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22 September 2014

Hugo Haig,
Lochallort Investments Ltd,
Cassini House, 57 St James's Street,
London, SW1A 1LD

Our reference: DCC/0837

Reading Borough Council: Coopers Site, Kings Meadow Road

Dear Hugo Haig,

Thank you for presenting the scheme to Cabe's review meeting on 09 September 2014. We are delighted to have the opportunity to review the proposal on this key site for Reading. The scheme is at an early stage of the design development and we look forward to seeing the project evolve further. We support the principle of a residential tall building at this location provided that the architectural quality of the tall buildings is outstanding. The proposed building has the potential to create a distinctive character and strong presence marking the arrival at Reading Station. However, we have significant concerns about the way the towers will impact on the local views and meet the ground. We recommend rethinking the approach to the podium to create a project that makes a positive contribution to Reading in terms of the quality of the public space at its base as well as long distance views. We suggest refining the residential amenity space, flat layouts and elevations.

Height and townscape impact

There are arguments for and against the proposed height on the site. We support the proposed height provided that it is a well-designed building with high quality residential accommodation. While we support the principle of a tall building at this location, more work is required to mitigate the cumulative impact of the bulk, massing and height on the local townscape. The towers will overshadow Kings Meadow and further work is required to assess its impact on the character of the open space and the microclimate. The three towers will dominate the views along Vastern Road and Kings Meadow Road as they will read as a single mass when seen from the side. We recommend refining the eastern and western elevations that will appear prominently in these streetscape views and testing alternative, perhaps less overbearing compositions.

Podium Design

We support the proposed approach with slender buildings but question the three storey podium design and its height. The podium footprint is squeezing the public realm at ground level to the edge along the busy roads and is unsuccessful in creating a pleasant pedestrian experience in this harsh environment. We suggest reorganising the



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podium to increase the public realm, perhaps by reducing the amount of car parking, which given the presence of public transport and the proximity of the town centre appears possible.

Relocating the main entrance to a new public plaza at the north-western corner of the site close to public transport could animate the public realm and improve legibility by providing more direct routes to the station. We believe the podium design could do more to connect the towers and the ground. Currently, the podium separates the towers from the ground level and we urge the design team to strengthen the relationship between the taller elements and the ground. We also question the usability of the gardens at the podium level as currently designed and encourage exploring the potential for the wider public realm improvements, connections to park and provision of on-site play area for children. We believe an integrated approach to the landscape design by embedding sustainability objectives, water management and biodiversity will benefit the design.

Building design.

The proposed design has the potential to make a strong statement, but we encourage the design team to be bolder, at both skyline and ground level, in celebrating this key location. The distinctive features on the top of the three towers will be difficult to read from a distance and we urge the design team to develop a clearer design rationale for those features informed by the context and townscape. We think that the elevational treatment will benefit from further refinement to make the tower fully feel like a residential development. The internal layout requires further refining to provide sufficient private amenity space and the size of the inset balconies could be more generous.

A high proportion of flats are single aspect with privacy and overlooking issues in relation to the adjacent towers. We urge the design team and client to reduce the number of single aspect flats by altering the floor plans and to take the orientation to the sun more into account. The elevational articulation will be instrumental in terms of creating more privacy and avoiding solar gains, for example. We are not convinced by the sustainability credentials of the design as it currently stands. The success of the scheme will also depend on the quality of materials and detailing and we think further refinement is required, particularly in terms of providing a rich design at the lower levels.

Thank you for consulting us and please keep us informed of the progress of the scheme. If there is any point that requires clarification, please telephone us.

Yours sincerely



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cc (by email only)

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Kieran Roughan	Reading Borough Council
David Griggs	Reading Borough Council

Review process

Following a site visit, discussions with the design team and local authority, the scheme was reviewed on 09 September by Mark Swenarton (chair), Louise Goodison, Les Sparks, Deborah Nagan, Peter Studdert and Kay Hughes. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

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Since the scheme is not yet the subject of a planning application, the advice contained in this letter is offered in confidence, on condition that we are kept informed of the progress of the project, including when it becomes the subject of a planning application. We may share confidential letters with our affiliated panels only in cases where an affiliated panel is taking on a scheme that we have previously reviewed. We reserve the right to make our views known should the views contained in this letter be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). If you do not require our views to be kept confidential, please write to designreview@designcouncil.org.uk.

MEMORANDUM

TO : [Faint text]

FROM : [Faint text]

SUBJECT : [Faint text]

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