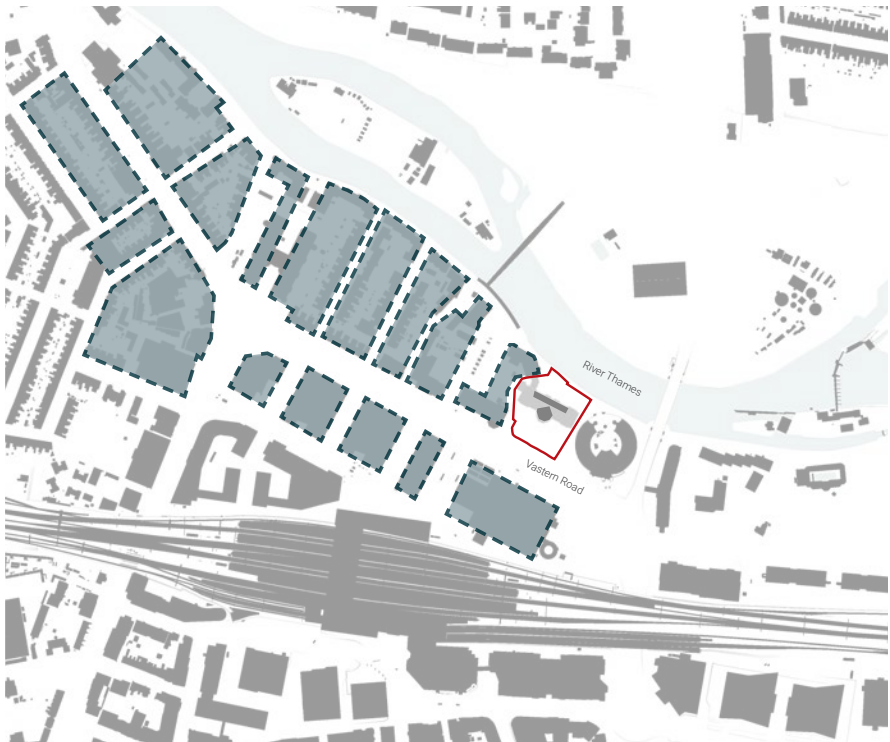


2.9 Urban grain and surrounding street patterns

Analysis of the surrounding area has been undertaken to understand the character of the existing urban context and how this could inform the design proposals. There is a well established street pattern and layout surrounding the site between Vastern Road and the River Thames.

The following key characteristics are present within the wider context:

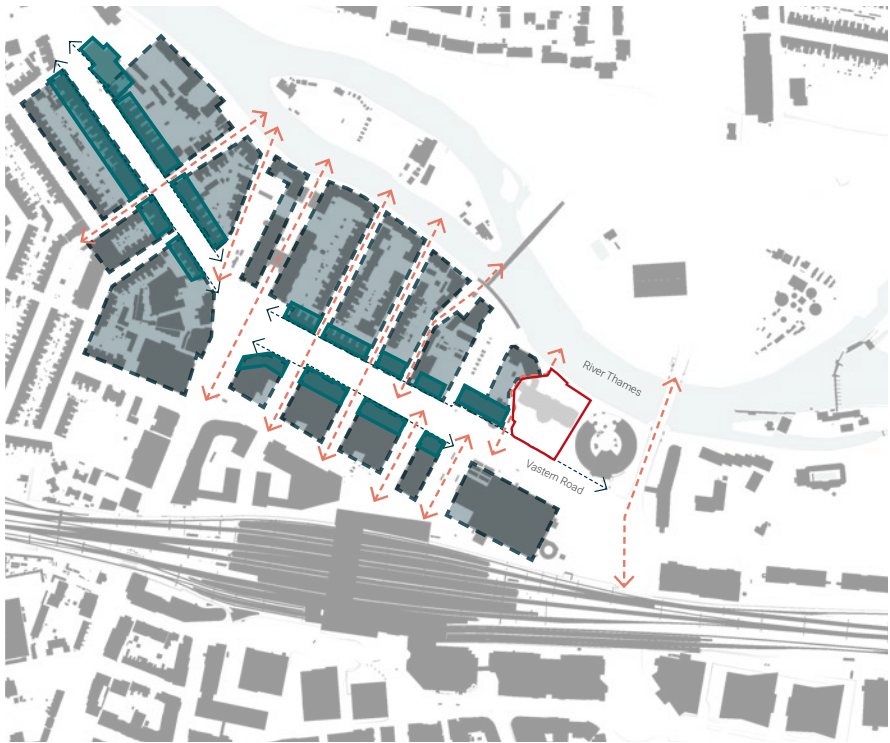
- 1. Established grid street pattern
- 2. North south connections to the river
- 3. Linear buildings fronting Vastern Road
- 4. Spaces between buildings providing connections and views to the river



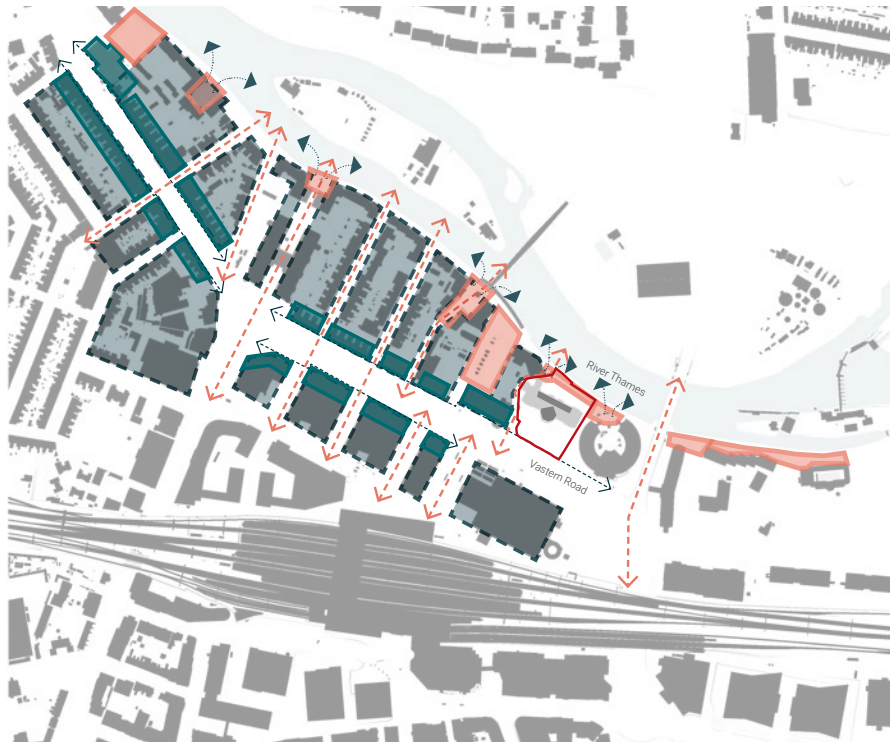
Established grid street pattern



North south connections to the river



Linear buildings fronting Vastern Road



Spaces between buildings providing connections and views to the river

2.10 Designated green spaces

The site is well located with excellent access to surrounding green spaces, providing residents and visitors with opportunities to connect with nature. Christchurch Meadow to the north offers a variety of outdoor activities and scenic spots for relaxation and exercise. However, access to green space is notably less prevalent on the southern bank of the river. Efforts to enhance green space on the southern bank would significantly improve the overall environmental quality and community well-being in the area.



2.11 Designated green spaces



Christchurch meadow



Hills meadow



View island



King's meadow



Forbury gardens



Rivermead Park



Westfield Park



Victoria Park

2.12 The flood zone

The majority of the site is located within Flood Zone 1. The northern and eastern boundaries are located within Flood Zone 2 and 3. The proposals will need to carefully consider the design approach to these boundaries of the site.

