



Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust

Registered Charity No. 1156812

www.cuct.org.uk

From / Please reply to:

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Planning Department
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Sent by email to: planning@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk

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Dear Sirs

SMD/2021/0536 - Land at Barnfields Industrial Estate, Sunnyhills Road, Leek, Staffordshire, ST13 5RJ: Reserved matters application for approval of appearance, landscaping, layout, and scale to provide: 157 residential dwellings (Class C3) providing a mix of two, three and four bedroom houses, and two bedroom apartments; 6 x live / work units (Sui Generis); 1 x public house / restaurant / café (Sui Generis / Class E(b)); a marina / basin and associated boating facilities with 13 berths; associated works including internal road network, associated highway works, drainage infrastructure, landscaping, open space, play area, pedestrian, and cyclist links; land reserved for future railway station with associated heritage / railway activities building/s and car parking; and land reserved for future link road including associated landscaping. (Pursuant to outline planning permission SMD/2014/0750.)

The Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation with the objectives to restore, preserve, maintain in good order and improve the existing Caldon Canal and all former arms of the Caldon Canal including the branch known as the Uttoxeter Canal for the use and benefit of the public. It came to being as a charity working to deliver the restoration on the Caldon Canal which was achieved, in partnership with others, in 1974. It is a member and delivery organisation within the Churnet Valley Living Landscape Partnership.

The Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust (CUCT) **OBJECTS** to planning application SMD/2021/0536 because the appearance, landscaping, layout, and scale cannot be approved for this site without first providing for a appropriate approach to deliver a feasible “marina / basin and associated boating facilities” (i.e. **waterspace with associated boating facilities connected to the Caldon Canal**).

We understand from the SMDC Regeneration team response that this application should be seen in combination with the application [SMD/2021/0537] to delete and vary four conditions attached to the outline planning permission for the Cornhill Regeneration Project (ref. SMD/2014/0750). CUCT has also responded in detail to SMD/2021/0537, in which the developer of this site seeks to remove the planning conditions regarding the obligation to construct a marina /basin and connect it to the Caldon Canal, stating that it is **not feasible or viable for The Casey Group to commit to fulfilling this obligation**. They go on to say that “the Council is seeking to access Government funding in order to deliver the marina basin as part of a wider package of potential projects in Staffordshire Moorlands.” Application SMD/2020/0552 is also related; it seeks to vary the S106 relating to SMD/2014/0750, again removing the obligation to deliver waterspace and proposing new clauses about how the developer would contribute to this instead.

We believe that every opportunity should be given to enable and support the delivery of a new waterspace project. CUCT has long supported the creation of a canal basin as a **public amenity** for residents and visitors to Leek, having campaigned for this since the early 2000s. Following very successful and widely supported public events at the present terminus of the canal in 2002 and 2004, we were pleased to participate in Leek Canal Corridor Study in 2006 (<https://cuct.org.uk/caldon/leek-canal-corridor-study>) which confirmed the significant opportunities presented by this location. The subsequent recently adopted Local Plan and Churnet Valley Masterplan envisages the opportunity of a canal and railway hub - both significant attractions and destinations in their own rights, but together would be a unique combination in this country.

The role of this location within the site is specified in the Churnet Valley Masterplan which states:

7.3.5 Cornhill Opportunity Site: Cornhill Concept Statement : Accessibility and Connectivity

- Utilise potential of canal to full advantage
- Make provision for a railway station and canal basin and associated car parking and create physical links between these.
- Any development should create physical linkages and sightlines between the on-site development, canal, railway and through sustainable transport links to the town centre.
- Seek opportunities to create walking and cycling routes between the site and Ladderedge Country Park and Birchall Playing Fields.

The preceding **7.33 Key Actions for Leek**, include:

- Development focused on Cornhill in line with Concept Statement
- Re-opening of rail line to Leek and development of canal gateway
- Extend network of off-road paths for walkers, cyclists and horse riders with links to Rudyard and Tittesworth to the north.
- Strengthen sustainable transport links between town centre and Cornhill and to other visitor attractions in the Churnet Valley
- Strengthen links to country parks – Ladderedge and Deep Hayes

All of these anticipated links, accessibility and connectivity will need to be able to take place in the southern, south-to-east axis of the site - the area between the canal/aqueduct/new waterspace land and the railway station land. In the application's proposed site layout this axis indicates it will include the site's main Play Area; it is suggested the location for this be reconsidered – see below.

This application for approval of appearance, landscaping, layout, and scale must also be seen against a background of the developer NOT undertaking

- The project to design in detail, deliver and operate any new waterspace, accessibility facilities and connectivity to the Caldon Canal, including consideration of the restoration of the Grade II listed 1801 aqueduct over the River Churnet;
- The project for the new railway station similarly;
- The detailed connectivity design to the Caldon Canal towpath and neighbouring public footpath, designated National Cycle Network route number 559, and to strengthening the links to Ladderedge and Rudyard.

(<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Transport/cycling/Documents/Cycling-in-Staffordshire-Moorlands-Leek-Issue-5.pdf>)

We suggest that an appropriate approach would be for the planning committee to seek changes, conditions or clauses that enable and support the delivery of the waterspace project and the flexibility to layout the accessibility and connectivity aspired to in the Local Plan. We suggest:

Designation of the south east section of the site as Waterspace / Open Space / Green Infrastructure.

