

Application No: 11/4001M

Location: JODRELL BANK OBSERVATORY, HOLMES CHAPEL ROAD, LOWER WITHINGTON, CHESHIRE, SK11 9DL

Proposal: ERECTION OF A SINGLE STOREY OFFICE BUILDING, CAR PARKING, CYCLE PARKING AND ASSOCIATED WORKS

Applicant: University of Manchester

Expiry Date: 02-Feb-2012

**Date Report Prepared: 9 December 2011**

**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION** Approve subject to conditions and satisfactory completion of Section 106 Agreement

#### **MAIN ISSUES**

- Impact upon character and appearance of the site and the rural character of the area
- Impact upon setting of Grade I listed telescope structure
- Green Travel Planning
- Heads of Terms for a Legal Agreement concerning Travel Plan

#### **REASON FOR REPORT**

This is an application for a small scale major development of international importance and significance. Given this significance and the location of the application site and the need to consider the application in the light of two Local Plans, it is considered appropriate that the application be considered by the Strategic Planning Board.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT**

The application site comprises the Jodrell Bank Telescope (and smaller associated telescopes) and the Jodrell Bank educational/office buildings (1950s) arranged generally in a courtyard around the main telescope. A Visitor Centre and Admissions building/café has been developed on the site in the last few months. At the same time, the main visitor car park has been extended and now incorporates fully laid out car parking for in excess of 150 cars. The site is an isolated site within open countryside and accessed via Bomish Lane. There are some isolated dwellings nearby with the closest being a farmhouse some 200m to the west of the telescope.

The Jodrell Bank site is located partly within the administrative area of the former Macclesfield Borough ( the main car park for the site and the arboretum) whilst the existing buildings and telescope structures are located within the former borough of Congleton.

Given that the development area is located in the administrative area of the Congleton Local Plan, this application falls to be considered in the light of this policy framework, with the Macclesfield Plan being an important material consideration.

In land use zoning terms the entire site in Macclesfield is located within countryside beyond the green belt and in Congleton the land use plan indicates that the telescope area is located within an areas of open countryside.

The general area is extensively rural. The site of the telescope, visitor centre and associated buildings, areas of hardstanding for car parking are set in an isolated position on flat land within the Cheshire Plain, well away from any settlement. The Jodrell Bank site itself is characterised by the imposing Grade I telescope, smaller telescopes, associated educational 1950 and 1960's buildings and structures, extensive car park, recently development visitor centre/admissions building and arboretum planted by Sir Bernard Lovell as part of the original development of the site. The main telescope dominates the skyline for many miles around.

## **DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

This application concerns a purpose built, single storey office building of circa 1,215 square metre floorspace located circa 100 metres to the south of the Lovell Telescope. The building is of a 'space age' design in the form of a flat roofed 'Y ' shaped building of 4m maximum height which utilises a metal roof and external facings utilising extensive areas of metal cladding, curtain wall glazing and brise soleil/solar shading panels.

The building is intended as a dedicated office/research establishment for the Square Kilometre Array Project. Ultimately 65 scientists and ancillary staff will be located for the duration of the project.

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

10/0875M - Erection Of Two Buildings To Provide New Visitor Facilities And Associated Works – permission granted 24 April 2010

## **POLICIES**

### **Regional Spatial Strategy**

DP1 (Spatial Principles)

DP2 (Promote Sustainable Communities)

DP4 (Make the Best Use of Existing Resources & Infrastructure)

DP5 (Manage Travel Demand, Reduce the Need to Travel & Increase Accessibility)

DP7 (Promote Environmental Quality)

DP9 (Reduce Emissions and Adapt to Climate Change)

RT2 (Managing Travel Demand)

W1 Strengthening the regional economy

W3 (Supply of Employment Land)

EM1 (Integrated Enhancement and Protection of the Region's Environmental Assets)

## **Local Plan Policy**

Congleton Borough Local Plan 2005

GR1 (All devts),

GR2 (Design)

GR6 – Amenity and Health

GR9 & GR10 – Accessibility, Servicing and Parking Provision for New Development

PS8 (Open Countryside),

PS10 Jodrell Bank Protection Policy,

E5 (Employment Development in the Open Countryside)

BH2 (Listed Buildings)

## **Other Material Considerations**

Macclesfield Borough Local Plan 2004

DC3 (Amenity)

DC6 (Safe and convenient access for vehicles, special needs groups and pedestrians)

National planning guidance

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development,

PPS 4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Development;

PPS5 Heritage

PPG13 Transport

Circulars of most relevance include: ODPM 06/2005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation; ODPM 05/2005 Planning Obligations; and 11/95 The use of Conditions in Planning Permissions.

Ministerial Statement March 2011 – Planning for Growth

Of the remaining saved Structure Plan policies, only policy T7: Parking and Gen 5 Jodrell Bank Zone are of relevance.

