



- Primary Commuter Routes
- Thames Way Path
- Existing disconnected route between Train Station and River Thames



2.5 Local Site Context

The site is currently used as the Scottish and Southern Electric office building with associated on-site parking. There is also a significant quantity of high voltage electrical distribution equipment serving the wider urban area – this is being retained and does not form part of the proposed application site.

The site is essentially level but raised relative to both Vastern and Lynmouth Roads by approximately 0.8m and to the Thames towpath by approximately 1.2m.

The site is bounded by:

- Vastern Road to the south
- Gardens of houses fronting onto Lynmouth Road to the west
- The towpath and River Thames to the north
- The boundary of Thames Court flats and Sovereign House offices to the east

Pedestrian access is primarily from Vastern Road, through the current SSE offices.

The existing frontage of the SSE office building is aligned with the adjacent residential terraced properties to the west.

Existing vehicle access is from Vastern Road with egress being onto Lynmouth Road – both are controlled by gates.

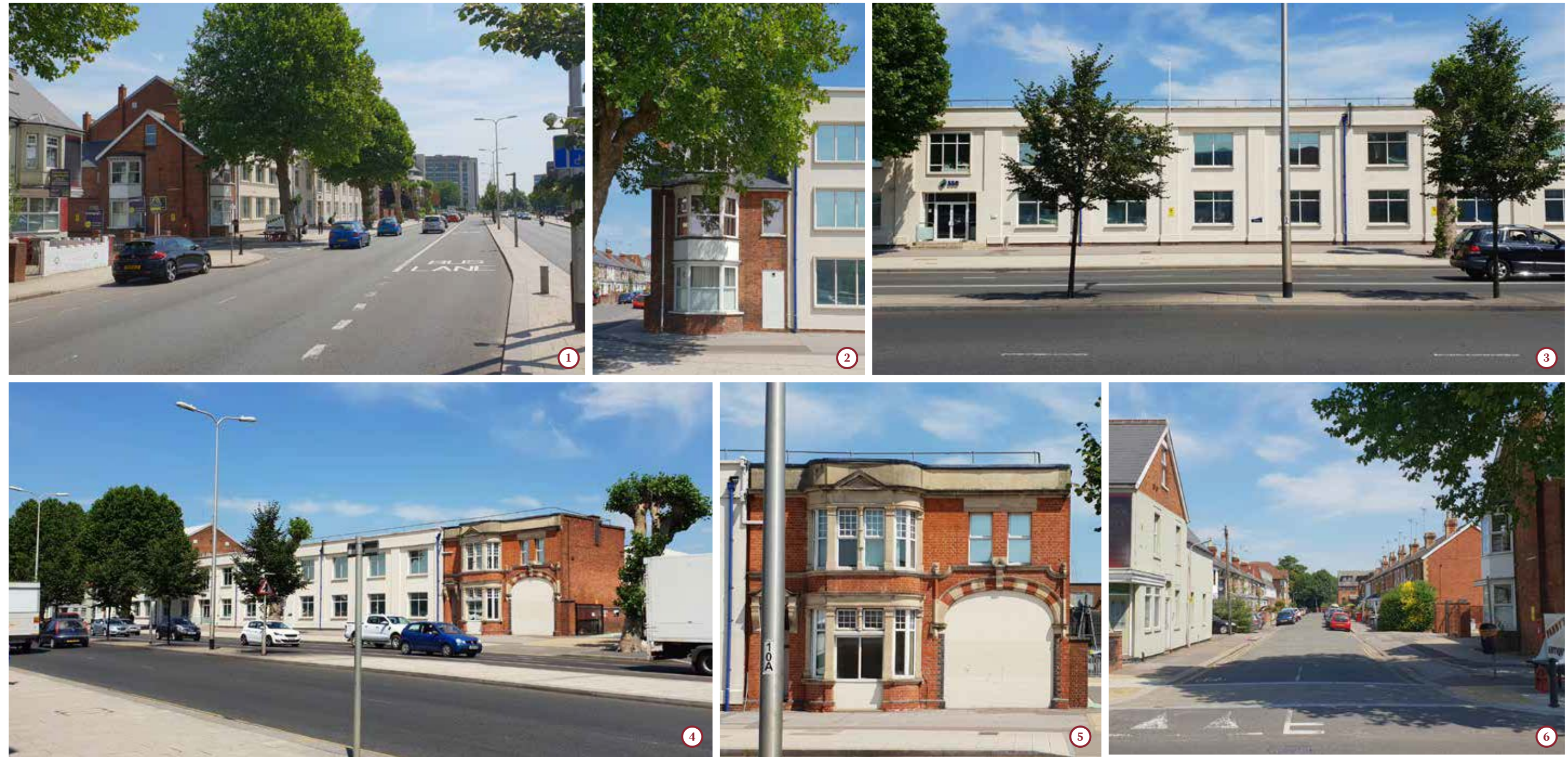
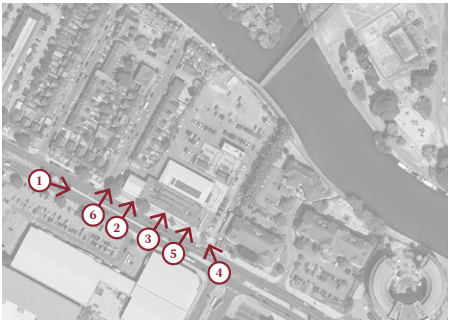
Site Area

7,673 square metres
0.767 hectares
1.895 acres

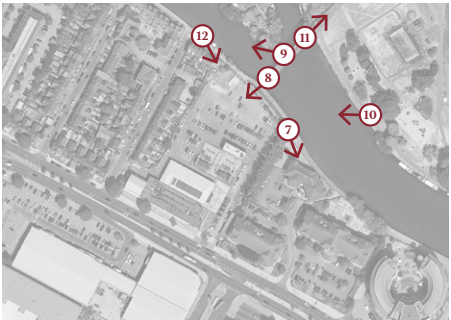
- ① Essential Retained SSE Apparatus
- ② Vacant SSE Office
- ③ Thames Court Residential Apartments
- ④ Christchurch Pedestrian Bridge
- ⑤ Thames Way - Tow-path
- ⑥ Lynmouth Road / Lynmouth Court
- ⑦ Vastern Court Retail Park
- ⑧ Sovereign House
- ⑨ Great Brighams Mead
- ⑩ Covea Insurance
- ⑪ Christchurch Meadow
- ⑫ Thames Water
- ⑬ De Montfort Road



