



st.martin's
Centre
Caversham

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

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01. Introduction

SITE AND CONTEXT

This document is submitted in support of a full planning application for Units 47-49 Church Street, Caversham for a mixed used development for retail, leisure and residential uses.

This Design and Access Statement is intended to explain the design process behind the proposals and will outline the scheme and discuss how the proposals can be delivered alongside the wider regeneration works. The document will explain the existing uses of the site and functions which shape the overall development. The final scheme design will also be explained and illustrated, demonstrating the rationale behind the layout and architectural design.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSALS

In March 2015 planning permission was granted under Application number 140997 for a wider scheme involving retail, leisure, residential, public realm, car park and landscape works and is currently being implemented on a phased basis. Phase 1b, which involved works to the shop fronts, canopies and public realm has recently been completed.

This application seeks to revise the proposals for part of the site. Block E (as annotated on the approved plans) proposed a large extension to Waitrose. Since that permission was approved, a change in circumstances has meant that the Waitrose extension will no longer be pursued and the landowner has therefore considered other options. This application therefore seeks a standalone planning permission for the refurbishment and extension of Units 47-49 Church Street to provide a new cinema, restaurants / cafes and residential units, together with a small extension to the existing Waitrose food store and internal alternations to the existing Superdrug store.

This document therefore considers the proposed development in light of both the existing and approved land uses.

Through a series of diagrams, photographs, sketches and drawings the proposed architectural design evolution will be explained, which takes into account the site considerations and influences associated with its location within the District Centre whilst ensuring that the proposals respond to, and seamlessly integrate with, the consented proposals for the wider St Martin's Centre.



fig. 1 Extant Permission Phasing Plan

02. Assessment

SITE & CONTEXT, OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

This chapter provides a detailed description of the site and the surrounding area, as well as considering the constraints and opportunities which have influenced the scheme design.

THE SITE

The site lies within Caversham which is a second tier settlement within the Borough and is specifically within the designated District Centre boundary. The District Centre provides key local services and operates as an alternative shopping destination to Reading town centre.

The site itself comprises nos. 47 – 49 Church Street, which includes Superdrug, the former QS retail unit (which is currently being used as the site office for the works within the St Martins Centre), the footway between the existing Waitrose store and Superdrug, and the service yard.

Parking for the site (both staff and customers) is provided to the rear within the main St Martins Centre car park, accessed from Archway Road.

THE SURROUNDING AREA

The area surrounding the application site is characterised by retail and commercial premises, with Waitrose foodstore forming one end of the District Centre and the BT Telephone Exchange the other end. The area in between (St Martins Centre) is a 1960's shopping precinct with residential uses on some of the upper floors.

Other surrounding uses to the north, east and west include a petrol filling station, Caversham Library, a social club, church, other retail and restaurant premises and office accommodation.

To the south of the site the St Martin's Centre car park is flanked by residential development on Abbotsmead and Crayshaw Court.

