Planning Statement

Yield Hall Place, The Oracle, Reading Town Centre

December 2022

Turley

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Client

The Oracle Limited Partnership

Our reference
PACS3000

December 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Turley on behalf of The Oracle Limited Partnership in respect of proposals for the repurposing and redevelopment of sites at the eastern end of The Oracle shopping centre in Reading town centre to provide a mixed-use development comprising residential and town centres uses.

1.2 The proposals focus around two main sites:

- Former Debenhams department store at the eastern end of The Oracle shopping centre building and northern side of the River Kennet, to be known as Yield Hall Place 1; and
- Vue cinema building on the southern side of the River Kennet and to the east of the Oracle Riverside multi storey car park, to be known as Yield Hall Place 2.

1.3 This statement accompanies two detailed planning applications and a conservation area consent application submitted to Reading Borough Council ('RBC');

- one detailed application for Yield Hall Place 1; and
- a detailed application and conservation area consent application for Yield Hall Place 2.

1.4 These applications are submitted concurrently to Reading Borough Council and it is expected the applications will be considered and determined in a coordinated manner by the local planning authority. This statement is submitted in respect of both developments and provides a combined assessment of the proposals. Where matters only pertain to one of the planning application sites, these are specifically identified within the report.

1.5 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

1.6 The development will deliver a mixed use town centre scheme providing commercial and hospitality space, including replacement cinema, restaurants and co-working / business incubation spaces. 449 new homes will be provided along with reconfigured retail and leisure space within parts of the former Debenhams store, enhancing, modernising and future proofing the retail offer of The Oracle.

1.7 The aspiration of the development proposals is to reimagine the eastern end of The Oracle shopping centre to reinvigorate the town centre offer, introduce a curated residential quarter and create a positive outward facing gateway to the town centre from the south.

1.8 This development will ensure continued investment into The Oracle, allowing it to evolve and thrive to meet the needs of residents and visitors. This confident intervention within the core of the town centre, will positively contribute to the vitality and viability of Reading Town Centre, and help ensure the town centre as a whole effectively performs as a regional town centre, serving the Thames Valley area and beyond.

The Oracle Limited Partnership

1.9 The Oracle Limited Partnership is a joint venture entity between Hammerson and ADIA. Hammerson lead on the asset management and long-term strategic planning of the centre, and would deliver the proposed development proposals.

1.10 Hammerson are an owner, operator and developer of shopping centres and urban real estate across UK, Ireland, and France. In recent years they have reviewed their portfolio and disposed of a number of assets in order to focus on priority urban locations. They currently own 10 core shopping centres in England, located within the heart of city and town centres. A review of Hammerson's shopping centre portfolio led to Oracle Shopping Centre being classified as a 'core' shopping centre in their portfolio.

1.11 As experienced by the majority of asset owners, Hammerson face challenges across their portfolio. The demise of department stores and a number of large space, national multiple retailers and occupiers over the last 5 years has resulted in significant retail voids across their estates. With the failure of House of Fraser and Debenhams, across their UK estate, Hammerson needed to work up plans to repurpose eight department stores, and all have significant cost implications.

1.12 Hammerson are committed to positive intervention in their assets and to ensure they proactively manage and plan for their centres to create thriving destinations – both within their assets but also within the town and city centres in which they are located. They aspire to deliver developments which create a positive and sustainable impact for generations to come and implement development proposals with longevity and which embed successfully within the locality.

1.13 Shopping centres, such as The Oracle, lend themselves to strategic redevelopment, more so than traditional high street retail in multiple ownerships. As large assets under single ownership and control, in contrast with high streets, where units may be owned separately by multiple landlords. Hammerson recognise that the single ownership, with ongoing asset management commitments, provides the opportunity to effectively curate space not only during the development stage but during the ongoing operational phase.

1.14 Retail, however, will remain at the heart of Hammerson's operations. The vision is to introduce new uses but ensure the core shopping element is retained and invested in enabling it to retain its premium offer within Reading. In considering the potential for change within the Oracle, Hammerson will need to ensure the retail provision remains anchored. That any additional uses complement and enhance The Oracle, and the wider Reading town centre, as a destination, and not detract from it.

Accompanying Documentation

1.15 This report is intended to assist RBC in its determination of the application and has been prepared in accordance with the requirements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') and Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG'). It seeks to evaluate the proposed development against national and local planning policies and considers the planning justification for the proposed scheme.

1.16 This Planning Statement is intended to address all the relevant planning policy considerations associated with the proposed development and should be read in conjunction with the other documents and drawings submitted in support of the application as set out in Table 1.1

Table 1.1: Technical Reports

Document Name	Consultant
Design and Access Statement	CRTKL
Statement of Community Involvement	Turley Strategic Communications
Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment	Turley Heritage
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal	HDA Consultancy
Framework Travel Plan	Stantec
Transport Statement	Stantec
Foul and Surface Water Drainage Strategy	ByrneLooby
Fire Statement	Jensen Hughes
Energy Statement	Rolton
Air Quality Assessment	Hydrock
Environmental Noise Survey	Hydrock
Archaeological Impact Assessment	PCA Heritage
Arboricultural Report	Tim Moya Associates
Contamination Report	Bryne Looby
Daylight / Sunlight Assessments (Proposed Residential accommodation and existing residential properties)	GIA
Microclimate Assessment	GIA
Structural Statement	ByrneLooby

Structure of Planning Statement

1.17 The remainder of the Statement is structured as follows:

- **Section 2:** provides an overview of the town centre context, Reading town centre and the broader context for the proposed development.
- **Section 3:** an overview of the site context and surroundings including reference to any site-specific designations.
- **Section 4:** sets out a summary of the proposed development for the site.
- **Section 5:** provides a summary of the pre-application discussions with Reading Borough Council prior to submission of the planning application.
- **Section 6:** a summary of the planning policy context relating to the site and proposed development
- **Section 7:** an assessment of the principle of development and proposed uses against planning policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and the Local Development Plan;
- **Section 8:** an assessment of the design of the scheme and its compliance with Planning Policy and associated Framework's / Design Briefs within the context of Reading town centre.
- **Section 9:** provides an assessment of the technical consideration of the scheme and its compliance with planning policy.
- **Section 10:** sets out the public benefits of the scheme.
- **Section 11:** provide an Affordable Housing Statement.
- **Section 12:** provides a conclusion on the planning assessment undertaken and scheme summary.

2. Town Centre and Development Context

Town Centre Context

2.1 Town centres are evolving and need to respond to a myriad of challenges and ensure they are resistant to future economic shocks and ever-changing consumer trends. Over the last 5-10 years the retail sector has experienced structural change caused by a variety of factors including:

- Growth of on-line retailing, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Online sales, as a percentage of total retail sales online topped 38% in December 2019 above the previous peak of 21.6% in November 2019. This is forecast to level out at around 42% in 2040 for comparison (non-food) goods[1];
- Continued competition from out-of-town retailing;
- Ongoing impacts from the global pandemic, including reduced office population in larger cities and continued recovery from reduced turnover and extended periods of closure during lockdowns;
- Pressures from increased cost of living reducing retail expenditure and consumer confidence; and
- Changing shopping behaviours with a greater awareness of the sustainable impact of 'cheap' clothing and a desire for greater experiences rather than the consumption of items.

2.2 The struggles of retailers to make bricks-and-mortar pay, coupled with the migration of shoppers online, had contributed to an increase in vacancy rates even before the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated this direction of travel and led to further retail business closures and to reductions in footfall within town centres. The demise of national multiple retailers, many of which operated anchor retail units within centres, such as BHS, Debenhams, House of Fraser, and the Arcadia group has resulted in significant voids on the high street. According to the Local Data Company, chain stores experienced a net decline of 10,059 units in 2021 as retailers rationalised their property portfolios. The 2022 report by property advisors LSH [2]states that between 20%-40% of UK retail space may need to be redeveloped or repurposed.

2.3 Whist the full implications of the pandemic for retailing and town centres will play out over many years, it is clear that town centres will need to adapt to fulfil a different role in the towns and communities they serve.

2.4 Town centres are having to respond to these challenges. Asset owners and local authorities are looking for interventions to repurpose vacant floorspace, reimagine shopping centres and implement strategies to reinvigorate town centres. This often involves an evolution in the role of the centre, bringing in new uses to increase footfall

[1] Precisely Retail Expenditure Product Guide 2021/22 (Table 3.4)

[2] Lambert Smith Hampton Shopping Centre Futures – Putting Shopping Centres at the heart of Regeneration 2022

and dwell time. With the structural changes in the retail sector caused by the factors outlined above, relying solely on retail footfall can be problematic for centres. The vast majority of city and town centres across the UK are experiencing an oversupply of retail floorspace, and there is a need to contract the quantum of retail space across the UK.

2.5 The need for intervention is recognised by national government. The Government's 'Build Back Better High Streets Strategy' set out the governments long term plan to "*support the evolution of high streets into thriving places to work, visit and live*". Over the last 3 years, national government has sought to support town centres through a range of funds including Future High Street Funds, Towns Deals and Levelling Up Fund. This focus of public funds recognises the significant costs and complexity in delivering intervention with our centres and seeks to bridge the funding gap or act as a stimulus to further private sector investment. In addition, there is recognition at a national level that there have been significant changes in the function of our town centres. The introduction of new Use Classes in September 2020 amalgamated many 'town centre' uses including retail within Class E, recognising the need for flexibility on our high streets.

2.6 The role of residential uses in our town centres is also increasingly recognised, and the benefits it can deliver in bringing vacant buildings into occupation, generating critical mass of population to support shops and services, and creating 24-hour vibrancy within centres. The introduction of new permitted development rights to enable change from Class E to residential were brought in by national government with the intention of increasing residential population within our urban centres.

2.7 Intervention is being seen in centres across the UK, both through either private and public sector or a combination of the two. Looking at the top 15 city and town centres in the UK[3], the majority of these are subject to development proposals to deliver transformational change to the town centre, or secure the reoccupation or redevelopment of anchor retail units / department stores. A schedule providing an overview of development proposals within the public domain / recently completed schemes with the top 15 centres in the UK is provided at **Appendix 2.** By way of examples:

- In Glasgow, the City Centre is due to be transformed through schemes at the Buchanan Galleries and St Enoch shopping centres within the city centre. These centres book end the north and southern ends of Buchanan Street at the core of the town centre and are subject to planning applications to create mixed used urban districts delivering thousands of new homes to the city centre.

- In Southampton, construction is underway on the redevelopment of the Bargate Shopping Centre, providing a residential and commercial development around new public realm in the setting of the Bargate monument and town walls. Planning permission has also been secured for the demolition of the adjacent Debenhams unit and replacement with 17 storey residential building.

- Hammerson themselves have secured planning permission for the repurposing and redevelopment of the former Debenhams store in the Highcross Shopping

[3] as ranked by Colliers LocateVenues indicator (see **Appendix 1**)

Centre in Leicester. The scheme proposes the demolition of the existing store and construction on 8-15 storey Build to Rent residential building with commercial ground floor providing 332 residential units.

- The Galleries Shopping Centre, Bristol is subject to pre-application proposals for the redevelopment of the city centre shopping centre to provide offices, student accommodation, mix of residential typologies, hotel and retail around public realm.

2.8 It is widely acknowledged that town centres need to evolve, with buildings and space reimagined and new uses introduced in order to reinvigorate the centre and reduce the reliance on retail floorspace. All town centres, however, are different and it is imperative that any interventions respond to the function of the centre, its unique characteristics and identified market demands.

Reading Town Centre

2.9 Reading town centre is a regional centre, with a catchment extending beyond the Thames Valley. It is the principal centre within the Reading local authority area and designated as a regional centre in the adopted Local Plan.

2.10 RBC has long possessed an ambition to transform Reading into a city. The City Centre Framework (2009) sets out that:

"Reading will be established as the capital of the Thames Valley and as a gateway between the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe and the World. It will provide the highest quality services and facilities for all our residents, businesses and visitors across all of Reading's neighbourhoods. Our vision is to maintain and improve the quality of life in Reading, embracing the challenges of a dynamic, inclusive urban community of the 21st century. Everyone will have the opportunity to benefit from all that Reading can offer. Everyone has a part to play in shaping our future."

2.11 This Vision has been reinforced and reimagined through the adopted Local Plan, which extends this vision through to 2036 and beyond to 2050. The Local Plan acknowledges exponential economic success of the town has made it "*one of the most economically dynamic regions in the country*". Buoyed by the opening of the Oracle in 1999, Reading's importance is no longer based solely on economic production, with being recognised more so as "*significant for leisure and culture, and, increasingly, as somewhere to live*" and a hub of the Thames Valley and wider south east region.

2.12 The core of the retail provision is focused around Broad Street, Minister Street and Bridge Street with The Oracle and Broad Street Mall anchoring the retail offer to the south and west respectively. The Oracle is home to a range of national multiple retailers, who do not have representation elsewhere in the Thames Valley. The John Lewis department store, Marks & Spencer, Primark and a range of retailers (predominantly in the sports and athleisure sector), service and food & drink uses also occupy retail space along Broad Street.

2.13 Key retailers with The Oracle include Apple, Next, Zara and a wide range of national multiple comparison goods retailers. The Oracle is particularly strong in the provision of jewellery operators, mid to high end fashion retailers and mass market retailers.

2.14 In terms of leisure uses, there is a wide range of food & drink uses dispersed throughout the town centre, with some clusters around The Oracle riverside, Bridge Street / Market Street and Market Place. The Vue cinema at The Oracle historically served as a leisure anchor with other leisure provision limited to small 3-screen cinema at Reading Biscuit Factory and leisure uses in the form of Spinners arcade located at Broad Street Mall, providing 2-lane bowling alley, mini-golf and darts, and chain-gymnasiums located across the town centre.

2.15 The town centre is also the civic hub for the borough, with the Town Hall, Council Offices, Magistrates Courts, Hexagon theatre and other community uses dispersed throughout the centre. It is a highly accessible town centre by public transport, with the railway station within 5-10 min walk from the core town centre, and bus stands dispersed through the centre providing quick and frequent to surrounding towns of Wokingham, Basingstoke and Bracknell and a range of public car parks.

2.16 Colliers have analysed the current role and performance of Reading town centre**.** Utilising Collier's LocateVenues ranking, Reading town centre is currently ranked as the 14th largest retail venue in the UK[4]**.** However, its ranking score has declined by 39 points since 2019, resulting from the loss of core retailers and absence of any significant development schemes coming forward in the town. It is identified that Reading has seen one of the biggest declines in LocateVenue score amongst its catchment competitors in this time period.

2.17 Whilst some of the larger centres in the UK have experienced larger reductions in ranking score than Reading over the period 2019-2022, a number of these centres have large scale interventions underway, or are progressing through the development process. As highlighted previously, in Glasgow for example there are two major development proposals coming forward at the St Enoch and Buchanan Galleries shopping centres to repurpose and diversify these core city centre assets and deliver a wide range of uses and increased residential population. Nottingham has also faced challenges around the Broadmarsh centre following the failure of Intu, but proposals to redevelop the centre to create public space, residential and commercial uses are progressing.

2.18 It is recognised that the Broad Street Mall in the town centre is subject to an extant planning permission to provide over 400 residential units in tower blocks above the shopping centre. However, this permission was obtained by the previous shopping centre owners and there is uncertainty whether the new owners, AEW, will take forward the proposals due to concerns regarding costs and viability. As such, there is not currently any schemes comprising the repurposing or intensification of shopping centres or department stores being actively implemented in Reading town centre. . This is despite the need to contract the retail provision to reflect the changing demand supply dynamics in this sector.

[4] Colliers Market Report at **Appendix 1.**

2.19 Importantly it needs to be considered how Reading is performing within its catchment and whether it will maintain its role as the dominant centre in the Teams Valley. Colliers has identified Reading is facing strong competition from the likes of Wokingham, Bracknell, Maidenhead, Newbury, Slough, and Oxford.

2.20 Locally, there are a number of proposals coming forward in the identified competing locations including:

- **Slough** – Redevelopment of the Queensmere shopping centre in Slough Town Centre to provide up to 1,600 new homes as well as up to 12,000 sqm of flexible town centre space alongside public realm. Outline planning application has been submitted and demolition of the shopping centre is due to commence in January 2023

- **Maidenhead** – Planning permission granted for redevelopment of the Nicholson Shopping Centre to create Nicholson Quarter in the town centre comprising 660 new homes, office space, restaurants, and public space.

- **Bracknell** – Demolition of Bentall's department store and redevelopment to create 'The Deck', providing new public square, shops, and restaurants. In addition, proposals to convert the former Debenhams unit into an entertainment venue.

2.21 Like all town centres, Reading is facing challenges from vacant retail floorspace, created by retailer failure or retailers downsizing or rationalising their property portfolio. Colliers has identified Reading town centre has a high vacancy rate of 21% gross space, which is significantly higher than the national average of 13.8%[5]. It is also higher than a number of competing locations within and around the catchment including Oxford, Wokingham, High Wycombe, and Basingstoke. Increased vacancy rates impact upon the attractiveness of a centre both in terms of public perception and investor / retailer confidence.

2.22 Newbury, Maidenhead and Slough are both identified has having higher vacancy levels than Reading, however all of these centres are subject to development proposals within principal shopping centres which will impact upon vacancy rates over the short term.

The Oracle

2.23 The Oracle Shopping Centre was granted planning permission in 1997 (ref. 970419) and opened in 1999. It transformed Reading's town centre, providing space that suited modern retailer requirements at that time.

2.24 The Oracle is a covered 2 level shopping centre with two departments stores, 81 retail units, 22 restaurants and a cinema. It sits at the heart of Reading town centre, having a main entrance on Broad Street, the town's historic main shopping thoroughfare.

[5] GOAD November 2022

However, the Vue cinema complex turns it backs towards the south of reading with the Inner Distributor Road acting as both a physical and visual barrier to movement.

2.25 The Oracle is the largest retail zone within Reading town centre, contributing nearly a third of Reading's town centre retail and leisure offer and considered to a key driver of visits to the town centre[6]. The supporting text to the Local Plan recognises the importance of The Oracle and highlights that its opening in 1999 helped to establish Reading as *"one of the leading shopping locations in the UK"* (para 5.1.4). The importance of the Oracle and the significant positive impact it has in strengthening the role and offer of Reading town centre is identified throughout the Local Plan and other local guidance documents.

2.26 As summarised in the Colliers report, The Oracle comprises the largest cluster of retail within Reading town centre, based upon both LocateVenues score and trading floorspace. The LocateVenues score reflecting a range of factors including nature of retail floorspace, and 'strength' of occupier with national multiples weighted more heavily and consideration given to price positioning of retailers (i.e., value vs luxury). The internal malls within the centre are dominated by national multiple retailers within Reading, with particular focus on mid/upper market fashion retailers, with occupiers benefitting from clustering together to attract footfall. Hammerson carefully curate the tenant mix within the shopping centre to ensure it retains an optimal mix of retailer representation and continues to attract retailers over and above other Thames Valley shopping locations.

2.27 Future planned openings and repurposing of space within The Oracle will increase the centre's LocateVenues score by an estimated further 9 points helping to cement the shopping centre as the prime pitch within Reading.

2.28 Colliers' have undertaken an analysis of The Oracle's catchment area. Commensurate with its anchor role within a designated regional centre, The Oracle draws shoppers from across the Thames Valley capturing market share from Didcot, Newbury, North Hampshire, Bracknell, Camberley, Maidenhead and Slough. Trade draws are particularly strong from areas to the north, west and east of Reading, with lower levels of market share to the east.

2.29 The Oracle draws from a more extensive catchment area than Reading town centre as a whole. Collier's LocateFootfall data has identified that 75% of visitors to The Oracle come from within a 32-minute drivetime of Reading town centre, compared to a 26 min drivetime for the town centre as a whole. This attraction of The Oracle from a wider catchment area, and the additional expenditure that this will generate, will deliver benefits to the town centre as whole, if linked trips between the asset and the wider town centre can be ensured, through appropriate integration and connectivity.

2.30 In terms of performance within its catchment area, Collier's interrogation of mobility data has identified that the market share of The Oracle has declined across the catchment between 2019-2022, with lower market shares identified towards to the east of the Thames Valley. This is particularly noticeable around the south east of the catchment and is considered likely to be in part a result of the improvements to

[6] Collier's Market Report **Appendix 1**

Bracknell Town Centre, providing increased competition to The Oracle and Reading town centre as a whole.

2.31 Despite the challenges outlined above, The Oracle has performed relatively well post pandemic, seeing a strong footfall return compared to national benchmarks. Footfall at The Oracle has been returning close to 2019 levels during late summer 2022 and the footfall recovery is identified as being ahead of Reading town centre as a whole. The Riverside is showing particularly strong recovery, with footfall identified above 2019 levels during July - September 2022[7], with the leisure component and the associated public realm on the riverside considered a key contributor to this.

2.32 Generally, The Oracle has a higher proportion of visitors at the weekend, when compared with the town centre as a whole. 35% of visits to The Oracle are at the weekend and it is considered to be an opportunity to increase the diversity of uses at the centre to target a more even distribution of footfall throughout the week. Collier's analysis of the mobility data has also identified that the nearly 80% of visits to The Oracle are during the day between 9am-6pm, indicating there is a need to consider the nature of the offer meeting the evening market.

2.33 In terms of frequency of visits, across both The Oracle and town centre as whole there has been a general trend towards increased frequency of visits during 2022 compared with 2019[8]. However, The Oracle experiences a much lower proportion of footfall visiting on a monthly or more frequent basis when compared with Reading town centre and UK benchmark locations. Just 8% of Oracle users, visit at least once a month compared to 14% for the town centre as a whole.

2.34 There remains active retailer interest in occupying units within the centre, within the primary mall areas. Recent letting transactions over the last 12 months have introduced the following retailers to the centre: Oliver Bonas, Gail's, Rituals, Charles Tyrwhitt and Boux Avenue, with a number of new retailers due to open stores in the coming months

Department Store Offer

2.35 The constructed Oracle shopping centre comprises department stores bookending the scheme at the east and west ends. When The Oracle was first developed, department stores were seen as a necessary anchor to the scheme given their role as a footfall generator, and their popularity amongst shoppers in providing a wide range of goods in a single location. The importance of department stores was confirmed through the imposition of a condition requiring MSUA (House of Fraser) and MSUB (Debenhams) to remain in use as a department store by preventing the sub-division of the units[9].

2.36 However, as identified above, retailing trends and demands are continually changing. The appeal of the department store has diminished as a wider range of alternatives became available to shoppers:

[7] Colliers Market Report pg. 19
[8] Colliers Market Report pg. 26
[9] Condition no.62 planning permission ref. 970419

- Supermarkets have grown in size and incorporate a greater range of products, with comparison (non-food) goods equally 50% of the product ranges in some of the larger stores.

- Retail parks evolved from 'bulky goods' destinations to including a number of anchor high street facias with the added convenience of being able to park directly outside.

- Online shopping has grown exponentially over the last 20 years, with growth in recent years strengthened through the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.37 This combined with a lack of investment and perceived absence of innovation by some department store operators, led to diminished demand for department stores by customers, and ultimately the demise of a number of operators including Debenhams and House of Fraser.

2.38 The Debenhams department store in The Oracle closed in April 2020 and whilst the House of Fraser store is still operating there is very little new investment into this store. Next Home and Beauty have taken occupation of the Debenhams unit but are only trading from one floor and have a very concessionary agreement in place which leaves the landlord with all of the occupational costs for the unit.

2.39 In March 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Hammerson obtained planning permission for the repurposing of the House of Fraser to sub-divide the unit and accommodate a number of new retail and leisure operators. However, due to changing in market requirements and operational demands the approved scheme is unlikely to be delivered. However, Hammerson remain committed to using this space for retail and leisure operators. It is expected that revised proposals for the sub-division and repurposing of the unit will come forward during 2023 to secure the long-term reoccupation and investment in the western end of the shopping centre.

Cinema Offer

2.40 On the south side of the river Kennett, the Vue cinema opened alongside the shopping centre in 1999 providing an 11-screen multiplex cinema with 1,800 seats. Now at over 20 years the cinema is in need of significant investment to upgrade the existing facilities, both in terms of physical environment for customers and technological infrastructure. The cinema is facing increased competition from more modern facilities within the Thames Valley including the Showcase in Wokingham and Cineworld at the Lexicon, Bracknell as well as market trends resulting in lower cinema footfall, including at home streaming services and cost of living challenges.

3. Site and Surrounding Context

Introduction

3.1 The site is located within a prime area of central Reading, forming part of the existing Oracle and Riverside shopping centre. The Oracle is widely regarded as the cornerstone retail attraction to Reading Town Centre, with the development site comprises different elements of retail, restaurant, and leisure uses.

3.2 As a result of the site's central location, it is considered to be highly sustainable via all forms of modal transport, in particular rail, bus, and a series of cycle networks that connect the site, and Reading town centre, with the surrounding sub-urban populations. The site is situated on a key vehicular Internal Distributor Road (IDR) A329(Queens Road) and facilitates pedestrian routes through and across the Oracle, to the wider shopping district along Broad Street and beyond.

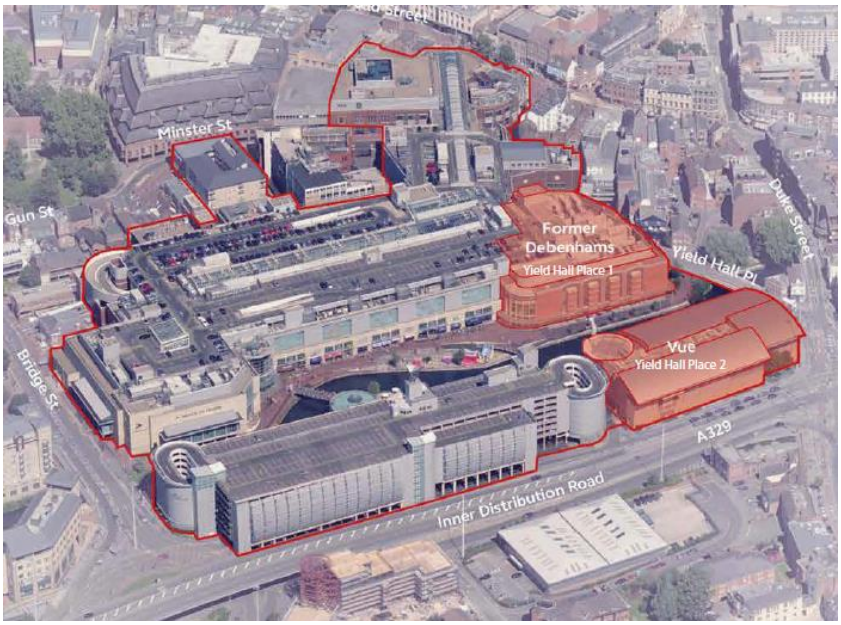
3.3 Central Reading is a focus within the adopted Development Plan for considerable regeneration, with a particular focus on delivering mixed use development and tall buildings through the redevelopment of a number of separate land parcels, such as the Station Hill development. In this context, accounting for real-time development 'on-the ground' within Reading there is recognition that there is a changing townscape within Reading to raise its profile commensurate with its role as an exemplar economic, social, and cultural hub within the Thames Valley.

Development Site

3.4 The Proposed Development comprises two respective development sites as shown Figure 3.1 below:

3.5 The two sites have been identified as Yield Hall Place 1 and Yield Hall Place 2 through this application and respected supporting documentation, sited north and south of Yield Hall Bridge respectively

Figure 3.1 Extract of Site Location Plan



Application Site 1: Yield Hall Place 1

3.6 The site is located within centre of Reading, bound by Yield Hall Place to the east and attached to The Oracle shopping centre to the north and west. The site currently comprises 6 storey building with predominantly brick and glasswork façade constructed as a department store, and operated as a Debenhams department store until 2020. Part of the retail floorspace is currently occupied by Next Home and Beauty and two restaurant units operate from riverside level. The majority of the frontage onto the riverside and Yield Hall Place are inactive.

3.7 Immediately to the west of the site are a variety of bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways that comprise The Oracle Riverside shopping centre. This is all under the control of the Applicant. To the north-east, beyond Yield Hall Place lies further retail and leisure activities in the form of restaurants, bars, and 'Escape Rooms' located at Kings Walk Shopping Centre.

3.8 The site is bound to the south by the Riverside walkway and River Kennet and faces directly the Yield Hall Place 2 site.

3.9 Yield Hall Place provides pedestrian and service vehicle access to Minster Street further north of the site, and facilitates pedestrian flows across the town centre, providing connections to Broad Street, and the wider core of central Reading.

3.10 Small-scale plots of trees and vegetations are situated to the western boundary, with small bushes and trees running parallel to the south of the site, adjacent to the Kennet and Avon Canal. Low-level steel fencing is positioned along the edge of the pedestrian walkway with public bike racks and benches also found at the southern edge of the site.

3.11 Vehicular access to the site is achieved from Yield Hall Place running adjacent to the east of the site. Pedestrian access through to the site can be achieved directly via the

Oracle Shopping Centre, as well as Yield Hall Place, with connections from Minster Street and the Oracle Riverside, owing to its central location at the heart of Reading town centre.

Yield Hall Place 2

3.12 Facing the site, on the opposite side the river, is Yield Hall Place 2. With pedestrian access routes via Yield Hall Place and Yield Hall Bridge over the Kennet and Avon Canal, located to the south-east of the site.

3.13 Yield Hall Place 2 comprises 4 storey cinema complex, with a cladded grey and brick façade. This block predominately houses a Vue multiplex cinema, with further restaurant and bar units housed at ground floor level. Yield Hall Place 2 shares similar structural landscaping in the form of trees and shrub planting to the north of the site, where it runs parallel to the Kennett and Avon Canal. To the east and south, the site borders Yield Hall Place / London Street, and A329 (Queens Road) that forms part of the Internal Distributor Road (IDR) that facilitates traffic through and across Central Reading. The IDR is a core vehicular route running through Reading central area and is a heavily trafficked route which can be perceived as a barrier to movement between the south and the town centre.

3.14 The adjacent site, located immediately to the west, is the Oracle multi-storey car park. The multi-storey car park comprises over 1,600 car parking spaces located over 7 floors. Restaurants and hot-food takeaways are situated on the south side of the Kennet and Avon Canal, forming a secondary retail and leisure frontage to the Oracle Riverside shopping experience.

3.15 Positioned to the east of the site and London Street is Grosvenor Casino, as well as clusters of multi-purpose tall buildings to the north east and south east, beyond the IDR.

Market Place Conservation Area

3.16 There are no listed buildings within either application site, however part of the Site does fall partly within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. As such there are a cluster of identified heritage assets in close proximity to Yield Hall Place 1 and Yield Hall Place 2:

Yield Hall Place 1

- The George Hotel - 60m north east (UID ref. 1155931)
- 17 and 18 King Street - 75m east (UID ref. 1113498)
- Building on South East Corner – 30m east (UID ref. 1302482)

Yield Hall Place 2

- 2 and 4 London Street – 30m north east (UID ref. 1321933)
- Coroners Court – 50m north east (UID ref. 1113514)
- High Bridge – 55m north-east (UID ref. 1321938)

Accessibility

3.17 Reading is widely recognised as the principal regional and commercial centre of the Thames Valley[10] and recognised as a strategic regional growth hub. One of the reasons for Reading's continued success is its excellent regional and national connectivity.

3.18 The town is a major transport interchange, continuing to benefit from Reading Station and its strategic location on the M4 corridor and proximity to Heathrow Airport and London.

3.19 Reading railway station is located within walking distance to the site and is one of the most important hub railway stations in the UK at the convergence of 4 national lines for both passengers, freight, and the Trans European Network. It provides a range of direct national, regional and local services to key economic centres including London, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and Cardiff.

3.20 The station has recently undergone circa £750m of strategic improvements and upgrades, creating an additional five rail platforms and making it one of the busiest stations outside London. This also includes the introduction of the Elizabeth Line provide fast and frequent connections to in central and east London, including Bond Street, Farringdon, and Canary Wharf (4 services per hour).

3.21 Reading is located immediately north of the M4 and can be easily accessed from 3 junctions (10 to 12) to provide strategic road access west towards Bristol and Wales and wider south west, as well as facilitating connections eastward towards Heathrow, Gatwick and towards London and the M25.

[10] Profile of Reading https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/borough_profile_2017_updated.pdf

4. Proposed Development

The Oracle – The Opportunity and Vision

4.1 The previous chapter outlines the context in which The Oracle shopping centre currently operates within. Hammerson, as joint owner, and asset manager of the shopping centre have a clear and urgent challenge in addressing the demand and supply imbalance that has arisen for both retail and leisure space, whilst ensuring a core focus of the shopping centre remains on retail. The centre is dominated by mainstream retail and food & beverage uses, with limited alternative uses. It needs to evolve to meet new customers' expectations with appropriate space for retail, social and living uses.

4.2 Hammerson are committed to The Oracle and Reading Town Centre and have articulated a strategic vision for the centre. Whilst it is performing well when compared with other assets in the UK, Hammerson recognise the need to future proof the centre and make it, and the town centre as whole, more resilient to market shocks and changing trends. The effects are starting to be seen from the cost-of-living crisis, with uncertainty regarding the full extent of its impact on the economy, consumer confidence and spending patterns. The shopping centres of the future need to be mixed use locations serving a wide range of local community needs in order to mitigate the impact that these changes are having on the sector.

4.3 LSH 2022 research report 'Shopping Centre Futures'[11] identifies the important role that shopping centres can play in the regeneration of towns and cities. The report draws upon empirical data and case studies to consider the centres of the future.

4.4 The report concludes that while unprecedented challenges abound, shopping centres still have important roles to play within towns and cities. However, they may need to take on radically different forms in order to survive and flourish. Repurposing activity is key to securing the future of centres, but it must be carefully planned and implemented so that it supports bold new visions of their long-term roles at the heart of communities (pg. 14).

4.5 LSH advise that the goal for many landlords should be to transform shopping centres from single use covered retail locations into diverse and open mixed-use places that are sustainable and provide people with more reasons to come to them and to stay for longer. Adding a wider range of residential, community and commercial uses will create a 'captive catchment' and generate footfall to ensure that properties are in use for longer periods of the day, including outside of normal retail hours. The report also recognises that varying degrees of redevelopment and repurposing activity will be suitable for different shopping centres, however, for a number, the retention of a significant volume of retail space will be an important part of the creation of vibrant community-focused locations.

[11] Lambert Smith Hampton 'Shopping Centre Futures – Putting Shopping Centres at the heart of regeneration 2022' (July 2022)

4.6 Hammerson recognise it is necessary to have an element of vacant floorspace within a retail centre to facilitate the natural churn of retail requirements, enabling retailers to upsize or downsize their floorspace as operational requirements dictate and providing opportunities for new entrants to the market. However, an excess of vacant space can lead to a perception of decline and uncertainty amongst both retailers and customers, leading to a downward spiral of decline and lack of confidence in the centre.

4.7 Hammerson has identified that The Oracle is currently oversupplied in retail floorspace, and there is a need to diversify some of the space into other sectors in order to rationalise the supply and preserve the prime retail offer in the centre. Hammerson has undertaken an audit of the asset and identified a series of opportunities across the centre.

Development Opportunity Audit

4.8 In particular it has been identified that the most urgent need for The Oracle is to contract the retail space that was built and designed for department stores. Hammerson's analysis has identified that retail space specifically created for department stores has suffered the largest imbalance of supply (high) versus demand (low) for space. Indeed, the aforementioned LSH research report states that a year after Debenham's demise, nearly 90% of vacated Debenhams stores remained empty[12]. As highlighted previously, Hammerson are facing the challenge of a Debenhams and House of Fraser department stores both operating under a temporary lease arrangements.

4.9 Part of the former Debenhams unit is currently let to Next Home and Beauty on a temporary lease, with a significant proportion of the unit vacant or being utilised as temporary retail storage. This is not considered to represent a long-term solution for the unit.

4.10 The House of Fraser department store at the western end of the centre was previously subject to repurposing proposals for leisure floorspace. Whilst those proposals have not come forward due to changing market requirements, the House of Fraser unit is considered to be a better configured department store, when considered against the Debenhams unit, and concluded to have a longer lifespan in its current form. It benefits from well configured floorplates for retail layout, good circular access, good connection with the car park, good prominence and visibility and is the most integrated into the customer journey. Likely to be as a result of these characteristics, recently Hammerson has had a good level of interest in this unit from retailers and leisure operators on a longer-term basis, and as such reoccupation of this unit by alternative occupiers is considered to be an appropriate strategy for that unit.

4.11 On the southern side of the river, the Vue cinema site is identified as an immediate opportunity. As presented in the previous chapter, VUE wish to upgrade their current cinema offer but required landlord investment is significant. This level of investment could only be supported by Hammerson if it conjointly delivered additional benefits through a modernised mixed use offer on the southern side of the river. Hammerson

[12] Pg. 7 Lambert Smith Hampton 'Shopping Centre Futures – Putting Shopping Centres at the heart of regeneration 2022' (July 2022)

are committed to seeking to relocate the existing food & beverage units in the Vue complex who trade strongly into other units within The Oracle.

4.12 The space audit also recognised a requirement to reinvigorate internal mall space within the existing mall space within the shopping centre. There is a need to provide high quality floorspace to accommodate existing retailers in alternative units as they go through 're-sizing' exercises with their store requirements and also to create appropriate space to attract new retailers into the centre.

4.13 However, in identifying the space within the centre to repurpose, it is necessary to understand the role of The Oracle and what differentiates itself from the remainder of the town centre, or retail facilities further afield. The Oracle's focus has been to offer space to primarily national retailers that demand large floor plates with clear sight lines. These units are not generally found within the Broad Street shopping area and it is a real point of difference for The Oracle. It is essential that any repurposing proposals do not jeopardise this unique offer. As such, attention has been focused on the opportunities presented by the more peripheral parts of The Oracle and the potential to deliver densification of the building footprint.

4.14 The Debenhams site, combined with the aged Vue cinema facility which has been identified as requiring significant capital investment, are considered to be two sites that provide Hammerson with an immediate, and most appropriate, opportunity. Redevelopment of these sites could accelerate the required transformation of the centre to reduce the retail footprint, provide a new relevant leisure offer and at the same time introduce sustainable, alternative uses including flexible workspace and residential accommodation. Proposals for the House of Fraser store at the western end of the centre would continue in parallel with these transformational proposals, but outwith the scope of the current planning applications.

4.15 Both being located at the eastern end of the centre, there is a clear opportunity for the coordinated redevelopment of these sites to provide a curated scheme focused on the river and to reimagine the eastern end of the centre. Bringing forward these sites enables Hammerson to introduce alternative uses into the environs of the centre without interrupting the current customer journey or flow of shoppers and will enable the creation of a high-quality residential environment. The curated nature of a shopping centre and Hammerson's ownership will enable the new uses to exist in defined areas, but with distinct overlapping zones of activity creating vibrancy and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the centre.

4.16 Extensive research has been undertaken into the demands and viability of bringing a range of different uses into The Oracle, and how these uses would both integrate into The Oracle physical environment but coalesce with the existing uses at the centre. Aligning with advice in the LSH Shopping Centre Futures report, one of Hammerson's strategic objectives is to transform The Oracle shopping centre from a single use covered retail location, to an open mixed-use destination that is more sustainable and engages more positively with the wider town centre and environs.

4.17 Over the years, Hammerson has taken steps to achieve these through the introduction of leisure and food & beverage uses, and ongoing investment in the Oracle Riverside and activity along the riverside. The public realm is acknowledged to be of its time and

in need of investment to bring it up to date, to meet customer demands for a modern, managed and curated leisure environment.

4.18 The current proposals represent a clear and immediate opportunity to deliver more transformational change and regenerate the eastern end of the centre, and address the transition between the Oracle centre and reminder of town centre, particularly the gateway to the town centre from the south of Reading.

Residential Potential

4.19 The work undertaken has identified significant potential to deliver residential development in the heart of Reading town centre, with the curated nature of The Oracle environment providing an optimal environment for the Build to Rent (BtR) residential typology. Residential space, alongside the right mix of commercial, retail and leisure uses, will create a location where people can live, work, play and socialise.

4.20 The Oracle is considered to be an exciting opportunity to create Riverside residential quarters in genuinely accessible and attractive environment to meet the acute demand for BtR units within Reading. To ensure any residential element delivers high quality residential environment, of an appropriate mix and density, to enable the community and space to be effectively curated, Hammerson has sought advice from BtR developer and operator, Packaged Living.

4.1 Packaged Living are an experienced investor, developer, and operator within the private rented sector. Packaged Living focus on creating good quality rental homes which foster a sense of community, working with local people and organisations to deliver wider regeneration benefits from development opportunities.

4.2 Packaged Living are working closely with Hammerson and the design team to develop the identified sites to create a vibrant mixed-use scheme with good quality, purpose-built Build to Rent (BtR) homes, co-working space, amenity lounges and landscaped roof terraces integrating effectively with The Oracle shopping centre and commercial uses proposed. Packaged Living strive to deliver relevant, effective and value enhancing solutions in order to deliver on their promise of 'Local Living at its Best.'

