The Oracle

Yield Hall Place 1 & Yield Hall Place 2

Mixed-use Development

Design + Access Statement

December 2022

CRTKL

Hammerson

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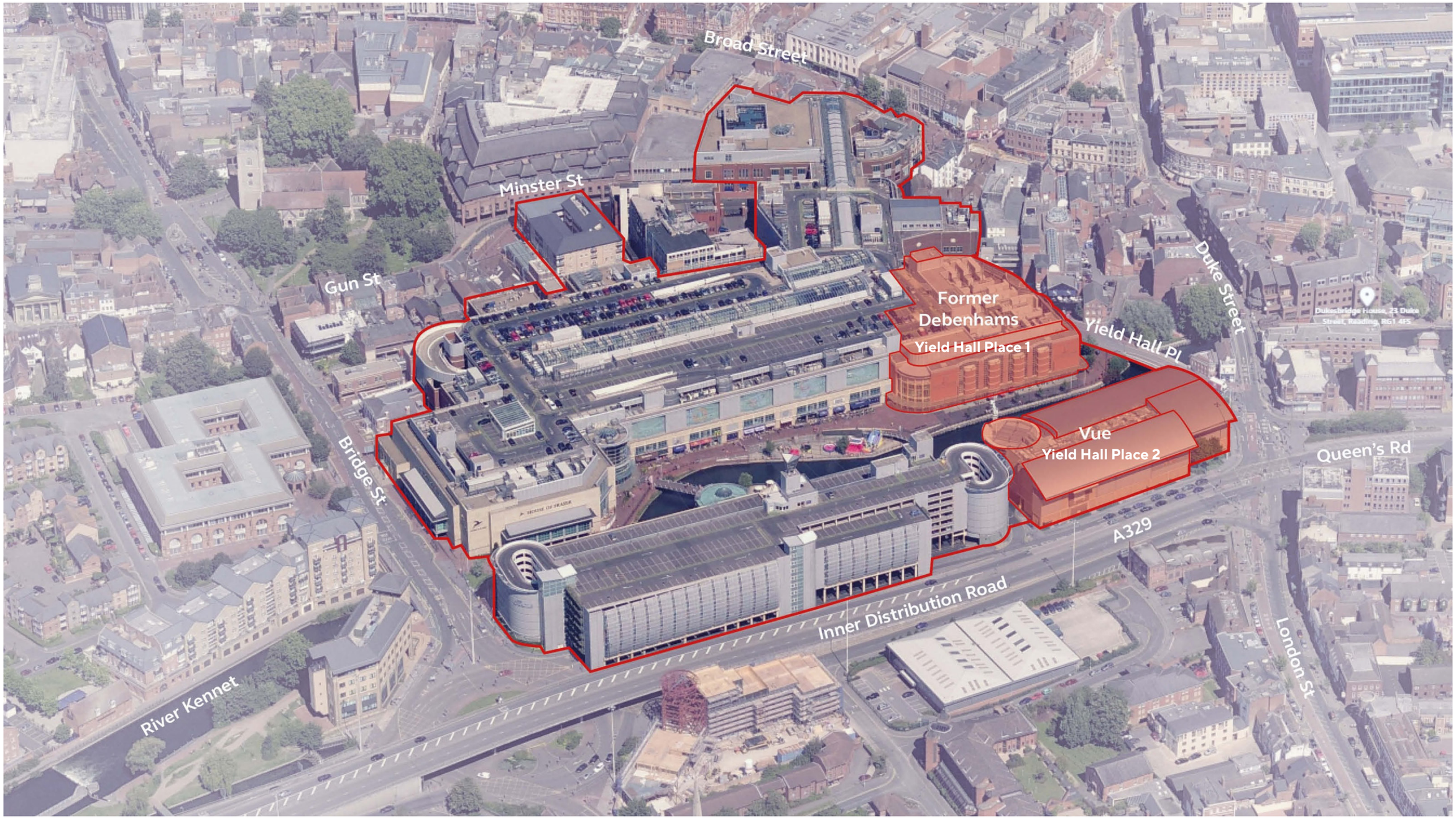
1.0 Introduction



