

Caversham Weir Reading Hydroelectric Project

S73 Application Supporting Statement
(including Design and Access)

Renewables First - Company

Renewables First is one of the UK's leading hydro and wind power specialists and has been delivering hydro and wind projects for over ten years. We provide all of the services from in-house resources to take a project from initial feasibility stage, through all of the consenting and engineering design stages and on to construction and commissioning. We use our experience of the installation and operational phases to provide feedback into the design stages of the next projects, ensuring that our customers benefit from our whole-project exposure.

We are independent of hardware suppliers, so we only recommend the most appropriate hardware to maximise energy production and return on investment, and to ensure a long and reliable operational life. We only recommend the best quality hardware from established manufacturers, and design good quality systems that will be reliable in the long-term. Our designs focus on maximising renewable energy production whilst applying best practice in regard to ecological protection or enhancement.

Document Control

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Application Appendices and Figures

Appendices

Appendix A – Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey – *as per existing permission*

Appendix B – Great Crested Newt eDNA Report - *as per existing permission*

Appendix C – [GCN letter 2017 Follow Up and eDNA report](#) - NEW

Appendix D – Weir Habitat Assessment - *as per existing permission*

Appendix E – Tree Survey & supporting letters - *as per existing permission*

Appendix F – [Tree Protection & Landscape Plan](#) - NEW

Appendix G – Hydrogeological Desktop Study - *as per existing permission*

Appendix H – Flood Risk Assessment - *as per existing permission*

Appendix I – Flood Sequential Test - *as per existing permission*

Appendix J - [Construction Method Statement](#) – REVISED

Appendix K - [Construction Materials](#) – NEW

Appendix L - [EA approved Fish Pass including EA approval notice](#) – NEW

Appendix M - [Flood risk Assessment Summary](#) – NEW

Drawings

Drawing 1 – DWG-RG-WA1 Development Boundary Plan – 1:500 *as per existing permission*

Drawing 2 – DWG-RG-LP1 Site Location Plan – 1:2500 *as per existing permission*

Drawing 3 – READH_01A Rev 3 – Site Layout Plan – 1:250 - NEW

Drawing 4 – READH_03 Rev 3 – Work Area and Site Access – 1:250 - REVISED

Drawing 5 – withdrawn

Drawing 6 – READH_06 Rev 5 Turbine Plan & Elevations- REVISED

Drawing 7 – withdrawn

Drawing 8 – READH-08 Rev 1 – Design Overview 3D – 1:100 –REVISED

Drawing 9 – 2020-02-27 – Flood Map Plan – 1:2500 – NEW

Drawing 10 –READH_9 Rev 1 – Turbine House Plan & Elevations – 1:40 - REVISED

1 Introduction

Background and rationale

- 1.1 This application seeks to vary full planning consent ref: 15/1715 dated 17th March 2017 for a hydroelectric scheme located adjacent to Caversham Weir on the River Thames.
- 1.2 The revised proposal is within the 2017 consented development boundary and does not change the description. There are some minor dimensional changes resulting from the detailed design and turbine supplier selection which are detailed in Chapter 2. The variation also includes additional details to fulfill the pre-commencement conditions attached the 2017 permission.
- 1.3 The scheme in its current size and layout is based on the constraints on the site in terms of land ownership and hydrology. Other key considerations are financial viability and environmental impact.
- 1.4 The hydro scheme is being constructed on unregistered land and the project has a draft heads of terms agreement with the owners of View Island in relation to the fish pass, this will form the basis of a legal agreement with Reading Council.
- 1.5 The project has secured Environmental licences for water use, EA Flood Risk Activity Permits and EA Fish Pass Panel approval.

