

Emma Fuller

From: Rob Ebrey [mailto:Rob.Ebrey@microfocus.com]
Sent: 26 September 2011 22:53
To: Planapps
Subject: Representation letter (11/01564/FULMAJ). Land at Aldermaston Wharf - objection

Rob & Tiffany Ebrey
 2 Wharf Cottages
 Station Road
 Padworth
 Reading
 RG7 4JN

We wish to object to the planning application submitted by British Waterways (11/01564/FULMAJ) and comment as follows:

Planning process

As observed by a number of other residents in their representation letters, there continues to be no sign of orange site notices on display. This is a major planning application that will have a significant impact on the local area, therefore it is important that the proper processes are followed. Letters were sent to residents initially giving an inadequate period for response, particularly given it was during the summer holiday season. No site notices have been displayed, which means that the application has not been publicised in the appropriate manner, which given that this site impacts a large number of both local residents and visitors to the area seems particularly inappropriate.

Preparation of BWs application/inaccuracies

BWs initial application was rejected due to them failing to follow the appropriate procedures. This application would also appear to be poorly prepared and contain a number of inaccurate statements and/or statements that may mislead. The list below may not be comprehensive, but provides a number of illustrations:

1. The site plan on page 4 of the design and access statement has a label saying "Canal cottage to be renovated into visitor centre". The building labelled is already the visitor centre. The toll house is labelled "location of existing visitor centre". This building is currently not in regular use and is not the main visitor centre building.
2. Para 1.5 of the design and access statement states "the site comprises the Visitor Centre and garden, with car parking adjacent to the buildings..... The remainder of the site is scrub area and vacant land". It fails to mention that it also includes parts of the gardens of 14/15 Wharfside, which will be reduced to an excessively small size relative to the size of these houses.
3. Para 1.5 also includes out of date pictures of 14/15 Wharfside (when they were boarded up and neglected by BW) which would appear to attempt to make the area look in a worse state than it is, perhaps to support BWs misleading assertion that this is a regeneration project, as opposed to over development of a rural area.
4. Para 1.9 attempts to justify the use of timber cladding, which is out of keeping with the local area by a spurious link to the canals industrial history. It also claims the slate roof's are a response to history. Whilst we agree that slate is much more appropriate than the previous proposal for metal clad roof's, it would be more honest simply to say that there was significant local objection to the previous proposals.
5. Para 1.10 states that there has been a local consultation in respect of this application. This is not correct. There was a consultation in respect of the previous rejected application, but no consultation in respect of this application. We trust that BW will either conduct such a consultation (with an appropriate extension to the planning timetable), or that all previous responses to the last

application will be carried forward.

6. Page 17 of the design and access statement refers to the roof's being metal. Are they metal or slate? There appears to be inconsistency in the references.

Without spending more time than is available it is impossible to identify how many more errors may be contained within the application, however for an organisation the size of BW and a development of this size we would expect that a greater level of attention to detail would be given to the application.

Comments on the development

Parking

Our property does not have off-street parking, therefore we are dependent upon the availability of spaces on Station Road. Whilst there is a local station, in common with most local residents in this rural area, we are dependent on our cars and therefore need appropriate provision for parking. When we moved to our property in 2003 car parking in the area was not a significant problem. Over the last few years parking has become significantly worse, due to the following:

1. The addition of yellow lines to sections of Station Road, reducing the number of spaces (in our opinion) excessively. Note – the consultation on this implied that more spaces would be available than actually are due to errors which the Highways Department have admitted in failing to acknowledge the existence of dropped kerbs and the traffic island.
2. The introduction earlier this year of parking charges for the station car park. This is totally counter-productive in that whilst it was justified as a way to fund CCTV, all that has happened is that users of the station (as well as other visitors to the area) park on the street whenever possible so as to avoid the parking charges. This means that the number of cars parked on Station Road all day by commuters as well as for shorter periods by rail users and other visitors to the area has increased significantly.

As a result we often find it difficult to find parking spaces and are forced either to borrow a space on our neighbours drive when it is free (which is not a sustainable or reliable solution), or park on Mallard Way (which the residents do not appreciate) or in the visitor centre car park (which is not its purpose). The parking situation is therefore already unacceptable and will become much worse once the already approved development next to the station is completed and will be even worse if the BW development goes ahead.

BW are proposing to charge for the visitor centre car park but assert that this will not discourage its use. It is human nature that given the option to park for free or pay a charge, people will opt to park where it is free, provided the inconvenience is minimal. It was claimed that a small charge for the station car park would not discourage its use, however it has done exactly that and the same can therefore be expected to apply if a charge is made for the visitor centre car park, with people choosing to park on Station Road, Mallard Way, etc where they can find a space. Hence this will make the parking situation worse for local residents, including our household and most likely mean that we will periodically need to pay to park in the visitor centre car park due to the lack of available parking.