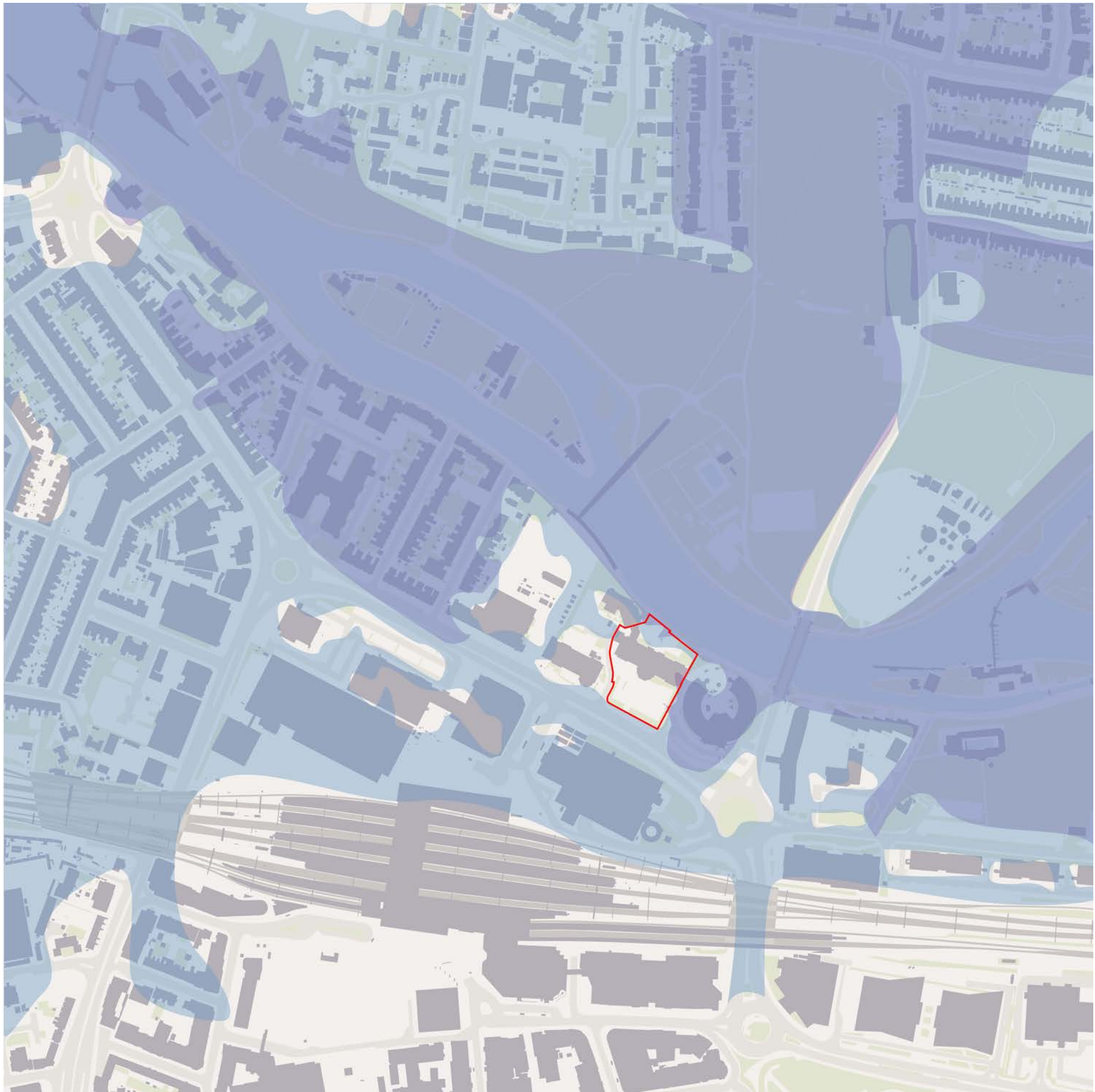
The proposal site benefits from being slightly raised which results in the site being outside of the flood zone.

Key

The site

Flood zone 2

Flood zone 3



Flood map

2.13 Surrounding building uses

The area surrounding the site is prominently characterised by residential and commercial office space. However the context is undergoing significant change with a number of consented proposals replacing office and retail space with mixed-use residentially led developments.

Key

The site

Residential

Office

Transport

Retail / commercial

Leisure

Hotel

Amenity

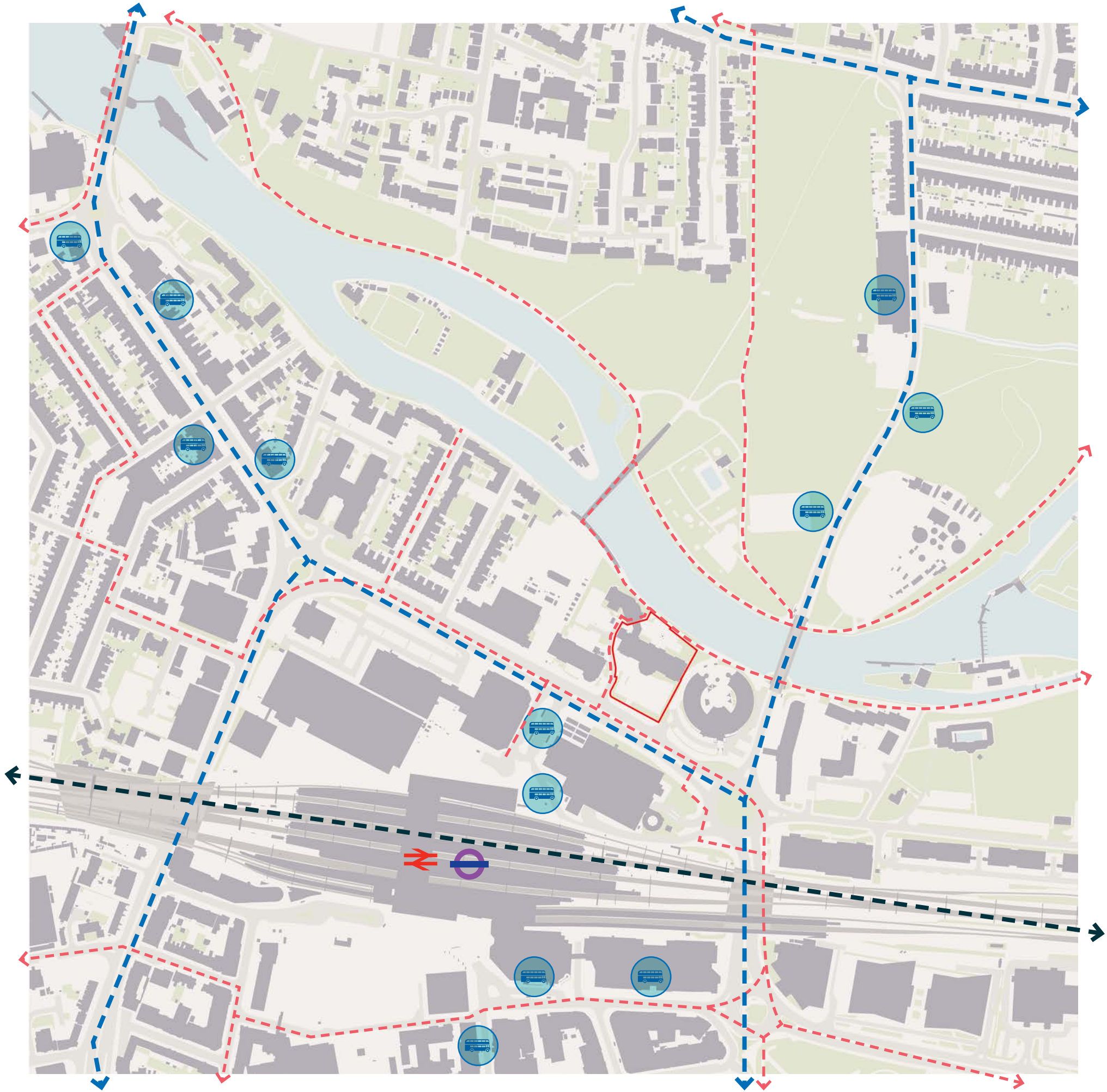
Industrial



2.14 Access and connectivity

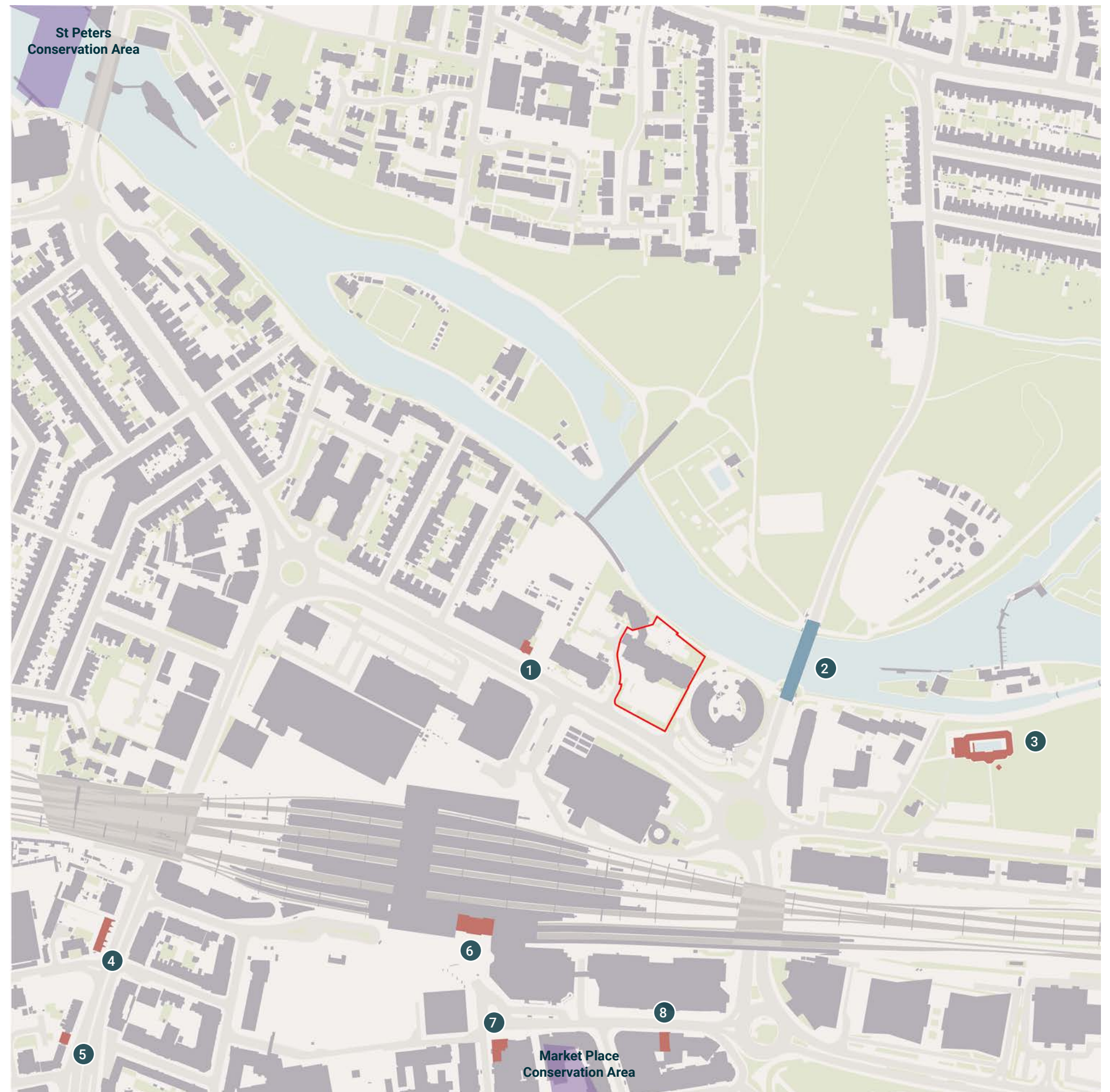
The site is well served by public transport and is within 5-10 minutes walking distance of the town centre. Reading railway station is less than 5 minutes walk and provides connections to London and to the south west of the UK. A number of bus services are located along Vastern Road. A national cycle route runs along the northern boundary of the site. Connectivity along Norman Place from Vastern Road to the river is currently poor and would benefit from significant improvement.