## **CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)**

**Highways:** No objections. The limited scale of the proposal and the likely increase in trips generated to the site as a result can be accommodated within the local highway network. The additional car parking to be provided (28 and 2 spaces allocated for disabled drivers) is acceptable. Considers, in addition to the existing traffic generated by Jodrell Bank, that this additional facility, cumulatively, justifies Travel Plan initiatives being undertaken at the site.

**Environmental Health:** No objections.

**English Heritage :** Fully supports the proposal. Recommend the proposal be approved. The proposal is located to minimise any effect on the Grade I Listed Telescope.

**Jodrell Bank (Safeguarding):** The University of Manchester has worked with the architects and designers of the proposal to put forward this scheme. The height of the building has been designed to not impact upon the functionality of the Telescope. From a Radio Frequency Interference point of view, many of the end users will be radio astronomers themselves and thus fully appreciate the need for a radio quiet site. Shielding measures have been discussed with the architects and the building design is optimised for simple shielding measures. Within the building, shielded racks will be used where necessary to house computer equipment – a similar approach is used within existing buildings at Jodrell Bank. On this basis, the application is supported.

## **VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL**

Goostrey Parish Council raises no objection to the proposal.

Lower Withington - No reply.

## **OTHER REPRESENTATIONS**

Councillor Gilbert supports the proposal. He considers the design of the scheme to be appropriate.

One email of support has been received from a local resident. This respondent considers the proposal will assist in maintaining the future viability of Jodrell Bank.

## **APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

The application is supported by a Planning Statement, Heritage Statement , Tree Assessment. These documents can be viewed online.

The planning statement states in support of the application that:

Jodrell Bank is at the 'global forefront of scientific research and education at the highest level'.

Jodrell Bank has been selected, ahead of international observatories, to be the best place for the headquarters of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA ) Project. The SKA project is a €1.5billion multi national science project to build the world's largest and most sensitive radio telescope. This will comprise the linking of thousands of radio wave receptors across the world and will enable ground breaking research in the fields of physics, astrophysics, cosmology and astrobiology. It will enable the investigation of previously unexplored parts of the distant Universe.

In total present employment at the site comprises 40 persons at the Observatory and 14 full time employees of the recently opened Discovery/Visitor Centre

This is an international partnership involving 67 organisations from 20 countries. 65 people will be employed by the Square Kilometre Array project.

The Project has funding for 15 to 20 years. The cutting edge research facilities incorporated within this building will be available for the continuing use of the University of Manchester, once the SKA Project ends.

The proposal has been prepared in the context of current local, regional and national planning policy guidance, and accompanying background material.

The Heritage Statement considers the Heritage implications of the proposal in the context of the Grade I Listed Telescope. This describes how the design has evolved in discussion with English Heritage to respect the Telescope structure.

## **OFFICER APPRAISAL**

### **Principle of Development**

This site straddles the boundary of the former Congleton and Macclesfield Borough Councils' administrative areas. The issues pertinent to this application have been assessed under both Plans. The main policy framework is considered to be the Congleton Local Plan and the policies within the Macclesfield Local Plan are considered to be important material considerations. This is because the area of the proposed building and associated new car park are located within Congleton and the access to site is via the main Jodrell Bank access from Bomish Lane, which is located within Macclesfield.

Section 38 of the Planning and Compensation Act 2004 requires a plan led approach to decision making in that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In this case the development plan consists of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West, the Cheshire Replacement Waste Local Plan, the 'saved' Policies of the Cheshire Replacement Structure Plan and the Congleton Borough Local Plan.

PPS1 states that sustainable development is the core principle underpinning the planning process. Planning should facilitate and promote sustainable patterns of development through protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, and ensuring high quality development through good design and efficient use of resources.

The area of development lies within the administrative area of Congleton. Policy PS8 of the Congleton Plan states that development in open countryside will be permitted if it is for employment development as long as the proposal complies with policy E5 and other relevant policies in the Plan. Policy E5 states that the expansion or redevelopment of an existing business will be permitted in the open countryside, provided that the proposal is appropriate to a rural area or essential to the operations on site and there are no other buildings that could be re-used.

It is accepted that the activities of Jodrell Bank require a relatively isolated location. Furthermore, the proposed administrative/research base for the Multi-National Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project could not be accommodated within existing buildings at the site. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in principle.

## **DESIGN AND IMPACT UPON THE SITE AND THE RURAL CHARACTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Local Plan Policy GR1 and GR2 address matters of design and appearance. Policy GR2 states that the Council will promote high standards of design and new development should reflect local character, use appropriate materials and respect form, layout, siting, scale and design of surrounding buildings and their setting.

Policy GR2 states that the overall scale, density, height, mass and materials of new development must normally be sympathetic to the character of the local environment including listed buildings, street scene, adjoining buildings and the site itself.

