
Committee Date:	09/07/2015	Application Number:	2015/03066/PA
Accepted:	21/04/2015	Application Type:	Full Planning
Target Date:	21/07/2015		
Ward:	Longbridge		

Land at Longbridge West, North of Bristol Road South, Longbridge, Birmingham

River infrastructure works, reprofiling of river banks, footpath/cycleway including bridge and landscaping (Including temporary river realignment)

Applicant: St Modwen Developments Ltd
c/o Agent
Agent: Planning Prospects Ltd
4 Mill Pool, Nash Lane, Belbroughton, Worcestershire, DY9 9AF

Recommendation

Approve Subject To Conditions

1. Proposal

- 1.1. Planning permission is sought for river infrastructure works, reprofiling of river banks, footpath/cycleway including bridge and landscaping (Including temporary river realignment). The works are being undertaken as part of bringing forward the adjacent site for the Royal College of Defence Medicine (RCDM) (which is currently awaiting determination), as well as the wider re-development of the land west of the A38.
- 1.2. The proposals seek to re-instate a more naturalised (1:2 slope) bank, with landscaping, removing the existing hard engineered structures for approximately 220m of the river. The new channel would run within/just to the north of the existing channel. It would be complemented with a new 6m wide and lit, riverside cycle-walkway running alongside the Rea's northern bank, approximately 6m to the north of the new bank top. The path would be half a two-way cycle path, and half for pedestrians. The path would be made of resin-bound gravel. The path would extend under the A38, to Austin Park. A 4m wide, wooden bridge connecting the southern to northern river bank is also proposed to allow cycle and pedestrian access to the A38 and RCDM site, with a short pathway spur leading up from the river to the A38. The bridge would be just to the west of the A38. New tree planting is indicated along the length of the path, and next to the path spur linking to the A38.
- 1.3. In order to construct new river banks, a temporary (circa one year) diversion of the River alignment into Longbridge West directly to the north is required. This would carry river flows whilst works within the former channel are undertaken. The temporary route arcs to the north, which the northern edge of the red-edged site describes. Apart from the construction works, the one year period would allow controlled flows in the new channel to allow vegetation to establish.

- 1.4. The works to the River Rea form part of the longer term plan for the River Rea corridor which has already seen the river de-culverted through the Longbridge North site, and within Austin Park.
- 1.5. The application is supported by a Planning Statement; Design Report; Flood Risk Assessment; Drainage Strategy; Ecological Appraisal; Tree Survey and Arboricultural Assessment and a Geo-Environmental Summary Report.
- 1.6. Site area: 1.22 hectares.

[Link to Documents](#)

2. Site & Surroundings

- 2.1. The site is located to the west and immediately opposite the new Longbridge Town Centre; Bournville College, Austin Park, recent housing developments along Lickey Road and the new Extra-care development.
- 2.2. The River Rea runs alongside the site for which planning permission is sought for an RCDM building (reference 2015/03064/PA). Formerly this site was used for the Bournville College Construction Centre; however this building has subsequently been demolished and relocated to a site off Devon Way in Longbridge, within the Longbridge Technology Park.

[Site Location Map](#)

3. Planning History

Includes:

- 3.1. Awaiting determination. 2015/03064/PA. Erection of secure serviced residential accommodation (Use Class C2A) for defence medicine personnel, access, parking, landscaping and associated infrastructure.
- 3.2. 19 March 2015. 2014/09425/PA. Outline planning permission granted with all matters reserved for future consideration granted for the erection of up to 10,040 sqm offices (B1), access, parking, landscaping and associated development infrastructure.
- 3.3. 21 January 2015. 2014/07124/PA. Temporary planning permission granted for the creation of a temporary car park with 209 parking bays for a period of 18 months. Permission granted until 31 December 2015.
- 3.4. 18 September 2014. 2014/04442/PA. Planning permission granted for the development of an extra care village comprising 260 units and village centre in a 5 storey building with associated car parking, roads and landscaping.
- 3.5. 7 August 2014. 2013/09229/PA. Planning permission granted for Retail and service development (A1, A3 and A5) comprising 14,832sqm (GEA) anchor store, retail units of 4,383sqm (GEA), restaurant/takeaway pavilion building of 589sqm (GEA), erection of multi storey car park of 1216 spaces and surface level car park of 500 spaces, access, landscaping and associated works.

