sites. A detailed Travel Plan will also be required for both developments which is recommended to be secured by way of conditions for both applications.

YHP2 - Public Highway Matters

7.5.37 It is noted that the existing Public Highway extends to within the existing building line of The Oracle within the YHP2 site and as such this must be rationalised as part of any planning application and areas of Highway not usable for Highway purposes need to be formally 'stopped up'. Figure 66 below shows the extent of the existing Public Highway within the existing building.



Figure 66 – Extent of existing public highway to be stopped up shown shaded blue

7.5.38 It is not clear to Planning or Transport Officers why this stopping up did not take place during the construction of The Oracle 25 years ago. The drawing in figure 66 above shows the proposed area of stopping up and considered to be acceptable. As shown in the recommendation box for the YHP2 application at the top of this report stopping up of the Public Highway in this location is proposed to be secured as part of the section 106 legal agreement for this application.

YHP2 - Street Lighting Matters

7.5.39 There is an existing high mast street lighting column in the south east corner of the YHP2 site which will result in an unacceptable relationship with the proposed residential units to the upper floors of the south and east elevations of YHP2. The Applicant has considered that this would not result in a detrimental impact upon the residential occupiers, however, the Highway Authority advises that the existing high mast generates a lux level of between 50-100 lux, which would be well in excess of the permitted light spill levels into residential properties which is just 5 lux.

7.5.40 The applicant has stated the proposal will include the provision of blackout blinds which are designed to block external light from entering a room. However, officers advise that this is not considered to be an acceptable solution and the introduction of residential dwellings in this location needs to properly deal with the issue. Therefore, the section 106 obligations for the YHP2 proposal include a requirement for the Applicant to enter into a s278 agreement to submit and agree a scheme for replacement of the high lighting mast with standards lighting columns in this location and around the IDR to provide the same extent of illumination to the IDR but at a lower level so as to not impact of the proposed residential windows. The Applicant would be fully responsible for the costs of this agreement and associated works.

7.5.41 In summary, with the required conditions, obligations and highways agreements, both applications are considered to be suitable in transport terms.

6. Flooding and the Natural Environment

Flooding

7.6.1 Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems) states that development will be directed to areas at lowest risk of flooding and that where development in areas at risk of flooding is necessary it will not reduce the capacity of the flood plain, impede flow of flood water or in any way increase risks to life and property arising from flooding and that wherever possible should be designed to reduce flood risk both on and off-site. All major developments are also required to incorporate SuDS to ensure that, as a minimum, run-off rates are no greater than existing conditions of the site.

7.6.2 Both applications are accompanied by a detailed Flood Risk Assessment (FRA). This identifies that the majority of both application sites and all areas where buildings are proposed are located within Flood Zone 1 which, as outlined in the National Planning Practice Guidance, is land at the lowest risk of flooding but that there are small areas of land within both sites along the banks of the River Kennet, which dissects the sites, that are located within Flood Zone 2 (land at a medium probability of flooding) and Flood Zone 3 (land at a high probability of flooding). As per National (NPPF chapter 14 – Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change) and Local Planning Policy and Guidance, development should be directed to areas at the lowest risk of flooding and both proposals are considered to satisfy this requirement with all new proposed buildings (both residential and commercial uses) as well as all routes for safe ingress and egress to the buildings located within Flood Zone 1. Modelling also confirms that no part of either site is located within the modelled flood plain given the topography of the river channel is such that all flood plain areas are contained within the river bank.

7.6.3 The Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) submitted with both applications has been reviewed by the Environment Agency (EA) who are a Statutory Consultee for developments such as the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals which are located within 20m of a main river. The EA have confirmed that the FRA has been carried out to an appropriate standard, and they are satisfied with its findings and as such they do not object to either application on flood risk grounds, subject that finished floor levels of both developments are set no lower than 38.15 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), to safeguard the development from flooding events associated with possible future climate change. This condition is considered necessary for both developments in order to protect future occupiers from flooding and to ensure compliance with Policy EN18.

Drainage

7.6.4 The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) currently objects to both applications because the submitted SuDS proposals fail to demonstrate that the developments would not result in run-off rates from both sites that reflect greenfield conditions nor a rate which is not greater than the existing run off rates for both sites as required by Policy EN18. The Applicant has been asked to address this matter for both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposed developments and officers will provide an update on this matter via an update report or at the committee meeting.

7.6.5 The EA have also commended in regard to SuDS for both developments and have identified that any future detailed SuDS proposals need to ensure that water quality measures are taken into consideration and incorporate mitigation to prevent contaminant runoff arising from hardstanding areas impacting upon water quality within the Kennet. Should the Applicant provide information to satisfy the LLFA concerns discussed above regarding run off rates then it is recommended that details of the water quality mitigation measures within the SuDS proposals as required by the EA be secured by way of conditions for both proposed developments.

Ecology and Biodiversity

7.6.6 The river Kennet runs between the two application sites and is identified as a significant Green Link through the Central Area and also a Priority Habitat area in accordance with Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and The Green Network) which requires such features to be maintained, protected, consolidated, extended and enhanced. Given the proximity of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals to the river, they will have an effect upon species and their habitats. The applications are accompanied by detailed ecological surveys which conclude that both proposed developments are unlikely to directly impact upon priority habitats or protected species within either site; however pigeons are recorded as nesting on the roof of the buildings and vegetation on the sites is likely to support nesting birds. The RBC Ecology Adviser is satisfied that the ecology surveys have been carried out to an appropriate standard and recommends a condition for both proposals to require that any demolition or vegetation clearance is carried out outside of the bird nesting season (March – August) unless a suitably qualified ecologist is present on site for the duration of works to check whether nesting birds are present.

7.6.7 There is also potential for both sites to be traversed by a range of protected and priority species which utilise the environment within the river channel, and this includes otters and bats. Both proposed developments have potential to impact upon the habitats within the river channel during both construction and operational phases as a result of contamination/pollution, such as surface run-off, noise, dust or littering, overshadowing by the proposals tall buildings, external lighting, increased footfall close to the river, disturbance of nesting birds and wildlife resting places.

7.6.8 In terms of construction phase impacts, the BC Ecology Adviser and the EA recommend a condition for both proposals to secure submission and approval of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) prior to commencement of each development to demonstrate measures to protect both wildlife and the environment of the River Kennet

from deterioration during construction. With regard to the operational phase of both proposed developments, it is considered that this would be largely the same as the existing situation at The Oracle, with active commercial uses located directly either side of the river channel. Both applications are accompanied by a range of ecological enhancements including street level public realm and roof terrace level nature landscaping, including new tree planting, biodiverse green roofs to flat roof areas not used as terraces as well as a variety of bird and bat boxes including those specifically designed for Swifts, Black Redstarts and a Peregrine Falcon nest box. Full details of the proposed ecological enhancements would be secured by condition for both applications including to require, as a minimum, provision of 25 integrated bat boxes and 50 integrated bird boxes for each development. A further condition is also recommended to ensure that all new external lighting proposed as part of each development is wildlife friendly.

7.6.9 The EA initially raised an objection to both applications over concerns that the proposed tall building elements would overshadow and adversely impact the river and its in-channel vegetation. In response the Applicant carried out a River Condition Assessment which identified that in-channel vegetation to the section of the river which runs through The Oracle is very limited. The Applicant also carried out a Daylight Impact Assessment on the river which shows that as existing the part of the river that passes through The Oracle receives 2+ hours of sunlight for 96% of its area and that as a result of the proposals when considered on a worst case scenario (i.e. cumulative impact of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals) 2+ hours of sunlight would be received to 92% of its area, concluding that no significant adverse impact from the proposals is considered to result. The EA, following review of both the River Condition Assessment and Daylight Impact Assessment, have removed their objection to both proposed developments, subject to a condition being applied to both proposals to require submission and approval of a landscape and ecological management plan to detail long term (up to 30 years) management and maintenance responsibilities for all proposed soft landscaping and ecological enhancement works, including details of treatment of site boundaries around water bodies. This condition, together with other ecological conditions explained above are considered reasonable to ensure that the proposals deliver long term ecological benefits to both sites and preserve and enhance the Green Link (River Kennet) in accordance with Policies EN12 and EN11 (Waterspaces).

7.6.10 It should be noted that both proposals would require an Environmental Permit to be obtained from the Environment Agency under the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2016 which is separate to the planning application process and may place additional requirements upon the developer in terms impacts upon the River Kennet. An informative can advise the applicant of this.

7.6.11 Both applications were submitted prior to biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements becoming a statutory requirement for new development. Nonetheless Policy EN12 requires that all development demonstrates that it would not result in a net loss in biodiversity and should wherever possible result in a net gain. The applications are accompanied by BNG assessments which as a result of the existing dominance of built form and lack of vegetation cover and the proposed new landscaping and ecological enhancements described above, demonstrate that both applications would each result in an on-site net gain in biodiversity of over 100%. The BNG assessments submitted have been reviewed by the RBC Ecology Adviser who is satisfied that they have been carried out to an appropriate standard and demonstrate compliance of both proposed developments with Policy EN12, subject to the required enhancements being delivered.

Trees and Landscaping

7.6.12 A Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment have been submitted in support of both applications. Within and adjacent to both application sites there are a total of 35 trees and 3 groups. 2 of the trees identified are Category A trees (trees of high quality), 32 of the trees identified and the 3 tree groups are Category B trees (trees of moderate quality) and 1 tree is a Category C tree (of low quality).

7.6.13 The YHP1 proposals would result in loss of 3 x Category B trees and 1 x Category C tree to facilitate the proposed new buildings and public realm works, whilst the YHP2 proposals would result in loss of 2 x B Category trees. The RBC Natural Environment Officer recommends a condition to secure a detailed Arboricultural Method Statement for both proposals prior to the commencement of development, including any demolition works, to demonstrate that all other existing trees that are proposed to be retained will be suitably protected during demolition, construction and future operation of both developments. It is noted that proposed underground servicing details (pipes, cables etc.) are not yet known for both developments, which could have an impact on the ability to retain trees, and as such this information is required to be included within the Arboricultural Method Statement and the proposed conditions will be worded accordingly.

7.6.14 As discussed in the Public Realm section of this report above (Section 3 of this Appraisal), both proposals incorporate extensive soft landscaping schemes both to public realm areas on and surrounding the sites at riverside, to Yield Hall Place and the IDR (Queens Road) and at roof level to the large roof terrace areas that are proposed. For the YHP1 proposals this includes the planting of 25 trees within the street level public realm areas within the site, resulting in a net gain of 21 public realm trees; whilst the YHP2 proposals include the planting of 27 trees; resulting in a net gain of 25 public realm trees. Across both proposals there are also 47 ornamental roof garden trees proposed, resulting in a significant net gain in trees for both proposed developments. Extensive soft landscaped planters are also proposed at street and roof level.

7.6.15 The proposed landscaping for both applications would satisfy the requirements of Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) which requires that the Borough's vegetation cover is extended and also contributes towards meeting the aims Borough's Tree Strategy (2021) which identifies Abbey Ward as having low tree canopy coverage and seeks that this is increased. Note is also given to (new) emerging Policy EN19 (Urban Greening Factor) within the Local Plan Partial Update (2025) and draft Town Centre Public Realm Strategy (2025) which heightens the need for a soft landscape-led approach to development. The RBC Natural Environment Officer is satisfied with the diversity of tree planting indicated in the proposed landscaping strategy. It is however concerning that as the position and extent of proposed underground services for both proposals is not yet known, this could reduce the viability of locations for proposed landscaping in terms of available soil volumes and therefore conditions are recommended for both applications to secure detailed landscaping proposals including locations of all underground services. Further conditions are also recommended to secure retention of all trees on both sites other than those proposed for removal, given the paucity of canopy cover identified within Abbey Ward and in line with requirements of the EA, details of a landscape and ecological management plan are also required for both developments.

7. Amenity Matters

7.7.1 Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) and CR6 (Living in Central Reading) seek to protect the amenity of existing surrounding and future occupiers. Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) seeks to protect surrounding and future occupiers from the impacts of pollution, including contamination. Policy CR10 (Tall Buildings) also seeks that that new development ensures adequate levels of daylight and sunlight are able to reach buildings and spaces within the development and avoid significant negative impacts on existing residential properties and the public realm in terms of outlook, privacy, daylight, sunlight, noise, light glare and wind.

7.7.2 Both application sites are separated by from existing nearby residential properties by roads and there are no directly adjacent residential uses to either site but both proposals seek to introduce significant new residential blocks. The impact on both existing surrounding and future occupiers of both developments must be considered.

Daylight Sunlight and Overshadowing

Existing Occupiers

7.7.3 The applications are accompanied by a daylight, sunlight and overshadowing report which considers the impacts of both proposals upon existing surrounding residential properties in relation to the standard Building Research Establishment (BRE) guidelines. The report has been carried out on a 'worse case' scenario basis and considers the cumulative impacts of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals. Due to the technical nature of the report, this has been independently reviewed on behalf of the LPA by a specialist daylight, sunlight and overshadowing consultant (BRE themselves). The report has identified the following nearby properties as potential sensitive receptors that could be impacted by the proposed developments:

- New Century Place, East Street (student accommodation)
- George Hotel, Minster Street (upper floor hotel accommodation)
- Dukesbridge Chambers, Duke Street (office accommodation)
- Townsend House, Crosslands Road (supported living accommodation)
- 33 London Street (upper floor hotel accommodation)
- 35 London Street (upper floor flats)
- 46 London Street (upper floor flats)
- 48 London Street (upper floor flats)
- Garner Hotel, 4-8 Duke Street (upper floor hotel accommodation)

7.7.4 In terms of daylight, the report makes three assessments. The first is of Vertical Sky Component (VSC) which measures the percentage of the total unobstructed view that is available once the development is placed within the view, calculated from the centre of a window, measuring the amount of light available following the introduction of the new buildings. A further assessment relates to No Sky Line (NSL)/Daylight Distribution (DD). The NSL/DD assessment divides those areas of the room which can receive direct sky light from those which cannot. If a significant area of the room lies beyond the NSL/DD (i.e. it receives no direct sky light), then the distribution of daylight in the room will be poor). The Annual Probable Sunlight Hours (APSH) is also used which measures the average total number of sunlight hours received at the centre of a habitable room window across the year.

7.7.5 The independent review of the daylight sunlight and overshadowing report advises that the applicant's report has been carried out to an appropriate standard using relevant methodologies. The review agrees that the proposed developments would not have a significant adverse impact in terms of the VSC assessment and all properties assessed would continue to meet BRE guidelines in this respect. In terms of the NSL/DD assessment, the review concludes that there would be a minor adverse impact to 1 x studio apartment (student accommodation) to the ground floor of New Century Place as a result of the YHP2 proposals but all other rooms within New Century Place and other buildings would not be adversely affected. The review notes that the impact to the single studio apartment affected is as a result of the deep nature of the room itself, which means it will always be difficult to not impact upon NSL. In terms of the APSH assessment, no adverse impacts are identified on existing surrounding properties. In terms of overshadowing, the independent review confirms that all existing amenity areas surrounding the site will exceed BRE targets and will retain good levels of sunlight. In overall terms, no significant adverse impacts to existing surrounding properties are identified in terms of daylight and sunlight receipt and overshadowing when considering the proposals on a 'worst-case' cumulative basis. Although separate studies have not been submitted, officers consider that it is reasonable to conclude that if only one of the proposals were implemented, then impacts would either remain the same or more likely lessen.

Proposed Occupiers of YHP1 and YHP2

7.7.6 The daylight, sunlight and overshadowing report also considers the standard of accommodation to be provided for future occupiers of the proposed developments in the context of relevant BRE guidelines. This part of the report also has been independently reviewed on behalf of the LPA by a specialist daylight, sunlight and overshadowing consultant (BRE) who conclude that the report provided by the Applicant has been carried out to an appropriate standard. The reports have been carried out on a 'worst-case' scenario basis and consider the cumulative impacts of both proposals.

7.7.7 The independent review concludes that 73% of the habitable rooms across both proposed developments will receive adequate levels of daylight. Where habitable rooms fall short of BRE standards in terms of receipt of daylight this largely relates to various dwellings spread across both developments that are located to the lower floors facing the other blocks and which have windows positioned beneath projecting balconies. With this in mind BRE agree with the applicant's daylight sunlight consultant that these units would overall still receive good levels of daylight. The independent review agrees with the findings of the Applicant's report in that the levels of daylight receipt for both proposed developments are in line with expectations for large scale high density town centre development with balconies and that overall, both proposals demonstrate that that they would receive adequate daylight in line with BRE guidelines.

7.7.8 In terms of receipt of sunlight, the independent review concludes that 42% of habitable rooms across both developments will receive levels of sunlight in line with BRE criteria. Where habitable rooms fall short of the BRE standards for receipt of sunlight advice from the independent review is that this is largely in relation to dwellings across both developments which do not have a main living space window orientated within 90 degrees of south which means adequate sunlight to these spaces is less achievable and that in these circumstances, BRE guidance accepts that such spaces will be unable to receive adequate levels of sunlight. The independent review carried out on behalf of the LPA concludes that levels of sunlight receipt being achieved for both proposed developments are in-line with the expectation for what can be achieved for large-scale high-density town centre developments.

7.7.9 Whilst BRE advise that the overall both developments, perform relatively well in terms of receipt of daylight and sunlight for future occupiers, the finding that just over a quarter of the dwellings proposed across both developments would receive levels of daylight below recommended standards is disappointing. Albeit BRE's view that the impact dwellings would still receive good level of daylight provides reassurance. Officers consider that as a result of competing demands upon the developments there is a degree of inevitability that some dwellings would be impacted given the orientation of some elevations of the buildings and because the buildings incorporate protruding elements, such as balconies, which have benefits in their own right but also invariably reduce access to daylight. Officers conclude that access to daylight for future occupiers of some dwellings is a shortfall of both proposals and a disbenefit of the developments which will fall to be considered as part of the planning balance assessment for both applications.

7.7.10 The Applicant has also carried out an overshadowing assessment in relation to the public realm areas surrounding both sites as well as the proposed podium and roof level amenity terrace areas. BRE guidance is that open spaces should receive at least 2 hours of direct sunlight across 50% of their area each day. The independent review concludes that at both the March Equinox (the part of the year when day and night are most equal in length so the best average representation of overshadowing throughout the year) and Summer Solstice (when the sun is at the highest point in the sky and when outdoor spaces are most likely to be used) all public realm and terrace areas would meet BRE criteria and that it can be concluded that these spaces would receive adequate sunlight throughout the year. It is considered that these spaces would provide high quality areas of communal outdoor space and access to sunlight for residents of both proposed developments.

