

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Rev B

THE WIRE MILL, SOUTHCOTE MILL, SOUTHCOTE FARM LANE, READING

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LIST OF SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATIONS

Wolstenholme Ltd. Drawings
Arboricultural Impact Assessment
Tree Survey and Arboricultural Method Statement
Bat Survey
Ecological Assessment
Topographical Survey
Site History
Flood Risk Assessment
Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment
Noise Risk Assessment

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Design and Access Statement is written in support of a proposed restoration and redevelopment of the currently derelict Wire Mill at Southcote Mill, Southcote Farm Lane, Reading, RG30 3DZ.
- 1.2 The application site in its entirety is 0.26 hectares in size; it can be accessed via a private single track road and is located 0.4 miles from the end of Circuit Lane, which itself is located 2 miles to the west of Reading town centre. The Wire Mill sits alongside Southcote Lock on the banks of the Kennet and Avon Canal, and has pedestrian access via the tow path.
- 1.3 The application site is owned by the Puddephatt family, which has been within their ownership for 4 years. The wider area of ownership, within which the application site sits, includes Southcote Mill and the lands to the north of the Canal, and amounts to an area of 1.75 hectares in total. Drawing W1236-01C shows the application site bounded in red, with the wider site within the Puddephatt family ownership bounded in blue.
- 1.4 Several third party organisations have been approached as part of discussing plans for development and putting together this Planning Application. These include:
- Reading Borough Council
 - The Canals and Rivers Trust
 - The Kennet and Avon Canal Trust
 - Ewaterpower, Bracknell
 - Urban Tree Experts, Arborfield
 - RIDGE, Property and Construction Consultants
 - Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust
 - Geoff Mayes, Chartered Civil Engineer



The Wire Mill, viewed from the Kennet and Avon Canal

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2.0 THE SITE

- 2.1 The Wire Mill is currently in the process of deteriorating and there has already been remedial work taken in the form of metal supports to prevent the walls from collapsing onto the towpath. The building is also at threat from vandalism and has been a spot for antisocial behaviour; this would be eradicated through redevelopment, creating a safe and accessible environment for the local community (CS7).
- 2.2 Reading Borough Council have commented that *'Much of the original building, below eaves level, remains intact but is at risk of deteriorating further. The building is not listed and is not located within a conservation area. On this basis it is considered reasonable to describe the building as an 'undesigned heritage asset' as described in national planning policy'*. Noticeable deterioration of the brick work (namely Bath Stone) has taken place over the past three years while being monitored by the residents of Southcote Mill. Despite the building not being in a conservation area or listed, the plans take into account guidance in policy CS33, with the primary aim of the project being to protect and enhance an existing feature of historic value.



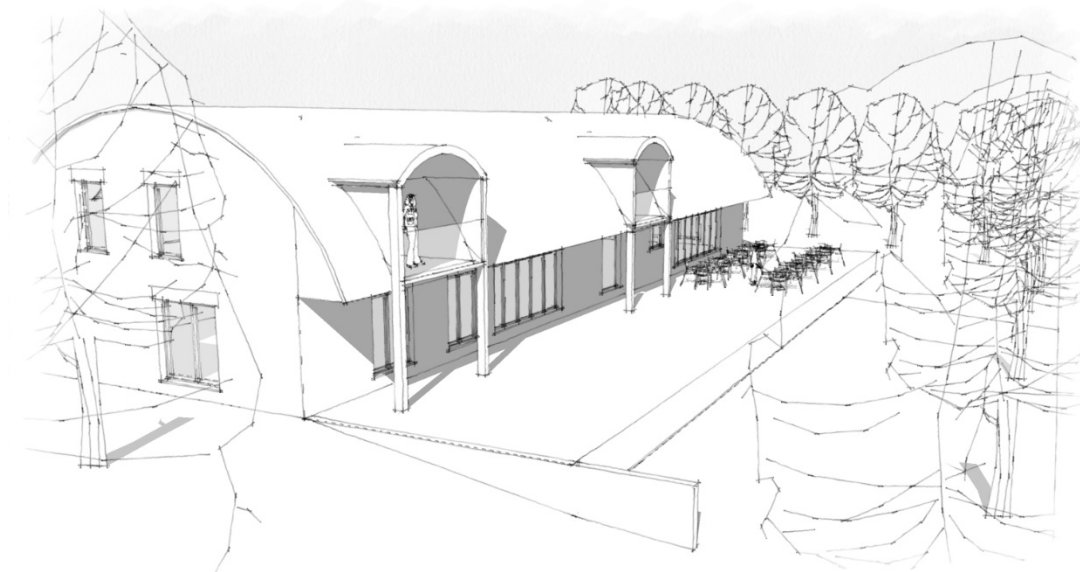
Internal view of The Wire Mill

3.0 HISTORY OF THE WIRE MILL

- 3.1 The site has historic significance relating to the construction of the Kennet and Avon canal. In 1800 it is listed in John Rennie's note book as "Wire Mill with water wheels and 'new' mill building" and appears on maps of the area from 1811. Initially the site was used for making wire but in 1852 Southcote Water Works began operation to supply the town of Reading. The Wire Mill at this point is used as filter beds, the shape and footing of the building appears to change shape and there is evidence of other buildings on the mill island. Once Fobney Water Works reopened with ozone treatment in 1982, Southcote pumping station was redundant and closed.
- 3.2 The 'Southcote Scrapbook', written by Matthew Girling gives a detailed account of the history of the building and site, including historic maps and photographs, and forms part of the supporting documentation for this Planning Application.

