

Application No: 17/4371M

Location: JODRELL BANK OBSERVATORY, MACCLESFIELD ROAD, JODRELL BANK, CHESHIRE, SK11 9DL

Proposal: This application relates to the improvement of visitor arrivals and capacity. It comprises of the modification and extension to the existing visitor car park and the construction of an external ticket booth / entry portal adjacent to the existing Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre Planet Pavilion. It includes landscaping works, fencing and associated enabling works.

Applicant: University of Manchester

Expiry Date: 01-Dec-2017

SUMMARY

The proposal is a visitor car park and entrance area to the Jodrell Bank site. Jodrell Bank Observatory is set in an isolated location in Lower Withington located partly within Goostrey Parish and partly within Lower Withington Parish. The observatory is home of the Sir Bernard Lovell telescope which was the largest steerable radio telescope in the world and approximately 60 years after its construction remains the third largest. The outstanding significance of the telescope has been recognised through its designation as a grade I listed building, which places it in the top 2.5% of the most significant listed buildings in England. The site has a series of buildings on it forming part of the University of Manchester research facility.

The Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre forms a main part of the site which is a public outreach arm and hosts approximately 150,000 visitors per year.

The proposals are for the expansion to the car parking facilities at the site which will see a car park capacity increase from 174 to 275 spaces + 50 temporary spaces, an increase in 101 permanent spaces along with a new ticket booth/entry portal building adjacent to the existing discovery centre, with path to the west.

It is considered that the proposed development is essential for the future effective operation of Jodrell Bank which is a key tourist destination within Cheshire East, in the short and medium term. The proposals will provide adequate facilities for the proposed expansion of the site with the First Light Project along with the expected capacity increases expected at the site in general. The proposed development accords with development plan policies and is therefore considered to be a sustainable form of development when considering the three strands. Sustainable forms of development that accord with the development plan must be approved without delay unless material considerations indicate otherwise, in this case it is considered that the proposal is acceptable subject to carefully worded conditions and is therefore recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to conditions

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site is the Jodrell Bank Observatory which is set in an isolated location in Lower Withington located partly within Goostrey Parish and partly within Lower Withington Parish. The observatory, which is home of the Sir Bernard Lovell telescope which, at the time of its construction 1952-57, was the largest steerable radio telescope in the world and approximately 60 years after its construction remains the third largest. The outstanding significance of the telescope has been recognised through its designation as a grade I listed building, which places it in the top 2.5% of the most significant listed buildings in England. The site has a series of buildings on it forming part of the University of Manchester research facility.

The Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre is also present at the site which is a public outreach arm and hosts approximately 150,000 visitors per year, it is part of the University of Manchester.

The SKA (Square Kilometre Array) project is also located at the site, and has been based at the site since 2012. The SKA located their headquarters at Jodrell Bank in 2012 and in 2016 took the decision to expand their presence on the site. SKA Organisation is an international science project that operates in the field of radio astronomy. Although there are regular interfaces with the Jodrell Bank Observatory, SKA operates their own scientific equipment, independent of the Lovell and MKII telescopes.

There are two vehicular accesses to the Jodrell Bank site, the northern access is the main access to the site for staff and visitors, however there is a secondary access to the south of the site onto the A535 which is subject to alterations as part of a previous approved project at the site.

This application deals with the main visitor entrance to the site and car parking facilities provided.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

The application proposes an increase to the visitor carpark to increase capacity at the site, due to existing capacity issues, and future capacity demands which will be placed on the site with the new First Light Project which is subject of an application currently being considered alongside this application.

The proposals will see a car park capacity increase from 174 to 275 spaces + 50 temporary spaces, an increase in 101 permanent spaces. This is largely done through the reconfiguration of the existing car park into a more formal arrangement; however some expansion of the car park will also take place mainly to the west of the site adjacent to the staff only access which runs parallel with the car park, which will involve the removal of some landscaping. The proposals also include a new ticket booth/entry portal building adjacent to the existing discovery centre, with path to the west.