7.7.11 It is not considered that the YHP1 or YHP2 proposals would result in any significant impact upon existing surrounding occupiers in terms of loss of daylight or overshadowing. Access

to daylight for future occupiers of the developments is a slight concern to some (around a quarter of units) and disbenefit of the proposals.

Noise and Disturbance

7.7.12 Both applications are accompanied by a noise impact assessment which considers the impact of the proposals upon future occupiers of the developments and also upon existing surrounding occupiers.

7.7.13 RBC Environmental Protection Officers have reviewed both proposed developments and the submitted noise impact assessment. Their advice is that the most significant potential impacts in terms of noise from both proposals would be noise from the existing and proposed commercial uses within The Oracle upon future occupiers of the proposed upper floor flats. The noise assessment proposes various forms of noise mitigation including glazing specifications, floor/ceiling sound insulation and a mixture of Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR), background ventilation and intermittent extract fans to address potential overheating in dwellings within parts of each development where external noise levels are likely prevent future occupiers from opening windows for ventilation at certain times of the day. RBC Environmental Protection Officers consider the proposed measures to be reasonable and appropriate to mitigate against potential noise impacts from the range of commercial uses that could occupy the proposed flexible commercial units within both developments. Submission and approval of full and final details of the noise mitigation proposals for each development would be secured by way of conditions.

7.7.14 Mindful of the range of proposed uses which could be permitted to operate within the YHP1 and YHP2 commercial units, and the considerable floorspaces involved and given the close proximity to the proposed upper floor dwellings; it is considered necessary to include an hours of use condition in respect of all commercial units to assist in protecting future occupiers from noise and disturbance, particularly spill out noise from patrons. The following hours of use for the commercial units within both YHP1 and YHP2 would be secured by way of condition:

- Monday to Saturday 08:00hours – 23:00 hours;
- Sunday, Bank Holidays 08:00 hours – 22:00 hours

7.7.15 Given the significant size of the units to be provided within the retained Debenhams floor space (1000+sqm each) a condition is recommended to be attached to require that no more than 20% of floorspace within the proposed flexible Class E and/or Sui Generis Bar units is floorspace to be for Sui Generis (bar/drinking establishment) use. Officers consider that, a solely bar use of this scale could have more intensive impact and create concerns in respect of anti-social behaviour and disturbance to existing and proposed residential occupiers.

7.7.16 This is also mindful of there already being a degree of late-night noise/disturbance which can reasonably be expected in this Central Reading / primary shopping area / central core location. With this condition secured these impacts are not envisaged to substantially worsen.

7.7.17 Notwithstanding the above, the RBC Environmental Protection Officer has identified a significant concern in respect of the proposed replacement cinema unit within YHP2 and potential noise/vibration spill to the proposed residential dwellings above. The Applicant has provided a technical note to support their noise impact assessment in respect of cinema noise. RBC Environmental Protection Officers advise that the technical note provides confidence that appropriate cinema noise mitigation can be provided and that full and final details can be secured by way of condition. Given the level of noise mitigation required will need to go beyond the level of mitigation provided to other parts of the proposed YHP2 building a separate condition is recommended to secure submission and approval of these details prior to commencement of the development of the YHP2

proposals. A similar condition is also recommended in respect of both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals to cover potential occupation of any unit as a gym.

7.7.18 A further condition is also proposed in relation to both proposals to limit deliveries/waste collection times to preclude this being possible from 23:30 – 06:00 (and from 22:30 on Sundays/Bank Holidays), in order to protect the amenity of future occupiers of the residential dwellings within both proposed developments. Also noting that this is a town centre location where the balance between providing active uses and protecting amenity must be balanced.

7.7.19 The submitted noise assessment also identified a particular existing noise impact due to machinery which regularly cleans the existing car parks at The Oracle. RBC Environmental Protection Officers have recommended a condition to secure a car park cleaning management plan to detail hours and frequency of cleaning and measures to prevent noise from the cleaning impacting upon the proposed residential occupiers of both developments. The Applicant has confirmed that that the car parks are within their ownership and control and therefore they accept a condition to secure these details.

7.7.20 In terms of noise from mechanical plant, given there would be residential dwellings to both sites, an acoustic assessment is required prior to the installation of any externally located plant. Given that the future commercial operators are unconfirmed, the applicant is seeking for a condition to prevent any externally-located mechanical plant being installed prior to a noise assessment being submitted. Officers are content with this approach, in the context of the proposals. Linked to noise matters, external cooking odour is often a significant problem from commercial kitchens and therefore an odour assessment will be required prior to any hot-food cooking premises being occupied. within both proposed developments. The reference to hot-food cooking is included as many uses within Class E could include the preparation of food with odours, not just Class E (b) restaurants. As such, the condition seeks to ensure that any odours are managed accordingly.

7.7.21 Given the distances to the nearest existing residential uses to both sites, which are all over 30m away and separated by roads, it is not considered that the YHP1 or YHP2 proposals would result in any adverse noise impacts to existing surrounding dwellings. The increase in general activity at both sites would be significant due to the introduction of such a high number of residential units. However, due to the nature of the site, in the town centre, it is not considered that there would be any undue increase in noise or disturbance for existing neighbours, especially given the distances involved.

7.7.22 Likely noise and disturbance impacts are also identified from both proposed developments at demolition and construction phase as well as a range of other impacts including from dust and vibration. These impacts may also affect new occupiers in one of the application sites from the other site, should this come forward earlier than the other. In this respect conditions are recommended to secure submission and approval of a detailed construction and demolition method statement prior to the commencement of either development to ensure suitable mitigation measures are put in place and adhere to through the development. Further conditions are also proposed to ensure all construction, demolition and associated deliveries takes place just normal daytime working hours only and that there should be no burning of waste on site which could adversely impact upon air quality.

7.7.23 Subject to the above recommended conditions it is not considered that the YHP1 or YHP2 proposals would result in any unacceptable noise impacts upon existing or proposed occupiers.

Air Quality

7.7.24 Both applications sites are located within an air quality management area (AQMA) and are accompanied by an air quality assessment which concludes that the levels of

pollutants at the new dwellings are likely to be below limit values. RBC Environmental Protection Officers consider that the assessment has been carried out to an appropriate standard and advise that subject to a condition to secure final details of the location of ventilation inlets for both developments it can be accepted that the proposals would not expose future occupiers to poor air quality. In terms of the proposed developments themselves creating air quality issues, the assessment concludes that as both proposals are to be car free, they would not have a negative impact upon air quality. This is accepted by RBC Environmental Protection Officers; however the introduction of a significant number of new residents to the area is likely to increase traffic movements, including from deliveries and taxis and therefore it is considered reasonable that some further air quality mitigation is provided by both development to mitigate for this. A condition is recommended for both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals to secure submission and approval of a scheme or air quality mitigation, which could include measures such as moss tiles or bricks which absorb contaminants and release oxygen

7.7.25 Subject to the above recommended conditions it is not considered that the proposals would result in any unacceptable impacts upon air quality and that future occupiers would not be adversely impacted by poor air quality either.

Overlooking and Privacy

7.7.26 Given the distances to the nearest existing residential uses to both sites which are all over 30m away and separated by roads, it is not considered that the YHP1 or YHP2 proposals would result in any adverse impacts in terms of overlooking or loss of privacy. Whilst both proposals are significant in terms of its height and scale, and would be visible from nearby residential properties, the distances would ensure that it would not appear directly overbearing from a residential amenity perspective in this relatively dense urban environment.

7.7.27 Proposed upper floor residential windows would face each other within the three blocks (C, D and E) which form the YHP2 proposals. The distance between facing window within blocks D and E (the two taller blocks) would be 19m and distances between facing windows in blocks C and D would be 16m. Policy CC8 recommends a minimum separation distance between facing habitable room windows of 20m to prevent overlooking and loss of privacy for residential occupiers. However, within the Central Area, separation distances are often slightly less than this given the higher density of developments and in this respect the separation between facing windows in blocks D and E and C and D of YHP2 is not considered to result in any detrimental living conditions for future occupiers in terms of overlooking or privacy issues or to be unusual within the Central Area. There is a small part of proposed block C that juts out and projects even closer to block D and in this location separation distances between the blocks is as close as 11m. As can be seen in figure 67 below this situation affects two or three flats only on each floor in both blocks. The impacted flats in Block C, unlike those impacted in Block D, are dual aspect and it is proposed that the windows to the relevant flats facing Block C would be obscurely glazed. This is considered to provide suitable mitigation to prevent any unacceptable overlooking or loss of privacy, whilst the dual aspect nature of the flats that would be required to have some obscurely glazed windows means that they would still be served by adequate daylight and outlook. Subject to a condition to secure relevant windows within Block C as obscurely glazed and retention of these in place, there are not considered to be an unacceptable relationships within YHP2 in terms of overlooking.



Figure 67 – YHP2 – Layout of proposed Blocks C and D

7.7.28 Between the two residential blocks (A and B) which form part of the YHP1 proposals the closest relationship between facing residential windows would be 16m which is considered adequate to prevent any detrimental impact upon the living conditions of future occupiers in terms of overlooking.

7.7.29 The relationship between the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals also needs to be considered. A large number of the proposed dwellings to the upper floors of both buildings would face each other across the river. However, at the closest point the separation distance between the two buildings would be 35m. This far exceeds the recommended 20m separation distance required within Policy CC8 to prevent overlooking and loss of privacy for residential occupiers and as such, it is not considered that there would be any unacceptable relationships between the two buildings in this respect. It is acknowledged that there is a proposed development of 170 residential dwellings within an 8 storey building on the site of the John Lewis Collection Point which borders the IDR across from the YHP2 site. Planning permission for this development was resolved to be granted at Planning Applications Committee on 8th October 2025, but the planning permission has not yet been issued because a section 106 agreement first needs to be drafted and signed. This proposal incorporates habitable room windows to its north elevation which would face the proposed habitable rooms window within the YHP2 development across the IDR. The separation distance between the proposed habitable room window in both developments would exceed 30m and as such no adverse overlooking or loss of privacy impacts are identified.

7.7.30 No significant adverse impacts are identified in respect of the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals in terms of overlooking or loss of privacy.

Standard of Accommodation to be Provided and Accessibility

7.7.31 Part a. of Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) requires that all new building housing outside of the Reading Central Area complies with the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS). The policy does not require new building housing within the Central Area to adhere to these standards. Within the YHP1 proposals 20% of the 1 bed units,

34% of the 2 bed units and 27% of the 3 bed units would fully meet the NDSS. Within YHP2 45% of the 1 bed units, 19th of the 2 bed units and 100% of the 3 bed units would fully meet the NDSS. The applicant explains that where overall unit sizes do not fully comply with NDSS, all habitable rooms (bedroom and living rooms) within these units do satisfy NDSS standards for individual rooms and that it is the absence of hallways areas and porches that cause the units overall to fall short of fully meeting the NDSS. The applicant sets out that NDSS standards do not take account of the specific characteristics of BtR accommodation, and the significant levels of communal amenity space provided as part of the scheme. Officers consider failure of a significant number of dwellings to fully comply with the NDSS is disappointing, albeit acknowledge compliance is not required by Policy H5 for new dwellings in the Central Area.

7.7.32 Both proposals incorporate a number of measures within the accommodation and landscaped areas to meet the accessibility needs of all users. A level approach/threshold would be provided to all entrances, and the main concierges and management hubs will have disabled access toilets and concierge desks will be designed in accordance with Part M of the Building Regulations. The ground floor levels have been designed to be step-free and designated apartments across all blocks will be wheelchair adaptable to meet the specific requirements of residents. Provision of a minimum of 5% of the total number of dwellings within each development as wheelchair user dwellings will be secured by way of conditions in accordance with part f. of Policy H5. Furthermore, such dwellings are also proposed to be located closest to fire escape routes. All external and internal doors and corridors will have a openings suitable for wheelchair users and all passenger lifts are also sized accordingly. Provision of and retention of lifts in good working order is proposed to be secured by way of condition for both proposed developments. An accessible w.c. will be provided within the entrance level of the apartments and all electrical switches and socket outlets will be mounted within the prescribed height limits. Both proposed developments are considered to be suitably accessible in accordance with Policy H5 and also Policy CC7 (Design and The Public Realm) which requires proposals are accessible, usable and easy to understand for all.

7.7.33 All public realm areas and entrances to residential lobby areas within both proposed developments are considered to benefit from good surveillance and access arrangements and to provide appropriate safe access for all. The Oracle has its own CCTV network, and the proposed developments would be connected to this and details are to be secured by way of conditions in respect of both developments.

7.7.34 The proposed BTR residential accommodation within both development is considered to provide an adequate standard of accommodation for future occupiers, in particular by providing access to the large podium and roof level terraces, ground floor residential lobby areas containing communal facilities, on-site 24 hour site management and maintenance services, cleaning services and pet-friendly dwellings.

External Lighting

7.7.35 As discussed within the design and public realm sections of this report (sections 2 and 3 above) both proposals would incorporate a range of external lighting features. To ensure future occupiers of both developments are not adversely impact by the proposed external lighting, a condition is recommended for each proposal to secure submission and approval of a detailed external lighting scheme to ensure all lighting is designed such that lux levels would not exceed those recommended in close proximity to residential dwellings. Subject to the recommended condition it is considered that external lighting impacts upon future occupiers at both sites can suitably managed to ensure no harm results to residential amenity.

Contaminated Land

7.7.36 A contaminated land desk study has been submitted with both applications which outlines that given the investigations and mitigation works that took place when both sites were

developed when The Oracle was first built, conditions within the ground are unlikely to be materially different to that reviewed and considered to be acceptable previously. Nonetheless, given this was some 25 years ago, conditions may have changed and also given the current proposals seek to introduce new residential occupiers to both sites, RBC Environmental Protection Officers recommend conditions are attached in relation to both proposed developments. These would secure submission, approval and implementation of contamination investigations and, if necessary, remediation schemes to ensure the sites are suitable for the proposed intended uses. The investigations need to take place after demolition and before construction and the proposed conditions will be worded accordingly to reflect this.

7.7.37 The recommended conditions would ensure that both developments would, in terms of potential contamination, be suitable for their proposed intended use.

Bin Storage

7.7.38 Policy CC5 (Waste Minimisation and Storage) requires that new developments incorporate facilities for storage of all type of waste and recycling. RBC Waste Officers have reviewed the bin storage proposals for both developments in respect of commercial and residential stores and are and are satisfied that the stores and bin collection points proposed are of suitable size to accommodate the necessary number of bins for each proposed use and development. As discussed in the Transport section of this report above (section 5) it is considered that the refuse collection arrangements proposed are also acceptable in respect of both developments. However, a condition is proposed for both developments to secure details of a refuse management strategy which will detail how all bins will be transferred between the stores and collection points to ensure the site is tidy and bins are not left at the collection points, as well as vermin control measures for all bin stores to ensure they are secure from pests.

Wind and Microclimate

7.7.39 A technical report assessing the microclimate/wind impacts of both proposed developments on future occupiers (and also nearby occupiers and future users of the area), has been submitted with the application. The assessment considers the impacts upon microclimate/wind impacts cumulatively in the event that both YH1 and YHP2 are built out and also individually in the event that one development is built and out and the other not. Given the technical nature of the report it has been independently reviewed on behalf of the LPA by a specialist consultant. Advice received from the independent review is that with either or both the proposed developments in place, the wind microclimate in and surrounding the application sites would remain suitable for the planned uses within the boundaries of best practice for wind microclimate assessments within the UK. A condition is recommended to be applied to both developments to ensure the proposals are carried out in accordance with the submitted wind/microclimate report which includes provision of appropriate safety balustrades to the edges of upper floor external terraces.

Fire Safety

7.7.40 Both the YHP1 and YHP2 applications are accompanied by a Fire Statement. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have reviewed both proposals and the Fire Statement and advise that they are content with the fire safety design for both proposals in respect of the land uses proposed. Both the HSE and the Royal Berkshire Fires and Rescue Service advise that the Applicant will need to address further matters at the later regulatory stages of the build but for the planning stage of both developments the submitted information is considered to be satisfactory. The Fire Statement outlines a number of fire safety measures for both proposals including dual stair cores for escape purposes to all blocks apart from Block C within YHP2 which is less than 18m in height and therefore the Regulations do not require a dual stair core for buildings of this height. Fire alarms and sprinklers will also be provided through the buildings within both developments.

7.7.41 Overall both individually and cumulatively, the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals are considered to provide a satisfactory standard of accommodation for future occupiers and the applications are considered to satisfactorily demonstrate that they would not result in any significant adverse impacts upon existing surrounding occupiers. Both proposals are considered to demonstrate compliance with Policies CC7, CC8, EN15, EN16, EN17, and CR10.

8. Sustainability and Energy

7.8.1 Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) requires that all new-build housing is built to high design standards. In particular, new housing should adhere to water efficiency standards in excess of the Building Regulations and achieve Zero Carbon homes standards (for major schemes), Policy CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) and Policy CC3 (Adaption to Climate Change) seeks that development proposals incorporate measures which take account of climate change. Policy CC4 (Decentralised Energy) requires developers to consider inclusion of decentralised energy infrastructure, in particular any development of more than 20 dwellings and/ or non-residential development of over 1,000 sq m shall consider the inclusion of decentralised energy provision, within the site, unless it can be demonstrated that the scheme is not suitable, feasible or viable for this form of energy provision.

7.8.2 Both applications are accompanied by a Sustainability and Energy Statement which outline have the proposals have been designed to satisfy the above policy requirements. In terms of measurable performance of the developments with regard to sustainability and energy efficiency the Sustainability and Energy Statements outline that the non-residential elements of both developments have all been designed to achieve a BREEAM Excellent standard which satisfies the requirements of Policy CC2. A series of conditions are recommended for both applications to require design stage and 'as built' final BREEAM certification to be submitted and approved to confirm the BREEAM performance of the developments achieve Excellent. The projected BREEAM performance of both proposals has been reviewed on behalf of the LPA by a specialist consultant who confirms that the projections have been carried out to an appropriate standard and are reasonable and achievable.

