

Development Management Sub Committee

Report returning to Committee - Wednesday 8 May 2019

**Application for Planning Permission 18/08091/FUL
At Land 34 Metres South East Of, 8 Bainfield Drive,
Edinburgh
Moorings for boat hotel accommodation (5 boats) at Union
Canal, west of Viewforth Bridge.**

Item number

Report number

Wards

B09 - Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart

Recommendations

It is recommended that this application be Granted subject to the details below.

Background information

This application was continued by the Development Management Sub-Committee on 24 April 2019 for a site visit and additional information. The additional information requested related to the following:

- The disposal of liquid waste;
- The servicing arrangements for the boat hotel; and
- Consultation with the City Canal Champion.

Main report

Liquid Waste

The applicant has confirmed the incinerator toilet turns everything to ash including the fluid. It can then be disposed of in a bin for landfill. The product is made by a Norwegian company and has been on the market since 1999 and has sold more than 50,000 units. Product information at <https://www.cinderellaeco.com/gb/vacation-homes/cinderella-comfort/>. No effluent will be discharged into the Union Canal.

Servicing

The applicant has confirmed they have agreed with Scottish Canals that we will use one of the small huts opposite the moorings to store supplies. This will be in addition to a larger storage facility in the centre of Edinburgh. The trolley will be collapsible and will also be stored in the hut opposite the mooring. However, it may not be necessary to use the trolley on each occasion and cleaners will sometimes only need to use a large holdall for servicing.

City Canal Champion

Councillor Gavin Corbett has confirmed he was not consulted as part of this planning application. He has now provided the following information:

At the Development Management Sub Committee meeting on 24 April 2019 it was rightly observed that the committee had not heard from the City Canal Champion in relation to the proposal to locate 5 boatels by Boroughmuir High School. So I have prepared this short note, largely drawing from the 2011 Canal Strategy but also discussions in the Canal Delivery Board, Canal Community Action Group and Fountainbridge Sounding Board since then.

1. Holiday boats (boatels) are an accepted moorings use within the canal strategy as part of a mix of different uses (page 36-37). This is generally accepted by stakeholders and, indeed, there is already at least one boatel in Lochrin Basin, in the area beyond Leamington Lift Bridge.

2. The 2011 canal strategy, which has material relevance to planning decisions, did not identify the current location as suitable for moorings. However, that strategy pre-dated the planning consent for the school and indeed was in the context of a different vision for the Lochrin hub (page 36-37 of the strategy) which included two new basins.

3. So the context for that part of the canal has changed. However, that changed context may not necessarily mean that a holiday boat use is acceptable. One might equally (or more plausibly) conclude that the building of a school with a current roll of 1,255 (with current extension plans to take it to 1,500) within 20m of that precise location should be the primary driver of a refreshed vision for that stretch of the canal.

*4. The "hardening" of the canal edge (page 5 of the report to Committee) is used to explain the shift from the canal strategy identified use of marginal vegetation to holiday boat use. However, the report (page 2) also acknowledges that the towpath improvements were funded by developer contributions, including from the school. In the original consent (13/00073/PPP) the section 75 contribution from the school towards the towpath improvement was identified as £139,500. **In other words, funds paid by the school construction project to improve the canal towpath are now being used to justify a change in anticipated use of the same canal bank which will inhibit use of the canal by the school.***

5. The canal strategy specifically (pages 19-20) seeks to ensure that new developments do more than simply treating the water as a setting or a backdrop; rather that they should seek to create a relationship with the waterway. My discussions with senior managers at the school demonstrate an appetite to do that, with the school purchasing kayaks, developing plans with Edinburgh Schools Kayak Club and looking at other learning opportunities from having the canal 20m from the front door. **The school has said it wants to be part of the canal not simply beside the canal, an aspiration which is entirely consistent with the canal strategy.**

6. This school community aspiration appears not to have been taken into account in the Moorings site options appraisal commissioned by Scottish Canals in the summer of 2018 which has acted as a frame for the current application. In stark contrast to the original strategy - which had significant stakeholder and public engagement - the 2018 exercise had no stakeholder engagement, least of all with the school which is now a major part of the canal community. Further, the appraisal seems to conceive of moorings within a very narrow view of the waterway rather than a wider development context. **There is no mention of the school in the appraisal; indeed, the school is not even shown as a school on the revised drawings in the appraisal.** seems a remarkable omission. Further, nowhere in the appraisal is any rationale given for recommending that holiday boats are a suitable use for this location, rather than, say, an opportunity for the school community to interact more fully with the canal.

