

29-35 Station Road, Reading

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Preliminary Note

For EIA Screening

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September 2018

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Nicholas Pearson Associates was appointed by K2 Developments to prepare an EIA Screening note with respect to landscape and visual issues for proposed mixed-use development at 29-35 Station Road, Reading, which is to include a tall building, currently proposed to be to maximum height of +121 metres AOD (approximately 77 metres height from street level). This Preliminary Note has been prepared for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening purposes. It identifies whether there are likely to be significant adverse effects arising on 'sensitive' (with respect to EIA) landscape and visual receptors.
- 1.2 Following initial desk based studies of the site and the local and wider context, including reference to adopted planning policies and previously consented developments, the 'sensitive' landscape and visual receptors are considered to be or relate to the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Chilterns AONB.
- 1.3 This EIA note therefore provides a preliminary appraisal only of the development's potential visual impacts on each AONB, to assist in the EIA Screening process.
- 1.4 This Note also includes a suite of figures comprising: zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) to 10km; AONB boundaries; preliminary appraisal reference areas; and viewpoint locations and photographs.
- 1.5 Preliminary photomontages of the proposals, from key viewpoints, have been prepared to assist in the appraisal process.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The appraisal undertaken for this Preliminary Note uses a methodology developed in accordance with guidance provided in the Institute of Environmental Management and

Assessment and Landscape Institute (LI/IEMA) document, *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (LI/IEMA, 3rd edition 2013).

2.2 A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) to a distance of 10 kilometres from the development site has been prepared to assist in the initial assessment of its visual effects.

2.3 Following analysis of the ZTV, an assessment has been undertaken by an experienced landscape professional, comprising the following stages:

- Identification of those areas within each AONB, identified through the ZTV, as having potential for views toward the development site, subdivided into reference areas, dependent on characteristics and continuity.
- Preliminary appraisal of each reference area using a combination of baseline information from desktop studies, including: mapping data, published AONB character studies, and other geographic mapping sources.
- Site appraisal of those areas outside the AONBs which are nevertheless within the ZTV.

2.4 The preliminary appraisal has identified, for each receptor, a number of representative viewpoints to further test the visibility of the proposed development, covering the Chilterns AONB, the North Wessex Downs AONB and, to provide a reference, an area of countryside outside the AONBs to the north of Reading. Representative viewpoint photographs have been taken and preliminary photomontages of the proposed development modelled to assist in the assessment of its visual effects.

3.0 BASELINE

3.1 *The National Planning Policy Framework* (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018) policy on AONBs stipulates: “172. Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.” The proposed development’s proximity to the AONBs bordering Reading to the west and north west, and its proposed height of +121 metres AOD, require its visual effects to be assessed.

3.2 Landscape character studies for both the Chilterns AONB and the North Wessex Downs AONB have been utilised for the assessment. These comprise the *Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 – 2019: A Framework for Action* (Chilterns

Conservation Board, 2014), and the *North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Integrated Landscape Character Assessment* (Land Use Consultants, 2002).

