



Proposed development at Eaton Court, Reading
Statement of Community Involvement
February 2023



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Summary

Summary

This Statement of Community Involvement has been prepared by Forty Shillings on behalf of Venta Propco 1 Limited (“Venta”), a Joint Venture between Osborne Developments and PGIM Real Estate. Venta acquired the property in June 2022 from Cannon Capital Developments.

Venta is bringing forward plans to redevelop Eaton Court in Reading town centre. The plans will deliver 120 high-quality rental homes and enhanced public realm.

A planning submission was originally made in March 2021 (ref no. 210639) following consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and local residents, including councillors, planning officers and community groups.

Following the acquisition of the site, Venta has continued to engage with immediate neighbours and other stakeholders. From these discussions, further changes have been made to the scheme, resulting in an updated submission in February 2023.

This document provides details of the community engagement that was undertaken to support the initial application and the further discussions that took place after March 2021 and outlines how the submitted scheme has evolved in response to feedback from the local community and the Council.

As part of the consultation undertaken ahead of the March 2021 submission, a number of groups were approached including Ward Councillors, the Reading Civic Society, Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association, and the Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee. Alongside this, a public consultation event was held in September 2019.

From these discussions, a number of issues about the development were raised regarding the massing, design and landscaping of the scheme.

In response to these comments, several changes were made to the proposals including;

- reductions to the height and massing to the west end of the building facing Oxford Road
- improvements to the design of the building façade and entrance square, and,
- enhanced landscaping to include tree planting.

More information on the design response to this feedback is outlined in the *Initial Consultation* section of the SCI.

Following the submission of the March 2021 application, engagement has continued with local stakeholders and neighbours regarding the plans for Eaton Court. During this time, further discussions have been held with Fynecast – the developer of the neighbouring 114 Oxford Road apartments, Reading Borough Council – including Abbey Ward Cllrs Page, Rowland and Ayub, the Reading Civic Society and the Royal Meteorological Society.

Following the March 2021 submission concerns were raised about the massing, height, design and landscaping of the submitted proposals.

In response further changes have been made as part of this submission:

- the massing of Blocks 1 & 3 have been reduced and revised,
- the first floor podium has been omitted in favour of a landscaped ground floor courtyard,
- greater separation from the Royal Meteorological Society building,
- there has been a reduction in height to the western boundary wall,
- access to terraces has been reviewed, and,
- overlooking balconies have been removed to address design concerns.

Further information on Cannon Capitals' response to the consultation undertaken between March 2021 and March 2022 and Venta's response, following their acquisition of the site, can be found in the *Consultation* section of the SCI.

Consultation policy

Throughout the planning process the applicants have followed best practice as established in the requirements of local and national planning frameworks.

National Planning Policy

Developments should:

“be genuinely plan-led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings, with succinct local and neighbourhood plans setting out a positive vision for the future of the area. Plans should be kept up-to-date, and be based on joint working and co-operation to address larger than local issues.”

Reading Borough Council: SCI 2014

“The Council agrees with [the National Planning Policy’s] emphasis on engaging the community from the outset. It can result in an improved scheme which takes the needs of the existing community into account, and a better relationship between the developer and the community that carries through the application process and beyond. This is particularly the case for proposals that are sensitive or of a significant scale.”

The Plans

Background

Eaton Court sits along Oxford Road in Reading Town Centre and is a 10-minute walk from Reading train station. The site is currently occupied by a disused three-storey office building, a two-storey car park and linked to the listed building Mannson House.

The proposed development will be neighboured by Chatham Place to the east and south of the site, across Oxford Road, lies the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area.

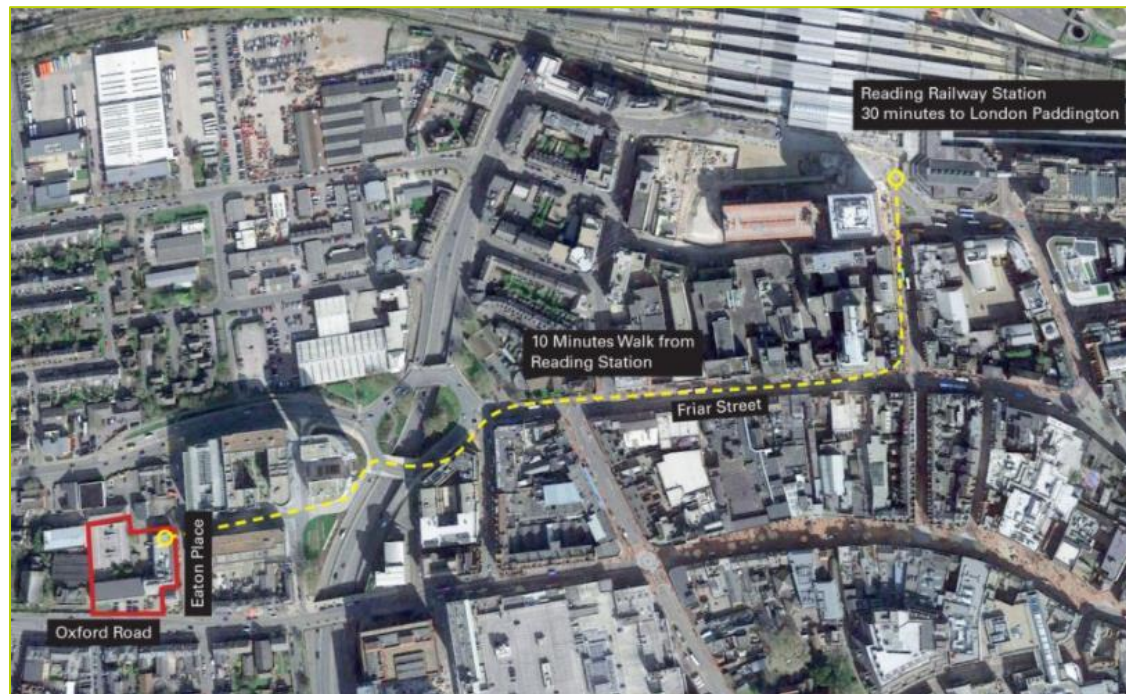


Existing building

The Plans



Proposed scheme



Venta intends to deliver the regeneration of Eaton Court on Oxford Road near Reading town centre, located on an under-used brownfield site.

The plans will provide 120 new homes centred around a landscaped courtyard and designed sympathetically to reflect the local neighbourhood and neighbouring conservation area.

The proposal would also include car parking with 14 spaces and separate cycle parking with a total of 75 spaces. Moreover, secure and sheltered refuse stores will be provided within the buildings at ground floor.

Initial Consultation

(pre-March 2021)

How we consulted

In September 2019, Cannon Capital consulted with a range of local residents and stakeholders:

- A public consultation event held at Odd Fellows Court, Oxford Road on 24 September 2019.
- Meetings with stakeholder groups including Ward Councillors, the Reading Civic Society, Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association, and Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee.
- Invitation leaflets posted to 3417 addresses.
- Dedicated project website – www.eatoncourt.co.uk
- Dedicated project email address and hotline.



