

# CASE OFFICER'S (EF) REPORT ON APPLICATION NUMBER 13/00575/OUT



## Site: Child Beale Wildlife Trust Beale Park Lower Basildon Reading

### Consultation responses:

Basildon Parish Council: No objections

Trees: Objections raised. See below for full comments.

Environmental health: No objections

Highways: Initial comments sought further information regarding visitor and staff numbers. On receipt of additional information no objections raised.

Natural England: Do not consider the scheme is likely to impact on the AONB but advise to seek the views of the AONB partnership. Development not considered to impact on the SSSI. With regards to protected species, local wildlife sites and biodiversity enhancements the LPA should ensure it has sufficient information to fully understand the proposal.

Ecology: Initial comments suggest that there is insufficient information to assess the implications of the proposal and a holding objection is raised. See below for full comments. Based on additional information the above comments still apply.

Disabled Access: The following points are raised - Car parking for Blue Badges must be a consideration: 6% of available parking and placed closest to the Museum, grass crete is not a suitable surface for wheelchairs, prams, pushchairs or walking aids, a pedestal Part M toilet would allow users to transfer either side, induction loop or hearing support to be considered and level entry required. Further to additional information the above comments still apply.

River and Canal Trust: Consultation not required.

AONB Management Board: The North Wessex Downs AONB accepts in principle the potential to locate this use at Beale Park. However, it is difficult to comment on potential landscape impacts at this stage based on the level of information in this outline application. The objections from the Council's Ecology Officer are also noted based on the level of information available to consider ecological impacts and loss of existing landscaping at this time.

Drainage: No objections.

Environment Agency: Objection raised, risk to nature conservation and inadequate flood risk assessment.

Representations: 47 letters of support

- Safeguarding maritime heritage. Preserve the history of Thames boating and boat building history. Consuta is a heritage asset.
- Educational attraction.
- Enhance attractions at Beale Park.
- Maintain conservation and heritage skills
- Tourist attraction
- Supports rural economy
- Will not impact on the landscape character of the area
- Number of boatyards lost as converted into dwellings.
- No environmental impact
- Assist in the use of the River Thames by historic vessels.

Description:

This application seeks outline planning permission for the construction of a boat museum at Beale Park. Matters of access and layout are for consideration only at this stage. The building has a footprint of approximately 548sqm: approximately 50m long, 9m wide and 6.25m high and is to be sited on a narrow island on the edge of the water gardens. The site allows direct access for boats from the lake. Visitor parking is to be provided within the existing car park.

#### Planning history:

Under application 00/01195/FUL planning permission was granted for the construction of a new cut between Beale Park and the river Thames with a footbridge. The purpose of the cut was to allow occasional boat access to and from the lake. This cut does not form part of the application site however it is noted that no information has been provided with this scheme to show the route that boats will take to access the museum. The use of the cut approved under this permission was restricted to a maximum of 20 per calendar year with prior notice given to the Local Planning Authority (condition 5) and no mooring of boats on the lake is allowed (condition 7).

In 2007 permission was sought to vary conditions 5 and 7 of application 00/01195/FUL. Under this application the applicants sought permission to moor a floating boathouse, capable of navigation on the lake. The Inspector, as explained in paragraph 4 of the decision notice viewed the intended mooring as tantamount to being permanent. The structure was 21.3m long, 4.9m wide and 3m high. Paragraphs 17-19 focus on the visual impact of siting such a structure within the lake. This appeal decision is a material consideration in the assessment of this scheme.

#### Principle of development:

Beale Park is located within the open countryside and within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. As highlighted within the NPPF Government seeks to promote sustainable development through the planning process; of which there are three stands: Environmental, Social and Economic.

Policy ADPP1 sets out the overall strategy for development within West Berkshire with the urban areas being the main focus for new development. Notwithstanding this Policy ADPP5 and Policy CS10 recognise the need to support the rural economy through appropriate and sustainable development. Policy CS10 states that existing small and medium sized businesses within rural areas will be supported in order to provide local job opportunities. This application seeks to support the existing leisure facilities at Beale Park encompassed within the existing park boundary and admission fees. The museum is expected to result in an additional 10,000-20,000 visitors a year. No additional staff will be employed.

Paragraph 28 of the NPPF relates to the rural economy. Here under bullet point three reference is made to the need to support sustainable rural tourism and the expansion of facilities in appropriate areas.

While generally supportive of the economic sustainability aspects of the scheme, the site is located within a nationally designed landscape and as such Core Strategy Policies, namely ADPP5 and CS19 place an emphasis on the need to enhance and conserve the local distinctiveness and qualities of this landscape. This is also supported by the NPPF. While principally a landscape policy, Policy CS19 also seeks the protection of the historic landscape and reference is made under criterion d) to the accessibility to and participation in the historic environment by the local community. Through the construction of a museum this application seeks to preserve the local maritime heritage and provide an educational visitor attraction.