Planning History

10/0875M Erection of two buildings to provide new visitor facilities and associated works,

approved, 30/04/2010

11/4001M Erection of a single storey office building, car parking, cycle parking and associated works, approved, 13/02/2012

13/1092C Erection of external lighting to approach and car parking between Jodrell Bank Control Centre Building and SKA Project Office, approved, 31/05/2013

13/1519C Replacement of lift cars and associated lift gear to 2no goods lifts within the towers of the Lovell Telescope at Jodrell Bank, Approved, 01/07/2013

13/5068M Erection of a new free-standing single storey building to form part of the existing Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre and associated external works. Erection of a permanent canopy structure over the existing terrace of the Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre Cafe. Extension of the existing timber decked terrace, Approved, 28/01/2014

14/4350M New build, single storey building providing short-term overnight accommodation for up to six visiting scientists, Approved, 02/12/2014

15/5496M Demolitions, refurbishment, two storey extension and landscaping to the Grade 1 Listed Observatory Building at Jodrell Bank. The project will include restoration of the retained facades; demolition of several extensions added in the 1960's; internal demolitions, remodelling and extension of the retained buildings to better suit their contemporary use, Approved, 08/03/2016

15/5498M Listed building consent for demolitions, refurbishment, two storey extension and landscaping to the Grade 1 Listed Observatory Building at Jodrell Bank. The project will include restoration of the retained facades; demolition of several extensions added in the 1960's; internal demolitions, remodelling and extension of the retained buildings to better suit their contemporary use, Approved, 08/03/2016

16/2706C Erection of new single storey research and administration building and associated landscape, car parking and road works, Approved, 30-Aug-2016

POLICIES

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2010-2030 Adopted July 27th 2017

Policy MP1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Policy PG6 Open Countryside

Policy EG4 Tourism

Policy SD1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East

Policy SD2 Sustainable Development Principles

Policy SE1 Design

Policy SE3 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Policy SE4 The Landscape

Policy SE5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands

Policy SE7 The Historic Environment

Policy SE13 Flood Risk and Water Management

Policy SE14 Jodrell Bank

Local Plan Policy

Para 215 of The Framework indicates that relevant policies in existing plans will be given weight according to their degree of consistency with The Framework.

Macclesfield Borough Local Plan

BE2 - Preservation of Historic Fabric

BE15 – Listed Buildings

BE17 – Preservation of Listed Buildings

GC6 – Outside the Green Belt, Areas of Special County Value and Jodrell Bank Zone

GC14 – Jodrell Bank

Congleton Borough Local Plan

PS8 – Open Countryside

PS10 – Jodrell Bank protection policy

BH2 – Listed Buildings

Goostrey Neighbourhood Plan

Policy SC1 – Science Facilities

Policy VDLC 3 – Hedgerows and Trees

Policy OCEH1 – Biodiversity

Policy OCEH2 – Views and Vistas

Policy OCEH3 – Heritage

Policy TTT5 – Lighting

National Planning Policy Framework

14 Presumption in favour of sustainable development

17 Core planning principles

Part 7 – Requiring good design

109 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Part 12 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Supporting Documents

Jodrell Bank Transport Study

Habitat and Landscape Management Plan

Extended Phase I habitat Survey

Transport and Car Parking Statement

The Granada Arboretum Arboricultural Report

Masterplan document

CONSULTATIONS

Historic England – Do not wish to comment, seek advice from Conservation Officer.

PROW - Local user groups have registered an aspiration under the Council's statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ref. T72) for the creation of a low-traffic route for pedestrians and cyclists between the site and Goostrey Station in order to create an attractive and feasible option for sustainable transport for visitors to and from the site. It is realised that the full scope of this aspiration may be outside of that of the applicant. However, discussions as to its feasibility could be undertaken, with delivery of those elements within the control of the applicant, and with contributions towards its construction being provided.

Facilities that are within the control of the applicant are the provision of best practice cycle parking on site; the application documents refer to the provision of additional Sheffield stands adjacent to the main entrance. Consideration to the provision of covered cycle parking stands could also be given in line with best practice standards.

