

Section 6

Assessment of Impact.

6 | Assessment of Impact

Summary of Proposal

6.1 JTP architects have considered alternative options for the Site since the pre-application in June 2019. As stated previously, the proposal currently includes the retention of the rear buildings on the Site in their current form and use. These are of higher quality architecturally and also far better survivals of the historic maltings character, which has been wholly erased from the front building. This front building, last used as a retail warehouse but currently unoccupied, is proposed to be demolished and replaced with a six to seven storey mixed-use building, comprising of 238m² commercial units at ground floor, with active frontages, and 44 residential units above. The central courtyard between this front building and the rear buildings will be retained and enhanced.

Methodology

6.2 The impact assessment uses the methodology set out in paragraphs 197 of the NPPF as its basis and is applied with the interpretation established by current case law, and with reference to the recently updated Planning Practice Guidance on Non-Designated Heritage Assets, as set out above. Additionally, Historic England's GPA2 (Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment) and Local Heritage Listing publications inform this assessment.

Principle of Redevelopment

6.3 As stated previously, it is our clear view, as outlined above, that the main building on the Site does not possess sufficient heritage significance to be considered a non-designated heritage asset. Furthermore, the new PPG regarding non-designated heritage assets now gives additional weight and emphasis to the extent of evidence and justification to support the designation, which should ideally be through prior inclusion on a local list. Only rarely should non-designated heritage assets be identified during the development process.

6.4 We understand that the Site has been put forward for Local Listing in response to the present proposals for its demolition. Whilst Reading Council are considering whether the main building on the Site should be acknowledged as a non-designated

heritage asset, it is our clear view that it would possess very little material heritage significance, particularly when compared to other non-designated heritage assets, such as those that have been properly and formally recognised through inclusion on Reading's Local List.

6.5 This is because it is clear from the wording of NPPF paragraph 197 that just as non-designated heritage assets are less significant than designated heritage assets, not all non-designated assets are equal to one another in status or significance. The paragraph requires an assessment of the significance of the non-designated heritage asset to be undertaken, with the degree of significance being one part of the paragraph 197 equation, alongside the degree of harm or loss, and the merits or harms of the scheme in its entirety.

6.6 Furthermore, recent case law has emphasised that the design of the replacement building is as much of a consideration as the loss of a non-designated heritage asset:

Paragraph 135 [now 197] calls for weighing "applications" that affect an NDHA, in other words the consideration under that paragraph must be of the application as a whole, not merely the demolition but also the construction of the new building.

6.7 Therefore, the principle of demolishing and redeveloping the Site, following the policy test set out in NPPF paragraph 197, can only be properly assessed alongside a full discussion and analysis of the proposed replacement scheme, which is carried out below.



Figure 7.1 Caversham Road CGI looking South towards the Site

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- 6.8 The Site is located in a transitional position between the low-rise residential area to the west and the larger-scale commercial uses around Reading Station to the east, which currently have redevelopment plans coming forward. Approval of Reading Metropolitan as currently envisaged would mean that massing heights would rise to eight to nine storeys opposite the site, as shown in the CGI reproduced in figures 7.1-.3.
- 6.9 JTP's initial design proposal was for an eight storey building, however, this was noted in the Pre-Application feedback, this was found as being 'inappropriate for its location in a transition zone'. This has been reduced to seven storeys in this final design which is now lower than the forthcoming proposals for the other side of the road mentioned above.
- 6.10 The building steps down to five storeys along Northfield Road, towards the existing ex-maltings buildings at the rear, which will be retained by the proposals, as by far the highest quality surviving buildings on the Site. This incremental height helps to create a balanced relationship between the front and rear buildings and is further enhanced by the courtyard separating the proposed building and the retained building. The step in height will also help act as a buffer for this development, forming a more gentle and sympathetic progression between the larger scale commercial character of Caversham Road and the more residential character of the western edge of the Site.
- 6.11 Further to this, as a gateway site into Reading city centre from the North, with its location on a main road, there is a clear opportunity to increase the height of built form on the site. The proposal has been adapted from its initial concept in order to use a lighter tone of brick, have a more unified facade and a more sympathetic height in relation to uses and scale of neighbouring buildings and the primary road which it is located on compared to the lower scale and finer grain of the residential buildings to the rear.
- 6.12 The design includes regularly spaced windows and long elevations which are reflective of the Site's historical use as a 19th century maltings and which has been lost in the form of the existing building through extensions and alterations to adapt it for numerous commercial uses since the closure of the

maltings in 1900. From a townscape perspective, this regularity adds some coherence and order to the street scene, whilst the set back to the rear of the building adds articulation to the facade.

