

# FORMER IMPERIAL HOUSE AND ADJACENT SITES

## MASTERPLANNING AND DESIGN ADVICE

Windsor Neighbourhood Plan Forum

October 2015

Draft Report

## Former Imperial House and Adjacent Sites Masterplanning and Design Advice

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 This report

Through the Department of Communities and Local Government neighbourhood planning programme, AECOM has been commissioned to work with the Windsor Neighbourhood Plan Forum (WNPF) to explore development options for the former Imperial House site and adjacent sites at Alma Way and Goslar Road.

This report presents the findings of the analysis. It is intended to be used to inform the production of a neighbourhood plan and to consider development on these sites that reflects local community aspirations.

The report is structured in the following way:

- This section introduces the work, our approach and the site
- Section 2 sets out the relevant local planning policies
- Section 3 summaries the site's spatial context
- Sections 4 introduces the options
- Section 5 considers next steps

## 1.2 The site

The site is comprises Windsor Police Station, Windsor Youth and Community Centre, an office building and a vacant site which formerly accommodated the Imperial House office block. We understand the Police are considering vacating the police station and it and the office building were considered as sites suitable for housing development in the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. Whilst it is in the study area, the youth and community centre – a valuable community asset - is not considered for redevelopment in this report.

The sub-sites are shown in figure 1.5 below.



Figure 1.1 Windsor Police Station



Figure 1.2 Windsor Youth and Community Centre



Figure 1.3 Office building



Figure 1.5 Former Imperial House site

Figure 1.5 Study area and sub-sites



### 1.3 Scope

As noted in the policy review in section 2 below, the Imperial House site is currently allocated for employment and has been so far in the emerging Borough Local Plan and is being marketed as such, albeit with no take-up so far. However, this report explores housing options for the site as an alternative development scenario to be tested through the neighbourhood planning process.

The other two potential development sites – the police station and the office between Alma Road and Goslar Way – have been explored as potential housing sites by the Council and the office site (along with the youth and community centre) was included as a housing site in the Borough Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation in January 2014 – for 84 dwellings.

Guided by some concerns expressed by the local community, and also the limited opportunities in and around Windsor to contribute to the Borough's housing need, this report presents some scenarios for housing-led development.

It is important to note a few points with regard to the content of this report:

- The design options are high level studies to explore potential capacities that are appropriate to the location and likely to be acceptable to the community.
- As such, they have not been subject to testing for impact on highways, for viability or for engineering feasibility (for example, building houses above the underground car park).
- The options broadly comply with existing policies on matters such as car parking, open space, protected views and housing mix, although note the comments about current land use designations above.

### 1.4 Approach

The report has been prepared through the following steps:

1. Briefings and site visit with members of WNPF
2. Review of policies and baseline information, including results of previous consultation by the WNPF
3. Urban design audit
4. Preparation of initial ideas and options
5. Discussion about the above with members of WNPF
6. Production of draft report taking account of WNPF comments

