



View of the site and existing leisure buildings from the opposite bank of the River Thames

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This statement accompanies the full planning application to replace the existing leisure buildings on this plot with a new boat house and summer house. The proposal has been through the pre-application process with Reading Borough Council and the feedback from the RBC planning team, who stated their support in principle subject to flood and other matters being addressed, has been responded to in full.

The site is on the north bank of the Thames in Caversham. It is directly adjacent to the Reading Canoe Club and is the first private riverside site on the south side of The Warren. The plot is in the same ownership as Blewgarth, the detached dwelling on the opposite side of the Warren; it is used solely for leisure purposes and this will remain the case if this proposal goes ahead.

There are three permanent structures on the site: a boat house, a flat-roofed leisure building and a small corrugated steel shed. The buildings are basic and in poor repair. They were erected at different times and they have no considered relationship to each other in style or setting.

As such these buildings do not respond well to the local context. They have no regard for the conditions created by flooding of the site, are in poor condition and of low design quality. They do not make a positive contribution to the area individually or as a group.

The proposal is to replace them with two new leisure buildings serving the same purpose but of much improved functionality and of a much higher design quality.

2.0 FLOODING

The site and the buildings sit within the Thames floodplain. So any proposal for redevelopment must offer:

- an improvement to the flood capacity of the site,
 - no increase in flood risk elsewhere,
 - less obstruction to the flow of floodwater across the site,
- and must ensure safe egress from the site for all occupants.

The proposal has been designed with a flood consultant to ensure it meets all four of these parameters.

RBC have stated that the “*the proposals are considered to pass the sequential test.*”

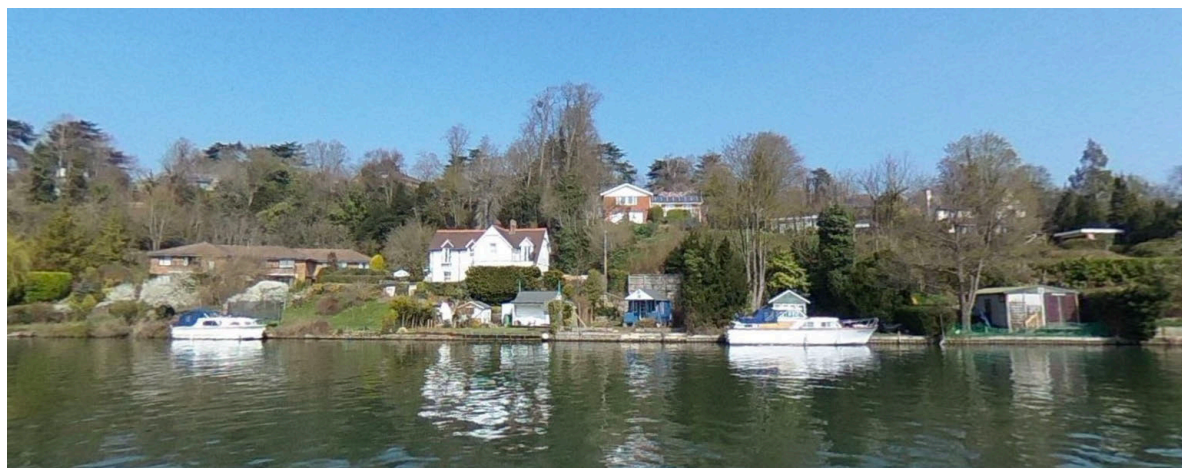
A Flood Risk Assessment and associated drawings are submitted with this application.