- 6.13 The proposed saw-tooth roof of the building also references the industrial history of the Site and gives the appearance of having a long rectangular shape, typical of 19th Century Maltings buildings. While the palette of materials which are suggested in the proposal also have influences taken from the existing building it will replace, including red and light buff brick, also characteristic of the wider area. This will be in keeping with the retained buildings to the rear of the Site as well as the terraced houses, fire station and school in the wider character area along Caversham Road and to the west.
- 6.14 Other elements of the malting's historical architectural character which have been incorporated in the design include the green glazed brick work around the door reveals and painted white lettering across the side of the building. These are currently the few surviving fragments of the building's historic character and use.
- 6.15 In townscape terms, the contextual design drawing on the historical architectural character enhances the coherence of the road through a comprehensive and less haphazard built form than the existing building, whilst its use will become more appropriate to the area. The high-quality design will also mean that nearby unattractive buildings such as the adjacent white and red warehouse building to the north will have less dominance over the local townscape.
- 6.16 Landscaping will be included in the development to enhance boundaries and add colour throughout the scheme. The proposed varieties of native trees would contribute to this help to soften this thoroughfare into Reading which currently lacks green space and foliage.
- 6.17 It was noted by the Council's Heritage Consultant in the Pre-application response letter that the Site is 'surrounded by a group of increasingly characterless and soulless modern developments'. It is clear that the proposal by JTP is a characterful and heritage-led development as set out above, which expertly takes into account its surrounding context, future character of this part of Caversham Road, and the history of the site from a maltings to retail use and now residential use.



Figure 7.2 Caversham Road CGI looking North towards the Site



Figure 7.3 Northfield Road CGI looking South East towards the Site

Section 7

Conclusion.

- 7.1 This report has provided a detailed assessment of the history, development and significance of 71-73 Caversham Road, Reading, concluding that, whilst the buildings are of minimal historical value in terms of the history of industrial development in the area, they are not representative or reflective of a particular local building form. The architectural character of the main building along Caversham Road has been wholly eroded by its subsequent and unsympathetic reuse and alteration, throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, which have involved a large amount of demolition, rebuilding and poor quality extensions.
- 7.2 The Site has not been in maltings use for over a century, does not retain any industrial machinery indicative of this former use, and as such is highly unlikely to retain any communal value for this use amongst the local community. It is clear in our view that the poor architectural character and lack of heritage significance means that the main building in particular should not be considered to be a non-designated heritage asset. Notwithstanding this, even if it were considered to have some minor heritage significance as a non-designated heritage asset, the level of this significance would necessarily be very low, as it has not even been considered sufficiently significant to be added to Reading's published local list.
- 7.3 The design of the updated proposal by JTP Architects has evolved through intelligently considering the Site's heritage and previous use, which have either been decayed or lost entirely on the current building, incorporating these into this final design. From a townscape view, we have concluded that the current proposal to replace the existing front building with a new mixed-use residential block, would make a significant contribution that would enhance the character and appearance of the Area which had been noted as 'soulless' by the Councils Heritage Consultant.
- 7.4 Observing these, the proposed redevelopment clearly outweighs the loss of the main building when considering the public benefits of the proposed scheme, including its high-quality contextual design and townscape merits. We consider the scheme to meet the requirements of the relevant policies, notably paragraph 197 of the National Planning

Policy Framework, as supported by the recently updated Planning Practice Guidance (2019), specifically regarding Non-Designated Heritage Assets. Accordingly, it is our clear view that the proposal satisfies current legislation, policy, and good practice principles and achieves a sustainable use for the Site, and should therefore be supported.

Appendix 1

References.