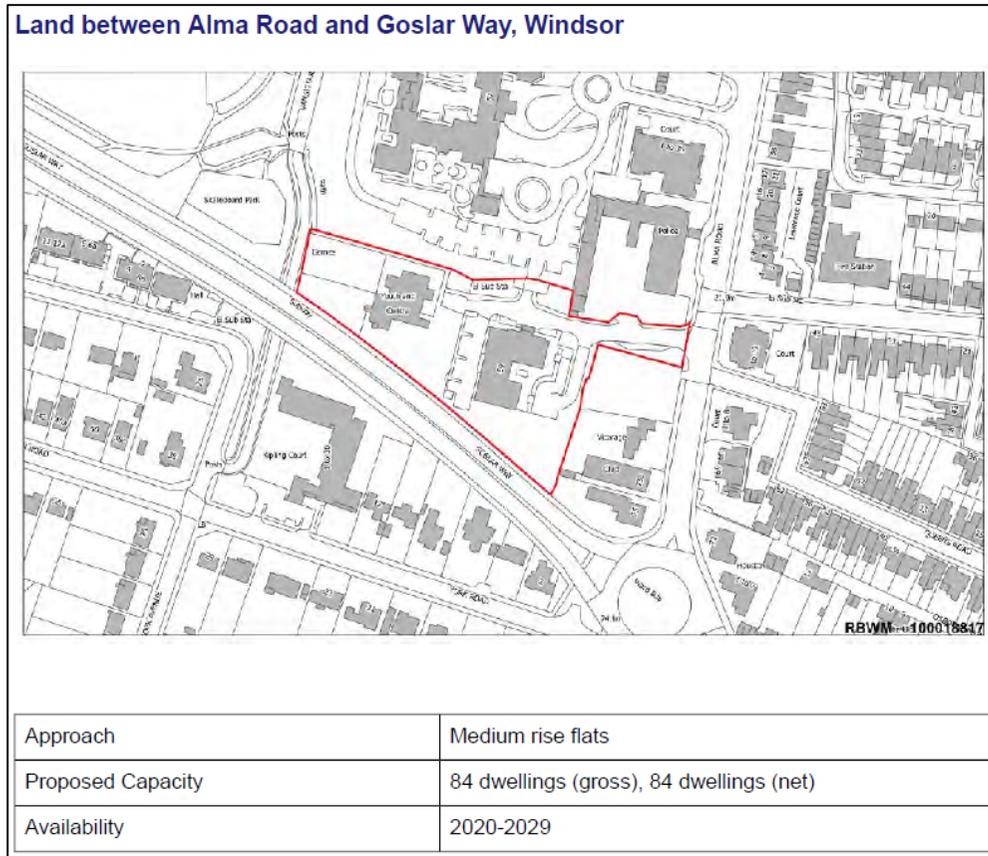
## 2 Background

### 2.1 Summary of planning policy

#### Emerging Borough Local Plan

In January 2014 the council consulted residents, businesses and other people interested in planning in the borough, on a First Preferred Options Borough Local Plan (BLP). This set out the council’s preferred approach to future development and included proposed policies on town centres, the environment, housing, the economy, infrastructure and many other matters including potential development sites on the edge of settlements.

Of note for the Windsor Neighbourhood Plan is that there is a site allocation for 84 dwellings as ‘medium rise flats’ at Land between Alma Road and Goslar Way, Windsor, as shown below.





- PLA2 Townscape and landscape
  - Using the Townscape Assessment, development proposals in the urban areas will maintain and, where appropriate, enhance the local character. This will be in terms of both the immediate surroundings and streetscene, and at the wider settlement or character type area, and will respond positively to defining features.
- EC1 Economic development
  - The preferred policy approach is to promote sustainable economic growth and manage the supply of required employment floorspace. A range of different types and sizes of employment land and premises will be encouraged, as will making more efficient use of existing sites and premises. Appropriate intensification, redevelopment and upgrading of existing employment sites and premises will be supported, together with working from home and the infrastructure required to service that. Improvements to education and skill levels, and the use of local labour, will be supported. Appropriate development proposals that would assist small or start-up businesses will also be supported.
- EC2 Defined employment sites (discussed above regarding Imperial House).
- HE6 Conservation Areas
  - Views of and from Conservation Areas should be considered during the design process.
  - The preferred policy approach is to conserve or enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas, and for development to positively contribute to the character, local distinctiveness and significance of the historic environment. Development proposals that involve the loss of buildings, structures (including walls and fences) or trees that make a positive contribution to, or help conserve the character of a conservation area will be resisted.
- NE4 Open Spaces
  - The preferred policy approach is to address the need to retain open spaces in the borough, create new open space where possible, and to improve existing open spaces and access to them, including outdoor recreational / sporting facilities. Criteria will be set out to assess and justify any loss of open space.
- INF1 Community facilities
  - The preferred policy approach is to support proposals for new or improved community facilities which meet the needs or aspirations of local residents and visitors. Proposals for new development will be required to make appropriate provision for community facilities.
  - The loss of existing community facilities will be supported where the applicant can demonstrate that adequate alternative facilities are, or will be, provided in a suitable location, that there is no identified need for the facility, its use is not economically viable and that it is not viable for any other social or community use.

In February 2015 the council's cabinet reviewed the work undertaken to date and agreed to continue the preparation of the BLP, including an ongoing programme of engagement and consultation with stakeholders. A new Second Preferred Options Borough Local Plan is scheduled to be published in November 2015.

## Adopted Local Plan

The adopted development plan is the Local Plan (Incorporating Alterations Adopted June 2003). This is not considered by the Government to be an up-to-date plan so may have limited weight. Relevant policies for the Windsor NP include:

- DG1 Design Guidelines
  - Important to maintain public views of Windsor Castle.
- CA2 Guidelines on Development affecting Conservation Areas
- R1 Protection of urban open spaces
- R4 Public Open Space in New Developments
  - For sites greater than 1ha, a minimum of 15% of the gross site area is required to be provided as public open space.
- R5 Children's Playspace
  - Within new developments of family houses on sites larger than 0.4 ha or 15 units (whichever is the smallest), the Borough Council will require, in appropriate locations, a local area for play (LAP).
- CF1 Protection of existing facilities
  - The Borough Council will not permit the loss of existing community facilities and buildings unless it is satisfied that:
    - There is no longer a need for them; or
    - An acceptable alternative provision is to be made elsewhere.
- E1 Location of development
  - Business industrial and warehousing development will usually be restricted to the employment areas identified on the proposals map, the town centre commercial areas of Windsor and Maidenhead, and small settlement commercial areas.
- S1 Location of shopping development
  - New retail development will be permitted where this would enhance the attractiveness and viability of existing centres provided that the proposal:
    - is of a scale commensurate with the size, character and role of the centre;
    - can be integrated into the existing shopping centre area and provides appropriate pedestrian and cycle links;
    - meets the requirements for parking, servicing and access included in appendix 7, and can be accommodated satisfactorily within the local highway network
- S7 Local Shopping Parades and Stores
  - Proposals for additional floorspace within local shopping parades should be of a scale and nature in keeping with the character of the area and should enhance local facilities. A change of use to uses within class A2 financial and professional services or class a3 food and drink will be allowed where this would help to maintain the vitality of the shopping parade, providing that it would:
    - not adversely affect the level and standard of local retail provision; and
    - not adversely affect the character of the area or the amenities of neighbouring residents; and
    - provide adequate car and cycle parking provision. Other proposals which would result in the loss of existing shops will be resisted.