Validation checklist

- 1.6 The Reading Validation Checklist (December 2016) has been consulted and the following documents have been commissioned and form this application:

Document	Author
Planning Statement inc. DAS	Renewables First Ltd
Flood Risk Assessment	eWaterpower & Renewables First Ltd
Flood Risk Sequential Test	TRSC
Drawings and Plans	Various
Weir Habitat Impact Assessment	Wallingford
Hydrogeological Desk Study	
Tree Survey	Richardsons's Botanical Identifications
Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey	Ecoconsult
Great Crested Newt eDNA assessment	SureScreen Scientifics
GCN 2017 letter & revised eDNA results	Dave Jones & Nature Metrics
Construction Materials	Renewables First Ltd
Construction Method Statement	Renewables First Ltd
Tree Protection & Landscape Plan	Renewables First Ltd

Pre-application consultation

- 1.7 Pre-application advice was sought informally during the original application and prior to this submission with the previous Planning Officer involved.
- 1.8 The scale of change does not significantly alter the previous informal pre-application advice.

EIA screening

- 1.9 An EIA screening response ref 15/0853/SCR was issued by Reading Borough Council and confirmed the original proposal did NOT require an Environmental Impact Assessment as it is a hydroelectric installation of less than 0.5 megawatts and should therefore be deemed to be a schedule 2 (item 3h) application.
- 1.10 Given this application dated January 2020 is a variation of the 2017 permission and it not materially different to the original proposal – a new EIA screening request has not been made.

Additional information submitted to address planning conditions from original permission

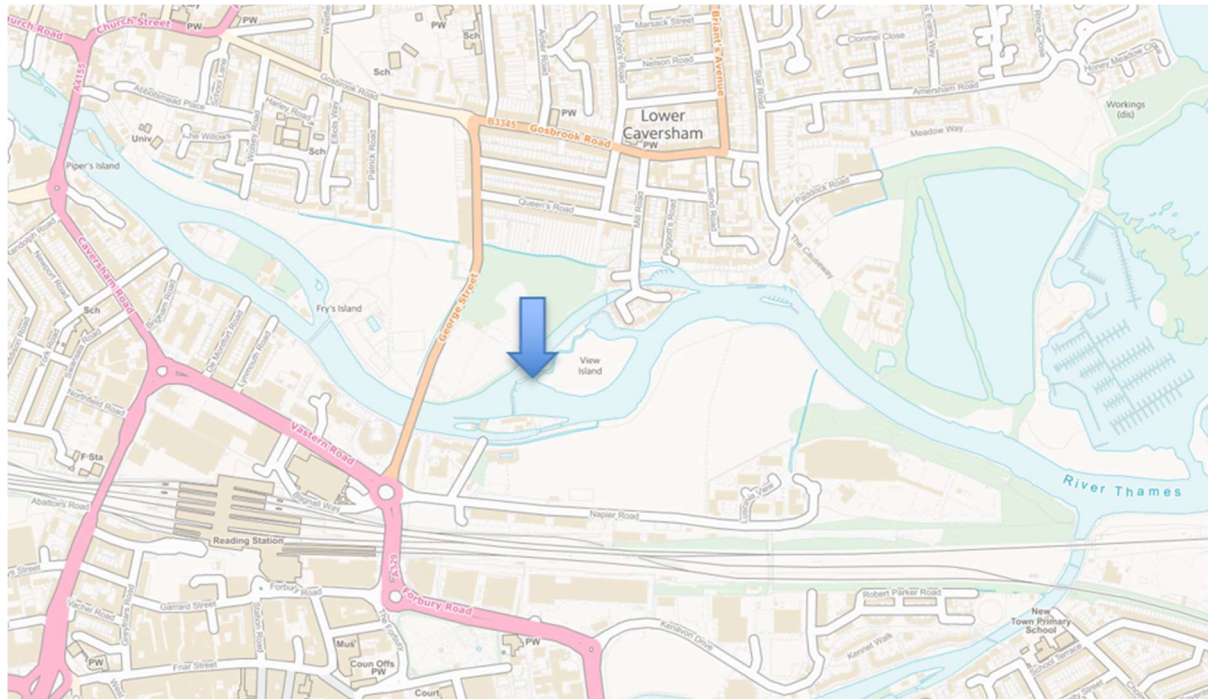
- 1.11 Below is a summary of the additional information submitted to address planning conditions from decision notice 151715 dated 17th May 2017.

