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**Walsall Council**

**Walsall Connected Gateway**

**Brief Review Report  
(Public Version)**

12/02/2024

**Beyond design.**

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# 1. Executive Summary

## Introduction

This document sets out the brief for the proposed 5-week review of the following key elements of the current RIBA Stage 3 Brief and the development work undertaken to progress the design.

Arcadis, Associated Architects and Cundall, have reviewed the options available in relation to the following elements of the project as requested by Walsall Council:

- Saddlers Centre Entrance / O2 Retail Unit
- New Proposed Retail Units on the former M&S Side of the proposed straightened Park Mall
- New Retail Unit to Rear of Former M&S
- Public Realm

This report presents the design options developed for each of the above to allow further feedback and review by the council ahead of progression to the next Design Stage.

In addition, it sets out the associated updated costs, programme, risks and issues, and procurement strategy for the project moving forward.

The key aims of the Connected Gateway project remain as:

### Saddlers Centre Entrance / O2 Retail Unit

- a central part of Walsall's wider £1.5bn ongoing regeneration plan
- the backbone of improved links between bus and rail stations
- a more flexible and improved offering in the Saddlers Centre
- permeability into the wider town centre and future developments

## Design Updates

The updated designs are set out in detail in Sections 3.1 – 3.3 of this report. In summary these have resulted in the following:

- Park Street Entrance - a reduced / less prominent gateway entrance that still emphasises that it is the entrance to the Saddlers Centre but is also the primary route to the station. The current O2 store is retained as a stand-alone unit with its entrance on Park Street. Two new kiosk type units are provided that take into account the current change in levels in Park Mall.
- Park Mall Rental Units – a series of new rental units are provided on the north side of the Mall adjacent to M&S which:
  - Maximizes the lettable area on the new straightened Park Mall
  - Promotes the letting of the new units on the opposite side of the Mall
  - Includes for the wider access needs of the proposed Adult Learning College in the former M&S space

A new convenience food store will be provided to the rear of the former M&S serving users of the Station / Saddlers Centre, Adult Learning College and local residents

- Public Realm (Including Park Street, new 'Plaza' and Station and Street. The new updated design:
  - reflects the redesign of Saddlers Centre entrance
  - simplifies and 'regularises' the proposed patterns in pavings – please note these are still significantly different to the proposals for the Active Public Space / Gallery Square development
  - Allows for no openings / active frontage on the exposed wall of Holland and Barrett other than a possible Video / News Wall

## 2. Executive Summary

### Programme and Phasing

The master programme has been updated to reflect the following:

- Key Lease End dates which drive demolition of Properties on Park Street
- Delivery of Bradford Mall as a stand-alone project
- The impacts of this Stage 3 brief review
- Completion of Stage 3 Design
- Ongoing public consultation and engagement
- Updated planning strategy / pre-app discussions
- 2 Stage Tender Process
- A phased construction delivery , i.e.
  - Phase 1 - Bradford Mall
  - Phase 2 - Park Mall / Concourse / Part 1 of Park Street / Station Street
  - Phase 3 – Park Street Demo
  - Phase 4 – Part 2 of Park Street and new ‘Plaza’
  - Phase 5 – Station Street (dependant on Adult Learning College)

Key Dates:

| <b>Milestone</b>                      |          |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Planning Submission                   | 20 /6/24 |
| Planning Approval                     | 19/11/24 |
| Out To Tender – 1 <sup>st</sup> Stage | 14/8/24  |
| PCSA                                  | 15/1/25  |
| Agreed Contract Sum                   | 3/6/25   |
| Start on site                         | 2/7/25   |
| Completion                            | 23/4/27  |

## 2. Brief

The following sets out the brief for the Stage 3 Brief Review as discussed at the 'Kick-Off Meeting' on 11 November 2023 and recorded in Arcadis' Project Brief Review Rev 0 – 20 November 2023 as outlined below.

### **Saddlers Centre Entrance / O2 Unit**

Walsall have confirmed their wish that the Saddlers Centre Entrance on Park Street be identified as the entrance to the internal element of the link between the Train Station and the Bus Station. The focus of Park Mall itself will be a 'grab and go' food offering backfilled with a retail offering where necessary.

The Walsall Regen Board have requested that the entrance itself will be less of a statement however the entrance should be visible for pedestrians both crossing and travelling along Park Street.

Whilst recognising the differences between location of Walsall Rail station (town centre) and Wolverhampton Rail Station (detached from City Centre) and the lines upon they are situated (local and West Coast Main Line respectively, the design team have been referred to the entrance design for the new Wolverhampton Train Station especially in relation to the glazed entrance and the positioning of Network Rail signage.

There is a wish for the Saddlers Centre / Train Station entrance to be referenced (subject to possible rebranding) in associated 'name' signage and lighting.

The existing O2 unit to the left of the Saddlers Centre entrance will remain in place and the entrance to the unit will remain on Park Street. No recladding of the O2 unit will be undertaken. The retention of the current O2 unit entrance will require the redesign of the main entrance steps and ramp.

It is recognised that the retention of the O2 unit in its current form:

- Does not line up with the proposed structural line of the proposed realigned mall.
- Will mean the loss of the current kiosk units to the rear of M&S due to the need to level the mall floor at the entrance.

The possibility of keeping O2 in occupation during the works is to be investigated.

It has always been assumed that the realignment of the Mall will result in the need for EE to be relocated.

Walsall have reconfirmed their wish to retain Park Mall as currently shown however the quantum of glazed rooflights should be reduced.

The new structural design should be cognisant of the need to provide deliveries to retail units on both sides of the Mall, however there is no specific requirement for storage to be provided at the upper level of retail units.

### **Retail Units Adjacent M&S**

As there was no plan for the use of the former M&S space the current brief allowed for the provision of a double height partition on the former M&S side of the new straightened mall. Whilst acknowledging the reason for this it was felt this would not promote the letting of the units on the other side of the Mall.

The Council are now in detailed discussions with the Adult Learning College regarding them taking occupation of the former M&S space and it is assumed they will NOT be granted any direct access on to Park Mall. For this reason the remainder of the existing retail units (following the structural works to realign Park Mall will be converted to grab and go food kiosk units.

The units range from 4.5 to 5.5m in depth and this is to be maintained. The existing escape corridor to the rear of the units will be retained as a protected secondary means of escape route.

Units are to be provided with power, toilets (possibly existing) and general plumbing.

### **New Retail Unit to the Rear of M&S**

Avison Young / Centre Management have requested that the new proposed Retail Unit to rear of M&S should be a convenience store. Avison Young have confirmed that deliveries can be either via the new ramp on Station Street (providing access for delivery vehicle or via goods lift adjacent to former Poundland store.

New access corridor to be reduced in length (taking into account Council comments regarding H&S / security concerns) by creating 'chamfered' entrance from the mall.

It shall be assumed the Adult Learning College will have no access onto the corridor other than fire escapes and these works are beyond the scope of the Connected Gateway project.

There will be no out of hours access to the shopping centre (or the proposed convenience store. All out of hours access onto and off Platforms 2 and 3 will be via the overbridge and new stairs / lift on Platform 1.

### **Public Realm**

The Regen Board have confirmed:

- The primary purpose is to create an external link between Bus Station and Saddlers entrance – the new Gallery Square design (part of the Active Public Space project) will be the 'congregation' area.

- The design shall assume that planning permission will be provided for the demolition of 44 and 46 Park Street.

An area of green space will be provided as currently shown.

No active frontage to be provided to Holland and Barrett unit hence no need for change in level required. Associated Architects to assess suitability of (separately funded) video wall on this elevation. Possible fire exit required in this elevation.

