

The Planning Inspectorate  
Room 3/20  
Temple Quay House  
2 The Square  
Temple Quay  
Bristol BS1 6PN

Reference APP/W0340/A/08/2064920/NWF

15 February 2008

Dear Sirs,

Appeal by the Consuta Trust – Floating Boathouse on Beale Lake

I write as a lover of the River Thames, rowing and traditional boating who has been a supporter of the Consuta Trust since the year 2000. I personally directed a significant amount towards Consuta's restoration.

Consuta is a historic steam launch of national importance that has been lovingly restored and needs the best possible winter storage and maintenance facilities. It has a close historical association with the location of Beale Park, having been originally built at Goring, a few miles upstream.

I believe the refusal of the Consuta Trust's original application by West Berkshire District Council was based on inadequate consideration of the facts of the case and did not give the applicant the opportunity to discuss the issues, contrary to the rules of natural justice. The application should have been referred to committee for decision by elected representatives of the public rather than dealt with under delegated powers. However, I concur with the view that a re-application with a view to committee decision would meet with a negative and defensive report from officers seeking to justify themselves and that therefore proceeding to appeal is the correct course of action.

I have read the letters in support of the application from Martyn Heighton, Director of National Historic Ships, from the River Thames Society, and from Laurence Monkhouse. I will not reiterate in detail the points put forward in these letters, but fully support them, particularly commending the professional opinion of Laurence Monkhouse to the Inspector.

The applicants are seeking to vary two conditions to the planning consent 00/01195/FUL that granted permission for the cut between Beale Park Lake and the River Thames with a new footbridge. This was granted "in order to enhance the leisure facilities on the site" (as stated in the officer's report recommending approval).

The first (condition 5) relates to the numbers of days per calendar year that the cut may be used. It is debatable whether this condition meets the enforceability criterion for planning conditions. No monitoring takes place of actual usage of the cut and to do so would probably be disproportionate in cost. In practice I understand there have been no

complaints from the public about interruptions of the right of way along the river bank when the bridge is open, to allow the cut to be used. In any event from a pragmatic point of view the proposed extra use by Consuta is immaterial in the overall context and unlikely to cause the limit in condition 5 to be exceeded. I am sure the Inspector can find a wording for the amended condition that would deal with the issue.

It is the second condition sought to be varied (condition 7) that is the crux of the matter. It comes down to weighing up the benefits of allowing a floating boathouse for an historic vessel of national importance to be permanently moored on Beale Lake versus the possible impact on the landscape in an AONB.

The first point to be made is that Beale Park is not in a remote or pristine location deep in the countryside – it is next to a major road (the A329) and the Great Western main line railway. It is a leisure facility receiving over 120,000 visitors annually, with the associated car parking, restaurant and other visitor facilities, including children's play areas, narrow gauge steam railway, in addition to the aviary, deer park and fishing facilities.

The mooring of a single structure designed visually to resemble a traditional Oxford College Barge (which themselves were based on their predecessors which were actual barges used on the Thames up to the mid-nineteenth century by City Livery Companies) cannot be a significant threat to the landscape of Beale Lake. The lake is approximately 300m long and 160m wide at its greatest extent, and the barge which I understand would be about 23m long and 5m wide would be modest in size by comparison. On the contrary, in my opinion mooring the barge in the lake would enhance the recreational value of the lake, providing an interesting element in Beale Park that will be visible to visitors as they leave the car park. It is thus entirely consistent with the rationale for the original planning consent for the cut.

Location of the boathouse within Beale Park will also mean that limited public access to Consuta will be possible when she is moored within the barge during the winter months. This would not be possible at alternative locations.

The application does not specify the size or design of the floating boathouse, although the a sketch was provided with the Design and Access Statement. The Inspector may like to be more precise when amending the condition to require the design to be substantially as set out in that Statement, or otherwise as approved by the LPA.

I strongly support the appeal, and trust that the Inspector will look favourably on the need to safeguard a national historic vessel and the benefits of so doing at Beale Park in relation to the impact on the landscape, using his powers to vary the relevant conditions appropriately.

Yours faithfully



Michael Gwinnell