Condition	Additional information
3. Pedestrian access to be maintained.	A Footpath Management Plan is detailed in this document and the CMS. Request condition re-written to reference this plan and the separate Footpath Closure application.
4. Details of Bat boxes	Details are in the Tree Protection Plan.
5. Great Crest Newt further information	A revised eDNA survey has been completed and it is proposed that a fingertip search before works start on the Fish Pass.
7. Tree protection and landscape Plan	Tree Protection and Landscape Plan is attached which outlines the measures to be implemented.
9. Construction Materials	Construction Materials document attached which confirms the materials.
10. Fencing	Construction Materials document attached which confirms proposed details.
11. Construction Method Statement	Construction Method Statement attached which details required measures to be implemented.
13. Cleaning procedures and reinstatement programme	The CMS attached details the cleaning procedures. The Tree Protection and Landscape Plan attached details reinstate to be implemented.
15. Detailed Designs of Fish and Eel Pass	A drawing pack showing the EA approved Fish and Eel pass design to be constructed. This has been approved by the EA National Fish Pass Panel.

2 Project description

Location

- 2.1 The proposed hydroelectric power (HEP) development lies on the River Thames adjacent to Caversham Locks. The site is wholly within the Reading Borough Council area. Location and site plans accompany this document as part of the planning application.
- 2.2 The site is on the eastern bank of the Caversham Weir and Locks on land known as View island, Reading.



Proposed Hydro location

Site description

- 2.3 The application site relates to an area of land adjacent to Caversham Weir in Reading. A footpath runs west to east. The site is on View Island, with a mill leat running to the north of the site and the River Thames running to the south of the island.
- 2.4 A concrete channel will be created under the footpath next to the weir to divert a small portion of the flow through the 2x Archimedean Screws. The Screw turbines will drive generators mounted at the top of the screws to produce power. The generators and control system will be housed in the generator hut. The existing footpath will be reinstalled over the intake channel to maintain permanent access.
- 2.5 The intake of the proposal will be located at OS grid reference SU 72019 74133. [This has not changed as a result of this variation.](#)

Site designations

- 2.6 The proposal does not lie within, or near to, a SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar or other designated environmental site.
- 2.7 The proposal is not within an area of sensitive or protected habitat or water use.
- 2.8 The proposal is not within a Conservation Area or Green Belt.
- 2.9 The proposal will not impact any designated public right of way.

Cumulative hydro schemes & existing WFD licences

- 2.10 There is an EA initiative aimed at encouraging hydropower development along the Thames. A number of schemes are being reviewed including: Teddington, Sunbury, Bell, Buscot, Rushey, Radcot, Abingdon, Shiplake, Sandford-on-Thames, Marlow, Boulter & Boveney Weirs.
- 2.11 There are operational hydro projects at the following locations known to the applicant: Romney Weir, Mapledurham Mill, Osney, Sonning, and Culham.
- 2.12 The nearest operational hydropower scheme at Sonning, 3.5 km downstream and 5.7km upstream at Mapledurham.
- 2.13 The application is associated with an Environment Agency impoundment licence application.

Comparison of revised design against the previously approved design

- 2.14 The revised design is the result of standard design updates during the procurement process. The scheme is wholly within the consented red line boundary. The location of the development remains unchanged. The abstraction rates of the hydro system and the twin Archimedean screw turbine setup is the same.
- 2.15 The main difference is the slight adjustment in the size of the structure. See the summary below:

Aspects	Consented	Revised	Difference
Abstracted flow	6.2m ³ /s	6.2m ³ /s	=
Number of screws	2	2	=
Screw diameter	2.7m	2.6m	-0.1m
Screw tube length	10m	6.6m	-3.4m
Total channel width	7.9m	6.95m	-0.95m
Total channel length	19.9m	20.8m	+0.9m
Total development width	7.9m	8.1m	+0.2m
Generator Hut height	3.7m	3.8m	+0.1m
Generator Hut Width	4.1m	4.5m	+0.4m
Generator Hut Depth	7.9m	6.95m	-0.95m

- 2.16 In terms of scale – there is very little change as detailed above and not noticeable.
- 2.17 In terms of appearance – it will be of similar scale and therefore visibility as the previous design.
The materials will be similar and are detailed in the Construction Materials document attached.