Aerial view from the south

1.1 Executive Summary

The proposals set out in this Design and Access Statement are part of the transformative vision to evolve the purpose and sustainability of The Oracle. Delivering a mixed-use leisure, retail and build-to-rent (BtR) scheme, the proposals will help secure the long term vitality and viability of the The Oracle and re-imagine the southern approach into the town centre.

This report forms one half of a dual submission relating to two plots either side of the River Kennet known as Yield Hall Place 1 and Yield Hall Place 2. It is provided in support of a full planning application to Reading Borough Council together with application drawings and supporting information for each site along with Conservation Area Consent for Yield Hall Place 2.

This report summarises the design process undertaken when developing proposals for the sites. It records the development of the buildings' design, from concept through to technical appraisal.

The project design team on behalf of The Oracle Limited Partnership have pleasure in providing the enclosed design narrative for consideration and review by Reading Borough Council, in support of design proposals for The Oracle.

The design team has developed a comprehensive and highly considered design proposal that take advantage of the many opportunities afforded by this riverside destination, delivering a landmark scheme for the future residents of and visitors to Reading.

Sketch view of the proposal from the south

1.2 Introduction

This Design and Access Statement supports two planning applications for the re-purposing and redevelopment of two sites at the eastern end of The Oracle. When delivered they will provide a mixed-use development comprising residential and town centres uses. The proposals focus around two main sites:

Yield Hall Place 1:

- Former Debenhams department store at the eastern end of the Oracle shopping centre building and northern side of the River Kennet.

Yield Hall Place 2:

- Vue cinema building on the southern side of the River Kennet and to the east of the Oracle Riverside multi storey car park.

Two detailed planning applications are concurrently submitted: one application for Yield Hall Place 1 and the other for Yield Hall Place 2. This DAS is submitted for both applications and considers the proposals as a single scheme for the purpose of the design narrative and assessment of accessibility.

The drawings submitted with both planning application identifies the full extent of the proposed developments that are covered by this Design and Access Statement.

Alongside the development proposals a major investment in local public realm enhancements is proposed including at:

- Junction with London Street and Inner Distributor Road
- Yield Hall Place from junction of London Street to Minister Street
- Oracle Riverside

The buildings respond to the different scales of their immediate neighbours, with an architectural strategy that creates a human scaled development, realising The Oracle Limited Partnership's, (a joint venture between Hammerson and ADIA) vision for the future of The Oracle.

The development will deliver a mixed used town centre scheme with over 3,700m2 of commercial and hospitality space, that includes the potential for a cinema, restaurants/bars, and co-working spaces; 449 new homes and, reconfigured retail and leisure space within retained parts of the former Debenham's store, enhancing, modernising and future proofing the retail offer of The Oracle

Active ground floor will bring variety of uses and new life to The Oracle. Alongside an enhanced landscape strategy, the changes will significantly improve the quality of the public realm and assist in integrating The Oracle with its surrounding uses, providing a positive outward facing gateway to the town centre from the south.

The development will ensure continued investment into The Oracle, allowing it to evolve and thrive to meet the needs of residents and visitors.

1.3 The Oracle

Developed in 1999 The Oracle transformed Reading's town centre by providing retail space that suited retailer requirement at the time.

Today, the Oracle comprises of a 2 level covered shopping centre anchored at either end by two department stores, over 80 retail units and 20 restaurants and a cinema.

The Oracle sits at the heart of Reading town centre and has its main entrance on Broad Street, the town's historic main shopping thoroughfare. However, the Vue Cinema turns its back towards the south of Reading with the Inner Distributor Road (IDR) acting as a both a physical and visual barrier to movement. From the south, views of the public realm along the riverside at The Oracle are limited.

