

**Application No:** 11/4346N

**Location:** Former Railway and Royal Mail Buildings Weston Road Crewe, CW1 6AA

**Proposal:** A hybrid application, comprising (i) full application for the demolition of existing buildings on the site and the construction of a surface grade car park (240 spaces plus 11 disabled), a Taxi rank, improved subway access (ii) An outline application with all matters reserved for new two-storey commercial building towards north west of the site with potential to incorporate A3 (restaurants and cafes) or A5 (hot food takeaways).

**Applicant:** Andrew Ross, Cheshire East Council

**Expiry Date:** 01-Mar-2012

#### **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

**APPROVE subject to conditions**

#### **MAIN ISSUES**

**Principle of Development**  
**Design Considerations**  
**Parking, Highway Safety and Traffic Generation**  
**Landscape and Tree Matters**  
**Impact On Protected Species**  
**Impact on Residential Amenity**  
**Flooding and Drainage**  
**Other Issues**

#### **REFERRAL**

The application has been referred to Strategic Planning Board because the proposal is over 1ha in size and the applicant is Cheshire East Borough Council.

#### **1. SITE DESCRIPTION**

This application relates to the former Royal Mail site positioned on the junction of the A534 Nantwich Road and the A5020 Weston Road in Crewe.

The site is adjoined to the west by Crewe Railway Station and light industrial commercial units to the south as well as a Premier Inn Hotel. On the opposite side of Weston Road, to the east,

is a large B&Q Warehouse and associated car parking. The Crewe Arms hotel is situated on the opposite side of Nantwich Road to the north where there is a narrowing of Nantwich Road caused by the railway bridge.

In terms of shape and size, the application site measures approximately 1.48ha and is roughly rectangular in shape.

The majority of the site is occupied by a mixture of buildings formerly used in connection with Crewe railway and as part of Royal Mail's operations and distributions. The buildings occupying the northern portion of the site are more traditional 2 storey (plus basement) buildings with the southern portion given over to 1960s part 2 storey and part 4 storey buildings.

There is a grassed area with some tree specimens located on the corner of the site bordering the Crewe Arms Roundabout behind which there is an access road which provides limited parking.

The site falls within the settlement boundary of Crewe as designated in the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011.

## **2. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

This is a "hybrid" application (i.e. part outline and part full planning permission). Full planning permission is sought for the demolition of the existing buildings on the site and the construction of a surface grade car park (providing a maximum of 240 spaces plus 11 disabled), a Taxi rank and improvements to an existing subway access.

Outline planning permission is sought for a new two-storey commercial building towards the north west of the site incorporating 6 retail units with potential to include A3 (restaurants and cafes) or A5 (hot food takeaways).

## **3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

Planning applications for the site are associated with the site's former use in connection with the railway industry and Royal Mail operations. More recently, a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use was granted which established that the authorised use of the site is a mix of B8 and B1 land use classes.

## **4. PLANNING POLICIES**

### **National Policy**

PPS 1 Delivering Sustainable Development

PPS: Planning and Climate Change – Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1

PPS4 (Planning for Sustainable Economic Development)

PPS 9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

PPG 13 Transport

PPS 23 Planning and Pollution Control

PPS 25 Development and Flood Risk

## **Local Plan Policy**

BE.1 Amenity  
BE.2 Design Standards  
BE.3 Access and Parking  
BE.4 Drainage, Utilities and Resources  
BE.6 Development on Potentially Contaminated Land  
TRAN.1 Public Transport  
TRAN.3 Pedestrians  
TRAN.4 Access for the Disabled  
TRAN.5 Provision for Cyclists  
TRAN.7 Crewe Railway Station  
TRAN.8 Existing Car Parks  
TRAN.9 Car Parking Standards  
NE.10 New Woodland Planting and Landscaping  
NE.20 Flood Prevention

## **Other Material Policy Considerations**

‘Planning for Growth’  
‘Presumption in Favour of Economic Development’  
Draft National Planning Policy Framework  
Supplementary Planning Document: Crewe Rail Gateway (Adopted Development Brief and Sustainability Appraisal)  
Circulars of most relevance include: ODPM 06/2005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation  
Relevant legislation also includes the EC Habitats Directive and the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994

## **5. OBSERVATIONS OF CONSULTEES (EXTERNAL TO PLANNING)**

### **Environmental Health**

Recommend conditions relating to hours of construction / piling, details of external lighting and contaminated land. An informative stating that a Brick Crusher Permit will be required under the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999.