Further, the feasibility of a cycle/e-cycle hire facility at Goostrey station could be explored in partnership with the station operator and the Friends of Goostrey Station. An assessment of the route between the station and site may be required to identify and implement any improvements and signage required.

Information on such facilities should be made available for visitors so that they have informed choices of transport modes whilst planning their visit, ahead of arrival.

Highways - This application is to provide an extension to the visitor car park at the Discovery Centre at Jodrell Bank and also to construct a ticket booth.

There are currently 167 car parking spaces that serve the Discovery Centre with access from the north off Bomish Lane. The proposal is to increase the number of spaces to 325 spaces to accommodate the predicted increase in visitor numbers to the site.

Although there is an increase in car parking spaces on the site, this is not considered to result in capacity problems on the local road network.

In summary, there are no objections to the application.

Environmental Health – No objection - Electric Vehicle Infrastructure on 5% of new car park.

Flood Risk Team - The application is ok in principle. The key going forward with this site is ensuring all surface water is drained within site boundary at a limited to existing brownfield run-off rate equivalent or provides a betterment on the existing system with appropriate attenuation on site. I note there is also a pond on site which could currently be benefit existing drainage systems, it is advised that the developer undertake a detailed survey to ensuring no drains are abandoned during new carpark extension works. No objections subject to condition.

Goostrey Parish Council – Goostrey Parish Council has no objections to the application to improve visitor arrivals capacity.

The Parish Council believes however, that an opportunity has been missed to improve access for pedestrians especially those arriving by train at Goostrey Station. The Parish Council proposes that it is made a condition of approving this application that a pedestrian access to

the new car park area is built into the new boundary fence which would enable a new footpath to be established which would allow pedestrians to safely approach Jodrell Bank across the fields to the South and West of the site rather than having to follow Bomish Lane which is a narrow, hedged lane with no pavements which is totally unsuitable for pedestrians.

Lower Withington Parish Council - Objection: Lower Withington Parish Council raises the following objections to the above planning application:

1) That the extension of the car park will result in a loss of trees on the site which is considered unacceptable and unnecessary. It is considered that, should the car park extension be permitted, a greater number of replacement trees should be incorporated within the overall car park design to create a more natural, rural appearance.

2) That the car park extension will create a significant expanse of hard material (tarmacadam and stone) which is not consistent or sympathetic with the rural environment. It is requested that, should the car park extension be permitted, use of alternative surface options, such as 'grasscrete', are incorporated as a condition of the decision to create a more natural, rural appearance.

REPRESENTATIONS

2 letters of objection received

– Concerns over the location plan showing The Old Cheshire Hunt property within the location plan

- Concerns over loss of trees

- Goostrey Footpaths Group feels strongly that no further development of the Discovery Centre should be made until safe pedestrian access to the site from the nearest railway station (Goostrey) has been established, The Discovery Centre's website tells those arriving by train they can walk along Blackden Lane and Bomish Lane in daylight. Although it cautions that these are narrow lanes, it does not caution that traffic makes them unpleasant and dangerous for pedestrians. Quite outstandingly dangerous for a family with a push-chair, and scarcely safe for cyclists.

With a national drive to encourage the use of public transport in preference to motor transport, surely a public attraction of Jodrell's standing should have safe, pleasant off-road pedestrian and cycle access from Goostrey Station? Perhaps even a cycle-hire facility at the station?

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Key Issues

- Principle of development
- Tourism
- Highways
- Heritage Assets
- Landscape
- Trees
- Ecology
- Flood Risk
- Amenity

- Accessibility
- Conclusion
- Recommendation

Principle of Development

The site is within the Open Countryside where development is restricted, however there are exceptions to policy PG6 where the proposed development is for:

- development that is essential for the expansion or redevelopment of an existing business or;
- for development that is essential for the conservation and enhancement of a heritage asset.

The application for the expansion and reconfiguration of the car park along with the proposed ticket booth building, and considered to be essential for the business to function effectively on the site. The discovery centre in particular attracts 150,000 visitors annually and this is expected to increase to 225,000 visitors annually and the dwell time on site is expected to increase to 4 hours.