- H3 Affordable housing within urban areas
  - The Borough Council will seek to achieve that a proportion of the total capacity of suitable residential schemes be developed in the form of affordable housing to meet the needs of "qualifying persons" as defined by the Borough Council. Suitable sites will include sites of 0.5 ha or over or schemes proposing 15 or more net additional dwellings. The council will wish to ensure that such housing is retained for successive "qualifying occupiers".
- H6 Town centre housing
  - The borough council will grant planning permission for the provision of additional residential accommodation within town and other settlement centres outside the green belt, and will normally require as a minimum within redevelopment proposals that the existing number of units of residential accommodation are replaced. In particular the Borough Council will encourage the re-use and conversion to residential accommodation of office space and vacant upper floors in shopping areas and favourably consider the conversion of vacant offices elsewhere.
- H8 Meeting a range of housing needs
  - The Borough Council will expect development/redevelopment proposals for all appropriate sites to contribute towards improving the range of housing accommodation in the borough and will particularly favour proposals which include dwellings for small households and those with special needs.
- H9 Meeting a range of housing needs
  - Within all new housing schemes the Borough Council will seek the provision of units which are accessible to the disabled, in accordance with identified local needs.
- H10 Housing layout and design
  - In considering applications for new residential development the Borough Council will require, where appropriate, that the proposals:
    - Provide separate access to the residential accommodation within mixed use development schemes;
    - Provide garages or parking spaces in close proximity to the housing they serve
- T7 Cycling
  - The Borough Council will make special provision for cyclists throughout the borough in order to:
    - provide safe cycle routes, lanes and shared cycle paths as appropriate;
    - achieve the network of desirable cycle routes identified for Maidenhead and Windsor;
    - provide convenient and secure cycle parking facilities particularly in town centres adjacent to pedestrianized areas;
    - improve cycling links to public transport facilities and provide cycle parking at these facilities;
    - ensure that, where appropriate, new development makes appropriate provision for cyclists;
    - take account of the needs of cyclists in the design of all new roads, highway improvements and traffic management measures;
    - promote and develop links with the Thames valley long distance cycle route.
- T8 Pedestrian environment
  - The Borough Council will improve conditions for pedestrians through traffic regulation and new highway schemes. The Borough Council will also identify opportunities for enhancing pedestrian access to town and other centres through the provision of new and improved footways. New development schemes will be expected to include appropriate provision for pedestrian access and routes.
- P4 and P5 Parking within Development

- The Borough Council will require all development proposals to provide car parking in accordance with the adopted standards as set out in appendix 7. In the case of development for business and industrial use the Borough Council will apply its own standards as set out above.
- The Borough Council will only consider requests for commutation of car parking requirements on town centre sites where there would be a consequent traffic or planning benefit. In all cases on site operational parking will be required.

### Supplementary Planning Guidance

The Parking Strategy, which is Supplementary Planning Guidance adopted in 2004, sets out the following maximum numbers of spaces for parking:

Use Class Order	Use	Maximum Parking Standard (Areas of Poor Accessibility)	Maximum Parking Standard (Areas of Good Accessibility)
C3 Residential	1 bedroom units	1 space per unit	0.5 spaces per unit
	2-3 bedroom units	2 spaces per unit	1 space per unit
	4 or more bedroom units	3 spaces per unit	2 spaces per unit
	Flats with communal spaces	1 space per bedroom	0.5 spaces per bedroom
A1-A2	Individual shop units, financial and professional services up to 550sqm	1 space per 30 sqm (4 spaces per 120sqm)	1.5 spaces per 60sqm (3 spaces per 120sqm)
A1-A2	Individual shop units, financial and professional services between 550sqm and 2500sqm	1 space per 30sqm plus 1 lorry space per unit	1.5 spaces per 60sqm
A3	Food and drink (restaurants, public houses, cafes, wine bars, licensed clubs)	1 space per 6sqm dining/bar/dance area	1.5 spaces per 12sqm
A1	Non-food general retail – floor area less than 2,500sqm	1 space per 30sqm plus 1 lorry space per 1000sqm	1.5 spaces per 60sqm
A1	Food retail	1 space per 14sqm covered area plus 1 lorry space per 500sqm	1.5 spaces per 28sqm
A1	DIY stores, garden centres	1 space per 25sqm open and covered display area plus 1 lorry space per 500sqm	1.5 spaces per 50sqm

