

FALCONER
CHESTER
HALL

FCH

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
1-15 QUEEN VICTORIA
STREET & 145-148 FRIAR
STREET, READING

THACKERAY GROUP

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

P22018-FCH-BA-XX-RG-A-0005 P01 MARCH 2024

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1-15 QUEEN VICTORIA STREET & 145 -148 FRIAR STREET, READING

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1.0 THE SITE

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

QVS1 Phase 1

The redevelopment of 1-15 Queen Victoria Street, 145-148 Friar Street (QVS1), and 144 Friar Street (QVS2) are to be as one development in two phases. The primary focuses are on the repair, restoration, and regeneration of the listed buildings as it is the essential catalyst for the redevelopment of the site, and fundamentally be part of the town center.

To facilitate the redevelopment and vitality, the site needs to be viable. Therefore, an underpinning use to create further viability is required. This will ultimately lead to both schemes working together. The apart-hotel will fund the development of the market square. Once operational, the market square will draw visitors and make full use of the apart-hotel/ hotel.

The market square and significant enhancement of the shops to QVS is the key focus that will be facilitated by the development of Phases 1 and 2, a vision shared by the Applicant, the Council, and public.

Thackeray Estate is currently in legal discussions with the preferred partner as there is a significant interest for the apart-hotel. One crucial point is the hotelier is seeking more bed spaces as they consider the site a prime location, and to further consolidate the viability. The incorporation of 145 and 146 (phase 1 +) into the apart-hotel is currently being assessed and worked upon, but will be considered by way of a separate pre-application and as part of Phase 1.

As part of the incorporation of 145-146, the market square will be enhanced and the offering will be expanded

Benefits

- Repair and reinstatement of the original historic frontages of the listed buildings and the architectural detailing that contributes to their significance;
- Visual improvement to these prominent retail streets with uniform shop frontages, signage and lighting, respectful to the original historic frontages;
- Removal and enhancement to the form and appearance of built form at the rear of the site;

- Provision of modern, subservient and respectful built form to the rear of the site, enhancing the visual appearance and supporting and promoting the grandeur of the retained listed buildings;

- Provision of additional floorspace for retail and appropriate town centre uses in a highly accessible and sustainable location

- Provision of a mix of retail uses, providing diversity in town centre offering and opportunities for respite and relaxation, such as with coffee shops;

- Provision for small businesses and shops with appropriate-sized retail units to meet demand and support the small business market;

- Introduction of apart-hotel use, providing short-term let accommodation, supporting the needs of, and attracting, working professionals and visitors to Reading, as well as assisting in remedying an identified under-provision;

- Provision of a town centre destination that will attract visitors, shoppers and workers to this part of the town centre, enhancing the activity, vitality and viability of this part of the centre;

- This is a proposal, which based on stakeholder consultation, will lead to significant public benefits.

- The proposals will arrest the decline of QVS and support and bolster the Reading economy, which is of particular importance at this current time and will play an important role in the post-Covid19 recovery of the town centre.

- The renewal of 141 – 148 Friar Street could act as a valuable catalyst to support wider improvements within this part of the Town Centre.



Consented scheme CGI

2.0 CHANGES TO SCHEME & REASONING

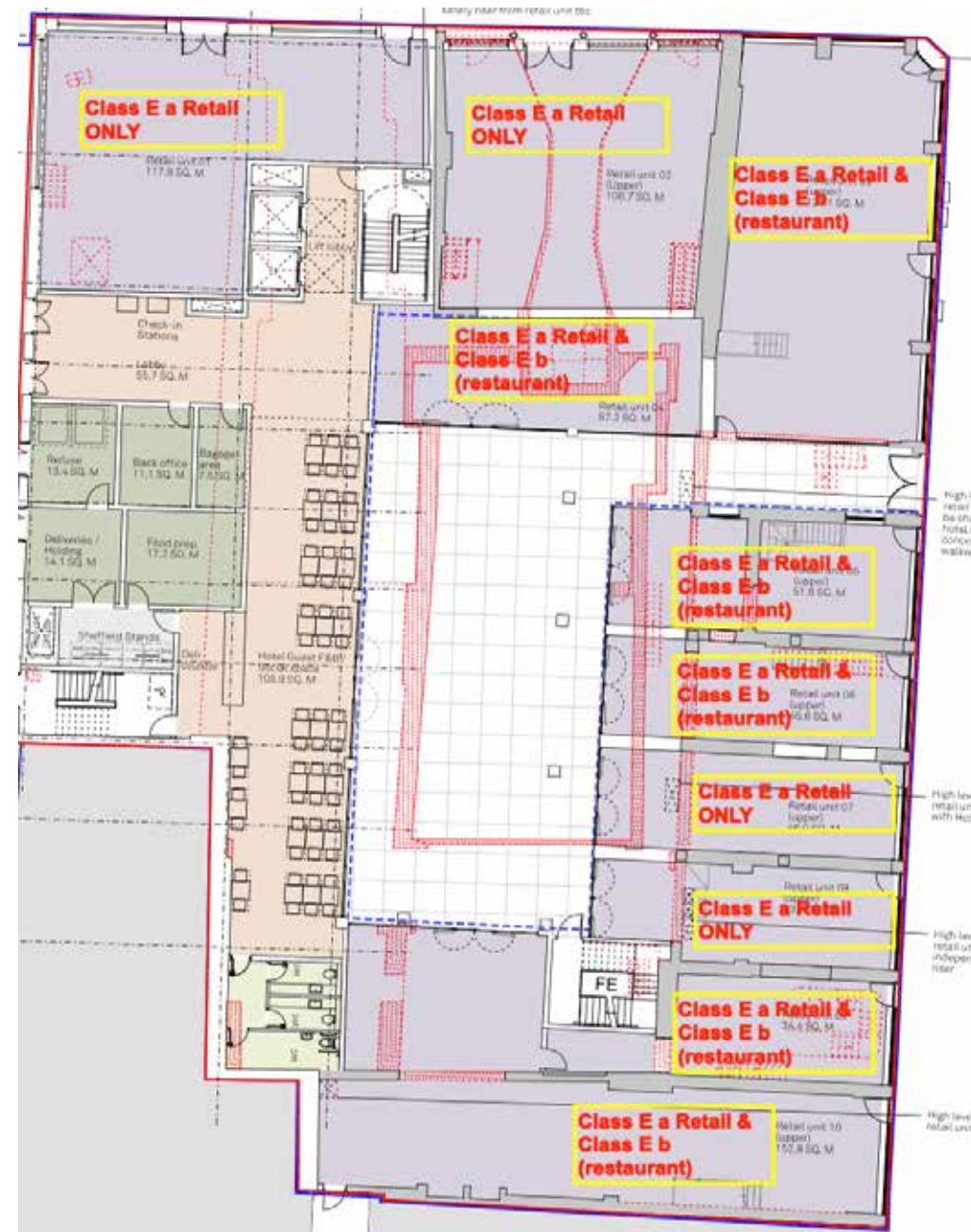
2.1 USE OF THE UNITS - REASON AND APPROACH

Reason:

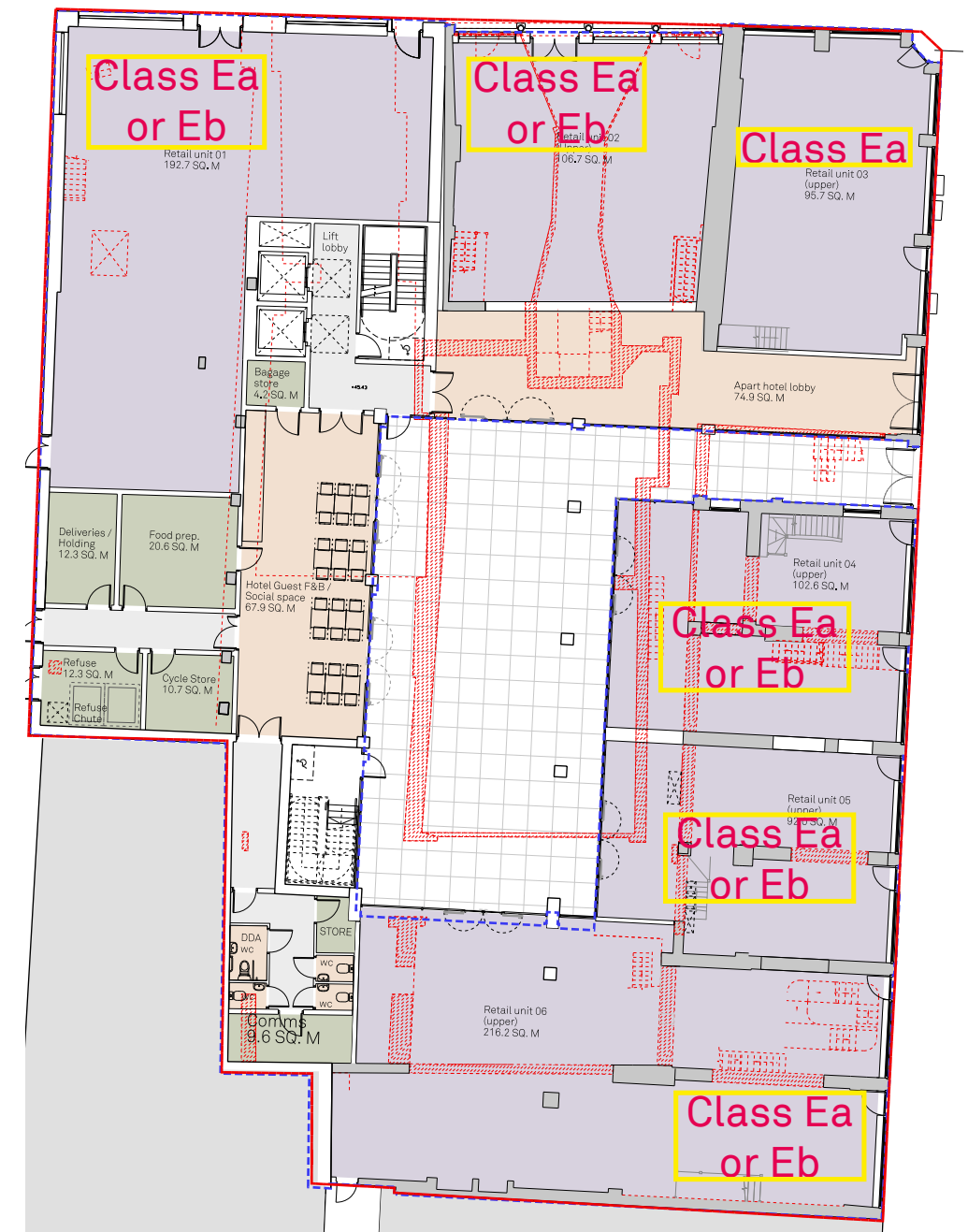
- Flexibility: The retail market is unrecognisable from pre-covid times and there is no longer the luxury of being selective over the type of occupiers you can let space to. They require the flexibility to re-let the building to any business within Use Class E.

Proposal:

- Current Interest: The applicant currently have two offers from national retailers that will anchor the scheme. However the interest they have secured will fall away if we do not get permission to vary the use class. The wave of further bankruptcies, store closures, and CVA's attributed to the rising interest rates, Cost of Living Crisis, and Political uncertainty has not been fully realised yet so the decline in the high street is going to continue to snowball. We need the ability to re-let our scheme to any business that operates under the Use Class E order. Use Class E was adopted during Covid to help bring life back to the high street, having restrictions put in place to prevent certain uses operating on the high street counteracts this and makes re-letting an almost impossible task.



APPROVED



PROPOSED

2.0 CHANGES TO SCHEME & REASONING

2.2 EXISTING RETAIL SPACE

1) 5 QVS - 'Gifts & Accessories'

GF = 27.3

Basement = 25.9

Total = 53.2sqm

2) 7-9 QVS - 'But is it Art'

GF = 66.3

Basement = 60.2

Total = 126.5sqm

3) 11-13 QVS - 'Rush Hair'

1st Floor = 68

GF = 67

Basement = 64.5

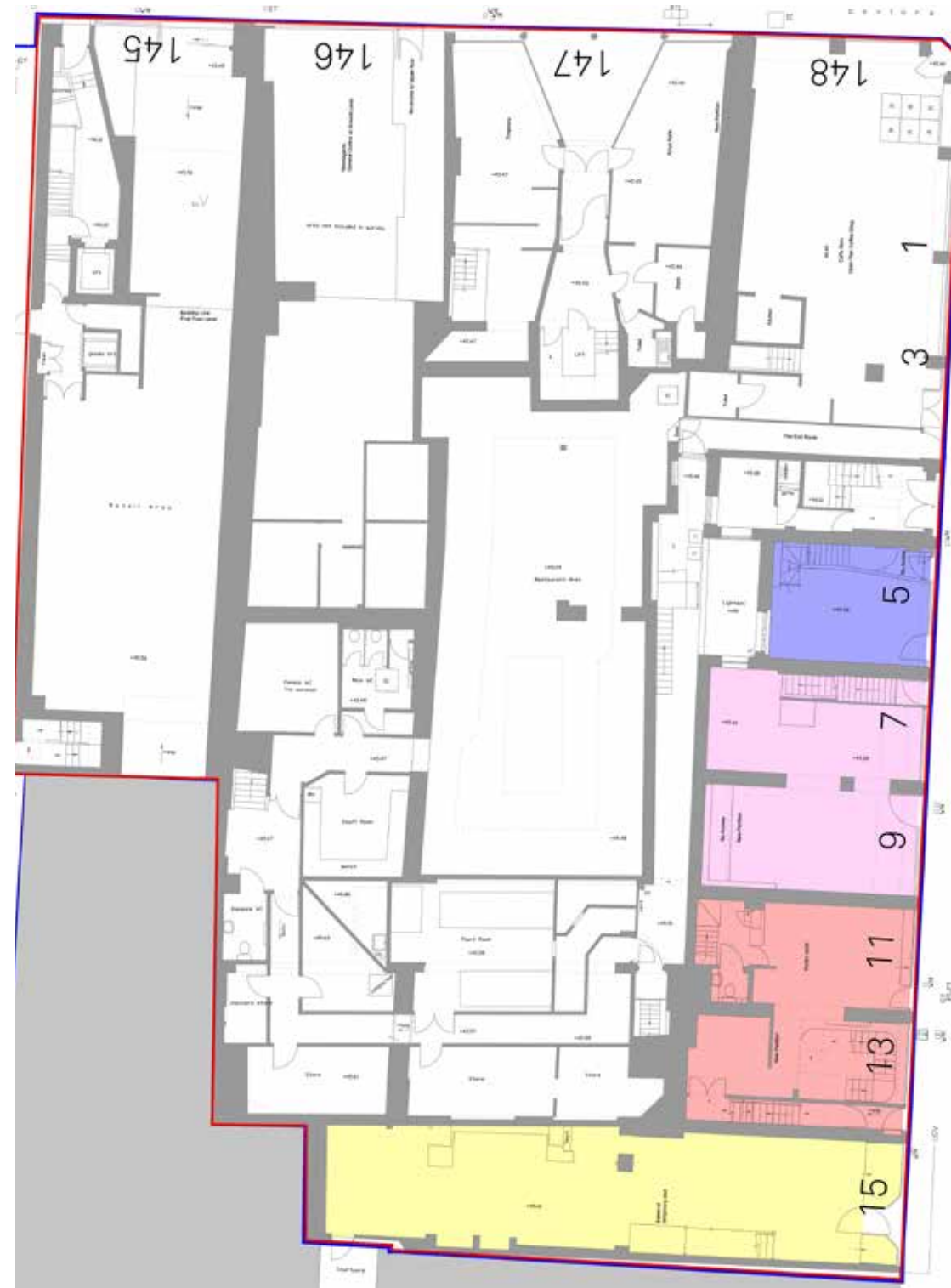
Total = 199.5sqm

4) 15 QVS - Expression Hair & Beauty

GF = 99.8

Basement = 50.3

Total = 150.1sqm



Existing Ground Floor



Existing Basement

2.0 CHANGES TO SCHEME & REASONING

2.3 PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF QVS RETAIL

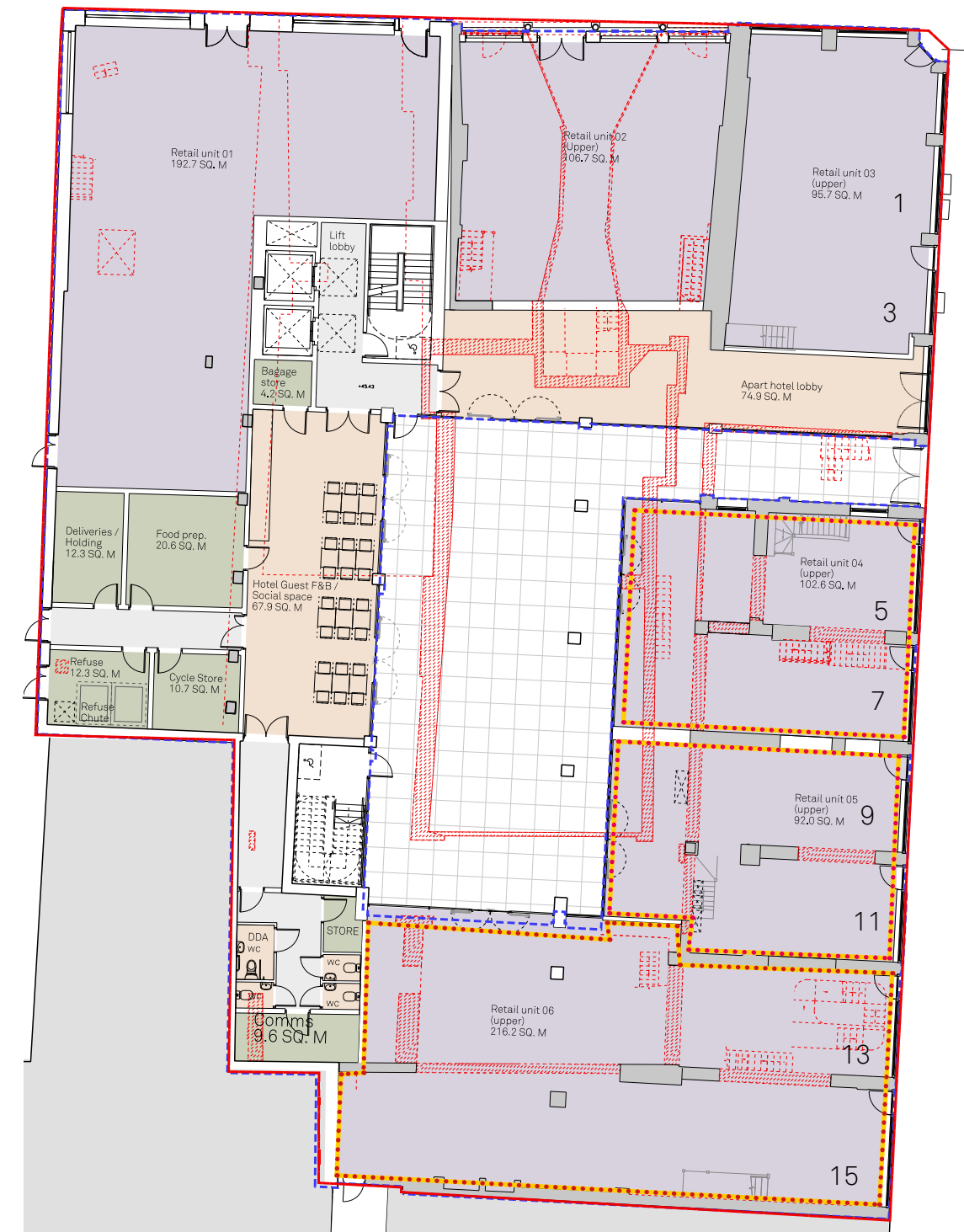
REVISED PROPOSAL

1) Friar Street

- Retail units 01 and 02 need to retain ability to amalgamate - these units are not constrained by CR8 Small Unit Policy.

2) Queen Victoria Street

- Existing unit (a)11-13 QVS (b) 7-9 QVS and (c) 15 QVS are in excess of the application of CR8 Policy (relates to shop units less than 75sqm).
- Revised scheme proposes 3no units (No 5-7, No 9-11 and 13-15)
- Extent of internal openings have been revised and existing wall nibs will be retained.
- External appearance of retail units will be put back to their original glory with individual shop fronts and external piers restored.



Proposed Ground Floor

2.0 CHANGES TO SCHEME & REASONING

2.4 BENEFITS OF ACCOMMODATING LARGER BUSINESSES

Provided below is a summary of the benefits to being able to accommodate larger businesses within our scheme, not only because it will increase our chances of re-letting the units but the wider implications it will have on Queen Victoria Street and the wider Reading town centre in the long term.

- This financial stability of the larger businesses reduces the risk of late or missed rental payments, providing a reliable income stream for the landlord to secure funding against. Thackeray have vast rent arrears throughout their Reading portfolio, all of which is attributed to the smaller independent businesses.
- Larger businesses have the funding to invest significant sums of money into their fitout which will enhance the overall quality of the property and make it more appealing to the public as well as raising the profile of the street and scheme. The majority of small businesses on Queen Victoria St who have low quality fitout and signage that damages the appearance of the Street – See Picture 1.
- Resilient to economic downturns due to their diversified operations and market reach. This resilience is not only advantageous but also ensures businesses can continue trading and prevents vacancies / empty units which is currently a major issue in Reading town centre - See Picture 2.
- Established customer base and marketing efforts generate a steady foot fall to the property. This increased visibility and customer flow will positively impact the performance of other tenants on Queen Victoria Street and the wider town centre. The smaller businesses are more prone to change in ownership, closures and re-locations. High turnover is disruptive and leads to increased vacancy periods, challenges in finding new tenants, and property security risks, as exemplified by The Harris Arcade – See Picture 3.
- The larger businesses have experienced and professional management teams, reducing the likelihood of issues related to property maintenance, adherence to lease terms, and other operational concerns.
- Serve as an anchor tenant, drawing customers and other businesses to scheme and wider Queen Victoria Street. The presence of a well-known anchor tenant can positively impact the perception of the street / retail parade.
- The shop front/ internal fit out is heritage positive and high quality, especially when compared to others. It has exposed brick-work, stone floor, heritage shop front; it is a significant enhancement to the street scene and the calibre and standard of fitout, which tenants simply cannot fund and based on past performance, have sought to undertake. (Pictures 4,5 and 6)



2.0 CHANGES TO SCHEME & REASONING

2.5 MARKETING TO DATE

-
- Thackeray Group have a national property portfolio and retail leasing agents instructed in all of the UK top 10 cities, so are well versed in marketing, leasing, and delivering mixed use retail schemes.
 - David Coffey Lyons and CBRE, who are national and international leasing agents, have been instructed to market the property over the last three years. The primary objective of the agents has been to secure tenant interest for the Queen Victoria Scheme. They have focused their marketing on five key areas:
 - Existing database of local requirements
 - New local requirements
 - New national requirements
 - Online listing platforms
 - Print advertising
 - The leasing campaign has yielded no interest that Thackeray are able to proceed with. Upon review it has become clear there are three overriding factors which are preventing the currently consented scheme from attracting viable interest:
 1. The size of the units we can offer.
 2. The Use of the retail units we can offer.
 3. Service charge costs attributed to the management of the courtyard.

2.0 CHANGES TO SCHEME & REASONING

2.5 MARKETING TO DATE

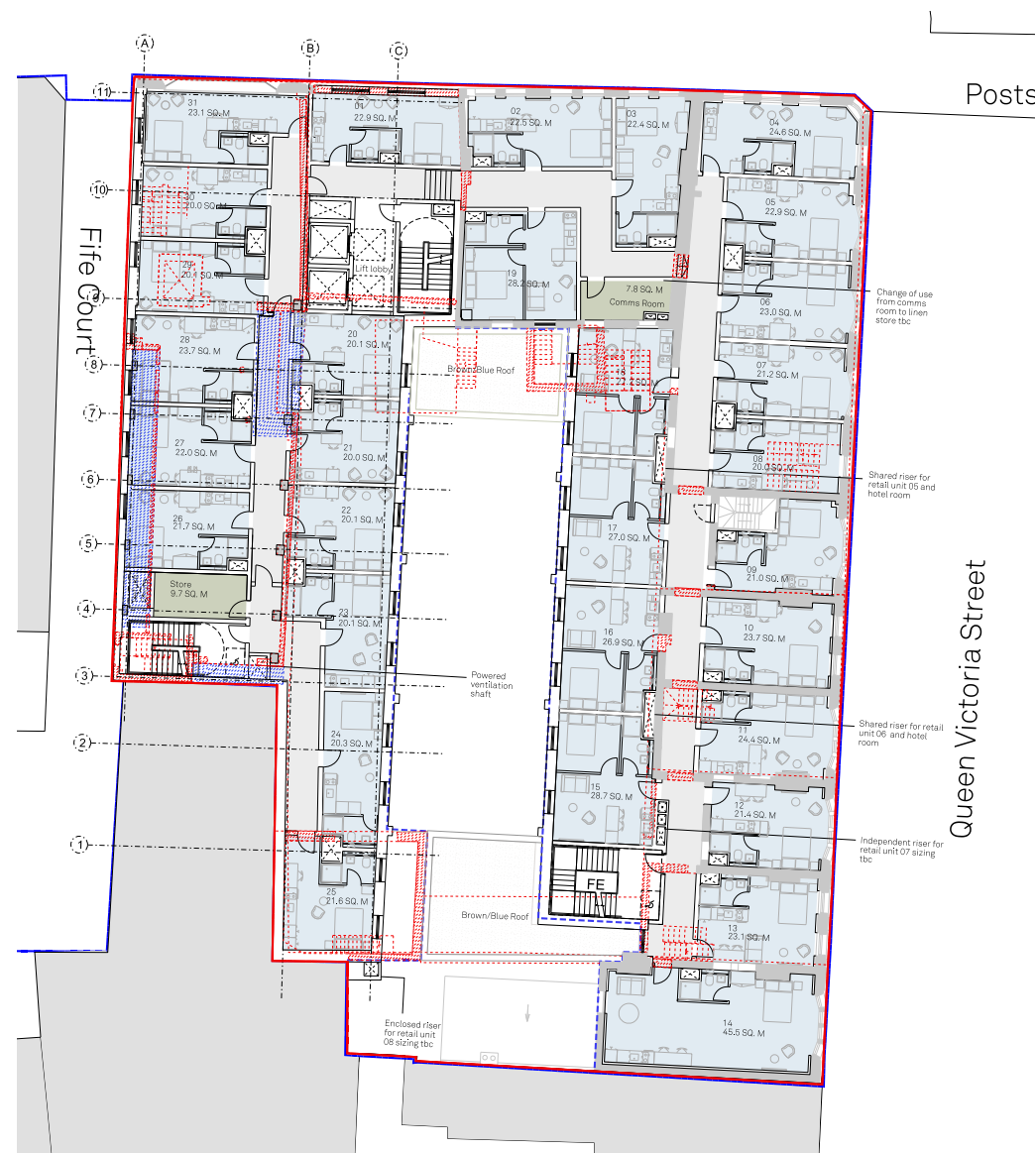
-
- Thackeray have undertaken vast amounts of market assessments and viability studies over a number of years to understand what mix of uses and massing will yield the best returns whilst sympathetically redeveloping these buildings.
 - The proposed scheme has evolved in a response to feedback received from both the retail and construction market. Had it been viable for Thackeray to bring forward the originally proposed scheme it would have been delivered as soon as practically possible, negating any of the extended hold costs which have been suffered.
 - From the initial planning application submitted there have been multiple global events which have had a detrimental effect on the real estate market in a various ways, i.e. COVID, inflation, interest rate rises, increased build cost, rising fuel prices, and the cost of living crisis, all of which have had significant implications on the viability of any redevelopment scheme.
 - As you will see, the financial returns produced by undertaking this redevelopment are much lower than would traditionally be seen in the market, however, this is on the basis the scheme is sold immediately upon completion. External market factors are dictating the level of returns developers can realise and so the typical model of 'build and sell' is no longer the best route for realising value.
 - Thackeray intend on retaining the asset within the portfolio and undertaking continued asset management initiatives which will allow the scheme to mature and once again become a cornerstone in the Reading market which in turn will improve the value of both the scheme and local areas.
 - Put candidly, there is no other solution to redeveloping this building. The choices in front of Thackeray are to proceed with the proposed scheme and try to recover costs over the next 5-10 years, or 'lock up' the site and leave the building as it is.

2.0 CHANGES TO SCHEME & REASONING

2.6 REDUCED MASSING & PLAN EFFICIENCY

Upper level changes

- Reduced build form at upper levels
- Internal plan alterations to improve efficiency
- Adjusted window positioning to suit interior layout changes
- Core location amended to improve plan efficiency



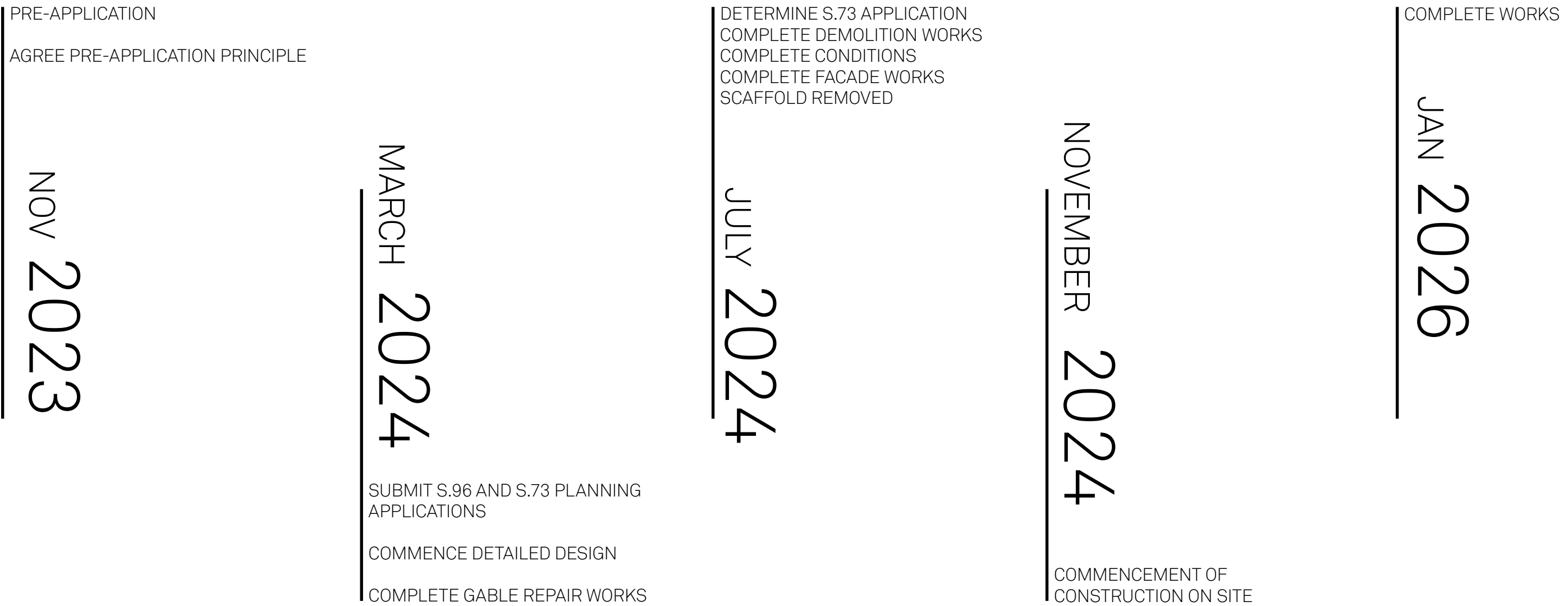
Consented plan



Proposed plan

2.0 CHANGES TO SCHEME & REASONING

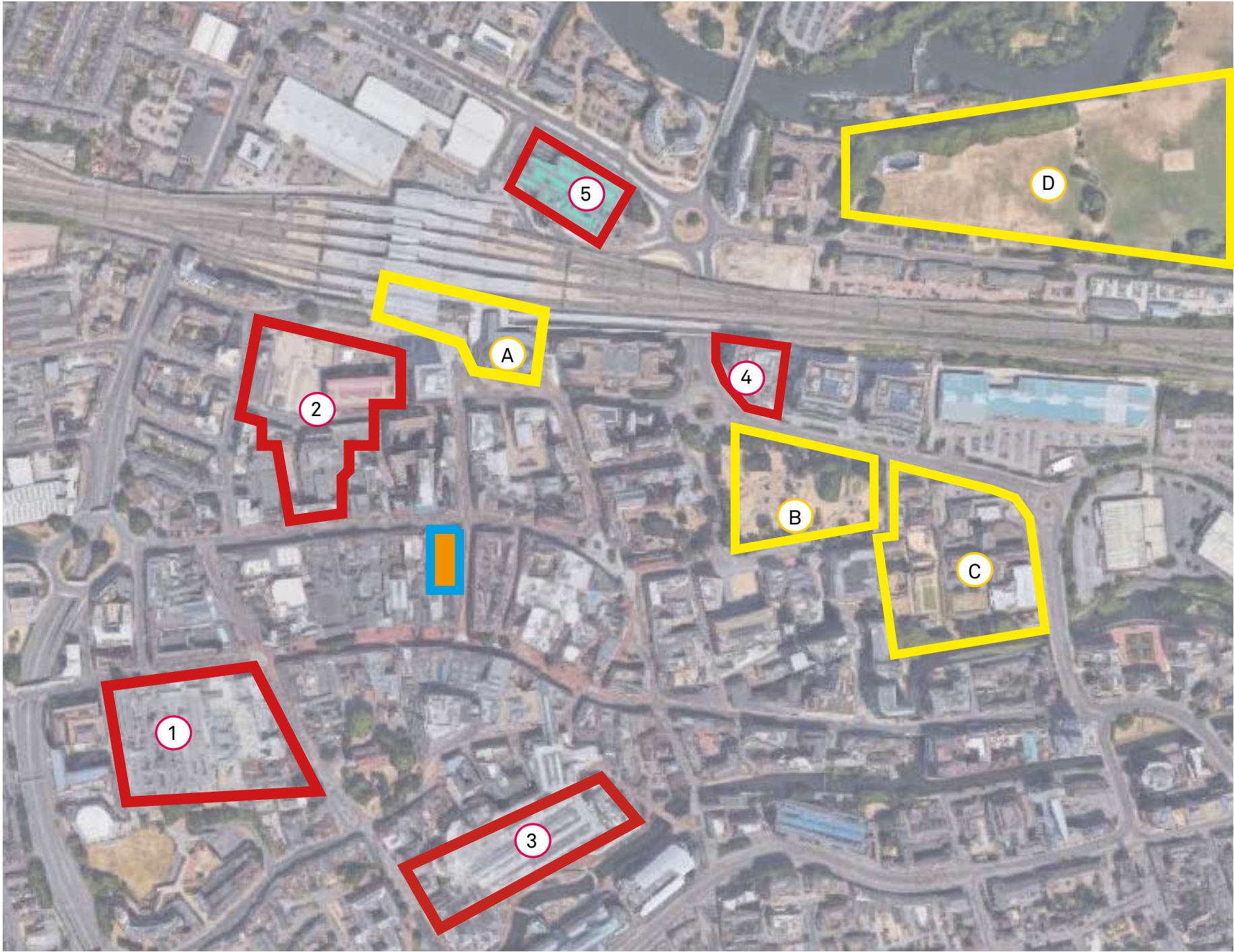
2.7 TIMELINE TO DELIVER



3.0 THE SITE

3.1 CONTEXT

- Key
- Proposed Site
 - Local Amenity
 - A - Station District
 - B - Forbury Gardens
 - C - Abbey Quarter
 - D - King's Meadow
 - Major Sites
 - 1 - Broad Street Mall
422 build-to-rent homes above and around the shopping centre.
 - 2 - Station Hill
1,200 new homes
 - 3 - Oracle Riverside
Major make-over in 2017 with new riverside amphitheatres and restaurants
 - 4 - Forbury Place
600,000sqft office development
 - 5 - Station Car Park
Outline planning application submitted 2020



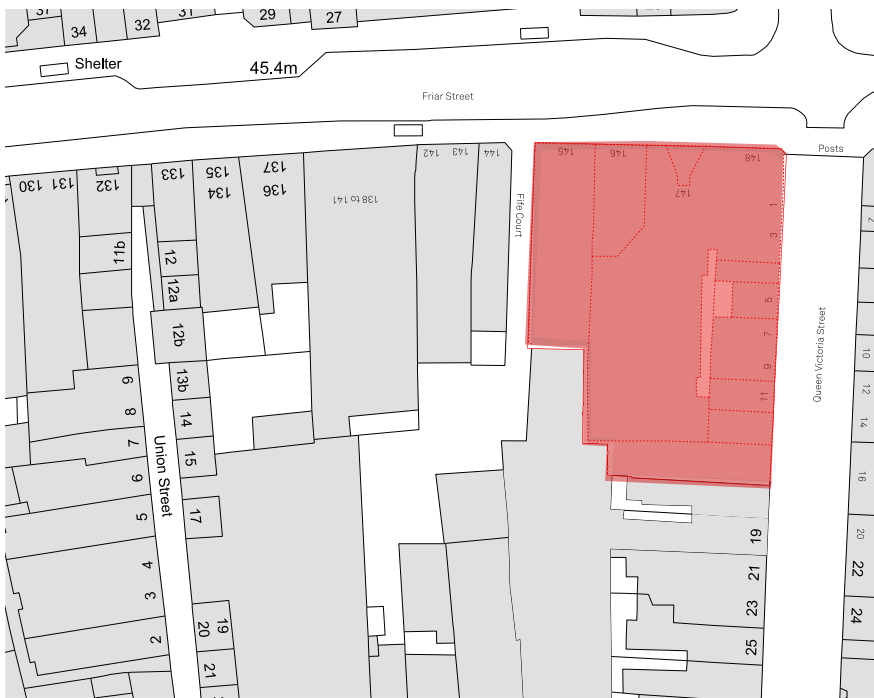
Aerial view of site highlighting areas of interest

3.0 THE SITE

3.2 CONSENTED SCHEME

Planning Committee Approval May 2023

The approved application 221232 & 221233 is a mixed-use development for the demolition of No. 146 Friar St and structures to rear and partial demolition of No. 145 Friar St and various external works to other existing buildings, as part of redevelopment to provide: reconfigured basement and ground floor uses (Class E(a) or (b)) on Friar St and Queen Victoria St frontages and proposed apart-hotel (Class C1) at part-basement, part-ground and on all upper floors; part-two, part- three storey rear extension to No's 5-15 (odd) Queen Victoria St; replacement basement and five storey building at No. 145 Friar St and two-storey roof extension to No. 146 Friar St; proposed public courtyard accessed via Queen Victoria St walkway; roof level plant.



■ Extent of consented scheme



CGI of consented scheme

3.0 THE SITE

3.3 HISTORY

Auctioneers, Estate Agents & Furniture.

The earliest Ordnance Survey large-scale mapping of 1879 shows that both sides of Friar Street were densely packed with properties, with long narrow plots fronting the streets and extending at the rear, often with yards or gardens, often served by narrow access lanes reflecting the burgage plots of the medieval town layout. The footprint of the present Site occupied part of a Gentlemen's Club, the Athenaeum, and two properties to the west, together with their rear gardens/yards and outbuildings.

The Charles E. Goad Ltd Fire Insurance Plan of 1895 provides details of the properties involved towards the end of the 19th century.

Text by Heritage Collective
Text and images taken from Frost architect's design and access statement

Comparison between the 1879 and 1895 plans show differences in the footprints of the properties west of the Athenaeum, suggesting that the current No. 147 Friar Street was built in this period which would accord with the 1880s date of the building. The Goad Fire Insurance Plan shows that the building was 3½-storeys in height with an iron and glass frontage to second floor level; this frontage was retained when the block was redeveloped at the beginning of the 20th century. The current frontage bears the date 1882 for a company of Auctioneers, Surveyors and Land & Estate Agents. However, this signage refers to the history of a later 20th century occupant (Nicholas Estate Agents) rather than to the early history of the building itself.

Properties in Friar Street and Broad Street were demolished at the end of the 19th century in order to create a new shopping thoroughfare linking Broad Street with the railway station. The new street, Queen Victoria Street, was completed in 1903. The work was one of a number of contemporary redevelopment schemes in the town which were sponsored by local Councillor and businessman, J.C. Fidler (of Fidler and Sons' Royal Berkshire Seed Stores). The street was flanked by matching 4-storey blocks with shops at ground level, constructed in yellow brick with terracotta façades and dressings. The design included corner plots at 148 and 150 Friar Street and Nos 24-28 and 35-38 Broad Street. The architect is uncertain: the Historic England List Entry names the possible architect as County Surveyor Joseph Morris, whilst Pevsner attributes the design to local architects S.Slingsby Stallwood and Charles Smith & Sons. The terracotta dressings were created by S & E Collier Ltd.



3.0 THE SITE

3.4 HISTORIC BUILDINGS- EXTERNAL

1-15 Queen Victoria Street and 148 Friar Street

The terrace along Queen Victoria Street and around the northern corner with Friar Street is a building of considerable architectural quality, primarily deriving from the quality and form of its front elevation which includes brickwork, terracotta, decorative gables, granite pilasters and original windows.

While generally complete above ground floor, the modern shopfronts, signs and lights and double-height shopfront to no. 148 are all modern and detract from the significance of the terrace. Nonetheless, the terrace remains as a good example of an early 20th century commercial premises and this bestows a degree of historic (illustrative and associative) interest. The rear elevation of the building is of lesser value. The rear terrace is heavily altered, albeit no.15 Queen Victoria Street retains some of its original rear composition.

Internally, nos. 1-3 Queen Victoria Street and 148 Friar Street have been heavily altered with all partitions being late 20th century in date associated with the office use of the buildings. Elsewhere within the terrace, the basement and ground floors are equally heavily altered. There are elements of plan form, original room proportions and circulation to the upper floors in the form of party walls, original staircases (present within no. 5 and 9), chimney breasts and partitions, however they are still much altered. The presence of this fabric adds to the architectural and historic interest of the building.



147 Friar Street

The significance of 147 Friar Street primarily relates to the architectural quality of the 1880s front elevation, particularly the double height colonnade shopfront and the 3no. segmental headed dormer windows that feature moulded coping between and modillion cornices. The building is a good example of a late 19th century commercial premises and this provides the structure with a degree of historic (illustrative and associative) interest. The modern shopfront, boarding over the fascias and the modern paint applied to the front elevation all detract from the original design intentions and significance.

Internally, the building has been heavily altered at various phases. The most notable phase appears to date to the 1930s when the rear stair and lift core were added and new internal partitions (curved to the first floor) were introduced. Where present, surviving elements of plan form present some degree of historic legibility within the building, but generally the interiors (now primarily open plan) should be able to accommodate change.



Rear Buildings

To the rear of the building are a variety of extensions and additions. Elements of built form which are contemporary with the terrace (located to the rear of the southern portion of the terrace) have limited value while more recent built form possesses either neutral or negative role in the heritage values of the listed building.

Other rear extensions (for example the former cabinet factory) are of various date and poor quality. While some of these may date to the late 19th or early 20th century, they are of no particular heritage value in their own right.

The main rebuilding was in use as Burger King, but has been vacant and left to deteriorate for over 10 years. Since then it has been the subject to use by rough sleepers who have had to be evicted a number of times.

Text by Heritage Collective

Text and images taken from Frost architect's design and access statement



3.0 THE SITE

3.4 HISTORIC BUILDING - EXTERNAL

Existing Street facing photographs



Images taken from Frost architect's design and access statement

3.0 THE SITE

3.5 HISTORIC BUILDINGS - INTERNAL

1-15 Queen Victoria Street and 148 Friar Street

Extensive photographic and scheduling has been carried out to record the features and condition of the existing listed buildings. This exercise has ensured proposals have been informed by the existing fabric. Whilst there is little evidence of existing features such as fireplaces, there are areas of cornicing plan form that have been identified and retained.

Overall, the proposed development can be summarised as the comprehensive redevelopment of the site to provide a high quality commercial and visitor accommodation that will reinvigorate a series of currently underused heritage assets within Reading town centre.

While interventions to the listed buildings are required to facilitate this, the proposals are based on a thorough understanding of the historic development, character and significance of the grade II listed buildings. Through the design development phase, the project team has sought to minimise harm through good design and retention of historic fabric and maximise benefits. Advice received from the Council as part of the pre-application stage has fed into and informed the scheme as submitted.

See Heritage Statement and Schedule of Works for further detail. Text and images taken from Frost architect's design and access statement



Existing Interior photographs



Existing Interior photographs



3.0 THE SITE

3.6 FACADE REPAIRS

A Listed Asset Revived

Central to the proposals is the restoration and re-use of the listed buildings. The buildings are in a state of disrepair and continue to deteriorate as much of the upper floors remain vacant. The existing gables and roof are at risk of collapse and temporary restraint works have been put in place

The careful and much needed restoration of the main façades, cleaning and repair of the elaborate terracotta and removal of scaffold supports will be carried out in meticulous fashion to ensure this building is retained for future generations.

It is considered that a series of well designed, appropriate shop fronts and signage can set a standard for the entirety of the street as has been seen in many towns with significant heritage assets.

Detailed work has been undertaken over the last 18 months with architects, engineers and specialist facade contractors to establish scope of remedial works required and contractor now placed.

Without the significant intervention, the building will continue to deteriorate and will start to place these buildings at risk, as well as to public safety.



3.0 THE SITE

3.7 APPRAISAL

Poor Quality Building in Prominent Location

This corner plot forms one of the most important and prominent sites in the town centre. It sits on one of the main pedestrian routes from the railway station to the main central area and shopping districts as well as a primary bus route. The pedestrianisation of Queen Victoria Street has further emphasised the importance of this location within the overall retail offer of the town centre.

Although the site offers an active retail frontage, it currently fails to present as a destination due to the disparate nature of the shops and shopfronts. Poor quality signage and inconsistent glazing systems have created a confused appearance with no co-ordinated identity.

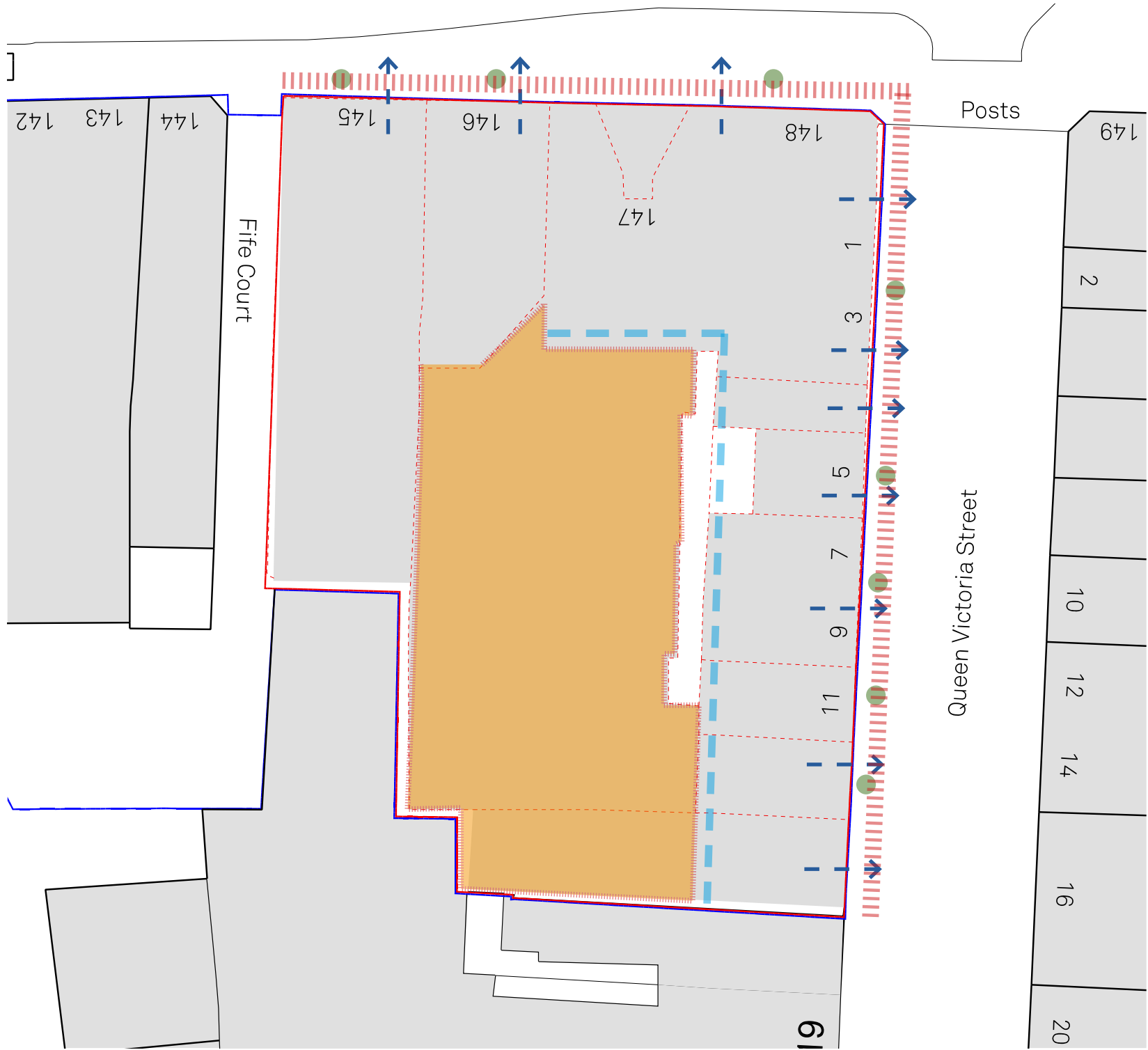
The buildings at 1-15 Queen Victoria Street, 147 Friar Street and 146 Friar Street present a varied collection of both high heritage significance and low quality structures in poor condition. The main buildings fronting onto Queen Victoria Street and Friar Street have important historical elevations with intricate original detailing. However, the building fabric is in urgent need of a complete overhaul and restoration.

The front elevation to 148 Friar Street has been significantly altered with inappropriate windows and timber panelling to the first floor. To the rear of the buildings various extensions and additions have resulted in a very poor quality and chaotic group of one/two storey structures. These landlocked buildings offer no obvious use or value to the public and have been left to deteriorate and are now in a dangerous state.

The rear façades to the main blocks are much altered, which has reduced both their heritage value and architectural quality.

Text taken from Frost architect's design and access statement

- Key
- ➡ Active retail frontage with high quality building to street
 - Low quality buildings to rear demolished
 - Poor Quality Rear Facade - significant alteration
 - Poor Quality Retail Frontage and Signage
 - Variety of lighting



3.0 THE SITE

3.8 IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

Located in the heart of the city centre, the site comprises of an amalgamation of buildings varying in massing, character and historical significance. Boarded by three streets; Queen Victoria Street, Friar Street and Fife Court, the corner plot offers a pivotal opportunity to add to the rich culture of Reading city.

The site is currently occupied by a number of retail and food outlets to the ground floor. The upper floors remain largely vacant and comprise of a combination of residential ,commercial and office spaces .

The buildings at the rear end of the site are of no architectural or historic merit and do not have any direct relationship with the listed buildings. Their redevelopment would facilitate the delivery of this new quarter and would be considered as an enhancement to the wider area.

It should be noted that a separate planning application has been submitted for 38-144 Friar Street which proposes a hotel that will be operated by the same operator as the apart-hotel.

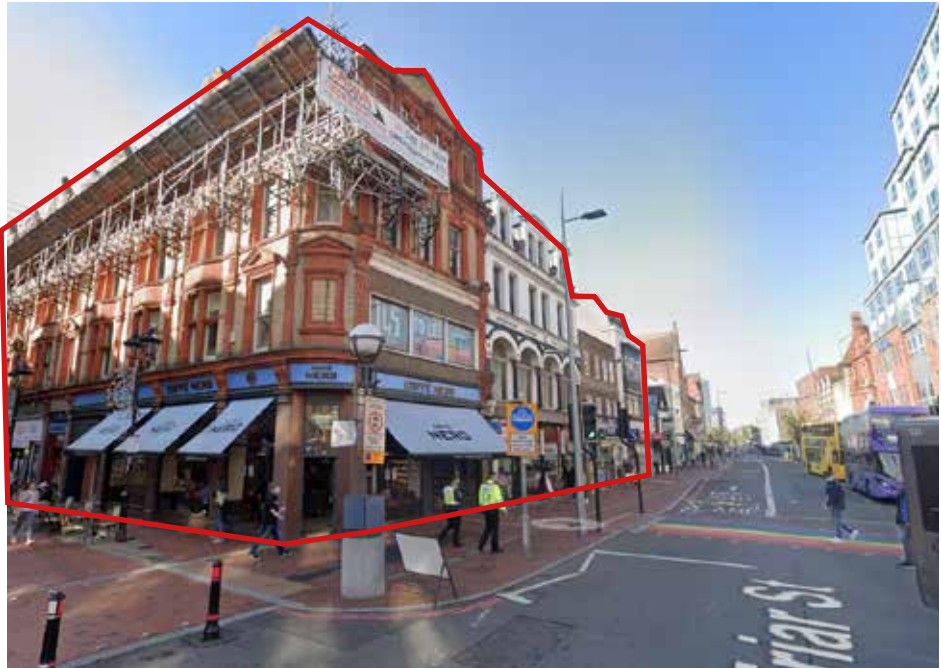
Key

QVS2 138-144 Friar Street

147-148 Friar Street, 1-15 Queen Victoria Street (QVS1)

3.0 THE SITE

3.9 EXTERNAL PHOTOS



View 01 Taken from the corner of Queen Victoria Street and Friar Street (taken pre-scaffold)



View 02 Taken from Friar Street captures Fife Court



Existing site plan. Block highlighted in red



View 03 Taken from Friar Street capturing building 145, 146 and 147.



View 03 Taken from Friar Street 145, 146, 147 and 148 (Taken pre-scaffold)

3.0 THE SITE

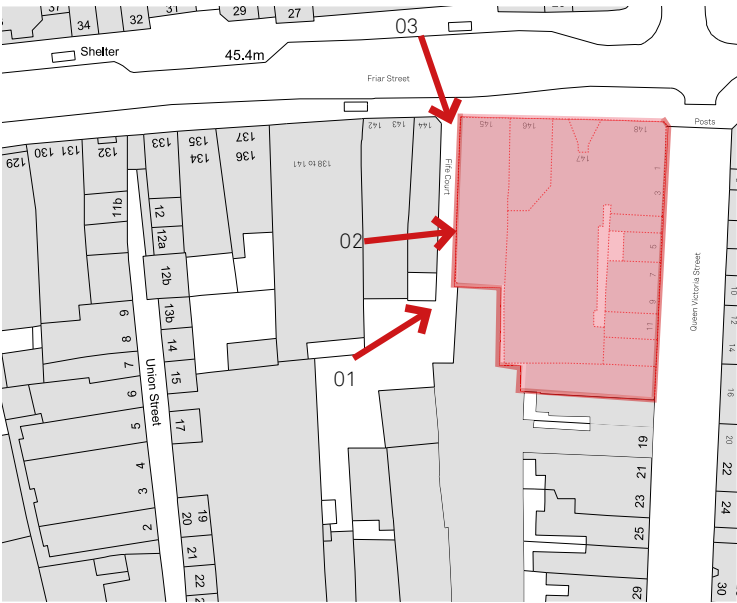
3.9 EXTERNAL PHOTOS



View 01 Taken from the rear of Fife Court capturing building 145 Friar Street



View 03 Taken from Fife Court capturing the side elevation of building 145 Friar Street



Existing site plan. Block highlighted in red



View 02 Taken from roof of neighbouring building capturing upper levels of building 145 Friar Street

