

Planning Statement

Proposed Cinema and Office Uses, 51 Church Street and Archway House (west), St Martins Centre, Caversham

February 2020

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Planning Statement is submitted by Turley on behalf of Hermes Property Unit Trust ('the Applicant') in support of a full application for the change of use of part of the upper floors of 51 Church Street, Reading (above Waitrose) and creation of new street level entrance to deliver a three-screen cinema complex and the change of use ground floor of Archway House (west) to B1(a) accommodation.

1.2 The application seeks permission for the following development:

"Change of use of part of the upper floors of 51 Church from existing solicitors (Use Class B1(a)) to cinema (Class D2), creation of new street level entrance to Church Street and a secondary entrance to the rear and external alterations to create cinema facility including creation of new street level entrance at 51 Church Street. Change of use of ground floor of Archway House (west) from Use Class A1 (Shops) to B1(a) (Office)."

1.3 Further details of the proposed development can be found under Section 3 of this Statement, and within the Design and Access Statement submitted in support of this application.

1.4 This application should be considered with reference to the existing planning consent for the 'wider site' (under reference: 140997), which is currently being implemented as a phased development.

1.5 Whilst these proposals have been submitted as a standalone planning application, they have evolved to ensure that the proposed uses complement the wider regeneration of the Centre (approved under ref: 140097) and ensure integration with the proposed with the wider District Centre.

1.6 This Planning Statement is intended to address all the relevant planning policy considerations associated with the proposed development, but should be read in conjunction with the other documents and drawings supported in support of the application, including:

- Application Forms and Certificates;
- Application Drawings and Plans;
- Design and Access Statement;
- Transport Statement;
- Arboricultural Assessment; and
- Noise Assessment.

Report Structure

1.7 This report is intended to assist Reading Borough Council in its determination of the application and has been prepared in accordance with the requirements set out in the

National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (the Framework) 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.

1.8 The remainder of the Statement is structured as follows:

- **Section 2:** Site and Surrounding Area
- **Section 3:** Planning History
- **Section 4:** Proposed Development
- **Section 5:** Planning Policy
- **Section 6:** Planning Assessment
- **Section 7:** Summary and Conclusions

2. The Application Site

Site Location and Context

- 2.1 The site is located within the extent of St Martin's Centre which is under the ownership of the Applicant. Caversham is a second tier District Centre as defined by the Reading Borough Local Plan. The only centre which ranks higher is Reading town centre itself. St Martin's Centre currently provides a range of town centre uses including a number of national and independent retailers and service operators.
- 2.2 The existing shopping complex was built during the 1960s, and sits to the south of Church Street. Planning permission was granted in 2015 for the regeneration of the 'wider site' (Ref: 140997) and is currently being implemented by the Applicant. However, since planning permission was granted, the UK retail market has undergone significant structural changes. As such, the Applicant has reviewed the scheme in order to reflect current commercial requirements and to deliver a scheme which will support the long term vitality and viability of the Centre.
- 2.3 There are two elements of this application relating to:
- 51 Church Street
 - Archway House (West): Ground Floor
- 2.4 This site relates to areas identified as Block E in the original scheme and forms an integral area within the District Centre both with regard to its street frontage to Church Street but also its position within wider District Centre (approved under Ref: 140997).



Figure 1 Approved Phasing Plan

- 2.5 The site is bound by Church Street along the northern boundary, the existing car park serving the wider site to the south, with further retail units to the east and west, beyond which lies the existing service yard.

Site Description

- 2.6 The application site itself comprises of an existing Waitrose food store (Use Class A1), which with the exception of a street level entrance to the upper floors, occupies the entirety of the ground floor. Waitrose also has occupation of ancillary office and storage space occupying one of three demises on the second floor. The remaining two demises include an existing gymnasium already in D2 Use, and a Solicitors (B1(a) Use) occupied by Caversham Solicitors.
- 2.7 The existing building is up to 3 storeys in height (inc. ground floor) with the existing Waitrose entrance fronting Church Street. There is a further entrance fronting Church Street that provides stair access to the first floor offices occupied by Caversham Solicitors as shown on drawing 29954_Block_E_A-E11-001 (Ground Floor Plan). The Church Street frontage is two storeys in height with the building increasing to 3 storeys within the central section projecting to the rear.
- 2.8 The offices only occupy part of the first floor fronting onto Church Street. The first floor is also occupied by storage facilities for Waitrose which is proposed to remain unchanged through these proposals with staff facilities on part of the second floor. The remainder of the first floor is occupied by Caversham Gym (Use Class D2) which is accessed from St Martin's Centre car park with a stair access leading to the first and second floors. The demises of each occupier are shown clearly on drawing

29954_Block_E_A-E11-002 (first floor plan) and (29954_Block_E_A-E11-003 (second floor plan) respectively..

- 2.9 The principal vehicular access is via Church Street and Archway Road and serves the wider St Martin's Centre. Access is also taken from this point to the public car parking facilities that serve the whole Centre.

Archway House

- 2.10 Archway House itself astrides Archway Road which currently provides two way vehicular access to the St Martins Centre Car Park and the rear of the retail units fronting Church Street (which form part of the District Centre).
- 2.11 The site comprises the ground floor of the western side of Archway House which is currently vacant and understood to benefit from planning permission for Use Class A1 use. The ground floor, subject to this application, extends to 29 sqm. The unit incorporates stair access to the upper floors of Archway House which are also currently vacant offices.

Planning Designations

- 2.12 For the purposes of Reading Borough's adopted proposals map, the application site falls within the District Centre boundary with 51 Church Street falling within the key frontage whilst Archway House does not fall within a key frontage. The site also falls within Flood Zone 1 as identified utilising the Environment Agency's Flood Map.
- 2.13 The closest designated heritage assets to the application site are the Grade II listed Caversham Library (125m west), the West Memorial Hall (150m east), and the Caversham Baptist Free Church 100m northeast of the site.