Due to the increase in visitor numbers in the medium and long term due to planned activities at the Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre there is a need to increase the car parking capacity for the visiting public. This application is being considered alongside the First Light Heritage project which if supported will create higher demands on car parking in the medium term.

The existing situation during all bank holidays and during school holidays is that additional car parking is required. Information submitted shows the end of May bank holiday is the worst scenario such that when a visit time is around 4 hours the car park capacity required is 230% so the existing situation would clearly be substandard. The information provided also shows that even with short visits of around 2 hours in the short and medium term, all bank holidays (excluding Christmas and Boxing Day) capacity exceeds 100%. Therefore the need is pressing during these peak times in order for the attraction to function effectively and continue to be a desirable visitor destination.

The First Light project being considered under application 17/4370M, is expected to create further demand on car parking provision which has been assessed in the transport information provided as being the medium term. The car park is not sufficient during peak times at the current time, therefore the situation will be exacerbated into the future. The First Light project is a heritage led project which provide visitors with the background to the Lovell Telescope and the history of the Jodrell Bank site as opposed to the discovery centre which is a science led exhibit.

It is considered that this proposal would enhance the heritage asset by providing the heritage exhibition at the site. The improvements to be made through this application to the car park and ticket booths are intended to improve the customer/visitor experience which together will improve the desirability of the site and help to fund the site and make the heritage asset sustainable into the future as a Grade I listed building and science facility.

It is considered therefore that the proposal is essential for the expansion or redevelopment of the existing business and further is essential for the conservation and enhancement of the

heritage asset. Therefore it is an acceptable form of development within the Open Countryside, subject to all other material considerations.

The site for the car park is partially within the Goostrey Neighbourhood Plan area, policy SC1 of the Goostrey Neighbourhood Plan states that:

The development and expansion of the buildings for scientific research and associated education and exhibition facilities at JBO will generally be supported. This includes the 'First Light' Project, the restoration and enhancement of the Sir Bernard Lovell Telescope, extension of the original control buildings and the construction of the world headquarters for the SKA project.

Therefore it is considered that the proposed development which is enhancement of the existing facilities at Jodrell Bank are supported through neighbourhood plan policy SC1.

Lower Withington is currently preparing a neighbourhood plan which is in the very early stages of preparation a Designated Neighbourhood Area has been established however no policies have been formulated.

Tourism

Policy EG4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan relates to tourism, and recognises Jodrell Bank as a tourist attraction and the policy states that tourist attractions will be protected and appropriate and that sustainable tourist related development will be supported. The policy states that the Local Plan Strategy will protect and enhance the unique features of Cheshire East whilst encouraging investment. The policy goes on to state that it will promote the enhancement and expansion of existing visitor attractions and the provision of new visitor and tourism facilities.

It is considered that the proposed development will enhance the existing site through the improvement of the visitor experience by providing the necessary car parking facilities and enhanced ticket booth area.

It is considered therefore that the proposal is in accordance with policy EG4 of the CELPS.

Highways

There are currently 167 car parking spaces that serve the Discovery Centre with access from the north off Bomish Lane. The proposal is to increase the number of spaces to 325 spaces to accommodate the predicted increase in visitor numbers to the site.

There is an increase in car parking spaces on the site, this is not considered to result in capacity problems on the local road network. The highways officer has raised no objections to the proposal.

It is considered that the proposal will work towards alleviating an existing problem which is demonstrated through the information provided to be an issue in the short and medium term.

Heritage Assets

This application relates to the improvement of visitor arrivals and capacity. It comprises of the modification and extension to the existing visitor car park and the construction of an external ticket booth / entry portal adjacent to the existing Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre Planet Pavilion. It includes landscaping works, fencing and associated enabling works. While there is considerable amount of work required for this operation it is considered that this essential work will not affect the setting of the listed structures at the site, therefore the proposed development is considered to be acceptable in heritage terms subject to conditions.

Landscape

The landscape officer has been consulted on the application and has raised no objections, however does concur with the tree officer's comments in relation to the species mix, which should be larger species for replacement planting. The proposed conditions will include a landscape scheme, and should include larger trees, native hedging and some Wych Elm.

