

Kevin Caldicott, Oxford City Council Tree Officer: response to press enquiry

The scheme as proposed initially retained a deodar cedar near to the Micro-Hydro generator. Although the deodar cedar is quite large, it is a low quality specimen being multi-stemmed and therefore having poor structural form. It is not very well suited to its location, being out of character with the riparian environment.

The proximity of the proposed generator to the deodar cedar tree is such that the roots of the cedar tree are likely to be disturbed during construction. Depending on the nature and extent of the root damage incurred, this is likely to require the tree to be removed during or sometime soon after the construction of the generator if it were retained.

Rather than recommending that the Council should refuse planning permission because of the potentially harmful effects on the tree, or that the applicant should re-design an otherwise acceptable development to avoid the potentially harmful effects on the tree, I've advised the deodar cedar should be removed and a new native tree, which is more suitable for the river side location, should be planted to mitigate the loss. This appears to me to be a positive approach that will best serve amenity in the area in the long term.

In response, the applicant has amended the proposal to remove the deodar cedar and replace it with a native black poplar. I have some concern about whether or not there is enough space for that particular species. But if planning permission is granted it will be subject to a condition that will require a detailed landscape plan to be submitted for approval and this will enable officers to consider the species selection more closely and agree the details before planting takes place.

The proposals also include the removal of other existing trees including a Lawson's cypress, a sycamore and a crap apple tree. I do not object to the removal of these trees if new planting is undertaken to mitigate the effect on visual amenity in the area following construction of the generator. Details of the trees and shrubs that will need to be planted will be agreed with the applicant if planning permission is granted.

WOCORE Press Lines

1. The original application has been amended to take account of the Tree Officer's view:
 - that we can't keep the tree and do the development
 - that anyway it is not a good specimen or native
 - that it would be good to take the opportunity to replace with something more appropriate
2. We were disappointed about this because had really hoped to keep the tree.
3. We have not amended the application to move the scheme - we want to keep it butted up as close as possible to the Buck Gates.
4. We have to move to EA timings on replacing the Buck Gates, so have to raise the money by May.
5. We will not go ahead unless it is financially viable.
6. We have been working on this for 12 years and if we can't move with the EA we will have lost the scheme entirely.
7. We will have no impact on navigation because the Abstraction Licence sets out an operating regime to ensure that the river levels are maintained at the right level to allow navigation under Osney Bridge but keeping enough water in the river for ecological reasons. There is no diversion of flow or increase in flow to allow the schemes to operate so there is no 'extra flow' that boaters have to deal with.
8. It is not overkill to develop two hydro schemes in close proximity to each other (Mill and Lock) because the flow of water is there. The two schemes together generate a very small part of West Oxford's total demand and we need to exploit all the opportunities we can if we are to reduce our carbon footprint and secure our energy future.