The principle of supporting the existing leisure facilities at Beale Park, the rural economy and the maritime heritage of the area is supported by the Core Strategy and the objectives of the NPPF. The site is however sensitively sited within the AONB and as such any successful scheme must demonstrate that the proposal will not have an adverse impact on the landscape character, ecology, trees, highways and flooding. The following Policies are relevant to this application:

National Planning Policy Framework

Core Strategy 2006-2026: ADPP1, ADPP5, CS10, CS14 and CS19

West Berkshire District Local Plan: RL.5A

Basildon Village Design Statement: Reference is made to viewpoints within the Child Beale Trust and the contribution of the site to the local economy. Point 13 - A requirement for development to preserve trees and habitats. Point 14 - A requirement for development to conserve biodiversity. Point 17 makes reference to conserving the views identified within the Statement of which the Child Beale Trust is referred to.

AONB Management Plan 2009-2014

Impact on the character of the area:

The existing buildings within the Beale Park complex comprise predominately of low key buildings which sit discretely within the landscape and when arriving at the site it is the open land and lake which surround the parking areas which are most apparent. The site is relatively flat and sits in a valley. When leaving the site through the one way system long views across the lake and through the site can be seen across a considerable distance. Within the vicinity of the park are a network of footpaths one of which includes the popular Thames Path. Glimpsed view of the site can also be seen from both West Berkshire and South Oxfordshire districts. While public views maybe limited when the trees are in full leaf the building will be highly prominent from within the site. The Basildon Village Design Statement recognises the importance and sensitivity of views across the Child Beale Trust as a whole.

Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy requires new development to respect and enhance the character and appearance of the area. Policy RL.5A of the West Berkshire Local Plan 1991-2006, Saved Policies 2007 seeks to protect the tranquility of the river Thames whilst recognising its recreational value. The Policy seeks to ensure that new development does not harm the character or landscape setting of the river or significantly increase the use of the river by boats. No information has been provided with regards to this second criteria.

The Design and Access Statement seeks to demonstrate that the building has been sited within part of the park which is already developed however at present there are no permanent structures in such close proximity to the lake. It is recognised that in paragraph 18 of the inspectors decision (appeal 07/01717/FUL), little weight was given to the proximity to other buildings within the site and similarly such arguments under this scheme are considered to be weak given the undeveloped and sensitive nature of the site.

The differences between this scheme and the appeal in 2007 are acknowledged, however the points raised within the decision are material to the determination of this application. The Inspector highlights the sensitivity of the site and within paragraph 17 states that 'mooring generally on the lake (other than during events) would harm its open, largely undeveloped appearance and detract from the natural beauty of the AONB's landscape and countryside'. While PPS7, referred to at the appeal has now been superseded the NPPF continues to place considerable weight on the protection of the countryside. Paragraph 115 states that great weight should be given to the protection of designated landscapes. Furthermore it is clear that the AONB should be protected for its own value and not simply from public views.

The building proposed under this scheme is significantly greater in size than the earlier boat house, approximately 29m longer, 4m wider and 3.25m higher. Based on the information provided as part of this application it is considered that a building within this position on the edge of the lake, would have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the park and on the wider countryside and AONB. The structure would appear as an alien feature and disrupt the open, largely undeveloped character of the lake and site as a whole.

For the reasons set out above the proposal fails to comply with the guidance contained within the NPPF with respect to good design and the need to protect the countryside and the North Wessex Downs AONB. The proposal also fails to comply with Policies ADPP5, CS14 and CS19 of the Core Strategy and the guidance contained within the AONB Management Plan and the Basildon Village Design Statement.

#### Ecology:

Initial comments: Holding objection raised for the following reasons:

Firstly some of the site is within a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and yet no assessment of the impact of this development on the LWS has been submitted. For instance records show that nearby to this site in the LWS are Broad Leaved Helleborines and Loddon Lily. A minimum extended phase 1 habitat survey is required to demonstrate the impact of the development on these habitats.

Secondly no information has been submitted to show what trees and shrubs will have to be removed to accommodate this application - a full tree survey is required showing which trees need to be removed.

Thirdly the application makes clear that it is the intention for one of the boats to leave the museum by water, yet no details have been given of the works outside the application area which are necessary for this to happen. The fishing pond may need dredging and the footbridge over the entrance to the pond may need removing and the channel widening. The application area needs extending to cover these works.