Current 'stitch' and 'basketweave' design to be progressed in (European) granite. Walsall accept that this does not interface with current proposal for Active Public Space – design for latter to be reviewed / simplified by One Creative.

The Council have requested that the previously omitted works to Station St are reinstated i.e. paving and associated services to the section between Park Street and the Station Street taxi / vehicle drop off area

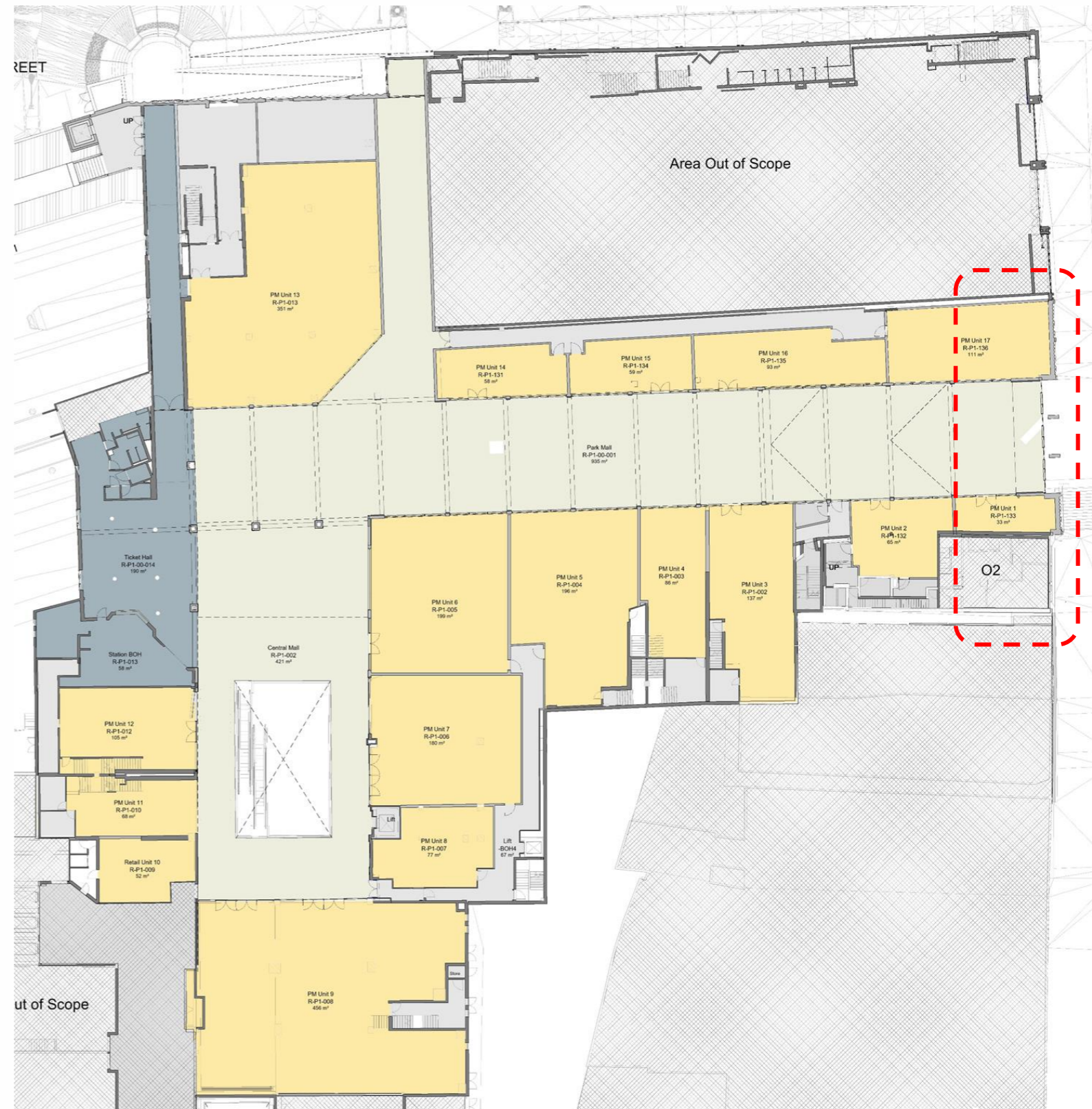
## **3. Design Development**

### 3.1 Park Street Entrance

# Park Street Entrance

The Park Street Entrance has been redesigned to reflect the removal of the O2 Unit from the project brief. Following inconclusive information from the invasive structural surveys, in order to mitigate design risk the decision has also been taken to straighten the new façade.

Removing the splayed entrance from the design allows existing column positions to be re-utilised which avoids the need for additional transfer structure below.



