
Non-Technical Summary

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Hermes Investment Management (the Applicant) proposes the construction of a mixed use (residential, retail, office, health centre) development on the former Royal Mail sorting office and distribution centre to the north of Reading railway station on Caversham Road. The site location is shown in the attached figure (Figure 1.1).
- 1.2 The development, known as Reading Metropolitan, comprises an area of approximately 2.2 ha and would provide 658 residential dwellings, up to 16,604 m² of office floor space, up to 1,889 m² of floor space for retail, food and drink outlets, and up to 772m² for a health and community centre.
- 1.3 Taking into account the nature and scale of the development proposed, a process of Environmental Impact Assessment has been undertaken in accordance with UK legal requirements to identify the likely significant environmental effects of the proposed development. An Environmental Statement (ES) has been produced, setting out the findings of the assessment process. The ES accompanies an outline planning application submitted to Reading Borough Council.
- 1.4 This document is the Non-Technical Summary of the ES. This summary document provides an overview of the assessment findings. Details of how to view the full ES or to obtain further copies of this Non-Technical Summary are provided at the end of this document.

2 The Proposed Development

Description of Development

2.1 The proposed development would comprise the following key components:

- Nine high rise buildings, each ranging in height from 7 to 24 floors above ground floor;
- Studio, one- two- and three-bed apartments on all floors with the majority on the 7th floor and above;
- Separate townhouses;
- Office accommodation on the first seven floors;
- Retail floorspace and a health and community centre at ground floor level;
- Basement parking for 70 cars;
- Associated infrastructure including refuse areas, cycle storage and plant;
- Access from the public highway for vehicles, pedestrians and cycles;
- Private and public communal areas/gardens including rooftop amenity space; and
- Associated landscaping.

2.2 Figures 2.1b and 2.3 from the main ES are included in this Non-Technical Summary to show the proposed layout of buildings at ground level and provide an illustrative landscape master plan for the Proposed Development. Figure 2.2a is also included to show how the north elevation of the Proposed Development.

Landscape and Open Space

2.3 The public realm, including new streets and connections will facilitate permeability through and legibility of the landscape and public realm, including to and from the station, city centre and Thames footpath. The design of Station Square will accommodate a high number of pedestrians moving through the space to/from Reading Station and the bus stops nearby.

2.4 The Communal Gardens are private courtyards where residents can go to spend time, relax, socialise and play. These courtyards offer a variety of spaces, including two playgrounds, areas that encourage social interaction and other quieter, more intimate spaces for people to relax.

2.5 A number of roof terraces are included as amenity space to be used by residents and office workers.

Access

- 2.6 The Proposed Development would include the creation of a new length of highway (The Avenue) between Caversham Road and Trooper Potts Way, access to the southern residential areas via Railway Walk and Middle Street, and an internal access road linking The Avenue with Railway Walk.

Construction Phase

- 2.7 Construction works would be undertaken in accordance with a Code of Construction Practice and /or a Construction Environment Management Plan agreed with the local authority. The current programme indicates a total construction period of approximately 7 years over three phases. Working hours are likely to be 07:00 to 19:00 hours Monday to Friday, 07:00 to 13:00 hours on Saturday and at no time on Sundays or on public or bank holidays. These hours would be subject to agreement with Reading Borough Council. In the event that works are required outside of these hours in exceptional circumstances, this would be agreed with the local authority prior to commencement of the activity.
- 2.8 The broad sequence of construction phasing is likely to be:
- Subject to planning consent demolition of existing buildings and enabling works may start in the third quarter (Q3) 2019 and take 18 to 20 months to complete.
 - Construction Phase 1 may start in Q1 2020 and take 24 to 26 months to complete.
 - Construction Phases 2 and 3 would each take between 18 and 24 months to complete.
- 2.9 The broad sequence of construction activities is likely to be:
- Construction of main site access to allow access for construction vehicles (to be done prior to Phase 1 across the whole site);
 - Demolition of existing buildings and removal of demolition materials (to be done prior to Phase 1 across the whole site);
 - Diversion of existing culvert;
 - Setting up of working areas and earthworks/regarding of the site;
 - Infrastructure works, including construction of The Avenue and internal roads, drainage works and sewage works for each phase;
 - Construction of substructures;
 - Erection of superstructures and building finishes; and
 - Planting in accordance with the landscape strategy.