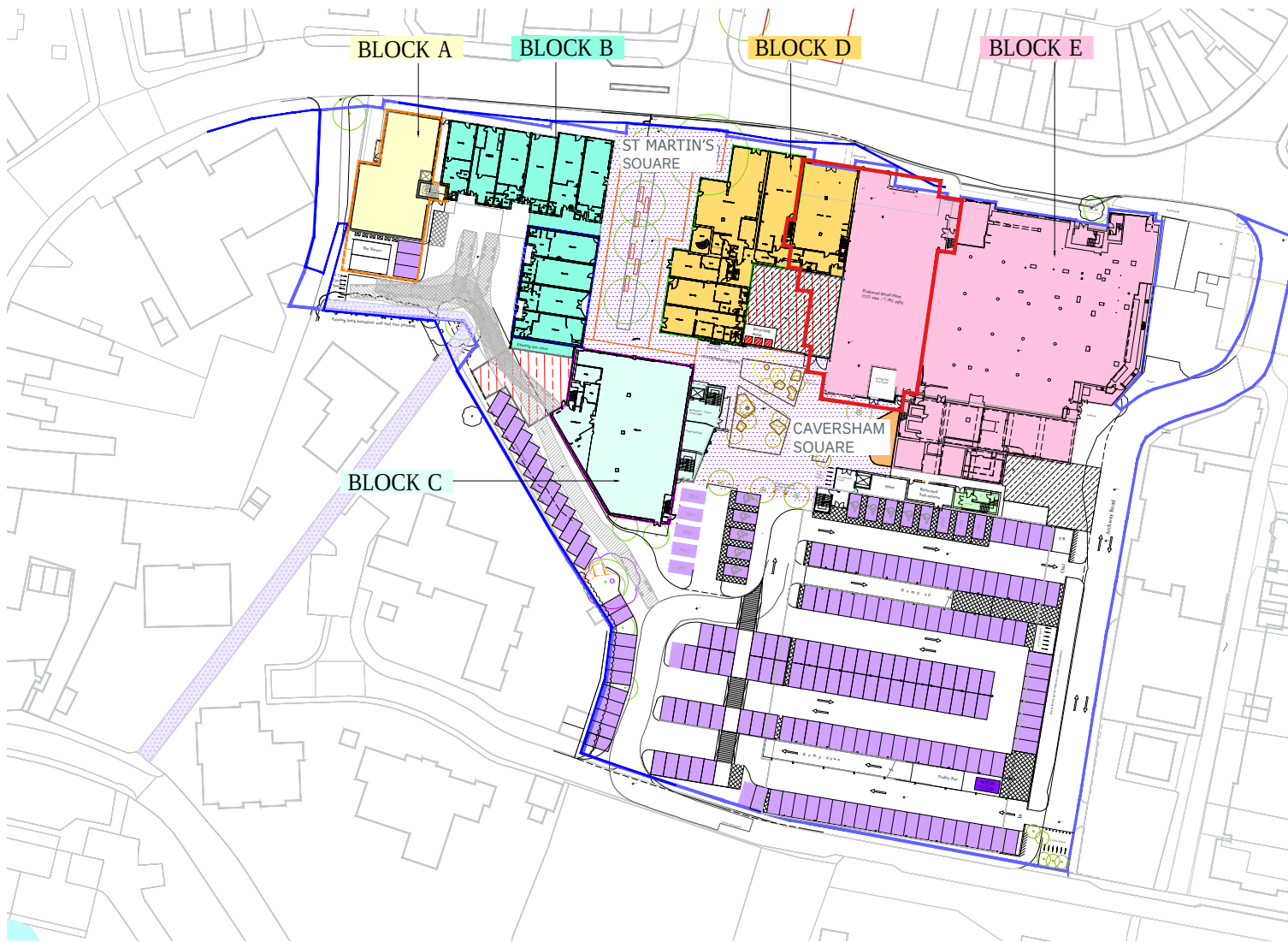


fig. 2 Extant permission site plan

THE HISTORIC CONTEXT

St Martin's Centre was re-developed in the mid-late 1960s and has been extended, modernised and improved over the last twenty or so years. The original centre comprised retail units at ground level with one or two storeys of residential accommodation above, set around a front paved courtyard with several mature trees. In the 1980's the Waitrose store was developed to the north-east alongside the open car park to the rear.

Much of the development was undertaken by local architects, surveyors and builders. The famous and prolific architect, Alfred Waterhouse, had settled in Reading and was appointed by Ebenezer West, owner and master of the Academy at Amersham Hall, to design first the Free Church in Gosbrook Road (later known as the West Memorial Hall) in 1865-6, and the Baptist Free Church in Prospect Street in 1876-7. In 1906-7 the public library was built on land donated by Mr Bullivant Williams and designed by local architect William G Lewton. By the early C20, Caversham Village was fully established as a small town centre with Bridge Street, Church Street and Prospect Street accommodating a wide range of retailers. In addition to these public buildings a cinema (The Glendale) existed on the opposite side of Church Street the site and has since been converted into a Church; the New Testament Church of God.

A further cinema previously existed on the site of the current Waitrose store. It featured a 35 foot wide proscenium and therefore was considered larger than any of the local cinemas.



