

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No: 201876/FUL

Address: Blewgarth, The Warren

Proposal: Demolition of existing buildings and erection of replacement boathouse and leisure building with associated access and landscaping

Agreed Target Date: 30/09/21

Case Officer: Connie Davis

Site description

Blewgarth is a residential dwelling located on the north side of The Warren. The application site relates to a leisure plot of land on the opposite (south) side of The Warren which fronts onto the bank of the River Thames and is under the same ownership. Similar leisure plots are located to the West along the bank of the river whilst to the east is Reading Canoe Club.

The existing site contains 3 small buildings - a boat house, leisure building and small shed.

The leisure plot is located within flood zones 3A and 3B and is within the North Reading dry valleys and Chilterns Escarpment Major Landscape Feature and within a 'Green Link' (as designated by policies EN12 and EN13) of the Reading Borough Local Plan). The eastern edge of the site is also located within the St Peter's Conservation Area.

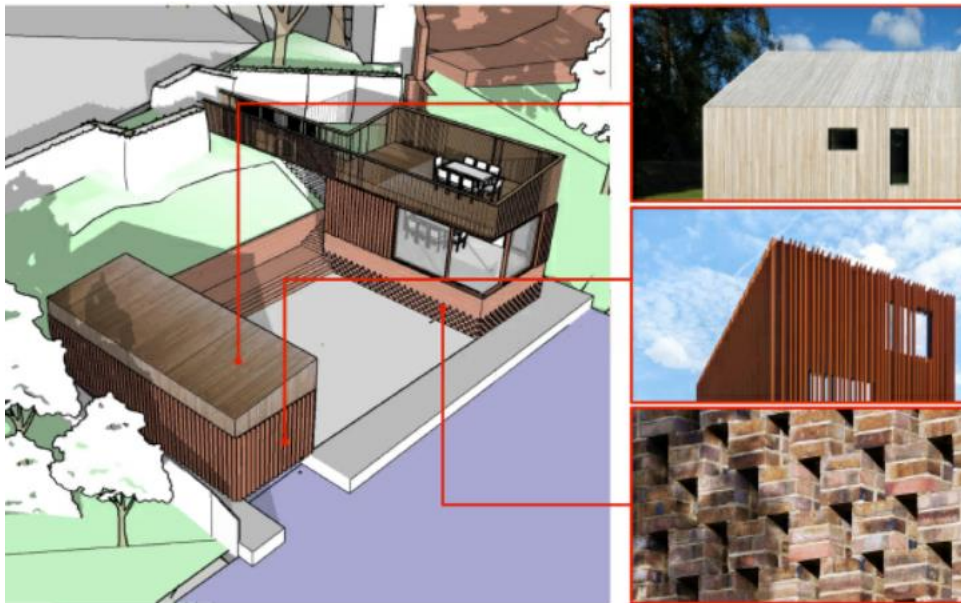


The application site with existing buildings

Proposal

Planning permission is sought for a proposed demolition of existing buildings on site and erection of replacement boat house and summer house.

At the base will be brick; a dense red brick with some colour variety will be used for the lower level of the summer house, the new retaining wall to the bank and the steps from summerhouse down to the lawn. In addition, metal ribs and timber battens will be used.



Information Submitted:

320/P/05 Rev C - Proposed Floor Plan

Received 23rd September 2021

Ecological Impact Statement prepared by windrushecolgy.com dated September 2021

Received 6th September 2021

Responses to the consultee feedback, planning application #201876

320/P/06 Rev B - Proposed Flood Plain Impact

320/P/07 Rev B - Proposed Roof Plan

320/P/08 Rev B - Proposed Elevations

320/P/12 Rev B - Proposed 3D Views

320/P/13 Rev B - Proposed Materials

Received 26th April 2021

320/P/15 - Proposed Block Plan

Received 6th January 2021

Design & Access Statement

352/P/01 - Location Plan

320/P/02 - Existing Site Plan

320/P/03 - Existing Elevations

320/P/04 - Existing Cross Sections and Volume Calculations

320/P/11 Rev A - Existing & Proposed River Elevations

320/P/14 - Tree Plan: existing and proposed planting

Application Form

CIL Form

Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment prepared by AKSWard dated December 2020

Envirocheck OS Water Network Map

Received 24th December 2021

Consultations

Internal Consultees

Environment Agency - Objection on Ecology grounds. No response received to further consultation within the specified time frame