2.5.1 Vastern Road



2.5.2 River Thames



2.6 Local Character

2.6.1 Vastern Road Brick Colour Mapping



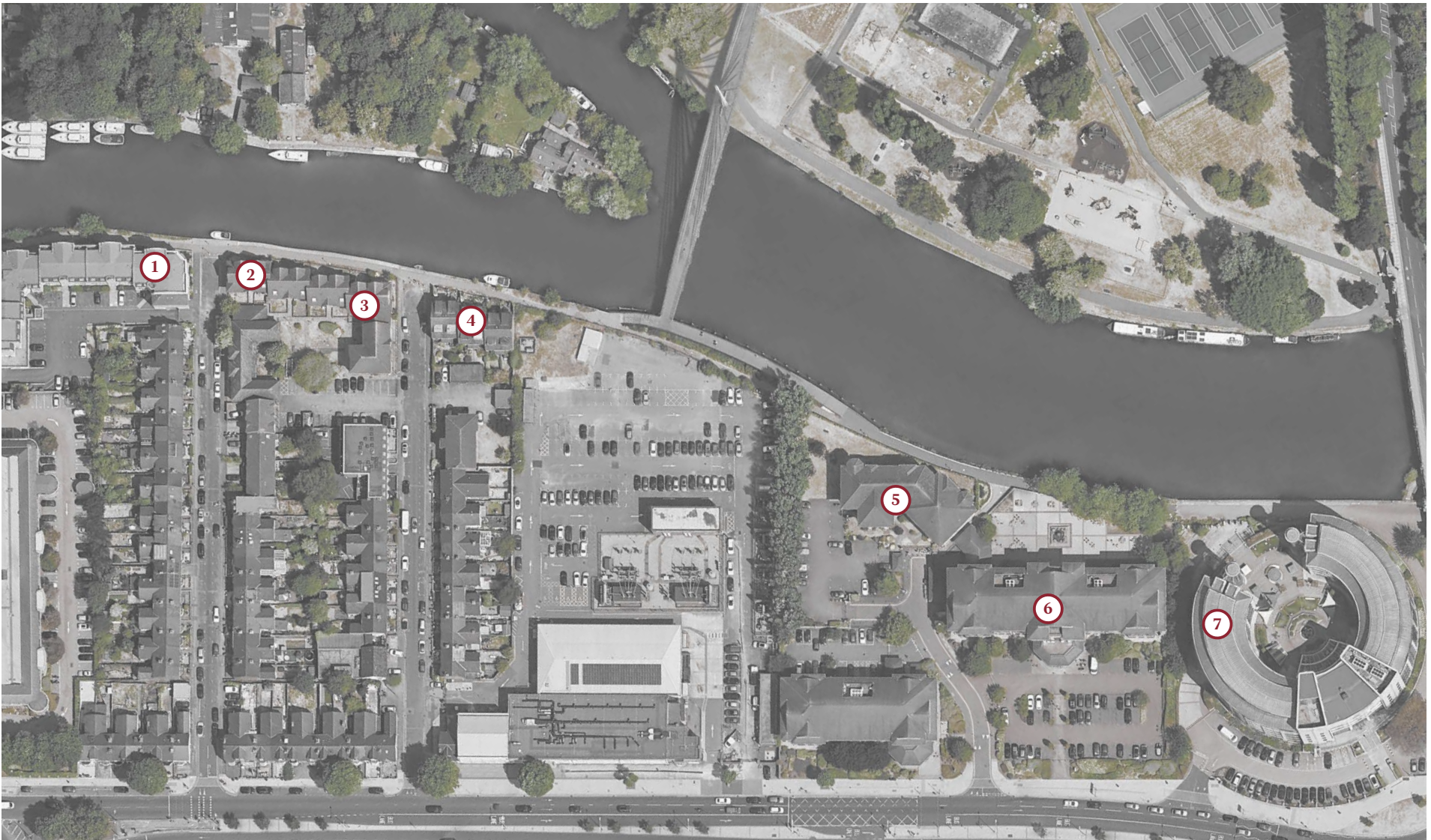
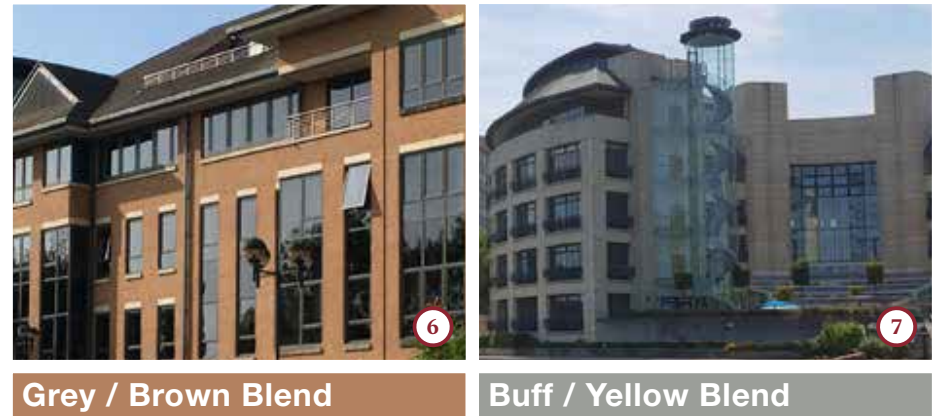
- 1 Residential Terrace
- 2 Vacant SSE Office
- 3 53-55 Vastern Road (Brick)
- 4 53-55 Vastern Road (Render)
- 5 Sovereign House
- 6 Covea Insurance
- 7 Great Brighams Mead
- 8 TGI Fridays
- 9 Retail Park
- 10 Reading Station Car Park



2.6.2 Thames Brick Colour Mapping



- ① Regents Riverside
- ② Isis Court
- ③ Isis Court
- ④ Lynmouth Court
- ⑤ Thames Court
- ⑥ Covea Insurance
- ⑦ Thames Water



2.6.3 Lynmouth Road

Lynmouth Road is a typically Victorian Street of predominantly 2 storey pitched roof terrace housing. There have been additional infill blocks added and extensions to the rear of the existing properties.

