

Assael

D&AS

Waterfront Square / Reading  
Design & Access Statement

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## **1.0 Introduction**

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1.1 The purpose of this document

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Assael Architecture for Packaged Living and Bridges in support of their planning application for a residential-led mixed-use development (hereafter ‘the site’).

The report demonstrates how the proposed development’s context has informed the design, it identifies consultation undertaken throughout the design process and how it has informed the proposals. The document goes on to outline the design and access principles and concepts of which the development proposal is based and how these are reflected in the individual aspects of the scheme.

The proposals presented within the document are as a result of detailed consultations with Reading Borough Council and other key stakeholders.

1.2 The opportunity

The site presents an exciting opportunity to transform a vacant office building into a vibrant mixed use development with a new public space at the heart. The proposal is for extensive public realm enhancements, new commercial and amenity space to meet local demand, and good quality homes for rental.

The vision for Waterfront Square is to:

- Provide circa. 250 much-needed new homes
- Enhance the rivers edge through creation of public space
- Bring the river and landscape into the site
- Re-connect Vastern Road to the river
- Provide a variety of commercial and amenity spaces at ground

1.3 Description of development

Demolition of the former Covea Insurance building and construction of residential-led development, access from Norman Place and associated car parking, infrastructure and landscaping.

1.4 Executive summary

The Proposed Development seeks to deliver 254 studio, one, two and three bedroom residential dwellings (Use Class C3), together with 278m2 (GEA) of flexible Class E floorspace at ground floor level. A series of internal and external amenity spaces feature within the layout. New pedestrian accesses are proposed from Vastern Road and Norman Place and a vehicular access to a ground floor undercroft car parking area is proposed from Norman Place. Substantial public realm surrounds the development, providing significant visual improvement to Vastern Road, Norman Place and the River Thames frontage.

In summary

Site area

0.54 hectares

Residential

254 homes in total, comprising:

|           |               |
|-----------|---------------|
| 18 (7%)   | studio        |
| 105 (41%) | one-bedroom   |
| 116 (46%) | two-bedroom   |
| 15 (6%)   | three-bedroom |

Height

Buildings ranging from 1 storey up to 11 storeys.

Parking

18 within undercroft  
(3 accessible bays, 2 car club bays & 100% EV charging )  
136 cycle spaces

Residential floor space (use class C3 dwelling houses)

14,282 sq m NIA (153,734 sqft)  
21,549 sq m GIA (231,955 sqft)

Residents amenity space

508 sq m (5,472 sqft) residents internal amenity GIA  
1,145 sq m (12,324.7 sqft) residents external amenity

Commercial space

257 sq m GIA (2,768 sqft)

1.5 The professional team

Client

Packaged Living

Funder

Bridges

Architect

Assael Architecture

Planning consultant

Opus Works

Heritage & townscape consultant

Lichfields

Transport consultant & flood risk assesment

Stantec

Cost consultant

Arcadis

MEP, M&E VT, fire, and accoustic consultant

Hoare Lea

Daylight consultant

GIA

Landscape architect

Assael Exteriors

Civil and structure consultant

Hexa Consulting

Sustainability consultant

Element

Ecology consultant

TEP Ecology

Archeology consultant

Oxford Archaeology

Air quality consultant

Hydrock

Building control consultant

Sweco



1.6 Packaged Living

Packaged Living is a vertically integrated business, established for the direct investment and development of purpose designed, best in class, Build to Rent assets across the UK residential market. Packaged Living draws upon its experience in the evolving institutional market place to ensure that schemes are designed with long-term use, tenant experience and management efficiencies in mind. It works across the residential property life cycle, acquiring land, gaining planning consent, building out and ultimately managing homes within the Build to Rent (BTR) sector.