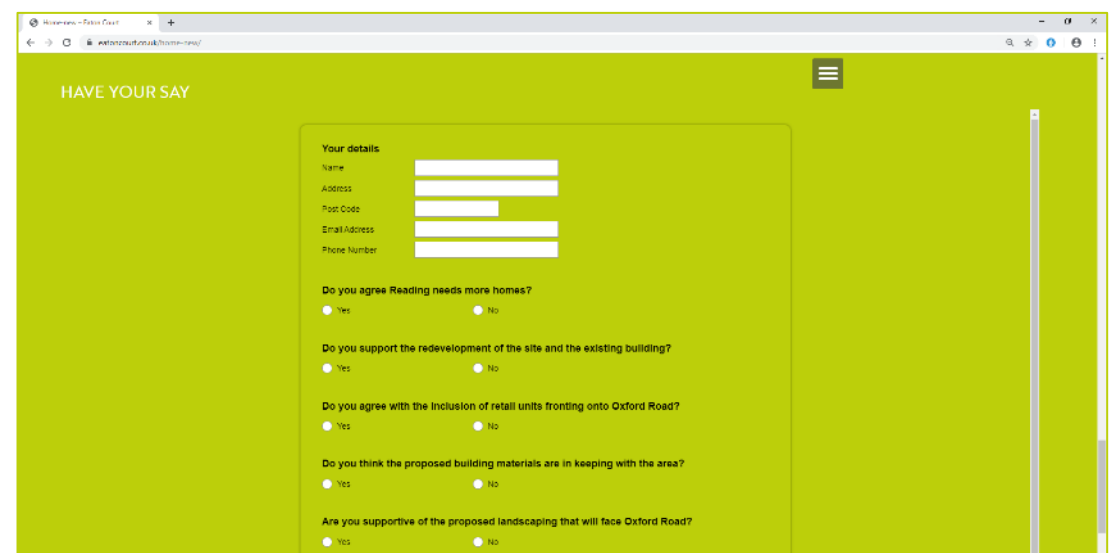
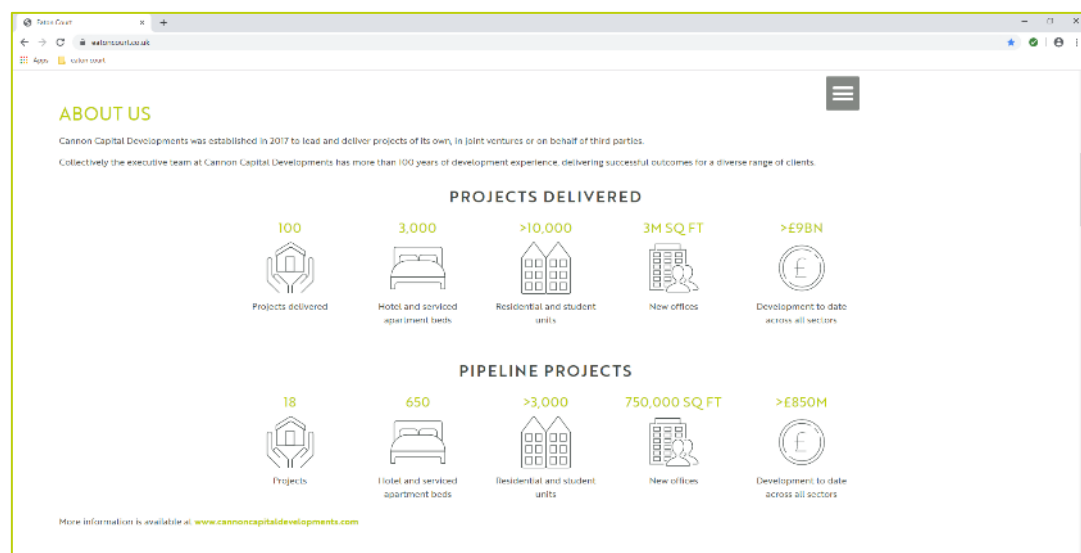
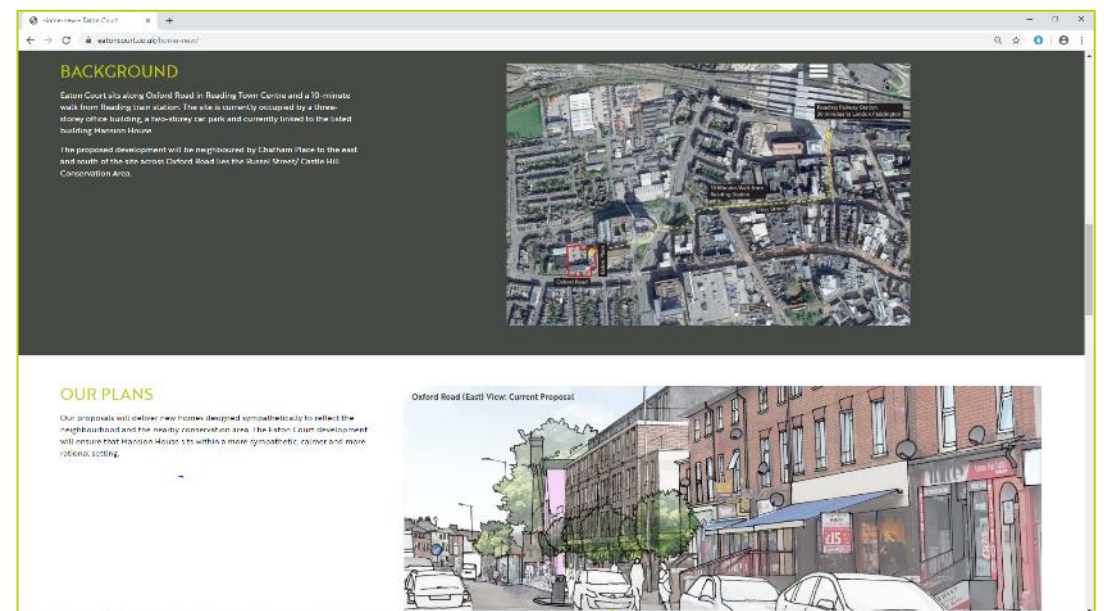
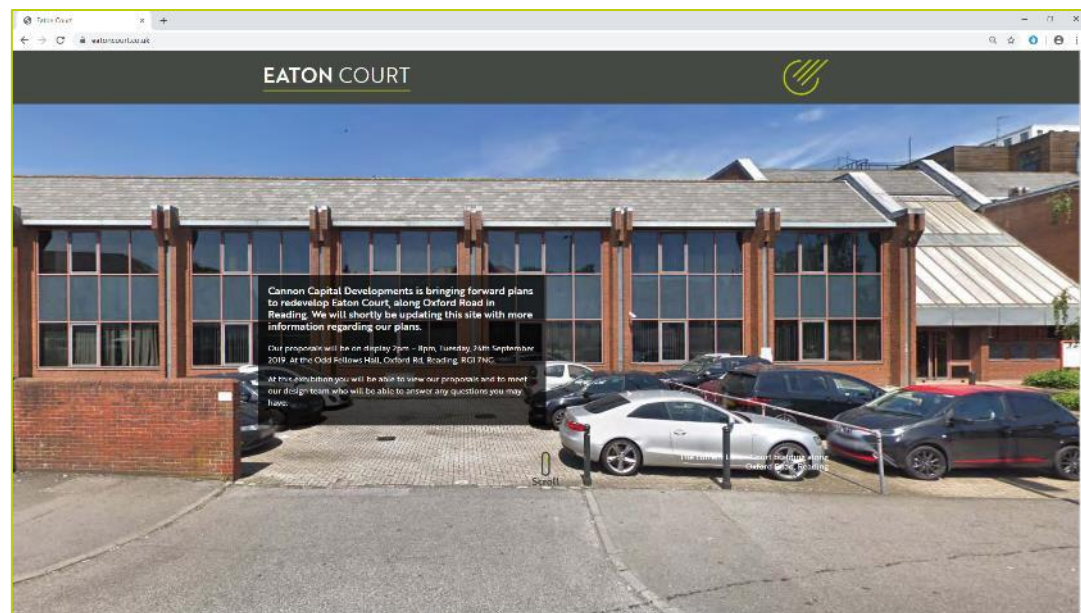
Front