fig. 3 View of centre - Church Street



fig. 4 Site of former Glendale Cinema on Church Street



fig. 5 Site of former Regal Cinema on Waitrose site



fig. 6 Riverside Setting - Caversham View of Thames - 1955

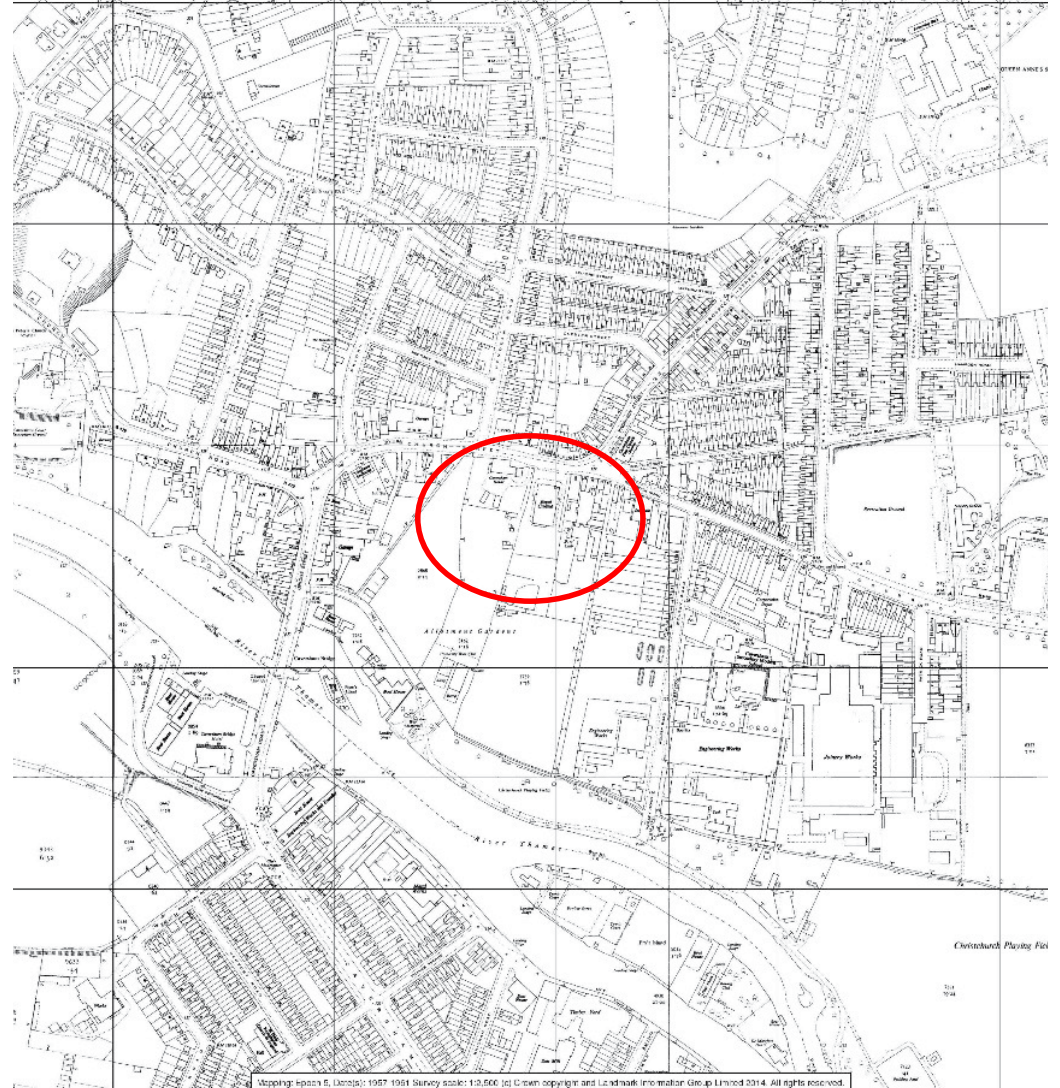


fig. 7 Historic Map of Caversham 1957

MOVEMENT

Given that one of the key drivers for the part of the wider site now forming the basis for this application was the extension to the Waitrose store, which is no longer being pursued, it has been necessary to review the opportunities for this area and consider what alternative development could come forward within the context of the wider approval.

As such, whilst the opportunities and constraints identified below still exist, elements of the technical and environmental considerations have been re-visited to reflect the implemented consent.

At present, one of the main routes into Caversham is from the western end of Church Street, where views of both sides of the road exist and the strong canopy line leading to the St Martins Precinct. Views of the application site, however, are only available from the west as you approach Hemdean Road and are seen within the context of the wider St Martins Centre with its upper floor residential units and Waitrose beyond (which does not have a canopy).

From the east, Waitrose dominates the views on approach with the canopy of Units 47-49 protruding beyond the frontage of Waitrose with first floor accommodation above (fig 11).

Figs 8 and 9 illustrate site frontages and key anchor points along the street. Examples of quality and character buildings do exist, like the library, and together with more modern styles provide Caversham with its current identity.