- 2.10 The development site would be fenced during construction. It is the intention of the applicant that the site would be registered under the Considerate Constructors Scheme or locally recognised certification scheme.

Summary of Key Parameters

- 2.11 The table below provides a summary of the key parameters which have formed the basis for the assessment of effects.

Table 1: Key Parameters for Environmental Assessment

Element of Development	Key Parameter for EIA
Project site area	2.2 ha
Area of built development	84,173 sq m
Number of residential dwellings	658
Maximum building height	To 123.18 mAOD
Area of office floorspace	16,604 sq m
Area of retail floorspace	1,889 sq m
Total number of car parking spaces	94
Highways infrastructure (excluding roads within residential areas)	New length of highway, The Avenue

3 Need and Alternatives Considered

Need for the Development

- 3.1 It is clear from the allocations in the adopted and draft local planning policy that there is a need for high quality retail, office and residential space in Reading. It is particularly clear that the area around the station should be developed in such a way to create an area of public use and provide pedestrian access from the station to the River Thames to the north.

Alternatives Considered

- 3.2 The design of the project has been an iterative process and has also taken into account feedback from statutory and non-statutory consultees, public consultation and exhibitions and the findings of the EIA process.
- 3.3 The design process has led to revisions in terms of the site layout; changes in the building appearance, including the building heights; the provision of health facilities, and community and leisure facilities; and how new pedestrian and road links would be delivered.

4 Consultation, Scope of Assessment and Methodology

Scoping and Consultation

- 4.1 Scoping is the process of identifying the issues to be addressed in the Environmental Impact Assessment process. This process sets the context for the assessment process.
- 4.2 A request for a scoping opinion was submitted to Reading Borough Council in January 2018. A response was provided in March 2018.
- 4.3 Responses were received from a range of consultees contacted by the local planning authority. Taking into account the nature, size and location of the proposed development, the information provided with the scoping opinion and other consultation responses provided throughout the assessment process, the following topics have been covered within the ES:

Table 2: Information Provided within the Environmental Statement

Structure of the Environmental Statement	
Non-Technical Summary	Summary of the Environmental Statement using non-technical terminology
Volume 1: Text	
Glossary	
Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Project Description
Chapter 3	Need and Alternatives
Chapter 4	Environmental Assessment Methodology
Chapter 5	Historic Environment
Chapter 6	Townscape and Visual Resources
Chapter 7	Geology, Hydrogeology and Ground Conditions
Chapter 8	Hydrology and Flood Risk
Chapter 9	Traffic and Transport
Chapter 10	Air Quality
Chapter 11	Noise and Vibration
Chapter 12	Socio-Economics
Chapter 13	Further Information
Volume 2: Appendices	
Including specialist report forming technical appendices to the main text.	
Volume 3: Figures	
Including all figures and drawings to accompany the text.	

Environmental Assessment Methodology

- 4.4 Environmental Impact Assessment is a means of identifying and collating information to inform an assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of a development. For each of the key environmental topics in the ES, the following have been addressed:
- Methodology;
 - Description of the existing environmental (baseline) conditions;

- Identification of and assessment of the significance of likely effects arising from the proposed development;
- Identification of any mitigation measures proposed to avoid, reduce and, if possible, remedy adverse effects; and
- Assessment of any cumulative effects with other proposed developments planned in the area.

4.5 In terms of significance, effects are described using the following scale:

- Substantial: Only adverse effects are normally assigned this level of significance. They represent key factors in the decision making process. These effects are generally, but not exclusively, associated with sites or features of international, national or regional importance that are likely to suffer a most damaging impact and loss of resource integrity;
- Major: These beneficial or adverse effects are considered to be very important considerations and are likely to be material in the decision making process;
- Moderate: These beneficial or adverse effects may be important, but are not likely to be key decision making factors. The cumulative effects of such factors may influence decision making if they lead to an increase in the overall adverse effect on a particular resource or receptor;
- Minor: These beneficial or adverse effects may be raised as local factors. They are unlikely to be critical in the decision making process, but are important in enhancing the subsequent design of the development; and
- Negligible: No effects or those that are beneath levels of perception, within normal bounds of variation or within the margin of forecasting error.

