

A11

F/TH/13/0980

PROPOSAL: Change of use of tunnels to provide visitor attraction (D2 use class) and alterations to include installation of metal entrance gates, creation of vehicular access, parking provision and landscaping works.

LOCATION: REDUNDANT RAILWAY TUNNELS, MARINA ESPLANADE, RAMSGATE

WARD: Eastcliff

AGENT: Mr K Read

APPLICANT: Ramsgate Heritage Regeneration Trust Ltd

RECOMMENDATION: **Approve**

Subject to the following conditions:

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

GROUND:

In accordance with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

- 2 The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the submitted plans dated 3rd December, 23rd December 2013 and 11th February 2014.

GROUND:

To secure the proper development of the area.

- 3 Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, shall secure the implementation of a watching brief to be undertaken by an archaeologist approved by the Local Planning Authority so that the excavation is observed and items of interest and finds are recorded. The watching brief shall be in accordance with a written programme and specification, which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

GROUND:

To ensure that features of archaeological interest are properly examined and recorded in accordance with Policies HE11 and HE12 of the Thanet Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 4 Prior to the first use of the development, the area shown on the deposited plan for the parking and manoeuvring of vehicles shall be operational prior to any part of the development hereby approved being brought into use. The area agreed shall thereafter be maintained for that purpose.

GROUND:

In the interests of highway safety

INFORMATIVE:

The applicant is advised that this planning permission does not convey any approval for construction of the required vehicular crossing, or any other works within the highway for which a statutory licence must be obtained. Applicants should contact Kent County Council- Highways and Transportation (web: www.kent.gov.uk/roads-transport.aspx or telephone: 03000418181) in order to obtain the necessary application pack. Before the development hereby approved is commenced, all necessary highway approvals and consents shall be obtained where required to avoid enforcement action being taken by the Highway Authority.

SITE, LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The section of tunnels run along underneath Victoria Road and part of Bellevue Road, with a section also underneath Marina Road, and an access point at ground level on Marina Esplanade. Two current blocked access points in Arklow Square and on Boundary Road are also included.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

The railway tunnel opened in 1863, and was closed to mainline traffic in 1926. It was then opened as a scenic railway in 1935, and was closed in 1968. The tunnels have been redundant ever since.

There is no relevant planning history for the site.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposal is to re-open the tunnels to allow for public access in the form of walking guided tours through the tunnels. It will be a visitor attraction, with video and audio installations, historic furniture, and visitor guide talks along the route.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES**Thanet Local Plan**

D1 – Design
EC8 - Ramsgate Waterfront
T1 - Tourist Facilities
TR16 - Car Parking Provision

NOTIFICATIONS

Neighbouring occupiers have been notified and a site notice has been posted. No objections have been received from this notification.

Ramsgate Town Council - Resolved that Ramsgate Town Council fully supports this much needed visitor attraction in the town of Ramsgate.

CONSULTATIONS

KCC Highways - No objections.

KCC Structures Management - Request that the following points to be addressed before the tunnels are opened for tours: A detailed structural/geotechnical inspection and condition report is provided to the Highway Authority demonstrating that the tunnels are stable and continue to provide safe support to the public highway; details of the proposed structural/geotechnical inspection regime necessary to demonstrate that the tunnels will continue to provide safe support of the public highway; all additional barriers installed within the tunnels shall include lockable gates to allow access for inspection and maintenance; the application indicates that it is proposed that the tunnels will be handed over from Thanet District Council to Ramsgate (Heritage Regeneration) Trust Ltd. The applicant shall either confirm that the tunnels are to remain owned by Thanet District Council, or will demonstrate that the Trust will have sufficient income from its assets to fund not only the running of the tours and day to day maintenance costs but also their obligations to inspect and maintain the tunnels.

KCC Senior Archaeological Officer - Thoroughly supports the raising of awareness of the historic importance of these tunnels. The proposed works towards the Marina Esplanade area may encounter archaeological remains because some of the Roman remains have been located c.100m to the north. I also suggest that 19th or 20th century features of interest may be encountered throughout the works, such as interesting fixtures and fittings, former workings or cultural material. In view of the range of heritages sites here, I suggest that it would be useful to have a formal watching brief maintained during works.

KCC Biodiversity Officer - We have reviewed the ecological information and are satisfied that there is limited potential for the site to be used by hibernating bats.

