

Riverside Works Steering Group

Information Day – feedback, next steps and Q&A

We held our first information day on the proposed development of the Environment Agency site in Fordbridge Road, at the Riverside Arts Centre in Sunbury on 23 June, where we shared the initial plans we have developed so far and got feedback from those who attended.

Around 25 people came along, with most living in the roads nearest to the development site. We collected some very useful feedback from them, which will be considered by the steering group as we work together to develop more detailed plans for the site ahead of any planning application.

We have gathered the issues raised at the information day, along with points, questions and concerns raised since the steering group was first formed, and have produced an extensive Q&A for anyone interested in the development.

We would welcome further feedback from any local residents or other people interested in the proposed development and would be happy to meet with people, if useful. We are currently developing more detailed plans which we will display as part of an exhibition that is likely to take place in September. If you have any questions or queries, please email sunbury@forster.co.uk, or you can speak to Peter Gilheany on 07798 881180.

Q&A

- Why is the site being developed for housing – why can't it be turned into a community amenity?

The site is allocated for housing in the Spelthorne Council Development Plan so any community use would be contrary to that policy. The Environment Agency also has a statutory responsibility to get best value from any financial agreements it enters, including the sale of any assets such as land.

- How long will any building work take?

This depends greatly on the final agreed scheme, but it is usually takes somewhere between 18 – 24 months.

- How much social housing is there likely to be on the site?

The plans for the development are still at early stages so this has not been finalised. However, one of the principles agreed by the steering group is a desire to see as many family homes on the site as possible

- How are you going to ensure there isn't too much disturbance for the people living near the site?

As with all the developments they manage, Linden Homes are committed to ensuring disruption is kept to a minimum. When any work starts, they will make sure they continue talking to local residents and taking on board and acting on any queries or concerns expressed in relation to disturbance.

- How are you going to deal with all the extra traffic and parking this will bring into what is already a very busy area?

The steering group has already committed to an important principle on this issue - All the parking for the development to be accommodated within the site. On top of that, we are also looking for ways to incorporate some additional parking for local residents including those living on Wheatley's Eyot. There will be no increase in traffic in relation to the Environmental Agency's operational activity, and we are actively looking at ways to ensure we maintain good traffic flow in the area.

- What benefits will the local community get from this development?

As well as the additional parking mentioned above, the steering group we will be exploring what benefits can be provided to the local community as a result of the development, and we would be very keen to hear people's thoughts on this issue.

- Why are you proposing the workshop on the island when the planning inspector made it clear this was unacceptable in the last application, as it is green belt land and on the flood plain?

The land within the control of the Environment Agency on the Island is designated as green belt. The Planning Inspector did consider the impact of the previous proposals and on balance, when considering the 'scheme' in its entirety and balancing all benefits with any negatives, considered the harm was, in that instance, too great.

The planning system requires each and every application to be considered on its own merits. That being said a decision maker on a different application is entitled to come to a different decision.

We are proposing a different scheme with different benefits. The previous guidance (PPG2) has now been withdrawn and replaced by the NPPF, which has a less restrictive approach to 'previously developed sites in the green belt'. The proposal for the 'island workshop', which is one of the options we have worked up, locates it in a location where the Environment Agency believes it will have no greater harm on the openness of the green belt. The proposed location is already part of the EA's operational facility on the island.

On the matter of the flood plain, the Inspector concluded that a flood permeable and water resilient workshop on the island was / is acceptable (paragraph 54 of the inspector's report). This was not a reason for refusal of the application.

For the Environment Agency staff running the facility, there are a number of benefits to having the workshop on the island, which are outlined below:

- *It locates the workshop as far away as possible from all existing and new residents to minimise disturbance*
- *All Environment Agency operations will be contained in a fenced-off island compound which will greatly improve security*

- *It would be located right next to the dry-dock so it'll be very convenient when we're working on our boats*
- *The workshop facilities such as the kitchen, toilets and drying room will be very convenient for our yard gang and boat crews*
- *It would reduce the number of HGV and crane movements over the bridge and on the mainland*
- *It makes it very easy for lorries to access the shutter door*
- *The shutter door will face the wharf for easy, direct access to and from the river*
- *The shutter door is 6m wide which would enable us to service our largest 7m x 5m lock gates (we will no longer have to jack the lock gates up onto Christchurch Cribbs on a flatbed lorry to take them across the narrow bridge onto the mainland)*
- *It would be located right next to the DDA toilet*
- *It positions the workshop far away from the root protection zones of the trees on the backwater bank*
- *It would be away from the dry-dock out-flow*
- *It has exactly the same footprint as the version submitted with the last planning application but is reduced in height by about 2m*
- *A pitched roof, sloping down from the considerably taller dry-dock roof would minimise its visual impact*
- *Office staff would have a good view of traffic entering the site from the bridge*
- *It would enable us to really green up this part of the island and create a wide, dense strip of trees and shrubs along the top of the backwater bank - this would greatly improve the depot's appearance for nearby residents*

The design for the proposed workshop has changed considerably since the last application, taking account some of the issues and concerns raised at the time, the most prominent of which is a significant reduction in the planned height.