Details of Air Quality will be submitted by way of an update.

### **Highways**

No objection, subject to conditions requiring the submission of a Construction Management Plan, a Traffic Management Plan, provision of real time parking information.

Pedestrian access to the station will be improved by the reopening of the subway linking the surface level car park with the station.

Overall, traffic impact from this development will be reduced when compared to the future impact if the sites existing use-class was to remain. The potential traffic generation from the

lawful use actually outweighs the calculated traffic generation from the proposed use and this provides benefits on all areas of the local highway network in capacity terms. This reduction in impact comes in a number of forms, including the reduction in traffic needing to pass the station to park in the existing Pedley Street car park and also traffic needing to either pick up or drop off at the existing station top facility.

A large proportion of these trips would use the new car park facilities and not need to enter Nantwich Road to access existing station facilities or car parks.

**Environment Agency:**

No objection, subject to a condition requiring the submission of a scheme for surface water drainage in accordance with the submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA). The use of a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) is also advised.

**United Utilities:**

No objection subject to further submission of details of drainage and provided that the site is drained on a separate system, with only foul drainage connected into the foul sewer. Surface water should discharge to the soakaway/watercourse/surface water sewer with the consent of the Environment Agency.

**Network Rail:**

No objection in principle, but express concerns regarding the following:

- Leasing arrangements
- The subway must be suitable/compliant and confirmation of funding should be provided
- Access and egress for delivery vehicles serving the retail units will be through the car park, which may not be open 24 hours
- Delivery vehicles may damage the barriers causing loss of revenue
- Conflicting vehicle movements between long stay and short stay parking
- Surface water drainage must not drain onto Network Rail property
- Who will manage CCTV?
- How will two-storey commercial building be accessed?
- The proposal must not encroach on roads, paths or ways to provide access to Network Rail land.

## **6. VIEWS OF THE CREWE TOWN COUNCIL**

No comments received at the time of report preparation

## **7. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS**

At the time of report preparation, one objection had been received on the following grounds:

- The proposed new entrance building looks nothing more than a toilet block.

- The proposed development does not provide a landmark station entrance/concourse.
- This is a major Gateway development site for Crewe and should only be used for a highly visual quality station entrance, providing a large new concourse with all the services brought together in it, (i.e. ticket offices, travel centre, shops, cafes etc.)
- Does not provide escalators or lifts to the subway. The subway does not provide access to all platforms (i.e. platform 12). The subway is not part of the proposed entrance building and is just out in the open.
- The proposed development does not bring the station together with one Landmark Entrance. It leaves a miss match of entrances with no gathering of services together.
- There is no transport interchange for buses and still leaves Nantwich Rd Entrance congested.

## 8. OFFICER APPRAISAL

### Main Issues

The main issues in the consideration of this application are the suitability of the site, in principle, for use as a surface grade car park as well as the introduction of the proposed retail units within the proposed two-storey commercial building and the impact that the proposals would have on the character and appearance of the Crewe Railway Gateway (CRG).