Build to Rent Residential

4.3 In respect of the residential typology identified, Build to Rent (BtR) is a tenure of residential development designed specifically for longer term renting, with all the units owned and managed by one landlord.

4.4 BtR is recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) glossary as the following:

"Purpose built housing that is typically 100% rented out. It can form part of a wider multi-tenure development comprising either flats or houses, but should be on the same site and/or contiguous with the main development. Schemes will usually offer longer tenancy agreements of three years or more, and will typically be professionally managed stock in single ownership and management control."

4.5 The key difference with BtR properties over more traditionally single unit rental properties is often the facilities they offer and the standard to which they have been

built. A key benefit of building purpose-built brand-new apartment blocks is that they are designed to modern, energy-efficient standards and can incorporate the latest technologies. Given that all the units remain in a single ownership, be it the BtR operator such as Packaged Living or The Oracle Limited Partnership, as land owner, the owners have a long-term interest in the property and ensure it is built to a high standard and maintained to such a standard through its lifetime.

4.6 Features of the BtR offer include:

- Flexible tenancy, including longer tenancy options of over 3 years and 1 month notice periods, which can add security and stability for those looking for longer-term tenancies.
- High quality residential units and provision of high quality and flexible amenity and event spaces for use by residents.
- Local events, and special offers to provide a community within the building.
- Critical mass of residential population to create a community feeling, and opportunities to socialise and engage.
- Cleaning services.
- Pet-friendly units.
- On-site maintenance and 24-hour on site management for residents.
- On-site car club initiatives.

4.7 Reading is considered to represents a strong location for the BtR residential typology, with a well-established local economy, with representation from a broad range of financial and professional services. It is considered to have a strong employment market and a large student accommodation, resulting in significant potential graduate population. Its excellent connectivity and relatively high levels of affordability (based on salary vs rents) lend itself to the BtR market. In terms of its demographic composition, it is well represented by the City Prosperity or Rental Hub MOSAIC groups which are target demographic groups for BtR accommodation. It is currently a relatively undersupplied market and this combined with increasing levels of investor demand make it a target location for additional accommodation.

4.8 Reading currently has a strong rental population, with around 20% of Reading's households identified has living within the private rental sector. However, in terms of rental stock this is dominated by private landlords within HMO's or individual properties. There is limited provision currently of BtR property, focused on providing a high quality and secure rental provision. In terms of the principal provision, Thames Quarter is complete and operation, providing 315 units whilst Station Hill development is under construction and will deliver over 500 units. These schemes, along with schemes in the development pipeline equate to a pipeline of around 1,200 homes. This is considered to represent a market penetration rate of just 8.9% of total rental

housing in Reading. It is estimated that saturation point is likely to be at least 30% of the total Reading rental market, at over 4,250 units.

4.9 As such there is considered to be significant levels of demand for further BtR accommodation in Reading, with the town centre the priority location for this residential typology. The current development opportunities at the eastern end of The Oracle offer significant potential in which to develop a unique and high quality BtR offer, to both meet identified demand for more BtR residential whilst also diversifying the offer at The Oracle through the creation of a new curated riverside residential quarter at the gateway to the town centre.

Description of Development

4.10 The planning applications to which this statement relates seeks full planning consent comprising of residential, employment, commercial, retail and leisure uses. In summary the proposed development comprises the following:

- 449 new build-to-rent units (including affordable homes);
- Mix of 1,2,3 bed apartments and wheelchair accessible dwellings;
- Repurposing of existing retail space to accommodate new leisure uses and retail floorspace
- Reprovision and upgrading of existing Vue cinema
- Provision of new commercial floorspace at riverside level, including restaurants and /or bars, co-working / business incubator space incorporating maker units
- New shopping centre entrance at riverside level
- Enhanced public realm throughout the site, Kennet and Avon Canal riverside corridor, Yield Hall Place, and IDR;

4.11 The proposed development will be delivered across two sites, either side of the canal. Separate planning applications are submitted for each site, referred to as Yield Hall Place 1 and 2 respectively. Details of the development pertaining to each site are provided below.

Site 1: Yield Hall Place 1

4.12 The description of development is as follows:

Mixed use development comprising part demolition of former department store and erection of new building comprising build to rent residential use (Class C3) and commercial uses within Uses Class E and / or bar (Sui Generis Use). Reconfiguration and change of use of 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.

4.13 The key elements of the development proposal at Yield Hall Place 1 include:

- Part demolition of the former Debenhams department store building now currently partially occupied by Next where it fronts onto Yield Hall Place to the east and Oracle Riverside Frontage (south elevation).

- Construction of a new high-quality tall building in this location comprising 19 Storeys at highest point with indoor and outdoor amenity space for prospective residents.

- Provision of 202 residential apartments providing a mix of units including studio apartments, 1 bed apartments, 2 bed apartments and 3 bed apartments, to provide a range of unit sizes to meet housing needs and demands.

- Reconfiguration of remainder of former Debenhams floorspace to create new retail unit and experiential leisure use (Class E and / or Sui Generis) to broaden the leisure offer and attraction within Reading town centre

- Provision of new commercial floorspace at ground (riverside) level of residential block to provide restaurant / bar (Class E and / or Sui Generis) and co-working / business incubator space incorporating maker units (Class E).

- Activation of ground floor uses onto The Oracle riverside and Yield Hall Place, including creation of new entrance into The Oracle at the eastern end of the riverside.

- High quality internal and external private amenity space for the building residents, comprising roof terraces with both indoor and outdoor space.

- Provision of 200 secure on-site cycle parking spaces.

- The residential units will be car-free and not allocated with car parking as part of the scheme. Two spaces will be converted to car-club spaces in accordance with Reading Borough Council Park Standards 2011. This will allow residents to use a car when needed for trips that are not possible by other modes of transport.

- Landscaping at the amenity roof terraces, a green roof and a suite of public realm improvements alongside the riverside frontage street level landscaping.

- Public realm improvements to the Riverside and Yield Hall Place.

4.14 The proposed development seeks to diversify the leisure offer available within Reading town centre to ensure that the level of provision available remains commensurate with its standing as an economic, social, and cultural hub for the Thames Valley region. There has identified to be market requirement for representation in Reading town centre from a range of leisure operators and the applicant is actively exploring this interest from a variety of end-operators. It is anticipated that the leisure unit to be created in the retained Debenhams floorspace will be operated by an experiential leisure operator new to the Reading market. An experimental leisure offer may include a bar element and as such the proposed use of the leisure use may fall within Use Class E and or constitute a hybrid Class E / Sui Generis use.

4.15 It is proposed that Yield Hall Place 1 be serviced from a combination of the existing locations:

- The proposed leisure and restaurant use will be serviced directly from the main Oracle service yard under the shopping centre as the Debenhams unit was.
- Residential and Co-working deliveries will be received from the existing servicing bay located on Yield Hall Place with the existing contractor parking relocated by the centre to within the service yard.
- Refuse and recycling collections will be collected from the north of the façade of Yield Hall Place.

Site 2: Yield Hall Place 2

4.16 The description of development is as follows:

*Mixed use development comprising demolition of existing buildings and erection of new building comprising build-to-rent residential use (Class C3), cinema (Sui Generis) and ground floor commercial uses within Use Class E and /or Bar (Sui Generis Use). Associated public realm and infrastructure work*s.

4.17 The key elements of the development proposal at Yield Hall Place 2 are set out below:

- Demolition of existing cinema complex and restaurant units and construction of new, 16 storey building at tallest point
- Provision of 247 residential apartments providing a mix of units including studio apartments, 1 bed apartments, 2 bed apartments and 3 bed apartments, to provide a range of unit sizes to meet housing needs and demands.
- Replacement provision of 2,600 sqm of Cinema (Sui Generis) at ground floor level, alongside commercial floorspace (Class E / Sui Generis restaurant and / or bar) located on ground level.
- An active frontage onto the Oracle riverside and Yield Hall Place, providing a betterment to the existing configuration of building and uses in this location.
- Provision of 156 secure on-site cycle parking spaces.
- As with Yield Hall Place 1, it is proposed that the residential units be car-free, owing to the highly sustainable nature of the proposals.
- Landscaping is provided at ground floor level to enhance the arrival experience to the site and provide a more attractive user-experience for existing and prospective users of the Oracle shopping centre in this location, especially given the anchor-feature Vue cinema.
- The proposed tall building provides both podium and rooftop terraced amenity to provide a more attractive and user-friendly development.

- Public realm improvements to Riverside, Yield Hall Place and around junction of IDR.

4.18 The proposed development at Yield Hall Place 2 seeks the demolition of the existing block comprising Vue cinema and restaurant / bar uses, with the cinema element reprovided to provide a bespoke, upgraded and more rationalised cinema offer. This will be accompanied by a restaurant / bar use towards the eastern end of the site, with a central residential access to ensure an active frontage along this element of the riverside shopping experience.

4.19 Yield Hall Place 2 is to be serviced from two areas:

- Any bulky deliveries and refuse collections for the residential units will be made from the existing servicing area, accessed from Mill Lane adjacent to the western façade. This bay along with the adjacent service yard located under the Riverside Car Park will continue to be used by the proposed cinema and restaurant unit as is the case with the current occupiers.

- An additional kerbside drop-off bay is proposed on the IDR to the south of Yield Hall Place 2 to allow smaller/quick deliveries to serve the residential units

Scheme Phasing and Delivery

4.20 The Applicant, as site owner and experienced developer, is fully committed to bringing forward the proposed development. As identified in the DHCLG Select Committee report in 2019[13], fragmented ownerships in town centres, where many different ownerships are involved, is a systematic issue in delivering town centre intervention. The applicant is the sole owner of the two application sites and has negotiated lease positions with the existing tenants where relevant to ensure that the development can be delivered in a timely manner. The applicant also intends to retain a long-term interest in the buildings and the residential units as BtR will be subject to ongoing and active management.

4.21 Redevelopment can only be accommodated around lease events and in order to mobilise a redevelopment of the former Debenhams unit, planning permission would be need to be secured by mid 2023, with development commenced by the end of that year.

4.22 In relation to phasing of the proposed development, it needs to be recognised that the application sites comprises an operational shopping centre in the core of Reading town centre. It will be necessary to phase the development to minimise disruption along the riverside as far as possible for town centre users. The implementation of the development proposals is proposed as follows:

- **Phase 1a** – Demolition of part of Debenhams unit and works to retained Debenhams floorspace to provide new retail unit and leisure facility. Construction of new riverside shopping entrance

[13] Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report, February 2019

- **Phase 1b** – Erection of Yield Hall Place 1 residential development and ground floor commercial uses and associated public realm works
- **Phase 2** – Demolition of Vue cinema and implementation of Yield Hall Place 2 development and associated public realm works

5. Pre-Application & Engagement

5.1 The Applicant has been fully committed to engaging with RBC early in the preapplication process, recognising the benefits this can provide to the application process for both parties, and to contribute towards the evolution of the proposals by resolving issues at the pre-application stage (in accordance with paragraph 41 of the NPPF).

5.2 This section of the Planning Statement outlines both the pre-application discussions held with the Local Planning Authority and the pre-application consultation exercise undertaken with the local community.

Stakeholder Engagement

5.3 Information regarding the proposals and the community consultation process was shared with key stakeholders through the pre-application consultation process.

5.4 A summary of the stakeholder engagement is outlined below. Further details are provided within the Statement of Community Involvement submitted alongside the respective application.

Reading Borough Council

5.5 The Applicant has engaged and been in contact with Reading Borough Council (RBC) on the application proposals since Summer 2021. Following initial discussions in September 2021, the applicant entered into a Planning Performance Agreement with RBC in February 2022.

5.6 As part of this agreement, a series of pre-application meetings and workshops with Officers at the local authority has been undertaken during the period March – November 2022 with representation from Executive Officers, Planning Officers and Highways Officers. The themes covered in these meetings include:

- The Oracle – the Applicant's vision and current challenges and opportunities,
- Principle of development – proposed uses and introduction of BTR residential,
- Scale and massing – including heritage and townscape considerations,
- Design,
- Public realm, connectivity, and permeability,
- Accessibility and transportation considerations.

Design South East

5.7 Between May and August 2022, the Applicant has engaged with the Design South East (DSE) including two panels as part of the pre-application process.

5.8 Throughout this process, there was acknowledgement and appreciation that shopping centres such as The Oracle present key opportunities for repair and redevelopment as

the experience of retail changes. Furthermore, for this scheme to be a successful mixed-use redevelopment, the Panel identified that a key driver will be the enhancement and strengthening of the public realm and its interconnectivity.

5.9 As part of the assessing the integration of the development within the surroundings, it was noted that the development "*presents an exciting opportunity to take a progressive approach when considering the IDR's future and demonstrate how this project could facilitate positive change*". Likewise, it was understood that pedestrian-friendly frontage on the southern elevation, facing the IDR should, would help facilitate and connect the riverside spaces with the southern part of the development and on across the IDR to the neighbourhood to the south.

5.10 Whilst DSE identified that the site falls outside these designated areas for "tall buildings", a supporting case would be necessary to justify why a landmark might be appropriate in the context of an architectural and heritage narrative around Reading.

5.11 It was recognised that the way the scheme is experienced as the entrance to the town centre from London Street is also an important consideration, so as to further permeability and wayfinding at a neighbourhood level. This area in particular to the south-eastern end of Yield Hall Place would benefit from wider public realm enhancements to raise the sense of arrival.

5.12 With regard to public realm, the DSE noted that connections through to an enhanced biodiverse River Kennet from both the south and north to help secure long-term flexibility as well as social, environmental and economic vitality. In addition, it was noted that the proposals must successfully dovetail with the remaining parts of The Oracle and relate legibly with spaces and routes inside. The Panel welcomed changes during this time to accommodate greater public realm and landscaping proposals. This is being provided alongside the reopening of previously closed openings to the shopping centre and broadening of connections between the internal and external public routes

5.13 In respect of the existing buildings, it was highlighted that "the existing buildings possess little architectural merit" and that an energy strategy be provided planning application stage optimise the use of energy to align with the Government's and Local Authorities guidance on energy use and production.

Reading Corporate Management Team

5.14 Meetings with the Reading Corporate Management Team (CMT) were held on the dates 17 May, 5 July, and 22 October 2022. The purpose of these meetings were to brief Executive Officers of the applicants proposals for the site and ensure the scheme takes account of the Council's strategic objectives for the town centre and Reading.

Political Engagement

Future Developments of Reading Forum

5.15 A meeting with the Future Developments of Reading group, held on 21 July 2022, was organised to introduce the vision for the eastern end of The Oracle. The meeting was attended by key political stakeholders from Reading Borough Council, including Leader of the Council Councillor Jason Brock, along with planning officers.

5.16 The themes that were discussed during councillors' questions included queries regarding the heights of buildings, timescales, and the improvements to be made over the public realm.

5.17 The Applicant met with Councillor Tony Page, Deputy Leader of the Council & Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy & Transport, on three separate occasions - 19 July 2021, 17 March 2022, 24 July 2022 and 14 December 2022.

5.18 The meetings held between the Applicant and the Councillor, discussed the design inspiration for the vision, the residential element of the proposals along with the focus on retail and leisure, to ensure elected Members were appropriately briefed on the proposals and able to respond to queries.

Key community stakeholders

5.19 An email introducing the vision and providing an invitation to a briefing was issued via email on 26 July to the following stakeholders:

- Reading UK Community Interest Company (CIC),
- Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP),
- Thames Valley Chamber,
- Reading Civic Society,
- History of Reading Society.

5.20 A meeting with Reading & Wokingham Local Chamber Advisory Group (LCAG) was held on 3 August. No further stakeholders accepted the invitation for a meeting but were kept up to date through the pre-application consultation stage.

Community Engagement

5.21 A Statement of Community Engagement has been prepared by Turley Strategic Communications and supports this application. The Statement sets out the approach taken to engaging with local members, local organisations, and businesses, alongside residents.

6. Planning Policy Context

6.1 This section outlines the key planning policy considerations relevant to the proposed development at a national and local level.

6.2 It follows Section 54(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990), as amended by Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should determine planning applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan

6.3 The Local Development Plan Reading Borough Council is formed of:

- Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019)
- Proposals Map (November 2019)

6.4 The site is not situated within an area with a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan area.

6.5 At a national level, relevant planning policy and guidance is set out within the National Planning Policy Framework ('the NPPF') published in July 2021 and the Planning Practice Guidance ('the PPG') in 2014 and updated as an online resource. These form a further material consideration.

6.6 There are a number of documents that are SPD's/SPG's the determination of this planning application, these are as follows:

- Affordable Housing SPD (2021);
- Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD (January 2022);
- Employment, Skills and Training SPD (April 2013);
- Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (October 2011);
- Planning Obligations under Section 106 (April 2015); and
- Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (July 2011).

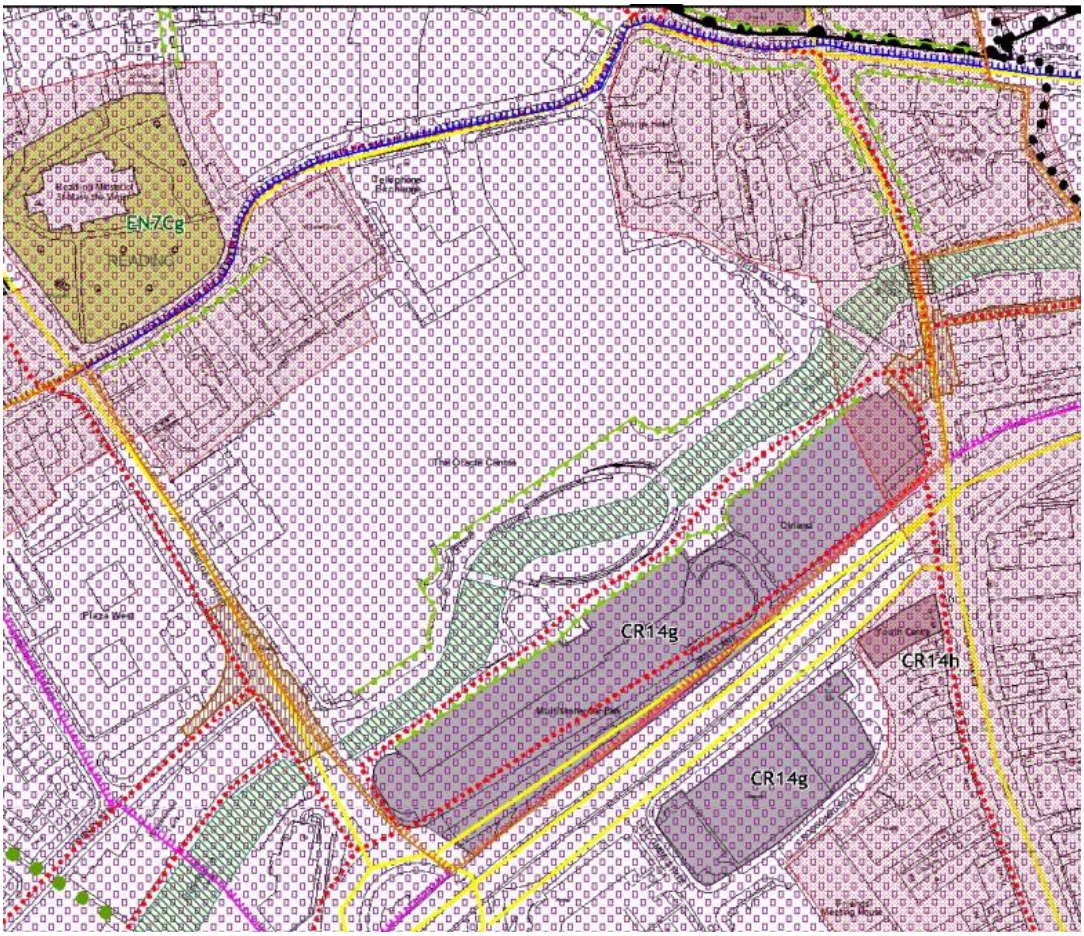
6.7 In addition, there are a number of technical documents produced by RBC which underpin the adopted Development Plan, which are considered material considerations to the determination of this application. These are as follows:

- City Centre Framework (2008);
- Tall Buildings Strategy (2008); and
- Western Berkshire Retail and Leisure Study (2017).

Local Plan Designations

6.8 For the purposes of the adopted Development Plan, an extract of the Councils adopted Proposals Map is provided below:

Figure 6.1 ***Extract of Reading Borough Council Proposals Map***



6.9 As identified on the Plan, the sites are subject to the following designations:

Yield Hall Place 1

- Located within a designated primary frontage in Central Reading (CR7) (Lime Green Line)
- Located within a primary shopping area (CR1) (Orange Dash Line)
- Located within Central Core (CR1) (Pink Triangle Line)
- Located adjacent to an area of identified biodiversity interest (EN12) (Dark Green Diagonal)
- Located in an area of archaeological potential (EN2) (Purple Upright Rectangle)
- Located within cycle routes (TR4) (Red Dot Dash)

- Yield Hall Place 1 adjoins the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and is subsequently in close proximity to the following listed heritage assets (EN1, EN3) (Red Dot):
    - The George Hotel - 60m north east (UID ref. 1155931)
    - 17 and 18 King Street - 75m east (UID ref. 1113498)
    - Building on South East Corner – 30m east (UID ref. 1302482)
- North-eastern boundary of the site is located next to a major transport project (TR2) (Brown Vertical Line)
- The whole site is located within a Flood Zone 1, but it is acknowledged that the site boundaries fall and within very close proximity of Flood Zone 2 and 3, by virtue of its location adjacent to the Kennet and Avon Canal.

Yield Hall Place 2

- Boundary of Reading Central Area policy CR1-10
- Air Quality Management Area see policy EN15
- Located within a primary shopping area (CR1) (Orange Dash Line)
- Located within Central Core (CR1) (Pink Triangle Line)
- Located in an allocated development site (CR14g (The Oracle Extension, Bridge Street and Letcombe Street)
- Located adjacent to an area of identified biodiversity interest (EN12) (Dark Green Diagonal)
- Classified highway network runs parallel to the south of the site along the A329, Mill Lane (TR3).
- Yield Hall Place 2 does fall partly within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

Yield Hall Place 2

- 2 and 4 London Street – 30m north east (UID ref. 1321933)
- Coroners Court – 50m north east (UID ref. 1113514)
- High Bridge – 55m north-east (UID ref. 1321938)

Reading Borough Local Plan

6.10 There are several key policies which are directly applicable the proposed development and these are summarised below. In addition, it is acknowledged that a number of other general, development management policies within the adopted development plan which are also relevant to the proposal.

6.11 Further details on the development plan and other material considerations are provided within **Appendix 1** of this Statement. A brief summary of relevant policies are listed below:

- **Policy CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development** will be taken a positive approach towards for development proposals that reflect the strategy

- **Policy CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction** all major non-residential developments or conversions to residential are required to meet the most up to date BREEAM 'Excellent' standards

- **Policy CC4: Decentralised Energy** shall be included within the site of any development of more than 20 dwellings and/ or non-residential development of over 1,000 sq. m

- **CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage** measures should be demonstrated for development

- **CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development** – advises that the scale and density of development will be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities, with the densest and largest scale development taking place in the most accessible locations.

- **Policy CC7: Design and Public Realm**- states that development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The various components of development form, including layout – urban structure and urban grain; landscape; density and mix; scale – height and massing; and architectural detail and materials

- **Policy CC8: Safeguarding amenity** – the policy sets out a range of amenity matters that would need to be addressed through a planning application to ensure that the living environment for existing and new residential properties is acceptable

- **Policy H2: Density and Mix** – advises how appropriate densities for residential development will be informed.

- **Policy H3: Affordable Housing** requires that sites over 10 units deliver 30% of the total dwellings in the form of affordable housing subject to viability considerations.

- **Policy H4: Built to Rent Schemes** – provides an overview of the requirements for build to rent developments

- **EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment** requires that historic assets including their settings will be protected and enhanced.

- **Policy EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas** states that the special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas will be conserved and

enhanced. Development proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

- **EN4: Locally Important Heritage Assets** require development proposals to demonstrate that development conserves architectural, archaeological, or historical significance

- **EN5: Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest** outlines new development should not harm and where possible should make a positive contribution to views of acknowledged historical significance

- **Policy EN6: New development in a historic context** - In areas characterised by heritage assets, the historic environment will inform and shape new development. New development will make a contribution to the historic character of the area by respecting and enhancing its architectural and visual qualities and considering how heritage considerations can influence the design of new development. The policy lists a number of factors to be taken into consideration.

- **Policy EN5: Protection of significant views with heritage interest** states that new development should not harm and where possible should make a positive contribution to views of acknowledged historical significance.

- **EN8: Undesignated Open Space** Development should not result in the loss of or jeopardise use and enjoyment of undesignated open space.

- **Policy EN13: Major Landscape Features and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**: The policy identifies a number of major landscape features within the Borough stating that planning permission will not be granted for any development that would detract from their character or appearance.

- **Policy RL6: Leisure Facilities** advises that there is a strong presumption in favour of retaining leisure facilities especially where they are the only facility of their type in a district, major or local centre.

- **CR7: Primary Frontages in Central Reading** outlines the uses on the ground floor along the designated primary frontages as shown on the Proposals Map will be within one of the following use classes: A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, C1, D1, D2 or related Sui Generis unless it is an entrance to upper floors. Development that fronts onto designated primary frontages will provide an active building frontage.

- **Policy CR10: Tall building** - outlines the definition of tall building which is '10 storeys of commercial floorspace or 12 storeys of residential (equating to 36m tall) or above'. Three areas are identified within the policy as having potential for tall buildings

- **Policy CR14g: The Oracle Extension, Bridge Street and Letcombe** identifies that the area between the River Kennet and Mill Lane is safeguarded for retail, with use of site at Letcombe Street protected for use as a public car park

- **Policy RL1 (Network and Hierarchy of Centres)** identifies Reading as a regional centre with a focus on ensuring the vitality and viability of the centre is maintained and enhanced. The following improvements will be acceptable in all centres:
  - Accessibility and transport improvements;
  - Broadening range of facilities;
  - Residential use of upper floors; and
  - Environmental enhancements.

6.12 Policy RL1 identifies that Central Reading will see the greatest level of change.

Material Considerations

6.13 The revised NPPF was adopted in July 2021. The NPPF covers a range of land issues including, transport, infrastructure, the economy, climate change and the natural and historic environments.

Achieving Sustainable Development

6.14 **Paragraph 10** of the NPPF outlines that at the heart of the Framework is a '**presumption in favour of sustainable development**'.

6.15 **Paragraph 11** identifies what the presumption in favour of sustainable development comprises for both plan-making and decision-taking. For decision taking the presumption in favour of sustainable development means:

> *"c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or*
>
> *d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the polices which are mist important for determining the application are out-of-date[14], granting permission unless:*
>
> > *i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed[15]; or*

[14] This includes, for applications involving the provision of housing, situations where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites (with the appropriate buffer, as set out in paragraph 74); or where the Housing Delivery Test indicates that the delivery of housing was substantially below (less than 75% of) the housing requirement over the previous three years.

[15] The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 181) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 68); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."

Decision Making

6.16 **Paragraph 39** of the NPPF states that good quality pre-application discussions enable better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community. **Paragraph 42** also outlines that the participation of other consenting bodies in pre-application discussions should enable early consideration of all the fundamental issues relating to whether a particular development will be acceptable in principle.

6.17 **Paragraph 47** reiterates that planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible, and within statutory timescales unless a longer period has been agreed.

Delivering a sufficient supply of homes

6.18 **Paragraph 60** states that to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward.

6.19 Within this context, **Paragraph 62** recognises the need to address the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community.

Building a strong, competitive economy

6.20 **Paragraph 80** highlights how planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

Ensuring the vitality of town centres

6.21 **Paragraph 86** states that planning decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management, and adaptation. This includes allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters.

Promoting healthy and safe communities

6.22 **Paragraph 92** states that planning decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive, and safe places. This includes places which

(a) promote social interaction, for example through mixed-use developments

(b) are safe and accessible, for example through the use of attractive, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space

(c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, for example through layouts that encourage walking and cycling

Promoting sustainable transport

6.23 **Paragraph 104** states that transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of development proposals so that opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued and patterns of movement, streets, parking and other transport considerations are integral to the design of schemes, and contribute to making high quality places.

6.24 **Paragraph 105** notes that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.

6.25 **Parapgraph 110** states that in assessing applications development, it should be ensured that appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be – or have been – taken up, given the type of development and its location and that safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users.

6.26 **Paragraph 111** stipulates that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe

Making efficient use of land

6.27 **Paragraph 119** recognises how planning decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions

6.28 **Paragraph 120** gives substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and supports the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained, and available sites could be used more effectively.

6.29 **Paragraph 124** states that decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account: a) the identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating; desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting, or of promoting regeneration and change; and the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places

6.30 **Paragraph 126** outlines the need for high quality buildings and places, and that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

Achieving well-designed places

6.31 **Paragraph 126** of the NPPF reiterates that the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.

6.32 **Paragraph 127** of the NPPF asks that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area; are visually attractive; and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities).

Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

6.33 **Paragraph 152** of the NPPF sets out that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, as well as taking full account of flood risk.

Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

6.34 **Paragraph 189** states that heritage assets are identified as an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations

6.35 **Paragraph 194** reiterates that local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

Planning Practice Guidance

6.36 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides direction on the consideration and determination of planning applications, alongside various other technical and procedural matters, supporting the overall implementation of the policies contained within the NPPF.

Town Centre Retail

6.37 Local planning authorities can take a leading role in promoting a positive vision for these areas, bringing together stakeholders and supporting sustainable economic and employment growth. They need to consider structural changes in the economy, in particular changes in shopping and leisure patterns and formats. A wide range of complementary uses can, if suitably located, help to support the vitality of town centres, including residential, employment, office, commercial, leisure/entertainment, healthcare and educational development. (Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 2b-001-20190722).

6.38 The following indicators, and their changes over time, may be relevant in assessing the health of town centres: customers' experience and behaviour; diversity of uses; state of town centre environmental quality. (Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 2b-006-20190722)

Healthy and Safe Communities

6.39 The design and use of the built and natural environments, including green infrastructure are major determinants of health and wellbeing. (Paragraph: 001 Reference ID:53-001-20190722)

6.40 A healthy place is one which supports and promotes healthy behaviours and environments and a reduction in health inequalities for people of all ages. It will provide the community with opportunities to improve their physical and mental health, and support community engagement and wellbeing. Paragraph: 003 Reference ID:53-003-20191101

Build to Rent

6.41 Build to rent is a distinct asset class within the private rented sector. Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 60-001-20180913.

6.42 The NPPF states that affordable housing on build to rent schemes should be provided by default in the form of affordable private rent, a class of affordable housing specifically designed for build to rent. Affordable private rent and private market rent units within a development should be managed collectively by a single build to rent landlord. 20% is generally a suitable benchmark for the level of affordable private rent homes to be provided (and maintained in perpetuity) in any build to rent scheme. Paragraph: 002 Reference ID: 60-002-20180913.

6.43 Affordable private rent homes should be under common management control, along with the market rent build to rent homes. They should be distributed throughout the development and physically indistinguishable from the market rent homes in terms of quality and size. The process for managing affordable private rent units should also be set out in the section 106 agreement. Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 60-006-20180913

6.44 Paragraph 11 states that Build to rent homes are normally designed, constructed and managed to a high quality standard. Affordable private rent homes within any particular scheme should be constructed and managed to the same high quality standards as the private rental homes. Paragraph: 011 Reference ID: 60-011-20180913

Supplementary Planning Documents

6.45 We have set out the scope for each SPD/ SPG below and the key parts of each document relevant to the proposals which will be referenced within the assessment sections of this statement.

6.46 ***Affordable Housing SPD (2021)*** - The purpose of this Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is to provide further information to supplement policies in the Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted November 2019) in achieving affordable housing.

- Build to rent involves purpose-built development held in a single ownership and intended for long-term rental. BtR has recognition in the NPPF, which includes acceptance that this form of development has characteristics which necessitate a distinct approach to affordable housing.

- For BtR proposals, this SPD sets out that, as per policy H4, schemes of ten homes or more, 30% of the dwellings will be affordable housing, provided on site, subject to viability considerations. National and local policy requires that this on-site provision will be in the form of 'affordable private rent'. Affordable private rent is a housing tenure introduced in the NPPF specifically to form the affordable housing element of build to rent developments. As for other forms of affordable housing, it must be at least 20% below local market rents, but the key difference from affordable rent is that it can be provided by the owner of the build to rent development rather than by a Registered Provider.

6.47 ***Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD (January 2022)*** – The guidance within this document will apply to all shopfronts within Reading Borough, both historic and traditional as well as modern frontage

6.48 ***Employment, Skills and Training SPD (April 2013) -*** This SPD sets out obligations which will be sought from developers within the context of the construction of the scheme. The purpose of which is to mitigate the impacts of development to ensure that local people can better access job opportunities arising from new development. This is particularly pertinent against a backdrop whereby there are vast disparities in education across the town.

6.49 ***Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (October 2011) -*** The SPD sets out that within Zone 1, there will be a maximum provision of 0.25 spaces per bedroom with offices requiring a maximum of 1 space per 250 sqm. There is no specific parking requirement for A1 uses. With regard to disabled parking, Section 6 of the SPD sets out that 'when establishing the required level of parking for disabled users it must be remembered that some of these motorists could have the option to switch mode, particular where they have access to high quality bus corridors and routes which tend to feature low floor access buses and other benefits.

6.50 ***Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (July 2011) -*** This document aims to promote high standards of Sustainable Design and Construction, in order to guide policies, set out in the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

6.51 ***Planning Obligations under Section 106 (April 2015)*** - This Guidance sets out the Council's approach towards seeking planning obligations, alongside the introduction of the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule.

Other Documents

6.52 ***City Centre Framework (2008)*** - The framework provides a spatial and design overview for the central area both to guide forth coming developments and to provide reference in the consideration of planning applications. The City Centre Framework, developed in tandem with the now superseded Reading Central Area Action Plan, recognised how the Oracle Shopping Centre has re-invigorated the town centre, and that the supporting residential and mixed-use developments of areas within the central core will increase the vibrancy of the central area and to bring about additional benefits such as improved access, public transport and open space.

- With regards to the strategic land use within Reading, the City Centre Framework establishes that the Oracle shopping centre is suitable for supporting mixed use retail, leisure and residential.

Figure 6.2: Extract of preferred strategic land uses within Reading central area.

6.53 ***Tall Buildings Strategy (2008)*** - This strategy informed the development of a tall buildings policy and of specific guidelines for individual sites and areas. It will also operate as a useful tool for the Council in assessing proposals for taller buildings in the central area of Reading over the coming years. This document is a material consideration in the determination of planning application.

6.54 In respect of the application sites, the strategy identified:

- This strategy identifies the Oracle as a character area with townscape capacity for Tall Buildings (Character Area 18) as per Figure 6.3 below. It concluded the design of The Oracle building was unexceptional.

- In assessing the Oracle's capacity for tall buildings, it is noted that "*the large block size and existing landmark structures (e.g. spire on the car park) create a high capacity for the development of tall buildings*". Consideration should also be given to the impact on St Mary's church and surrounding Conservation Area.

- A key characteristic of views along the Kennett canal are the manner in which it is framed by tall buildings with a large block size; further tall buildings would enhance this characteristic

- The strategy was updated by RBC in 2018 and reached the same conclusion regarding the capacity of the Oracle, that it was of low townscape sensitivity o tall buildings

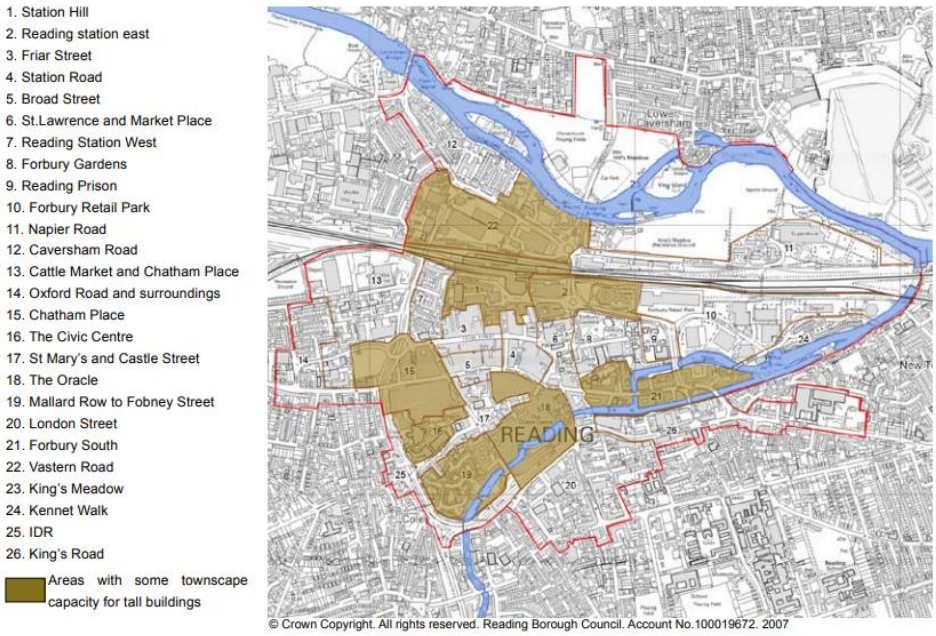


Figure 6.3 Extract of Figure 4.1: Townscape capacity for tall buildings (Tall Building Strategy SPD).

6.55 ***Western Berkshire Retail and Leisure Study (2017)*** - The purpose of this study when prepared was to be used by authorities to assist in the determination of applications for new retail development within their respective authority areas. The study recognises The Oracle as the main centre within the Western Berkshire sub-region, with good representation from national multiple retailers and a comparison goods focused provision. The retail study sets out indicative quantitative capacity requirements for centres in the area, including Reading, but given this assessment is over 5 years old and the structural changes in the retail sector in the interim, it is considered these figures are largely obsolete. In respect of leisure uses, the study identifies a qualitative need for additional commercial leisure provision in Reading, including additional cinema facilities and entertainment venues (i.e. bowling / ice skating).

6.56 ***Reading 2050 Vision*** – In parallel to the development of the Local Plan, Reading UK[16], the economic development and marketing company for Reading, has launched a 2050 vision for the town as a smart and sustainable city by 2050. The 2050 Vision identifies clear ambitions for living within the environmental limits and ensuring healthy and just society and seeks to drive this ambition with opportunities for all in the long term.

- By 2050, it is envisioned that Reading will be a city that:
  - Shares success to support and enable thriving communities;
  - Delivers a real sense of place and identity;

[16] Reading UK (2017) Reading 2050 Vision

- Thrives on cultural and cross-generational diversity;
- Is recognised for its heritage and natural assets;
- Embeds technology to deliver innovation and low carbon living for all; and
- The 2050 Vision acknowledges that Reading's success has been significantly influenced by its physical and virtual connectivity nationally and internationally, alongside local leadership.

6.57 **The 20-minute Neighbourhood -** The Town and Country Planning Association published its report '20-Minute Neighbourhoods – Creating Healthier, Active, Prosperous Communities An Introduction for Council Planners in England' in March 2021 and is considered to be a forward-thinking approach to modern planning issues within England. The TCPA defines the 20-mintue neigh

"The 20-minute neighbourhood is about creating attractive, interesting, safe, walkable environments in which people of all ages and levels of fitness are happy to travel actively for short distances from home to the destinations that they visit and the services they need to use day to day – shopping, school, community and healthcare facilities, places of work, green spaces, and more. These places need to be easily accessible on foot, by cycle or by public transport – and accessible to everyone, whatever their budget or physical ability, without having to use a car."

6.58 The principles of a 20-minute neighbourhood are illustrated through Figure 6.4 below:

Figure 6.4: Features of a 20-minute neighbourhood as per TCPA report.

6.59 Whilst it goes without saying that the sign, characteristics, and detail of any 20-minute neighbourhood will vary with local context and the aspirations of each community, it is clear that the concept of a 20-minute neighbourhood can bring positive impacts in the following way

Goal	20-minute Neighbourhood
Economic	Investment in better streets and public spaces for pedestrians can boost footfall and trading Keeping investment local through community wealth-building can develop the skills of local people and create stable, well-paying job Making active travel safer and more inviting can help to minimise traffic and unproductive congestion
Environmental	Help to reduce air pollution by promoting a shift from private cars to active travel Walkable environments assist in climate change mitigation by reducing the reliance on fossil fuels for transportation Planning for walkable environments offers opportunities to improve biodiversity
Social	Promoting physical and mental health benefits of regular physical activity and active travel are well established Living in a walkable environment can support a sense of community and improve social interaction Increased pedestrian activity in public space can improve perceptions of safety through passive surveillance that naturally aids the prevention of crime, w

7. Planning Assessment – Principle of Development

7.1 This section considers the scheme in the context of the principle of redevelopment of the site given the growth objectives and vision for the regeneration of Reading and environmental, social, and economic goals to drive ambitious and sustainable growth in the Town.

7.2 In addition, consideration is given to the policy context for the proposed uses on-site assisting in demonstrating the compliance of the scheme with the adopted Development Plan documents.