7.8.3 In terms of the residential elements of both applications, Policy H5 requires all new residential dwellings to achieve Zero Carbon Homes standards. In accordance with the adopted RBC Sustainability and Design SPD (2021) adherence to the Zero Carbon Homes standards requires a minimum 35% improvement in the dwelling emission rate over the 2013 Building Regulations standard, and a financial contribution towards carbon offsetting within the Borough to off-set the remaining dwelling emission rate to zero. The Building Regulations were updated in 2021 to require a higher standard dwelling emission rate performance from all dwellings which is already a 31% improvement over 2013 Building Regulations Standards. The Sustainability and Energy Statements for both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals model/predict that the proposals will both achieve over a 50% improvement in the 2021 Building Regulations emission rate which equates to an even higher performance when compared to the 2013 Building Regulations standards as required by Policy H5. A financial contribution to off-set the dwelling emission rate performance of both developments to zero is also proposed to be secured by way of s106 financial contribution obligation for both applications. A series of planning conditions are also recommended for both applications to secure design stage and as built stage final SAP assessment for all dwellings to confirm the actual performance of the developments and amount of carbon off-setting contribution required. The projected dwelling emission rate performance of both proposals has also been reviewed on behalf of the LPA by a specialist consultant who confirms that the performance projections have been carried out to an appropriate standard and are reasonable and achievable and that the LPA can have confidence that both developments will achieve a dwelling emission rate performance which exceeds the standards required by Policy H5.

7.8.4 In demonstrating compliance with the above standards, the proposals have been designed to incorporate a range of sustainable construction techniques and measures to adapt to climate change including use of sustainable and thermally efficient materials, high efficiency water fittings and the extensive on-site ecological and soft landscaping enhancements discussed earlier in this report to align with Policies CC2 and CC3. Key to achieving these standards is also provision of sources of decentralised energy within the developments in accordance with Policy CC4.

7.8.5 Initially both applications proposed that the main source of on-site decentralised energy provision for the developments would be utilising Ground Source Heat Pump (GSHP) systems which rely on underground coils or boreholes to extract latent heat from the ground, or as was proposed in this instance, from the latent water temperature heating from the adjacent River Kennet. Policy CC4 and the adopted RBC Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2021) require that all developments consider use of GSHPs first over other forms of decentralised energy, given they enable greater seasonal efficiencies.

7.8.6 However, following further investigation and consideration of the viability of GSHP, the Applicant subsequently advised that they were changing approach and instead were proposing to utilise Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) within both developments. They explain that reasons for change of approach are the timescales needed to investigate and ascertain the suitability of the local geology for use of GSHP (around 6 months) which they have not yet commissioned; and the impact this would have upon the development programme, the costs of such investigations including drilling of boreholes (£50,000 to £100,000) which they have not yet commissioned; as well as the additional timescales needed to obtain Licenses from the Environment Agency for boreholes and operation of GSHP. Given the above time and costs would be 'at risk' with no guarantee that GSHP systems can be provided, the Applicant advised that they are switching approach to utilise ASHP instead.

7.8.7 Officers (in consultation with the Council's Sustainability Manager) consider the removal of proposed GSHP systems from both developments to be disappointing given the adjacency of both sites to the river which was considered to provide an ideal source for river-based GSHP to be incorporated within the proposals. The RBC Sustainable Design and Construction SPD outlines under paragraph 8.6 that evidence should be provided at the detailed planning application stage where GSHP systems are discounted, and ASHP systems selected, with the following technical analyses included:

- Calculated system seasonal efficiency comparison;
- Evidence of any constraints on boreholes related to existing utilities or other sub-surface infrastructure;
- Borehole spatial constraints; and
- Any other technical reasons why GSHP cannot be progressed and ASHP must be taken forward as the primary heat technology.

7.8.8 The justification provided by the Applicant for moving away from provision of GSHP, advises of cost and time related issues and uncertainties more so than technical matters; which is not considered to robustly demonstrate sound technical reasons as to why GSHP is being discounted. However, the Applicant has agreed to undertake a study based upon the above technical criteria to determine whether or not it is feasible for both or either developments to incorporate GSHP using the river. This will be secured via condition for both the YHP1 and YHP1 proposals.

7.8.9 Instead, both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals propose a combination of ASHP (for heating and hot water) and photovoltaic panels to provide sources of decentralised energy. Whilst, as discussed above GSHP, is the clear policy preference, ASHP in their own right are commonly provided and considered to be an appropriate form of decentralised energy provision. In terms of photovoltaics the Energy and Sustainability Statement set out that photovoltaics would be provided to the large flat roof spaces of both YHP1 and

YHP2 with 128 panels proposed to YHP1 and 65 panels to YHP2. The proposed use of ASHP and photovoltaics together with other sustainable construction techniques and measures to adapt to climate change still ensure that the proposals meet and exceed Local Plan targets in terms of BREEAM and zero carbon homes performance of the developments.

7.8.10 Notwithstanding the above, advice of the RBC Sustainability Manager is that both application sites are ideally located for possible future connection to a Reading Centralised Heat Network. Plans for the Heat Network are at an early stage but at present include a possible network extending from the Central Area to areas beyond in a south easterly direction and with the intention to run the network from GSHP utilising the River Kennet. Following discussions with the Applicant and the RBC Sustainability Manager it seems unlikely, given the early stages of a potential Reading Centralised Heat Network, that provision and implementation of such a network within a timeframe that would align with and facilitate possible connection and linking up with the proposed YHP1 and YHP2 development would be possible within this project's timeframe. Whilst it would be unreasonable to require the developments to be paused whilst heat network rollout catches up, the Applicant has agreed to an obligation within the s106 agreements for both applications that requires a pre-commencement of development feasibility review of connecting to a Reading Centralised Heat Network, to consider whether some a connection is possible from both a timing and technical perspective. Depending on the Applicant's timeframe for implementation of both applications it could be possible that one or both of the developments could connect to the Centralised Heat Network. For instance, if YHP1 were to be implemented first and built out it could be that by the time YHP2 implementation begins the Heat Network may be more advanced to make forming a connection to the YHP2 proposals more achievable. Officers are satisfied that the

7.8.11 Overall, with the proposed level of CO2 emission reduction, thermal efficiency measures and BREEAM Excellent rating, the proposals are considered to comply with policies CC2, CC3 and H5 and achieving these standards is considered to be a benefit of both proposals. In terms of decentralised energy, the proposed s106 terms to secure a feasibility review of possible connection of both developments to a future Reading Centralised Heat Network based around GSHP and the river is welcomed and together with the on-site ASHP provision and photovoltaic panels is considered to demonstrate compliance with Policy CC4 (Decentralised Energy Provision).

Waste Minimisation

7.8.12 It is noted that The Oracle is a relatively modern development, and it is questioned whether removing large areas of the built form is a sustainable approach. Policy CC5 (Waste Minimisation and Storage) sets out that development should demonstrate measures to minimise the generation of waste in the construction, use and life of buildings and promote more sustainable approaches to waste management, including reuse and recycling of construction waste. The RBC Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019) supports a hierarchical approach to dealing with waste associated with development as shown in figure 68 below.

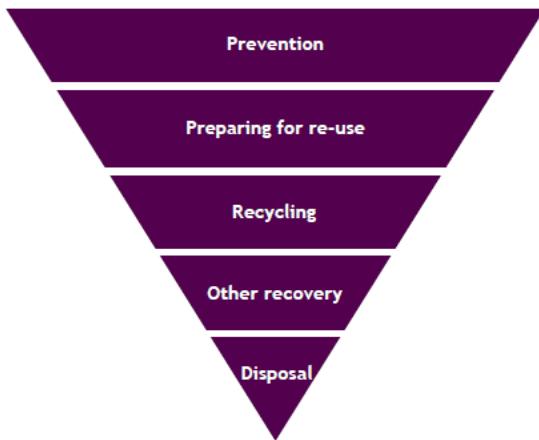


Figure 68 – Waste Hierarchy

7.8.13 As shown in the waste hierarchy from the SPD above, the preferred options for development are to prevent waste and for re-use of resources and materials. The YHP1 proposals achieve this in part by proposing to demolish only some of the existing building with the large- scale leisure and flexible commercial units to the rear of the YHP1 building to be provided by way of retention and conversion of the rear part of the existing building. Due to the nature, construction load and reinforced foundations required for the taller parts off the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals the parts of the site where these elements of both developments would be located are proposed for demolition. Notwithstanding this both applications set out that that the developments will follow the waste hierarchy principles to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill and promote recycling. It is stated that any suitable materials from demolition waste would be crushed and re-used on the site during the construction of the proposals and that off-site re-use, recycling or recovery of demolition and construction waste would also be maximised where possible with waste only being sent to landfill as a last resort if there is no alternative disposal route.

7.8.14 Both applications also state that primary construction materials to be used will include internal and external concrete, steel frame and cladding, timber, brick and tarmac which, where possible, will be sourced from the local area. All timber and wood-based products would be sustainably sourced and procured from known and legal sources, whilst recycled aggregate will be given preference over virgin aggregate, a finite resource, wherever such material can meet the required specification for use. Further details with regard to construction materials and practices and opportunities to reduce waste through management and procurement will be set out within a Site Waste Management Plan (SWMP), submission and approval of which is to be secured by way of pre-commencement condition for both proposed developments.

7.8.15 It is acknowledged that The Oracle was only constructed around 25 years ago which is a relatively short lifetime for a building to then be proposed to be demolished. Given the significant difference in scale and appearance of the proposed developments compared to the existing shopping centre buildings it is accepted that from a practical perspective retention of all of the existing buildings is not realistic and in this respect part retention of the existing YHP1 building demise is welcomed. It must also be acknowledged that a significant part of both proposed developments is to enhance The Oracle from a visual perspective given the rather limited/dated architectural merit of the existing shopping centre buildings. It is considered that the proposals, at least from a purely design perspective, achieve a visual improvement particularly from street level and the public realm areas around both sites, which is unlikely to have been possible with a proposal that retained all of the existing buildings.

7.8.16 It is considered that both applications have presented a reasoned approach to waste minimisation and demonstrate a suitable and sustainable approach to demolition and construction in accordance with Policy CC5 and the RBC Sustainable Design and Construction SPD. Full details of the approach of both developments to waste

minimisation can be secured by way of submission and approval of a SWMP under appropriately worded pre-commencement conditions. As discussed above both the proposed YHP1 and YHP2 developments are considered to perform well in terms of adherence to Local Plan policies in respect of energy efficiency and sustainability and in overall terms the development is considered to demonstrate a suitable approach to sustainable design and construction.

9. Other matters

Archaeology

7.9.1 Policy EN2 (Areas of Archaeological Significance) requires developments to ensure that they do not have an unacceptable impact on archaeological remains, and for proposals to undertake appropriate safeguarding. The applicant has submitted a desk-based archaeological assessment for both the YHP1 and YHP2 application sites, which indicates that there is known archaeology within the vicinity of both sites from the medieval period which could be impacted by the proposed developments. Berkshire Archaeology have reviewed the submitted archaeological assessment and recommend that conditions are attached in relation to both developments to secure submission, approval and implementation of written schemes of archaeological investigation to ensure the identification and recording of any buried archaeological remains, in accordance with Policy EN2.

Public Viewing Observatory Access

7.9.2 Policy CR10 requires tall building proposals to incorporate managed public access to an upper floor observatory and to ground floors where appropriate. The proposed commercial uses to the ground floor of both YHP1 and YHP2 facilitate managed public access to those parts of the developments. Whilst neither proposal includes an accessible upper floor observatory for the general public the nature of the upper floor residential uses to both YHP1 and YHP2 means that public access to these areas would raise a number of security concerns for residents of both developments. The Applicant notes that rooftop amenity spaces are provided through the scheme for use by residents within the BtR units. These spaces will be accessible by all residents and through the building management arrangements will be able to be booked by residents for private functions, which can be attended by non-residents. As such there would be some, albeit limited, potential for, non-residents to experience views created by the tall buildings.

Matters Raised in Public Representations

7.9.3 All matter raised are considered to have been addressed within the Appraisal section of this report.

10 Legal Agreement

7.10.1 Policy CC9 (Securing Infrastructure) states that proposals for new development will not be permitted unless, infrastructure, services, resources, amenities other assets lost or impact upon as a result of developments or made necessary by developments will be provided through direct provision or financial contributions.

7.10.2 This section below provides a brief overview of the reasoning for each of the section 106 contributions and obligations proposed to be secured for the YHP1 and YHP2 proposed developments:

7.10.3 **Affordable housing:** Policy H3 requires 30% on-site provision in Major schemes, although the Affordable Housing SPD advises the use of a deferred payment mechanism (DPM) in instances where the development, at the time of determination, cannot sustain the policy requirement level.

7.10.3 Following extensive discussions and examination of both proposals viability, agreement with the applicant has been reached on the provision of an (initial) on-site affordable housing provision, equating to 10% of dwellings within YHP1 and 10% of dwellings within YHP2 and the delivery and mix of the units is considered to be reflective of the overall dwelling provision for both applications. The figures of 10% have been arrived at following an open book viability discussions between the Applicant and the Council and has been agreed as being deliverable for both proposed developments.

7.10.4 **Affordable housing deferred payment mechanism:** via an 'open book' viability discussion, it has been agreed that there would be a mechanism to potentially capture a policy compliant 30% (equivalent) affordable housing provision for both the YHP1 and YHP2 proposals, on the basis that either or both developments achieves better than expected returns.

7.10.5 **Public realm/open space/leisure** – A financial contribution of £1.2million towards soft and hard landscaping works on land to the rear of Queens Road Car park, soft and hard landscaping working to the riverside foot and cycle ways between The Oracle and Waterloo Meadows and towards replacement play equipment to St Giles Play Area. To be provided by whichever of the YHP1 or YHP2 developments is implemented first. To provide necessary setting, open space and leisure mitigation for either and both developments.

7.10.6 **Public Realm works to the IDR/London Street junction** - Provision of scheme of works and its implementation to provide low level hard and soft landscaping in-front of the black history mural on Mill Lane, planting of 5 trees to the central reservation of the IDR to the west of the London Street junction and a feasibility study for replacement of existing crash barriers over the IDR crossing with low level soft landscaped planters and implementation. To provide necessary setting for the YHP2 development.

7.10.7 **Public art** – To require both YHP1 and YHP2 proposals to submit for approval of details, a scheme of public artwork to be provided within the public realm areas of both site. This will ensure that the art responds to its context and forms an integral part of the public realm areas within the sites.

7.10.8 **Medical facilities:** The addition of the 218 new residents in each of YHP1 and YHP2 will have an impact on medical facilities in the Central Area. The NHS Integrated Care Board has sought a financial contribution towards the provision of extra primary clinical capacity to mitigate the increased impact of both developments on primary care function in local GP practices in Abbey ward and adjacent wards. The NHS ICB in consultation with your officers and the applicant has agreed a relevant contribution of £188,352 from each application which would be secured through a S106 obligation. This is required to offset the additional impact of each proposals on medical facilities in the Central Area as a result of the population increase via the development in accordance with Policy CC9 and also reflects emerging requirements in respect of (new) Policy CC10 (Health Impact Assessment) H11 within the draft Local Plan Partial update (2025) which requires developments to mitigate negative impacts upon health. Other developments in the central area may also contribute towards this facility (as may be appropriate to those developments' individual circumstances and impacts).

7.10.9 **Transport:** there are various transport obligations required to ensure that both the YHP1 and YHP2 developments provide and are supplied with the necessary transport infrastructure and to facilitate the proposed on and off-site public realm works, including traffic regulation orders (TROs), section 278 agreement(s) and a car club.

7.10.10 **Heat network and energy:** to secure a carbon off-setting contribution for both YHP1 and YHP2 in accordance with Policy H5 and submission, approval and implementation of a feasibility study for connection of either or both developments to a Reading Centralised Heat Network in accordance with Policy CC4.

7.10.11 **Employment, skills and training:** provision of construction and end user phase employment and skills plans or equivalent financial contributions for both the YHP1 and YHP2 developments in accordance with the adopted Employment, Skills and Training SPD (2011) in order to ensure suitable skills, training and job opportunities are provided within the borough. Obligation wording for both developments to facilitate provision of either plans or equivalent financial contributions. All contributions to be calculated using the formula within the SPD.

7.10.12 **Build to rent restrictions:** the Recommendation box includes a detailed list of BTR restrictions which are considered necessary and have been used for similar developments within the borough to ensure control over the BTR development, for instance, setting out suitable approaches to for nomination rights.

7.10.13 **Monitoring section 106 costs/other:** this section includes the s106 monitoring costs and for the cancels reasonable legal costs to be paid.

7.10.14 Other obligations, as set out, are required in order to carefully control the delivery of the development and the trigger points and the details of the obligations themselves are considered to be necessary in order to provide a suitable development and deliver the various public benefits.

7.10.15 It is considered that each and every obligation, as also summarised at the outset of this report, would comply with the National Planning Policy Framework and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in that they would be: i) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms, ii) directly related to the development and iii) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development, as set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance. They are also considered to comply Policy CC9 (Securing Infrastructure) and the and The Heads of Terms have been agreed with the applicant and the adopted Planning Obligations under Section 106 SPD (2015).

11. Equality implications

11.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

11.2 The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation. It is considered that there is no indication or evidence that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular application

12. Conclusion & planning balance

12.1 As with all applications considered by the Local Planning Authority, both of these planning applications are required to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, in accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

12.2 Any harmful impacts of the proposed developments are required to be weighed against the economic, social, environment and any other public benefits in the context of national and local planning policies, as detailed in the appraisal above. In this instance the harmful impacts of both proposals include the identified incidences of less than substantial harm

to statutory and non-statutory heritage assets, including their settings, which as per paragraphs 215 and 216 of the NPPF (December 2024) and Policy EN1 of the RBC Local Plan 2019, must also be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals.

12.3 It is also pertinent that both the YHP1 and YHP2 applications propose developments which depart significantly from adopted policies within the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019). Both proposals are a departure in respect of Policy CR10 (Tall Buildings) given they incorporate tall building elements on sites that are both situated outside of the areas stated within the policy as being the only locations with the Central Area appropriate for tall buildings. Furthermore, the YHP2 proposals are also a departure in respect of Policy CR14g (The Oracle Extension, Bridge Street and Letcombe Street) which allocated a wider parcel of land within which the YHP2 site is located for retail uses only. The planning balance assessment for both applications therefore needs to consider whether there are material planning considerations that justify such departures from the Local Plan.

