

Speculative “Blind” Approval and a Structural Collapse Risk

I am lodging this Objection as supplementary, and in addition, to my previous Objections. The documentation submitted for this Avon riverbank conversion is shockingly speculative and presents a real threat to the local environment and structural safety of the building.

What is being marketed as a "conversion" is, in reality, a high-risk gamble that may result in a catastrophic structural failure, possibly forcing a total rebuild of the asset. Approving this application in its current state sets a dangerous precedent, allowing a designated building of historical interest to be put at immediate risk based on assumptions.

The applicant has completely failed to meet the mandatory prerequisite, explicitly set out by the Wiltshire Council Conservation Officer (Heritage Statement - May 2024 Clause 1.7) during the pre-application stage, who demanded proof that significant rebuilding would NOT be required. Yet, by submitting a proposal entirely devoid of specialised structural surveys, trial pits, cross sections or engineering calculations, the applicant is asking the Council for a blind approval.

Instead of a valid professional, evaluation and conversion plan, the applicant is relying on guesswork and hiding massive structural risks behind that guesswork:

- **Speculative "Blind" Approvals:** Both the Design and Planning Statements make assumptions about the features to be either retained or demolished. They are littered with such words and phrases as “expectation”, “likely”, “perhaps”, “where suitable”, “wherever possible”, and “where possible”. The most concerning being those associated with the scope of necessary work to the East and South walls which cannot be assessed with any confidence purely because they are entirely or partially buried under thick ivy and other vegetation. The Council cannot safely approve structural works on old cob walls that cannot even be seen.
- **A Rebuild Masked as a Conversion:** The applicant explicitly notes an "expectation" that a large section of the East elevation is past repair. Their solution is to tear it down and replace it with modern timber boarding. This is a partial demolition and a major modern rebuild, completely invalidating the policy requirements for a genuine, historic building conversion.
- **Catastrophic Riverbank Failure Risks:** The Old Forge sits directly on the banks of the River Avon. Cob architecture is highly sensitive to water tables. Yet, the applicant proposes to dig up the floor, "perhaps" underpin the structure, and cut new openings into walls of unknown stability, without submitting a single specialised structural survey or any basic cross-section drawings to show how they will do this safely without causing a total collapse on the river bank.
- **Heavy internal Changes:** The plans try to squeeze a new kitchen, living space and an entire independent, timber framed, mezzanine gallery into a delicate old workshop without considering the constitution of the existing floor or the effects of excavating it and subsequently installing a new limecrete floor with glapor sub-base. Again there are no expert

drawings or engineering proof that the ground or the remaining structure can handle these new loads,

The Council is effectively being asked to sign a blank cheque to potentially destroy a piece of local history through an unquantified, dangerous construction project that risks a catastrophic wall collapse into the River Avon. This proposal relies entirely on assumptions where absolute technical certainty is required.

The application must be roundly refused until the applicant provides the bare minimum of:

- **A specialised structural survey** conducted by an accredited company specialising in cob-walled buildings of this vintage, carried out only after the ivy and restrictive vegetation have been fully cleared.
- **A full structural appraisal** by a Chartered Structural Engineer (preferably with historic building accreditation) proving the floor and sub-base can safely handle the mezzanine loads.
- **Comprehensive structural cross-sections** and a phased methodology statement detailing exactly how the building and the riverbank will be protected during construction.