

Application No: 11/1051N

Location: LAND AT, MIDDLEWICH ROAD, NANTWICH

Proposal: Provision of Greenway from Crewe to Nantwich, Sections from Wistaston Green Road to A51/Nantwich Bypass including a 3m wide Surfaced Path together with associated Engineering and Landscaping Works

Applicant: Cheshire East Council

Expiry Date: 05-Jul-2011

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Approve with conditions

MAIN ISSUES

- Principle of Development
- Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Open Countryside
- Impact on Landscape Features – Trees/Hedgerows
- Impact on Amenity of adjacent properties
- Impact on Highway Safety
- Impact on Protected Species

1. REASON FOR REFERRAL

This application has been deferred from the Southern Planning Committee of 22nd June 2011 in order for Members to carry out a site inspection. The application is to be determined by Southern Planning Committee as the development is a small scale major application, due to site area being over 1ha, and where the applicant is Cheshire East Council.

2. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site is located entirely within the Open Countryside as defined by the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011. The route of the proposed greenway would begin at the roundabout by Alvaston Business Park, cutting through the existing hedgerow into an agricultural field. The link will then follow the field boundary which adjoins Middlewich Road, the land descend steeply towards Cheney Brook and then rises again on the northern side. The application route continues to follow the line of Middlewich Road before taking a 90 degree turn to the west to Colleys Bridge and then follows an existing agricultural track, which is in part bound by hedgerows and trees to peach Lane (Alvaston Farm). The route of the application site also includes the made service road to the front of Alvaston Hall Hotel. To the north of Alvaston Hall the route follows a green lane between two field boundaries and then continues to follow the line

of a field hedgerow within an agricultural field before taking a 90degree turn to the east joining with Middlewich Road opposite the Rising Sun Public House.

3. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

The application proposes the construction of a 3m wide cycleway and footway as part of the national Connect 2 project which attempts to encourage people to take everyday journeys by foot or bike. It is proposed within the application forms that the laid route would be constructed from compact bituminous surfacing. The scheme also includes the construction of a bridge over Cheney Brook and the creation of a Pegasus crossing over Middlewich Road.

4. RELEVANT HISTORY

No relevant Planning History relating to the site however a series of applications at Alvaston Hall.

5. POLICIES

The development plan includes the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (RSS) and the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011 (LP).

Local Plan Policy

NE.2 (Open Countryside)
NE.5 (Nature Conservation)
NE.9 (Protected Species)
BE.1 (Amenity)
BE.2 (Design Standards)
BE.3 (Accessing and Parking)
BE.4 (Drainage, Utilities and Resources)
BE.5 (Infrastructure)
BE.1 (Hazardous Installations)
TRAN.5 (Provision for Cyclists)
RT.9 (Footpaths and Bridleways)

Cheshire East Local Transport Plan (2011 – 2015)
Cheshire East Right of Way Improvement Plan (2011 – 2026)

Other Material Considerations

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development
PPG13: Transport
PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation

6. CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Strategic Highways Manager – No highways objections

National Cyclists Organisation – Support the application

Sustrans – Fully support as application will provide a route for pedestrians/cyclists and in this case horse riders away from the busy, narrow Middlewich Road.

Sport England – Sport England's planning policy objective 16 supports measures to protect, enhance and develop the network and other permissive routes that provide opportunities to access the countryside by foot, bicycle and horse. Therefore, do not raise an objection.

Countryside Access Development Officer - Policies of the Cheshire East Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2011-2026 and Cheshire East Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2011-2026 seek to improve walking and cycling facilities for travel and leisure purposes. The proposed development will support these policies.

7. VIEWS OF THE TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL

Nantwich Town Council - Wish to draw attention to a possible conflict between users of the Greenway and vehicles servicing Alvaston Hall Hotel and agricultural traffic from the tenant of the trustees. Measures should be tabled to minimise possible hazards arising from such conflict.

Wistaston Parish Council - The junction of Middlewich Road with Wistaston Green Road is becoming more dangerous, due to increased use by motorists avoiding the newly installed chicanes around Queens Park Drive, Crewe. A Pegasus crossing installed near this junction with no advanced warning signs to drivers approaching from both directions is unacceptable and will have a contrary effect on road safety.

8. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

Comments made by Beam Heath Estate stating that the service road for Alvaston Hall is constantly used for deliveries, hotel staff, refuse collections and agricultural traffic. Concerned, as land owners, about the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

Objections raised from Peach Cottage (x2 and photographs of HGV), Nettle Cottage and The Paddocks, Colleys Lane, the salient points being:

- Safety for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders – conflict with HGV's servicing Alvaston Hall Hotel and turkey farm
- Would lose all privacy
- Nuisance from motorcyclists
- Anti-social behaviour as will be a hang around site
- Security of property will be affected
- Route would be better following line of Middlewich Road
- Impact on farming system

9. APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Ecological Assessment (*prepared by TEP dated March 2011*)

- Consideration given to habitats, Great Crested Newt, Water Vole, Otter, Bats, Badgers, Birds and Himalayan Balsam
- Grassland habitat have limited species diversity and of little ecological value

- No records of Great Crested Newts within 500m of cycle route, no likely impact on GCN population or habitat
- No implications with respect to water vole or otter
- Not likely to impact bats – no removal of vegetation
- No evidence of badger
- Suggested condition for the removal of vegetation during breeding bird season
- Himalayan Balsam identified on site – this is a non native species which reduces the biodiversity value of the watercourse. Needs controlling however any localised control would have little impact on the overall spread

10. OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

The application proposes the third stage of the Sustrans Connect 2 project and will provide a link from the north of Nantwich to the western side of Crewe. The application site is located entirely within the Open Countryside where Policy NE.2 states that only development which is appropriate to the rural area will be considered to be acceptable. Policy RT.9 relating to Footpaths and Bridleways states that proposals which improve the footpath network will be permitted. National Planning Guidance contained within PPG13 states that greater priority should be given to walking whilst, with regard to cycling, Local Planning Authorities should promote national and local networks.

The Cheshire East Local Transport Plan and the Cheshire East Right of Way Improvement Plan 2011-2026 seeks to improve green infrastructure in accordance with Policy H.3 which requires the enhancement of public rights of way/green infrastructure and endeavour to create new links. One of the key initiatives of the PROWIP is for the sustainable access to green spaces, and support initiatives to connect up the highway footway and public rights of way networks for greater pedestrian movement, and with regard to cycling, seek to provide appropriate highways improvements (e.g. on-road cycle lanes or wide nearside lanes) and off-road routes to make commuter cycling a safe and quick alternative to car use.

It is considered therefore that there is significant Policy support, at both national and local level, for the proposed footway/Cycleway in principle. However, consideration needs to be given to the impact that the proposed greenway would have on the character and appearance of the open countryside, specific landscape features, protected species, the amenity of nearby properties/uses, and highway safety.

Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Open Countryside

The application site is located within the Open Countryside and large sections of the route cross agricultural fields, as such the proposed development needs to be sensitively integrated into the rural setting. At two points, to the south and north of Alvaston Hall, the greenway follows the line of two lightly used green lanes which add value to the landscape character of the area. Whilst part of the route will follow the existing service roads at Alvaston Hall. The scheme proposes a 3m wide track which would be treated in bituminous bound surfacing. In isolation a bituminous track is likely to cause detrimental harm to the character and appearance of the open countryside and would appear as an alien and incongruous feature on the landscape and the greenlanes. It is therefore considered that this would be an insensitive and inappropriate form of development in this open

countryside setting. There would be little or no change in character along the existing service roads at Alvaston Hall. There are however significant planning benefits for the proposed scheme through providing green infrastructure and enhancing access to sustainable modes of transport. Furthermore, whether the landscape concerns can be overcome by appropriate conditions should be explored.

The application submission states that additional stock proof fencing, hedgerows and trees will be planted. Additional landscaping is welcomed and would help to integrate the development into the landscape and soften its impact. However a regimented scheme of landscaping could appear equally out of place on this landscape. Therefore a condition requiring a landscaping scheme to be submitted is suggested to ensure that any landscaping is appropriate to the rural setting.

A gravel or stone chipping surfacing could be more appropriate to the rural setting within the agricultural fields and be more appropriate along the “green lanes”. It is acknowledged that a bituminous surfacing material may be more appropriate for ease of maintenance however this should not be at the expense of the character and appearance of the open countryside. Whilst the detail of the surfacing material as detailed in the application form is in the main considered to potentially be unacceptable it is considered that, rather than to refuse the application, a condition could be attached to any permission to require alternative surfacing materials to be explored and such details to be submitted and approved.