This is clearly an important and sensitive issue for many residents and we are keen to explore all options and views on the location of workshop before we make any definitive decisions.

- **What are the dimensions for the proposed workshop and what will it be used for?**

We have had the following response from the Environment Agency on this point:

We haven't designed the workshop yet but we know that we can fit it into the same footprint as the workshop from our last planning application, i.e. 195 sqm.

Approximately 50% of the workshop building will be the actual workshop, about 25% will be an office and quiet room (with 5 desks needed to support our operational staff) and 25% will be welfare facilities (toilets, kitchen, drying room and boiler room - again, these are essential to support our operational staff).

By using a wall-mounted crane and by not having a green roof, we will be able to reduce the workshop height by about 2m (from 6.3m to about 4.4m).

16 - 20 operational staff will still be needed along with the 4 - 5 office support staff. So we still anticipate providing 21 car parking spaces. Our HGVs will also park on the island when they are not in use. If the workshop is located on the mainland, it will need to be within a secure, fenced-off ancillary area of no less than 425 sqm. We will also need to ensure that there is adequate manoeuvring space for all types and sizes of vehicles around the workshop if it is located on the mainland.

We haven't changed our plans for the covered storage area behind the dry-dock. We still want to replace the roof and keep it within the existing footprint of 178 sqm. As per our last planning application, this is in addition to existing containerised and open storage (which will be rationalised).

- Why is the EA working with Linden Homes when they have made themselves so unpopular in Sunbury?

Linden Homes has good reputation for producing high quality developments that are popular with both local residents and people who move into them. There have obviously been some issues with their proposed development of the Police Training College in the village, which has affected their standing in the community. The team leading on that project are working hard to turn that around, and the team working on the Riverside Works project are committed to working closely with the community and keeping them fully involved in the decision making process. This is why they are one of the members of the steering group that has been formed, and are committed to the principles for the development that have been agreed by that steering group.

- How can we trust that you will practice what you preach and ensure the site is of a very high quality?

The steering group will be actively involved in ensuring we meet all of the principles we have agreed, including ensuring the development is high quality. It will also be dealt with by planning conditions, such as landscape, materials etc, and the steering group would be willing for all conditions to be signed off by the Local Authority.

- What measures are you going to take to preserve the biodiversity on the site?

The steering group has already had some discussion on this issue, and certainly we are all committed to making sure we maintain the biodiversity that currently exists on and around the site. We are currently looking at the most practical ways of doing so and will be starting by commissioning the surveys needed for us to establish the level and nature of biodiversity in the area.

- How much EA activity will there be on the site, how many lorries will be going in and out on the daily basis?

The proposed separate EA access is a re-use of an existing access point, and will be relatively lightly used compared to the amount of traffic that the existing EA access has historically accommodated.

It is anticipated that there will be, on average, 2 to 3 HGVs going in and out of the site per day, outside of any emergencies. Usage by other vehicles will vary depending on what orders have been placed and what work is being carried out, and will also vary from day to day (e.g. Mondays are generally busier than Fridays). On

average, the following vehicle movements can be expected:

EA site staff: 15 cars/vans per day.

EA visiting staff: 2 cars/vans per day.

External contractors (using the dry dock): 3 to 4 cars/vans per day

Small deliveries: 1 box van and 2 to 3 'transit' vans per day.

Large deliveries: 2 articulated HGVs per week.

Aggregate deliveries: 2 40-tonne tipper HGVs per week.

EA flatbed lorry: parked on island overnight. Leaves site around 7am and returns the same day. Occasionally makes 2 or more trips.

Skip removal/delivery – 1 roll-on/roll-off skip wagon per week.

Recyclable waste collection – 1 refuse collection vehicle per fortnight.