Invitation leaflet posted to local addresses

Back

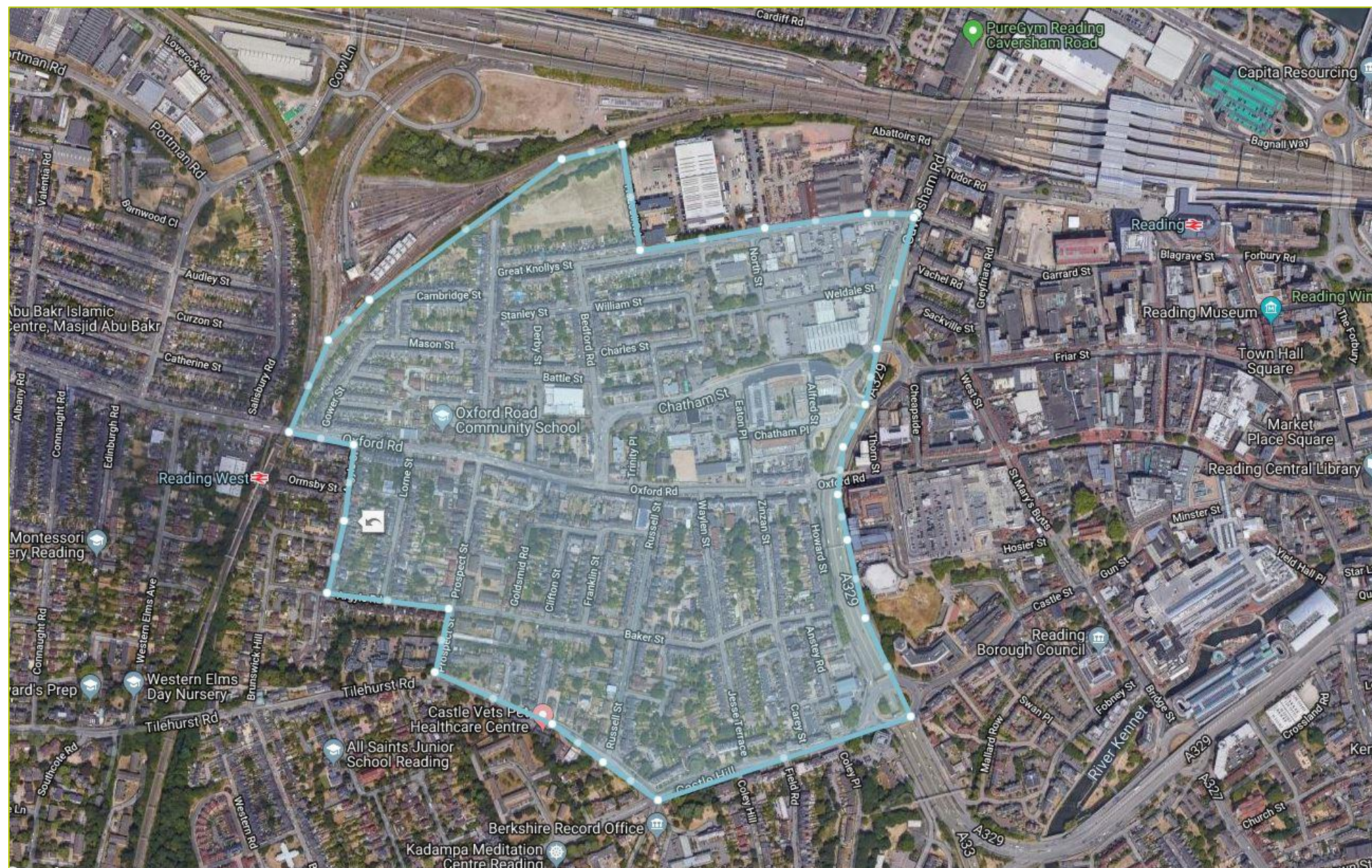
Project website

A dedicated project website - www.eatoncourt.co.uk - was set up to provide residents with information.



Leaflet distribution

Leaflets were posted to 3417 addresses inviting them to the public consultation event.



Public exhibition

The public exhibition was held on Tuesday, 24 September 2019 at Odd Fellows Court, Oxford Road, Reading.

The exhibition was attended by around 35 people, including representatives from the Reading Civic Society, Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association, Reading Meteorological Society, and members of the public.



Meetings with stakeholders

Following the public exhibitions, Cannon Capital continued to engage with the Council and local stakeholder groups, meeting with the following:

27th November 2019

- Ward Councillors
- Reading Civic Society/Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee
- The Butler Pub

22nd January 2020

- Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association



Feedback comments

Of the 35 local residents that attended the public exhibitions, 6 local residents provided more detailed comments on the proposals. Written comments focused on:

Building design and use:

- Attendees were keen that the buildings fitted into the architectural style of the area, and the use of traditional materials such as brick was welcomed.
- Privacy into neighbouring residences was noted as a concern by residents whose balconies look onto the site.
- One attendee preferred the use of brick instead of render to the walls abutting the listed building.

Building use:

- One attendee questioned the need for additional ground floor retail space along Oxford Road, but the majority of attendees welcomed the improved streetscape.

Landscaping:

- The proposed landscaping along Oxford Road was welcomed by the majority of attendees. No one raised as a concern the loss of trees on Eaton Place.