4.6 Such effects may be beneficial or adverse.

5 Summary of Environmental Effects

- 5.1 This section provides a summary of the findings of the environmental assessment process. For full details of the assessments, please refer to the ES.

Historic Environment

- 5.2 This Chapter of the ES considered the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development on the historic environment resource.
- 5.3 There is the potential for the presence of buried archaeological remains within the site, which may be associated with prehistoric stray finds and palaeoenvironmental deposits, early medieval funerary remains, agricultural remains of early medieval or later date and remains associated with 19th and 20th century railway works. Whilst previous development may have affected buried archaeological remains, the full extent of the truncation is unknown.
- 5.4 Demolition and construction works, especially the excavation of the basement and other excavations required to facilitate the construction of building foundations and associated services, have the potential to truncate the archaeological remains. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and local planning policies require archaeological recording of non-designated heritage assets to be harmed by development. Therefore, a phased programme of archaeological investigations would be undertaken, which would include in the first instance an archaeological evaluation, the results of which would inform the scope of mitigation. Such works, which would be secured by an appropriately worded archaeological condition attached to consent granted, would partially offset the loss of the archaeological resource through the increase in knowledge. Following the implementation of the mitigation the effects on the archaeological resource within the sites would not be significant and the provisions of the local and national planning policies would be met.
- 5.5 The Proposed Development, as a result of the construction of tall buildings within the site, will introduce change within the surroundings of a number of heritage assets, including four Listed Buildings and a Conservation Area. A settings assessment undertaken with regard to these assets established that as the character of the settings of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Area, which comprises modern urban form, would not change, the Proposed Development would not result in any harm to the designated heritage assets and as such the proposal would be consistent with the provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the NPPF and the local planning policy requiring the protection of heritage assets.

Townscape and Visual Resources

- 5.6 This part of the ES describes the potential townscape and visual effects that are likely to result from the proposed development.
- 5.7 A study area of up to 2km from the boundaries to the project site was identified and the potential effects of the proposed development on townscape character and upon the visual amenity of 21

representative views was assessed using a method based on the guidance within the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (GLVIA 2013). Consultations were undertaken with Reading Borough Council to determine the locations of each of the representative viewpoints.

- 5.8 The town centre of Reading is an evolving townscape with several consented schemes for tall buildings (buildings over 10 commercial or 12 residential storeys in height) already approved, these include Station Hill (to the immediate south of the railway line and the proposed development site), Thames Quarter (to the east and under construction at the time of undertaking the ES) and Weldale Street, to the west. These consented schemes form part of the 'future baseline' against which change due to the proposed development has been assessed, i.e. they are considered to form part of the townscape and an element within each of the representative views into which the proposed development would be placed.
- 5.9 Baseline studies included a Zone of Theoretical Study (ZTV) to establish the approximate extent of the study area from which views to the proposed development would be potentially available. For each of the representative viewpoints, visualisations or Visually Verifiable Montages (VVMs) have been prepared. These can be described as, accurate Computer aided design (CAD) 3-D representations of a proposed development, displayed to an agreed level of detail. These visualisations formed a key part of the baseline for the assessment.
- 5.10 Townscape character areas within the study area were described and defined using those within the Reading Tall Building Strategy (2008), the Newbury District Council (1993) District-Wide Landscape Assessment and conservation areas. For those parts of the study area not covered by these published studies, areas with broadly similar townscape characteristics were defined by RPS using the results of desktop and field survey information.
- 5.11 Mitigation during the construction phase would include hoardings around the construction site boundaries to screen most general ground level construction activities. As part of the design evolution of the proposed development, and with specific emphasis on its scale and massing, a townscape review of the design proposals was undertaken (RPS 2018). This study considered its fit within the evolving townscape setting of Reading which, as described above, includes several proposals for tall buildings. The conclusions to the study by RPS were that the proposed development achieved a good level of fit with the existing urban form and that it complemented the existing tall building cluster provided by other planned tall buildings within the town centre, i.e. Station Hill. It also made recommendations concerning the heights of parts of the proposed development which were taken forward and given further consideration by the design team.
- 5.12 During the temporary construction phase, locally significant adverse effects were assessed upon views from 3 representative viewpoints abutting the project site within which ground level construction activity, hoardings and vehicles bringing materials and construction personnel to the proposed development would be clearly visible within what are near distance views. In terms of temporary effects upon townscape, no potentially significant adverse effects upon any of the townscape character areas within the study area were identified. However, there would be a temporary Minor adverse significance of effect upon some of the more rural or parkland townscape