- 3.3 Reading Borough Council (RBC) SPD documents have been utilised to assist in selecting appropriate viewpoints for the preliminary assessment. These include *Station Hill South Planning and Urban Design Brief* (RBC & Entec, 2007), *Reading Tall Building Strategy* (Entec, 2008), *Reading Station Area Framework* (Doyle Town Planning & Urban Design, 2010), and *Reading Tall Buildings Strategy Update Note* (RBC, 2018).
- 3.4 Within the *Reading Tall Building Strategy* (2008), the proposed development is located within *RC13a Station Area Cluster*, one of three preferred areas for locating tall buildings. Though guidance on building heights is not included, the Strategy notes: “*this will include the tallest buildings in Reading, of around 30 storeys*” (Entec, 2008).
The development site is equivalent to plot S12 in the *Reading Station Area Framework* (2010). Height guidance is again not defined, though plot S12’s density was then advised as “*medium-very high*”, with its landmark height guidance of “*local landmark*”, where landmark buildings “*may exceptionally ‘puncture’ the benchmark heights*”.
The 2018 *Update Note* agrees with and does not alter the principles of the 2008 Strategy. Viewpoints within the guidance that lie within the Chilterns AONB (viewpoints 8 and 9) remain with a high sensitivity to tall buildings.
- 3.4 Landscape receptors within the Chilterns AONB comprise the character areas illustrated by the 2014 Management Plan: *the Thames Fringes, Thames Floodplain, and Plateau with Valleys* (Chilterns Conservation Board, 2014). Visual receptors within the Chilterns AONB comprise residents, walkers on public footpaths and bridleways, users of the mainline railway, and users of roadways.
- 3.5 Landscape receptors within the North Wessex Downs AONB comprise the character areas illustrated by the 2002 Landscape Character Assessment: *2B Ashampstead Downs, 7D Pang Valley and 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons* (Land Use Consultants, 2002). Visual receptors within the AONB comprise residents, walkers on public footpaths and bridleways, and users of roadways.
- 3.6 Outside of the AONBs, landscape receptors comprise the National Character Areas of *110 Chilterns* (Natural England, 2013), *115 Thames Valley* (Natural England, 2015), and *129 Thames*
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Basin Heaths (Natural England, 2014). Visual receptors comprise residents of the town of Reading, its suburbs and outlying settlements such as Theale and Sonning Common, walkers on public footpaths and bridleways, including along the River Thames corridor, users of the mainline railway, and users of highways including the M4.

4.0 PRELIMINARY APPRAISAL

4.1 The preliminary appraisal table below sets out the baseline position and the influencing factors with respect to landscape and visual effects.

Ref. area * & dist. from site	Geographic features	Corresponding AONB Character Area	Characteristics effecting visual effects (i.e. landform, vegetation)	Influences on potential for views to development site	Viewpoint photography	Prelim. visual effect
NWD1 (9-10 km from site)	Includes small section of Englefield Deer Park.	<u>North Wessex Downs AONB</u> 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons	• Generally flat agricultural land including the edge of a deer park. • Vegetation comprises low hedgerows and some scattered oaks.	Intervening layers of hedgerows and other vegetation prevent views to Reading suburbs and centre.	Not required	None
NWD2 (6-7 km from site)	Linear area to the very eastern edge of the AONB, abutting the Reading suburb of Tilehurst.	<u>North Wessex Downs AONB</u> 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons, <i>“...the area retains a quiet rural character, apart from at the eastern edge where there are views to Reading”</i>	• A locally flat plateau abutting Tilehurst; further westwards the landform drops away sharply to the river Pang valley. • The plateau generally comprises agricultural fields intersected by hedgerows. • The very western edge of the plateau, and the valley sides to the west are characterised by strong belts of woodland.	Due to the proximity of the settlement edge, intervening built form and vegetation prevents views to Reading centre through the majority of this area. There is potential for glimpsed long-distance views (7km from site) above/ through the treeline, of consented tall buildings, and the proposed development in Reading town centre from an area of locally raised ground on the plateau (public right of way SULM/3/1).	Locally raised ground on public right of way (7km from site) SULM/3/1: refer to View 1 existing / proposed, figures 4 – 5.	Negligible/ Slight (adverse)
NWD3 (9-10 km from site)	Discontinuous area to the west of (not including) the settlements of	<u>North Wessex Downs AONB</u> 2B: Ashampstead Downs	• Fingers of locally raised landform, sloping down westwards towards the settlements of Tidmarsh and	Glimpsed long-distance views (9km from site) toward the east are available from east-west aligned roads on the summits of	Not required	None