View of the site with Reading Canoe Club



View of the site with Blewgarth and other houses behind



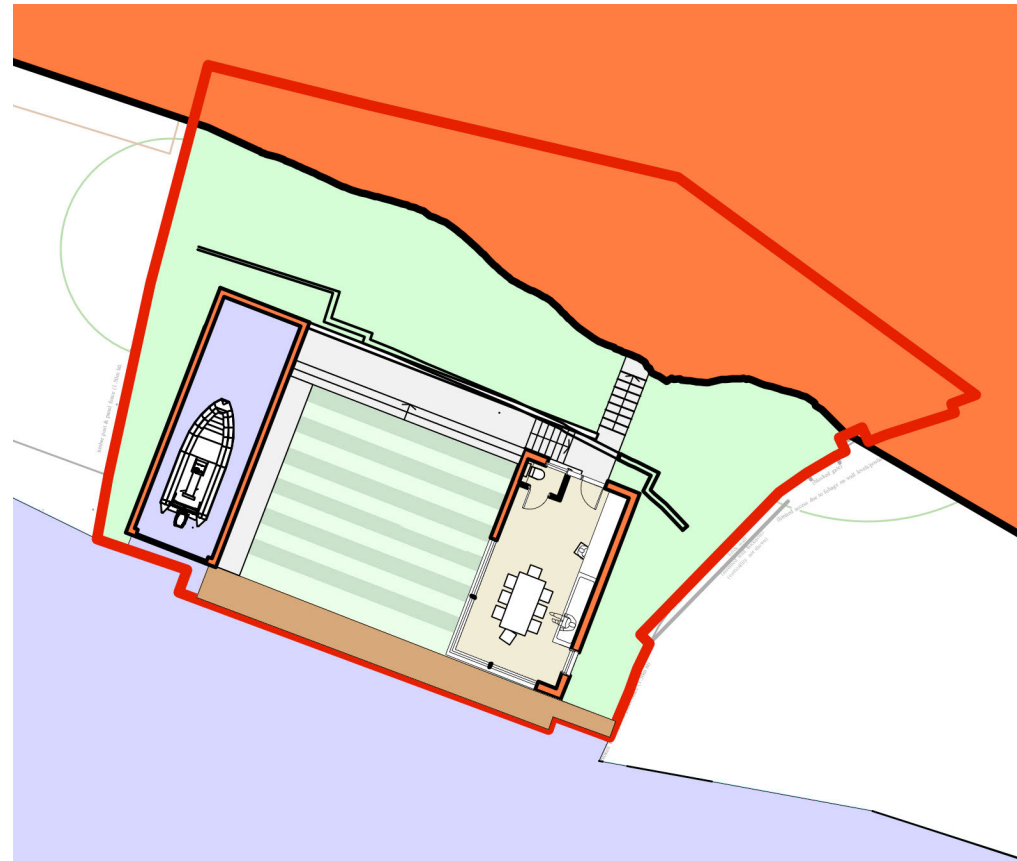
View of the stretch of riverbank immediately to the west of the site: a melange of leisure buildings and houses