The Principle of Development

7.3 The adopted Reading Local Plan provides the appropriate planning framework through which the vision for Reading 2036, and beyond to 2050 can be achieved. The vision draws on a range of work in deciding on the direction Reading is going in, and as such continues the overall approach of previous visions for the Borough, for the town to be to be a "*dynamic, inclusive community of the 21st Century*", to "*thrive as an internationally recognised economic centre, and the core of a wider, vibrant urban area*" and to provide "*access to high quality housing that meets their requirements and safeguards their quality of life*".

7.4 At the time of adoption, it was acknowledged that "*Reading Borough cannot be viewed in isolation from its wider context*", and that the Reading urban area "*in many ways functions as a single 'city region' with the nearby towns of Wokingham and Bracknell*".

7.5 It is recognised that the constrained nature of the Borough dictates the spatial strategy insofar as significant development can only occur where sites are available, which inevitably means a considerable focus on the centre and south of Reading, resulting in "*a need to look within the existing urban area for opportunities, and to ensure efficient use of land*".

7.6 Paragraph 3.2.1 of the adopted Local Plan reiterates Central Reading "*as the focus for meeting much of the identified development needs at a medium and high density*", as a result of it being "*one of the most accessible locations in the South East*" boosted by recent major investment in an upgraded station, new transport interchanges and by the arrival of the Elizabeth Line.

7.7 Policy RL1 (Network and Hierarchy of Centres) sets out that Reading is the only Regional Centre, and that "*Central Reading will see the greatest levels of development and change*". The Policy reiterates how the vitality and viability of these centres should be maintained and enhanced and that the following improvements will be acceptable in all centres:

- Accessibility and transport improvements;
- Broadening range of facilities;

– Residential use of upper floors; and

– Environmental enhancements

7.8 This context is furthered by Chapter 7 of the NPPF that seeks to ensure the vitality of town centres. Paragraph 86 empathises that planning decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities and to take "a positive approach to their growth" by

- *"allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters" …*

- *retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones; …*

- *recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites.*

7.9 The rationale for bringing forward these proposals has been set out above in this statement. There is a clear need and immediate opportunity for the applicant to deliver intervention at The Oracle shopping centre in the heart of the town centre.

7.10 The site is situated within the main urban area, and central Core of Reading, as defined on the adopted Proposals Map. The site constitutes previously developed land, that provides a range of existing town centre uses in the form of leisure (cinema), retail, and restaurant and bars. As noted throughout this statement, the need for increase diversity and swift response to shifts in economic models and social shifts with regards to shopping patterns, requires town centres to flexible and adapt to changing circumstances

7.11 The principle of retaining ground floor active town centre uses and the vitality and viability of the overall retail experience is integral to the proposals and reflective of the sites positioning within the Central Core and primary shopping frontage. Providing a reimagined commercial offer at the eastern end of The Oracle is fundamental to the application proposals. The reconfigured Debenhams space within the centre will provide a new prominent retail unit accessed from mall levels, with The Oracle remaining foremost a shopping destination.

7.12 Paragraph 92 of the NPFF states that planning decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive, and safe places which:

(a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;

(b) *are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of attractive, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high-quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and*

(c) *enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling*

7.13 As will be explored throughout this statement, the proposed development clearly contributes positively to the objectives of NPPF paragraph 92 on a number of levels. The principle of a mixed-use development within the town centre of Reading, where existing uses are to be broadened and intensified, and modernised through the repurposing of existing space and densification of development is clearly supported through the hierarchy of planning policy.

7.14 In conceptualising the proposed development, attention has been drawn to, and due consideration to the idea of '20-minute Neighbourhood'[17] which has had a significant impact on establishing the vision for the proposed development and its importance in achieving sustainable development and delivering tangible that benefits the existing and future community within Reading.

7.15 Based on the characteristics of a 20-minute neighbourhood identified in the previous section, it is clear that Reading town centre could function effectively as a 20 minute neighbourhood. Any residential development at The Oracle would assist in creating this 20-minute neighbourhood, and delivering the social, economic and environmental benefits associated with this concept.

7.16 A plan showing the proximity of the site to a plethora of services, community, facilities, and open spaces is enclosed in **Appendix 4.** This plan illustrates the highly sustainable credentials of the site, and its location at the heart of Reading and the community in which it serves. Residents living with the high-quality housing proposed would be at the heart of a sustainable network, with access to town centre commercial uses, schools, healthcare facilities and other civic and service facilities within their neighbourhood.

Town Centre Uses

7.17 Paragraph 4.6.2 of the Local Plan identifies Reading as a centre of regional significance and references an Experian study from 2017 which identified the centre as having the 8th strongest market potential in the country, however it is recognised in the Local Plan that as competing centres continue to enhance their offer, it will continue to be necessary to develop and adapt to maintain its position.

7.18 As recognised in the Local Plan supporting text, as competing town and city centres undertake intervention there is a risk that Reading falls further behind on the rankings.

[17] https://tcpa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/final_20mnguide-compressed.pdf

7.19 It is essential that Reading looks to at least a similar scale of intervention in order to 'keep up' with these locations It is clear from the schedule that there is no single development solution being implemented across the major regional centres. Each scheme is different, and this is essential to ensure it responds to the local market context and the characteristics of that centre. Any intervention within Reading needs to respond and relate to the existing context, the identified challenges and opportunities, and understand Reading's market needs

7.20 The commercial provision is at the heart of the proposed application. The proposal includes a variety of flexible uses, primarily within Class E, which would be accommodated on the riverside level of the development and within The Oracle shopping centre. Given the ongoing evolution of the town centres and the need for The Oracle to be able to respond appropriately, planning permission is sought for flexible Class E uses, and / or Sui Generis bar and cinemas uses for specified elements of the ground floor floorspace. This statement identifies the current intended uses for the ground floor space, but in accordance with the intentions of national policy to provide flexibility within town centres, it is requested the planning permission allows for flexibility within Class E.

Retail and Leisure

7.21 In order to ensure success and vibrant town centres, the main thrust of national and local planning policy is to direct town centre type uses to existing town centres. Local policy in Reading establishes a hierarchy of centres, with Reading as the primary region for major new town centre development

7.22 As identified, it is proposed to repurpose part of the existing Debenhams unit within the Oracle shopping centre, to provide a new 2,000 sqm retail unit (Use Class E) and 417 sqm experiential leisure use (Use Class E and / or Sui Generis experiential leisure use). Restaurant / bar uses are also proposed on the ground floor level of the two developments and in addition, within the Yield Hall Place 2 scheme it is proposed to replace the existing Vue cinema with a modernised cinema offer, enhancing the leisure provision at The Oracle. This enhancement of the leisure offer is supported by the Local Plan which identifies that *"the focus of town centres across the country is increasingly on leisure provision. Reading town centre's leisure offer will need to expand to ensure that the centre can meet this changing role" (para 5.2.10).*

7.23 The Local Plan is clear in that the most suitable location for retail, leisure and culture development is in existing centres and that development in these centres should maintain and enhance the centres' vitality and viability. Paragraph 4.6.8 emphasises that the centre of Reading is the most accessible location in the Borough and is among the most accessible locations in the South East, and therefore represents the best location for major development of this type. The proposed development accords with Local Plan policy in this regard.

7.24 Whilst the Local Plan identifies a quantitative need for new retail floor space, this policy was prepared prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the significant structural changes in the retail sector which have occurred over the last 5 years. As such, it is considered the quantitative need set out in Local Plan policy is largely out-of-date, with

the significant volumes of retail floorspace created by the demise of department stores and other retailers indicating a need to rationalise retail floorspace in certain locations.

7.25 It is acknowledged that the proposal would result in the loss of some Class E floorspace through the repurposing of part of the upper floors of the former Debenhams store to residential use. This is a clear response to market demands and need for retail floorspace, or indeed lack of need for floorspace of the scale and format provided in the Debenhams unit. Hammerson have been unable to secure a long-term occupier for the former Debenhams unit, with Next Home & Beauty only occupying part of the floorspace. The difficulties in securing the reoccupation of such floorspace for retail use was highlighted earlier in this statement, through the Colliers market report. This identified that just 37% of Debenhams stores were reoccupied by retailers, the majority of which already have representation in Reading, and two thirds of stores remain vacant after 2 years. With the House of Fraser department floor space in The Oracle also available for reoccupation, and identified as being a preferred retail location, there is considered to be no realistic prospect of the retail floorspace in the Debenhams unit being successfully reoccupied in its entirely.

7.26 Commensurate with market demands, it is proposed to re-provide part of the retail floorspace within the Debenhams units, to create a new prominent retail unit to be accessed from within the shopping centre at upper and lower mall level. It is intended this unit will be occupied by national multiple fashion retailer according with Hammerson's wider strategic vision for the shopping centre to enhance the retailer representation within the core malls. This is in accordance with Policy RL1 (Network and Hierarchy of Centres) and RL2 (Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure and Culture Development) that seek to focus retail and main town centre leisure and culture development in the centre of Reading.

7.27 The remainder of the retained floorspace within the shopping centre would be repurposed to provide a new leisure use for the town centre. As set out previously there are a identified market requirements for representation in Reading town centre from a range of leisure operators and Hammerson are actively exploring interest. It is anticipated the unit will be operated by an experiential leisure operator new to the Reading market. This offer may include a bar element and as such the use is considered to fall within Use Class E and or a hybrid Class E / Sui Generis use. By providing a new use to the town centre, this leisure floorspace will have a positive impact on the vitality and viability of the centre. This is evidenced by Collier's in their research and the example at Wandsworth of the Gravity leisure unit in the former Debenhams department store, which resulted in both increase in footfall and dwell time in the centre.

7.28 Policy RL6 (Leisure Facilities) advises that there is a strong presumption in favour of retaining leisure facilities especially where they are the only facility of their type in a district, major or local centre. The proposed scheme retains the existing cinema offer at The Oracle, providing an updated offer strengthening the provision within the town centre, in clear accordance with policy RL6.

7.29 It is recognised that the site at Yield Hall Place 2 is allocated within the adopted Local Plan under Policy CR14(g) (The Oracle Extension, Bridge Street and Letcombe Street)

for approximately 1,600 – 2,000sq.m of retail and/or town centre uses. As set out previously the Applicant, as owner of the site, is seeking a rationalisation of existing retail offer within Reading as they have identified an oversupply of retail floorspace within the shopping centre due to structural changes in the retail market. As such, there is not considered to be the need to provide additional retail floorspace at The Oracle as per the allocation under Policy CR14(g). The allocation also incorporates the multistorey car park adjacent to the Yield Hall Place site. Hammerson recognise that this site may have development potential over the longer term, depending on the longer-term trends on car park usage and may seek to repurpose part of the site over a further plan period. The current proposals do not prejudice any future proposals for the multistorey car park in the longer term.

Co-working space / maker units

7.30 In addition, as part of the flexible Class E commercial floorspace at riverside level it is proposed to provide a co-working and business incubator floorspace including a series of 'maker spaces'. The co-working space will provide a high-quality environment in the heart of the town centre for people to work and hold business meetings, reflecting the increased demand arising from the shift to home, hybrid and flexible working.

7.31 The objective of reinforcing a high-quality environment and creating an economy that extends beyond the 'working day' flows through the development proposals. The City Centre Framework Plan (2008) recognises how '*the co-location of multiple uses that support an urban community can contribute to this sense of place and add the vitality and diversity of the area and increase the viability of individual businesses'*[18]. The co-working and business incubator space will contribute to this.

7.32 Policy CR7 specifies the uses considered appropriate for a designated primary shopping frontage, however this policy pre-dates the introduction of Use Class E in September 2020 and the majority of use classes identified are now obsolete. The uses identified in Policy CR7 are broadly consistent with Class E and the definition of town centres uses found in the NPPF. As such, it is considered that co-working and business incubator space, which formerly were classified within Use Class B1 and not specified in the policy, are an appropriate use for primary shopping frontages and demonstrate the attributes of uses suited for these frontages. These commercial uses will incorporate active frontages, generate footfall and contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre. As such, the inclusion of this element of commercial floorspace is not considered to be contrary to the aims of Policy CR7.

7.33 Policy EM2 relates to the location of new employment development and states that major office development will take place in the centre of Reading. The supporting text highlights that employment development which attracts significant numbers of trips should be in highly accessible locations, well served by a choice of transport. While at 792sqm, the co-working space is not considered to constitute a 'major' office development, the principles of being in central Reading in a highly accessible location are considered to remain applicable. As such the delivery of employment floorspace

[18]Page 6 of the City Centre Strategy 2008

within the development, in the form of co-working space and maker spaces is considered to be in accordance with policy.

Active frontages

7.34 At ground level, Hammerson are committed to ensuring the activation of the Riverside, as has been the case through Hammerson's previous investment into restaurants and the public areas along the river. In accordance with Policy CC7, the proposed developments seek to enhance the visitor experience for existing and prospective residents of Reading, facilitating permeability and legibility through its high quality design and active frontages that compliment wider Oracle and riverside leisure experience.

7.35 The commercial units will all provide active frontages onto the riverside, as well as introducing new activation onto Yield Hall Place and the IDR. Currently, the Debenhams unit provides an inactive elevation onto the Riverside and Yield Hall Place, turning its back onto the streetscene, which may be perceived as an opposing approach to the shopping centre and town centre from the south. Likewise, the Vue cinema complex turns its back on Yield Hall Place and IDR, focusing solely on the relationship with the Riverside. The application proposals seek to address this and through the incorporation of activation on a number of elevations will result in a significant enhancement on the existing arrangement. The importance of active frontages is recognised at para 5.3.28 of the Local Plan which states that *"Active frontages at ground floor level are key in creating the impression of a healthy centre".*

7.36 The maker spaces will be visible on the corner of the north Riverside and Yield Hall Place, and create frontages of interest to those walking by, providing a differentiated offer to the town centre and a clear sign of economic activity.

7.37 A requirement to enhance the integration between the Riverside and the shopping centre has also been identified. This will be addressed through the introduction of a new shopping centre entrance from the riverside to the mall from the eastern end of the centre. This new entrance will provide a new pedestrian link to mall level and the new ground floor leisure, whilst also providing increased activation through higher pedestrian flows and sense of activity in this location.

7.38 The approach to create active frontages and creating activity within a primary frontage is therefore in accordance with Policy CR7. The use of glazing will predominate on these street level frontages, to provide visual interest and contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre.

Housing

7.39 As set out in Section 4, the proposals seek to provide 449 residential units at upper floors across the two sites. The delivery of residential units in this location is considered to be in accordance with policy and will make a significant contribution to meeting Reading's strategic objectives.

7.40 There is a requirement within the NPPF to 'boost significantly the supply of housing' (Paragraph 60). The adopted Local Plan discusses that housing provision in general (alongside affordable housing) is one of the towns biggest challenges alongside

ensuring that its provision protects the quality of the environment and identity of specific communities.

7.41 NPPF para 120 relates to the effective use of land and states that planning decision should encourage multiple benefits from urban land through mixed use schemes and give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs. Local planning authorities should also take a positive approach to applications for alternative uses of land which is currently developed but not allocated for a specific purpose in plans (para 123).

7.42 Policy CC6 (Accessibility and Intensity of Development) requires that the scale and density of development be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities, with the densest and largest scale development taking place in the most accessible locations. It is important that development is accessible by a choice of modes of transport, facilitating access by walking and cycling to a wide range of employment, services and facilities, leisure, education, and health facilities, or which are accessible by walking to routes/stops of frequent public transport services.

7.43 The application sites are located at the heart of Reading town centre, widely recognised as one of the most accessible locations in the South East and accordingly is recognised as in Figure 3.2 of the Local Plan and extracted below in Figure 7.1 as the most sustainable location for development:

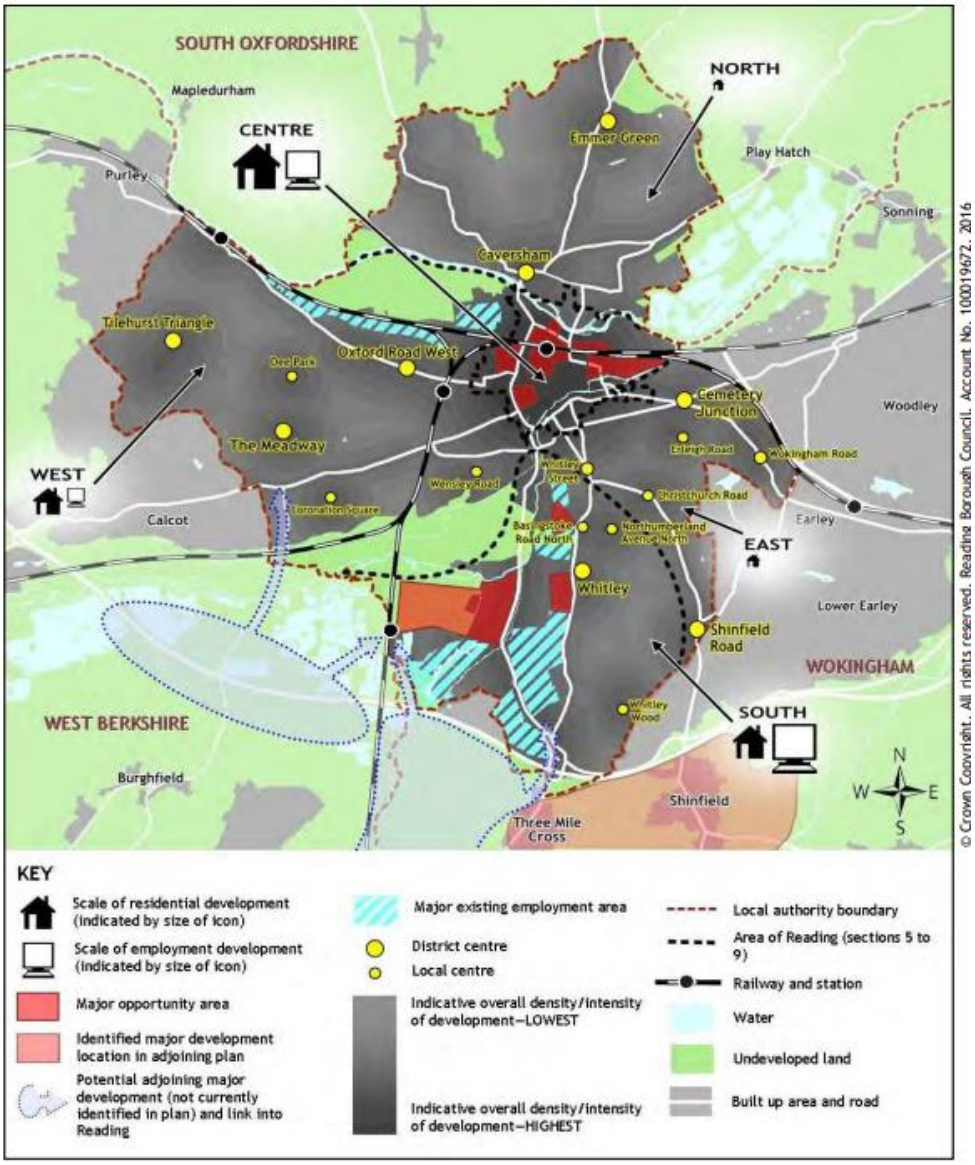


Figure 7.1 Illustrative extract of the Spatial Strategy for Reading.

7.44 Paragraph 3.2.9 of the Local Plan recognises that centres are appropriate locations for new residential and employment development which may often be at a higher density than surrounding residential areas. In turn, sustainable locations would also help address local housing need by widening the choice of housing in what are often predominantly lower density suburban areas. New development will also give an opportunity for environmental enhancements and new facilities within these centres.

7.45 The site as evidenced in the Transport Statement is in a highly accessible location, and proposes a scale and quantum of development commensurate with its sustainability credentials, by virtue of the ease of access of the site via bus, cycling, and walking with key social and economic centres within the town, as well as easily accessible to major transport hubs in Reading Station and direct links to London, Heathrow Airport, and surrounding towns within the South East, making a vital contribution to the wider national economy and a hub for social and cultural interaction.

7.46 Paragraph 119 of the NPPF requires that planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Paragraph 120 broadens this, noting that planning decisions give "*substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs*" and, where appropriate, promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively (Paragraph 120).

7.47 The principle of residential uses in the proposed developments is clearly in accordance with both Local Plan policy and the NPPF. In terms of development plan policy, of particular note Policy RL1 supports residential at upper floors and Policy CC6 seeks to locate the most densest and largest scale development in the most accessible locations.

Build to Rent residential

7.48 Built-to-Rent (BtR) development is supported by policy with the Local Plan acknowledging that the Council '*will support institutional investment in the sector where benefits are secured for residents and the economy of the Borough and where this produces high quality development with positive benefits for the Borough*.'[19] The collaboration between Hammerson and Packaged Living will ensure that wider economic benefits can be secured, beyond solely the provision of residential development.

7.49 Paragraph 92 of the NPFF asks that the planning system aim to achieve healthy, inclusive, and safe places that promote social interaction, for example through mixed-use developments, that provide high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas and enable and support healthy lifestyles. As described earlier in this statement, BtR residential can make a significant contribution to the creation of mixed-use developments which encourage and facilitate social interaction. The unique benefit of this development is the embedded nature of the residential accommodation into The Oracle shopping centre and the heart of the town centre. The amenity spaces within the BtR buildings provide opportunity for social interaction between residents, and the proximity of a range of leisure, retail and commercial floorspace will encourage this interaction to extend out beyond the building into the town centre.

7.50 Local Plan policy H4 relates specifically to BtR development and sets out a series of criteria that such schemes should meet. In respect of this criteria, the following is highlighted:

- The proposed residential uses will be secured in a single ownership providing solely for the rental market
- The applicant is committed to providing tenancies for a minimum of 3 years with a 6-month break clause in the tenants favour

[19] Paragraph 4.4.31 of the Local Plan (2019)

- Provide a high standard of professional on-site management and control of accommodation. Hammerson are focused on providing a high quality, curated environment across The Oracle and the same high standards will apply to the residential accommodation as a direct extension of the shopping centre

- Provide a commitment to high quality rental arrangements. Hammerson are being advised by Packaged Living, who operate a BtR accommodation elsewhere in UK and prioritise the operation of high-quality assets.

- The developments will provide for a mix of unit sizes, commensurate with the function and target market of this accommodation. Further commentary is provided on this below

- The residential units will accord with the requirements of Policy H5. See further detail below in respect of space standards and accompanying Sustainability Statement.

- The scheme will deliver on-site affordable housing in the form of discounted market rent. Further consideration of affordable housing contribution is provided in Section 11.

7.51 The supporting text to policy H4 advises that the Council "*will support institutional investment in the sector where benefits are secured for residents and the economy of the Borough and where this produces high quality development with positive benefits for the Borough*." The scheme will deliver wider benefits to the Borough, beyond that of solely additional residential development. Section 10 of this report highlights the clear public benefits to be delivered by the proposed development and the accompanying Economic Impact Assessment evidences the material economic benefits which will be generated.

7.52 As highlighted at paragraph 4.4.28 of the Local Plan a large part of the housing stock in Reading is privately rented, although mostly through landlords who own a limited number of separate properties. Due to the quantum of properties, local authorities can struggle to effectively regulate and monitor these properties, resulting in a proportion providing poor quality living conditions and levels of residential amenity for both tenants and surrounding residents. It is considered that the provision of a bespoke build-to-rent product could release wider pressures on existing stock by providing a more attractive alternative to renters. The BtR offer providing a more secure and higher quality offer, in an unparallel location in terms of accessibility and proximity to shops, services and amenities. This could result in a reduction in demand for converted rooms in family sized housing or HMO's, thereby assisting in releasing family-housing back to the market by reducing the commercial viability of this product. This could contribute to addressing the identified requirement within Reading for additional family housing.

7.53 The sites' proximity to the centre of Reading is considered to create an attractive residential product that would assist in attracting and retaining an ambitious workforce to live, work, and play within Reading town centre. The application proposals seek to deliver a bespoke rental product, providing a differentiated offer to the Reading market. Being located in the heart of the town centre, in an attractive Riverside

location with unparalleled access to retail, leisure, civic and commercial floorspace in a regional centre. It is considered that residential provision of this nature will enable Reading to compete with other regional or national centres, with many young professionals, long term renters and graduates looking for more than 'just a flat' and seeking a lifestyle in their rental accommodation.

7.54 The proposed development will provide high-quality living accommodation which has access to communal areas and amenity space. Across different levels, the landscape is divided into amenity roof terraces, a green roof, and the street level interface. Each space provides a variety of uses, allowing residents to inhabit and use the spaces for socialising, playing, working, and relaxing. The residential units will be provided in the form of BtR which benefits from all the units being owned and managed by one landlord. This provides residents with a secure and safe environment in which to reside.

7.55 In respect of space standards, Policy H5 (Standards for new Housing) recognises the difficulty in town centre development, acknowledging that proposals for building housing within the Central Area do not need to comply with nationally described space standards. Whilst it is not a policy requirement, the proposed development will provide all residential units at NDSS standard. It should also be noted that NDSS standards do not take account of the specific characteristics of BtR accommodation, including absence of entrance porches, corridors within flats and the significant levels of communal amenity space, so therefore in practice the space to be provided in the residential development exceeds national defined standards. This is a clear benefit of the proposals.

7.56 Taking all the above into account, it is considered that all the proposed residential units will provide floorspace to each resident, equivalent to the standards expected by NDSS, with a number of the units exceeding this standard.

7.57 The proposed development is considered to accord with the criteria of Policy H5.

Housing Mix

7.58 Policy H2 (Density and Mix) sets out the guidelines for identifying an appropriate mix of uses, accounting for the need to achieve a high-quality design, the accessibility of the site; character and mix of uses of the area in which it is located (including heritage assets) and the ned to minimise detrimental impacts on neighbours.

7.59 Paragraph 4.4.7 recognises it is important that efficient use is made of the land that is available to boost the delivery of new home, given the significant need for housing in Reading and surrounding areas. In this context, site has its own particular characteristics, and it is not appropriate to set down exact densities for developments to achieve. As detailed throughout the Design and Access Statement that accompanies this application, the proposed housing mix and density is reflective of its central location at the heart of Reading, where the highest level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport is already available.

7.60 The site is located within a highly accessible and sustainable location, with the opportunity for residential development to increase the footfall to The Oracle and support its long-term vitality. The site is a brownfield site and therefore opportunities

ae been considered dot maximise the efficiency of the land with consideration given to securing high quality design, the environmental impacts, and heritage and townscape matters.

7.61 Having considered the assessment of the residential element is acceptable in respect of Policies H3, H4, and H5, it is now possible to assessment the development against the provisions of Policy H2 (Density and Mix). The proposed development seeks to provide the following mix of housing:

Type	Units	
Studio	23	5%
1 Bed	246	55%
2 Bed	4	37%
3 Bed	164	3%
Total	**449**	

7.62 In respect of proposals within the Central Area, the supporting text to Policy H2 states that the considerations with regarding to housing mix will be very different and instead Policy CR6 is applicable. This policy states *"all proposals for residential development within the central area will be required to contribute towards a mix of different sized units within the development*". The policy sets out as a guide [Turley emphasis], a maximum of 40% of units should be 1 bed / studios and a minimum of 5% of units should be at least 3 bed, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would render a development unviable.

7.63 As set out above, the scheme does not strictly accord with the suggested housing mix, seeking a greater provision of 1 bed / studio apartments and just under 5% of 3 bed units. The housing mix for the developments has been carefully developed to ensure it provides for the identified target market who would seek to live in this type of rental accommodation in the heart of the town centre, in close proximity to leisure and retail facilities, including the night-time economy. The extensive market intelligence undertaken clearly indicates the demand in this location would be for a greater number of smaller units, rather than the 3 bed units typically targeted at families. To ensure the viability of the scheme, it is necessary that the residential mix accords with the requirements for this location rather than the blanket application of a mix for all residential typologies in the central area. It is also highlighted that the specified mix in the policy is a guide, and therefore failing to fully accord with this policy does not constitute a breach of Policy CR6.

7.64 The proposed scheme reflects the need to maximise the efficient use of land in a town centre location, where a higher density of development is envisaged. As a result, the provision of housing through the proposed scheme, at a highly sustainable location in central Reading that meets identified needs is considered acceptable in accordance with the Development Plan.

Summary

7.65 This section has demonstrated that the principle of uses proposed are in complete accordance with development plan policy, and considered to be entirely appropriate within this central Reading location.

7.66 Of particular note:

- The spatial strategy set out in the development plan directs development to central Reading as the primary settlement in the borough and a highly accessible location;
- The principle of a mixed-use development within the town centre of Reading, where existing uses are to be broadened and intensified, and modernised through the repurposing of existing space and densification of development is clearly supported through the hierarchy of planning policy;
- Retail, leisure and other town centre uses are directed to the town centre, and this positive intervention in Reading town centre will assist in it maintaining its role as a centre of regional significance, future proofing the Oracle and increasing its resilience, ensuring long term reoccupation of prominent units and bringing an increased diversity of uses to the town centre;
- The development will deliver increased activation at street level, within the designated primary shopping frontages, providing a range of footfall generating town centre uses to ensure activation and footfall throughout the day;
- Any residential development at The Oracle would assist in creating this 20-minute neighbourhood, and delivering the social, economic and environmental benefits associated with this concept;
- The delivery of residential units in this location is considered to be in accordance with policy and will make a significant contribution to meeting Reading's strategic objectives;
- The scheme will provide BtR accommodation to meet identified market requirements within Reading, creating an attractive residential product that would assist in attracting and retaining an ambitious workforce to live, work, and play within Reading town centre . The applicant is committed to adhering to the operational / management principles set out in Policy H4; and
- The proposed residential units will be of a high quality, adhering to NDSS and providing an appropriate housing mix which responds to the identified target market and bespoke location within the heart of the town centre.

8. Planning Assessment – Design Approach

8.1 The Design & Access Statement prepared alongside this submission provides a detailed analysis of the urban form in central Reading, and sets out how the proposed development responds to this, in creating a well-connected place. From the outset of the design process, the prominent nature of the site has been recognised as a gateway to the town centre, and the opportunity presented by the site to deliver a high-quality development which responds to its townscape and heritage context, and provides an enhancement to the current situation.

8.2 Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) expects all new to be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading, to be assessed by, amongst other things the character of the development and surrounding area; continuity and enclosure; and quality of the public realm and provision of green infrastructure and landscaping.

8.3 Full details of the design evolution, response to context and design principles is provided in the accompanying Design & Access Statement. This includes analysis of how the submitted design as responded to the feedback and guidance from DRP, and the extensive dialogue with Officers at RBC. This section of the statement, provides an overview assessment of the scheme against development plan design policies, with particular regard to scale & massing, landscape, public realm, heritage and townscape.

High Quality Design Solution

8.4 The submitted design is considered to represent a high-quality design solution for the site, which accords with the design principles set out in Policy CC7. These principles are considered in further in the Design & Access Statement which clearly demonstrates that the development responses to the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located.

8.5 Given the location within Central Reading, Policy CR2 is also applicable. Again, the detailed consideration of the design attributes identified in Policy CR2 is provided in the Design & Access Statement, but in summary:

- The scheme respects the structure of the central area and will provide appropriate relationships between buildings and spaces, providing frontages which actively engage with the street at lower level. It will positively contribute to enhanced ease of movement by the inclusion of additional pedestrian linkages and upgrading existing movement corridors;

- The proposed development will enable The Oracle to better relate with the town centre, opening up the eastern end of the centre and stitching it back into its surroundings. The uses and built form will integrate better with existing neighbouring uses and town centre realm, rather than facing inwards presenting largely blank facades to the street.

- Significant consideration has been given to the public realm strategy, involving extensive dialogue with Officers at RBC and feedback from the DRPs. The

resultant strategy will deliver well designed public realm, provide high quality, and well maintained hard and soft landscaped areas and enhances the sense of place and perceived safety of linkages to adjoining areas;

- Green infrastructure is incorporated into the development proposals to enhance the existing very urban environment. These include roof terraces and incorporation of green infrastructure on external elevations

- The architectural approach reflects the local context and draws upon detailing and materials local to the development site to bring forward a set of buildings which both provide a positive architectural statement in this central and prominent location

- It is not considered the development proposals would prejudice or cause unreasonable burdens on the future development of adjacent development sites.

8.6 The application proposals are therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy CR2.

Scale and Massing

8.7 Local Plan Policy CR10 (Tall Buildings) defines tall buildings as developments of 10 storeys of commercial floorspace or 12 storeys of residential (equating to 36 metres tall) or above. Policy CR10 also identifies areas around the Borough where 'tall buildings' would be appropriate. Three tall building clusters are referred as a Station Area, Western Grouping and Eastern Grouping. The application sites are not located within any of these areas.

8.8 As set out in Section 4, the application proposals include several 'tall' building blocks, with the highest point of the scheme to be sited on Yield Hall Place extending to a maximum height of 19 storeys above podium level creating a landmark building with a distinct profile that will enhance Reading's skyline. Given the sites fall outwith the identified tall building areas it is necessary to explore why The Oracle is considered to be an appropriate location for a tall building to justify the breach of this element of the policy, and to demonstrate a tall building in this location would not prejudice the wider tall building strategy for Reading.

8.9 In respect of tall buildings, supporting text at paragraph 5.3.35 highlights that *the vision for Reading seeks to build on the status of central Reading as the dynamic and creative core of the capital of the Thames Valley. Tall buildings have an important part to play in achieving this. They have a symbolic role in marking the centre out as a regionally-significant hub of activity, and a practical role in accommodating the level of development that this status entails in a highly accessible location*.

8.10 The Oracle is at the heart of Reading town centre and an anchor asset to the centre. With the IDR functioning as a boundary to the core town centre area, the Oracle is the gateway point to the town centre from the south. Tall buildings in this location could provide a landing point to the centre, providing a positive statement of the status of

the town centre and symbolising the dynamic and ambitious nature of Reading as a town centre.

8.11 The evidence base for Reading's existing tall building strategy comprises the Tall Buildings Strategy prepared by Entec in March 2008. Whilst this document is nearly 15 years old, it is considered the physical characteristics of the application site remains largely unchanged so the conclusions therein remain relevant.

8.12 The Tall Buildings Strategy identified a character area comprising The Oracle Shopping Centre (see plan ref in Section 5). It reached the following conclusions in respect of the character area:

- The area has low townscape sensitivity to tall buildings, with the large block size, absence of historic features within the site and existing landmark structures, such as the spire on the car park) creating a high capacity for the development of tall buildings

- The design of the Oracle building is unexceptional, the public realm along the River Kennet is an attractive and well used resource which is in good condition.

- The area does not perform well in terms of sustainable transport with the site relatively distant from the railway station, albeit the site is within walking distance of the town centre and main bus routes and on cycle routes.

- Views along the Kennet canal form a localised area of open views, with the view flanked on each site by a well-defined edge, created by the tall, blocky structures within the Oracle development. A key characteristic of the view is the manner in which it is framed by tall buildings with a large block size; further tall buildings would enhance this characteristic. The view is assessed as having a low sensitivity to the introduction of a tall building.

- The Oracle is visible in the viewpoint from the A4155, adjacent to Coley Hill. The A4155 is a key route into Reading and this viewpoint is representative of views experienced at a key gateway into the town. The road slopes downwards towards central Reading, and buildings within central Reading The view has a low sensitivity to the inclusion of further tall structures and is assessed as potentially benefitting from the addition of a tall structure to further focus the view.

- In terms of sensitivities, consideration should be given on a case by case basis to how the development would impact on the skyline above St Mary's church and the surrounding Conservation Area.

8.13 An update to the Tall Buildings Strategy was produced by RBC in 2018. This update concluded that The Oracle character area continued to have capacity to accommodate tall buildings and that townscape sensitivity continues to remain low. It should also be noted that the 2018 update considered market demand for tall buildings within each character area as one of the determining factors for suitability for a tall building. The assessment stated that there was no evidence of market demand for tall buildings in The Oracle character area.

8.14 Being located outwith a designated tall building cluster does not infer that the locality is not capable or appropriate to accommodate a tall building. The Council's Tall Building Strategies clearly identify there is capacity for The Oracle to accommodate a tall building and it is considered that the addition of tall buildings in this location could benefit the key views along the Canal and from the A4155.

8.15 In relation to the criteria for determining whether a site is suitability for a tall building, it is noted that The Oracle did not perform strongly in relation to market demand or access by sustainable transport measures.

8.16 In terms of market demand, as evidenced by this planning application there is a clear and current demand for a tall building in this location, to enable densification of the site and delivery of a critical mass of residential units to create a high quality, curated residential community. As brought out throughout this statement, there have been a number of structural changes in our town centres and there is a need for intervention. Asset owners, local authorities and asset managers have needed to respond and develop creative solutions to address the decline in retail demand and provide greater diversity of uses. Shopping centres, often with a single ownership, are a deliverable opportunity for this intervention, with potential to accommodate densification of development and a critical mass of floorspace. The schedule at Appendix 2 details a number of comparable locations in the UK where shopping centres are the focus of proposed 'tall buildings'. These schemes along with the Broad Street Mall permitted proposals in Reading provide clear evidence of demand for tall buildings within or around shopping centres.

8.17 Considering sustainable transport, it is assumed that the assessment was undertaken specifically in relation to office or employment uses which generally seek to be located in closer proximity to a railway station. As identified on plan ref. PACS3000GIS_101 at Appendix 4, the site is well within 10 minute walk of the railway station, with good footpaths and well used streets through the heart of the town centre. The site is at the core of the town centre, directly on designated cycle routes with number of bus stands easily accessible. A number of improvements are proposed to connectivity through the application proposals, enhancing the accessibility of the site and immediate environs. As such, it can only be concluded that the site performs very strongly in terms of sustainable transport accessibility, particularly in relation to the delivery of residential uses in a tall building. This weighs in the support of a tall building in this location.

8.18 Taking all of the above into account, in particular the independent findings of the Tall Buildings Strategy which clearly identifies capacity for a tall building in this character area, it is considered that The Oracle is a suitable location for a tall building.

8.19 The proposed development would also not prejudice the Council's wider tall building strategy in relation to the focus on 3 tall building clusters around the town centre. The tallest part of the subject proposals will sit at a lower AOD than buildings within these tall building clusters, and when viewed in longer range views will sit appropriately within the Reading skyline as subservient to these clusters, in particular the Station Area cluster.

8.20 In addition to the area-specific requirements, Policy CR10 also provides extensive criteria as to the architectural quality and amenity to be achieved through any tall

building proposal. The proposed development has been subject of proactive and constructive discussions with Officers at RBC and Design South East over the last year. The resulting scheme provides range of building heights in order to create an appropriate mass and identity for the proposed development and to take appropriate advantage of the opportunities offered by The Oracle site, and its riverside location.

8.21 In consider the criteria at Policy CR10, we would comment as follows:

- The proposed development would enhance Reading's skyline, with the tallest tower element on the north side of the river (Yield Hall Place 1) incorporating a considered design of the upper and middle sections of the building. The proposed crown feature at the upper section will create a distinctive profile and provide clear articulation of the top of the building;

- Given the unique nature of the sites and in particularly on the Yield Hall Place 1 site, the inherent need to ensure the development proposals integrate as an extension to The Oracle shopping centre, careful attention has been paid to the lower section of the building. The provision of commercial units at riverfront (ground) level help contribute to a human scale environment, with a focus on activated frontages and use of different materials to differentiate the base element of the buildings. On the Yield Hall Place 2 proposals, detailed assessment of the ground floor element ensures that the site responds to both the riverfront and IDR, creating activity on all elevations. The creation of a new riverside entrance to the shopping mall in the Yield Hall Place 1 scheme, as well as legible and accessible entrances along all the frontages will assist in creating a human scale environment and the use of green infrastructure, planting and well designed and comprehensive public realm scheme will all positively contribute.

- The accompanying HTVIA provides a detailed assessment of the contribution the development will make to distance, middle-distance and local views. It is recognised that due to the scale of the proposed developments, they will materially impact upon all scales of views, but it is overall considered that this will be positive impact, particularly in local views, in and around the town centre.

- The application proposals take full account of the context in which they are located. The Design & Access Statement summaries the extensive context analysis undertaken by the design team, and the efforts undertaken to reflect architectural styles within the scheme. The existing Debenhams building and Vue cinema complex are not considered to positively respond to the urban grain of the wider town centre, where as the proposed new buildings will introduce a more appropriate design response drawing together architectural characteristics from the local context.

- It is acknowledged that the proposed buildings constitute tall buildings and a significant intensification of development on the sites. To avoid bulky and over dominant massing the schemes has been broken up into a series of tall building blocks, stepping down from Yield Hall Place 1 across the river and towards the conservation area. It is considered that this represents a more appropriate design solution than a scheme comprising lower rise but more bulky and solid building blocks, which would appear over dominant and not respond to the

surrounding context. The use of contrasting materials and articulation on the elevations, contributes to the appearance of appropriately slender building blocks, with clear distinction between individual blocks ensuring that the development is viewed as a series of buildings, rather than an over dominant single built form.