The centre is dominated my mainstream retail and food & beverage uses, with limited alternative uses. It needs to evolve to meet new customers' changing expectations with appropriate space for retail, social and living uses. Further, the public realm is of its time and is in need of investment to bring it up to date, to meet customer demands a modern, managed, and curated leisure environment.

We aspire to improve the connectivity that The Oracle has with its surroundings. Today it is both introverted and open and this gives the centre a unique identity. The proposals use this identity and the centre's relationship with its immediate context to enhance key urban design and architectural decisions in the scheme, in terms of the site organisation, the buildings' massing, geometry, scale and architectural expression.

KEY RETAIL

Boots, H&M, Zara, Apple, New Look, Superdry , Hollister, Reiss, Next and River Island

ENTERTAINMENT

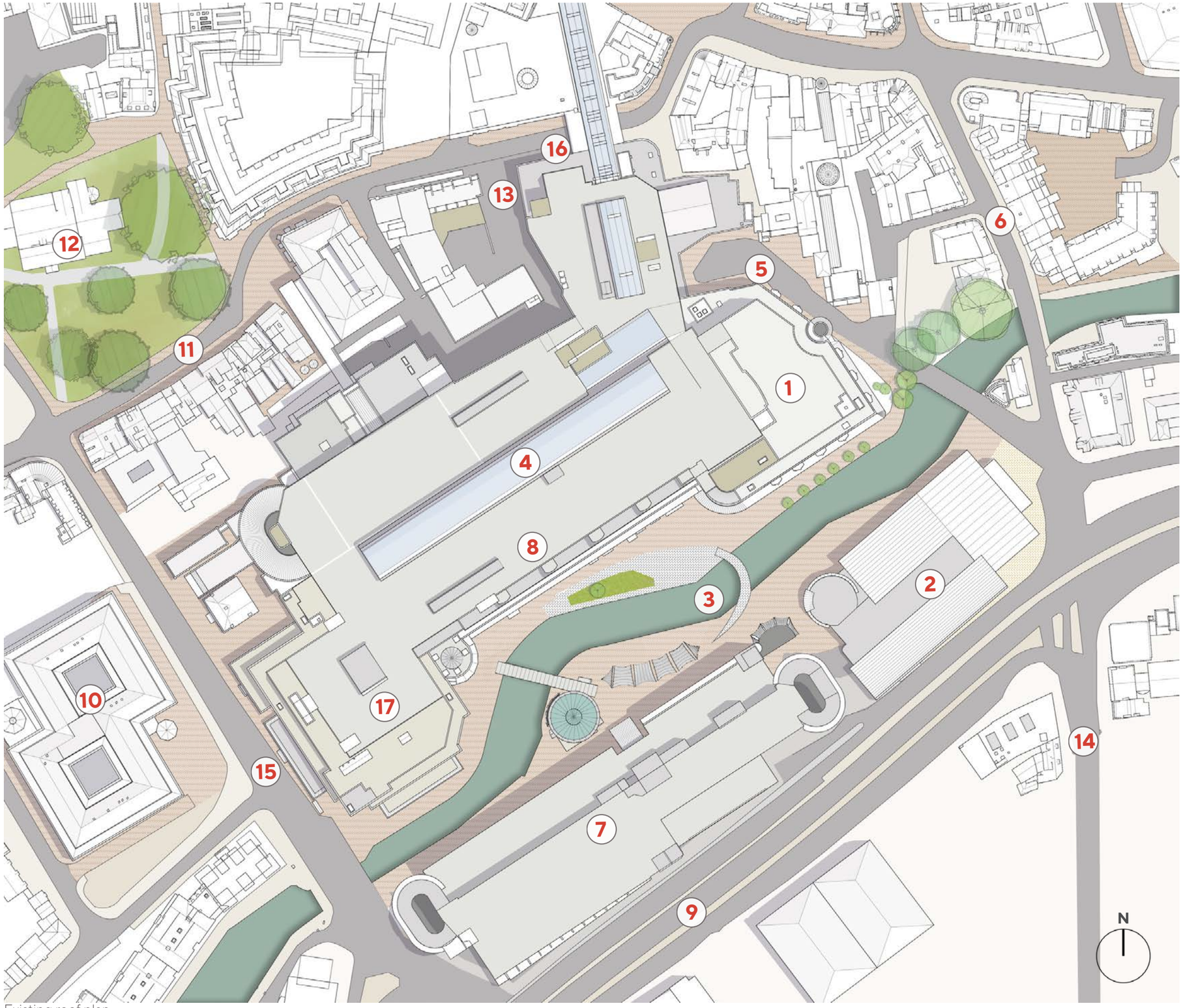
VUE Cinema (11 screens)