- Key
- Green spaces
 - Cycle route
 - Vehicle route
 - Railway line
 - Bus stop
 - Elizabeth Line
 - Train station



2.15 Conservation and heritage assets

The site is not located within a conservation area and is some distance from any listed structures. The closest listed structure is proposed for demolition as part of the consented 55 Vastern Road development. A heritage report has been prepared as part of the application and should be referred to for further details.



2.16 Conservation and heritage assets



55 Vastern Road



Reading Bridge



Thames Lido



Regent Place



29 and 31, Caversham Road



Reading General Station



Great Western House



Walter Parsons Corn Stores

2.17 Planning policy framework

The purpose of this Section is to identify the key national and local planning policy and guidance relevant to the determination of the planning application against which the proposals have been considered during design development. An analysis of the key policies and tests relating to the proposed development is included below.

2.17.1 National Planning Policy

National planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the most recent update of which was adopted in December 2023. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11), with three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. These are to be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies within the Framework.

This means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay and where the development plan is absent, silent or out of date, granting planning permission unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of development, or specific policies in the NPPF indicate otherwise.

2.17.2 The Development Plan

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that any determination under the Planning Acts should be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan for the Site comprises the Reading Local Plan, adopted November 2019.

There are also a number of supplementary guidance documents published by the Council which have been taken into account during the course of design development and the preparation of the planning application. Insofar as they may be considered relevant to this application is the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019), Design Guide to Shopfronts (2022), Employment Skills and Training SPD (2013), Planning Obligations under Section 106 SPD (2015), Affordable Housing SPD (2021), Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011) and Reading Station Area Framework (2010).

2.17.3 Emerging Policy

The Council agreed in March 2023 to undertake a partial review of its adopted Local Plan (2019), following the publication of the NPPF 2021 which superseded the 2019 development plan. The 2021 revision of the NPPF included updates in relation to local housing needs and updates to the standard methodology for calculating housing needs, pertinent to urban centres including Reading that have been retained in the latest December 2023 update.

The number of homes to be provided is the most significant question that the Partial Update must address, and the main reason that an update is required. The standard methodology introduced by the NPPF 2021 placed a 35% uplift for the authorities that cover the main parts of the 20 largest urban areas in England, including Reading, which means that the housing need is increased by 35%. The Council considers that a lower figure of between 735 and 800 homes per year is more appropriate based on an ongoing Housing Needs Assessment and review of site capacity in the Borough. This still represents a significant uplift over the figure of 689 dwellings per annum identified in the Local Plan 2019, which did not account for unmet need of 230 dwellings across the plan period.

Meeting an annual provision figure of 800 dwellings per year would mean identifying sites for an additional approximately 1,700 dwellings, either on new sites or by changes to capacity of existing identified sites. As part of the LPU, the Council is currently proposing that ‘the housing provision figure in H1 be amended to reflect available capacity to 2041, expected to be in the region of 800 homes per year for a total of around 14,400 homes, but to be refined through more detailed capacity work’.

In addition to an increase in the number of new homes required within the Borough over the plan period, the Council has recognised need to provide larger-sized accommodation. It has been found that that the policy as it stands is not delivering the size of accommodation needed and that ‘based on the needs identified in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Reading needed 3,558 new homes of three or more bedrooms between 2013 and 2023, but actually delivered 1,125, only around a third of the need, despite overall housing delivery broadly in line with identified needs’. Changes to Policy H2 seeks to increase delivery of 3+ bedrooms within the Borough, primarily outside of the town centre area in which the site is located, but it is also proposed to increase provision in this area.

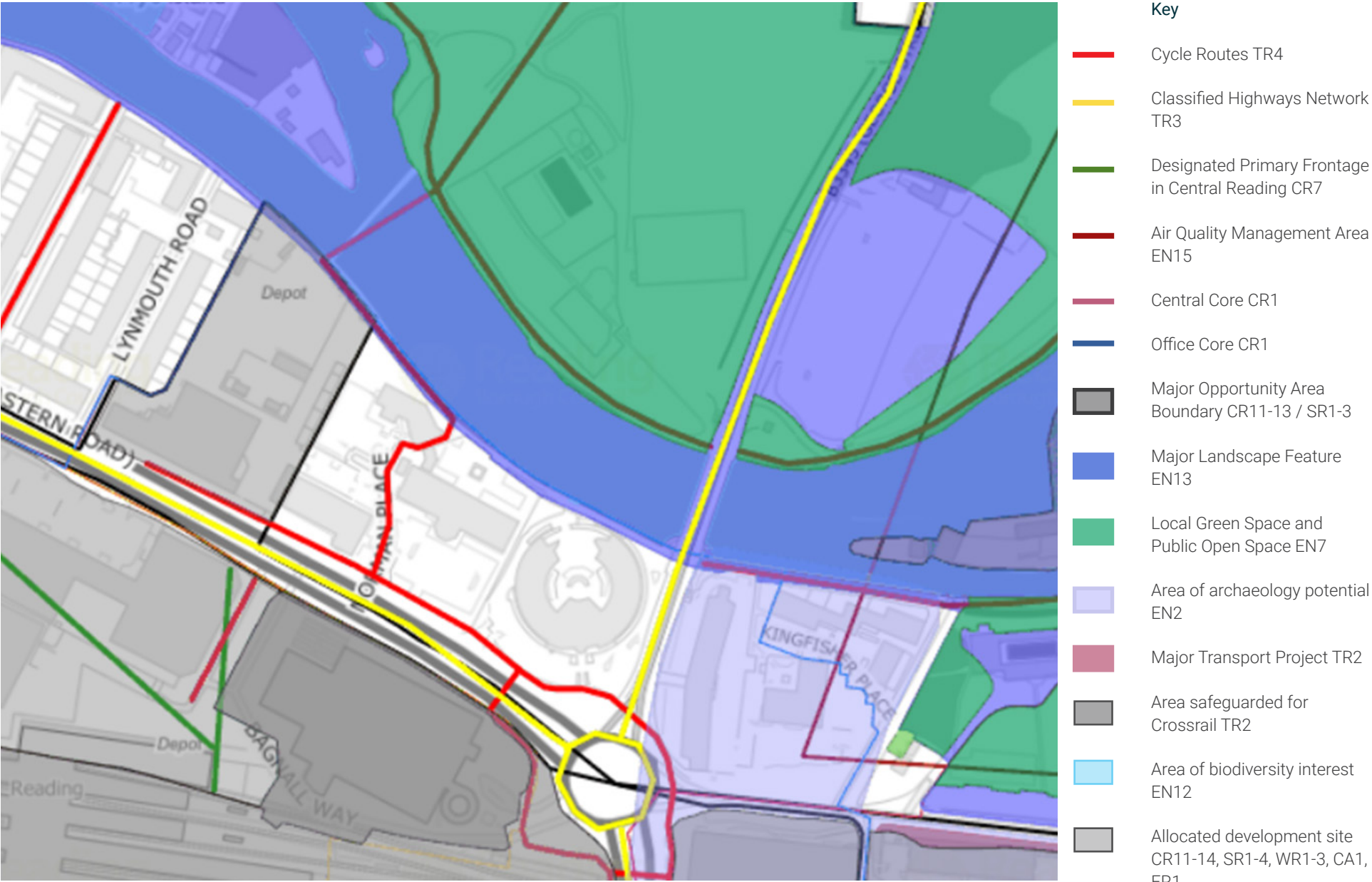
The Council’s review has also identified the need to allocate new sites for housing development and Policy CR14 considers sites that could be included within the Local Plan Update. The site subject to this planning application is featured within the Reg 18 Consultation document, ref: Cen5 for residential development with an indicative capacity of 240 dwellings.

Site Designations

The Site is subject to the following designations, as defined in the Reading Local Plan 2019:

- Within the Borough Boundary;
- Within Central Reading;
- Within the Central Core and the Office Core
- Within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).

The site is also adjacent to the River Thames, which is identified as an Area of Identified Biodiversity Interest and a Major Landscape Feature.



Reading Borough Council Policy Map

2.18 Area of change

Reading, a historic market town that is undergoing significant transformation characterized by numerous new developments and a dynamic, evolving context. Surrounding the site there are a number of recently completed developments and consented applications coming forward. The adjacent diagram illustrates these developments in relation to the site.