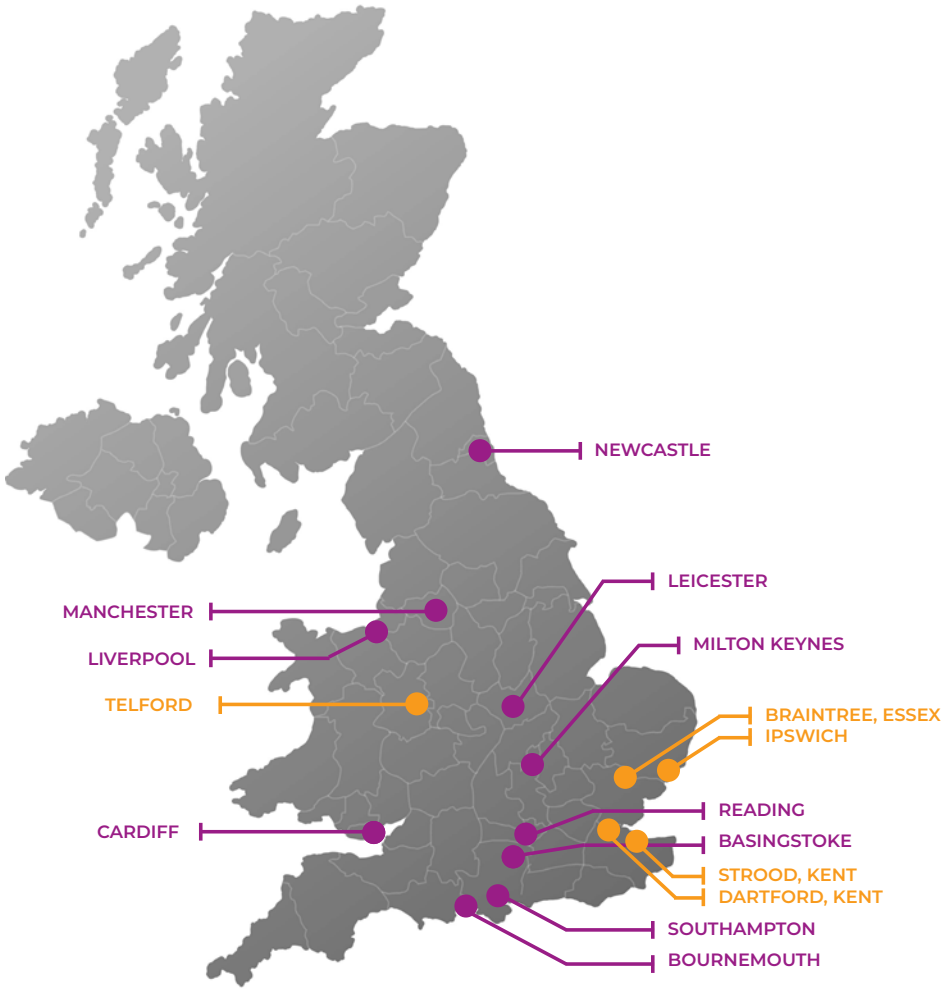
Since inception in 2018, Packaged Living has secured a number of development sites across the UK, providing a pipeline of over 5,000 Build to Rent homes, both in the multi-family and single family housing sectors. Additionally, Packaged Living act as development manager and build to rent advisor for a small number of public and private institutions.

Packaged Living has a significant track record of delivery through its experienced management team, who have between them invested in and developed over 1bn of UK BTR assets and have over 50 years in the wider UK residential sector.

Packaged Living is focused on creating good quality rental homes which foster a sense of community, working with local people and organisations to deliver wider regeneration benefits from development opportunities.

PACKAGED LIVING PORTFOLIO

MULTI-FAMILY | SINGLE-FAMILY



The Almere, Milton Keynes - 294 BTR Homes, completed on site and operational since 2022



The Castings, Manchester - 352 BTR Homes, currently on site



Maritime Gateway, Southampton - 603 BTR Homes, Planning Approved



The Laureate, Bournemouth - 245 BTR Homes, Planning Approved

### 1.7 Build to Rent: Packaged Living's approach

The design and operation of Packaged Living's build to rent developments can be structured into four clearly defined zones. 'Front of House' is the main front door to the development which all residents pass through, creating a sense of community. A concierge desk with customer service and resident engagement team are on site to provide residents with 24/7 support.

Residents have access to a number of shared internal and external amenity spaces, such as lounge areas, co-working space and games rooms. The principle of Packaged Living's developments is that residents should feel as if they are renting the whole building, not just their apartment. Packaged Living support local businesses through flexible leisure/commercial offerings at ground floor, as well as inviting local businesses into the building to enhance the amenity offering for residents, such as cookery classes, well-being sessions and pop-up coffee carts.

Resident's private apartments are efficiently designed with open plan layouts, maximised glazing and equal size double bedrooms, typically with their own bathroom.

The Back of House zone is key to ensuring maximised operational efficiency and ensuring servicing takes place away from the public realm in a dedicated zone. The Back of House areas provide refuse and recycling stores, dedicated unloading areas for residents moving in and secure cycle parking for residents.

#### Zone 1 - Front of House

- Publicly accessible and visible from street level
- Linked to high-quality public realm
- Entrance foyer with concierge desk
- Access to cores and residential amenity zones
- Access to loading and Back of House areas

#### Zone 2 - Residents' shared areas

- Accessible for residents only
- A variety of internal and external shared amenity spaces, including courtyard gardens, to encourage a sense of community
- Suitable for local pop-up events e.g. wine tasting, quiz night, yoga classes

#### Zone 3 - Residents' private areas - apartments

- Designed to maximise key views
- Designed to maximise dual aspect and mitigate single aspect homes

#### Zone 4 - Back of House

- Clearly separated from public-facing area, and easily accessible from concierge for deliveries
- Routes designed specifically for ease of servicing
- Easy access to all homes
- Dedicated management service for the entire development



## 1.8 Bridges Fund Management

### A pioneer and a global leader in sustainable and impact investment

- Specialist private markets investor founded in 2002, particularly focused on impact investment and sustainability
- Real Estate investments focus on three core impact themes of: Healthier Lives, Stronger Communities, and Sustainable Planet across 70 investments to date
- Since 2010 and across 6 funds, Bridges Property Alternative Funds has undertaken 19 lower cost & affordable housing projects across sub-sectors including Build to Rent, Student Living, and Co-Living
- To date, over £885m of equity has been committed across the real estate funds
- Bridges has set up two proprietary operating businesses providing pioneering solutions in response to demographic shifts and societal needs: Birchgrove & Renaiss Health
- Strong track record of delivering attractive financial returns alongside positive social and environmental impact within needs-driven sectors
- Bridges Property Alternatives Funds V & VI are both designated as Article 9 funds under SFDR disclosure
- A global thought-leader in impact measurement and management, most recently via our work facilitating the Impact Management Project