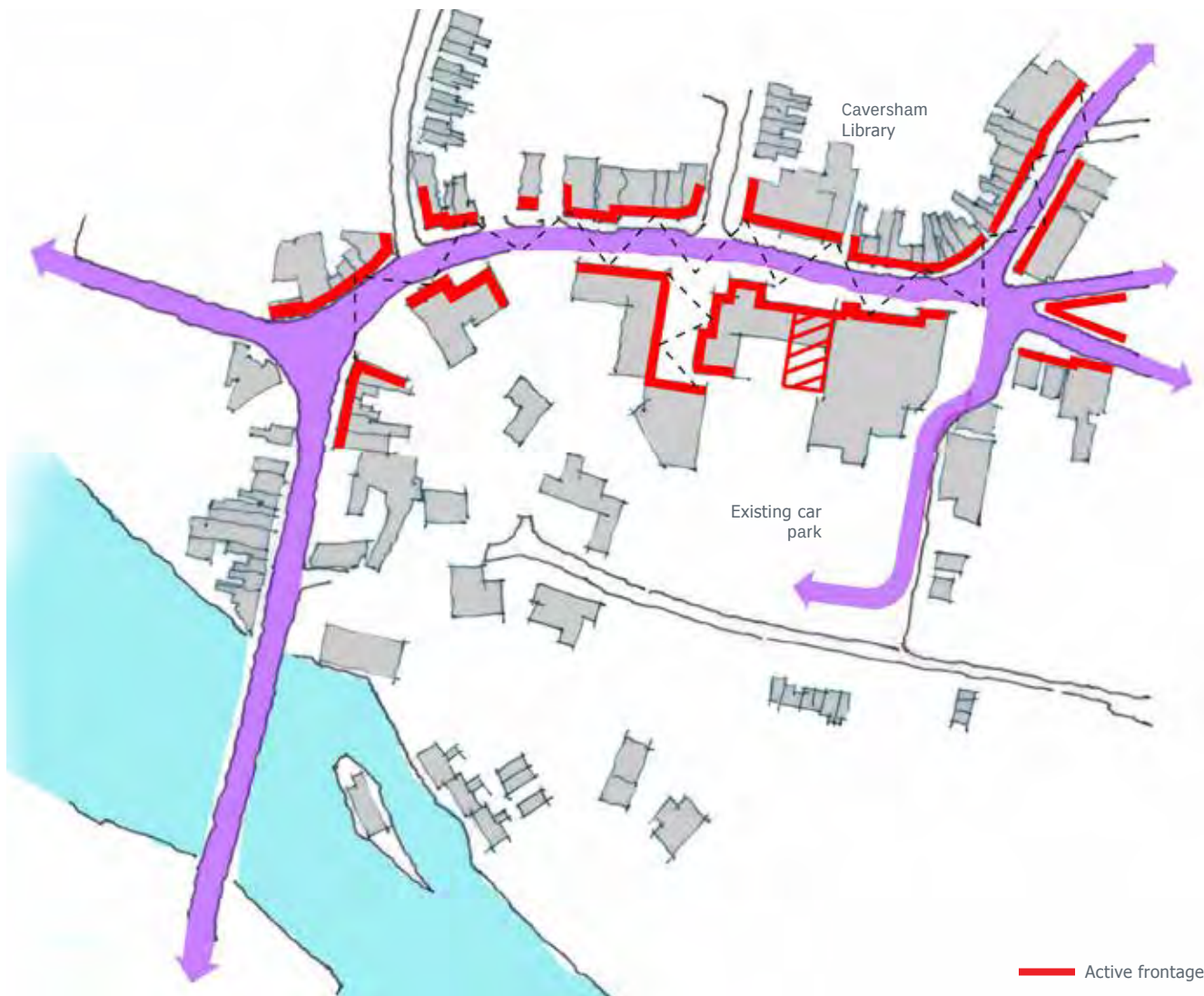


fig. 8 The High Street and "Active" Frontage / Street Character as Existing

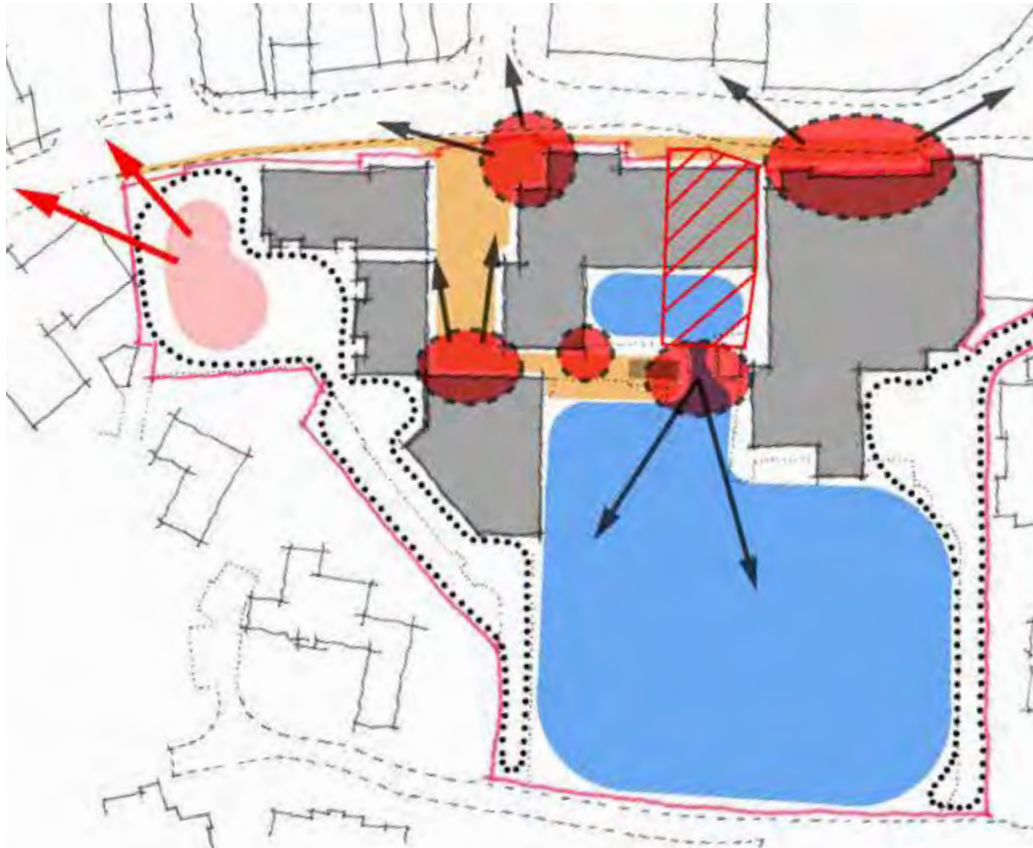


fig. 9 Current Site Anchor Points



fig. 10 Recently Refurbished St Martin's Square Precinct Phase 1b



fig. 11 View Of Proposed Site

Since the approval of the wider regeneration scheme, improvements to the existing retail frontages have been implemented for the majority of the Centre, as illustrated in figs 10 and 11, although Units 47-49 have not been completed pending the outcome of this application. The extant permission includes for additional floors to be added to buildings to provide residential units and the application site is located adjacent a 4 storey building, which will be dominant in the street scene approaching from both the east and west. These proposals will complement both the existing and proposed taller elements of the wider scheme.

To the rear, the site is visible but has no significant public access apart from the footway between the existing Superdrug unit and Waitrose. The rear of the building provides service access for existing retail units.

The extant consent (figs. 12, 13, 14 & 15) provided for a new entrance into Waitrose and a new public square, which will be retained as part of this application but amended slightly to reflect the revised approach to the building. New access to the building will be created, serving the restaurant / café units at ground floor and the cinema above from Caversham Square. The footway between the buildings will be removed in its current form but a throughfare within Waitrose will be provided, which is the same as that extant approved scheme.

