

From: Jenkins, Carolyn <Carolyn.Jenkins@reading.gov.uk>
Sent: 20 October 2020 11:56
To: Markwell, Jonathan <Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: 55 Vastern Rd, Reading (200188)

Jon

Thanks for keeping us in the loop.

The Council does not own any land on that stretch of the south bank of the Thames. There is a PROW across the land, but it is not ours. The Council owns the stretch between Caversham Bridge and Thames Avenue, but then nothing until Reading Bridge. That is as may be; as managers of the PROW, we would have concerns about future overhang, as the path is not wide along that stretch.

Even so, I agree with your sentiment that the problem is the overall density and positioning, which isn't sorted out by tinkering at the edges.

Carolyn

From: Jenkins, Carolyn <Carolyn.Jenkins@reading.gov.uk>
Sent: 23 November 2020 10:36
To: Markwell, Jonathan <Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: 55 Vastern Road, Reading (200188)

In addition to Sarah Hanson's comments [of 17/11/2020 Re Berkeley's letter of 12 November 2020], please note the following:

River Thames mark-up plan: as far as we are aware, RBC does not own the stretch of towpath directly to the north of the development site.

Towpath proposal: we see the ecological value of the seeded coir roll along the canalised bank of the river, but are opposed to any effective narrowing of the towpath by the proposed planting along it. There is already some vegetation along that route, so either the ecological value of the surface planting will be minimal, or there will be encroachment. This is a very busy off-road route, and needs to accommodate bicycles, as well as pedestrians, buggies and wheelchairs.

I note the following.. question about mitigation on the south bank of Christchurch Meadows:

A further area we were keen to explore with officers was the river bank adjacent to Christchurch Meadows, as we understand this was used to mitigate the impact of shading from the bridge. On the basis the bridge shades a similar part of the river to the development we had hoped officers would be supportive of this further enhancement to this stretch of river which is enjoyed by the public. Therefore, I would ask officers to consider again whether the southern bank of Christchurch Meadows provides a suitable alternative area for mitigation in addition to the areas outlined on the attached 'River Thames Mark-Up (448.300.LAND.003)'.

Given the density of trees and undergrowth on most of the areas marked in red on the 'River Thames Mark-up', we do not see much scope for enhancement at almost all of the red-lined locations. The Council values marginal vegetation for its wildlife importance, but needs to balance its management of river banks with the requirement to keep views of the river open for people using the parks for recreational walking. We therefore have a mix of open views and reeds/coppice vegetation, which we manage on a three-yearly cycle (one third each year). While there is scope for some additional planting along both the south bank of Christchurch Meadows and the north bank of King's Meadow, we are reluctant to plant up large sections of the bank to further close out views. What we have attempted to achieve is a series of closing and opening views, so that one's experience changes as one walks along the route. It is unlikely that these stretches can be relied on to provide sufficient mitigation for the whole development at 55 Vastern Road. We would be interested to see specific proposals.

Regards,
Carolyn

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From: Jenkins, Carolyn <Carolyn.Jenkins@reading.gov.uk>
Sent: 07 April 2021 18:16
To: Markwell, Jonathan <Jonathan.Markwell@reading.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: 55 Vastern Road, Reading (200188)

Sorry that this has taken so long to reply; you will be aware that I was on leave.

Land ownership

I note the Land Registry document that confirms ownership by Reading Borough Council of the southern bank of the Thames. This differs from information provided on the Council's mapping system, but I accept that the Land Registry information is definitive.

Ecological mitigation

The question for me is whether we would plant marginal vegetation along the northern (Christchurch Meadows) bank if a developer was not looking to offset the deleterious ecological impacts of a proposed scheme. We might want to plant some of it, but not all of that stretch. We have tried to vary the vegetation and experience as one walks along the riverside path, including having stretches where visitors can get right to the water's edge. Further along (near the end of Wolsey Road), the reeded vegetation makes this impossible. So, yes, in principle, 33% (say) of the proposed stretch could be planted up with coir rolls, primarily in sections where there is already some riverside vegetation already. However, the varieties of plant used would need to be agreed, because we do not want any planting that grows more than 0.4-0.5m above the height of the bank (which would obscure views) nor anything that will grown outwards too significantly encroaching on the bank/path/existing vegetation.

There would also be benefit from having better quality marginal planting under and alongside the footbridge on the south side, repairing the deficient or poor planting highlighted in the document that had photographs 1-8. This could be extended east and or west, particularly/preferably where the footpath is wider, as, again, we do not want encroachment on the path.

Trees

The proposal to plant smaller crowned varieties of the species suggested is not acceptable. It is canopy cover that we want, together with the undeveloped space to accommodate these larger canopies, as both space and trees are important for the quality of the public realm. This is about landscape quality, and climate and biodiversity benefits, rather than numbers of trees.

Other issues

I support entirely the comments in the report about the importance of the north-south link; the importance of not compromising the 'Thames-scape'; the height and massing and associated shading; and the importance of tree planting along Vastern Road.

In summary, therefore, we agree in part to some of the mitigation proposals, but these would need to be agreed in detail. On other important points, we remain unpersuaded that they have been adequately addressed.

Please let me know if you need anything else from me.

Carolyn

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