

3. SITE EVALUATION

3.1 URBAN GRAIN

The site sits within an area that is mostly occupied by medium to large developments. The fine residential grain lies further North-West and it is severely separated from the site by the major transport route, Vastern Road.

The railway station, warehouses (South), the office buildings facing the River Thames and the station's car park building (located East of the site) contrast against the tight residential grain to the North of the site.

According to the Reading Tall Buildings Strategy:
The building blocks have a large floor space, although the buildings are not high rise and there is extensive car parking adjacent to the buildings. These features combine to create a medium scale townscape.

— Site Boundary
— Character Area 22



3.2 GREEN SPACE

Christchurch Meadows and the river walk to the North of the site are the closest green space/green public amenities .

There are no public green spaces located within the character area.

The proposal site presents an opportunity to improve the existing amenity through the provision of a green link between Caversham and the centre of Reading, which stands in line with the aspirations stated in local planning guidance.

— Site Boundary
— Character Area 22

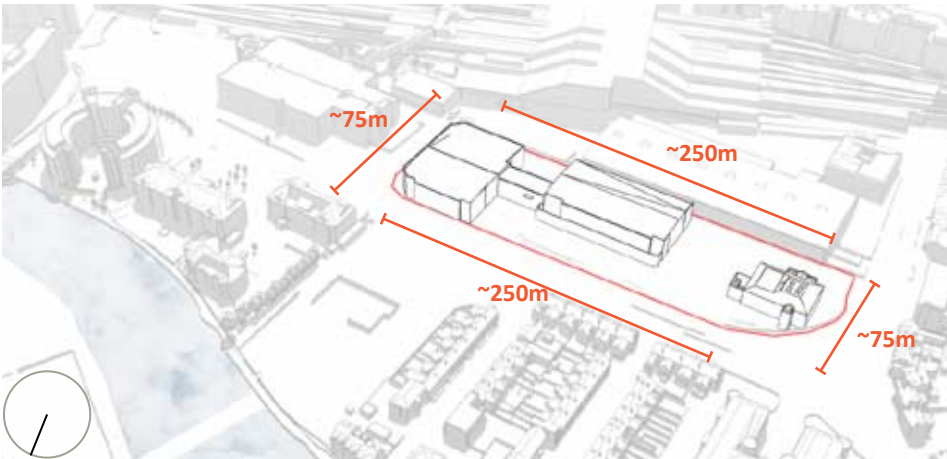
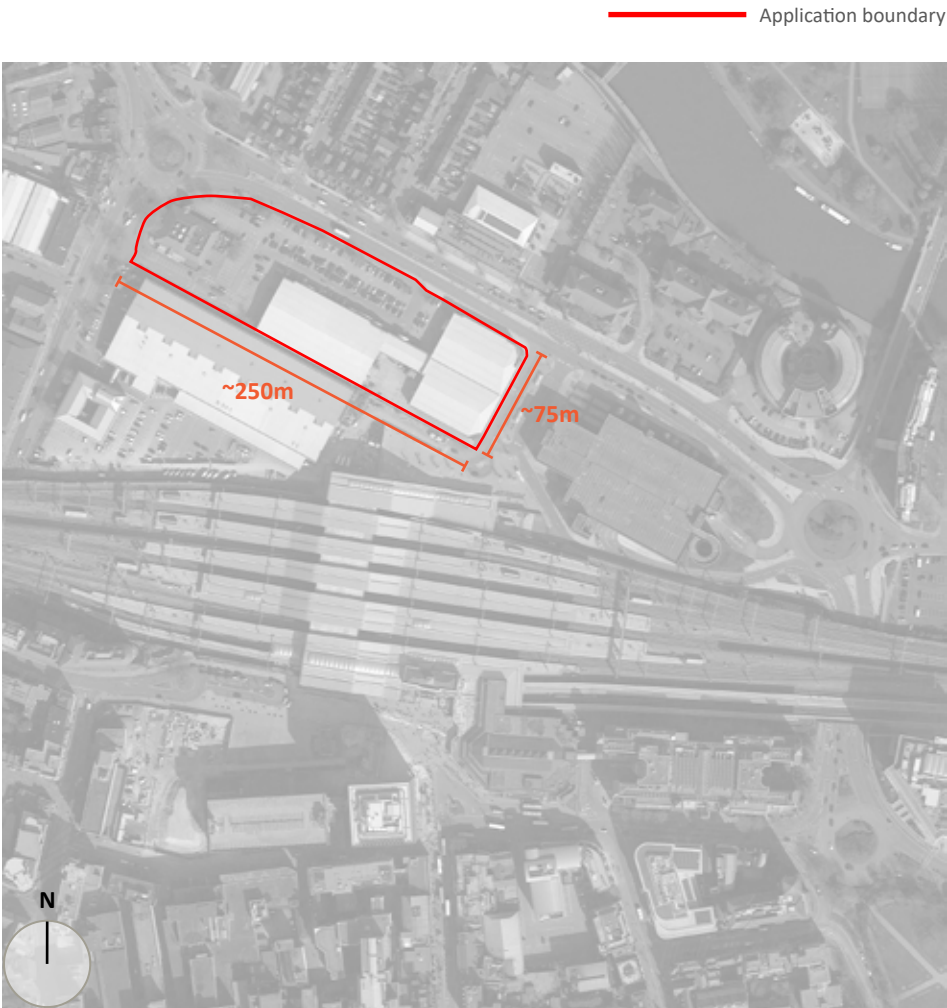