Revised Park Mall Rental Unit Layout

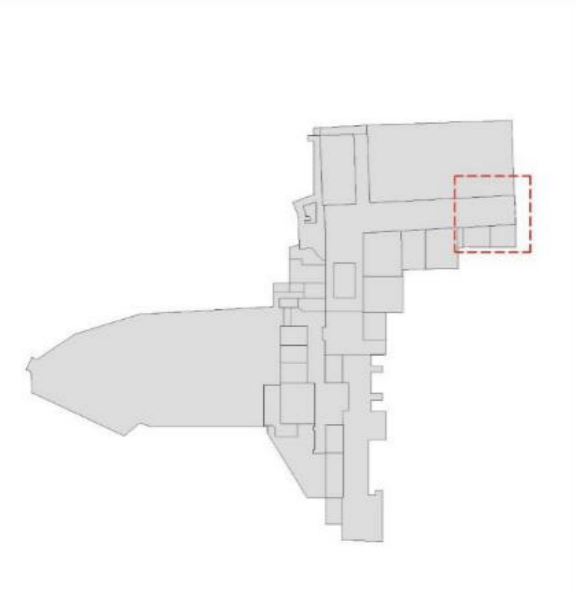




## Park Street Entrance

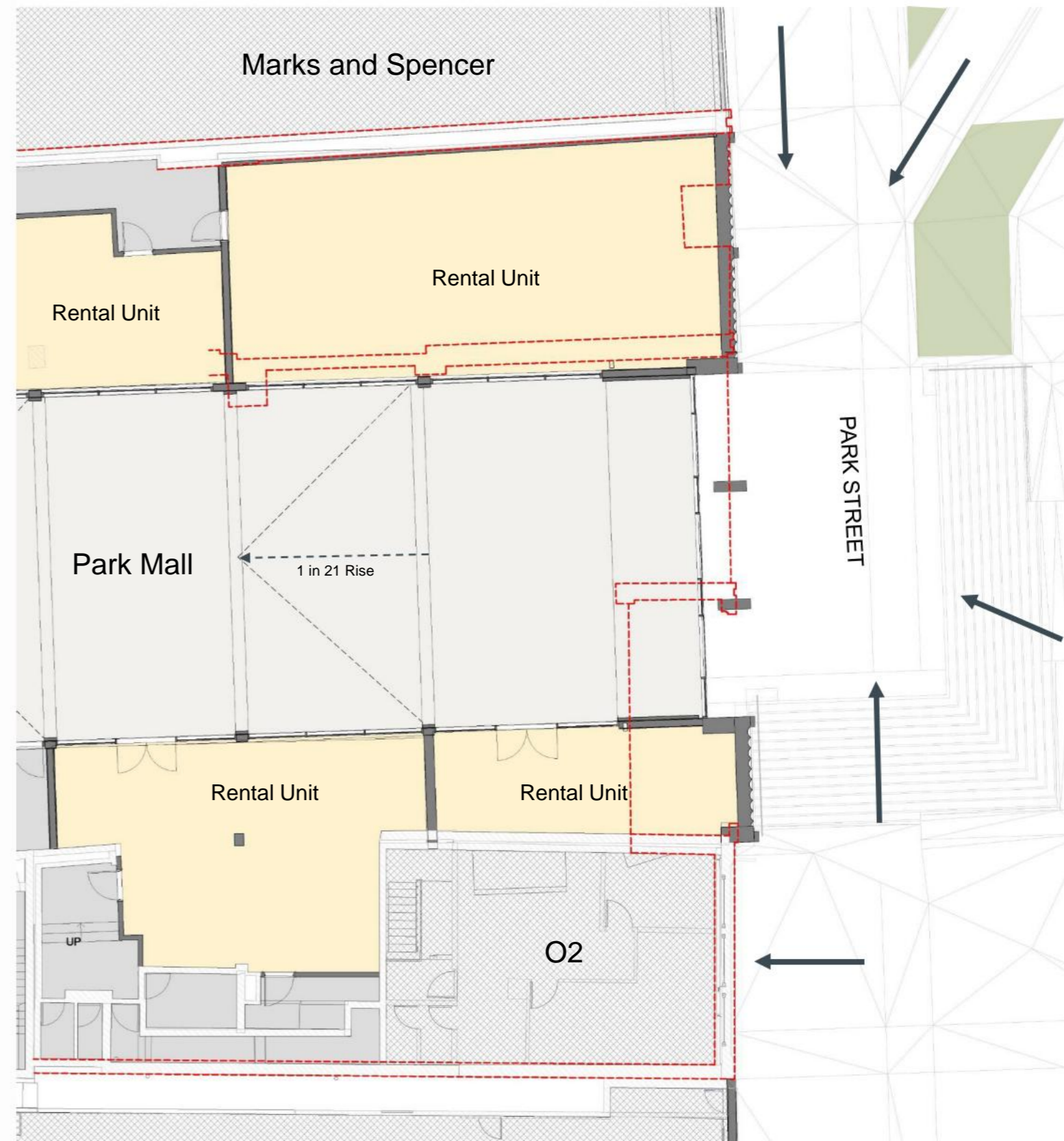
Introducing a simple grid to the main elevation splits the façade in to 6 equal bays. This rhythm helps to simplify the design of the new frontage and is more in-keeping with the repeating bay design found on the adjacent M&S façade.

The Stepped landscape has been redesigned to reflect the new façade design and to ensure clear frontage across the face of the O2 Unit without compromising the quality of the urban realm design. The Landscape design development is explained further in section X of this document.



**KEY:**

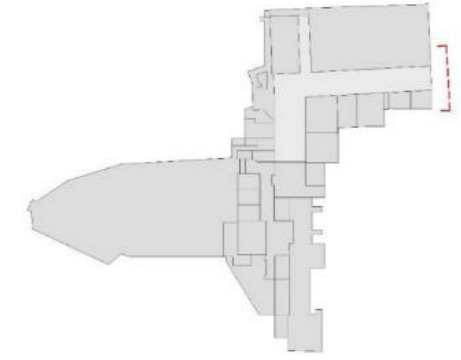
- - - Existing building line
- Key approach



*Park Mall Revised Entrance Plan Diagram*

# Park Street Entrance

The drawing below illustrates the developed façade design with the 6 bays, 3 of which form the glazed entrance, the other 3 with inset feature cladding panels. The Feature horizontal band across the middle of the elevation ties through with the internal shop front Datum lines and creates a zone for the Saddlers Centre name (subject to any future rebranding).



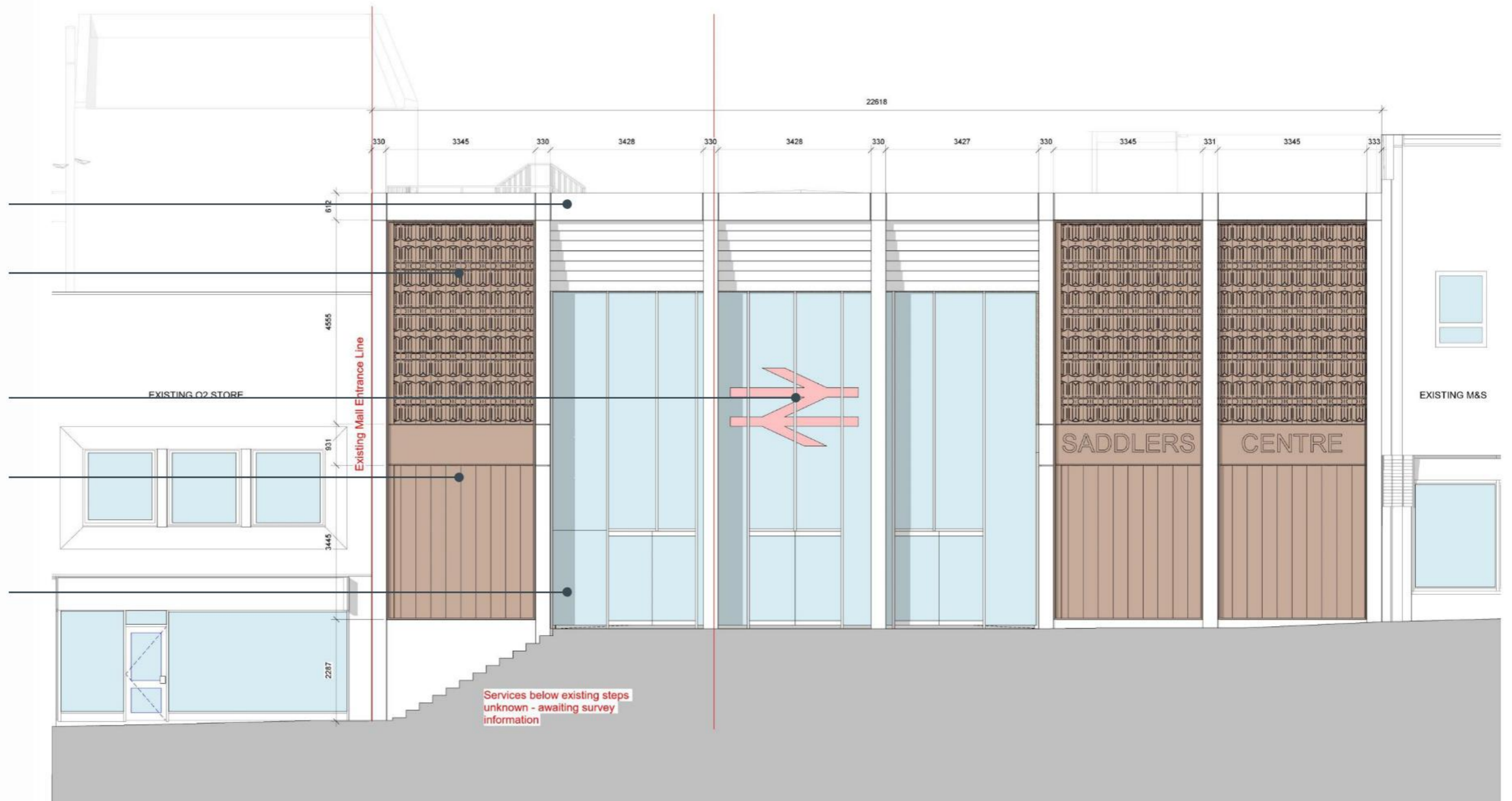
GRC Cladding and colonnade

Aluminium PPC Profiled Cladding, perforated with bespoke pattern and integrated lighting.

Large feature Network Rail illuminated signage.