We achieve our four impact goals by focusing on needs-driven sectors to deliver future-proofed, institutional-quality assets



Sustainable  
Planet



Healthier  
Lives



Stronger  
Communities



Future  
Skills



### Latitude, Leeds

- > Lower cost and affordable housing development in Leeds
- > Acquisition of a derelict brownfield site forming part of a larger redevelopment masterplan. 7<sup>th</sup> transaction with trusted and experienced JV partner, HUB
- > Planning achieved for 900+ residential units near city centre, equivalent to 30% of Leeds City Council's annual new housing target
- > Scheme successfully pre-sold to a major Canadian investor with PC forecast in Q1-24 for Phase 1 and 2025 for Phase 2



### Taberner House, Croydon, London

- > Lower cost and affordable housing development in Croydon
- > Acquisition in a JV with HUB group of a vacant brownfield development site in Croydon
- > Planning permission was granted in 2019 for 513 residential units, with a 51% allocation to affordable and intermediate housing (a higher percentage than the previous existing consent)
- > Has formed a major component of Croydon's town centre regeneration
- > Scheme successfully pre-sold



### Abbey Wood, Woolwich, London

- > Lower cost and affordable housing development in south east London
- > Acquisition in a JV with HUB group for a site within 100 metres of the new Elizabeth Line.
- > 245 highly energy efficient mixed-tenure homes were delivered across two buildings, linked by a shared residents' garden
- > The site formed part of a large regeneration masterplan that transformed redundant land into needs driven private and affordable housing. Abbey Place has become a central part of this emerging neighbourhood with excellent connections from Abbey Wood station



### York Street, Belfast

- > Student scheme located in proximity to Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast
- > Acquisition alongside JV partner, Rok Property, of a site with consent for 307 student studio bedrooms
- > Located in an area undergoing significant redevelopment including the £350m development of the new Ulster University Campus. Belfast is an established university city home to 38,472 full-time students of which 14% are international
- > Construction underway with PC forecast in Jul-2024



### 1.9 Assael Architecture

Assael Architecture is an award-winning practice providing urban design, architectural, landscape design and interior design services to a range of developers, investors, institutions and local authorities in the UK and overseas. Based in design studios in London, we work across a variety of sectors including residential, hotel, leisure, mixed-use and masterplanning.

Our approach brings together innovation and creative design, informed by research, thorough site analysis and years of experience. We're committed to providing a high quality professional service that suits our clients' individual requirements and project timescales.

We are well respected for our responsive and flexible approach to design particularly in difficult or challenging circumstances, and our expertise is most often called upon to realise the full potential and value of complicated sites, often in sensitive locations. We have therefore amassed many years of experience in the design and implementation of successful new-build mixed-use developments on tight urban brownfield sites, often involving the refurbishment of listed or historic buildings.

We regularly win awards for our projects, treatment of staff and business success. We were named Architect of the Year at The Sunday Times British Homes Awards in 2016 and 2014, and our work in Build to Rent has recently been rewarded; we won the Housing Project Award at the 2015 British Homes Awards and a Housing Design Award in 2016, both for Creekside Wharf, plus another Housing Design Award for 19-27 Young Street in 2014. We've also won the AJ100 Employer of the Year in 2017, Building Magazine's Good Employer Guide for two years in a row, the AJ's Business Pioneer of the Year in 2014 and have consistently been on The Sunday Times Best Small 100 Companies to Work For list. This recognition by our peers is important to us, and drives our continual improvement.



1.10 Assael experience

Kings Point, Reading

Location Reading, UK  
Client CNM Estates  
Date 2013 - 2019

Located in Reading  
Waterside Experience

The 17-storey tower at King’s Point contributes to Reading’s Tall Building Strategy, part of the Central Area Action Plan Eastern Quarter, and aims to guide future development of the town centre.

The scheme provides 103 new homes which benefit from cascading roof garden and ground floor commercial space along the canal and new public realm. The outwards-facing development responds to and connects with the surrounding parks, waterways and amenity space around King’s Road.

Assael successfully gained planning consent in 2015 and undertook a monitoring role throughout the construction of the development, completed in 2019.



Kings Point, Reading

Pier Road, Woolwich

Location London, UK  
Client Populo Living  
Date 2021 - ongoing

Build to Rent  
Waterside Experience

The vision is to redevelop the vacant brownfield site into a new residential development designed specifically for rent, contributing to The Royal Docks and Beckton Riverside Opportunity Area.

Located adjacent to the Grade II listed Woolwich pedestrian foot tunnel and Woolwich ferry terminal, the 348 high-quality new homes include a variety of apartments for Build to Rent, intermediate rent and social rent, accommodated across five buildings with views across the River. The proposals also include residents’ amenity spaces, landscaped courtyards, a new café, and 770 sq m of makerspace units at ground floor to activate the improved public realm.