4.0 THE PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The proposed redevelopment uses the existing walls to bring the building back to life, primarily for business purposes with small residential elements, but ultimately to find a use that prevents it deteriorating further or having to be demolished, supporting CS7 in 'protecting and enhancement of rivers and corridors'. Finding a use for the building, specifically incorporating a business element, supports the intentions of The Draft South East Plan which seeks to "recognise opportunities for sustainable tourism and leisure provided by the River Thames and other inland waterways". In October 2015 Southcote Lock was listed as 9th on Trip Advisor as a place to go around Reading, which reflects the number of people who pass the site on a regular basis and the importance of having access to the canal locally.
- 4.2 The proposal has been created keeping the heritage of the building at the forefront of the design, and as per policy CS7 the development seeks to prevent the loss of historic characteristics of the building by renovating the existing shell in a way that is sensitive to its environment, tying in with the urban characteristics of the Kennet (as per CS8). The main aim of the project is to put the building back into use rather than change the landscape, keeping the intentions of CS7 and CS8 in mind. The front aspect of the building will remain very similar, overlooking the canal, with the intention that the development is 'heritage-led' and its distinct character positively enhances the surrounding waterways (as per CS8). The currently deteriorating Bath stone that makes up the front facade will be repointed and repaired where necessary using conservation techniques. The plans propose using the existing footprint and foundations, creating a steel frame within the existing walls meaning they do not need to be load bearing support for the roof. The intention is to maintain as much of the original fabric as is feasible, materials will be reused from the existing structure where possible and new ones carefully chosen to be in-keeping with the conservation of the building. The intention is to expose interesting features, such as the metal work sluices within the foundations, and incorporate them into the design to create clear references to the building's former use as a Water Works.
- 4.3 The alternative to the proposed works is that the building declines further and potentially requiring demolition. This would alter the surrounding environment and mean the loss of a historic feature, which is one of a number that together make 'Reading waterways a significant asset' (CS7). The plans support the intention of the policy CS8 to 'protect the local character' of Reading's waterways.



Proposed view of the redeveloped Wire Mill, viewed from the south

5.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 5.1 Pre-application advice was sought from Reading Borough Council, dated 21 September 2015. This outlined the information that would be required as part of a formal Planning Application, and concluded that *'it is clear that it would be desirable for the building to be protected from further deterioration and that the best means of achieving this is to find a viable use for it. A café with modest, subservient, residential use associated with it appears to be a suitable approach'*.
- 5.2 A Planning Application was submitted in August 2016, but following comments regarding the scale/appearance, transport comments, the Flood Risk Assessment and noise, the application was withdrawn and these items have been addressed in the revised Design and Access Statement and supporting drawings/documents.

6.0 FLOOD RISK

- 6.1 The Risk Assessment was carried out by Geoff Mayes, Chartered Civil Engineer, and forms part of the supporting documentation for this Planning Application.
- 6.2 In summary the findings were as follows:
1. Development works as currently outlined in the Planning Application will have no adverse effects on the flood risk in the area or transfer the risk downstream.
 2. The access track to Southcote Mill crosses the "Functional Flood Plain" in EA Zones 2 and 3 which have a medium or high probability ($>1/100$) of flooding. The Wire Mill site is in Zone 1 on land with a lower flood probability ($<1/1000$).
 3. Access to the Wire Mill site will be made slightly more difficult under Climate Change flow conditions which are estimated to be a rise in water levels of less than 80mm higher than the observed flood in 2014.
 4. The planned ground floor level in the proposed development would be 300mm above the level of the towpath.
 5. Extreme flood events tend to occur after prolonged winter rainfall such as that in late 2013 and early spring 2014. While inconvenient, to those living at Southcote Mill and working at the proposed Wire Mill development, there would be several days warning of rising flood plain inundation enabling them to evacuate.
 6. The water levels in the canalised sections of the K&A Navigation are controlled by CRT staff to maintain the safety of the craft and to protect the canal assets from structural damage by leakage or overtopping of the embankments. The towpath between Southcote Mill and Burghfield Bridge is therefore permanently accessible along its full length. This was the case during the 2013/14 period of flooding and is unlikely to be altered even with increased surface run off under climate change conditions and every effort would be made to maintain the canal asset.
 7. The Wire Mill is well worthy of a modern usage rather than progressing into further decay. A well-managed leisure facility would be beneficial to the local economy with no tangible downsides.
 8. Operation of the café on the Wire Mill could be closed to reflect EA Flood Warnings. This can be made a condition covering seasonable activities which the Planning Authority may wish to impose for reasons of public safety.

