



Report of the Chief Planning Officer

CITY PLANS PANEL - UPDATE REPORT

Date: 10TH MARCH 2015

Subject: APPLICATION 15/00651/FU – VARIATION OF CONDITION 18 OF PREVIOUS APPROVAL 14/01511/FU FOR MINOR MATERIAL AMENDMENT RELATING TO USE OF EXTERNAL FACING MATERIAL AT LEEDS WEIR

APPLICANT

Leeds City Council

DATE VALID

13/02/15

TARGET DATE

15/05/15

Electoral Wards Affected:

**City & Hunslet
Burmantofts and Richmond Hill**

Yes

Ward Members consulted

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

RECOMMENDATION: GRANT APPROVAL FOR VARIATION OF CONDITION 18 TO ALLOW THE USE OF HIGH QUALITY CONCRETE (OPTION 4) AS AN EXTERNAL FACING MATERIAL SUBJECT TO AGREEMENT OF A SAMPLE PANEL

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

- 1.1 This is to be read as an update report further to Agenda Item 7. Since the publication of the initial report, a Heritage Statement has now been received alongside additional information provided with the applicant's Justification Report and views sought from consultees.
- 1.2 Consultation comments have now been received from English Heritage, the Environment Agency, the Canal & Rivers Trust and from the Council's own Conservation Team.

2.0 CONSULTATIONS RESPONSES:

2.1 Statutory:

2.2 English Heritage: No objections to the use of concrete which is considered to preserve the character of the Conservation Area. Listed building consent for the removal of the Leeds Weir has already been granted. Although previously (2012) the removal of the weir was considered to substantially harm the significance of the listed structure, English Heritage were satisfied that there were substantial public benefits which would arise as a result and that these public benefits outweighed the harm. In response to application ref 14/01511/FU, the importance of agreeing materials and finishes prior to commencement of development was highlighted.

Having accepted that the removal of the existing weir is necessary to secure substantial public benefits relating to flood alleviation, English Heritage consider the main issue to be the impact of the proposed materials on the surrounding Conservation Area. A section of the existing weir will be retained which will retain some evidence of the original construction and materials.

This part of the Conservation Area has a more mixed character with a range of materials being used including stone, brick, concrete and sheet piling. This area is perhaps slightly less sensitive than those just to the east and west. It is still important that the materials used are of a high quality but English Heritage do not object to the introduction of modern concrete in the limited quantities proposed in this instance.

English Heritage do not consider the impact on the Conservation Area to be such that it would outweigh the benefits to the project outlined. It is recommended that if permitted concrete should be of the high quality 'smooth' finish (Option 4).

2.3 Environment Agency: Construction experience has shown that it is important that materials are chosen on a site specific basis reflecting conditions encountered over many years to ensure assets perform as expected when required to protect people and property. The use of high quality concrete is supported and will bring associated benefits over the lifetime of the moveable weir.

2.4 Canal and River Trust: Their preference is for reuse of stone masonry from Knostrop Cut ('option 1') but they note the applicants supporting information to use concrete on technical / maintenance grounds and therefore consider that high quality concrete ('option 4') would be an appropriate alternative with full details to be controlled by condition.

2.5 Non-statutory:

2.6 Conservation Team: It is considered that the use of concrete will preserve the character of the Conservation Area.

The current weir at Crown Point (Leeds Dam) is known to occupy a location close to at least one earlier weir installed to control flows on the river Aire. The original weir was associated with a mill race that served a mill and also created what is now

Fearn's Island. At the turn of the 18th century, the mill race was reconstructed as a cut and lock to facilitate the use of the Aire by commercial vessels. This was later adapted to the present arrangement which links the navigation to Clarence Dock and onwards to the junction with the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

The historic significance of the weir lies mainly in the associative and illustrative value of its function as part of Navigation (i.e. where it is rather than what it looks like is important) and this was one of the considerations that was taken into account when the decision was taken to allow its demolition, as well as the public benefit of the Flood Alleviation Scheme which could not be delivered without the modification of the weir.