3. SITE EVALUATION

3.3 CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

SITE DIMENSIONS AND PROPORTIONS

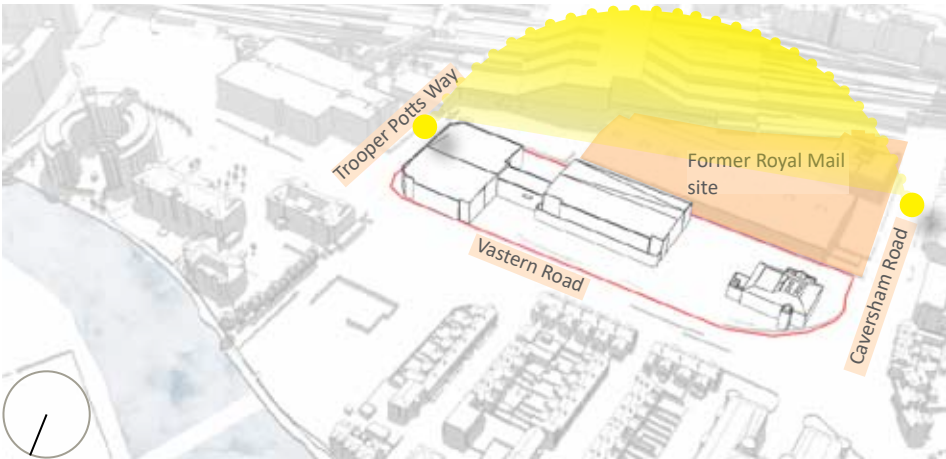
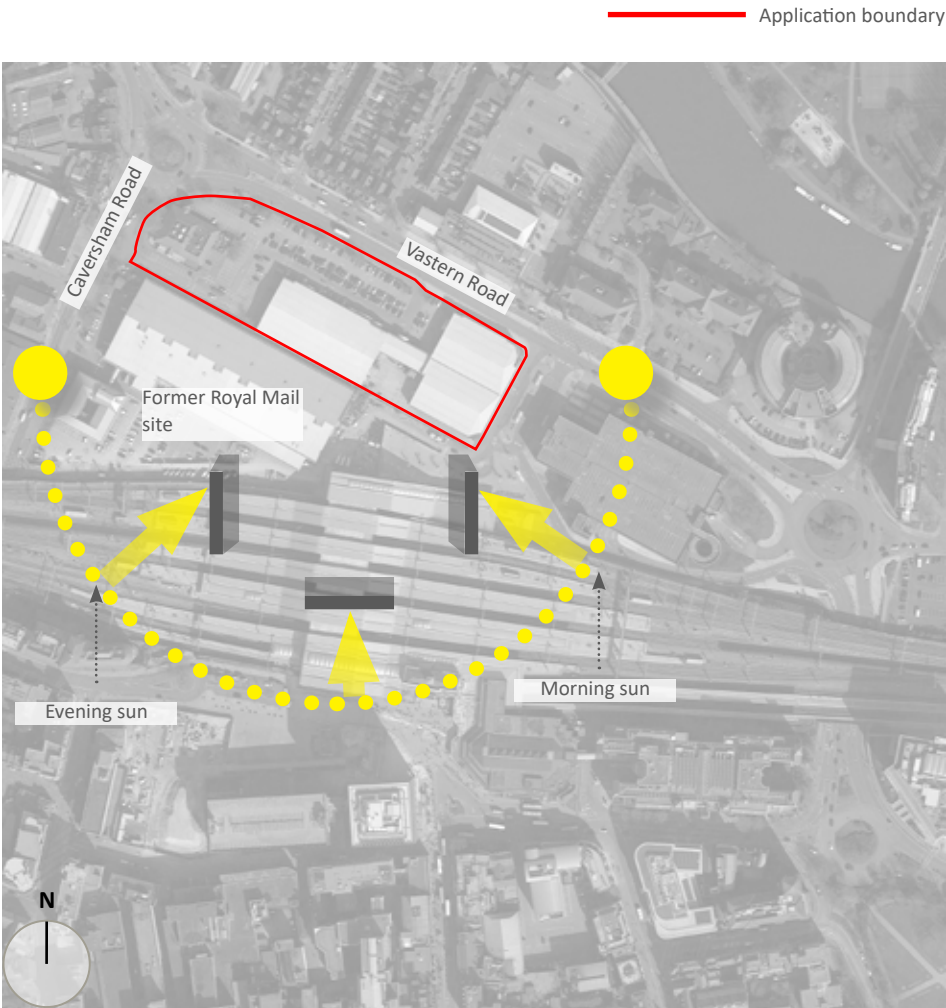
The site has an area of 1.77 Hectares / 4.4 acres and measures approximately 250m by 75m.



SUNLIGHT AND NORTHERN ASPECT

The site is a rectangular shape, with one of the long edges facing N - NE along Vastern Road. The opposite side adjoins the former Royal Mail site, which is currently under consideration for redevelopment.

The arrangement of development on the Aviva site will need to be carefully considered in term of mass and layout so that buildings placed adjacent to the Vastern Road boundary do not overshadow the houses to the north. These buildings adjacent to Vastern Road should also not themselves be overshadowed by other development on the Aviva site against the Royal Mail boundary.



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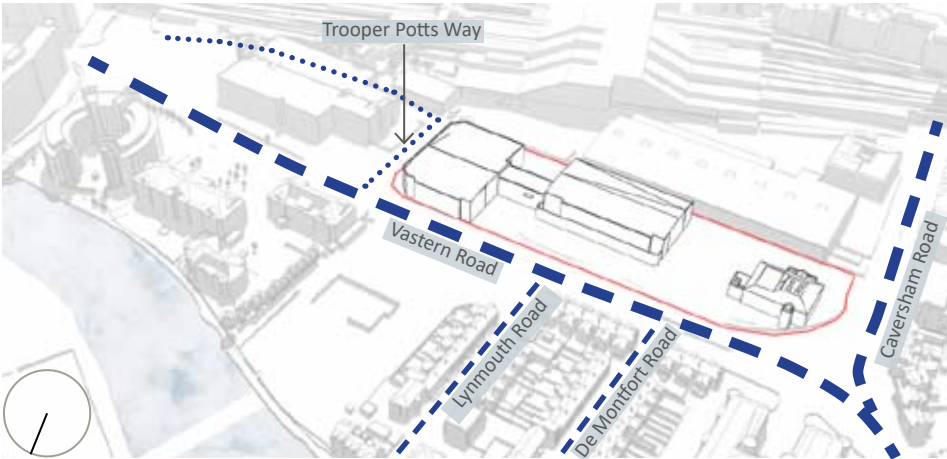
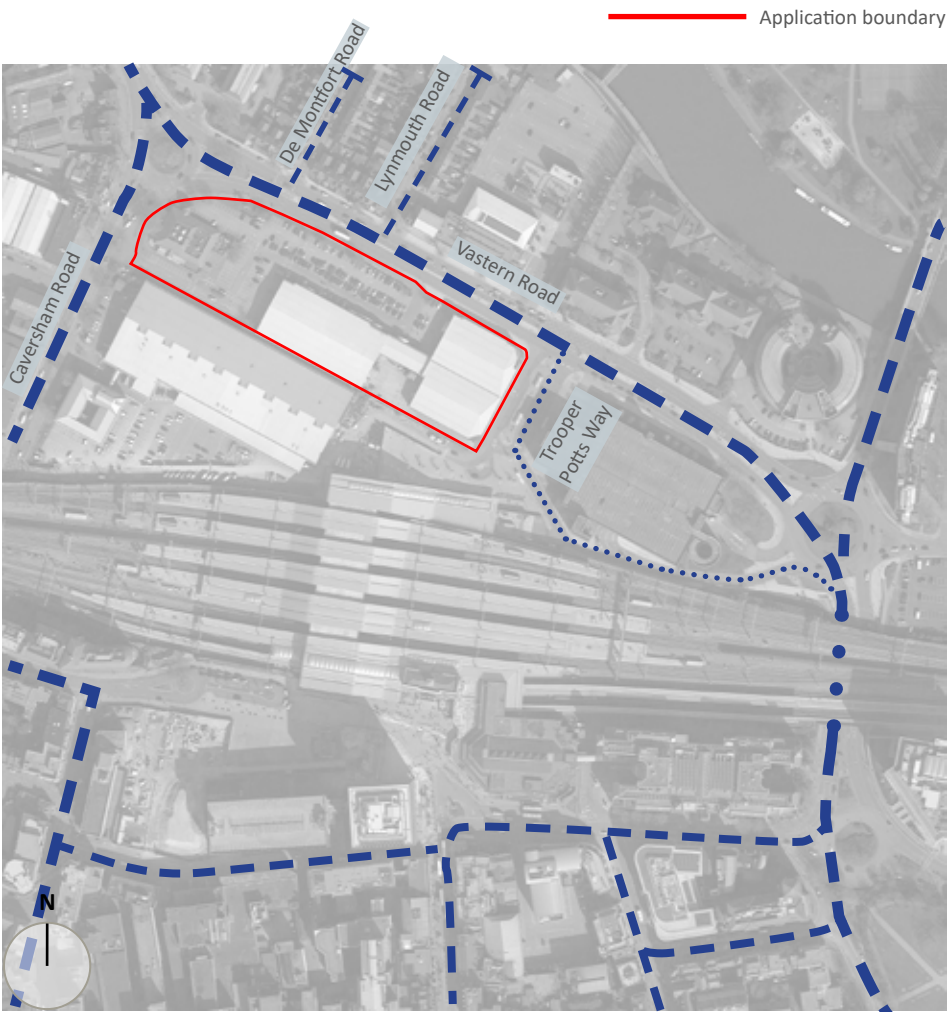
3.3 CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