- 6.3 The report confirms that the building itself has a lower flood risk and the main area of concern is not the building flooding but the access to it being compromised. There are several mitigation opportunities to maintain access for the longest duration possible. The following outlines the proposed mitigation activity that will take place as part of the project to address the issues raised in Section 6.2 above:
1. A significant period of warning, confirmed by the report, creates a reasonable opportunity to react to the potential of a flood event. Therefore, the likelihood of residents being at risk suddenly is low and means that negative consequences are reduced as a result.
 2. Following the 2013/14 flood, two drainage additional pipes have been installed in the access track following discussion with the Environment Agency and existing ones cleared. Additional drainage pipes can be incorporated into the track as part of the project if the relevant body (EA and Reading Borough Council) deem it appropriate. This will lessen the effect of the track stopping the flow of water, which would be seen as a positive aspect of the development.
 3. The proposed project suggests a condition of limiting the number of permanent residents living across the whole Southcote Mill site to twenty people (the level that exists currently) and therefore would not put additional people at risk as a result, taking account of the EA's 'Safe access and Egress Guidance Statement'.
 4. The proposed project incorporates several business functions which are central to the plan.
 5. The residential elements have been created for either business purposes or to enable the business to operate. Without the inclusion of both commercial and residential the project as a whole is not viable. An evacuation procedure including relevant health and safety equipment will be created.
- 6.4 The proposed building project must be considered against Policy CS35 which outlines Reading Borough Councils policy regarding flooding. The policy states, *'appropriate weight will be given to the redevelopment of land at risk of flooding that provides significant regeneration benefits on previously developed land'*. The project supports this intention of the policy with the main aim to regenerate an existing building to benefit the local community and generally improving the local area (even if only on a small scale). The proposed building work will take place in the existing footing on the original building and therefore the capacity of the surrounding floodplain will not be altered negatively (subject of CS35, 11.21). In fact, building in several additional drains to the access track will have positive implications on the flow of flood water.
- 6.5 The applicants experienced the full effects of the 2013/14 floods. Although this related to Southcote Mill it gives a picture of how flooding impacts the area neighbouring the proposed development.
- The floods occurred with a significant period of warning that the levels were increasing and this was monitored closely via information provided by the Environment Agency. This allowed time for several precautionary measures to be implemented in advance of the event occurring.
- During this time the access track to the property was flooded with vehicle access limited for a short period of time. Outside these times the water receded although the access to Southcote Mill was blocked for longer than necessary due to the industrial pumps brought in by Reading Borough Council which were positioned in such a way as to prevent access for a longer duration than prevented by the water levels.
- The residents of Southcote Mill travelled to and from work/outside locations on foot. While the flooding was at its worst access was possible via the towpath which was always passable for the duration. Cars were parked in Burghfield Boat Club or at the end of Circuit Lane depending on available access route. The towpath is always likely

to be passable on foot as it runs alongside a man-made watercourse that is significantly higher than the surrounding water table, which is supported by the FRA.

Also during this time, before pumps were introduced, 4x4 vehicle access was possible for the majority of the flooding event. None of the residents missed work or earning opportunities as a result and all were able to come and go as needed, albeit taking slightly longer than usual.

During this time the Wire Mill was always accessible on foot. The majority of the brick chambers with the existing foundations are dry throughout the year. However, there is a small section where a feeding sluice leaks slightly from the canal. Despite this, the levels did not rise noticeably for the duration of the flood event and water did not become present in any more tanks than usual. The low riverbank to the rear of the Wire Mill was overtopped during the flood event but this is to be expected and allowed for in project plans.

During the flood event water levels in the canal (a manmade watercourse) were lower than usual due to the adjustments made by the Canal and River Trust to the sluice gates.

6.6 Sequential Test:

Due to the nature of the site it is necessary to apply the sequential test, which aims to steer new development to areas with the lowest probability of flooding. The café will rely on the passing leisure trade tapping into the high footfall already in existence along the towpath (rather than creating a destination). It will meet the needs of the passing traffic, indicated for example by the number of impromptu picnics taking place in the area. In addition to this the location has aesthetic value unlikely to be found easily in other areas of Reading and is important to attract function and holiday let bookings. Reading is a relatively urban area and therefore sites that have the opportunity to create a business as per the above with the same canalside aesthetics are non-existent. In addition to this the opportunity to prevent further deterioration of the existing Wire Mill would not be fulfilled in another location, missing the main objective of this project - putting the building back into use.

6.7 Exception Tests:

As per the Flood Risk Assessment and Geoff Mayes report, the exception test will be applied, as set out in paragraph 102 of the Framework. The two parts to the test require proposed development to show that it will provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh flood risk, and that it will be safe for its lifetime, without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

The development intends to add value to the local community providing a destination for members of the public and space that local groups can use. It will also help to reduce the antisocial behaviour around the canal providing a usable space in a derelict site prone to unwanted attention. In addition to this the site will be rescued from deteriorating further and becoming a potential hazard to towpath users. The amount of time the building may be impacted by flooding is limited and more likely to occur at times when the building has its lowest level of use. As such the benefit of the building outweighs the risk or danger posed by flooding.

The design of the restored building will incorporate flood prevention features to ensure the building is viable for the foreseeable future. As discussed in the Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment the building sits at a high point and as such is less likely to be affected by water ingress in the same way as the surrounding area. In addition to this as the project

aims to reuse the site of an existing building there will be no change to flood levels or impact experienced elsewhere as a result.

The main impact of flooding is being able to maintain access to the property. As discussed above the plans propose to incorporate several pieces of work to prevent the access flooding. The proposed flood alleviation work to the access track will have the added benefit of reducing the effect of it being considered by West Berkshire Council to have contributed to flooding upstream (as per the HR Wallingford report). This should be considered an additional benefit to the local community and a prevention scheme that would not take place without the planned Wire Mill development.

7.0 USE

7.1 BUSINESS USE:

The Wire Mill, being alongside the canal towpath, has a high footfall of passing traffic, especially during the summer and school holidays. This is made up of pedestrians, dog walkers, cyclists and passengers of hire boats. There is regular traffic from people visiting Madejski Stadium, the nearby nature reserve near Fobney lock, the Cunning Man and Prospect Park, there are also a regular number of commuters that use the towpath. The plans aim to take advantage of this by creating a business space within the design. Specifically, an area for a café that can be used by the passing traffic. This is likely to take the form of a simple offer of tea/coffee, ice cream and cake at the outset. The business aims to provide for passing trade (which is already high) rather than creating a destination. It is likely that the café will not attract boat users to dwell as they have their own facilities onboard. However, the expectation maybe they 'pop in' for an ice cream or milk while passing.