### Principle of Development

As Members will be aware the Minister for Decentralisation has recently published two statements. The first is entitled 'Planning for Growth' and the second highlighted a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. These statements set out a much more positive approach to development and state that:

*'The Government's top priority in reforming the planning system is to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs. Government's clear expectation is that the answer to development and growth should wherever possible be 'yes', except where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in national planning policy' and that LPA's should 'approve development proposals that accord with statutory plans without delay and grant planning permission where the plan is absent, silent, indeterminate or where relevant policies are out of date'.*

The above statements were followed by the Draft National Planning Policy Framework which was published in July 2011. Although this is in draft form it is still considered to be a material planning consideration and some weight should be given to this document in the consideration of this planning application. In terms of economic development the draft NPPF states that

*'Planning policies should recognise and seek to address potential barriers to investment, including poor environment or any lack of infrastructure, services or housing'.*

In terms of transport it states that: *'encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion'* and that:

*'local authorities should work with neighbouring authorities and transport providers to develop strategies for the provision of viable infrastructure necessary to support sustainable economic growth'.*

These recent statements and the draft NPPF support this proposed development which would assist in the redevelopment of a vacant brownfield site and would help to promote the use of Crewe Railway Station. In terms of Local Plan Policy, the site lies in the settlement boundary for Crewe, where there is a general presumption in favour of development provided that it complies with relevant development plan policies.

This includes policy TRAN.7 which states that land at Crewe Railway Station will be safeguarded to permit an extensive modernisation scheme which will include, improved access for pedestrians, cyclists, cars, taxis buses, service vehicles, including a new bus interchange, multi-storey car parking, improved links to Crewe Town Centre, a new station concourse, ticket office, and new passenger facilities.

Policy TRAN.7 is complimented by the 'Crewe Rail Gateway' supplementary planning document which provides a development brief for the wider Crewe Rail Gateway (CRG). The application site falls within the core station sub area of the CRG. Whilst the development brief states that a comprehensive approach to the development of the whole gateway would be advantageous, the brief also recognises the need for flexibility in the delivery of the development which is increasingly important in the current economic climate.

The proposals would improve pedestrian links with the station by opening up an existing subway access to the car park. Additionally, the proposal would provide much needed parking which would help to relieve pressure on the Pedley Street car park and the need for vehicles to approaching from Crewe Arms Roundabout to enter Nantwich Road and Station Top. Provision for cycle parking would be made as well as a taxi rank close to the reopened subway access.

Whilst the proposal does not provide for a multi-storey car park or bus interchange at this stage, this proposal represents the first step in delivering improvements to this strategically important site. In considering this scheme, it is of importance that the proposals do not preclude or indeed prejudice the long term aims and spatial vision for the wider Crewe Rail Gateway.

The submitted scheme would result in the clearance of the existing out of date and poor condition buildings which occupy the site and would provide development which would not be practically intrusive (i.e. a car park) and which would not therefore represent a barrier to future redevelopment or the regeneration strategy advanced in the 'Crewe Rail Gateway' supplementary planning document.

With respect to the proposed retail on the site, the scheme includes provision of a 6 retail units within the proposed two-storey commercial building. This would be located in the North West corner of the site occupying a frontage off Nantwich Road next to the Station Top Bridge.

Whilst the site is situated outside of the Town Centre, the CRG supplementary planning document recognises and promotes the inclusion of small scale ancillary retail uses to compliment the station. The proposed retail element would offer only 549 sq m floorspace and as such would not be considered 'significant' and would principally serve the users of the station. Consequently, the proposed retail element would not be of a scale or nature that would harm the vitality and viability of Crewe Town Centre. As such the retail element is considered to be acceptable and in compliance with the aims of local plan policy TRAN.7 and the Crewe Rail Gateway SPD.

Thus, it is clear that there is support for the principle of this development at National, Regional and Local levels and there are benefits of this scheme.

## **Design Considerations**

### **Surface Level Car Park**

The site is located on a major roundabout at an important gateway into Crewe opposite the Crewe Arms Hotel and next to Crewe Railway Station. It is currently occupied by buildings and areas of hard surfacing, with a large grassed area separating the present taxi waiting area from the Crewe Arms roundabout, Nantwich Road and Weston Road. A group of mature trees stand in the grassed area.

The buildings would be removed and the basements beneath would be filled with recycled site-work material and engineered fill from the demolition of the existing buildings.