KEY RESTAURANTS & BARS

Five Guys, Wagamama , Pizza Express, Cote, Nando's, All Bar One, Miller & Carter, Comptoir and Franco Manca.

Key:

1. Former Debenhams
2. Vue Cinema
3. River Kennet
4. Roof light to Upper Mall
5. Yield Hall Place
6. Duke Street
7. Multi-storey car park
8. Restaurants at ground floor
9. IDR
10. Civic offices
11. Gun Street
12. St Mary the Virgin Garde I Listed church
13. Minister Street
14. London Street
15. Bridge Street
16. Mall Access from Broad Street
17. House of Fraser



Existing roof plan

The Oracle Riverside looking west

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THE ORACLE

2
next BEAUTY & HOME
SHARED PATH
Please consider other path users

3
THE ORACLE

4

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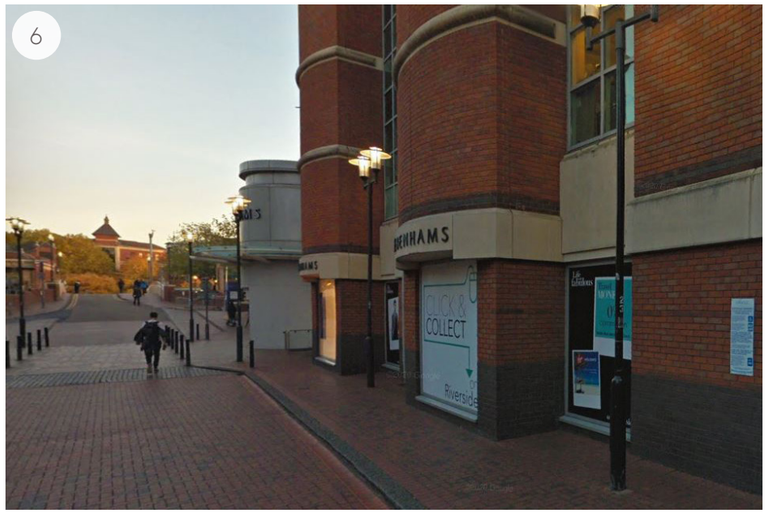
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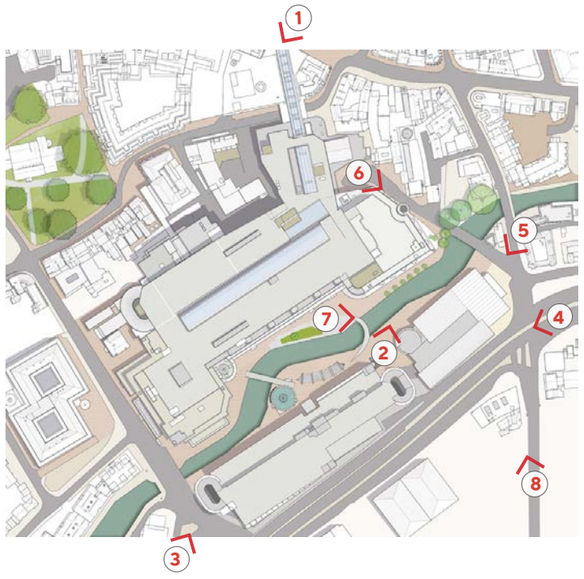
DEBENHAMS
CLICK & COLLECT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1.4 Vision for The Oracle