Natural Environment - No objections, subject to conditions

Ecology - Objection (due to the Environment Agency's objection)

External Consultees

A site notice was displayed between 15th January 2021 - 5th February 2021

Four comments (objections/ observations) were received from local residents/ action groups (CADRA and Friends of Caversham Court, WADRA and CAAC) relating to the following matters:

- Summer house is larger than the existing and should not be used for overnight stays
- The impact the summerhouse would have from the river
- Design needs to blend in with the Conservation Area and be respectful to the Canoe Club site which forms part of the Grade II listed Caversham Court complex
- Would impact views from Caversham Bridge which is a designated view in the Local Plan
- Building should be lower in height to blend in with neighbouring plots to the west
- Ecological impacts of the proposal

Officer comment: *The above will be discussed within the report*

Relevant Planning History

None.

Relevant Planning Policies

CC1: Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development

CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction

CC7: Design and the Public Realm
CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas
EN5: Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest
EN6: New Development in a Historic Context
EN11: Waterspaces
EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
EN13: Major Landscape Features and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
EN18: Flooding and Drainage

Other Relevant Documentation

St Peters Conservation Area - Conservation Area Appraisal (2018)

Appraisal

The following matters will be considered:

- Principle of development
- Design and impact on the surrounding area
- Impact on neighbouring amenity
- The Natural Environment
- Flooding

Principle of development

In land use terms the site is already established as a leisure plot containing a number of existing buildings. The proposals seek to retain the plot in this existing use and therefore in planning land use terms there are no objections to the continuation of this use.

The proposed summer house would include living space, WC and roof top terrace seating area but does not include sleeping accommodation. A condition will be applied stipulating that the site/building are used for leisure use only and specifically not be used as C3 dwellinghouse use. Due to the position of the site, its location within the flood plain and its small size the use for residential purposes would not be acceptable.

Design and impact on the surrounding area

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) states that all new development is of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area. Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) seeks that development preserves or enhances heritage assets including conservation areas.

Policy EN11 (Waterspaces) seeks that waterspaces are protected and enhanced so that they can continue to contribute to local and regional biodiversity and ecology, flood mitigation, local character, heritage and visual amenity, the provision of accessible leisure and recreational opportunities and, where appropriate, navigation.

The existing boathouse, shed and summerhouse appear to be in a fairly dilapidated state and as such do not contribute particularly positively to the waterside environment. The proposals would replace the existing three structures on the site with two and therefore reduce visual clutter on the site when viewed from the waterway.

There is a wide range of buildings to this stretch of the riverside including boathouses, moorings and other summer buildings of a range of style and sizes to the adjacent leisure plots and also large detached houses of both modern and more traditional architecture which either sit directly on the river bank or have rear gardens which mooring and outbuildings which do. In this context there is no predominant character to this stretch of the river bank. The proposed contemporary appearance of the replacement boat and summerhouse is considered to demonstrate a good standard of design quality and use of materials which in general terms would enhance the visual contribution of the site to the surrounding area and riverside environment.

Both buildings would be taller than the existing structures to be replaced, in part due to the need to set usable floor space above the worse case flood level however this is not to an extent that the buildings are considered to appear overly prominent or detrimental to views from the water way or surrounding conservation area/ Listed curtilage, nor impact the protected view from Caversham Bridge to a substantially harmful degree that would warrant refusal of the application. The site is set at a lower level than the land to the north of the plot such that even with the increased height of the buildings they are not considered to appear unduly prominent from The Warren.

The proposed summerhouse includes a small bridge access link from the higher ground at the entrance to the leisure plot to the north from The Warren. Again, due to the change in levels and position of the bridge access to the rear of the site it is not considered to result in substantial adverse visual harm.

In visual terms the proposals are considered to enhance the contribution of the site to the surrounding area and waterway. The modest nature of the proposals and good quality of design/use of materials is such that the proposal is not considered harmful to the setting of the St Peters Conservation Area which runs along the eastern boundary of the site. The position of the site is such that views to the leisure plot from the Conservation Area are limited and largely obscured by the large Reading Canoe Club building and retaining wall between the sites.

The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in relation to Policies CC7, EN3 and EN5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Impact on neighbouring amenity

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) seeks that development protects the amenity of existing and proposed surrounding occupiers. Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) states that development should protect existing and proposed occupiers from the effects of pollution.

