

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Whitley
App Ref: 211857/FUL
Address: Reading Sewage Treatment Works, Island Road, Reading, RG2 0RP
Proposals: Permission for permanent retention of containerised buildings
Case Officer: James Schofield
Date received (valid from): 15 September 2021
Target Decision date: 10 November 2021 - Extended 26 May 2022

1. SITE DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

Reading Sewage Treatment Works (STW) is located to the south of Reading on the west side of the A33. The STW serves Reading and the surrounding area for the treatment of sewage. The STW site comprises sewage treatment plant and a number of buildings which either house sewage treatment plant and equipment or provide office space in connection with the operational and administrative functions of the STW.

The Reading Recycling Centre is located to the west of the STW site, beyond which are open fields. To the north of the STW across Island Road are a landfill site, a number of residential properties and the River Kennet, beyond which is Thames Water's Fobney Water Treatment Works. A former greyhound racing track is located to the east of the STW. On the opposite side of the A33 to the east is the Hilton Hotel and the former Manor Farm STW site, which has been developed for residential and other uses.

The containerised buildings are located to the rear (east) of the main STW Building, close to the eastern boundary of the STW, as shown on the enclosed Location Plan. The proposal is to retain the buildings in their current location. The application site comprises a very small area within the context of the overall STW site.

2. PROPOSAL

The proposal seeks permission to retain the two containerised buildings in their current locations. The buildings are rectangular in shape and constructed from steel, coloured light grey. Building 1 is 7.93m in length, 3.5m in width and 2.4m in height. Building 2 is 9.83m in length, 3.5m in width and 2.4m in height. Each building is sub-divided to provide separate internal rooms.

Permission was granted for the buildings under application 150855 on the 3rd July 2015. The original permission was sought for a temporary period and a condition attached to the approval required the buildings to be removed by the 3rd June 2020.

Thames Water's Innovation Team still require the additional space for laboratory facilities and are seeking to retain the buildings on the site permanently.

3. CONSULTEES

Statutory:

- **Environment Agency (EA)** -no objection.

Non-statutory:

- **RBC Environmental Protection** - No objection.

Public consultation:

No written representations were received in respect of this application.

4. PLANS/DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED

The agent supplied the following:

- Planning Statement
- Flood Risk assessment
- Block Plan
- Building 1 Plans & Elevations
- Building 2 Plans & Elevations
- Photographs of site

5. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

150855/FUL Retrospective permission for two containerised buildings to provide laboratory facilities for 5 years. Granted 3 July 2015

6. EQUALITY ACT 2010

In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore, in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

7. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019):

- CC7 (Design and the Public Realm)
- EN18 (Flooding & Drainage)

APPRAISAL

The main issues in consideration of this application are:

- Need for the development;
- Impact on visual amenity;
- Flooding, and
- Other considerations.

Need for the development

The applicant has advised that Thames Water has a statutory obligation to extend and improve wastewater infrastructure as agreed with the Government Regulator (OFWAT). The provision of the additional facilities for laboratory sample testing is considered to be in the public interest and therefore justified. In addition, the containerised buildings are sited within the existing Reading STW and therefore the principle of the use of the land is already established.

Impact on visual amenity

Policy CC7 requires that all development shall be of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

The container buildings are not attractive in appearance but are functional and appropriate for the use they are put to. Due to the size (maximum 2.4m high) and location the containerised buildings are not visually prominent in relation to the already existing built form. The containerised buildings are also screened from view by the trees and soft landscaping defining the eastern boundary of the Reading STW site. As a result of the introduction of the containerised buildings, there has not been a significant change in the visual appearance of the site or character of the surrounding area. While when granting the previous temporary permission weight was given to the temporary nature of the application the reasons for accepting the development then remain and therefore there is no justification to now not confirm a permanent permission but with a condition requiring the buildings are removed when use no longer needed.

Flooding

The site lies within Flood Zone 2 where there is an annual probability of flooding of between 0.1% and 1%. The Environment Agency has been consulted as the site is a sewage treatment plant and has not objected. The containerised buildings are sited on an area of hardstanding close to the existing buildings on site. The submitted Flood Risk Assessment indicates flood mitigation measures in terms of a drainage strategy for the Reading STW that will divert all surface water through the treatment works. Due to their size and scale, the containerised buildings are not considered to significantly impede the flow of flood water or increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. Therefore, in terms of flooding issues the proposal is considered to accord with guidance contained within Policy EN18 and the NPPF.

Other considerations

In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation. It is considered that there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the current application) that the protected groups would have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application.

The Local Planning Authority have worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner based on seeking solutions to problems arising in relation to dealing with the planning application.

RECOMMENDATION

Grant

CONDITIONS

- 1) Once use ceases buildings to be removed and the land shall be restored to its former condition. CC7: Design and the Public Realm