12.4 The proposals relate to two separate planning applications and therefore two separate planning balance assessments need to be undertaken.

PL/22/1916/FUL - YHP1

12.5 The harmful impacts identified by Officers in the assessment above are:

- Visual harm to the character and appearance of a various visually-sensitive parts of the Central Area, notably to views from the east along the Kennet around the High Bridge and from the north around Minster Street, St Marys Butts and Market Place as a result of the scale and visual dominance of the proposed buildings (Policy CC7 and CR10).
- Less than substantial harm at a high level to the settings of no. 2-4 London Street (London Street Brasserie), no.1 London Street (Grade II Listed Buildings and High Bridge (a Grade II Listed Building and Scheduled Ancient Monument) (Policy EN1 and CR10).
- Less than substantial harm at a moderate level to the setting of St Laurence Church (Grade I Listed), no.s 23-26, 27-28, 29-31, 32, 33-14, 48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place, no. 10 High Street, no.s 7-15 Gun Street and to the character, appearance and setting of the St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area and the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area (Policy EN1 and CR10).
- Less than substantial harm at a low level to the setting of no.s 33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 69, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 81, 86, 88, 89-93, 95-97, 99, 101, 103, 90, 92, 94, 104, 108 and 110 & 114 London Street (all Grade II Listed Buildings), no.s 73 & 75, 77 & 79 London Street (all Grade 2* Listed Buildings), no.s 43-75, 55-57, 60, 78, 82-84, 83-85, 87, 106 and 107 London Street all Buildings of Townscape Merit), St Marys Church (Grade I Listed Building) and Grade II Listed St Marys Churchyard and no.s 24-52 Queens Road, Telephone Exchange building at 41-45 Minster Street and the George Hotel and Restaurant at 10-12 King Street (all Grade II Listed Buildings) (Policy EN1 and CR10)
- Failure to provide an appropriate mix of dwellings within an overdominance of 1 bedroom dwellings (51% compared to the CR6 guidance of a maximum of 40%). Failing to meet the housing mix needs of the Borough (Policy H2)
- Sub-optimum standard of accommodation to some dwellings in terms of receipt of daylight (Policy CC8)

12.6 Public benefits associated with the YHP1 proposals are considered to be:

- Provision of 218 dwellings towards meeting the Council's housing needs on an accessible brownfield site (Policy CC6)
- Provision of 10% of dwellings as affordable housing despite the viability constraints of the proposed development, contributing towards the critical need for affordable

- housing within the Borough including agreement to a deferred payment mechanism (Policy H3)
- Visual enhancements at street level from the high quality architecture to the shop fronts and ground floor frontages of the buildings (Policies CC7, CR2 and EN11)
- Activation of Yield Hall Place through provision of glazed frontages providing visual enhancement and vibrancy to a current poor quality part of the Central Area (Policies CC7, CR2 and RL1)
- Significant public realm enhancements along the riverside and Yield Hall Place including creation of a small pocket park (Policies CC7, CR3, EN9 and RL1)
- A net gain in on-site tree planting and significant soft landscaping proposals within the public realm areas and to roof top amenity terrace areas (Policies CC7 and EN14)
- A significant net gain in on-site biodiversity and provision of ecological enhancements (Policy EN12)
- Provision of a financial contribution towards off-site open space, public realm and leisure enhancements (Policies EN9, CR3 and CC9)
- Agreement to a future feasibility study for connection of the development to a future Reading Heat Network (Policy CC4)
- Provision of all commercial units at BREEAM Excellent standard and agreement a zero carbon off-setting contribution (Policies CC2 and H5).
- Diversification of part of The Oracle, a key contributor to the Reading Central Area and its vitality and viability to address retail market trends and address vacancy of existing retail floorspace, including the significant floorspace of the former Debenhams department store (Policy RL1)
- Facilitating significant investment in The Oracle strengthening its role in the evolving Central Area and Readings role a key regional centre and attracting people to the town (Policy RL1)
- Provision of a range of flexible Class E/Sui Generis bar use units, including a possible significant leisure offer, increasing the potential for occupancy of units by wider range of occupiers creating potential to enhancing the both the day and nighttime economy offer for the local community adding vibrancy to the Central Area (Policy RL1)
- Improved connectivity/permeability between The Oracle and the Central Area to the north via removal of the gate and replacement with bollards at the junction of Yield Hall Place and Minster Street (Policies CC7 and TR1)
- Creation of jobs at both construction and end user phases (Policy CC9)
- Provision of a financial contribution towards healthcare facilities within Abbey and adjacent wards (Policy CC9)

12.7 The Recommendation box advises that two matters are outstanding at this time. The progress and satisfactory conclusion to these matters will be factors in the planning balance and commentary will be provided in and update report or at the committee meeting.

12.8 Notwithstanding the above, Officers consider the planning balance to be very finely poised. The harms identified, particularly in relation to scale and visual dominance, extensive harmful heritage impacts and overdominance of 1 bed units with the dwelling mix are considered to be significant. However, there are also considered to be significant public benefits including the substantial enhancements to public realm areas both on and off site, street-level activation and creating visual interest via new shopfronts to existing poor quality parts of the Central Area, provision of 218 dwellings towards meeting the Council's housing needs whilst providing a high standard of accommodation for future occupiers as well as the range of benefits evidenced by the Applicant in terms of securing diversification of The Oracle to facilitate it to secure its existing and future important role in the overall vitality and viability of the Central Area and Readings role as a key regional centre within the Thames Valley, in accordance with Policy RL1. Whilst the proposals are a departure from Policy CR10 of the Local Plan Officers considered that adequate material planning considerations and public benefits have been demonstrated by the Applicant to justify the specific departure identified in this instance.

12.9 In this finely balanced case, it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the completion of a s106 agreement and the conditions outlined in the recommendation box at the top of this report for this application.

PL/22/1917/FUL – YHP2

12.10 The harmful impacts identified by Officers in the assessment above are:

- Visual harm to the character and appearance of a various parts of the Central Area, notably to views from the south from the IDR (Queens Road), London Street, east along the Kennet around High Bridge and from the north around St Marys Butts and Market Place as a result of the scale and visual dominance of the proposed buildings (Policy CC7 and CR10).
- Less than substantial harm at a high level to the setting of no. 2-4 London Street (London Street Brasserie), no.1 London Street (Grade II Listed Buildings and High Bridge (a Grade II Listed Building and Scheduled Ancient Monument) (Policy EN1 and CR10).
- Less than substantial harm at a moderate level to the setting of St Laurence Church (Grade I Listed), no.s 23-26, 27-28, 29-31, 32, 33-14, 48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place, no. 10 High Street, no.s 7-15 Gun Street, no.s 33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 69, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 81, 86, 88, 89-93, 95-97, 99, 101, 103, 90, 92, 94, 104, 108 and 110 & 114 London Street (all Grade II Listed Buildings), no.s 73 & 75, 77 & 79 London Street (all Grade 2* Listed Buildings), no.s 43-75, 55-57, 60, 78, 82-84, 83-85, 87, 106 and 107 London Street all Buildings of Townscape Merit and to the character, appearance and setting of the St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area and the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area (Policy EN1 and CR10).
- Less than substantial harm at a low level to the setting of no.s, St Marys Church (Grade I Listed Building) and Grade II Listed St Marys Churchyard and no.s 24-52 Queens Road all Grade II Listed Buildings) (Policy EN1 and CR10)
- Failure to provide an appropriate mix of dwellings within an overdominance of 1 bedroom dwellings (44% compared to the CR6 guidance of a maximum of 40%) Contrary to Policies CR6 and H2 and failing to meet the housing mix needs of the Borough
- Sub-optimum standard of accommodation to some dwellings in terms of receipt of daylight (Policy CC8)

12.11 Public benefits associated with the YHP2 proposals are considered to be:

- Provision of 218 dwellings towards meeting the Council's housing needs on an accessible brownfield site (Policy CC6)
- Provision of 10% of dwellings as affordable housing despite the viability constraints of the proposed development, contributing towards the critical need for affordable housing within the Borough including agreement to a deferred payment mechanism (Policy H3)
- Visual enhancements at street level from the high quality architecture to the shop fronts and ground floor frontages of the buildings (Policies CC7, CR2 and EN11)
- Activation of Yield Hall Place and the IDR (Queens Road) through provision of glazed frontages providing visual enhancement and vibrancy to a current poor quality part of the Central Area (Policies CC7, CR2 and RL1)
- Significant on-site public realm enhancements along the riverside, Yield Hall Place and the IDR (Queens Road) (Policies CC7, CR3 and RL1)
- Provision of off-site public realm enhancements around the IDR (Queens Road)/London Street junction (Policy CC7, CR3, CC9 and RL1)

- A net gain in on-site tree planting and significant soft landscaping proposals within the public realm areas and to roof top amenity terrace areas (Policies CC7 and EN14)
- A significant net gain in on-site biodiversity and provision of ecological enhancements (Policy EN12)
- Provision of a financial contribution towards off-site open space, public realm and leisure enhancements (Policies EN9, CR3 and CC9)
- Agreement to a future feasibility study for connection of the development to a future Reading Heat Network (Policy CC4)
- Provision of all commercial units at BREEAM Excellent standard and agreement a zero carbon off-setting contribution (Policies CC2 and H5).
- Diversification of part of The Oracle, a key contributor to the Reading Central Area and its vitality and viability to address retail market trends and address vacancy of existing floorspace (Policy RL1)
- Facilitating significant investment in The Oracle strengthening its role in the evolving Central Area and Reading's role as a key regional centre and attracting people to the town (Policy RL1)
- Provision of a flexible Class E/Sui Generis bar use unit and, whilst smaller, more modern cinema leisure offer, increasing the potential for occupancy of units by a wider range of occupiers creating a better quality leisure offer more aligned to modern customer expectations, contributing towards both the day and nighttime economy offer for the local community adding vibrancy to the Central Area (Policy RL1)
- Improved connectivity/permeability between The Oracle and the Central Area to the south off-site via improvements to the crossings over the IDR (Queens Road) (Policies CC7 and TR1)
- Creation of jobs at both construction and end user phases (Policy CC9)
- Provision of a financial contribution towards healthcare facilities within Abbey and adjacent wards (Policy CC9)

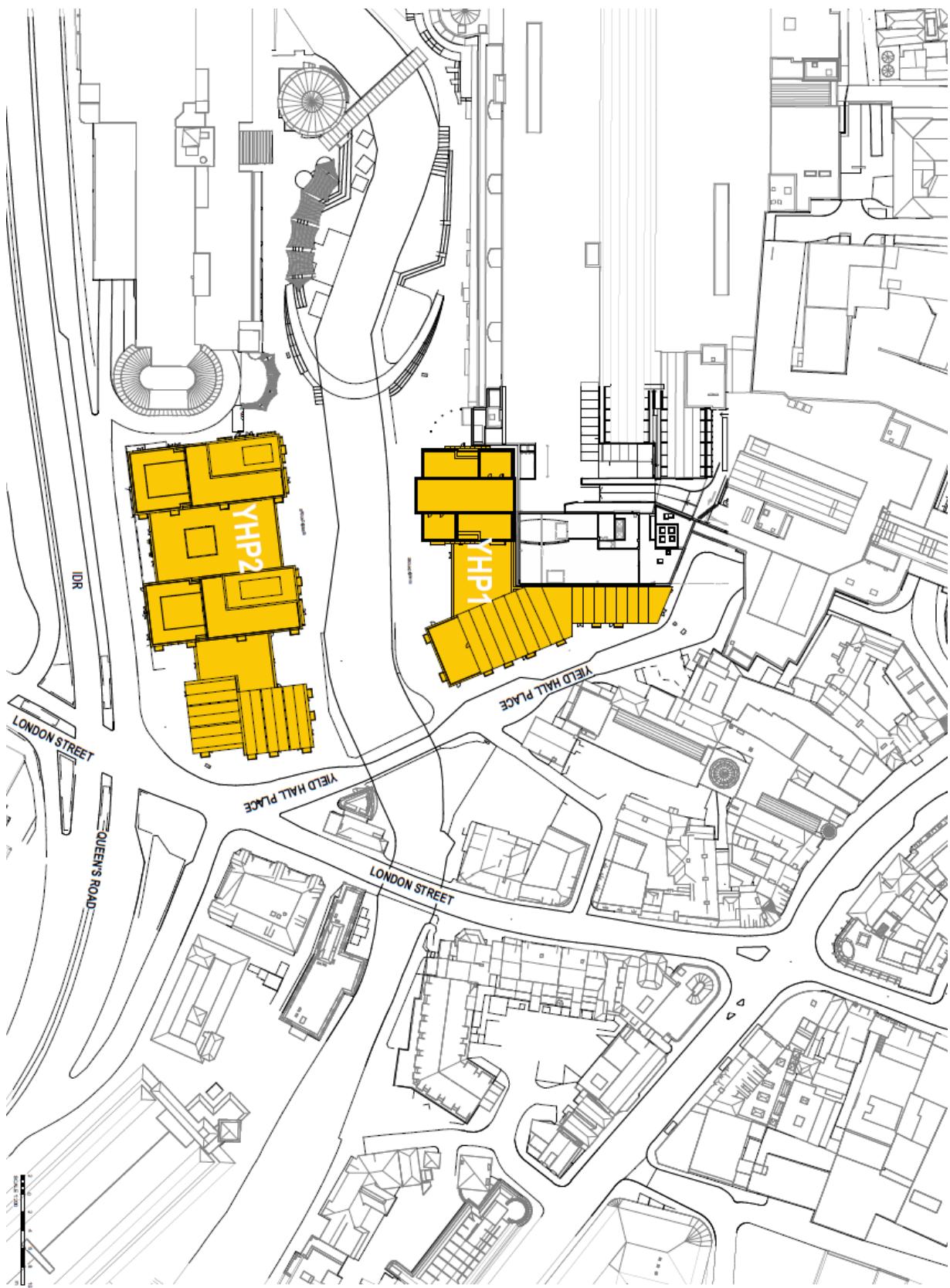
12.12 The Recommendation box advises that two matters are outstanding at this time. The progress and satisfactory conclusion to these matters will be factors in the planning balance and commentary will be provided in and update report or at the committee meeting.

12.13 Notwithstanding the above, Officers consider the planning balance for this application to also be very finely poised. The harms identified, particularly in relation to scale and visual dominance, extensive harmful heritage impacts and overdominance of 1 bed units with the dwelling mix are considered to be significant. However, there are also considered to be significant public benefits including the substantial enhancements to public realm areas both on and off site, street-level activation and creating visual interest via new shopfronts to existing poor quality parts of the Central Area, provision of 218 dwellings towards meeting the Council's housing needs whilst providing a high standard of accommodation for future occupiers as well as the range of benefits evidenced by the Applicant in terms of securing diversification of The Oracle to facilitate it to secure its existing and future important role in the overall vitality and viability of the Central Area and Readings role as a key regional centre within the Thames Valley, in accordance with Policy RL1. Whilst the proposals are a departure from Policies CR10 and CR14g of the Local Plan Officers considered that adequate material planning considerations and public benefits have been demonstrated by the Applicant to justify the specific departures identified in this instance.

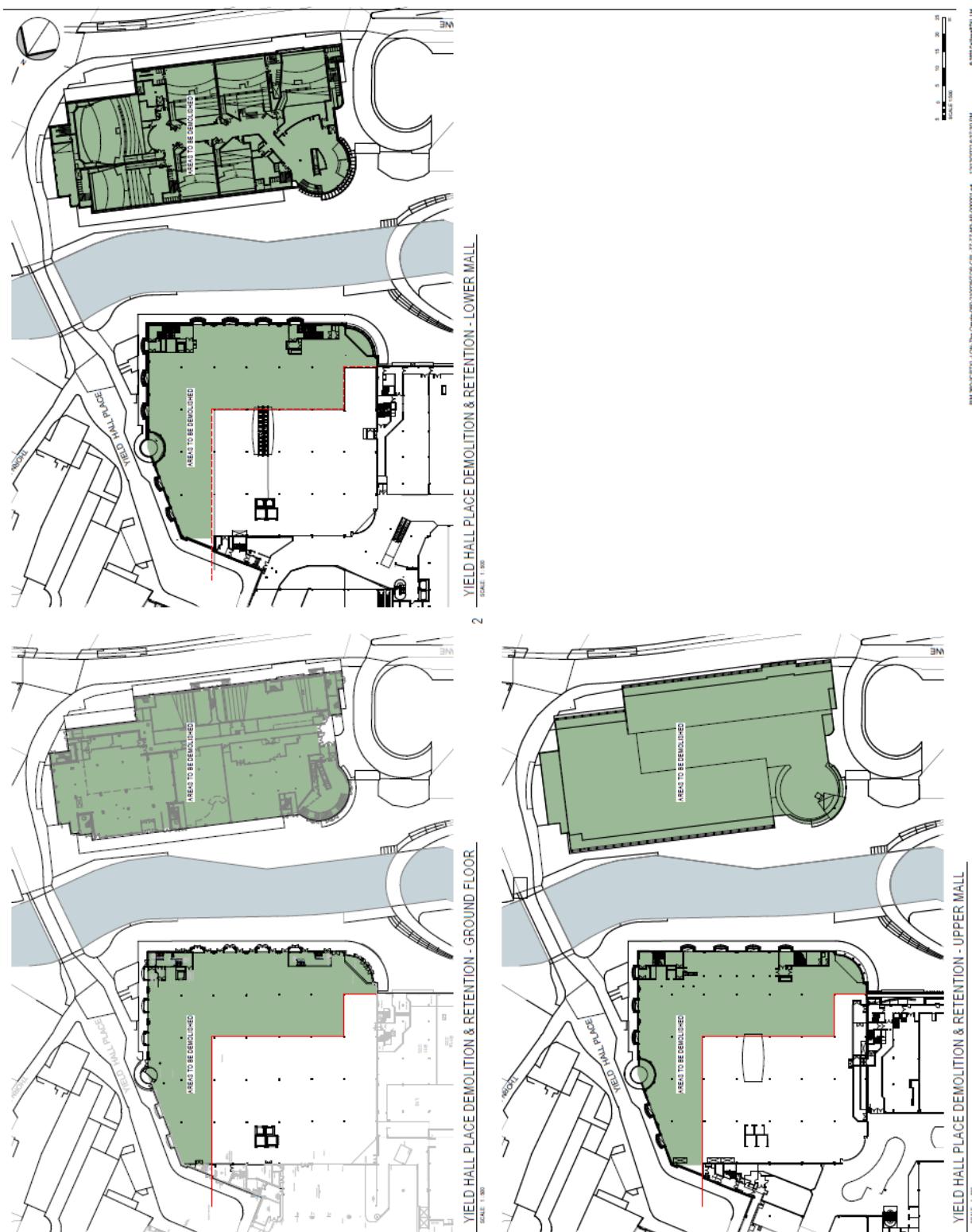
12.14 In this finely balanced case, it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the completion of a s106 agreement and the conditions outlined in the recommendation box at the top of this report for this application.

