

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 31 MARCH 2021

Ward: Out of Borough

App No.: 210237 (SODC ref. P/20/S3501/FUL)

Address: North Lake, Caversham Lakes, Henley Road

Proposal: Change of use of an established lake for recreation and sports purposes

Applicant: Cosmonaut Leisure Ltd.

Date received: valid by SODC on 21 September 2020

Application target date: SODC target date: 4 May 2021

RECOMMENDATION:

That South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) be informed that Reading Borough Council raises an **OBJECTION** to the proposal on the following transport grounds:

1. Insufficient information has been submitted with the planning application to enable the highways, traffic and transportation implications of the proposed development to be fully assessed. From the information submitted, it is considered that the additional traffic likely to be generated by the proposal would adversely affect the safety and flow of users of the existing road network within Reading, contrary to Policies TRANS4 and TRANS5 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035;
2. The proposed development does not comply with the Local Planning Authority's standards in respect of pedestrian facilities and, as a result, is in conflict with South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 Policies TRANS2 and TRANS5; and
3. That SODC is sent a copy of this report for their information and use.

1. INTRODUCTION

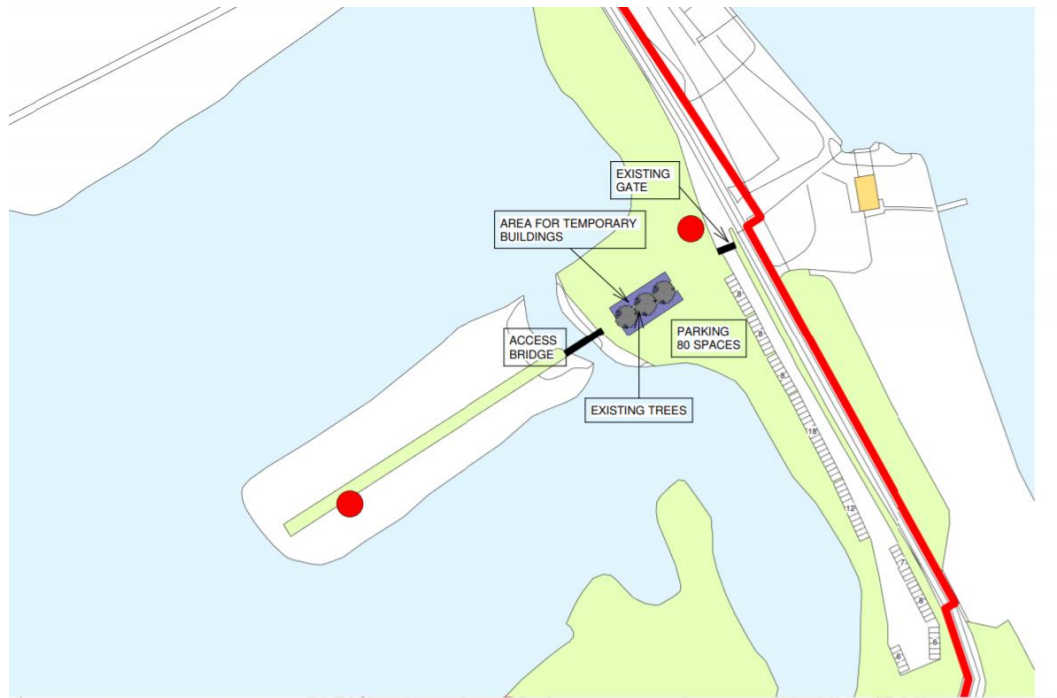
- 1.1 The Council has been notified of an application within the adjacent authority area (within South Oxfordshire District) which directly adjoins the Borough boundary in the eastern extremity of Caversham (Emmer Green ward). The site currently has an undeveloped appearance and was formerly a gravel extraction pit, which ceased operation approximately ten years ago. The application site is 39.44 hectares in total which includes a large lake with a field to the north and an island in the south-west. A private access road leads to this site and other recreational facilities in the area centred around water-based facilities, including the Redgrave Pinsent Rowing Lake, a water ski lake, the Thames and Kennet Marina and an Environment Agency building (a district navigation office).