3. Planning History

- 3.1 The Site was originally constructed during the 1960s and 1980's. The Site was acquired by Hermes in 2007, who undertook the following works prior to the approval of planning permission for the wider site (Ref: 140997):
- Refurbishment of residential properties fronting Church Street
 - Replacement of two dead trees within the wider site with large specimens in specialist tree pits
 - Extensive drainage and surfacing repair
 - Essential maintenance such as roof covering exercises
- 3.2 In addition to the above work, the Applicant has shown commitment to the consented regeneration of the wider site with the recent completion of Phase 1b, part of the permitted regenerations scheme (Ref:140997).
- 3.3 A review of the Council's online planning register indicates an extensive planning history on the wider site, although the majority are not relevant to this application.

Wider Site Planning Context

- 3.4 The most relevant application in relation to the site is that for the St Martins Centre Regeneration which was granted planning permission on 11th February 2015 (Ref:140997) for the following development:
- "Erection of new and extended retail (use class A1) floor space, new restaurant (use class A3), new leisure (use class D2) floorspace, residential apartments (use class C3), car park works (including erection of a single storey deck and reconfiguration at ground level) and associated landscaping, surfacing, public realm and shopfront improvement works".*
- 3.5 This consent has been partly implemented, with works undertaken to the public realm, shopfront and streetscene improvements and introduction of new trees.
- 3.6 A non-material Amendment to Condition 2 of the permission 140997 was determined on the 8th June 2016 under reference 160018, and approved a phasing plan allowing the development to be carried out in stages. The approved phasing plan is shown in Figure 2.1 above.
- 3.7 Since the 2015 approval, Waitrose's position has changed and they no longer wish to pursue this opportunity. A revised scheme has therefore been considered, based on appropriate and alternative town centre uses which can support the ongoing viability and vitality of the Centre. The applicant is committed to bringing forward development of the site, as a key component of the wider regeneration, and therefore the proposals have sought to draw upon the objectives and design rationale secured through the extant permission.

3.8 The approval of the wider development scheme (Ref: 140997) has established that the principle of Town Centre uses within this location is acceptable and this application aligns with this position and proposes an appropriate mix of uses, enhancing the retail and leisure offer within the District Centre.

3.9 Most recently, a planning application has been submitted to Reading Borough Council in November 2018 under planning reference 180499 for the following development:

“Extensions and alternations to 47-49 Church Street, St Martins Centre to provide a 5 storey mixed use scheme comprising 16 residential apartments (1x studio, 9 x 1 bedroom, 6 x 2 bedroom), a Cinema / Leisure facility (Use Class D2) and retail units (Use Class A1 and Use Class A3)”

3.10 This application is awaiting determination.

3.11 In light of this application for the change of use of the upper floors of 51 Church Street for the provision of a cinema facility in D2 use, the Applicant is considering opportunities to convert the area permitted for a cinema facility through the 2015 Masterplan Consent. It is considered to be unlikely to be commercially viable for two cinemas to be located within the Centre, however, alternative proposals for the previously consented cinema space will be subject to a separate planning discussion in due course.

Planning History

3.12 A review of the Council’s online planning application register identifies a number of minor applications that have been submitted in relation to the proposed site, both at 51 Church Street and at Archway House respectively.

Reading Borough Council Pre-application Advice

3.13 The Applicant sought pre-application advice in relation to this application, and the wider St Martins Centre in May 2019 with a meeting held with Planning Officers’ on the 22nd May 2019. Planning Officers are aware of the intention of the Applicant to submit this application.

4. Proposed Development

- 4.1 The proposals relate to delivering a new 3 screen cinema on part of the first and second floors of 51 Church Street alongside a change of use of the ground floor of Archway House (west) to offices.
- 4.2 The scheme for consideration has evolved through a cinema occupier indicating a desire to locate within St Martin's Centre. An opportunity has been identified to utilise the existing floorspace above Waitrose to deliver a new cinema facility that has been designed to meet the operator's requirements and specification. With regard to the existing gym, there are on-going discussions for the operator to relocate elsewhere within the District Centre.
- 4.3 This proposal presents an opportunity for a B1(a) use to occupy at Archway House subject to a high profile, DDA compliant, street frontage being achieved at ground floor level of Archway House (west).
- 4.4 We discuss each element of the proposals in turn below.

51 Church Street

- 4.5 Given the nature of the existing uses on-site and the areas of the building to which this application relates, a change of use is only required on part of the building relating to the first floor office use (B1(a)) which is currently occupied by Caversham Solicitors. This extends to 540 sqm of the existing building.
- 4.6 As previously advised, the existing Waitrose will continue to occupy the floorspace across the ground, first and second floors as it has historically and will remain unaffected by the proposals.
- 4.7 Part of the first and second floor are currently occupied by a gym (D2 use) and therefore do not require a change of use given the use class is the same as for a cinema (D2 use).
- 4.8 In addition, a minor extension is proposed to the existing Church Street access to the upper floors to create a high quality entrance to the proposed cinema use.
- 4.9 The external alterations proposed to 51 Church Street relate to extending the existing entrance along Church Street forward from the existing façade by 1.2m x 8.05m at ground and first floor albeit still set back from the eastern façade of Waitrose fronting Church Street. The following will be delivered:
- An extension of 18.4sqm to the front of the building onto Church Street;
 - Upgrading the current sense of arrival into the site, with improvements to the northern elevation so as to allow for pedestrian access from Church Street;