Case Officer: Matt Burns

A selection of plans and drawings submitted (not all shown) with each application are shown below: Full sets of drawings can be viewed using the application search function on the Council website.



Proposed site plans (YHP1 and YHP2)



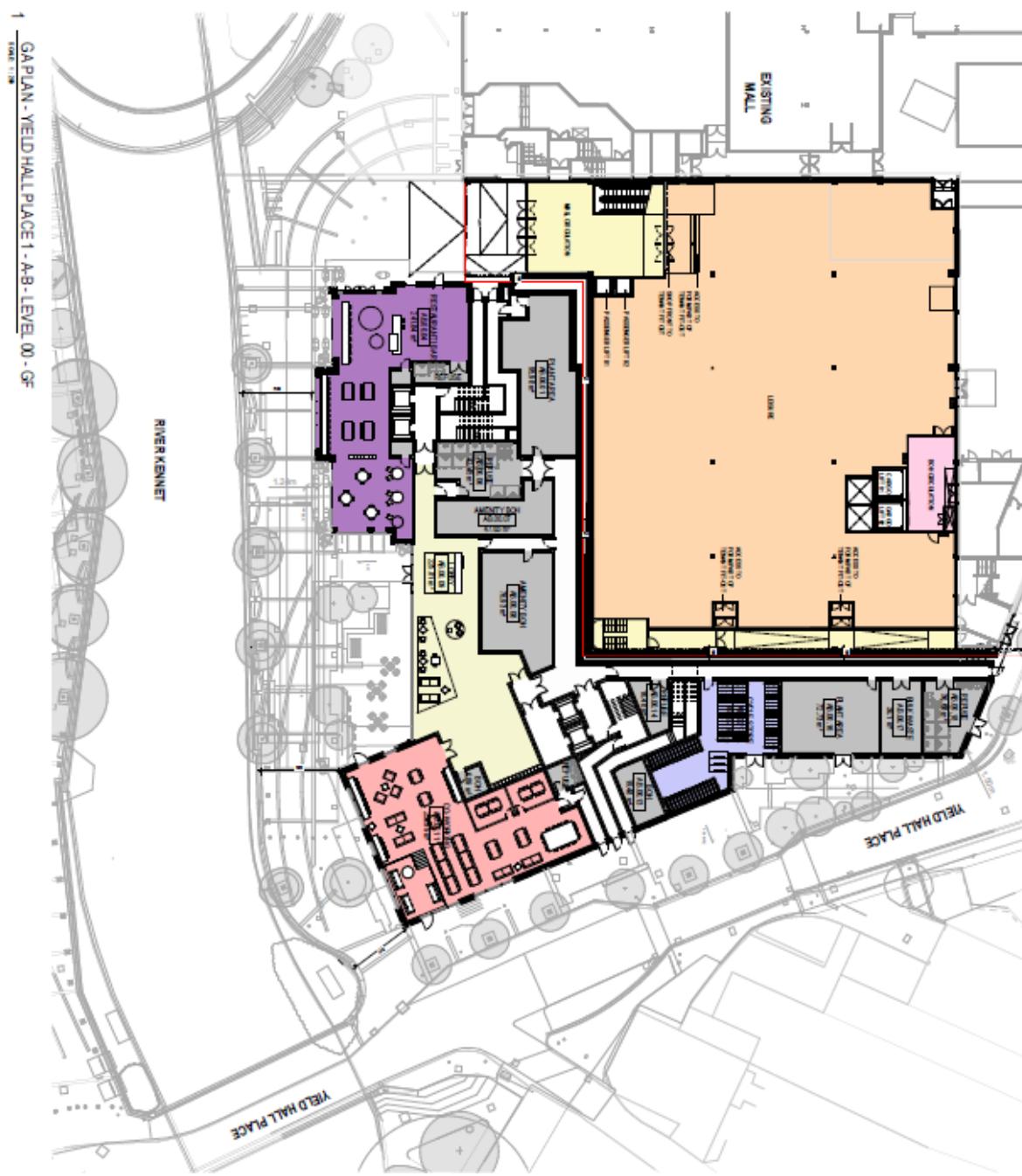
Building References

Yield Hall Place 1 (YHP1) : Blocks A, B.
Yield Hall Place 2 (YHP2) : Blocks C, D, E.



Proposed block numbers (YHP1 and YHP2)

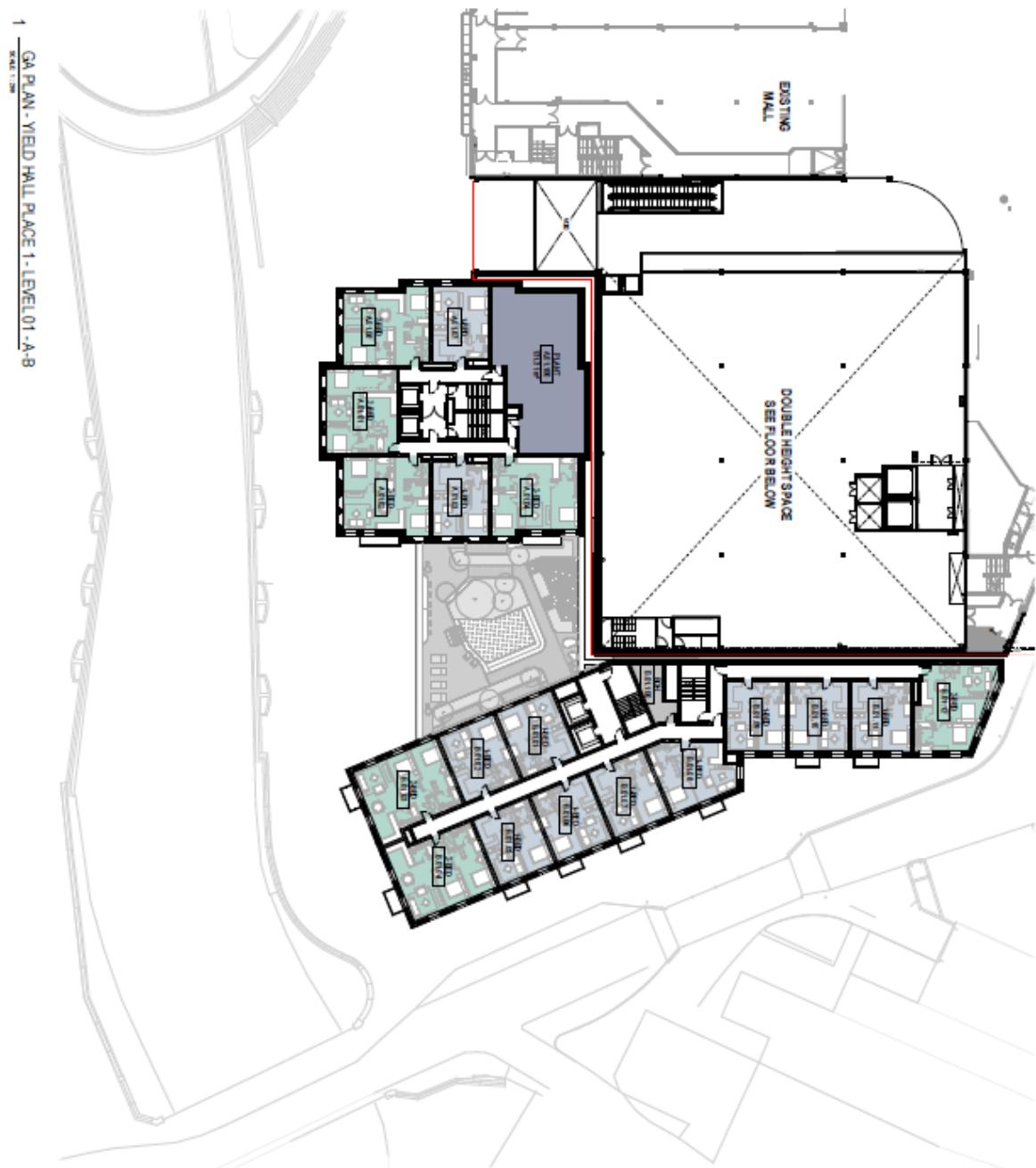
YHP1



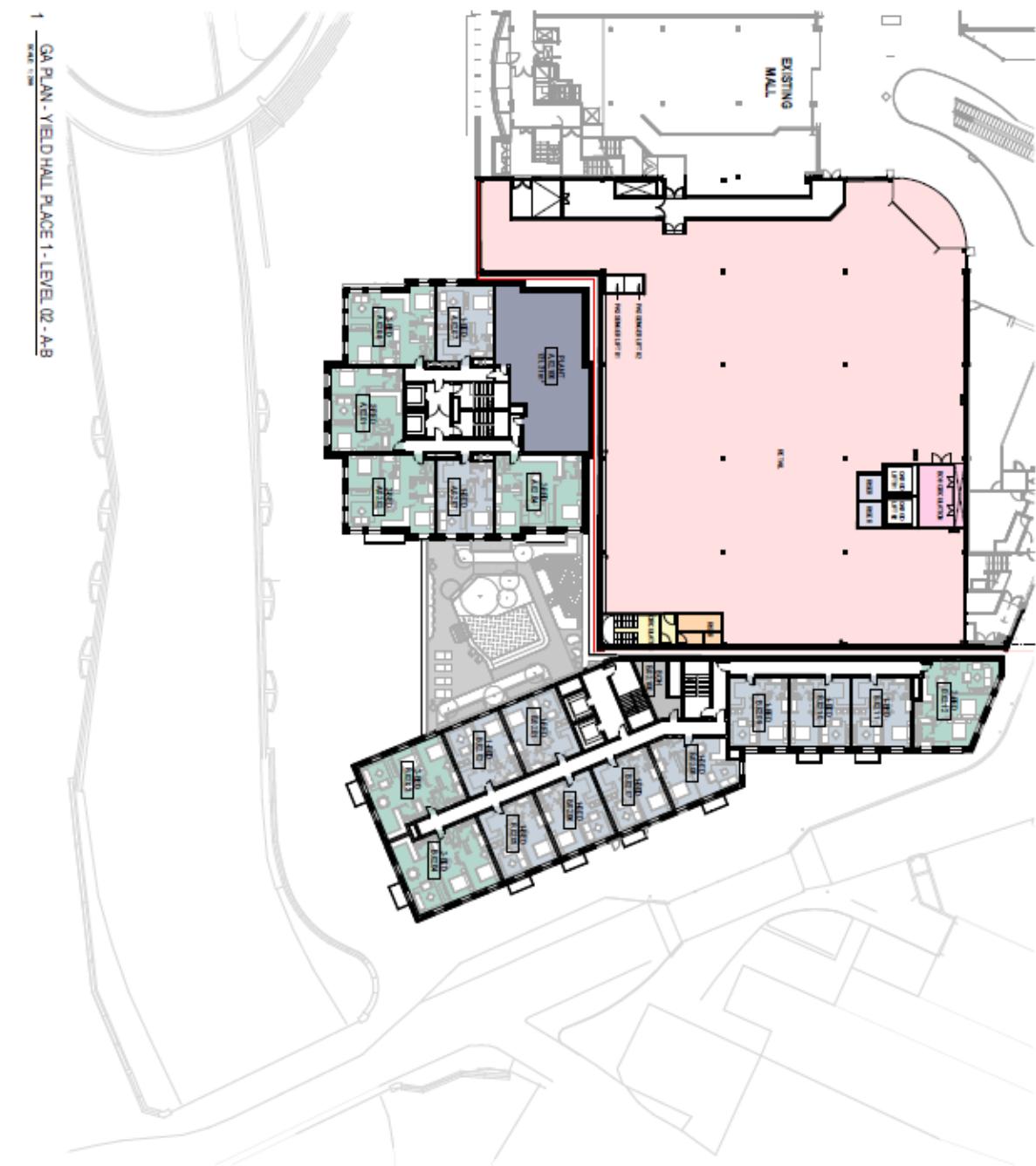
Proposed ground floor plan



Proposed mezzanine floor plan



Proposed 1st floor plan



Proposed 2nd floor plan



Proposed 3rd floor plan



Proposed 4th floor plan



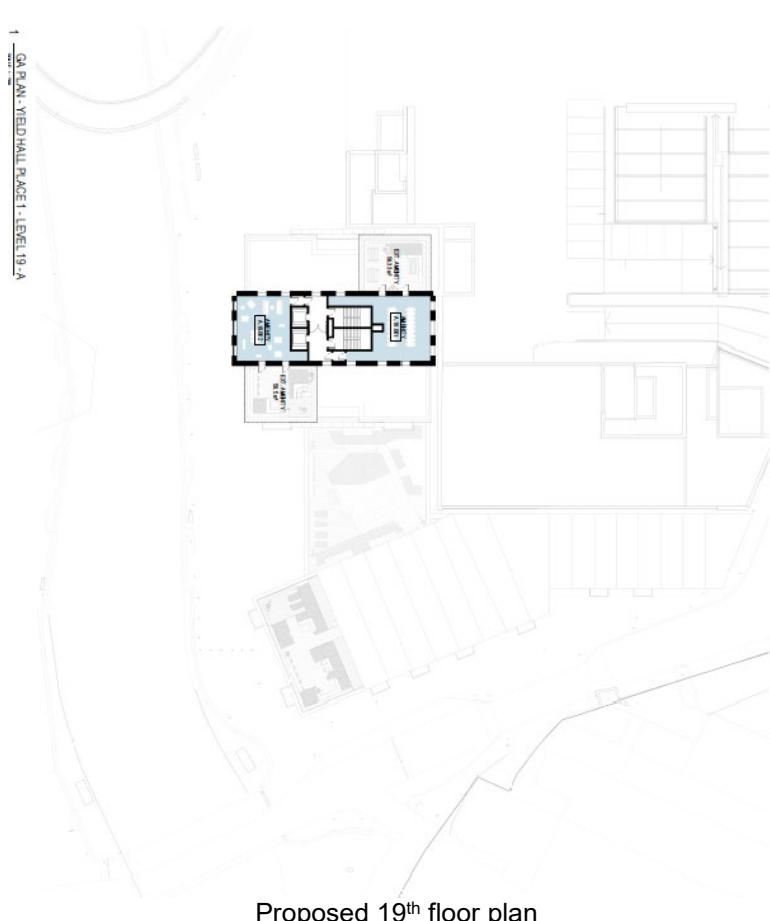
Proposed 5th floor plan



Proposed 6th and 7th floor plans



Proposed 8th and 17th floor plans (layout of in-between floor similar)