SURROUNDING ROADS

The site sits at the junction of two major vehicular routes: Vastern Road to the North of the site and Caversham Road to the West.

An access from Caversham Road and an egress onto Vastern Road currently serve the existing uses on the site.

A secondary access route serving as a taxi parking and bus turning point, as well as an exit from the railway station multilevel car park, sits to the East of the site.



- Bus only and station car park access
- Secondary vehicular access
- ===== Main vehicular access

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

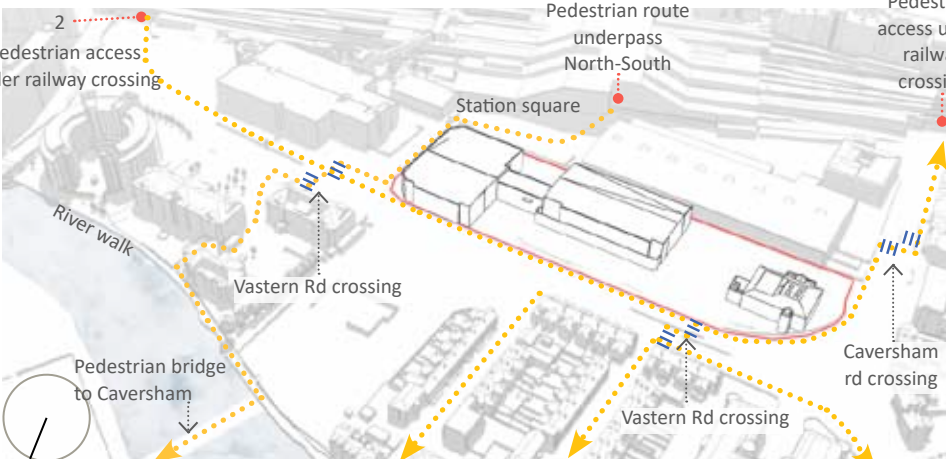
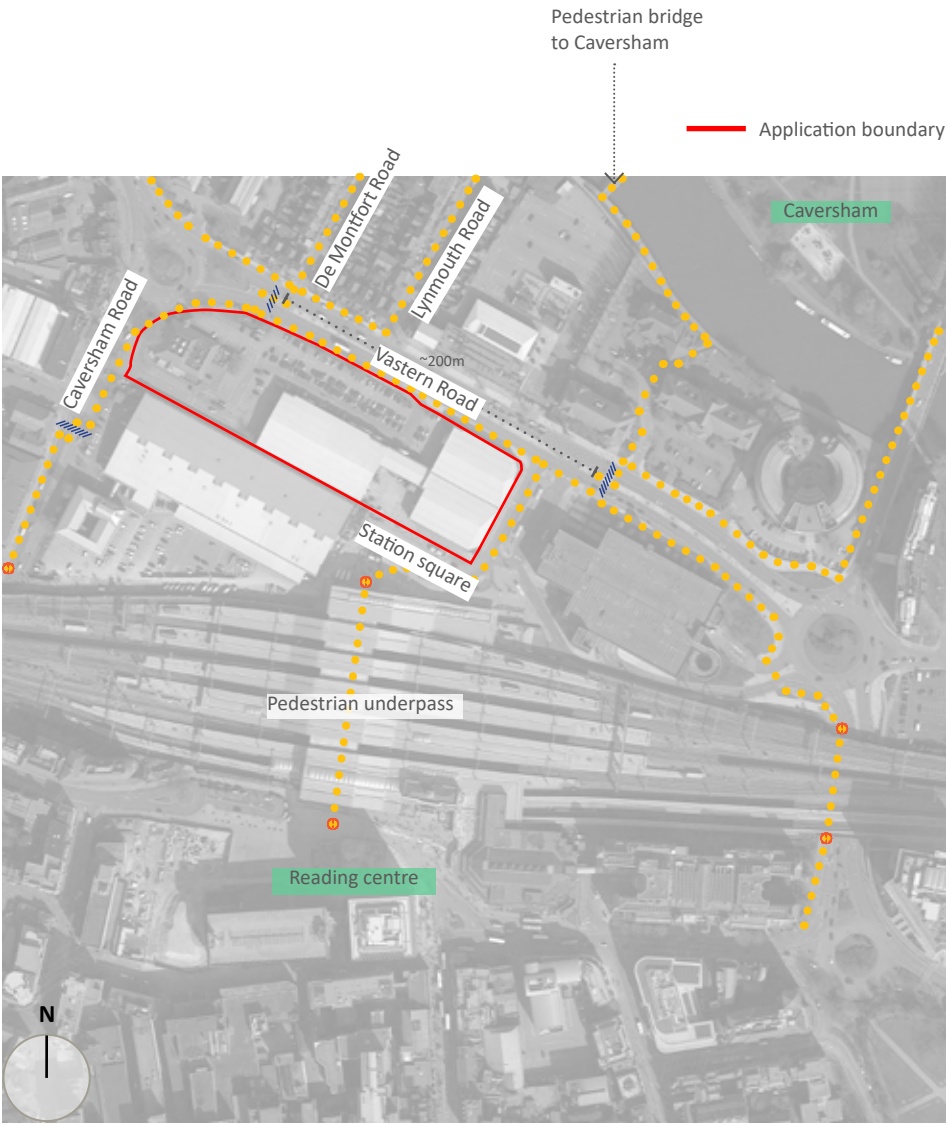
The northern exit from the railway station and subway from the town centre emerges onto the back of the retail park - the back of the site- onto Station square. The pedestrian routes to and from Caversham to the railway station are currently interrupted by Vastern Road and by the lack of permeability posed by the Station Retail Park site.

Routes from the centre of Reading to the green space in Caversham and to the river walk have to cross under the railway tracks and busy Vastern Rd. The latter can be crossed using one of the two staggered crossings. From the northern pavement of Vastern Road, routes down Lynmouth Road or De Montfort Road, or a route through the office development to the East of the site are the only opportunities to gain access to the river.

Access to both routes is located at considerable distance from the pedestrian under-passage that exits onto Station Square or from one of the two pedestrian accesses below the railway tracks placed West and East of the station.