The location of the leisure plot is such that potential for harm to surrounding occupiers is limited. The closest residential occupiers are located to the north along The Warren. The separation distance to these properties as well as the difference in levels is such that no overlooking or loss of privacy is considered to result. The proposed summerhouse includes a roof top terrace area which is surrounded by solid guarding the height of which would prevent any undue overlooking to the Canoe Club to the east of the site.

The site is an existing leisure plot and the proposals seek to continue this use. It is not considered that proposals would result in any material intensification of the use of the site which would result in any significant noise or disturbance impacts. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in relation to Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

The Natural Environment

Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) states that planning permission will not be granted for developments which would negatively impact on the 'green network' including areas of biodiversity interest along the River Thames and 'Green Links' and that on all sites development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity.

Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) seeks that individual trees, groups of trees and hedges will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, that Reading's vegetation cover is extended, and that the quality of waterside vegetation is maintained or enhanced. New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change.

Ecology

As referred to above the site is located within a designated Green Link as per policy EN12 of the local plan and the site is surrounded by gardens and pockets of scrub and woodland in the wider landscape. The River Thames is a priority habitat (as per the NPPF) and the site, the river, and other surrounding habitats are likely to be used by a range of protected and priority species including bats, reptiles, nesting birds, otter, and water vole. As such, the proposals could affect priority habitat and protected and priority species.

Paragraph 99 of the government Circular 06/05: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and Their Impact Within the Planning System (this document has not been revoked by the National Planning Policy Framework) states that:

"It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been

addressed in making the decision. The need to ensure ecological surveys are carried out should therefore only be left to coverage under planning conditions in exceptional circumstances, with the result that the surveys are carried out after planning permission has been granted.”

The Ecologist has confirmed that the Ecology Report has been undertaken to an appropriate standard and concludes that the proposal is unlikely to directly affect protected species such as bats.

However the Environment Agency has objected to the proposal on Ecology grounds. Following this objection, the Ecologist has also raised objection (with no elaboration on the EA's comments/ view). The Environment Agency and Ecologist consider that the proposal provides an inadequate buffer zone to the River Thames; policy EN11 states that development should be set back from the waterscape by 10m to allow an adequate buffer zone. At present, the site has a hard standing buffer zone which is seeking to be retained. The hardstanding mooring area has been in place for 50 years. Because the applicant seeks to retain the hardstanding, which is already in situ, the Ecology specialists consider the proposal does not go far enough to enhance the ecology of the river corridor.

Whilst Officers are mindful of the objections, it is noted that the scheme does provide an enhancement in terms of Ecology and biodiversity (as concluded by the submitted Ecological Statements) due to the landscaping proposed (in terms of vegetation), and further ecological enhancements are:

- The proposed planting scheme of wildflowers, trees and shrubs will have a positive impact on the ecology of the site and will create a net positive effect on biodiversity
- The proposed installation of a wet dock and reed bed area (to the west and east of the mooring, respectively) will have a positive impact to the ecology at the river margin
- Coir roll to be planted into the water in front

It is not considered reasonable to require the applicant to remove a longstanding fixture when already providing additional ecological enhancements as part of the scheme. Policy EN12 states that *“on all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible...Development should: protect and wherever possible enhance features of biodiversity interest on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable; and Provide new tree planting, wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements (such as wildlife ponds, bird and bat boxes) wherever practicable”*.

Whilst the removal of the hardstanding would have been desirable, the scheme is still considered to provide an increase in biodiversity and ecological enhancements compared to the existing situation. As such, the Ecology objections, in this instance, are not considered robust enough to warrant refusal of the application on Policy EN12 of the Local Plan.

As per the Environment Agency guidance, a copy of the decision notice will be sent to them if going against their objection.

Trees

The site is located directly adjacent to a Conservation Area, adjacent to the Thames (a treed corridor in the Reading Borough Tree Strategy) and is located within a designated 'Major Landscape Feature' area. As such the impact on vegetation needs to be considered.

In terms of landscape principles, the following is now included: a new hedgerow on the east boundary (near the river), new shrub planting which appears around most of the perimeter and new wildflower planting on the bank. Full details will need to be secured via condition.