Key

The site

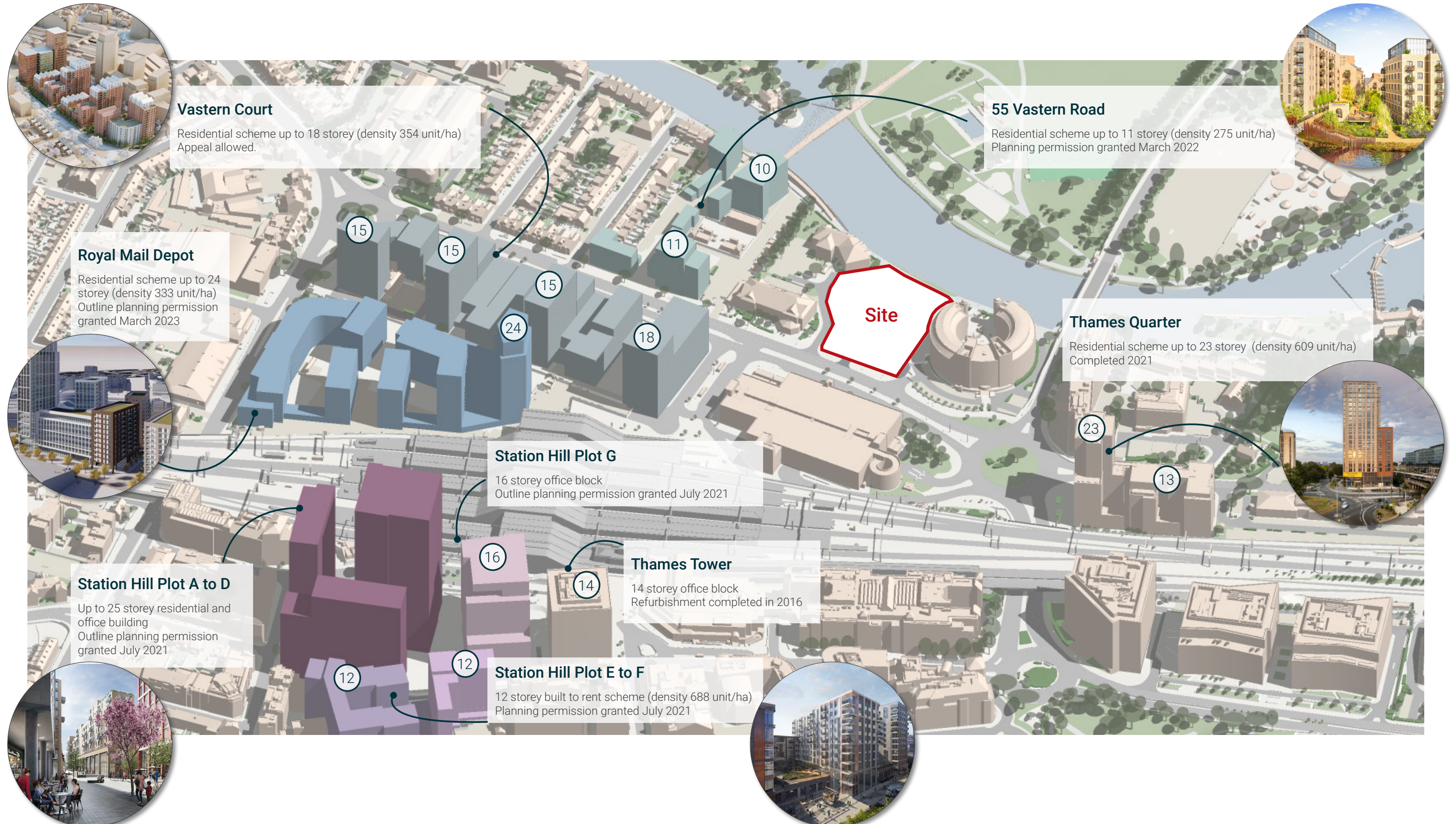
Completed or under construction since 2019

Consented proposals



2.21 Existing and emerging context

This page summarises the surrounding schemes coming forward or recently completed in close proximity to the site. These developments, both consented and completed, have informed our design.



2.21.1 Wider emerging context

The diagram below demonstrates the wider emerging context within the Town Centre of Reading.



2.22 Key views

The following viewpoints have been identified from a range of key locations from which the proposed development could be visible. These locations have been agreed with Reading Borough Council. The existing views are shown below. Please refer to the Townscape Visual Impact Assessment for the proposed views and more details.

Key

The site

Views proposed to be included within visual assessment

Illustrative material provided

View from
McIlroy Park



2.23 Key Views



View from Vastern Road



View from Vastern Road



View from Thames Path



View from Thames Path



View from Chirstchurch Bridge



View from Caversham Bridge



View from Station Road



View from Thames Path



View from Balmore Walk



View from North Street



View from Chirstchurch Meadow



View from Chirstchurch Meadow

2.24 Key Views



View from Thames Path

View from Hills Meadow

View from Chirstchurch Meadow

View from Chirstchurch Meadow

View from Chirstchurch Meadow

View from Caversham War Memorial

View from Mclloy Park

View from Forbury Gardens

View from Reading Station

Introduction

Context

3.0 Design process

Design response

Landscape proposals

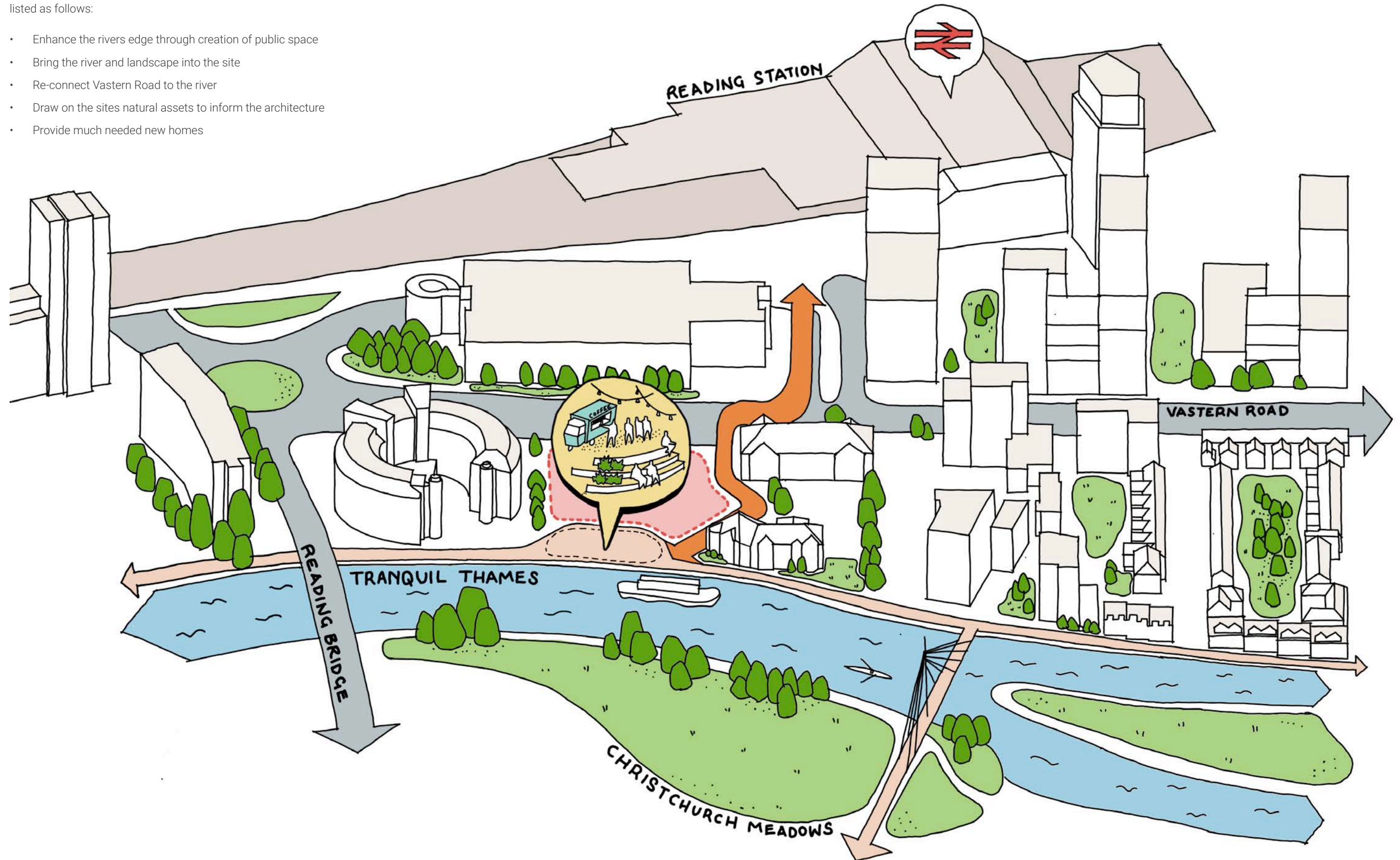
Access

Appendices

3.1 The vision

The proposals for Waterfront Square have been informed by a set of key design generators, informed by the site context, planning objectives and client aspirations. All stages of the design process have been informed by these design generators, listed as follows:

- Enhance the rivers edge through creation of public space
- Bring the river and landscape into the site
- Re-connect Vastern Road to the river
- Draw on the sites natural assets to inform the architecture
- Provide much needed new homes



3.2 Constraints and opportunities

The site presents a number of opportunities and constraints that have been considered and addressed in the design. From this analysis, a design strategy is adopted and a design response prepared.