Aluminium PPC Profiled Cladding, pattered at low level for robustness

Curtain Walling Glazing with capped vertical mullions and uncapped silicone joints to horizontal transoms.



# Park Street Entrance

Existing Entrance Arrangement to Park Mall via Park Street.



# Park Street Entrance

Concept visualisation of the revised Park Street Entrance design with O2 removed from the project scope and revised entrance steps.



# Park Street Entrance



## **3. Design Development**

### 3.2 Park Mall Rental Units

# Park Mall Rental Units

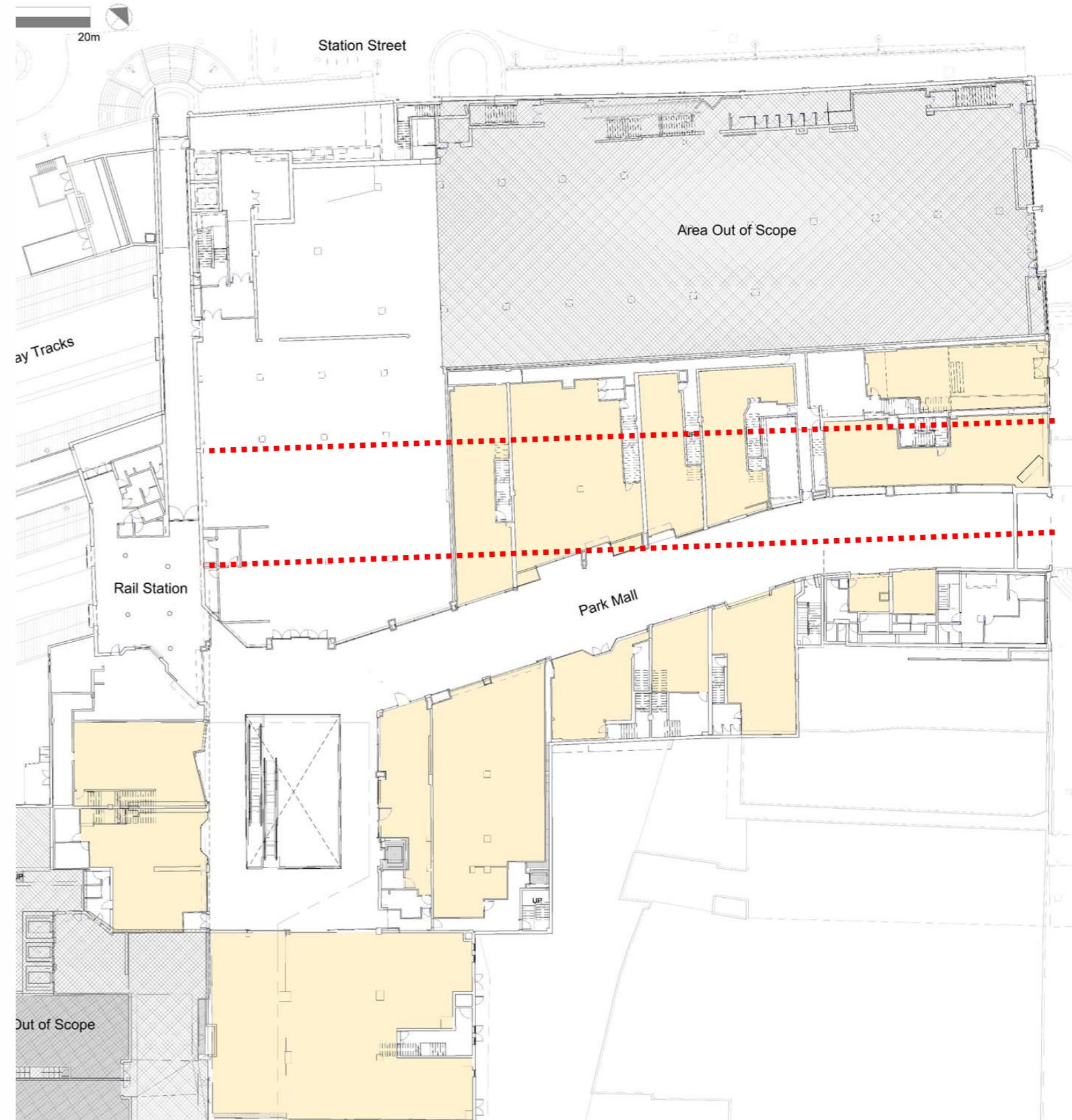
Developed from the previous design iteration, the revised design for Park Mall follows the same key design principles as before, straightening the concourse and creating a double height inviting space which creates a strong visual link between Park Street and the Railway Station.

Excluding the vacant Marks and Spencer Unit the existing mall provides circa 1890m<sup>2</sup> of retail floor space excluding back of house areas. The revised design increases this by 28% to circa 2426m<sup>2</sup> when including the new convenience unit adjacent to the train station.

The following pages cover the changes to the scheme following the brief review and design updates.

**KEY:**

..... New Park Mall Concourse

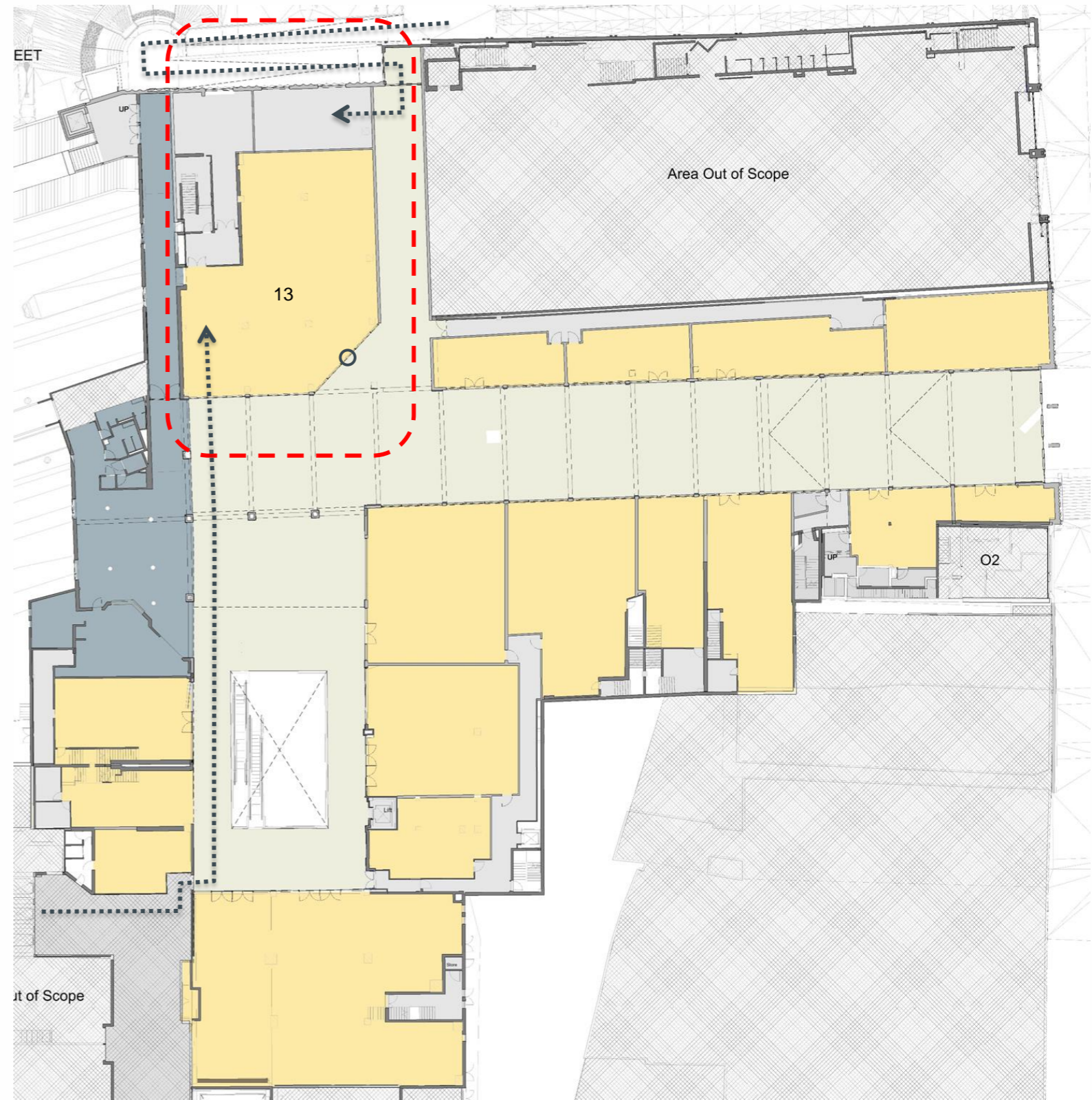
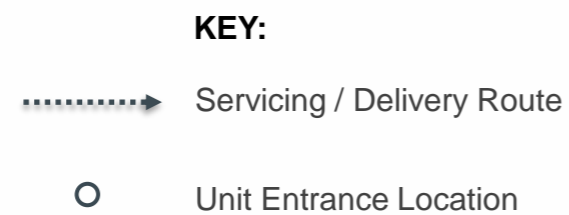