3 Design and access

Design & Layout

- 3.1 The application is for a hydroelectric scheme consisting of two Archimedean screw turbines and associated plant equipment. The maximum capacity of the scheme will be 46kW.
- 3.2 The development will measure 20 metres from intake to outfall.
- 3.3 The overall planning area will measure 0.1 ha; this includes the intake location, the hydro channel, the generator hut, fish pass, temporary compound and vehicular access. [The development boundary remains unchanged from the original permission.](#)

Appearance

- 3.4 Wherever possible the scheme will be designed to be in keeping with its surroundings. The generator hut will be constructed to reflect the materials and design of local structures.
- 3.5 All materials are defined in the attached Construction Materials document.

Use

- 3.6 The site will be used as a hydro-electric generating station with the turbine and associated infrastructure in place for the duration of the project lifetime. There are examples in the UK of hydroelectric infrastructure working continuously for 50 – 100 years.
- 3.7 The fish & eel pass should have a similar if not longer design life given it is a passive structure with no moving parts.

Access

- 3.8 Construction access will be via a bridge across the mill leat to the site from the Hills Meadow Street car park north of the site. The construction compound will be located in the Hills Meadow car park.
- 3.9 The proposed development, once constructed, will be largely self-maintaining and will be primarily via the existing footpath. Major works would be through the Hills Meadow Car park with a temporary bridge or by barge.
- 3.10 Impacts on traffic and transport will be short-term and minor during the construction phase. There will be no road closures. The development will only require temporary traffic management operations during deliveries of large components such as the Archimedean Screw turbines.
- 3.11 Once the scheme is running there will be a negligible impact of maintenance vehicles attending on an approximately monthly basis to service the turbine and keep the system clear of obstructions. It is therefore unlikely that the development will have any discernible long-term impact on the wider highway network.