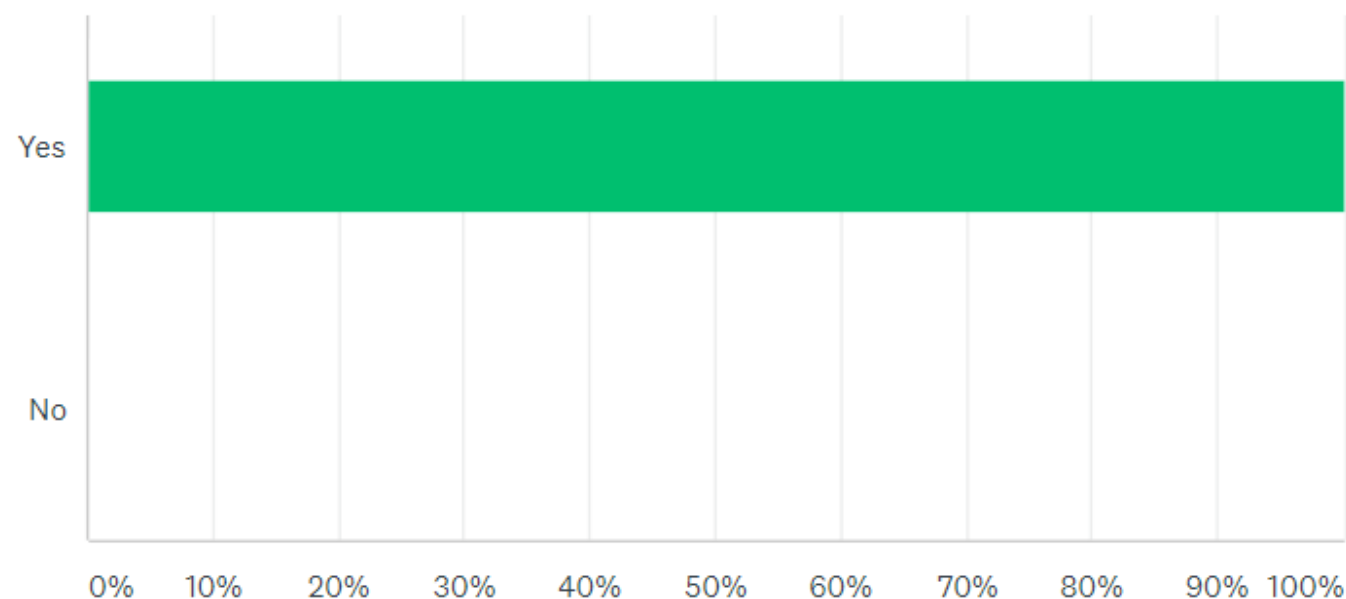
Construction stage:

- Construction noise was a concern for some attendees.

Feedback form summary

Do you agree Reading needs more homes?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 1

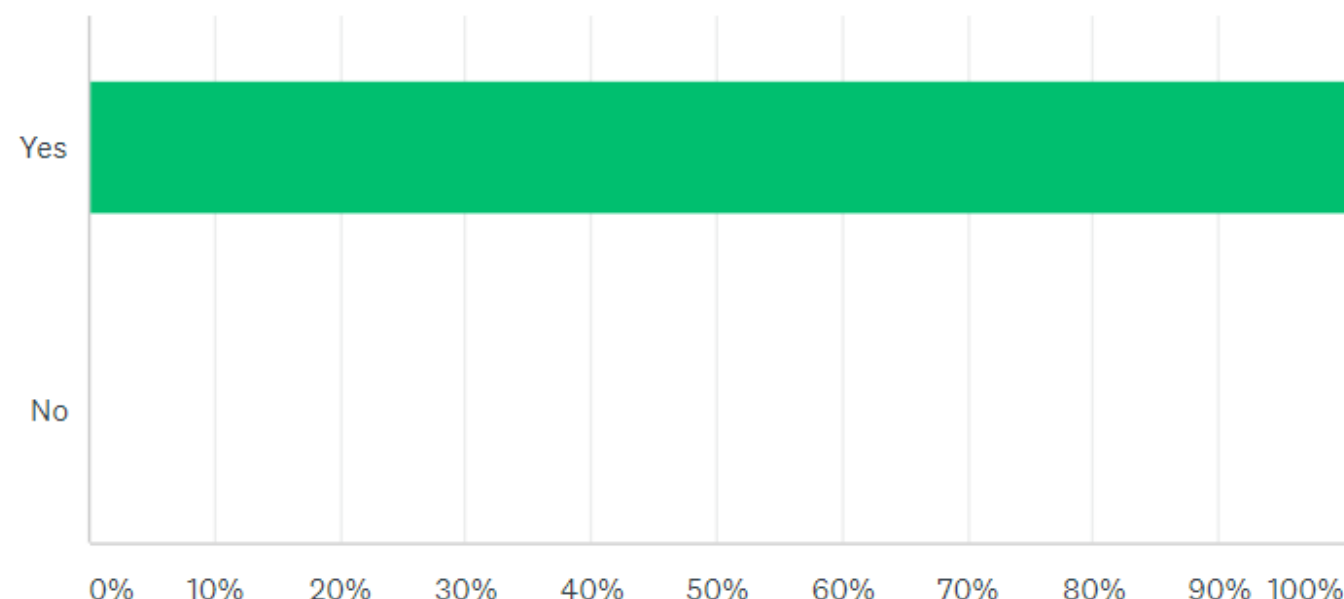


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	100.00%	5
No	0.00%	0
TOTAL		5

Feedback form summary

Do you support the redevelopment of the site and the existing building?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

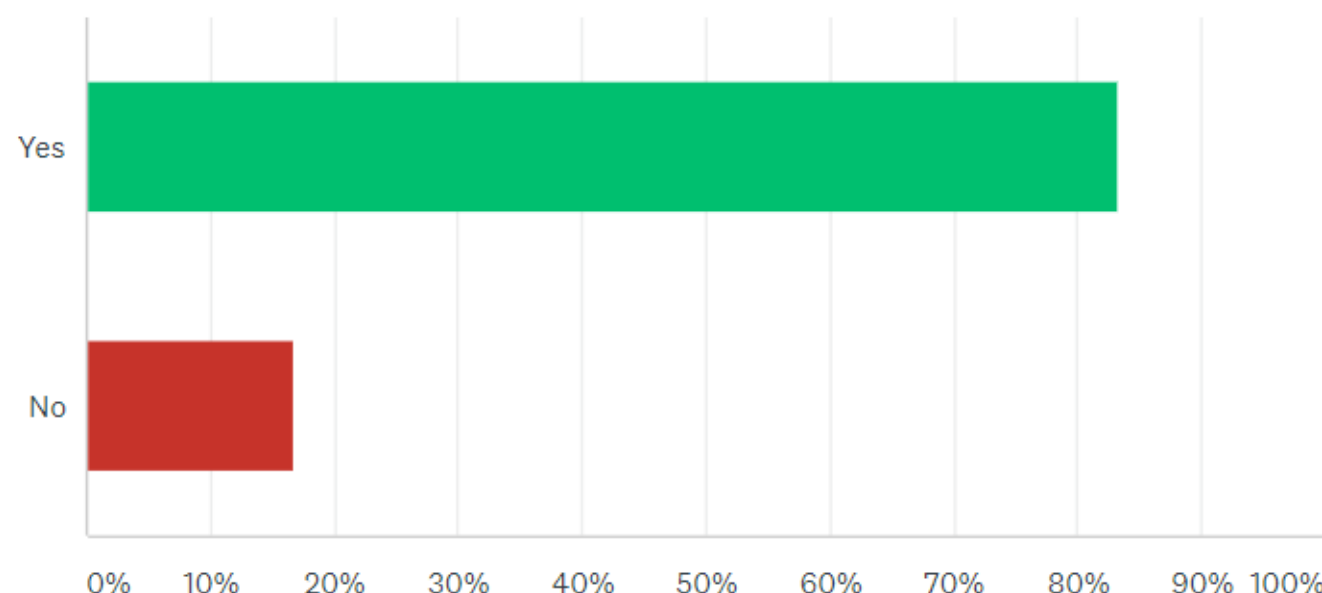


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	100.00%	6
No	0.00%	0
TOTAL		6