- 3.6. 21 June 2012. 2012/02283/PA. Planning permission granted for Recreational park including alterations to river alignment, new bridge, pedestrian cycle bridge, footpaths, hard & soft landscaping and associated river & drainage infrastructure works.
- 3.7. 9 September 2011. 2011/00773/PA. Planning permission granted for mixed use development comprising new superstore, shops (A1), Financial and Professional (A2), Restaurants/Cafes (A3), Public Houses (A4) and Hot Food Takeaways (A5), Offices (B1a), 40 residential apartments, hotel, new public park, associated parking and service infrastructure and new highway access from Longbridge Lane and Lickey Road.
- 3.8. 17 April 2009. 2008/06456/PA. Planning permission granted for Development of a college facility (Class D1), with associated landscaping, parking and access arrangements.

4. Consultation/PP Responses

- 4.1. Local residents, Ward Councillors, MP and Resident Associations notified. Site and press notice posted. No response received.
- 4.2. Environment Agency – No objection subject to a safeguarding condition relating to the development being undertaken in accordance with the River Rea Infrastructure Design report.
- 4.3. Drainage – This planning application does not require a Sustainable Drainage Assessment of Sustainable Drainage Operation or Maintenance Plan. No Conditions to Apply. It would be expected that a SuDS Assessment and SuDS O&M plan be received with the complimenting planning application for the serviced accommodation and car parking.
- 4.4. Regulatory Services – No objection.
- 4.5. Network Rail – No comments to make.
- 4.6. City Ecologist – No objection subject to safeguarding conditions relating to bird/bat boxes, ecological mitigation and management plan.
- 4.7. Transportation – comments awaited.

5. Policy Context

- 5.1. Longbridge Area Action Plan, UDP, Draft Birmingham Development Plan, NPPF, NPPG, Car Parking Guidelines SPD. Places for All SPD.

6. Planning Considerations

- 6.1. The application site sits within the Longbridge Area Action Plan (AAP) framework, which forms part of the Development Plan for the purposes of determining planning applications. The AAP contains a shared vision for Longbridge:

"Longbridge will undergo major transformational change redeveloping the former car plant and surrounding area into an exemplar sustainable, employment led mixed use development for the benefit of the local community, Birmingham, Bromsgrove, the region and beyond. It will deliver new jobs, houses, community,

leisure and educational facilities as well as providing an identifiable and accessible new heart for the area. All development will embody the principles of sustainability, sustainable communities and inclusiveness. At the heart of the vision is a commitment to high quality design that can create a real sense of place with a strong identity and distinctive character. All of this will make it a place where people will want to live, work, visit and invest and which provides a secure and positive future for local people."

- 6.2. The MG Rover plant closed in April 2005. Preparation of the AAP commenced in April 2006 and was adopted in April 2009. St Modwen and Advantage West Midlands assisted in developing the AAP along with Bromsgrove District Council and Worcestershire County Council. The aim of the AAP is to create an urban eco-centre *"delivering 10,000 jobs, a minimum of 1450 houses, new education facilities, retailing, leisure, community and recreation uses underpinned by quality public transport and infrastructure"*.
- 6.3. Very significant development and regeneration has already taken place at Longbridge, following the site remediation carried out by the site owners. A new town centre has been delivered, which to date comprises Bournville College, various retail developments including a Sainsbury's supermarket, leisure uses, 3,240sq.m of B1a offices, and a new urban park of 0.99 ha. A large new Marks and Spencer and other retail development has been granted planning permission and is currently under construction. North of Longbridge Lane is the two-thirds completed Technology Park, the new youth centre, and the recently completed re-located Bournville Construction College. 132 dwellings have been provided on Lickey Road and residential development is progressing on the former East Works site in Bromsgrove District along with employment development on the Cofton Centre.

