5.0 Architectural Proposals

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5.1 Architectural Principles

The design team recognises that the proposal will be a large-scale development within the town centre, and that using architectural strategies, language, and motifs inappropriate to that scale would devalue both the proposal and its context.

The aspiration is to create buildings that have their own architectural integrity whilst sharing some of the key qualities that are unique to the site and Reading. This will ensure that the building, will be seen to fit into and belong to the town's long architectural heritage. To achieve this the team has referenced the sites' and Reading's architectural heritage to identify key character traits that are identifiably Reading.

The massing of the building is articulated to express its underlying geometry. Where the building shifts in height or footprint brick colour is changed. These moves break down and humanise the scale of the buildings and introduce a scale appropriate to the scheme's context. At Level 19 on the Yield Hall Place 1 site a 'crown' will give the scheme of a point of urban focus and elegantly finish the tallest part of the development.

5.2 Tall Buildings

The application sites do not sit within a designed tall building zone, though The Oracle is identified in the Council's Tall Building Strategy to have capacity to accommodate tall buildings. The Tall Buildings Strategy (2008) and subsequent update (2018) form part of the Council's Local Plan evidence base. The need for height was driven by the requirement to transform the eastern end of The Oracle and deliver an economically sustainable development which delivers sustainably communities, and genuinely active ground floor active frontages as well as an improved public realm. Accepting the need for height sets two major design challenges:

1. The need for a coherent design strategy in relation to height, scale and massing that delivers a high-quality development, an improved public realm, and an enhanced Reading town centre.
2. Addressing potential impacts on the buildings' immediate context notably on the conservation areas and the setting of listed buildings.

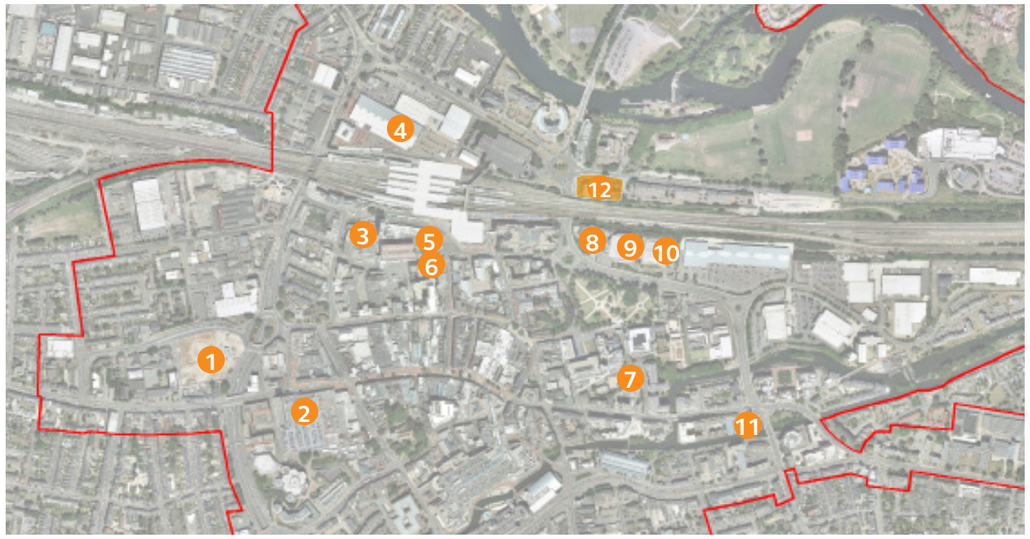
The design strategy set out in detail in this document developed over time in dialogue with Reading Borough Council, the design review panel and with the input of the heritage and townscape consultants. It creates a clear hierarchy of height on the site, with the tallest building within the depth of The Oracle estate and with the other buildings stepping down towards the perimeter of the site. This strategy was developed to create buildings with an elegant geometry and with an architecture that relates to context. But more than that it provides an opportunity to improve the urban environment of this part of Reading by:

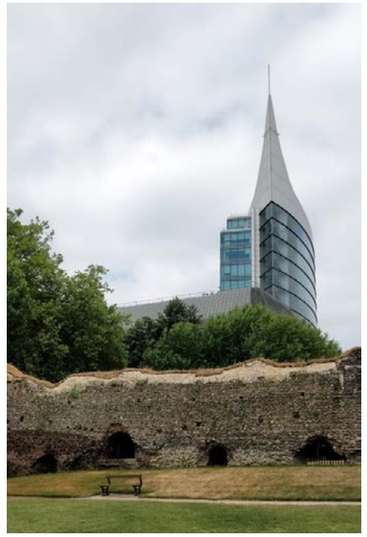
- Replacing two tired buildings that fail to address or enhance their wider contexts with new more outward facing ones that have active ground floors and a better public realm.
- Creating a clear architectural composition and building geometry to create a new southern gateway into the town centre, landmark a key site and public realm and enhance urban legibility from key vantage points.

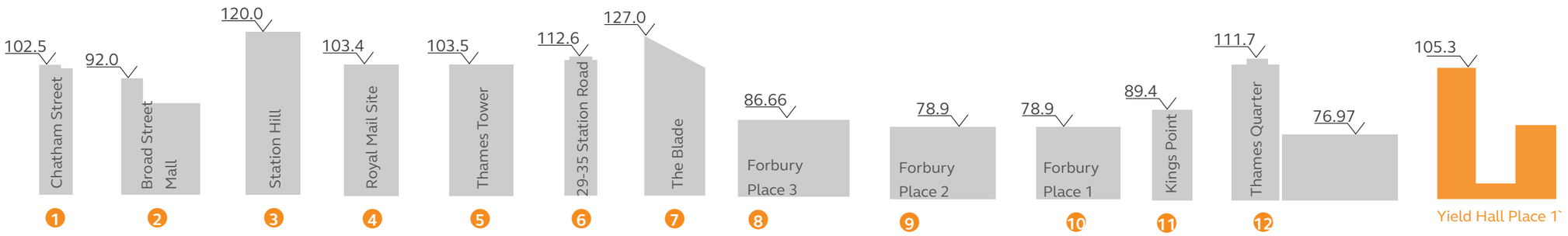
Though tall, the buildings will not be the tallest in Readings. On a comparative basis they will be well within the heights already established within the town centre as shown in the diagram opposite. This includes buildings close by. When set within the site's topography (low datum of the valley of the river Kennet) the buildings will be significantly less impactful on their surroundings than they would be on higher ground, as illustrated on the before and after context sections opposite. Given their low position that may contribute positively to the roofscape of the town when seen from higher locations.

The heritage and townscape statement included with the planning application addresses these issues in further detail and assesses the buildings' impacts on heritage assets. In relation to these assets the design team was guided by the objective of minimising harm or where possible enhancing the settings of historic buildings.

1. Chatham Street
2. Broad Street Mall
3. Station Hill
4. Royal Mail Site
5. Thames Tower
6. 29-35 Station Road
7. The Blade
8. Forbury Place 3
9. Forbury Place 2
10. Forbury Place 1
11. Kings Point







Comparison drawing of tall buildings across with their location shown on the map above Reading, with strategy for a landmark / benchmark building on the proposal site with heights aligned with town centre strategy