Whilst writing this objection, on Thurs 22 Sept at approx 1:45 we looked at how many cars were parked in the visitor centre and station car parks. The visitor centre car park had only one available space (and one car parked on the pavement, ie not in an allocated space), Station Road had no available spaces. The station car park was completely empty. The following morning when getting the train to work at 8:25am, the station car park was again completely empty. It would therefore appear clear to us that charging for parking will only make the parking situation worse by increasing demand for on street parking even further.

BW state that their car park utilisation study highlighted that a reduction in the number of spaces at the

visitor centre could be justified, albeit that they are not proposing to reduce the number. Over the past year the car park is regularly full or nearly full. Was this study completed before the rejuvenation of the visitor centre?

We also assume that the residents of the new properties will have visitors. Where will they park??

On page 12 of the Design and Access statement, BW refer to their "generous gift" of land to West Berkshire Council to improve access to the station car park and state that too much parking would be unsightly and out of keeping with the conservation area. Are BW implying that they wish Network Rail to solve the problem of inadequate parking by the station car park becoming the overflow for the lack of spaces available to local residents, visitors and residents of the new properties? We cannot see how this can be relied upon as solution, given that the primary purpose of the station car park is to provide a facility to rail users. This would appear to be a tacit acknowledgement by BW that the area cannot support their proposal.

Note – we have seen a suggestion that more car parking is made available using some of BW's land adjacent to Station Road. At present our outlook is onto the road and a large amount of trees/shrubs. We do not wish to look out onto a carpark, which would be a further overdevelopment and inappropriate near the canal basin, which is an attractive area. Could car parking be made available on the tarmaced area off Mallard Way, near the junction with Station Road (ie by the substation)?

Adverse impact on local area for residents and visitors during construction and loss/damage to local shop/visitor centre

- We understand that during construction the canal visitor centre will be closed for a period of c. 6 months. The visitor centre has recently been given a new lease of life by a energetic couple running it, who provide an excellent service both to visitors to the area and local residents, through operating a tea room and small shop selling bread, milk, newspapers, gifts, etc. The impact of the construction on this business is likely to be irreparable and at a minimum will result in the loss of an important local amenity for the period of construction.

Also, Will alternative parking be made available during this period to replace the visitor centre car park?

Nature of development

- The proposed development is in a rural conservation area. It would constitute a significant over-development of an area much loved by residents and visitors.

Whilst the number of houses has been reduced, there are still too many for the available space, particularly given the strain on local infrastructure.

The style of the properties is inappropriate and not in keeping with the local area. In particular:

1. Based on other similar developments, timber cladding may look good when new, but often ends up stained or unevenly weathered, such that it looks scruffy after a relatively short period of time
2. 2.5 storeys is not consistent with other properties in the area and is excessively high. In particular we object to Building B, which is very close to our property and the canal, making it particularly inappropriate.
3. The properties are also excessively close to the visitor centre, which is a listed building. It will become crammed in between the properties on either side which will detract from its overall amenity value.

Whilst residential developments fronting canals in urban areas have often significantly improved run-down areas, this development seeks to overdevelop a rural canal setting for the economic gain of BW. We consider the close proximity of the houses to the canal (which are much closer than the other recent developments in the area) to be inappropriate.

The reduction in size of the canal visitor centre garden is particularly inappropriate. This garden is very well used both for teas/coffees by visitors and for functions operated by the visitor centre and will be adversely impacted by the reduction in size.

The new location of the sewage pumping station is unsightly and inappropriate.

The properties will overlook our property resulting in a loss of light and privacy.

Summary

We object to this application, which would significantly over-develop this conservation area and put excessive strain on the local infrastructure. We would suggest that BW reconsider their application and either withdraw it completely, or reduce it significantly. There would appear to be an opportunity for BW to significantly improve the utilisation of the land if they amalgamate 14/15 Wharfside into the development and do not relocate the sewage pumping station (which the cost of relocating must necessitate the excessive housing density in order to provide an acceptable rate of return on the development).

We do not object to Building A, which would appear an appropriate place to develop.

We would also note that as well as being residents of the area, we also own a boat which is moored locally and pay a licence fee to BW and hence appreciate the budgetary demands on BW and the need to develop their property portfolio to provide much needed funds to maintain the canals and constrain the licence fee. This must however be done in a sensitive and appropriate way and not at the expense of the local community and the many visitors to the canal.

Please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss further.

This constitutes two objections.

Best regards

Rob & Tiffany Ebrey

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