Para 35 of PPS1 concerns assessing design quality include the extent to which the proposed development (inter alia) should:

- *Address the connections between people and places by considering the needs of people to access jobs and key services.*
- *Be integrated into the existing urban form and natural and built environments.*
- *Be an integrated part of the processes for ensuring successful, safe and inclusive villages, towns and cities.*
- *Creates an environment where everyone can access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available to members of society*
- *Consider the direct and indirect impacts on the natural environment*

This proposal is a small scale major development which comprises a single storey office building of 1130 sq metres floor space located circa 110 metres to the south of the Jodrell Bank Telescope. The building is of a simple design in a 'y' shaped configuration which is circa 60 metres in overall length and 15 wide with a maximum height of 4 metres, and in keeping with the other 1950's educational/office complex built contemporaneously with the Telescope. The proposal has a flat roof to ensure the operation/signal to the Telescope are not fettered by buildings and other structures.

The proposal is somewhat 'space age' in terms of its external appearance with panels of light and dark metal cladding interspersed by extensive areas of glazing and brise soleil /sun blinds. This very much sits within the design context of the telescope, whilst making sure that the building does not interfere with the orientation and functionality of the telescope.

The proposed development is set in an attractive and fairly secluded parkland setting. A small number of mature trees are to be removed to allow for a better relationship with the Telescope. None of the trees are protected. The Council's Tree Officer has negotiated semi-mature replacement specimens to off-set against this loss.

Overall, given the setting of the proposal, it is considered that the proposed single storey building and car park will not have a significant visual impact in the wider landscape. On this basis, the proposal is considered to be acceptable and comply with Policies GR1 and GR2 of the Congleton Local Plan.

## **IMPACT UPON SETTING OF GRADE I TELESCOPE BUILDING**

The Lovell telescope is a Grade I Listed Building. The siting of the proposal is a continuation of the existing group of buildings circa 100m to the south of the Telescope. It is not considered that the proposal buildings would affect the historic character and appearance of the Listed Building. English Heritage have raised support for the proposal and do not consider there to be any impact upon the setting of the listed building.

## **HIGHWAYS IMPLICATIONS**

The Highways Engineer raises no objection to the proposal subject to Travel Plan initiatives being undertaken. The Agreement on the behalf of the Applicant to the provision of a Green Travel Plan is a significant addition to this scheme.

There are no changes in the means of access to site and its expected that most trips generated by this development will use the existing road access route to the north on Bomish Lane, it is not considered that there are any capacity issues associated with this development. Overall, the numbers of people employed at the site as a result of the proposal and the existing activities will be a maximum of 120-130 people.

Whilst this would not normally reach the threshold within PPG13 to require a Travel Plan, it is considered that the isolation of the site from existing settlements and transport interchanges ultimately means that car borne traffic is likely to be the most common mode of transport. In this regard, the willingness of the applicant to provide a green travel plan to encourage car sharing and other initiatives aimed at reducing the numbers of car trips to the site are welcomed.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION**

For the reasons stated above, it is considered that the proposed development would not be detrimental to the Special Historic Interest of the Lovell telescope, the rural character of the site and surrounding countryside or the amenity afforded to neighbouring properties in the wider area. The development accords with the Local Plan Policies. The proposal will further support the research and educational tradition of the Site and the University of Manchester.

There are no material considerations which would weight against this application. As such, the proposal is positively recommended subject the following conditions and the satisfactory completion of a S106 Agreement.

## **SUBJECT TO**

### **PROPOSED HEADS OF TERMS**

- Provision of a green travel plan
- Monitoring costs associated with the operation of the Travel Plan

## **LEVY (CIL) REGULATIONS**

In order to comply with the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations 2010 it is now necessary for planning applications with legal agreements to consider the issue of whether the requirements within the S106 satisfy the following:

(a) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;

- (b) directly related to the development; and
- (c) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

The provision of a Travel Plan underpins the commitment to sustainable travel choices for the staff employed at the site. The relatively isolated location of the site and the fact that the site is not readily accessible to a choice of means of transport results in a greater potential for over reliance on the private car. This proposal will increase the numbers of people employed at the site by up to 65. When taken into the context of the existing numbers of scientists and support workers employed by Manchester University at the site and the recent redevelopment of the visitor centre, the likely amount of car borne traffic is inevitably going to increase.

On this basis the provision of the Travel Plan is necessary, directly relate to the development and is fair and reasonable in relation to the scale and kind of development.

#### Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subejct to a Section 106 Agreement and the following conditions

1. A01LS - Landscaping - submission of details
2. A01TR - Tree retention
3. A02EX - Submission of samples of building materials
4. A02TR - Tree protection
5. A03AP - Development in accord with revised plans (unnumbered)
6. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
7. A03TR - Construction specification/method statement
8. A04LS - Landscaping (implementation)