- The provision of a new lift shaft to allow for wheelchair access from Church Street alongside a relocated concierge desk to improve the arrival experience; and
 - Suitable locations and fixings for additional external signage as required by prospective occupiers¹.
- 4.10 In terms of internal reconfiguration a number of works are proposed. Whilst these works do not require planning permission and do not form part of the current planning application, for clarity the following works are proposed.
- 4.11 At first floor level:
- Reconfiguration of internal areas to accommodate three cinema-screen rooms with a maximum seating capacity of 109 (including wheelchair spaces);
 - The provision of ancillary kitchen and bar facilities to provide on-site food and drink refreshments to deliver an enhanced leisure experience; and
 - Alteration to the existing internal layout to provide a central common area will create an outstanding first impression. This will involve creative interior design to allow for a high-quality entrance with inclusive access.
- 4.12 The second floor (within the three storey element of the building) will be a void associated with the delivery of the three cinema screens. The existing mezzanine floor at 2nd floor level will be removed to create sufficient floor to ceiling heights for the cinema auditoriums. No increase in building height is proposed.
- 4.13 The layout proposed has been informed by input from a cinema occupier and acoustic advice to ensure that a first-class, well design cinema complex with complimentary amenity uses is deliverable.

Archway House

- 4.14 The ground floor of Archway House (west) has remained vacant for over three years and was formerly occupied as an A1 retail unit of 29 sqm.
- 4.15 These proposals seek to provide an opportunity for high quality office accommodation to be delivered at Archway House bringing vacant B1(a) floorspace back to the market that meets occupier demands. Such accommodation has been delivered on the upper floors of Archway House following the approval of amendments to the external and internal appearance of the building (app. ref. 171145). However, the existing sub-standard entrances to the offices to the rear of the building are proving unattractive to potential occupiers. The improvements required cannot be overcome by aesthetic changes given this would still result in a lack of DDA compliant access and is not of a size suitable for delivering an office reception as desired by occupiers.

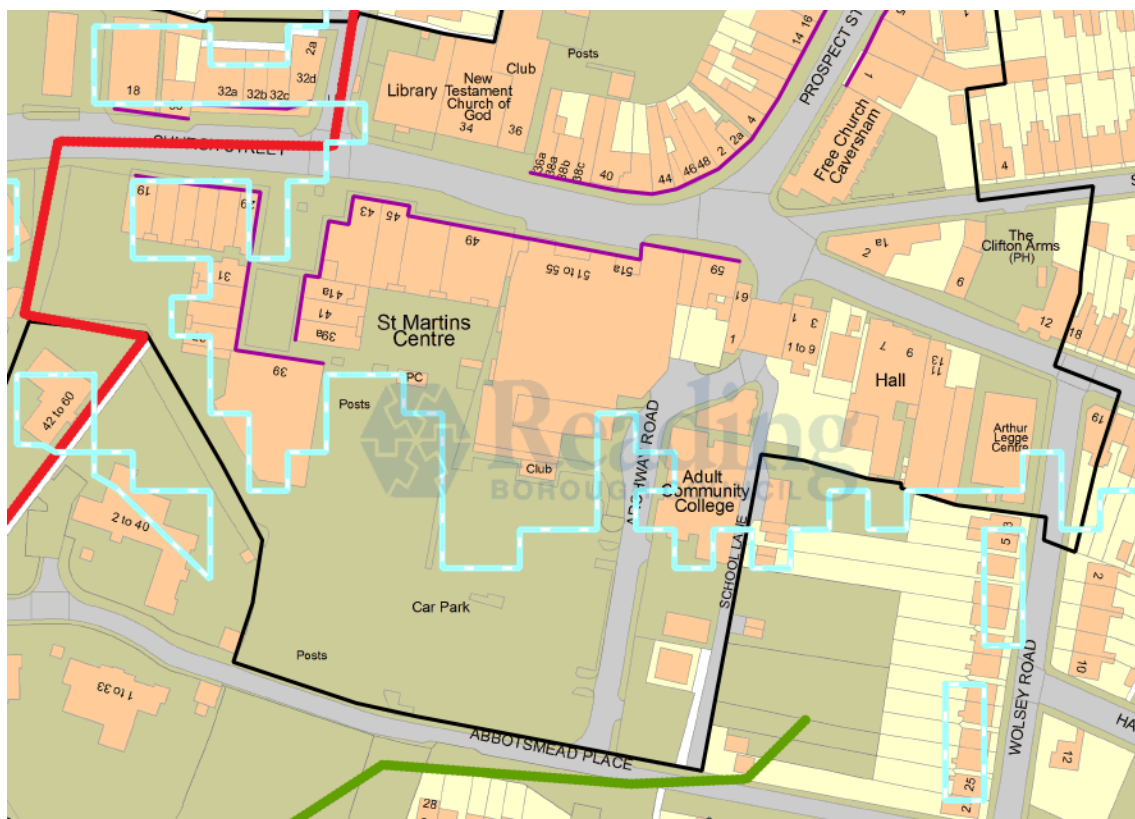
¹ Any signage proposals will be subject to a separate advertisement consent application in due course

- 4.16 As such, within the scope of this application it is proposed that a change of use of the A1 floorspace at ground floor level to B1(a) floorspace to provide access to upper floors of the building to meet occupiers requirements. Historically the offices have remained vacant due to concerns over the existing access which would be resolved through this proposals. It is considered that this space offers potential to be accommodated by existing B1 (a) office uses within the district centre by those who require alternative premises or new office tenants seeking representation in this location.
- 4.17 The application does not propose any internal or external alterations to Archway House and the proposals merely relate to the change of use of the ground floor of the building given the existing layout incorporates direct stair access to the upper floor offices.