- Full assessment of the impact of the development proposals on the setting of designated heritage assets, including listed buildings in the vicinity and Market Place conservation area in which part of the development is sited, is provided within the accompanying HTVIA. The findings of this assessment are summarised later in this section. In summary, however, the proposed development is considered to result in a degree of harm to designated heritage assets, however, this level of harm is assessed to be less than substantial, and at the lower end of that scale. It is also considered that the development should be viewed in the context of the existing development on the site which does not contribute positively to the setting of the conservation area.

- The submitted application drawings and illustrative CGI's provide an indication of the proposed materials and finishes on the buildings and public realm. It is acknowledged that this is a prominent location, and the taller elements will be visible within a range of views, and as such the choice of materials and finishes has been carefully considered to ensure they provide a high-quality development with longevity. Further details on the materiality is provided in the Design & Access Statement.

- The scheme will deliver a clear and measurable positive impact on the public realm, along the full extent of the eastern part of The Oracle and the riverside. The quality of the public realm is a clear priority to Hammerson and the accompanying Landscape Statement outlines the public realm audit undertaken and the extensive works proposed to ensure the public realm is safe, pleasant and attractive. The public realm works are summarised later in this section.

- The development offers significant potential to incorporate innovative ways of providing green infrastructure and the applicant is committed to incorporating these where possible. The submitted scheme includes a series of roof gardens serving as amenity space for the residential accommodation as well as extensive public realm works at street level including the creation of several pocket parks.

- Due to the highly accessible location of the site, no additional car parking is proposed. The proposed uses will utilise the existing parking provision provided at The Oracle, namely the Riverside and Holybrook car parks located immediately adjacent to the respective development sites. As an operational shopping centre, existing servicing arrangements apply and these will be utilised. A proposed 'drop off' point is proposed on the southern side of Yield Hall Place 2 development to accommodate small delivery vans. This will be accessed directly off the IDR and will not impact upon public realm.

- The accompanying Sustainability Statement outlines the energy efficiency measures being incorporated into the development in order to minimise energy generation and usage resulting from the proposals. All the commercial

floorspace is targeted at achieving BREEAM Excellent, as evidenced in the Sustainability Statement.

- The accompanying Wind Assessment and Daylight & Sunlight report concludes that the development is appropriate when considering the impacts of wind speed / turbulence or any overshadowing effects. No significant adverse impacts have been identified and further details are providing in the following section of this report. Likewise the daylight / sunlight assessment has concluded that adequate levels of daylight and sunlight are able to reach the majority of buildings and spaces within the development.

- The technical assessment has concluded that the application proposals would not result in a significant negative impacts on existing residential properties and the public realms in terms of outlook, privacy, daylight, sunlight, noise and light glare. Further consideration of impact upon amenity is provided later in this section.

- Whilst the development does not specifically provide for an accessible upper floor observatory for the general public, rooftop amenity spaces are provided through the scheme for use by residents within the BtR units. These spaces will be accessible by all residents and through the building management arrangements will be able to be booked by residents for private functions, which can be attended by non-residents. As such it is considered the development does incorporate sufficient provision for the views and experience created by a tall building to be appreciated by a significant group of the public.

- Given the unique offer of this development as part of The Oracle Shopping Centre and providing BtR residential accommodation, ongoing management and maintenance of the development is a core principle of the scheme and has been identified as a priority from the outset. Appropriate maintenance arrangements have been incorporated into the scheme.

8.22 In view of the above, it is considered that the proposals comply with the design criteria set out in Policy CR10. The degree of conflict with the policy is limited to part of the policy identifying designated tall building clusters within Reading, for which the application sites fall outwith.

Townscape and Heritage

8.23 Policies EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) and EN6 (New Development in a historic Context) notes that proposals will be expected to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located.

8.24 The site partially falls within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, with the remainder of the site directly abutting it to the east. In addition, a number of listed buildings have been identified within close proximity to the site. The architectural quality of the proposed development and subsequent impact on the setting and character of listed heritage assets has been submission has been informed by a

baseline heritage and townscape assessment that has been submitted in support of this application.

8.25 The NPPF advises that when determining planning applications, applicants should consider the significance of any heritage assets surrounding the site that may be affected by the proposals. It goes on a paragraph 202 to state that *Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.* In relation to non-designated heritage assets, paragraph 203 requires a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset

8.26 A similar approach is reflected in Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) of the Reading Borough Council Adopted Development Plan.

8.27 In respect of designated heritage assets, the Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA) considers each of the identified assets in turns and considers the impact on heritage significance, and the scale of that impact. Detailed assessment is provided in Table 6.2 of the HTVIA, however Table 8.1 below provide a summary of the findings.

Table 8.1: Likely Built Heritage Asset Impacts

Name / Address Heritage Asset Type Grade	Impact on Heritage Significance Category (Scale)
Coroner's Court, London Street Listed Building (Grade II)	Neutral / Sustain
High Bridge Listed Building & Scheduled Monument (Grade II & N/A)	Neutral / Sustain
Nos.24-52 Queen's Crescent Listed Building (Grade II)	Neutral / Sustain
Church of St Laurence Listed Building (Grade I)	Neutral / Sustain
Church of St Giles, Southampton Street Listed Building (Grade II)	Neutral / Sustain
St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area	Neutral / Sustain
Telephone Exchange, Minster Street Listed Building (Grade II)	Neutral / None
George Hotel, King Street & Building on south-east corner, Yield Hall Place Listed Building group	Neutral / None

(all Grade II)	
Nos.2-4 London Street Listed Building (Grade II)	Adverse / Harm - Less than Substantial (Lower End) & Beneficial
London Street / Market Place Conservation Area	Adverse / Harm Less than Substantial (Lower End) & Beneficial
Nos.33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 London Street Listed Building group (all Grade II)	Adverse / Harm Less than Substantial (Lower End)
Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place (including No.10 High Street) Listed Building group (all Grade II)	Harm Less than Substantial (Lower End)
Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts Listed Building (Grade I)	Harm Less than Substantial (Lower End)

8.28 For the majority of assessed designated heritage assets, the development proposals are identified as likely to have a neutral or sustaining impact upon the significance of the heritage asset. Indeed, for the London Street / Market Place Conservation Area and Nos 2-4 London Street Grade II listed buildings, it is assessed that elements of the development would have a beneficial impact upon the significance of these assets.

8.29 As set out above it is identified that the proposed development would likely cause a degree of harm to the significance of a number of designated heritage assets. These assets are identified in Table 8.2 above, It is considered the potentially adverse impacts would principally be as a result of the visually distracting effects of an increase in the overall height, scale and massing of new built form on the sites within the setting of, and also some shared views to and from, these heritage assets.

8.30 It is concluded, however, in the HTVIA, that any potential harm caused to the significance of each of the listed buildings or groups, and also the conservation area, would be minor in magnitude, would fall within the category of less than substantial for the purposes of the NPPF (paragraph 202), and also would fall towards the lower end of the scale within that category (as further guided by NPPG[20]) in each case.

8.31 This adverse impact should be considered in the context that the proposed change on the site would not directly affect any historic fabric or features of a listed building or other positive element within the conservation area designation. Also for each of the listed buildings there would be an indirect impact as a result of change to the character

[20] NPPG, Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20140306

and appearance of a smaller part of their much wider townscape setting. A further clear consideration is that the existing modern condition of the sites does not contribute in any positive way to the significance of these heritage assets as found today.

8.32 There exist a substantial number of local and other longer distance views of these listed buildings from within the conservation area and across the wider town centre, which better experience and appreciate the heritage interests of the listed building, and which are not orientated towards, or would otherwise be affected by the proposed development on the application sites. The proposed development would impact only part of a much wider and highly diverse urban setting within which each of these heritage asset are experienced and observed dynamically, and within a townscape that has changed substantially in character from that historic as a result of post-war redevelopment and infrastructure, and has also continued to evolve through more recent comprehensive town centre schemes such as The Oracle itself.

8.33 The potential for the proposed development of these key town centre sites to result in adverse impacts on the significance (and setting) of heritage assets has been assessed from the outset. Extensive consideration has been given to how potential adverse impacts could be balanced against the objective to reimagine and regenerate the eastern end of The Oracle and deliver a high quality, viable development of new built form and spaces. It has been an iterative design process. This has included the process of optioneering and the testing of views using 3D computer modelling of iterations of the scheme prior to design fix. Such considerations and discussions have also formed part of a process of pre-application engagement with the local planning authority and other stakeholders (including Design Review Panel), including scheme refinements and revisions undertaken by the Applicant during this process in response.

8.34 NPPF Paragraph 202 sets out more fully that for cases of the category of less than substantial harm this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals as a whole, including where appropriate securing the optimum viable use of the asset or assets. Section 10 of this statement outlines the public benefits of the proposed development, however it is also necessary to consider the identification and potential delivery of "heritage benefits". This responds not only to paragraph 200-202 of the NPPF in relation to heritage harm (as has been described previously in this section), but also paragraph 206 that encourages local planning authorities to look more proactively for opportunities for new development within conservation areas, and also within the setting of other heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance.

8.35 NPPG confirms that public benefits can also include such heritage benefits, which are changes that would enhance or better reveal the significance of heritage assets[21]. By definition, heritage benefits can also enhance the contribution of the setting of a heritage asset, reduce or remove risks to a heritage asset, and securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset or assets in support of their long term conservation. In summary, the HTVIA identified the following potential heritage benefits that could flow from this scheme as:

- Introducing a new and richer mix of uses on the sites that would complement and contribute to those existing locally, as well as the introduction of more

[21] NPPG, Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20140306

active and interesting street frontages and quality architectural design, and public realm improvements. All which would enhance the character and appearance of this part of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and also the setting of the nearby listed building Nos.2-4 London Street; and

- Creating new private amenity spaces at roof terrace level within the proposed development that would create opportunities for new views outward to experience the wider townscape surroundings, including the appreciation of views looking across the historic townscape of the nearby conservation areas, along the river and canal, and landmarks such as the listed Parish churches and Town Hall.

8.36 Due consideration has been given to Policy EN1 of the Local Plan. The submitted HTVIA statement demonstrates a proportionate understanding and appreciation of the significance of the identified heritage assets in our stud area, and also describes effectively how proposed change would affect their significance (and setting). The extensive design evolution of the proposed developments has sought to protect and enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings. However achieving densification of the development to reimagine and regenerate the eastern end of The Oracle will always be challenging without impact to some degree upon heritage assets in the vicinity. It is acknowledged that some harm is likely to result from the proposed development to the significance of a number of listed buildings and one conservation area. This level of harm is categorised as less than substantial (and at the lower end of that scale in each case) and in accordance with Policy EN1 the delivery of a wide range of public benefits (as set out in Section 10) provide clear and convincing justification for the level of harm forecast. It is, therefore, considered compliance with Policy EN1 can be demonstrated.

8.37 In respect of Policy EN3, relating to conservation areas, as set out in both the Design & Access Statement and HTVIA the scheme design responds to the distinctive character of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, where the Yield Hall Place 2 site falls partially within, and also within the setting of this area. The HTVIA identifies a number of enhancements that these proposals would deliver through the new mix of uses, the quality architecture of replacement buildings and also public realm improvements. It is considered the scheme accords with Policy EN3.

8.38 The HTVIA provides an assessment of the likely effects of the proposed development on Site on the relevant visual receptors, and also on the character of both local and longer distance (representative) views that have been agreed with RBC for analysis at application in the context of Policy EN5. View 3 of the RBC adopted list of Significant Views with Heritage Interest is located within our study area, however the alignment of this long view from the high vantage point of Whitley Street along Southampton Street would be orientated away from the Site itself. This view includes the listed buildings St Mary's Church and St Giles's Church as part of a sequence of landmarks that forms part of its heritage interest. Both these heritage assets have been assessed in terms of development impacts as part of HTVIA, and in relation to their setting and shared views. In addition, the accurate visualisation prepared for RV 12, also from this higher vantage point to the south of the town centre, indicates that the defining

characteristics of these views would not be undermined by these proposals. As such the proposals complies with Policy EN5.

8.39 Policy EN6, sets out that in areas characterised by heritage assets, the historic environment should inform and shape new development. In response, both the DAS and the HTVIA describe how the scheme design has sought to respond to the history and distinctive character of the sites and the locality. Although the optimised scale of these proposals would likely result in some adverse heritage impacts, this scheme also has the potential to deliver enhancements such as a richer mix of uses, quality new architecture replacing existing building of no merit, and also public realm improvements. The application proposals align with Policy EN6.

Townscape

8.40 In respect of townscape identifies a series of townscape areas around the application sites which are of greatest relevance to the application proposals. Figure 4.10 of the HTVIA identifies these townscape character areas (TCA) and provides a summary of the characteristics and sensitivities of each area. The application sites are located in TCA18 – The Oracle which is identified as having a low sensitivity due to its limited heritage asset designations, comprehensive commercial development and large scale modern buildings and variety of architectural styles and materials. A summary of the local TCA's and their assessed 'value' is summarised below.

Table 8.2: Townscape Character Areas

TCA18: The Oracle	Ordinary
TCA6: St. Lawrence and Market Place	Medium
TCA20: London Street	Medium
TCA17: St Mary's and Castle Street	Medium
TCA21: Forbury South	Ordinary
TCA26: King's Road	Low

8.41 The HTVIA has identifies that the sites are largely located within 'The Oracle' Townscape Character Area which is not designated and overall is of Low/Ordinary townscape value. However, part of the Yield Hall Place 2 site is located within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

8.42 In respect of Policy EN6, the baseline townscape assessment confirms that the existing site buildings and layout do not relate to the historic condition or positively contribute to the townscape character of this part of the town centre and its waterside. Further, the existing buildings within the sites do not contribute to the significance of nearby heritage assets. Through the demolition of the eastern extent of The Oracle shopping centre and the Vue cinema complex, the proposed development presents the opportunity to enhance the contribution of the sites to the townscape and visual amenity. It is considered the reimagined sites will better relate to the surrounding

context and introduce a comprehensive scheme. This includes a scheme which enhances its contribution to the setting of nearby heritage assets and contribution to the London Street/Market Place Conservation Area.

8.43 The proposed development comprises two buildings ranging from 4-19 (above podium). It has been concluded that the introduction of new, high quality residential buildings with ground floor commercial space across two principal blocks either side of the River Kennet would enhance the townscape character in this location and add interest to the city skyline in both short-range and long-range views. This would be reaffirmed by the variation of height within each block which includes stepped up massing south-north and east- west, with the tallest building located at the north-western extent of the Site. Added interest is further achieved by the varied use of material palette which is used to articulate the elevations and establish a vertical emphasis to the buildings and make them slenderer in appearance.

8.44 The introduction of a new active frontages on to new and improved public realm including new pedestrian routes, widened pavements with dedicated cycleways, and new street tree planting and landscaping will improve the vibrancy of the local area and help to integrate the proposed developments in the surrounding townscape. The development will also improve the permeability of the sites and establish wayfinding towards Reading town centre and the retail and leisure destination of The Oracle.

8.45 The assessment of effects on the six assessed townscape character areas were identified as:

- **Beneficial effect of High magnitude –** TCA1 The Oracle
- **Neutral effect of Medium magnitude –** TCA 6 St Lawrence and Market Place, TCA 20 London Street; and,
- **Neutral effect of Negligible magnitude –** TCA 17 St Mary's and Castle Street, TCA 21 Forbury South, and TCA 26 King's Road

8.46 The assessment of visual effects identified that there would be changes to local views arising from the proposed development. The quality of local streetscape views in close proximity to the sites are likely to improve as views of the existing building, which are of low quality and make a poor contribution to the townscape character, would be replaced with views of a new building of high-quality design and construction with improved active frontage. The new development would also provide added visual interest to views along the River Kennett, Market Place, Coley Place, Church Street, and London Street.

8.47 In views from further afield the taller element of the proposed development would be visible on the skyline in the background of views. The variation of building heights and vertical emphasis of elevation treatment would contribute positively to the appearance of the skyline and establish wayfinding to Reading town centre and The Oracle, experienced amongst a varied urban townscape context.

8.48 The HTVIA has also concluded that the proposed development would result in the following residual, permanent type of effect and magnitude of change on the assessed visual receptors:

- **Neutral and Beneficial effects, varying from Medium to Low magnitude -** Road users on main routes, such as London Street, Southampton Street and Whitley Street running north-south, and Queens Road (including the IDR) running east-west, also including key crossings of the River Kennet; users of other local or secondary roads, streets and spaces within the town centre area, including the pedestrianised riverside area of The Oracle development; and users of public open spaces, such as Market Place and St Mary's Churchyard, and the Mapledurham Estate.

- **`Beneficial effects of Low to Medium magnitude -** Users of River Kennet / Kennet and Avon Canal and other associated waterways / towpaths / bridges; and existing local residents within established housing areas to the south of the sites (beyond the IDR).

8.49 In summary, in townscape terms, the proposed development it is considered to comply with development plan policy. The effects on townscape and visual receptors would be beneficial or neutral and the proposals would contribute to the revitalisation of this south eastern part of Reading town centre and present enhancements to the public realm and quality of built form in this location.

Landscape / Public Realm

8.50 Local Plan Policy CR3 relates to public realm in central Reading and requires development proposals to make a positive contribution to the quality of the public realm. The applicant recognises the importance of public realm around The Oracle, and how this integrates the shopping centre with the wider town centre. Providing high quality, accessible public realm is a key objective of the development proposals and Hammerson have worked closely with the design team to develop a public realm strategy with delivers for all users of the proposed development, The Oracle shopping centre and wider town centre uses. The proposed public realm and landscape strategy will enable Hammerson to deliver on its wider strategic vision for The Oracle, creating a place where people dwell, relax and interact.

8.51 Full details of the landscape strategy and approach to public realm is provided in the accompanying landscape strategy

8.52 In respect of the assessment criteria set out at policy CR3, the scheme responds as follows:

- The development will provide a new pocket park alongside the riverfront for general public access, as well as a series of new public spaces for people to dwell.

- A new public space will be provided at the southern gateway including incidental play route and seating areas amongst the soft landscaping, providing an imaginative response to this largely urban and commercial frontage;

- Appropriate use of planting, including street trees, as well as hard landscaping and high quality materials to create usable attractive spaces, which are appropriate for the expected footfall in this location

- Maintenance of the existing riverside access points on both the north and south sides of the canal, ensuring a clear is retained given it is a shared cycle route, whilst utilising planters in appropriate locations to create seating areas and enable users to appreciate the waterfront location.

- The development will enhance the appearance of the River Kennet, providing activate frontages along the riverfront at street level as well as enhanced public realm. At upper floor levels, the use of balconies and roof terraces to the residential properties will also provide activation and enable appreciation of the waterfront location.

- The application proposals look beyond the immediate environs of the former Debenhams store and Vue complex. The landscape strategy proposes interventions along Yield Hall Place to increase the attractiveness of Yield Hall Place as a pedestrian route between Riverside and Broad Street. This route is currently underutilised by town centre users and the proposal provides an opportunity to re-activate this frontage through well designed public realm and new frontages providing natural surveillance and activity throughout the day. This approach will allow The Oracle to integrate rather than turn its back on Yield Hall Place and provide an enhanced north-south connection to the town centre

- Public realms works are also proposed towards the south of the application site, at the junction of London Road and the IDR, to enhance the permeability of movement north to south across this junction, and significantly enhance the quality of the urban environment in this location. New areas of public space incorporating incidental play provision, seating areas and planting will be provided assisting the scheme to face onto its surroundings. The applicant is committed to exploring interventions at this junction to enhance pedestrian connectivity and providing stronger visual and physical linkages from London Street to The Oracle riverside.

8.53 Overall, the proposed public realm and landscaping proposals are in conformity with Policy CR3. Indeed, they are considered to go beyond the requirements of policy and will deliver an enhanced scheme and clear public benefits in terms of the quality of public realm. The works will enhance the user experience at the eastern end of The Oracle, both for residents, shoppers and those travelling through the site.

Summary

8.54 This section has provided a focused assessment on the design characteristics and credentials of the application proposals.

8.55 In summary, it is assessed that:

- The application proposals represent high quality design, reflective of the locality and context to the site and are therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy CR2.

- The application proposals will deliver ‘tall buildings’, however, the application site falls outwith the designated ‘tall building clusters’ set out in Policy CR10, and the scheme is therefore in conflict with that element of Policy CR10.

- The proposals are considered to comply with the design criteria set out in Policy CR10, in that the proposed buildings will enhance Reading’s skyline and appropriately address the heritage, townscape and public realm context.

- The development is likely to result in harm to several identified listed buildings and Market Place / London Street conservation area, with this harm identified being as less than substantial, and at the lower end of that scale. This level of harm needs to be afforded ‘great weight’ in the planning balance and convincingly justified when weighed against the public benefits afforded by the application proposals.

- Notwithstanding the identified harm to some heritage assets, the proposed development will sustain the significance of a number of assets, with some elements of the scheme likely to have a beneficial impact on specific heritage assets. The scheme appropriately responds to the heritage context of the site and is should be considered in the context of the existing built form and uses on the site which do not contribute positively to the heritage context

- In townscape terms the proposed development it is considered to comply with development plan policy. The effects on townscape and visual receptors would be beneficial or neutral and the proposals would contribute to the revitalisation of this south east part of Reading town centre and present enhancements to the public realm and quality of built form.

- The proposed public realm and landscaping proposals are in conformity with Policy CR3. Indeed, they are considered to go beyond the requirements of policy and will deliver an enhanced scheme and clear public benefits in terms of the quality of public realm. The works will enhance the user experience at the eastern end of The Oracle, both for residents, shoppers and those travelling through the site

9. Planning Assessment – Technical Considerations

9.1 Within this section, we consider the technical elements of the proposals within the context of adopted planning policy to demonstrate compliance with the proposed development.

Wind Micro-Climate

9.2 Policy CC3 (Adaptation to Climate Change) requires, wherever possible, new buildings shall be orientated to reduce exposure to wind. A similar approach is reflected in Policy CR10 (Tall Buildings) where all tall building proposals should mitigate any wind speeds or turbulence or overshadowing effects through design and siting.

9.3 In addition to the above, Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) requires new development to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, by reason of set criteria, including wind, where the proposals involve new development of more than 8 storeys.

9.4 There is no specific planning policy guidance dealing with microclimate in terms of pedestrian comfort in the NPPF, however, paragraph 130 states that planning decisions should ensure that developments "create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.

9.5 This application for both Yield Hall Place 1 and Yield Hall Place 2 are supported by a Wind Microclimate Assessment Report prepared by GIA consultants. This report confirms that all ground level wind comfort conditions are expected to be suitable, including thoroughfares, on and off-site building entrances, existing seating areas and proposed seating areas.

9.6 The report recognises that the proposed development introduces a localised region of exceedance to the east of the Riverside Car Park building. This area is identified as a 'back of house' area within the proposed development resulting in limited impact on daily users. This is low-use region that does not intersect the cycle-path between the Riverside Car Park and Yield Hall Place 2), so is not anticipated to impact upon the utility or safety of the cycle route. Furthermore, the proposed development is considered to reduce the extent and severity of a region of existing exceedance to the west of the Riverside Car Park building at the junction of Bridge Street, thereby providing a benefit in terms of wind conditions.

9.7 The report concludes that the overall impact of the proposed development on the wind safety risk in the local area can be viewed as between "net even to net beneficial". There is a design requirement in that a perimeter screen of 1500-1800mm is required for the level 12 amenity terrace at Yield Hall Place 2, and that this has been successfully integrated into the proposed design.

9.8 The proposed development therefore accords with policies CC3, CR10, and CC8, of the adopted Local Plan in regard to addressing wind amenity.

Daylight/Sunlight

9.9 As aforementioned Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) highlights that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties in terms of access to sunlight and daylight and other considerations.

9.10 To accompany this report, a Daylight and Sunlight report has been commissioned and undertaken by GIA Consultants. This report has been conducted and written in accordance with Building Research Establishment Guidelines entitled 'Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight – A Guide to Good Practice (2022)'.

9.11 This review takes account of existing and consented residential properties to understand the potential daylight and sunlight changes that the proposed development will have ensure that they still retain the highest expectation for natural light. The report concludes that there will be limited impacts to the surrounding residential properties, all of which are typically minor and considered acceptable given the dense, urban nature of the site.

9.12 Two of the three rooftop amenity areas will fully comply with BRE guidance for sunlight amenity. The central rooftop amenity area to Yield Hall Place 2 will fall marginally short of BRE guidance, receiving two hours of direct sunlight to 48.73% of its area against a target of 50%. This is a marginal deviation from the target criteria and, as such, is considered a minor and acceptable impact.

9.13 The overall impact of the scheme on the surrounding residential properties and amenity areas is therefore considered wholly acceptable, whilst the amenity areas within the proposed development will exhibit very good levels of sunlight.

9.14 In relation to residents within the proposed development, GIA consultants have also undertaken by a report focusing specifically on the light levels with the apartments to be created. This assessment is submitted with the application and concludes that the majority of the habitable rooms to be created will have acceptable levels of daylight. GIA conclude that the levels of sunlight to be achieved are in line with the expectations for a large scale residential development such as this which incorporates balconies.

9.15 The proposed development accords with the requirements of Policy CC8 in this regard.

Highways and Accessibility

9.16 Policy TR1 (Achieving the Transport Strategy) states that all development proposals should make appropriate provision of works and contributions to ensure an adequate level of accessibility and safety by all modes of transport from all parts of a development, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling, in accordance with any agreed transport assessment submitted as part of the application.

9.17 The site is advantageously located to make full use of the frequent and direct public transport services provided by the local bus services and the national rail network in accordance with the requirements of Policy TR1(Achieving the Transport Strategy) and TR5(Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charing). The site is located in Reading Town Centre within the demise of the existing Oracle shopping centre and Riverside. The site from part of the core town centre area and is located less than a 10minute walk from Reading Railway Station.

9.18 National and local policy guidance sets out that development should be sustainable in transport terms, i.e., easily accessible by a range of modes of transport including walking, cycling and public transport and situated within convenient distances to local facilities. Adequate levels of cycle parking should be provided, and access arrangements should be safe. Fundamentally, development should not be prevented from coming forward for transport reasons where the residual impacts are not severe.

9.19 It is generally accepted that walking and cycling provide important alternatives to the private car and should also be encouraged to form part of longer journeys via public transport. CIHT's document 'Planning for Walking' (2015) states that for journeys shorter than one mile (approx. 1,600m) walking is the dominant mode and that walking neighbourhoods are typically characterised as having a range of facilities within an 800m walking distance. In addition, the guidance in Manual for Streets (MfS) states that walking offers the greatest potential to replace short car trips, particularly for journeys under 2km.

9.20 Indeed, it is noteworthy that the Institute of Highways and Transportation (IHT) has recently published updated guidance that provides advice with respect to the provision of sustainable travel in conjunction with new developments. Within these documents it is suggested that:

- Most people will walk to a destination that is less than one mile (approx. 2km) (Planning for Walking, 2015);
- The bicycle is a potential mode of transport for all journeys under five miles (approximately 8km) (Planning for Cycling, 2015); and
- Walking distances to bus stops should not exceed 400m, whilst people are prepared to walk twice as far (800m) to rail stations (Planning for Walking, 2015).

9.21 As identified in Section 7, the site will contribute to a genuine 20-minute neighbourhood. The new developments will be within 10-minute walking distance of a wide range of amenities that residents would expect to access on an day to day basis, as well as extensive shops and leisure facilities.

Car Parking and Cycle Provision

9.22 Policy TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) stipulate that all new houses with dedicated off-street parking should provide charging points. Within communal car parks for residential or non-residential developments of at least 10 spaces, 10% of spaces should provide an active charging point. Whilst there are no

designated parking spaces provided for these development proposals, it should be highlighted that Hammerson are actively exploring significant investment into electric charging points at the asset.

9.23 No additional car parking is proposed as a result of the development proposals. The residential units are designed to be car free, however to ensure residents still have access to a car if they wish, it is proposed to convert two spaces within the existing Oracle multi-storey car parks to car club spaces in accordance with RBC Parking Standards.

9.24 The proposals will include secure cycle provision, as explained in the Design and Access Statement and Transport Statement. It is proposed to provide 200 spaces at the Yield Hall Place 1 development (+22 above policy requirement) and 156 spaces in Yield Hall Place 2 development (+19 above policy requirement). These spaces will be provided in secure, covered cycle storage rooms within the development, with direct access onto Yield Hall Place or the IDR cycle route respectively.

Pedestrian and Cycle Accessibility

9.25 Policy TR4 (Cycle Routes and Facilities) states that developments will be expected to make full use of opportunities to improve access for cyclists to, from and within the development and to integrate cycling through the provision of new facilities, development will not detrimentally affect an identified cycle route.

9.26 The application site is located within a well-established network of pedestrian routes that encourage safe pedestrian activity in the local vicinity and throughout the wider town.

9.27 The Oracle is largely pedestrianized, with buses running adjacent to the site to the east (along Duke Street), to the north (along Minster Street) and further west (along Bridge Street) and south (London Street) to enhance the connectivity of the site. The riverside is restricted to pedestrian and cyclists only, providing east-west connectivity, as well as north-south trips through the Oracle or along Yield Hall Place respectively.

9.28 In addition to the strong baseline position, improvements to pedestrian connectivity are proposed through the current application:

- Introduction of new mall entrance to The Oracle at eastern end of the centre, increasing permeability through the shopping centre to the town centre and creating an additional route to and from the riverfront

- Physical improvements to Yield Hall Place north of the River Kennet to create a more attractive and perceived safer route along the eastern side of the shopping centre up to Minster Street and Broad Street

- Active elevations onto the IDR on the southern side of Yield Hall Place 2 providing natural surveillance, creating a more attractive footpath and cycle route along the southern boundary of the site

- Commitment to exploring improvements to pedestrian permeability and connectivity across the IDR, connecting London Road with Yield Hall Place. Creation of high-quality public realm along Yield Hall Place south of the River Kennet to create a more attractive approach for pedestrians from the south.

9.29 The existing cycle routes running along the riverside and south side of Yield Hall Place will be maintained, with the public realm strategy ensuring that a clear route is maintained for cyclists. A drop off bay is proposed on the south side of Yield Hall Place but there remains sufficient pavement width to ensure the cycle route is not adversely affected.

Bus Services

9.30 The site is well served by an extensive bus network that provides high frequency services throughout the day, including evening and school services.

9.31 Bus stops are located close to the site on London Road, Duke Street, Bridge Street and Minster Street. These stops are sheltered and provide seating and timetable information for users. Additional bus stops located on Broad Street and Kings Road and to the north, from which the eastbound and westbound services operate from. The stops are well located within 400m walking distance of the site, as recommended by the guideline document 'Planning for Walking' (2015). GIS plan ref PACS3000 GIS_101 at Appendix 4 illustrates the number of bus stands located within 10-minute walk of the application sites.

9.32 The buses offer more than a combined 20 services per hour in the immediate vicinity of the site. This demonstrates that the site location in the centre of Reading provides it with the benefit of being highly accessible by public transport.

Rail Services

9.33 Reading Railway Station is situated circa 550m walking distance to the north of site (approximately eight minutes' walk). Trains operated by Great Western Railway, South West Trains and Cross Country provide direct connections to key destinations such as London (Paddington and Waterloo), Gatwick Airport, Oxford, Maidenhead, Basingstoke, Guildford, and Swindon. Direct trains are also available to destinations further afield including Bristol, Southampton, Exeter, and Birmingham.

Travel Plan

9.34 A draft Travel Plan has been prepared for the site to help manage accessibility and to promote sustainable travel and reduce where practicable single occupancy private car trips. This includes target measures and monitoring for the ongoing management of the site.

9.35 The applicant would welcome further discussions with the council on the proposed approach and would be open to further development of the Travel Plan being secured by planning condition.

Summary

9.36 In summary, review of existing conditions has demonstrated that the site is in a highly accessible town centre location. The local pedestrian and cycling environment is of very good standard and the site is located within convenient proximity to Reading Railway Station which has fast and frequent services to a wide range of destinations. The site is situated in close proximity to a number of bus stops that provide a large number of services to destinations within Reading and further afield.

9.37 Given the location of the site within Reading Town Centre, there are a high number of local services and facilities within a short walking and cycling distance of the site. In summary, with reference to the key transport principles set out in the NPPF, this chapter demonstrates that the site is located in a suitable location in transport terms – in that it meets the tests of the NPPF as it is in location that provides genuine opportunities for sustainable travel options to be taken up.

9.38 The proposals fully accord with Policy CC6 (Accessibility and Intensity of Development); Policy TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy; Policy TR5: Car and Cycle Parking. Safe and suitable access to the site will be achieved for all people and it will not result in an increase of vehicle movements over the course of a typical day; and therefore, the residual cumulative impacts of the development will certainly not be 'severe'.

9.39 The proposed development accords with the local and national transport planning policy background. On this basis, the proposal is acceptable in highways and transport terms.

Flood Risk and Drainage

9.40 The NPPF requires that '*all plans should apply a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development' so as to 'avoid where possible, flood risk to people and property'*, with a requirement for a 'sequential test' to be applied to ensure that new development is steered to areas with the lowest probability of flooding' (i.e., Flood Zone 1.

9.41 Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems) in the Adopted Local Plan outlines that all major developments must incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SUDS) as appropriate and in line with the Government's Technical Standards. Runoff rates should aim to reflect greenfield conditions and, in any case, must be no greater than the existing conditions of the site. Schemes should ensure that the movement of water through vertical infiltration as well as horizontal run-off does not worsen contamination effects.

9.42 A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy has been prepared by Byrne Looby that notes that the existing site and all the surrounding areas drain via discharge to surface water sewers. It is therefore proposed to attenuate storm water and limit discharge of surface water generated by the development proposals via these existing connections. The discharge will be limited to greenfield runoff rates via flow control device.

9.43 The proposed development, both application sites, will incorporates SuDS as part of the drainage strategy. Surface water from the development will be attenuated within the site boundary prior to being discharged to a maximum flow rate of 2l/s to the existing Thames Water or other operated storm sewer(s). This will be achieved by:

- Rainwater harvesting;
- Green Roof for approximately 50% of the roof area;
- The attenuation of surface water within the site boundaries to limit the rate of discharge via an attenuation tank system located below ground floor level (The attenuation tank will be designed to attenuate a 1:100 year + 40% climate change storm event;
- Low water usage and water saving devices throughout the building to minimise wastage of water supply and incorporation of water conservation measures.

9.44 The proposed foul drainage is to have a positive gravity fall towards a proposed pumping station, prior to pumping at a controlled discharge rate to Thames Water foul sewers.

9.45 The proposed development can therefore demonstrate accordance with EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems).

Air Quality

9.46 The development site is located within an identified Air Quality Management Area and as such needs to demonstrate compliance Policy EN15 (Air Quality). Policy EN15 states that development should have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality. Development that would detrimentally affect air quality will not be permitted unless the effect is to be mitigated. It is acknowledged that the site lies in close proximity with the IDR, a major transport route through and across Reading.

9.47 In demonstrating compliance with this policy, an Air Quality Assessment prepared by Hydrock has been prepared and is submitted in support of the respective applications for Yield Hall Place 1 and 2. The AQA concludes that, through good practice and implementation of appropriate mitigation measures, which can be secured via an appropriately worded planning condition attached to any formal consent, that the release of dust would be effectively controlled and mitigated, with resulting effects considered to be 'not significant'.

9.48 In addition, the report recognises that there will be no material change in the quantum of traffic generated by the Proposed Development as the residential element is proposed to be "car free". Therefore, any and all movements are below the relevant EPUK & IAQM guidance criteria and as such, it is not anticipated that any significant adverse impacts on local air quality will occur as a result of the Proposed Development, with any and all impacts are considered to be temporary and short-term in nature.

9.49 The proposed development can therefore demonstrate accordance with Policy EN15 and the impacts of the proposed development on air quality receptors have been identified as "no significant".

Noise

9.50 Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) explains development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties in terms of noise and disturbance and other consequent factors.

9.51 Furthermore, Paragraph 185 of the NPPF recognises that the planning system should ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. This includes mitigating and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impact resulting from noise from new development.

9.52 The submitted acoustic assessment concludes that appropriate acoustic conditions can be achieved within habitable rooms and proposed shared outdoor amenity areas with the implementation of standard acoustic mitigation measures. The applicant is committed to implementing these mitigation measures and as such the proposals is considered in conformity with Policy CC8.

Energy and Sustainability

9.53 The adopted Local Plan at policies CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction), CC3 (Adaptation to Climate Change), CC4 (Decentralised Energy) and CC5 (Waste Minimisation) provides the policy requirement in relation to energy generation and waste. An Energy Statement prepared by Rolton has been submitted, which is contained within the Sustainability Statement prepared by Turley.

9.54 Policy CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) requires that all major conversions to residential are required to meet the most up to date BREEM 'Excellent' standard. Furthermore, stated in Policy CC4 (Decentralised Energy) any development of more than 20 dwellings and/ or non-residential development of over 1,000 sqm shall consider the inclusion of decentralised energy provision, within the site.

9.55 In terms of energy generation, an innovative approach is proposed utilising the riverfront location. It is proposed to incorporate a water source heat pump into the developments to generate energy using the adjacent water feature.

9.56 With regard to waste minimisation at Policy CC5, appropriate measures will be put in place to ensure more sustainable approaches to waste management in relation waste storage and recycling. Measures will be agreed with the occupiers of the proposed development, prior to occupation.

9.57 In relation to the construction phase, a site waste management plan will be prepared. This will set out how waste will be managed, reduced, reused, or recycled.

9.58 A Sustainability and Energy Statement prepared by Turley Sustainability. as to fully address the requirements of Policy CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD. This policy states that all major non-

residential developments are required to meet the most up to date BREEAM 'Excellent' standards, where possible.

9.59 Turley Sustainability has undertaken BREEAM Excellent Pre-assessments by implementing the two methodologies; New Construction (NC) 2018 and Refurb and Fit Out (R&FO) 2014 methodologies to ensure that both new build and refurbished elements of the development are assessed using a suitable method. As detailed within the accompanying document, applying BREEAM New Construction criteria to a refurbished scheme is not suitable as it would mean the refurbished areas would need to achieve already challenging criteria intended for new buildings, such as energy performance.

9.60 At this stage in the development process, the pre-assessments indicate how both aspects of the development can go beyond the minimum 70% score required for BREEAM 'Excellent' whilst including relevant mandatory requirements in accordance with the requirements of Policy CC2(Sustainable Design and Construction). A detailed summary of credits targeted through each assessment is provided within the Sustainability Statement.

Ecology

9.61 Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) of the Adopted Local Plan explains that new development shall demonstrate how the location and type of green space, landscaping and water features provided within a scheme have been arranged such that they maintain or link into the existing green network and contribute to its consolidation. Such features should be designed to maximise the opportunities for enhancing this network.

9.62 This application is supported by a Preliminary Ecological Assessment (including Bat Roost Assessment) prepared by HDA Consultants to demonstrate the scheme's compliance with adopted policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network).

9.63 The report identifies that the built-up habitats in the immediate surrounding area provides poor quality habitat for commuting and foraging bats and, subject to the implementation of the recommended measures for habitat retention, creation and enhancement, no reduction in the ecological interest of the site or its surrounds is likely to arise as a result of the proposed development.

9.64 A calculation of biodiversity net gain has been undertaken by HDA Consultants and is submitted with this application. It has identified the developments will deliver significant gains in biodiversity, with Yield Hall Place 1 estimated to deliver 50% gain in broad habitats and Yield Hall Place 2, 31% gain in the same category. For linear habitats, both schemes would deliver 100% gain upon the baseline situation. In addition, further gains are considered achievable through the inclusion of features for bats / breeding birds on buildings and existing trees, use of fruit and nut producing species and nectar rich species and log and brash piles around scrub edges and on rooftops for invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles.

9.65 Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) outlines individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of

importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended. New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change.

9.66 The submitted Landscape Statement identifies the substantial soft landscape improvements proposed, which includes the provision for tree retention and planting of 37 new trees (34 net additional), including along the street frontage and within areas of public realm to enhance the character and appearance of the area.

Archaeology

9.67 As part of this submission, due consideration has been given to adopted policies EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), EN2 (Areas of Archaeological Significance), EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) and EN6 (New Development in a historic context), all of which require that consideration be given to historic areas and areas of historic importance with regard to the significance of heritage assets and their setting within the context of the development proposals. Consideration of the scheme against built heritage considerations is provided in the previous section of this report.

9.68 Policy EN2 (Areas of Archaeological Significance) of the Adopted Local Plan states that applicants should identify and evaluate sites of archaeological significance by consulting the Historic Environment Record. This will require an assessment of the archaeological impacts of development proposals to be submitted before the planning application is determined.

9.69 The site's location within a sensitive area of historical importance has been thoroughly considered throughout the conceptualisation and design and of the proposed development. Yield Hall Place 2 site has been identified as being situated within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and both sites are located within an area of archaeological significance. Accordingly, this planning application submission is accompanied by an Archaeological Desk Based Assessment, which demonstrates compliance with Policy EN2 (Areas of Archaeological significance).

9.70 The archaeology report recognises that site was developed in several phases during the 20th century, with the most recent phase being the construction of the Oracle shopping centre. The sum of these activities will have had severe, if localised, impacts on below-ground archaeological remains.