Impact on Landscape Features

The proposed development is likely to require the removal of some small sections of hedgerow and/or trees to accommodate the 3m width of the greenway, particularly where the greenway would begin and end cutting through hedgerows. No details have been submitted to demonstrate how much is likely to be removed, however at the time of writing this report the applicant a survey was being prepared. The extent of the removal of trees is likely to be minimal and would not significantly alter the wider landscape value of the area. Furthermore, and as detailed in the previous section, additional landscaping will be secured by condition which would help to blend the proposals into the rural environment. There are no protected trees along the route of the greenway.

Impact on the Amenity of adjacent properties

The proposed cycle way and footpath would, at points, be within close proximity to residential properties. Walking, cycling and horse riding are leisure activities which do not generate a high level of noise or disturbance. Whilst the proposed route would pass the front of some properties these buildings, at their nearest point, would be 16m from the greenway between which are the parking/turning areas and points of access for these dwellings which are the more public areas of dwellings. It is therefore considered that there would not be a significant impact on any property near to the application site which would be detrimentally impacted through loss of privacy.

Impact on Highway Safety

Concern has been raised with regard to the potential conflict between users of the greenway and vehicles, particularly HGV's, which service Alvaston Hall Hotel and agricultural operations. The greenway at this point will follow the existing made service track which serves dwellings, the hall and golf course, and agricultural units. The proposals have been assessed by the

Strategic Highways Manager who has raised no objection to the proposals. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that a condition be attached to any permission for details to be submitted of safety measures/signage which could be incorporated along the route at this stretch to improve awareness/safety.

The link will connect with Phase 2 of the route to the north of Nantwich, the route crosses the A500 and the site access to Alvaston Business Park, it is unclear what measures would be installed to ensure safe pedestrian/cycle movement however this is outside of the application site. The end of the route is opposite the Rising Sun PH on Middlewich Road and it is proposed to construct a Pegasus crossing over this road. This crossing would be signalled and allows the crossing of un-mounted horses along with pedestrians and cyclists. This is works that is within the adopted highway and can be carried out under Highways agreements.

At the point where the cycle route cuts through the hedgerow at Middlewich Road the route runs adjacent to Middlewich Road. The distance between the edge of the highway and the hedgerow is narrow at this point. Further details of how this area will be treated have been requested as there will be a requirement for the removal of some vegetation to accommodate a 3m wide greenway. There is no concern from the Strategic Highways Manager with regard to any of these works.

Impact on Protected Species

A protected species survey has been submitted to support the application. A desk top survey has been carried out to determine the likely impact of the proposed development a protected species. The survey identifies that there would be no adverse impact on such species, but has suggested a series of Reasonable Avoidance Measures and conditions. The Councils ecology consultation has confirmed that there would be no adverse impact on protected species or their habitat and has raised no objection to the proposal. This is subject to a condition being attached to any permission for further survey work to be carried out if works are to commence during the bird breeding season (1st March and 31st August). A condition is therefore recommended to that end.

Other Matters

A hazardous Installation consultation zone runs along Middlewich Road and part of the adjoining field. The application site is partially within this consultation zone. However the development type is of a nature and low sensitivity which does not require consultation with the Health and Safety Executive. Therefore there are no implications on the hazardous implication or public safety risk to the users of the proposed development.

11. CONCLUSIONS

The proposed development would provide an important stretch of infrastructure which would encourage the use of sustainable modes of travel. Whilst some harm may be caused to the character and appearance of the open countryside it is considered that benefits, along with appropriate conditions relating to landscaping and surfacing materials would overcome the harm caused. Furthermore, it is considered that there would be no significantly detrimental harm to the amenities of neighbouring properties, highway safety protected species or any other matter. The proposed development, as conditioned, is therefore considered to be in compliance with Policies NE.2 (Open Countryside), NE.5 (Nature Conservation), NE.9 (Protected Species), BE.1 (Amenity),

BE.2 (Design Standards), BE.3 (Accessing and Parking), BE.4 (Drainage, Utilities and Resources), BE.5 (Infrastructure), BE.21 (Hazardous Installations), TRAN.5 (Provision for Cyclists) and RT.9 (Footpaths and Bridleways) of the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

APPROVE with conditions

- 1) Commencement of Development**
- 2) Plans**
- 3) Details of surfacing materials to be submitted and approved**
- 4) Scheme of Landscaping to be submitted and approved – including fencing**
- 5) Scheme of Landscaping to be implemented**
- 6) Details of highway safety measures/signage to be submitted and approved**
- 7) Survey to be submitted and approved if works carried out between 1st March and 31st August**

