

Application No: 17/1094C

Location: Land At White Moss Quarry, CREWE ROAD, ALSAGER

Proposal: Reserved matters application for residential development comprising 350 dwellings (30% affordable), creation of public open space including children's play areas, and associated works, pursuant to outline approval 13/4132N.

Applicant: Mr Niall Mellan, Persimmon Homes (North West) Ltd.

Expiry Date: 11-Jul-2018

## **SUMMARY**

The site is allocated within the Local Plan for residential use and consists of almost the entire LPS20 allocation. The development accords with the Local Plan policy relating to its allocation by providing housing.

The site already has the benefit of outline planning permission and therefore the principle of residential development on the site, as well as the means of access into the site are already established and the only matters for consideration are layout, scale, appearance and landscaping.

Cheshire East is currently able to demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing however this site is included within the 5 year supply and this proposal will make a valuable contribution in maintaining this position.

The design and layout of the development are not in accordance with the requirements Cheshire East Design Guide. The reasons for this are outlined in detail later in the report.

The proposal has been subject to amendment during the course of the application and no landscape proposals have been submitted.

The play areas have been relocated during the application process and are now considered to be in a suitable location.

**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION: Refuse**

## **REASON FOR REPORT**

The application has been called-in for determination by Strategic Planning Board for the following reason;

*The density of the proposed development is overbearing and there is no mention of the extra care facility provided; relocation and redevelopment of existing garden centre; provision of local services including A1 uses: 465 square metres convenience store, 3no. 95 square metres retail units, D1 uses: childrens day care centre and doctors surgery, public house/restaurant.*

*As well as this, it would seem that the proposed development is a shared space and yet there are no pavements. A recently parliament report by the Women's and Equality Committee proclaimed that shared spaces are a source of concern to many disabled people across the country, particularly features such as the removal of controlled crossings and kerbs and inconsistency in the design of schemes from place to place. I therefore think that the absence of pavements poses a serious risk should any such scheme be pursued as part of the application.*

## **PROPOSAL**

The application is for reserved matters approval for residential development comprising 350 dwellings (30% affordable), creation of public open space including children's play areas, and associated works, pursuant to outline approval 13/4132N.

The reserved matters for approval are layout, scale, appearance and landscaping.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The application site reflects about half of the area of White Moss Quarry measuring approximately 19.8 hectares. The majority of the site lies within the former Crewe and Nantwich District and forms part of the Parish of Haslington, although it lies outside the defined settlement boundary. A small area of the site, to the south east, lies within the former Congleton District and lies outside the settlement boundary of Alsager.

To the north of the site lies the rest of the quarry site beyond which is Nursery Road, a number of residential properties, farms and agricultural land. To the east of the site is Close Lane and town of Alsager. To the south of the site is Butterton Lane, beyond which is the extensive development of Radway Green BAE Plant. Immediately to the west the site bounded by the M6 Motorway.

The site, an active sand and peat quarry, lies between 76m and 80m AOD and the worked areas lie some 10m below those levels. The existing groundwater levels are between 2-11m below the surface of the site and much of the excavated areas therefore lie below the water table.

The site therefore currently operates principally as a mineral quarry, but there is also a garden centre and aggregate recycling operation located on site. There is also a concrete panel operation on the site (subject to further investigation).

Parts of the site have been restored to provide wetlands and open space (not publically accessible) as part of the ongoing restoration related to the quarrying permissions on the site. These restored areas lie mainly to the north of the site beyond the proposed housing development.

The site is currently surrounded by a range of land uses. Beyond the quarry to the north of the site lies open countryside, areas largely used for agriculture. The land to the east of the site is occupied by the town of Alsager. The majority of Alsager is made up of residential development, with some public amenities such as shops, schools, transport links, leisure centre and parks. The area to the south of the site is largely of industrial/business purposes. It is occupied by a large scale ammunition factory and various other smaller industrial units that, in their entirety, represent a fairly large industrial complex. There lies an open area of land between this industrial complex and the White Moss Quarry land holding.

The site is bounded by a public footpath to the west, beyond which lies the M6 Motorway.

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

The site has been subject to numerous applications in the past relating to current quarry use, however these are not directly relevant in the consideration of this application. The only relevant previous application is as follows;

13/4132N - Outline application for the residential development of the White Moss: Incorporating the provision of up to 350 residential dwellings; extra care facility; relocation and redevelopment of existing garden centre; provision of local services including A1 uses: 465 square metres convenience store, 3no. 95 square metres retail units, D1 uses: childrens day care centre and doctors surgery, public house/restaurant; and, provision of public open space and associated highway improvements and biodiversity enhancement. Approved with conditions and subject to a section 106 agreement on 14 September 2015.

## **NATIONAL & LOCAL POLICY**

### **National Policy**

The National Planning Policy Framework establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

### **Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy**

The following are considered relevant material considerations as indications of the emerging strategy:

SD1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East

SD2 Sustainable Development Principles

SE1 Design

SE2 Efficient use of land

SE 3 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

SE 4 The Landscape

SE 5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland

SE 6 Green Infrastructure

SE 13 Flood Risk and Water Management  
CO 1 Sustainable Travel and Transport  
SC 1 Leisure and Recreation  
SC 2 Outdoor Sports Facilities  
SC 3 Health and Well Being  
SC 4 Residential Mix  
SC 5 Affordable Homes

Directly relevant to this site is the following allocation for the entire site:

- Site LPS 20 White Moss Quarry, Alsager

It should be noted that the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was formally adopted on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2017. There are however policies within the legacy local plans that still apply and have not yet been replaced. These policies are set out below.

Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Adopted Replacement Local Plan

NE.5 (Nature Conservation and Habitats)  
NE.9: (Protected Species)  
NE.20 (Flood Prevention)  
NE.21 (Land Fill Sites)  
BE.1 (Amenity)  
BE.3 (Access and Parking)  
BE.4 (Drainage, Utilities and Resources)  
TRAN.3 (Pedestrians)  
TRAN.5 (Cycling)

**Other Material Considerations:**

National Planning Policy Framework  
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)  
The Cheshire East Borough Design Guide SPD

**CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)**

**Environment Agency** – No objection. Conditions have been requested relating to flood risk, surface water drainage, ecology and contaminated land.

**United Utilities** – No objections. Conditions have been requested in respect of surface water drainage from the site and that the site shall be drained on separate systems.

**Highways** – No objection following the submission of the amended plans. .

**Housing Strategy** – Object, the details of this are outlined below.

**Flood Risk** – No objection. Conditions have been requested relating to surface water drainage and the development being carried out in full accordance with the Flood Risk Assessment.

**ANSA** – No objection. The play areas have been relocated as part of the amendments to the scheme so they relate better to this development and also to the facilities provided on the adjoining site.

**Countryside Rights of Way** – No objection.

**Natural England** – No objection.

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

Alsager Town Council – *Alsager Town Council objects to this application for the following reasons:*

- • *Appose the reduction in affordable housing.*
- • *Concerns over the safety of the play area location.*
- • *Would like the application to have more starter homes.*

## **OTHER REPRESENTATIONS**

Representations have been received from 17 properties over the 2 periods of consultations and the points made are summarised as follows;

- no further houses needed to be constructed in Alsager given the existence of other ongoing local housing developments. An objection was raised with reference to the impact of traffic on Crewe Road from any housing development on this site. Objections generally stressed the impact of the increase in local population on local roads.
- It was deemed unclear by some objectors where sewage from the development would enter the existing sewer network, and more generally the proposal was seen as being vague about the proposed sewerage infrastructure. The existing sewer on Close Lane is insufficient to support such a development. Both Close Lane and Valley Brook were highlighted in one objection as areas liable to flooding. This objection also stated the view that it was likely the proposed recreation scheme was included in the flood mitigation strategy for the applicant's development site.
- It was the view of an objector that United Utilities had failed to carry out a proper network capacity assessment in anticipation of the effects of the proposed development. The existence of a groundwater assessment for the site was also queried. An objector raised the possibility of including water collection butts within the development as a mitigating measure. An objection was made about the removal of a previous right of way near the site, presumably in the objectors view to make way for more houses on firmer ground.
- An objection was raised about the need for a country park type area to serve the increase of houses on 'this side' of Alsager. An objection stated that the quarry area was originally meant to be restored to nature.

- Concerns were raised that an air quality report requested by Alsager Town Council had not been produced. The issue of noise pollution alongside air pollution as an effect of new housing and any subsequent traffic increase. Large quantities of traffic and air pollution in the town were cited as important factors.
- The location of the children's play area proposed location was questioned, given a possible flooding risk.
- The site's affordability was questioned, with a dispute about the number of new affordable homes not reaching a third, as was stated in the development proposal; the objection stated that only 83 of the proposed houses were meant to be affordable.
- Design quality of existing housing developments in the area, with a comparison to better designed and higher quality homes abroad and within the UK. The objection questioned the possible quality of the houses proposed to be built on the site.

## **APPRAISAL**

### **PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT**

The principle of residential development and the access arrangements for the site have been established following the approval of the outline application 13/4132N in September 2015.

The outline permission approved the principle of the following;

- up to 350 residential dwellings;
- extra care facility;
- relocation and redevelopment of existing garden centre;
- provision of local services including A1 uses: 465 square metres convenience store, 3no. 95 square metres retail units, D1 uses: children's day care centre and doctors surgery, public house/restaurant.
- provision of public open space and associated highway improvements and biodiversity enhancement.

The access to the site will be taken from a newly created roundabout on Crewe Road at the location of the existing signal junction with Radway Green Road. The decision notice is subject to 43 conditions that primarily relate to cycle and pedestrian linkages, a travel plan, noise, air quality, ecology, contamination, and flood risk. These mainly need to be submitted and agreed before the development can commence.

Some of the conditions required tree and ecology to be submitted as part of the reserved matters application. This has been submitted and is considered acceptable and would be subject to further conditions should the application be approved.

A Section 106 agreement accompanies the outline permission and this secured the following;

1. 30% affordable housing with a tenure split 65% rented housing and 35% intermediate affordable.

2. Minimum of 12,250sqm of public open space to include:
  - large equipped children's play area on the public open space. The equipped play area needs to cater for both young and older children - 8 pieces of equipment for young, plus 8 pieces for older children
  - The proposal should also provide a Multi Use Games Area marked out to include 1 basketball court and 1 5-a-side football pitch (D's and spots only). The Multi Use Games Area also needs to be floodlit.
  - Private Residents Management Company to maintain all open space on site including amenity greenspace, play space, allotments, incidental open space, footpaths and cycleways.
3. Education Contribution (Amount £683,316)
4. Highway contribution for traffic signals at Halsall Road/Crewe Roas junction and to improvements at Sandbach Road/B5077 Crewe Road/Lawton Road. (Amount £342,000)
5. Healthcare Contribution (Amount £339,173)
6. Appropriate restoration of the adjacent quarry land including phasing

The restoration of the remainder of the quarry site is currently being considered as part of application 15/2259N. The S106 agreement requires the restoration scheme to be approved for the remainder of the site before the development approved by 15/3142N can commence.

## **DESIGN & LAYOUT**

The importance of securing high quality design is specified within the Framework. Paragraph 61 states that:

*“Although visual appearance and the architecture of individual buildings are very important factors, securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations. Therefore, planning policies and decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment.”*

This approach is fully consistent with CELPS policy SE1 and the recently adopted Cheshire East Design Guide.

### Background

Volume 1 of the Cheshire East Design Guide identifies the key design cues for the larger settlements within the borough, paragraph 176 of the document and this gives the key design cues for Alsager as being;

- *A broad mix of building styles and ages with detached/semi-detached Victorian villas interspersed with short rows of terraces and modern infill developments of flats and houses.*

- *Few terraced houses, mainly within the Radway Estate and in town centre.*
- *Buildings mainly two storey with a number of bungalows in residential areas.*
- *Victorian Villas dating back from the 1850's front onto Fields Road and are designated as a Conservation Area.*
- *Later 19th Century development of fine semi-detached and detached homes extend along Station Road. Features include single and full height bay windows, ridge detailing and prominent chimney stacks. Properties set back behind low brick walls.*

Volume 2 of the design guide provides the practical guidance on what is expected of new developments. The design guide provides a checklist to assess new developments against and a full assessment of the proposals has been carried out against this checklist as well as against the 12 criteria set out in the Building for Life assessment. The key issues that arose from this assessment are considered below.

### Character and sense of place

This is a very distinct site and opportunity. It has a strong 'blue' character, albeit presently a working quarry. The wetland character with a number of large water bodies and surrounding habitat has the potential to reinforce a very strong sense of place for development on the site. It must also be noted the consented restoration scheme provides for a large waterbody on the site.

Whilst this scheme departs in some ways from a standard housing estate, the proposal has not sufficiently exploited the context of the site as a wetland environment. This translates at several levels in terms of layout, the approach to blue and green infrastructure and the design of buildings. Water bodies are included but they are not being exploited for positive layout purposes and their location is primarily an engineering response rather than considered place making.

The landscape strategy attempts to embody the wetland character within parts of the site and to reinforce the character areas and main areas of open space but this will only have limited effect set against more standardised approaches within the layout and detailing of buildings. The net result will be that this is not a truly distinctive and memorable place and is a missed opportunity given the distinct context.

### Frontage continuity and views of the rear of plots

There are a number of places where the views are poorly considered at the termination point of a street. The repositioning of units could provide a better viewpoint by positively containing the view or streets could be connected to prevent views of the backs of housing or rear parking.

Ineffective turn-the-corner house types results in the rear of the dwellings being open to the view from the road, and insufficiently active frontages to the side. This is unsatisfactory and goes against the guidance of perimeter blocks that have definitive areas of public and private space and appropriate levels of passive surveillance. This problem is exacerbated by the inseting of buildings to provide frontage parking in relation to corner units, exposing their rear gardens to view within streets.



### Housing mix

The affordable units are overly concentrated in certain areas of the site which is contrary to the design requirements of pepper potting affordable units to provide a diverse community.

The usual 'tell' with affordable housing is that the parking is commonly to the front of the units which make the car a dominant feature of the street scene. A more acceptable solution would be to break up the parking with soft landscaping or to create landscaped parking squares/mews as positive features within the street.

A mix of accommodation is necessary to provide diversity of form and community. Whilst a range of unit sizes are proposed, there seems to be an underrepresentation of apartments for a scheme of this size and given the mixed use strategic nature of the site. It is also unclear what provision is being made for the elderly and also to meet the need for smaller, private 'starter homes'. This is all relevant in satisfying the requirements of LPS policy SC4 Residential Mix.

### Parking

A mix of parking solutions is encouraged by the Design Guide so that the street scene isn't dominated by vehicles. Many of the plots have the parking spaces to the front of the units within the curtilage. The knock on effect to this is the dominance of vehicles on the street scene and minimal green amenity space to the front of the units. Several streets have an abundance of front of plot parking with very limited scope for landscaping to prevent the street scene becoming visually dominated by vehicles.

Courtyard parking is not an ideal solution if not gated/and or over looked. Spatially the courtyards are very tight and are unlikely to exhibit quality in landscape terms. They should look good as spaces both with and without cars in order to be effective.

### Density

The edge of the site presents an overly dense built edge which is contrary to the guidance in the design guide: 'Areas of lesser activity, for example sub-urban residential areas adjacent to open spaces or the countryside would have a reduced density and less formal character with more generous gardens.' Pg22, Volume 2 Cheshire East Design Guide.

In contrast, the site entrance/gateway in proximity to the future local centre is not considered sufficiently dense or of a scale to appropriately define the key gateway into the site. This area of the site presents an opportunity to increase the scale/intensity of development in proximity to the local centre and bus stops on Crewe Road.

### Quality of landscaping

The principal and secondary streets in particular do not have sufficiently strong landscape to reinforce the street hierarchy, or to supplement and connect the green infrastructure on the periphery and within the site. The effect on the street scene is exacerbated by the width of the principal street, which has been specified by Highways, whilst elsewhere, the quantity of

front of plot parking that has reduced the potential to create a strong green edge to the street, limiting tree planting and creating significant breaks in hedging.

The proposals have been subject to some detailed discussion during the course of the application. Amended plans were submitted, however these amended proposals did not include landscaping proposals. As the reserved matters application seeks approval of landscaping details this is fundamental to the consideration of this application and therefore this forms a reason in itself for refusing the application.

#### House type design - quality and local distinctiveness

The house types have been adapted from existing house types used locally and drawn from another region. They have been adapted to suit the character area approach, principally in terms of materiality and colour.

The fundamental problem rests with the quality of the individual designs in architectural terms and in the context of this site, and whether they result in a quality of townscape that befits the site and the policy objectives for its development. The house types do not go far enough architecturally to respond to the context and provide the distinctive character of development that this site could achieve.

This issue is interconnected with issues around street design, landscape and characterisation in terms of creating a truly distinct development with a strong sense of place and identity. There are key opportunity/focal locations within the scheme that are not being exploited by creating strong enough buildings and groupings; instead it is proposed to use render to define these key buildings. Furthermore, the Crewe Road gateway, which will define the entrance into the development, does not exhibit sufficient quality and strength of architecture to positively define the entrance into the development.

#### Sustainable design

Whilst the site is in a sustainable location and a mixed use local centre is proposed as part of this site, there is very little information to demonstrate that other passive or active sustainable design has influenced the development. The site context offers an opportunity for sustainable design to be an underpinning theme of the development.

#### Design Summary

The site allocation policy LPS 20 sets out site development principles to be applied to the development of the site. Principle a. requires: "Ensure the delivery of a high quality and sustainable development which respects the character of local landscape and delivers excellent urban and architectural design" The submitted plans do not reflect this requirement.

This application seeks approval of layout, scale, appearance and landscaping. For the reasons outlined above the layout, appearance and landscaping proposals are unacceptable.

The proposals include a mix of 2, 2.5 and 3 storey properties. The site is of a sufficient size to accommodate 3 storey dwellings and they are appropriately located away from the rural

fringes of the site. Given the distance of the site from existing properties the inclusion of up to 3 storey houses is considered acceptable.

The Design Guide and Building for Life 12 assessment indicates that there are issues in several fundamental areas that are as follows;

- Failure to create a distinctive character
- Failure to create well defined streets and spaces
- Domination of the car parking in the streetscene
- 

As a consequence the proposal is not considered to be of a sufficient standard to approve. The proposal is contrary to Policies LPS20, SD2, SE1, SE4 and SC4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, the provisions within volume 2 of the Cheshire East Borough Design Guide and paragraphs 56, 61 and 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

## **RESIDENTIAL AMENITY**

In order for the proposals to be acceptable, it is important that they do not have a detrimental impact on the amenities of existing residents. Local Plan policies BE.1 seek to ensure that new development does not significantly injure the amenities of adjoining or nearby residential property.

The dwellings on the site are a considerable distance from existing residential properties on Close Lane and therefore no issues of overlooking, overshadowing or the development having an overbearing impact will occur.

Within the site the separation distances set out in the Cheshire East Borough Design Guide are generally met throughout the site and all the proposed properties have an adequate level of amenity space. The relationships between the properties on the site have an acceptable relationship with each other in terms of overshadowing and no overbearing impacts will occur.

All other environmental impacts were considered as part of the outline application and suitable mitigation identified at that time.

## **COMMENT ON REPRESENTATIONS**

Issues raised in respect of the need for housing on the site, flooding issues, traffic and highway safety, ecology and air quality are all matters that were addressed as part of the outline application. They are all issues that are dealt with through the submission and agreement of further mitigation before works can commence on site. With regard to flooding issues the development must be carried out in accordance with the flood risk assessment submitted as part of the outline permission and additional conditions relating to surface water drainage are required to be discharged before works can commence.

With regards the comments about the location of the play areas, these concerns were shared by officers and as a result the location of the play area was amended during the course of the application.

Concerns were raised over the number of affordable properties provided as part of the development. The number of units provided complies fully with the requirements of Policy SC5 and therefore is acceptable in respect of the affordable housing provision.

## **CONCLUSION**

The site enjoys the benefit of outline planning permission and this application is for the consideration of matters relating to layout, scale, appearance and landscaping.

Firstly no landscaping scheme has been submitted that reflects the current layout being considered and as a result the application is contrary to Policy SE4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan and part iv of volume 2 of the Cheshire East Borough design Guide.

The layout and overall design of the development fails to comply with the site allocation Policy that covers this site, this states: “Ensure the delivery of a high quality and sustainable development which respects the character of local landscape and delivers excellent urban and architectural design” it is clear from the considerations above that fundamental issues exist with the layout surrounding the inappropriate design of the house types, the mix of housing, the lack of respect afforded to the characteristics of the site, lack of landscaping, over-dominance of the car parking and the lack of local distinctiveness.

As a result the proposal is contrary to the provisions of policies LPS20, SD2, SE1, SE4 and SC4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, the provisions within volume 2 of the Cheshire East Borough design Guide and paragraphs 56, 61 and 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The application is recommended for **Refusal** for the following reasons;

- 1. The proposed development fails to respect and positively respond to the wetland character of the site to create a distinct sense of place and local identity. Coupled with the applicant’s failure to submit a comprehensive landscape proposal for the site the proposal is contrary to LPS20, SD2, SE1 and SE4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, the provisions within volume 2 of the Cheshire East Borough design Guide and paragraphs 56, 61 and 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework**
- 2. The proposed layout creates an over-dominance of car parking to the front of properties, which coupled with the lack of a suitable landscape scheme would lead to a car dominated layout that is detrimental to the character and quality of the development. The layout fails to respect the rural surroundings at the edges of the site and results in an inappropriately dense development along the northern and western boundary of the site. Therefore the proposal is contrary to Policies LPS20, SD2, SE1, and SE4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, the provisions within volume 2 of the Cheshire East Borough design Guide and paragraphs 56, 61 and 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework.**

3. The proposal comprises the use of standard house-types which exhibit little architectural quality and do not create a strong townscape or a development with its own distinct, high quality identity. The house types in conjunction with the layout also result in instances of corners being defined by blank gables, poor termination of vistas within the layout and the failure of the scheme to properly define the entrance to the site resulting in an extremely poor quality development. Therefore the proposal is contrary to Policies LPS20, SD2, and SE1 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, the provisions within volume 2 of the Cheshire East Borough design Guide and paragraphs 56, 61 and 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework
4. The mix of dwellings proposed is not accompanied by a justification for the proposal. Therefore the proposal is contrary to Policy SC4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy.

*In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Board's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions / informatives / planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Head of Planning (Regulation) delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Strategic Planning Board, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Board's decision.*