Policy

- 6.4. Paragraph 109 of the NPPF identifies that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by *"recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services and minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures."*
- 6.5. The NPPF goes further and states in Paragraph 117, that planning policies should *"promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations"*.
- 6.6. Paragraph 3.38 of the UDP identifies that *"the retention and enhancement of existing tree cover, hedgerows, wildlife habitats and geological features will be supported in order to ensure that the natural heritage of an area is not lost."*
- 6.7. The application site sits within the Regional Employment Site on the former MG West Works site covered under Policy RIS1. The river corridor is covered under Policy OS2a – Linear Open Space Walkway which states *"Development of two major linear open space walkways and cycleways through the site – opening up the River Rea and River Arrow, with associated enhancements to wildlife habitats, landscaping and the provision of cycle and pedestrian routes along the walkways and good quality links to the wider area. Proposals should create a recreational resource; contribute positively to biodiversity and recognise the historic and archaeological value."*

- 6.8. The policy then deals with each river corridor in turn and specifically for the River Rea states *“enhancement of the open channel including improvements to the profile and beds. The River Rea through West Works will also continue to be protected and enhanced as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation.....Good quality attractive and safe landscaped/open space walkways and cycle routes to be provided alongside the whole length of the river including the link across the A38 to the local centre.”*
- 6.9. I consider that the works to the River Rea and its banks adjacent to the RCDM application site and running into North Works along with works to provide improved ecological benefits and a pedestrian footpath/cycleway are in accordance with both national and local policy.
- Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy
- 6.10. A Flood Risk Assessment has been submitted as part of the planning application for both the RCDM application and this submission. The assessment identifies that the works proposed to the river corridor in order to restore it from an engineered channel to a natural channel would represent an environmental enhancement and betterment in line with the requirements of the NPPF and the Water Framework Directive.
- 6.11. In relation to the proposed river works, the assessment states that the proposed river channel profile has been subject to hydraulic modelling to ensure that the hydraulic performance and flood extents of the River Rea remain unchanged. The proposed shared pedestrian/cycle bridge has been designed to span the river providing a 600mm gap between the soffit and peak water level to ensure that flood flows are not impeded, and therefore flood risk minimised.
- 6.12. The assessment concludes that the proposals would continue the wildlife corridor throughout the wider Longbridge site, enhancing the ecological value of the site and providing access to the public. It finally concludes that the wider benefits of the river works outweigh any short term adverse impacts involved as part of wider site developments.
- 6.13. The Environment Agency has raised no objections to the proposed river works subject to safeguarding conditions. I concur with their view and relevant safeguarding conditions are recommended.

Contaminated Land

- 6.14. The accompanying Geo-Environmental report has assessed both the RCDM site and the River Rea South and North Banks. In relation to the South Bank, the report identifies the site as being made ground comprising varying proportions of sand, gravel silt and clay sized fractions with plastic, brick and concrete fragments below which were deposits of alluvium. In relation to the north bank (location of the proposed walkway), the ground consists of sand and gravel with ash, brick and concrete underlain by weathered sandstone.
- 6.15. Surface water samples were collected during the investigative works which had no elevated levels of recorded contaminants in them.
- 6.16. Regulatory Services has raised no objection to the proposed works and I concur with this view.

Trees

- 6.17. A tree survey has been undertaken of the trees falling within the boundary of the proposed river works. 8 individual trees were surveyed comprising of Willow, Ash, Common Alder and Crack Willow along with four groups of trees. The four groups included Sycamore, Hawthorn, Ash, Cherry, Goat Willow, Crack Willow, Bay Willow, Holly, Lilac, Norway Maple, Hazel, Apple and Elm. Of the eight individual trees, 2 fell within 'B' category, 3 within 'C' category and 3 within 'U' category. Three groups were classified as B and C trees. The application proposes the removal of the 3 Category 'U' trees that were identified as Willow, Common Alder and Crack Willow.
- 6.18. My Arboricultural Officer has raised no objection to the loss of the three trees identified and has recommended safeguarding conditions relating to tree protection and implementation.