from site)	Tidmarsh and Pangbourne.	(Also includes the extreme edge of area 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons)	Pangbourne (highest contours 115m Pangbourne College). • Land use comprises a mosaic of agricultural land and hedgerows, interspersed by villages/ hamlets. There are several copses, generally to the higher ground.	raised ground (e.g. Bere Court Rd, Pangbourne Hill). Any views to Reading suburbs and centre are discounted at this stage due to the extent of the intervening landform and vegetation.		
NWD4 (6-8 km from site)	Borders the river Thames and the Chilterns AONB.	<u>North Wessex Downs AONB</u> 7D: Pang Valley	• Floodplain to the river Thames, edged by settlements of Purley-on-Thames and Pangbourne. • Predominantly agricultural land, very sparsely settled with scattered individual trees, copses and hedgerows.	The floodplain continues eastwards to the centre of Reading; views to Reading town centre are discounted due to the extent of intervening vegetation.	Not required	None
C1 (3-4 km from site)	Small area at the southern-most extent of the Chilterns AONB.	<u>Chilterns AONB</u> Thames Fringes	• Undulating landform, levelling out to the south as the area borders the suburb of Caversham. • Extensive vegetation including Chazey Wood, small copses of trees, and scattered vegetation associated with Caversham Heath golf course.	Though views of the edge of Caversham will be afforded toward the south-east, views of Reading centre are discounted due to the extent of intervening vegetation and intervening built form.	Not required	None
C2 (4-6 km from site)	Adjacent to the settlement of Tokers Green	<u>Chilterns AONB</u> Thames Fringes	• A gently undulating plateau, predominantly agricultural and sparsely settled. • Large 'prairie'-style fields intersected by low hedgerows, with scattered trees.	The relative height of the plateau and the intervening vegetation prevents any views to Reading suburbs or centre.	Not required	None
C3 (4-10 km	Linear area of river valley and valley sides from	<u>Chilterns AONB</u> Thames Fringes & Thames Floodplain	• Flood plain, with steep valley sides to the north.	The winding nature of the valley and the extent of intervening	Refer to View 2 existing / proposed,	Negligible

from site)	Whitchurch-on-Thames to Mapledurham		Land use comprises agricultural land in the valley bed, criss-crossed with hedgerows; the upper parts of the valley sides are interspersed with small copses and woodlands.	vegetation will prevent most views toward Reading centre. Glimpsed long-distance views (4-5km from site) between vegetation of the outer suburbs of Reading are afforded in the eastern part of the area. Long-distance panoramic views of the existing skyline of Reading will likely be afforded from public rights of ways on upper parts of Sandy Hill, beyond Chazey Wood.	figures 6 – 7 (corresponds to <i>Reading Tall Buildings Strategy/Update Note 2008/2018</i> viewpoint 8). Refer to View 3 existing / proposed, figures 8 – 9, an established view from distance.	
C4 (5-10 km from site)	Large area including settlements of Whitchurch Hill, Goring Heath. The A4074 is a main route into Reading.	<u>Chilterns AONB</u> Plateau with Valleys	- A series of gently undulating plateaux intersected with shallow dry valleys, heavily wooded. - Criss-crossed by roads and public rights of way, often framed by hedgerows.	The relative height of the plateaux and the extent of intervening vegetation will prevent any views to Reading suburbs or centre.	Not required	None
C5 (6-7 km from site)	Bordering Sonning Common to the west, includes much of Crowsley Park.	<u>Chilterns AONB</u> Plateau with Valleys	- Gently undulating plateaux. - Well wooded, and sparsely populated with farmsteads.	Views to Reading suburbs and centre are discounted due to the intervening landform and layers of vegetation.	Not required	None

C6 (5 km from site)	Discontinuous group of small areas at the AONB boundary.	<u>Chilterns AONB</u> Plateau with Valleys	• Locally raised areas above a shallow dry valley to the north. • Pastoral land intersected with hedgerows and small copses.	Views to Reading suburbs and centre are discounted due to the intervening landform and layers of vegetation.	Not required	None
C7 (6-8 km from site)	Includes settlement of Mays Green	<u>Chilterns AONB</u> Plateau with Valleys	• Gently undulating landform. Land use is agricultural, sparsely habited with hamlets/farmsteads. • A well vegetated landscape, some larger woodlands (e.g. High Wood) as well as scattered trees, tall hedgerows.	Views to Reading suburbs and centre are discounted due to the intervening landform and layers of vegetation.	Not required	None
C8 (6-10 km from site)	Large continuous area including settlements of Rotherfield Peppard, Rotherfield Greys.	<u>Chilterns AONB</u> Plateau with Valleys	• A series of gently undulating fingers of raised land between steep dry valleys. Well wooded, particularly to the centre and west of the area. Tall hedgerows border fields. • Land use is predominantly agricultural, with occasional farmsteads and linear villages along B-roads.	The reference area is criss-crossed by several public rights of way, including the Chiltern Way. Views to Reading suburbs and centre are discounted due to the intervening landform and layers of vegetation.	Not required	None
C9 (9-10 km from site)	Includes National Trust property and gardens Greys Court in the west.	<u>Chilterns AONB</u> Plateau with Valleys	• The peak of a ridgeline. • Land use is predominantly agricultural, with scattered trees, hedgerows of varying age and height, small copses. • Greys Court is considerably enclosed by vegetation.	Views to Reading suburbs and centre are discounted at this stage due to the considerable distance from Reading (10km), the intervening landform and extent of intervening vegetation. To the east of the reference area, the intervening built form of Henley-	Not required	None

