

From: CADRA
Date: 14 April 2020 at 15:32:17 BST
To: Jonathan Markwell <jonathan.markwell@reading.gov.uk>
Subject: 55 Vastern Rd, Reading - Application no 200188

Dear Mr Markwell,

Further to CADRA's letter of 14 November 2019 to Richard Eatough which made observations on the need for the Hermes, Aviva and Berkeley sites to be considered as a whole in respect of their density, heights, massing, green space principles and the route from the station to the River, and not in a piecemeal way, we are now writing with our comments on the Berkeley application 200188, recently submitted.

1. Alignment, coherence and legibility of the new pedestrian and cycle route from the station to the river.

The Reading Station Area framework and the Reading central area action plan allowed for a direct link both visually and in landscape terms through to the river from the station. Due to the need to retain SSE equipment, only part of the SSE site has come forward for development. Berkeley have thus moved the pedestrian and cycle route west from the route intended, whereas Aviva on the adjoining site have kept the original alignment. There is thus now an indirect route to the river and a dog leg along the way, and the possibility of taking advantage of the view from the new fully glazed first floor station concourse towards the river has been lost. This is a failure of urban design. The alignment of buildings along the route on the Berkeley site does not add to the directness of the route. There has not been liaison between developers on the alignment of the route. Co ordination of detailed design between developers along the route such as tree species, hard surfacing , street furniture etc would also be beneficial.

2. Building heights directly adjacent the river.

We previously raised the matter of heights of buildings and the skyline directly adjacent the river. The Thames is a major local and national landscape asset and public design guidance should be available for developers in respect of height and distance from the River Thames. The still applicable Station Area framework document gives indicative heights of 4 to 6 storeys. Even taking these as 'commercial' storeys, the 10 residential storeys proposed for the eastern block on the site is excessive and not in accordance with the framework. There will be significant new overshadowing of the River Thames as indicated in the applicants Daylight/ Sunlight report. The proposed 10 storey eastern block alongside the Thames is also substantially higher than the successful Thames Water HQ building to the east. The skyline as viewed from the Thames itself and from Christchurch Meadows will be damaged.

3. General

There are a number of positive aspects to the proposals that can be highlighted. The direct connection of the Christchurch footbridge into the site is well handled, together with the provision of a cafe. The landscaping at footpath level adjacent the towpath alongside the river is welcome. We believe that the restrained ornamental brickwork to the riverside buildings together with the choice of a light coloured brick on these north facing buildings works well. Detailing on the proposed Vastern road buildings looks more forced and it's success will be dependent on detailing, the depth of reveals, shadow lines etc to avoid the bland.

I hope these comments are useful to you in your consideration of the application.

On behalf of Caversham and District Residents Association