In total, this will result in the following vehicle movements on a typical weekday:

- *21 cars/vans per day, i.e. 42 daily two-way movements; and 6 deliveries per day, i.e. 12 daily two-way movements*
- *The access strategy has been agreed in principle with Surrey County Council and will be set out in the Transport Assessment.*

- What will happen to the footpath that gives access to the island?

This will remain as it is currently

- Are you planning to open up the riverfront to local residents and the public more widely?

This is not something that we envisage, and any access would be for residents only.

- Will any development work increase the risk of flooding for residents who live nearby?

The development will not increase the risk of flooding.

- How many homes are you planning to put into the site?

The exact number is unknown at this stage, but the steering group has agreed a principle of no more than 50 dwellings on the whole site.

- What sort of accommodation are you planning to build?

The steering group has agreed a principle to see as many family homes on the site as possible and our early draft plans show a mixture of 2 bedroom apartments and 2, 3, 4 and 5 bedroom houses.

- How will local schools cope with the increase in the number of children in the area?

We are still at very early stages of the development, but this is one of the issues that will be discussed with the relevant local authorities.

- Are you working with other developments in the area to consider the impact you will all have as a whole on the community?

We are keeping a close eye on all the developments in the area and considering what impact that will have on this site.

- How green will the development be?

We haven't finalised our plans in this regard but the development will certainly meet Code 4 for Sustainable Homes.

- What are you planning to do with conservancy cottage?

We are planning to demolish the property.

- When are you going to undertake the bat surveys?

These will be undertaken in the correct season (between May and September)

- How is it proposed to provide access? Will it be safe?

One of the main concerns with the previous scheme was the sharing of the access for the residential and EA uses – the Inspector was concerned about EA traffic routing through a 'tight' residential site. Since then the steering group has agreed to a principle of separate accesses.

As a result, the early plans include separate accesses for the housing and the retained EA operation.

The residential access is the same arrangement that has been agreed with Surrey County Council previously and which complies with design standards and has been tested and found to be acceptable at the Inquiry.

The EA access is a re-use of an existing access point, and will be relatively lightly used compared to the amount of traffic that the existing EA access has historically accommodated. It is anticipated that there will be, on average, 2 to 3 HGVs going in and out of the site per day, outside of any emergencies. Usage by other vehicles will vary depending on what orders have been placed and what work is being carried out, and will also vary from day to day (e.g. Mondays are generally busier than Fridays). On average, the following vehicle movements can be expected:

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In total, this will result in the following vehicle movements on a typical weekday:

*21 cars/vans per day, i.e. 42 daily two-way movements; and
6 deliveries per day, i.e. 12 daily two-way movements*

The access strategy has been agreed in principle with Surrey County Council and will be set out in the Transport Assessment.

- How will pedestrians cross Fordbridge Road? Won't this be dangerous?

We are currently discussing options with Surrey County Council. There are perhaps three options:

- *A zebra crossing (as per the appeal scheme) – this wouldn't have the traditional belisha beacon – it would have a 'halo' of yellow LEDs. These would be recessed so that the light is directed towards traffic and not spill into adjacent dwellings. The LEDs would also be dimmed so that they are much less bright at night (when they don't need to be as bright as they are in the day).*
- *A pelican crossing (i.e. a signal controlled crossing) – the lights would be cowed to minimize light spill sideways*
- *A simple dropped kerb crossing*

- Is this a suitable location for new houses?

Yes – The site is allocated for housing in the Spelthorne Council Development Plan.

The traffic assessment that accompanies any future planning application will identify the reasonable level of facilities and services in the local area and the good opportunities for walking, cycling and travelling by bus

- Will there be enough car parking?

Yes – The steering group has already committed to an important principle on this issue - All the parking for the development to be accommodated within the site. On top of that, we are also looking for ways to incorporate some additional parking for local residents including those living on Wheatley's Eyot. There will be no increase in traffic in relation to the Environmental Agency's operational activity, and we are actively looking at ways to ensure we maintain good traffic flow in the area.

- What plans do you have for mooring and pontoons on the riverside of the site and are you planning to give the public access to the island?

We understand the concern raised about the future management of moorings.

However, at this early stage of the design, whilst the Environment Agency do have a policy of promoting access and recreational use along the banks of the Thames, we have not yet got into the detail of considering firstly whether or not there would indeed be moorings as part of the scheme, and only if so, would we need to consider the important management matters that you have raised.

We can say that the inclusion of any moorings would be done with a full consideration of all the policy objectives.

With regards to public access through the site to the river, this is not something that we envisage, and any access would be for residents only.