The nature of the café business will be seasonal and the redevelopment plans look to offer spaces that can be used to generate income at all time of the year. The design of the cafe has been created to respond to the levels of business; in the summer it can use the whole room, but in quieter months the room will be able to be sectioned off and reduced in size.

The café area will double up as a function space that can be made available to small private groups e.g. to accommodate family gatherings, host local organisation meetings (such as the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust) creating a hub for local community organisations, the potential of creating of an occasional pop-up restaurant, and working with an existing contact who offers vintage experiences in special locations. This will not incur any additional cars, as arrival will be by foot via the tow path.

There is a multimedia space incorporated into the design that will include the ability to act as a recording and production studio. The studio will be sound proofed to a high level to ensure that there will be no acoustic issues or disturbance (please refer to the Noise Risk Assessment). The space will be available to hire by local groups, and production services can also be provided. This will in effect act as an 'office space' to further an existing business which has until now operated on a smaller scale at Southcote Mill.

7.2 TOWN CENTRE SEQUENTIAL TEST:

The proposed development is small in scale and therefore would not detract from the 'vitality or viability' of retail centres in the borough. A small scale, low-key café use would be appropriate in this location as it would serve the leisure function of the canal, footpaths, cycleways and surrounding open space and Policy CS25 applies. In addition to this, the café/function space business will provide a significantly different offering to that of surrounding catering outlets, which means it would not pose direct competition.

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- 7.3 **SHORT TERM HOLIDAY LET USE:**
The space above the café will be created into a two/three-bedroom apartment, one bedroom with the potential to be incorporated from the residential dwelling to alter the space to accommodate a larger group if needed. Although technically residential, this space will be used for short term holiday lets becoming an additional business venture to help generating maximum income during high-season to normalise less popular time of the year. With the additional of some rentable accommodation the potential for hiring the space increases the appeal to customers and offers opportunities such as hosting small groups overnight after an evening entertainment in the function space or while using the services of the multimedia studio.
- 7.4 Due to the flooding concerns, choosing short-term lets and function hire means that hosting additional people on-site can be kept to favourable times of the year and bookings can be cancelled if there are adverse weather conditions or EA flood alerts issued that mean additional people do not visit the site when flooding that can affect access to the site is a hazard.
- 7.5 The cafe will create very low levels of noise and odour as the main food items will be tea/cake and sandwiches. Despite this, sufficient extraction will be included and directed away from sensitive facades.
- 7.6 **STAFF:**
The businesses outlined above are unlikely to require high levels of staffing. The core business will have one permanent member of staff who would be supported during peak season or at functions with a team of up to four casuals. The permanent member of staff will live onsite to ensure they are able to oversee the business easily and also act as host for any residents staying overnight.
- 7.7 **OPENING HOURS:**
During peak season the intention would be to open during the day seven days a week, approx. 9am - 5pm. This would be reduced to suit demand at other times of the year. The businesses described above are 'lifestyle' so the fact someone will be onsite at most times of the day (due to the addition of staff accommodation) would make it easy to respond to demand outside these times if needed. Private functions would potentially extend into the evening but this would be managed on case by case basis.
- 7.8 **DELIVERIES:**
It is possible for larger vehicles to gain access to Southcote Mill and deliver to the north side of the canal. Items would then be transported by foot across the canal. It would not be expected that deliveries are high in number and probably amount to no more than one or two additional vehicles to the site a month. Most deliveries will be met at the gate, where they will be unloaded. Due to the relatively small size of the business, it is likely that most supplies would be bought from a local cash and carry and be transported onsite in staff vehicles.
- 7.9 **WASTE COLLECTION:**
There are regular domestic waste collections to the site which would suggest it would be possible to organise a trade collection. Recycling is a really important feature of the business values and there are current arrangements in place for recycling collection to the site.
- The nature of the businesses proposed should create waste on a relatively small scale (in comparison to a business in a city centre location as the expected number of customers will be lower). The café and function operation would be expected to generate the most and customers waste will be collected and disposed as necessary. However, the business would endeavour to recycle where possible, being a core value, and help

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keep waste to a minimum. Other business decisions such as using limited amounts of disposable containers and instead using china that can be reused will aid this. A space for storage of waste (before collection) will be incorporated into the design.

The surrounding lock and towpath is often used as a site for impromptu barbecues and picnics (potentially a sign there is a business need). The rubbish is often left which can make the area quite untidy and this is already regularly taken care of by the residents of Southcote Mill. With a more permanent facility, and with the renovation of the area, hopefully people will be encouraged to make use of the café and there will be a reduction in the amount of litter left. The business will take on the clearing of the towpath in 100 yards in each direction, with regular litter picks taking place. Southcote Mill already supports the work of the Southcote Globe and K&A Rescue groups with their regular environmental and clean-up events. The café has already been suggested as a hub for such events in the future.

