

02 February 2018

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By email

Planning & Countryside

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Our Ref: 17/00242/PREAPP

Your Ref:

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Dear Sirs

PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

Reference:	17/00242/PREAPP
Site:	Land South of Whitchurch Bridge
Proposal:	Improvement works comprising a footway and carriageway widening and associated works at Whitchurch Road, Land South of Whitchurch Bridge, Pangbourne.

Thank you for submitting the above request for Stage 1 and 2 Pre-Application Advice. This stage comprises a preliminary assessment of the planning merits of the proposal, identifying the key issues likely to be raised by the proposal, and where possible advice on the possible outcome of any formal planning application. A pre-application meeting with the highways officer and myself, fulfilling the Stage 2 part of the pre-application process, was held on site on Tuesday 16 January 2018.

Please find my comments on the planning merits of the proposal below. Please note that these preliminary comments are made at officer level only, based on the professional judgement of officers and the information that has been provided at this stage. These comments are made without prejudice to any future comments, discussions, submissions or decisions, as there is no way that we can prejudge the final outcome of any application that may be submitted.

These comments are made in light of the current planning policy position. Please be aware that there may be subsequent changes to relevant policies, regulatory controls or guidance, which would need to be taken into account if they occur before a formal application or decision is made.

This pre-application response has been made on the basis of a desk based study of the submitted details and observations made during the site meeting.

Planning policy

The planning system is plan-led, which means that planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The West Berkshire Development Plan comprises:

- The West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2026 (2012)
- The West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006 (Saved Policies 2007)
- The West Berkshire Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (HSA DPD) 2006-2026 (2017)
- The Replacement Minerals Local Plan for Berkshire (2001)
- The Waste Local Plan for Berkshire (1998)

In this instance, the following policies of the Development Plan are considered relevant to the proposal.

Core Strategy: Policies ADPP1, ADPP5, CS5, CS13, CS14, CS16, CS17, CS18, CS19
Local Plan: TRANS.1

You can download copies of these plans from www.westberks.gov.uk/planning

The National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England, and it is a material consideration in planning decisions. A copy of the NPPF can be downloaded from <http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningsystem/planningpolicy/planningpolicyframework/>.

The following Supplementary Planning Guidance and Supplementary Planning documents are material planning considerations in the planning process, and are considered relevant to this request for pre-application advice:

- The West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document on Quality Design (2006);
- The West Berkshire Planning Obligations SPD (2014);
- North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2015-2019;
- The Pangbourne Village Design Statement (2005)

Main issues

Having regard to the relevant planning policies, the nature of the proposal and the site constraints, it appears that the main issues which would need to be considered in a planning application are:

- The principle of development
- Impact on the setting of the Grade II listed bridge
- The impact on the character and appearance of the area
- Highway safety
- Impact on Trees
- Impact on ecology
- Flood risk

The principle of development

The site is located substantially within the defined settlement boundary of Pangbourne, although part of the works to the east of the Road may take place outside of but adjacent to the settlement boundary. It is situated within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and forms part of the setting of Whitchurch Bridge, a Grade II listed bridge. The proposed works are for improvements to the existing highway in this location to increase the footpath and carriageway width to improve highway safety in the vicinity of the bridge. The principle of development for highway improvement works in this location is likely to be accepted. The acceptability of the proposed works would be determined in accordance with its compliance with policy and other material considerations.

The impact on the setting of the Grade II listed bridge and the character and appearance of the surrounding AONB

Both the conservation officer and South Oxfordshire DC have reviewed the pre-application submission. The conservation officer has commented that less signage is preferred in terms of impact on the setting of Whitchurch Bridge. Therefore, the scheme without the chicane is the Council's preferred scheme. While on the site we discussed the importance of retaining as many trees as possible to retaining the distinctive green backdrop to the bridge, which forms an attractive transition between the built form of Pangbourne and the more open character of land surrounding the bridge. We also discussed that the opportunities to provide additional landscaping to replace lost trees may be limited, which increases the importance of retaining as many existing trees as possible. The impact on the setting of the listed bridge will be instrumental in determining the acceptability of the proposed works, although this must be given due weight against the benefits to highway safety associated with the scheme. In more general terms, I would recommend that any signage associated with the improvements is kept to a minimum, with the starting point being the existing level of signage on the site.