Trees

The application has been subject to a pre-application meeting with the Environmental Planning Team (Landscape, Forestry, Conservation and Ecology). The submitted proposals are broadly in accordance with the discussions held with the applicant and their Agents.

This application, together with the accompanying application for the new Visitor Centre (App 17/4370M) is supported by an Arboricultural Report (ACS consulting dated June 2017) in respect of trees located within the Granada Arboretum. The report is supported by an Arboricultural Plan (Ref ARB/34560/Y/100 B).

A Tree Retention and Removal Plan Planit LLP (Car Park Package drawing PL1648-004 and Landscape Softworks Planit LLP (Car Park Package Softworks Drawing PL1648 -003) has also been submitted in support of the proposed car park extension.

Whilst the Arboricultural Report does not provide specific detail on the numbers of trees proposed for removal the Planit Tree Removal and Retention Drawing shows around 65 trees located around the existing car park that will require removal. The greater proportion of these are low (C) category specimens, although one high (A) category group (G2053) comprising of Birch, Poplar, Cherry and Field Maple adjacent to the eastern boundary and access road to the car park present a moderately high contribution to the landscape.

The submitted landscape drawing proposes 13 replacement semi mature trees comprising of varieties of flowering Cherry, Maple and Oak located in proposed turfed areas around the periphery of the car park. In terms of mitigation for the loss of trees around the car park the replacement provision does not provide for a net benefit in canopy cover or like for like replacement. Over half the proposed replacements are small canopy species (Prunus) and given the loss of high category trees around the edge of the car park and the extensive area of hard standing proposed, a greater emphasis is expected on provision of high canopy replacements commensurate with the University 2:1 replacement policy and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Whilst there are no principle objections to the proposal, significantly more high forest replacement planting is expected than what is currently proposed. There is scope for

additional planting on the site, therefore this will be secured by a landscaping condition.

Ecology

Great Crested Newts

A number of ponds are located within 250m of the proposed development and this protected species has been recorded at a number of ponds in close proximity to the proposed development. The application site however offers limited habitat for great crested newts and the more suitable habitat available is partially fragmented by the presence of the existing car park.

The potential impacts of the proposed development on this species are mostly associated with the risk of any newts that venture onto the site being killed or injured during the construction process. In order to address this risk the applicant's ecological consultant has recommended a suite of 'reasonable avoidance measures' and outline measures are detailed in the submitted Phase One habitat survey.

It is advised that provided these measures are implemented the proposed development would be unlikely to result in a breach of the Habitat Regulations. Consequently, it is not necessary for the Council to have regard to the Habitat Regulations during the determination of this application. A condition in respect of GCN is required.

Brown Hare, Common Toad, Hedgehogs and Polecats

These priority species have been recorded in the broad locality of the current application. Considering the scale of the proposed works it is advised that these species are unlikely to be significantly affected by the proposed development.

Ponds

The proposed development will result in the loss of an existing pond. Whilst this pond does not support great crested newts it may still be of nature conservation value. Further more detailed surveys undertaken next year would be required to fully assess this pond.

It was originally advised that the pond be retained, however following discussions between the ecologist and the agent for the application, it has been agreed that the proposed pond for the first light project would provide sufficient compensation for this loss. However in the event that the first light project is not implemented a condition requiring details of a compensatory pond on site is to be submitted prior to commencement, to ensure that in any event, that a pond is created on the Jodrell Bank site.

Reptiles

It is advised that reptiles are not reasonable likely to be present or affected by the proposed development.

Nesting birds

Conditions in relation to the safeguarding of nesting birds are required.

Trees with bat roost potential

Four trees were identified as having low bat roost potential during the submitted habitat survey. Based on the submitted landscaping plan it appears likely that some of these trees would be lost as a result of the proposed development.

As these trees have only 'low' potential for roosting bats further surveys are not required. The trees should however be felled under reasonable avoidance measures as recommended by the submitted report.

Whilst the application site offers limited opportunities for roosting bats, bats are likely to commute and forage around the site to some extent. To avoid any adverse impacts on bats resulting from any lighting associated with the development it is recommended that a condition attached regarding lighting.

Hedgerows

Native species hedgerows are a priority habitat and hence a material consideration. The submitted ecological assessment states that 130m of hedgerow will be removed as part of the proposed development.

The ecologist has advised that this loss must be compensated for as part of the landscaping of the site, therefore replacement hedgerow must be considered as part of the landscaping scheme to be conditioned.

The addition of Wych Elm in the landscaping scheme would provide a benefit for white letter hairstreak, a priority butterfly species, which has been recorded in this locality. It is recommended that this species be included in the landscaping scheme.

Flood Risk

The site is located within flood zone 1 which is the lowest risk of flooding. The Flood Risk Team has been consulted on the application. It is important to ensure that all surface water is drained within the site boundary at a 'limited to existing brownfield run-off' rate equivalent or provide a betterment on the existing system with appropriate attenuation on site. There is a pond on site which could currently be of benefit to existing drainage systems. It is advised that the developer undertake a detailed survey to ensuring no drains are abandoned during new carpark extension works. The flood risk team has raised no objections and conditions have been recommended.

Amenity

There are no residential properties directly affected by the proposed development.

Accessibility

The proposed development does not directly affect a public right of way, however the rights of way team has commented on the application in relation to the aspirations locally to improve links from Goostrey railway station which is within close proximity to the site. It is true that the road network to the site consists of some narrow country lanes without footpaths. This aspiration has also been reflected in the views of a representation made on the proposal.

Improved links for alternative modes of transport would be welcomed such as cycle routes. However, this is not a requirement of the development. The site is existing and has been well established for many years. The proposal simply improves parking facilities on the site, due to the nature of the Jodrell Bank site and its purpose as a science facility and attraction it has to be located in a rural area to ensure the dark skies are maintained. The proposal does include provision for cycle parking and coach parking, as many parties arrive at the site by coach. In order to further promote more sustainable vehicles the proposal is also required to provide 5% electric vehicle charging points which is encouraged to improve air quality within Cheshire East through new developments.

The local road network is not within the control of the applicant and it would be unreasonable to request improvements outside of the site as this is not required by the highways department to make the proposal acceptable in planning terms. It is considered that the development therefore is acceptable in terms of accessibility.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

It is considered that the proposed development is essential for the future effective operation of Jodrell Bank which is a key tourist destination within Cheshire East, in the short and medium term. The proposals will provide adequate facilities for the proposed expansion of the site with the First Light Project along with the expected capacity increases expected at the site in general. The proposed development accords with development plan policies and is therefore considered to be a sustainable form of development. Sustainable forms of development that accord with the development plan must be approved without delay unless material considerations indicate otherwise, in this case it is considered that the proposal is acceptable subject to carefully worded conditions and is therefore recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE subject to conditions

1. Time Limit
2. Approved Plans
3. Landscaping and Floorscape Scheme to include replacement hedgerow planting, Wych Elm and larger species trees around car parking area.
4. Landscape Implementation
5. Materials as per application unless otherwise agreed
6. Prior to the commencement of development a detailed method statement of Great Crested Newt Reasonable Avoidance Measures is to be submitted to and agreed by the LPA. The proposed development to proceed in accordance with the agreed method statement.
7. Nesting Birds Safeguarding
8. Features for breeding birds to be submitted and installed
9. The felling of any tree identified as having low bat roost potential should be undertaken in accordance with the measures detailed in paragraph 5.3.5 of the submitted Extended Phase One Habitat Survey prepared by WYG dated February 2017
10. Lighting scheme to be submitted
11. Tree Retention unless otherwise agreed
12. Tree Protection measures to be submitted
13. Tree pruning felling specification

14. Arboricultural Method Statement

15. No development shall take place until a detailed strategy / design and associated management / maintenance plan of surface water drainage for the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The drainage design must also include information about the design storm period and intensity (1 in 30 & 1 in 100 (+30% allowance for Climate Change)) & any temporary storage facilities included, to ensure adequate drainage is implemented on site.

16. 5% of spaces to include electric vehicle charging points.

