



Statement of Community Involvement

35-39 Friar Street, Reading

June 2022



Executive Summary

Shaviram Group has undertaken a programme of public consultation to outline and shape its plans for a mixed-use development including 103 new homes together with 1,752 sqm of retail, food and drink and co-working space and associated landscaping and other works at 35-39 Friar Street, Reading. The site is situated between Reading rail station to the north, The Oracle Shopping Centre and Broad Street to the south. The site also borders the emerging Station Hill development to the immediate west.

Pre-application consultation activity for the proposal has included:

- A scoping meeting with the Council on 12th May 2021, followed by a virtual pre-application meeting with the Council on 26th May 2021.
- The scheme was also presented at an initial Berkshire Design Review Panel on 10th September 2021 and a follow up review was held on 24th November 2021.
- The distribution of 2,016 leaflets to properties around the proposed development site, to make residents and businesses aware of the proposals, to invite them to share their views with the project team and to advise them on where they can leave feedback;
- The creation of a project website, www.friarstreetconsultation.co.uk, outlining the proposals as well as providing contact details and an online feedback form;
- A consultation telephone number where members of the public could contact a member of the project team if they had any queries;
- A public consultation webinar, advertised via the consultation leaflet and website, which was held on Thursday, 3 March 2022; and
- A meeting with Abbey ward councillors on Thursday, 10 March 2022.

The various feedback channels remain in place to provide members of the public the opportunity to comment and ask questions throughout the planning process.

Feedback has been sought through a public consultation webinar, project website and a meeting with Abbey ward councillors.

The main comments raised during the consultation process focused on the proposed housing mix, the design and appearance of the proposed development, car parking provision and proposed public realm enhancements.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The views of the community are vitally important to Shaviram Group. The company embraces community consultation; placing it at the heart of its approach to development, not only in the pre-application phase but also for the duration of the project. This document outlines that consultation has been undertaken prior to the submission of the application, the feedback received and forthcoming consultation activities.
- 1.2. Shaviram Group's consultation was informed by the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) of Reading Borough Council (adopted March 2014) which embraces engagement from an early stage and provides general principles for how consultation ought to be undertaken.
- 1.3. The SCI emphasises the importance of the need for developers to carry out pre-application community consultation. On Page 14, paragraph 7.3 of the SCI states:
 - 1.4. *"The Council agrees with this emphasis on engaging the community from the outset. It can result in an improved scheme which takes the needs of the existing community into account, and a better relationship between the developer and the community that carries through the application process and beyond. This is particularly the case for proposals that are sensitive or of a significant scale."*
- 1.5. Reading Borough Council's SCI defines significant development as that which provides "a net increase of more than 50 units" in terms of housing and identifies that those promoting "Significant Developments" should undertake the following community involvement:
 - *Developers should prepare circular information on the developer/applicant's intentions to make a planning application and develop a particular site.*
 - *Developers should widely distribute such information as may be agreed by the local planning authority by posting to household addresses and other addresses determined in conjunction with and agreed by the local planning authority.*
 - *Developers should arrange and provide at least one interactive involvement event*
 - *Developers should provide a website of relevant information or provide digital images and information*
- 1.6. Shaviram Group has looked to carry out its consultation programme in line with these principles, with maximum involvement from local residents, local councillors and other stakeholders.

Localism Act 2011

2.1. Cratus' community engagement work has met the consultation principles established within the Localism Act 2011 for consulting the public. Principally, these are:

- The publication of the proposed application widely, to an extent that can be reasonably said to bring the proposed application to the attention of the majority of persons who live at, or otherwise occupy, premises in the vicinity of the land.
- To make clear how interested persons may contact the applicant team should they wish to comment or collaborate in relation to the proposed development.
- To give such information about the timetable to ensure that persons wishing to comment on the proposed development may do so in good time.
- To have regard to the responses to consultation that have been made following the consultation process.

2.2. Consultation work has also complied with the NPPF's Framework (2021) in relation to pre-application engagement and front-loading consultation. These principles are outlined below:

“39. Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

40. Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.

41. The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs.

42. 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, even where other consents relating to how a development is built or operated are needed at a later stage. Wherever possible, parallel processing of other consents should be encouraged to help speed up the process and resolve any issues as early as possible.

43. The right information is crucial to good decision-making, particularly where formal assessments are required (such as Environmental Impact Assessment, Habitats Regulations assessment and flood risk assessment). To avoid delay, applicants should discuss what information is needed with the local planning authority and expert bodies as early as possible.