Appendix 1 | References

71 - 73 CAVERSHAM ROAD | READING

Patrick, A, for English Heritage (2004). *Strategy for the Historic Industrial Environment Report No.1 – Maltings in England*
Reading Borough Local Development Framework, Core Strategy (2008) With Alteration Adopted 27th January 2015

Appendix 2

**Bell Tower Community
Association**

Neighbourhood News,

Issues 54-55 (Dec18 - Mar19).

Neighbourhood News



from the Bell Tower Community Association

Issue 54 - December 2018

www.bell-tower.org.uk



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Season's greetings to all our readers

BEFORE DREWS...



MANY YEARS AGO: malthouses on an 1881 map, with trees in Caversham Road

Many of us will be sorry to see the closure of Drews Ironmongers in Caversham Road, and the Bell Tower Community Association is particularly grateful to the company for its support over the years. *Julia Wink* looks at the rich history of the Drews building and its occupants over the years.

The Drews building dates from the Victorian era, and has had various different uses.

We need to go back to 1870 to trace the origin of Northfield Road and the Drews site. At that date none of the side roads off Caversham Road north of the railway crossing had been built. Where Northfield Road would be was an arable field called, unsurprisingly, North Field. It belonged to John Weldale Knollys, who owned a large estate encompassing much of the area north of Great Knollys Street, some of which had already been leased by 1870.

In 1871 a new 99-year lease at £32.10s a year was drawn up for a rectangular plot of land that included the Drews site and the area west of it, extending as far as today's residential houses on the south side of Northfield Road. The lease required the lessee, within

two years, to build two or more brick houses or other approved buildings to a high standard. Knollys himself would build the street that would become Northfield Road.

The lessee, Henry Pendlebury Dowson, was a maltster with two other malthouses, one in Tudor Road and another in Malthouse Lane. Ordnance Survey maps of the late 1870s show the new malthouses already in place. Within two years of signing the lease Dowson had borrowed £5,000 from The Reading and County Permanent Benefit Building Society. Another £1,000 loan followed in 1877. Translated into today's prices, the total amounted to around £650,000; the loans would have probably been used to finance the construction of the malthouses and other buildings.

Things did not always go smoothly. Caversham Road was vulnerable to flooding, and for a business much of whose activity was conducted at ground floor level this was a disaster. More than once in the early 1880s complaints were made to the council about the losses sustained, which the council acknowledged but for which it did not accept liability.

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Business continued, but in the mid 1890s Dowson retired and left Reading, the business then being supervised by a manager. Dowson died at the end of 1902 and all malting activity on the site ceased very shortly afterwards.

In 1903 the remainder of the lease together with the malthouses, a dwelling house, stabling and other buildings were assigned to three men Arthur Cooper, Robert Curtis and William George Lewton, who were respectively a surveyor, a builder and an architect (Lewton designed the York Road Presbyterian Church). Cooper lost no time in putting in planning applications to the council. These involved the building of stables, stores and lock-up shops in Northfield Road, alterations to the malthouse on the corner and the conversion of one of the existing buildings into more shops.

The building was then converted to shops, which is how it was laid out at the start of World War 1. We will continue to tell the colourful history of this building in a future edition of *Neighbourhood News*.

From maltings to mallets

Part 2 of our history of the Drews building. *Julia Wink* looks at events on the site from the early 20th century onwards.

After the death of Henry Pendlebury Dowson the premises were converted from a malthouse providing malt to Reading brewers H&G Simonds to shops. The first business to occupy one of these was Stransom & Cheney, corn, hay and straw merchants. They also had offices and retail premises in Broad Street and were on the Drews site from 1905 until just before the outbreak of World War I in 1914.



THEN AND NOW: the Smallbone works in Caversham Road in the 1940s, and the malthouses in Northfield Road as they are today.

There was a grocer, William Orchard, for a short time and a boot-making and repairing company, W Cummings, which was there from around 1909 and was still there at the outbreak of hostilities. A long-standing presence was that of GW Harrison, a firm of manufacturing chemists that occupied the premises from 1913 for around 20 years. During the war a tailoring firm, Album and Solomon, briefly had a shop on the site.

