

Responses to the consultee feedback, planning application #201876

Blewgarth, The Warren, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7TH.

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

Dear Connie,

Thank you for facilitating the planning application and consultation process for our application so far. Having reviewed the consultee feedback, we are pleased to submit revised plans to acknowledge and act upon the points raised. The amended drawings are no.s

- 352.P.05B - Proposed Floor Plan
- 352.P.06B - Proposed Flood Plain Impact
- 352.P.07B - Proposed Roof Plan
- 352.P.08B - Proposed Elevations
- 352.P.12B - Proposed 3D Views
- 352.P.13B - Proposed Materials

Summary of design changes

The revised scheme encompasses modifications to the flood design system of the building, a significantly increased planting scheme in order to ensure a net increase in biodiversity, whilst also softening the outline of the summer house building, blending it into the landscape. In summary, the amended scheme now includes:

1. Modification to the flood void area covering, providing a total of 4 large openings (each 1.5m in width) with 2 on each of the east and west facing walls (shown in figure 1), following consultation with the Environment Agency, in the interests of aligning with the latest guidance on flood compatible design. We have retained the perforated brick design to the front of the building, providing additional flood compatibility, beyond what the guidance requires.
2. Establishment of a natural soft bank, approximately 1.8 metres in width on the far-east side of the existing concrete mooring area.
3. The addition of coir rolls in front of the natural bank area, to provide a fish refuge, in the interests of increasing biodiversity.
4. Planting of wildflowers and shrubs across the sloped bank, covering approximately 30% of the site. The bank is steeply sloped towards the river and hence is visible from the south side of the river. The planting will make a positive contribution to the view of the site.
5. Planting along the edge of the river margin, between the boat house and summer house, in order to further blend in the new buildings.

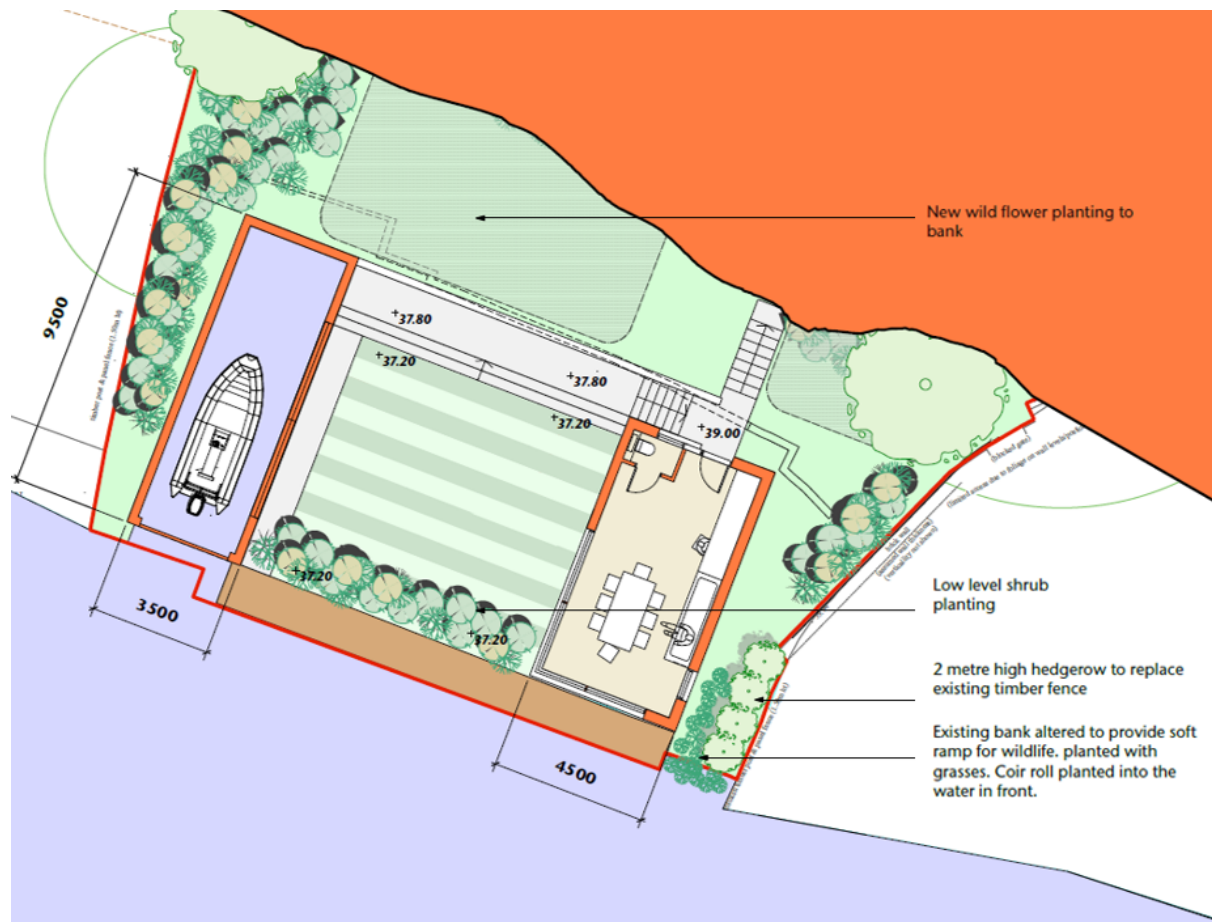
6. Planting of hedging, c.4 metres in length, 2 metres in height, replacing the proposed panel fence to the south-east corner, adjoining the canoe club. The hedge will provide both improved ecology and soften the visual impact of the new summer house building from the east, including from Caversham Bridge (c.0.5KM to the east)
7. Addition of 2 new bird boxes and 1 bat box to the buildings to further enhance site ecology.