It was discussed as to whether a green roof could be incorporated into the design of the new summer house. The agent advised that the structure could not incorporate the weight of the green roof. Whilst this would have been an additional positive element of the scheme in terms of the natural environment, it not being incorporated is considered a reason to refuse the application. The application, without the green roof, is still considered to provide an acceptable level of landscaping, subject to condition of full details to fully comply with Policy EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Flooding

The site, due to its location on the river bank, is located within both flood zone 3A (classified as land having a 'High Probability' of flooding - greater than 1 in 100 (1%) annual probability of river flooding,) and flood zone 3B (classified as 'Functional Floodplain' - land where water has to flow or be stored in times of flood). As such the principle of the development must also be assessed in terms of flood risk.

Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems) reflects the general requirements set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) with regard to flooding. The policy states that:

Development will be directed to areas at lowest risk of flooding in the first instance, following the Sequential and Exceptions Test set out in the NPPF, and taking into account the effects of climate change. It will consider flooding from all sources, including fluvial, surface water, groundwater and sewer flooding. Where development in areas at risk of flooding is necessary, it will not reduce the capacity of the flood plain to store floodwater, impede the flow of floodwater or in any way increase the risks to life and property arising from flooding. Wherever possible, development should be designed to reduce flood risk, both on- and off-site.

The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) defines the flood risk vulnerability of different development types. As set out in the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) submitted with the pre-application advice request the proposals, located on an existing leisure plot on the bank of the river, are considered to be for 'Water Compatible Development' which the NPPG states includes development for water-based recreation (excluding sleeping accommodation).

Table 3 under paragraph 067 of the NPPG set out that the principle of Water Compatible development is appropriate within both Flood Zones 3A and 3B subject to the application of the Sequential Test which seeks to guide development to areas at lowest risk of flooding (first to flood zone 1, then zone 2 and then zone 3). The submitted FRA has considered the sequential test and states that:

The site is a redevelopment and replacement of existing water compatible buildings. There is no other available location to construct a boathouse or summer house with the required access to the River Thames.

The sequential test guidance states: When applying the Sequential Test, a pragmatic approach on the availability of alternatives should be taken.

Given the scale of the development and the water compatible nature of the redevelopment the sequential test is deemed to be passed.

It is considered that the above assessment is valid and reasonable approach to take in the context of the existing leisure plot and as such the proposals are considered to pass the sequential test.

The notes to Table 3 under paragraph 067 of the NPPG also sets out that:

- Some developments may contain different elements of vulnerability and the highest vulnerability category should be used, unless the development is considered in its component parts.
- In Flood Zone 3a essential infrastructure should be designed and constructed to remain operational and safe in times of flood and;
- In Flood Zone 3b (functional floodplain) essential infrastructure that has to be there and has passed the Exception Test, and water-compatible uses, should be designed and constructed to:
 - remain operational and safe for users in times of flood;
 - result in no net loss of floodplain storage;
 - not impede water flows and not increase flood risk elsewhere.

Therefore, whilst the principle of the use of the land for water compatible development is considered appropriate and the development is considered to have passed the sequential test any proposed development must also demonstrate that it can be designed and constructed to achieve the above requirements.

The FRA set out that a number of site-specific flood risk mitigation and design features that would be incorporated within the development such as floor levels raised above the flood level for the site, provision of voids beneath the buildings to prevent any net loss of

floodplains storage, reduction in overall building footprint on the site compared to existing therefore increasing flood storage volume on the site.

The Environment Agency (EA) are the statutory specialist advisor on technical flood risk matters. Following the receipt of additional information in addition to the Flood Risk Assessment, the Environment Agency confirmed the proposal was acceptable in terms of Flood Risk. As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in relation to Policy EN18 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) subject to condition that the development will be carried out in accordance with the flood prevention measures outlined in the submission.

Conclusion

Recommendation: **GRANT** permission

Subject to the following conditions:

All pre-commencement conditions have been agreed with the applicant

- 1) Time Limit
- 2) Approved Plans
- 3) Materials as specified
- 4) Ancillary use of the outbuilding
- 5) Landscaping to be approved) - **Pre-commencement**
- 6) Boundary Treatment (to be approved)
- 7) Ecological enhancements to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans and documentation
- 8) Flood prevention measures to be carried out in accordance with the approved documentation

Informatives:

- 1) Terms
- 2) Building Control
- 3) Complaints about construction
- 4) Encroachment
- 5) Positive and Proactive