- ① Eastern side of the street is predominantly red brick with buff brick detailing
- ② Brick detailing at storey heights and to window reveals
- ③ Sliding sash windows
- ④ Western side of the street is predominantly grey brick with red brick detailing
- ⑤ Painted expressed stone lintels
- ⑥ Projecting bay windows at ground floor
- ⑦ Slate pitched roofs
- ⑧ Chimneys
- ⑨ The typical street width is 16.4m

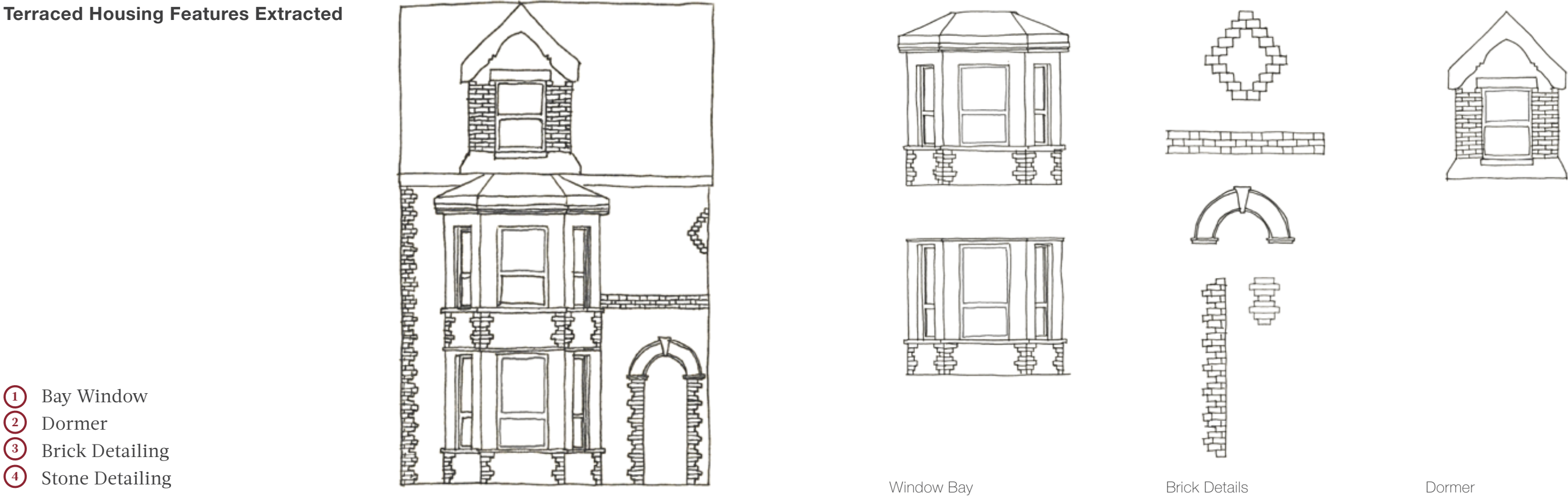
The proposed scheme will seek to reference a number of these key elements and use them as a baseline to develop an architectural language for the site that grounds the scheme in its



2.6.4 Terraced Housing Features



Terraced Housing Features Extracted



2.6.5 55 Vastern Road - Locally Listed Building

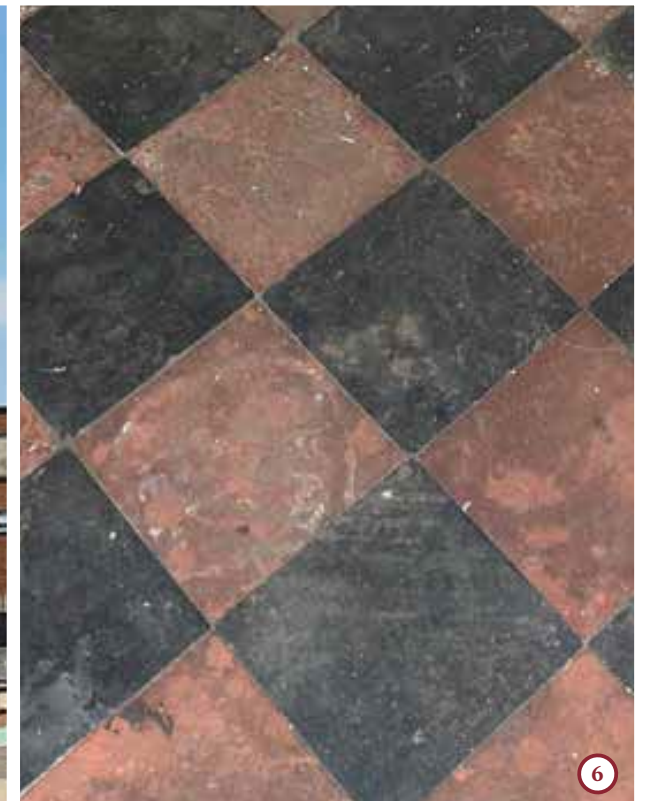
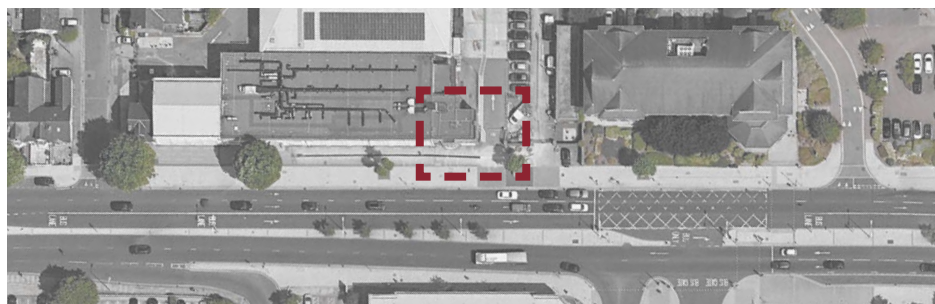
55 Vastern Road is a locally listed building and was the former main entrance to the Electricity Works.

The Building has a number of architectural features which include the following:

- ① Horizontal stone expression of window cill height
- ② Window proportions of approx. (w/h) 1/2.2
- ③ Curved bay window
- ④ Stone dressed parapet
- ⑤ Red brick cladding with stonework details. Brickwork is a mix of stretcher and header bond courses
- ⑥ Chequerboard floor to pedestrian entrance
- ⑦ Entrance archway – contrasting materials in arch
- ⑧ Junctions between jamb and archway
- ⑨ Contrasting brick to entrance jambs

This Application includes a detailed Heritage Statement commissioned by Berkeley Homes, which demonstrates that the building's heritage value derives principally from its street facade, which is however “much compromised by the infilling of the carriage arch, the clumsy replacement of the door in the bay with a window, the modern front door, the very insensitive uPVC fenestration, surface-mounted wiring and conduits, and (when viewed from across the street) the railing around the roof parapet.”

The building of 55 Vastern Road was designed by local architect F.W. Albury who also practised as Albury & Brown throughout his career. A number of outstanding examples of his work remain as part of his legacy which is described on the following pages.



2.6.6 F. W. Albury Works

John Lewis shop front, Broad Street historically the works of F. W. Albury could be seen throughout Reading with examples in Friar Street, Broad Street and Blagrove Street as listed below:

- 1885 Blagrove St West side – 3 shops for J.H Blagrove
- 1885 St Giles School
- 1886 Norcot Rd, St George's Cemetery Lychgate
- 1886 No 1 Friar Street
- 1886 Theatre Royal
- 1888 Blagrove St/Station Road shop/offices
- 1888 St Saviour's Church
- 1889 Corn Exchange & Markets
- 1892 Friar St Chamber (as Albury & Morris)
- 1894 Arcade Chambers
- 1894 Central Electric Station
- 1903 Stores for the Reading Electric Co. Vastern Road
- 1907/08 West Reading Library, Oxford Road
- 1909 New Shop front for Heelas

There is conflicting evidence that F. W. Albury also designed The Corn Stores (Grade II Listed) on Forbury Road when he practised as Albury & Brown. The Brown brothers retired and died in this period when Albury also practised as a sole trader.