The boundaries with the site would be fenced with a 1 metre high boundary treatment. The applicant has stated that the boundary fencing will be high quality with opportunity for some artwork to help improve the public realm. These details will be secured by condition.

With respect to the general appearance of the site, concerns have been expressed regarding the potentially intrusive impact that the development would have given that the parking areas would travel hard up to the perimeter edge of the site along the key frontages. In order to address this, the layout has been amended to enable the provision of a buffer strip along the frontage and corner so that some soft landscape works and planting can be introduced. Such works would help to soften the visual appearance of the site and to respect the boulevard style which is prevalent along the approach to Crewe Arms Roundabout.

### **Subway**

To the rear of the site, there is an existing subway access to the site which would be reopened to provide a direct pedestrian link with the station. This would require the construction of a stair case but this would have minimal impact on the character or appearance of the development as it would be situated towards the rear of the site and would be mainly below ground. Details of finishes should be secured by condition.

### **Two-Storey Commercial Building**

This part of the scheme is in outline form with all matters reserved. Therefore, full consideration cannot be given at this stage to the design layout or appearance of the

proposed building. Nonetheless, the indicative plan shows that the building would be sited in the far North West corner of the site so as to front the Nantwich Road. The indicative plans also show that the building would turn 90 degrees so as to provide some frontage along Weston Road.

The building would be two-storey and would accommodate 6 retail units aimed specifically at rail users. It occupies a position where the CRG SPD promotes a concourse building linking in with the Station Top frontage along Nantwich Road. Subject to an appropriate design, which could be secured at the reserved matters stage, the proposed building could be designed to adjoin and link-in with a future concourse development when the economic and financial climate dictates. Thus, at this stage, the proposal would not preclude or prejudice the continuing development or future regeneration of the site.

### **Parking, Highway Safety and Traffic Generation**

Policy BE.3 deals with access and parking and states that development will only be permitted where proposals provide:

- safe pedestrian access
- the provision of any off street parking
- manoeuvring and operational space should be designed to minimise visual impact
- safe vehicular access and egress arrangements.

The development will increase parking available at the station and will also improve the pickup and drop off facilities in close proximity to it. The reopening of the existing subway will provide a direct link into the station for pedestrian users and this will reduce pressure on the use of the Station Top along Nantwich Road which currently serves as the existing drop off and pick up point.

The road network in Crewe is constrained by the existing rail infrastructure in the town with congestion forming on a number of routes within the town. The Crewe Green Link Road Major Scheme Business Case Report identifies that the Road from B5078 Edleston Road leading up to the Crewe Arms roundabout suffers from congestion. This congestion occurs mainly at peak times, apart from the A534 along Nantwich Road which occurs in the inter-peak period.

Vehicular access to the proposed car park is to be provided by a priority controlled give way access off Weston Road. The access would be offset towards the southern end of the site to increase separation with the roundabout junction at the location of the former Royal Mail access junction. Some minor modifications to the existing junction are proposed in order to provide a wider right-turn lane for traffic turning into the site from the north. In addition, in order to discourage any queuing northbound vehicles from blocking the entry and exit into the car park, 'Keep Clear' road markings are proposed to be provided.

In terms of the impact of the development on the highway network, a Transport Assessment was produced by MVA Consultancy.

The traffic generation from the existing use has been calculated in it alongside the proposed traffic generation from the new car park. In order to calculate the net traffic impact from the new development, it is necessary to deduct the existing traffic generation of the existing use



from the traffic generated by the proposed use. This gives a figure for net traffic generation which can then be factored into the adjacent junction capacity analyses contained within the Transport Assessment and enable effects on the highway network and junction capacity to be calculated.

Distribution patterns have been taken from traffic patterns for the Crewe Gates Industrial Estate and demand for Pick-Up and Drop-Off service (PUDO), taxis and short-stay parking has been taken from survey data from the users of the existing car parks which serve the station.

Overall, traffic impact from this development will be reduced when compared to the future impact, if the sites existing use was to remain. In fact the potential traffic generation from the current use actually outstrips the calculated traffic generation from the proposed use and this provides benefits on all areas of the local highway network in capacity terms.