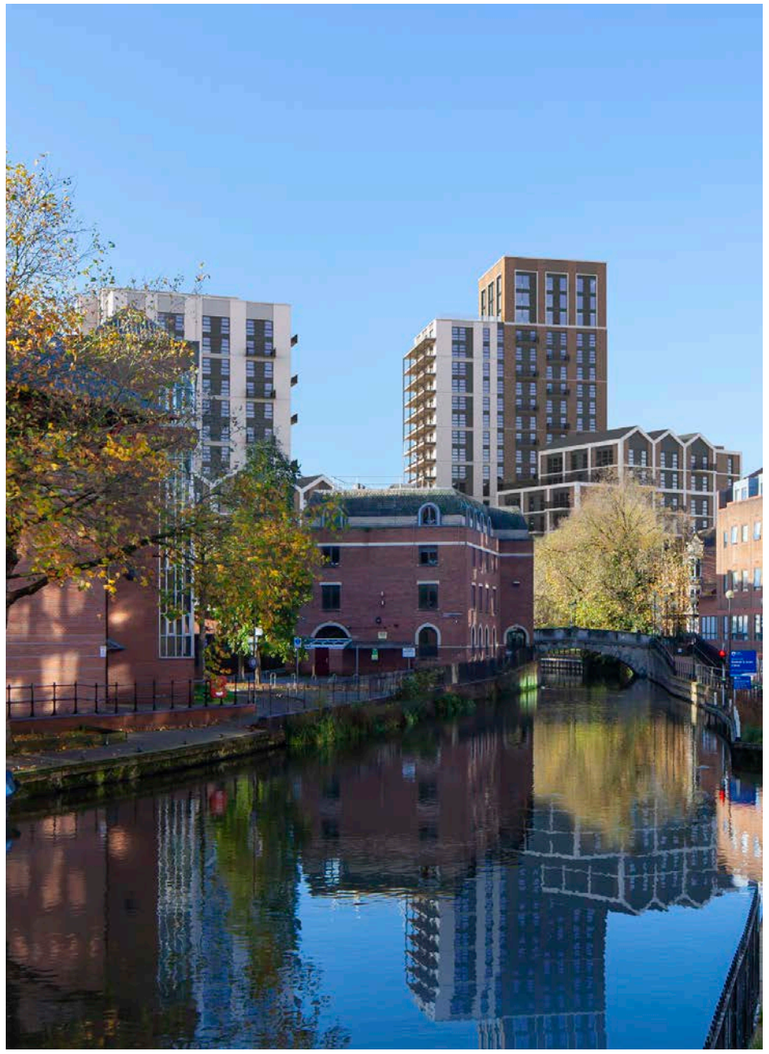
5.3 Tall Building

The proposed buildings will be taller than other buildings in their immediate surroundings. They will sit approximately 150m outside and be lower than the proposed western cluster of tall buildings identified in Reading's Tall Building Strategy, and will be lower than the Station Hill cluster under construction 450m to the north. They will sit in area identified by Reading as having some townscape capacity for tall buildings. They will be visible on the skyline from many locations across Reading.

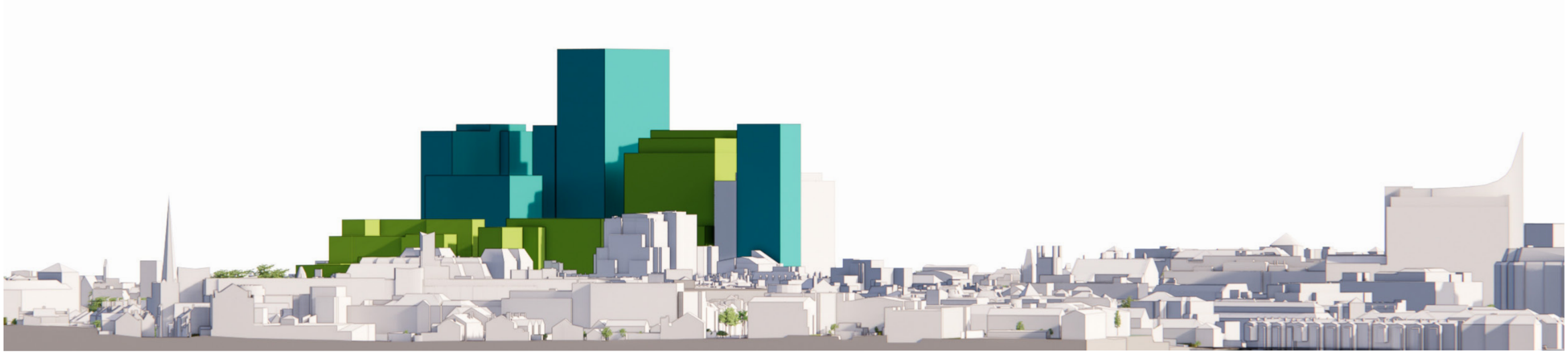
As such, the proposal takes the opportunity of the sites' redevelopment to introduce new typologies (courtyard, point and perimeter blocks) and variation in scale, grain, height, and massing. The design will activate the public realm along the riverside and importantly along London Street, the IDR, and Yield Hall Place. The proposal will begin to repair the rupture between the town centre and London Street to the south caused by the construction of the IDR in the late 20th century. It will create a stronger sense of place, enhance urban legibility, and generally enrich the wider area in terms of use and townscape. It will offer regeneration benefits, the improvement and activation of the local streets, the re-population of this part of the town centre, and the delivery of buildings of quality.