Overall, the proposal will achieve:

1. A net positive visual impact of the site, which has been in a state of disrepair for over 50 years.
2. A net positive increase to the flood storage area, contributing a net increase of 84 cubic metres of flood storage through a combination of new flood compatible buildings, reduction of the ground level and creation of a wet dock.
3. A net positive improvement to the ecology and biodiversity of the site.

We believe that this response addresses all concerns and objections raised by the consultees.

Summary of changes - plan view



Responses to the comments of the consultees

1. Environment Agency (EA) / Inadequate Flood Risk Assessment & Flood Void Design

- a. We confirm that the shed - and all areas forward of the retaining wall (including summerhouse, wet dock and shed on the current site) reside within the design flood area and are hence included within the net flood storage calculations. These are identified on page 26 of the FRA.
- b. We can confirm that a net increase of 84 cubic metres of new flood storage area will be created as a result of the improved building flood compatibility; reduction of soil level within the flood area and restoration of wet dock.
- c. We noted a concern from the EA regarding the choice of flood void covering (perforated brick). Following consultation with the EA, we have modified this design to also include large openings on the east and west facing walls (in addition to the perforated brick at the front). This is shown in figure 1 in this letter and within the updated drawings. The email correspondence with the EA confirming this is also attached as a separate file. The flood voids are 1.5 metres in width each (6 metres in total) and set at the height of the design flood level.
- d. We can confirm that in the event of a flood event, the flood waters would enter the void openings and the perforated brick at the same time, since the ground is level.

2. Environment Agency / Inadequate buffer zone

- a. We noted the objection from the EA regarding the position of the summer house being within 10 metres of the river and hence within the “buffer zone” - an area of the land adjoining a river which, for ecological reasons, *“should be free from all built development including hardstanding, formal landscaping and lighting”*. We also noted a suggestion from the EA to move the summer house building back by 5 metres from the waters edge.
- b. We note that there is an existing concrete hardstanding (mooring) along the majority of the waters edge, which has been in situ for over 50 years. The hardstanding is approximately 1.3 metres in width. This proposal does not seek to make any modification to the hardstanding which is needed for mooring boats to suit the leisure use of the plot.
- c. Due to the existing hardstanding, the area within the river buffer zone is already developed. We have been advised by consultant ecologist Dr Edward Bodsworth MA (Cantab) PhD MCIEEM that moving the summer house back 5 metres from the water edge, as the EA suggested, creating a small area of bare ground or grass, approximately 3.5 metres in width between the building and hardstanding would have negligible ecological value. We therefore do not propose to make any changes in this respect, but we do intend to improve biodiversity relative to what is there now, and that is what policy requires.
- d. We also note the concern that the proposed buildings position may create shade or additional light within the river. However, we note that the building is south-facing and hence will not cast shadow into the water at any time of day.