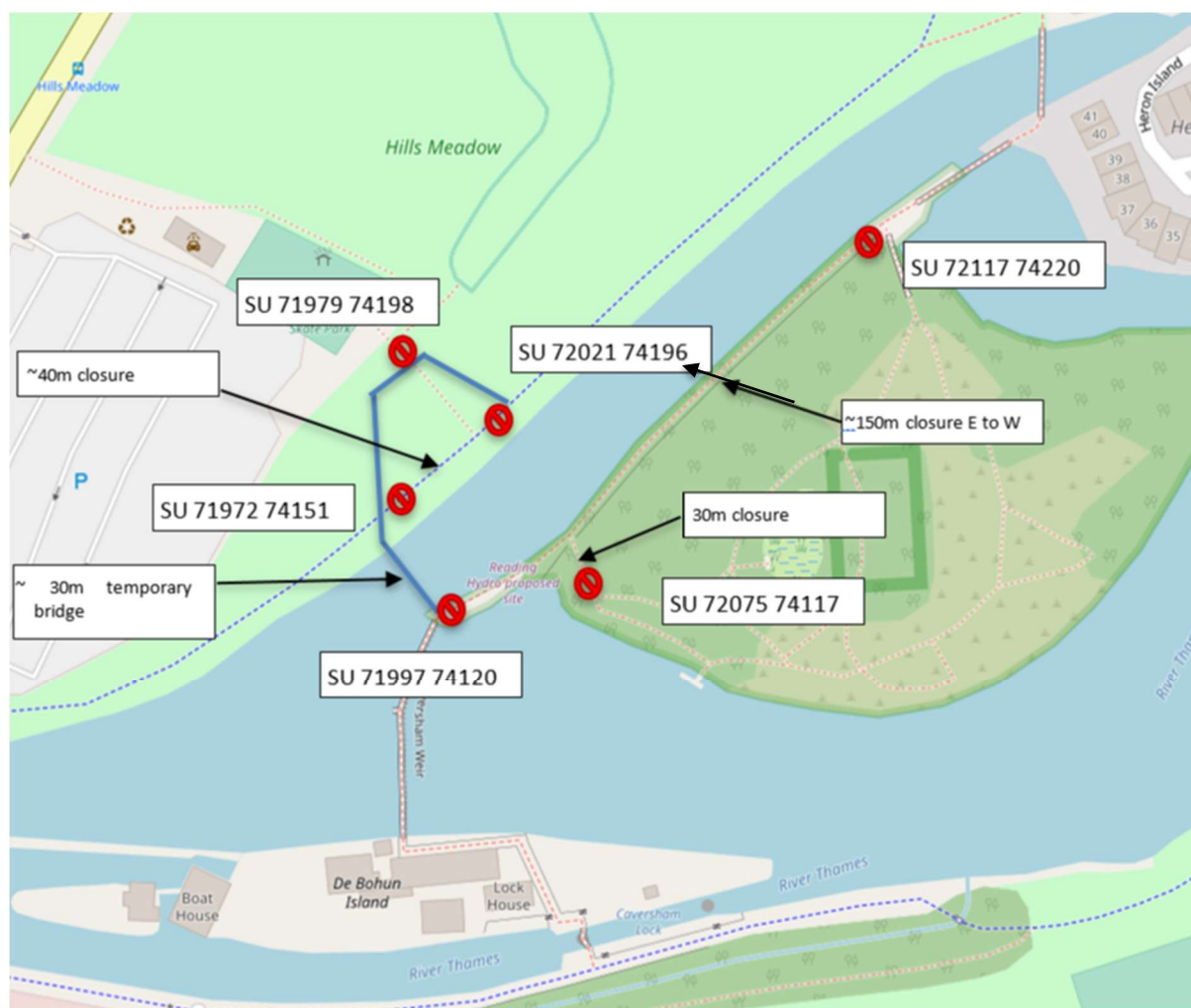
Public Safety & Accessibility

- 3.12 The proposed development would be sited across part of an existing public footpath, which follows eastwards from the Weir. A Footpath application to Reading Borough Council is being made in parallel with this application detailing the temporary arrangements during construction.



Existing public footpath (red line)

- 3.13 While construction work is undertaken, this footpath will be redirected across the mill leat via a temporary bridge structure (scaffold, floating pontoon or similar temporary structure). This temporary routing will be installed prior to any other construction works being undertaken. This is subject to a separate Footpath application that has been submitted to Reading Borough Council. Adequate signage and fencing will be installed to ensure public safety and access is maintained at all times. An outline plan of the diversions and temporary closure that will be required for the construction phase are detailed in a plan below (including approximate grid references).



- 3.14 The scheme will not require the permanent closure of the path. The hydro intake channel and fish pass will be covered over to ensure the same level of access once the hydropower scheme is operational.

4 Planning policy

Extant planning policy

- 4.1 The planning approval dated 2017 was deemed to comply with all relevant local and national planning policies. A brief review of the relevant NPPF 2018 policies is included,
- 4.2 Since the decision notice was issued, a new Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted November 2019. The 2019 Local Plan is supportive of renewable energy and hydropower. As such this will be briefly reviewed to ensure the varied development still complies with all relevant policies.

NPPF policies

- 4.3 Para. 11 sets out that the presumption in favour of sustainable development lies at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 4.4 Para. 151 requires all planning authorities to have a positive strategy to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy.
- 4.5 Para. 152 states that local planning authorities should support community-led initiatives for renewable energy.
- 4.6 Para. 154 states that in determining planning applications for renewable energy, local authorities should:
- not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and also recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and
 - approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

Reading Local Plan adopted November 2019

- 4.7 The following main policies in the Local Plan are relevant to this application:
- Policy CC4: Decentralised Energy
 - Policy EN7: Local Green Space and Public Open Space
 - Policy EN14: Trees, hedges and woodland
 - Policy EN16: Pollution and water resources
 - Policy EN17: Noise Generating Equipment
 - Policy EN18: Flooding and Drainage
 - Policy CR14m: Caversham Lock Island and Caversham Weir (including reference to hydropower).

- 4.8 The revised proposal has been assessed against the above policies and is believed to comply with all policies. Mitigations will be put in place to ensure no adverse impact on woodland, habitats and wildlife during the construction and future operational of the scheme. In addition mitigation will be implemented to ensure no adverse impact on the human receptors.
- 4.9 Overall the proposal will enable local, long term power generation and habitat improvements.

