

From: Caroline McHardy
Sent: 19 May 2020 14:42
To: Markwell, Jonathan
Cc: Craig Pettit ; Joseph Harding; Kim Cohen; David Taylor (Oxford)
Subject: Vastern Road - EA response 200188

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Dear Jonathan

Further to the Environment Agency response received, as attached, please find below our response.

Ecological Buffer Zone

The site is currently not accessible to the public, masked by a brick wall and mesh fencing (c. 2-3m in height) once you cross the Christchurch Bridge and onto the towpath. The proposals for the ecological buffer zone and area of planting along the River Thames towpath (as can be seen on the attached final CGI, and page 90 of the submitted DAS) show how the site has been opened up to create public interface along the Thames, providing activity for residents and local community, whilst providing sufficient flood storage compensation for the Caversham Alleviation Scheme. The design for opening up the site whilst subtly designing in the Caversham Alleviation Scheme flood defence requirements was welcomed by the EA when we engaged with them pre-application on October 2019.

In conjunction with your landscape officer, and local resident feedback has raised the points that the space, whilst being used as an ecological buffer, should have some functionality, a place to stop along the towpath and enjoy the River. The narrow strip of the amenity grassland as proposed, in conjunction with the wet tolerant meadow and wet tolerant native shrub, provides a layered approach to planting on the edge of the River Thames bank. For maintenance purposes, we believe that it is always advisable to have an amenity grass edge along the edge of paths and meadows, to prevent vegetation overhang into movement routes.

In terms of the width of the buffer zone please see attached the 'EA buffer and River Edge offsets' PDF. We have provided a 8m offset from the edge of the watercourse as mentioned. In addition, we have provided between a 9.6m and 11.5m offset from the edge of the watercourse to any proposed development on the site. In terms of the ecological buffer and maximising it to its fullest potential, the planting buffer allows for a width of between 4m and 8.1m of proposed planting. The smallest gap of 4m to the Thames towpath is because we have introduced a new ramped access, providing accessibility for all to the River Thames. Again this was introduced following feedback from the consultation period. We have worked hard with the EA's technical team with regards to the Caversham Flood Alleviation scheme so that we can provide the correct amount of flood storage as well the proposed buffer zone and appropriate planting so that the scheme is attractive as well as functional.

A biodiversity metric has been undertaken as part of the proposals for the site which confirms that the site achieves a net biodiversity gain resulting in +0.32 of habitat gain and +1.13 for linear features.

Proposed planting (including species and mix)

We have sought to engage with RBC's landscape officer in relation to the proposals on the site and there has been an agreed position with the proposed species and mix that we have suggested which was subject to a few minor amendments prior to submission of the application. In reference to the species mix, the EA correction, (*Corylus avellana*) is the intended species that is proposed. The species that has been selected across the site combines a suggested choice of both native and non-native variants. We understand and agree that the preference for the Thames corridor as a vision should be native species however we have provided a variety of specific mix to ensure that the majority of the species selected take to their proposed environment.

In relation to the trees proposed, *Quercus palustris* has been selected as it is resilient to water logging hence the reason that it was selected in this location. Our concern is that being close to the river, we could run the risk of waterlogging tree pits due to the water levels. If the tree has time to establish root systems before a period of flooding or water logging, the tree will likely be able to survive, even if it is not suited to those conditions. Our concern is that a newly rootballed tree will likely drown and therefore would need replacing. The chosen species can cope with mild waterlogging, other native Oak (*Quercus robur*) and Birch (*Betula pendula*), do not cope so well in these conditions however we are more than happy to test the area once the bank has been formed and we can have a better understanding of the rooting conditions for those riverside trees.

Overshadowing

We have worked hard with the LPA and the EA to achieve a balanced approach to the creation of a buffer zone, ecological planting and well as providing an off-set to the River so that we are able to maximise the potential of the existing brownfield site. There is already partial shading which occurs on the southern bank created by the construction of the Christchurch Bridge and the existing trees which sit along the site boundary. The vegetation along the river bank will receive a good amount of sunlight throughout the day and also receive indirect sunlight; the marginal vegetation in those areas will still grow under these circumstances. This is of course in addition to the planted buffer we are proposing as part of our site coming forward for redevelopment which will take into account a species mix designed to take into account some partial shade as well as coping with mild waterlogging.

I hope our response clarifies the proposals on our development and I am more than happy to discuss in more detail once you have reviewed in full.

Kind regards

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Caroline McHardy
Land and Development Director