There are no artificial lights proposed on the exterior of the building that would increase light levels in or near to the river.

- e. In our revised proposal we have proposed a small soft bank area to the far east of the hardstanding, approximately 1.8 metres in width to provide an area allowing animals to ingress and egress from the water.

3. Other consultees / Visual impact of the new summer house

We noted concerns raised regarding the visual impact of the summer house, in particular, relating to its height and location within the protected view cone. To address this point, additional planting has been added with the intention of softening the visual impact, blending it in with the natural river setting whilst also increasing the site ecology. However, we do not intend to move the summerhouse back on the site and we are unable to reduce the height for the following reasons:

- a. The summer house building height was determined based on the latest flood compatible design requirements and a requirement to set the floor level at a minimum height to allow for flooding (39 metres AOD in this case). These requirements did not apply historically, when the original buildings were erected, hence the new development must be taller than the existing. It is not possible to reduce the height of the new building for this reason.
- b. The summer house cannot be moved back because there is a public sewer running beneath the bank behind it (immediately behind the retaining wall) and it is not permitted to build over a public sewer.
- c. The current site has been in a state of disrepair for over 30 years and is currently detrimental to the view. The proposal designs will provide a significant improvement to the current condition.
- d. The view of the site from Caversham bridge is partially obscured by a number of trees on the adjacent canoe club including a large weeping willow, which retains its leaves for the majority of the year. Please also note that the bridge is approximately 0.5KM from the site. We do not believe that the relatively small summer house building would have a substantive visual impact from the perspective of the bridge, in particular when considering the significantly larger canoe club building next door. The additional planting scheme further improves the aesthetic of the site and will blend the development in further with its natural surroundings.
- e. Notwithstanding this lack of impact, there is no harm in the small summer house being visible to some degree. The site already has a boathouse which is necessarily right on the river's edge, and the replacement will be in the same position. So the site has one building on the water and it makes sense to align the second building with it so they relate to each other and create a complementary composition.
- f. It is important to note also that it is an intrinsic characteristic of this length of river bank that there are numerous buildings distributed along its length which come to the water's edge and contribute to the nature of this stretch being used for domestic and leisure purposes. It is not a virgin stretch of riverbank and as such the buildings make a positive contribution to its occupied nature, and add visual interest. Part of the pleasure of walking along the opposite

bank is looking at the houses and buildings which give event and character to the river; the new summer house will similarly make a positive contribution, and there is no harm in it being on the waterfront where it can be seen.

4. Ecology Natural Environment Office

- a. Green roof - We kindly note your suggestion of a green roof for the boat house. We have considered this carefully. This building will be a lightweight structure providing simple shelter only, so it is not suited to a heavy green roof (which will also add more height for the necessary heavy deck plus substrates to support the green roof). As proposed, the roof will have timber slats which will swiftly weather down and gather lichen, and become very soft to the eye. We think this will be equivalent in visual impact terms to a green roof.
- b. Services avoiding RPAs - We note your question regarding installation of services within root protection areas (RPAs). We can confirm that no services shall be routed via any RPAs. The precise routes of all services are not known at this time, however, we note that a) there is a foul sewer running through the site (immediately behind the summer house / retaining wall) which we intend to use for sewerage discharge; b) there is an existing water bore hole on the site that we intend to use for a source of freshwater, subject to further water quality testing, c) mains electricity will most likely be connected via the road, significantly clear of any trees and RPAs; d) there are very few trees within or within close proximity to the site and these can easily be avoided.
- c. We can confirm that a section of the hedge on the north boundary will be removed during the build process, then reinstalled in its new proposed location (c. 1.5 metres forward of its current position to create the entrance area) in conjunction with a fence for security purposes. The hedge will be visible from the south. The objective of this design element is to ensure a natural and attractive view from the south, in conjunction with the wider planting, including wildflowers and shrubs to be planted on the bank.