Pier Road, Woolwich

Vulcan Wharf, Newham

Location London, UK  
Client London Square & Peabody  
Date 2019 - ongoing

Waterside Experience

Set within the wider Puddling Mill masterplan, the proposals co-locate 457 new homes with industrial space, all set within an enhanced public realm.

Assael has been collaborating with Metropolitan Workshop to develop two sites in the emerging Puddling Mill neighbourhood as one cohesive scheme. Together, the six buildings provide 457 new homes at the confluence of the River Lea and Bow Back River, which forms the eastern gateway into the Puddling Mill neighbourhood.

The vision is to provide an exemplar ‘co-location’ scheme, demonstrating how high-quality homes can sit seamlessly alongside modern industrial uses.



Vulcan Wharf, Newham

**Introduction**

**2.0 Context**

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## 2.1 Introduction

This section reviews the existing character of the site and the surrounding area. A comprehensive appreciation of the overall site is the starting point for designing a cohesive and successful place.

## 2.2 The site

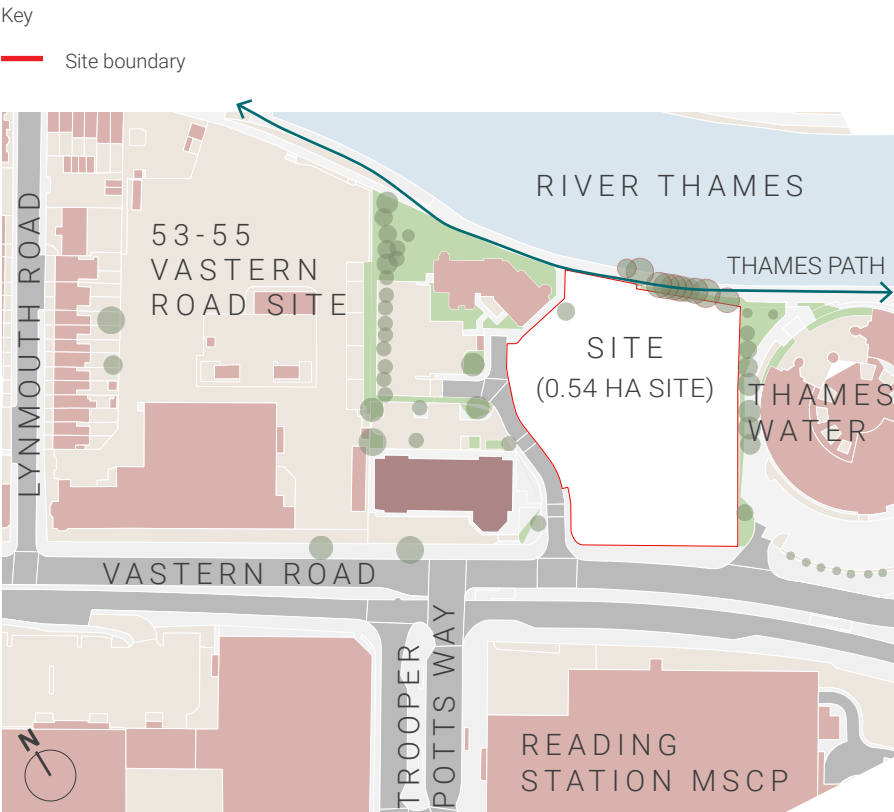
The site is located to the north of Reading town centre. It is bounded by Vastern Road to the south and the River Thames to the north. Norman place runs along the western boundary and Clearwater Court is located along the eastern boundary.

Reading train station is located 650m to the south of the site. Neighbouring buildings and a public right of way along Norman place connects pedestrians and cyclists with the River Thames Towpath, Christchurch Bridge and Christchurch Meadows beyond.

Neighbouring buildings range in height between 4-7 storeys.

### 2.2.1 Existing site description

The existing site is occupied by a large surface level car park fronting Vastern Road with a 4 storey unused office building towards the north of the site. The site is largely flat but is slightly elevated from both Vastern Road and the River Thames Towpath so that it sits outside of the flood zone. A covered culvert runs along the southern edge of the site. Vehicle access is via Norman Place