Existing Park Mall Rental Unit Layout

# Park Mall Rental Units

Unit 13 adjacent to the Railway Station has had several changes implemented:

- A chamfer has been introduced at the entrance creating a set back entrance on the corner between Park Mall and the Station Street link. This also widens the Station street link on the corner, increases visibility and creates a more open circulation space.
- Storage space to the North of the unit to be accessed and serviced either via the ramp to Station Street or by the goods lifts to the south of the plan.



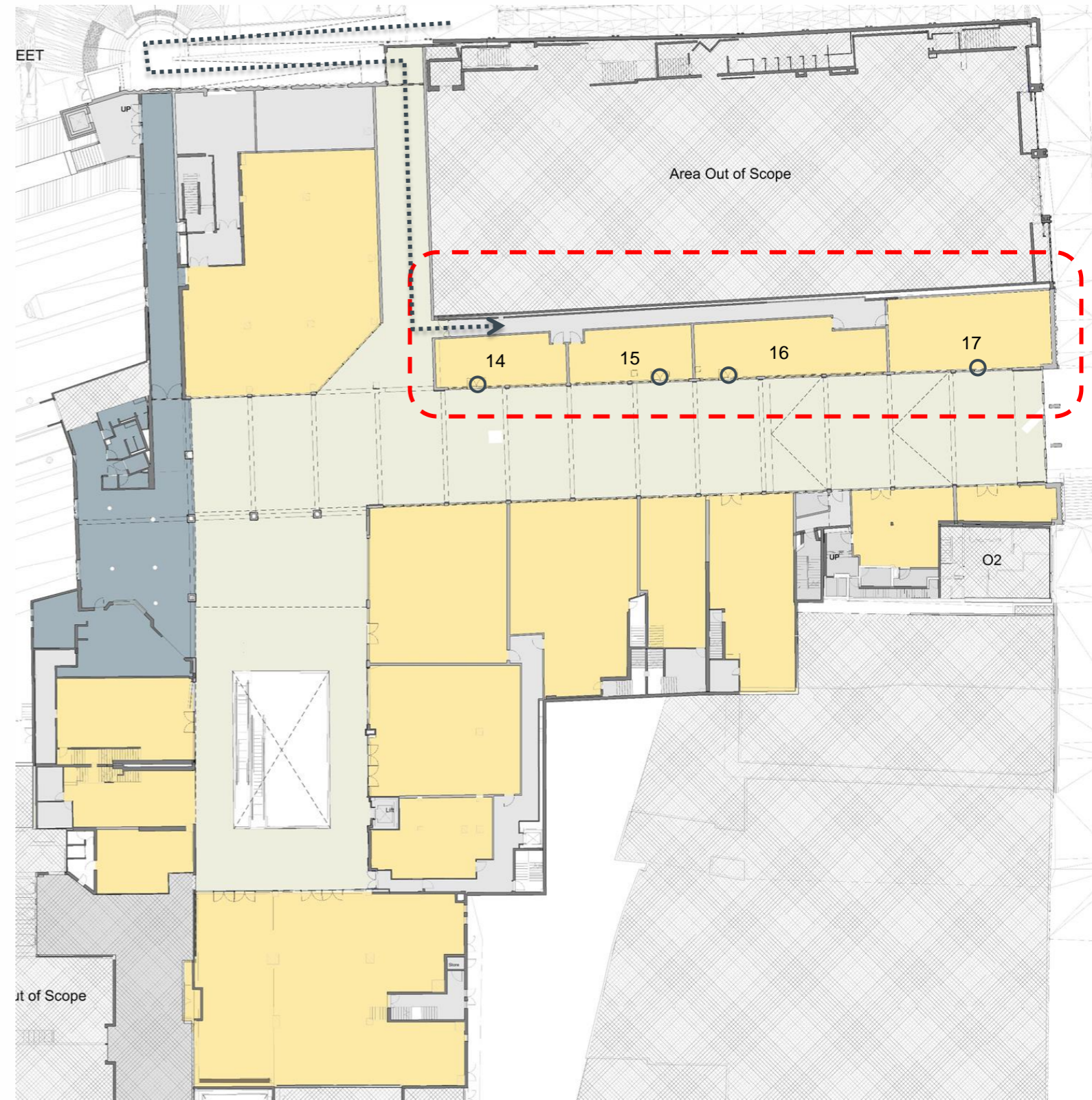
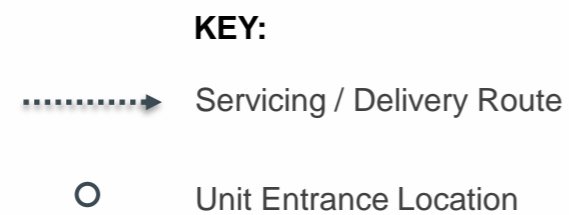
Revised Park Mall Rental Unit Layout



# Park Mall Rental Units

Units 14 – 17 have been added to the scheme, introducing a line of rental units to the North side of the mall, flanking the back of the former Marks and Spencer Unit, intended to be developed in to an Adult Learning Centre. The same frontage design developed for the South of the Mall has been applied to the Northern elevation ensuring continuity through the new concourse.

- The service corridor has been retained to the rear of the units which will also provide a secondary means of escape. Final discharge of this corridor in to the Station Street link to be reviewed further with the project Fire Engineer.
- The current requirement is for the Adult Learning Centre to have no direct link to Park Mall. It is understood however that this may change or develop as designs progress. If desired, one of these units could be utilised to provide an additional access / connection between Park Mall and the Adult Learning Centre. Unit 14 would provide the most benefit in terms of position, located within the heart of the centre and at the opposite end to the main entrance on to Park Street.