Figure 1: adjustended flood compatibility design includes large openings covered with metal bars, spaced at 100mm. The height of the openings is 38.67M, the design flood level. The width of each of the openings is 1.5M.

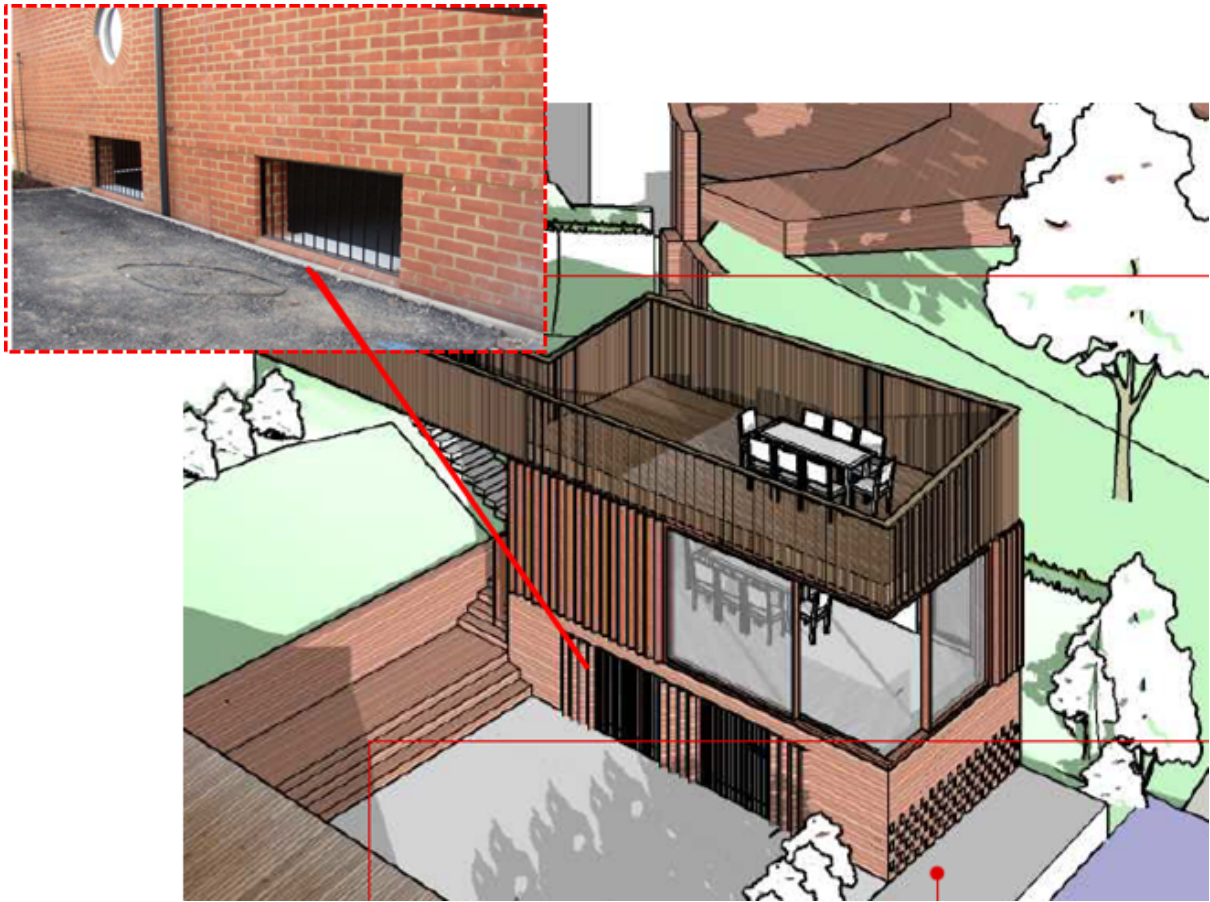
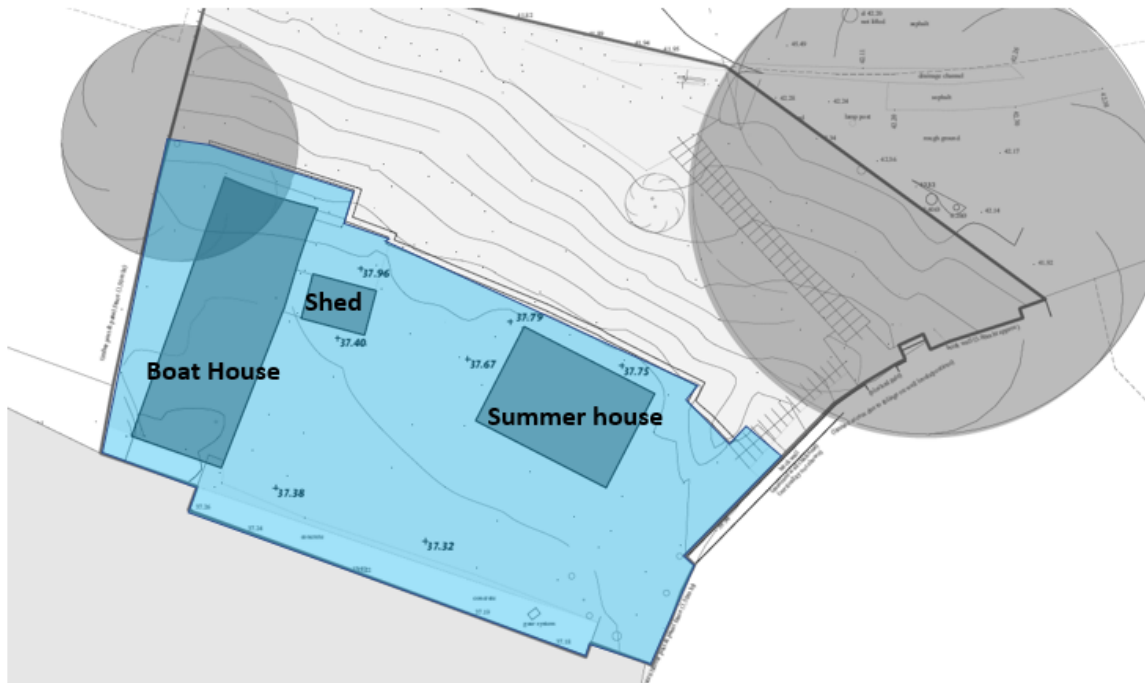