The Free Renaissance Style practised by Albury was typical of many buildings being erected in the late 19th to early 20th century by local Reading architects. Red and buff brick were often used with York stone detailing common to buildings constructed during this period.

The examples of Albury's remaining works are of high quality, are more complete and have been maintained and preserved to a higher standard than the locally listed building of 55 Vastern Road.



Grade II Listed Battle Library, Oxford Road



No. 1 Friar Street Dated 1886



Illustration of the architects original design for the present John Lewis store, Broad Street



John Lewis shop front, Broad Street

2.7 Locally Listed Buildings

Pre-application discussion with Planning Officers and Reading Borough Council's Heritage Officer have established that it is only the Vastern Road facade of 55 Vastern Road which has notable heritage value. Therefore, in response to this, we have reviewed examples of façade retention projects.

These are explained below.



Contrast

The Altolusso apartments in Cardiff are an extreme example of façade retention. Part of the original Victorian façade has been retained to create a three storey foyer with access to a car park and 23 storey apartment building behind. The apartment building makes no reference to the retained façade in scale, architectural style, materials or historical site use.

With regard to the proposed Vastern Road project, this approach would result in creating a stark contrast between the traditional facade and a contemporary scheme. Pre-application discussions have steered the design away from the type of contemporary design which would deliver this type of contrast. This approach is therefore not achievable.



Façade Retention

The Lillian Knowles House in London is an example of a retained façade masking an unremarkable new build behind.

In this context, we feel this example of façadism is not viable and not good practice as it does not contribute in an honest way to the retention of the façade for functional reasons. We feel the response is of poor architectural quality.



Façade Retention

UCL student housing in London is an example of how an historic façade has been retained with a contemporary building constructed behind it. The nineteenth century warehouse façade retains a street level presence but has no link architecturally to the contemporary accommodation behind which in turn is of poor architectural quality. In addition, the retained façade compromises the outlook of the student accommodation behind and reduces daylight into the site.

In this context, we feel this example of façade retention is not viable and not good practice as it does not contribute in an honest way to the retention of the façade for functional reasons. We feel the response is of poor architectural quality.



Abstract Reference

No 1 Poultry in London is a well known example of an abstract Interpretation of its' context with pink and yellow limestone cladding. The Postmodern work by James Stirling has provoked both criticism and praise since its construction on the site of a Grade II Listed building.

In this context, we feel that an abstract interpretation of the locally listed building would be a pastiche and not legible by members of the public. This approach was discussed at pre-application #01 stage and discounted.



Retention

Blackburn Place, London is an example of how an existing building of historic interest can be retained with a new building adjacent to it. The new build aspect compliments the Georgian house by respecting its height and form. Classic proportions of fenestration and feature brick detailing avoid a pastiche replication and provides a modern interpretation of its Georgian surroundings.

In this context, the scale of the existing building can be respected. For the Vastern Road scheme, this approach is not possible given that the desire is to link the town centre to the river at the urban scale. As an entrance building, the locally listed building is also unavoidably in the wrong location to function as a successful entrance to the site. This type of solution is tested as Option 01 (overleaf) and results in a significant reduction of proposed homes to be delivered on the site and therefore would not be an efficient use of the opportunity which the site presents.

Conclusion

Following this review, our approach is to use the industrial heritage of the whole site to inform the scheme design and to celebrate the history of the site rather than celebrating this in a much more restricted way by referring to a single building.

Notwithstanding this conclusion we have explored and illustrated a range of options for façade retention that are shown on the following pages.

2.7.1 55 Vastern Road Options

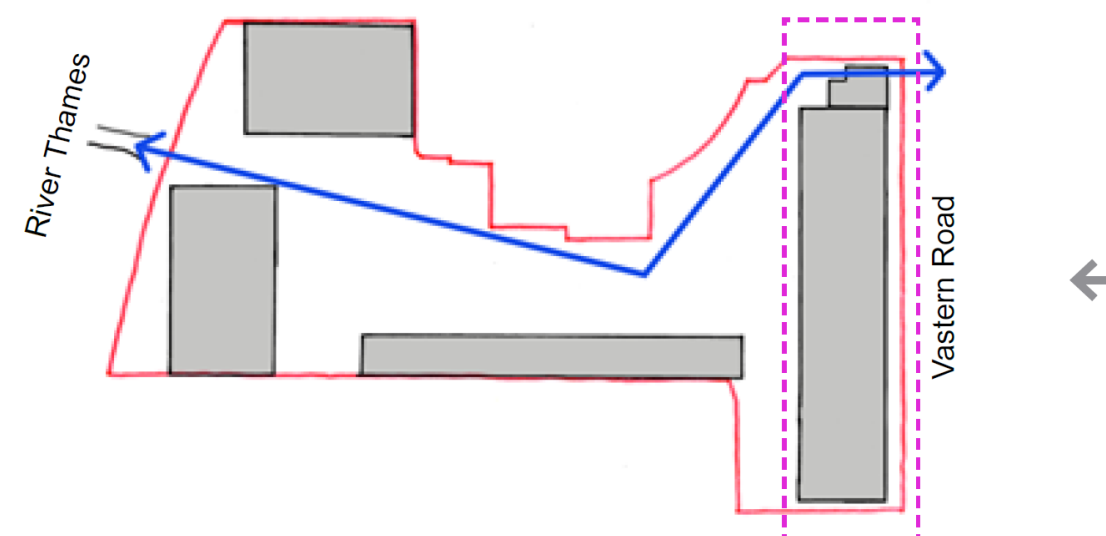
The design team have explored a range of options exploring the opportunities for retaining and integrating 55 Vastern Road into the proposed scheme.

The function of 55 Vastern Road is that of an entrance or gateway building. In seeking to retain the building, the aim is for it to function as originally intended.

As the SSE equipment is to be retained, the locally listed building is at the corner of the site. It is the most constrained location for providing a legible and high quality link to the River Thames and the footbridge.

The sketch site plan to the right illustrates the impact of retaining the locally listed building as an entrance to the site and summarises the pros and cons of doing so.

The first set of elevation options (01-05) presented here are based upon the above principle of retaining the locally listed building as an entrance to the site.