- character areas and character area 22: Vastern Road, within which the proposed development would sit, and which would be directly impacted during the construction phase.
- 5.13 Once complete, during the permanent operational phase, the proposed development would introduce further tall buildings to views from the representative viewpoints, which would inevitably cause some visual obstruction and foreshortening to these views. These impacts would be greatest where the proposed development is visible as a separate grouping from the other tall building clusters. Conversely, when visible set against a tall building group, these impacts would be reduced. Whilst the proposed development would introduce buildings of some considerable architectural merit to the Reading townscape, which would complement its evolving townscape, the resultant visual obstruction and foreshortening to views that would result from it are assessed as adverse effects upon views. However, no potentially significant adverse effects upon views from any of the representative viewpoints have been identified during its permanent operational phase.
- 5.14 The proposed development would transform an area of derelict and un-used townscape, which had fallen into disuse, to one which would be accessible to the public with new civic spaces; one of which would extend Station Square North. It would become an area of active townscape and would result in permanent beneficial effects upon townscape character area 22: Vastern Road. It would also effectively extend the existing commercial centre of Reading to the north, establishing the railway station and Station Square (north and south) as a new and expanded civic hub.; there would thus also be further beneficial townscape effects as a result on character area 1: Station Hill. In contrast, the proposed development would have some slight adverse characterising effects upon character area 12: Caversham Road, which is a tightly knit area of terraced residential buildings of 2-storey height. The proposed development would markedly contrast with the character of this established townscape. However, none of these potential effects are assessed as being significant.
- 5.15 Potential cumulative effects of the proposed development, in association with other development proposals for which either a planning application has been submitted or for which a site is allocated, were also assessed. No significant adverse or beneficial cumulative effects were identified, other than a potentially significant cumulative effect upon the view from representative viewpoints 4: Caversham Bridge and 13: Christchurch Bridge due to the Reading and Caversham Flood Risk Management Scheme and, with respect to the allocated site CR11e (Vastern Road Retail Park), upon the view from representative viewpoint 10. Albeit, that the likelihood of any potentially significant cumulative effects being entirely dependent upon the final form and scale of these two development proposals.

Geology, Hydrogeology and Ground Conditions

- 5.16 Historical mapping indicates that a number of potentially significant current and historical on and off-site contaminative land uses may be present. Two intrusive investigations carried out across the site in 2010 and 2012 did identify some elevated concentrations of contaminants of concern in

soil or groundwater samples, however these are not considered to be significant. Given the time elapsed since the investigations, it is recommended that an additional Phase 2 Environmental Site Investigation (including soil, groundwater and ground gas monitoring) is carried out at the site to provide an assessment of the current status of soil and groundwater beneath the site and potential impacts to identified receptors.

- 5.17 It is considered that any risks identified as part of the site investigation works can be appropriately controlled through the completion of any recommended mitigation measures and the implementation of environmental management practices during the construction works.
- 5.18 Standard operating procedures will be followed during the construction phase of the development. These will include a wide range of environmental management procedures for implementation during the construction phase, including issues in relation to groundwater and previously unidentified contamination.
- 5.19 Potential impacts arising from the construction phase would be expected to be localised and short term. Consequently, it is concluded that the likely significance of effects would be negligible to minor adverse during the construction phase. There may also be a minor beneficial effect if any identified contamination at the site requires remediation. In addition, the removal of Made Ground beneath certain areas of the site, as part of basement construction, will lead to the removal of potential source areas and overall betterment of soil and/or groundwater quality beneath the site.
- 5.20 It is assumed that good environmental site management procedures would be employed during the operation of the project. Potential impacts arising from the operational phase would be expected to be localised and intermittent. Overall, the significance of effects would be negligible to minor adverse for the completed development.