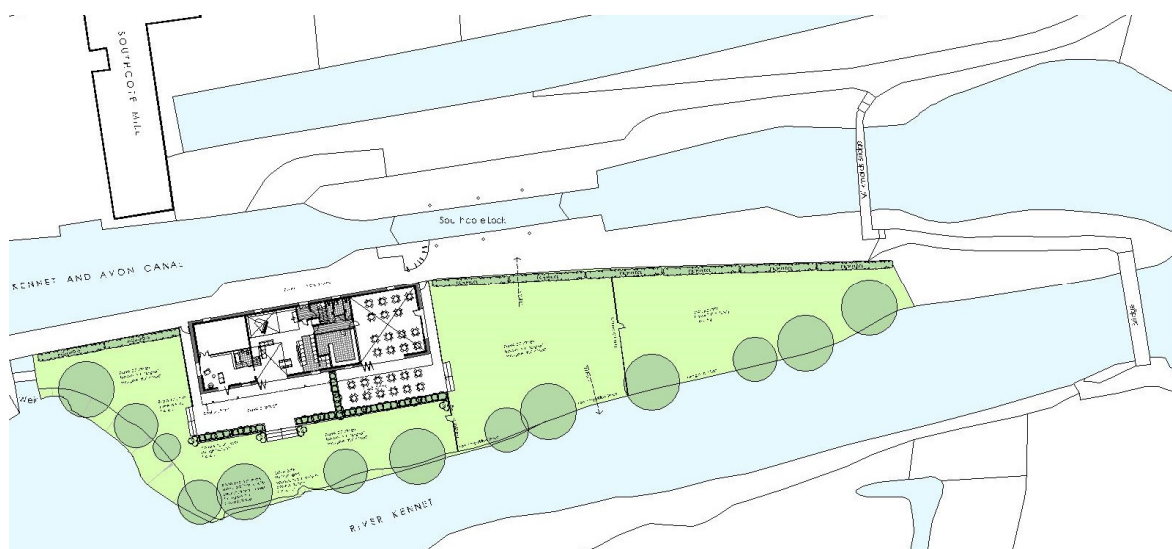
7.10

RESIDENTIAL USE:

The plans include a residential dwelling that will be used by the business owners to provide a means of being in close proximity to aid development of the business. Having residents on-site will benefit the short-term, holiday let apartment business as any problems can be resolved quickly and easily. Some functions could be managed, depending on what is required from the customer, without having many additional staff needed on-site.

Creating a residential dwelling means there will be someone in and around the building at all times which should have the effect of improving the environment and preventing the desire for antisocial behaviour that has occurred in the past (as per CS7 which looks to create safe environments).

The residential dwelling will be made up of two/three bedrooms and incorporate media studio and office space to manage business operations. One of the bedrooms will have the potential of being incorporated to offer additional accommodation in the holiday let if needed.



Proposed site plan of the redeveloped Wire Mill

8.0 PARKING AND ACCESS

8.1 The site currently has a high footfall of passing people using the tow path and track which extends from Circuit Lane in Southcote, on foot, bike or boat. The tow path and track make up National Cycle Route number 4. There is no vehicular access to the general public. The residents of Southcote Mill have vehicle access and parking spaces already allocated, with the opportunity for ad-hoc additional spaces to accommodate those staying in the holiday lets. Service companies, such as Thames Water, have vehicle access to the track although their parking is within compounds further towards Circuit Lane.

8.2 **PARKING:**
Customers to the café would be made up of existing passing pedestrian traffic and therefore expected to arrive on foot. As such, no additional car parking or vehicular access will be provided.

For overnight bookings car parking will be provided in existing spaces on the north side of the canal, i.e. no additional spaces will need to be created to host two additional spaces. There will be no change in the number of long term residential parking onsite.

8.3 **ACCESS FEATURES:**
The café/function area that will be used by the general public will be created to be all on one level to aid the use of bicycles, buggies and wheelchairs. NB, there are very few wheelchair users along this section of towpath as a kissing gate restricts access at Fobney and a long stretch in the Burghfield direction before access is possible. Buggies that are manoeuvrable around these obstacles are more common.

Bicycle parking will be provided within the vicinity of the café/function space as they are likely to form a large proportion of customers.

Toilets available for use by the public will be built in accordance with relevant building regulations and include 'reasonable adjustments' to meet the needs of users.

8.4 **ACCESS DURING WORKS:**
It will be necessary to transport materials and machinery to the site to allow building work to take place. Depending on the nature of the materials or machinery there are several options currently being investigated.

Vehicle access to the drive at Southcote Mill will allow for the delivery of materials and machinery that can be carried across to the building site in smaller loads, via the bridge. The lock gates will not be used to transport materials. There are areas of the private drive that can be used for storage while transportation across the canal takes place. Risk Assessments will be carried out when necessary and access to the towpath will be in accordance with 'Impact on Towpath' below.

Informal conversations with the Canal and River Trust to find out what processes they adopt when constructing in and around the canal are also taking place and appear positive. It may be possible to mirror some of these as best practice building techniques. Examples of work taking place in the local area include a small digger that was granted access to the towpath for work at the nearby weir. In the construction of the sluice gates, close to the Wire Mill building, materials were transported using a small barge, loaded one side of the canal, floated across and unloaded on the other. Work to replace the lock gates involved a floating crane as well as materials being transported by canal and access from the Circuit Lane track. Southcote Mill has been used as a base for various bits of machinery following a request from the Canal and River Trust to the residents of the mill to make work access easier. Facilities of the mill are

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often made available to Canal and River Trust volunteer work parties on a regular basis (car parking, toilets etc.) As noted in Section 13.4, any work requiring access via the towpath will be done in accordance with the Canal and River Trust (or relevant body).