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

4.1 REMOVE

Low Value in Poor Condition

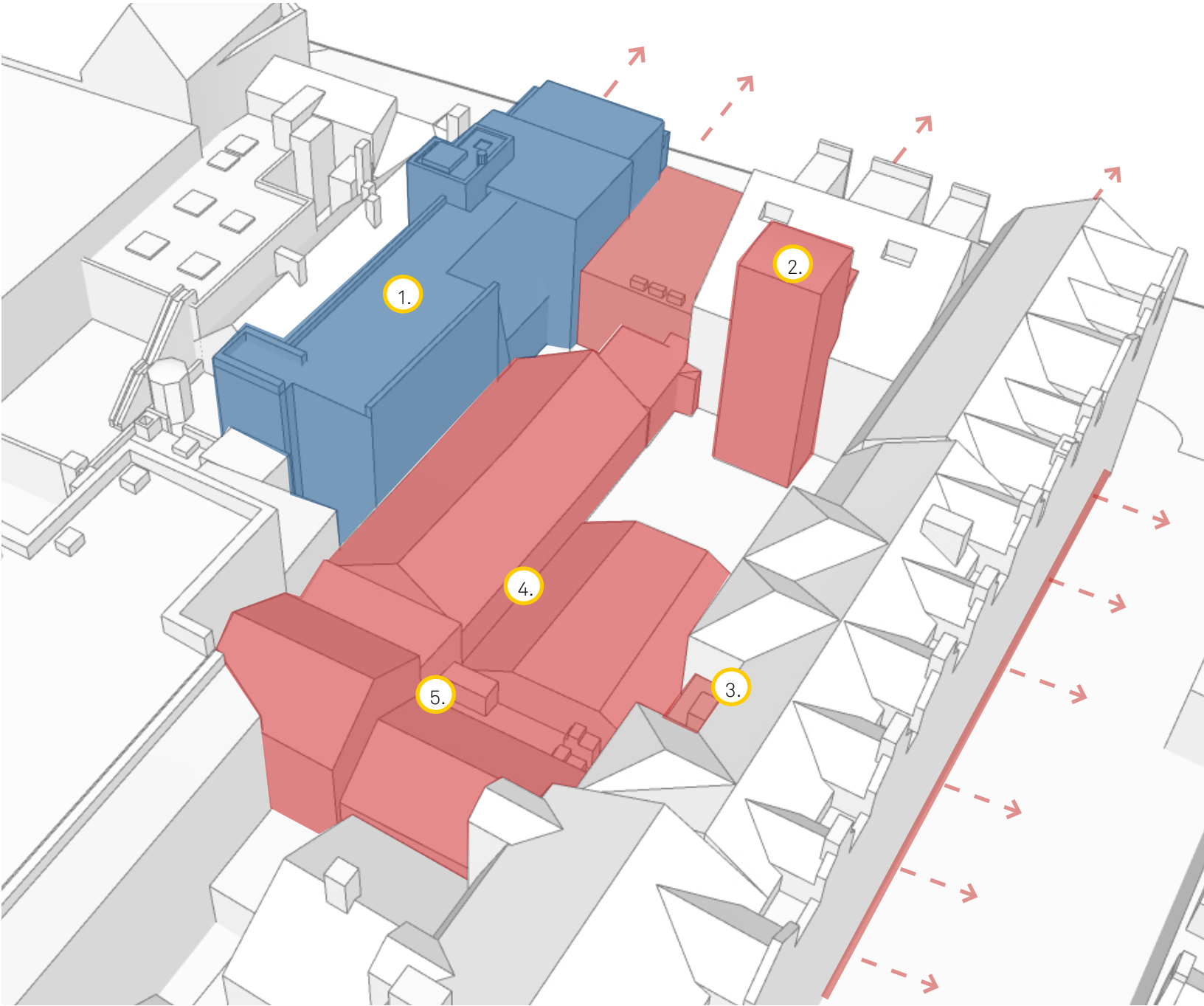
The dense building stock to the rear of the site has been assessed for the heritage and commercial value. Removal of poor-quality additions to the rear of the buildings is considered appropriate and fundamental to the proposal.

The structures are generally in poor condition and they are of low amenity value. They are currently vacant and are difficult to maintain in their present form. The configuration of the buildings lends itself only to uses that would be more appropriate away from the town centre location, such as storage or light industrial uses.

The clearance of these buildings will enable the re-use and restoration of the listed buildings which is fundamental to the wider proposals.

Text taken from Frost architect’s design and access statement

- Key
- Partial Demolition and Retention
 - Full Demolition
 - > Addressing shopfronts



Existing massing highlighting demonilition of varrying degrees and intended alterations to shop fronts

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

4.2 RESTORE

A Listed Asset Revived

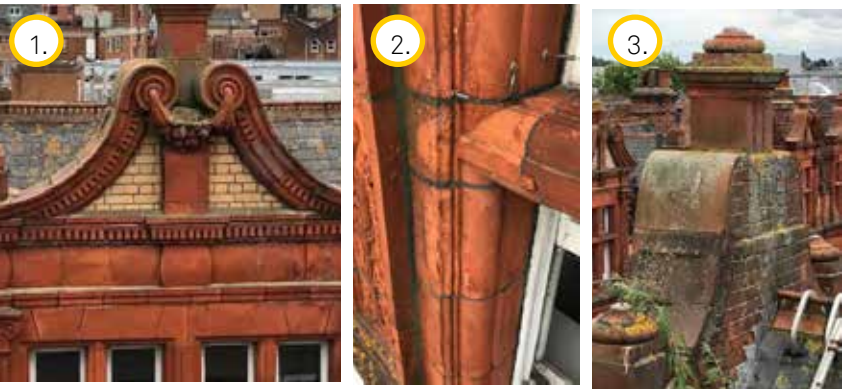
Central to the proposals is the restoration and re-use of the listed buildings. The buildings are in a state of disrepair and continue to deteriorate as much of the upper floors remain vacant.

The careful and much needed restoration of the main façades, cleaning and repair of the elaborate terracotta and removal of scaffold supports will be carried out in meticulous fashion to ensure this building is retained for future generations.

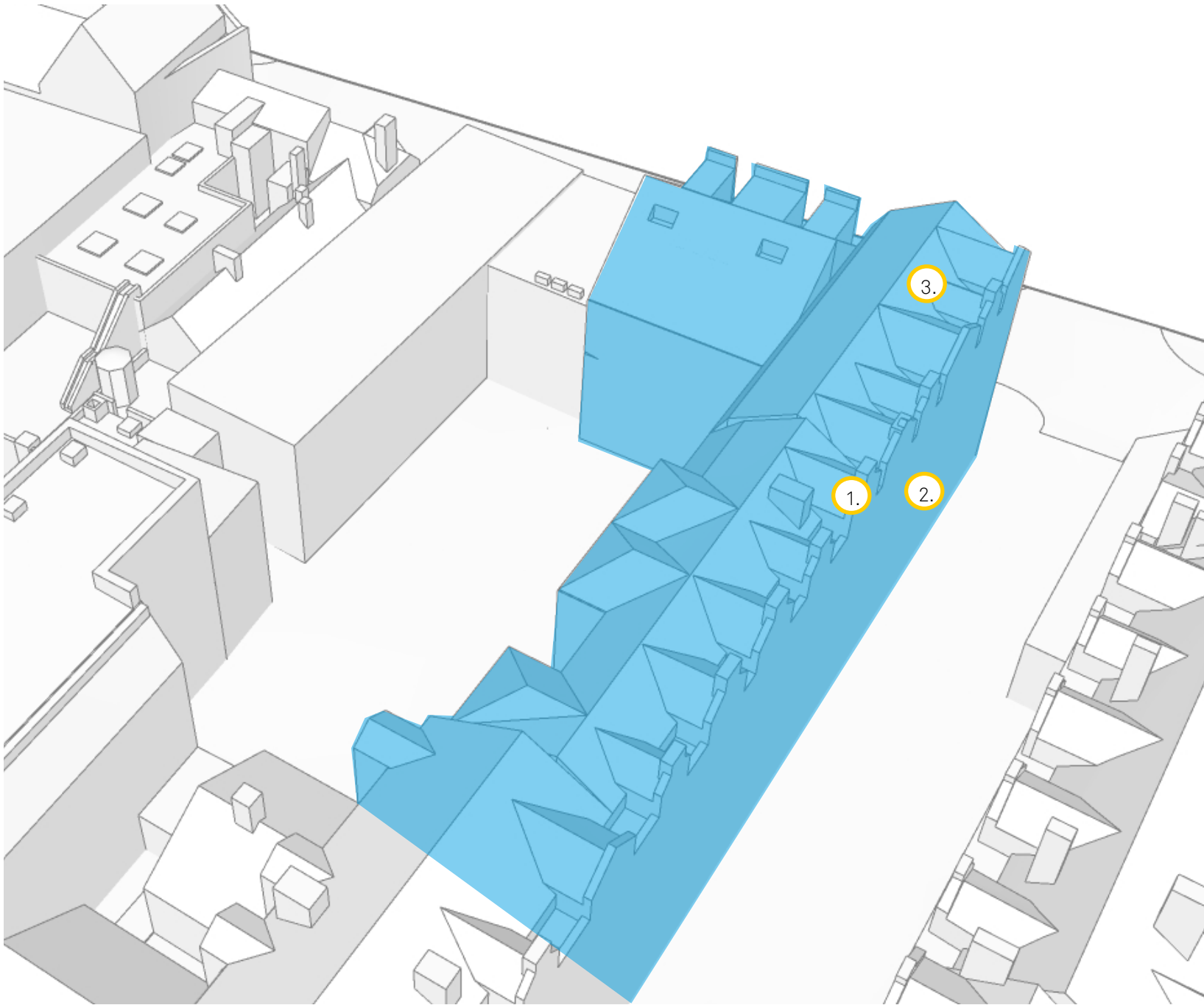
It is considered that a series of well designed, appropriate shop fronts and signage can set a standard for the entirety of the street as has been seen in many towns with significant heritage assets.

Text taken from Frost architect’s design and access statement

Key
Listed Buildings



Building 145 Friar Street, front and side



Existing massing highlighting extent of listed buildings

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

4.2 RESTORE



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER

FCH



AFTER

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

4.2 RESTORE

Restoration progress



4.0 THE PROPOSAL

4.2 RESTORE

Restoration progress