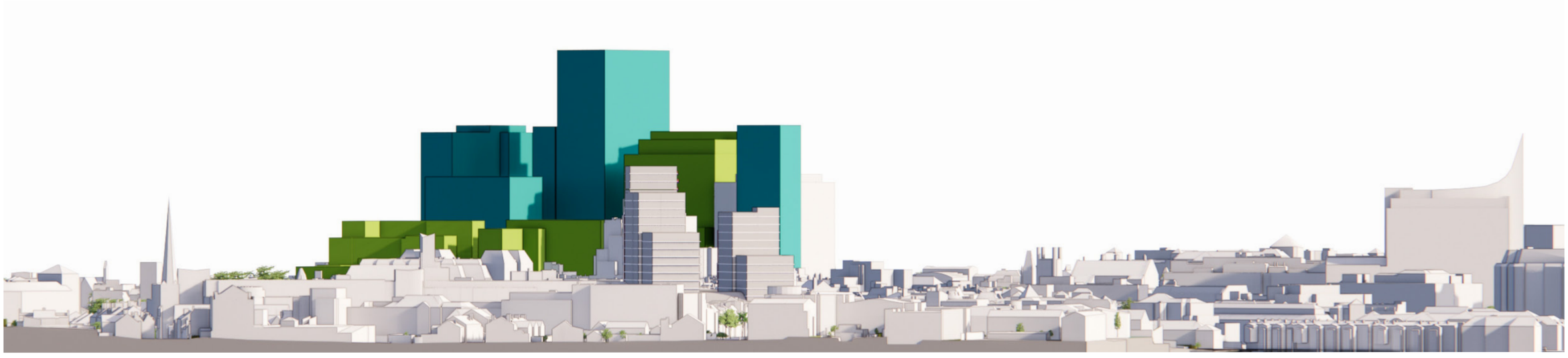
The design of the individual buildings has paid close attention to the local architectural heritage which has been analysed and used to inform the design approach whilst recognising the new building type and its distinctive traits within its context.

A detailed analysis of the impact of the development on neighbouring conservation areas and the settings of historic buildings has been used to as a design tool in setting the height, massing form and geometry of the buildings. A full report on the impacts of the scheme is submitted separately with this application.



Verified view from east of the site by Crane Wharf





Comparison before and after sections through the town centre when viewed from the south, with Station Hill development in the background. Light green are buildings under construction around Station Hill and blue green with approval. The proposed buildings at The Oracle sit in the foreground of the lower image.

5.4 Organising the Façades

Working with the local authority and the DRP the design team set themselves the following objectives in designing the façades:

- Establish a clear hierarchy of design moves that responds to town wide, neighbourhood and immediate views of the buildings.
- Create elegant façades with a vertical emphasis.
- Achieve well-proportioned elevations that are human in scale.
- Use materials and detail that relate to the different contexts and site characteristics.
- Detail the buildings so that they are robust, durable, sustainable, and beautiful.

The façades are highly ordered reflecting the uses within the building. They each have a clear bases, middles and tops which are expressed through the articulation of detail, play of proportions, grouping of windows and on Yield Hall Place 1, the use of a distinctive crown on the tallest building.

The stacked nature of the residential homes creates a high degree of repetition and visual interest in maintained by grouping of windows to create a vertical emphasis on the taller blocks which is balanced in the overall composition with a more horizontal arrangements to the buildings on the site's perimeters.

A strong reading of the individual window assemblies above the podium levels gives the buildings a residential scale whilst at ground and mezzanine levels the larger scale glazed façades engage with the Riverside public realm environment.

Detailing is kept simple, robust, and elegant. This will ensure that the buildings look as well in twenty years' time as they will when first opened. Changes of material and surface planes, that cause staining and streaking are avoided. Brick, aluminium and stone like material are used thought out and these are illustrated in the bay studies on the following pages.