EXTANT PERMISSION DRAWINGS



fig. 12 Phase 2b Block E Illustrative Visual

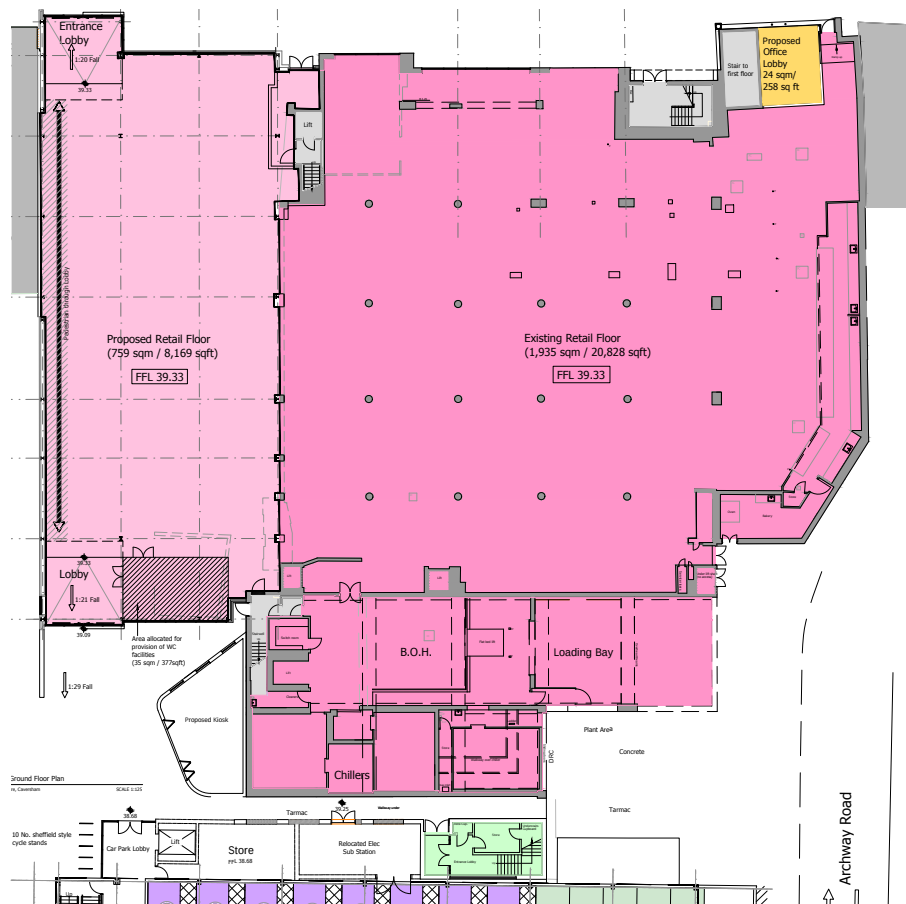


fig. 13 Phase 2b Block E Proposed GF Plan (Extant Permission)

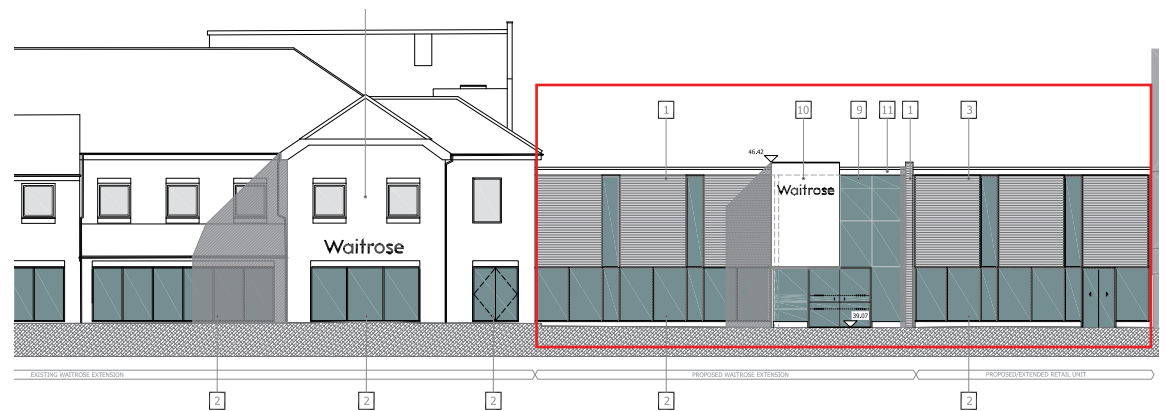


fig. 14 Phase 2b Block E Proposed Church Street Elevation (Extant Permission)

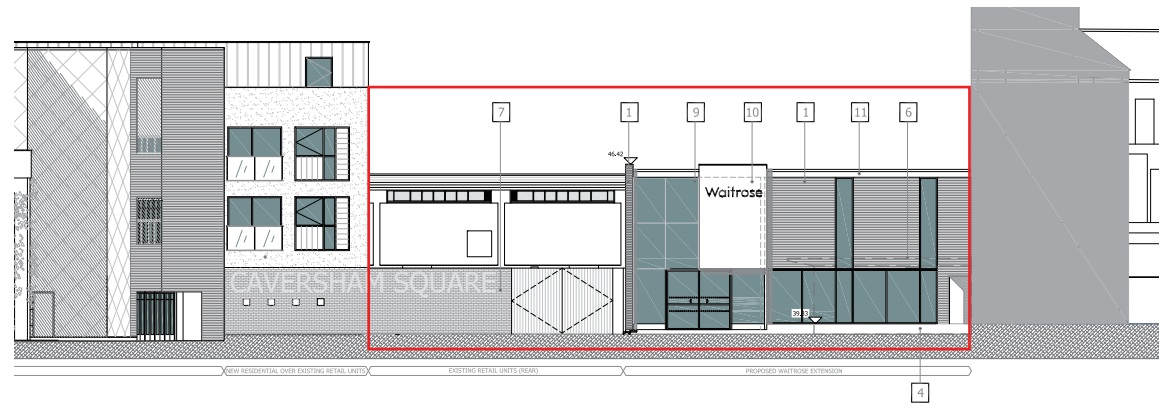


fig. 15 Phase 2b Block E Proposed Caversham Square Elevation (Extant Permission)

As part of the original design process for the consented scheme the site as a whole was analysed and reviewed by a comprehensive team of expert consultants and advisers and the final scheme was reflective of their input and understanding of the constraints and opportunities that existed.