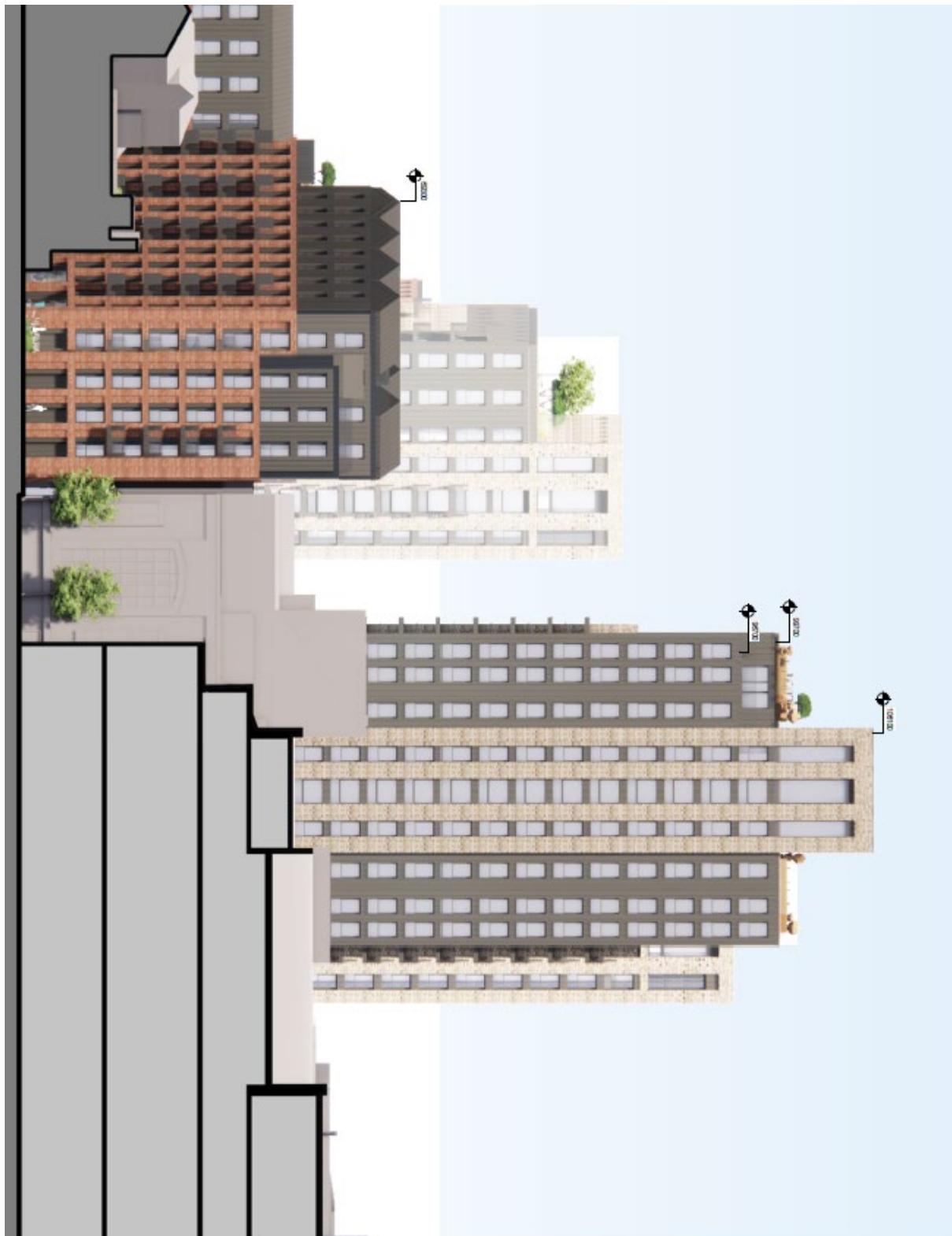
1
YEB HALL PLACE 2 - ROOF PLAN



Proposed roof plan



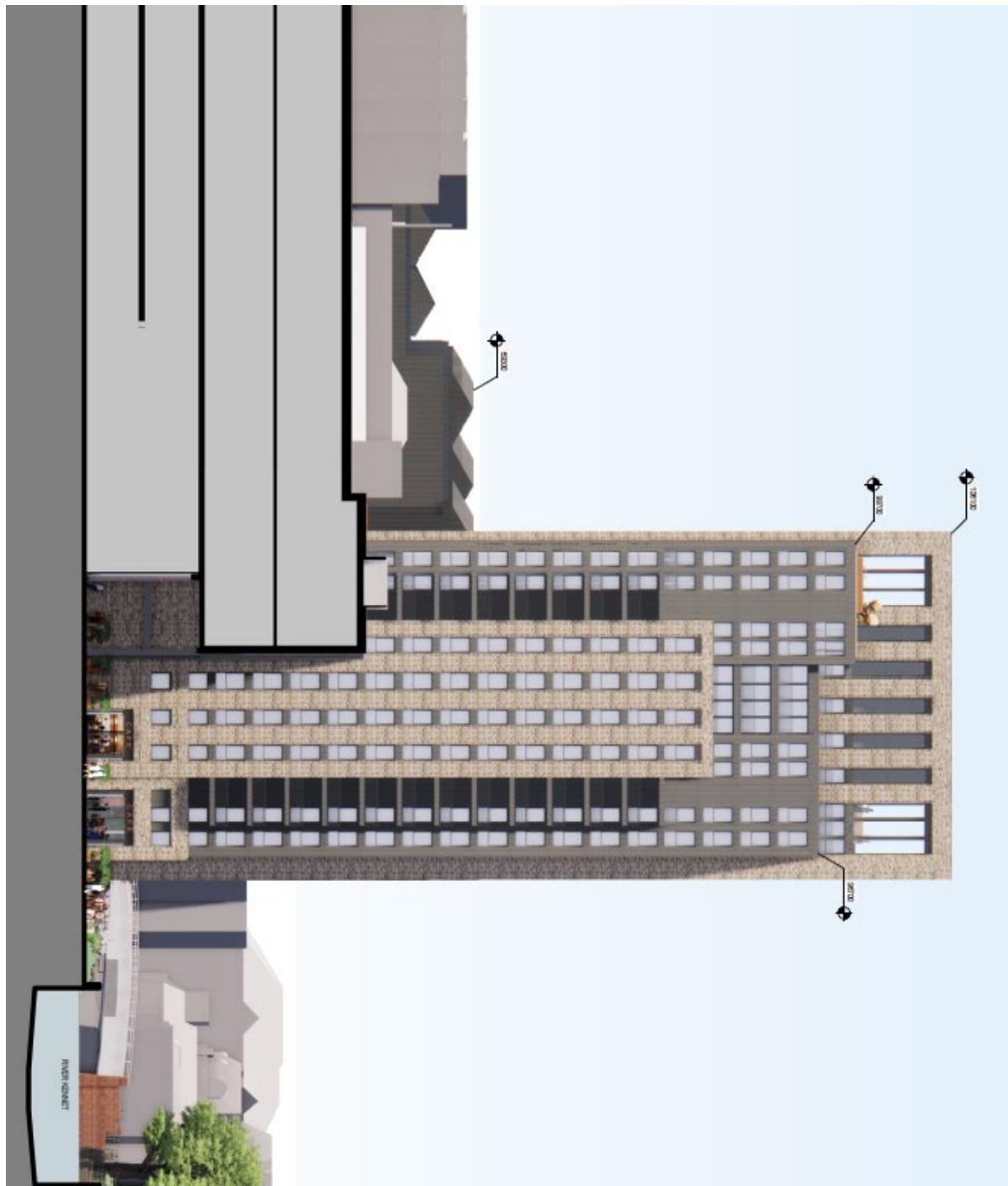
Proposed East Elevation – Yield Hall Place



Proposed north elevation (YHP2 proposals shown in background)



Proposed South elevation (riverside)



Proposed east elevation



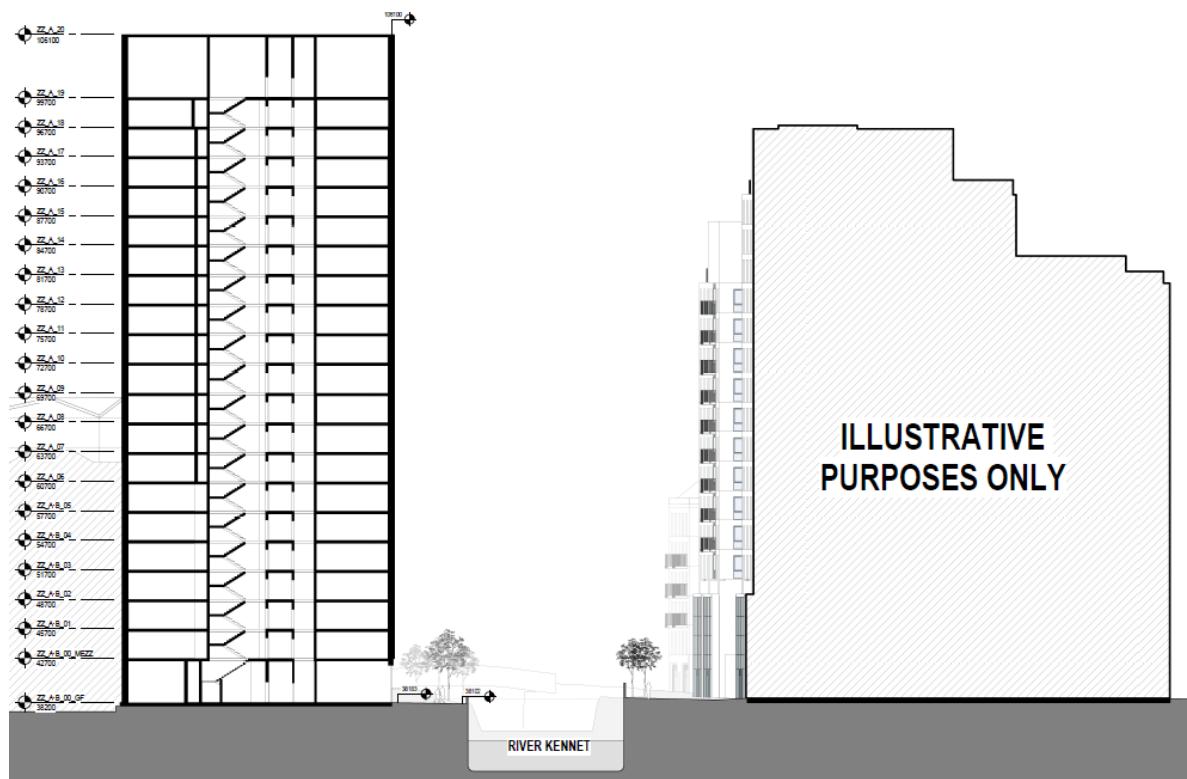
Proposed east elevation Block B



Proposed west elevation Block A



Proposed blocks A and B sections



Proposed block A section with river showing YHP2 proposals



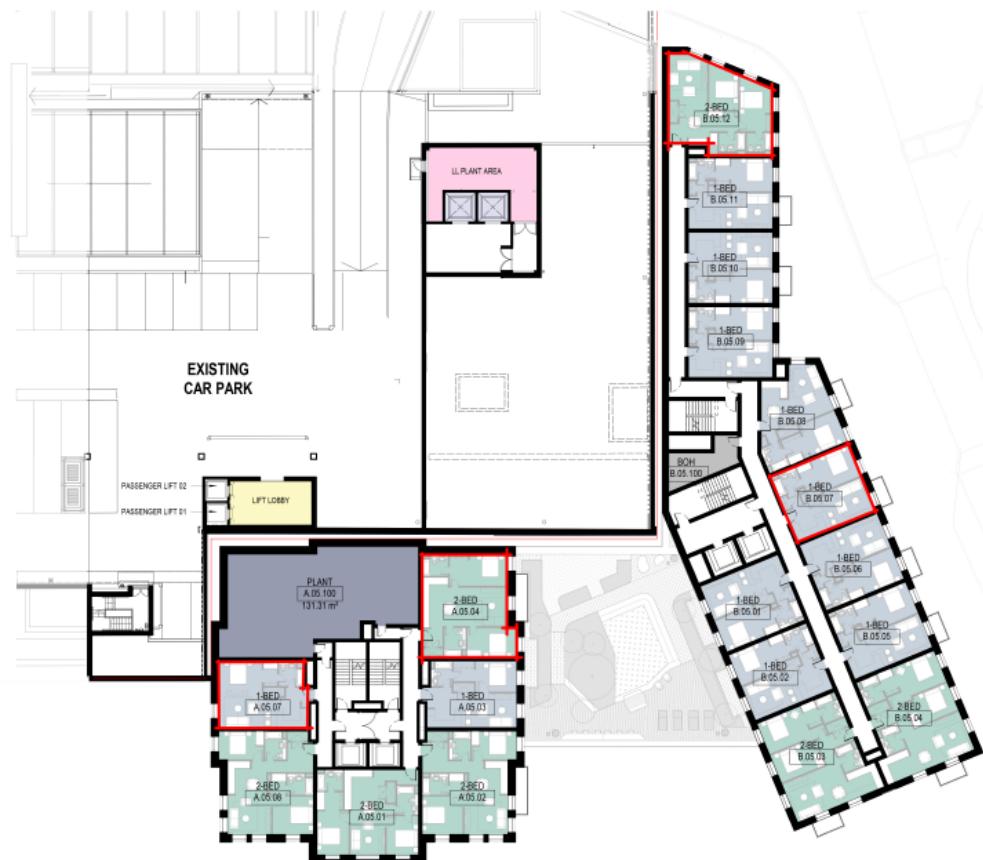
Proposed 1st floor plan – location of affordable dwellings outlined in red



Proposed 2nd floor plan – location of affordable dwellings outlined in red



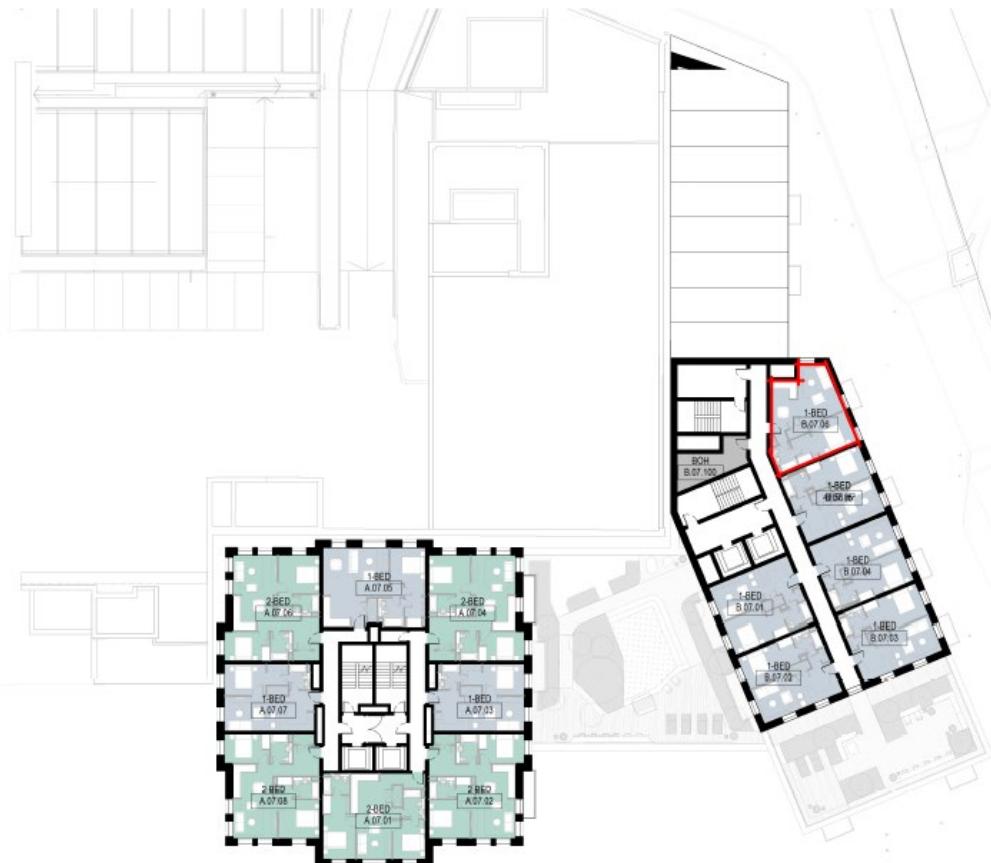
Proposed 4th floor plan – location of affordable dwellings outlined in red



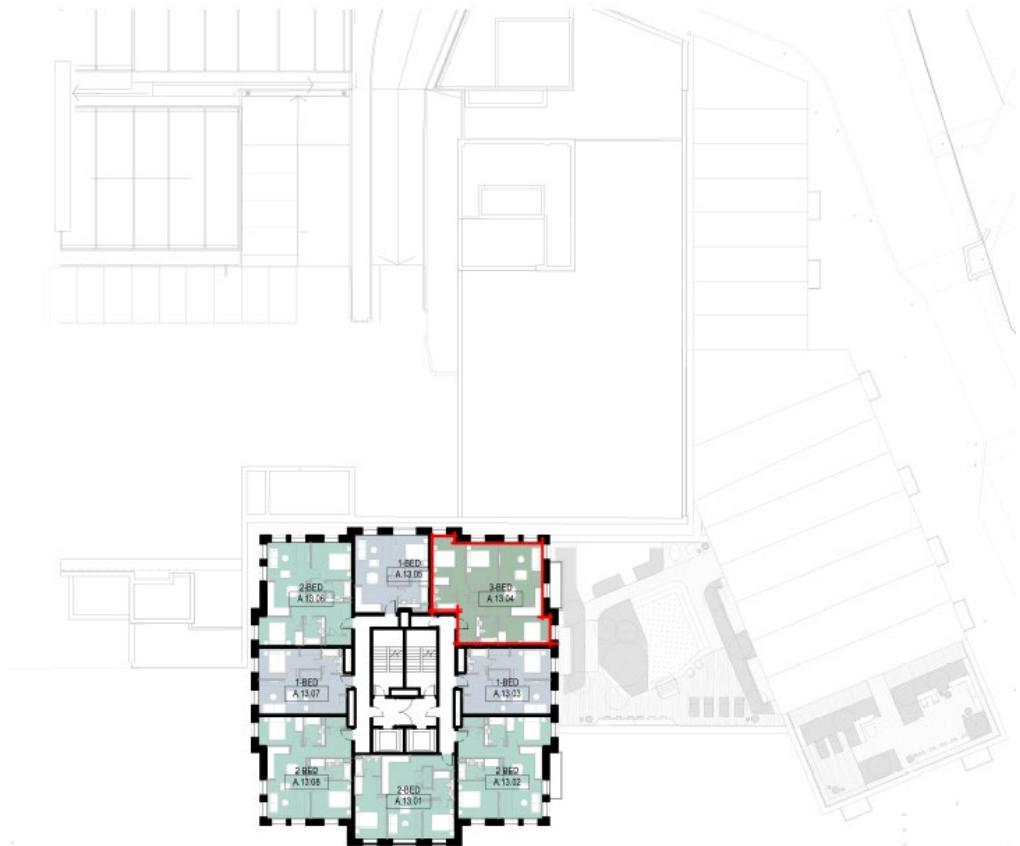
Proposed 5th floor plan – location of affordable dwellings outlined in red