9.71 It is noted that there is the potential archaeological remains have survived, but have not yet been fully excavated, and truncation from past development is documented but its detailed extent cannot be satisfactorily determined by a desktop study. The Applicant is willing to accept an appropriately worded planning condition attached to any consent ensure the any nature of archaeological remains are preserved in site, in advance of construction commencing, and further during the construction process.

9.72 The proposed development therefore demonstrates accordance with Policy EN2.

Fire Strategy

9.73 A Fire Statement has been prepared by Jensen Hughes to support the application due to the proposed height of the development. The Strategy addresses matters relating to means of escape, internal fire spread, external fire spread and Fire Service access. This gateway 1 report is submitted in accordance with legislative requirements contained in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure and Section 62A Applications) (England) (Amendment) (Order) 2021.

9.74 Of note, the following measures are proposed:

- Each tower in Yield Hall Place 1 will be provided with two stair cores. All stair cores exit directly to outside at ground floor level.
- The Central and West towers in Yield Hall Place 2 will incorporate two stair cores, while the 4 storey East tower will have a single stair core. All stair cores exit to outside at ground floor level by protected corridors
- All internal lining, external wall materials and roof coverings will achieve the minimum requirements of Building Regulation guidance documents
- Evacuation alert system (EAS) will be provided to the building.
- Sprinkler system will be installed in the residential accommodation.

Ground Contamination

9.75 Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) sets out development will only be permitted on land affected by contamination where it is demonstrated that the contamination and land gas can be satisfactorily managed or remediated so that it is suitable for the proposed end use and will not impact on the groundwater environment, human health, buildings, and the wider environment, during demolition and construction phases as well as during the future use of the site.

9.76 Byrne Loobey have prepared a Contaminated Land Statement that draws upon the site investigations works previously undertaken at the site in developing the existing uses. Given both of the application sites comprises fully developed land and the existing uses do not give rise to contamination concerns, it is considered the ground conditions will not be materially different from that reviewed and considered appropriate at the time The Oracle was originally constructed.

9.77 The applicant is willing to accept a condition as part of the granting of planning permission ensuring that appropriate site investigations are undertaken prior to the commencement of development and any identified mitigation requirements completed.

9.78 In respect of the construction phase, the applicant is committed to preparing and submitting a construction management plan prior to commencement of development which will provide details of the procedures to be undertaken during the demolition and construction phases to ensure there is no adverse impact upon the groundwater

environment, human health and the wider environment. The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy EN16.

Summary

9.79 This section has assessed the proposed development against the technical considerations set out in the development plan and NPPF. A suite of technical documents is submitted with the planning application with provide detailed assessment in respect of the relevant technical disciplines.

9.80 In summary, however, this section has identified that the proposed development is in conformity with the relevant technical policies with the development plan and / or relevant NPPF policy, in particular:

- The development will ensure high levels of residential amenity for both proposed residents and existing residents, in terms of daylight / sunlight, noise, wind and air quality.
- The application sites are in a highly accessible location, accessible by a range of transport modes. The scheme incorporates policy exceedance cycle parking and pedestrian connectivity will be enhanced through creation of new routes and public realm improvements
- The application proposals incorporate a range of sustainability measures to minimise energy usage and generate energy. The commercial units are targeted to achieve BREEAM Excellent and innovative water source heat pump is proposed within the scheme
- The development will deliver significant ecological benefits in terms of biodiversity net gain and provision of additional ecological features.
- An appropriate assessment of the likely archaeological impacts of the development proposals has been undertaken
- An appropriate fire strategy has been developed for the proposed buildings in accordance with national legislation
- The proposed development is not considered to give rise to any unacceptable impacts in respect of ground contamination

10. Public Benefits

10.1 The NPPF is a material consideration and at Paragraph 10 it confirms that, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development ('the presumption'). This has been reflected within Local Plan Policy CC1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development).

10.2 In relation to decision-taking, Paragraph 11 explains that sustainable development means:

c) "approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) "where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

> *i) The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
>
> *ii) Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."*

10.3 Within the context of paragraph 11(c), the Court of Appeal judgment in Cornwall Council v Corbett highlights that conflict with a particular policy within the Development Plan, does not necessarily equate to a failure to comply with the development plan as a whole nor deprive a proposal of the statutory presumption in favour of the development plan. This is particularly relevant where there are other policies within the Development Plan which are strongly in favour of the proposals, given planning policies "can pull in different directions"

10.4 Whilst we recognise that the scheme is not in conformity with part of Policy CR10 in relation to the location of tall buildings, it is considered that the proposals are in conformity with a significant proportion of the relevant policies contained in the Development Plan. In particular, the scheme is in accordance with Policies RL1, RL6 and CC6 relating to the role and function of the town centre, and will direct new development to accessible locations such as the town centre. The development proposals will provide a clear and evidenced positive contribution to the role of Reading town centre. As such it should be determined to accord with the aims and objectives of the development plan when taken as a whole.

10.5 In addition, we are mindful that the Heritage & Townscape assessment has identified that the proposals would lead to harm to some identified heritage assets, with this categorised as 'less than substantial harm' (at the lower end of the less than substantial scale). As such, consideration has been given to paragraph 196 of the NPPF (2021) which states that:

"Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use."

10.6 The PPG considers 'what is meant by public benefits' and sets out that:

'public benefits may follow from many developments and could be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental progress as described in the NPPF. Public benefits should flow from the proposed development. They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and should not just be a private benefit. However, benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be genuine public benefits.'

10.7 As referenced above, the NPPF provides guiding principles for the assessment of sustainable development including economic, social, and environmental dimensions (paragraph 8).

10.8 These objectives should not be taken in isolation and decisions need to take local circumstances into account, so they respond to different opportunities for sustainable development in different areas. There is not a fixed UK standard and therefore each proposed development has to be individually assessed in its own context.

10.9 An assessment of the proposed development against these guiding principles of sustainable development and the public benefits that will be derived is provided below.

10.10 As a pre-cursor to describing the clear benefits which will be delivered as a result of the Yield Hall Place proposals, it is helpful to re-state the Council's strategic objectives for the town, as set out in the adopted Local Plan and reinforced in the Reading 2050 vision document.

10.11 An identified Local Plan strategic objective is to:

"Strengthening the role of Reading, including central Reading, as the hub for the Thames Valley, providing an accessible focus for the development of employment, housing, services and facilities, meeting the needs of residents, workers, visitors, those who study in Reading Borough, and the wider area" [Turley emphasis];

10.12 The Reading 2050 Vision aims to establish Reading as an 'internationally recognised and economically successful city region'. The proposed development will make a positive and clear contribution to Reading achieving these aims, as summarised in the table below.

Table 10.1 Contribution to Sustainable Development and Public Benefits

Dimension of Sustainable Development	Scheme Provision
Economic	
Positive intervention in Reading Town Centre • The application proposals will assist in maintaining the role of Reading as a centre of regional significance. The proposed intervention in this core town centre asset, will help ensure that Reading is able to, at minimum, keep pace with competing centres in the catchment area and thereby maintain its role in the retail hierarchy. • The loss of the department store unit and diversification of uses in the centre, will assist in future proofing The Oracle Shopping Centre, increasing its resilience to structural changes in sector, and ensuring it will continue to successfully anchor the town centre. • The proposed development will deliver the regeneration of prime sites at the gateway to the town centre from the south. The vacant Debenhams store and blank eastern and southern elevations of the Vue cinema building detract from the arrival experience into the town centre. This visible sign of significant investment in the town centre by a core landowner, is a positive indicator of commercial confidence in the centre and is likely to act as catalyst for future investment.	
Securing long term reoccupation of former Debenhams department store unit. • As identified in Collier's report also submitted in support of this planning application, the reoccupation and repurposing of former department stores is becoming more challenging with 63% of Debenhams units remaining vacant 2+ years post closure. Shopping centres are identified has having the largest vacancy of department stores, and highest levels of long-term vacancy[22]. • Within part of the former Debenhams unit, the application proposals will facilitate the creation of a new large unit to accommodate a prominent fashion retailer within the mall and the delivery of new leisure and restaurant units along the riverside, providing a significant enhancement to the leisure offer in Reading town centre. • The capital expenditure required to create these new leisure and retail units could not be met without the delivery of the wider residential development. As such, without the wider proposals it would not be commercially viable for Hammerson to commit the capital expenditure required to deliver the repurposing of the former Debenhams floor space.	

[22] Local Data Company 2022 referenced in Colliers Market Report Appendix **1**

Benefits of new leisure uses in town centre

- The introduction of new and upgraded leisure uses within the centre will deliver benefits to the town centre as a whole, in terms of increased footfall, dwell time and expenditure.

- Colliers consumer survey[23] identified that 56% of consumers citied choice of leisure as an important factor when choosing a location to go shopping or to eat. The introduction of new experiential leisure use within the Yield Hall Place 1 scheme as well as upgraded cinema within Yield Hall Place 2 will both support and increase the attractiveness of Reading town centre as a destination.

- Collier's identified that following the repurposing of a former Debenhams store to a 'Gravity' leisure facility in Wandsworth, footfall to the unit significantly increased upon opening of the leisure asset and remained above levels achieved by Debenhams. Footfall to the centre increased by 27% and dwell time within the facility also increased by 40%, providing a more even distribution of trips across the week. It is expected a similar trend would be achieved in respect of the proposed leisure use at The Oracle, to the benefit of the shopping centre and to the town centre as a whole.

- The introduction of new leisure uses in the town centre is also forecast to increase engagement with different demographics, particularly within the 25-44 age categories, ensuring the centre is adapting to meet the demands of younger generations. This ties in with the proposed nature of the BtR accommodation, and aspirations for Reading to retain greater levels of working age population.

Job Creation:

- 260 gross FTE construction jobs per annum, equating to 175 direct net additional jobs and 90 net indirect / induced jobs

- Creation of 130 gross FTE jobs in the proposed retail, leisure, and food & beverage floorspace and 30 FTE jobs supported in the operation of the residential building and co-working / maker spaces.

- Taking account of existing jobs with the Next Beauty & Home and restaurant units on the site, this results in 85 gross additional jobs in the revitalised retail, restaurant, and bar space, generating 65 direct jobs plus 20 indirect / induced jobs.

- The existing cinema jobs will be retained / re-provided through the re-provision of the cinema facility.

Tax Revenue:

- £1.0m additional Council Tax annually to Reading Borough Council

- £260,000 additional Business Rates collected by Reading Borough Council

[23] Colliers Retail Midsummer report 2022

GVA Generation

- £72.5m generated during construction phase
- £5.5m net additional per annum from proposed uses

Additional residential spending:

- The proposed development will result in an additional population of c. 780 people living in the heart of the town centre. It is forecast this new population could earn a combined gross annual income of £19.8m and will spend around £8.3m annually on retail and leisure goods, supporting 85 jobs in this sector. This spending is likely to be focused on the town centre and facilities therein.
- The nature of the proposed development, in terms of high quality BtR accommodation and its location in the heart of the town centre adjacent to leisure and food & drink uses on the riverside, will provide a bespoke and attractive offer to Reading. It is anticipated that the residential floorspace will attract a range of demographics, in particular young professionals, and working age population. This development could assist in retaining graduates from local universities, and reducing 'brain drain' to locations elsewhere, such as London.

New employment floorspace

- Proposed co-working or business incubator floor space, will provide new flexible working space within the heart of the town centre, enhancing the choice and provision available to local businesses and workers, and enhancing opportunities for business collaboration;
- Maker (or craft) spaces will provide a unique offer within the town centre, enabling small businesses to rent space in a prominent location to secure pass by trade and increased profile, and benefit from being co-located with other makers in adjacent units.

Social

High quality rental accommodation.

- The redevelopment of the Site will bring benefits in terms of additional housing to provide which will make a positive impact on resident's health and wellbeing through the provision of:
- Well designed and accessible amenity spaces throughout the residential buildings, which can be utilised for resident events and help residents integrate and form a community;
- Organised opportunities to socialise and engage, thereby fostering a sense of community – i.e. homework clubs;
- Local events and special offers, with a unique opportunity for the development to link in with facilities and amenities with The Oracle Shopping Centre and remainder of the town centre;
- Flexible and longer tenancy options, providing security and stability for residents, which are typically unavailable from smaller landlords; and

- On site management and maintenance of accommodation, ensuring the high-quality offer is maintained and ensuring a safe environment for residents and visitors alike.

Contribution to Reading Housing Supply

- Provide a high quality and secure rental offer as an alternative to the privately rental offer in HMO's or converted family housing which current dominates the Reading rental market.

- Address the identified demand for additional BtR accommodation in Reading, a tenure which is currently identified as undersupplied based on market penetration rate and forecast demands.

- Help secure the retention of graduates and skilled professionals by providing a high quality residential offer in highly accessible, central location, enabling Reading to compete effectively with other towns and cities in the UK

- Provide an effective alternative to private rental stock with Reading within HMO's and converted family housing, which could assist in reducing demand for this properties and releasing family housing back to the market. This could contribute to addressing the identified requirement within Reading for additional family housing.

Affordable Housing

- Provision of affordable units for rent to be directly managed by the build to rent provider, ensuring high quality management and seamless integration within the development.

- Units will be maintained in perpetuity at an agreed discounted to market rent, to be secured by legal agreement.

- The exact proportion of affordable housing to be delivered will be determined by development viability and further discussion with RBC. However, given scale of development at c 450 units, the likely proportion to be delivered will make a material contribution to affordable housing supply.

- In addition to the formalised affordable housing provision, the market levels of rent proposed for this development are intended to be inherently 'affordable' and achievable for the target market.

Social Value Impact - Forecast impact of £1.7m through provision of employment and skills opportunities

Positively contribute to a genuine 20 min neighbourhood within Reading town centre, reducing reliance or need to travel by private car

- Residential development in the heart of Reading town centre will provide an additional population of c 780 people and new spending to help to sustain the vitality and viability of the town centre.

- As identified on plan ref PACS3000 GIS_101 at Appendix 4 and considered in detail in Section 7 of this report the site is well served by an array of education, health, community, and civic

facilities as well as retail, service and commercial uses found within The Oracle and the wider core town centre.

- Residents will be able to genuinely meet their day to day needs within their neighbourhood, and the additional population will help sustain a number of these services and / or encourage investment in new amenities to serve the town centre population.

- Colliers analysis of mobility data at Wandsworth also identified that the introduction of leisure use within the former Debenhams unit in that location resulted in greater levels of engagement in the town centre from the catchment area, with a noticeable shift in shopper origins to the town centre.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

- A payment of c. £2.5m to be spent on infrastructure specified by the Council, including contributions towards transport infrastructure, open space, education, health provision and economic development services.

A well-designed scheme that responds to the character of the area

- A positive statement of high-quality design in the heart of the town centre, at the gateway to such from the south.

- The scheme opens up the eastern end of The Oracle and stitches it back into its surroundings, enabling the uses and built form to integrate better with existing neighbouring uses and town centre realm, rather than facing inwards.

- The scheme responds positively to the conservation area than the existing built form, using appropriate materials, articulation and built form.

Enhanced permeability and connectivity within and around the centre, through extensive public realm works

- Creation of a new mall entrance from the river front into The Oracle at the eastern end of the centre, enhancing connectivity between the shopping centre, the riverfront, and London Street beyond, creating genuine connectivity throughout the centre.

- Improved connections with London Street to the south, through enhanced public realm and exploration of enhancements to the IDR / London Street junction.

- Enhancements to the Yield Hall Place pedestrian route along the eastern perimeter of the shopping centre from the IDR up to the junction with Minister Street.

- Creation of a new ‘pocket park’ on the riverside, making more effective use of the waterfront location and creating genuine spaces for people to both travel through and dwell, and opening an opportunity for Sam Smiths to design and integrate a scheme upon their own pub site.

- Public realm enhancements to the north and south sides of the riverside walkway, creating attractive and accessible routes alongside the water to both travel and dwell, providing greater affinity between the built and physical environments.

- **Creation of more attractive and perceived safer spaces within the town centre**

- Enhancing feelings of safety, security and attractiveness along the Riverside, Yield Hall Place, London Street, and IDR.

- Replacing active frontages along the riverside and increasing activation of these uses where appropriate. Introducing active uses on the Yield Hall Place elevation of both schemes to activate these frontages and alongside the IDR.

- The residential population will provide greater levels of activity throughout the day and night in the vicinity of the centre, assisting in creating natural surveillance and boosting perception of safety amongst all users.

- Enabling all demographics and genders to enjoy and utilise the town centre and be confident about dwelling and travelling through the space.

Environmental

Biodiversity net gain

- The proposed developments are forecast to deliver significant biodiversity net gain, well exceeding policy requirements and 10% net gain target being brought forward through national legislation.

- Yield Hall Place 1 development is forecast to achieve a 50% gain in broad habitats and 100% gain in linear habitats

- Yield Hall Place 2 development is forecast to achieve a 31% gain in broad habitats and 100% gain in linear habitats

- The development will deliver of new areas of open space, planting and landscaping, including:

    - new pocket pack alongside riverfront to enable people to interact and enjoy the riverfront location;
    - new public place adjacent to Yield Hall Place 2 at the junction of IDR and London Street; and
    - new tree planting alongside IDR and Yield Hall Place.

- Ecological enhancements will be delivered on the site include the provision of new opportunities for wildlife movement around the site, bird and bat boxes on buildings and retained trees and log and brash piles for invertebrate, amphibian and reptile habitat which will enhance biodiversity net gain above the levels forecast.

- Use of nectar-rich and fruit-producing species within formal landscaping and prioritising native species

Delivery of sustainable homes of energy efficient design and construction

- Including prioritising natural daylighting and ventilation to promote solar gains.
- High levels of insulation and air tightness
- Incorporation of energy efficient heating systems and equipment
- Installation of water efficiency measures including water meters, low flow fittings and dual flush WCs, to achieve target water consumption rate of 110l/p/d
- Utilisation of materials and services that have low emission rates and pollutants
- Residential buildings designed in accordance with Governments Interim 'Future Homes Standard', achieving a 31% target carbon reduction over previous Part L 2013 standard

Utilising Efficient Energy

- Connection into Water Source Heat Pump that will utilise the adjacent River Kennet to extract energy and provide a latent heat source for the buildings.
- Solar photovoltaic (PV) panels to be utilised where possible.

Negligible Risk of Flooding

- The proposed development sites are not at risk of flooding, nor will they impact upon the risk of sites in the vicinity flooding.
- An appropriate surface water drainage strategy is proposed utilising the existing storm sewers around the site.

BREEAM – Commercial elements of the development will be designed to achieve a BREEAM Excellent rating

Positively contribute positive to a genuine **20 min neighbourhood** within Reading town centre, reducing reliance upon or the need to travel by private car:

- Extent of core Reading town centre can be accessed via a 10-minute walk, including Reading railway station and range of bus stands. Residential areas in Caversham, Coley and East Reading are also within an easy 20-minute walk of the site
- Dedicated cycle routes accessed immediately adjacent to the sites along the southern side of the River Kennet and south of Yield Hall Place 2 development alongside the IDR
- Appropriate cycle provision provided within both residential developments exceeding Reading Parking Standards requirement, along with existing cycle parking located around The Oracle shopping centre for the commercial uses. Yield Hall Place 2 cycle parking will egress directly on to the designated cycleway alongside the IDR

- Proposed car free residential development, with car club spaces and disabled parking provided

Redevelopment of a brownfield site.

- Densification of development making more effective use of previously developed land in accordance with national and local policy objectives. As set out in the accompanying Design & Access Statement, the proposed design of the development, including the scale and massing, has been carefully development in response to the site's context. It is considered to represent an appropriate response, and will provide a positive statement within Reading town centre and wider townscape

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Summary

10.13 In view of the above summary, it is clear that the proposals constitute sustainable development, delivering on a number of social, economic and environmental facets, and accord with national policy in this regard.

10.14 As set out in this chapter, the development will deliver wide ranging public benefits which should weigh in favour of the application proposals, as important material considerations. These include:

- Positive intervention in Reading town centre, maintaining its role as centre of regional significance, future proofing the Oracle and increasing its resilience, ensuring long term reoccupation of prominent unit and bringing increased diversity of uses to the town centre.

- Genuine public realm enhancements beyond the immediate vicinity of the site, creating safer and more permeable routes through the town centre and along the riverfront

- Range of economic benefits, including job creation, social value impact, increased spending in the town centre and tax revenue

- Significant contribution to the creation of a genuine 20 neighbourhood, on accessible, brownfield sites.

- High quality design which positively contributes to sustainability targets through incorporating innovate water source heat pump for energy generation and achieving BREEAM Excellent in commercial spaces

- Substantial biodiversity net gain through the introduction of 34 additional trees, new planting areas and pocket parks, and further current unquantified gains to be achieved through species selection and incorporation of animal habitat boxes.

- Delivery of on-site affordable housing at discounted market rent, as a fully integrated part of the high quality rental offer

11. Affordable Housing Statement

11.1 Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) and Policy H4 (Build to Rent Schemes) in the Adopted Local Plan highlights that on residential developments of 10 or more dwellings, 30% of the total dwellings will be in the form of affordable housing subject to viability considerations. For sites of 10 or more dwellings, provision should be made on site in the first instance with a financial contribution being negotiated to make up the full requirement as appropriate.

11.2 Local Plan paragraph 1.2.2 identifies affordability of housing as an "increasingly critical issue" that has subsequent impacts in forming a barrier to economic growth, with access to housing making recruitment difficult in many sectors.

11.3 Local Plan para 4.4.32 accepts that BtR developments are dependent on long term rental income rather than early sales, their funding is inevitably long term, and operates to different viability models compares to for sale schemes. Government policy sees a need for flexibility, particularly in relation to affordable housing and a viability appraisal should be provided where such justification is being made.

11.4 RBC Supplementary Guidance on Affordable Housing was published in 2021. The guidance recognises that BtR has recognition in the NPPF for displaying characteristics which necessitate a distinct approach to affordable housing.

11.5 For BtR proposals, this SPD sets out that, as per Local Plan Policy H4, schemes of ten homes or more, 30% of the dwellings will be affordable housing, provided on site, subject to viability considerations. National and local policy requires that this on-site provision will be in the form of 'affordable private rent'. Affordable private rent is a housing tenure introduced in the NPPF specifically to form the affordable housing element of build to rent developments. As for other forms of affordable housing, it must be at least 20% below local market rents, but the key difference from affordable rent is that it can be provided by the owner of the build to rent development rather than by a Registered Provider.

11.6 The supplementary guidance identifies that in Reading, rather than adhering to the national policy position that DMR should be at least 20% below market rents, the rents must be set in relation to Local Housing Allowance (LHA).

11.7 The applicant is committed to delivering an element of affordable housing in the development, in the form of discounted market rent (also referred to as affordable market rent). In accordance with the PPG, these units will be provided with both developments and will form an integral part of the scheme, and provided and managed by the build to rent provider, rather than a separate Registered Provider. Residents within the affordable units will have full access to all amenity space and facilities provided with the development.

11.8 Due to viability constraints, and the significant costs involved in delivering development on town centre sites such as these, the applicant is unable to deliver policy compliant levels of affordable housing on this development. Rather than setting levels linked to Local Housing Allowance, the applicant has adopted the approach set

out in the NPPF and PPG which sets 20% below market rent as a suitable benchmark. The Applicant has submitted an accompanying viability evidence, in accordance with policy, that demonstrates that the development cannot deliver any further contributions towards affordable housing, accounting for the constrained nature of the site and complex delivery, alongside the requisite community infrastructure levy contributions.

11.9 The applicant is committed to entering into a Section 106 agreement to confirm the terms of the affordable housing delivery, including the eligibility criteria to be applied to the identified affordable units and management of the affordable private rent units, in accordance with the PPG.

11.10 Whilst the scheme is unable to deliver policy levels of affordable housing, it will deliver an element of affordable housing which will contribute towards addressing a "critical need" within Reading Borough, and accords with the exception criteria listed within Policy H3. This is a clear public benefit and should be afforded appropriate weight in the determination of the application.

12. Planning Balance and Summary

12.1 The legislative basis for decision making is Section 70(2) of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 which requires a local planning authority in determining a planning application to have regard to the development plan insofar as it is relevant and other considerations that are material, and Section 38(6) of the Act (as above).

Para 202 Heritage Balance

12.2 In respect of designated heritage assets, the Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA) identifies that the proposed developments would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and the following listed building(s):

Nos.2-4 London Street Listed Building (Grade II)
London Street / Market Place Conservation Area
Nos.33, 35, 37-39, 41, 49-53, 44-46, 48-52, 54-58, 62-66, 68, 70, 72, 74-76, 80, 86 & 88 London Street Listed Building group (all Grade II)
Nos.48-49, 50-51 & 52 Market Place (including No.10 High Street) Listed Building group (all Grade II)
Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts Listed Building (Grade I)

12.3 The level of harm is identified as being at the lower end of the less that substantial scale.

12.4 Paragraph 202 of the NPPF requires that any less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset(s) should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In relation to non-designated heritage assets, paragraph 203 requires a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset in question.

12.5 The public benefits of the proposals have been clearly evidenced in Section 10 of this statement. In addition, the HTVIA identifies a number of heritage benefits that should be taken into account which are summarised in Section 8. It should also be noted that the HTVIA identifies the proposal would have sustain the significance of a number of heritage assets in the vicinity including the Coroner's Court (Grade II), High Bridge (Grade II), Church of St Laurence (Grade 1), Nos 24-52 Queens Crescent (Grade II), Church of St Giles (Grade II) and St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area, and

some elements of the development will have a beneficial impact on the London Street / Market Place Conservation Area and Nos 2-4 London Street.

12.6 It is acknowledged that great weight should be afforded to any harm arising to the significance of designated heritage assets within the planning balance; and that (as section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 applies) considerable importance and weight should be given to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings (and therefore to any harm caused to their significance). However, the extensive public benefits of the development are considered to outweigh the low level of harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets identified, which has in itself been identified as falling at the lower end of the less than substantial scale.

12.7 These public benefits are clearly articulated in Section 10 of this statement, along with the heritage benefits identified in the HTVIA and summarised in section 8 of this statement.

12.8 In performing the Paragraph 202 balancing exercise, it is considered that the considerable public benefits deriving from the development proposals outweigh the low level of harm to the identified heritage assets. The NPPF paragraph 202 test (replicated in Policy EN1) is therefore considered to be met.

Planning Balance

12.9 With the NPPF Paragraph 202 test having been met, it is necessary to consider the wider planning balance and consider the proposal against the policies within the development plan when taken as a whole and other material considerations.

12.10 In assessing the proposals against development plan policy, it is considered that the proposed developments are in accordance with the development plan when taken as a whole. The principles of the proposals accord wholly with the aims and objectives of the Plan. They seek to focus major development within the heart of the town centre which is identified as a priority for development and is a highly sustainable location.

12.11 The policy is considered to comply with the following policies of relevance within the development plan:

- Policies RL1, RL2 & CR1 – the proposals will positively impact upon the vitality and viability of Reading town centre by regenerating the eastern end of The Oracle, enhancing the diversity of uses with the centre, and by providing a clear and positive statement of investment within the town centre. The delivery of residential uses and broadening the range of facilities is in full accordance with Policy R1, with The Oracle with the Central Core remaining the focus for retail and leisure uses as per Policies RL2 and CR4.

- Policy CR7 – The proposed development will provide active town centre frontages along the designed primary frontages, bringing back into active use the Debenhams frontage along the riverside and within the shopping centre, and creating additional activity on the south bank of the river and along Yield Hall Place. It will also result in the Oracle 'turning the corner' to London Street, along

the south bank of the river thereby becoming more 'outward looking' and enhancing its relationship with such.

- Policy RL6 – the development will re-provide the existing Vue cinema, in a modernised and upgraded form, whilst also introducing a new leisure use into the town centre.

- Policies H1 & H4 – the development will deliver 449 high quality new residential units at the heart of the town centre, designed specifically for the BtR market to meet an identified market requirement for this typology. The applicant is committed to conforming with the criteria set out in Policy H4 in respect of tenancy lengths and high-quality professional management.

- Policies CC6, TR4 & TR5 – The site is highly accessible, being located in the heart of the town centre, and being the preferred location for the densest and largest developments. The developments will benefit from immediate access to designated cycle routes with cycle parking in excess of policy requirements being provided.

- Policies CC7, CR2 & CR3 – The scheme is of high-quality design which responds positively to its locality. Extensive public realm improvements are proposed which will enhance permeability through the town centre and The Oracle.

- Policies CC8 and CR6 – Proposed residential units will provide high quality living accommodation for residents and will not cause detrimentally impact on the living environment of existing residents in the town centre.

- Policy EN1 – whilst the proposals are assessed as likely to cause a degree of harm to some identified heritage assets, in accordance with policy, a clear and convincing justification for this less than substantial harm has been provided through the identification of the considerable public benefits to be delivered by the scheme.

- Policy EN5 & EN6 – the defining characteristics of the relevant significant views would not be undermined by the proposed developments and the scheme design responds to the historic and distinctive character of the site(s) and its locale. Through the demolition of the existing buildings, the proposed development presents the opportunity to enhance the contribution of the site(s) to townscape and visual amenity. It is considered the reimagined sites will better relate to the surrounding context and enhances their contribution to the setting of nearby heritage assets and their contribution to the London Street/Market Place Conservation Area. The scheme will deliver considerable enhancements such as a richer mix of uses, quality new architecture replacing existing buildings of no merit, and also public realm improvements.

- Policies CC2, CC3, CC4 & H5 – the scheme incorporates sustainable design and construction principles and appropriate measures to adapt to climate change. Water source heat pumps will be utilised within the development thereby utilising the River Kennet as a latent heat source.

- Policies CC5 – appropriate waste and storage collection arrangements are incorporated into the design and the applicant is committed to minimising waste during the construction process

- Policy EN11 – the scheme will provide appropriate, attractive uses and buildings that enhance views of the River Kennett watercourse, creating a high quality public ream and making a positive contribution to the character and amenity of the watercourse.

- Policies EN12 & EN14 – the proposed developments will deliver substantial biodiversity net gain, well in excess of policy requirements and make provision for significant tree planting, with a net gain of 34 trees across the site along with pocket parks and other public realm areas

12.12 It is acknowledged that the proposed development doesn't not comply with all policies contained within the development plan. However, as set out below, any conflict is limited:

- Policy CR10 – the scheme does not accord with the aspect of this policy in respect of the location of tall buildings. However it does accord with the 'design principles' expected for a tall building set out in the Policy. In particular it has been demonstrated that the site(s) represent a suitable location for a tall building, in townscape terms, and would not prejudice the Council's tall building clusters identified within the policy. It is, therefore, considered that the proposals fail to comply with Policy CR10 in part only.

- Policies H3 & H4 – in respect of affordable housing, it has been identified that the proposals do not fully comply with policy as the viability assessment demonstrates it is not viable to deliver 30% of the units as affordable on the site. However as is recognised in the policy wording, viability is a consideration, and it should be noted the applicant is committed to delivering affordable units on the site, in the form of DMR. The provision of an element of affordable housing should be afforded weight in the planning balance and, as such, it is considered the proposals fails to comply with Policies H3 & H4 in part only.

- Policy CR6 – in terms of housing mix, it is recognised that the proposals do not fully accord with the Council's preferred housing mix for the central area with the scheme proposing a higher proportion of one-bedroom units than suggested. However, the policy wording clearly identifies that the suggested housing mix is a guide and recognises scheme viability impacts upon housing mix. The proposed unit mix, which comprises one, two and three bed units, responds to the unique site location and the specific market requirements which this scheme is seeking to address. It is, therefore, considered the proposed housing mix does not constitute a strict conflict with Policy CR6.

12.13 In view of the above it is considered that any breach of development plan policy is extremely limited, and the identified breaches would not prejudice the delivery of the wider strategic aims and objectives of the development plan.

12.14 Conversely, it is considered that the more strategic policies of the plan in relation to bringing forward sustainable development, delivering housing, supporting the vitality and viability of the town centre and focusing major development in central Reading are of higher order importance and, hence, should be afforded significantly more weight in the planning balance.

12.15 It is for the decision maker to assess the proposal against any potential conflict with the Development Plan. However, we very clearly conclude that the proposed development(s) are in conformity with the development plan when taken as a whole.

12.16 Notwithstanding our proposition that the proposed development(s) conform with the development plan when taken as a whole, there are a number of other material considerations which should be taken into account in the determination of the application. The most significant of these being the contribution this scheme makes to sustainable development and the numerous public benefits, including the , social, economic, and environmental benefits the scheme(s) will deliver as outlined in Section 10 of this statement.

12.17 We therefore conclude that the planning balance weighs heavily in favour of planning permission(s) being granted for the proposed development(s).

Summary

12.18 In summary, the current application proposals aspire to reimagine the eastern end of The Oracle shopping centre to reinvigorate the town centre offer, introduce a curated residential quarter and create a high-quality gateway to the southern end of Reading town centre. The development proposals respond to market conditions and seek to future proof The Oracle as an anchor asset within Reading Town Centre.

12.19 This confident intervention within the core of the town centre, will positively contribute to the vitality and viability of Reading Town Centre, and help maintain its role as regional town centre and economic powerhouse for the Thames Valley area.

12.20 These proposals are necessary in order to address the clear and urgent challenge presented by the demand and supply imbalance at The Oracle. The redevelopment of these sites could accelerate the required transformation of the centre to reduce the retail footprint, provide a new relevant leisure offer and at the same time introduce sustainable, alternative uses including flexible workspace and residential accommodation

12.21 The proposed developments are considered to conform with the development plan when taken as a whole. Any breach with policy is very limited, and will not prejudice the overall strategic objectives of the plan.

12.22 The application proposals will bring a considerable number of social, economic and environmental public benefits, both quantitative and qualitative, which should be given significant weight in the determination of the planning applications.

12.23 The proposed developments are considered to represent an appropriate and positive response to the site and will deliver a landmark scheme which maximise the potential

of this riverside location in the heart of the town centre. It will provide a series of enhancements on the current situation and deliver a new and unique residential offer to Reading.

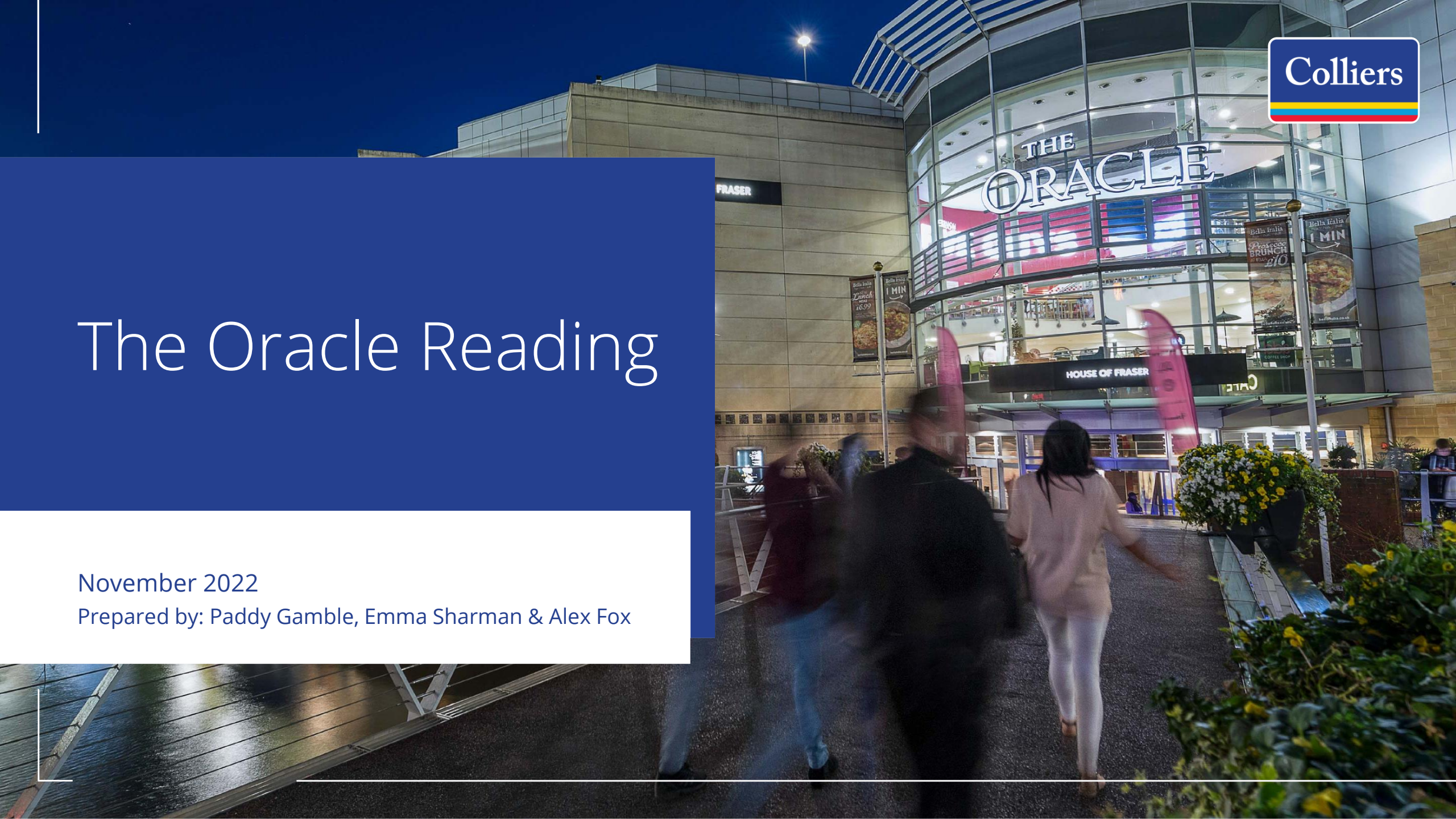
12.24 It is respectfully requested that planning permission and conservation area consent is granted for the Yield Hall Place 1 and Yield Hall Place 2 developments.

Appendix 1: The Oracle Reading – Colliers Report

The Oracle Reading

November 2022

Prepared by: Paddy Gamble, Emma Sharman & Alex Fox



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Business

Section 1

Introduction

The Oracle Reading
Introduction

Hammerson Group Management, owner of The Oracle shopping centre in Reading are seeking to repurpose the Debenhams store within the asset.

Hammerson are seeking a data led report that highlights the role of The Oracle in Reading and wider catchment, to support the planning application submission and assist in demonstrating the requirement for this intervention within the centre.

A range of retail supply and consumer demand/behavioural data has been explored and analysed to deliver this report. Insights include...