Revised Park Mall Rental Unit Layout



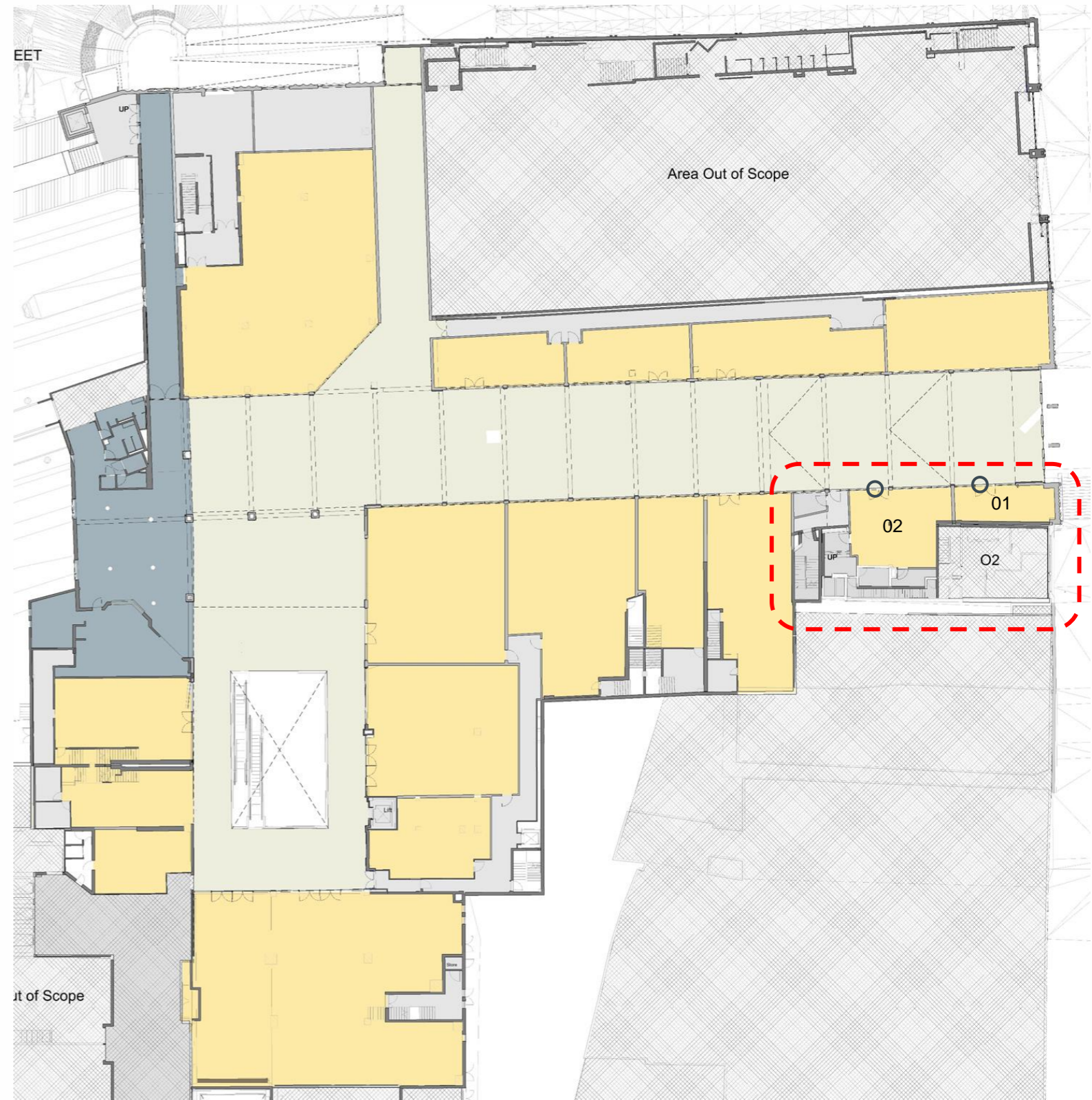
# Park Mall Rental Units

Units 01 – 02 have been developed following the removal of the current O2 Unit from the Connected Gateway Scheme. The new Mall sits several meters further North than the edge of the previous Mall and this allows for the creation of Unit 01 along what would have otherwise been the blank edge of O2.

Unit 02 will be created through joining the existing 2no. Kiosk units together with some additional frontage to the Mall. The floor levels in both units required to be raised by a maximum of 450mm in order to tie through with the new Mall levels.

The existing units have approximately. 4.8 – 5m clear height from the underside of the roof to the current floor level which should allow for the necessary increase in ground floor level. To the rear of unit 2 back of house spaces will then step back down again in order to tie through with the existing floor levels within the staircases which lead to the service access below H Samuel.

- KEY:**
- .....➔ Servicing / Delivery Route
  - Unit Entrance Location



Revised Park Mall Rental Unit Layout



# Park Mall Rental Units

Existing Park Mall arrangement.



# Park Mall Rental Units

Revised Park Mall arrangement looking towards Park Street.



*(Rooflight subject to change in width following further development in RIBA Stage 3.)*

# Park Mall Rental Units



*(Rooflight subject to change in width following further development in RIBA Stage 3.)*

# Park Mall Rental Units



*(Rooflight subject to change in width following further development in RIBA Stage 3.)*

## **3. Design Development**

### 3.3 Park Street and Plaza Landscape Design

# Brief

## Project Context

Node have been commissioned by Walsall Council as sub-consultant to Associated Architects to prepare landscape design concepts for what is known as the Walsall Connected Gateway. The Connected Gateway scheme aims to provide a new connection and improved public realm between Walsall Bus Station, the Saddlers Shopping Centre and the Railway Station.

Two design options were considered during previous stages. Following comments and coordination, the preferred design has been updated as described under the 'Design Update' section to provide a better and enriched public realm for the Connected Gateway scheme.

The project was one of a number of interventions identified within Walsall's Town Centre Masterplan which was completed in 2019. In December 2020 Walsall Council was awarded £11.44m by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as part of the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF).

This is a critical project in the delivery of the Council's long term, aspirational vision for the regeneration of Walsall town centre.

This report provides a brief summary of work undertaken recently to produce a preferred design after a brief hiatus when the Mall's future uses were being determined and confirmed. This includes further defining the brief, understanding, influencing and applying the PRIP (Public Realm Investment Plan) and PRM (Public Realm Manual), developing and applying key issues, design principles and themes in the context of defined constraints, developing a preferred design option suitable for planning, costing and client approval/ selection with a view to advance to public consultation and planning applications.

## The Brief, Vision and Aspirations

The brief is for: 'transformative investment of the rail and bus stations either side of Park Street in Walsall town centre. The intervention will radically improve the visitor experience on Park Street, drive wider regenerative benefits and re-position Walsall's economic status as a sub-regional centre.

The project will transform the rail station arrival experience by creating a better connected, more welcoming place for visitors and residents. It will see a physical and visual link developed between the rail station and main bus station creating a coherent transport interchange on the high street. The FHSF project will modernise and re-purpose existing retail floorspace to provide a more balanced and attractive town centre offer which meets the needs to the retail and leisure market. It will create new public spaces to attract more people and increase dwell time, thus becoming the catalyst for the transformation of the whole town centre.'

The public realm design is a key aspect of achieving this.

## Town Centre Masterplan


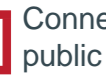
The Connected Gateway Scheme is a crucial part of the delivery of Walsall's Town Centre Masterplan vision.

By 2040 the Masterplan aims to:

- Double the number of quality homes to 1800+
- Reduce the vacancy rate by 70% to less than 5% overall.
- Become the healthiest town centre in the UK with a score of 0.34.
- Double the number of visitors to the town centre.
- Increase the number of street to sevenfold to 500+.
- Increase the number of quality green links by a factor of ten to 5km overall.



**LEGEND**

-  Connected Gateway
-  public realm boundary

During the recent design review and update the schemes redline has evolved. This is due to a better understanding of the projects technical constraints and opportunities, available finances and funding streams and the projects real world requirements. Figure 1 shows the current redline.