In 1915 a new business, the Goblin Toy Factory, took over premises next to the site. This was set up to provide work for returning servicemen, offering them training in toy-making. It started well, but a few weeks after the Armistice a passer-by noticed flames coming out of the roof. He made his way over to the GWR signal works where he called for help. By the time the fire brigade brought the fire under control much of the building and the entire Christmas stock had been destroyed. The fire also spread to Harrison's chemical works and beyond to the premises of a W Barkus. Without stock or a means of production Goblin could not continue and the business closed.

GW Harrison's works survived the fire and until the early 1930s shared the premises with Reed and Partners, electrical engineers. In 1925 Percy Smallbone, motor engineers, moved in and remained there until 1947. After Reed and Partners left around 1930 and Harrison in 1933 Smallbone took over their premises. One can still see the signage 'Smallbone Ltd' faintly on the side of the building. Following Smallbone Ltd the building was occupied by Brown Bros, motor accessories providers and later electrical wholesalers, for around 30 years. On their departure Drews took over the premises in 1979.

In spite of the changes of use the Drews building retains some features of a malthouse in the shape of its roof



Cast iron lamp posts to be refurbished



We finally have a date for refurbishment of the remaining cast iron lamp posts in our area. This will start on Monday 25 February, so should be in progress as this newsletter goes to press. Addison Road is top of the council's priority list as three street lights there have not been working. York Road, Newport Road and Barry Place should follow in a few weeks.

Lamp posts will have new swan neck brackets fitted and will be converted to LED, and the former gas columns such as those in Addison and York Roads will have a small bollard installed nearby. The council also plans to start repainting all the remaining cast iron lamp posts in the spring.



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Community Association's AGM

All welcome

Appendix 3

**Pre-Application Feedback Letter,
Reading Borough Council (July 15).**

Historic England has produced new guidance on the interpretation and implementation of the NPPF and PPG with regard to the historic environment in the form of:

- Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (Historic England, 2016);
- Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015a);
- Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2015b); and
- Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 4: Tall Buildings (Historic England, 2015c).

Brewery Building

The existing brewery building (71-73 Caversham Road) is in origin a Malthouse building which formed part of Reading's important brewing industry. Located close to the GWR railway goods yard for access to markets it dates from at least 1879 as it is shown on the First Edition OS mapping as 'Malthouses'.

The building proposed for demolition is a two storey malthouse building on a corner plot, which appears to be largely intact although the roof has probably been replaced in corrugated iron. Built of good quality brick with burnt headers in Flemish garden Wall bond, with buff brick detailing over segmental windows and doors. It appears to have 'ghost' sign-lettering at first floor level on Northfield Road – possibly 'MALT'.

Proposals

Proposals consist of replacing the existing former maltings building with a 6-storey building which imitates the warehouse style. The proposals would have a saw-tooth roof in order to reference the industrial history of the malting building, with a palette of materials which have influences taken from the existing building it would replace.

Discussion

The Brewery building is considered to be an undesignated heritage asset and is potentially locally listable due to its age, architectural quality, landmark presence in the streetscene and relationship to an historic industry within Reading. The effect on an undesignated heritage asset should be considered in accordance with paragraph 197 of the NPPF which states that:

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

The Heritage Statement assesses the remaining building as having very little heritage interest. However, the building, especially along Northfield Road, retains its original character as a maltings building, surrounded by a group of increasingly characterless and soulless modern developments. The presence of the building in the streetscene represents a remnant of one of Reading's most important former industries: brewing. The last physical remnants of that industry are increasingly being lost, making the last vestiges more important locally. Replacing this building with a 6-storey building which imitates the warehouse style of the building whilst being wholly out-of-scale with it and the surrounding townscape would be harmful to not only the non-designated heritage asset but also to Reading's townscape.

The Heritage Statement states that JTP architects have considered alternative options for the site but consider it unviable to refurbish and extend the existing building to benefit the area and townscape. Whilst this would, no doubt, be less commercially beneficial, the basis of this unfeasibility and the options considered are not provided. The proposals seem to be being justified on the basis of the potential future townscape using a scheme (80 Caversham Road) which is not yet built or given permission.

Conclusions

As stated in paragraph 197 of the NPPF, the effect of a development on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application, weighing the scale of the effect on the heritage asset and its significance.

