

# Design & Access Statement

## Rickmansworth Waterways Trust, Batchworth Lock Education Centre

### Adjacent 99 Church Street, Rickmansworth

Rev D 30.03.17

## Introduction

Rickmansworth Waterways Trust (RWT) is a heritage education charity which invites school groups between 4 and 11 years old to learn about the history of the canal system locally and nationally. Due to the recent loss of access to their classroom facility, which has been used to deliver the programme for over twenty years, RWT currently use a first floor room at St Mary's Church Hall to greet groups of up to 30, plus up to 6 adult helpers. Children now have to be escorted alongside and across a busy main road to reach the lock and would benefit from all facilities being adjacent to the lock.

RWT also travel to adult groups such as historical societies and U3A to give lectures on the canal history, but would like to have facilities to invite those people in groups of 20 to 30 to Batchworth Lock.

RWT are proposing to erect a single storey cabin type structure at Batchworth Lock to facilitate the education programme. The building would have occasional daytime use during the spring to autumn months when the majority of the educational visits are held.

## Site analysis and evaluation



Aerial photo



1. View of access ramp from Church St



2. View of access ramp from canal towpath



3. Existing CRT workshop & NE corner of site



4. View of site from canal towpath



5. View of 99 Church St on opposite side of canal



6. View of southern river side edge of site

## Location and character

The site is located between the Grand Union Canal and the River Colne, next to Church Street and close to the centre of Rickmansworth. Historically the site has been used for retail and housing. When these buildings were cleared (partly to make room for the new dual carriage way along Church Street) the site became vacant and was let by TRDC to the Rickmansworth Waterways Trust. The RWT currently have a small model canal system on the site for educational purposes and a storage container for their equipment.

While the site did not originally have trees on it, there are now trees which have grown within the last twenty years around the edges of the site, as well as some scrub and weeds adjacent to the River Colne.

The site is near to the listed No. 99 Church Street and adjacent the Canal and Rivers Trust (CRT) workshop and No. 115 Church Street. There is an existing ramp access from Church Street onto the CRT owned towpath which gives access to the site.

## The existing facilities

The existing site area is **480sqm (0.048 ha)**. The site currently has a model canal for educational demonstrations built by RWT volunteers and there is a metal storage container for storing their educational equipment.

RWT own a narrow boat called 'Roger' which is moored at the canal lock basin and used as part of the Trust's education work with school children and other visitors.

RWT hire a first floor room at St Mary's Church to host talks to school children but this is not a convenient location as children have to be escorted along and across a busy main road to reach the lock.



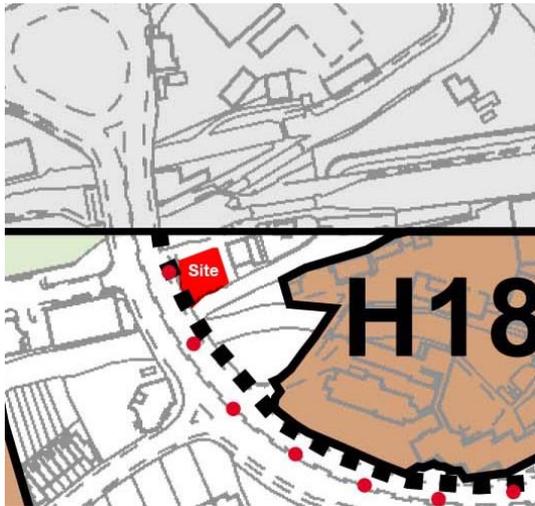
Site plan – existing

## The proposal

The proposal is to remove the model canal, the existing metal storage container and some of the trees on the site, and erect a new single storey education centre building.

## The Local Plan

The established current use on the site is educational use, for the RWT charitable education programme.



KEY:	
<b>Environment Policies:</b>	<b>Development Policies:</b>
Metropolitan Green Belt	H12 Housing Development Site
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	Business / Industrial Site
Chilterns Landscape Area	1 2 3 Shopping Frontage (Policies S1-3)
Central River Valleys Landscape Area	Publicly Accessible Open Space
South Herts Plateau Landscape Area	Proposed Cycle Routes
Site of Special Scientific Interest	Area Liable to Flooding
Local Wildlife Site	Area Specific Policies
Nature Reserve (LNR or Wildlife trust)	District Boundary
Conservation Area	<small>NB: The boundary of the administrative area of Three Rivers District Council shall be taken as the limit of District-wide policies.</small>
Site of Archaeological Interest	<small>Please note, the policy reference numbers contained within the Housing Development Site notation relates to the reference number outlined in the following tables in the Written Statement:</small>
Scheduled Ancient Monument	<small>Table 3a - Five year housing land availability, April 1998 - 2003</small>
	<small>Table 3b - Other Sites, pre 2008</small>
	<small>Table 3c - Long term housing sites, April 2006 - 2011</small>
	<small>The policy reference numbers contained within the Area Specific Policies notation relates to the numbered policy within the Written Statement.</small>