## 2.2 Selected Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Evidence Base

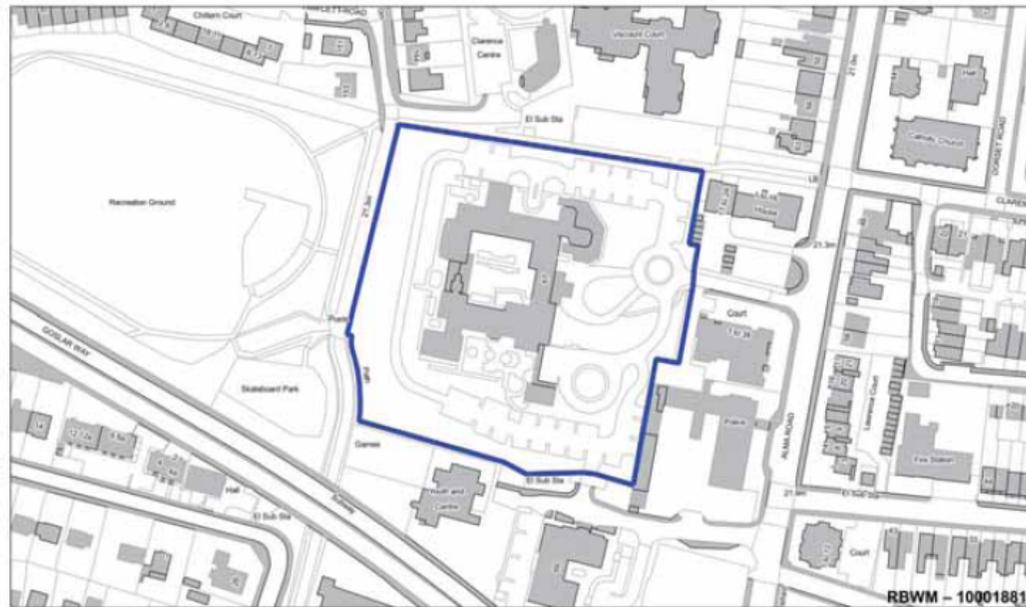
### Employment

The evidence in the Employment Site Assessment 2013 suggests that the likely need for employment floorspace within the borough can be largely met through intensification and redevelopment leading to more efficient use of existing sites, and that small elements of employment land can be redeveloped for housing alongside this.

The assessment recommends allocation BUS11 Imperial House, Alma Road, Windsor as a Business Area. A Business Area allocation is defined as “an area where all employment uses are permitted and intensification is encouraged”, as opposed to a mixed-use area combining non-employment uses.

The site assessment for Imperial House is shown below:

**BUS11: Imperial House, Alma Road, Windsor**



Expected approach and capacity

- Permission for redevelopment for high quality office floorspace.

Delivery

- 2014-2019

Requirements

Design guidance

- High quality office floorspace, creating an office campus environment.
- Business support services possible.
- Development to maximise the potential of the site to deliver floorspace in a sustainable urban location.
- Development to be compatible with nearby residential uses and take account of any development on adjacent sites.

Other requirements

- Once planning permission is implemented, uses to be compatible with and enhance the office campus environment.

The 2009 Employment Land Review stated that “*Imperial House, Windsor [S1] (1.83 ha) is a large, vacant office building which lies within the south-western suburbs of Windsor, around 500 m from the town centre. This gives it good access to services and public transport and road access is reasonable with the M4 less than 4 km away via a dual carriageway. Although the building is currently vacant, its location means that it should be attractive to occupiers if redevelopment or refurbishment were to take place. Given the site’s suburban context it seems unlikely that much additional space could be achieved on the site, even if it were completely redeveloped, although this could improve the quality and market attractiveness of the space. Overall this is a good quality employment location.*” Ranked overall as ‘Good Quality’ with a score of 22 out of 30; and that such sites should be retained as employment land.

### Open space

The Open Space Audit 2007 states that natural and semi-natural greenspace is deficient in Windsor and should be prioritised when delivering open space:

“The Windsor and Eton analysis area has a total of circa 62 hectares of open space provision above the recommended minimum level, when balanced against the recommended local standard for each typology. This is predominantly due to a high level of outdoor sport provision. Children’s play provision, outdoor teenage facilities and allotment provision are also all above the recommended minimum level. In contrast, natural and semi-natural greenspace and amenity greenspace are below the recommended minimum level. Parks and gardens provision is adequate when balanced against the recommended local standard.”

### Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

The existing SHMA states that the majority of household growth is expected to result from increasing single person households. There is other evidence that demand for smaller homes may increase from an ageing population and also that demand for three bedroom and family units is acute among those currently on waiting lists.

A broad distribution, subject to monitoring, of 35%, 30%, 30% and 5% for 1 bed, 2 bed, 3 bed and 4 bed units, respectively should be considered.

The SHMA also states that in town centre and edge of centre locations, developers “*must consider the opportunities to create family sized housing as well as the smaller units currently found in flatted developments*” in order to shift the balance in town centres away from the typical one bedroom properties in favour of a greater supply of 2 and 3 bedroom accommodation and/or assisted living accommodation for older people.

### Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

The 2014 SHLAA states that RBWM are looking to Neighbourhood Plans to help contribute towards housing delivery in the borough. This is an opportunity for the Windsor plan to assist the council in meeting its housing needs.