Feedback form summary

Do you agree with the inclusion of retail units fronting onto Oxford Road?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

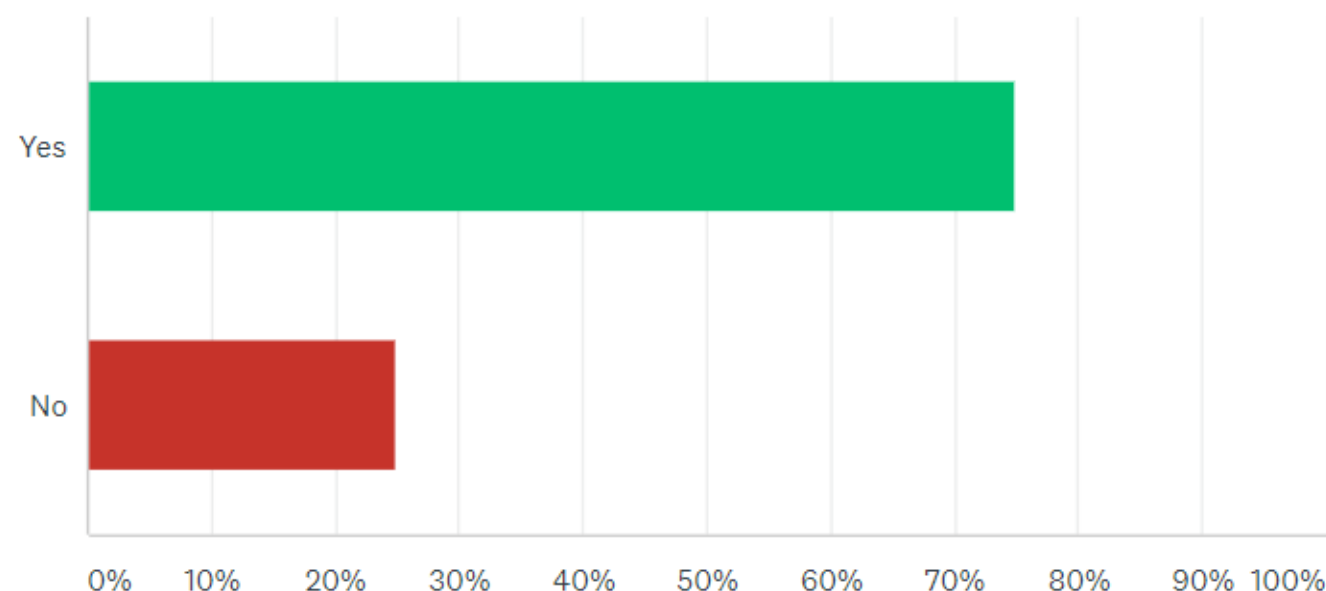


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	83.33%	5
No	16.67%	1
TOTAL		6

Feedback form summary

Do you think the proposed building materials are in keeping with the area?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 2

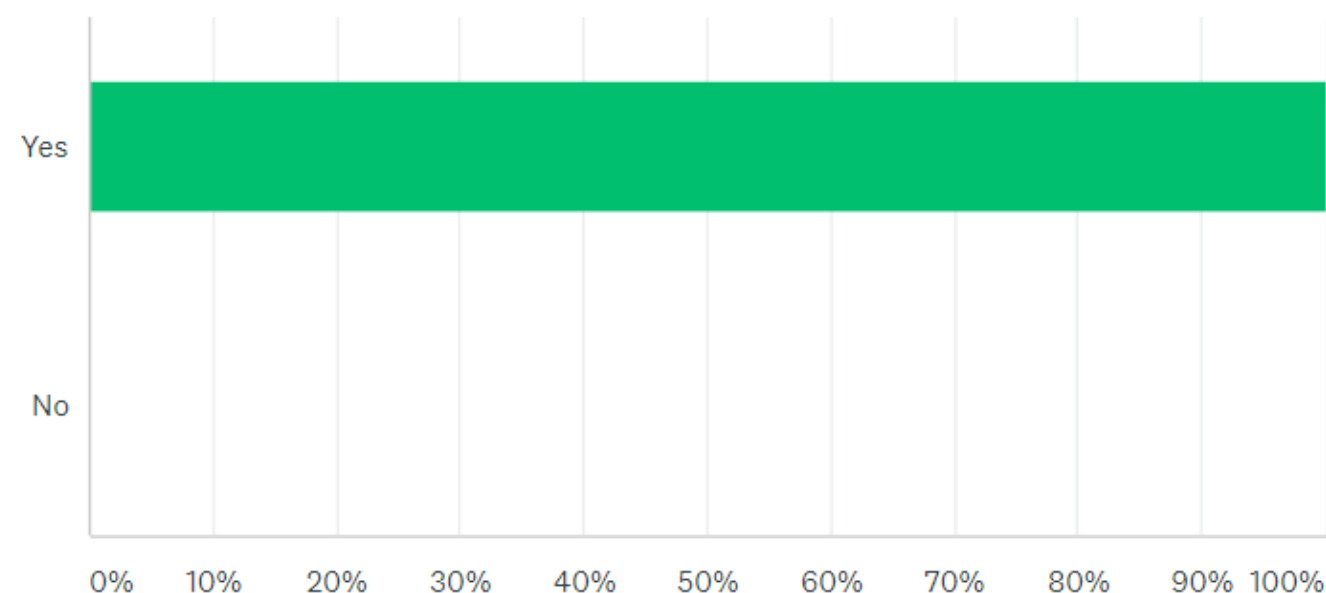


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	75.00%	3
No	25.00%	1
TOTAL		4

Feedback form summary

Are you supportive of the proposed landscaping that will face Oxford Road?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	100.00% 5
No	0.00% 0
TOTAL	5

Key issues raised

In addition, members of the exhibition team recorded the following verbal comments.

Building design:

- Councillors and Caribbean Associations Group members want the building to be sympathetic to the conservation area - the use of brick was welcomed along with a suggestion that the balustrades could be changed to metal as opposed to glass.
- Public realm enhancements were generally welcomed - increased separation from the listed building.
- Affordable housing should not be 'pepper potted' as this has proved unsuccessful in the neighbouring development.
- Attendees hoped that the redevelopment would improve local issues with anti-social behaviour.
- Overall reception was positive and the redevelopment of the site is generally welcomed.

Affordability:

- Amount of affordable housing within the scheme was questioned by attendees, and it was noted the exact percentage was to be agreed with the Planning Officers at Reading Borough Council.