Developer Obligations

- 4.10 Under the Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule (2014), Development of buildings and structures into which people do not normally go (e.g. pylons, wind turbines, electricity sub stations) are exempt from the CIL.

Conclusion

- 4.11 There is no material change to the proposal and the applicant believes that the variation is compliant with all relevant planning policies.

5 Visual Impact Assessment

- 5.1 The character of the surrounding area is a mix of urban background and water / tree lined parkland. The significant weir and locks structure is central in the area adjacent to the proposed development.
- 5.2 The development involves the installation of 2 archimedes screw turbines, housed within concrete channels and a generator hut on top.
- 5.3 The revised proposal involves a slightly smaller structure overall from the 2017 permission.
- 5.4 The physical scale of the development will be unobtrusive, largely below ground level, and reflective of the existing built form within the immediate locality. [The scale of the building has not significantly changed as a result of the revised proposal.](#)
- 5.5 The unobtrusive scale of the building, along with its architectural design, will reduce any harm that may be occasioned to openness of the local area and general visual amenity. Furthermore any harm would be very limited in terms of geographic extent.
- 5.6 The development as a whole directly corresponds with the core land-use planning principle expressed within the NPPF which aims to ‘support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood-risk and coastal change, and encourage the re-use of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by development of renewable energy (para. 17 bullet six))’.
- 5.7 The plant building, along with the rest of the proposal, cannot reasonably be sited anywhere other than at this particular location (i.e. adjacent to the weir and the sluice gates) in order to perform its intended function.
- 5.8 Furthermore it is considered that the modest footprint of the scheme coupled with its low height and appropriate use of materials will result in only a marginal impact on the openness and visual amenity.
- 5.9 A public footpath follows the river / mill leat and passes through the application site, thus providing public vantage points of the surrounding area; however the footpath has a urban backdrop prior to entering the trees within View Island.
- 5.10 Finally, significant weight should be attached to the wider environmental benefits that would result from the installation of the proposal is capable of generating enough renewable electricity to power approximately 107 homes (an increase due to the average consumption reducing since the original application).

6 Noise and Heritage Assessments

Noise & amenity impact

- 6.1 The dominant noise source in the area during the daytime is water flowing over the weir. There is background noise from road traffic on George Street and Napier Road. There is some noise audible from the London to South West train line approximately 250m south of the site. Given it is in an urban area there will be some road and rail traffic most times of the day.
- 6.2 Any turbine and generator are bespoke pieces of equipment so the precise amount of noise they make varies from site to site. Typically Archimedean Screw systems do not generate more than 85 dB(A). The primary source of noise is from the generators which are situated inside the generator hut. However the noise associated with the system is all generated within the generator hut, which has been designed to minimise acoustic leakage.
- 6.3 The nearest noise sensitive property to the proposed development is a residential property (the Lock Keepers House) on DeBohun Island south of the proposal, in excess of 70 m away.
- 6.4 A preliminary desktop noise assessment has been carried out and the results show that the sound levels at the nearest residential property will be well below the statutory nuisance level.

Location \ Frequency	$L_{Aeq,T}$
	1000
Assumed Source Noise from turbine & generator	85.0
Spherical Sound Divergence as sound spreads to power house perimeter (3m)	-9.5
Sound Reduction Index for Generator Housing absorption. (Concrete 700kg/m ²)	-32.0
Sound Power Level outside power house	43.5
Spherical Sound Divergence as sound spreads to receptor (3-70m)	-36.9
Ground Absorption over soft ground (70m)	0.0
Atmospheric Attenuation over 70m	0.0
Predicted Noise Rating Level at receptor	6.6

- 6.5 The project is intending to install block work with a higher noise attenuation (around 40 dB(A)) than modelled. [https://www.forterra.co.uk/plugins/downloads/files/fenlite_background_datasheet_v2.pdf accessed 18/02/2020]
- 6.6 Condition 6 attached the original decision notice requires a noise assessment of the mechanical equipment. The project is currently undertaking the required assessment to comply with condition 6 and will be submitted via a separate discharge of condition application.

- 6.7 The physical scale of the development is considered to be unobtrusive and reflective of the existing built form within the immediate locality. Residential amenity will therefore be unlikely to be significantly adversely affected by this development.