Notwithstanding this, the appearance of the weir is an important part of its character and the use of concrete instead of stone will be a significant change to its character even when it is under water. However, it is considered that the use of concrete will not be out of character with the context given the concentration of existing "contemporary" structures in the vicinity of the weir, including the Knight's Way Bridge, the sheet pile embankment along the northern bank of the weir and the concrete overflow channel to the immediate west. More modern apartment buildings are located further north at Merchant's Quay and Turlow Court which add to the variety of finishes and styles within the immediate area.

Given the nature of a number of exposed finishes and contemporary development within the immediate surrounds, it is considered that the use of concrete will preserve the Central Area Conservation Area.

3.0 APPRAISAL

- 3.1 The applicant has stated that there are a number of technical and maintenance limitations for construction other than concrete. The use of solid masonry is not supported by the applicants in terms of its increased maintenance and construction requirements, whilst the use of cladding is not supported on maintenance grounds including longevity of the cladding and resistance to damage from impact debris. Ongoing maintenance would be required and there is risk of damage to the cladding as a consequence of the location within the middle of the Channel where risk from damage is substantial. Further investigation at Knostrop Cut shows the structural concerns that have arisen and this has been photographed and submitted.
- 3.2 In terms of stone cladding it should also be noted that replacing any damaged masonry would present a significant health and safety risk.
- 3.3 Further to the additional technical information received, it has become clear that the use of concrete would offer the most appropriate engineering solution.
- 3.4 The use of high quality concrete with full details to be agreed by condition has the support of Canal & Rivers Trust and raises no objections from English Heritage, the Environment Agency and the Council's Conservation Officer.
- 3.5 The English Heritage and Conservation Team confirm that the main issue of consideration is the impact of the proposed materials upon the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This part of the Conservation Area has a range of materials including stone, brick, concrete and sheet piling and a number of contemporary structures and modern apartment blocks with a variety of finishes. They confirm that subject to the concrete being of a high quality, its use will preserve the character of the Conservation Area.

- 3.6 The Canal & Rivers Trust preference would be for the use of stone (from Knostrop Cut) as it would meet the requirements of the planning consent and their recommendations in responses to the previous planning consultations.
- 3.7 However, the Trust note that the applicant has identified in the supporting statement risks to the projects delivery associated with the use of stone masonry and consider that a high quality concrete finish could be an appropriate alternative taking into account that the new weir represents a modern addition to the waterway and requires the use of modern materials to avoid a 'pastiche' development.
- 3.8 In addition the Canal and Rivers Trust state that should the Local Planning Authority determine that high quality concrete is appropriate, then all visible concrete should be a 'class F3 standard'.
- 3.9 A class F3 standard would result in a finish that is smooth and of a uniform texture and appearance and would be obtained from only one source. The applicants have confirmed the concrete will be to this standard.
- 3.10 The Flood Alleviation Scheme is a key infrastructure project which has significant environmental, economic and social benefits and the adverse programme implications for using stone as outlined in the Justification Report is of much concern to the applicant, contractor and Local Planning Authority as a successful outcome to the delivery and completion of the scheme would be at risk if the use of concrete is not agreed.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 As a result of the reasons given and in light of all consultee responses which confirm support for the use of high quality concrete it is considered that, on balance, this material will preserve the character of the Conservation Area whilst allowing delivery of the Flood Alleviation works in a timely and efficient manner. The applicants also outline that high quality concrete will offer the most appropriate proposal in respect of health and safety and long term maintenance and this is not contested and is a material consideration in support of the use of this material. In the light of the Heritage assessment submitted recently and the views of the relevant consultees officers consider that Option 4 (the use of high quality concrete) can be supported and so recommend the variation to Condition 18 as requested.

5.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 5.1 Application files 14/01511/FU and 14/01713/LI and history files 12/04465/FU and 12/04466/LI.
- 5.2 Appendix A - Updated Justification Report for Change to Material Finishes at Crown Point Weir (5 March)
- 5.3 Notice served on the Canal and River Trust and Pemberstone Reversions (Leeds) Ltd.