The Oracle has a unique role within Reading – a UK top-20 shopping destination and a centre for the local community, integrated within the town centre environment and its infrastructure. The ambition for the proposed developments is to continue to evolve and support The Oracle's role as a multi-use, inclusive, heart of town, asset.

This development recognises the critical need for a consolidated retail offer. To ensure a thriving retail offer in the town The Oracle needs to attract the best brands enabling a knock on benefit for other retail locations.

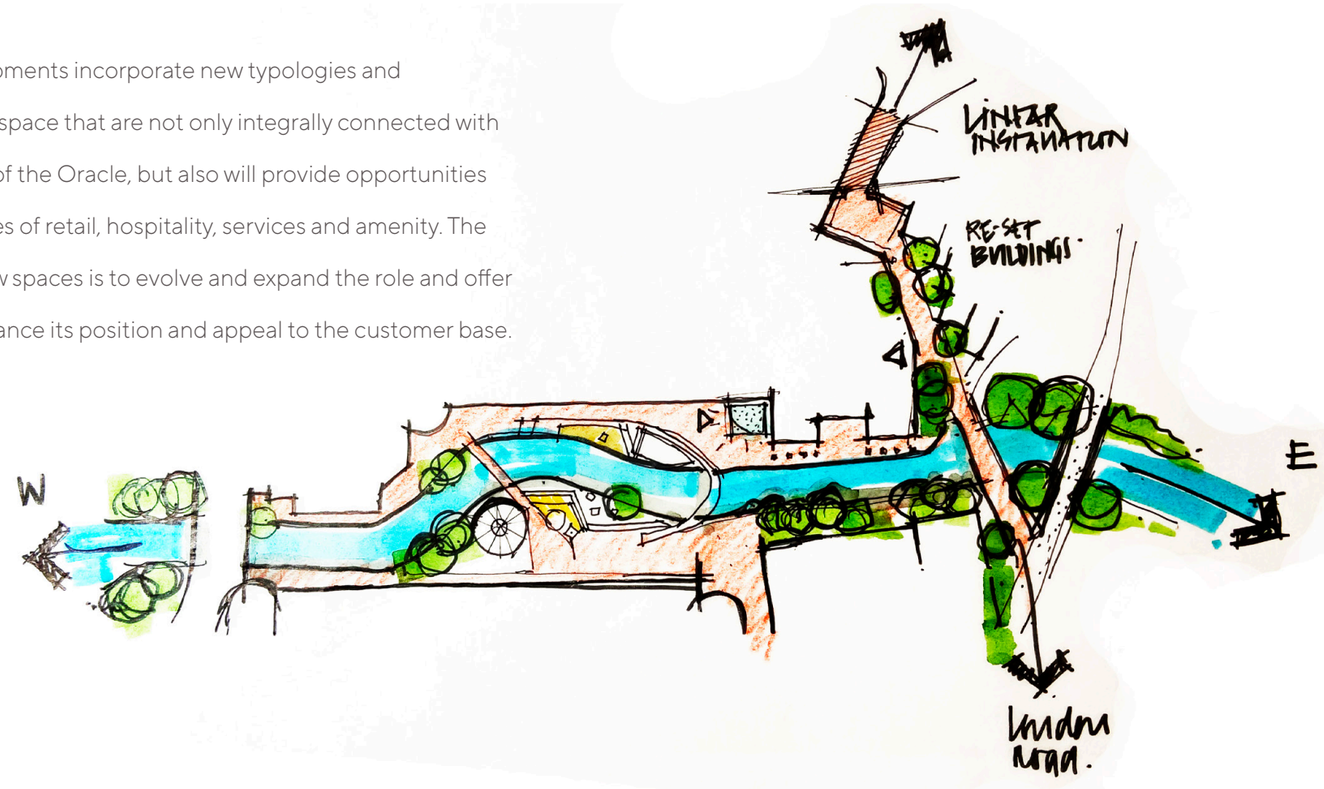
The changes to the retail environment over the last decade, and the integration between customer demands and behaviour is well documented. It is evolving to create a new hybrid, experience and quality led offer.

