

From: CADRA

Date: 24 April 2020 at 07:04:50 BST

To: "brian.conlon@reading.gov.uk" <brian.conlon@reading.gov.uk>

Subject: Aviva site, Reading Station Park, Vastern Rd, Reading RG1 8AJ - Application 200328

Dear Mr Conlon,

Further to CADRA's letter of 14 November 2019 to Richard Eatough, attaching our letter to Aviva commenting on their pre planning proposals, we are writing now with our comments on the outline application 200328 recently submitted by Aviva. Whilst there are some changes from the pre application that ameliorate the proposals, broadly speaking our previous comments remain valid. Our letter to Richard Eatough also made observations on the need for the Hermes, Aviva and Berkeley sites to be considered together as a whole by RBC in respect of their density, heights, massing, green space principles and the route from the station to the river.

THE BIG PICTURE AND SITE USE

CADRA accept the concept of a new, largely residential quarter between the station and the River Thames. We have no objection to the mix of uses incorporating residential, offices, a hotel, and retail to serve a new residential community. This needs to be of appropriate density and heights with a clear and well landscaped pedestrian and cycle route from the station through to the new Christchurch Bridge and with the provision of proper ancillary facilities and green space. The proposals for all three sites, Hermes, Aviva and Berkeley involve a high density of residential development where none exists at present. With regard to the Aviva site, the number of residential apartments appears indeterminate on the application, although a schedule in the Design and Access statement indicates 562 flats. This appears to be a welcome reduction on the 600 to 900 flats proposed at pre application stage. Nevertheless the figure of 562 flats when added to the 650 residential flats proposed on the Adjacent Hermes/ Royal Mail depot site, application no 182252, gives a total of 1212 apartments. We note that Site CR 11e in the new Local Plan, which covers the Aviva and Hermes sites combined, has an indicative allocation of 640 to 900 dwellings. The total proposed by these two developers of 1212 apartments is therefore substantially in excess of the upper range in the Local Plan and goes a great way to explaining the unsatisfactory nature of the proposals. We hope that RBC will apply the new Local Plan policies with rigour.

ALIGNMENT AND LEGIBILITY OF THE NEW PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE ROUTE FROM THE STATION TO THE RIVER, INCLUDING THE VIEW FROM THE STATION CONCOURSE

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 their site have not matched or coordinated with this alignment. There is thus now an indirect route to the river and a dog leg along the way. In addition the possibility of taking advantage of the View from the new fully glazed first floor station concourse towards the river has been

lost. Plot C of the Aviva application now squarely blocks this View. This is a failure of urban design. We attach below a photograph showing the current outlook from the glazed station concourse, which indicates the potential of designing to take advantage of this View. We also enclose a marked up extract from the Applicants Design and Access statement illustrating the indirectness of the route proposed. There has not been liaison between developers on the alignment of the route. Plots D and C should be re configured to investigate providing a direct route. The future View from the glazed Station Concourse (requested from the Applicant but not forthcoming) should be a fundamental part of the design of both the Aviva and Berkeley sites. Co ordination of detailed design between developers along the route such as tree species, hard surfacing , street furniture etc would also be beneficial.

HEIGHTS AND MASSING

The proposals are not in accordance with the spirit of RBC Tall buildings policy. This allows for a cluster of the tallest buildings to the south/ town centre side of the Railway line. Heights then reduce northwards towards the river and RBC have an elegant diagram with a curved line setting this out visually. Heights on the taller southern edge of the Aviva scheme do not coordinate with those on the Hermes site and in many cases rise in height from the Hermes site rather than reduce. On the northern edge of the site, where heights should be substantially reduced, 8 to10 storeys are proposed. The proposals should be reduced in height to better reflect policy and to be in proper scale with the buildings of the existing residential communities to the north and west of the site where they adjoin them.

DENSITY AND GREEN SPACE

Related to the points on heights and massing above, the proposed density of development, green space and distances between buildings and blocks will lead to unsatisfactory living conditions. There has been some movement from the pre App stage where the applicant was proposing dimensions of 15 metres, window to window, between residential blocks and buildings 6 to 8 storeys high! 20 metres separation is now proposed, this remains unsatisfactory given the proposed heights. The width within the courtyards, window to window, of the multi storey residential blocks (including single aspect flats) appears still to be less than 20 metres.

With regard to green space, the 'podium garden' spaces within the courtyards of the residential blocks are at first floor level. Any planting will be on a concrete deck and limited. This and the narrow dimensions of these areas, highlighted above, indicates that these areas are likely to be relatively hard areas with limited natural sunlight and limited planting and cannot be considered as contributing effective or satisfactory amenity space.

TRANSPORT AND PARKING

CADRA do not believe that sufficient thought has been given at this Outline Application stage to the principles of transport and parking on this scheme and the needs of the possible circa 562 flats proposed, some of whom will be families with children. Parking for adequate car sharing spaces, visitors, multiple and frequent deliveries and the disabled needs proper consideration. Advocating the use of public car parks such as the station

car park is unrealistic. Transport also needs to be considered in relation to school catchments.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN QUALITY

Whilst this is an outline application, the choice of materials is unimaginative. The illustrative overall block views using these materials illustrate a blandness and mediocrity that do not bode well for any future detailed architectural treatment of the scheme.

FOOD RETAILER

While discount retailing is a recent development and may not be considered a Planning issue, the potential loss of the Aldi store on the site does need to be raised and properly considered and this has not been addressed. The Aldi store offers low cost food and household goods to the current communities in the area, many of whom may be on modest incomes. In this respect it has an important function. In addition, the overall proposals for the area postulate an increase in population of several thousand people. Food shopping within walking distance for this new car free community needs to be considered and planned for.

CONCLUSION

This application is an exercise in establishing value for the the Applicant. The design is fundamentally flawed in respect of density, satisfactory urban living standards, and many urban design principles. It holds no benefits for Reading and requires a radical rethink and redesign in coordination with the related adjoining sites.

I hope these comments are useful to you in your consideration of this application,

Kind regards,

On behalf of Caversham and District Residents Association