Map highlighting the site location



Site location plan



2.4 Existing site photography



View of the site from Vastern Road looking north-east



View of the site from Vastern Road looking west



View of the site from Vastern Road looking north-east



View looking north



View looking east



View looking west



Key



View from River Thames



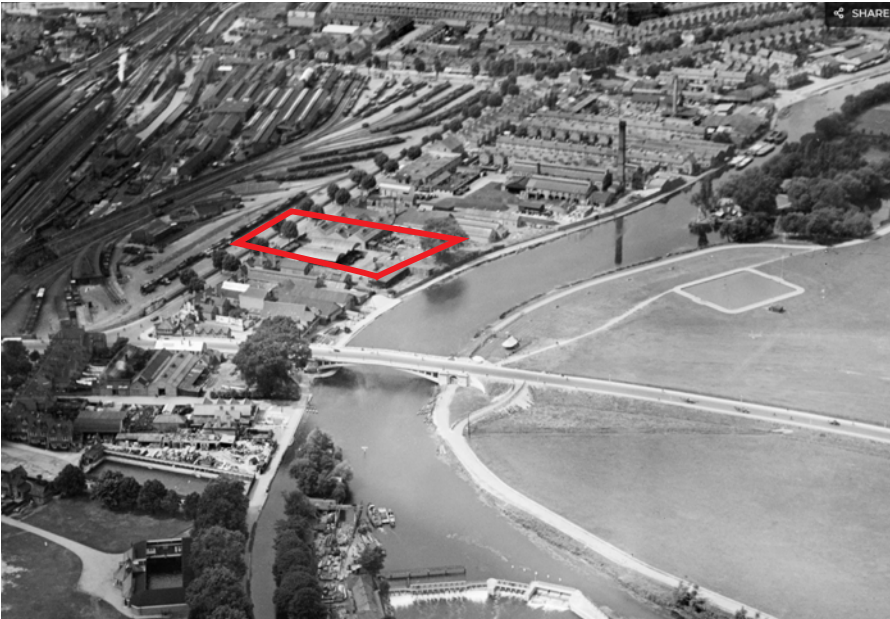
View from Christchurch bridge

2.5 Site history

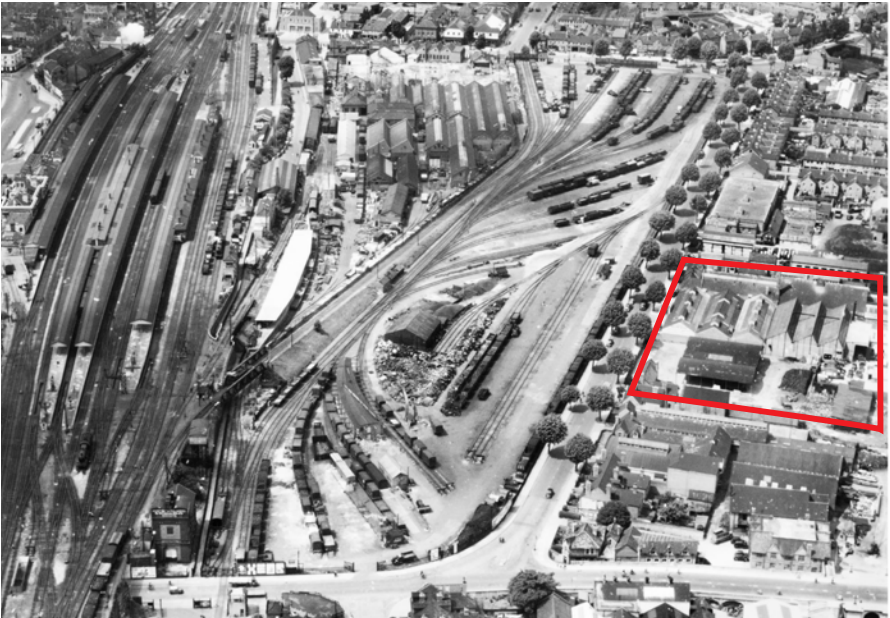
The site is located on the southern bank of the Thames and was originally used for farmland. From 1900 the site was cleared and developed for industrial uses such as Thamesbank Iron Works. The Iron Works remained until 1935 when Paint Works and a Timber yard occupied the site. In 1998 the existing office building was completed and currently occupies the site along with surface car parking.