3.0 THE CONTEXT

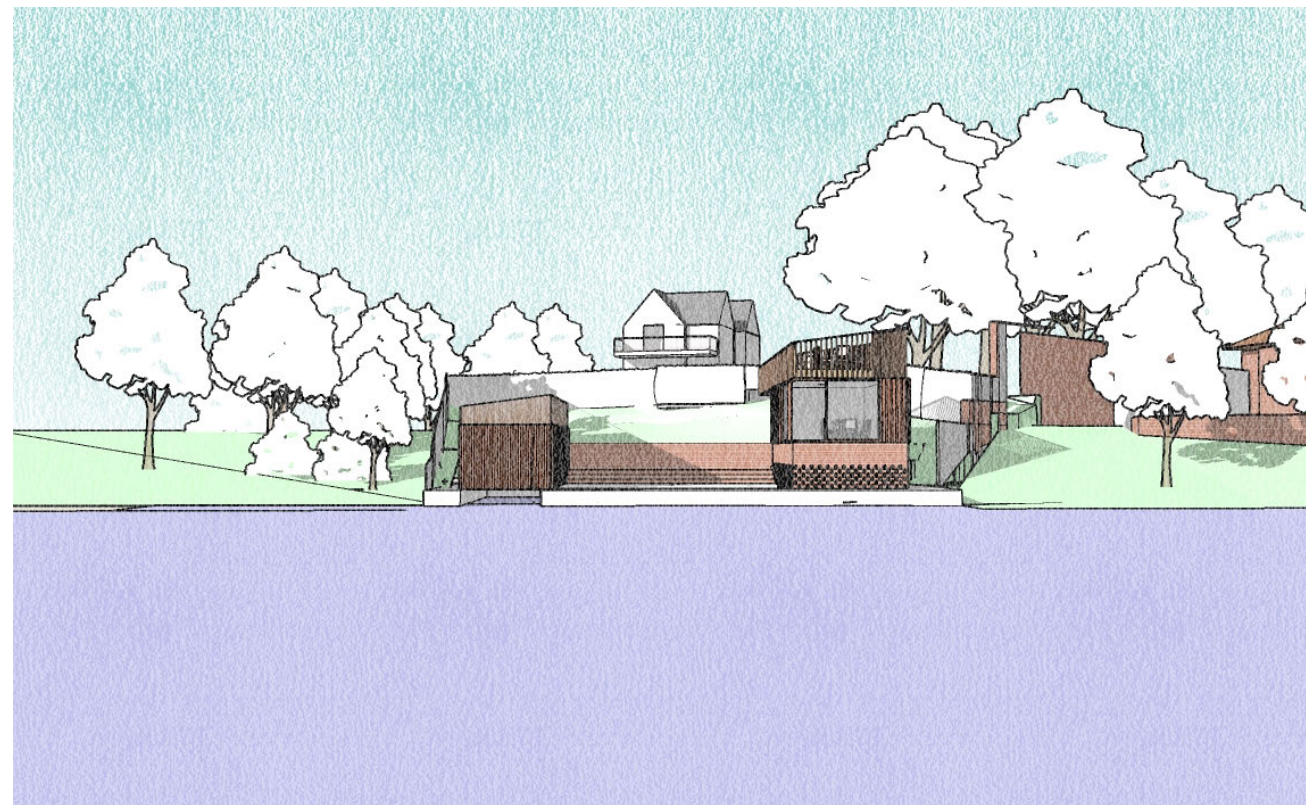
To the east of the site sits Reading Canoe Club: a long, red-brick two-storey building with accompanying brick retaining walls and a range of wide steps down to the water line. The combination of the major built structure with ancillary hard landscaping creates an imposing presence on the north bank of the Thames here with a hard edge to the waterfront which contrasts with the green edge to the river further to the west.

Around the plot itself, large detached houses sit above the site occupying the escarpment and are clearly visible from the opposite side of the river. These form the backdrop to the site, interspersed among the many mature trees which are characteristic of the slopes above the Thames here.

Up river, the riverside plots are occupied by a variety of different buildings: 'Ballihoo' is a prominent detached house right on the river, but otherwise the plots are occupied by smaller leisure building and boathouses. Behind these, larger houses on both sides of The Warren step up the hillside.