This reduction in impact comes in a number of forms. The first of which is the reduction in traffic needing to pass the station to park in the existing Pedley Street car park. Furthermore, traffic needing to either pick up or drop off at the existing station top facility would be reduced. A large proportion of these trips would use the new car park facilities and not need to enter Nantwich Road to access existing station facilities or car parks. The proposed car park junction has been calculated to operate well within capacity on the proposed design flows both at the year of opening (2015) and the predicted future year (2030).

The B&Q access junction, which is signalised, has been modelled (using LinSig software) for the development traffic impact and is shown to retain over 17% total junction capacity in the year of opening and a slightly reduced but still positive capacity in 2030. Because the B&Q junction is relatively close to Crewe Arms roundabout the TA considers traffic queue lengths in PCU's (passenger car units) as per the industry standards for traffic modelling. Calculated queue lengths for vehicles at this junction show little interference with adjacent junctions and the only junction that is affected significantly is the proposed car park junction itself and this will be managed through traffic lane markings to accommodate the right turn access traffic.

The proposal includes the refurbishment of the existing subway, which is currently not in use for the general public. This is in order to provide a direct pedestrian connection into the station from the car park. Access into the subway will be provided by steps down from the surface level car park. This will improve pedestrian access into the station from the car park and also from the south as pedestrians will be able to enter the station at this location, rather than walking along Nantwich Road to Station Top.

To conclude highways matters, traffic impact from this development will be reduced when compared to the future impact, if the sites existing use was to remain. The proposal will reduce traffic needing to pass the station to park in the existing Pedley Street car park and also traffic needing to either pick up or drop off at the existing Station Top facility. As such, the Strategic Highways Manager is satisfied with the proposals having regard to highways and parking considerations.

## **Landscape and Tree Matters**

The proposed development would require the removal of all the existing vegetation, taking car parking right up to the road boundaries with a 1 metre high hoop topped railing around the perimeter to the north and east, a 2.4 m high black palisade fencing to the boundaries of the Royal Mail site to the south and the proposed commercial buildings to the north west. In mitigation for the tree loss, 9 replacement trees were initially proposed.

The existing group of mature trees is a prominent feature in the street scene and the tree canopies soften views of the existing buildings when viewed from the roundabout. The most southerly tree is a poor specimen. However, the remaining trees appear healthy and offer some public amenity value. On the approaches to the roundabout, Crewe Road and Weston Road are tree lined boulevards and this design concept has been maintained in recent developments including the B&Q store which has a wide landscape buffer strip around the periphery.

Loss of prominent trees would be detrimental to visual amenity. Moreover, the design as initially submitted would not be viewed as being sympathetic to the character of the surrounding area. In its initial form, the proposals would detract from the boulevard landscape structure. However, as stated earlier the applicant has now amended the layout of the car park to enable a buffer strip to be provided along the key frontages. This will provide space for the introduction of some soft landscaping works including, trees plants and shrubs which should help to soften and minimise the impact of parking on the street scene whilst tying in with the existing boulevard character.

## **Impact on Protected Species**

The application is supported by an ecological assessment, which identifies buildings on the site with moderate potential to support roosting bats. The submitted assessment suggests that further bat surveys be undertaken next spring/summer.

The Council's Nature Conservation has considered the submitted surveys. Having regard to the recorded history of bats in Crewe, the urbanised nature of the surroundings, the lack of significant foraging and commuting habitat and the abundance of alternative roosting opportunities in the vicinity, on balance, the Nature Conservation Officer considers that bats are not reasonable likely to be present or affected by the proposed development. Consequently, the Nature Conservation Officer advises that further bat surveys are not required to inform the determination of this application in accordance with PPS9.

A condition requiring a breeding bird survey to be carried out if works are undertaken during the nesting season is recommended. Accordingly the requirements of PPS9 and the EC Habitats Directive are satisfied.