Key

Site boundary



Historic photo from 1958



Historic photo from 1958



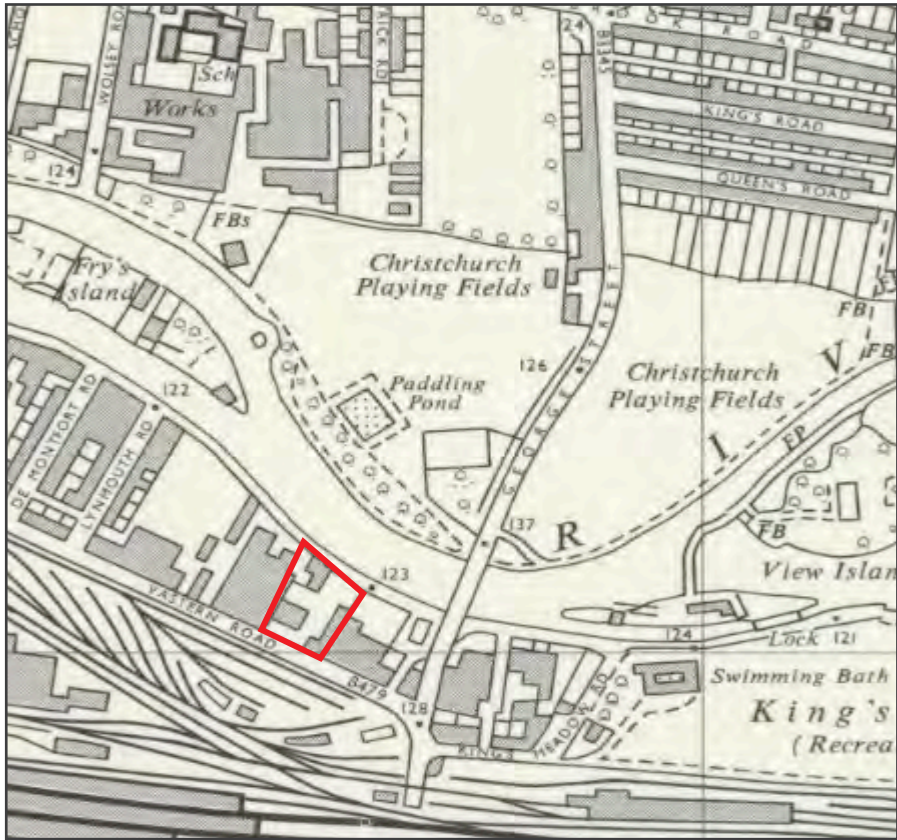
Historic map from 1882



Historic map from 1914



Historic map from 1935



Historic map from 1962

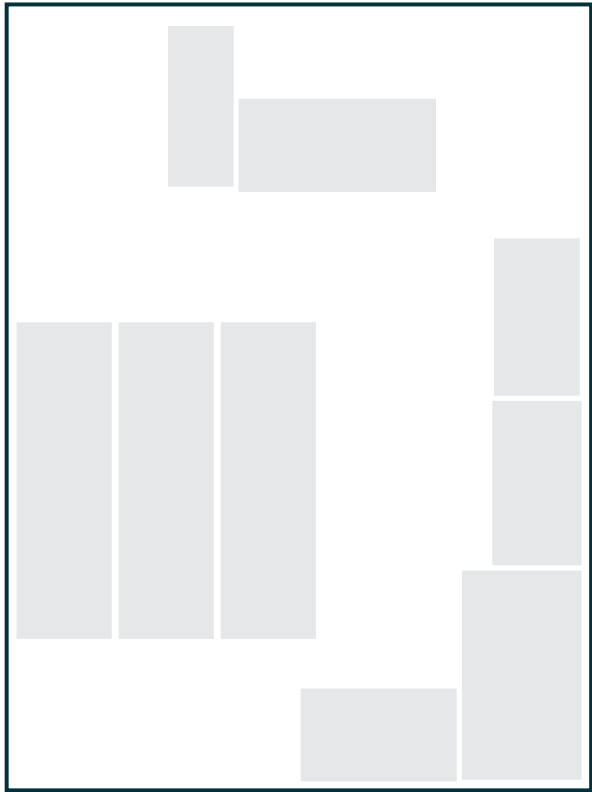
2.6 Historic site evolution

The site has previously been occupied by a collection of buildings that have evolved over time. A series of buildings forming an L shape have framed the eastern and southern boundary with an arched vaulted hanger remaining within the centre of the site for 50+ years.

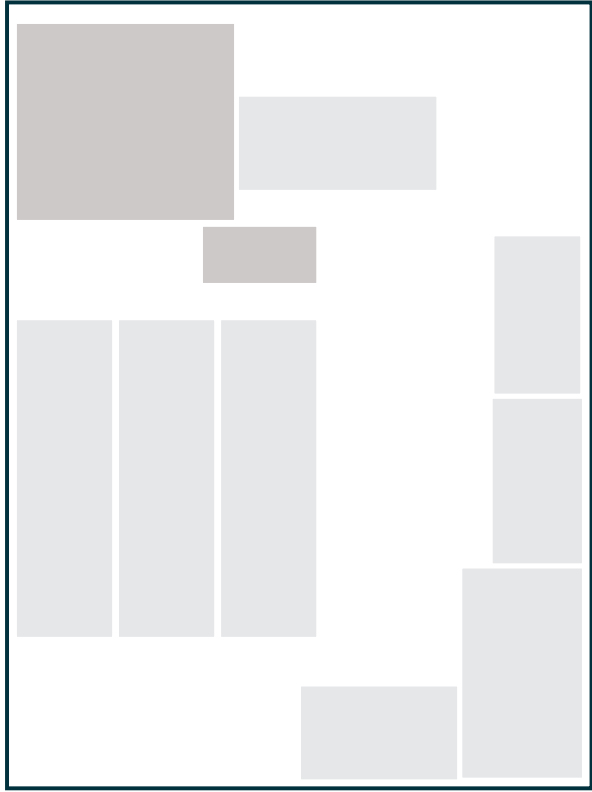
The riverfront buildings to the north have been temporary shed structures that have changed over time.

The primary building forms create an L shape along the eastern and southern boundary which have informed the positioning of the proposal. The large hanger provides strong building line and frontage along Vastern Road despite being setback. The hanger creates a corner building to Norman Place and Vastern Road which was a strong initial principle for layout out the proposal. The more temporary shed structures create a step down in height towards the river.