According to Gensler's Experience Index for Retail, more than half of customers go to stores to socialise, spend time with the family, learn something new, or simply browse. As recently described by Gensler "If a customer enters your store, they're often looking to do more than just buy a product".

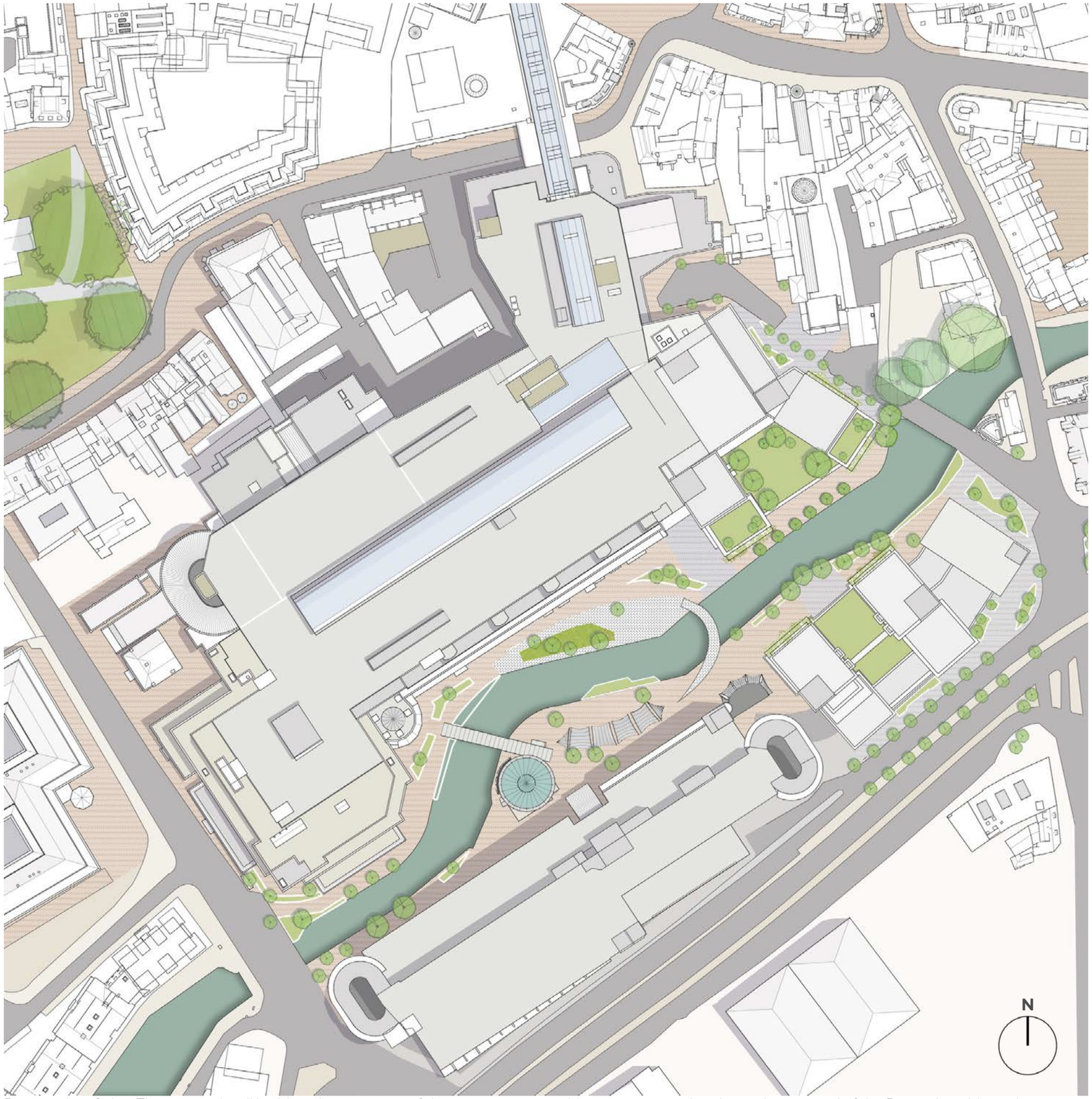
This evolved retail proposition – alongside the continued demand and success of mixed-use neighbourhoods in UK towns and cities - is at the heart of the reason for reinvesting to evolve the space at the Oracle, and particularly the former department stores and under invested leisure offers.