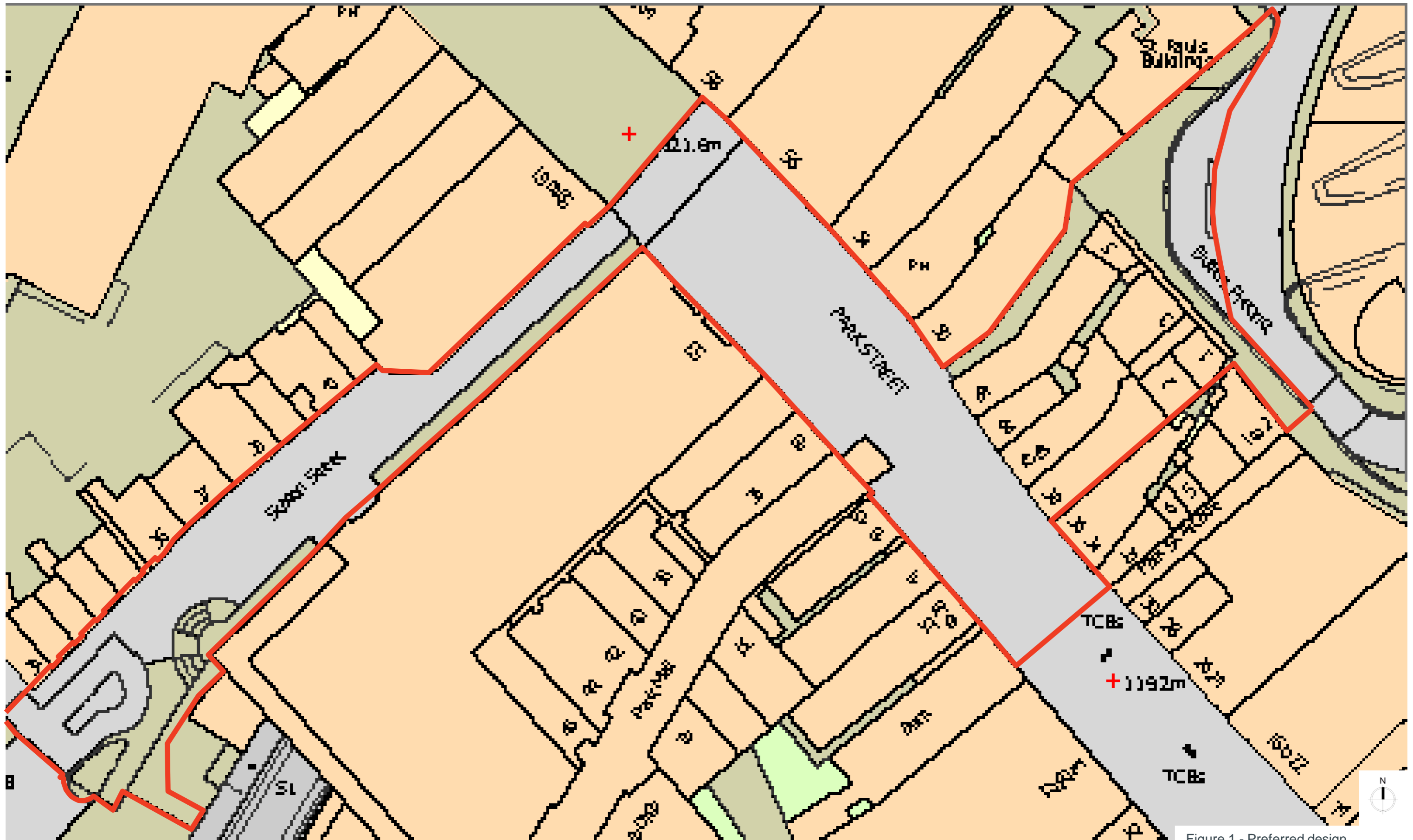


Figure 1 - Preferred design

# Concept and Themes

Previously we identified that a scheme can only deliver at a high quality if it is informed by a strong vision, concept and overlapping themes.

As part of the iterative journey from Stage 1 through to the end of 3 we have maintained using concepts and themes as the conceptual basis for the public realms design development. These concepts and themes are as follows, and represented graphically opposite:

The **‘Stitch’** based on Walsall’s saddle making heritage and repairing and pulling together disparate elements of the urban fabric;

**‘Human Traces’** encompassing ideas around people, buildings, stories, movement, connections, the past, the future, energy and flow:

**‘Interchange and Exchange’** based upon the idea that successful places are those which encourage social interaction, economic and cultural exchange. Encompassing ideas around people, movement, social interaction, connections, nucleus, exchange of ideas and economic regeneration.

**‘Health and Wellbeing’** based on the idea of creating healthy cities and people by considering how public realm can encourage healthy behaviours, uplift spirits, appeal to all our senses, improve physical and mental health, green the city reducing pollution and improve micro climate. Encompassing ideas around people, health, greening, senses, the cardio-vascular system, organs, flow, energy and repair.

Further explanation of how these concepts and themes have been woven into the current design can be found in the ‘Design Development - Options A and B’ section of the Report.