There is a significant opportunity to improve the pedestrian access for the area by accommodating new links within the proposal and a high level of permeability.

- Pedestrian routes
- ⊕ Under-crossing access
- //// Pedestrian crossing



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3.3 CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

FRONTAGE AND ACTIVATION

The existing buildings provide a limited contribution to the area’s active frontage.

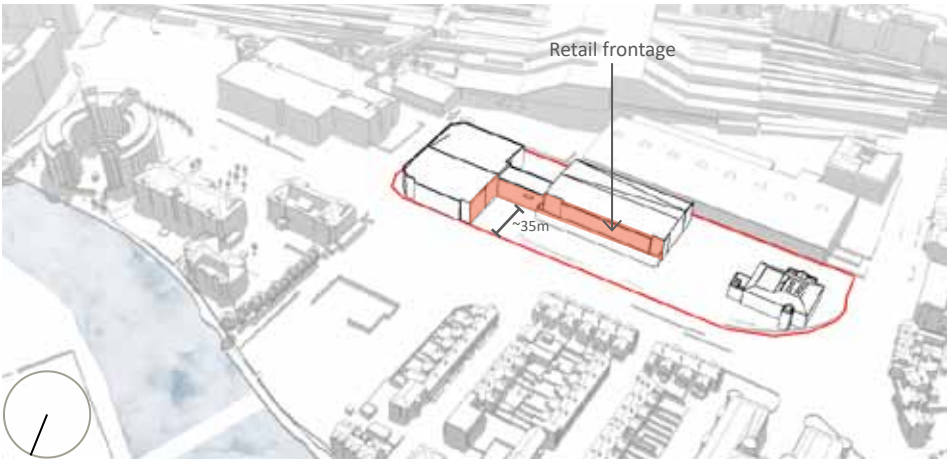
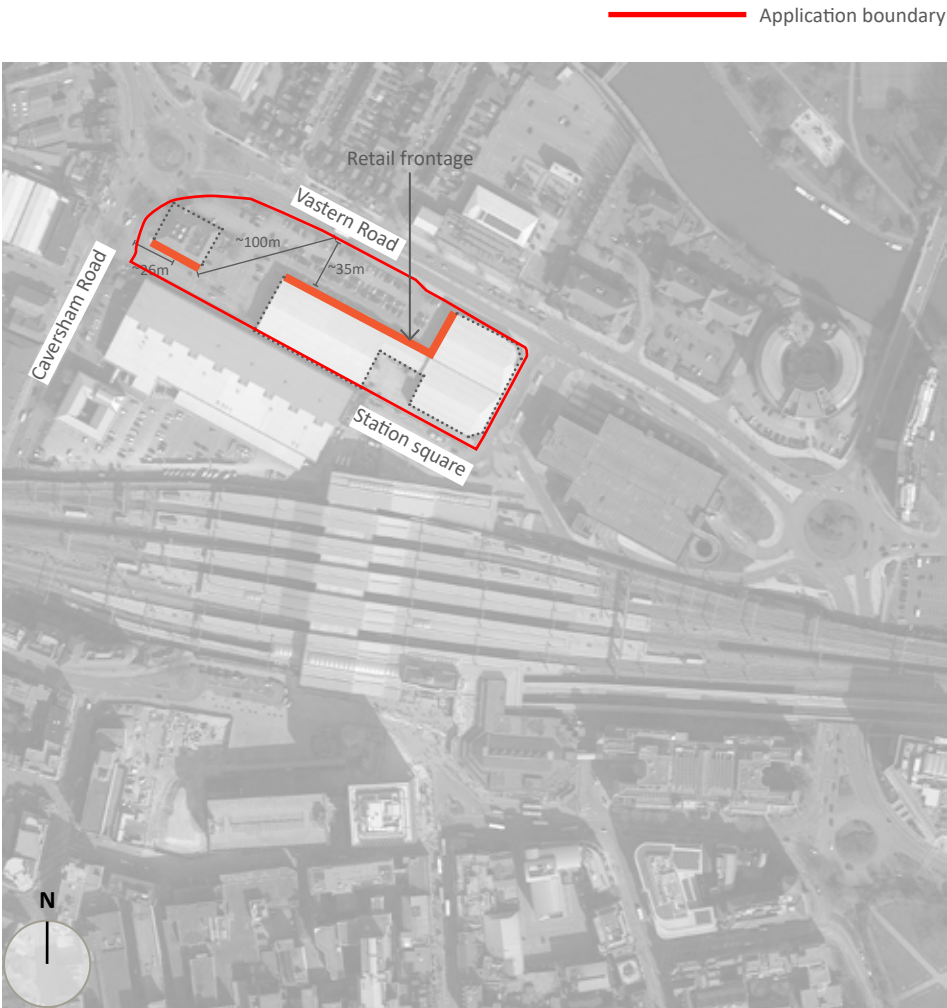
Facing station square is the service access and back of house area for the retail park.

Along Vastern Road, the entrances to the existing retail units are set back from the road behind the customer car park.

The existing retail units are self-contained and rely on costumers arriving by car. Pedestrian access is limited through the car park.

There is an opportunity to improve the area by providing a focus on pedestrian links and pedestrian experience. The area could change from a transition zone into a community hub.

Active frontages should address all major routes - existing and proposed.



