



St Martin's Centre Redevelopment –Planning Application 140997

Revised plans 25 September 2014

Comments from the Caversham and District Residents' Association 6 October 2014

Mr Stephen Vigar
Planning Officer
Reading Borough Council

Dear Mr Vigar

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the revised plans. I set out below the response of the Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA). We request that this should be viewed alongside our comments of May 2014, on the pre-application plans, including a Vision for Caversham and our comments July 2014.

Block A (Pizza Express and Residential)

This 5 storey block is as high as the masts on the adjoining Telecom building. This is not in keeping with the 'village scale' and we ask that the height be reduced to 4 storeys to be more in keeping with local character. As there are no weight constraints on this new building, we would like to see a greater proportion of the brick finish to reduce the overall amount of the grey zinc finish in the scheme.

The projection over the pavement and the canopy would appear to conflict with the retention of the two street trees on public land which are important to softening that part of Church Street. The plans appear to take no account of these trees.

Block B (shops and residential to west of St Martins Square)

The additional storey overlooking St Martins Square will add to the problem of excessive shade on the square. Although brick clad fins are shown in some representations, these are not shown on the plans. The balcony access to the 2nd floor flats is an outdated approach resulting in poor living conditions

Block C (Iceland and Cinema)

This is a welcome improvement.

Block D (Above Boots and Costa)

The proposed building clashes with the Holm Oak as previously advised. It is disappointing that this issue remains unresolved in the revised plans. The retention of the Holm Oak is critical to softening the impact of new building on Church Street. The introduction of red brick finish is welcome as is the greater vertical emphasis to the elevations.

Block E (Waitrose)

The redesigned entrance to Waitrose is an improvement on the earlier plans. The bricks used on the existing Waitrose building are dull and flat and the less they are used the better. The elevations either side of the new Waitrose entrance are weak and nondescript and we hope can be improved.

Decked Car Park

The large utilitarian structure of steel and concrete requires considerable softening on all sides with more trees on the edges. The view from the entrance road (and sheltered housing behind School Lane) would be much improved by trees as well as a hedge if this can be accommodated with the position of the sewer.

Lighting on the ground floor of the car park needs to be of a very high standard to avoid a gloomy and insecure walk through for pedestrians.

St Martins Square

The higher buildings to the west, south and east of the square will make this a very dark area. Even if this shading can be reduced, a very high standard of lighting, hard landscaping and appropriate planting are needed to mitigate this. New planting nearer Church Street, perhaps where the second Holm Oak previously stood, would cause less shading and make a significant impact on the Church Street frontage which requires more planting to soften the impact of larger higher and more modern buildings.

The Canopy on Church Street

The steel support poles are thin. This makes them difficult to see and is therefore hazardous for pedestrians. If the poles need to be retained, we would like to see them clad in an attractive material to create a convincing column. The proposed signs appear to protrude into public space, creating a further narrowing. The space under the canopy will need careful lighting to create a pleasant shopping area on dark afternoons and evenings.

The Archway entrance

The car park also serves the shops on Prospect Street where the shortest pedestrian route is along Archway Road. The opportunity should be taken to improve the pedestrian and vehicle route in and out of the car park.

Public Toilets

It is very disappointing that the applicant is unwilling to recognise the need for public toilets to be available outside the Waitrose opening hours.

Cycle Parking

The increase in the number of spaces with better locations is welcome. This is something CADRA has been requesting over many years.

Planting scheme

We look forward to seeing a more detailed landscaping plan.

Community Notice board

As outlined at pre-application, we are very concerned that an appropriate location is identified for a community notice board to replace the current board in St Martin's Square.

Parking Numbers

We dispute the analysis set out the letter to the applicant 1 August 2014 which states:

With regard to vehicle parking, Transport DC have calculated that, based on the Councils Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011), the maximum provision required is 296 parking spaces. The proposals are for 308 spaces for the retail uses and 40 for the residential uses which represents an over-provision of 52 spaces. The site is in a very sustainable location, an attribute that will be enhanced further with the opening of the new footbridge over the River Thames. This being the case, this over-provision is not required and contrary to national and local policy.

More recent guidance and the national debate on supporting economic success in the 'High Street' must be taken into account. There is already significant pressure for spaces. The car park has always served the whole of Caversham Centre and is critical to its economic and commercial success. It is unrealistic to expect that many households will complete their food shop without the use of a car. The many smaller businesses rely heavily on people coming to complete their weekly shop and making other purchases at the same time. Caversham is one of the few centres in Reading where a significant number of independent shops thrive and the availability of adequate parking is critical to maintain that.

Although the new pedestrian/cycle bridge may bring more leisure trade to the centre, its impact on the shops is likely to be limited. We are aware parking is an issue of considerable concern to the local traders. There were grave concerns expressed that the 52 additional spaces would be insufficient and we are already receiving concerns from local residents on the severe reduction shown in the revised plans. It is in nobody's interest to place the commercial success of the centre at risk. If more people travel further for their food shopping and local shops and services fail, that is not a **sustainable** outcome.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lambert
CADRA Chair

7 October 2014