Environment/sustainability:

- The redevelopment should fit into the sustainability goals of RBC's Local Plan.

Infrastructure and parking issues:

- The new proposed route through the site is regarded as a road to nowhere.

Feedback form comments

“This looks as if it will be a distinct improvement on the present building. A good location for residential.”

“Principal of redevelopment is fine but why the ground floor retail? Plenty of units in the area that tend to be low rent/long hours- do you really want to be in the flats above? Getting rid of some of the retail and some of the parking will lead to a more profitable development.”

“I am looking for a building that people think has always been there. “

“Provided the trees are alongside the shops and entrances, I can see the trees becoming concrete.”

“Noise of construction must be considered at all times. Use noise reduction where possible. Provide specific construction start and end times.”

“Windows to be staggered and tinted to reduce intrusion.”

“Flanks of the building that are the backdrop to the listed Mannson House should be brick not rendered.”

Councillor's comments

At the exhibition we also received comments and suggestions from Cllrs Page, Rowland and Ayub.

Design:

- Cllr Page noted that he considered that the taller building, at G+9 floors, was currently too high for the site.
- Cllr Rowland welcomed the revised streetscape proposals, and would like to see more information relating to the development of the façade design and how this relates to the adjacent Conservation Area.
- Cllr Page noted that the pavement width to Eaton Place was currently not very generous.
- Additional views were requested, including a view from Chatham Street to the north.
- Noted that our scheme should not inhibit development on adjacent sites.

Sustainability:

- Cllr Page was interested in maximising rainwater harvesting, and also expressed interest in the centralised plant being able to link to a future district heating system.
- Cllr Page was also interested in the possible addition of Solar panels into the scheme.

Affordability:

- All Cllrs were interested in maximising the percentage of affordable housing on the site.

Response to feedback

Following the public consultation in Autumn 2019, and prior to the March 2021 submission, the scheme evolved and Cannon Capital worked closely with Reading Planning Officers to make a number of changes to the plan which reduced the proposed units from 161 to 131. A summary of those changes can be found below:

Key issues	Design response
Height and massing	Reductions were made to the height and massing to the west end of the building facing Oxford Road. The height of the tallest building in the scheme was reduced by two floors in response to feedback.
Design	The design of the building façade and entrance square was improved to complement the surrounding area and neighbouring conservation area. Glass balustrades were replaced by metal balustrades following feedback from the public consultation.
Landscaping	Landscaping was enhanced, including additional tree planting and retaining the tree on Eaton Place corner. The submitted scheme provided a well sized courtyard garden for all residents and will act as the heart of the development – this was replanned and realigned with increased separation distances, and improved internal daylighting.

Response to feedback

Key issues	Design response
Building positions and access	The distance between buildings was increased to provide quality amenity space for residents. The Eaton Place pavement was widened, with additional residential uses added to the ground floor to activate the building frontage along Eaton Place.
Sustainability	An environment strategy was developed by M&E consultants to provide a green roof, PV panels and rainwater harvesting as part of the submitted scheme.
Layout	Flat plans were developed to show the proposed scheme will achieve good internal layouts and the sizes have been adjusted to meet National Standards. The scheme was replanned to reduce the number of north facing single aspect units.

Further Consultation

(March 2021 – February 2023)

Discussions with stakeholders

Following the submission of the March 2021 application, Cannon Capital continued to consult with neighbours and local stakeholders, with a view to updating the planning submission in 2022.

During this time, Cannon Capital had discussions with the following groups:

- **Reading Borough Council (RBC)**
 - **Including a meeting with Abbey Ward Cllrs Tony Page, Karen Rowland and Mohammed Ayub (10th May 2021)**
- **The Royal Meteorological Society**
- **Fynecast – developer of the neighbouring 114 Oxford Road apartments**
- **Reading Civic Society (meeting, 16th April 2021)**

RBC comments

The following comments were received between March 2021 and February 2022 as part of discussions with RBC and Abbey Ward Cllrs Page, Rowland and Ayub. The comments relate to the design and massing of the development.

Proposed West Elevation

- “Whilst reduced from its original height it remains identifiably taller than all other elements of the proposal and of contrasting scale to the lower-rise buildings to the west. This abrupt transition rather than a gradual transition continues to work against the scheme”.

Massing Relationship between 114-116 and 112 Oxford Road

- “The proposed transition is still not considered as sympathetic or appropriate as it could be. Based on the information now available, notwithstanding any amenity issues that may exist between both sites, the scale of the development as proposed... is considered unreflective and out of scale with the adjoining constructed development”.

Ground Floor Façade

- “The ground floor façade on the northern elevation remains unwelcoming and devoid of any real features or opportunities for activity... We suggest that this element of the scheme is reconsidered to complement the approved development at 115 Chatham Street”.

Further comments

The following feedback was received from Fynecast – the owner/developer of the neighbouring 114 Oxford Road apartments and the Royal Meteorological Society in late 2021.

114 Oxford Road

- Concern regarding the height and massing of the West Elevation.
- Concern regarding the impact on privacy that windows on floors 1-3 of Block 1 will have on 114 Oxford Road apartments.
- Concerned with the impact of the reduced Daylight/Sunlight into his new (adjacent) development.

Royal Meteorological Building

- Concern regarding proposed 1st floor windows with direct views onto the Royal Meteorological Building.

Venta acquisition

In June 2022 Venta completed the acquisition of the site, inheriting the planning application and incumbent design team. Following the acquisition the design has continued to evolve. Meetings have been held with the following stakeholders to inform the design changes:

- Fynecast (20 July 2022),
- Royal Meteorological Society (26 July 2022 and 30 November 2022),
- Reading Borough Council (21 September 2022).

Fynecast

It was agreed that Venta would:

- Remove west facing balconies that looked into 114 Oxford Road
- Remove the west facing terrace on building 1 that looked into 114 Oxford Road
- Further reduce the boundary wall height from 2.8m.

Fynecast welcomed the removal of the podium and increased separation between buildings 1 and 3.

Royal Meteorological Society

- Concerned regarding proposed 1st floor windows with direct views onto the Royal Meteorological Building , the height and the overbearing nature of the proposed development.
- Concerned about the impact of the development on their work and on the fabric of their building.

Response to feedback

In response to comments raised by neighbours and local stakeholders following the March 2021 submission, further changes have been made to the proposals which have reduced the number of proposed units from 131 to 120. An overview of the proposed changes to the plans can be found below:

Key issues	Venta's response
Height and massing	The podium level has been removed, reducing the mass of the building up to first floor. The massing of Block 3 has been reduced by one storey from G+7 storeys to G+6, allowing it to sit more comfortably with the rest of the proposal and minimising the visual affect towards the listed buildings. The block has also reduced in depth, allowing for a greater separation distance from block 1. Block 1 also received revised massing with a cutback introduced in the north-west corner of ground, first and second floor. A reduction in mass on the third and fourth floor at the western edge has also been introduced. This enables the proposals to be more responsive to the neighbouring 114 Oxford Road, linking adjoining developments visually at an appropriate scale. Access to the roof terrace on level 3 has been removed to give greater privacy to 114 Oxford Road.

