

Caversham and District Residents Association
CADRA position on Caversham Lock Island and Kings Meadow Pool

Caversham Lock Area - Development Principles

The planning brief for the area, following public consultation is well constructed and most welcome. It should form the guiding principles for decisions taken by RBC both prior to and during the planning process. We note in particular that:

- The principles (1.1) *“will guide any future proposals in a way that benefits and enhances the area’s role as an important focus for land and waterborne visitors, leisure and wildlife.”*
- King’s Meadow (2.18) *“could be enhanced by a programme of sensitive environmental and leisure-related improvements that acknowledge each element of the historic environment. This document seeks to protect and enhance these intrinsic assets and ensure that any proposals for the area do not detract from its primary function as a major area of public open space, but contribute to creating a special place where people want to spend their leisure time”.*
- Kings Meadow Pool (2.25) *“Additional small-scale development may be acceptable in order to provide practical and viable facilities in this location, but the impact on the listed building, the affect on flood storage capacity and flow, and any resultant loss of open space will need to be carefully assessed.”*

(2.26) “As a part of any application for development associated with the pool, the setting of the building will need to be defined and the impact of the proposed development on the setting as well as the wider historic environment will need to be demonstrated and assessed.”
- Caversham Lock Island (1.3) *“will be a focus for visitors and those enjoying the River.”*

(3.12) “.....redevelopment on the Lock Island will need to be of a relatively low-intensity and of a sensitive design, in line with the Waterways policies of the adopted Reading Borough Local Plan, and that acknowledge each element of the historic environment. some form of tourist/visitor-focused activities, such as a restaurant/café with river-related interpretation centre, with small-scale conference/meeting space and boater facilities may be appropriate in principle.”

The decision made by the Scrutiny Panel and by Cabinet should be clearly tested against these principles.

The Background

CADRA has previously stated its view that:

- Both areas are very run down and a solution is needed to bring new life to the area.
- There is concern that local people can continue to enjoy the area and that at least some of the new facilities should be affordable.
- All decisions taken should be in line with the Development Principles which were established after wide consultation.

We have followed all stages of the process and would like to thank the Council for allowing us the opportunity to examine the details of these two proposals. We look forward to a continuing involvement with plans for this area.

Kings Meadow Campaign

The team put forward a very exciting range of new opportunities for the community which would save the pool building, bringing it back into use and would provide additional facilities along the river.

We note that if the Campaign were given a period of exclusivity, they would need to:

- Establish a charitable trust.
- Secure support from English Heritage for the restoration details and for the proposed new building.
- Secure considerable capital funding
- Establish a realistic plan for a balanced revenue budget.

Each of these would require active support from the community of Reading and from the Borough Council.

This proposal would require a completely separate plan for the Lock Island which is owned by the Environment Agency. The only control RBC would have over proposals from the EA would be through the normal planning process.

Askett-Hawk Developments

This proposal produces a far reaching scheme which would link Kings Meadow, The Lock Island and possibly Hills Meadow but introduces new structures of a completely different scale. There is likely to be divided opinion between those who would welcome new riverside facilities and those who consider the proposals to be excessive and out of keeping with the area.

We believe many would welcome a permanent high quality future for the pool with availability for the public to swim, the provision of riverside bars, cafes and restaurants and new bridges. There are in principle, benefits to an integrated plan for the whole area, maintaining public access to the riverside.

However, in its current form, we do not believe it would command public support. If the scheme were to be considered further, it is very important the following issues should be addressed.

Visual aspects

- The proposed car parking on stilts above the present Napier Road car park and the high level walkway to the hotel across Kings Meadow would be hugely dominating to the meadow.
- The design amongst the veteran riverside trees appears unrealistic.
- A 5+ storey development covering almost all of the Lock Island and combined with a high level walkway, is very different from the range of facilities envisaged in the Development Principles.
- A new hotel building reaching 15+ storeys at the apex.

If the Council were to take forward this proposal, there would need to be a clear prospect of achieving a reduction in the massing and height on both the Lock Island and the hotel building in line with the Development Principles and a very different solution for hotel car parking.

Social aspects

CADRA would also wish to see a clear commitment to achieving wider access across the community rather than purely high end facilities. This could include as a minimum:

- A commitment to reduced price availability of swimming tickets for Passport to Leisure holders
- A commitment to terms for at least one café which would enable them to offer affordable prices.

