

RBWM Local Access Forum Fast Response Team

The planning application at Town Moor is for the development of a walkway and bridge, with associated landscaping to allow for a dedicated escape route for the residents of the St. Mary's Park development in case of flood. A design plan and extract from the developer's design statement is attached, and the Fast Response Team's comments are included below.

Consultation Response: Planning Application No. 11/00226 - Installation of a raised walkway across Town Moor, Maidenhead

The Local Access Forum (LAF) Fast Response Team have examined the above planning application and make the following comments on behalf of the Forum:

General Response

The Local Access Forum considers that the proposed development would have a significant adverse effect on Town Moor and recommends that the application should not be approved in its current guise.

Visual Impact

First and foremost the Local Access Forum considers that this development will create a significant detrimental visual impact on Town Moor and the proposal does not go far enough to limit and minimise this impact.

Landscaping

The landscaping of the proposed development is of vital importance in relation to its effect on the Moor, and is concerned by the suggestion made by Shanly Homes in the Planning Statement that a detailed landscaping scheme be secured by a suitably worded planning condition. It is felt by the Forum that this would not allow the public the opportunity to comment effectively on the final landscaping proposals and recommends as a result that any landscaping proposal should be subject to public consultation rather than be decided by a planning condition. The forum supports the comments made by the East Berks' Ramblers' that the proposed landscaping scheme removes beneficial landscaping already in place to soften the impact of the substation and car park, and that the proposal to plant reeds will exacerbate the problem of reed overgrowth and will attract litter.

Bridge Design

The Local Access Forum is concerned that the design of the bridge is not sensitive or sympathetic to the area and should be redesigned to lessen its visual impact on the Moor. The Forum disagrees with the statement made in the Planning Statement that the existing public footpaths are not prejudiced by the dedicated safe escape route and would like to support the comments made by the Council's Principal Public Rights of Way Officer, that the raised walkway and new footbridge would significantly alter the open views from the footpaths, and that consideration should be given to realigning the escape route with the existing footbridge rather than building a second bridge in close proximity of the existing bridge at Maidenhead Footpath 6.

Proposed Route

The Local Access Forum disagrees with the statement made by Shanly Homes that the proposed route as “considerably less impact on Town Moor” than the original route. The original proposed route was 40% shorter than the current proposition, and crossed the more developed areas of the moor, which lessened its impact on the open areas. In addition to this, as referred to by the Environment Agency, the new proposal does not have the benefit of allowing emergency access vehicles and thus deprives the application of the wider community benefit originally proposed. In addition to this the proposed walkway is not fit for purpose as it is not sufficiently high to be crossed in the dry.

The Local Access Forum also wishes to support the comments made by East Berks’ Ramblers’ that using the existing footpath network at Footpath 7 would make a shorter route to higher ground.

Safety / Security

The Local Access Forum recognises and supports the comments made by the East Berks’ Ramblers’ and also those of Mr Daniel McKeagney, considering that the current design would not create a safe environment for the public to use because the only way on and off the walkway is at the terminating ends. This creates a potential danger because there are no escape points should a member of the public be confronted or attacked. The walkway should have regular access and exit points to allow members of the public to escape the leave if they choose.

The Local Access Forum agrees that the proposed design would create areas where anti-social behaviour is likely to occur.

Planning Application questions & comments

In addition to the comments above, the Local Access Forum would also like to raise some issues with the application itself. The application states that no new rights of way are to be created yet the walkway is designed to be for public use as well as an escape route. It is considered that a project of this scale should be protected by including a right for the public to use the route.

The application also states that the proposals do not require any diversions/extinguishments and/or creation of rights of way. As stated above it is considered by the Local Access Forum that should the walkway be created in this position it should be joined with the existing Maidenhead Footpath 6 and as a result a diversion or alteration of the existing footpath will be required, notwithstanding new rights to be created over the walkway.

The application states that the Town Moor is important urban open space, and states that the site is vacant, when in fact it is well used as important urban open space.

Date of response: 8th April 2011.

This letter constitutes formal advice from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Local Access Forum. The Royal Borough of Windsor and

Maidenhead Council is required, in accordance with section 94(5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this forum in carrying out its functions.

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Supplementary Advice

The Local Access Forum (LAF) Fast Response Team would like to make the following additional comments to the revised plans:

The Local Access Forum wishes to object to the new design plan on the following grounds:

The new footbridge design is not acceptable because it does not link with the existing footpath network (specifically Maidenhead Footpaths 5 and 6) and severs the level access currently enjoyed to the Town Moor from Holmanlease.

The Fast Response Team consider that a ramp to facilitate access to these paths would not be acceptable because the design requirements for an accessible ramp would make it as intrusive as the bridge itself and too inconvenient for the public to use.

It is considered that the original proposal routing the development across the bridge at Fire Station Court remains the most acceptable and pragmatic solution.

Date of response: 24th June 2011.

This letter constitutes formal advice from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Local Access Forum. The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council is required, in accordance with section 94(5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this forum in carrying out its functions.