8.5 PARKING PROVISION DURING WORKS:

Vehicles during construction works can be accommodated on the Southcote Mill side of the canal (e.g. vehicles belonging to workers or ones delivering materials). Any vehicles requiring direct site access (potentially a small digger, roller or other small motorised vehicles) can be accommodated within the building site (after relevant permission has been granted for vehicles to access the site in the first place and in accordance with advice in the tree surveys) and not left stationary at any point on the towpath. A planned route will be drawn up and agreed with the relevant body beforehand. There should be no displacement of existing cars using the site to accommodate additional vehicles as and when required.

8.6 SERVICES:

The location of the site means that services will need to be carefully considered. Water, electricity and any cabling will run via an existing conduit from Southcote Mill to the site. Waste will use a water treatment system that has been approved by the Environment Agency for use close to the waterways and will be the same as the one used by the main house at Southcote Mill. The services within the building will be installed in such a way to take into consideration the increased risk of flooding to areas surrounding the building. Measures for example raising the electronic cables above floor level could be used as precautions should the building itself flood.

9.0 SCALE AND APPEARANCE

9.1 The proposed plans focus on reviving the structure that is currently on the site, using the existing walls and foundations. As per CS7, protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm.

The currently deteriorating front facade will be repointed and renovated and a roof will be reinstated. The proposal means the building will be reconstructed in such a way that the surrounding environment is not altered significantly in appearance, specifically from the canal-side. The area surrounding the building will also be sensitively landscaped and improved for wildlife following the advice of the tree, ecological survey and experts in the field such as the local Wildlife Trust (who have been consulted).

The plans look to incorporate existing materials and highlight features of the building's former use in the design. For example, making a feature of some of the metal work and exposing the filter tanks through the new floor using a glass panel (please refer to drawings for areas).

The intention is to maintain and incorporate as many features and materials as possible to create an industrial feel to the building to highlight its past. Proposed materials would include salvaging as many from the site while also looking to source reclaimed items that are similar to what is believed to have been used in the original building

10.0 TREES

10.1 An Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Tree Survey and Arboricultural Method Statement have been commissioned and form part of the supporting documentation for this Planning Application.

10.2 ARBORICULTURAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT:
The tree survey identified ten individual trees and one group of trees either within the site outline or adjacent to it this might be affected by the proposal (see appendix 2 & 3 of the report). It was concluded that the proposed scheme will result in the direct loss of trees and pruning of retained trees, but the proposed removals will not cause a significant detriment to the amenity value of the local or wider area.
Due to the close proximity of trees, there is a potential to damage the retained trees or tree roots in implementation of the development. The retained trees should be protected. The impact on retained tree roots is anticipated to be minor.
The proposed development uses the existing outer walls which have been in place for many years; it is therefore not foreseen that there will be any significant negative landscape impacts through development of this site.

10.3 TREE SURVEY AND ARBORICULTURAL METHOD STATEMENT:
The ten individual trees and one group of trees that would be affected by the proposals were assessed, and are categorised as follows:

- Two trees are category B, 'of moderate quality'
- Three trees and the group are category C, 'of low quality'
- Five trees are category U, 'trees unsuitable for retention'

The method statement recommends the removal of the five category U trees '*regardless of the proposed scheme*'. For the retained trees the relevant mitigation is outlined, which includes installing protective barriers, sufficient ground protection and using construction techniques that are less invasive. In addition to this the report advises on preventing damage to retained trees and will be used as a guide for best practice when working on the site.

In addition to the report further advice suggest that any of the trees within the site could potentially be felled if they are going to constrain the scheme, so long as they are not protected (which the report states is not the case). There is the potential for the area to be re-planted to reflect the scale of the building. The vegetation on the site is of poor quality especially the understorey and this would benefit from improvement.

10.4 SCHEDULE OF TREE AND VEGETATION WORKS:
Work has already started to clear the site to allow the necessary investigations to take place for gaining planning permissions. The trees that have been identified as requiring removal will be felled regardless of the proposal being approved (as per the advice above) using experienced contractors and following the advice of the various surveys (specifically work taking place during breeding season).

11.0 ECOLOGY

11.1 As part of the development several ecological surveys have been commissioned to determine the presence of wildlife at the site and potential impact. As part of the project the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust have been consulted on a number of factors and will continue to be throughout the duration of the project. Specific advice includes incorporating wildlife friendly features into the building, sensitive lighting and a native planting scheme. Whilst building, it is necessary to take relevant precautions for reptiles (although a survey was thought to be unnecessary) and nesting birds. The guidance received was in-line with existing plans/intentions and will be adhered to as part of the course of the project seeing further advice at relevant points.

11.2 **BATS:**
A bat survey has been carried out and forms part of the supporting documentation for this Planning Application. The survey included both daylight and emergence studies. In summary the report concluded that there is no evidence of bat presence or historic activity at the Wire Mill. It was considered that the building presents negligible roosting potential for bats and there is a low risk that bats may roost within the building. No bats were found to emerge from the building but it is thought from the survey that they are roosting nearby and commute to the site to feed. The report states that *'the proposed area of work should not cause disturbance to any bats, therefore a European Protected Species licence is not required prior to works being undertaken'*.

11.3 **ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT:**
An Ecological survey was carried out in December 2015 and forms part of the supporting documentation for this Planning Application. It found that the Wire Mill is located within a local wildlife site (Fobney and Kennet Meadows (LWS)). As a result, the report advises consulting with the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust, something which has already taken place.

The survey found a number of interesting species to be located within a 2km radius of the site including birds, reptiles, rare plant species and small mammals.