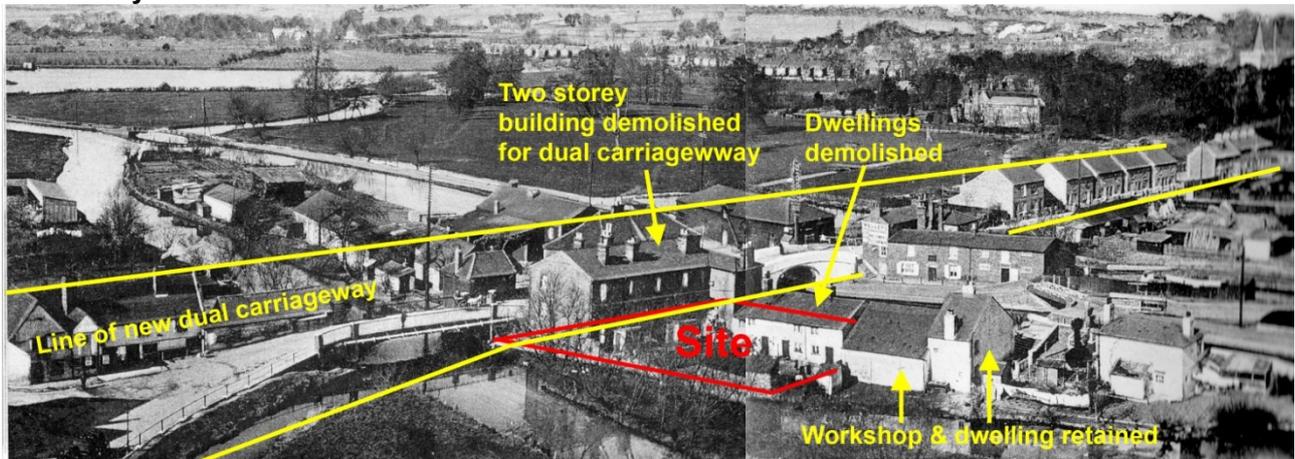
Extract from Three Rivers map

### Relevant Three Rivers Policies

The relevant policies are as follows:

- General design GEN 1, 3
- Design, D1-3, D6-9
- Appendix 1: Making Development More Sustainable

### Site History



Panoramic photograph of site taken by TJ Price in 1910

Historically there were a mixture of single and two storey buildings on the site, which were used for retail, housing and storage. The site was cleared and made available for use by the Rickmansworth Waterways Trust (RWT) over twenty years ago. RWT are tenants and the land is now owned by Three Rivers District Council.

### Consultation

The applicant has sought informal advice from the Three Rivers planning team. The main issues raised were as follows:

1. Prepare a flood risk assessment and agree a strategy for managing flood risk with the Environment Agency.
2. Review whether single storey development on the site is appropriate in view of the context.
3. Review the Church Street elevation to avoid a long low uninterrupted form.
4. Review proposed external materials in context with the immediate surroundings (99 Church Street is a listed building).
5. Review proposed site activities with a view to their potential impact on nearby residential dwellings.

6. Provide a tree survey and assessment of any works to existing trees.
7. Review parking and access requirements.
8. It was noted that as the development proposals are not commercial and not residential then an Energy Statement is not required.

The applicant has also sought comments from the Canal & Rivers Trust (CRT) in a meeting on 26.01.17. The following comments were made:

- a. The site boundary and plan should clarify RWT's wish to gain access across CRT's land.
- b. A risk assessment should be made when using the vehicle and pedestrian ramp for visitor access.
- c. The potential impact (if any) of the new construction on the adjacent canal and river must be reviewed by the CRT engineers.
- d. Consider how users may be affected by future floods and how they may be evacuated if necessary.
- e. Consider how the proposed gravel external finish can be retained to avoid it washing into river.
- f. Justify the massing and form on the site.

