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**PLANNING SUMMARY AND  
OVERVIEW REPORT  
BBC CAVERSHAM PARK  
DISPOSAL**



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH) has been instructed by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to establish the best value for the sale of Caversham Park (the site) in Reading, Berkshire.
- 1.2 The site covers circa 40 hectares (ha) of land set within the suburb of Caversham to the north of Reading. The site is predominantly bounded (west, north and east) by mid to late twentieth century, low-rise/low density residential development which sets a precedent and context which we believe lends favour to further residential development in this locality.
- 1.3 To progress towards the eventual sale of the land, a due diligence exercise has been undertaken to establish a value of the site based upon what we consider to be a realistic amount and type of development that can be achieved, subject to obtaining the necessary consents.
- 1.4 To establish this position, we have taken design feasibility options through two stages of formal pre-application engagement with the Local Planning Authority (Reading Borough Council) and one round of pre-application engagement with Historic England.
- 1.5 All of the Pre-application submission documents and the associated correspondence and advice from Reading Borough Council along with Historic England are available for review in the Data Room.

## 2.0 DUE DILLIGENCE EXERCISE

### *First Round of Pre-application Engagement with Reading Borough Council*

- 2.1 To ensure the design feasibility option submissions presented to the Council were robust, covering the appropriate technical areas of expertise; LSH appointed and managed a cross-disciplinary consultant team to prepare the design scheme option(s) that would be presented for the Council's consideration.
- 2.2 With Lambert Smith Hampton acting on behalf of the BBC; leading on the overall planning and disposal of the site, the Planning team appointed and managed a consultant team comprised of OWAL Architects, Turley Heritage, Aspect Ecology and Systra Transport Consultants (formerly JMP Transport Consultants).
- 2.5 Following an extensive review of a range of potential development options, a scheme was presented to Reading Borough Council, with the first meeting having taken place on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2016. All of the pre-application submissions are available for review within the Data Room.
- 2.6 Subsequent to receipt of the Council's written advice, a refined proposal was prepared and submitted to Reading Borough Council, with the second pre-application meeting having taken place on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017.

### 3.0 READING BOROUGH COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

- 3.1 In addition to the pre-application engagement with the Borough Council's Planning service, LSH were instructed to make formal representations on the Borough Council's New Local Plan public examination.
- 3.2 Between January and March 2016, the Council undertook a consultation on the Issues and Options which was the first stage of the Plan; and then following this consulted on the Draft Local Plan from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2017 to 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.
- 3.3 The relevant Policy related to the site is Policy 'CA2: Caversham Park', which was initially worded in a manner which we considered to be restrictive on the following key points:
- Where it states that the site contains a number of statutorily Listed features which "should be conserved";
  - Where the policy wording vaguely described alternative uses ("*from offices to residential and/or a cultural, community or heritage use...*") for the conversion of the mansion house;
  - Where it specifically referred to an estimated 40-45 dwellings that could be accommodated, despite acknowledging that that the figure will be dependent upon more detailed assessment;
  - Where the wording requires that "*any development or conversion proposals should open as much of the park as possible up to public access, including reinstatement of historic public footpaths*", despite there not being records confirming the existence of these within the site; and
  - Where it stated that "the policy does not allocate the site for additional development over and above conversion of the house".
- 3.4 Our representation argued that the Policy as first worded was unsound. We provided suggested changes to the wording in order to ensure suitable flexibility so that any applications on the land would not be overly restricted by the unsound wording as first drafted.
- 3.5 All of the BBC representation submissions along with the Borough Council's responses and their proposed amendments are available for review in the Data Room.

- 3.6 The Local Plan was been submitted to the Secretary of State (29th March 2018), which marked the beginning of the process of public examination which we attended and made representations re-emphasising the points and suggested amendments from the written submission. The public examination has now concluded.
- 3.11 Through the examination process the independent Government Inspector identified a number of modifications, which were then consulted on (between 12 June and 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019) as Main Modifications.
- 3.6 With regards the alternative uses for the conversion of the main house, the Policy wording was amended to read as below:  
*“Conversion of the house from offices to residential and or a cultural, community or heritage use, or other suitable use compatible with its heritage, will be acceptable if it sustains the significance of the listed building...”*
- 3.7 With regards the policy referring to the specific amount of dwellings that could be accommodated, the re-worded version recognises that further assessment will be required, where it states:  
*“It is currently estimated that up to 40-45 dwellings could be accommodated, but the figure will be dependent on more detailed historic assessment of the building and the precise mix of uses”.*
- 3.8 The reference to public access and reinstatement of historic public footpaths was reworded as below:  
*“Any development or conversion proposals should open as much of the park as possible up to public access, including reinstatement of any historic public footpaths where possible and appropriate”.*
- 3.8 The section of the policy which relates to additional development on the site was amended as shown below:  
*“This policy does not allocate the site for additional development over and above conversion of the house. There may be scope for some limited development on previously developed land within the site, which will need to be justified at application stage. Such development must comply with the criteria below:*
- No development will ~~harm the historic interest~~ negatively affect the significance of heritage assets and their setting;

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- *Development will not detract from the character or appearance of ~~or~~ the important landscape ~~value of the site~~; and*
  - *Development will not ~~detrimentially-negatively~~ affect ~~protected-significant~~ trees or areas of biodiversity importance.”*

3.9 The Borough Council's Sustainability Appraisal of Main Modifications document published June 2019 notes that the Inspector found that the additional wording for Policy CA2: Caversham Park adds flexibility for an applicant in order to account for uncertainty about the existence of past historic footpaths and their suitability.

3.10 It further notes that the changes also aim to bring criteria into line with the wording of Policies EN1 'Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment', EN12 'Biodiversity and the Green Network', EN13 'Major Landscape Features and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' and EN14 'Trees, Hedges and Woodland'.

3.11 The Council have not yet verified the date when the New Local Plan is scheduled to be adopted, but it is anticipated to be at some stage this year or in early 2020.

## 4.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The BBC has undertaken a comprehensive due diligence exercise ahead of disposing of this asset in order to establish the planning, heritage, transport, ecological and tree related constraints and opportunities in relation to future development.
- 4.2 A multi-disciplinary team was appointed to address these items specific to the site. The BBC professional team have engaged in a two-staged pre-application process with Reading Borough Council and a one stage pre-application engagement with Historic England. All of the supporting submission reports addressing the aforementioned specialist areas, along with the Council and Historic England's related correspondence are available for review in the Data Room.
- 4.3 Alongside this pre-application work, representations have been made to the Council and to the independent Government Planning Inspector as part of the New Local Plan public examination and consultation process, which has resulted in the wording of the Policy relevant to the site (CA2: Caversham Park) being amended to be more flexible than as first worded by the Council's Policy Officer(s).
- 4.4 The anticipated date for adoption is not yet finalised, but is anticipated to be at some stage this year or early in 2020.