It is therefore recommended that demolition and re-development of the building is resisted subject to potential designation as a locally listed building.

There is no disputing the building's age, architectural distinctness, landmark presence in the street scene or relationship to an historic industry within Reading. The NPPF defines a heritage asset as a building identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in a planning decision, specifically because of its heritage interest. In this regard, Officers consider the existing building to be a heritage asset. Whether the replacement building would harm the character and appearance of the area and would justify the overall loss of the building requires careful consideration.

Based upon the advice received from the Council's Heritage Consultant, the building appears to have more than sufficient architectural significance to be a material consideration in determining any forthcoming application. The NPPF requires a balanced judgement to be made, having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. In these circumstances and as a starting point, the total loss of the heritage asset would directly conflict with Policy CS33 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy adopted 2008 (CS) which protects the historic environment and seeks its enhancement. This would weigh considerably against the proposal as it currently stands.

Design

Policy CS7: Design and the Public Realm sets out the requirements with regard to design of new development and requires that all developments must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area in which it is located. The aspects of design include: Layout: urban structure and urban grain; Landscape; Density and mix; Scale: height and massing; and Architectural detail and materials. Additionally the policy requires assessment of proposals to ensure that they:

- Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness.....
- Create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion;
- Address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable and easy to understand by them; and
- Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping.

Any proposal on this site should be developed in the context of this policy, including heights, building lines, and plot coverage, of adjacent sites, taking into account the existing built form/ footprint. The RCAAP contains a number of provisions relevant to development within the town centre. Specifically, development would be expected to:

- *Build on and be respectful to, engage at with the street at lower levels contributing to enhanced ease of movement through and around the central area;*
- *Provide a high quality streetscape, landscaping, and architectural detail.*

In turning to the design critique of the replacement building, the Council's Design Review Panel (DRP) has had the opportunity to consider proposal at its earlier initial stage. It should be noted that the panel recognised the proposal was in flux and the context in which the site sat in relation to the current major application opposite. The panel shared the Council's aspiration to achieve comprehensiveness and integration along Caversham Road and fully consider any scheme against an accurate understanding of the building's heritage significance. Overall the DRP accepted that the site is located in a low density 'mediocre' area where various sites are presently coming forwards, and opportunity did exist in this regard.