Verified view from west of the site on Bridge Street

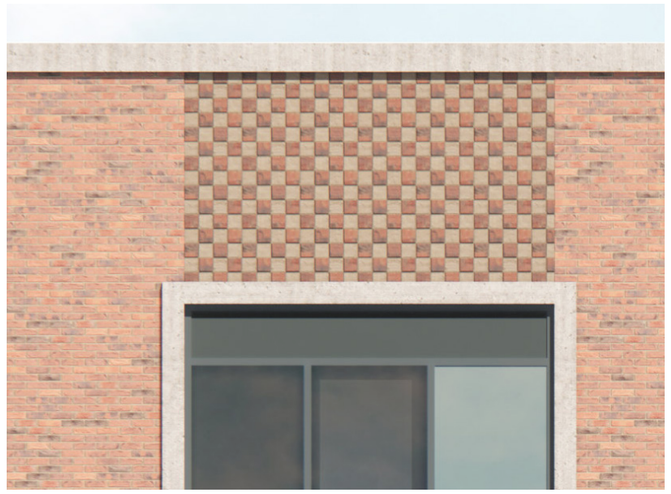
5.5 Materials, Detail & Ornament

The scale, grain, use of brick and its colour inform the design of the elevations. A light white/grey brick is proposed for the parts of the buildings facing the river to contrast with a red brick proposed on those parts that face the outer edges of the scheme, relating to the scheme immediate surroundings.

Copings and floor level horizontal banding group the façades horizontally, giving the buildings a residential scale. These are balanced by the vertical stacking of the window assemblies, the fine details of the panels between grouped windows and the detail at parapet level.

The panels within the grouped windows are in a dark metal. The overall window assembly gives a clear reading of window dominating the solidity of the façades.

A chequer board brick arrangement is used to heads of window and parapets to ornament key parts of the building and as a modern interpretation of Reading's distinctive architectural heritage.



5.6 Bay Study: Elevation to London Street

The elevation of Yield Hall Place 2 to London Street includes:

- A frame of stone like appearance enclosing red brick panels.
- Industrial like window arrangement above mezzanine floor.
- Curtain walling type windows to mezzanine level and the ground floor unit,
- Dark grey-black panels to window heads.
- Metal railings to a small terrace.

5.7 Bay Study: Yield Hall Place 2.

Part elevation study take at the junction of the lower level red brick building and the taller white/grey brick element includes:

- Balconies with metal railings are on the taller white brick building only.
- Balconies project 1,500mm from line of windows.
- Windows in white/grey elevations are generally groups in pairs vertically.
- Windows in red brick part are not grouped and horizontal coursing is visible at each floor level.
- Industrial style windows are used through out.
- Chequer board detail ornaments each window grouping on the white /grey brick facade and each window on the red brick facade.

5.8 Crown

A crown decorates the tallest part of the scheme to landmark the building within The Oracle and the town centre.

A strong and deep coping caps the building and, a strong and deeper horizontal coursing defines the base of the crown.

Windows are grouped over three levels and framed with a band that matches in colour and texture the horizontal bands on the main elevations. It projects forward from the brick by approximately 50mm.

The verticality of the grouped window arrangement is reinforced with a repeat of the chequer board motif.

A new curtain walling type window typology is used to give the window assembly a lighter appearance and spandrels panels are introduced at floor level.

6.0 Phasing

6.1 Phasing

The proposed works will be phased to ensure that disruption to The Oracle is minimised and that the general environment remains attractive throughout construction.

Phase 1A

- Demolition of part of the existing Debenhams store up to the 'cut line' indicated on the drawings.
- Construction of external wall along the cut line.
- Reconfiguration of the, retained Debenhams floor areas to provide new retail space at lower and upper mall level, leisure space at riverside level.
- Landscape as shown on drawings.

Phase 1B

- Construction of the new homes, front and back of house facilities and co-working space on Yield Hall Place 1 site.
- Landscape as shown on the drawings.

Phase 2

- Demolition of the existing cinema, restaurant space and associated service areas on the Yield Hall Place 2 site.
- Construction of the new cinema, café/restaurant space, new homes, amenity, and back of house spaces.
- Landscape as shown on drawings.