7. I have a frequent and very positive relationship with Scottish Canals, but, on this occasion I have conveyed my disappointment about the lack of engagement.

8. Alongside the canal strategy and moorings site appraisal, policy, Des 10 from the LDP is relevant. It says "Planning permission will only be granted for development on sites on the coastal edge or adjoining a watercourse, including the Union Canal, where the proposal:

- a) provides an attractive frontage to the water in question.
- b) where appropriate, **maintains, provides or improves public access** and along the water's edge.
- c) maintains and enhances the water environment, its nature conservation or landscape interest including its margins and river valley.
- d) if appropriate, **recreational use of the water.**"

*Clearly, boatels will provide public access to the water and recreational use, for those handful of members of the public who hire the boatels at any one time. However, it will do so at the cost of restricting that same access and use for the much larger school community. In my view, **the tests set by Des 10 have not been met since the aggregate effect is to limit access and use to a small group of visitors and so reducing it for a larger school community.***

9. The development of Fountainbridge and, in particular, the former brewery sites has been praised over the last five years. Aside from the school, the renovation of the old rubber factory has resulted in the building now hosting Edinburgh Printmakers and opened on Saturday 27 April. The masterplan for homes and workplaces across Viewforth from the school has won awards and is now out for procurement. Developers Moda and Vastint will be on site this year to the north and east of the council-owned site and both have engaged productively with stakeholders through the Fountainbridge Sounding Board. The dialogue between stakeholders has been constructive over the last 8 years, if also robust at times. **The offer of dialogue also extends to potential development opportunities on the canal itself; but on this occasion, that opportunity has not been taken.**

10. So, as it stands, the proposal is generally not welcomed by residents, the school community and canal groups. It is inconsistent with the canal strategy and policy des 10 and inhibits the way in which a growing school community can develop a strong sense of ownership of the canal which is a key theme of the strategy. It is framed by a narrowly-conceived moorings site options appraisal which has taken no account of the proximity of the school and the opportunities that offers.

Gavin Corbett
Edinburgh Canal Champion
26 April 19

Further Information

In response to Councillor Corbett's comments above, the following information is provided.

Point 4 - Use of Towpath - Scottish Canals has confirmed that developer contributions were received to ensure that the landscape treatment of the towpath was done to a consistently high standard. The Scottish Canal's Fountainbridge improvement proposals were presented to the Council's streetscape working group and the aim was to ensure that connections from new development to the canal corridor happened in a co-ordinated manner. Follow up meetings were held with the council cycling officer, neighbourhood team and Historic Environment Scotland - all of whom were engaged in the works that have since been completed. This was not to justify a change of use - it should be noted that the towpath use is not changing and it remains for public use by all parties.

Points 5 and 6 - Relationship with Boroughmuir High School

Scottish Canals has met the head teacher of the school on 25 February 2019 and the boat proposal was discussed at that meeting. It was agreed that the school would be given a detailed implementation programme for the boat hotel if it is approved and there would a quarterly meeting between Scottish Canals, the applicant and the school to review the operation and any issues arising.

In terms of the Canoe Club, the school has acquired a few canoes and are looking to establish a club to promote leisure use of the canal and would like to implement access to the water near the school. There is a small boats pontoon in place nearby next to Leamington Lift Bridge which the school can use in the first instance. Scottish Canals outlined the best location for a small boat pontoon (nearer Gibson Terrace) - this would keep canoes away from the bridge opening and residential boats and is a safer environment for a launching point as it is greenspace rather than a hardspace. Discussions are ongoing regarding the funding and implementation of this.

Links

Policies and guidance for this application

LEN16, LTRA02, LTRA03, LEMP10, LHOU07, LDES05, LDES10, LEN08, LEN15, NSGD02,

A copy of the original Committee report can be found in the list of documents at

<https://citydev-portal.edinburgh.gov.uk/idoxpa-web/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=PFRQPXEW6I00>

Or Council Papers online

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