The report advises several precautionary measures including ensuring scrub clearance takes place outside breeding season. This measure is something already identified as being important and has informed previous activity on and around the site. The island already has a good number of bird boxes installed on the site; none of these are on trees detailed above that have been identified for removal.

There is also reference to bats being around the site and ensuring that light levels are low while work takes place and also in the final building. This advice confirms that of the full bat survey detailed above and lighting considerations below.

The survey suggests that a reptile survey may be required to determine if they are present. Grass snakes have been sighted around the building and therefore it will be assumed they are present and mitigate accordingly. Taking advice from the Local Wildlife Trust (who agree a survey is unnecessary) a barrier should be constructed around the site while work is taking place, there will be a sweep of the enclosed areas and removal of any reptiles found. The temporary placement of several patches of roofing felt or corrugated iron sheet will be put in place within the site in advance of work taking place to attract any resident reptiles to allow for them to be removed. In addition to this the site will be removed of other attractive habitats to prevent their return while building work takes place.

It was noted in the report highlighted the potential presences of "protected and notable aquatic plant species within the LWS". These include: rare river water-dropwort,

fennel pondweed, flowering rush, and spiked water milfoil. Advice from the local Wildlife Trust suggests that the clearing work taking place is likely to improve opportunity for such species to grow although none of the species mentioned in the report are protected by law with one of them being a variety of Hogweed (rare river water-dropwort) which is quite hazardous to human health. Two of the species (fennel pondweed & spiked water milfoil) are water dwelling and therefore practices to prevent the contamination of the water sources will mean it is unlikely building work will have an impact on these species. As part of these conversations it was evident that clearing the site to create a more diverse habitat is likely to encourage species which the local Wildlife Trust see of greater importance, specifically water voles that have been recorded in the area.

It is the intention that the site will generally be improved for wildlife and features specifically to attract reptiles, birds and small mammals will be installed outside the work area to the east of the island initially and eventually will surround the whole building. Since gaining ownership of the whole site two years ago several improvements have been made with the environmental impact in mind. The septic tanks have been replaced with Environment Agency approved versions, solar power has been installed a wood chip boiler replaces oil. A number of bird boxes have been installed by the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust (Reading branch) and the site is now involved in a mink control scheme run by the local Wildlife Trust.

The building itself will be designed to incorporate several wildlife friendly features from a bug hotel under the walkway to the rear terrace to including bird and bat boxes into the fabric of the building.

11.4 LIGHTING:

As lighting has been identified in the bat survey as having an effect on foraging it will be necessary to take into account the impact of lighting on the surrounding area when determining location and type. Plans are yet to include lighting but The Bat Conservation Trusts advice on lighting will be incorporated into plans as well as verbal advice from the team carrying out the various ecological surveys, e.g. using motion sensor lights so impact of light is limited to when it is actually required.

11.5 LANDSCAPING:

Currently, the site has not directly been managed and as such been left to become quite overgrown with dominant species (ivy, willow and bramble and other successional growth) to take over. However, historically the site would have been relatively open and has become overgrown only in the last ten years or so. This is the opportunity to implement a scheme that will improve the area for both management purposes and also wildlife. At the moment the site does have some wildlife value and the nearby canal attracts lots of different species. However, the surrounding site could be improved with the reduction in dominant species to create an area of greater diversity and provide specific nature conservation features (As per CS36) such as log piles, wildflower areas and boundary hedges. In addition to the proposed project it is the intention that the whole island area will gradually be improved for wildlife.

Taking advice from the tree survey documents mentioned above the plans will include a sensitive landscaping scheme which seeks to enhance and restore the biodiversity of the area (CS36) improving the wildlife benefit. Improving the area's diversity will have a positive effect on the wildlife corridors that already exist along the length of the nearby canal.

Trees identified by the Tree survey as being in poor condition will be removed. The smaller growth will be cleared to open up the area to the rear of the building. There will also be the removal of the non-native, invasive species; Himalayan Balsam which will be

replaced with a native planting scheme that also has a wildlife benefit. Ivy will be encouraged in more wild areas of the scheme and hawthorn can be planted to act as boundary hedges, planting in such a way to create a much denser feature (than the individual light seeking saplings that currently exist) and will hopefully attract a number of birds, insects and small mammals providing a food source.

Opening up the area directly behind the building will allow greater amounts of light so a much more diverse range of plants can be grown to appeal to different species. Increasing the amount of light to not only the bank but the river too will hopefully also encourage increased number of fish loving birds such as the Kingfisher and Heron to the area. Reducing the amount of undergrowth and creation of perches will allow greater sight of water areas and the exposed banks provide additional burrowing opportunities for water vole.

The outside area, along the riverbank, to the rear of the building is liable to flooding as it is lower than the proposed terrace, descending to the River Kennet. As such any planting would need to bear this in mind and be resilient to being under water at certain times of the year.

12.0 ARCHAEOLOGY

- 12.1 As plans focus on reusing the existing foundations of the building, no significant groundworks are due to take place that might disturb archaeology if it were to exist in the area. As per the pre-application advice, a 'watching brief' will be employed should any need to take place to install underground services etc. which would meet the requirements of CS33 and ensure the development has no adverse impact on historic assets and their settings.
- 12.2 The pre-application advice states that Mesolithic worked flints have been recovered from this area therefore it is possible that further worked flints may be present. However, it is believed it will be very unlikely to find any in the area that the proposals affect as the site has been industrial for over the past 300 years. The area it is on is built up from the floodplain (the same as the mill) and therefore there is little possibility that Mesolithic flints being present except in the gravels in the river.