### **Planning history**

*A submission was made and registered on 06.03.17 - ref 17/0461/FUL. During this application it was noted that TRDC did not raise an objection to the principle of the proposed development, however the planning team raised a couple of issues which caused RWT to check the site boundaries. The land is leased by TRDC to RWT and therefore RWT rely upon TRDC for information about the site extents. There has been some confusion over the definition of the site boundaries and RWT have now updated the site boundary line to conform to their latest understanding of the site extents. Therefore RWT have been required by TRDC to withdraw this application and make a new submission.*

*The issues raised by the planning team were stated in their email 29.03.17. In summary:*

- A. *There was concern about the length of the building in relation to the site boundaries and TRDC expressed their wish to see the building set in from the site edges. There was also some associated concern about the height of the building and its impact on Church Street and the adjacent buildings.*
- B. *The arrangements for dropping off visiting school children were questioned.*

*The applicants now seek to address these issues in the revised submission. With regard to the first issue, A, the revised site boundaries go a long way to addressing the point:*

- *The site boundary has been amended which alters the context of the comments made by TRDC (an additional 70sqm of site including an additional 3m wide zone to the east)*
  - *Therefore the proposal is 3m from east boundary,*
  - *an average of 2.9m from Church St pavement (2.4m to 3.3m),*
  - *a min. 3.3m from south (River Colne) boundary*
  - *and a min. 4m from north (towpath) boundary*
- *The proposed gross external floor area of 184sqm represents only 38.3% of the total site area, which is, in the view of the applicants, a low density proposal.*
- *The proposed ridge is only 4.2m above Church Street level at the highest point (the eaves are only 0.9 to 1.3m above street level) which represents a low level of development in comparison to the two storey building at 99 Church Street. Drawing 162031-D-17 has been added to the re-submission to clarify the height of the proposals in relation to its immediate context on Church Street and the canal.*
- *99 Church Street is directly placed on the boundary with the back of pavement on Church St - this is the nearest and most relevant precedent for this boundary.*
- *The workshop directly adjoins No. 115 with no space between.*
- *Notwithstanding the TRDC comments, the historical precedent is that the original buildings on this site extended all the way to the edge of the site and adjoined the workshop.*

- *The applicants are proposing a gable ended roof which would be in character with the immediate surrounding buildings: No. 99, No. 115 and the workshop which are all gable ended.*
- *RWT have had discussions with CRT heritage and planning advisors who have supported the building position, massing and design.*

*With regard to the second issue, B, RWT have provided a written email response (see RWT email dated 29.03.17). The key points made are:*

- *The Trust has been using the drop off point outside Travis Perkins since the Learning at the Lock programme started over 20 years ago. Up to 1000 school children each year have used these arrangements safely and under the supervision of Trust Volunteers and their teachers.*
- *RWT volunteers are ready to meet the children when the coach arrives and the children are offloaded within 5 minutes and the coach departs. RWT also always ensure that the children are ready on time to meet the coach at the pickup point so the departure is equally well managed.*
- *The timing of arrival and departure of the coach is also always outside the rush hour periods of busiest traffic.*
- *The suggested drop off point in Northway would present a significant challenge to RWT's operation as some of the schools bring children as young as 4 to 5 years old. We would then have to walk the children a considerable way along the narrow pavements of Church Street and also crossing several busy roads which we feel would present significant additional hazards.*
- *This would also present a challenge to opening the programme to less mobile individuals which is one of the hopes of the Trust in designing a new facility with disabled access and facilities.*
- *RWT acknowledge that if the Travis Perkins site were to be developed with a new hotel then the existing drop off arrangement might become less suitable, however RWT have a good relationship with Travis Perkins and hope to secure an arrangement to use the road between the two proposed new buildings as a location for completing a similar drop off and pick up operation.*

*RWT acknowledge the possibility of future issues with traffic flow as a consequence of the development of the Travis Perkins site but would question whether it is appropriate to prejudice this application on the basis of another application which has not yet been implemented. RWT hope that the safety of the visiting children can be prioritised, especially given that the drop off is managed to occur outside peak periods and to happen as quickly and smoothly as possible.*

## The design solution



Proposed site plan

### Site layout

The proposed site layout will comprise the following:

- Single storey education centre building which includes:
  - Teaching hall
  - Entrance foyer
  - Toilets
  - Administration office
  - kitchenette
  - storage rooms
- External decking area adjacent to the River Colne
- Open entrance forecourt area facing the canal towpath

Proposed gross external floor area of education building: 184.0sqm

Proposed gross internal floor area of education building: 180.4sqm

For safe supervision of the canal activities the foyer and admin office overlook the canal towpath. Therefore the proposed foyer and office are both placed on the north side of the building.