5. Planning Policy

- 5.1 This Section outlines the key planning policy relevant to the proposed development at a national and local level.
- 5.2 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, states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should determine planning applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.3 At a national level, relevant planning policy and guidance is set out within the National Planning Policy Framework ('the NPPF') published 2019 and the Planning Practice Guidance ('the PPG').
- 5.4 The adopted development plan for Reading Borough Council comprises the newly adopted Local Plan (November 2019). This is the core development plan document and sets out numerous policies which are of relevance to the proposals included within this application.
- 5.5 Reading Borough Council adopted the Proposals Map in October 2012, and it sets out geographically where the policies contained within the adopted development plan documents should be applied. An extract of the Proposals Map is shown below which identifies the site within the key retail frontage of Caversham District Centre.

Figure 5.1 Extract of Reading Borough Council Proposals Map (Adopted 2012)



Adopted Development Plan

5.6 Reading Borough Council adopted its new Local Plan on 04 November 2019. This document supersedes the Core Strategy and the Sites and Detailed Planning Development Plan Document and will be used to guide development in the Borough up to 2036, which will replace all existing adopted development plan documents.

5.7 The adopted local plan also contains a number of cross cutting policies, which will apply to the whole of the Borough. Those of reference to this application are listed below:

- **Policy CC1: Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development** reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained within the Framework;
- **Policy CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction** requires that the refurbishment of existing buildings incorporates a design and layout that uses energy, water, minerals and materials appropriately and efficiently taking account of the effects of climate change;
- **Policy CC6: Accessibility and Intensity of Development** identifies that the densest and largest scale development will take place in the most accessible locations.
- **Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm** sets out that all 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.
- **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, *inter alia*, privacy and overlooking; noise and disturbance; vibration; and artificial lighting.
- **Policy EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodlands** requires that individual trees 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.
- **Policy EN17: Noise Generating Equipment** states that where noise generating equipment is proposed, the noise source rating level (plant noise level) should be at least 10dBA below the existing background level as measured at the nearest noise sensitive receptor.
- **Policy TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy** states that 'All development proposals should make appropriate provision for 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, accordance with any agreed transport assessment submitted as part of the application.

- **Policy TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-related matters** sets out that development will be permitted where the development would not have a material detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network, not be detrimental to the safety of users of the transport network including pedestrians and cyclists and for non-residential uses, off-street servicing would be provided.
- **Policy TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging** discuss that car parking and cycle provision will be provided that is appropriate to the accessibility of the location.
- **Policy RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres** identifies Caversham as a District Centre where the vitality and viability of the centre should be maintained and enhanced. The following improvements will be acceptable in all centres including broadening the range of facilities.
- **Policy RL2: Scale and Location of Retail and Leisure Development** sets out that provision will be made for up to 34,900 sqm of retail and related facilities in Reading to 2036 together with new leisure facilities.
- **Policy RL3: Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres** focusses on 'no net loss of 'centre uses' for 'non-centre uses' at the ground floor (apart from entrances to upper floors) except in exceptional circumstances. On upper floors, other uses including residential ('living over the shops') will be acceptable. Centre uses relate to Assembly and Leisure (D2 uses) with non-centre uses being B1 uses.
- **Chapter 8** of the adopted local plan sets out the Area Strategy for the development of Caversham and Emmer Green. This chapter recognises that this area has relatively little scope for additional development compared to some other areas

5.8 Reference is also made to those sites which already benefit from extant planning permissions, including St Martins Centre (Ref:140997) and states that the permission establishes the principle of development in this location and therefore an allocation is not required. Any future applications on these sites will be acceptable where they are substantially the same as the existing permission.

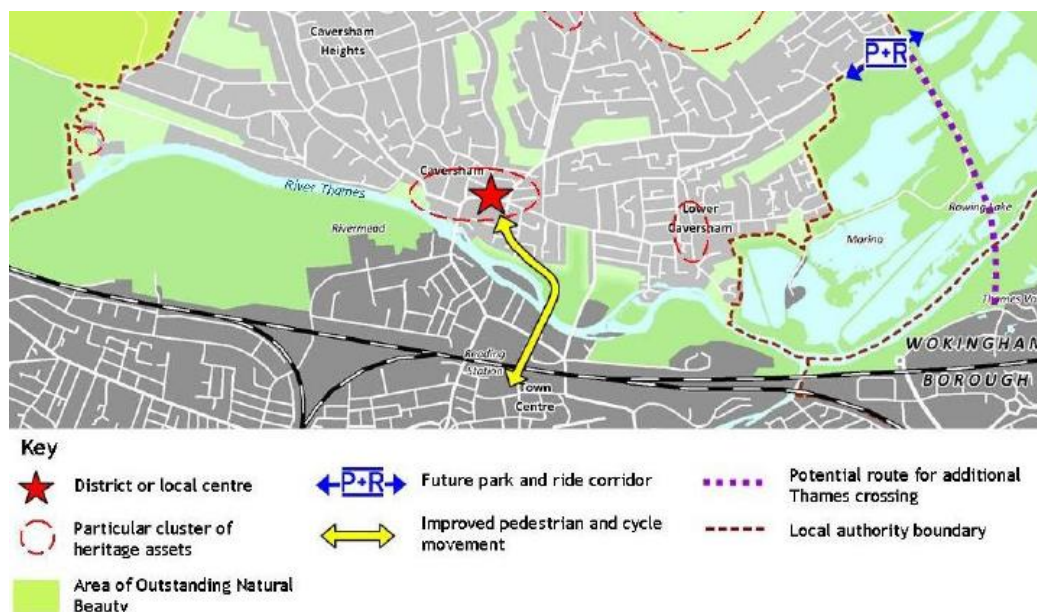


Figure 5.2: Reading Borough Council Proposed Area Strategy, Caversham and Emmer Green

Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.9 The revised National Planning Policy Framework ('the 'Framework') was adopted in February 2019. It sets out the Government's economic, environmental and social planning policies for England and requires the planning system to "play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions" (paragraph 9). The Framework covers a range of land issues including housing, transport, infrastructure, sustainable communities, climate change and the natural and historic environments.
- 5.10 Paragraph 7 of the Framework emphasises that "the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development".
- 5.11 Paragraph 8 of the Framework reiterates that the planning system has three overarching objectives:
- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth
 - **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
 - **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land.
- 5.12 Paragraph 10 states that at the heart of the framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development**.