Proposed 6^h floor plan – location of affordable dwellings outlined in red

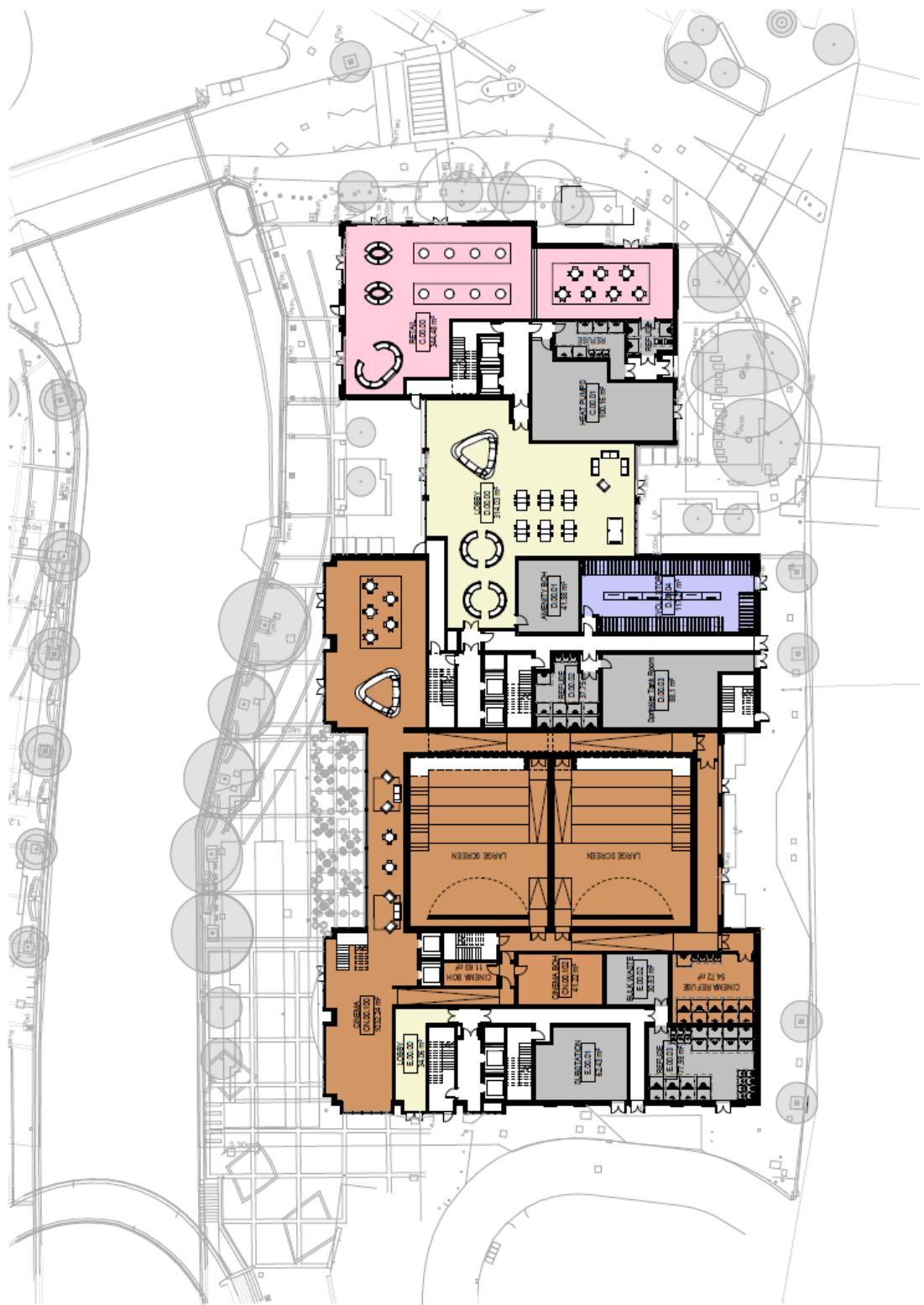


Proposed 7th floor plan – location of affordable dwellings outlined in red

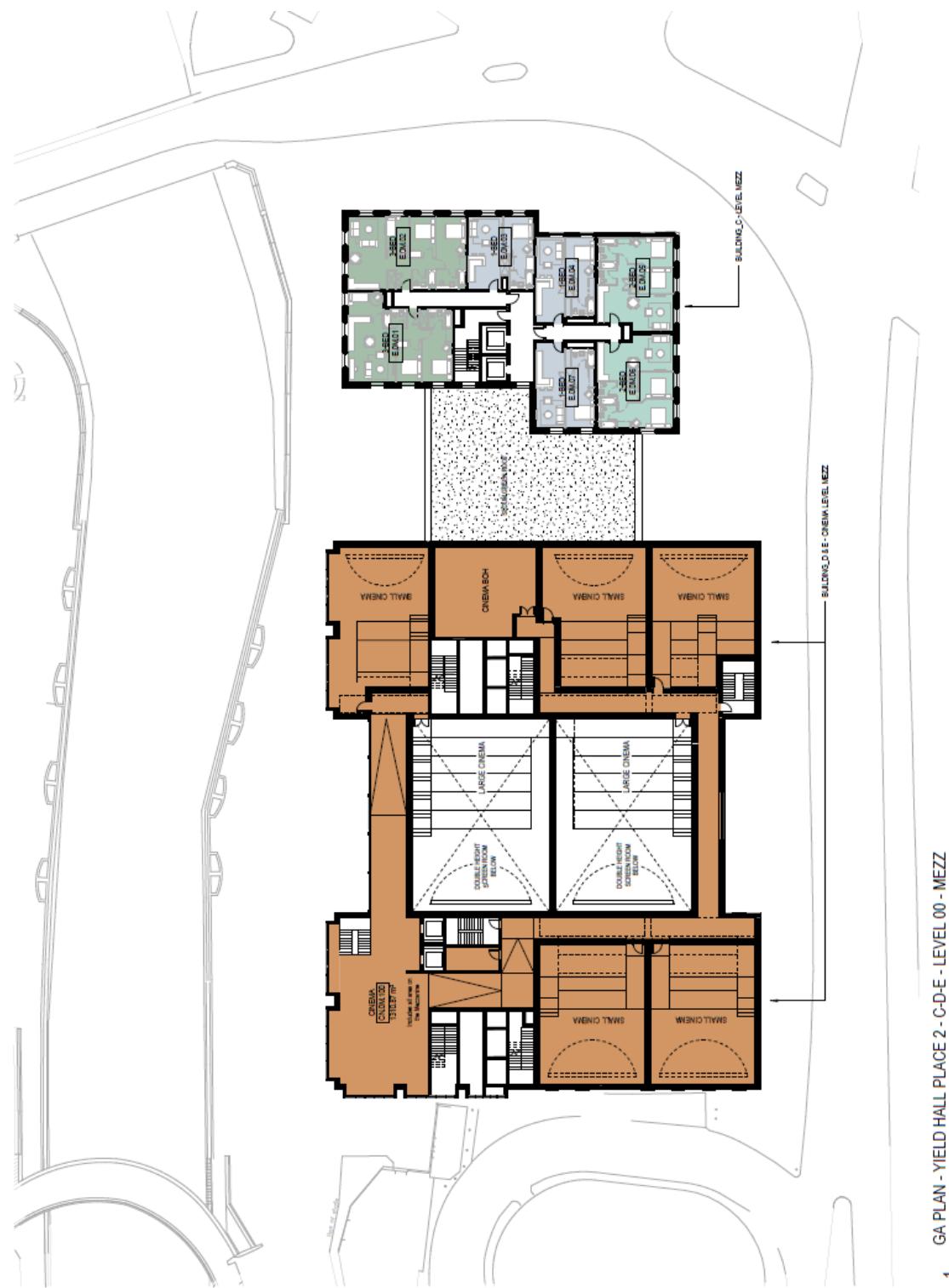


Proposed 13th floor plan – location of affordable dwellings outlined in red

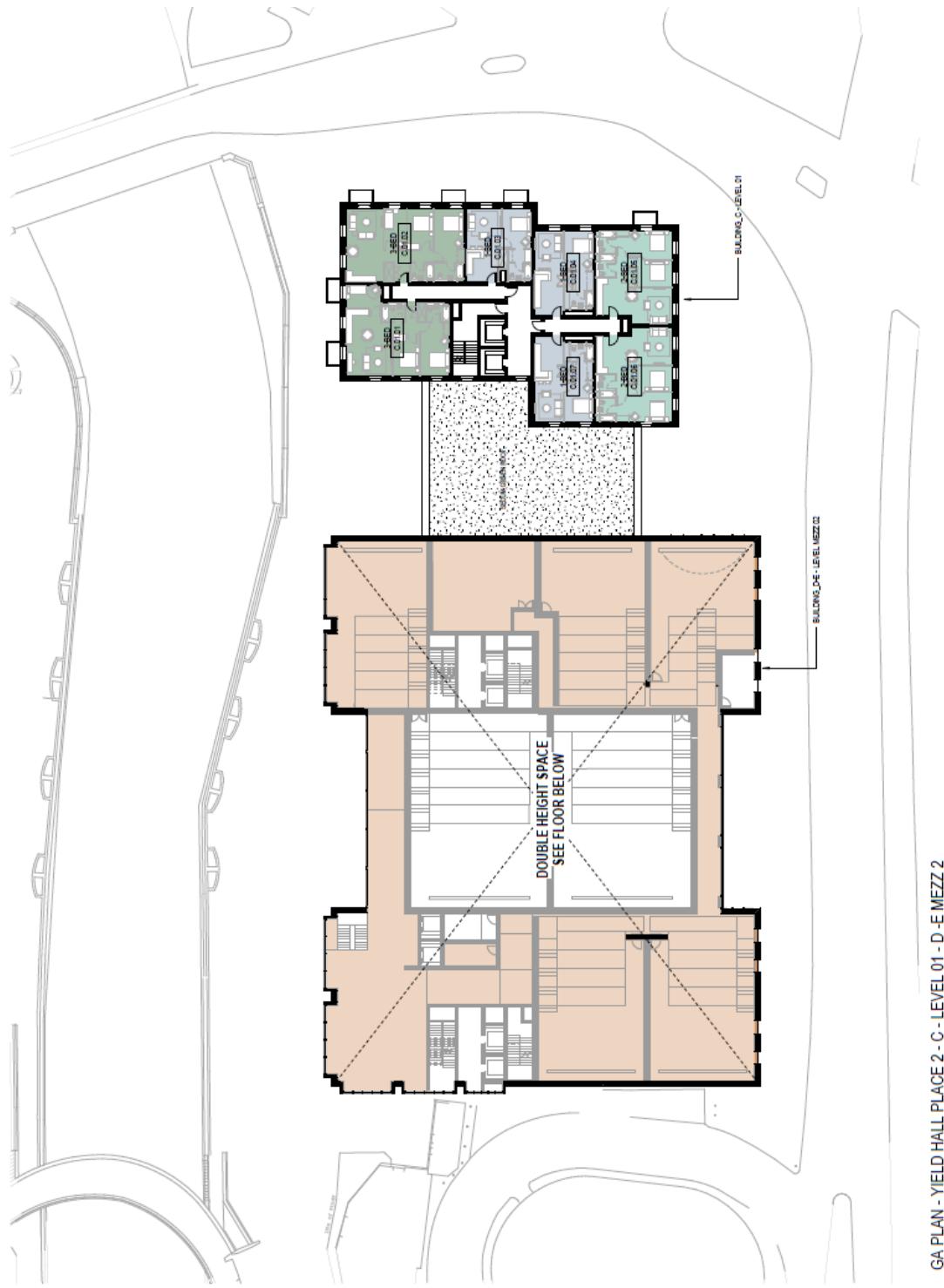
YHP2



Proposed ground floor plan



Proposed first mezzanine floor plan



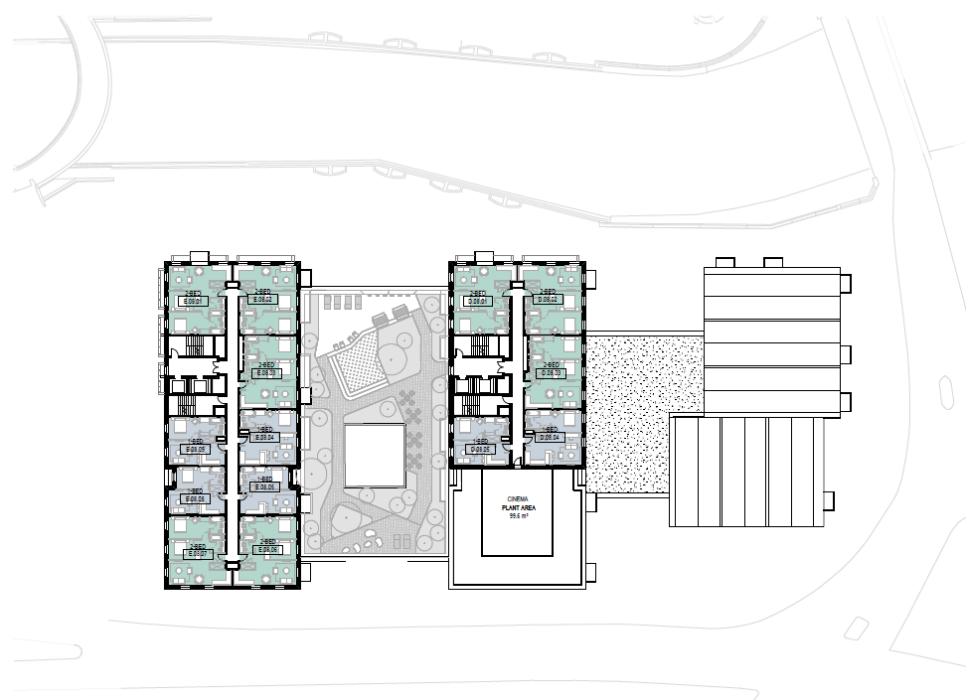
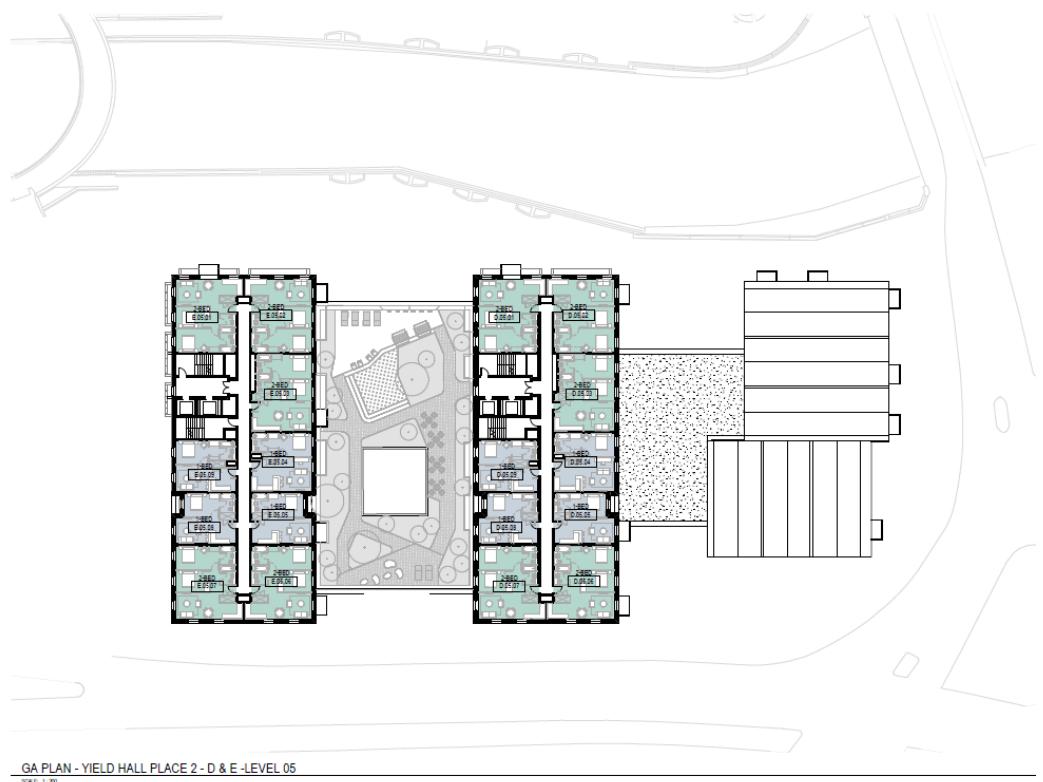
Proposed second mezzanine floor plan



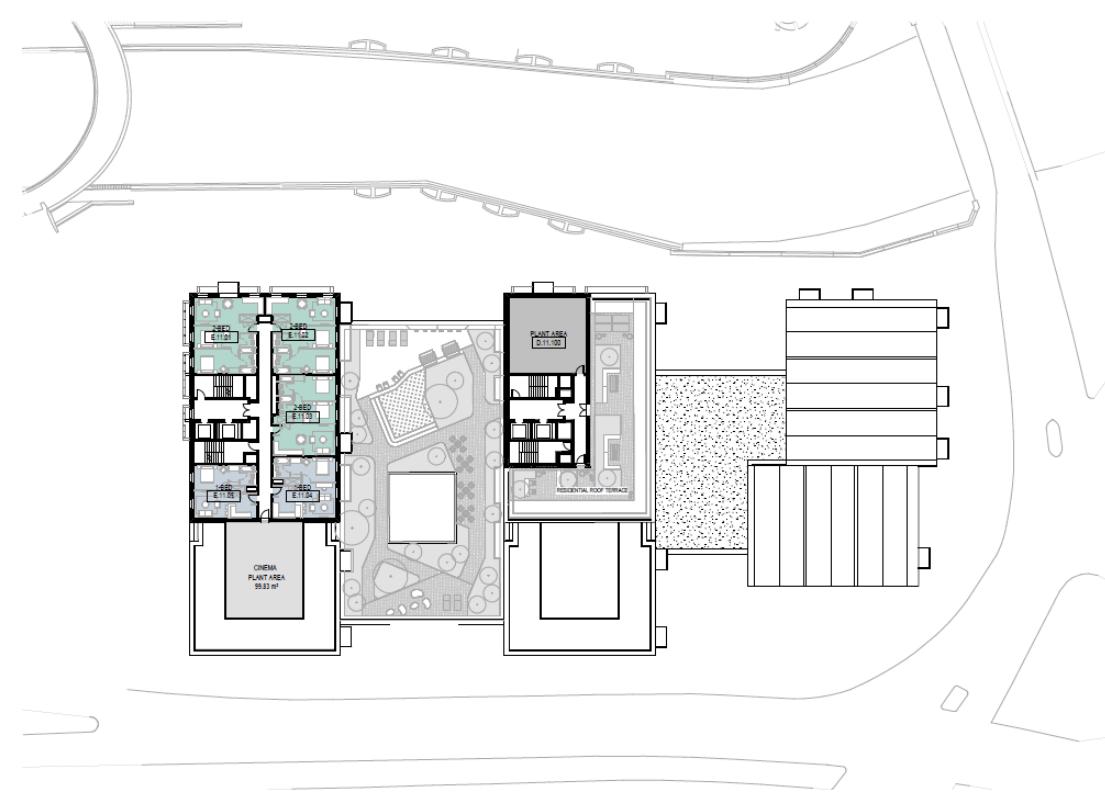
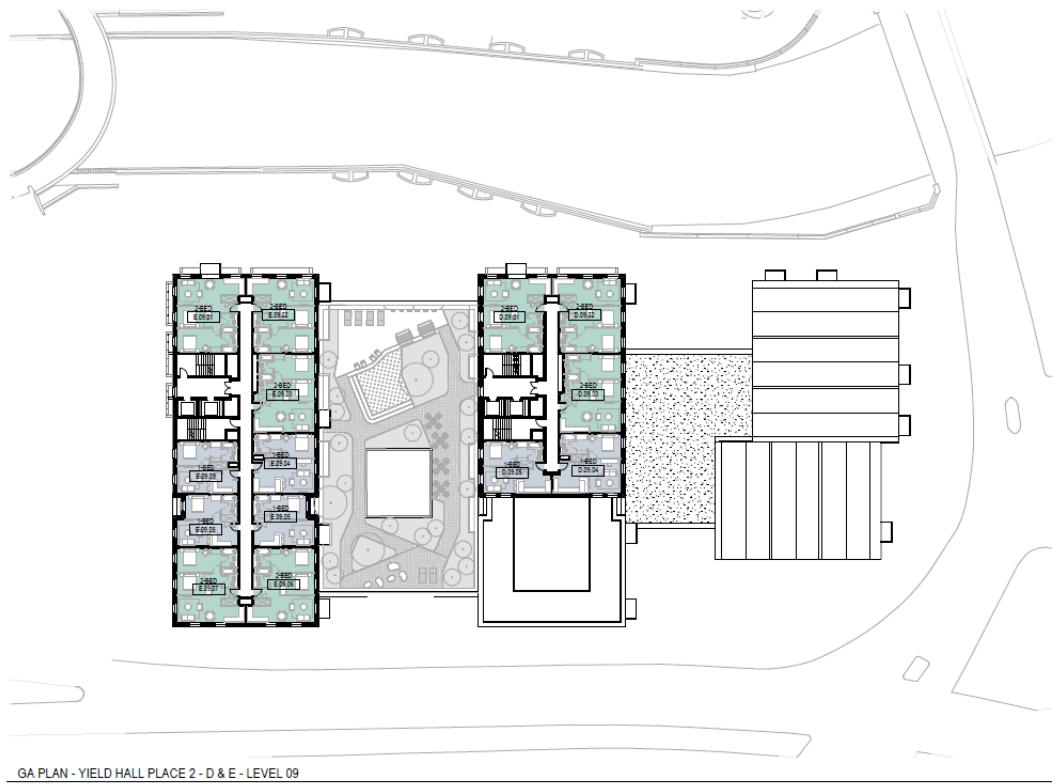
Proposed 3rd floor plan