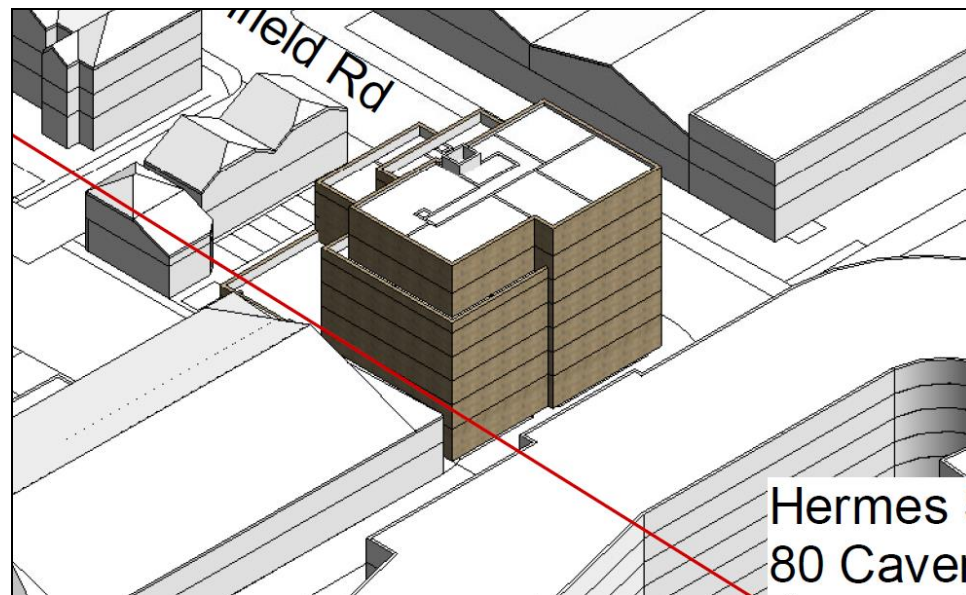


Fig 1: Initial concept presented to Council

Whilst not benefiting from the most current design proposals, the panel recognised that a scheme on this site has the potential to be 'architecturally significant' and with further design development could achieve such an aspiration. The earlier iteration viewed by the panel (Fig 1) was not considered to benefit from a compelling design rationale, with layering that was viewed as unnecessarily apologetic and a main facade which was "too busy" and uncomfortable. The DRP recommended a more monolithic approach be explored, recommending any worked up proposal references the site's plot width (rather than the pretense of two buildings as previously proposed - suggesting the verticality of a residential Victorian or Georgian typology).

A 1.5 storey ground floor commercial element (rather than 2 storeys) was considered to better link its commercial use, and provide better articulation as a plinth for the re-worked upper floors. A 1.5 storey base would better align with the neighbouring building and with a 5 storey middle and 1 storey top, better accord with Council guidance on tall buildings. By avoiding an oversimplified grid this was felt to offer the opportunity for improved accommodation and a more defined roofline and silhouette.

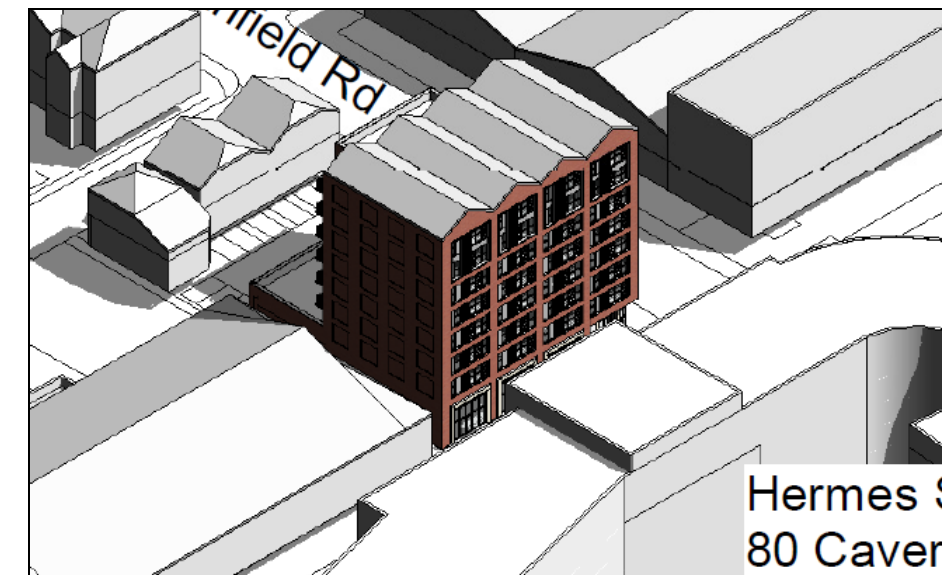


Fig 2: Second iteration presented to Council

The second iteration of the scheme (Fig 2) signified a notable departure from the earlier concept viewed by the DRP. In responding to the design feedback from the DRP, a 1.5 storey base, 5 storey middle and 2 storey top (presenting an 8 storey building) was presented. The ground floor proportions have taken on board the DRP feedback, whilst the use of red brick, a reduced material pallet and more simplistic, monolithic articulation of the building is beginning to display a more visually coherent appearance, and one which acknowledges the sites former historic significance. Two distinct roof gardens are now included, which are supported in ecological and sustainability terms, providing a degree of usable amenity space to the eastern elevation and making effective use of space as the building steps down to the retained brewery buildings at the rear.

