

Thursday 21st June 2018

Mr Andrew Lewis
Cherwell District Council
Bodicote House
Bodicote
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX15 4AA

Our Ref CRTR-PLAN-2018-
24875
Your Ref 18/00825/HYBRID

Dear Mr Lewis,

Proposal: Demolition of buildings and structures as listed in Schedule 1; Outline planning permission for mixed use redevelopment, the continuation of use of areas, buildings and structures already benefiting from previous planning permissions, as specified in Schedule 2; associated infrastructure works including surface water attenuation provision and upgrading Chilgrove Drive and the junction with Camp Road

Location: Heyford Park, Camp Road, Bicester

Waterway: Oxford Canal

Thank you for your consultation.

The Canal & River Trust (the Trust) is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales. We are among the largest charities in the UK. Our vision is that “living waterways transform places and enrich lives”.

The Trust has reviewed the application and the main issue relevant to the Trust is the connectivity to and impact on the canal corridor, from increased use, as part of the Green Infrastructure network.

On the basis of the information available our advice is that a **legal agreement** is necessary to address this matter. Our advice and comments are detailed below:

The Oxford Canal is located to the west of the Application site and although not in the immediate vicinity of the site the towpath is accessible on foot or by bicycle from the development and opens up opportunities for leisure and active travel. The canal towpath is an important traffic free route for walking / cycling for both leisure and utility walkers and could provide linkages / access to local facilities such as schools and in particular Lower Heyford train station.

The towpath would also aid in providing a safe, convenient and attractive walking and cycling network to promote health and well-being, consistent with the aims of the NPPF.

The Design & Access Statement refers to links to existing green infrastructure as an opportunity for the redevelopment of the site and the submission references cycling routes to the station though this does not appear to include the towpath. The proposed Portway footpath should link to the canal and there should be a clear route from the public park in the centre of the development to the towpath. The towpath is accessible from the site and would provide an important off-street alternative for cyclists.

The need for improved signage is referenced in the application and this is a positive aspect though it should be ensured that this includes signage to the canal. As highlighted above the canal will provide a number of benefits to physical and mental wellbeing for future residents and a sustainable off-road transport route.

However, in order to achieve this, it is important to ensure there are clear links between the site and the canal and it is fully integrated with the development at this stage. A stronger emphasis on the canal as part of the Green infrastructure/ sustainable transport links for the development should be included. In addition, there needs to be a stronger emphasis on cycle parking and more focus on the door-to-door journey in the sustainable movement section of the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

The towpath offers a great way for people to cycle to and from the station, thus incorporating some active travel in their daily routines. There is no mention of the canal in the 'Blue Infrastructure' section of the Green Infrastructure Strategy though it is highlighted in the policy context section. This development represents an opportunity to enhance the canal environment and encourage more people to use it, resulting in benefits to their physical and mental wellbeing. There should therefore be a more holistic approach to the way that this development interacts with the canal and towpath.

The Canal & River Trust generally seeks to maintain its assets in a "steady state", and in the case of towpath maintenance, this is based on current usage. Where new development has the likelihood to increase usage we consider that it is reasonable to request a financial contribution from developers to mitigate this impact by, for example upgrading an access / towpath surface to a standard which is more durable and thus able to accommodate increased usage.

The towpath at this location is not in a condition that it could support this additional footfall and the Trust would therefore seek enhancements as part of any submission. The Trust therefore ask the local planning authority to seek agreement from the developer, **prior to determination**, that a contribution towards improvement of the towpath and access points from Bridge 204 'Allens Bridge' to Bridge 206a 'Station Road bridge' are included within any S106 agreement. Further detailed calculations, costings and a specification for the access and towpath surfacing works could then be provided.

The Trust would note that the towpath width is restricted and there may be structures, pinch points and narrow sections of canal towpath, such as adjacent locks, within the District which may be a challenge in terms of increased usage and integrating with other towpath users, visitor moorings and anglers.

It should therefore be recognised that enhancements / improvements may involve more than towpath resurfacing works. The improvement of existing access points may also be required to support the proposed developments and increased use of the canal network. In addition, widening and improvements to the tow path (and subsequently the canal bank) may be required along with dredging and vegetation management should widening be required to support additional use.

To encourage and support additional use of the canal for cyclists additional signage may also be required in pinch points to highlight that pedestrians have priority. Interpretation along the canal, with circular walks etc could also be required to support additional leisure use. Enhancements such as the removal of graffiti and measures to reduce any further instances of vandalism should also be incorporated as these would further enhance the attractiveness of the use of the canal corridor.

In light of the support afforded by Policies ESD16, 17 & Villages 5 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031; Connecting Oxfordshire: Local Transport Plan 2015-2031, and the approach to developer contributions guidance contained within the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (CIL), we consider that a case can be made that such a contribution is necessary, directly related to the proposed development and is fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development proposed, as the towpath would be a key cycle and pedestrian route for leisure use to promote health and well-being and overall sustainability of the proposed development site and can therefore expect significantly increased usage.

For the Trust to effectively monitor our role as a statutory consultee, please send me a copy of the decision notice and the requirements of any planning obligation.

If you have any queries please contact me, my details are below.

Yours sincerely

Anne Denby MRTPI
Area Planner
Anne.Denby@canalrivertrust.org.uk
01926 622752