44. Local planning authorities should publish a list of their information requirements for applications for planning permission. These requirements should be kept to the minimum needed to make decisions,



and should be reviewed at least every two 14 years. Local planning authorities should only request supporting information that is relevant, necessary and material to the application in question.

45. Local planning authorities should consult the appropriate bodies when considering applications for the siting of, or changes to, major hazard sites, installations or pipelines, or for development around them.

46. Applicants and local planning authorities should consider the potential for voluntary planning performance agreements, where this might achieve a faster and more effective application process. Planning performance agreements are likely to be needed for applications that are particularly large or complex to determine."

3. Consultation Activities

Project Website

- 3.1. In order to utilise the opportunity to establish an ongoing presence for the development online, a dedicated project website was set up: www.friarstreetconsultation.co.uk. The website provides an overview of the proposals, information on the applicant and the site, alongside an online feedback form. The website also contains a recording of the public consultation webinar and presentation slides, whilst detailing information on how visitors can engage with the consultation. At the time of writing, the website has been viewed by 570 individual users.
- 3.2. The website was advertised on leaflets which were distributed in and around the local area. The project website can be viewed in Appendix 1.

Consultation Leaflet

- 3.3. The leaflet for the proposed development is a double-sided A5 size full colour document that is designed to inform local residents and stakeholder groups about the proposals and to invite them to provide feedback and to participate in the public consultation webinar. It provides a CGI in order for residents to understand what the proposed development would look like, as well as contact details should they wish to get in touch with a member of the project team.
- 3.4. The leaflet was circulated by first class post on 21 February 2022 to 2,016 addresses in the area around the site. The leaflet can be viewed in Appendix 2. The distribution area for the leaflet can be viewed in Appendix 3.

Reading Borough Council

- 3.5. In order to inform members of Reading Borough Council of the proposals, Cratus Communications Ltd, on behalf of Shaviram Group, wrote to Abbey ward councillors and members of the Planning Applications Committee to invite them for a meeting, and to join the public consultation webinar.



3.6. On 10 March 2022, Shaviram Group met with Abbey ward councillors Tony Page, Karen Rowland and Mohammed Ayub to discuss the proposals. The project team delivered the presentation which was given at the public webinar and took questions. Issues raised at the meeting related to design, housing mixture, car parking provision, sustainability and public realm enhancements. The meeting also discussed issues surrounding the existing Cosmo restaurant. It was noted that a larger Cosmo restaurant would be welcome and there were also conversations regarding the entrance and layout.

Consultation Webinar

3.7. On 3 March 2022, a consultation webinar was held to inform members of the public of the proposals. The webinar consisted of a presentation given by members of the project team followed by a Q&A session.

3.8. The webinar lasted approximately 45 minutes and was attended by six members of the public. A copy of the webinar has since been uploaded onto the project website together with a copy of the presentation slides.

4. Summary of Consultation Feedback

Overall Feedback

4.1. At the webinar, members of the public asked the following questions:

- “I saw the number of flats seems to be 103. Is that the overall total?”
- “If you get Planning Consent in the Autumn when would the work start and how long would it take?”
- “So what is the mix of flats?”
- “How much sunlight will reach the garden area on the first floor given the height of the surrounding buildings?”
- “Looks good. The colonnade is narrow compared to plot e. Will they complement each other?”
- “What's the deal with Cosmo? Seems odd to plan for them to come back two years later when they could just relocate elsewhere?”
- “So with just 6% 3 bed = 6 flats and yet you have a play area for children. I am not convinced that flats are child friendly at all. How do you make this child friendly?”
- “What is the affordability percentage?”
- “Any plans for the other parts of your ownership further along Friar St?”
- “Love the plans overall - they tie in really well with the Station Hill design and overall development, and really add benefit to the Friar St area. The roof gardens are a really nice touch.”

4.2. Feedback received at the public consultation webinar included comments surrounding the development such as the height and scale of the building and housing, as well as neutral statements and some positive comments. Discussion also focused on the existing Cosmo restaurant.

4.3. There were clear trends in the feedback received both during the consultation webinar and through conversations with Abbey ward councillors. The main comments raised relate to housing in terms of



affordable housing provision and the proposed mix of type and tenure, the height of the development and car parking provision.

- 4.4. Feedback from the local community and councillors is of paramount importance to Shavriam Group. To this end, Shavriam Group has sought to act upon the feedback received in order for it to play a role in forming the final, high quality planning application.
- 4.5. The Shavriam Group appreciates that Cosmo is a popular restaurant and that many local people would like to see it retained in the new development. Accordingly, an agreement is in place that a larger Cosmo restaurant will be re-provided in the new development.