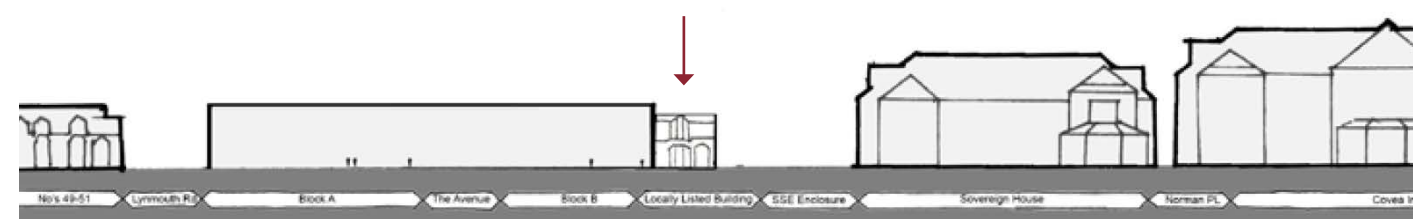
Pros:

- Retaining No. 55 Vastern Rd
- Original access to the site brought back

Cons:

- Reduction in overall number of homes
- Pedestrian access to the site not clear
- Pinched / uncomfortable access into the site
- Reduced undercroft parking
- Increased views of substation
- No direct pedestrian route or views of Christchurch Bridge

01



Pros:

- Retaining No. 55 Vastern Road archway as site entrance (no building above)
- Original access to the site brought back
- Addresses RBC future vision link
- No change to the character of No. 55 Vastern Road

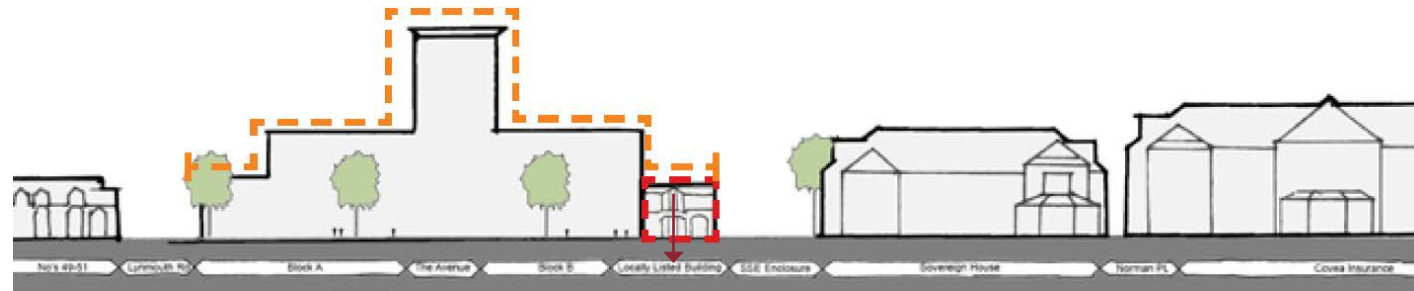
Cons:

- Urban marker in wrong location for legibility of entrance
- Pedestrian access to the site not clear
- Extensive inactive frontage
- Increased views of substation
- Pinched / uncomfortable access into the site
- No direct pedestrian route or views of Christchurch Bridge
- Reduction in number of homes against policy allocation

Option Studies

Retention of 55 Vastern Road with Building above

02



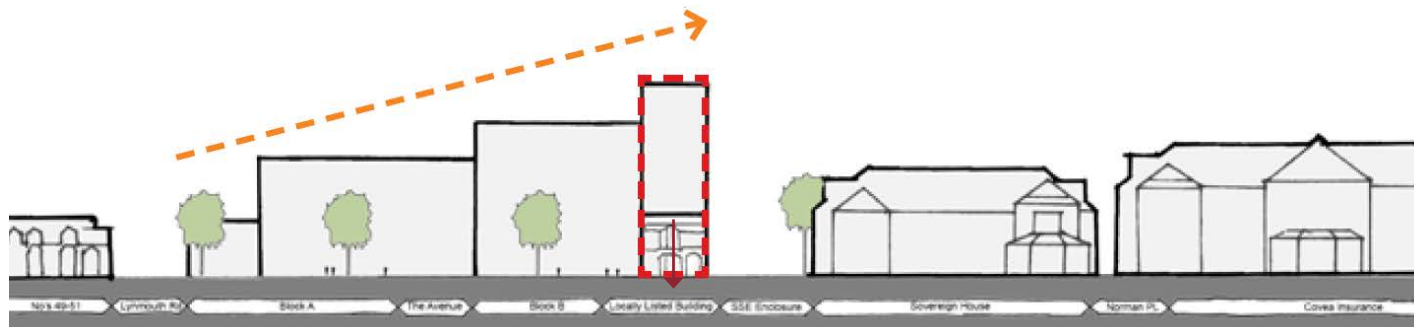
Pros:

- Retaining No. 55 Vastern Road (no building above)
- Addresses RBC future vision link
- Most sensitive treatment of No. 55 Vastern Rd

Cons:

- Pedestrian access to the site not clear
- Tallest part suggests the main entrance
- Does not address RBC future vision link
- Poor legibility
- Extensive inactive frontage
- Significant reduction in number of homes against policy allocation

04



Pros:

- Retaining No. 55 Vastern Road (building above)
- Original access to the site brought back
- Clear entrance to the site

Cons:

- Change to the character of No. 55 Vastern Road
- Does not address RBC future vision link
- Poor legibility
- Extensive inactive frontage
- Significant reduction in number of homes against policy allocation

03



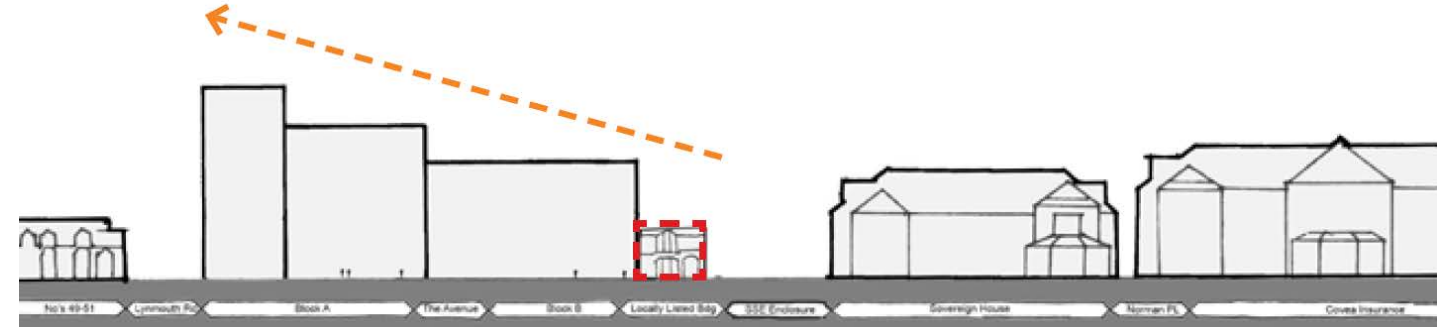
Pros:

- Retaining No. 55 Vastern Road (building above)
- Original access to the site brought back
- Gradually stepping up towards the middle

Cons:

- Pedestrian access to the site not clear
- Archway very small for such a main pedestrian route
- Change to the character of No. 55 Vastern Road
- The massing appears to be too compact
- Does not address RBC future vision link
- Poor legibility
- Extensive inactive frontage
- Significant reduction in number of homes against policy allocation

05



Pros:

- Retaining No. 55 Vastern Road (no building above)
- Addresses RBC future vision link
- No change to the character of No. 55 Vastern Rd

Cons:

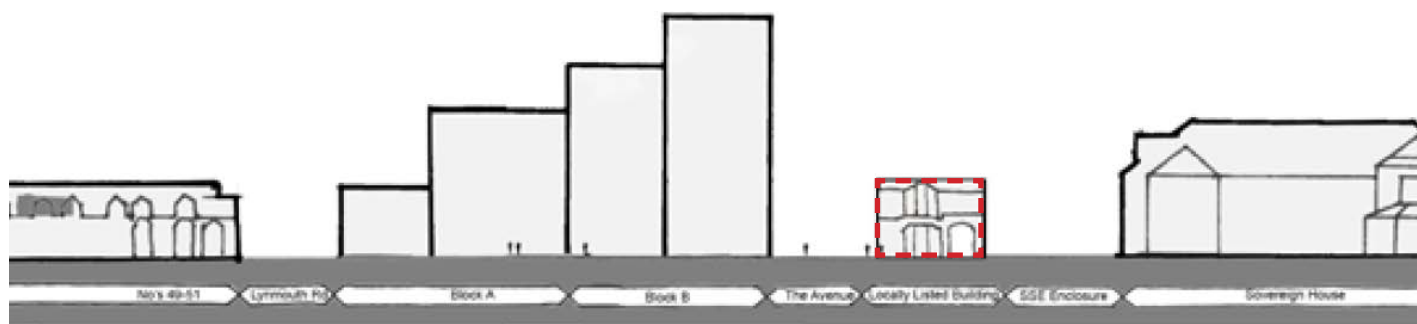
- Tower overshadows Lynmouth Road residents
- Poor legibility of entrance to site
- Extensive inactive frontage
- Urban marker in wrong location for legibility of entrance
- Significant reduction in number of homes against policy allocation

2.7.2 Option Studies - Independent Structure

Options 6 and 7 explore the impact of retaining 55 Vastern Road as a standalone element but not using it as an entrance building.



06



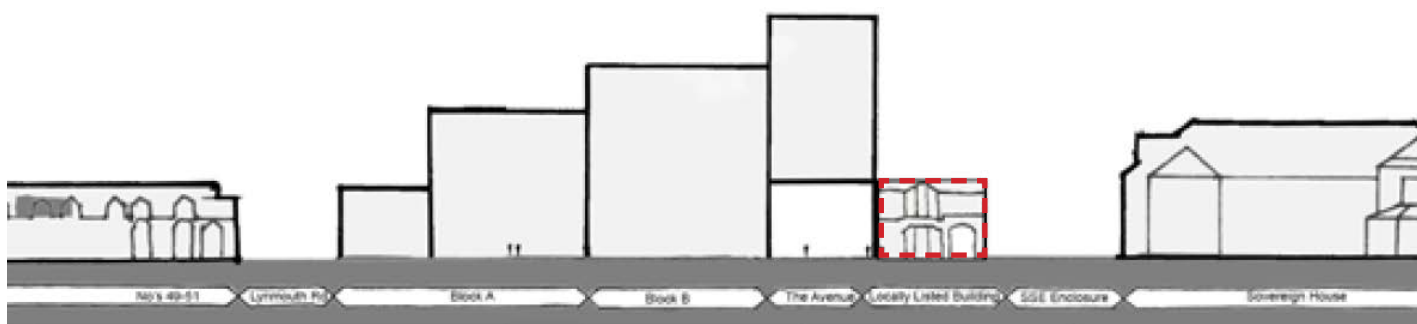
- Pros:

 - Retaining No. 55 Vastern Rd
 - Setting of 55 Vastern Road
- Cons:

 - Reduction in overall number of homes
 - Pedestrian access to the site not clear (duplicated)
 - Pinched / uncomfortable access into the site
 - Increased expanse of inactive frontage
 - Increased views of substation
 - No direct pedestrian route or views of Christchurch Bridge



07



- Pros:

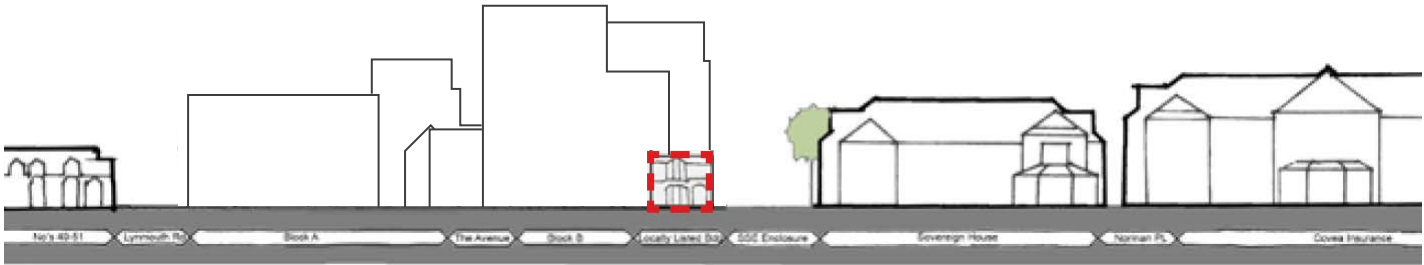
 - Retaining No. 55 Vastern Rd
 - Original access to the site brought back
- Cons:

 - Reduction in overall number of homes
 - Pedestrian access to the site not clear
 - Pinched / uncomfortable access into the site
 - Reduced undercroft parking
 - Increased views of substation
 - No direct pedestrian route or views of Christchurch Bridge