The SHLAA assesses two sites at Goslar Way/Alma Road with the following information:

Ref	Name	Housing type appropriate	Est Developable Area	Density Range	Overall Net Capacity	Phasing
WMWI4058	Area between Goslar Way and Alma Road	Low rise flats/medium rise flats	0.89	90-122	84	10-15 years
WMWI4057	Police Station Alma Road	Medium and high rise flats	0.3	116-131	48	10-15 years

The SHLAA was underpinned by a Capacity Assessment (2013) that identified the following densities as appropriate for Windsor:

## 2 CONCLUSIONS

2.1.1 The densities described above allow a good standard of design solutions with adequate parking, to ensure efficient use of sites but avoid “cramming”. They vary from the standards used by RBWM as follows:

Table 5: comparative densities

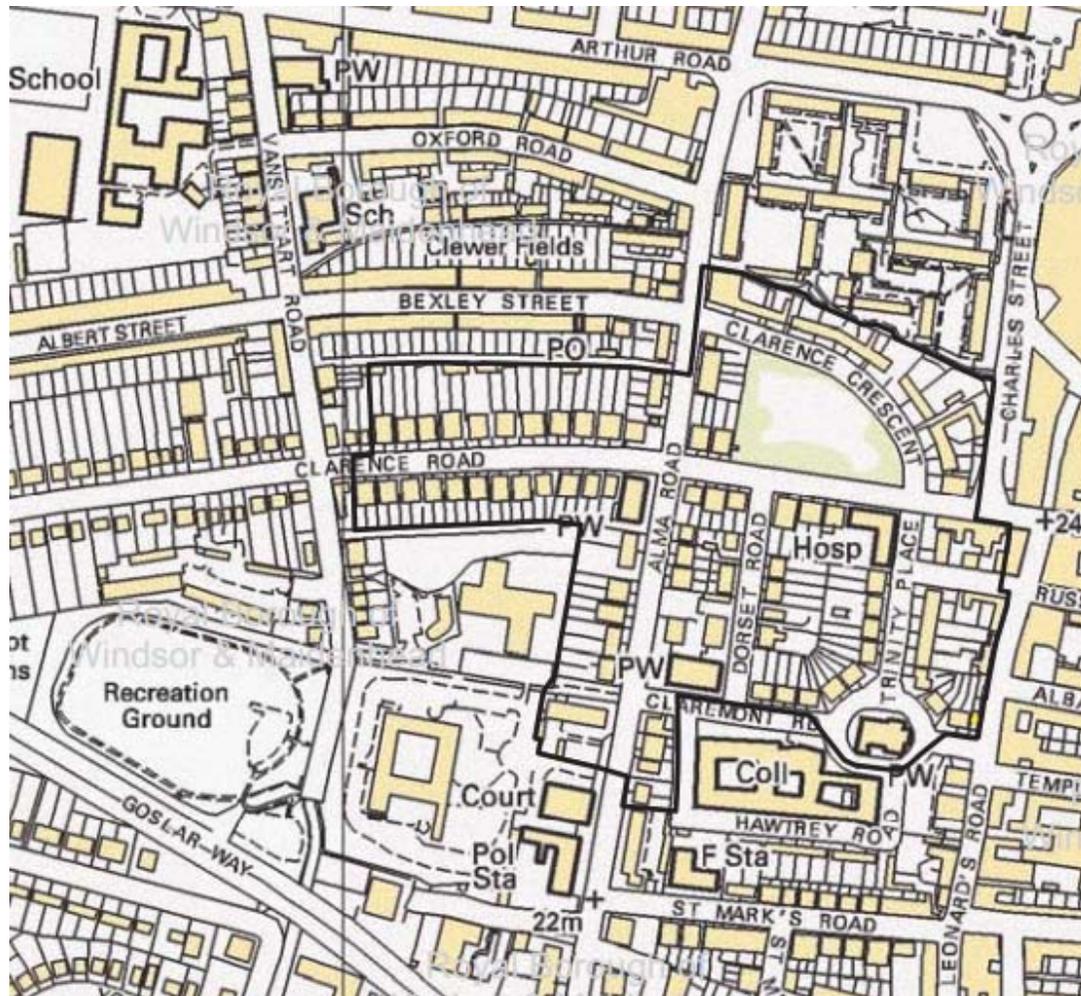
	RBWM dph assumption	Studio REAL dph advice	Observations
<b>Smaller style houses</b> (higher density terraced typology, as per table 1)	35 – 60	43 – 50	Higher end of the range may be difficult to achieve a comfortable environment and accommodate necessary car parking
<b>Larger style houses</b> (linked / semi - detached and detached typologies, as per table 1)	30 – 35	22- 40	We would see 30 – 35 dph as very much a medium range. Larger style houses of the kind we have seen in the Royal Borough would be well below this.
<b>Low rise flats (town)</b>	45 – 120	90 – 109	Falls mid-range
<b>Medium rise flats</b>	70 – 130	116 –122	Falls mid-range
<b>High rise flats</b>	120 – 140	127-131	Falls mid-range

### Townscape Assessment

The Townscape Assessment (2010) identifies no key views or landmarks at the sites that are subject of this report.

### Conservation Areas

The Imperial House site is adjacent to the Trinity Place/Clarence Crescent Conservation Area, shown in thick black outline below.