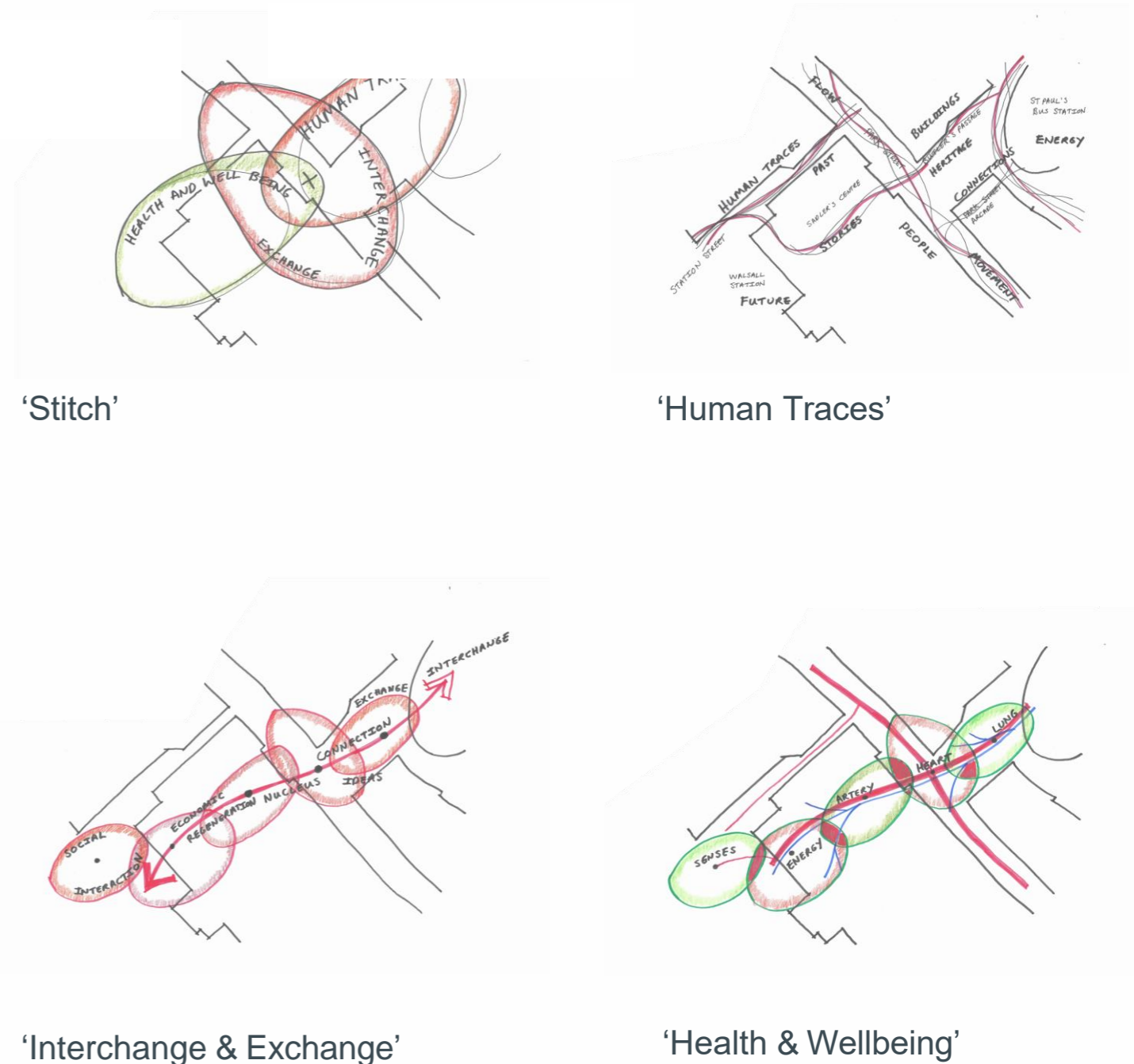


Figure 2 - Design Concepts and Themes

# Design Principles

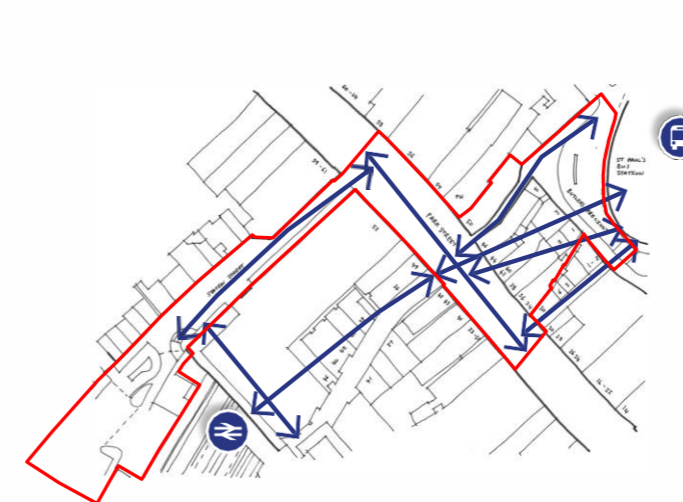
As part of the journey from Stage 1 to 3, we also maintained using (integrated along with our concepts and themes) four, key 'design principles' to underpin the conceptual basis for the public realms optioneering. These four design principles are as follows, and represented graphically opposite:

**'Reintegration'** incorporating the key components of the stitch, connections, visual permeability and desire lines:

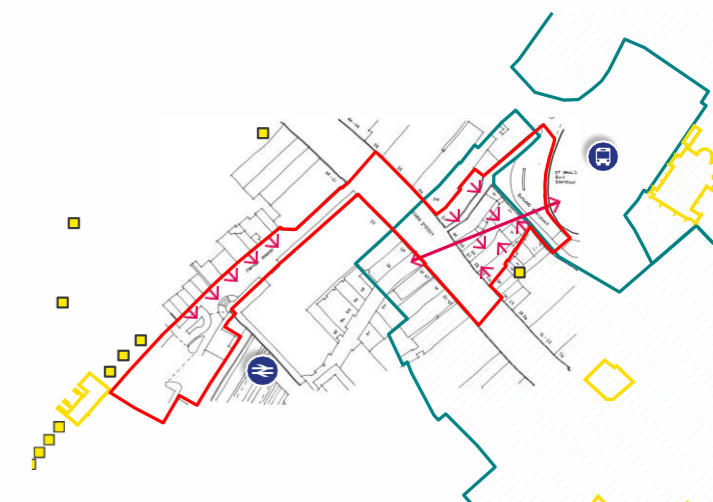
**'Respect and enhance heritage'** incorporating the key components of human traces, the conservation area, listed buildings and locally listed buildings:

**'Place, activity, people'** incorporating the key components of improving Exchange Plaza,

**'Green and sustainable'** incorporating the key components of improving Walsall health and wellbeing, sights, smells, sounds, tactile experience as well as creating new green infrastructure:



'Reintegration'



'Respect and Enhance Heritage'



'Place, Activity, People'



'Green and Sustainable'

Figure 3 - Design Principles



# Saddlers Centre entrance on Park Street



# Entrance on Station Street

(Façade design to be further updated in RIBA Stage 3).



## Public Realm Future Proofing

The proposed paving design and layout have the potential to be extended along Park Street and stitch together the whole of the Walsall town centre area in the future.

Standardised materials and furniture has been chosen to align with the Walsall PRM requirements. This provides an efficient and coordinated opportunity for expanding and creating a consistent design beyond the projects current redline.

An artistic impression of the extended layout along Park Street is shown to the right.



Figure 7 - Public realm extension to park Street

## Next Steps

Following approval of the preferred design and instruction to proceed with the next stage of design we will look to develop a pack of information suitable for public consultation and ultimately to support the schemes keys stakeholder and public consultation as we as the projects planning application. The next pack of information is likely to include the following:

Complete coordination, keys stakeholder and public consultation and design progression with client, co- consultants and project manager.

Attend key stakeholder workshops and public consultation. Presentation materials produced for both.

Produce specifications and typical design details for hard landscape materials including landscape surface finishes, planting, trees, features and furniture. Coordinate with suppliers on lead times and typical construction methods. Produce typical details limited to 1no.. detail per item.

Design and specify the softworks layout, including planting plans and species selection palette. Typical tree pit details and any requirements for planning application

Coordinate and input into other consultants' lead areas of responsibility to ensure correct design and integration of built elements in the landscape. Including costing, lighting, drainage, irrigation, water features, ecology and habitat, plant rooms, build- ups, structures, and levels

Provide detailed proposals for updating the costs and check alignment with cost budget



## **5. Next Steps**

5.2 Outline RIBA Stage 3 Programme



# Outline RIBA Stage 3 Programme

The Master Programme has been further developed to take into account the following:

- Key Lease End dates which drive demolition of current leased properties on Park Street, in particular:
  - Subway
  - Card Factory
  - Holland and Barrett
- Delivery of Bradford Mall as a stand-alone project
- The impacts of this Stage 3 brief review
- Completion of Stage 3 Design, – these include:
  - Resolution of fire engineering related issues
  - Receipt, review of intrusive surveys
- Ongoing public consultation and engagement
- Updated planning strategy / pre-app discussions
- 2 Stage Tender Process
- A phased construction delivery (see opposite), i.e.
  - Phase 1 - Bradford Mall
  - Phase 2 - Park Mall / Concourse / Part 1 of Park Street / Station Street
  - Phase 3 – Park Street Demo
  - Phase 4 – Part 2 of Park Street and new ‘Plaza’
  - Phase 5 – Station Street (dependant on Adult Learning College)

## Proposed Phasing Strategy (Indicative)

Phase 1 –  
Bradford Mall



Phase 2 – Park Mall /  
Concourse / Phase  
1 of Park St/ Station  
St Entrance



Phase 3 –Park St  
and Butlers  
Passage Demo



Phase 4 –Bus  
Station Sq. /Park  
Street Phase 1



Phase 5 – Station  
Street and Adult  
Learning College



An updated Master Programme is attached below

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