2.7.3 Building Retention / Demolition Analysis

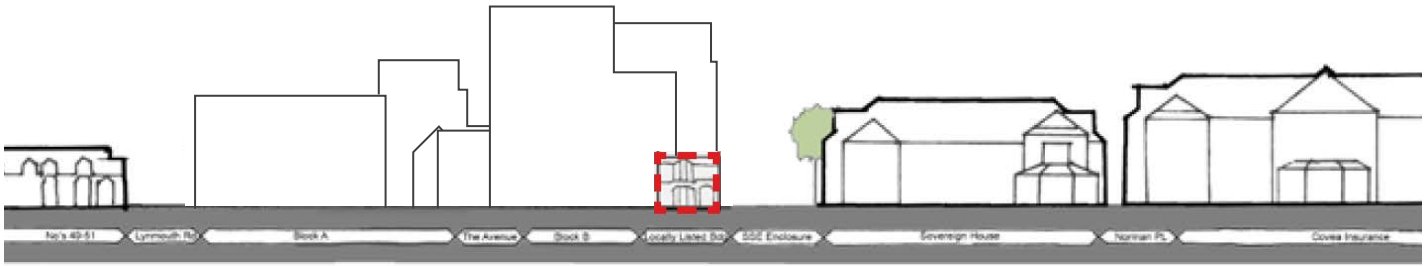
Options 8 and 9 explore whether 55 Vastern Road could be incorporated into the current design of the residential development.

08



- Pros:
- Retaining No. 55 Vastern Road façade
- Cons:
- Pedestrian access to the site not clear
 - Poor legibility
 - Detracts from overall design
 - Has limited meaning architecturally

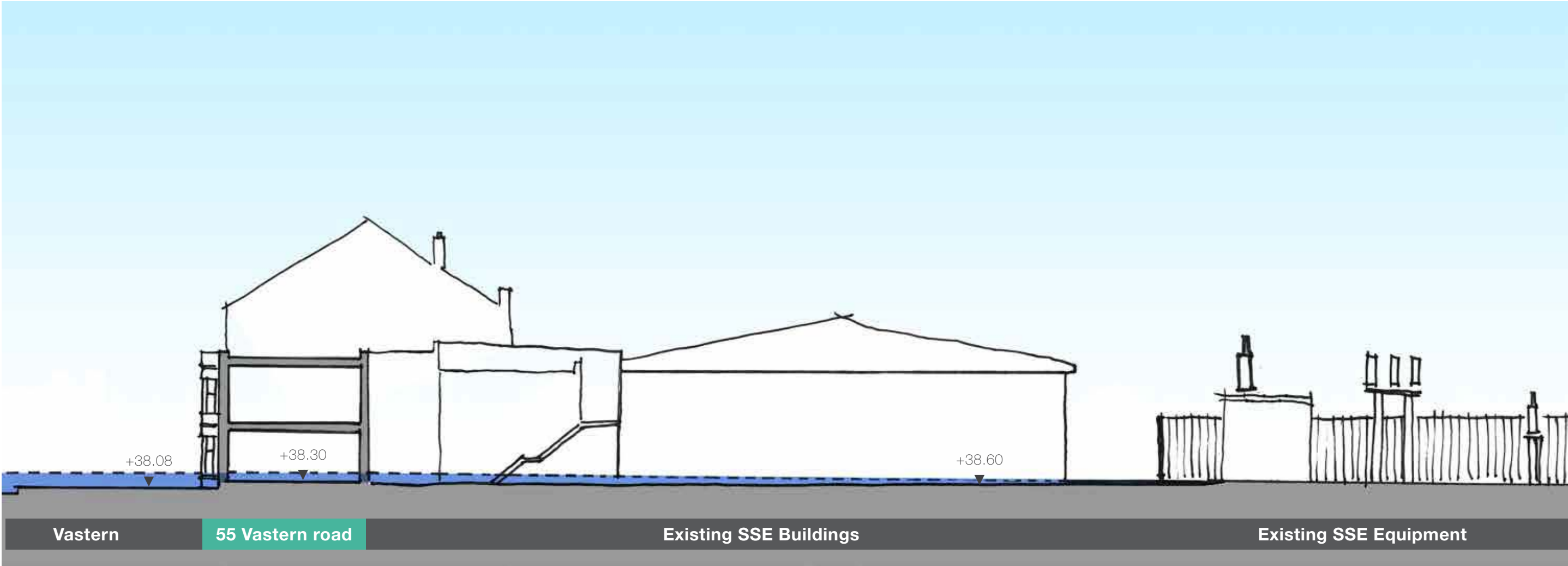
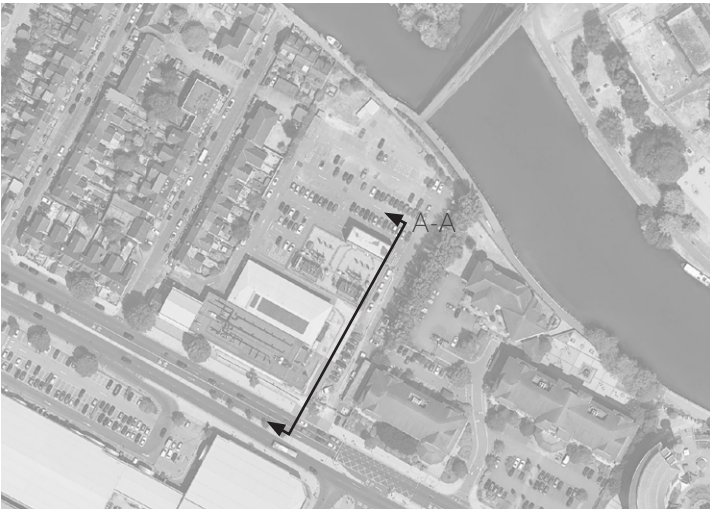
09



- Pros:
- Retaining No. 55 Vastern Road
- Cons:
- Pedestrian access to the site not clear
 - Poor legibility
 - Detracts from overall design
 - Lacks cohesion with proposed scheme

2.7.4 Building Retention / Demolition Flood Risk Analysis

Floor levels within the retained locally listed building are below that of the proposed recommended flooding site level of 38.60m AOD therefore the ground floor of the locally listed building would not be suitable for residential use and as such would require substantial elevational adjustments at low level further damaging the existing facade.