In respect of the existing railings on the site, I consider these to make some contribution to the aesthetic of the area surrounding the bridge and therefore any replacement should be with railings of the same or similar appearance.

I note that the proposed works might also be expected to require the creation of surrounding retaining structures. An application for these works would need to be accompanied by full details of all retaining structures, including sections and elevations for above ground structures. I would also expect the application to be accompanied by a topographical survey and proposed levels for the site in order to fully assess the visual impact and prominence of the works in views from the banks of the Thames and surrounding AONB.

Highway safety

The highways officer and I have discussed the site since the date of the site visit, and I understand that he is supportive of the proposed improvement works and the design. He has also indicated that in his view the chicane option would be unnecessary in this location as vehicle speeds are reduced leaving the 20mph zone in Pangbourne or exiting the bridge travelling towards Pangbourne. In the case of this application, where highway safety concerns may be finely balanced against conservation of the setting of a heritage asset it will be important to support a planning application with a soundly reasoned

justification in terms of the highway safety rationale for the improvements, including details of the accident record for the site the highway safety concerns that the works seek to address. I would also suggest that a brief summary of the various options that have been considered and the reasons for discounting these options accompanies a planning statement submitted with the application.

In terms of construction methodology, while a detailed construction method statement will be likely to be recommended by highways as a condition, it would be of assistance for details of how contractor parking and machinery/equipment storage areas will be provided to accompany a planning application. It should also be noted that public right of way Pangbourne 9/1 runs to the east of the site, and should not be obstructed by the works. The impact of the works on the pedestrian crossing from the Dolphin Centre car park into the site should also be considered.

Impact on trees and ecology

I have already discussed the potential loss of a number of mature trees and limited potential for landscaping above. There are a number of tree preservation orders on trees surrounding the site, and it is therefore recommended that an arboricultural report on the impact on these trees, accompanied by an arboricultural method statement and tree protection scheme is submitted with a planning application for the works. While I note the limited potential for landscaping on the site I would encourage you to make further investigations into the potential for additional landscaping to replace some of the lost trees, which would be of great assistance in mitigating the impact on the setting of the bridge and views from the wider AONB, and softening the impact of any retaining structures.

In terms of ecology, I note that the site does not lie within a SSSI, SAC, local wildlife site or biodiversity opportunity area, but nevertheless is close to the Thames, which does contain habitats for a variety of local wildlife. Therefore I would recommend that an application is accompanied by a phase 1 ecology survey.

Flood risk

The site is located within flood zones 2 and 3. A flood risk assessment and drainage strategy should be submitted. My main concern in this respect would be the impact of any retaining structures on displacing water towards land and buildings surrounding the site and the resilience of such structures to flood water.

Community engagement

The NPPF strongly encourages applicants to engage with the local community before submitting their applications. Applicants will be expected to work closely with those directly affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Proposals that can demonstrate this in developing the design of the new development should be looked on more favourably. I therefore recommend that you contact the local parish council to present your proposals. It is also advisable to discuss the proposals with any neighbours which may be affected by the development.

Conclusion

The works are proposed in order to bring about benefits in terms of highway safety and these will need to be supported by sound justification. It is clear that there may be a conflict between preserving the setting of the listed building and the visual impact of the works in terms of the loss of trees and the interests of improving highway safety. Therefore I am unable to indicate the likelihood of success for an application for these works, but would encourage you to consider any possibilities for limiting the works to trees, instating additional landscaping and any other measures for minimising the visual impacts of the works.

In terms of documents to be submitted I would suggest that the list provided with the pre-application is correct, and that a design and access statement should also be submitted.

I hope that this advice is of assistance in your considerations. I have also attached responses that I have received from consultees to the accompanying email.

Yours sincerely

Simon Till
SENIOR PLANNING OFFICER