## **Impact on Residential Amenity**

The surrounding uses are predominantly commercial and industrial and therefore the proposal will not directly impact on the amenity afforded to any adjoining residential uses.

## **Flooding and Drainage**

A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been carried out to determine the impact of the proposed development on flooding. In accordance with PPS 25 and local policy, the FRA has considered the impact on the surface water regime in the area should development occur. The Environment Agency has confirmed that the redevelopment of the site is considered to be acceptable with the use of appropriate conditions for a drainage scheme for surface water run-off.

## **Other Issues**

Issues relating to air quality will be provided to Members by way of an update once comments from Environmental Health have been received.

With respect to the issues identified by Network Rail relating to leasing, subway specification, funding, damage to car parking barriers, who monitors CCTV, and encroachment, these are not material planning considerations. Deliveries to the site could be managed by condition, and the other issues relating to vehicle movements would not sustain a refusal having regard to highway considerations covered earlier in the report.

## **10. REASONS FOR APPROVAL**

The principle of the development is supported by local, regional and national planning policy as well as emerging planning documents such as the NPPF and the statements made by the Planning Minister in relation to 'Planning for Growth' and a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'.

Whilst the proposal would not at this stage deliver comprehensive development of the Crewe Rail Gateway, local plan policy recognises the need for flexibility in the delivery of the development. This proposed scheme would facilitate the delivery of additional parking close to the station and would improve access and pedestrians links with the station. The development would not by its nature, prejudice or preclude the future redevelopment or regeneration of the station.

The proposed retail provision would not harm the vitality and viability of the Town centre having regard to its ancillary nature and small scale.

Overall, traffic impact from this proposal will be reduced when compared to the impact of the site's existing use if it was to remain used like this in the future. The potential traffic generation from the lawful use actually outweighs the calculated traffic generation from the proposed use and this provides benefits on all areas of the local network in capacity terms. This reduction in impact comes in a number of forms, the first of which is the reduction in traffic needing to pass the station to park in the existing Pedley Street car park and also traffic needing to either pick up or drop off at the existing Station Top facility.

Subject to an amended layout, which provides for an appropriate landscape buffer along the key frontages, the proposal will not have a significant impact on the boulevard character of the area and will serve to minimise the visual harm to the area. Appropriate high quality boundaries will be secured by condition as will a scheme of landscaping.

The proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of its impact upon residential amenity, ecology, drainage/flooding and it therefore complies with the relevant local plan policy requirements and accordingly is recommended for approval subject to other environmental health considerations.

## **11. RECOMMENDATION**

**APPROVE** subject to the following conditions:-

- 1. Standard 3 year time limit (Phase A – Car Park)**
- 2. Standard outline time limit (Phase B – Two-Storey Commercial Building)**
- 3. Submission of reserved matters (Phase B - Two-Storey Commercial Building)**
- 4. Approved Plans including Amended Layout**
- 5. Submission of Materials**
- 6. Notwithstanding submitted details, details of Boundary Treatment to be submitted**
- 7. Landscaping submission**
- 8. Landscaping implementation**
- 9. Breeding bird survey to be carried out prior to commencement of any works during nesting season**
- 10. Submission of details of bin storage.**
- 11. Compliance with flood Risk Assessment**
- 12. Scheme of Surface water Drainage**
- 13. Construction of Access**
- 14. Hours of construction**
- 15. Details of pile driving operations**
- 16. Sustainable Urban Drainage System**
- 17. Only foul drainage to be connected to sewer**
- 18. Limit retail floorspace to with subdivisions**
- 19. Submission of Construction Method Statement**
- 20. Submission of Traffic Management Plan**
- 21. Submission of details of a scheme for of real time parking information**
- 22. Submission of details of CCTV**
- 23. Demolition to take place in accordance with submitted demolition strategy**
- 24. Details of the proposed finishes and hard landscape treatments of the subway and stair facilities.**
- 25. Submission of details of cycle racks**
- 26. Submission of details of external lighting**

## Location Plan