RWT members and visitors arrive at the entrance foyer via the entrance forecourt adjacent the towpath. Here the visitors are taken into the teaching hall where they would be briefed on their activities for the day and provided with safety/floatation equipment. They would then be split into groups which would carry out, in rotation, canal lock visits, narrow boat trips, viewing the historic narrow boat 'Roger' and informal teaching within the hall.

There would be a partially covered decking area facing the river with suitable security/safety balustrading. It would provide a location for external viewing of the river and a place for packed lunches to be eaten.



View 01 from Church Street bridge



View 02 from Church Street entrance ramp



View 03 from Church Street (SW)



View 02 from Church Street (S) across River Colne

**Building form and design**

The use of the building dictates a single storey structure. The primary teaching hall is a vaulted space approximately 4m high and all ancillary spaces need to adjoin it and serve it at the same level. Given the inadequate current arrangements for the visiting children at St Marys, RWT are keen to provide all facilities at ground level to avoid stairs and provide improved access for disabled visitors.



View 05 - aerial view from SE



View 06 from canal towpath towards entrance

The main teaching space runs east-west so that visitors can see both the canal and the river. This aligns with the predominant ridge line existing at the CRT workshop, No. 115 and the main canal-side wing of No. 99. The entrance foyer is placed at one end of the hall, accessed from the canal towpath. The ancillary office, kitchenette and storage space are at the other end of the hall. The building is set back to create an external entrance space next to the canal.

The teaching hall presents its tall gable end to Church Street, with access doors serving the ancillary space. This punctuates the elevation as seen from Church Street and addresses the informal comments made by TRDC planning.

There would be an external decked area to the rear, south facing portion of the site. This has been positioned to allow space for existing and new trees.

The proposed roof finish would be artificial slate to complement the existing slate roofs on the adjacent workshop, No. 115 and No. 99. The proposed external wall finish would be white painted timber cladding to complement the white render on the adjacent workshop and No. 115.

RWT have carefully considered the constraints of their budget, brief and the site when selecting a suitable construction method. The proposed timber system has the following benefits:

- It is sustainably sourced from a renewable material;
- It can be delivered flat-packed and off loaded from the ramp avoiding closure of the adjacent dual carriageway;
- It requires only minimal pad foundations with a suspended floor on brick piers to minimise impact in the flood zone and minimise impact on the adjacent canal and river;
- It is 70% lower cost than a traditional brick construction and therefore meets the Trusts funding restrictions.

In response to comments made by the Canal & River Trust, the design has been amended from its original 'L' shaped form to a simple linear arrangement that is similar in eaves height, roof pitch, ridge height and form to the original dwellings that occupied that part of the site, and relates positively to the adjacent remaining workshop and dwelling.

### **Landscape design**

The application is accompanied by a tree survey by Leisure Turf - see LT1002, LT1003, RWT Landscape Consultancy Report and Tree Schedule.

As can be seen from the historic 1910 photo of the site, there used to be no trees on it, only buildings. When the site was cleared about twenty years or so ago, seedlings took root and have grown into a mixture of scrub/weeds and trees.

It is proposed to remove a few of the existing trees and the scrub to allow room for the new building, while keeping the rest to provide a landscaped setting. Some smaller existing trees will be transplanted to better locations on the western end of the site.

There are spoil heaps to the western end of the site, near Church Street, which would be removed and the site would be levelled.

A porous gravel pathway would be formed from the towpath to the front entrance and as access around the north and west sides of the building.

### **Ecology**

By reviewing the Biodiversity Checklist it has been noted that because the site is adjacent to water there may be an ecological interest. Herts Ecology have been approached and their initial view is that the site offers little ecological interest and a formal ecological survey would not be required. Herts Ecology have written to confirm this and advise that any works to existing trees should be carried out outside of nesting times - see letter dated 24.01.17.

### **Impact on nearby dwellings**

The outdoor activities run by RWT for visiting children already run on the site and there would be no change to these:

- Trained adult supervision of educational visits for groups of about ten children to see how the Batchworth lock mechanism works and be taught about the historical importance of the canal.

- Trained adult supervision of trips on the narrow boat, 'Pride of Batchworth', along the Grand Union Canal.
- Trained adult supervision of educational visits for groups of up to five children to see how people lived and worked on the canals in the traditional working narrow boat 'Roger'.

All other activities will be based inside the teaching hall. All activities will be on weekdays during school hours and therefore will not be likely to cause any disturbance to residential properties. The activities outside the teaching hall have been taking place at Batchworth for over the last twenty years and there is no proposed change to these.