Key

Cycle route

Thames path

Route from Reading station to River Thames

Enhanced public route through to the River

Improved Vastern Road & Normans Place frontage

Existing trees

Existing protected trees (TBC)

1

Number of storeys

Removal of existing substation

Existing substation

Close proximity to surrounding buildings

Busy road - potential for noise issues

Existing trees

Existing mature trees

1

Number of storeys

Underground culvert

Redline boundary

3.2.2 Design constraints

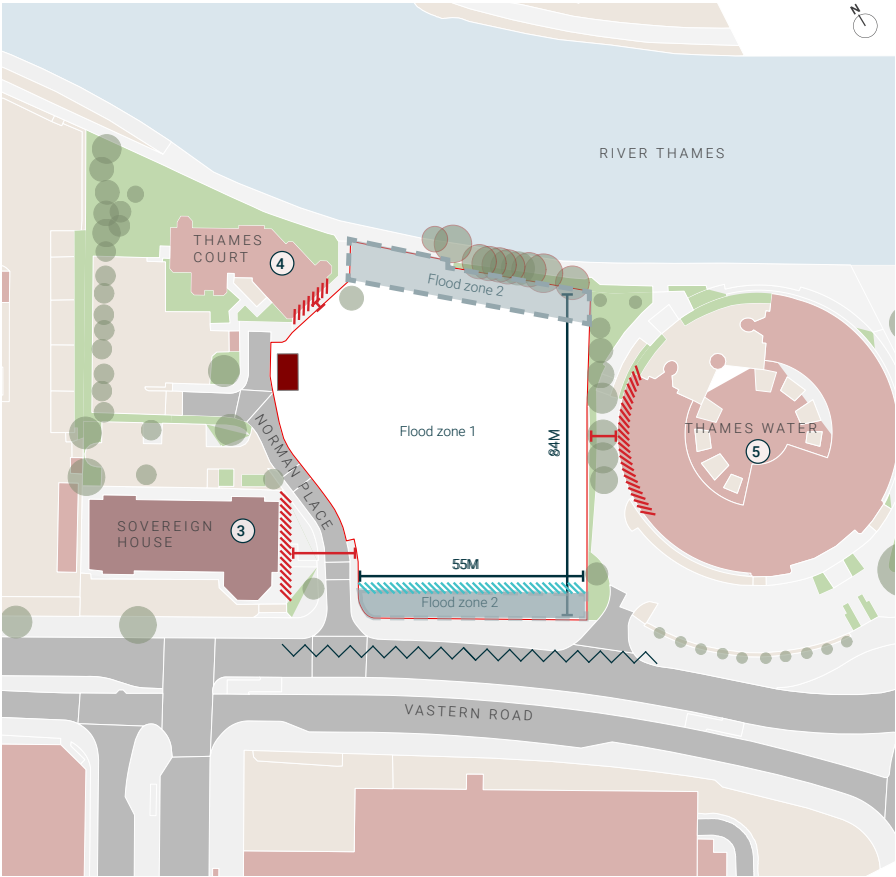
This site presents a series of constraints. The key elements are set out below:

- Proximity to neighbouring buildings with potential overlooking and daylight / sunlight considerations
- Existing substation situated along a key public route
- Some mature trees that form part of the Thames Tree Corridor (although not protected by TPO)
- Flood risk considerations (refer to flood risk technical note prepared by Stantec)
- Public right of way and highway network, which bound the site on 3 sides

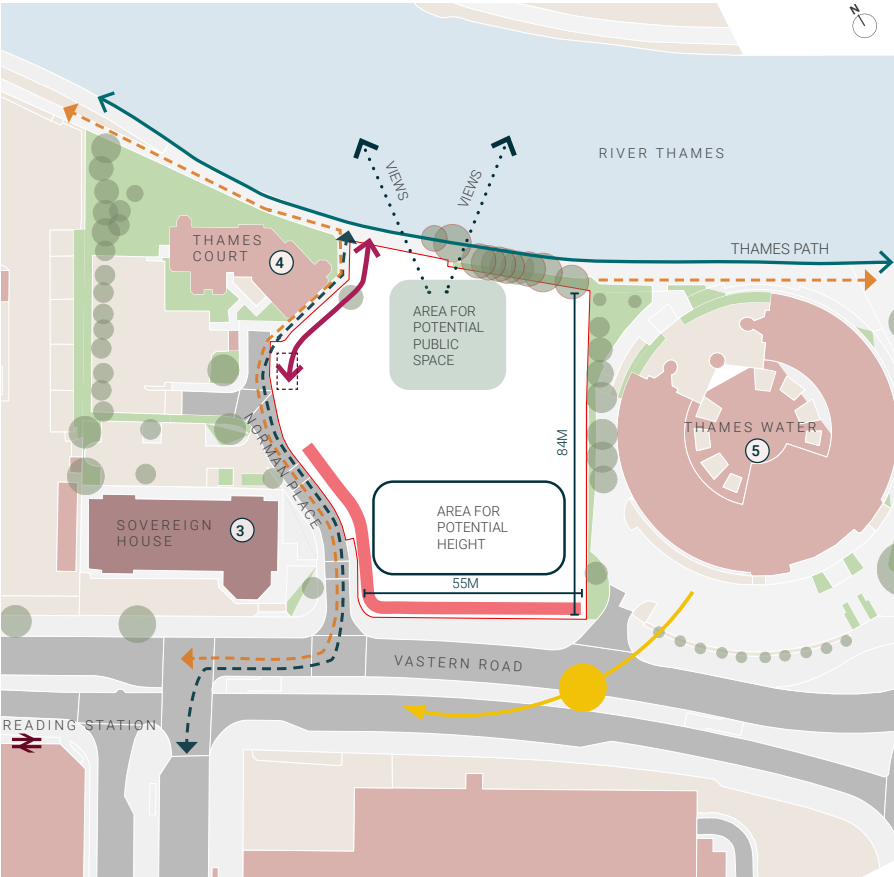
3.2.1 Design opportunities

The adjacent diagram illustrates the key design opportunities that relate to this site:

- Improved streetscape along Vastern Road via high quality buildings
- Enhanced connection to from Reading Station to the river via active frontages and improved public realm
- Potential for a new public space / public realm fronting on the river where provision is currently poor
- Maximise views to the river for both the public and residents
- Improved pedestrian and cycle route along the river
- Potential to significantly increase tree cover on site and enhance the sites biodiversity
- Opportunity to consider neighbouring sites holistically to better define mixed-use community and character of the area
- Making an effective use of a brownfield site in a sustainable location



Constraints plan



Opportunities plan

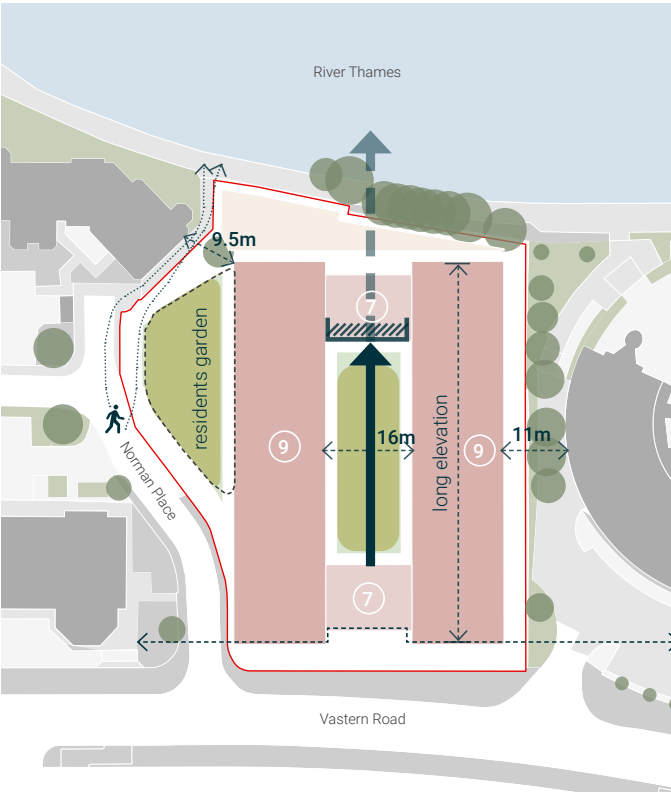
3.3 Early site arrangement studies

Several distinct site arrangement options were explored at the early stages. Each option was reviewed against the design drivers as well as the following considerations:

- Maximise public space front the river
- Create views to the river for residents
- Enhance the pedestrian and cycle route through to the river from Reading Station
- Provide high quality residential accommodation in a range of sizes, avoiding single aspect north facing homes
- Increase the sites biodiversity

