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30th June 2023

Cat White
Turley
6th Floor North 2 Charlotte Place
Southampton
SO14 0TB
By email only

Dear Cat

Planning Reference: 221918/SCR

Description of development: Request for EIA Screening Opinion from Reading Borough Council (RBC) in accordance with Part 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended) in relation to the following developments proposed by the following planning applications:

"Debenhams" 221916/FUL - Mixed use development comprising part demolition of former department store and erection of new building comprising up to 202no. build to rent residential dwellings (Class C3) and 1,209 sqm commercial uses within Uses Class E and / or bar (Sui Generis Use). Reconfiguration and change of use of up to 5,866 sqm 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 and external alterations to shopping centre, including creation of new shopping centre entrance.

"Vue Cinema" 221917/FUL - Mixed use development comprising demolition of existing buildings and erection of new building comprising up to 247no. build-to-rent residential dwellings (Class C3) and 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.

Location: The Oracle, Reading

Information considered: Debenhams & Vue, The Oracle, Reading Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report by Turley and Built Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (HTVIA) Debenhams & Vue, The Oracle, Reading by Turley

Screening opinion:

It is considered that the proposal does not fall within Schedule 1 of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (hereafter referred to as the EIA Regulations 2017). The proposal falls within the description at paragraph 10(b) of Schedule 2 and exceeds the threshold of including more than 150 dwellings in column 2. Therefore, the Council considers the proposal to be 'Schedule 2 development' within the meaning of the EIA Regulations 2017.

Accordingly, the Council has considered if the proposed development is likely to have significant effects on the environment. In determining such effects, the Council has taken into account the criteria for screening Schedule 2 development set out in Schedule 3 of the Regulations. These are the characteristics of the development, its location and the types and characteristics of the potential impact. Based upon the description of the development provided, the information provided in your submission received on 17/12/18 (screening request 221918/SCR) and the information provide under planning applications 221916/FUL and 221917/FUL at the site, the development could be considered to be likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size and location. More specifically, the following significant effects are identified:

- Impact on Natural Resources (Water – River Kennet) - Due to scale of proposed buildings located in close proximity to either side of the River. There is currently an Environment Agency objection to the proposed planning applications (221916FUL and 221917FUL) citing concerns about overshadowing/shading and impact on the water body and its biodiversity.

- Population and Human Health - The Environment Agency have identified that part of the site of the application to the north of the river (ref. 221916) is located within flood zone 3B (functional flood plan) where the proposed residential and commercial development is, in accordance with Annex 3 of the NPPF, considered incompatible with this flood zone and should not be permitted due to the high probability of flooding. The EA have also identified that the Flood Risk Assessments submitted in support of the applications on both sides of the river are inadequate and fail to demonstrate that the proposals would be safe for their lifetime from flooding.

- Biodiversity (species and habitat) – The River Kennet is a Priority Habitat as per paragraph 179 of the NPPF and forms part of the local green network and area of identified biodiversity interest under Policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019). Due to scale of the proposed buildings and their proximity to the river, the Council's Ecology Consultant considers that there is likely to be a significant impact upon biodiversity within the river. Furthermore, the Environment Agency object to both applications with similar concerns, noting that there is no assessment of how extra shading over the river from the development will impact the river and river corridor in terms of biodiversity.

- Townscape and Visual – The scale of buildings proposed mean they would be highly visible and likely to result in significant visual and townscape impacts. Supporting Heritage and Townscape Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA) submitted with the application note the proposals would provide for a 'landmark feature' and therefore a significant impact is implied – it is not considered that the information submitted with the applications demonstrates that this impact would not be adverse. The proposed development would be significantly taller that the majority of buildings within the town centre and would incorporate tall buildings in a location that is outside of the designated tall buildings clusters identified within the town centre under Policy CR10. The scale

of the proposed buildings so close to river channel would also result in significant impacts on setting of riverside spaces (Policy EN11).

- Cultural Heritage - Historic England object to the planning applications on the basis of the proposed tall buildings (and submitted HTVIA) and consider that the proposals would harm the setting of the nearby Market Place/London Street Conservation Area through dominatingly tall and bulky buildings. Possible harmful impacts on the St Marys Butts/Caste Street Conservation Area are also identified. Historic England identify less than substantial harm in the context of NPPF but indicate that further information is required to fully assess the proposals. It is not considered that the HTVIA fully demonstrates that impacts would not be significant.

Accordingly, in exercise of the powers conferred by Regulation 6 (6) (b) of the EIA Regulations 2017, the Council hereby considers that the proposed development described in your request and the documents submitted with it is 'EIA development', within the meaning of the EIA Regulations 2017, and hence a positive screening opinion is hereby adopted.

NOTICE under Regulation 6, Part 2 of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

Pursuant to Regulation 6(7), Part 2 of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 Reading Borough Council as Local Planning Authority considers that due to exceptional circumstances, i.e. due to the Statutory Consultee responses from the Environment Agency on the related planning applications not being received until 16th June 2023, it is not been possible for the LPA to adopt a screening opinion within the relevant period specified in paragraph (6) of Reg.6. Therefore, Reading Borough Council as the Local Planning Authority hereby extends that period until 28th June 2023 .

Informatives
You are advised, by virtue of Part 2 Regulation 6 (10) (b) of the EIA Regulations 2017 that you have the option to make a request to the Secretary of State to issue a Screening Direction if you disagree with this Opinion.

Please note that this screening opinion is provided without prejudice to the formal decision of the Council on this or any other application which may subsequently be submitted.

Yours sincerely

Matt Burns

Matt Burns
Principal Planner