Heritage assessment

- 6.8 The Hydrogeological Assessment contains some detail on the history of the site. There has been some form of human engineering at the site for 1000 years. Given the site of hydro project is an area of relatively modern development and associated ground disturbance – there is low risk to any buried archaeology.
- 6.9 The nearest designated heritage asset is the Grade II listed Kings Meadow Swimming Pool which is 150 metres south of the development and is screened by the buildings on De Bohun Island.
- 6.10 There is a history of buildings on View Island, however the development is not in the vicinity of these now removed structures and therefore no impact.
- 6.11 There are no nearby designated heritage assets that would be affected directly or indirectly by the scheme.

7 Ecology

Extended habitat report

- 7.1 A key aim of the National Planning Policy Framework is to minimise impacts to biodiversity and provide enhancements *where possible* (Paras. 174 and 175).
- 7.2 An ecological appraisal, which included a desk study and extended Phase 1 habitat survey, was undertaken by Ecoconsult was completed as part of the previous application. It is believed that the design changes have no change in impact and as such the original report is appended to this application.
- 7.3 The report found no designated species or habitat would be adversely affected by the proposal. The site would be improved with some removal of dead or poor health trees, improved fish and eel passage, installation of bat boxes, removal of any invasive species and installation of an insect tower.

Great Crested Newts

- 7.4 During the original application a Great Crested Newt eDNA survey was completed and 1 of the samples indicated the presence in one of the 2 ponds onsite. As such a condition was inserted into the Decision Notice reference 5.
- 7.5 Prior to this application a revised eDNA survey was completed which concluded negative results for GCN DNA. Attached to the variation application is a letter which states that a fingertip search will be carried out prior to construction to ensure there are no GCNs present.

Weir Pool Habitat Assessment

- 7.6 A Weir Pool Habitat Impact Assessment was carried out by Wallingford Hydro Solutions as part of the original application. Given there is no material changes to the scheme layout and operation – the original assessment is appended to the variation application as the conclusions are representative.
- 7.7 The original conclusion that the installation of the hydro scheme on the weir would have limited potential impact upon spawning coarse fish population.

Water framework directive compliance assessment

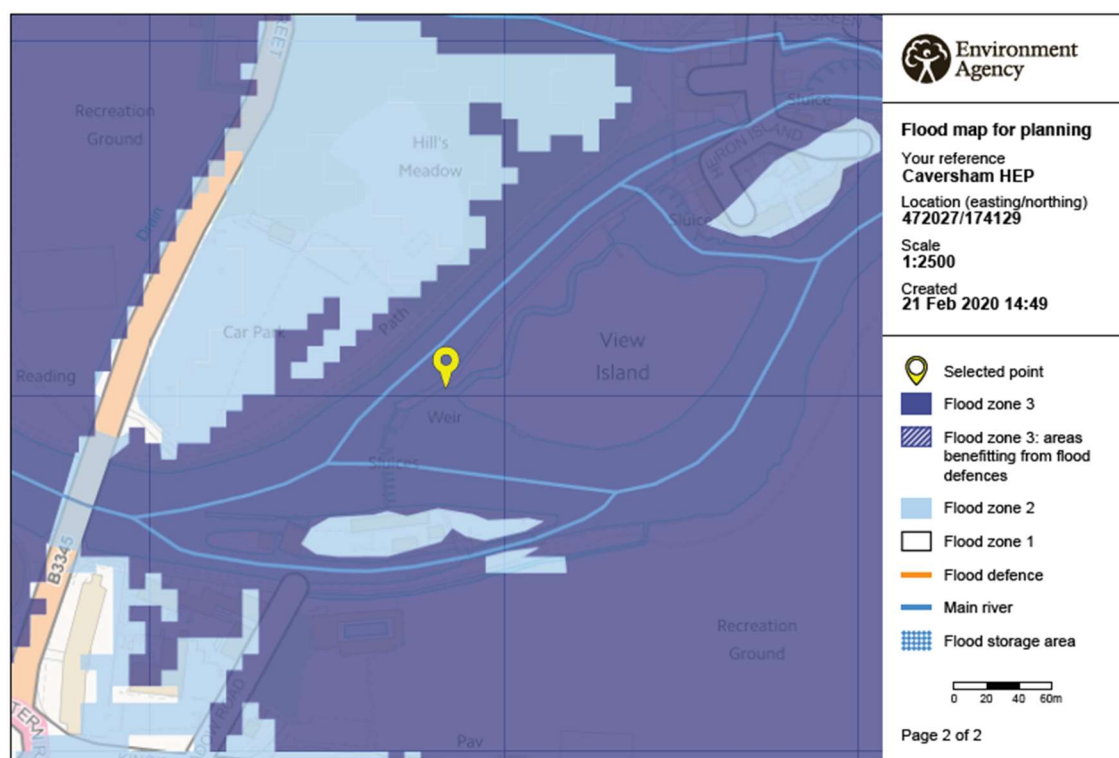
- 7.8 The Water Framework Directive (WFD) aims to ensure the health of all water bodies across Europe, and has been transposed into English Law. Any works undertaken as part of development that have the potential to deteriorate the status of the water body, or which could prevent it from achieving its status will need to be supported with a Water Framework Directive Compliance Assessment.