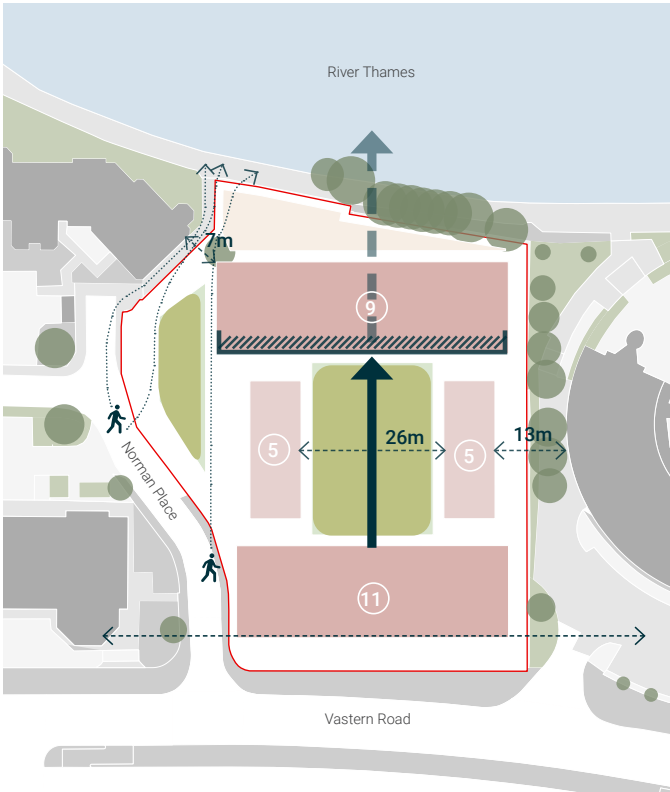
The diagrams below show the 4 main options and details the positives and negatives of each option. Of the options reviewed, a 'U' shaped courtyard block, open to the north offered the best balance of accommodation, height and open space, particularly along the rivers edge, where a meaningful public space could be created.

This arrangement of buildings provide a stronger edge along Norman Place and Vastern Road, helping to give structure to the pedestrian and cycle route to the river along Norman Place and re-engaging with the predominant building line along Vastern Road.



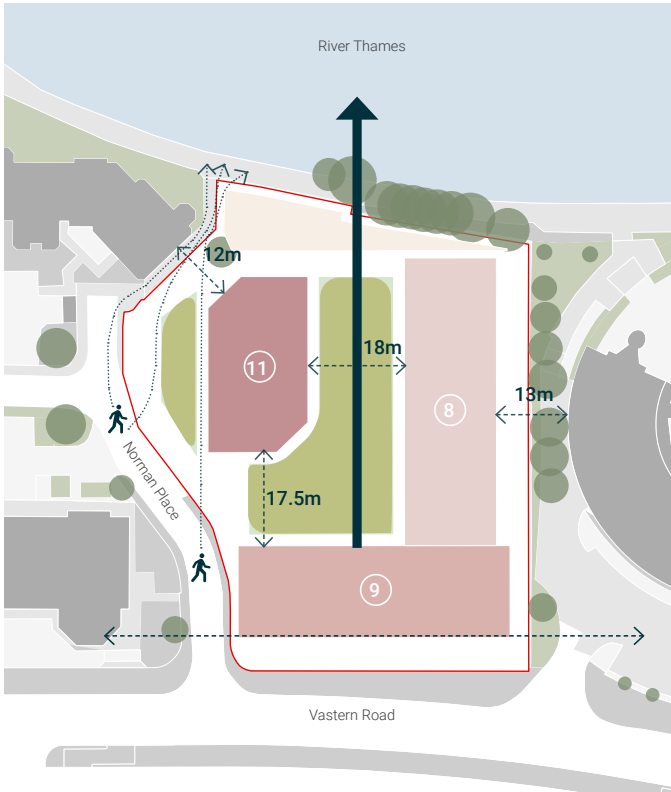
1. Courtyard typology with linear buildings fronting Norman Place and the eastern boundary.

- Positives:
- Large proportion of external amenity and public space
 - Good connectivity to the river
- Drawbacks:
- River views blocked by the northern link building
 - Frontage to Vastern Road does not align with prevailing street pattern
 - Proposal does not optimise use of the brownfield site
 - Building forms create long interrupted elevations
 - Public spaces are fragmented
 - Residents courtyard is narrow and would be overshadowed by surrounding 7-9 storey buildings



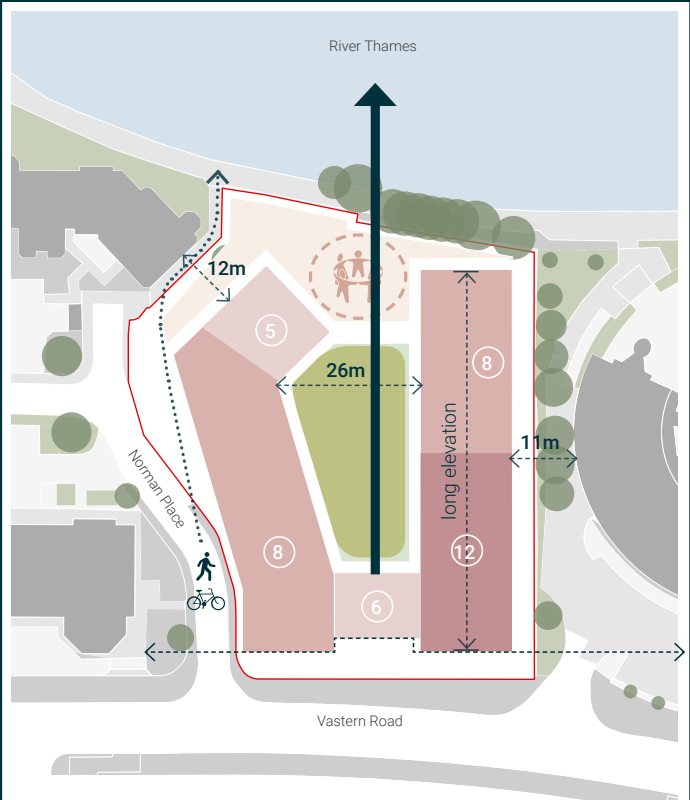
2. Courtyard typology with linear buildings fronting Vastern Rd and the river.

- Positives:
- Large proportion of external amenity and public space
 - Good connectivity to the river
- Drawbacks:
- River views blocked by the northern building
 - Frontage to Vastern Road aligns with prevailing street pattern however, the elevation is long and would need to be broken down
 - Proposal does not optimise use of the brownfield site
 - Building forms create long uninterrupted elevations
 - Public and private space is not well defined



3. Point building typology with linear buildings fronting Vastern Rd and the eastern boundary.

- Positives:
- Large proportion of external amenity and public space
 - Good connectivity to the river
 - Uninterrupted views to the river
- Drawbacks:
- Significant height is proposed adjacent to existing four storey residential building
 - Frontage to Vastern Road aligns with prevailing street pattern however, the elevation is long and would need to be broken down
 - Proposal does not optimise use of the brownfield site
 - Public and private space is not well defined



4. Courtyard typology opening out towards the river.

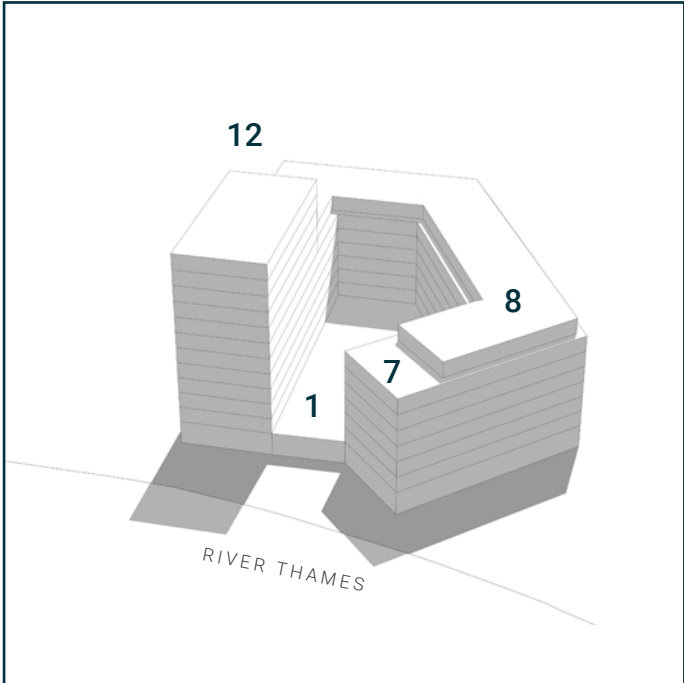
- Positives:
- Large proportion of external amenity and public space
 - Good connectivity to the river
 - Uninterrupted views to the river
 - Good enclosure to the residential courtyard
- Drawbacks:
- Frontage and height to Vastern Road does not align with prevailing street pattern
 - Building forms create long and uninterrupted elevations that would need breaks to create a series of distinct buildings

3.4 Early massing options

Following selection of a broad site arrangement, several massing options were explored. In all options a general datum on between 6-8 storeys was selected to create a mid-rise development that ties in to the heights of the neighbouring buildings. This was complimented by 1 taller element, providing a focal point.

The diagrams below show the different configurations tested. Option 4 offered the most contextual approach with the tallest point at the south west corner and heights stepping down towards the river. When viewed from Christchurch Meadows this configuration of heights has the effect of mediating the heights along the rivers edge with the taller buildings emerging to the south of Vastern Road and towards the centre of Reading.

Stepping heights down towards the river also has the benefit of minimising overshadowing of the new public space created along the rivers edge.