Ecology

- 6.19. An ecological appraisal is submitted in support of the planning application following field surveys which took place in November 2014 and February 2015. The report identifies that the site lies within the Natural England defined Midlands Plateau Natural Area, which possesses a diverse nature conservation resource although the area is essentially urban. The River Rea itself, including the application site, is designated as a Wildlife Corridor.
- 6.20. The site comprises a road bridge (A38) constructed from a combination of brick, concrete and metal girders; an area of species-poor semi-improved grassland as banktop vegetation; woodland and scrub; scattered trees and short perennial vegetation. The river comprises the following:
- 4m in width channel;
 - Trapezoidal bank profile, with steep bank at 90 degrees to the river channel and approximately 3m high;
 - Reinforced banks for all of the northern bank;
 - Channel substrate comprises silt and sand with scattered debris;
 - Heavily shaded channel with dense bankside vegetation with no in-channel or marginal vegetation present.
- 6.21. In relation to fauna, the survey found that there was no evidence for the presence of bats during the survey within the site; no evidence of badgers were found within the site and that there is limited suitable habitat; no evidence of water voles was identified and the reinforced banks and dense shading make it unsuitable for them.
- 6.22. The report identifies that the proposed works would have a beneficial impact on the ecological value of the corridor by the:
- Removal of two areas of concrete reinforcement;
 - Re grading of the river bank in areas to provide a safe slope and a variety of marginal habitats for aquatic and wetland species;
 - Flow deflectors in the channel to encourage flow diversification and the accumulation of material to form additional habitat features;
 - Selective removal of scrub and trees from the areas of re-graded bank, to reduce shading of the river; and
 - Other trees would be selectively pruned or coppiced.
- 6.23. Mitigation and enhancement measures identified in the report comprise:
- Impacts on the river should be minimised by employing good construction management practices;

- Preparation of a management plan for the enhancement and management of the river;
- Retained trees should be protected by barriers and/or ground protection;
- A pre-construction check for active badger setts within 100m of piling operations and 30m of working footprint should be undertaken;
- Consultation with an ecologist prior to structural or lighting changes to the A38 road bridge to determine potential for roosting bats;
- Consultation with an ecologist prior to felling of trees to determine potential for roosting bats; and
- Site clearance/tree works should be undertaken outside of bird breeding season (March to August).

6.24. The City Ecologist identifies that the River Rea at this point, due to its location within the former Rover factory site, was previously out of view for much of its length and is contained within a modified channel, some sections having concrete walls. The brook course is also heavily shaded in places. The combination of these factors will have reduced the ecological value of this section and limited the connectivity between nature conservation sites both up and downstream. However there is a good opportunity to improve and enhance this section to provide a greater connectivity between these more natural sections, upstream at Rubery Great Park and downstream at Daffodil Park. Overall the proposed work would improve the ecological value of the river channel.

6.25. Safeguarding conditions are recommended by the City Ecologist relating to ecological enhancement measures, bird and bat boxes and a nature conservation management plan and these conditions are recommended below. Specific issues relating to Kingfishers and Grey wagtail, plant species for the proposed bank seeding and bird/bat boxes have been forwarded to the applicant so that they can be included within an application for the agreement of condition details.

6.26. I note the comments made by the City Ecologist and I consider that the proposals would have a significant benefit on the ecology and biodiversity of the River Rea channel in this area and would improve connectivity along the River from Rubery Great Park through the former West Works site and into the new town centre park.

7. Conclusion

7.1. The site is located within the AAP linear open space walkway. As such, the proposed development is acceptable in principle and accords with the land use allocation policies of the Longbridge AAP. The proposal would see changes to the existing river banks to establish a natural bank that would have significant ecological benefits to the corridor for both flora and fauna. The creation of a link to this part of the corridor both under the A38 into Longbridge North and the new town centre park and up onto the A38 itself would improve connectivity both into and through the wide Longbridge site and to the wider river corridor to the north and south of Longbridge. Cycling and walking access would be provided for existing and future residents and employees in the area, and I consider the design and landscaping to be appropriate. On this basis, I consider the proposal to be in accordance with both national and local policies relating to protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

7.2. I note that the key principle in the NPPF is the presumption in favour of sustainable development and this is identified as having three stems of economic, social and environmental. As the proposal would continue to support the wider site redevelopment with its associated significant economic and social benefits, support

the provision of further local employment on the allocated RIS site on West Works and would have a positive and significant environmental benefit, I consider the proposal to be sustainable development and on this basis, should be approved.

8. Recommendation

8.1. That planning permission is approved subject to the conditions listed below.

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| 1 | Requires the scheme to be in accordance with the listed approved plans |
| 2 | Requires the prior submission of a method statement for works in the river channel/bank |
| 3 | Requires the prior submission of a programme, method statement and arrangements for the temporary river alignment |
| 4 | Requires the prior submission of a scheme for ecological/biodiversity/enhancement measures |
| 5 | Requires the prior submission of details of bird/bat boxes |
| 6 | Requires the prior submission of a habitat/nature conservation management plan |
| 7 | Requires the prior submission of hard and/or soft landscape details |
| 8 | Requires the prior submission of hard surfacing materials |
| 9 | Requires the prior submission of a lighting scheme |
| 10 | Requires the prior submission of a CCTV scheme |
| 11 | Development to be in accordance with the River Rea Infrastructure Design Report |
| 12 | Retained Trees - Protection |
| 13 | Limits the approval to 3 years (Full) |
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Case Officer: Pam Brennan