5. Response to Consultation Feedback

- 5.1. Shavriam Group is grateful to the local community for their feedback during the consultation process. Based on the feedback received, a number of changes have been made to the scheme which are reflected in the final form of the planning application.
- 5.2. Following public consultation, further development of the communal terraces and shared amenity spaces have looked to improve the usability of the spaces and inclusivity of the furniture for all ages and abilities.
- 5.3. Given the sites location and proximity to the station, there will likely be a large group of young families that occupy the building, and with that, comes friends and family to visit and stay.
- 5.4. To accommodate these we have redesigned the public amenity to provide picnic benches and outdoor furniture for people who are in need of backrests and use wheelchairs. There is definitely a need for disabled, easy access outdoor furniture. All made robustly to take the knocks from wheelchairs and manufactured from sustainable wood from environmentally friendly sources.
- 5.5. Along with this, adaptation to the circulation space at ground floor regarding parking has made getting in and out of the building at lower level easier, along with revisions to the flexibility and adaptability of workshop / incubator spaces at ground, improving their ability to be re-configured according to the occupier and end user.
- 5.6. Furthermore, acoustic ventilation panels and mesh screens have also been incorporated into the southern façade in order to mitigate overheating.

6. Media Engagement

- 6.1. Following an enquiry from a journalist at the Reading Chronicle specifically concerning the impact of the proposals on Cosmo restaurant, Cratus provided a statement to the journalist referencing that the restaurant would be retained. The Reading Chronicle also provided a link to the webinar presentation on its website.



7. Summary and Conclusion

- 7.1. A comprehensive process of pre-application community consultation has been undertaken. As well as with the Council and Design Review Panel. Engagement with stakeholders has been sought using an appropriate mixture of methods and feedback has been fed into the development of the proposal.
- 7.2. Shaviram Group is confident that most of the concerns identified have been appropriately addressed through the development of a planning application or can be properly managed at a later stage in the development process.

Appendix 1 – Project Website



Shaviram Group is consulting with the local community in central Reading ahead of submitting an application for new homes and a new streetscape at 35-39 Friar Street.



Our proposals will include:

-  103 much needed high quality, sustainable affordable homes including affordable housing
-  Enhanced connectivity into Reading town centre. The site is well-situated to encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport
-  Biodiversity enhancement through the provision of accessible amenity space and roof gardens.
-  Active frontage, extending the vibrant high street into Friars Walk.

About Us

Shaviram is an investment group established in 2013 that specialises in property investment and development projects.

Since inception Shaviram has built over 875 homes, with a further 1000 currently under construction. Through years of experience, we have developed a proven approach of identifying strong investment opportunities, managing every stage of our projects and delivering them with extremely high attention to detail.

We are committed to building sustainable developments that create exceptional places for people to live and enjoy an excellent quality of life





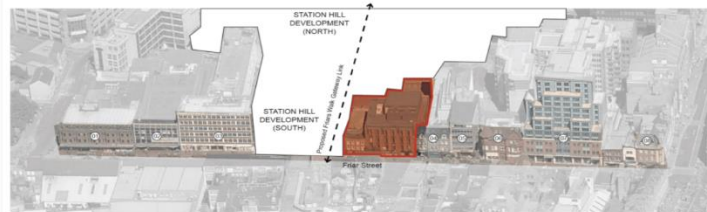
35-39 Friar Street Site Context

Existing Context

The Site

The site is located at 35-39 Friar Street in Reading town centre. Located between the railway station to the North, Broad Street and The Oracle to the South. The site occupies a visible location along the North-South route that will redefine pedestrian and non-vehicular movement through Reading in the near future.

The site neighbours the emerging Station Hill development to the immediate West and is within a 5 minute walking distance of Reading train station.



Emerging Context

Station Hill



Station Hill is a transformational development for Reading and the Thames Valley, a new centre of activity creating a connected live-work-play experience. Redevelopment is finally under way and once complete will provide a truly mixed-use, sustainable development for the benefit of all. The mix of uses across the project offers new homes, assisted living accommodation, a hotel and flexible high-tech office space delivered as world class commercial buildings. The public realm in and around the site will be activated by restaurants, retail, food halls, community and leisure spaces designed to act as the framework for a holistic experience where people will live, work, play and relax.