				on-Thames will also prevent views to Reading suburbs and centre.		
MI (4 km from site)	Miscellaneous area outside AONBs, within open countryside to the north-east of Reading.	N/A	• Locally raised, gently undulating plateau to the north-east of the suburb of Caversham, with scattered hamlets. • Large 'prairie'-style agricultural fields bounded by hedgerows. • Scattered copses and small woodlands.	Views of Reading are afforded (4km from site) from the highest areas of raised ground and in gaps in intervening vegetation, with existing tall buildings in Reading centre appearing above the skyline.	Refer to View 4 existing / proposed, figures 10 – 11 (corresponds to <i>Reading Tall Buildings Strategy/ Update Note 2008/2018</i> viewpoint 11).	Slight (adverse)

Note - For reference area plans, refer to figure 02.

Landscape impacts on AONB

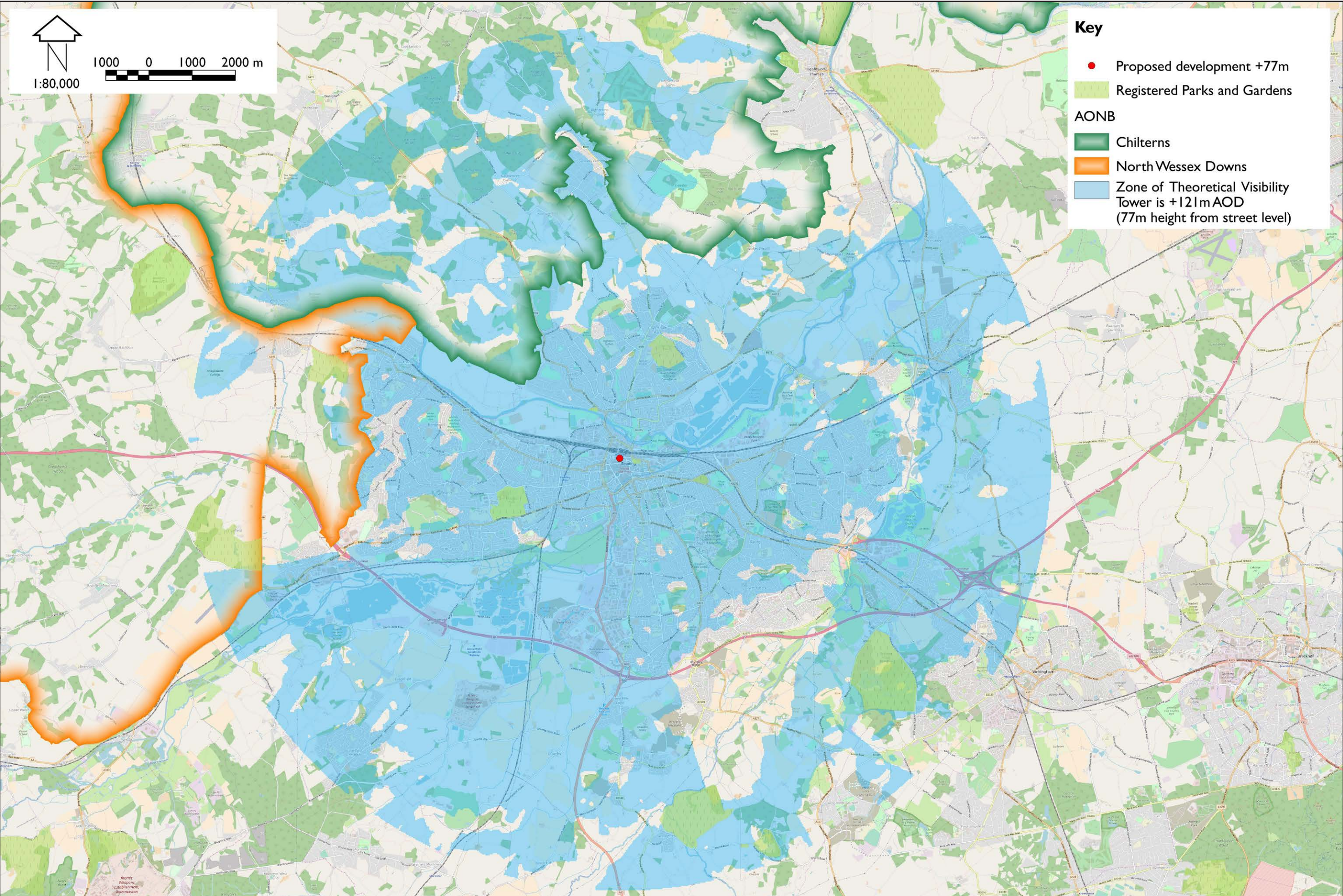
- 4.2 The proposed development site is located within Reading town centre, outside of the AONB, and 2.7km from the nearest AONB boundary of the Chilterns. Therefore there will not be any direct impacts to the AONB designated landscapes. With respect to indirect impacts resulting from impacts to the setting of the AONB, the effects relate to additional height and massing of built form in a small geographical area, within an established location for similar developments. It is assessed that this will not give rise to any significant adverse impact to the setting of AONB designated landscapes.