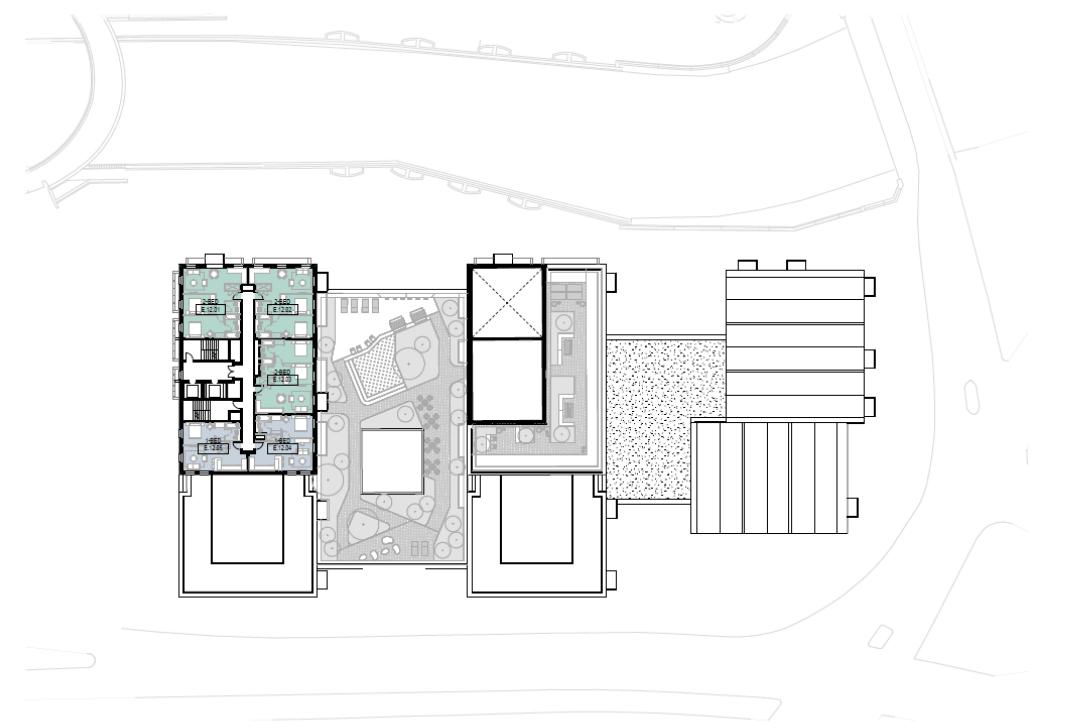
Proposed 4th floor plan



Proposed 5th to 8th floor plans

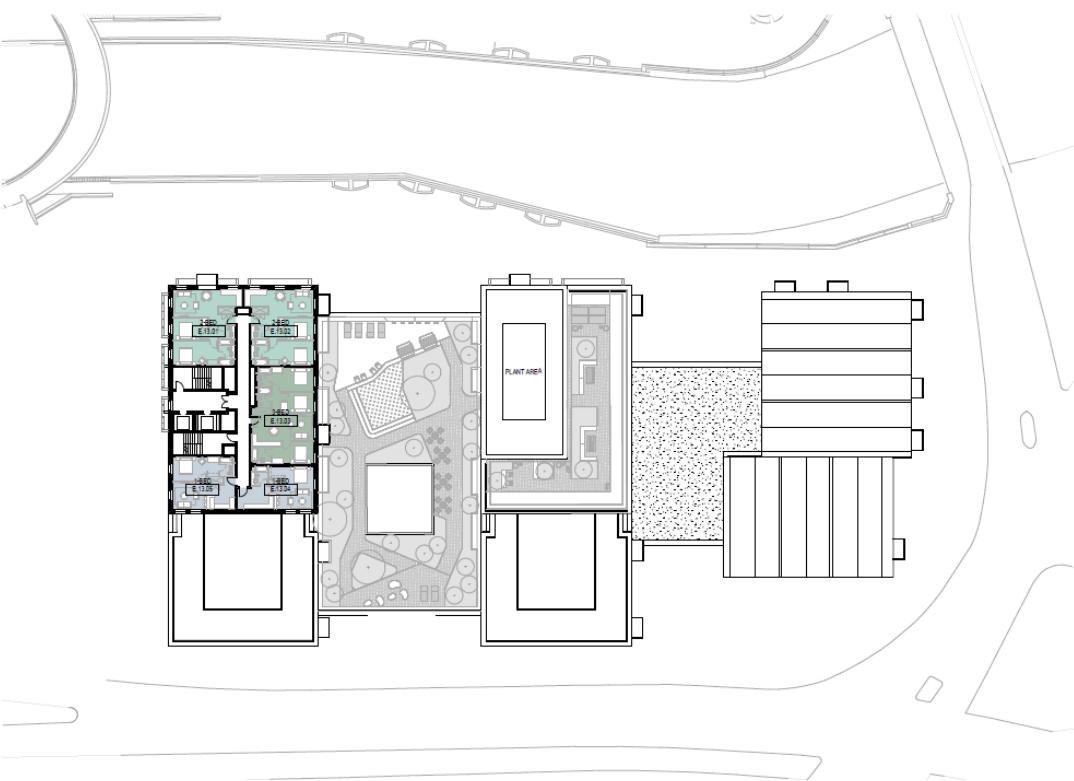


Proposed 9th to 11th floor plans



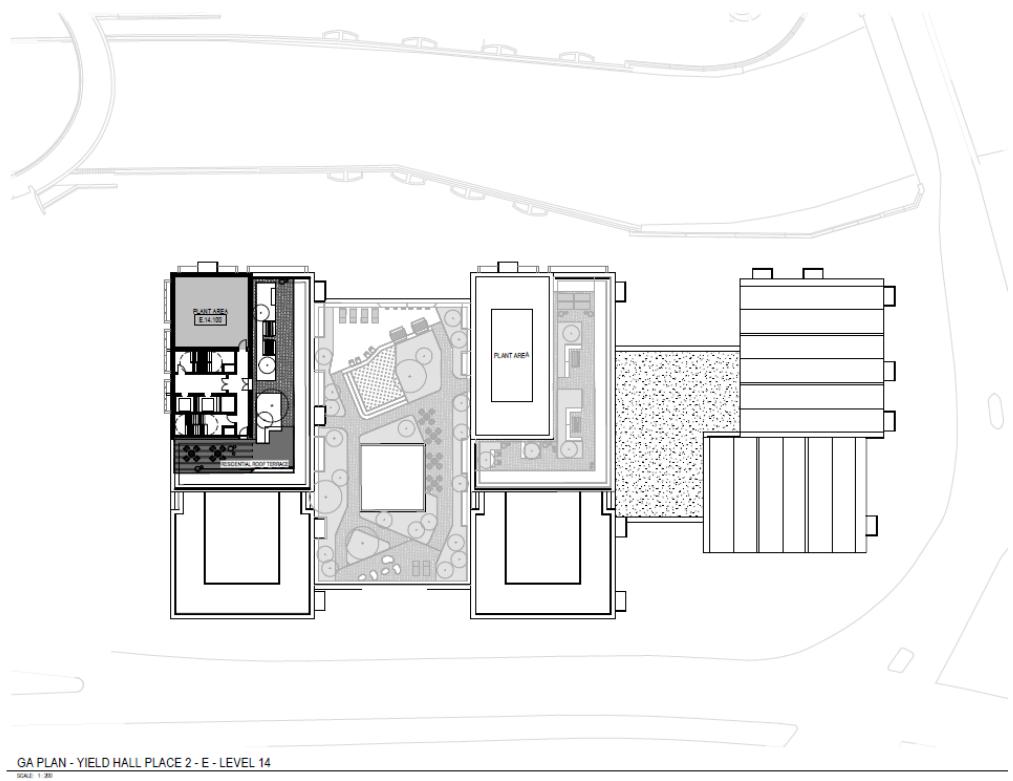
1 GA PLAN - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - D & E - LEVEL 12
SCALE: 1:200

Proposed 12th floor plan



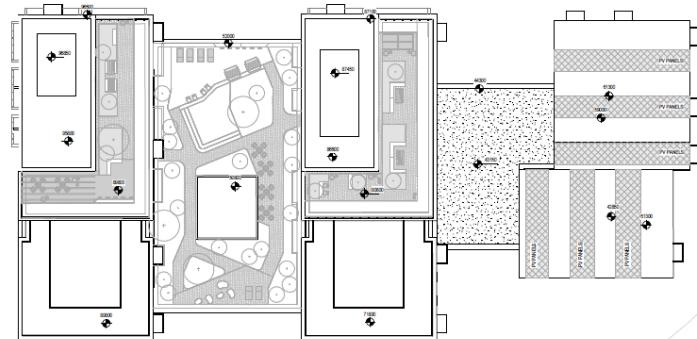
1 GA PLAN - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - E - LEVEL 13
SCALE: 1:200

Proposed 13th floor plan



GA PLAN - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - E - LEVEL 14

SCALE: 1:200



GA PLAN - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - C-D-E - ROOF PLAN

SCALE: 1:200

Proposed 14th floor and roof plan



Proposed east elevation – Yield Hall Place

ELEVATION - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - NORTH
SCALE: 1:200



Proposed north elevation – riverside



Proposed south elevation – IDR (Queens Road)



Proposed west elevation (Mill Lane) (block E)



Proposed west elevation (block D)



ELEVATION - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - COURTYARD EAST 2

SCALE: 1:200

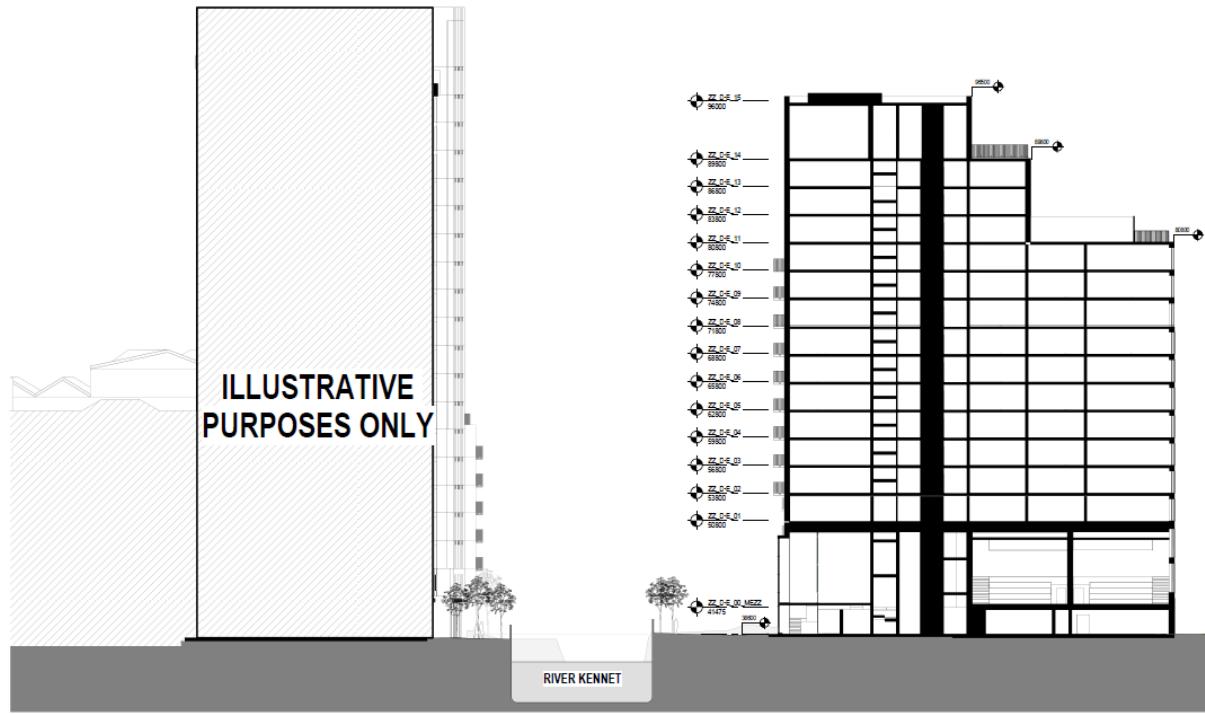
Proposed east elevation (block C)



ELEVATION - YIELD HALL PLACE 2 - COURTYARD WEST 2

SCALE: 1:200

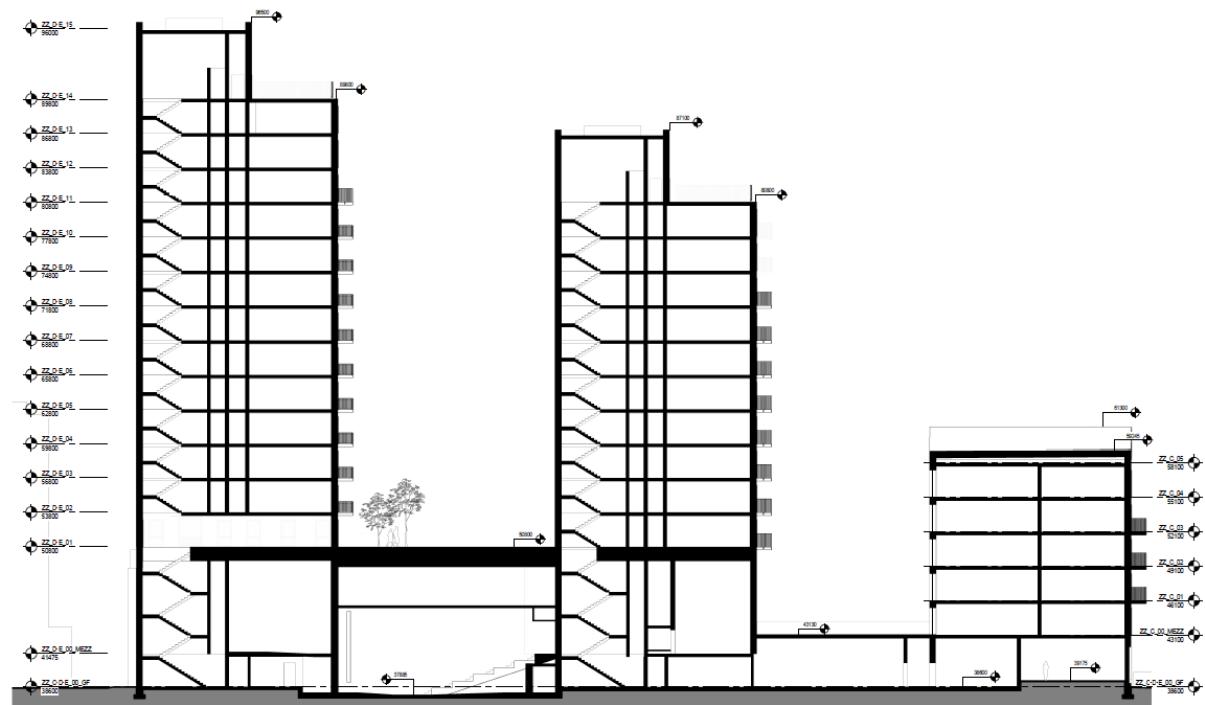
Proposed west elevation (blocks D and E)



YIELD HALL PLACE 2 CROSS SECTION

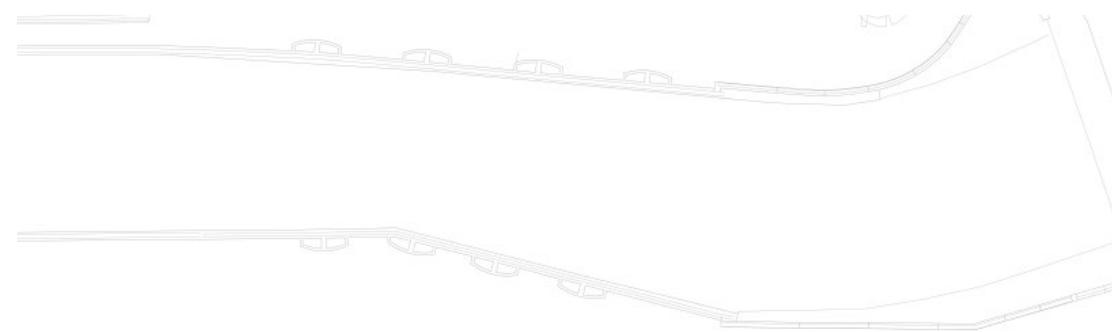
Scale 1:200

Proposed section with river (block E)





Proposed mezzanine floor plan – affordable dwelling locations outlined in red



Proposed 1st floor plan – affordable dwelling locations outlined in red