EMERGING CONTEXT

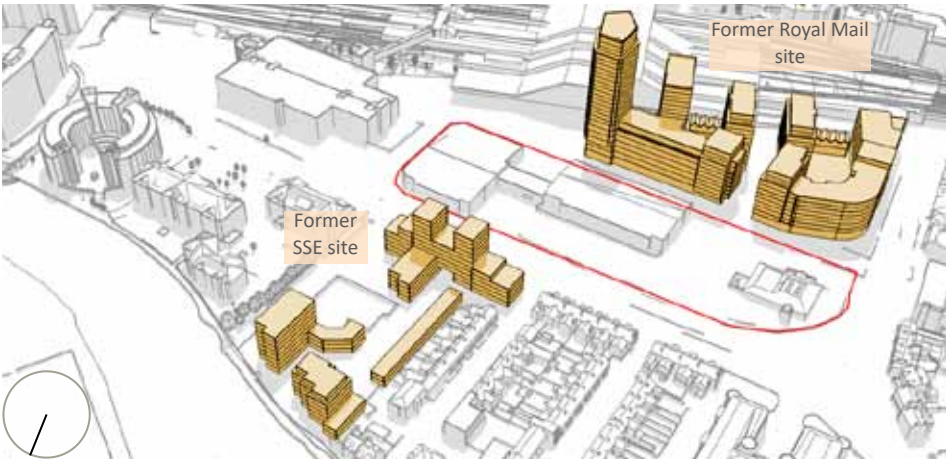
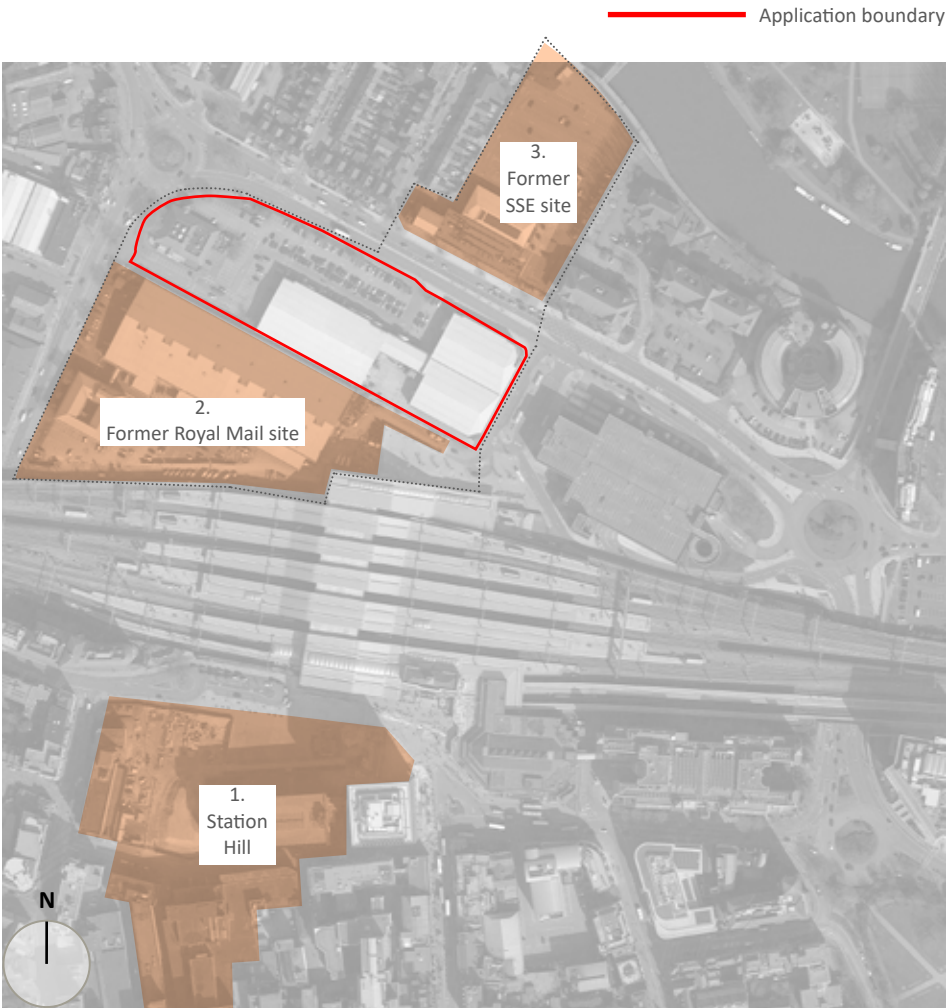
The area and townscape will change significantly with new developments emerging in close proximity to the site.

Detailed in Reading Station Area Framework (RSAF) as a major opportunity site for the northern area of Reading sites are all currently being considered for redevelopment.

There is an opportunity to co-ordinate the emerging proposals for these sites.

- 1. Station Hill
- 2. Former Royal Mail site
- 3. Former SSE site

The Former Royal Mail site lies directly to the south of the Aviva site and development here is likely to limit sunlight and daylight levels on the Aviva site. At Reserved Matters stage, the design of residential accommodation on the Aviva site will need to be carefully considered and arranged on the site so that accommodation on the Aviva site receives acceptable levels of daylight and sunlight.



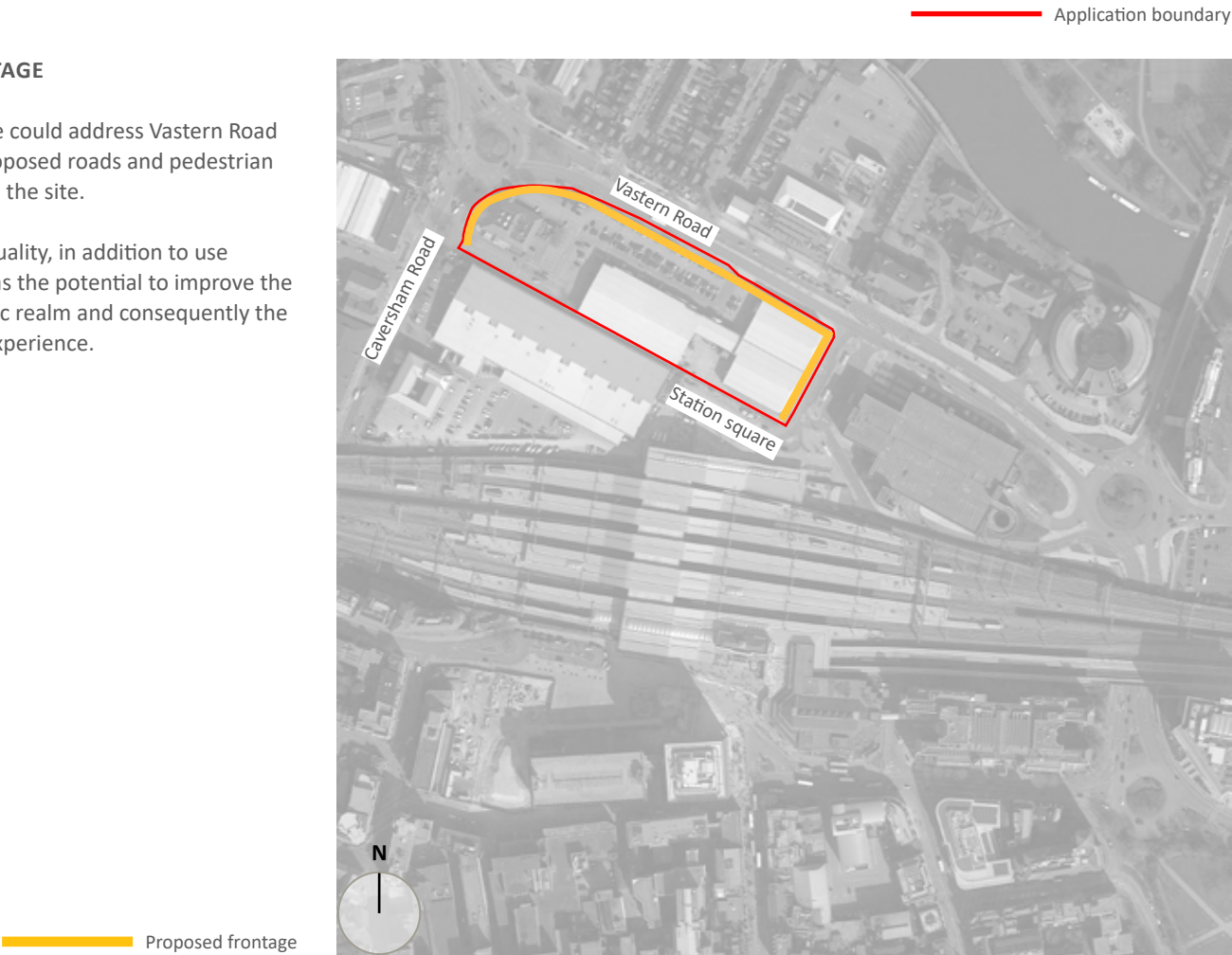
3. SITE EVALUATION

3.3 CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

NEW FRONTAGE

New frontage could address Vastern Road as well as proposed roads and pedestrian routes within the site.