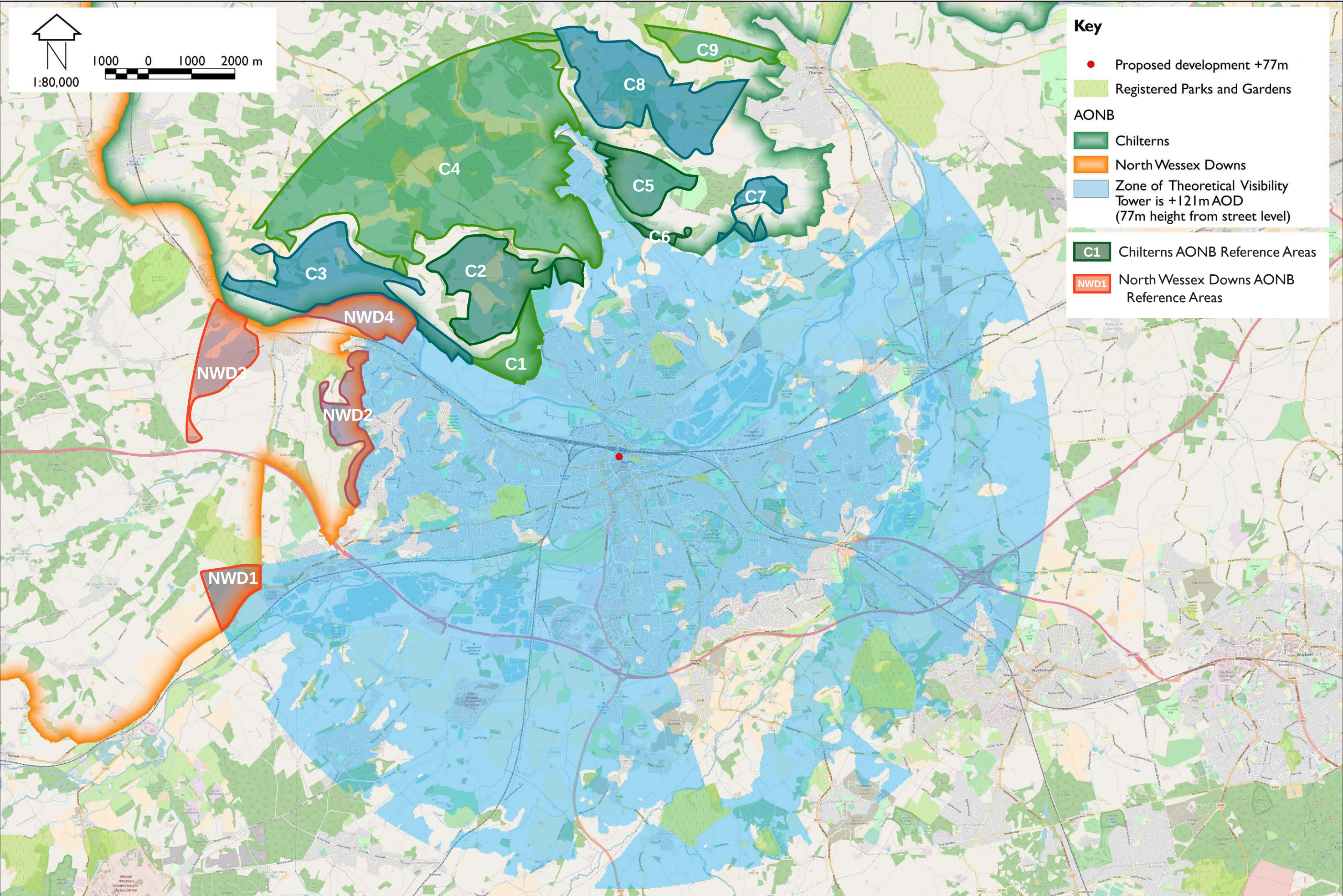
Visual impacts on receptors within the AONB