Hydrology and Flood Risk

- 5.21 The site is covered by buildings and impermeable hardstandings, and discharges directly to a culverted watercourse that runs through the site. The site is located in an area with a medium flood risk from the River Thames, it has an annual probability of flooding of 1.0% to 0.1%. There are no flood defences that protect the site from flooding from the River Thames. The flood risk could increase to an annual probability of 1.0% over time if the predicted effects of climate change are not reversed. The site is at low risk of flooding from sources including sewers and groundwater, however the ground water in the area is known to be high, there are no historic records of the site being subject to flooding.
- 5.22 All residential buildings are set 300mm above the highest estimated flood level to protect property and residents from flooding. In the event of a flood, safe access has been provided from the development to an area not prone to flooding. A flood management and evacuation plan will be prepared for all occupiers in the development setting out how flooding warnings are issued and how to sign up to receive them along with procedures to follow in the event of a flood.

- 5.23 Flood storage volumes have been maintained across the site by adjusting ground levels to ensure that the same volume of flood waters can be contained on site as per the current situation.
- 5.24 Surface water runoff from the development will be treated via the use of sustainable drainage systems, the runoff will be attenuated on site and discharged to the culverted water course at a lower rate than currently discharge by the existing site, ensuring the surface water flood risk is reduced.
- 5.25 A code of construction practice has been prepared which sets out the measures that will be implemented to construction activities during the demolition and construction phase of the development, so they do not result in damage to the culvert, increase the risk of flooding on site or the surrounding area and to prevent pollution of the groundwater or watercourse.
- 5.26 During the construction phase of the development, with the introduction of the above mitigation measures, no significant effects are expected to construction workers or residents in the area as a result of increased river or surface water flooding. With the introduction of the code of construction practice no significant effect to the water quality is expected during the construction phase either.
- 5.27 During the operational phase, no significant effects are expected to occupiers of the development from river or surface water flooding and no significant effect is expected to residents and others in the surrounding area from river flooding.
- 5.28 The effect to residents and others in the area from surface water flooding as a result of the development is not significant but is likely to slightly beneficial. Similarly, no significant effects are expected to the water quality but the use of sustainable drainage systems in the development should provide a small benefit to the quality of runoff reaching the watercourse.

Traffic and Transport

- 5.29 The baseline for traffic flows has been established through Automatic Traffic Counts (ATCs) and Manual Classified Counts (MCCs). Additional information from DfT has been used to supplement this information and provide traffic flow information for key links around the site.
- 5.30 A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would be implemented prior to commencement of demolition and construction works. Management strategies formed as part of the CEMP would be implemented to ensure that any effects associated with HGV/LGV movements to and from the site are minimised.
- 5.31 For the operational phase of development, the development and implementation of two travel plans is the main proposed mitigation strategy. These travel plans will set out overarching objectives aimed at promoting sustainable travel to, from and within the Proposed Development. By encouraging sustainable travel choices, impacts arising from increased vehicle use are designed to be somewhat mitigated.
- 5.32 No further mitigation is proposed for the operational phase of the development, as the effects of the Proposed Development do not have significant adverse effects upon the assessed receptors.

- 5.33 The effects on traffic flow, severance, delay, amenity fear and intimidation, accidents and safety have been assessed for the construction and operational phases of this development.
- 5.34 During the construction phase, no significant effects are expected. During the operational phase, the most significant effect will be on improving pedestrian and cyclist delay. No significant effects are expected on vehicle flows during the operational phase.

Air Quality

- 5.35 This chapter of the ES, undertaken by Resource and Environmental Consultants Limited (REC), assesses the potential effects of the proposed development with respect to Air Quality.
- 5.36 This Air Quality Chapter has been completed with due regard to the requirements of Reading Borough Council Environmental Health Department. The development has the potential to cause air quality impacts at sensitive locations. These may include fugitive dust emissions from construction works, and additional operation road vehicle emissions associated with the Proposed Development.
- 5.37 Potential construction phase air quality impacts at human receptors as a result of fugitive dust emissions were assessed. Suitable mitigation techniques have been identified and, assuming these are implemented, impacts from earthworks, construction, and trackout activities are considered to be negligible and therefore not significant.
- 5.38 Dispersion modelling was undertaken in order to predict air quality impacts as a result of the emissions from the local highway network and additional vehicle trips associated with the Proposed Development. Overall impacts upon sensitive receptor locations within the vicinity of the Site were predicted to be negligible and therefore not significant. In addition, dispersion modelling was undertaken to quantify pollutant concentrations across the site and assess potential exposure of future users. The results indicated that pollutant levels across the site were below the relevant Air Quality Objectives. The location is therefore considered suitable for the proposed end use without the inclusion of mitigation methods to protect future users from poor air quality.
- 5.39 Based on the assessment results, air quality is not considered a constraint to planning consent for the proposed development.