Figure 2: Approximate area of flood area shown in shaded blue.

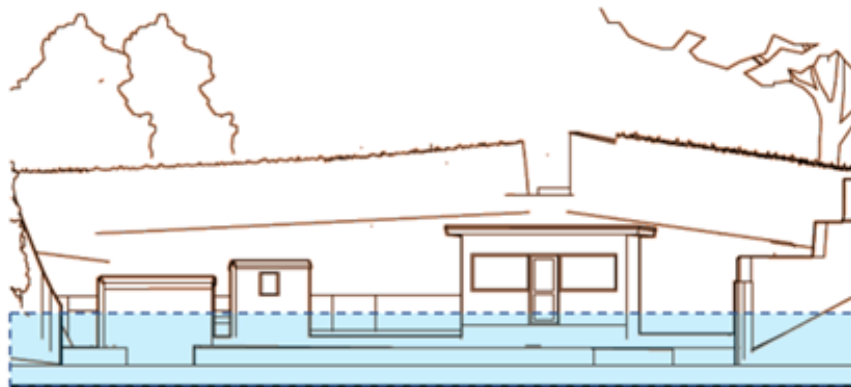
Existing Site Plan

Areas affected by flooding at 1% AEP +25% climate change level of **38.67m** shown in shaded blue



Existing Site Plan

1% AEP Flood Level
(25% increase in flows)
38.67M AOD
shown in shaded blue



Proposed Site Plan