- Retail Supply
- Catchment analysis
- Consumer behaviour
- Department store repurposing

Section 2

Executive Summary

Executive summary

Dominance of Reading is under threat; The Oracle is a key component to wider town centre performance

- **Reading currently ranked 14th largest retail venue in the UK** [1]
  - **The Oracle is the largest retail zone within the town centre**[1], contributing nearly a third of Reading's city centre retail and leisure offer and a **key driver of visits,** drawing visitors from further afield than a typical town centre visitor
- Footfall at **The Oracle has been returning close to 2019 levels in recent months** [2]
  - **Recovery is ahead of Reading town centre as a whole** and so **demonstrates the importance of the asset for the town** in terms of driving post-pandemic recovery and attracting footfall
  - Asset is particularly important at driving weekend footfall within Reading
- Whilst **Reading is the dominant venue across its catchment** it has **been in decline since 2019** [3]
  - Faces strong competition from the likes of Wokingham, Bracknell, Maidenhead, Newbury, Windsor, Slough, High Wycombe and Oxford
  - When compared to these key competing venues, **Reading has experienced the biggest decline in LocateVenues score since 2019**[1] and with 21% of gross retail space currently vacant is **at risk of losing its dominance**
    - For example, highlighted by the **weakening Reading market shares seen around some of these key competing venues when compared to 2019**[3] levels of performance

Source: (1) Colliers LocateVenues (2) Colliers LocateFootfall (3) Colliers LocateCatchments

Executive summary

Repurposing retail space ensures locations remain vibrant and prevent decline

- **Like many towns and city centres across the UK, increased vacancies are in part being driven by changing consumer behaviours and the evolution of the role and purpose of retail space**
  - For example, department stores have faced major challenges and pressures to their business model as more sales have gone online, brands increasingly selling direct to consumers and consumers increasingly favouring specialist retailers
- **Shopping centres typically have the highest vacancy rate of any location type**, approx. 18.9% in the first half of 2022; and they also have highest levels of long term vacancy[(4)]
- **Weaker demand for retail space has led to a an increased amount of repurposing**
  - **63.3% Debenhams stores remain vacant 2+ years post closure**, and nearly 70% of Arcadia stores remain vacant [(4)]
- **Repurposing retail space ensures locations remain vibrant**, can drive increased customer engagement and footfall, **prevents decline of a location** and taps into demand from other sectors (leisure, offices, residential)
  - Where repurposing has been carried out, Colliers analysis highlights how a **change from department store to alternative use brought in in significantly more footfall and had a positive impact of shopper and catchment engagement**
  - For example: Gravity, Wandsworth

Source: (4) The Local Data Company

Section 3

Retail Supply

Summary: Retail Supply

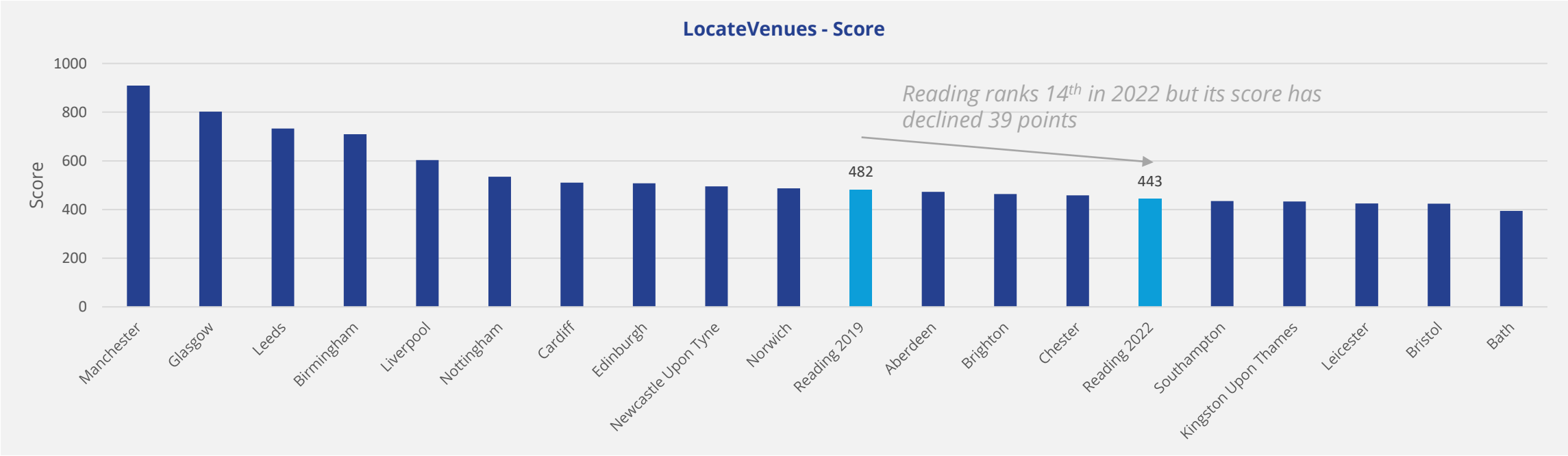
Reading the dominant venue in its catchment but had greater decline since 2019 than competing venues

- **Reading is the 14th largest retail venue in the UK currently, but its score has declined since 2019 (-39 points)**
  - Big losses in the city include Debenhams closing April 2020, and the decline of House of Fraser
  - **Reading has seen one of the biggest declines in LocateVenue score amongst it's catchment** competitors in this time period
  - 21% of Gross space is currently vacant which **will impact the town's attractiveness and vibrancy**
- **The Oracle shopping centre is the largest retail zone within Reading**, contributing nearly a third of Reading's score
- Reading faces competition in the catchment from other towns such as:
  - Wokingham, Bracknell, Maidenhead, Newbury, Windsor, Slough, High Wycombe and Oxford
- Retail offer in Reading is…
  - **More luxury focused than average UK venue**, however not as biased as other nearby locations like Oxford and Marlow
  - Retail offer is **more biased towards younger consumers**
  - **Fashion retail bias is lower than other competing venues** in the catchment

Source: : Colliers LocateVenues

Retail supply

Reading is 14th largest retail venue in UK



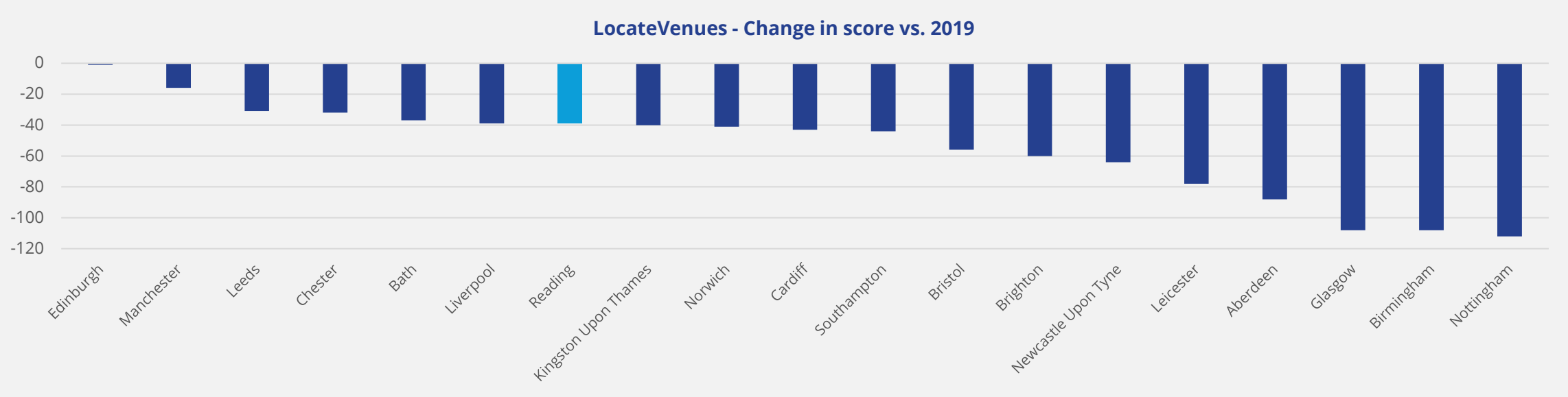
- Reading currently ranks 14th in the UK, with The Oracle contributing 29% towards this LocateVenue score
  - On par with Brighton, Chester and Southampton

Source: LocateVenues

Locate Venues

Retail supply

Majority of venues with large declines have investment planned

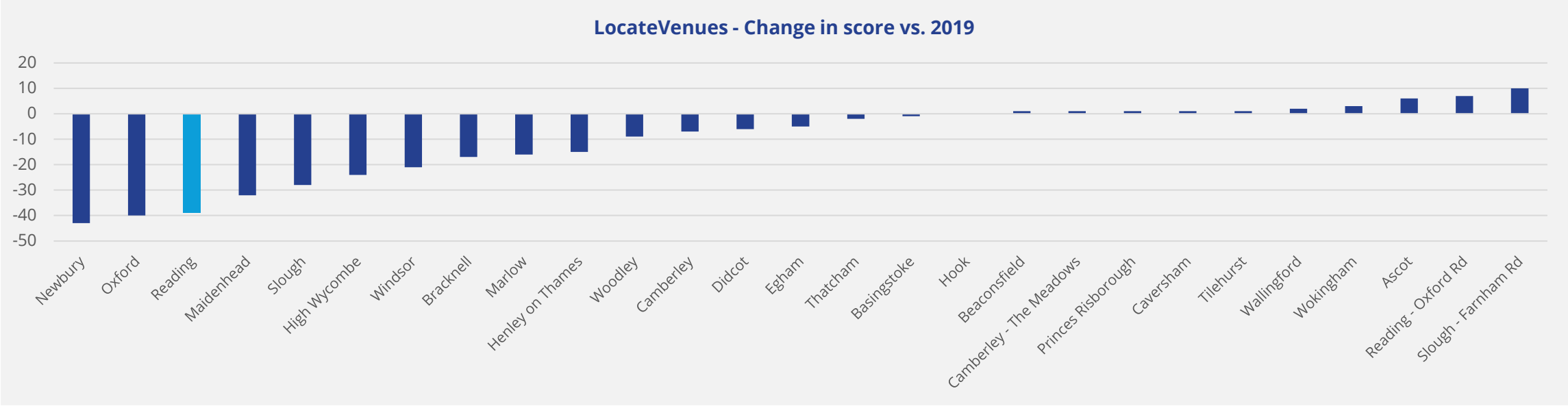


- Whilst Reading has had a lower change in score than some other major UK retail venues many of these have investment in the pipeline e.g. Glasgow
- In a rapidly changing retail environment venues cannot stand still, they need to continually evolve as circumstances change e.g. loss of multiple department stores

Source: LocateVenues

Retail supply

Reading has seen 3rd greatest decline since 2019



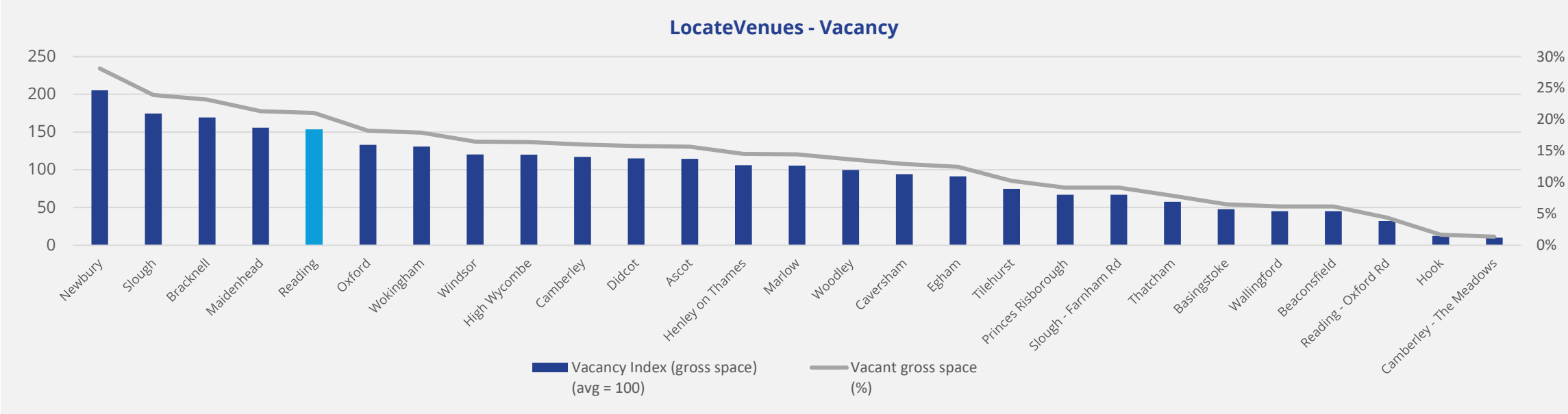
- Reading's LocateVenue score has decreased 39 points versus December 2019
  - One of the largest decreases versus other competing venues in the catchment
  - This greater level of decline could potentially make some competing venues more attractive and impact Reading market shares across its catchment

Source: LocateVenues

Locate Venues

Retail supply

Reading has a high vacancy rate vs. catchment competition

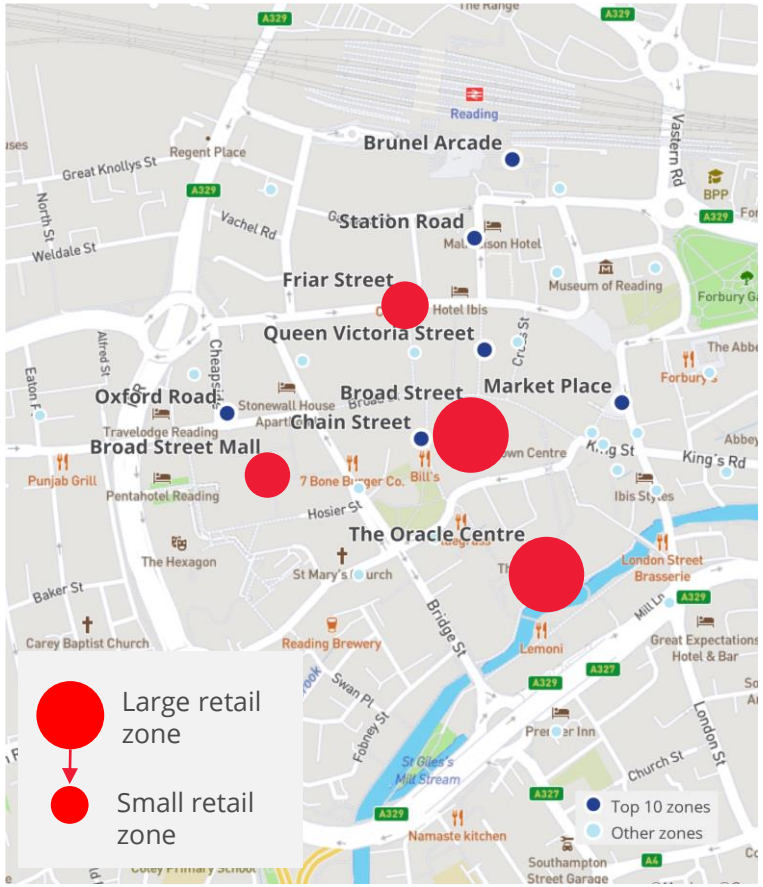


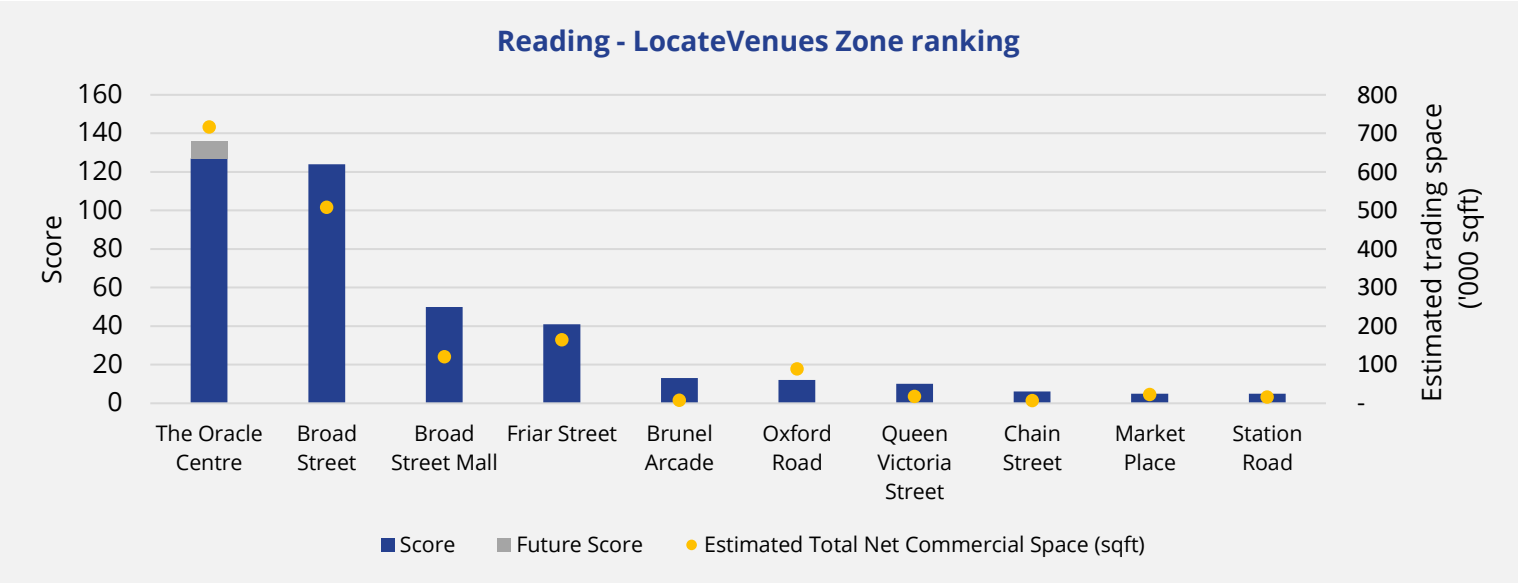
- Recent closures in Reading means it has a high vacancy rate (21% gross space) vs. competing locations, which will impact its overall attractiveness.

Source: LocateVenues

Retail supply

The Oracle Centre is largest retail zone in Reading



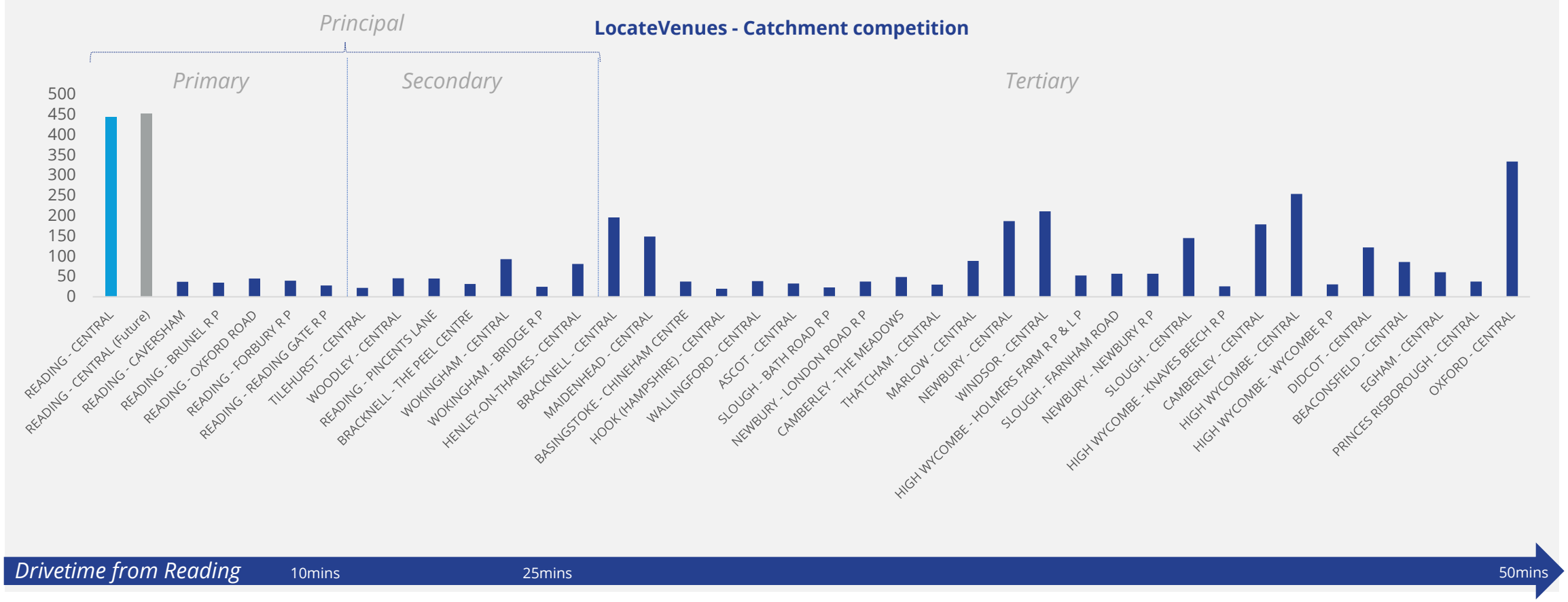


- The Oracle has the largest cluster of retail within Reading (based on both score and trading space) and is a key component of the core retail zone
- Future planned openings/repurposing of space within The Oracle will add an additional 9 points to the score helping to cement the mall as the prime pitch within Reading

Source: LocateVenues

Retail supply

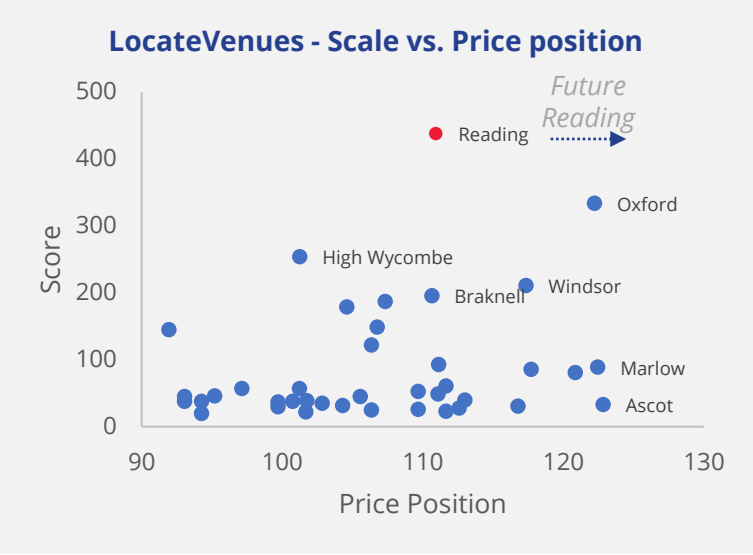
Reading is dominant in Principal catchment

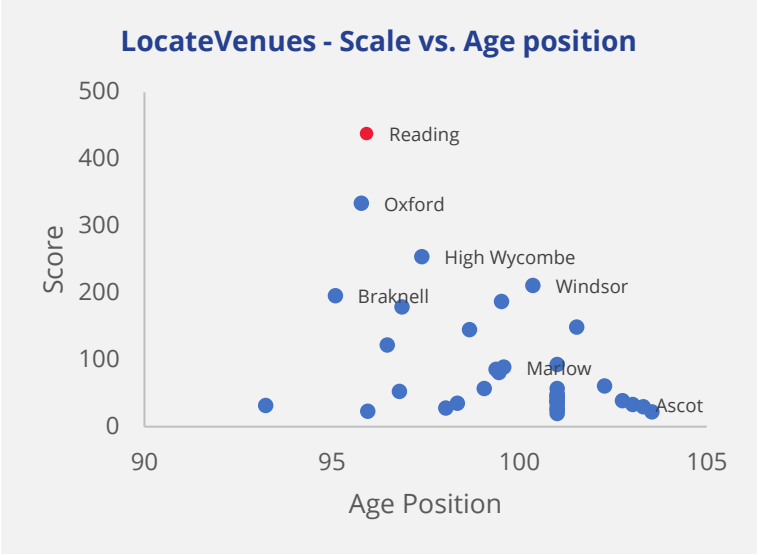


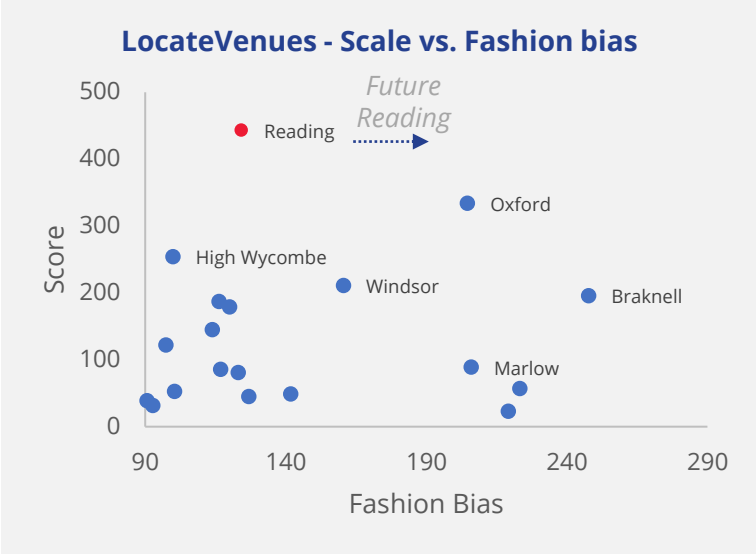
Source: LocateVenues

Retail supply

Less of a fashion bias than competing centres







- Reading has an above average price position i.e. more luxury focused, however less biased than places like Oxford, Marlow and Ascot
- Price position will increase with planned tenant changes

- Reading has a below average Age position i.e. focused towards younger consumers

- Reading's fashion bias is low versus other major competing venues such as Oxford and Bracknell
- Planned tenant changes likely to strengthen Reading's fashion bias

Source: LocateVenues

Locate Venues

Section 4

Shopping Patterns

Summary: Shopping Patterns

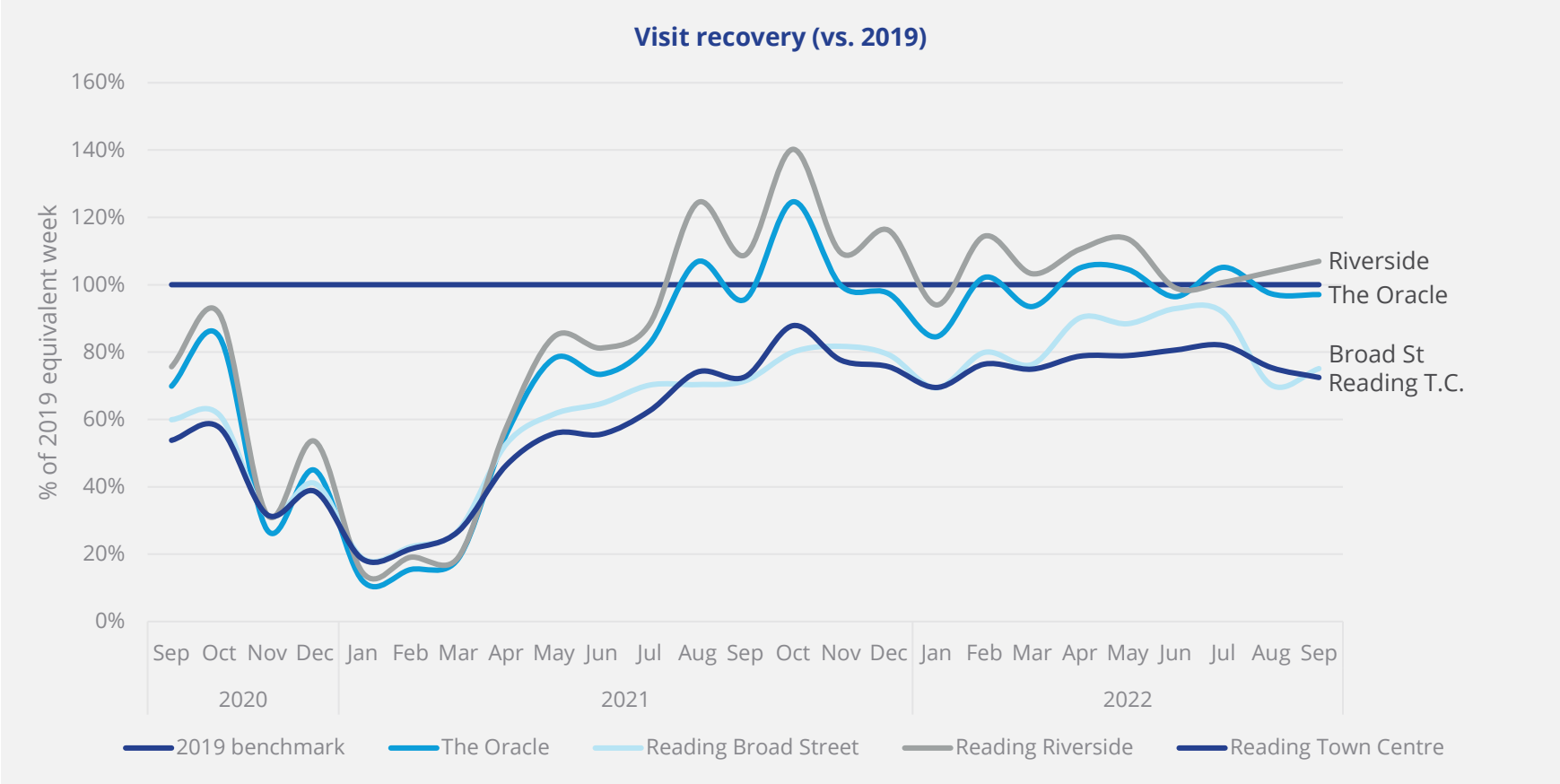
Footfall close to 2019 levels, The Oracle ahead of Reading town centre footfall recovery

- **Footfall at The Oracle has been returning close to 2019 levels in recent months**
  - Footfall **recovery at The Oracle is ahead of Reading town centre as a whole**
- Catchment market share analysis shows weaker market shares to the North East of the catchment in 2019, with a similar pattern evident in 2022
  - Strongest improvement in market shares over this time period has been in the central area of the catchment
- **Affluence of The Oracle profile has declined versus 2019**
- Shopping patterns in Reading and at The Oracle have been analysed using mobility data
  - **Shift towards more frequent visits** and **shorter dwell times** generally, however **The Oracle has not seen as significant a shift as Reading**
  - The **Oracle has a higher proportion of visitors at the weekend** versus town centre
  - 78% of visits to The Oracle are during the day (9am-6pm)

Source: : Colliers LocateVenues

Shopping patterns

Oracle footfall returning to 2019 levels

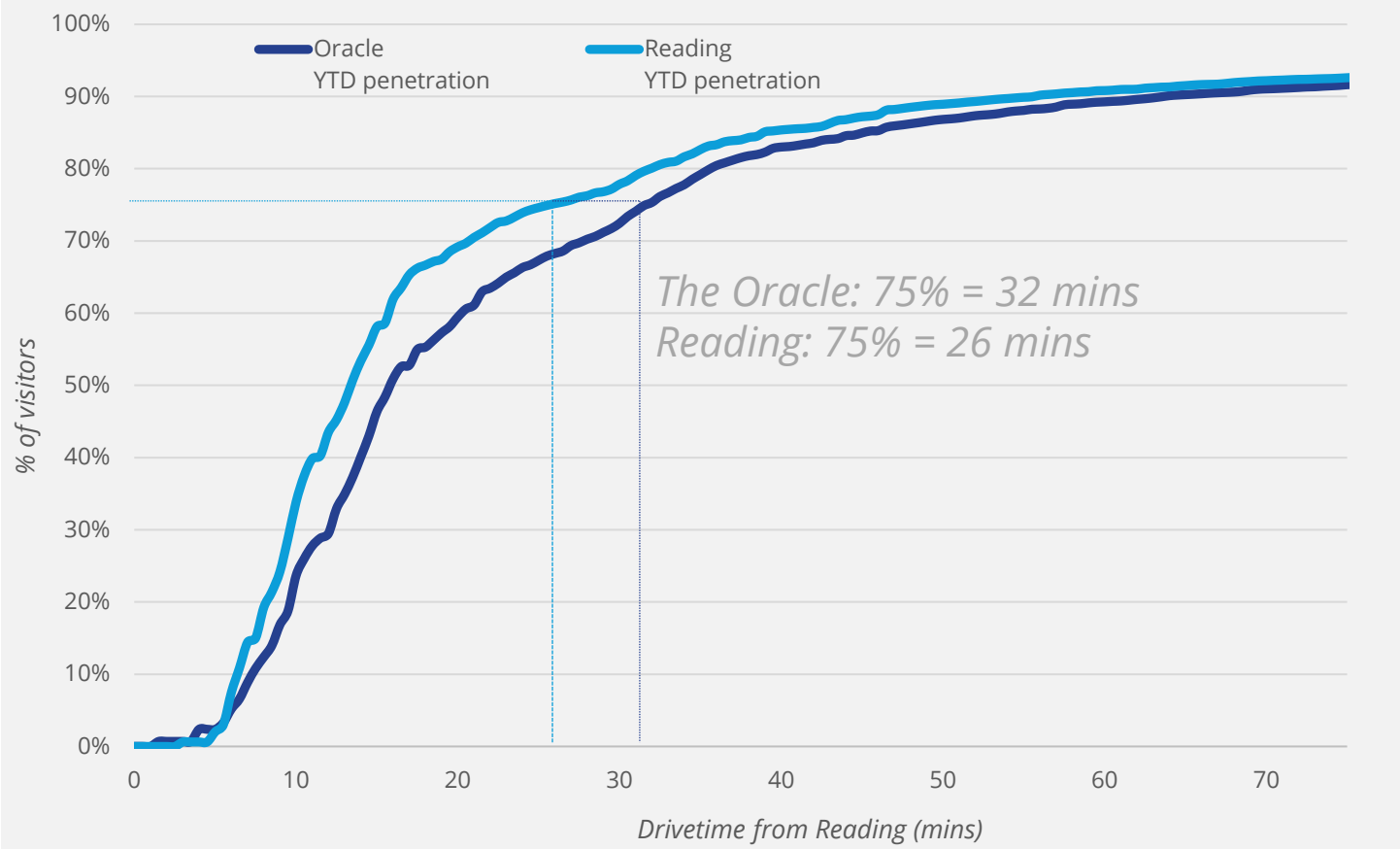


- The Oracle and Riverside footfall is recovering well versus pre-pandemic levels
  - Leisure offer at Riverside will be a key driver of this
- Footfall in Reading town centre however remains down 38% versus 2019 as of September
- Highlights how The Oracle more likely to draw catchment footfall that the wider town centre

Source: LocateFootfall

Shopping patterns

The Oracle has larger catchment than town

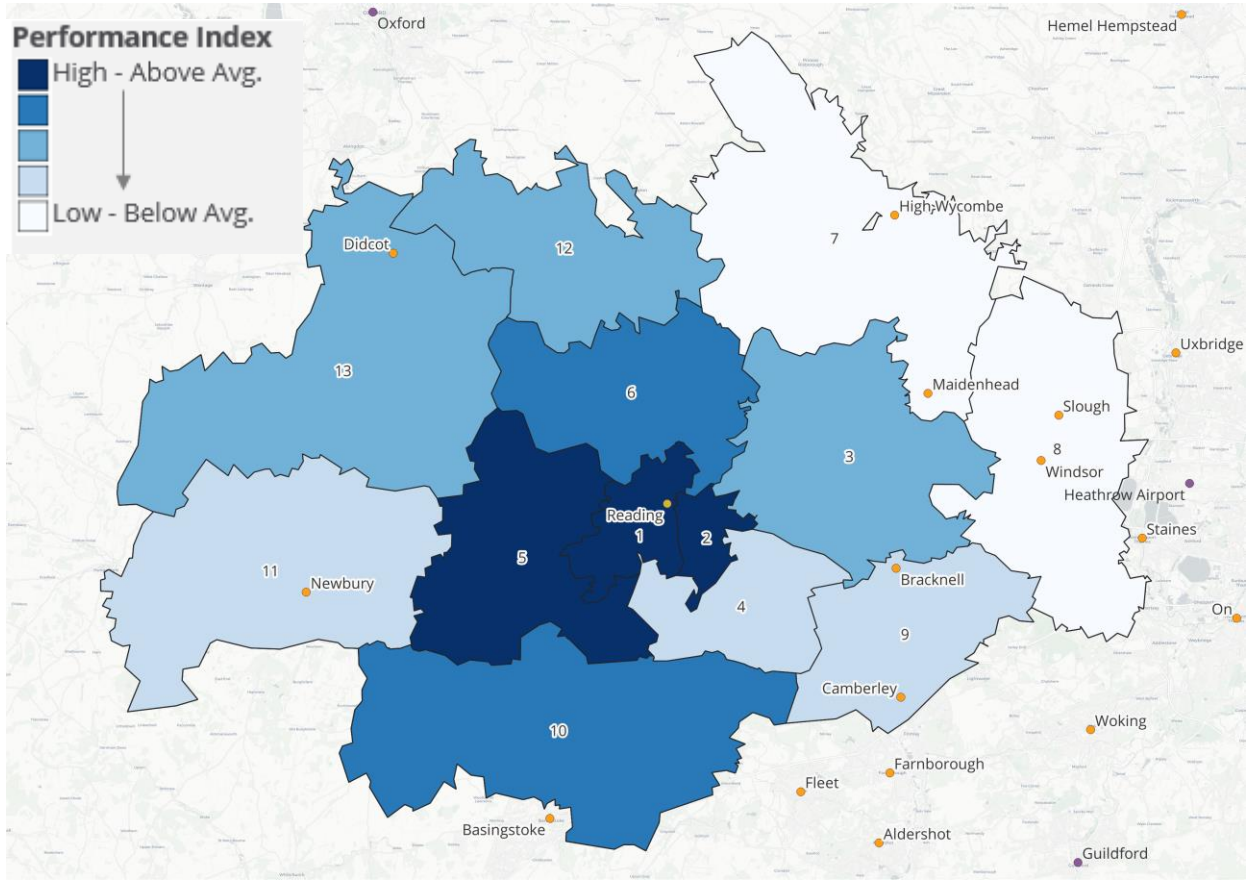


- The Oracle has a larger catchment than the town centre pulling from further afield

Source: Colliers LocateFootfall

Shopping patterns

2019: Weaker performance in North East



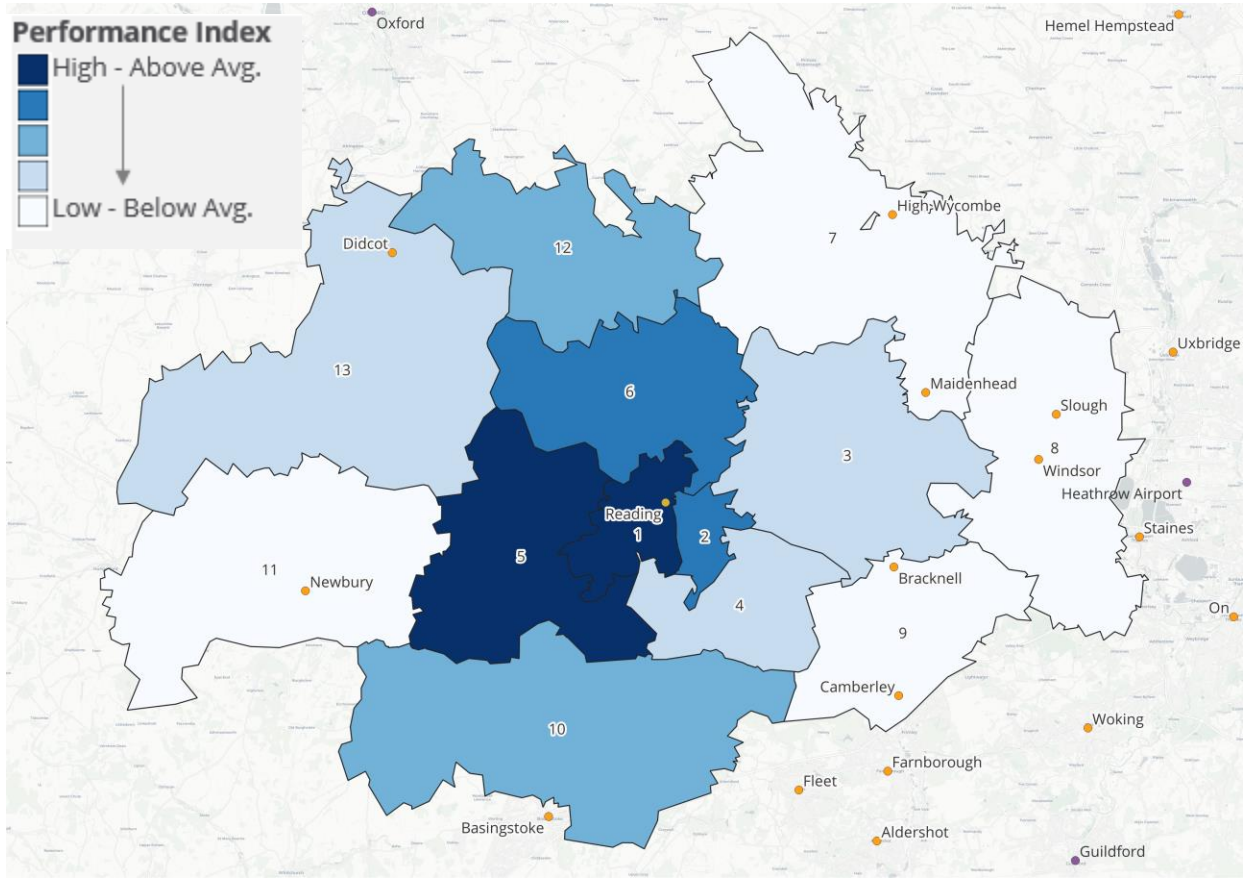
- The Oracle was typically overperforming across large parts of its catchment in 2019
- Below expected levels of market share in the north east of the catchment, towards Windsor and High Wycombe

Source: LocateFootfall

Locate Footfall

Shopping patterns

2022: Continued lower performance to the East



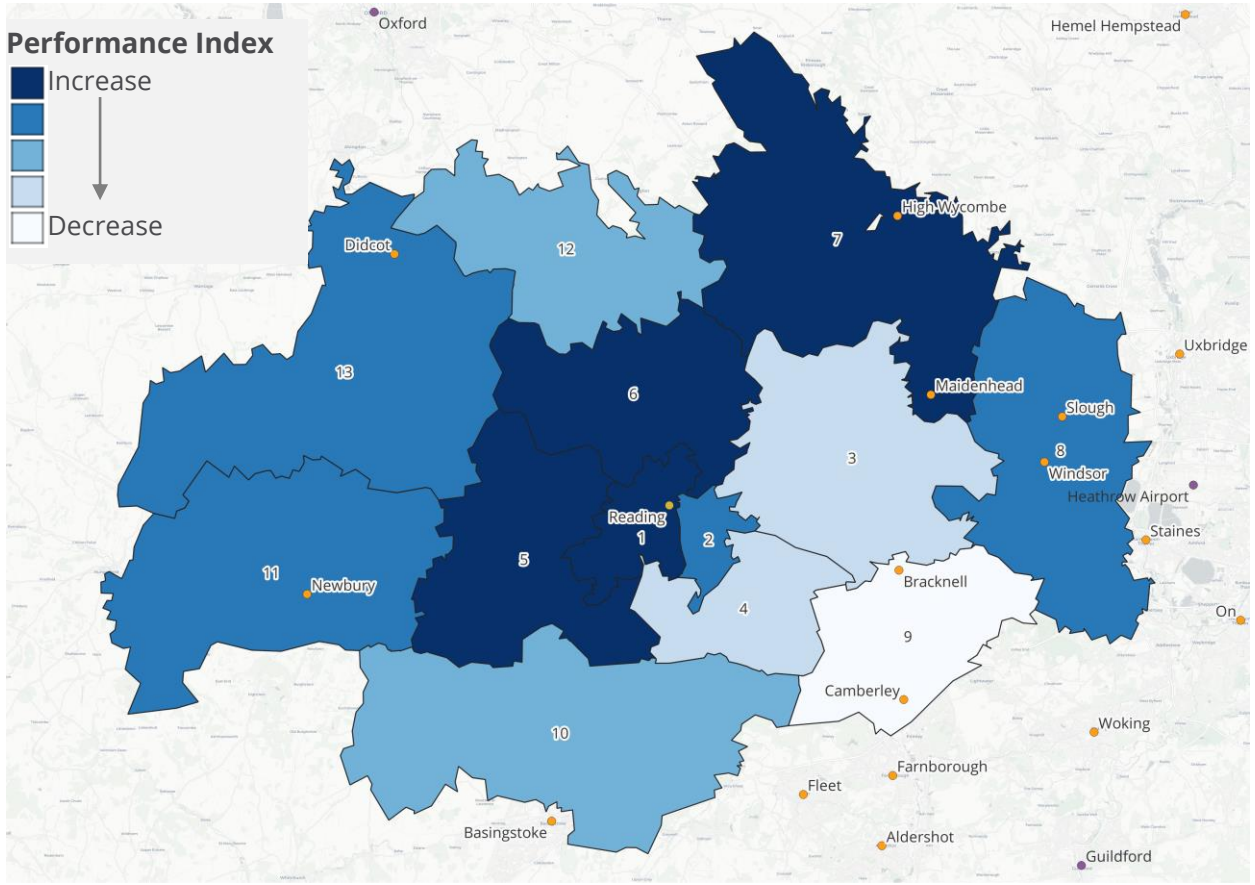
- The geography of The Oracle's market share in 2022 is similar to in 2019, with a higher than expected shares to the west of the centre, but a lower share to the east
- Overall, market share performance declined across the catchment

Source: LocateFootfall

Locate Footfall

Shopping patterns

Change vs 2019: Market share improvement in central catchment



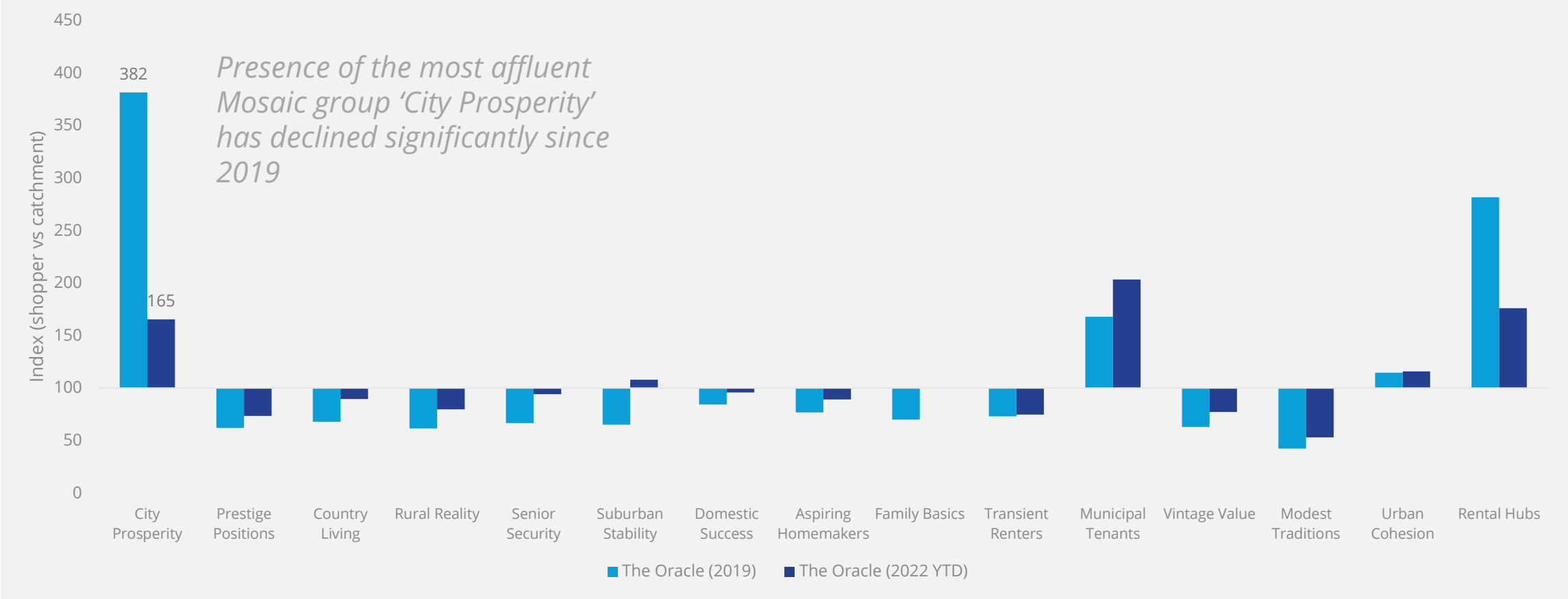
- Strongest improvement to market shares in central Reading catchment (zones 1, 5, 6 and 7)
- The Oracle has seen a decrease in market share in zones 3, 4, and 9 to the south east, coinciding with the improvements to Bracknell Town Centre.