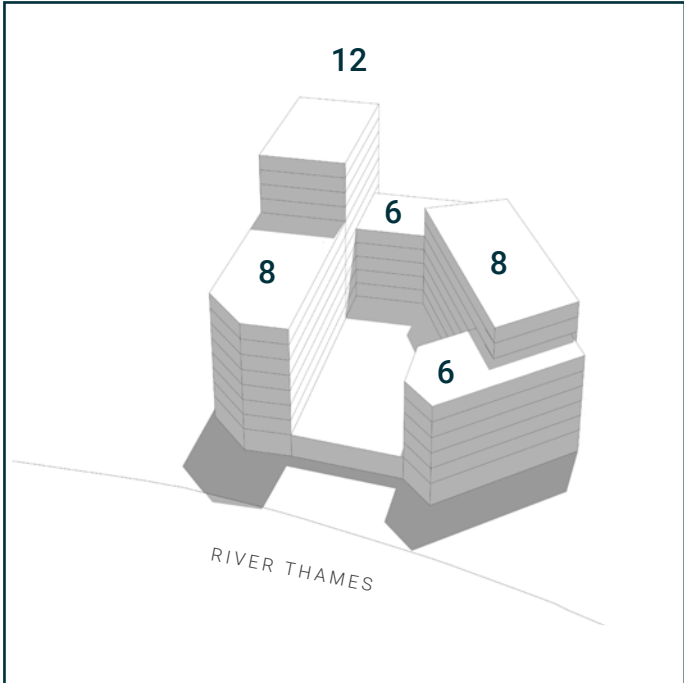


Massing 01

Mid-rise residential buildings of 7 storeys with an eighth storey setback frame a central courtyard. The taller element is positioned on the river to assist with way finding from Reading Station to the river.

- Positives:
- Good sense of enclosure
 - Top floor is set back to reduce impact of height

- Drawbacks:
- Tall building is not positioned to address wayfinding from the station
 - Significant height onto the river and adjacent to four storey residential building
 - Massing is long and relentless with no breaks in the building form

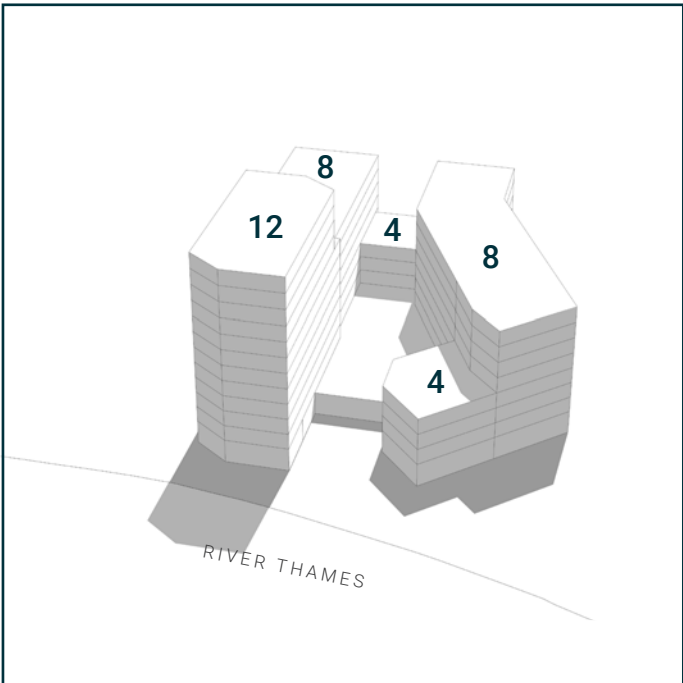


Massing 02

Mid-rise residential buildings of 6-8 storeys frame a central courtyard. The eastern building steps from 8 to 12 storeys onto Vastern Road creating a taller element to assist with way finding.

- Positives:
- Good sense of enclosure
 - Height steps down to the 4 storey residential building on the west
 - Building forms are broken to the east and west

- Drawbacks:
- Tall building is not positioned to address wayfinding from the station
 - Massing could benefit for more significant variation in heights to create variety
 - Massing does not step down towards the river on the east

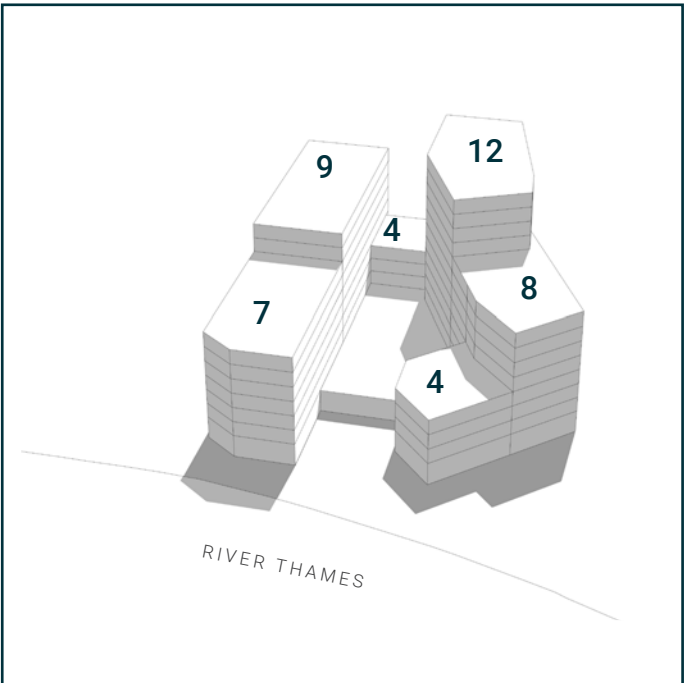


Massing 03

Mid-rise residential buildings of 8 storeys frame the central courtyard with the tallest point stepping up to 12 storeys onto the river to help with way-finding from Reading Station to the river. The north western element steps down to 4 storeys along the river. The central southern element steps down to four storeys to encourage light into the courtyard.

- Positives:
- Good sense of enclosure
 - Building height steps down to 4 storeys adjacent to the existing 4 storey residential

- Drawbacks:
- Tall building is not positioned to address wayfinding from the station
 - Significant height onto the river and adjacent to four storey residential building
 - Massing is long and relentless with no breaks in the building form
 - Height steps up towards the river on the west which is counterintuitive to the surrounding townscape



Massing 04

A variety of mid-rise residential buildings of between 7-9 storeys frame the central courtyard with the tallest point stepping up to 12 storeys onto Vastern Road help with way-finding from Reading Station to the river. Height steps down to the river and to the 4 storey residential building to the west. The central southern element steps down to four storeys to encourage light into the courtyard.

- Positives:
- Good sense of enclosure
 - Building height steps down to 4 storeys adjacent to the existing 4 storey residential
 - Tallest point on the corner of Vastern Road and Norman Place provides legibility
 - Breaks in the massing to the south encourage daylight into the courtyard

- Drawbacks:
- Massing to the east and west creates long elevations and would need to be broken into building elements
 - Massing would benefit from stepping down to the river to the east

3.5 Consultation process

The proposals have been presented to a range of stakeholders throughout the design process, including officers and councillors at Reading Borough Council, Design South East and the local community.

A summary of the consultation activities is set out in the time line below.

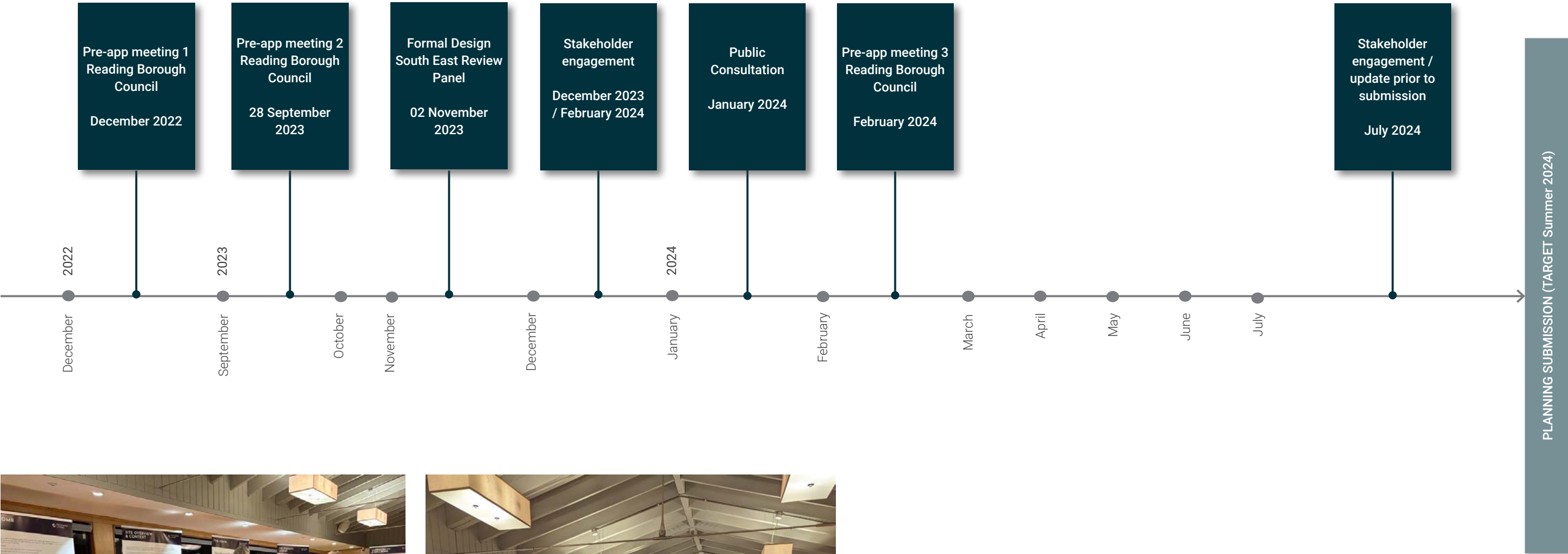
This design development and consultation section identifies the key areas in which the consultation process has informed the design and demonstrates the key changes that have led to the final proposals.