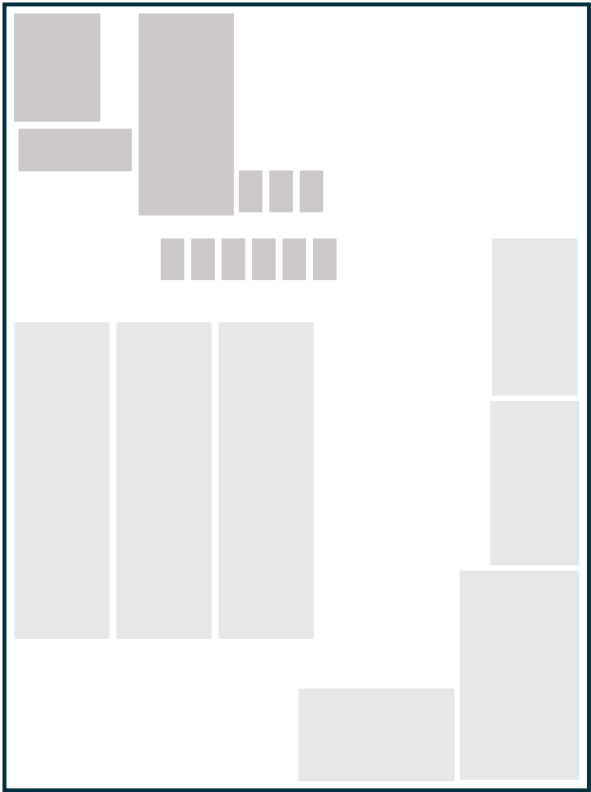
The existing office building is positioned in the middle of the site and does not respond positively to either the river front or Vastern Road.



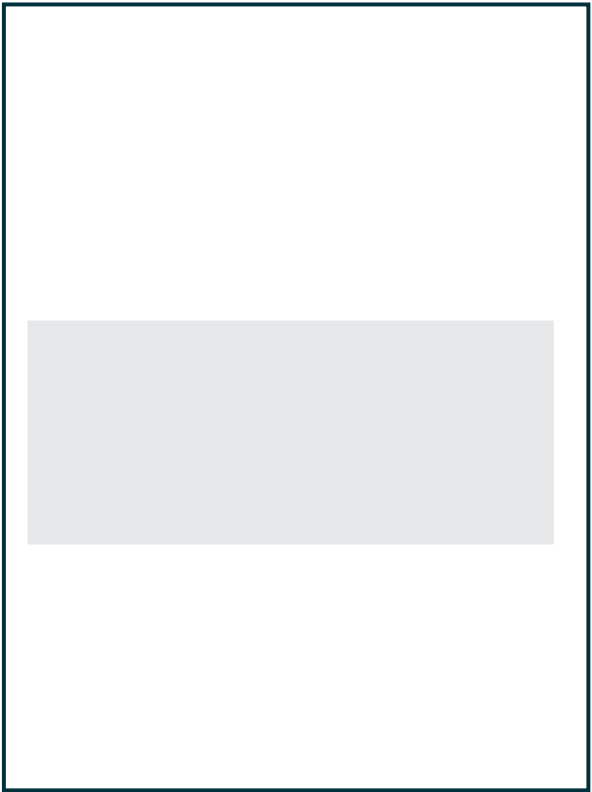
Indicative block plan from 1928



Indicative block plan from 1948



Indicative block plan from 1955



Indicative block plan from 1998



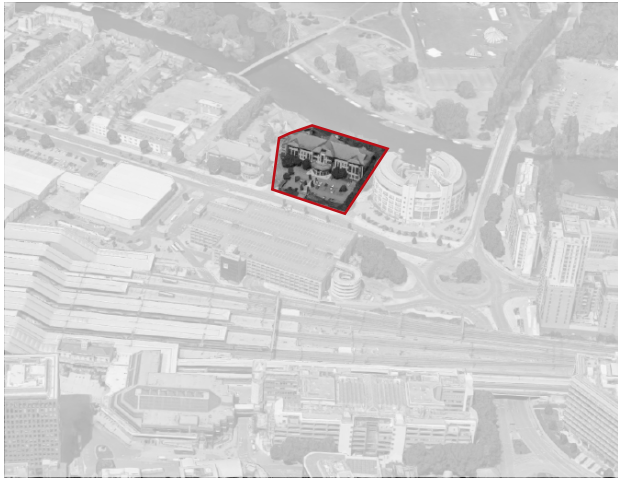
- Collection of industrial buildings
- Buildings frame southern and eastern boundary of the site



- Arched/vaulted hanger remains centrally to the west for 50+ years



- Riverfront buildings temporary shed structures changing over time



- 1990s office building creates a block to the riverfront and provides negative contribution to Vastern Road and the river

2.7 Existing building

The site is currently occupied by a 3-4 storey office building with a pitched roof. The building is set back from the street to allow for car parking which is accessed through a security barriers.

The existing office building on the site is no longer fit for purpose and offers low quality office space which does not compete with newer, more modern offices built in the area. In it's current state, the building offers very little to the townscape. Being set back, the building does not define the street edge and offers little by way of active frontage. The existing building also offers no positive contribution to the northern boundary along the rivers edge.