Photo(s)

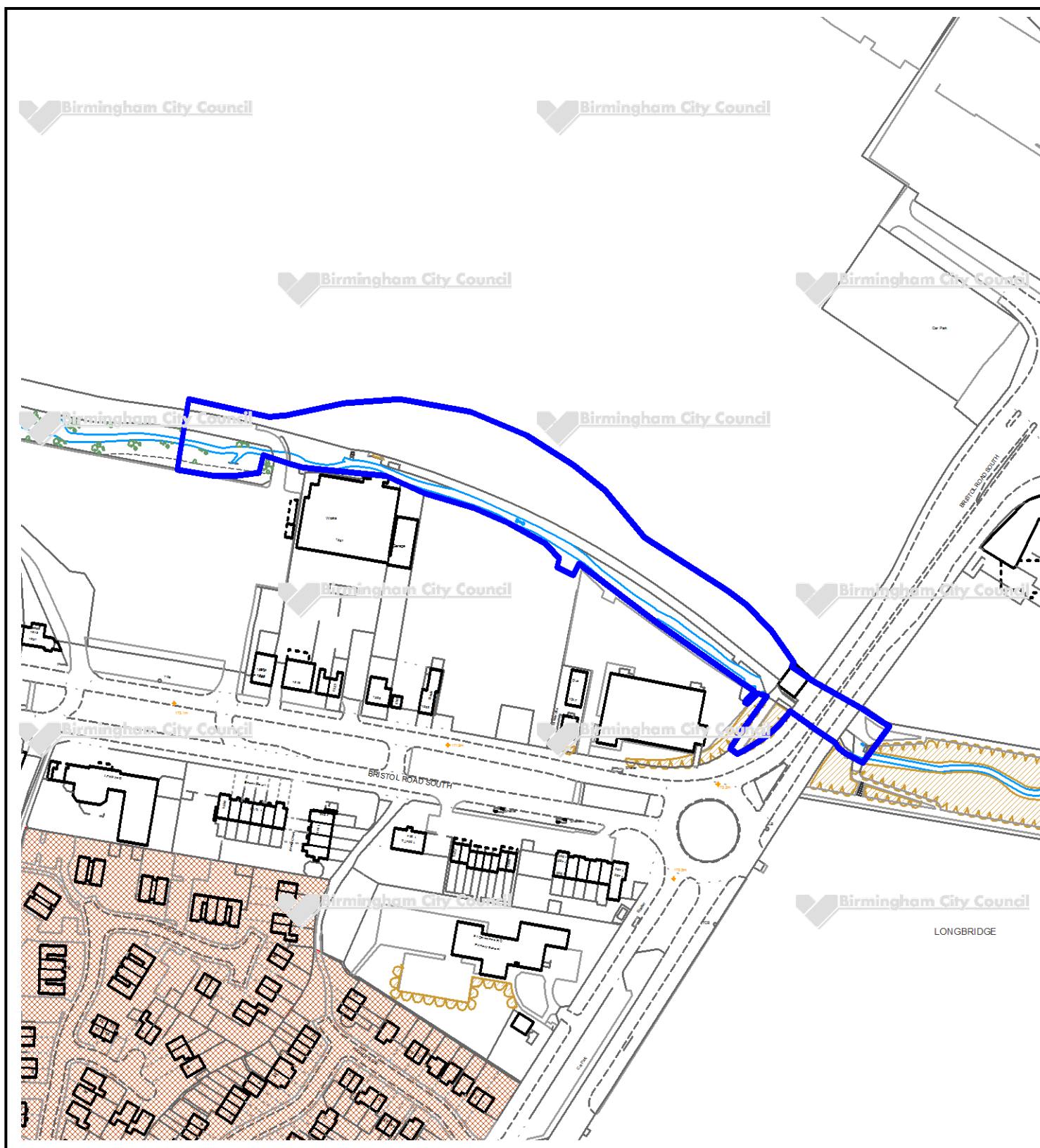


View of RCDM site, river channel and under road bridge access



View of River Channel from Road Bridge on Bristol Road South

Location Plan



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