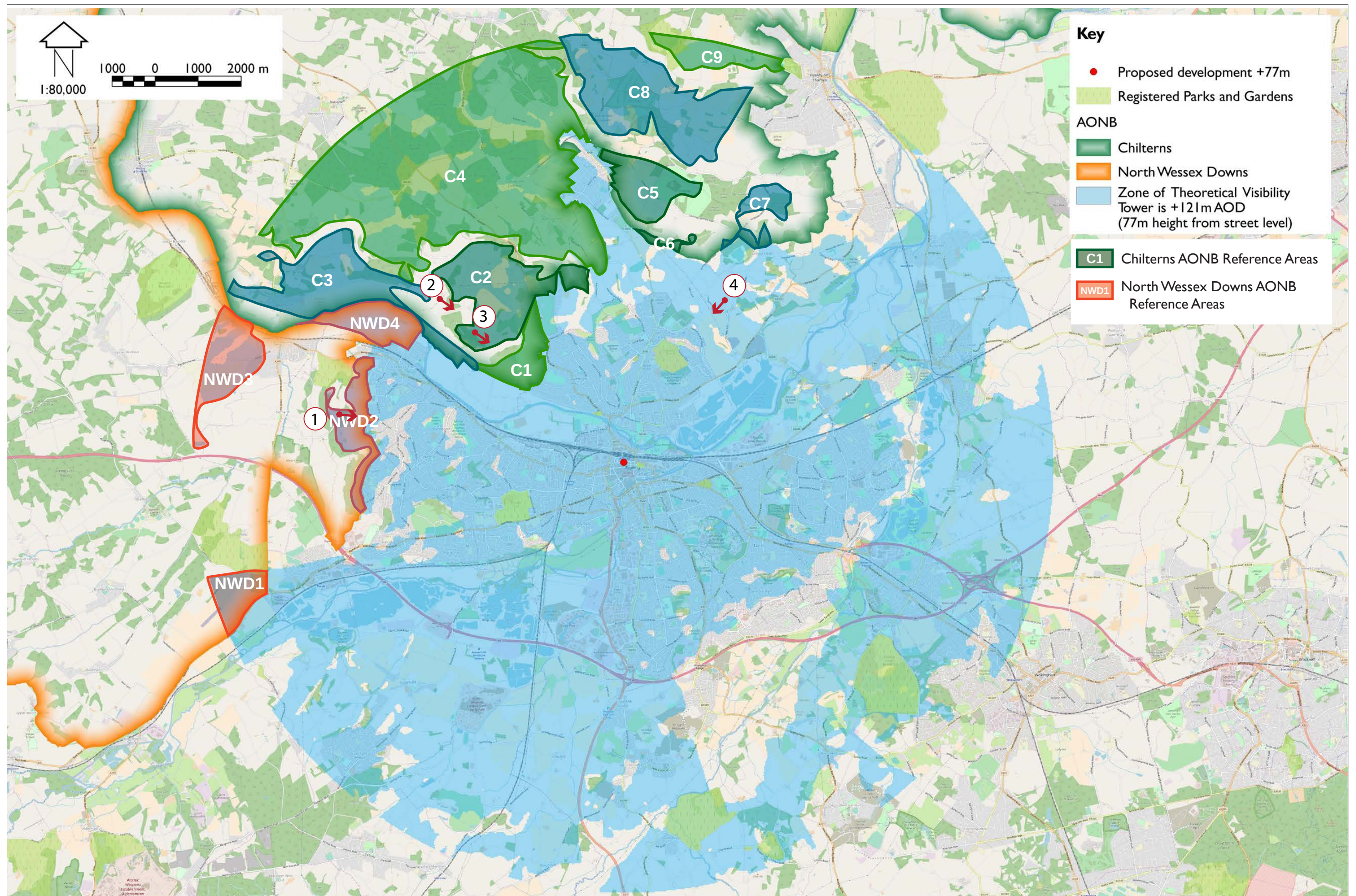
- 4.2 The availability of views from within the AONB of/ towards the development site within Reading town centre, are very limited as a result of intervening topography, extensive mature vegetation and, at the eastern edges of the AONB, existing urban settlement. Where views are available, these are at considerable distance (between 3km – 10km) and already comprise views, often panoramic, of and across Reading, which include existing tall buildings. In such views the proposed development will be seen as an additional, minor complementary element. This will not give rise to a significant adverse visual effect to receptors. Due to the distances involved the proposed development will very rarely be visible in isolation from the existing urban form, and then only in glimpsed, transitory long-distance views. The preliminary assessment of such an effect is judged to not give rise to a significant adverse visual effects to receptors.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 An experienced landscape professional has undertaken a preliminary appraisal of proposals for proposed mixed-use development at 29-35 Station Road, Reading, which is to include a tall building, currently proposed to be to maximum height of +121 metres AOD. A preliminary appraisal, with reference to Guidelines for LVIA has been undertaken, to address the potential for significant adverse impacts to sensitive landscape and visual receptors, as relating North Wessex Downs AONB and Chilterns AONB.
- 5.2 The proposed development will not give rise to significant adverse impacts to the landscape character of North Wessex Downs AONB and Chilterns AONB nor give rise to significant adverse impacts to visual receptors within the AONBs. This is due to the combination of intervening extensive woodland and other vegetation and the distance of views from the site. Where views toward Reading town centre are available, these are generally panoramic and distant, with the existing skyline providing an established pattern of settlement in the views. The potential for the proposed development to be visible from the AONBs, in isolation from other development in Reading, has been considered. Such effects are judged to be very limited and not significant.
- 5.3 A range of other landscape and visual effects to other receptors are likely to occur within the broader study area. These will be assessed through a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). This LVIA will include consideration of the effects to the AONB as above.