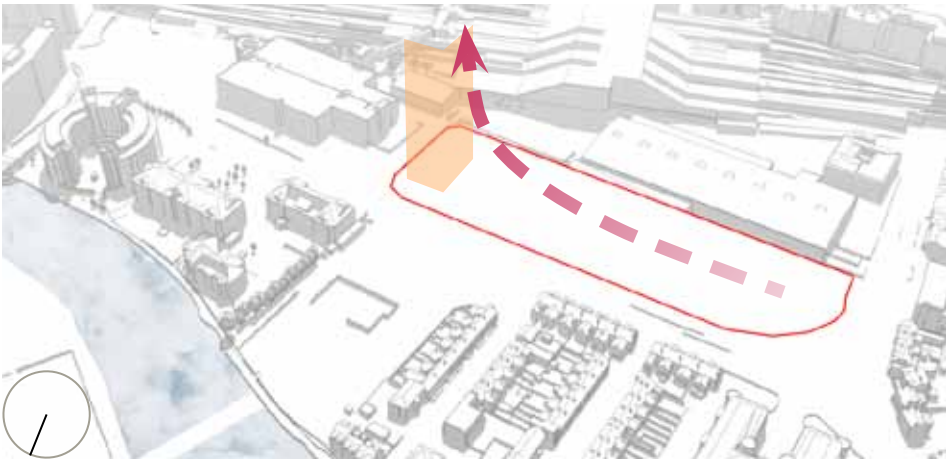
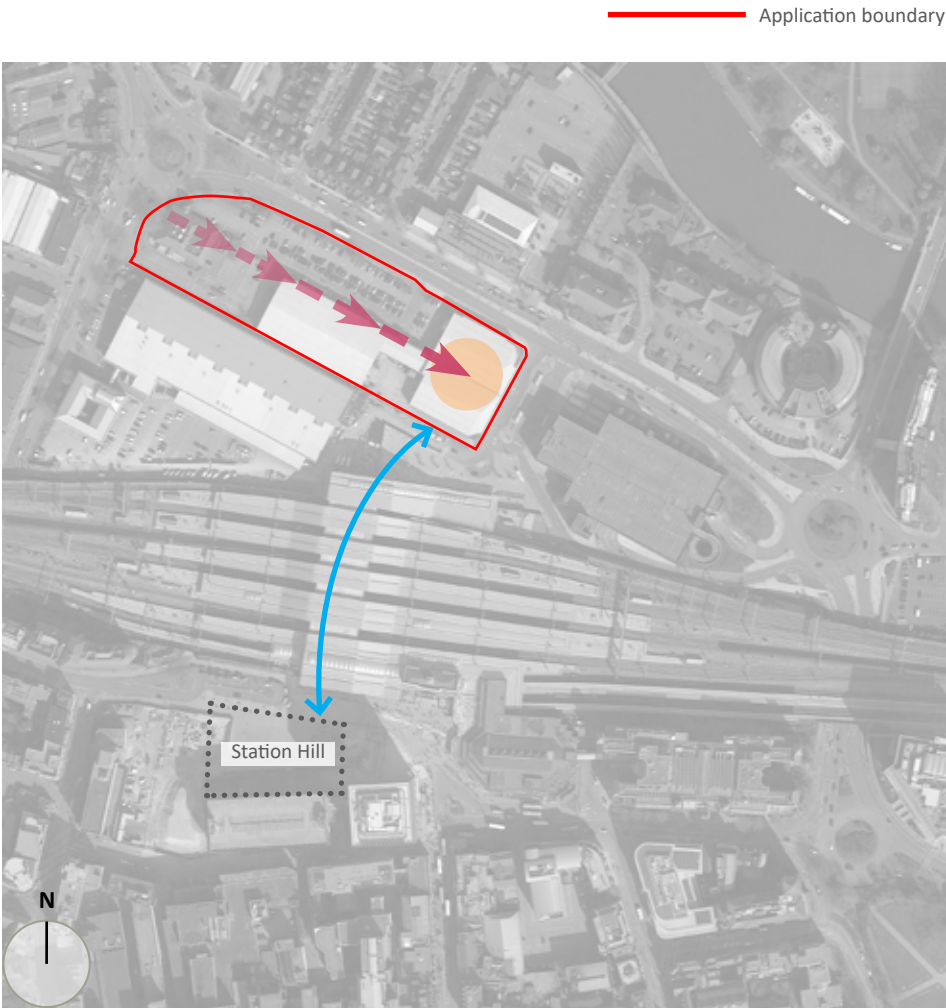
The design quality, in addition to use allocation, has the potential to improve the existing public realm and consequently the pedestrian experience.



LANDMARKS

As recommended in the local planning guidance, the proposed development's height should gradually rise from West to East, reaching the peak at the area of the site currently occupied by The Range.

In line with planning guidance, the site will provide the Local Landmark on the northern side of the railway station. The landmark will complete the 'gateway into Reading' with the emerging development on the Station Hill site.



3. SITE EVALUATION

3.3 CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

NEW ROUTES

Local connectivity and permeability will be improved with the provision of new vehicular and pedestrian links.

Local planning policy recommends visual and pedestrian co-ordination between new streets and existing routes. The distribution of new routes should provide a visual and physical connection with the roads opposite Vastern Road: Lynmouth Road and De Montfort Road.