Southern Water - No objections.

Environment Agency - Have assessed the application as having a low environmental risk, therefore they have no comments to make.

Contaminated Land Officer - No objections, but would recommend a condition requesting the use of personal gas monitors during the tour.

COMMENTS

This application has been brought before members as Thanet District Council is the owner of the land.

Principle

The proposed change of use to allow public access is supported by Policy T1 of the Thanet Local Plan, which supports development that will extend the range of tourist facilities, and increase the attraction of tourists to the area. The proposal is also supported by Policy EC8 of the Thanet Local Plan, which supports development for tourism on land adjacent to Ramsgate Harbour. The proposed change of use is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle.

Character and Appearance

The proposal incorporates the erection of new metal entrance gates to the tunnel. The gates will be set just inside the tunnel entrance and will extend the full height and width of the tunnel entrance for security reasons. The gates are simple in design, and bear reference to the historic use of the tunnels for a railway line, whilst also advertising the presence of the tunnels. The gates are considered to be of an acceptable design, and will have a positive impact on the character and appearance of the area, in accordance with Policy D1 of the Thanet Local Plan and the NPPF.

Highway Safety

The plans show the provision of 4no. car parking spaces to the front of the site, along with an area that can be used for the parking of motorcycles. Two of the spaces are shown as tandem spaces, with the front car parking space to be used for staff only. KCC Highways raise no objections to the proposed scheme subject to the provision and permanent retention of the vehicle parking spaces as shown on the submitted plans. The impact on highway safety is therefore considered to be acceptable.

Health and Safety

The Environmental Protection Manager has inspected the tunnels, and raises no objections to the proposed scheme. He requests, however, that a safeguarding condition be attached regarding gas monitoring during guided tours, which should be alarmed for hydrogen sulphide, carbon monoxide, methane and oxygen. With respect to the report into findings of Contamination Surveys it is noted that there is a requirement for a licensed company to remove Asbestos in accordance with Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 and for the creation of a robust and relevant Asbestos Management Plan. Structures Management at Kent County Council recommend that a detailed structural/geotechnical inspection and condition report is provided to the Highway Authority demonstrating that the tunnels are stable and continue to provide safe support to the public highway. These are considered to be operational matters for the owner of the land, and are not material planning considerations relevant in the determination of this application.

It is intended that a lease will be granted, under which responsibility for the safety of visitors to the tunnels with regards to gas monitoring, asbestos management and structural stability within the tunnels will rest with the applicant, who will need to put in place appropriate public liability insurance cover together with measures to ensure public safety. The applicant will also be required to comply with all relevant health and safety statutes in relation to the area in question.

Ecology

The KCC Ecology Officer originally raised concerns that no ecology information had been submitted with the application, particularly whether there would be any impact on hibernating bats.

A hibernation check has since been carried out by a member of Kent Bat Group, who advised that no bats were found. He further advised that this is likely to be due to the temperature record throughout the tunnel, which ranged from 10 to 12C, which is too high for hibernating organisms. He concluded that the warm internal temperature in the tunnel and paucity of bat feeding habitat throughout the Isle of Thanet means the likelihood of the railway tunnel being used as a hibernation site for bats is negligible.

The KCC Ecology Officer has responded that they are satisfied that there is limited

potential for the site to be used by hibernating bats, but encourages the applicant to carry out additional bat hibernation surveys if the internal temperature within the tunnels were to change.

Other Matters

The Senior Archaeology Office at KCC considers the proposal to be a wonderful heritage project and an excellent scheme. She thoroughly supports the raising of awareness of the historic importance of these tunnels. They are part of the development of Ramsgate as a 19th and early 20th century leisure resort and part of the industrial heritage too. The proposed works towards the Marina Esplanade area may encounter archaeological remains because some of the Roman remains have been located c.100m to the north. She also suggests that 19th or 20th century features of interest may be encountered throughout the works, such as interesting fixtures and fittings, former workings or cultural material. In view of the range of heritages sites here, she suggests that it would be useful to have a formal watching brief maintained during works.

Conclusion

The proposed change of use will support tourism in Ramsgate. There are no detrimental impacts on highway safety or the character and appearance of the area. It is therefore recommended that Members approve the application.

Case Officer

Emma Fibbens

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ESPLANADE, RAMSGATE