Response to feedback

Key issues	Cannon Capital's response
Height and massing (cont.)	Building 2 has been slightly reshaped, with the ground floor reception being pulled back from the Royal Meteorological Building. The building has been made slightly narrower, resulting in a greater setback from Eaton Place. Cutbacks on levels 2-5 have been regularised to allow for improved buildability, better apartment layouts and a consistency in appearance from street level.
Design	The ground floor retail unit has been removed, replaced with apartments and residential amenity space. The removal of the podium has resulted in the reduction of car parking and improved access to each block. Each block now has it's own entrance, which for blocks 2 and 3 results in an enhanced active street frontage on the north elevation. Accessible roof terraces have been introduced for the benefit of all residents.

Response to feedback

Key issues	Cannon Capital's response
Design (cont.)	All apartments have been given either a Juliet balcony, regular balcony or private terrace.
Landscaping	The removal of the podium allows for better tree specimens to be introduced at ground floor. More extensive planting is promoted on roof terraces and at the entrance to the development.

Reduced height and massing



March 2021 Scheme –
West Elevation Block 3



February 2023 Scheme –
West Elevation Block 3

Reduced height and massing



March 2021 Scheme – South Elevation with 114 Oxford Rd – G+2

— Indicative outline of 2020 planning submission

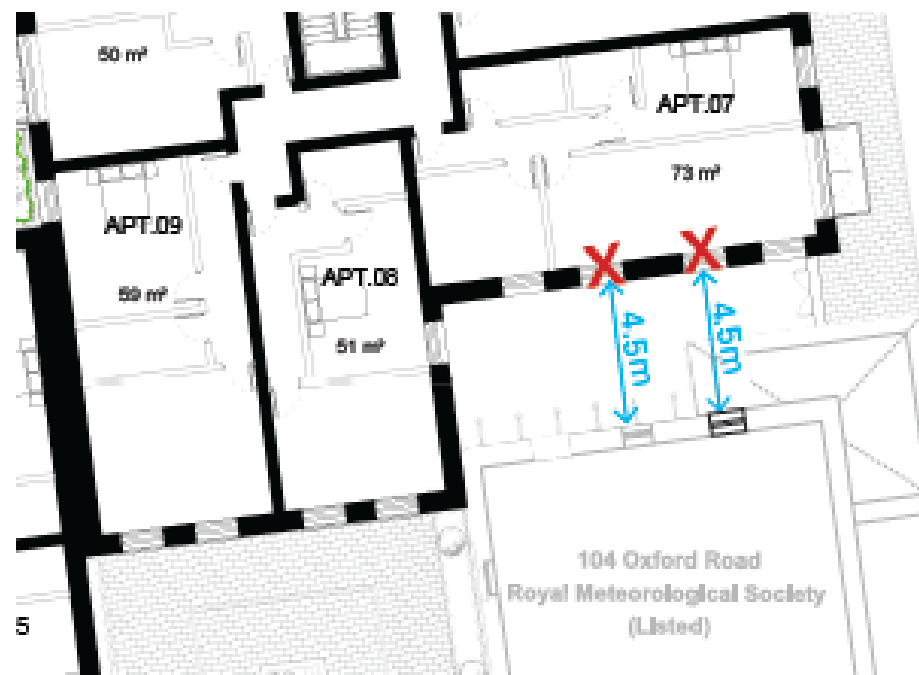
Reduced height and massing



February 2023 Scheme – South Elevation with 114 Oxford Rd Outline – G+1 and G+2

— Indicative outline of 2020 planning submission

Omission of windows with direct view



March 2021 Scheme – Proposed 1st Floor: Two windows with direct views, approx. 4.5m apart



February 2023 Scheme – Proposed 1st Floor: Two windows with direct views now omitted and separation distance increased

Reduced height and massing



Oxford Road Front View:
Public consultation scheme
2019.



Oxford Road Front View:
Submitted scheme 2023.