- 5.13 Paragraph 11 sets out that, for decision-taking, this means:
- approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
 - 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.
- 5.14 Paragraph 38 of the Framework asks that Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way.
- 5.15 Paragraph 48 sets out how Local planning authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:
- (a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);
 - (b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and
 - (c) the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).
- 5.16 Paragraph 80 states that 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.
- 5.17 Paragraph 85 of the Framework emphasises how planning policies and 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.
- 5.18 Paragraph 91 states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which 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 and strong neighbourhood centres.
- 5.19 In a similar fashion, Paragraph 92 requires planning policies and decisions to:

- (a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments
- (b) take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community;
- (c) guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs;
- (d) ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community; and
- (e) ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

5.20 Chapter 9 of the Framework guides the important role transport plays in achieving sustainable development, seeking to maximise sustainable transport solutions.

5.21 Paragraph 108 states that it should be ensured that:

- (a) appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be – or have been – taken up, given the type of development and its location;
- (b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users; and
- (c) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree.

5.22 Paragraph 117 encourages planning policies and decisions to promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses.

5.23 Paragraph 118 expands on this, stating that planning policies and decisions should give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs.

5.24 In achieving appropriate densities, Paragraph 122 policies and 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 it;
- (b) local market conditions and viability;
- (c) the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential for further improvement and the scope to promote sustainable travel modes that limit future car use;

- (d) the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and
 - (e) the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.
- 5.25 Paragraph 124 reiterates that the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.
- 5.26 In doing so, Paragraph 127 emphasises that will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, for the lifetime of the development; are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping; are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment; and optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks.

National Planning Policy Guidance

- 5.27 The Planning Practice Guidance was published in 2014, and is updated on a regular basis as an online resource. It provides guidance to support the NPPF discussing individual topics in greater detail, including the consideration and determination of planning applications, design, and various other technical and procedural matters, supporting the overall implementation of the policy contained within the Framework.
- 5.28 The relevant references within the Town Centres & Retail PPG are included below:
- Para 001 –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
 - Para 001 - Evening and night time activities have the potential to increase economic activity within town centres and provide additional employment opportunities. They can allow town centres to diversify and help develop their unique brand and offer services beyond retail
 - Para 008 – To support new ventures and pop ups and avoid buildings being left empty, permitted development rights allow a range of uses (such as offices, shops, financial and professional services etc) to convert temporarily to another uses (such as shop, offices, restaurant) for a single continuous period of up to three years

Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance

- 5.29 The following supplementary planning documents and guidance are considered relevant to the proposed development and have been considered as part of the outline planning application:
- Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)
 - Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2011)
 - Planning Obligations under Section 106 (April 2015)

6. Planning Assessment

- 6.1 As set out previously, Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that development proposals are considered against the relevant provisions of the Development Plan, and other material considerations. Proposals are to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 6.2 Accordingly, this section provides an appraisal of the proposed development against the relevant planning policy considerations and any other material considerations. This focuses on the suitability of the site to accommodate the proposed development and the specific issues associated with the suitability and deliverability of the application proposals.

Principle of Development

- 6.3 This section will consider a number of policy matters associated with demonstrating that the principle of development proposed through this application:
- The principle of development within Caversham District Centre;
 - The viability and vitality of St Martin's Centre;
 - The principle of the change of use of part of the upper floors to D2 Cinema (51 Church Street);
 - Creation of new Church Street entrance frontage to the proposed cinema; and
 - The principle of the change of use of Archway House (ground floor) to B1 (a) office.

The principle of development within Caversham District Centre

- 6.4 The Framework adopts a pro-growth stance and identifies a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It proposes that planning should proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units and communities the country needs.
- 6.5 The Framework sets out at Chapter 11 the need to make effective use of previously developed land. There is recognition at paragraph 118 that there are multiple benefits from urban land through mixed use schemes, with substantial weight being given to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements.
- 6.6 The application site is within the existing settlement boundary of Caversham within the heart of the District Centre and forms part of St Martin's Centre which is the principal focus of the District Centre's retail and leisure offer. As such, the principle of development within this location is supported by policy RL1 of the Local Plan which supports new development that maintains and enhances the vitality and viability of District Centres.

- 6.7 When considering St Martin's Centre more specifically, planning permission was granted in March 2015 for a proposal that sought to deliver additional development incorporating further town centre uses including a cinema and a new residential offer. The Applicant has commenced implementing the permission which is seeking to support the vitality and viability of the District Centre.
- 6.8 Since 2015, due to structural changes within the retail market alongside changing occupier demands, there is a requirement to re-visit elements of the extant permission including the cinema provision to ensure that a viable and attractive District Centre offer is delivered within St Martin's Centre. In addition, the Applicant has been liaising closely with existing tenants within the Centre to understand their growing premises requirements to ensure that these companies can remain within the District Centre and do not need to relocate elsewhere.
- 6.9 As part of these discussions, it has emerged that the proposed cinema within the extant permission is not available for development and therefore alternative opportunities have been reviewed to ensure that new cinema can come forward as soon as possible to support the District Centre. This has resulted in an opportunity to deliver a new cinema at 51 Church Street on the first and second floors where a stronger street frontage can be provided.
- 6.10 Furthermore, the opportunity to re-introduce high quality office space back to the local market which has been historically plagued by poor access, can be delivered through the change of use of the ground floor of Archway House. This prompts the requirements for the change of use of the ground floor of Archway House from A1 to B1(a) to facilitate the re-occupation of the long vacant offices on the upper floors.
- 6.11 The proposed development accords with the main thrust of the Framework with regard to a town centre first approach as set out within the Framework (2019). Cinema and office uses fall within the definition of 'Main Town Centre uses' which are acceptable within town centres and will support the vitality and viability of the District Centre. The proposed development is entirely consistent with the national objectives of supporting town centres and delivering a positive approach to growth.
- 6.12 Given the rationale for the proposals set out above, we consider the policy position supporting the proposals below.