Site Section A-A: Mews House to Lynmouth road

2.7.5 Building Retention / Demolition Analysis

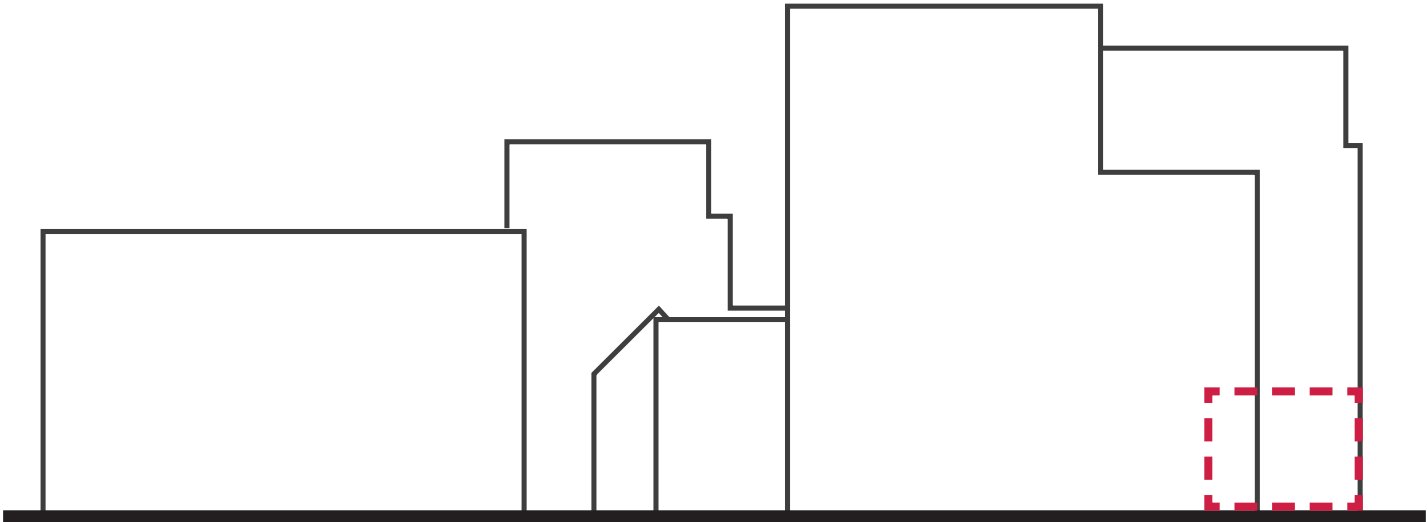
We have undertaken a thorough appraisal to understand the impact 55 Vastern Road has on the emerging scheme in terms of delivering on the key site allocation points as set out in emerging policy CR11g, Riverside.

We have shown a number of options of possible site configurations which incorporate 55 Vastern Road as retained and we have highlighted the key positives and negatives.

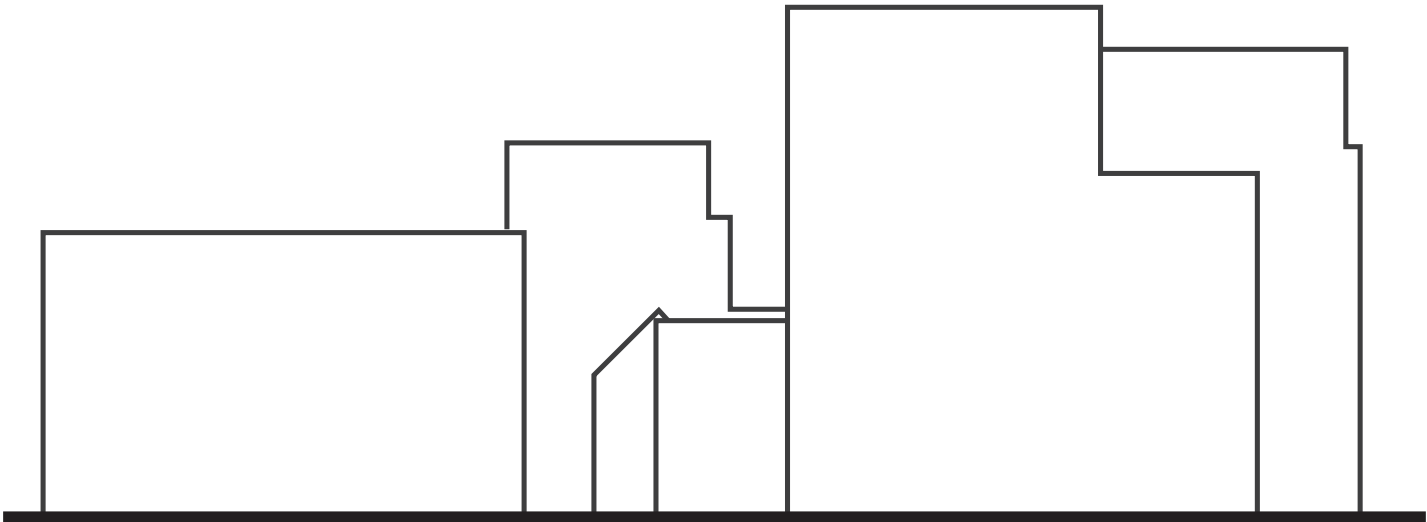
Following this option review we have concluded that, in the balance, retaining the locally listed building in the proposed scheme has a significant detrimental impact on being able to deliver the key allocation notes of the site. This is summarised in the schedule to the right with boxes shaded in traffic light colours to demonstrate in our opinion, to what extent the allocation note is delivered.

We propose to develop the design by using the whole site to reference the industrial heritage and provide a legible high quality scheme, as opposed to using a single building which has a compromised heritage value to reference the site’s industrial heritage with a further constrained scheme. This approach is summarised in the following diagrams.

In conclusion, the proposal is to dismantle 55 Vastern Road, but explore opportunities to reference the building through the design.



Extent of 55 vastern Road Building on scheme design



Extent of site history reference on scheme design

2.7.6 Allocation and Summary Schedule

	Allocation Note - CR11g	55 Vastern Road Retained
1	Maintain and enhance public access along and to the Thames	Access along and to the Thames is maintained and a new access route is generated, however, its legibility is compromised by the path to the Riverside. The access route is also lined with significant inactive frontage which detracts from the activity and passive surveillance of the route.
2	High quality green link from north of the station to the Christchurch Bridge.	A green link can be created, however, the quality of the link is compromised by the legibility of its route including how the route is 'signalled/marked' from Vastern Road by the scale of 55 Vastern Road if retained as a gateway building.
3	Potential for an area of open space at the River side	No Impact
4	The main use should be residential	No Impact
5	Development should take account of mitigation required as a result of a Flood Risk Assessment	Floor levels within the retained locally listed building are below that of the proposed flooding level therefore the ground floor of the locally listed building would not be suitable for residential use.

2.8 Analysis

2.8.1 Orientation & Views

The site is located to the north of Reading town centre, between Vastern Road and the River Thames.

There are no buildings located immediately north or south of the site, low rise residential buildings are to the west and the retained SSE infrastructure to the east. The site is therefore not overshadowed or substantially overlooked on any of its boundaries. There is however a sensitive boundary to the west, to be considered when locating and modelling the proposed development.

There are short range views to and from the rear of the residential properties to the west and the retail units to the south, across Vastern Road. There are long range views north to Christchurch Meadows and obliquely west and east along Vastern Road from the front of the site. From upper floors of the new development there will be long range views in all directions, including the town centre.

The site is also visible as part of the riverside from Reading bridge.