Location plan

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The application is for the retrospective change of use of a redundant gravel extraction pit and lake to water sports and recreational use. The North Lake is being used for non-motorised sports such as kayaking, open-water swimming and paddle-boarding. Typical hours are stated as being 0600-2000. No buildings are proposed, although the planning statement mentions the need for storage containers for equipment stores, reception, changing rooms, coffee shop. The planning statement suggests that the car park would not be formally marked out but would remain an informal gravel parking area, in keeping with the open countryside character of the area.



Extract of Block Plan

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 There is no relevant planning history on this site dealt with by Reading Borough Council.

4. CONSULTATIONS

4.1 SODC has carried out its own consultations. RBC's consultation responses are outlined below.

RBC Transport Development Control:

4.2 The proposed application consists of the change of use of an established lake to include recreation and sports purposes at North Lake, Caversham Lakes, Henley Road, Caversham, Reading. The site is located to the north of Reading with the existing vehicle access to the site taken from an existing private access road which leads off the A4155 Henley Road. The private access is a single two-way carriageway with the access onto the A4155 Henley Road being located directly adjacent to the signalised junction of the A4155 Henley Road / C103 Caversham Park Road. A Transport Statement has been submitted to accompany the application and I comment on this as follows:

Trip Rates

4.3 The Transport Statement has confirmed that the applicants have operated or still operate similar operations at Marlow Lake, Bray Lake, Liquid Leisure [Windsor] and Heron Lake [Staines] and that these other sites are accessed via a single road, away from built up areas, and are therefore are not as accessible as the application site and more reliant upon access by private car. For these other established sites, data has been collected on visitor numbers and in principle I have no objection to the use of this type of data.

- 4.4 The applicant has stated that given their understanding of the operation and the variety of users a ratio of 1.6 people per car has been utilised to estimate the number of cars visiting the site. However, there is no evidence provided alongside this application to corroborate that this ratio is realistic or accurate and therefore further evidence would be required before this ratio can be agreed.
- 4.5 The survey information also shows that the number of cars visiting Heron Lake for swimming has not exceeded 142 in one day. However, the proposed change of use is for a number of non-motorized water sports including kayaking, general swimming and paddle-boarding therefore the survey data is not acceptable as this is not comparable with the Heron Lake facility given that this only provides open water swimming.
- 4.6 I would add that further transport Information has been provided since the submission of the application and this has identified that the use of the application site in 2020 generally generated 300 visitors a day with a maximum of 500 visitors a day during August bank holiday, this is significantly is also greater than the survey data included within the Transport Statement. This is of concern to the Highway Authority given the potential increase in vehicle movements and the close proximity of the access to the adjacent signalised junction and the limited trip rate information accompanying this application.
- 4.7 I would also stress that the applicant has spread the trips evenly throughout the day but the latest accompanying data states that '*most visitors stayed on site for approximately 2 hours, but some up to 4 hrs*'. It is therefore evident that the trips would not be spread evenly and there would be peaks and troughs in relation to vehicle trips. To establish the vehicle trip profile of the site actual survey data of a similar site would be required so that the impact on the Highway network can be thoroughly assessed.
- 4.8 Given that the vast majority of the data submitted to establish the trip rate analysis is not based on factual data or is not comparable to the proposed development, the Highway Authority have significant concerns regarding the assessment of the proposal and as such it could not be supported.

Site Access

- 4.9 The proposal seeks to utilise the existing site access which as stated above is directly adjacent to the signalised junction of the A4155 Henley Road / C103 Caversham Park Road. I am unable to assess the impact on the junction given the limited information on the trip generation of the proposal.
- 4.10 The applicant has also stated that the accident data collected from CrashMap identifies that only two accidents have occurred in the last five years however the actual data has not been submitted to allow the Highway Authority to review the cause of the accidents. Although there may only be two accidents, the proposed use may result in there being more opportunity for these types of accidents to occur and therefore must be reviewed. It is noted that one of the accidents involved three vehicles and therefore implies that this involved vehicles entering or exiting the private road onto the A4155 Henley Road, and it is therefore essential that the Highway Authority reviews the cause of these accidents.