Source: LocateFootfall

Locate Footfall

Shopping patterns

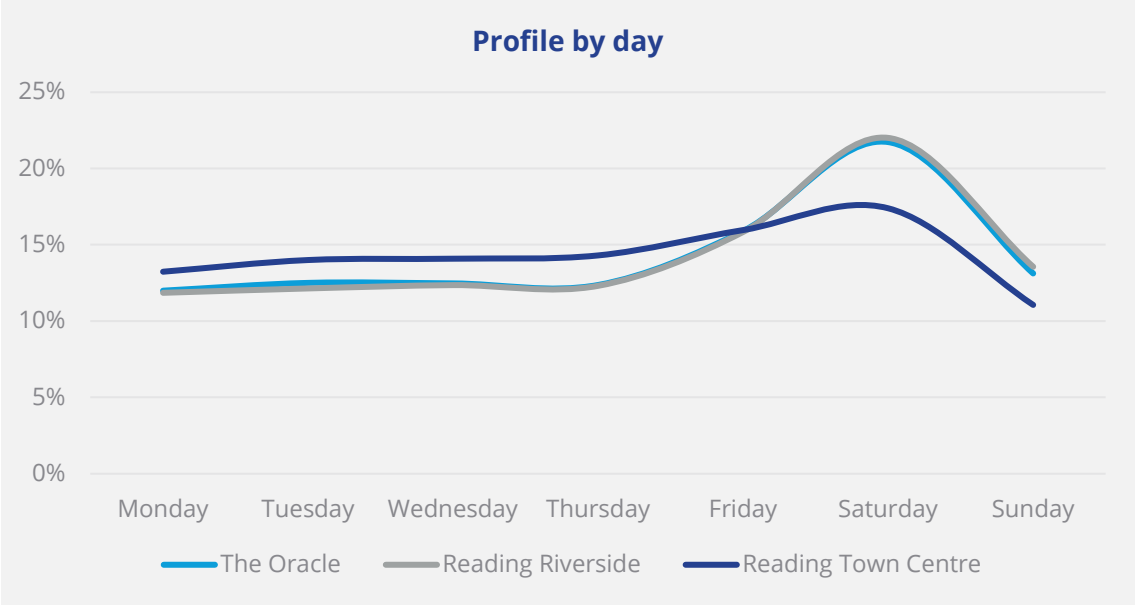
Affluence of The Oracle profile has declined vs. 2019

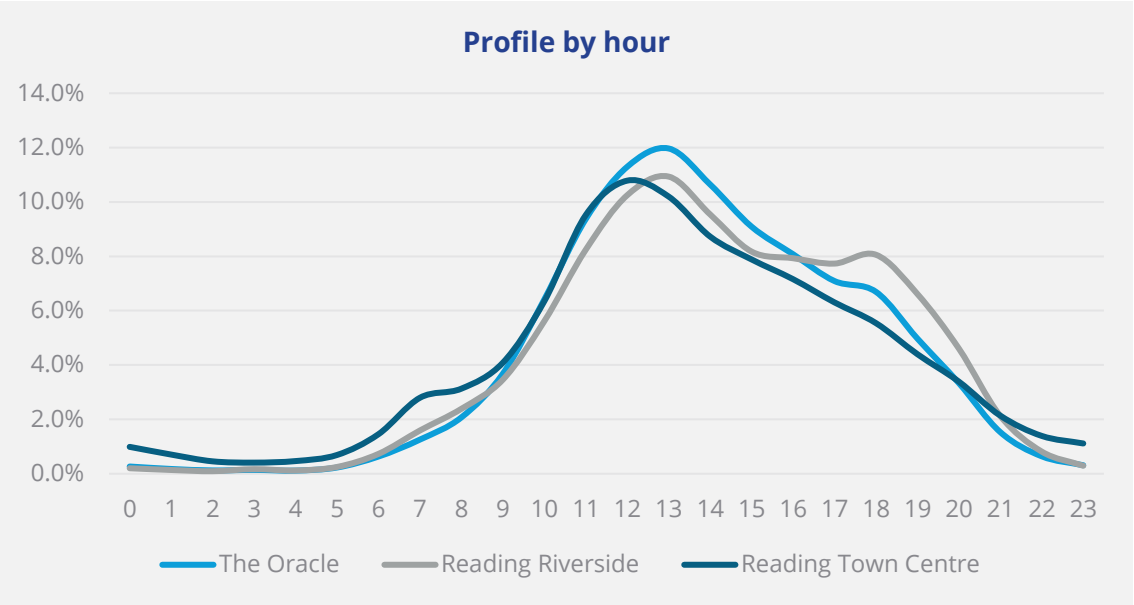


Source: LocateFootfall, Mosaic - Experian

Shopping patterns

35% of visits to The Oracle are at the weekend



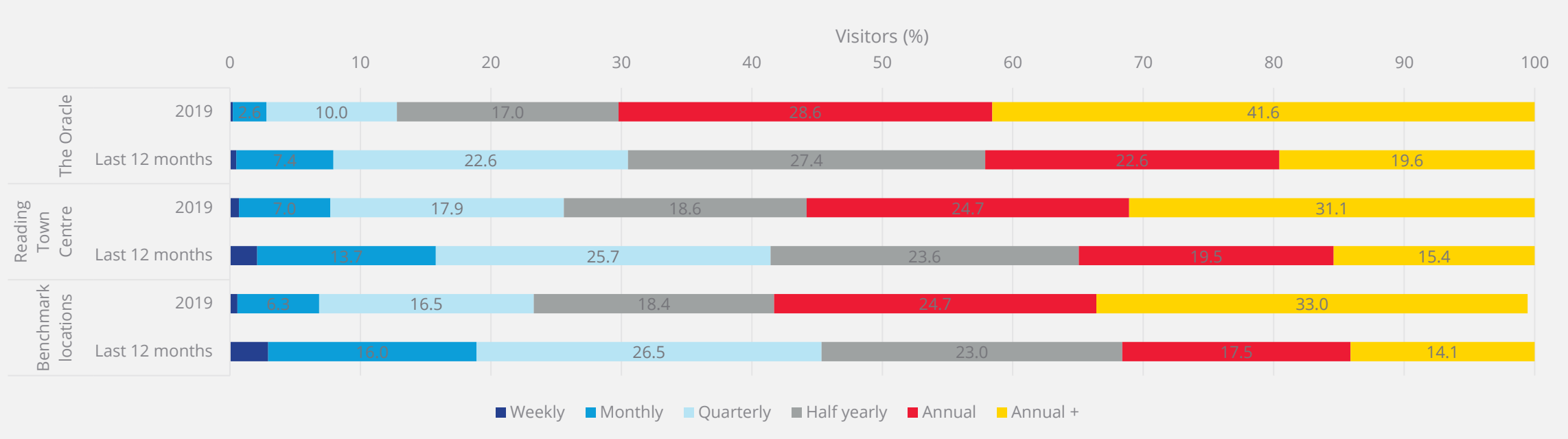


- The Oracle pulls in a higher proportion of visitors at the weekend vs. town centre
- 78% of visits to The Oracle are during the day (9am-6pm) and 17% in the evening

Source: LocateFootfall (2022 YTD)

Shopping patterns

Shift towards higher visitor frequency post Covid



- Across The Oracle, Reading TC and benchmark locations there has been a general trend towards increased frequency of visits in last 12 months vs. 2019
- However, The Oracle has a lower proportion of visitors visiting Monthly or more frequently (7.9% vs. benchmark average of 18.9%).

Source: LocateFootfall

Section 5

Focus on department store repurposing

Department store repurposing

Department stores facing challenges

- Department stores facing major challenges and pressures to their business models
  - Debenhams ceased trading in April 2020
  - House of Fraser have closed multiple stores including Oxford St flagship
  - John Lewis have closed 16 stores during the pandemic
  - Marks and Spencer announced a further 67 stores to close
- Challenges include:
  - Channel shift as sales shift to online
  - Specialists vs. generalists – consumers favouring specialist retailers
  - Brand owned direct to consumer – retailers selling direct to consumer to capture increased margins
  - Polarisation – shift from mid-market spend to more luxury / more value markets

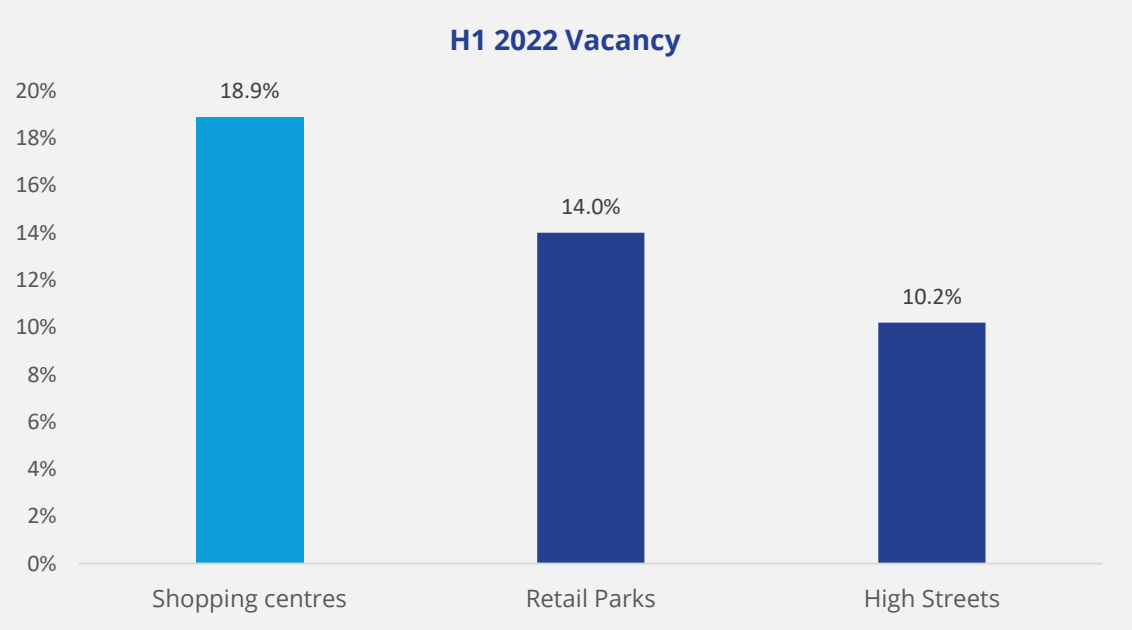
Almost 90% of Debenhams stores still lie empty a year after collapse

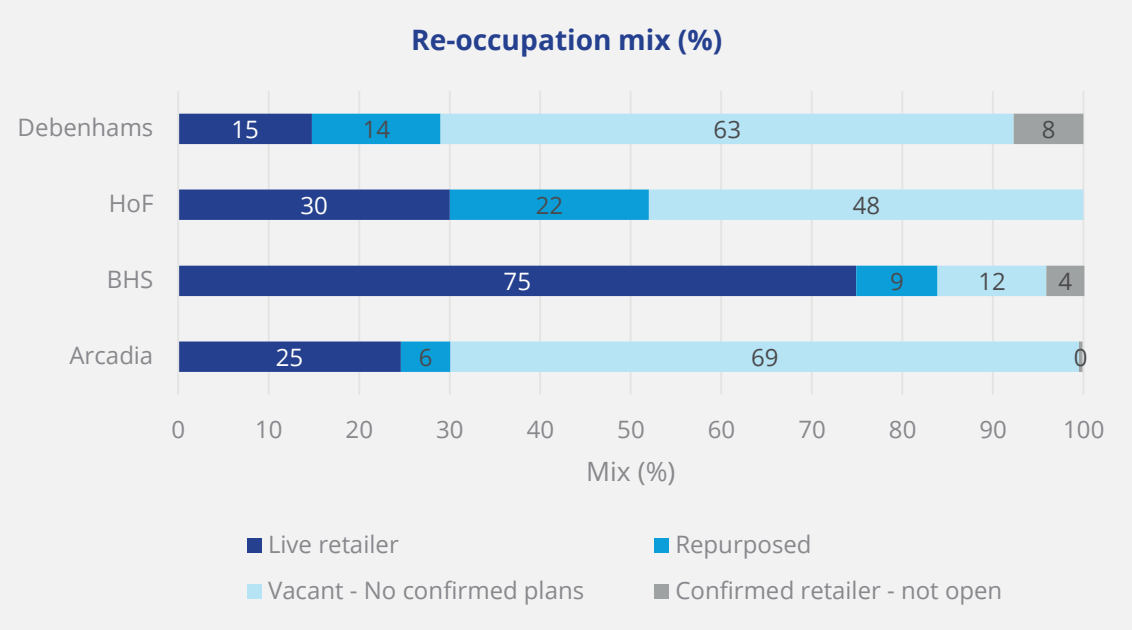
M&S to close one in four bigger stores selling clothing and homeware

John Lewis to close eight more stores, putting 1,500 jobs at risk

Department store repurposing

Closed stores remaining empty for years..



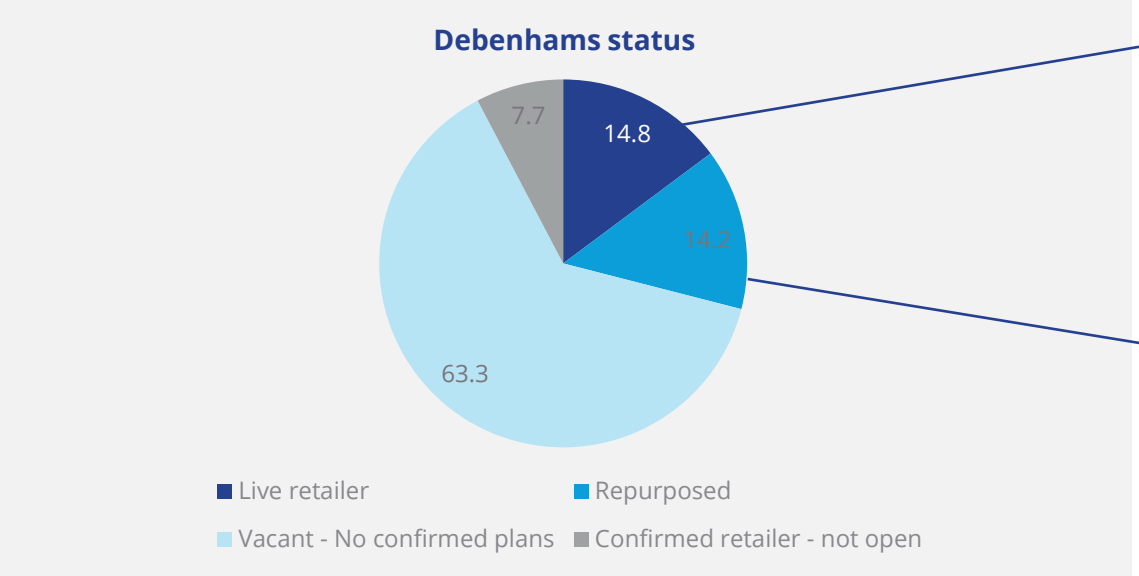


- Shopping centres continue to have the largest vacancy rate of any location type, landing at 18.9% in H1 2022; and they also have highest levels of long term vacancy (Local Data Company - 2022)
- 63% Debenhams stores remain vacant 2+ years post closure, and nearly 70% of Arcadia stores

Source: Local Data Company (March 2022)

Department store repurposing

Only 14.8% Debenhams have been re-let to a retailer so far



Live retailer examples

next HOME
The Range Home · Leisure · Garden
SPORTS DIRECT
M&S
home bargains
FRASERS

Repurposing examples

GRAVITY
offices
flats

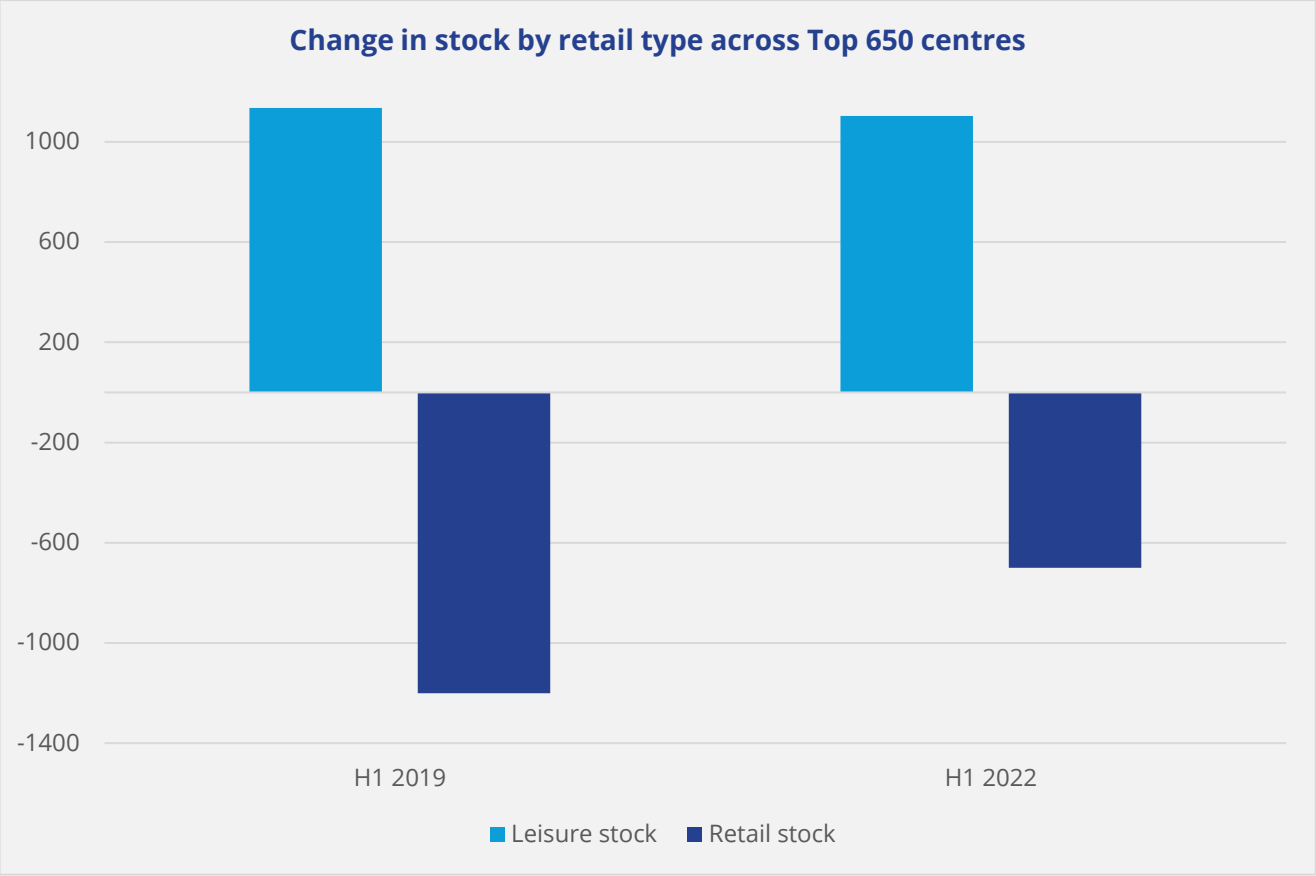
- 14.8% former Debenhams stores have re-opened with new retailers e.g. Next Home, Sports Direct
  - Majority of these retailers already present in Reading
- A further 14.2% stores have been repurposed e.g. Wandsworth store now a leisure site, Plymouth store potentially being converted into flats (with some smaller retail units below)

Source: Local Data Company (2022)

Department store repurposing

Leisure stock levels reaching 2019 levels, whilst retail stock in decline

- Leisure saw the second largest year on year increase in units in the first half of 2022 (Local Data company)
- In our recent Midsummer retail report consumer survey (June 2022) 56% respondents cited choice of leisure when choosing a location to go shopping, eat etc as important.



Source: Local Data company, Colliers Retail Midsummer report 2022

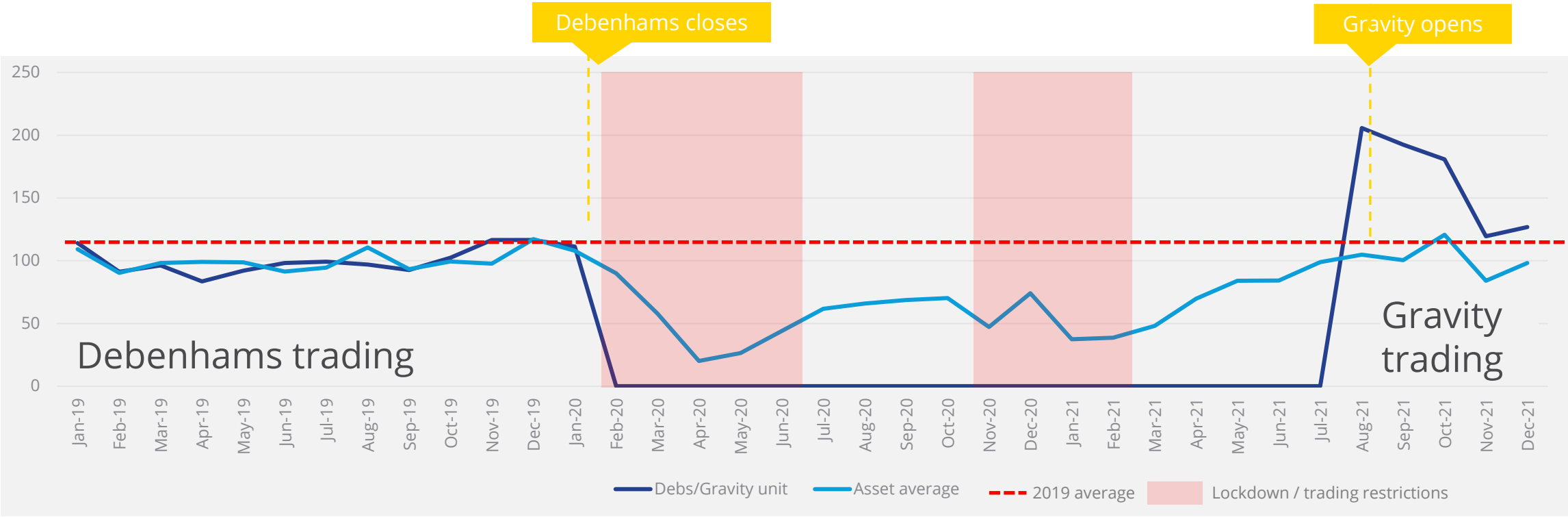
Department store repurposing

Repurposing ensures location remains vibrant

- Repurposing space can drive increased customer engagement, preventing decline of a location
- Mobility data has been used to understand impact of repurposing former Debenhams site in Wandsworth into Gravity (a leisure concept) which opened August 2021
  - Using mobile data, we are able to profile visitor interaction pre and post opening on Gravity in Wandsworth

Department store repurposing

Repurposed Debenhams unit bringing in significantly more footfall when converted to Gravity leisure offer



Source: LocateFootfall

Understanding shopper behaviours

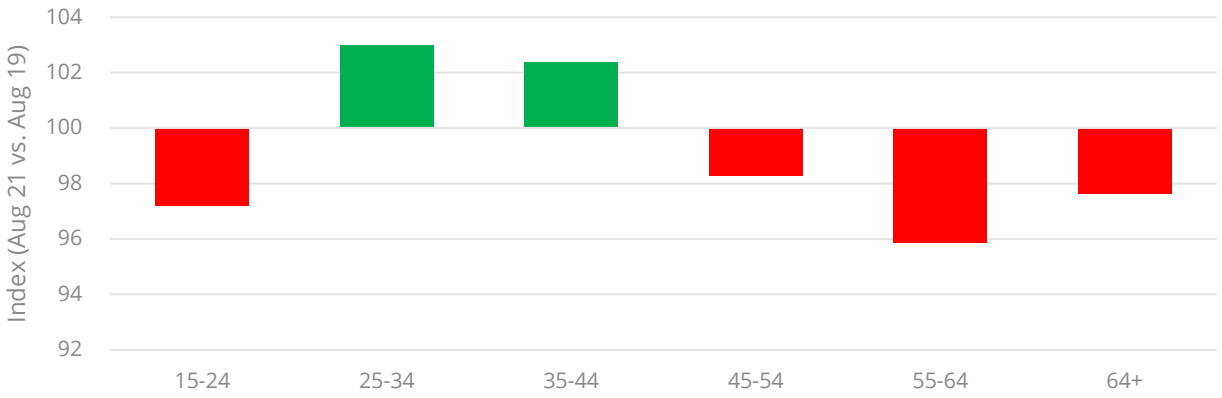
Positive impact on shopper engagement

Footfall overview

Footfall
+27%

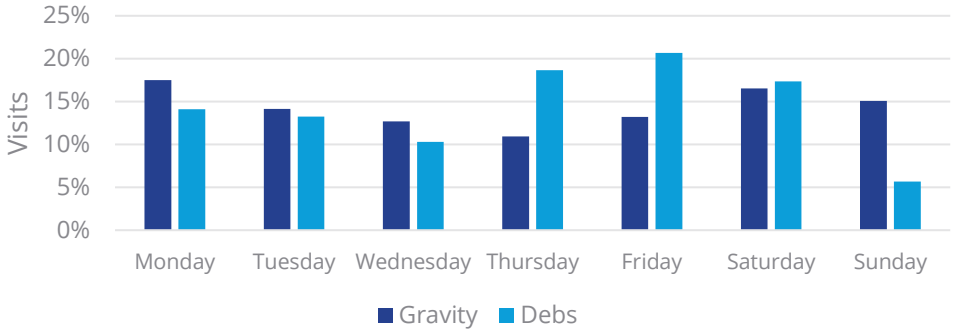
Dwell Time
+40%

Age Profile

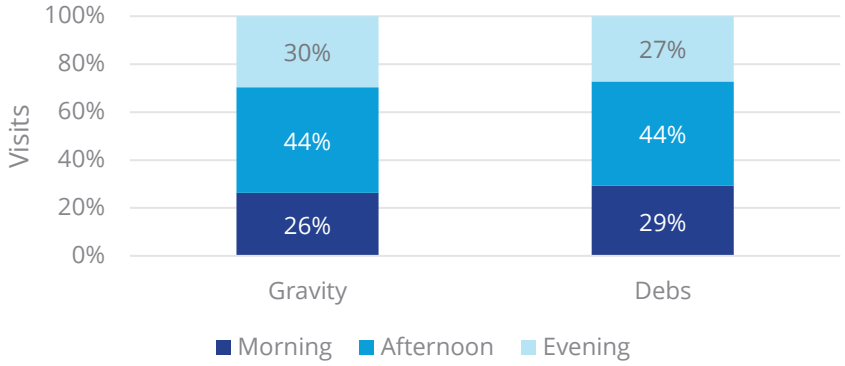


Increased engagement with 25 to 44 year olds

Trading Patterns



More varied trading days

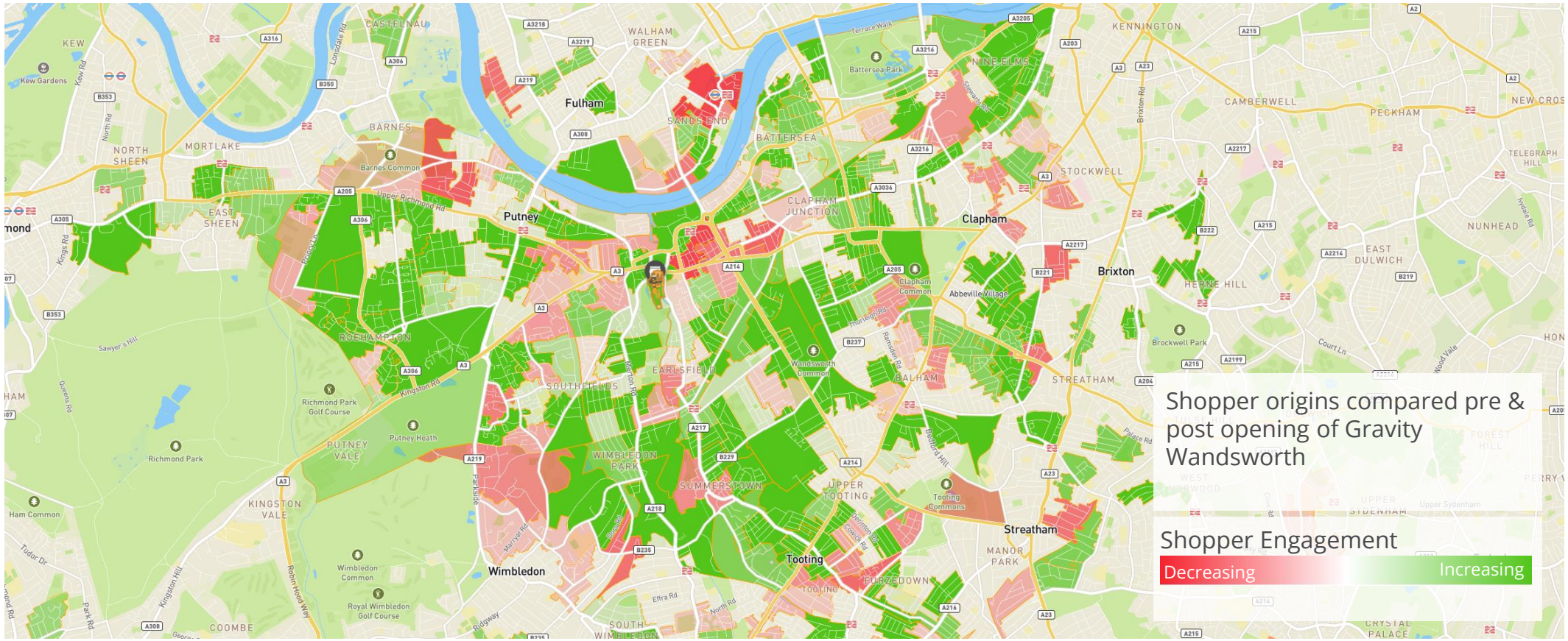


More varied trading hours

Click to add text

Department store repurposing

Repurposing and change to unique leisure proposition drove catchment engagement….



Source: LocateFootfall | LocateCatchments

Section 8

Appendix

Appendix

Mosaic groups

Type	Name	Description
A	City Prosperity	High status city dwellers living in central locations and pursuing careers with high rewards.
B	Prestige Positions	Established families in large detached homes living upmarket lifestyles.
C	Country Living	Well-off owners in rural locations enjoying the benefits of country life.
D	Rural Reality	Householders living in less expensive homes in village communities.
E	Senior Security	Elderly people with assets who are enjoying a comfortable retirement.
F	Suburban Stability	Mature suburban owners living settled lives in mid-range housing.
G	Domestic Success	Thriving families who are busy bringing up children and following careers.
H	Aspiring Homemakers	Younger households settling down in housing priced within their means.
I	Family Basics	Families with limited resources who budget to make ends meet.
J	Transient Renters	Single people renting low cost homes for the short term.
K	Municipal Tenants	Urban residents renting high density housing from social landlords.
L	Vintage Value	Elderly people with limited pension income, mostly living alone.
M	Modest Traditions	Mature homeowners of value homes enjoying stable lifestyles.
N	Urban Cohesion	Residents of settled urban communities with a strong sense of identity.
O	Rental Hubs	Educated young people privately renting in urban neighbourhoods.