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- 7.9 A WFD assessment was completed by Wallingford Hydro Solutions and appended to the original application. The variation proposed makes no change that would affect the original assessment and therefore the original document is submitted with this variation application.
- 7.10 The assessment concludes that the hydro scheme proposed would not contribute to deterioration in the current status or potential waterbody and did not prevent the achievement of future objectives.

Overall

- 7.11 No designated habitats or protected species will be adversely impacted by this scheme.
- 7.12 There is no change in impact as a result of the revised design submitted as part of this s73 application.

8 Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy



- 8.1 The Environment Agency Flood Map for the area shows the highest river flood risk (Zone 3) is in the vicinity of the River Thames and incorporates the whole of View Island. A large part of the Meadow Hills car park is Flood Risk Zone 2.
- 8.2 A full Flood Risk Assessment and separate Sequential Test was completed and approved in the previous application. A revised Flood Risk Assessment has been completed. The design changes have no change in the volume of water to be abstracted or have any change in impact on flood risk – so it is presented that the previous assessments are still correct.
- 8.3 There is potential during the construction phase to temporarily drain a very small section of the channel. The construction method statement will include site specific requirements to ensure no drainage of existing wet areas, or diversion of existing drainage channels occurs.
- 8.4 Electrical equipment located within the generator hut will be protected to the 1 in 100 year (+ climate change) flood level.
- 8.5 The increase in impermeable area arising from the generator hut footprint is minimal and will therefore have a negligible impact on flood risk.
- 8.6 In summary, no element of the temporary or permanent works will cause any increase in the likelihood or impact of flooding events.
- 8.7 There is no change in flood impact as a result of the revised design because the intake channel and abstracted flows have stayed the same.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The proposal for a variation to the design of the 46kW hydroelectric system adjacent to Caversham Weir in Reading complies with and is supportive of local and national strategies for renewable energy. The scheme has been sensitively designed to minimise the impact on the surrounding area. The design submitted in this variation is not materially different from the original consented design and is within the red line development boundary.
- 9.2 The revised scheme is expected to generate approximately 405,000 kWh per year, which is sufficient to power around 107 homes, providing an equivalent carbon saving of more than 112 tonnes of CO₂ per year. This is similar generation as the original consent but the average household consumption and grid emission factors have changed.
- 9.3 Reports have been completed that show there will be no significant impacts on resident amenity, ecology, fisheries, heritage, landscape, or flood risk. No protected species or habitat will be affected by the development or operation of the scheme.
- 9.4 Additional information has been provided to effectively discharge conditions 7, 11, 13 and 15 (pre-commencement of development) by allowing the conditions to be re-written to reference documents which contain the required information.
- 9.5 Additional information has been provided which may allow conditions 3, 4, 5, 9 and 10 to be re-written to reference documents which contain the required information.
- 9.6 This proposed development conforms to the relevant planning policy and legislation as defined at local, national and EU level and should therefore be granted approval.
- 9.7 All documents referenced in this report have been submitted as part of this application.