View 1 - North Wessex Downs AONB, PROW close to Sadler's Farm - Existing

View Number	I	Date and Time	14:38 18th July 2018	Co-ordinates	SU 64901 74298	Field of View	39	Project No	I 1022	Client	K2 Developments Ltd	Figure No	4
Location	North Wessex Downs AONB, PROW close to Sadler's Farm			Eye level (AOD)	101.6m	Viewing Distance	500mm @ A3	Date	Jul-18	Project	29 - 35 Station Road, Reading		
View Type	Single Frame, Focal Length 50, using Canon EOS 5D MK III			Direction	E	Weather conditions	Sunny Intervals	Issue Status	Preliminary	Figure	View 1 - Existing		



View 1 - North Wessex Downs AONB, PROW close to Sadler's Farm - Proposed

View Number	I	Date and Time	14:38 18th July 2018	Co-ordinates	SU 64901 74298	Field of View	39	Project No	I 1022	Client	K2 Developments Ltd	Figure No	5
Location	North Wessex Downs AONB, PROW close to Sadler's Farm			Eye level (AOD)	101.6m	Viewing Distance	500mm @ A3	Date	Jul-18	Project	29 - 35 Station Road, Reading		
View Type	Single Frame, Focal Length 50, using Canon EOS 5D MK III			Direction	E	Weather conditions	Sunny Intervals	Issue Status	Preliminary	Figure	View 1 - Proposed		