Comments dated 25th April: The response to Natural England's comments states that Local Wildlife Sites have no statutory status. Locally designated sites are mentioned in the NPPF and in accordance with that are referred to in Policy CS17 of the West Berkshire Local Plan. Natural England point out that the Council should have sufficient information to fully understand the impact of the proposal on the Local wildlife Site before it determines the application in accordance with ODPM Circular 06/2005 - Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and their impact within the planning system. The reference to TVERC's records infers that because there are no records of protected species on site that there are none. Unfortunately this cannot be inferred as the records are collected on an ad hoc basis and not as the result of methodical surveys.

This is an outline application under which the principle of development is established. As such if later surveys establish that it would be better to move the location or indeed not allow the development, this would not be possible. Similar issues arise in regards to trees on site. For this reason this information is required.

The applicant states that no work is planned outside the red line boundary. However, paragraphs 2.2.6 and 2.2.7 of the design and access statement clearly highlight the need for access to the River Thames for "Consulta". It is clear from Drawing U.06/06/04 and aerial photographs that there is a footbridge in the way and that the channel into the main lake is narrow. The aerial photograph also clearly shows signs of shallows in this part of the lake. It is therefore reasonable to assume that if this application is accepted that works outside this area will be needed to allow "Consulta" access to the main lake. As such these works should be part of the application so that the full implications can be properly assessed.

An objection is raised to this application on the grounds of insufficient information.

#### Trees:

Initial comments: The plans provided have identified the trees at the site as indicative circles only and provided no additional supporting information on the trees. The site contains a significant number of trees, of various species, size, age and quality, whilst a number of these trees are in a poor condition with limited value a full tree survey in accordance with BS5837:2012 is required to determine which trees are worthy of retention and those which can be lost and mitigated with new landscaping.

The current level of information provided to determine the application is insufficient. A full tree survey should be carried out in accordance with BS5837:2012, and should identify the trees both on and adjacent to the site, those trees proposed for retention and those to be lost and also provide information on the requirements of the tree protective fencing and any Arb method statements and an indicative landscaping plan showing an overall indication of the proposed level of landscaping for the site to mitigate losses.

Comments dated 15th May 2013: The information provided agrees that the trees in this location do form a good natural screen for Beale Park, but fails to provide sufficient information on those trees to be retained and protected as part of the development. To provide a tree survey after the location of the building, service road and other facilities have been approved, is of little use other than to confirm the number of trees to be removed to facilitate the development, whilst landscaping will help mitigate some of the losses it can't replace the 30 years growing time needed for the new trees to provide the same level of screening, hence the need to ensure that the impact to the trees is known and agreed prior to the location of the building being finalised.

The additional information still fails to fully identify the impact to the trees, which the applicant also agrees provide a good screen for the site. The lack of supporting information in the form of an Arboricultural survey or impact assessment means that the impact to the trees is unclear and could be greater than appear on the plans provided, as access work space and the storage of materials all need adequate space, which hasn't been covered in the application.

An objection is still raised to this application on the grounds of insufficient information.

#### Drainage:

No objections raised. The submitted FRA makes reference to the removal in 2001 of a large amount of material from the site thus increasing the potential flood plain storage volume and although this occurred around 12 years ago. In this instance it is a reasonable argument to offset the small loss of flood plain storage as a result of this current development proposal against this previous gain.

#### Highways:

Concerns have been raised on previous applications over the intensification of the use of the access onto the A329 due to the restricted visibility to the north. It is noted that on this current application Basildon Parish Council has raised 'no objections'.

This application will clearly see an increase in vehicle movements from this site, however even with the additional anticipated visitor numbers identified above, the overall level of visitors would still be below previous peak numbers. On the assumption that it is unlikely that visitor numbers would reach this figure again, as the site currently stands, this increase can be accommodated within the previous peak visitor numbers.

Given all of the above no objection is raised to the application.

#### Environment Agency:

Objections raised for the following reasons:

- No assessment of the risks to nature conservation.
- Inadequate flood risk assessment.

#### Other matters:

The scheme has been supported by 47 letters of support which make reference to the preservation of local maritime history and the educational importance of this. As set out above the NPPF (section 12) and the Core Strategy (CS19, SC14) seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment and

while the Consuta does not constitute a heritage asset in planning terms its historic role/importance is recognised.

Following an assessment of this scheme it is however considered that the benefits of providing a working museum to preserve such boats do not outweigh the harmful visual impact of a structure on the wider landscape and the AONB nor do they override the concerns raised for the landscape and ecological impacts of the scheme or those issues relating to flooding as raised by the Environment Agency.

While the scheme may well meet with a number of the economic and social sustainability objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework the proposal will potentially result in significant harm to the natural environment and as such does not meet with the environmental objectives.

**Conclusion:**

After weighing up the merits of this case and the clear policy objections, the application is recommended for refusal.

Copy for  
Basildon Parish Council  
Elizabeth Cottage  
Croft Road  
Goring  
Reading  
RG8 9ES