Constraints:

1. The existing buildings consist of standard shop-fronts with high-level signage canopy over. The second floor is set back with a brick and ribbon window elevation which forms the storage areas for the units along this elevation. The issues associated with the existing buildings have been analysed in the extant permission, however, the main issues are:

- The format of the upper floors provides limited storage for the retail units below
 - The units as a whole are dated in appearance and no fenestration or activity facing into Church Street or to the rear exist.
2. The extant permission provided a new entrance for Waitrose but was functional in its internal layout to accommodate the foodstore extension and as such is not adaptable for other uses without a redesign.
3. The extant scheme, in terms of height and massing, only linked to the existing low-level structures. The connection to the massing of the existing Waitrose and proposed Block D was limited.
6. Rear elevations facing onto the proposed Caversham Square under the extant scheme only provided flexibility for the operational functions and entrance to the proposed food store. The rear of the site has been consistently debated as an important link which will bring improved activity into the area and extend the public realm from the front to the rear.

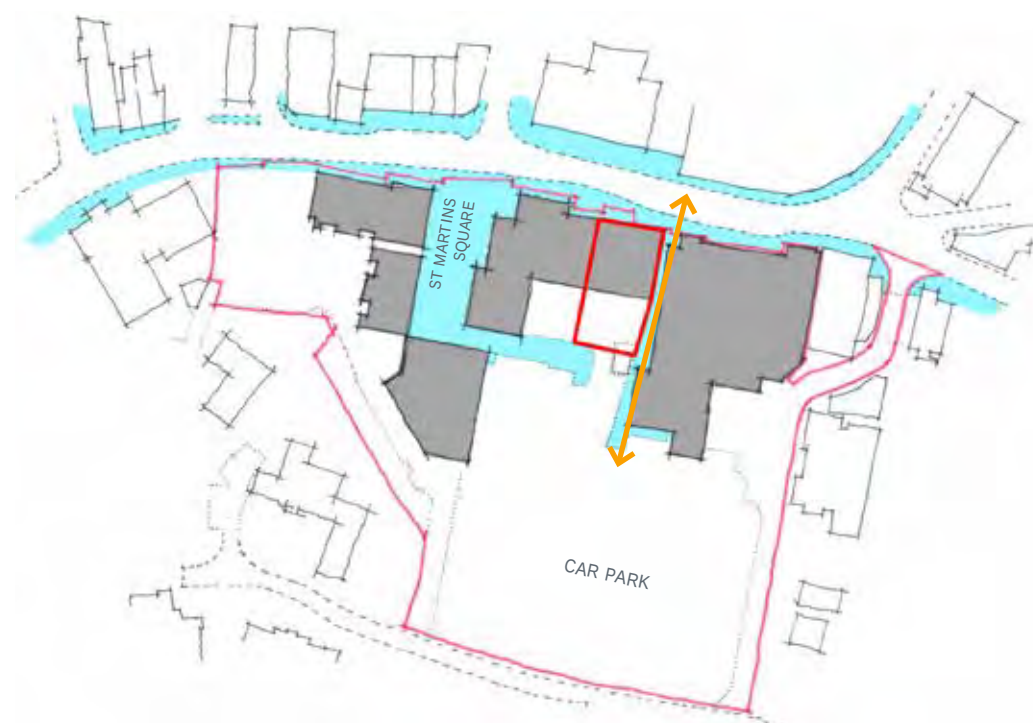


fig. 16

Opportunities:

In considering both the existing position and the extant permission, the opportunities associated with this part of the site include:

- Link Church Street to the car park with an improved and covered link.
- Improvements to adapt existing store frontage along Church Street.

The opportunities of the site pursuant to the principles established by the extant permission are as follows:

1. Establishing an improved pedestrian link from Church Street to the rear of the site.
2. Retention space of the ground floor retail units and enhancements to the retail environment, linking aesthetically to the recently completed Phase 1b.
3. Potential for the building to work as a key anchor to the development, with similar proportions to buildings at the other end of St Martin's Centre.
4. Alter the massing of this part of the overall regeneration scheme to improve relationship with the massing of the existing Waitrose and permitted Block D.
5. To further enhance the architectural composition of Church Street.
6. To create a truly mixed-use scheme, further enhancing the viability and vitality of the District Centre.
7. Retention of the proposed Caversham Square, to the rear of the site.



fig. 17 Recently Refurbished precinct



fig. 18 Access between Waitrose and Units 47-49



fig. 19 Church Street pavements

03. Assessment

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

The application is accompanied by a Planning Statement which identifies the relevant planning policy framework in which this application is being considered. The following provides a summary of policies where they directly relate and inform the approach to design.

The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 27th March 2012 and forms the overarching planning framework for England. The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people (paragraph 56). The following paragraphs within the Framework are considered relevant:

- Paragraph 58 sets out the functions that high quality design should achieve including the need to establish a strong sense of place, improve the long-term quality of the area, optimise the development potential of the site, respond to local character and history, safe developments that discourage crime and disorder, as well as visually attractive development.
- Paragraph 60 sets out guidance that planning decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness.
- Securing high quality design goes further than aesthetic considerations and thus planning policies and decisions should address connections between people and places, and ensure the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment, in line with paragraph 61.
- In line with paragraph 63, local planning authorities are encouraged to afford great weight to outstanding, innovative design which would help to increase the overall quality of the area.
- Design proposals that demonstrate high attainment of sustainability by engaging good design, should not be refused solely due to concerns relating to compatibility with an existing townscape (paragraph 65).
- Paragraph 66 encourages developers to engage the local community within the design process for new development.

The Development Plan for Reading Borough Council (RBC) comprises:

- The Core Strategy (2008)
- Site and Detailed Policies DPD (2012)

RBC is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan albeit the policies are considered to be of limited weight as the plan is yet to be submitted for Examination to the Secretary of State.

There are further supporting Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance which have been consulted to assist in the design evolution process. These include:

- The Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2011)
- Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)

The following policies are considered to be relevant to the design considerations of this proposal and have guided the overarching design/ landscape approach set out within this DAS. A separate Planning Statement has been prepared by Turley and supports this application.

ADOPTED POLICIES

Core Strategy Policies (2008)

Policy CS1: (Sustainable Construction and Design) sets out that proposals for new development, including the construction of new buildings and the redevelopment and refurbishment of existing building stock, will be acceptable where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change. There is the requirement for following:

- All new housing is required to meet the most up to date Eco-Homes 'Very Good' as a minimum standard, and all new commercial developments are required to meet the most up to date BREEAM 'Very Good' as a minimum standard;
- On larger developments of more than 10 dwellings or 1,000 m² of floorspace, ensure that 50% of the provision meets the most up to date Eco-Homes and BREEAM 'Excellent' standards

Policy CS3: (Social Inclusion and Diversity) - Major developments should demonstrate measures to enhance social inclusion in terms of access to housing, employment, services, community facilities, leisure, health, education, and other services and facilities. Development should recognise and take account of the social and cultural diversity of the area in which it is located, and contribute to the enhancement of local distinctiveness.

Policy CS4: (Accessibility and the Intensity of Development) seeks to ensure the scale and density of development within the Borough will be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities.

Policy CS5: (Inclusive Access) states that all buildings should be located, sited and designed to provide suitable access for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily.

Policy CS7: Design and the Public Realm. All development must be of high quality design that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The various components of development form, including:

- Layout: urban structure and urban grain;
- Landscape;
- Density and mix;
- Scale: height and massing; and
- Architectural detail and materials.

The proposal will be assessed to ensure that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to the following urban design objectives: -

- Character – a place with its own identity and sense of place
- Continuity and Enclosure
- Quality of the public realm
- Ease of movement and permeability
- Legibility – clear image and easy to understand
- Adaptability – capable of adaptation over time
- Diversity - meets a wide range of needs.

Developments will also be assessed to ensure that they:-

- Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm;
- 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
- Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping.
- Scale: height and massing; and
- Architectural detail and materials.

Applications for major and minor developments should be accompanied by a Design and Access Statement that deals with all the above matters.

Policy CS27: Maintaining the Retail Character of Centres seeks to ensure a strong retail character is maintained in the centres identified as being part of the network.

Policy CS33: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment states that Listed Buildings and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings, will be protected and where appropriate enhanced.

SITES AND DETAILED POLICIES DPD (2012)

Policy DM4: Safeguarding Amenity sets out the need for development to not result in significant detrimental impacts to the living environment of existing or new residential properties, in terms of:

- Privacy and overlooking;
- Access to sunlight and daylight;
- Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;
- Noise and disturbance;
- Artificial lighting;
- Vibration;
- Dust and fumes;
- Smell; or
- Crime and Safety.

DM10: PRIVATE AND COMMUNAL OPEN SPACE

Dwellings will be provided with functional private or communal open space that allows for suitable sitting-out areas, children's play areas, home food production, green waste composting, refuse storage, general outdoor storage and drying space. Houses will be provided with private outdoor space whereas flats may be provided with communal outdoor space, balconies and/or roof gardens.

The design of outdoor areas will respect the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity, clearly identify whether they are private or communal spaces, ensure that they are appropriately related to main entrances, enhance safety and the perception of safety for future residents and the general public, and not be compromised by the relationship of other buildings which may be detrimental in terms of overlooking, overbearing or overshadowing.

EMERGING LOCAL PLAN

Policy CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction seeks to ensure development proposals, including the redevelopment of existing buildings, where the design and proposed site layout uses energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately and efficiently, accounting for the effects of climate change. Reference is made to "all major non-residential development or conversion to residential are required to meet the most-up to date BREEAM 'Excellent' standards, where possible'.

Policy CC6: Accessibility and Intensity of Development seeks to ensure development that is of a scale and density related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities, and that the densest and largest development should be located in the most accessible of areas.

Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm sets out that development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhance the character of the area in Reading where it is located. Major developments will need to be supported by Design and Access Statements. Developments will be assessed to ensure they meet the following criteria:

- Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm;
- 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, including providing suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users;
- Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping.

CC8: Safeguarding Amenity seeks to ensure that development does not have a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties.

Policy EN17: Noise Generating Equipment sets out 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 H2: Density and Mix sets out that the appropriate density of residential development will be informed by the character and mix of uses in the area, including housing mix, as well as the consideration of nearby heritage assets or townscape areas. The policy states that densities below 30 dwellings per hectare will not be considered acceptable.