View 2 - Chilterns AONB, unclassified road north of Mapledurham - Existing

View Number	2	Date and Time	13:56 18th July 2018	Co-ordinates	SU 67108 76960	Field of View	39	Project No	11022	Client	K2 Developments Ltd	Figure No	6
Location	Chilterns AONB, unclassified road north of Mapledurham			Eye level (AOD)	50.6m	Viewing Distance	500mm @ A3	Date	Jul-18	Project	29 - 35 Station Road, Reading		
View Type	Single Frame, Focal Length 50, using Canon EOS 5D MK III			Direction	SE	Weather conditions	Cloudy	Issue Status	Preliminary	Figure	View 2 - Existing		



View 2 - Chilterns AONB, unclassified road north of Mapledurham - Proposed

View Number	2	Date and Time	13:56 18th July 2018	Co-ordinates	SU 67108 76960	Field of View	39	Project No	11022	Client	K2 Developments Ltd	Figure No	7
Location	Chilterns AONB, unclassified road north of Mapledurham			Eye level (AOD)	50.6m	Viewing Distance	500mm @ A3	Date	Jul-18	Project	29 - 35 Station Road, Reading		
View Type	Single Frame, Focal Length 50, using Canon EOS 5D MK III			Direction	SE	Weather conditions	Cloudy	Issue Status	Preliminary	Figure	View 2 - Proposed		



View 3 - Chilterns AONB, PROW Sandy Hill - Existing

View Number	3	Date and Time	12:43 18th July 2018	Co-ordinates	SU 68026 76295	Field of View	39	Project No	11022	Client	K2 Developments Ltd	Figure No	8
Location	Chilterns AONB, PROW Sandy Hill	Eye level (AOD)	66.6m	Viewing Distance	500mm @ A3	Weather conditions	Sunny Intervals	Date	Jul-18	Project	29 - 35 Station Road, Reading		
View Type	Single Frame, Focal Length 50, using Canon EOS 5D MK III	Direction	SE					Issue Status	Preliminary	Figure	View 3 - Existing		



View 3 - Chilterns AONB, PROW Sandy Hill - Proposed

View Number	3	Date and Time	12:43 18th July 2018	Co-ordinates	SU 68026 76295	Field of View	39	Project No	11022	Client	K2 Developments Ltd	Figure No	9
Location	Chilterns AONB, PROW Sandy Hill	Eye level (AOD)	66.6m	Viewing Distance	500mm @ A3	Weather conditions	Sunny Intervals	Date	Jul-18	Project	29 - 35 Station Road, Reading		
View Type	Single Frame, Viewing distance 50, using Canon EOS 5D MK III	Direction	SE					Issue Status	Preliminary	Figure	View 3 - Proposed		



View 4 - Playhatch, Dunsden Green - Existing

View Number	4	Date and Time	11:14 18th July 2018	Co-ordinates	SU 73900 76922	Field of View	39	Project No	11022	Client	K2 Developments Ltd	Figure No	10
Location	Playhatch, Dunsden Green	Eye level (AOD)	76.6m	Viewing Distance	500mm @ A3	Weather conditions	Sunny Intervals	Date	Jul-18	Project	29 - 35 Station Road, Reading		
View Type	Single Frame, Focal Length 50, using Canon EOS 5D MK III	Direction	SW					Issue Status	Preliminary	Figure	View 4 - Existing		



View 4 - Playhatch, Dunsden Green - Proposed

View Number	4	Date and Time	11:14 18th July 2018	Co-ordinates	SU 73900 76922	Field of View	39	Project No	11022	Client	K2 Developments Ltd	Figure No	11
Location	Playhatch, Dunsden Green	Eye level (AOD)	76.6m	Viewing Distance	500mm @ A3	Weather conditions	Sunny Intervals	Date	Jul-18	Project	29 - 35 Station Road, Reading		
View Type	Single Frame, Focal Length 50, using Canon EOS 5D MK III	Direction	SW					Issue Status	Preliminary	Figure	View 4 - Proposed		