Reduced height and massing



Butler Pub View:
July 2020



Butler Pub View:
February 2023

Reduced height and massing

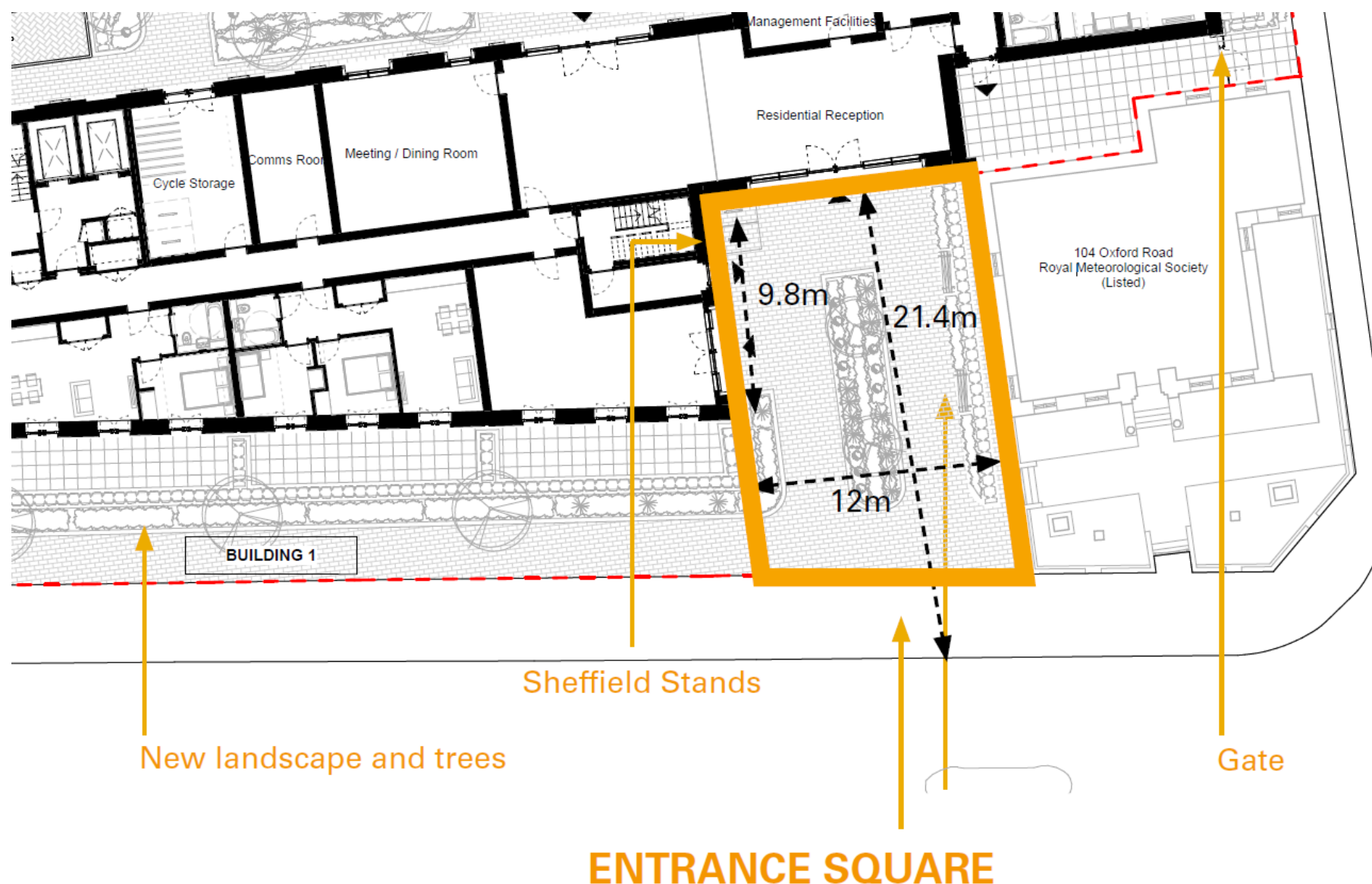


Eaton Place Block 2:
July 2020 scheme



Eaton Place Block 2:
Submitted scheme
February 2023

New entrance square



The distance between buildings has been increased to provide quality amenity space for residents, including a new entrance square on Oxford Road.

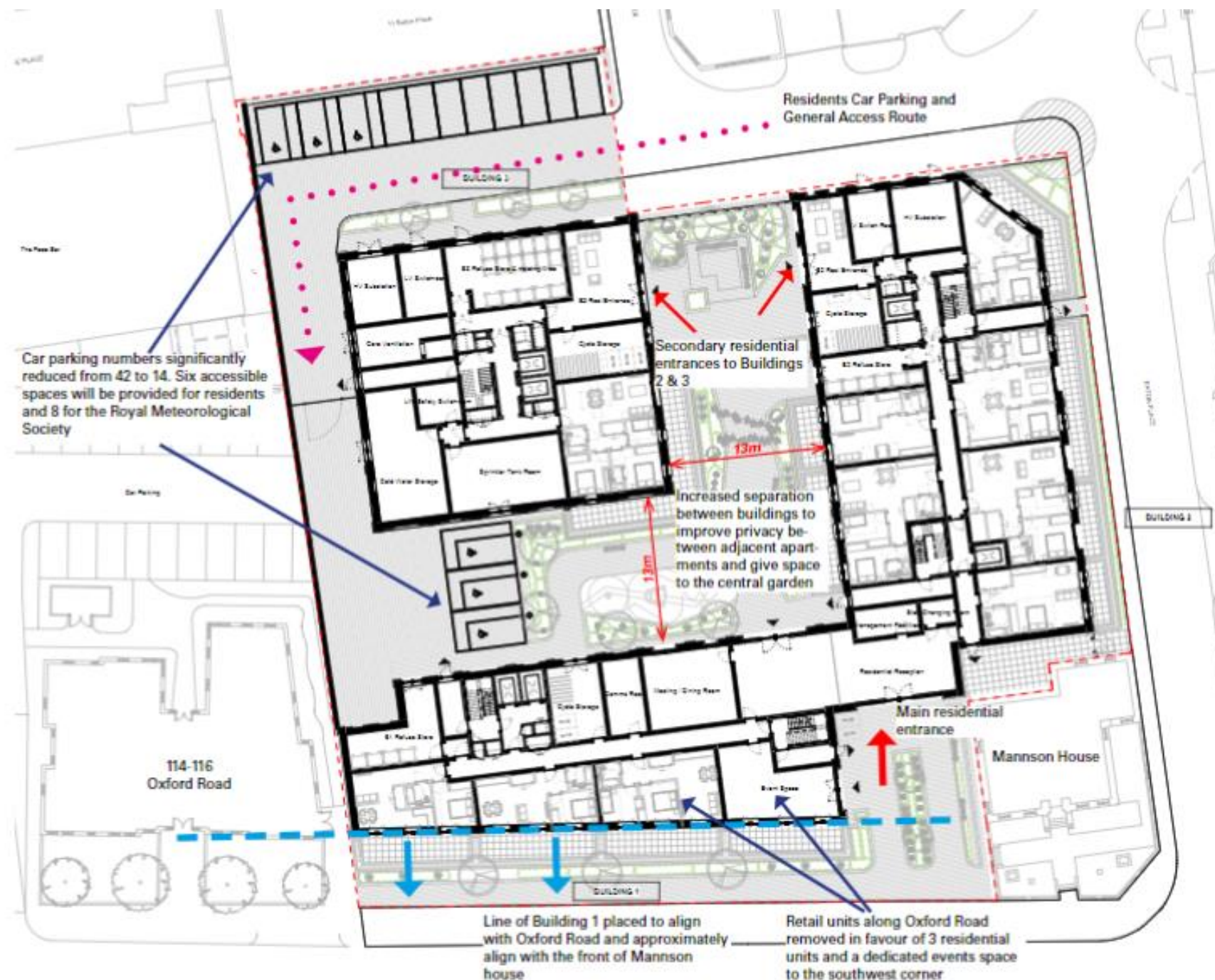
Enhanced landscaping

The submitted scheme provides a well-sized courtyard garden which acts as the heart of the development. In response to feedback, the first floor podium has been removed with the courtyard replanned and realigned with increased building separation distances, and internal daylighting has been improved.



Proposed indicative courtyard view looking north-west

Enhanced landscaping



Public support



Summary

Just Build Homes is a platform that connects supporters of house building with the planning process. They helped publicise the application among younger audiences. As a result of this work, we believe 115 residents in Reading registered support on the Council's planning portal for Cannon Capital's application that was submitted in 2021.

Registered supporters



Public support

Some comments made by supporters

“I support more homes being built due to the high demand of properties in the local area.”

“I support more affordable homes being built in the local area because the ones available are too expensive.”

“I want to see more homes being built because more homes are needed for the younger generation.”

“New homes are a good idea as Reading is a nice area.”

“Because I think it gives more people an opportunity like myself, I’m looking to buy my first home and along with the help to buy scheme I think it would be beneficial to us too as it only applies to new homes.”

“I’m renting a flat in Reading, the rent is far too expensive and has gone up so much in the last 3 years so there needs to be more affordable housing.”

“Despite there being lots of development already, it still doesn’t necessarily keep up with demand.”

Conclusion

Conclusion

The plans for Eaton Court's redevelopment will provide much-needed homes and enhanced public realm. The plans have significantly evolved, over a number of years, in response to comments from the community, local stakeholders, and the Council.

Following acquisition of the site in June 2022, Venta has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to engage with the local community and stakeholders, by continuing to consult on its proposals. The resulting application updates submitted in February 2023 incorporates further changes requested by both the Council and local community. The feedback also shows there is general support for the redevelopment of the site.

The main changes to the scheme include:

- Significant reductions in the height, massing and number of units.
- Removal of podium and reduction in car parking numbers.
- Increased separation between blocks 1 and 3.
- Enhanced landscaping, public realm and improved privacy for neighbours.
- Improved design and entrance square to complement the surrounding area.

The submitted proposals therefore deliver a scheme that responds to the concerns and needs of the local community, regenerating an unattractive and underutilised brownfield site with a more suitable and sustainable development.