The area linking to the canal and its towpath and routes to Ladderedge, the proposed new waterspace and the land between them and the railway station plus Barnfields Road needs to be set out to enable as much active use, inter-connectivity and accessibility as possible; for instance:

- Walking; hiking groups
- Cycling
- Disabled access for wheelchair and mobility scooter users
- Launching canoes and stand-up paddleboards
- Fishermen carrying equipment
- Groups boarding The Beatrice Charity narrowboat including wheelchair users.

It is suggested that the all the south-eastern area of the site between the canal/aqueduct new waterspace land and the railway station land, be designated to be Open Space for the site and that that this can be factored in to the Council's project looking to deliver feasible new waterspace that is accessible to all. Thus the layout and the design of routes across this space would only be agreed once the required linkages and plans for their management can be determined.

This would be in line with Adopted Local Plan policies in the Churnet Valley Masterplan:

Policy 6: The Spatial Strategy "There will be support for development that provides opportunities for visitors to access, understand and engage with the Churnet Valley's landscape, heritage and nature conservation assets and these opportunities will be well promoted. ... Communities in the area will benefit from improved accessibility and enhancement of the natural environment as well as new employment opportunities."

6.8.4 Transport Corridors and Links: "A comprehensive network of road and off-road routes for all users is to be promoted with links to existing routes and trails e.g. Staffordshire Way, canal towpath, Churnet Valley Railway.

6.8.5 Green Infrastructure, the network of green spaces and natural elements that intersperse and connect the Churnet Valley, including canals.

Children's Play Facilities be relocated

The Proposed site layout places the site's main Play Area at the centre of the above Open Space. If an accessible viable waterspace it to be achieved along with the connectivity envisaged above this would not be the ideal position for a suitably sized Play Area for the site. (Elements of play could be incorporated into the Open Space's surfaces and interpretation.)

The consequence of this would be that the another position within the site layout would need to be identified for the Local Equipped Area for Play. In the approved outline planning (ref. SMD/2014/0750) the play area was positioned in a more central location of the housing development, and not within close proximity of the trees to the south boundary where leaf litter and algae may present a problem to the equipment and specialised surfacing. This is another reason reinforcing the suggestion to designate the south east section of the site as Open Space / Green Infrastructure.

Preliminary Marina Layout is insufficient for the delivery of new waterspace and associated facilities

The proposed site layout indicates how waterspace could be incorporated into the development by including a "preliminary marina layout". Statements from the applicant in the accompanying planning applications indicate that this has been considered as a commercial venture that is not feasible to deliver and operate as such. Hence we strongly suggest providing for an appropriate

approach to deliver a feasible public amenity “basin and associated boating facilities” designed to connect and operate with the Caldon Canal.

It is also stated “It is envisaged that a new footbridge will be constructed, as part of a subsequent application, over the [marina] entrance structure to maintain pedestrian access.” The nature of this is not detailed; detailed design will need to consider future accessibility across the bridge by as many as possible – potentially not just those on foot.

The applicant states, “A run of 2.5 storey properties is also positioned adjacent to the Marina, these units form part of a home zone area which take advantage of the water way views.” However the only detailed design offered for the proposed marina is a boundary treatment of a 2.1 m high metal security fence which will interrupt these views. Similar developments at other canal-side locations have successfully incorporated both long term and visitor moorings within a public open, welcoming environment without high security fencing, e.g. Market Harborough, Brecon, Aylesbury, Gloucester. It is suggested that the applicant supports the improvement of the waterway views for these house by helping address the concerns raised in our responses.

No technical and environmental consideration is given to the extent of boater’s facilities that could be provided to encourage boaters to visit Leek. Fresh Water, electrical supply, electric-boat charging, elsan disposal and refuse & recycling point. The overall services for the site need to allow for these to be made available alongside future waterspace.

When the planning committee considers the planning application(s) we urge it again to consider the need for conditions in the light of needing to plan for not a commercially-operated mooring marina but a mooring basin that is part of the site’s public realm, has agreed connectivity with the Caldon Canal and is accessible to the public and boaters of all types. *Thus this will need to allow for working in partnership with navigation authority Canal and River Trust where the site should be introduced via the Enterprise Manager for Staffordshire as an opportunity to improve the Caldon Canal and create a destination that can be developed to be sustainable and contribute to wider well-being - rather than be submitted for a commercial agreement.*

It is noted that circa 104 parking spaces will be created to the southern eastern boundary, associated with land reserved for future railway station, and subject to a future planning application. It is envisaged that this parking will also serve the marina [waterspace] and will be sign posted to ensure appropriate usage.

In conclusion, we must object to the application as currently proposed and request that due consideration is given to our concerns and suggestions. We urge the planning team and committee to work with the applicant to devise an approach that will enable the design of an accessible basin that will deliver a distinct sense of place, reconnect Leek to its canal and with the railway offer a unique gateway to the Churnet Valley - which will add enormously to the Staffordshire Moorlands facilities and offer for its residents and the tourism economy.

Yours sincerely

Julie Arnold
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Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust