

Application No: 15/3488M

Location: ROYAL LONDON HOUSE, ALDERLEY ROAD, WILMSLOW, CHESHIRE,
SK9 1PF

Proposal: Formation and laying out of permanent car park

Applicant: Mr N Kilshaw, Royal London Group

Expiry Date: 24-Sep-2015

REASON FOR REPORT

The proposed has been referred to the Northern Planning Committee as the proposal is a departure from the extant development plan.

SUMMARY

The overall positive economic benefits of the proposals, the lack of better alternatives, in combination with the history of numerous temporary permissions, are considered to provide very special circumstances that justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to conditions

PROPOSAL

The application seeks full planning permission for use of land as a permanent car park for 126 cars. The car park exists at present following temporary consent granted for three years (the last time in 2012) and has been in situ for 18 years following numerous temporary permissions.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Royal London House site is a major developed site in the Green Belt and comprises numerous buildings and car parking areas. The site of this proposal lies within a field to the north west of the developed site and is accessed from the main complex. The temporary car park currently accommodates approximately 100 spaces and is finished in gravel. The site is relatively well screened by existing mature vegetation, with more open aspects to the east towards the railway line

Royal London Wilmslow first occupied the site in 1987 and the company has experienced growth at the site since that time.

RELEVANT HISTORY

97/1417P - Temporary car parking for 104 cars. Approved 1997

98/1532P - Retention of temporary car park. Approved 1998

00/1738P - Renewal of 97/1417P for a temporary car park. Approved 2000

02/2043P - Renewal of 00/1738P for a temporary car park. Approved 2002

04/1066P - Use of land for temporary car park. Approved 2004

09/0571P - Use of land for temporary car park. Approved 2009

12/2631M – Use of land as a temporary car park. Approved 2012

14/5536M – Formation and layout of permanent car park – Undetermined

15/3554M – Use of land as a temporary car park - Undetermined

POLICIES

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development and healthy communities.

Of particular relevance are paragraphs 7, 8, 9, 14, 19, 87, 88 and 89

Development Plan

Macclesfield Borough Local Plan – saved policies

GC1 Green Belt

DC1 Design

DC3 Amenity

DC37 Landscaping

NE11 Nature Conservation

The saved policies are consistent with the NPPF and should be give full weight.

CONSULTATIONS

Highways:

No objections

Environmental Protection

No objection subject to conditions in respect of hours of demolition and air quality.

United Utilities

No objection subject to condition

Heritage & Design – Nature Conservation:

Bats and Trees

A number of trees are proposed for removal. Based upon the tree survey it appears likely that a number of these trees have the potential to support roosting bats. They should be subject to a bat survey and a report of the survey submitted to the LPA prior to the determination of the application unless amended plans show retention.

Lighting

Artificial lighting is known to disrupt wildlife particularly invertebrates and some species of bats.

The site of the temporary car park is not known to be particularly sensitive in ecological terms however it may support some level of bat activity particularly in relation to the trees discussed above.

To reduce any adverse impact on wildlife recommends that a condition be attached that the lighting of the site is limited in terms of its hours of operation.

Heritage & Design – Landscape/Forestry

Any comments will be reported as an update

Wilmslow Town Council

Recommend refusal on the grounds that no exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated at this time for this development in the green belt.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

Over 15 extensive objections have been submitted and they can be fully read on the CEC website, but a summary of issues raised is:

- Green Belt land should be protected
- There is no justification for use of Green Belt for such purposes
- Contrary to Green Belt policy/legislation; no exceptional circumstances
- Concerned it could lead to further encroachment into the Green Belt
- RL need to make proper, long-term arrangements on site with travel plan.
- Application is premature and should await the Local Plan being completed.
- Alternative modes of transport need exploring
- No evidence to support the company's stated aim of implementing "green travel plan"

Key issues

Environmental Sustainability – The application raises issues in respect of landscape impact.

Social Sustainability – The application raises no issues

Economic Sustainability – The application raises specific issues in terms of supporting the local and national economy.

APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

In principle, the proposal is contrary to National Planning Policy/Guidance in respect of Green Belt policy as outlined in the NPPF. The proposed constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore very special circumstances have to be demonstrated to overcome the harm caused by inappropriateness (and any other identified harm).

Green Belt and very special circumstances

NPPF

The NPPF which has a significant bearing on the appraisal and determination of the application will be provided below:

The purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development.

There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental...The economic role is about...contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy...The environmental role is about...contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment...These roles should not be undertaken in isolation...

Pursuing sustainable development includes (amongst other things)...making it easier for jobs to be created in cities, towns and villages...

A set of core land use planning principles underpin plan-making and decision-taking, which include (amongst many other things)...protecting the Green Belts...and actively managing...patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling...

Delivering sustainable development involves building a strong, competitive economy. The Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity...ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support economic growth...significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth...

Transport policies have an important role to play in facilitating sustainable development...The transport system needs to be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes, giving

people a real choice about how they travel...Encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion

The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts...New buildings and other forms of development that do not preserve openness or conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt...inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances...very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Green Belt Assessment

It is considered that appraisal of this application comprises consideration of two key policy areas identified in the NPPF: protecting the Green Belt and supporting economic growth.

It is accepted that the proposed permanent car park would normally constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt - a material change of use of the land which does not maintain openness. It is also considered that the car park does and would have a degree of impact on visual amenity (though limited) and constitutes encroachment into the Green Belt. Hence, the proposed would be contrary to Green Belt policy as outlined in the NPPF. Consequently, very special circumstances need to be presented that clearly outweigh the harm identified.

It is considered that Royal London is committed to its Travel Plan and is seeking to assist employees to reduce car usage and increase use of other modes of sustainable transport. The aim of increasing sustainable modes of transport is consistent with NPPF policy of promoting sustainable modes of transport and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. A key tool in achieving a move towards increasing sustainable transport modes is the Green Travel Plan that is in place at Royal London. A number of initiatives are contained to encourage the use of public transport.

It is acknowledged that Royal London is a major employer within the Wilmslow area and indeed the Borough of Cheshire East; as such it makes a significant economic contribution to the area. It is also acknowledged that the continued economic well-being of the company is likely to involve further growth through, for example, further acquisitions. Consequently, the number of employees on site is likely to grow. Using the planning system to achieve growth is a core theme of the NPPF.

It is clear that the existing permanent car parking capacity on site is not sufficient to accommodate the existing demand, regardless of any potential increased demand for car parking on site. As such, a solution is required to the problem in order to prevent the possibility of displacement and support the company's desire for growth.

It is acknowledged that some parking restrictions have been introduced in some streets within the vicinity of the site. It is considered that the problem of displacement of vehicles from the Royal London site into neighbouring residential areas does not appear to be a significant problem in recent times. However, it is also considered that displacement could be an issue if changes in staffing levels were to occur at the Royal London site and the demand for car parking spaces on site cannot be met.

It is noted that the economic benefits have been accepted as amounting to very special circumstances, when the Council have determined previous applications for the temporary provision over the last 18 years.

The fact that 7 temporary permissions have been granted over an 18 year period is also a significant material consideration in favour of reaching a long term permanent solution. During this time travel planning has been implemented but this has not in itself enabled the on site demand for car parking to be met without the provision of the car park that is the subject of this application.

Discussions have taken place to look at alternative car parking proposals within the Royal London Campus and outside of the green belt. All of the alternatives have been discounted due to impact on the listed building within the site or due to visual impact on the setting of the site. A current application has been submitted for car parking at the front of the campus on the existing lawn area. Officers have advised that application ref 14/5536M would be recommended for refusal and the applicant has confirmed that the application will be withdrawn should a permanent permission be granted for this application site.

A further application for temporary permission has also been submitted as a fall back position in an attempt for the applicant to avoid falling in breach of planning control. However, officers are of the view that a permanent solution is required and that this application provides the most appropriate solution.

The permanent car park would be properly landscaped and would be a visual improvement on the current temporary car park (although it must be noted that a condition of the temporary approval is to remediate the land at the end of the temporary period).

In weighing up the competing issues of protecting the Green Belt, supporting economic growth and promoting sustainable modes of transport, it is considered that Royal London, through their Travel Plan, are committed to achieving a reduction in car usage and an increase in sustainable modes of transport. It is also considered that the operational needs of the company require the flexibility of having a car park in order to achieve growth and meet current demand on site.

It is considered that there is a strong justification for a permanent car park. The need to meet this parking demand is considered to carry with it economic benefits helping to sustain the needs to the business on site – an important local employer. This carries significant weight in favour. The development has a limited visual impact and causes no significant landscape harm. This carries some weight in favour. There is a lack of a viable or preferable alternative. This carries some weight in favour. Temporary permissions have now resulted in a relatively poor quality development being sustained for a period of 18 years. This carries significant weight in favour. These factors in combination are considered to carry substantial weight that clearly outweigh the identified harm to the green belt through inappropriateness, and any other harm.

Hence, it is considered that the case presented does constitute very special circumstances to justify a grant of planning permission.

Design and landscape

The physical layout, materials used and access to the site have all been deemed to be acceptable if the principle is to be accepted. The parking area would be formally laid out and benefit from substantial enhanced landscaped fringe and much improved screening to the present temporary arrangement. A natural transition would be formed to the open land. Also it is important to note that it is considered any other locations on the greater site would have a more detrimental visual impact on the landscape and the area.

Impact on residential amenity

As the nearest residential properties are over 70m away from the site it is considered that there are no residential amenity issues arising from the application.

Arboriculture and nature conservation

It was initially proposed to remove some trees for reasons of health but an amended plan has been requested that would retain these specimens as there is potential for roosting bats as reported by the Nature Conservation Officer. This plan is awaited and shall be reported as an update.

Other Material Considerations

Response to Objections: The objections overwhelmingly relate to the issue of loss of green belt land and this concern is both justified and recognised. However, as described, in the planning balance, it is considered the economic benefits secured by the proposals provide very special circumstances in support of the application.

PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt. However, the almost unique specific circumstances regarding the long term use of the car park and the interests of economic sustainability are considered to amount to very special circumstances that would outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by virtue of inappropriateness, loss of openness and encroachment in this instance. There would be no greater visual impact than at present and the improved landscaped boundary would improve on present site conditions. As such, the application is recommended for approval subject to conditions.

In order to give proper effect to the Committee's intentions and without changing the substance of the decision, authority is delegated to the Head of Planning and Regulation, in consultation with the Chair (or in his absence the Vice Chair) of Northern Planning Committee, to correct any technical slip or omission in the wording of the resolution, between approval of the minutes and issue of the decision notice.

Should this application be the subject of an appeal, authority be delegated to the Planning and Place Shaping Manager in consultation with the Chairman of the Southern Planning Committee to enter into a planning agreement in accordance with the S106 Town and Country Planning Act to secure the Heads of Terms for a S106 Agreement.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to following conditions

1. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
2. A01AP - Development in accord with approved plans
3. A13GR - lighting hours
4. A04LS - Landscaping (implementation)
5. Flood
6. Hours
7. Air