### **Sustainable design**

The building is to provide occasional use for teaching by the charitable trust members and volunteers. It would primarily be used during the day time from spring to autumn, therefore it will not be continually heated – it will only be heated, if required, when used for teaching. On this basis it has been agreed with TRDC Building Control that it does not need to meet Part L regulations. It has also been agreed with TRDC Planning that no Energy Statement is required because it is not commercial or residential use. Nevertheless, RWT will seek to provide basic insulation to the floor and roof of the building and double glazing to reduce the heating energy requirements.

The main focus for sustainability will be as follows:

- The building floors, walls, roof structure, doors, window frames, steps, decking and balustrading will all be constructed from timber that has been renewably sourced and FSC certified.
- Rooflights will be used to minimise the need for electric lighting in the teaching hall and foyer.
- The building layout and window/rooflight positions allow good cross ventilation and stack effect to help drive it – this will avoid the need for any comfort cooling.
- The floor will be suspended above the main ground level on a series of brick piers and pad foundations to minimise the impact on the existing ground and flood area. The gap between floor and ground will have a black mesh guarding against vermin while allowing air and water to pass beneath.

### **Flood risk assessment**

The site is located within a zone 3b flood risk area.

Site data has been sought from the Environment Agency and a detailed Flood Risk Assessment has been prepared. The main points made in the report are:

- The site has been used for educational and recreational visits for over twenty years.
- There is no proposed change of use of the site.
- Historical EA records demonstrate that the site has not flooded.
- There are no permanent occupants or sleeping accommodation on the site and no proposals for any occupants or sleeping accommodation. There is existing seasonal use of the site by visiting parties of up to 30 children accompanied by adults.
- If there was a flood warning then the educational programme during the predicted flood period would be cancelled and re-arranged at a time that was safe.
- The building has been designed to have its main internal floor level raised well above the predicted flood level - see site section drawing below. The design flood level at the Batchworth Lock site is **46.55m** (see above). The floor level has been raised **46.82m**, which is well above the design flood level.

Generally the site levels will remain as they are, but the existing spoil heaps will be removed and a level surface formed beneath the proposed new building. The construction of the new educational building would consist of a suspended timber floor over dwarf brick piers and pad foundations. The suspended floor void would be ventilated and would allow any flood waters to pass beneath it, minimising the effect of displacement during any future floods.

## Access

The site is accessed via a pedestrian and vehicle ramp from Church Street and the CRT owned canal-side towpath.

It should be remembered that the education centre is only occasionally used during the daytime from spring till autumn.

RWT members and visitors do not currently use any parking space on the site and there is no intention or need to provide any parking there.

RWT members use the public car parks in Rickmansworth which are about 450m and 600m from the site, or they walk, or they use public transport. Individuals and small groups of visitors are invited to do the same. The Rickmansworth Metropolitan Line station is approximately 750m walk from the site and there are bus routes along Church Street adjacent to the site.

RWT arrange for visiting groups of school children to be dropped off by school bus or coach outside the Travis Perkins Building Supply Company site and escorted to the RWT education centre adjacent. Note that the children are escorted by supervising adults at all times on the road drop off and on the ramp and towpath. This is an existing arrangement and *it is proposed that it be continued for the new facility until such time as the Travis Perkins site is developed. At this point RWT would seek to make a new arrangement with Travis Perkins to allow drop off of their visitors using the new road between the new buildings on that site - see also p.6, Planning History and RWT email 29.03.17.*

The ramp access would only be used for service and maintenance access to the site if required, which is how it is used now to access the other building adjacent to the site.

A key operational requirement for RWT is that the facilities should be accessible to disabled visitors. The current rented room in St Mary's church is at first floor level with no lift access.

Given the requirement to avoid flooding and satisfy Environment Agency requirements, the new building will be raised up above the existing ground levels and therefore ramped access with balustrading and handrails will be provided to comply with Part M of the Building Regulations. Once up at this level all education and ancillary facilities will be accessed on one level, without internal steps or ramps. Specific provisions are:

- wide doors and lobbies for easy access and manoeuvring;
- purpose designed disabled toilet to comply with Part M and Changing Places Consortium guidelines

## Summary

The applicant has sought informal advice from the Three Rivers planning team and from Canal & River Trust and responded to the issues raised. *The issues raised by TRDC have caused the site extents to be rechecked and adjusted and so a new application is being made which illustrates the revised site boundary and addresses the points made by TRDC. It was noted that TRDC did not raise an objection to the principle of the proposed development.*