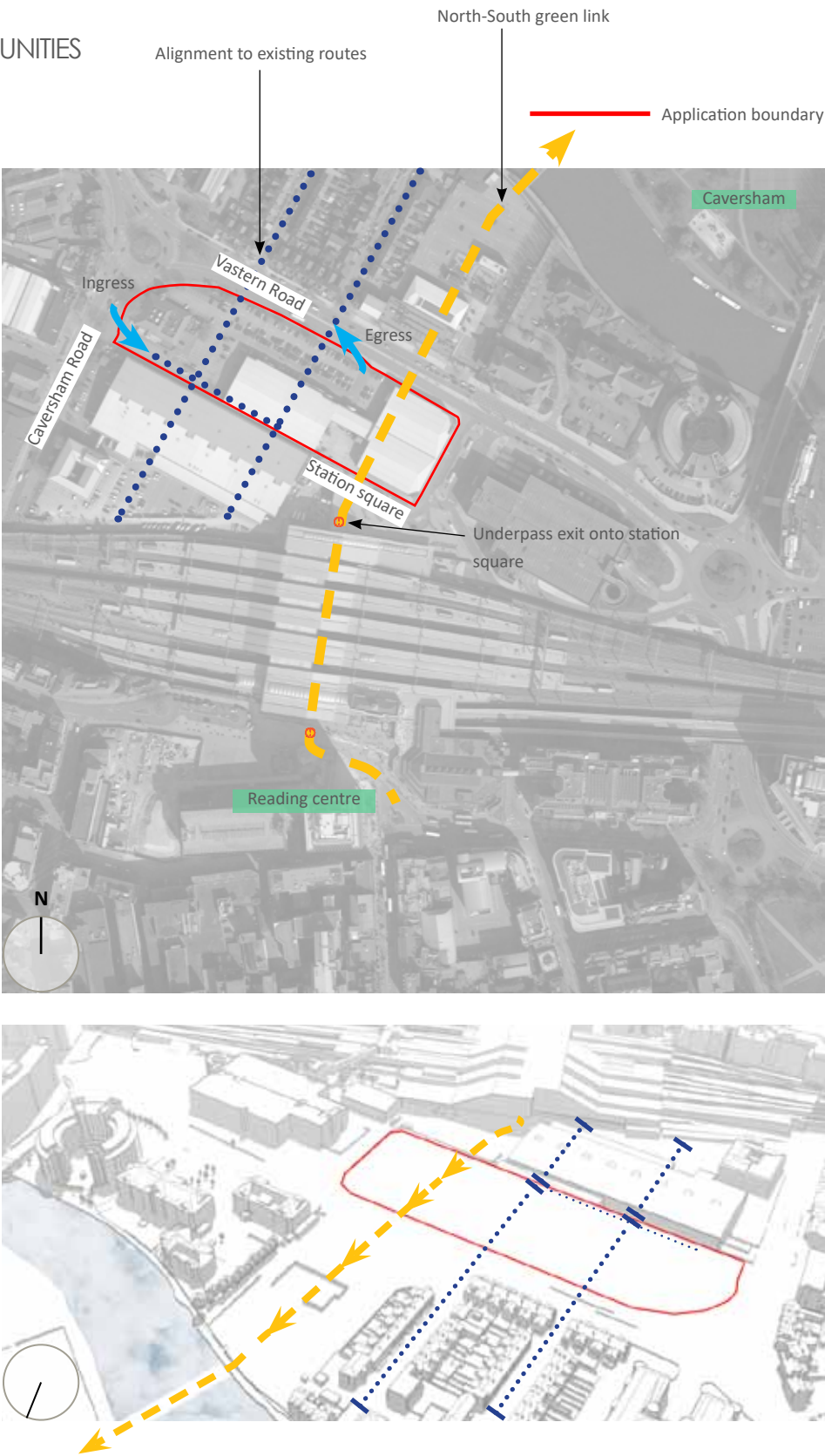
The proposal should seek to retain the site's existing access and egress points, unless proposed amendments to these could improve the existing circulation.

The proposal should seek to limit the provision of vehicular routes in favour of a pedestrian and cycle friendly environment.

The opportunity to create a continuous route from the centre of Reading to the green amenity in Caversham should be considered for the site.

Provision of this link is in line with the recommendations outlined in local planning guidance. This route will provide additional amenity and green spaces accessible for the public.

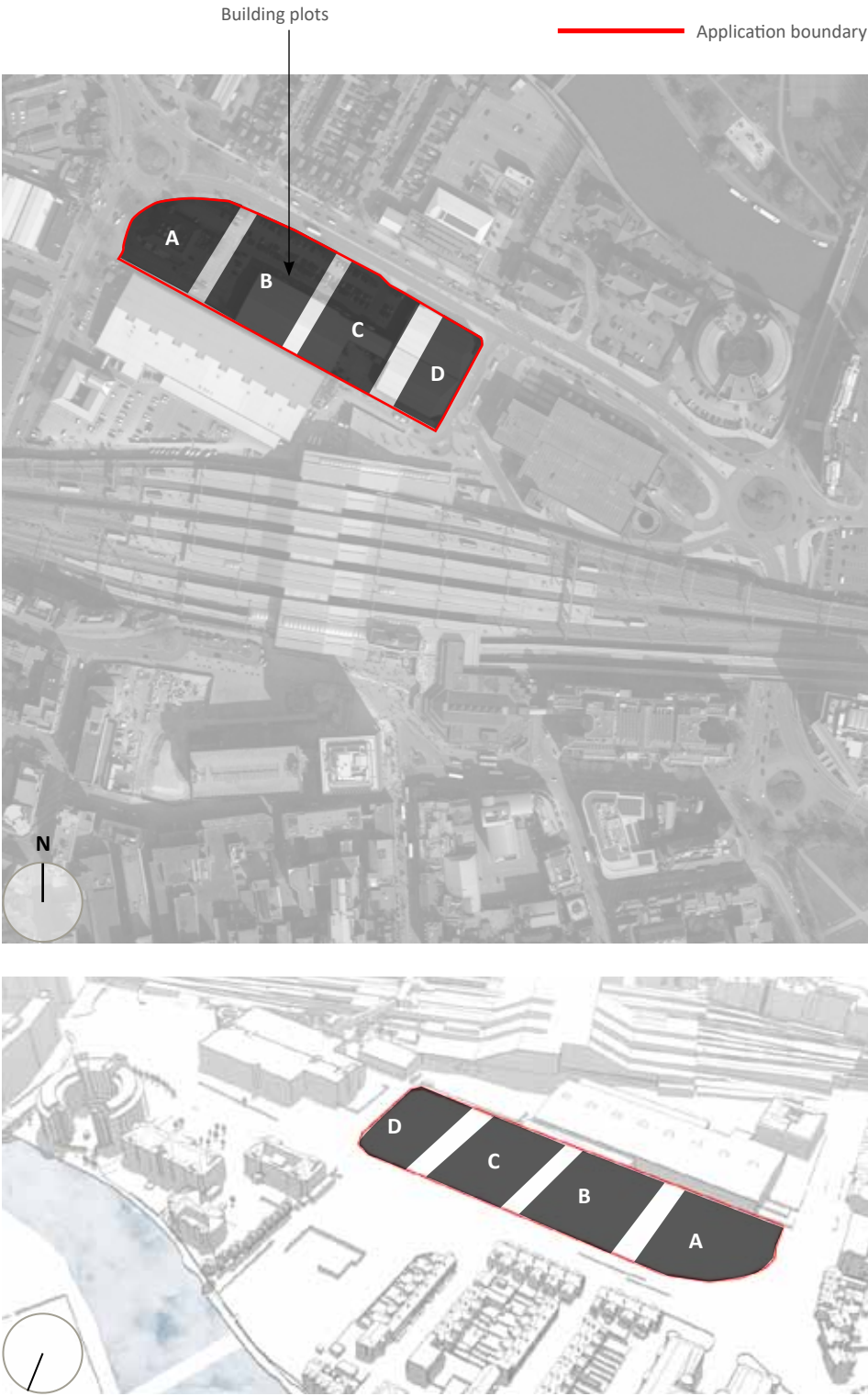
The measure will improve the existing connectivity within the wider area as well as the quality of public amenity.



PROPOSED BUILDING PLOTS

Alignment to existing routes, permeability and the proposed green link define four building plots.

The resulted layout is in line with the recommendations from the Reading Station Area Framework.