### 2.3 Imperial House planning history

Application 10/00820/FULL was refused in 2010 for the “Demolition of existing building and erection of five buildings of between 1 and 5 storeys and a 3-storey car park to provide 25,464 sqm of office floorspace, a cafe/restaurant, ancillary security and substation as well as associated car parking, delivery drop off, service bay, cycle and motorcycle parking, public accessible open space, improved access and landscaping” at Imperial House, Alma Road, Windsor.

This was appealed in 2010 under Appeal Reference 10/60074/REF with the appeal allowed in 2011. A number of conditions have been discharged since, including access arrangements and materials, and the permission has now been implemented by demolishing the Imperial House building.

The site is currently being marketed as the Windsor Business Quarter, including 495 car parking spaces.

## 3 Spatial context

### 3.1 Locational analysis

The site is located to the south west of Windsor Centre. It is within ten to fifteen minutes walking distance from Windsor & Eton Central Railway Station, Windsor & Eton Riverside Railway Station, Windsor Castle and Windsor Centre.

The site is surrounded by predominantly residential uses, and a small variety of commercial and community facilities. It is bounded by Goslar Way dual carriageway to the south which creates a severance in pedestrian and cyclist movements, and generates noise due to fast-passing traffic. The roundabout located at the junction of Alma Road and Goslar Way also causes severance in pedestrian and cyclist movement as it does not accommodate formal crossing.

The site is neighboured by Vansittart Recreation Ground Park to the west which accommodates facilities such as a play area, skate park, dog walking circuit and a small car park. The pedestrian and cycle way between the park and the site is an important connector between the areas south and north of Goslar Way.

To the north of the site there is a care home and a medical centre. The car park located between the care home and the site is currently not in use. The pedestrian and cycleway which lies to the north of the site is an important connection between Vansittart Recreation Ground Park, and Alma Road and Windsor Town Centre.

Figure 3.3 below provides a visual analysis of the former Imperial House site today.