Proposed site plan



View from the river

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

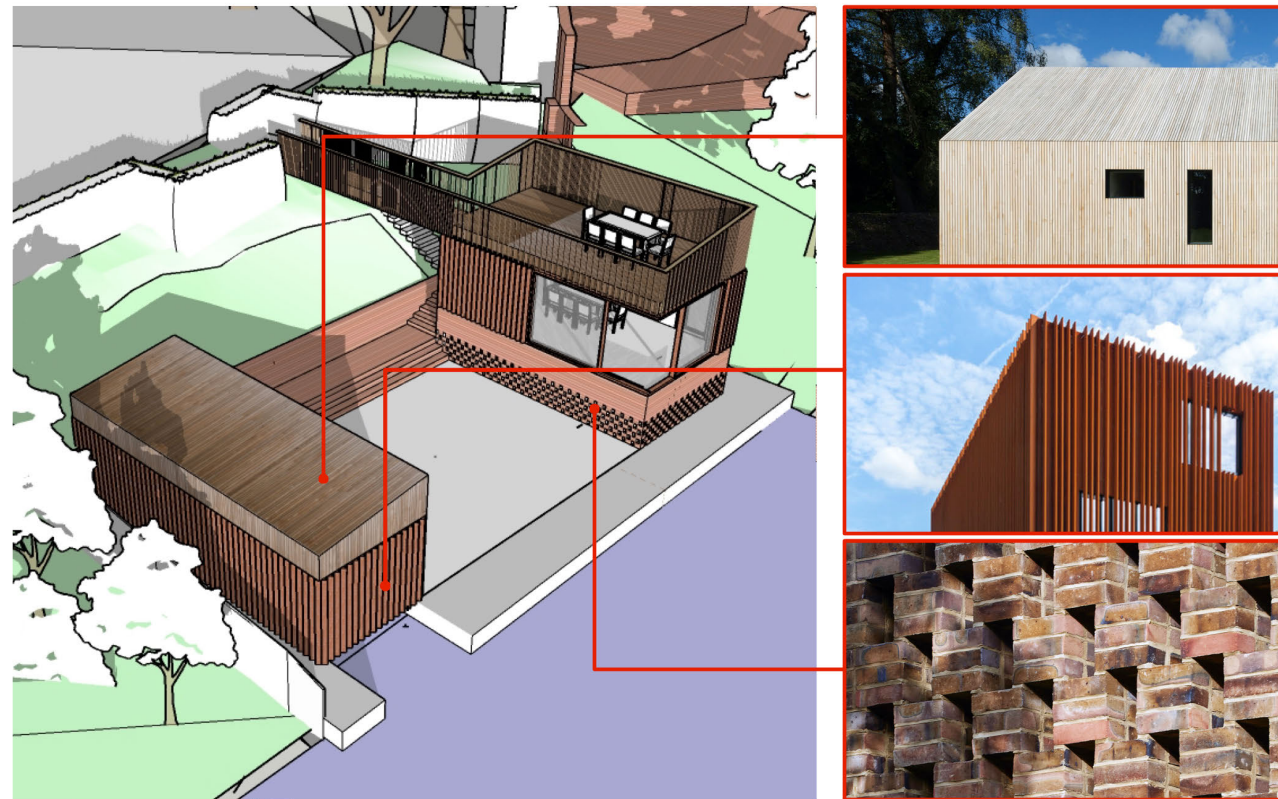
The proposal is for two new buildings to replace the three buildings which currently occupy the site.

The first building will be a boat house which will sit over the existing boatdock just as the current one does. It will be shorter than the existing boathouse and have a reduced footprint. The building will be open to the river and allow floodwater in and out. It will be slightly higher to accommodate a boat hoist for lifting boats out of the water but the visual impact will effectively remain as it is. However the quality of materials and design will be hugely improved; the building will relate closely to its larger sibling (see below) and be dressed in robust, long-lasting cladding to both walls and roof (see below also).

The second building will be a new summerhouse replacing the existing summer house and shed. This will be a rectangular building turned so the narrow end elevation faces the river, unlike the existing summerhouse and shed which both address the river side on. This means that although the new building will be taller than both its antecedents it will not have a greater visual impact on the river. The new building is taller because the floor is raised above the worst-case floodplain height so the interior will always remain dry and safe.

The new summer house has three distinct levels which have different functions and different treatments:

- At ground level the building cannot be occupied and cannot be entered and cannot be used for storage; it is surrounded by a brick skin with a pattern of perforations to the full perimeter allowing floodwater in and out but preventing any access.
- At the internal floor level, raised approximately 1.7m above ground level, there is a single large room with a small separate WC. This is the summer house room; it has a large corner window facing up river and across the river to make the most of the panoramic views, and a smaller window facing down river to catch the morning sun and views to Caversham Bridge but prevent overlooking from the canoe club. Although it is called the summer house, this room will be able to be enjoyed year-round. It will be accessed by steps down the bank from the site entrance on The Warren; the room and the access will both be above the floodplain for safe egress.
- At roof level there will be a deck which is accessed by a bridge from the site entrance, providing level access from the site entrance. This deck will be for occasional occupancy in good weather. Both the deck and bridge will be surrounded by a solid guarding, for safety and visual privacy, which is higher on the canoe club side to prevent overlooking, although the timber boards of the guarding will be angled to allow views through on the south-west corner.