The principle aim of consultation was to provide the opportunity for all stakeholders to review and comment on the proposals to help inform the designs. This was carried out in a variety of ways including:

- Three pre-application meetings focusing on key topics which included: design, transport, microclimate, sustainability and energy strategy, amongst others
- A design review with Design South East Review Panel
- Meetings with local stakeholders including local residents and local councillors

3.5.1 Pre-application 1 (December 2022)

At the very early stage of the project advice was sought from officers about the principal of changing the sites existing office use to residential to allow for a comprehensive redevelopment of the site. The principal was accepted and design development commenced.



Public consultation

3.5.2 Pre-application 2 (28/09/2023)

The first design focussed pre-application meeting was held in September 2023. The scheme presented comprised a courtyard building typology, set around a shared residents' podium garden with a public space positioned on the riverside at the heart of the proposal. A mid-rise cluster of linked blocks was proposed ranging in height between 4 - 12 storeys, stepping down to the river. Blocks were orientated north-south, generally following the site boundary, with a lower link block connecting the two main legs along Vastern Road.

Use & amount

- circa **270** homes
- Of which there are approximately:
- 55% 1 beds
 - 39% 2 beds
 - 6% 3 beds
 - **30** Car parking spaces



3.5.3 Pre-application meeting 2 feedback

The following pages set out the comments received from officers and detail how the design developed to respond to those comments:

Comment

Use:

1

Change of use on the site was supported



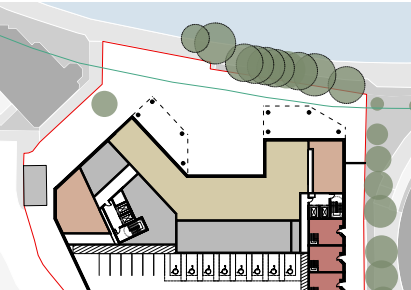
Response

Design of proposed uses progressed.

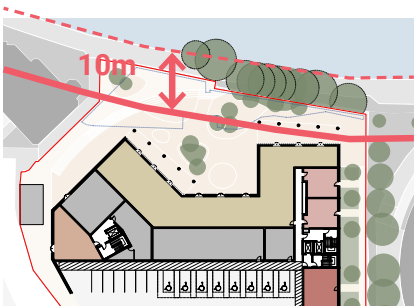


2

Public space was considered a welcome addition subject to the 10m requirement being met



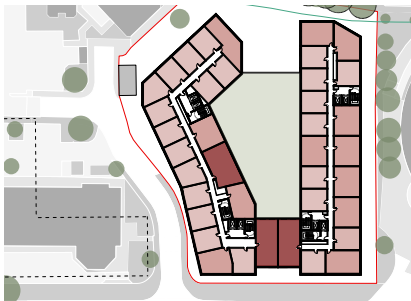
Proposed building footprint is beyond the 10m river setback zone.



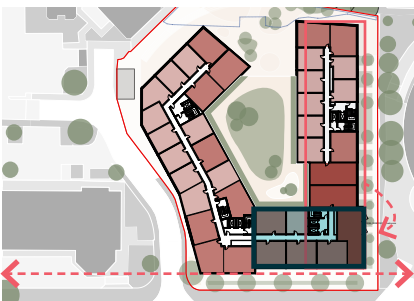
Layout:

3

Consider the existing street patterns, grid layout and linear character of the surrounding area

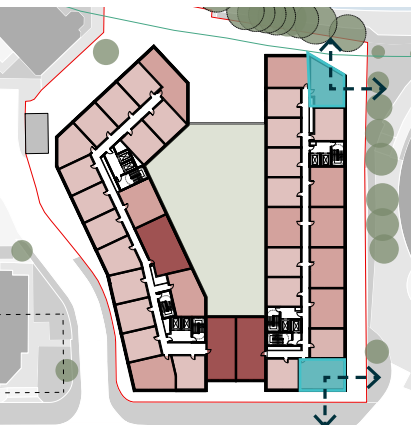


Proposals have evolved to follow the more linear street pattern. Further analysis has been undertaken of the surrounding street patterns and urban grain (refer to page 30).



4

Proposals should be considerate of potential adjacent development



Proposals have been developed to increase dual aspect to the west, improving from the pre-application scheme of 25% to 60% along the western boundary. Link blocks with dual aspect homes were introduced.

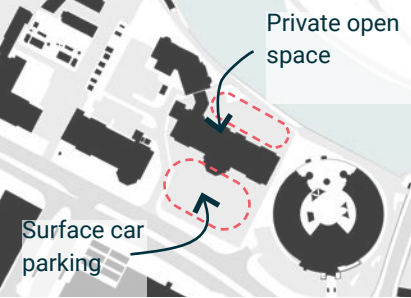


Comment

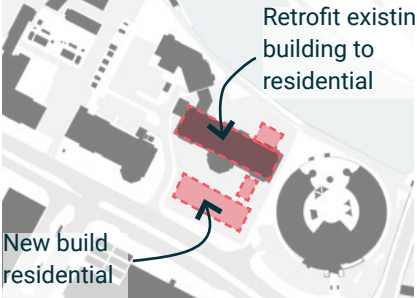
Layout:

Response

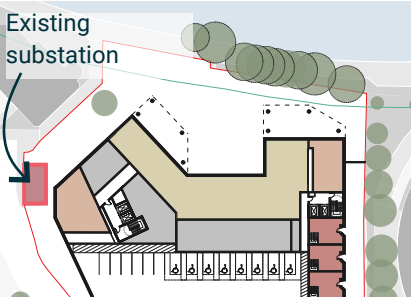
5 Explore the existing building footprint as a starting point and consider the potential for an east-west riverside building



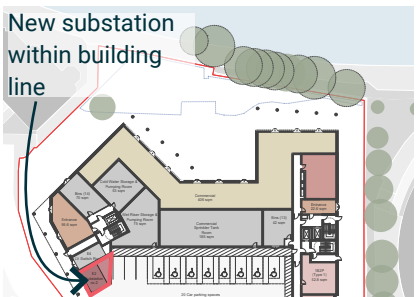
The existing building is set-back from Vastern Road to allow for surface parking and provides poor frontage. The position of the building blocks both physical and visual connections to the river. A study for converting the existing building into residential demonstrates a significant number of north facing single aspect apartments (32% of a typical floor plate). The new build element to Vastern Road would need to be circa 16 storeys to provide 250 homes. The existing building would block views from the new building to the river.



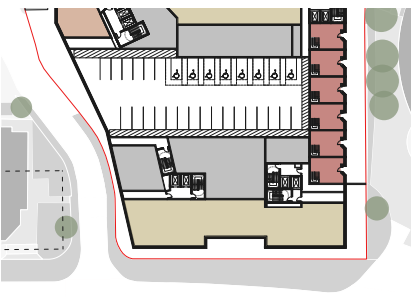
6 Strongly advised that the team explore relocating the substation



The existing substation has been relocated within the proposed building.



7 Greater emphasis should be given to landscape / greening proposals for Vastern Road

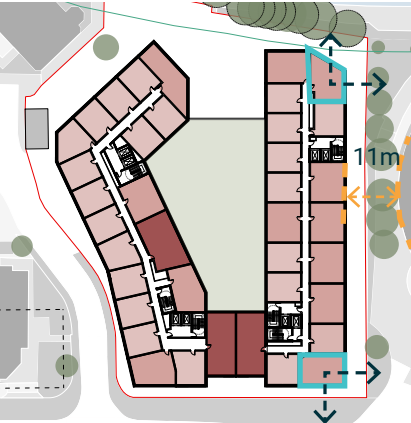


Landscape proposals to Vastern Road developed to provide significant greening and a considered approach to the change in level as part of the landscape design.

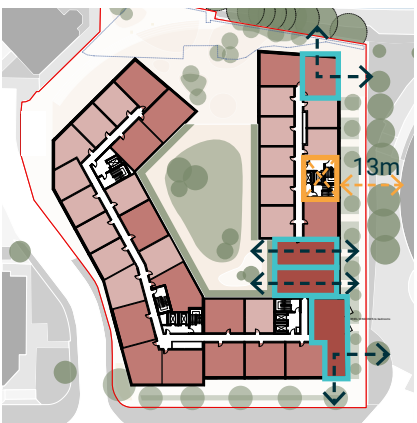


Apartment quality & mix:

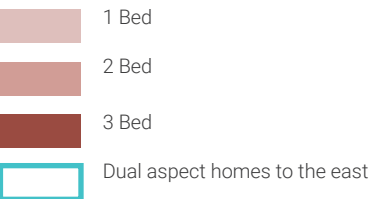
8 Consider proximity, outlook and amenity for dwellings positioned along the eastern boundary



More than half of the apartments to the east are dual aspect and a stair core is positioned at the narrowest point. A private landscaped mews street is provided at ground floor.



9 Proposed mix exceeds Policy CR6(i) of maximum 40% 1-bed/studios (subject to viability)



Mix of 1-bed homes has been reduced from 55% to 46% with this further mitigated through increased, policy-exceeding, provision of 3 bed units.