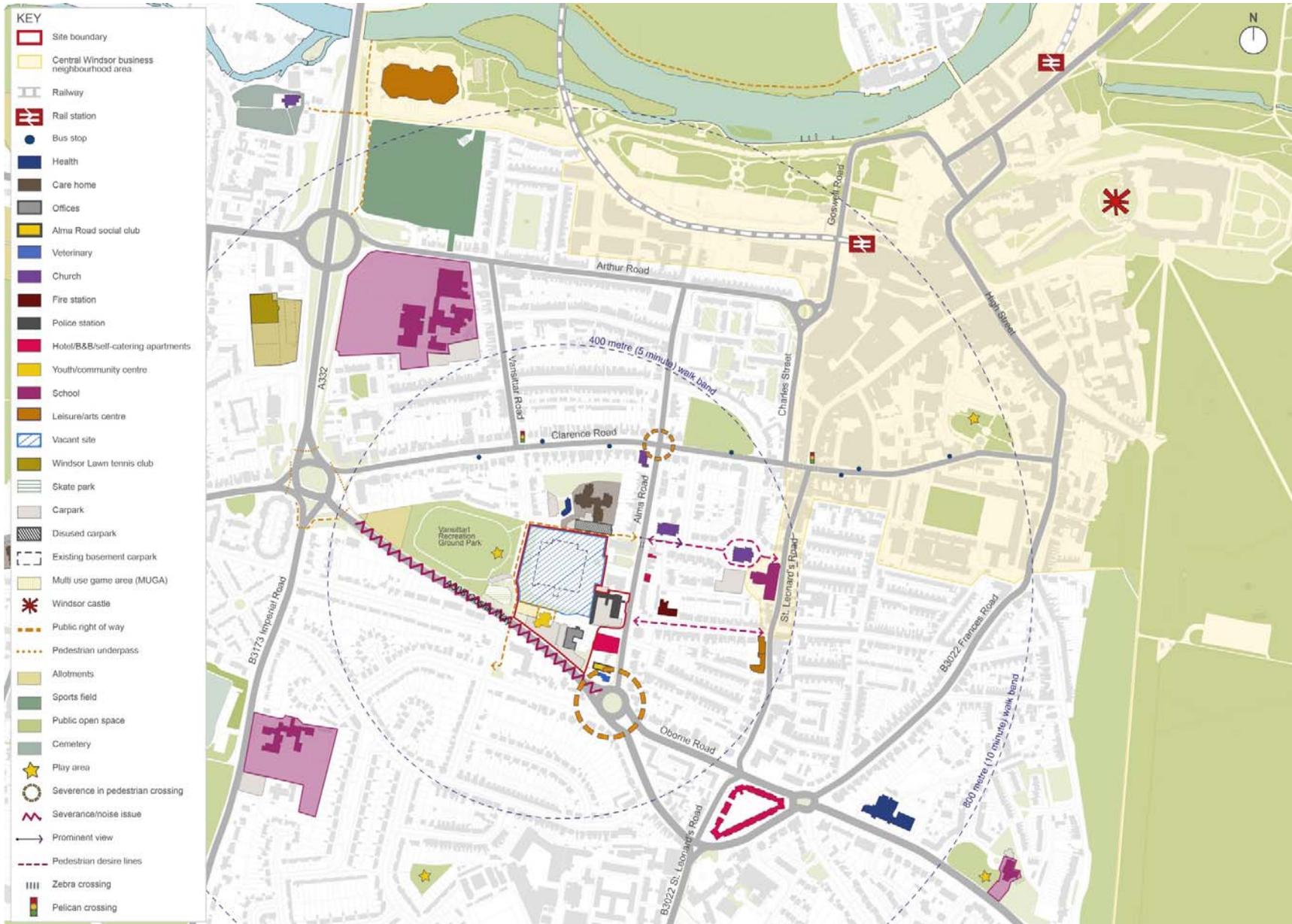


Figure 3.1 Vansittart Recreation Ground Park



Figure 3.2 Pedestrian and cycleway north of the site

Figure 3.3 Imperial House locational analysis



## 3.2 Site analysis

The study area currently accommodates a police station, a youth and community centre, an office building and a vacant site which formerly accommodated Imperial House.

The site has a frontage to Alma Road only at the south-eastern corner where the police station is located. There is also another access from Alma Road to the site between two residential buildings, which are presumably used as the access for the former business centre.

The vacant site is framed by a green ribbon formed by mature deciduous trees. This green ribbon also forms the green character of the pedestrian and cycle way at the west of the site, and provides a secluded environment for the multi-use games area (MUGA) located in the youth centres yard.

Alma Road has a very green character owing to its mature street trees. The road is fronted by a variety of types of buildings from different eras. Building heights vary from between three to five storeys. The road accommodates mostly residential uses, a few hotel/guest houses and two churches. The spire of Holy Trinity Garrison Church is an important local landmark and is visible from Vansittart Recreation Ground Park.

St Leonard Road is the nearest retail hub to the site where a variety of shops, cafes and restaurants are located. The route of Claremont Road leading towards Holy Trinity Garrison Church from Alma Road is an important pedestrian desire line to St. Leonard's Road and then on to Windsor Centre. Likewise, St Mark's Road is an important route towards St. Leonard's Road and Windsor Centre.

Figure 3.6 below provides a visual analysis of the former Imperial House site today.