Sustainable Access

- 4.11 Pedestrian access to the site would also be from the vehicle access road which does not benefit from any pedestrian footways or street lighting. The closest bus stops to the site are located on Henley Road, approximately 550m from the application site and therefore does provide for an alternative mode of transport. Whilst the bus stops are well served by public transport, the pedestrian route between the bus stops and the site is considered unsuitable as there no footways or street lighting provided.
- 4.12 Given the above the Highway Authority would object to the proposal on the grounds of insufficient information on traffic generation and unsuitable pedestrian facilities [the reasons supplied by the Highway Authority are set out in the Recommendation box above].

Natural Environment Team

- 4.13 The following is a summary of the comments received from the Planning Natural Environment Team (the tree officer). Physically, the proposal seems to involve temporary buildings as shown on the Proposed Site plan and some parking spaces, however, the location of these buildings would seem to necessitate the removal of some trees? Therefore, it is not clear what harm there would be to trees, whether this has taken place already, or if the trees and container buildings can co-exist in the locations shown. It is also unclear as to whether vegetation will be retained alongside the parking spaces - retention of vegetation along the access road to provide a buffer between this and the parking would be beneficial. Provision of replacement planting is likely to be required.

RBC Ecology Consultant

- 4.14 RBC's ecologist is aware that concerns have been forwarded to SODC from SODC's ecologist. RBC's ecologist concurs with these concerns and has nothing further to add.

RBC Leisure

- 4.15 No objections

CADRA

- 4.16 A response has been received from the Caversham and District Residents Association (CADRA), who advise that if the retrospective application is approved, an outdoor beach and water facility stand to be extremely well used, given how far Reading is from the sea. This seems likely to put substantial pressure on the junction which is already a concern locally.

5. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'.

- 5.2 The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Planning Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework

Local Plan

South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (adopted December 2020)

Policies:

TRANS2 Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility

TRANS4 Transport Assessments, Transport Statements and Travel Plans

TRANS5 Consideration of Development Proposals

6. APPRAISAL

- 6.1 The main issues of potential significance to RBC are in terms of traffic generation/highway safety and impact on the local visual environment.

(i) Traffic generation/highway safety

- 6.2 As set out above, given that the vast majority of the data submitted to establish the trip rate analysis from the applicant is not based on factual data or is not comparable to the proposed development, RBC as the immediately adjacent Highway Authority have significant concerns regarding the assessment of the proposal and as such it cannot be supported at this time. Officers advise that the our officers are in direct contact with SODC and Oxfordshire County Council (their Highway Authority), but at the time of writing, RBC Development Control is not satisfied and an objection should be supplied.

- 6.3 Whilst the site is reasonably well situated in relation to the nearest bus-stop, there are no pavements and none are proposed, so this is unlikely to make bus and walking to the site safe or attractive.

- 6.4 As a consequence of the above, it is recommended that RBC should raise an objection on the basis of the relevant traffic generation and sustainable transport policies of South Oxfordshire's newly-adopted local plan.

(ii) Impact on the local visual environment

- 6.5 The initial information submitted with the application is unclear on a number of aspects (including transport, ecology, impact on trees and flooding) and it is understood that officers at SODC are seeking various further submissions from the applicant at this time to answer these matters.

- 6.6 Apart from the highway aspects above, direct impacts on Reading Borough are likely to be very minor. It is not clear that there would be any detrimental impact on the landscape character of the area as observed from Reading Borough given the

number of other trees in the vicinity. Officers assume that the container buildings would be permanent, but from their size, siting and landscaping in this low-level area, clear views from the Borough are considered to be unlikely. SODC will take into account on-site tree/landscaping issues and impact on the open countryside in an assessment against their own policies.

Other matters

- 6.7 The site includes an island that is designated as an ancient woodland. Due to the nature of the proposed use - water sports - there will be no requirement for users to access the island and as a result no damage likely to be caused to the ancient woodland.
- 6.8 There is understood to be no motorsport noise associated with the use, except for a motorboat used for staff/rescue use on the lake and again, this is something SODC would seek to control, were they to issue a planning permission.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 There is some uncertainty regarding the permanent or temporary nature of the buildings/use of the site. However, for reasons of traffic generation and pedestrian safety which may affect Reading Borough, the recommendation of officers is to advise SODC of the objection as set out above.

Case Officer: Richard Eatough