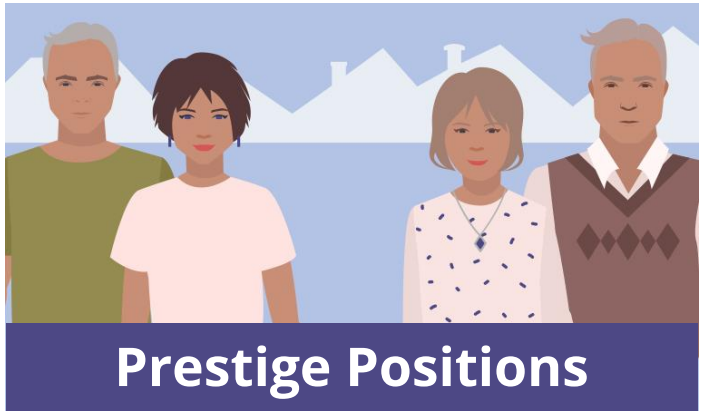
Source: Experian

Mosaic groups

4.07%
households

A: City Prosperity

- City Prosperity are high-income residents who have expensive homes in desirable metropolitan locations. Households range in type from successful young professionals to wealthy families.
- Age: 26-35
- Income: £100 – 150k



7.39%
households

B: Prestige Positions

- Prestige positions are established families in large detached homes living upmarket lifestyles.
- Age: 55-65
- Income: £150k +

Source: Mosaic - Experian

Mosaic groups

6.64%
households

C: Country Living

- Well-off owners in rural locations enjoying the benefits of country life.
- Age: 66+
- Income: £70-99k

6.54%
households

D: Rural Reality

- Householders living in less expensive homes in village communities.
- Age: 56-65
- Income: £20 – 30k

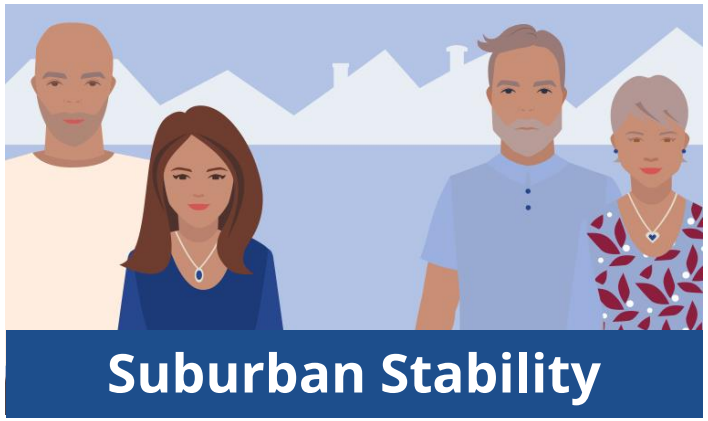
Source: Mosaic - Experian

Mosaic groups

8.3% households

E: Senior Security

- Elderly people with assets who are enjoying a comfortable retirement.
- Age: 66+
- Income: £20-30k



6.5% households

F: Suburban Stability

- Mature suburban owners living settled lives in mid-range housing.
- Age: 56-65
- Income: £30-39k

Source: Mosaic - Experian

Mosaic groups

7.3%
households

G: Domestic Success

- Thriving families who are busy bringing up children and following careers.
- Age: 36-45
- Income: £70-99k

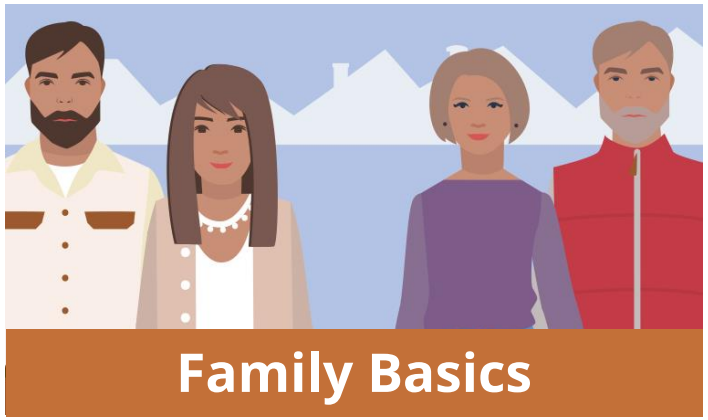
9.4%
households

H: Aspiring Homemakers

- Younger households settling down in housing priced within their means.
- Age: 26-35
- Income: £40-49k

Source: Mosaic - Experian

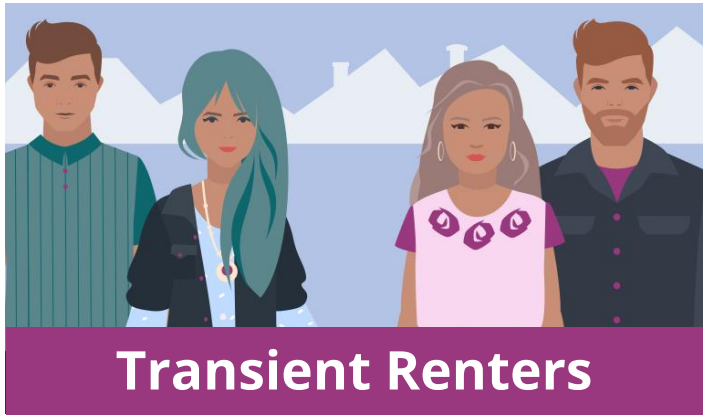
Mosaic groups



7.9% households

I: Family Basics

- Families with limited resources who budget to make ends meet.
- Age: 36-45
- Income: £20-29k



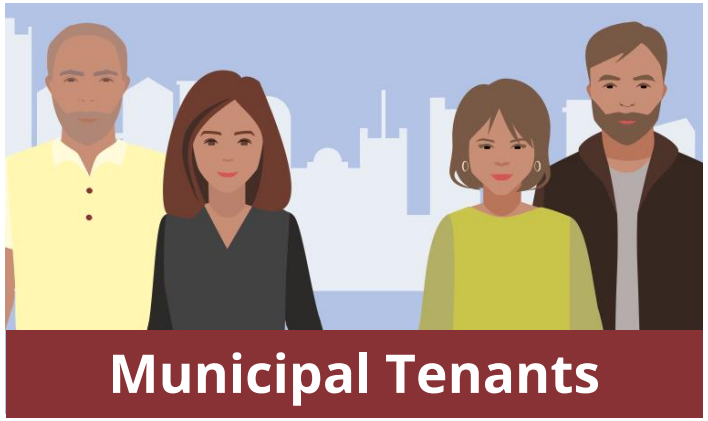
5.2% households

J: Transient Renters

- Single people renting low cost homes for the short term.
- Age: 26-35
- Income: £20-29k

Source: Mosaic - Experian

Mosaic groups



6.7%
households

K: Municipal Tenants

- Urban residents renting high density housing from social landlords.
- Age: 56-65
- Income: <£15k

6.5%
households

L: Vintage Value

- Elderly people with limited pension income, mostly living alone.
- Age: 66+
- Income: <£15k

Source: Mosaic - Experian

Mosaic groups

4.9%
households

M: Modest Traditions

- Mature homeowners of value homes enjoying stable lifestyles.
- Age: 56-65
- Income: £20-29k

4.8%
households

N: Urban Cohesion

- Residents of settled urban communities with a strong sense of identity.
- Age: 36-45
- Income: £20-29k

Source: Mosaic - Experian

Mosaic groups

7.8%
households

O: Rental Hubs

- Educated young people privately renting in urban neighbourhoods.
- Age: 26-35
- Income: £30-39k

Source: Mosaic - Experian

Data-driven, objective location strategy

We work with Occupiers and Landlords/Investors to optimize
store/branch estates and real estate assets

Retail Strategy & Analytics

We work with landlords and occupiers to understand and adapt to these changing market dynamics

For Landlords

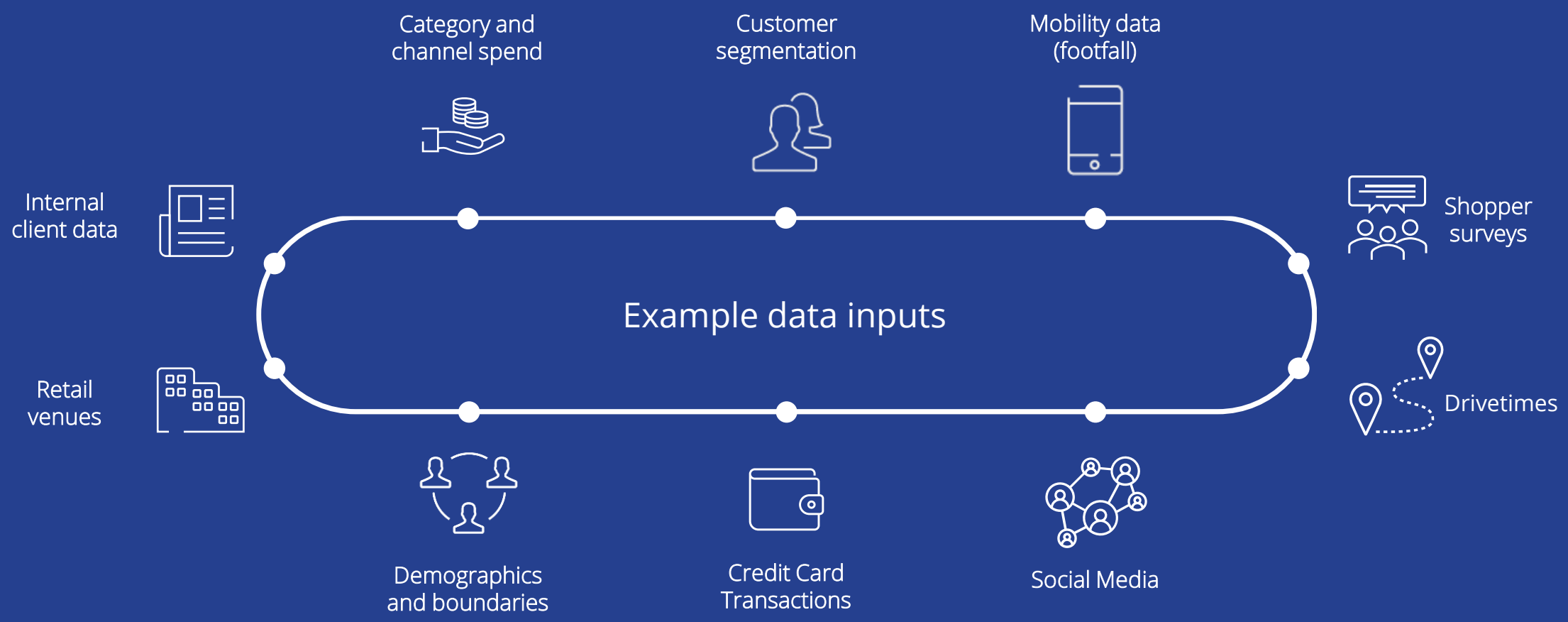
- Scheme optimization
- Catchment & customer insight
- Development / redevelopment strategy
- Investment strategy
- Sales & sustainable rental modelling
- Footfall and performance trends analysis
- Embedding BI & analytics tools

For Occupiers

- Customer profiling and segmentation
- Catchment definition and profiling
- Channel ‘halo’ analytics
- Sales forecasting and performance analysis
- Cannibalization analytics
- Expansion / optimization strategy
- Footfall and visitor profile reporting

Our data tools

Data is at the heart of everything we do….



Illustrative / Non-Exhaustive

Locate
Venues

Colliers LocateVenues

Venue ranking

LocateVenues is a brand new ranking of commercial venues across the entire UK, enabling occupiers, investors, landlords, developers and local authorities to track the characteristics of the UK's retail and leisure locations.

- Offer scale *(weighted presence of multiples, floorspace)*
- Price positioning *(value vs. luxury)*
- Independent mix, vacancy/voids
- Leisure & F&B orientation, tourism orientation

LocateVenues monitors the retail and leisure offer of over 9,000 venues across the UK, covering all major venue types. Venue sizes range from major city centres to standalone grocery stores.

Locate
Venues

Colliers LocateFootfall

Footfall intelligence

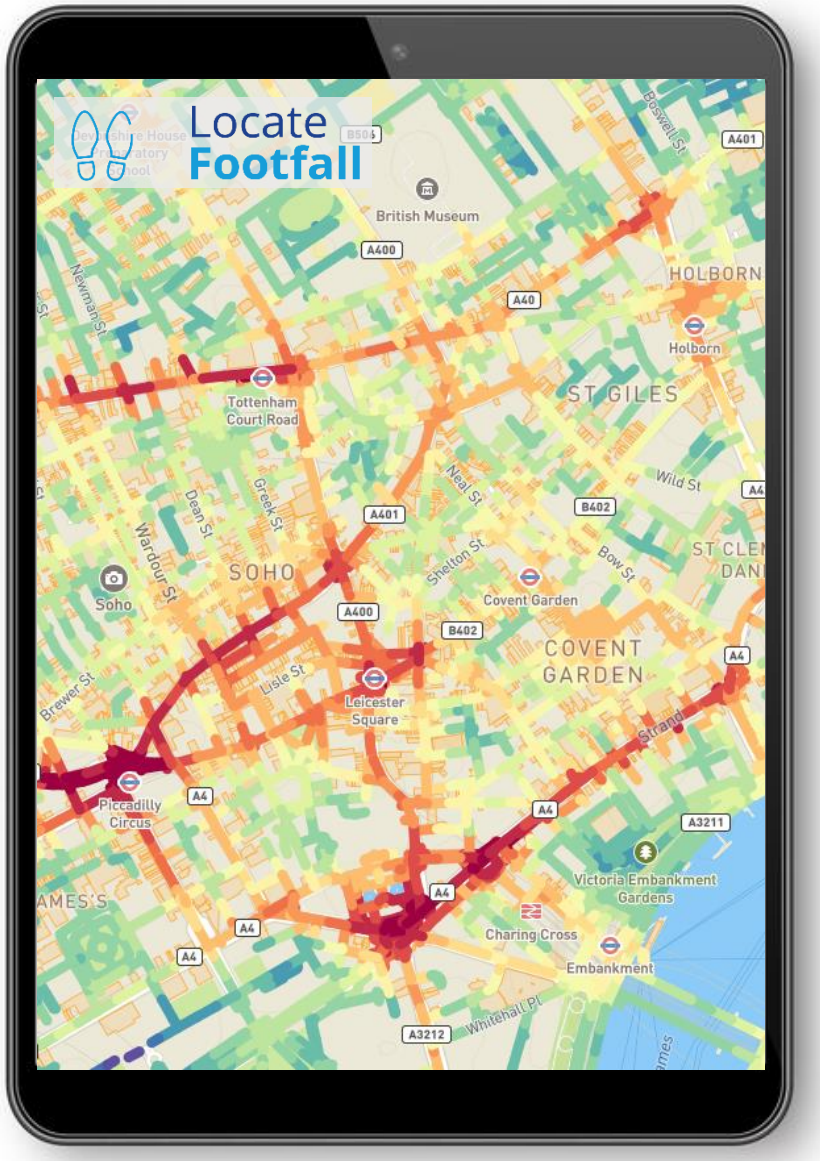
Using mobile data, we are able to profile visitors from a data pool of billions of records

Part of Colliers' proprietary LocateInsights Platform, LocateFootfall delivers unique crowd level profile & behavioural insights for use across the UK retail sector.

The platform is the product of a range of unique partnerships across the Data & Proptech markets, harnessing big data and A.I via a simple browser based tool.

- Market leading intelligence from 80+ data sources
- Sample size of over 15 million active smartphone users
- Delivers data instantly without hardware installation
- Location data at any level of geography, over any time period

Locate Footfall



LocateFootfall

Regular reporting

Reports can be created for bespoke boundaries to cover multiple streets/zones to understand historical & real time performance, and post-COVID recovery rates.

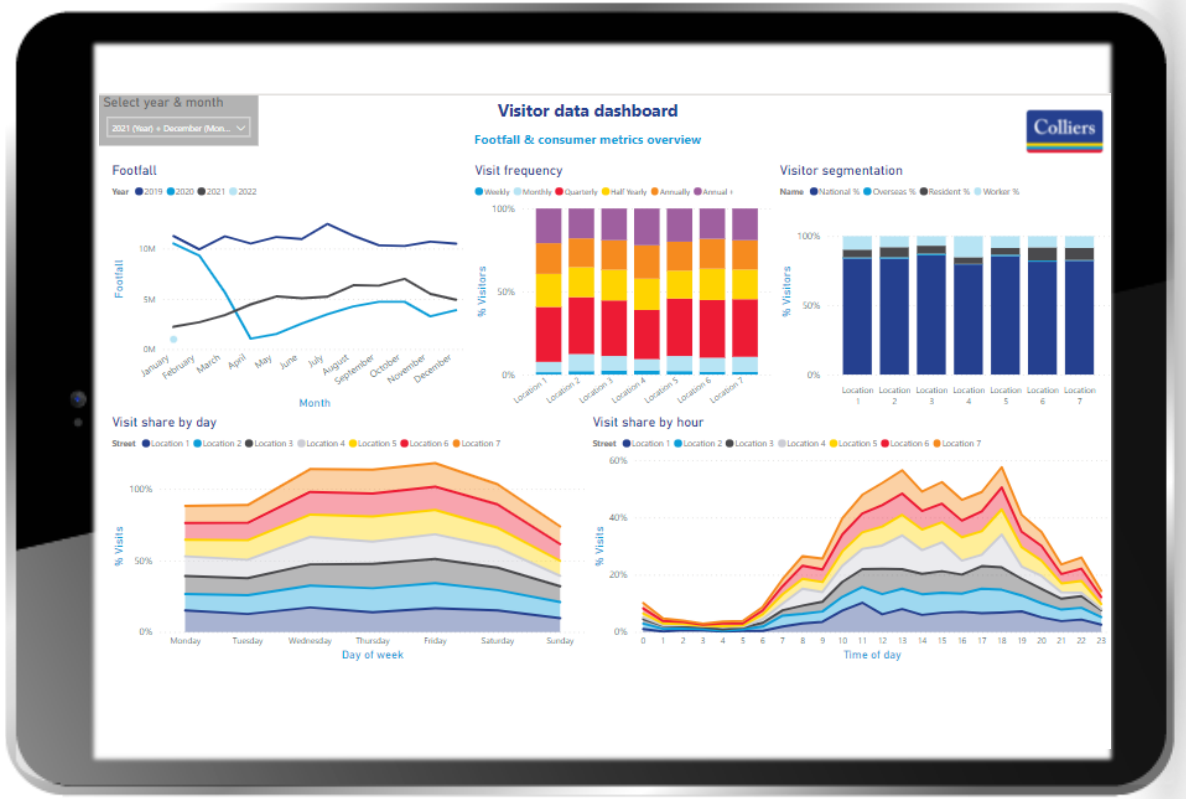
Comprehensive range of data available, covering visitor behaviour, profile and preference metrics.

Benchmark against any number of UK locations or assets.

Footfall | Time of Day | Seasonality | Dwell Time | Frequency

Age Profile | Demographic | Occupation | Visitor Type | Preferences

We can deliver regular visitor metric reports for your locations



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Business

Appendix 2: UK Town and City Centre Repurposing / Regeneration schemes

Centre	Repurposing / Redevelopment Scheme
Manchester	**Debenhams -** AM Alpha: proposals for extension up to 10 floors to accommodate ground floor retail, leisure and offices **House of Fraser** – permission for roof extension, demolition of adjoining buildings to provide 14 storey office block and public realm
Glasgow	**St Enoch centre** repurposing (Sovereign Centros). PPP (outline) application submitted. Revitalised shopping and leisure space, up to 1,700 homes (mixed typologies), office space, hotel, performance space and public realm **Debenhams** – permission for repurposing to offices and restaurant **Buchanan Galleries.** Shopping centre repurposing to create net zero mixed use urban district in city centre (Landsec)
Leeds	**House of Fraser** - planning application submitted in February 2022 for redevelopment to provide a 11 storey building for student and retail use. **Debenhams –** permission granted to repurpose in April 2021. The scheme will deliver flexible commercial space totalling 45,000sqft and 124 student beds. Scheme will preserve the listed buildings 1930s architectural appearance, whilst adding a 5th floor. **Trinity and Victoria Leeds** opened 2019
Birmingham	**House of Fraser** (Rackhams)- Repurpose and carve out the centre of department store with 2 storey rooftop extension for offices and mixed-use on ground floor. Permission granted in 2018. **Debenhams** – department store in Bullring repurposed for lesiure uses. ***House of Frasers (Solihull Town Centre)*** - identified to be repurposed for a 9 storey BTR tower with ground floor

	retail. Proposals set out in their masterplan and Council due to choose their delivery development partner
Liverpool	**Debenhams –** application approved by City Council (Feb 22) for conversion of upper floors of former store for leisure use, with a £10m 'fun factory' including a go-kart track and bowling to open inside the old department store. Lower and grounds floors retained for retail and upper floors offering a combined 80,000 sq ft.
Nottingham	**Broadmarsh Redevelopment –** £20m+ refurbishment and development of the Broadmarsh shopping centre and surrounding area. Generation of 3,000 jobs in the build and 3,000 new jobs once completed. Creation of more than 750 new homes and 400,000 sq ft of high-end business, office space and contribution to public realm.
Cardiff	**House of Frasers (Howells building)** – Purchased in January 2022 by Thackeray Group. Proposals for £100m mixed use development – conversion into apart-hotel, BtR apartment, restaurants, office, and leisure space **Queens Arcade** – Comprehensive mixed-use redevelopment. Mandatory Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) completed by Addington Capital. Application is yet to be submitted. Demolition of existing buildings and scheme to comprise residential, commercial and leisure and public realm.
Edinburgh	**St James Quarter** opened June 2021 – New shopping centre including John lewis and 1.7m sq ft of shops, restaurants, cafes, bars, public space **Jenners,** Princes Street – Repurposes to accommodate retail, hotel and food & drink uses **Frasers,** Princes Street - Repurposed to Johnnie Walker visitor experience. **Debenhams,** Princes Street – Repurposes for hotel with rooftop uses, food & drink, leisure, and conferencing space
Newcastle upon Tyne	**Debenhams** – no firm plans. Potential sub-division. Significant investment required for reoccupation and considered unviable to convert to flats (April 2022). Value of shopping centre dropped in 2020 by more than £50m to £93m (from £145m) and further to just £29m (31 March 22).

Norwich	**Debenhams –** plans being drawn to transform the former 100,000sqft Debenhams store (17 November 22). In April this year, it was revealed that the site had been taken on by "a student-focused developer" expected to spend millions on the project, with a retail element for the ground floor. **East Norwich Masterplan and Carrow House –** projected to build 3,500 homes and create 6,000 jobs in the areas around Carrow and Trowse.
Aberdeen	**Union Square** sold to Brookfield in 2022 **Bon Accord** owners entered administration in 2022. Planning application submitted for repurposing for former bowling club in centre for experiential leisure hub. **Trinity Centre –** currently on the market. **Debenhams** - charity shop in temporary use (Sept 22) - no firm plans for unit **John Lewis** (Norco house) - store closed in December 2020. Building on the market as of August 22. Initial proposals by Aberdeen Council to convert to Natural History Museum have stalled.
Brighton	**Churchill Square shopping centre** – the 500,000sqft shopping centre has been put up for sale for circa £250m **Brighton Centre –** plans for a new 10,000 seat conference centre and entertainment venue could be built on the existing Brighton Centre (November 2019)
Chester	**Chester Northgate** development (Rivington Hark) - market, cinema and food & drink venues.
Southampton	**Debenhams** – planning permission for demolition and replacement with 17 storey tower (Sept 2022). **West Quay -** John Lewis & M&S still anchor shopping centre

	Bargate Quarter – construction on site. Demolition of Bargate Shopping Centre and car park and development of 287 residential units, 240 bedroom hotel and c 7,000 sqm of flexible retail, office and restaurant uses. New public realm around scheduled Bargate monument and old town walls **Former Toys R Us –** Demolition and redevelopment to provide over 600 BtR apartments, 6,000 sqm offices and 700 sqm ground floor commercial with public realm.
Kingston upon Thames	**Eden Walk Shopping Centre –** permission granted for redevelopment of shopping centre. £400m investment providing 385 homes, new cinema, restaurants and public realm. **Wilko –** planning permission granted for the reuse and extension of existing store in Kingston Town Centre, generating 55 dwellings whilst maintaining the ground and lower ground floor for retail. **John Lewis Riverside –** works to convert retail and leisure space on the riverside to workspace and riverside public realm enhancements. **Town Centre Strategy –** Kingston Council currently preparing 10 year vision for the town centre. Consider development opportunities around Council owned land and Unilever redevelopment.
Leicester	**Debenhams, Highcross Shopping Centre**. Demolition of existing store and construction on 8-15 storey BtR building with commercial ground floor (332 residential units). Planning permission granted. **Haymarket Shopping Centre.** Purchased by Leicester City Council in November 2021
Bristol	**Debenhams** building (freehold owned by City Council) has been sold to AEW UK and a redevelopment scheme (alternative uses) is expected. Various other schemes are coming forward within the City Centre as part of rejuvenating and repurposing – Bristol City Counil advise that there are 8 separate projects/schemes currently active (in pre-app or otherwise). These include: **Galleries Shopping Centre –** £550m redevelopment of the centre. Replacing existing shopping centre with offices, student accommodation, residential (mix of typologies), aparthotel and retail around public realm.

	The Council is also working on a City Centre Development Delivery Plan which will be out for further consultation in the coming months, on the basis of providing a positive strategy to guide and deliver change https://citycentrebristol.co.uk/
Bath	**Debenhams –** Subject to current planning application for repurposing of building including roof extension for commercial uses
Bournemouth	**House of Fraser** – currently on the market as repurposing opportunity **Beales** – current planning application to repurpose and extend building to 13 storeys to provide residential, leisure and amenity space. **Avenue Road shopping centre and adjoining M&S uni**t – pre-application submissions for residential led repurposing of sites, to include development of tall buildings. Development brief prepared for site by BCP Council **Debenhams** – repurposed as Bobby's. Retail and workspace / art hub
Oxford	**Boswells Department Store –** plans for refurbishment and redevelopment of department store into 4-star 101-bed hotel with a ground floor restaurant, bar and co-working space as part of partnership between Reef Group & Oxford City Council (Feb 2022) **City Centre –** £280 million pound project submitted to council, plans would see developers build new homes, a hotel, public realm, walking and cycling routes and creation of new jobs.
Derby	**Becketwell Regeneration Scheme:** Phase 1 **–** construction of 259 BTR apartments with a new public square. Phase 2 new 3,500 capacity performance venue. Future planned phases consist of other complementary uses such as office & commercial space, a hotel, a multi-storey car park and purpose-built student residential. **Derbion Shopping Centre –** Masterplan issued for 'Eagle Quarter' with 1,250 new homes, restaurants and public spaces. Replace the Eagle Market and Derby Theatre and redevelop Bradshaw Way Retail Park.

Bracknell	**Debenhams –** the 219,503sqft shopping centre is the subject of a new £2 million investment to transform the site into an entertainment venue (October 2021) **Bentalls** – demolition of department store and redevelopment for 'The Deck' - new public square, shops, leisure and restaurants
Newbury	**Newbury Town Centre -** a third attempt to reinvent a town centre has been submitted. The so-called £115 million Eagle Quarter vision is to replace the ageing Kennet Shopping centre. Developers Lochailort want to build 367 flats on the site.
Portsmouth	**Debenhams –** planning application being prepared for 38 redevelopment of site to deliver 38 storey building accommodation 400 residential units along with commercial and retail space **City Centre North –** outline planning application submitted by Portsmouth City Council for major regeneration of former Tricorn shopping centre for residential led development, public park, leisure and community uses
Slough	**Queensmere shopping centre –** outline planning permission granted in September 2022 for the redevelopment of the shopping centre to provide 1,600 flats, 2,000 sqm retail and leisure, 40,000 sqm office and public open space. Includes 18 storey buildings

Appendix 3: Relevant Planning Policies

Policy Ref.	Policy Title	Policy Text
CC1	**Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development**	a positive approach towards for development proposals will be taken that reflect the strategy. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Proposed development that conflicts with the development plan will be refused unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.
CC2	**Sustainable Design and Construction**	Proposals for new development, including the construction of new buildings, will be acceptable where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy, water, minerals, materials, and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change. The polices states that all major non-residential developments or conversions to residential are required to meet the most up to date BREEAM 'Excellent' standards.
CC3	**Adaptation to Climate Change**	outlines that all developments will demonstrate how they have been designed to incorporate measures to adapt to climate change. Wherever possible, new buildings shall be orientated to maximise the opportunities for both natural heating and ventilation and reducing exposure to wind and other elements. The use of trees and other planting, where appropriate as part of a landscape scheme, to provide shading of amenity areas, buildings, and streets and to help to connect habitat. All development shall minimise the impact of surface water runoff from the development in the design of the drainage system
CC4	**Decentralised Energy**	shall be included within the site of any development of more than 20 dwellings and/ or non-residential development of over 1,000 sq. m, unless it can be demonstrated that the scheme is not suitable, feasible or viable for this form of energy provision.
CC5	**Waste Minimisation and Storage**	measures should be demonstrated for development to minimise the generation of waste in the construction, use and life of buildings and promote more sustainable approaches to waste management, including the reuse and recycling of construction waste and the promotion of layouts and designs that provide adequate, well-designed space to facilitate waste storage, reuse, recycling, and composting.
CC6	**Accessibility and the Intensity of Development**	outlines that the scale and density of development will be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities, with the densest and largest scale development taking place in the most accessible locations

CC7	**Design and the Public Realm**	states that development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The various components of development form, including layout – urban structure and urban grain; landscape; density and mix; scale – height and massing; and architectural detail and materials. This will all be assessed to ensure that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to the following urban design objectives: – character – a place with its own identity and sense of place; – continuity and enclosure; – quality of the public realm and provision of green infrastructure and landscaping; – ease of movement and permeability; – legibility – clear image and easy to understand; adaptability – capable of adaptation over time; and – diversity – meets a wide range of needs. Developments will also be assessed to ensure that they: respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm; create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable, and easy to understand by them, including providing suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily; and are visually attractive as a result of good high-quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping. Applications for major developments, or other relevant developments, should be accompanied by a design and access statement.
CC8	**Safeguarding Amenity**	outline that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties in terms of: privacy and overlooking; access to sunlight and daylight; visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development; harm to outlook; noise and disturbance; artificial lighting; vibration; dust and fumes; smell; crime and safety; or wind, where the proposals involve new development of more than 8 storeys. The positions of habitable rooms, windows and outdoor living spaces will be particularly important.
EN5	**Protection of Significant Views with**	outlines new development should not harm and where possible should make a positive contribution to views of acknowledged historical significance

	Heritage Interest	
EN6	**New Development in a Historic Context**	requires that new development will contribute to the historic character of the area by respecting and enhancing its architectural and visual qualities and considering how heritage considerations can influence the design of new development. When determining planning applications for new development, the following factors will be taken into consideration: the positive contribution of the development to the existing historic townscape (scale, height, mass, proportion, plot size, street form, materials, significant vistas and views, and open space); sensitivity to historic context; reflection of borough-wide major heritage themes that contribute to local distinctiveness (e.g., patterned brickwork or former worker terraced housing); whether development promotes and/or improves access to previously undiscovered or neglected historic significance
EN9	**Provision of Open Space**	• entails that all new development should make provision for appropriate open space based on the needs of the development. This can be achieved through on or off-site provision, contributions toward provision or improvement of existing leisure or recreational facilities. The provision of open space for all developments shall satisfy the most urgent need subject to considerations of deficiencies. The most up-to-date Open Spaces Strategy should guide provision type and size.
EN10	**Access to Open Space**	• states that in areas with relatively poor access to open space facilities (including as a result of severance lines), new development should make provision for, or contribute to, improvements to road and other crossings to improve access to green space and/or facilitate the creation or linking of safe off-road routes to parks.
EN11	**Waterspaces**	in Reading will be protected and enhanced, so that they can continue to contribute to local and regional biodiversity and ecology, flood mitigation, local character, heritage and visual amenity, the provision of accessible leisure and recreational opportunities and, where appropriate, navigation. Where development in the vicinity of watercourses is acceptable, it will: provide appropriate, attractive uses and buildings that enhance the relationship of buildings, spaces, and routes to the watercourse, including through creating or enhancing views of the watercourse, and create a high-quality public realm; and make positive contributions to the distinct character, appearance, historic significance, landscape, and amenity of the watercourses
EN12	**Biodiversity and the Green Network**	requires that new development shall demonstrate how the location and type of green space, landscaping and water features provided within a scheme have been arranged such that they maintain or link into the existing Green Network and contribute

		to its consolidation. Such features should be designed to maximise the opportunities for enhancing this network. All new development should maximise opportunities to create new assets and links into areas where opportunities are yet unidentified on the Proposals Map.
EN14	**Trees, Hedges and Woodland**	• will be retained, and new development shall make provision for tree planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained. On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible.
H1	**Provision of Housing**	• will be made for at least an additional 15,847 homes (averaging 689 homes per annum) in Reading Borough for the period 2013 to 2036.
H2	**Density and Mix**	• of residential development will be informed by the character and mix of uses of the area in which it is located, including the housing mix, and including consideration of any nearby heritage assets or important landscape or townscape areas; its current and future level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport; its current and future level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport; the need to maximise the efficiency of land use; and the need to minimise environmental impacts, including detrimental impacts on the amenities of adjoining occupiers.
H3	**Affordable Housing**	• states that on sites of 10 or more dwellings, 30% of the total dwellings will be in the form of affordable housing. For sites of 10 or more dwellings, provision should be made on site in the first instance with a financial contribution being negotiated to make up the full requirement as appropriate. In all cases where proposals fall short of the policy target as a result of viability considerations, an open-book approach will be taken, and the onus will be on the developer/landowner to clearly demonstrate the circumstances justifying a lower affordable housing contribution.
H4	**Build to Rent Schemes**	declare that planning permission will be granted for developments of self-contained, private rented homes which are secured in single ownership providing solely for the rental market for a minimum 20 year term with provision for clawback of affordable housing contributions should the covenant not be met; provide tenancies for private renters for a minimum of three years with a six month break clause in the tenant's favour and

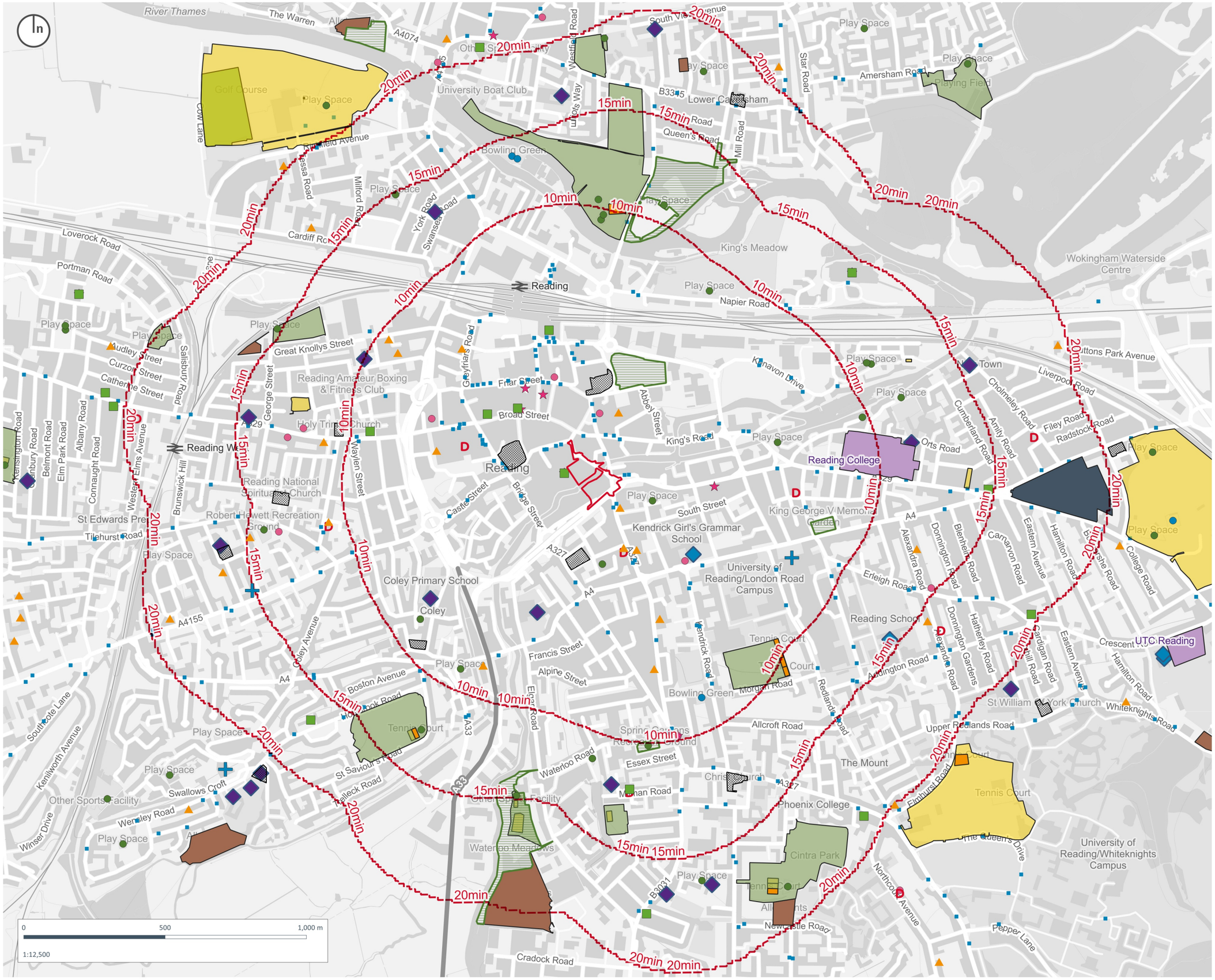
		structured and limited in-tenancy rent increases agreed in advance; provide a high standard of professional on-site management and control of the accommodation; provide a commitment to high-quality rental arrangements, through meeting Reading Borough Council's voluntary Rent with Confidence Standards or equivalent measures; provide for a mix of unit sizes in accordance with Policy H2 or CR6; meet the standards of design set out in Policy H5; and provide 30% on-site affordable housing, either in accordance with Policy H3 and any relevant Supplementary Planning Document or in the form of Affordable Private Rent Housing as defined and set out in a relevant Supplementary Planning Document.
H5	**Standards for new housing**	requires that all new build housing to be built to the higher water efficiency standard under Regulation 36(3) of the Building Regulations. All major new-build residential development should be designed to achieve zero carbon homes. On developments of 20 or more new build dwellings, at least 5% of dwellings will be wheelchair user dwellings in line with M4(3) of the Building Regulations.
TR4	**Cycle Routes and Facilities**	outlines developments will be expected to make full use of opportunities to improve access for cyclists to, from and within the development and to integrate cycling through the provision of new facilities. Development of new facilities for cycling, such as cycle hire points and cycle parking, will be acceptable
TR5	**Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Parking**	should be provided with development that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport. Within communal car parks for residential or non-residential developments of at least 10 spaces, 10% of spaces should provide an active charging point.
RL1	**Network and Hierarchy of Centres**	defines Reading as a Regional Centre. The vitality and viability of these centres should be maintained and enhances. The following improvements will be acceptable in all centres: accessibility and transport improvements; broadening range of facilities; residential use of upper floors; and environmental enhancements.
RL2	**Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure and Culture Development**	• outlines that Provision will be made for up to 34,900 sq. m of retail and related facilities in Reading to 2036, together with new leisure facilities. Retail and main town centre leisure and culture development, where it would mean a net gain of over 2,500 sq. m, will take place in, or as an extension to, the centre of Reading, unless it is on a site allocated for such development.
RL6	**Protection of Leisure Facilities and Public Houses**	summarises that existing leisure facilities or public houses will generally be retained, and there is a strong presumption in favour of retaining leisure facilities or public houses where they are the only facility of their type in a district, major local or local centre. Developments that would result in the loss of a leisure facility or a

		public house will not be permitted unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the function of the facility can be adequately fulfilled by an existing facility, or a facility proposed as part of the development, where that facility would be at least as accessible to the same catchment.
EN1	**Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment**	requires all proposals to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. Any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits.
EN3	**Enhancement of Conservation Areas**	will be conserved to ensure the special interest, character and architecture is maintained. Development proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Positive consideration will be given to proposals which take opportunities to enhance the character of conservation areas.
CR1	**Definition of Central Reading**	identifies the Central Area Boundary as shown on the Proposals Map will mark the edge of the town centre other than where specified. However, for the purposes of application of the sequential test for main town centre uses.
CR2	**Design in Central Reading**	seeks for development to build on and respect the existing grid layout structure of the central area, providing continuity and enclosure through appropriate relationships between buildings and spaces, and frontages that engage with the street at lower levels, and contributing towards enhanced ease of movement through and around the central area. Development will provide appropriate, well designed public spaces and other public realm, including squares, open spaces, streetscape, utilising high quality and well maintained hard and soft landscaped areas, and public art, that provide suitable functions and interest, sense of place and safe and convenient linkages to adjoining areas. Development should consider and include ways of providing green infrastructure designed into the development. The architectural details and materials used in the central area should be high quality and respect the form and quality of the detailing and materials in areas local to the development site. Development and any associated public realm should contribute to the diversity of the central area, be capable of easy adaptation over time to meet changing circumstances and be designed to enhance community safety. Development should be designed with consideration of adjacent development sites and should not prevent or cause unreasonable burdens on the future development of those sites

CR3	**Public Realm in Central Reading**	outlines that proposals for new development will need to make a positive contribution towards the quality of the public realm of the central area. All proposals on sites of more than 1 hectare within the central Reading boundary will need to provide new public open space or civic squares integrated with surrounding development. Imaginative uses of open space and the public realm, which contribute to the offer of the centre, will be encouraged, and new open spaces should be of a size and shape to be flexible enough to accommodate such uses. The provision of water features, trees (including street trees) and other planting, as well as hard landscaping, to create high-quality spaces, will be expected, where appropriate. Development proposals adjacent to or near a watercourse will retain and not impede existing continuous public access to and along the watercourses and will provide legible continuous public access to and along the watercourses where this does not currently exist. The design of developments adjacent to a watercourse, including the refurbishment of existing buildings, will be required to enhance the appearance of the watercourses and to provide active elevations facing the watercourses. Development that turns its back on the watercourses and results in blank or mundane elevations facing the watercourses will not be permitted. The public realm should conserve and enhance the historic environment of the centre and the significance of heritage assets therein and their setting, including through layout, materials, hard and soft landscaping. There may be opportunities for areas of public realm to provide improved access to and visibility for heritage assets.
CR4	**Leisure Culture and Tourism in Central Reading**	identifies that the Central Core will be the prime focus for major leisure, cultural and tourism development. Leisure, cultural and tourism uses that would attract a wide range of people into the centre will be encouraged. Innovative solutions to leisure provision will be encouraged, particularly those that make best use of available (often limited) site area.
CR6	**Living in Central Reading**	requires that all proposals for residential development within the central area will be required to contribute towards a mix of different sized units within the development. Ideally, a mixture of one-, two- and three-bedroom units should be provided. Developments of 15 dwellings or more, a maximum of 40% of units should be 1-bed/ studios, and a minimum of 5% of units should be at least 3-bed, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would render a development unviable. Proposals for new residential development will be required to demonstrate how the issue of potential noise disturbance from neighbouring land uses and other sources, and air quality implications of residential development, have been considered and if necessary, mitigated. New residential development should not be located next to

		existing town centre uses where those uses would give rise to unacceptable levels of noise and disturbance to the occupiers of the new scheme unless this can be mitigated. An overconcentration of social renting for single persons will be avoided.
CR7	**Primary Frontages in Central Reading**	outlines the uses on the ground floor along the designated primary frontages as shown on the Proposals Map will be within one of the following use classes: A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, C1, D1, D2 or related sui generis uses, unless it would be an entrance to upper floors. New developments that front onto any of the designated primary frontages will provide an active building frontage with a display window or glazed frontage at ground floor level, to contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre and provide visual interest. Frontages should be of a high visual quality. Any frontages that have the potential to hinder movement or cause unnecessary safety risk will not be permitted. Proposals that would result in the loss of A1 or A2 use such that the proportion of the length of frontage within the street in A1 or A2 use falls below 50% will not be permitted, unless the proposal introduces a use that makes a positive contribution to the overall diversity of the centre. 50% of new primary frontages as shown on the Proposals Map should be in A1/A2 use.

Appendix 4: 20 minute Neighbourhood Plan



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- Application Boundary
- 10, 15 & 20min Walking Distance
- Bus stops
- Dentists
- GP Practices
- Hospitals
- Opticians
- Pharmacy
- Social Care Locations

Facilities

- Further Education

Green Space

- Allotments or Community Growing Spaces
- Bowling Green
- Cemetery
- Golf Course
- Other Sports Facility
- Play Space
- Playing Field
- Public Park or Garden
- Religious Grounds
- Tennis Court

Schools

- Primary School
- Secondary School

CLIENT:
Packaged Living Ltd

PROJECT:
Debenhams & Vue, The Oracle, Reading

DRAWING:
20 min Neighbourhood Concept Plan

PROJECT NUMBER:
PACS3000

DRAWING NUMBER:	CHECKED BY:
GIS_101	SH
REVISION:	**STATUS:**
1.0	Draft
DATE:	**SCALE:**
November 2022	1:12,500 @ A3

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