Friars Walk

Friars Walk delivers an intimate retail thoroughfare with independent retailers, local heroes and carefully selected anchor brands, creating a new and distinct retail experience for Reading. Human scale, domestic shops create a calm and pleasant place to browse and relax. Station Hill Plaza and Friars Walk will become the preferred choice of pedestrian route through Reading town centre.



Planning Context

The Reading Borough Local Plan Proposals Map (RLPM) (adopted November 2019) identifies the site as falling within the Reading Central Area and office core (CR1) and the Station Hill River Major Opportunity Area (CR12) where the site specifically falls within the wider Friar Street and Station Road sub area (CR11a) (in total this sub area comprises 1.36 ha) within which the Council seeks:

"...active retail and leisure uses on the ground floor along Friar Street and Station Road, with a mix of uses on higher floors. Development should enhance linkages in a north-south direction to link to the Station Hill area. Listed buildings and their settings in the area will be conserved, and opportunities to improve the environment of Merchants Place will be sought".

Overall the indicative potential for the wider sub area is stated (RLPM, pg. 146) as 150-270 dwellings, offices, retail and leisure (with no significant net gain assumed). The proposals map also identifies the site as being in an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP). The site falls just outside the Station Area Tall Building Cluster (CR20).



Placemaking Principles

1

CONNECTIVITY

Enhancing the North South gateway to a greener Reading town centre.

2

CELEBRATING CORNERS

Completing the final piece of the Station Hill jigsaw puzzle.

3

ACTIVE FRONTAGE

Extending the vibrant high street into Friars Walk.

4

INTENSIFYING ECOLOGY

Urban greening through roof gardens and spaces for play.

Connectivity



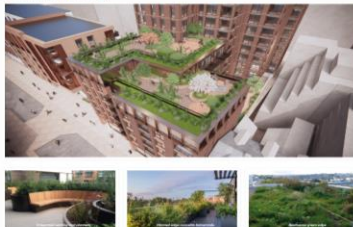
Celebrating Corners



Active Frontage

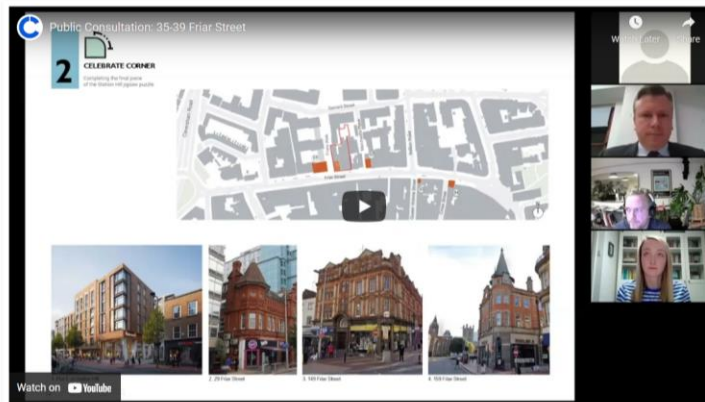


Intensifying Ecology





On Thursday, 3rd March a public consultation webinar took place. You can view a recording on the webinar below, and a copy of the presentation slides is available here.



[Download the presentation slides](#)

General Feedback

Name (Required)

First Last

Address

Street Address

Address Line 2

City State / Province / Region

ZIP / Postal Code Country

Email (Required)

General Comments



SHAVIRAM GROUP ONLINE CONSULTATION EVENT 35-39 FRIAR STREET, READING

Public consultation webinar on Thursday, 3 March 2022. 19:00-20:00.

Shaviram Group is holding a public webinar for the local community to consult on proposals for the redevelopment of 35-39 Friar Street into a residential-led mixed use scheme alongside retail space.

We would greatly value the input of local people in shaping our plans.

At the online consultation event, our project team will share proposals ahead of a planning application, discuss the proposed timescales for the application and answer any questions you may have.

Our proposals will include:

- ▶ 103 new homes, including affordable housing.
- ▶ Enhanced connectivity into Reading town centre. The site is well-situated to encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport.
- ▶ Biodiversity enhancement through the provision of accessible amenity space and roof gardens.
- ▶ Active frontage, extending the vibrant high street into Friars Walk.

Please join us in order to provide feedback on our proposals and discuss the development in detail and question our project team.

Please register to attend the webinar via the project website - friarstreetconsultation.co.uk - you will receive a confirmation email and joining instructions. If you are unable to attend, but would still like to view the proposals, a recording of the webinar will be uploaded to the project website after the event. The website will also provide information on how to leave feedback on the proposals.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Duncan Flynn of Cratus Communications on Dfflynn@cratus.co.uk or call 07769 653 052