The proposed developments incorporate new typologies and configurations of floorspace that are not only integrally connected with and managed as part of the Oracle, but also will provide opportunities for new styles and types of retail, hospitality, services and amenity. The intention for these new spaces is to evolve and expand the role and offer of the Oracle and enhance its position and appeal to the customer base.

The uses and frontages will include flexible workspace, further diversification of the bar and restaurant mix, new possibilities for social and entertainment uses, such as a fit-for-purpose cinema, as well as other spaces for activation and customer engagement. These new spaces will integrally join into the covered malls and existing retail offer.



The proposals are underpinned by a strategy to better connect and integrate The Oracle with its neighbours



Proposed roof plan: The proposals will build on the successes of the existing centre, adding new uses and vitality to the east end of the Riverside public realm

1.5 Project Brief

The retail line-up at The Oracle has been pro-actively transformed in the last few years to reduce reliance on department stores and enhance the retail and leisure mix, ensuring the centre remains relevant and attractive to customers and the wider community.

Hammerson's brief to the design team was to:

- Consult extensively
- Integrate the scheme with its neighbourhood
- Improve connectivity, particularly north - south
- Be highly sustainable and meet Hammerson's sustainability strategy
- Take a holistic approach to the design to:

  Deliver wider benefits.

  Ensure that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Enhanced permeability through the sites and improved access between the lower retail mall and the Riverside will improve connectivity. Form will be used to drive identity and to create a unique sense of place, appropriate to Reading and the character of The Oracle. Overall, the proposals must provide an exemplary architectural response that contributes significantly to the continued vitality of Reading centre.

1.6 Design Consultation

Between September 2021 and December 2022 evolving design proposals were presented at several pre-application meetings and workshops held with planning officers from Reading Borough Council (RBC). In addition the scheme was presented to two Design Southeast Design Review Panels, groups of elected members and other RBC management and statutory bodies. Open debate and feedback covered a variety of themes including those on use, housing mix and tenure, urban design, and the public realm; building height, scale, and massing; connectivity, layout, and materiality.

Public consultation was held, both in person and virtually and local people consulted through direct correspondence.

The design reflects the high degree of input by officers, members, stakeholders, and consultees. The feedback from all of the public consultations was assessed and where appropriate incorporated into the design. This iterative process has informed and is recognised by the design team for having significantly influenced and positively developed the proposals.