The viability and vitality of St Martin's Centre;

- 6.13 The Framework is clear at paragraph 8 that the role of the planning system is to 'help build a strong and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth'. This could not be more relevant than to this application which responds to the market needs of two appropriate town centre uses as defined within the Framework. This aligns with achieving social objectives that underpin the purposes of the District Centre through supporting 'strong, vibrant and healthy communities'.
- 6.14 The Framework also reinforces at paragraph 85 the importance for 'planning policies and decision 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'. These proposals represent an appropriate response to a changing town

centre market and the premises requirements of key town-centre uses that support the local community both economically and socially.

- 6.15 The proposals seek to enhance the mix of uses available within the District Centre by ensuring a cinema facility is deliverable on site whilst allowing an existing occupier to grow and diversify without leaving Caversham. The proposed application requires limited external alterations to the existing buildings and ensures that existing and proposed town centre uses can be supported and not compromised in terms of delivery by limited site availability. In this context, the proposed development conforms with Policy RL1 (Network and Hierarchy of Centres) of the adopted Local Plan.

The principle of the change of use from B1 to D2 (Cinema) (51 Church Street)

- 6.16 The Framework at paragraph 85 requires that the needs for leisure are met in full and are not compromised by site availability. At present, there is no cinema facility within Caversham, but permission exists for one as part of the extant consent. The extant permission allowed for the change of use of part of the upper floors of Block C to provide a cinema. The consented proposals for Block C cannot currently be implemented as the upper floors of Block C are within the demise of an existing occupier, with an ongoing lease that they are not willing to negotiate. In addition, through on-going discussions with potential cinema operators, there sufficient market interest for a cinema to be located within this part of the Centre. As such, in the interests of delivering a new leisure facility to support the vitality of the Centre for local residents, this application has been submitted to allow such a facility to come forward within the new few years.
- 6.17 The Local Plan recognises (at paragraph 4.6.8) that the most suitable location for retail, leisure and cultural development is within existing centres. In addition, the Western Berkshire Retail and Commercial Leisure Assessment 2016 (April 2017), which discusses that 'commercial leisure' facilities that includes cinema uses, are 'becoming an increasingly important contributor to the vitality and viability of town centres'. Furthermore the study recognises that 'leisure is becoming an increasingly important component in town centre regeneration schemes' (paragraph 4.23), which is pertinent given the on-going regeneration of St Martin's Centre which is currently being implemented by the Applicant.
- 6.18 The Assessment specifically identifies that there is an under provision for cinema and family entertainment, in particular parts of the survey area, especially with regard to the small scale/boutique offer within Reading and demand for ideally an independent cinema facility. This is carried through in the local plan whereby, at paragraph 4.6.10, it states that there is a need for entertainment uses, including additional cinema provision.
- 6.19 The proposals the subject of this application will deliver a 1094sq.m cinema and leisure (D2) facility which will complement the wider uses within the District Centre, contributing towards addressing the 'identified' shortfall of 'commercial leisure' facilities within Reading, whilst ensuring a more diverse offering within the centre and providing evening activity.
- 6.20 The proposed cinema facility will play a role in meeting the identified need for additional entertainment facilities in the Borough in accordance with paragraph 92 of the Framework which highlights the importance of providing the social, recreational

and cultural facilities and services the community needs. It will further reduce the need for residents to travel to Reading town centre for such services and assist in establishing Caversham as a leisure destination for local residents. The proposed cinema can play a role as an anchor to the site and the wider scheme helping to ensure the vitality of the District Centre in the long term, especially given its positioning and frontage onto the proposed Caversham Square. It is expected that the cinema users will undertake linked trips with other shops and services within the centre, resulting in a positive impact on the existing centre.

- 6.21 As such, it is considered that the proposals will deliver new leisure facilities within an existing District Centre, addressing an identified need and will accord with policy RL2 (Network and Hierarchy of Centres) and RL3 (vitality and viability of smaller centres) of the local plan.
- 6.22 In relation to the extant consent for the cinema above Block C, it is not currently possible to bring that forward and nor is there sufficient market interest for a cinema to be located within this part of the Centre. Whilst approval of this application would technically enable 2 cinemas to be developed in the centre, in practice this is unlikely to be delivered on site. The applicant is reviewing options for Block C and giving consideration to alternative uses in this location.
- 6.23 With regard to the change of use of B1(a) entrance at ground floor level of 51 Church Street, the existing ground floor B1(a) use is a non-centre use for the purpose of policy RL3. As such, the change of use will deliver a new 'centre use' along the primary shopping frontage of the District Centre and provide a much-needed leisure facility on the first and second floors that responds to an evident need within the District Centre.
- 6.24 The proposals will deliver an appropriate 'centre use' that is employment generating, with the proposed cinema employing circa 25 members of staff, including 10 full time. Given the nature of the use will deliver economic growth for the centre by supporting existing uses through creating a more attractive offer for residents to visit the Centre.