Given this, the proposal seeks to replace the building with a more suitable one, and deliver much-needed housing. The new proposal will provide a positive contribution to Vastern Road and the Thames Path, whilst also maximising the site's potential.

More information will be provided in the design process and response sections of this report.



1. View from Vastern Road



1. View towards the river from Norman Place



Key



3. View from Christchurch Meadows



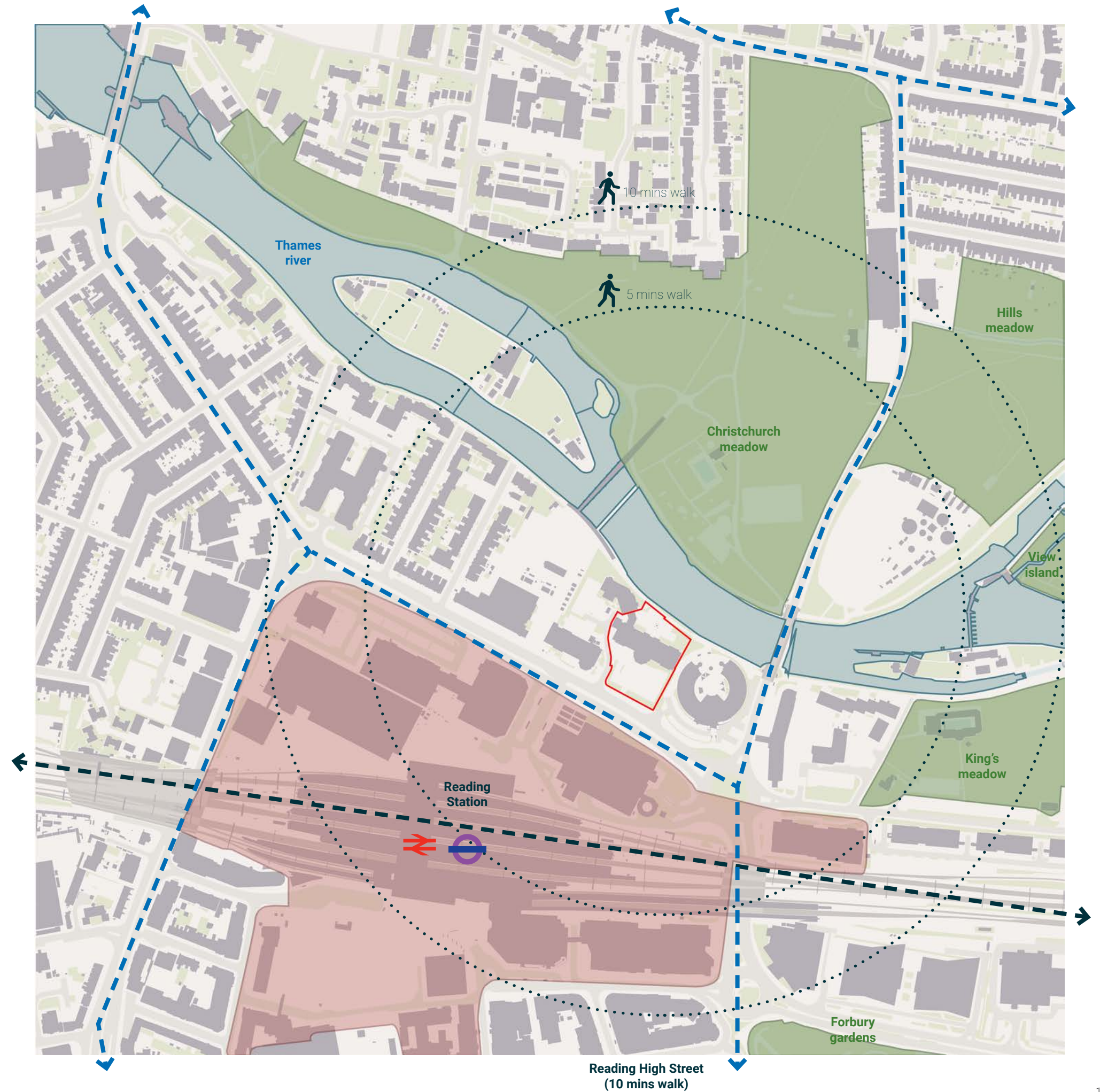
4. View from Christchurch Meadows

## 2.8 The wider neighbourhood

The proposal site at Waterfront Square sits within Reading Borough, within the Reading Central area as identified in the Local Plan 2019. The site is strategically positioned within the context of emerging developments, focused around Reading station. The site is easily accessible from Reading station, within close proximity to the town centre, and facilitates north-south connections to the river and Christchurch Meadow. Nearby Reading Station provides easy access to both central London to the east and wider routes to the southwest of the UK.

The established street pattern to the east breaks down towards the site, with larger, more modern buildings surrounding the area. To the south of Vastern Road, there is an area undergoing significant change.

To the north, the site benefits from a riverine landscape with the river's edge and Christchurch Meadow providing excellent amenity value.



### Key

- The site
- Thames river
- Green spaces
- Tall building boundary
- Key traffic route
- Railway line
- ⊕ Tube station
- ⇌ Train station