3. SITE EVALUATION

3.3 CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

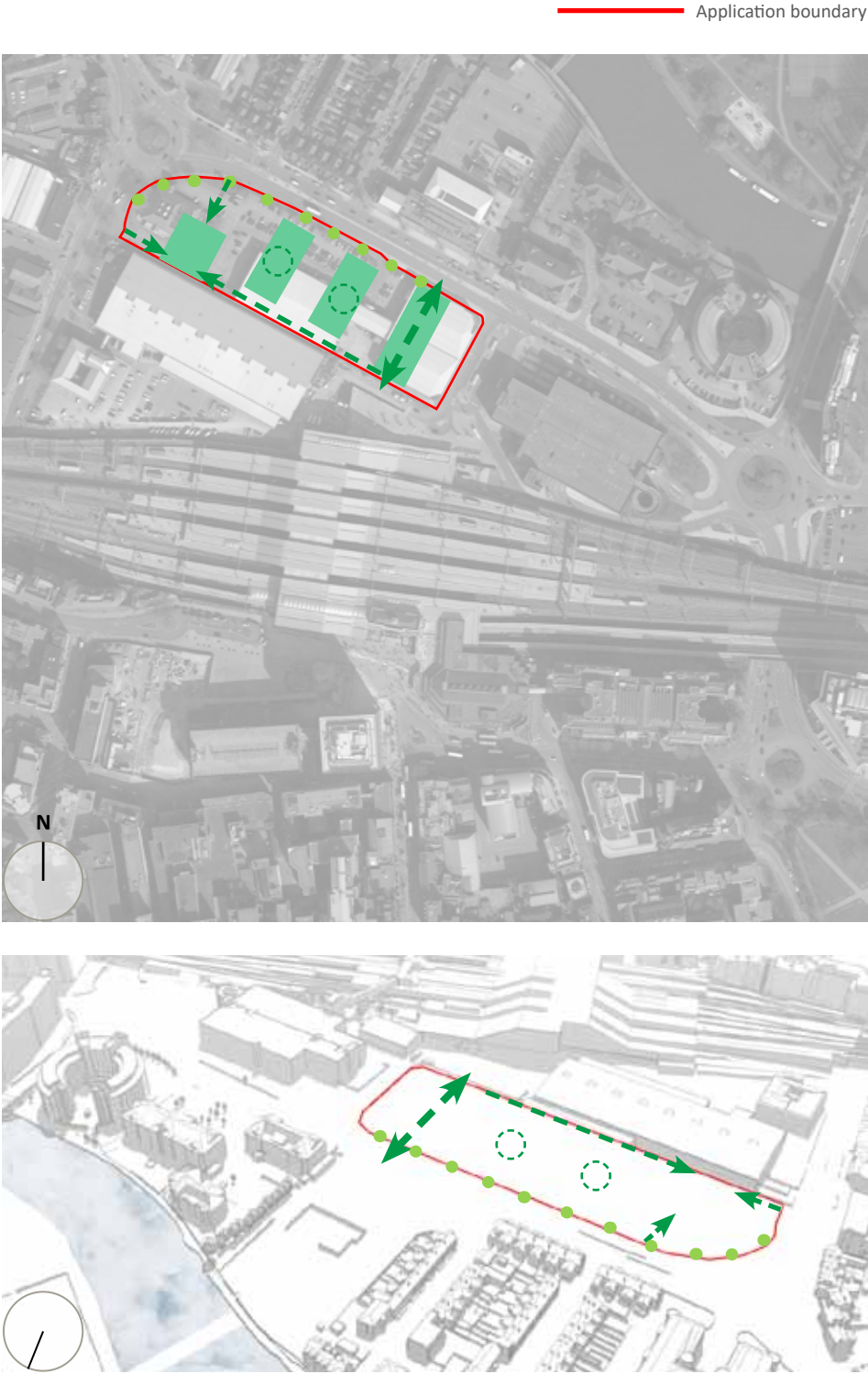
PROPOSED GREEN SPACES

A range of green spaces with different levels of privacy could be provided on site. Landscape strategies will contribute to the character of the area and likewise to its quality and security.

Perimeter blocks allow for enclosed courtyards that would provide private amenity to residents and safe playspace.

There is an opportunity to address planting along Vastern Road. Improvements on this major traffic route will benefit both existing and future residents.

Providing a green public square near the western edge of the site, an area which enjoys good aspect, will distribute the amenity space throughout the site.



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3.4 VISION

Successful precedents of mixed use developments informed the vision for the site. These schemes share a common focus on communal amenity and emphasise the importance of landscaped areas.

The outdoor amenity displays a range of degrees of privacy. The ground floor space is animated by retail/leisure spaces, cafes, shops and restaurants.

The public space is designed to be high quality and surpasses the function of a transit zone becoming itself a destination.



Fitzroy square, Fitzrovia



Fitzroy square, Fitzrovia



Brindley Place



Kings Cross



Brindley Place



Brindley Place



Brindley Place



Kings Cross

3. SITE EVALUATION

3.5 THE CONCEPT

BRINGING THE MEADOWS INTO READING

There are three Design Concepts that will be interwoven into the landscape proposals of the Site.

The first concept develops the Kennet-Thames Spine, which provides a strategic connection between the River Thames and the town centre as a green corridor, bringing the river meadows into Reading.

Elements include:

- Creating a green corridor from Christchurch Meadow and King’s Meadow to the north of the River Thames, through the site and into the centre of Reading
- Providing a rich and biodiverse planting scheme creating new habitats and wildlife corridors
- Creating a varied and resilient landscape able to deal with climate change.
- Promoting wellbeing for the new and existing residents by providing easy access to nature.



● SITE LOCATION

FIGURE L1: BRINGING THE MEADOWS INTO READING



The three Design Concepts inform the masterplan and are woven into the design of each character area.

- L2. Christchurch Meadows
- L3. King’s Meadow



CONNECTING TO THE THAMES

The second Concept recognises that the Site benefits from being close to the River Thames and River Kennett. This provides a number of opportunities to inform the proposals:

- The Site is in the historical flood plain of the River Thames. Echoes of this geography will be represented through careful use of green and blue infrastructure elements.
- Rain gardens and swales will be used to address rainwater run-off within the Site, to help raise awareness of the water cycle and the natural processes rain can go through.
- The East to West curving shapes and riverine forms will be visually represented through landscape features and patternation in materials.



● SITE LOCATION

FIGURE L4: CONNECTING TO THE THAMES



The three Design Concepts inform the masterplan and are woven into the design of each character area.

- L5. River Thames
- L6. River Kennet



3. SITE EVALUATION

GATEWAY - CONNECTIONS

The Site is separated from Reading and the Thames by a number of physical barriers for pedestrians and cyclists, in particular Vastern Road and the railway line

The third Design Concept intends to break down these barriers.

- Create new connections, enabling the Site to become a gateway to the centre of Reading to Caversham and the open spaces of the Thames.
- Linking with the new footbridge over the river to Caversham.
- The station is a key consideration as it represents a gateway, connecting the Site to the wider region and nation.
- This concept will be interpreted through linear forms and patternation that run North/South. The forms are aligned to the street grid and contrast with the riverine forms that run East/West.



● SITE LOCATION

FIGURE L7: GATEWAY - CONNECTIONS



The three Design Concepts inform the masterplan and are woven into the design of each character area.

- L8. Reading Railway Station
- L9. Christchurch Bridge