13.0 EFFECT ON THE CANAL

- 13.1 The building is located directly next to the tow path and therefore the proposal includes means of mitigating any negative impacts
- 13.2 **IMPACT OF THE BUILDING WORKS ON THE LOCK:**
It might be reasonable to expect that excavation alongside the lock may impact on its stability. However, there will be no additional ground works required as part of the proposals as the building will use existing foundations. The existing foundations, which fall below the depth of the lock, are watertight and sufficient to support the weight of the proposed structure. As such there should be no adverse impact on the nearby lock. A watching brief will however be employed, should any additional ground work be required.
- 13.3 **POLLUTION OF WATERWAY DURING BUILDING WORKS:**
Building development can be a source for water pollution and as such the works will implement good construction site practices which will endeavour to control and prevent pollution. An environmental risk assessment for all construction activities and materials likely to cause pollution will be conducted throughout the building process. Specific measures can then be taken to mitigate risks such as covering piles of building materials like cement and regularly inspecting for spillages. Care will be taken to ensure

that materials are located where they will not be washed into waterways or drainage areas.

In addition to the above, the plans themselves include no groundworks as they make use of existing foundations. The movement of soil is one of the main causes of pollution and by the nature of the plans will not be something that will feature heavily in proposed works.

13.4

IMPACT ON TOWPATH AND USERS DURING AND AFTER WORKS:

As the building sits right next to the tow path it is reasonable to suggest that works might have a negative impact on existing users. The works will be carried out in such a manner as to ensure that the right of access is maintained at all times and there are no additional health and safety implications to the general public (e.g. Heras fencing used to surround the site from the general public). Best practice building regulations, incorporating practices used by the Canal and River Trust where relevant, to be followed at all times with specific attention to the impact on nearby towpath/canal users. Risk assessments will be created for all works and any negative impact on the towpath identified on a case by case basis and advice sought from the relevant bodies (e.g. Canal and River Trust) depending on the nature of the impact.

There is sufficient space to the rear and side of the building to act as working or as storage space for materials (although in accordance with the tree survey). As such materials or works should not at any times prevent towpath access.

There is a small space to the front of the building before it becomes towpath that could be used if scaffolding or works are required to the front of the facade. However, there is sufficient space that this shouldn't encroach on the towpath and access can be maintained. In addition, the location of the building being next to the lock and landing stage does provide more space for a much wider tow path than in other areas of the canal.

Although scaffolding to the front is possible, the works will endeavour to access the site from the three sides that will not have any impact with works or scaffolding only being used to the front facade when absolutely necessary and with consultation of the Canal and Rivers Trust (or other relevant body). As the proposed building is only to be single story (with accommodation in the roof space) there will be limited need for workers to be at great height, reducing the amount of scaffolding required.

Despite the fact that the works will be carried out with the idea of keeping the towpath accessible at all times, should for any reason this not be possible, advice will be sought before works in question take place to agree the most workable solutions e.g. creating an alternative route or diversion.

After the works have taken place, the businesses created will operate for towpath users and enhance their experience of using the canal. As per outline details set out in 'Business Use' above, the customers will primarily arrive on foot via the towpath that already has a reasonable footfall. There is the expectation that boat users will also be customers and 'pop-in' while going through the lock. The aim of business is not to create a destination location but provide a service for existing passing traffic. Therefore, it is unlikely to increase the footfall to the area dramatically and would not be expected that the development would have a negative impact on either the lock or footbridge. In terms of mooring, boats often moor opposite the house overnight and as such there are already several opportunities for mooring, if boaters wanted to stop for a longer period of time without impacting the lock landing. The Canal and River Trust have several times moored in the area without impacting the flow of boat traffic. Also, with

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various recent stoppages it has highlighted that it is possible to moor several boats in the area without affecting the canal traffic and lock landing.

Despite the fact the Applicants are not aiming to encourage boats to dwell longer than usual at the site, it will be a responsibility of the business to ensure the lock landing is free at all times (when not being used for correct purpose) and it may be necessary to for example covering the cost of signage to point out best mooring places. There is also private mooring outside Southcote Mill that could be made available for short stays. As such there should not be an increased usage of the lock landing.

13.5 IMPROVEMENT OF LOCAL ENVIRONMENT:

The area surrounding the Wire Mill and the stretch of canal towards Reading does suffer from an amount of antisocial behaviour. There are regular nuisance motorcyclists and impromptu picnics and BBQs that leave litter in the area. Putting the building back into use and renovating the surrounding area should have the effect of making it a much more pleasant place for all canal users. The building will no longer provide a hiding spot and instead be opened up as a leisure facility for the local community. There is the potential to act as a hub for existing community groups as well as host general member of the public for tea/coffee.

14.0 CONCLUSIONS

14.1 Without taking action soon, The Wire Mill is at great risk of deteriorating further, undoubtedly resulting in eventual demolition.

By redeveloping The Wire Mill it will not only significantly improve the appearance of the area, but will allow the building to once again be a place that will benefit the community.

The existing fabric and features of the building will be retained so as to allow the heritage of the Mill to be clearly recognised. The new elements of building have been sensitively designed to respect the historical character of the existing building, whilst created a new and modern chapter in the history of The Wire Mill.

The Applicants have put a great deal of dedication and research into their proposals for redeveloping and saving The Wire Mill, and into restoring what is a local heritage asset. They have a clear understanding of what is needed to sensitively redevelop the building in a way that will protect the Mill for generations of future users, whilst also protecting the surrounding landscape and wildlife.