The principle of the change of use of Archway House (ground floor) A1 to office B1(a)

- 6.25 The change of use of the ground floor of Archway House (west) from a vacant A1 use to B1(a) will provide a new entrance/reception area to the upper floor offices.² The existing A1 unit has been vacant for several years alongside the upper floors offices. The ongoing vacancy of the A1 unit has been attributed to its limited size being only 29sqm and its location removed from the primary frontages.
- 6.26 With regard to the upper floor offices, discussions with agents have identified there has been limited occupier interest on account of:
- The lack of prominence of the building from Church Street;

² Internal and External alterations to the Archway House secured under application 171145

- No formal reception area to serve the offices on upper floors – the existing entrance is to the rear of the building and is of an insufficient size to provide an appropriate reception area;
- No level access – the entrance to the rear only provides step access and appears subservient to the main building; and
- The quality of the existing accommodation.

- 6.27 Given the above and the opportunities for either a well-established occupier to relocate within the Centre to the upper floors of Archway House or a new business to the district centre, a change of use is sought for the 29sqm of A1 floorspace to B1(a) to serve the upper floors providing a high quality entrance and reception area to these offices.
- 6.28 The adopted proposals map does not identify Archway House (west) as within a key frontage and therefore only policy RL3(b) is relevant. Point 1 of RL3(b) relates to the avoidance of 2 consecutive A5 takeaways, which is not relevant to this development. . Point 2 relates to the position that ‘there would be no net loss of ‘centre uses’ for ‘non-centre uses’ at the ground floor (apart from entrances to upper floors) except in exceptional circumstances’.
- 6.29 As set out previously, local commercial agents have confirmed there has been no interest in ‘centre’ uses (as defined by RBC) due to the size of unit and lack of prominence from main shopping streets. Of further relevance is paragraph 4.6.48 of the Local Plan which states that ‘it is important that uses such as housing and offices are integrated into centres at upper floors to ensure diversity and good access to jobs and housing’, an objective which this application is keen to deliver. This is directly relevant to what is being proposed given that, in this instance, the de-minimis loss of A1 retail floorspace, located in an ‘unconventional’ unit, would assist in enhancing the attractiveness and viability of the offices which are currently vacant on upper floors. The upper floor offices have been marketed for at least six months prior to Hermes acquiring the site in December 2015 albeit have failed to generate any market interest during this time.
- 6.30 As such, this application has provided an opportunity to consider a more comprehensive approach. Given the premises requirements of an existing office occupier alongside the opportunities to deliver a new cinema facility in the centre, the current proposals would support the vitality and viability of the town centre through delivering appropriate town centre uses³.
- 6.31 This application would significantly enhance the existing upper floor office space by addressing concerns raised by local agents regarding the attractiveness of the office accommodation in the absence of a high quality and DDA compliant entrance/reception area. The proposal could assist in retaining existing office occupiers within the Centre or attracting new tenants into the centre by enhancing the attractiveness of the long vacant upper floor offices.

³ Paragraph 85 of the National Planning Policy Framework (published 2019)

Requiring Good Design

- 6.32 Paragraph 128 of the Framework states that the design quality should be considered through the evolution and assessment of proposals with paragraph 131 stating that great weight should be given to helping raise design more generally within the area'. This position is confirmed at a local level through RBC's own policy.
- 6.33 The proposed alterations to 51 Church Street principally relate to the frontage along Church Street where it is proposed to bring forward the existing entrance by 2m to align with the existing urban form along Church Street.
- 6.34 The design of the proposed development will be complimentary to the existing character in Caversham District Centre and build upon the design principles as set out in Policy CC7 of the adopted Local Plan. The proposals seek to optimize the development capacity in a sensitive manner that further diversifies the range of uses and complements the existing street scene. Consideration has been given to how the bulk and mass responds to Church Street, with the existing structure remaining largely unchanged, with no further extensions to the main mass of the building. It is noted that the main entrance will now extend into Church Street by approximately 2m, however this is in the corner of two existing buildings.
- 6.35 It is considered that this development will ensure that views from Church Street are minimised and to ensure the amenity of neighbouring properties is retained in line with Policy CC8.
- 6.36 Policy CC8 of the adopted Development Plan states that all 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*". In this context, the design of the proposed development takes account of the existing urban layout within the District centre, with the proposed façade being a continuation of the brick material that is currently found the existing buildings. Black brickwork is proposed so as to enhance the entrance to the site and differentiate it from existing uses and make it easily identifiable within the District Centre.
- 6.37 With regard to Archway House, no external or internal amendments are required.
- 6.38 The Applicant has devised a wholly inclusive design and layout as to maximise accessibility to the site from Church Street and wider District Centre. The relocation of a lift shaft and relocation of the entrance to the northern elevation will create an enhanced visitor experience that will complement the day and night time economy of Caversham.
- 6.39 The Applicant acknowledges the importance placed on good design and seeks to deliver a high quality regeneration of St Martins Centre through this application and the wider consented scheme (Ref: 140997). The proposals for the site will respect and enhance the existing and proposed surrounding environmental and design context.