Meetings, presentations and workshops were held on the dates below:

- 01 09 2021 Introductory meeting
- 31 03 2022 Pre-application meeting no1
- 17 05 2022 Corporate Management Team
- 26 05 2022 Design Review Panel 1
- 24 06 2022 Pre-application meeting no 2
- 05 07 2022 Corporate Management Team
- 21 07 2022 Future Reading
- 12 08 2022 Drop-in public consultation event
- 23 08 2022 Public consultation webinar
- 25 08 2022 Design Review Panel 2
- 15 09 2022 Workshop with officers
- 14 10 2022 Workshop with officers
- 07 11 2022 Workshop with officers
- 22 11 2022 Corporate Management Team
- 28 11 2022 Workshop with officers

1.7 Residential Development Requirements

The Brief

- Deliver excellent homes for the build-to-rent market
- Organise the building, its amenities and support facilities so that residents are incentivised to stay for the long-term
- Build a community within an excellent development that is appropriate to its context
- Create a synergy between the shopping centre and the new residential development so that residents can enjoy shopping, leisure, restaurants at their doorstep and, the centre will benefit from footfall, night and day activation and increased vibrancy. The Oracle as a whole will become more welcoming and attractive

This requires:

- 449 apartments for rent with a mix of studios, 1-, 2- and 3-bedrooms homes
- Ancillary resident facilities including external and internal amenity spaces and the use of external spaces of The Oracle
- Street facing commercial space, with active frontage that will enliven the public realm
- Minimal quantum of car parking
- Extensive cycle spaces
- Public realm improvements
- A sustainable development

Build-to-Rent Design Drivers

The success of a Build-to-Rent project relies on creating a place where people enjoy living. Residents rent the whole building, not just their apartments. At The Oracle this will include access to amenities, landscaped courtyards and roof top terraces. This is wrapped together with a professional and customer facing on-site management team that facilitates a high-quality living experience.

Achieving this in a sustainable manner is vital to the vision for the development . It will be car free (there is extensive car parking available through out The Oracle estate) and will offer extensive cycle provision for residents, encouraging healthy movement across the town. A high performing building fabric will reduce energy demand, air sourced heat pumps will be incorporated into each apartment and a water (ground) source heat pump will take heat from the river for use in the development. Roof terraces and landscape areas will improve biodiversity and encourage a healthy and sustainable lifestyle.

Socially, Build-to-Rent attracts a range of demographics with young friends, key workers, couples, families, and single people living under one roof. The combination of high quality homes, excellent amenity and leisure spaces and the on-site presence of management that is focused on tenants' needs will help build a more sustainable and enriching community.

The Functional Requirements of Built to Rent

Homes are designed to provide good spatial standards, with each of the individual spaces such as living areas, bedrooms, bathrooms, and kitchens meeting the requirements of the Nationally Described Space Standards. The fire strategy for the building necessitates the use of a fire engineered approach for the control and management of fire and protection of the means of escape. This includes the use of smoke and fire detection, and a sprinkler system to all homes. As a result, the entrance lobbies that would commonly be used in a scheme with other means of fire safety management, are omitted throughout. This allows for the design of more efficient, better organised, and elegant apartment plans where usable space is crafted to meet tenants' needs.

1.8 Operating a Build-to-Rent Development

The design and operation of a high quality build to rent development is structured into four clearly defined zones. 'Front of house' is the main front door to the development through which all residents pass through, fostering a sense of community. A resident engagement team will provide residents with 24/7 support.

Residents will also have access to a number of shared internal and external amenity spaces, such as lounge areas and co-working space. The principle of Build to Rent developments is that residents should feel as if they are renting the whole building and the places and spaces it offers, not just their apartment.

Resident apartments are efficiently designed with open plan layouts, maximised window sizes and functional layouts for living spaces and bedrooms. The back of house zone is key to ensuring maximised operational efficiency. Servicing takes place away from the public realm in a dedicated zone. The back of house will provide refuse and recycling stores, dedicate unloading areas for residents moving in and secure cycle parking. Given that the development will be within a managed wider estate there will be a strong synergy with existing managed services.

1 **Zone 1** Front of house - publically accessible

2 **Zone 2** Residents' shared areas - circualtion and amenities

3 **Zone 3** Resident's private areas - residential lettable areas

4 **Zone 4** Back of house - administration and plant