Proposed materials palette



View in detail

5.0 CONSTRUCTION AND MATERIALS

The functional divisions of the buildings into distinct separate levels will be reflected in the architectural treatment of the exteriors.

The buildings, and hard landscaping, will be layered:

- 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. This material will be close in colour and texture to the party wall between the plot and the canoe club, giving the buildings a solid earthy base and relating them to their built context.
- At the next, occupied level of the buildings, they will both be clad in a ribbon of coated or weathered metal ribs, which will create a strong texture and rhythm of shadows, which will both absorb doors seamlessly (in particular the river door on the boathouse) and part like a curtain for the large glazed openings.
- Above this ribbon the walls and roofs will both be clad in fine timber battens creating a continuous surface over the tops of both buildings and across the bridge.

Within the external cladding, the walls of the summerhouse will be built of robust structural materials with high levels of insulation and airtightness to ensure a minimal use of energy. Altogether the buildings are designed for maximum longevity, minimal maintenance and minimum carbon footprint.

6.0 TREES AND ECOLOGY

The submission includes a tree plan (ref. 352.P.14) which shows existing trees with their root protection areas which will be protected during the building works and whose ground levels will not be affected by the building works. Two new trees will be planted on the bank, an aspen and a golden alder, as shown on the plan.

The submission also includes an ecological survey and appraisal of the site with measures which will be incorporated for the protection and enhancement of the riverside habitat.

7.0 PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS AND OUTCOME

The proposal has bene through a pre-application submission and response from RBC. The letter is included in the submission so it can be read in full. The conclusion was:

"Subject to confirmation from the Environment Agency that the proposals would be acceptable in technical flood risk terms given the location of the site within the functional flood plain it is considered that the principle of the proposed development would be supported by Officers. The proposals are considered to be of good design quality which would integrate well with the surrounding area and equally are not considered to result in harm the amenity of surrounding occupiers. The additional requirements for any application in respect of tree and ecological matters set out in the main text of this letter should be noted."

These additional requirements have been met, and the full FRA is submitted for the EA to determine acceptability in flood terms. Apart from adding new trees to be planted and additional information as required, the only change since the pre-application submission is the minor enlargement of the boat house so it can fit the requisite boat: it is still smaller in footprint area than the existing boat house and has no added impact on floodplain storage, water flow or flood risk elsewhere.



Proposed view downriver with Reading Canoe Club in the background

8.0 DESIGN IN CONTEXT

This stretch of bank is very prominent in views from the river and from the park opposite so it is important that any replacement buildings are of high quality and respect their context. But this is not a virgin natural landscape: although the escarpment is heavily wooded the riverfront and the bank here are both peppered with buildings of different sizes, ages, materials and styles. In this context what matters is for any new additions :

- not to be substantially more prominent than their antecedents
- to relate to each other and their neighbours in a considered and careful fashion
- to be of the highest design quality
- to have a lucid and clear design rationale.

The existing buildings are arranged haphazardly on site with no relationship to each other stylistically or spatially. The new buildings are designed to relate to each other in style and material, but also in their spatial composition. They are arranged parallel to each other and at rightangles to the river and bank so that they frame the space between as a kind of external room and create a unified composition which clearly relates to the straight line of the riverbank.

The buildings also relate to each other in form, with the pitch of their roofs forming one continuous line. This line, rising from west to east (left to right when viewed from the river) then rises to meet the roof of the canoe club next door, so there is a step up in height and scale from boat house to summer house to canoe club as if all three are related. This relationship is reinforced by the continuity of material and the added presence of the party wall between the properties.

9.0 SUMMARY

Altogether the proposed buildings represent a significant upgrade on the existing:

- They offer improvement in all aspects of flood mitigation and safety.
- They will both function much better than the existing buildings, with the boathouse allowing for greater access to the boat and a boat hoist, and the summer house offering a larger space with hugely improved views, and with the addition of the panoramic roof deck above
- They will both use high quality, robust materials which will age well without the need for maintenance.
- The summer house will be built with excellent levels of insulation and airtightness so it will have a minimal carbon footprint.
- They will both relate well to each other and to their context and make a positive contribution to the setting.