Promoting Sustainable Transport

- 6.40 The Framework states at paragraph 103 that significant development should be focussed on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel' and promoting sustainable transport modes (paragraph 108).
- 6.41 Further, in accordance with the Framework at paragraph 110, developments should be located and designed, where practical, to:
- Allow for the efficient delivery of goods and access by service and emergency vehicles ;
 - Give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, and have access to high quality public transport facilities;
 - Create safe and secure layouts which minimise conflicts between traffic and cyclists or pedestrians, avoiding street clutter and where appropriate establishing homes zones;
 - Incorporate facilities for charging plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles; and
 - Consider the needs of people with disabilities by all modes of transport.
- 6.42 Parking and vehicular access for the proposal will remain unchanged from that provided for the existing uses on site. The proposed cinema use will be accessed through the refurbished entrance from Church Street.
- 6.43 As accepted through the extant planning permission, the site is within a highly sustainable location and is well located to integrate into the local pedestrian, cycle and public transport network with opportunities for sustainable transport modes optimised within this location. The proposed development is therefore in accordance with adopted Local Planning Policy CC6 (Accessibility and the intensity of the development), which asks that development be accessible by sustainable modes of transport,
- 6.44 The proposals will not seek to amend the vehicle access strategy agreed under planning permission 140097 access for St Martin's Centre with the main vehicle general traffic and service deliveries from Archway Road.
- 6.45 The application is accompanied by a Transport Statement prepared by WYG. This document demonstrates the proposed development accords with Paragraph 109 National Planning Policy Framework whereby the *"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"*.
- 6.46 With regards to parking provision, vehicle parking will remain unchanged as a result of the proposed development. This is considered both reasonable and appropriate on the basis that there is no specific standard for Cinema parking, and the St Martins Centre Masterplan was approved for an over-provision of parking.

- 6.47 Similarly, cycle and motorcycle provision will stay as per the existing levels provided on site. The approved level of cycle parking is appropriate for the proposals on the basis that a significant proportion of trips by all modes are likely to be linked and those travelling by bicycle to the site will most likely be visiting other destinations either within the St. Martins Centre or within the District Centre. It is therefore considered that the proposed development accords with Policies TR1 (Achieving the Transport Strategy), TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway-related matters) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) of the adopted Local Plan.

Noise

- 6.48 A supporting Noise Assessment considers the impact of the proposed cinema use and the appropriate noise mitigation required to be incorporated in to the scheme. Existing noise levels around the site have been established and the Noise Assessment concludes that the noise environment at the site does not preclude the proposed development and it is therefore considered that the proposals are in line with adopted policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) and EN17 (Noise Generating Equipment).

Flooding

- 6.49 Paragraph 155 of the Framework states that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure flood risk is not increased elsewhere and only considered development appropriate in areas at low risk of flooding, where, informed by a specific flood risk assessment.
- 6.50 The application site falls within Flood Zone 1, and with the exception of the minor extension to the 51 Church Street entrance area does not propose any additional floorspace. The proposed development primarily relates to the change of use of existing floorspace and does not involve 'vulnerable uses' as defined in flood risk terms. The external modifications to the northern elevation to provide an access from Church Road is not considered to result an increased flood risk to the wider site.

Trees

- 6.51 The supporting tree survey that accompanies this application has assessed the existing tree on-site. The Survey has identified that the existing tree is 'Category B' and is of 'moderate quality' given the tree in situ has restricted growth and a restricted rooting environment.
- 6.52 It is proposed that the existing tree is to be removed so as to facilitate the development. A replacement tree is proposed to be planted in a 3mx3m planting pit to the west of the site. The replacement tree is to be of high quality and whilst the species is not yet determined, it is suggested as either Ginkgo Biloba (male) or Acer Campestre. The applicant has successfully undertaken similar works elsewhere in the centre through the 2015 Masterplan consent, resulting in the additional of new high quality trees within the centre, positive enhancing the centre environment.
- 6.53 It is considered that the replacement tree will more than offset a 'moderate quality' tree which has restricted growth and rooting environment, and will deliver a positive benefit to the streetscene and physical environment. The proposed development is

therefore considered to be in accordance with Planning Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) of the adopted Local Plan

Summary

- 6.54 On the basis of the above, we consider that the application proposal complies with the relevant planning policy criteria and will deliver a design that responds to and enhances the design approved through the extant permission. We have demonstrated that there are no adverse impacts that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits brought about as a result of this proposal.

7. Summary and Conclusions

- 7.1 This application seeks planning permission for the change of use of part of the ground and first floors and second of 51 Church Street to deliver a D2 (Cinema Use), with the change of use of the ground floor of Archway House from A1 to B1(a) to create a high quality reception area to serve the vacant upper floor offices of Archway House.
- 7.2 Hermes is committed to delivering on the regeneration of the District Centre and is proactively seeking opportunities to deliver a revised scheme that will complement and further enhance the District Centre in response to existing market conditions. The amended proposals for this element of the St Martin's Centre regeneration seeks to further ensure the viability and vitality of the District Centre. It will deliver a cinema facility to complement the existing mix of town centre uses including leisure, retail and residential. It is considered that this cinema facility is an appropriate 'main town centre' use in this location and is supported by the adopted and emerging development plan.
- 7.3 Likewise, the change of use of the ground floor of Archway House (west) is considered appropriate and would have a positive impact upon the centre. It could facilitate the relocation of an existing use within the centre or provide enhanced floorspace for new office tenants to the centre, and enable the successful re-occupation of Archway House which has been vacant for a number of years.
- 7.4 The proposed development retains the current structure's scale and form, but proposes an innovative reconfiguration of existing upper level floorspace so as to deliver a cinema facility. . The proposed development requires limited external alterations which are focussed on a small extension at the frontage of the property to provide a new entrance at street level to the proposed cinema on the upper floors. .
- 7.5 The design approach seeks to optimise the accessibility by providing a more suitable access from Church Street and onto Caversham Square. The external design has sought to align with the wider regeneration of St Martins Centre.
- 7.6 The accompanying documents demonstrate that the proposed cinema use is acceptable from a noise and transport perspective.
- 7.7 The proposals respond to changes within the retail market and ensure the opportunities for 'town centre' occupiers are not limited by the lack of available sites within the existing Centre. They also reflect the positive strategy that the Applicant is taking to its role in supporting the vitality and viability of the District Centre in line with the Framework.
- 7.8 It is considered that the proposed development represents sustainable development and accords with the relevant policies of the adopted and emerging development plan and should be approved without delay in line with paragraph 11 (c) of the Framework.

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