

Memo

To: Jonathan Markwell

From: Giles Sutton (RBC Ecology Consultations)

CC:

Date: 04 June 2020

Re: Planning application ref: 200188

Address: 55 Vastern Road, Reading, RG1 8BU

Description: Demolition of existing structures and erection of a series of buildings ranging in height from 1 to 11 storeys, including residential dwellings (C3 use class) and retail floorspace (A3 use class), together with a new north-south pedestrian link, connecting Christchurch Bridge to Vastern Road

The application site comprises an office block and car park directly adjacent to the River Thames. It is proposed to construct a series of buildings with the taller buildings fronting the River Thames.

The River Thames is a “priority habitat” as per the NPPF and is of considerable importance for wildlife.

The EA

The EA have objected to the application due to the impact of the proposals on the River Thames. Their letter does not refer to the Lighting Assessment.

The applicant has provided additional information to try and address their concerns.

Ecological Assessment

This report concludes that the site is unlikely to host a bat roost and that other than the River Thames, there are unlikely to be any major ecological constraints to the proposals.

Bat Activity Survey Report

The surveys were been undertaken to an appropriate standard. These found that:

“4.1.1 Five species of bats were recorded foraging or commuting on the River Thames near to the Site.

4.1.2 Most bats recorded were common and soprano pipistrelle bats with smaller number of Daubenton’s and individual Nathusius’ pipistrelle and noctule bats.

4.1.3 The River Thames provides a wildlife corridor between countryside to the west and east of Reading. Data suggests that this section of the River Thames is of county importance for commuting bats and of borough importance for foraging bats.”

Lighting Assessment

The appendices B to F appear to be missing and as such full comments on the document cannot be made.

However the preliminary comments are as follows:

- The site is assessed as being in Zone E3 – “Small town centres or suburban locations”. However this should be E2 – “Village or relatively dark outer suburban locations” and the assessment would need to be updated accordingly (the report reads: “RBC were also contact after the baseline survey to agree the Environmental Zone classification for the site” but have not provided details of these communications).
- The report reads: “At this time a detailed lighting design is not available, however given the scale and nature of the proposed development and lighting requirements, it is anticipated that the site will remain as E3 (medium district brightness).” As no detailed design has been provided this statement appears unfounded and anticipating that the site will “remain as E3 (medium district brightness)” is not sufficient to assess the impacts of the scheme.

This report is therefore insufficient to assess the impacts of that the lighting scheme will have on the river and its wildlife.

Massing and location of the proposals next to the river

The EA have objected to the proposals due to the impact that the tall buildings will have on the river. The applicant has provided some additional information to rebut the EA’s comments. These do not appear to address the comments and it is considered unlikely that a series of very tall buildings directly adjacent to the river, with a narrow strip of planting would comply with Policy EN11, EN12 and EN14 of the council’s Local Plan. As per the EA’s comments it may be possible to overcome this by reducing the height of the buildings nearest to the river significantly or moving them further from the river.

Landscaping

I concur with Sarah Hanson’s comments on this and note that there are ongoing discussions. I would suggest that if the development is approved a condition be set to ensure that detailed updated landscaping plans be provided.

It is very disappointing that green roofs have not been included apparently because the applicant believes that green roofs and solar PVs are incompatible. This is not the case, indeed they can actually complement each other, and green roofs can result in higher energy output from the PV panels, see:

<https://livingroofs.org/green-roofs-solar-power/>

http://www.rio12.com/rio02/proceedings/pdf/151_Koehler.pdf

Provision of green roofs on the buildings could help mitigate some of the impacts of the scheme on the River Thames by providing additional wildlife habitats next to the river.