H5: STANDARDS FOR NEW HOUSING

New build housing should be built to the following standards:

- a. All new build housing outside the Central Area as defined on the Proposals Map will comply with the nationally-described space standard;
- b. All new build housing will be built to the higher water efficiency standard under Regulation 36(3) of the Building Regulations 77;
- c. All major new-build residential development should be designed to achieve zero carbon homes;
- d. All other new build housing will achieve as a minimum a 19% improvement in the dwelling emission rate over the target emission rate, as defined in the 2013 Building Regulations;
- e. All new build housing will be accessible and adaptable.
- f. On developments of 20 or more new build dwellings, at least 5% of dwellings will be wheelchair user dwellings in line with M4(3) of the Building Regulations.

H10: PRIVATE AND COMMUNAL OUTDOOR SPACE

Dwellings will be provided with functional private or communal open space, including green space wherever possible, that allows for suitable sitting-out areas, children's play areas, home food production, green waste composting, refuse storage, general outdoor storage and drying space. Houses will be provided with private outdoor space whereas flats may be provided with communal outdoor space, balconies and/or roof gardens.

The design of outdoor areas will respect the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity, clearly identify whether they are private or communal spaces, ensure that they are appropriately related to main entrances, enhance safety and the perception of safety for future residents and the general public, and not be compromised by the relationship of other buildings which may be detrimental in terms of overlooking, overbearing or overshadowing.

04. Assessment

EVALUATION DESIGN PROCESS

RESPONSE TO OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The opportunity to review the design and layout of the development at nos. 47-49 Church Street is a result of Waitrose's commercial decision not to pursue the large scale extension approved under application 140997.

The starting point for the new scheme was, therefore, the way in which the constraints of the existing buildings could be overcome whilst ensuring that the opportunities capitalised upon by the wider regeneration scheme were retained and further enhanced where possible.

By retaining the existing ground floor retail units and proposing at a "build over" solution, the existing storage at the first floor can be consolidated to provide a more efficient layout. This allows for further uses to then be introduced at the upper levels, including the first floor to provide a mixed-use development strengthening the vitality and 18 hour activity in this location.

By making the building a dual frontage, opportunities to provide windows on both the Church Street and Caversham Square elevations have been explored.

A revised scheme can overcome the issues associated with the specific entrance design for Waitrose and its inability to adapt for other uses.

Finally, consideration has been given to the scale and massing of the building, including the potential to provide a landmark building permitted within this part of the overall scheme and which sits comfortably with the higher building on the edge beginning of St Martins Centre.



fig. 20 Proposed Concept Diagram

DESIGN EVALUATION

INITIAL REVIEW OF OPPORTUNITIES

The early stage of the review process considered the potential of a mixed-use development which could respond to identified market needs and assessed how this could be configured around the existing retail uses and in line with design parameters approved under the extant permission.

The options included additional retail floorspace, new restaurants, leisure and residential uses. (Figs. 21 to 25)

Options in relation to the massing of the building and its relationship to the streetscape were also explored considering the character of the existing Centre and its evolving environment character through the implementation of the approved regeneration proposals.

Reviewing at the existing and approved buildings as well as other notable architecture in the area allowed for options to be considered regarding appropriate proportions for any revised scheme. The existing library provides an example of a well-established and successful building and this was studied further and the principles and concept of the proportions of the windows and the materials formed the basis for some early stage concepts.

To determine the site potential and capacity, the elements of the site that would benefit from retention as part of any scheme were first reviewed. Units 47-49 at ground floor and the first floor were considered important to retain as a key active frontage along Church Street. The solutions would therefore entail a build-over around the existing massing.

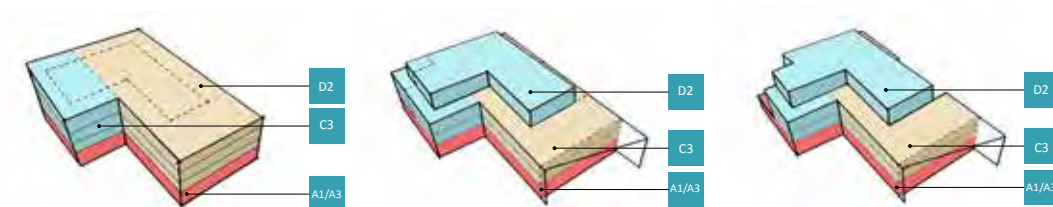


fig. 21 Layout and massing diagrams



fig. 22 Proposed elevation along Church Street



fig. 23 Proposed elevation Street

DESIGN EVALUATION
INITIAL REVIEW OF OPPORTUNITIES



fig. 24 Typical plan arrangement



fig. 25 Section showing retained retail

- The key requirements for retention/ enhancement were identified as follows:
1. Retained retail at ground floor with increased shop front presence facing Church Street.
 2. Potential for A3 uses at ground floor facing into the approved Caversham Square to deliver additional active frontages to the rear of the site (fig. 26).
 3. Leisure/Cinema uses at first and second floors would create a spatial system above and between the retail spaces.
 4. Opportunities for the site to accommodate additional height to create a focal principle within the street scene, adding additional visual influence.

DESIGN EVALUATION
INITIAL REVIEW OF OPPORTUNITIES



fig. 26 Initial illustrative Sketch from Caversham Square

DESIGN EVALUATION

INITIAL REVIEW OF OPPORTUNITIES

Fig. 27 shows various sketches produced at an early stage when looking at the options. These conceptual commercial frontages demonstrated different approaches to visual and elevational treatments and provided a basis for further review and refinement. The containment of the leisure uses needed further consideration.



fig. 27 Illustrative Review of Street Frontage along Church Street