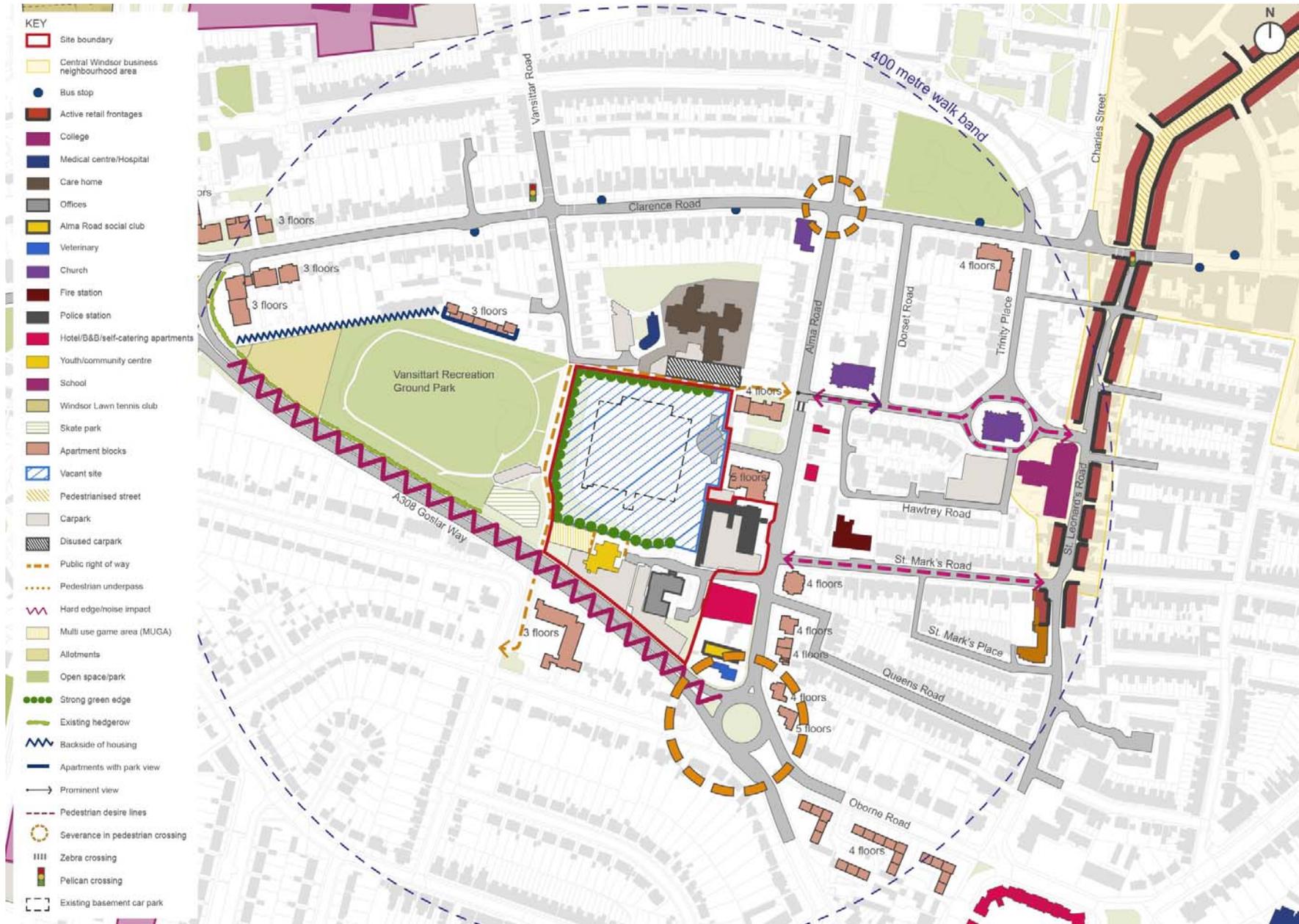


Figure 3.4 Alma Road



Figure 3.5 St. Leonard's Road retail hub

Figure 3.6 Imperial House site analysis



## 4 Opportunities and options

### 4.1 Opportunities

Following the existing policies this section analyses opportunities to redevelop the study area as a residential-led mixed-use site with community and the opportunity for other uses such as retail

The main design principles established for the site are:

- create a new pedestrian and cycle connection between Alma Road and Vansittart Recreation Ground Park
- improve existing pedestrian and cycle ways by introducing overlooking building frontages
- create a connected layout to increase pedestrian and cyclist movement alternatives
- protect and enhance the green character of Alma Road
- respect and respond to the surrounding mass and scale of the buildings
- no retail is order to protect nearby shopping areas, although retail or other services could comfortably be accommodated in the Alma Road frontage
- introduce a feature building at the location of the police station to create an articulated view from St Mark's Road towards Alma Road
- indicative layouts are provided in a way that means that development could be delivered either as a whole or to respect the boundaries of the sub-sites in figure 1.5

### 4.2 Options

There are six different options prepared testing the capacity of the site at different density ranges. The capacity of the each option is shown on the drawings on the following pages.

**Option 1** provides low to medium density housing incorporating both semi-detached houses and apartment blocks. The houses are located to the north-western part of the site adjacent to the existing care home, as a continuation of the urban fabric along Vansittart Road. Following the analysis of the surrounding housing stock, each of the proposed houses is provided with a 3m front garden and back gardens ranging from 10 to 12 metres in depth. Each housing plot can also accommodate two car parking spaces.

The footprint of the apartment blocks is retained to a minimum to present a greener more permeable option, in line with the planning policies described in Chapter 2. Parking is provided at 1.1 car park space per unit, while the use of the existing underground car park was retained, as in all the options.

The office block to the south of the site was developed into an apartment block and is being proposed as a 5-storey building in all the options due to its location adjacent to the A308 highway with semi-natural green space as a buffer. Parking was re-provided on the eastern side of the block to facilitate access.

The community and youth centre was retained with the existing footprint and connected to its existing MUGA and car park facilities. This was repeated in all the options.

Access to the site is provided from both Vansittart Road and Alma Road. The main route aims at facilitating movement within the site, while narrower private drives are being proposed to access the houses.

Option 1 is illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

**Option 2** draws from the same design principles as Option 1 with the inclusion of apartment blocks replacing some of the semi-detached housing, resulting in a higher residential density. As in Option 1, the use of the existing underground car park was retained with the possibility of providing direct access to/from the overlaying apartment blocks.

Option 2 is illustrated in Figure 4.2 below.

**Options 3 and 4** present alternatives with increased densities by means of larger apartment blocks on the eastern and western side of the site respectively. In these options, a podium garden is proposed on top of the undercroft car park to provide recreation and meeting space both for residents and shoppers.

Options 3 and 4 are exemplified in Figures 4.3 and 4.4 below.

**Option 5** proposes semi-detached houses covering the majority of the site with the retention of only the southern apartment block. This option also benefits from the use of the existing underground car parking and the retention of the community and youth centre and its facilities; however it does not include retail space.

Finally, **Option 6** offers a combination of semi-detached housing, one apartment block and an employment centre, with the retention of the community and youth centre. The new office block is located to the north-east of the site to make use of the existing underground car park while semi-detached houses front onto Alma Road as in Option 5.

Figure 4.6 below provides a visual representation of Option 6.



Figure 4.2 Option 2 – Medium density housing



Figure 4.3 Option 3 – Medium to high density housing



Figure 4.4 Option 4 – High density housing



Figure 4.5 Option 5 – Family housing



Figure 4.6 Option 6 – Mixed use: Housing and employment



## 5 Next steps

### 5.1 Finalising the report and embedding it in policy

We recommend that the following steps are now undertaken:

Action	Who by	Notes
Decide which of the above options to include in the consultation draft neighborhood plan	WNPF	More than one option can be included
Write draft policy for consultation draft neighbourhood plan	WNPF/AECOM	
Engage with landowners or their representatives	AECOM	Needs to be done before consultation draft is published
Discuss with Council any proposals that not be compliant with emerging Borough Local Plan	WNPF	
Finalise this report in response to WNPF comments	AECOM	

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