Noise and Vibration

- 5.40 The noise climate at the site is dominated by road traffic noise on Caversham Road and Vastern Road, and rail movements at Reading Station to the south.
- 5.41 The nearest noise sensitive receptors are residential properties on Caversham Road and Vastern Road, which are exposed to high levels of road traffic noise.
- 5.42 Noise levels during construction of the Proposed Development will have a negligible effect on the existing properties at Caversham Road and Vastern Road, however the phased nature of the development means that Phase 1 residents will be subject to a major adverse effect during

construction of Phase 2, and similarly that Phase 2 residents will be subject to a major adverse effect during construction of Phase 3.

- 5.43 Best Practical Means of noise control will be used throughout the construction period.
- 5.44 Vibration during construction and operation of the Proposed Development is expected to have a negligible impact on either existing or new vibration sensitive receptors.
- 5.45 Acoustic requirements for the residential facades and ventilation have been outlined such that internal ambient noise levels are compliant with the guidance given in BS 8233:2014 and adopted by Reading Borough Council. Therefore, the noise impact on residents within the Proposed Development from road and rail traffic noise can be considered Negligible.
- 5.46 Noise emission limits for future items of building services plant have been set in accordance with the requirements of Reading Borough Council. This ensures a Negligible impact arising from external building services and plant, both at the existing noise sensitive receptors, and those within the Proposed Development.
- 5.47 The operational impact of the Proposed Development on the surrounding noise and vibration sensitive receptors is anticipated to be Negligible.

Socio-Economics

- 5.48 The proposed development will bring forward a series of social and economic benefits to the site and the local Reading area including:- job and training opportunities, additional private and affordable housing, increased local expenditure, enhanced healthcare and education provision as well as a series of local environmental improvements

Further Information

- 5.49 The scoping opinion provided by Reading Borough Council agreed that ecology could be scoped out of the assessment of the Proposed Development as it is not in an ecologically sensitive area. However, the Council requested an updated habitat survey and a bat survey.
- 5.50 The further information chapter is concerned with ecology and nature conservation. The site is not designated for wildlife and consists primarily of hard standing and buildings with only small sections of the site supporting vegetation. None of the habitats present considered to be of elevated ecological or nature conservation value.
- 5.51 The buildings on site lacked features that could be used by roosting bats or nesting black redstarts and overall the site was not considered to be of value to any protected animal species, other than small numbers of common birds that may breed in the trees and scattered scrub within the site.

Cumulative Effects

- 5.52 The EIA Regulations require that the ES considers the potential cumulative effect of other planned developments with the Proposed Development. Each assessment topic chapter in the ES has a

section that reports the findings of the cumulative effects assessment for that topic. No significant cumulative effects were identified.

6 Further Information

- 6.1 This ES has been submitted as part of an outline planning application for the proposed development of Reading Metropolitan. The application has been submitted to Reading Borough Council. The planning application, ES and Non-Technical Summary can be viewed during normal office hours at:

Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

- 6.2 Copies of the ES and planning application documents can be viewed on the local planning authority website:

<http://www.reading.gov.uk>

- 6.3 Further copies of the ES can be obtained from the following address:

RPS
20 Western Avenue
Milton Park
Abingdon
Oxfordshire
OX14 4SH

- 6.4 A paper copy of the full ES can be obtained for a cost of £250 plus VAT or an electronic copy (CD) for a cost of £10.

- 6.5 All comments on the ES (and the planning application) should be issued to Reading Borough Council (Planning Department) at the address stated in paragraph 1.21 above.