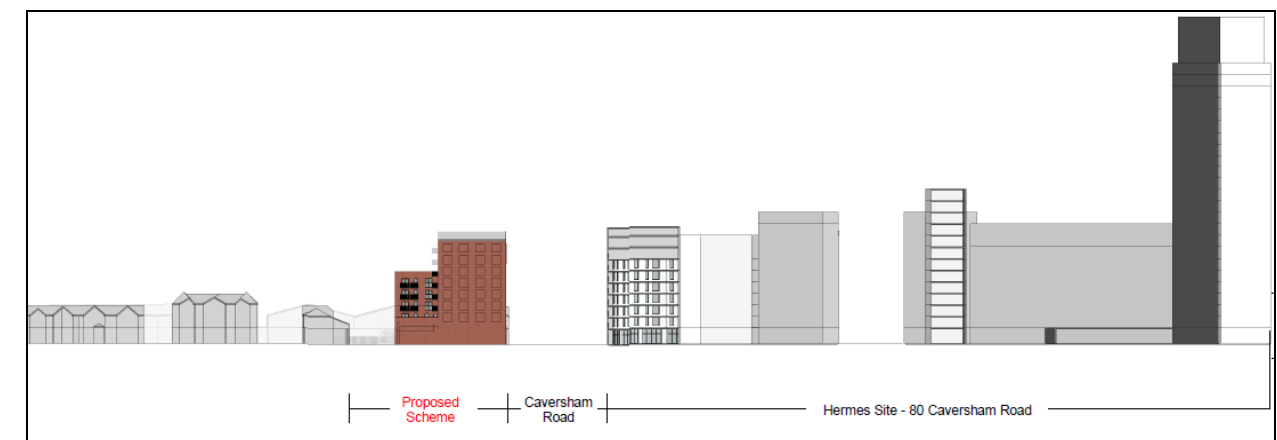


Fig 3: Section in comparison

With regard to scale, the rear (east) of the site the existing brewery buildings are two-storey, whilst next along Northfield Road is a three-storey modern block of flats, followed closely by the beginning of a traditional two-storey residential terrace. The proposed design is 8 storeys (excluding roof structure). Whilst not categorised as a tall building, it would be viewed as a significant feature when viewed along Caversham Road and westwards against the framing of the much reduced low-rise buildings either side. The proposal would also be viewed eastwards along Northfield Road towards the Caversham Road junction and against the backdrop of the much larger continuous mass of the Hermes site and landmark buildings beyond.

At present, the proposal has little differentiation in scale with the western block of the most recent Hermes scheme. Despite the ambition of the SRMOA, the fact the pending Hermes scheme is not currently approved and could be subject to change, it is considered more appropriate for any proposed scheme to 'look westwards' in

order to establish an appropriate scale within this transition zone. For any new building to effectively perform its role as a 'transition to' a zone of low density residential within the SRMOA, it should not be viewed as a continuation of the higher density development supported on the SRMOA. The Council would expect to see a building of a height which visually transitions to the lower density along Northfield Road, arriving at the two-storey terrace. This would need to acknowledge the stepped height of the three-storey flats and the need to sit visually and materially below that of the circa 8 storey building of the westernmost part of the Hermes scheme opposite. In taking account of the standoff across Caversham Road (providing visually detachment between development sites), the Council would wish to see the building materially reduced to reflect its primary role as the beginning of a 'transition' to low density residential along Northfield Road, rather than an attempt to look up to the taller buildings proposed within the SRMOA. The stepped approach to the rear of the site (existing brewery buildings) is essential, so too is a material reduction in the building height. Officers cannot entertain a scheme that does not perform a logical transition to these lower rise buildings without adequate justification and to proceed with a building of this scale, would weigh against the scheme in any planning balance.



Fig 4: CGI of proposed scheme

Whilst considered by Officers to represent an improved design overall when compared to the first iteration, any final scheme would need to be subjected to a full design review as part of a planning application (though DRP). As apparent, a second DRP review event fell outside of the agreed scope of this pre-application enquiry.

It is entirely possible that a building which follows the current design approach with the desired reduction in scale, could successfully integrate with both the envisaged development within the SRMOA opposite Caversham Road and that more traditional scale of development which currently exists to the east outside of the 'transition zone'. It would then be the case that this positive design would be considered in the overall planning balance against the heritage significance and removal of the existing building. However, when considered with those other shortcomings identified, the merits of the replacement building are not itself able to outweigh or mitigate the scale of the effect on the heritage asset and its significance.

c) Residential amenity

Policy DM4 sets out that the relevant matters which must be considered to ensure that development does not cause a significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing or new residential properties. The areas covered by this policy are:

- Privacy and overlooking;
- Access to sunlight and daylight;
- Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;



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