

Application No: 18/6118N

Location: Land Between Flowers Lane Minshull New Road The A530 Middlewich Road And North Of, PYMS LANE, CREWE

Proposal: A proposed series of highway infrastructure measures and associated works, in the Leighton area of Crewe, and known as the North West Crewe Package

Applicant: Chris Hindle, Cheshire East Council

Expiry Date: 05-Apr-2019

SUMMARY

Cheshire East Council is proposing the construction of a series of highways and junction improvements in the area of Leighton, located to the north west of Crewe. The highways scheme encompassing these improvements is known as the North West Crewe Package, herein referred to as ‘the proposed NWCP’.

The proposed NWCP would include the construction of new roads linking Smithy Lane with Minshull New Road and Middlewich Road (A530). It would also include the realignment of Smithy Lane, Flowers Lane and improvements to other road junctions associated with the scheme. Minshull New Road, outside of the Leighton Academy, would be closed off to vehicular traffic.

The proposed scheme will create a total of 2.9 km of new roads with street lighting and a 30mph speed limit on these new roads. Dual use footways & cycleways will be provided along the scheme with appropriate crossing points to ensure safe crossing facilities.

The proposed NWCP forms a key part of the Local Plan Strategy (LPS) infrastructure programme for Crewe, which will deliver an improved highway network for the town. The benefits of the proposed NWCP also extend to unlocking a number of housing and employment LPS sites by improving wider traffic movements and transport links in the locality. These improvements will also reduce congestion and improve access to Leighton Hospital and the Bentley Motors proposals.

The proposals will have some landscape and ecological impacts, but both can be readily mitigated. The scheme will have neutral effects on most other matters with the benefits set out above.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE with conditions

SITE DESCRIPTION

The proposals for North West Crewe cover 22.5ha and the area affected is located approximately 2.5 km to the north west of Crewe Town Centre.

The site is bounded to the north by Flowers Lane, to the rear of properties (mainly associated with Bentley) off Pyms Lane to the south, by Minshull New Road to the east and the A530 Middlewich Road to the west. Surrounding land uses include Leighton residential areas, Leighton Hospital, open countryside, the Crewe Household Waste and Recycling Centre and the Bentley Motors industrial site to the south. Furthermore, the majority of the proposals for North West Crewe are to be constructed within the proposed Strategic Site of 'Leighton West' – LPS4, which is a mixed-use development area for housing and employment as has been identified within the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy.

The site is largely a flat, large scale landscape made up of small to medium sized, regular and irregular shaped fields and consists of hedgerows, some with trees, a few scattered individual trees in the fields, and finally some belts of trees mainly to the site boundaries. The landscape in general would be described as open in character. Whilst Leighton Brook (a large part of which is in a culvert) lies to the south, the only other water body of note is a fishing pond in a field to the north of Leighton Hospital.

Three public footpaths cross the site, all roughly running east-west. Finally the land does fall away towards Leighton Brook at the southern end of the site especially towards the road frontages of Minshull New Road and Middlewich Road.

PROPOSAL

The scheme, which is accompanied by an Environmental Assessment (ES), comprises four main sections and can be broken down as follows:

Primary Hospital Link Route

This is a 1.1 km section of single lane carriageway that would be built in a north south direction connecting the new Fairfield Link in the north and Minshull New Road in the southeast and would be connected via two new roundabouts (the hospital roundabout and Minshull New Road roundabout respectively). This route also connects Leighton Hospital with the proposed Fairfield Link. It would specifically enhance the blue light corridor to Leighton Hospital.

Fairfield Link (Fairfield being the developer land of Flowers Lane)

This is a new link road to provide access for the future development areas and to facilitate NMU (Non Motorised Users) permeability of the area. It is created by the realignment of Smithy Lane, to the south of Leighton Hospital, including three new roundabouts junctions, connecting the A530 Middlewich Road, in the west, to the Primary Hospital Link Route and to Flowers Lane in the east. The Fairfield Roundabout and A530-Smithy Lane roundabout will be created at either end of the road to allow access to Flowers Lane and A530 Middlewich Road, whilst the third roundabout (Hospital roundabout) will be constructed to provide access to Leighton Hospital and the Primary Hospital Link Route. The eastern arm of the existing Smithy Lane will be closed to traffic and access would be restricted to only NMUs, whilst the western arm section will remain open to traffic in both directions up to the location of the car park / A&E entrance access. Traffic movements west of the car park / A&E entrance junction will be limited and access west of this point restricted to essential access and Blue Light Vehicles only.

Movement of traffic from the A530 into Smithy Lane from both directions will remain unaffected as the existing situation.

East-West Link

This is a new 0.6km long link road between two new roundabouts: the A530 Leighton Farm Roundabout to the west and the Engine of the North roundabout (at the junction with Primary Hospital Link Route) to the east. It facilitates access to an area being promoted by Engine of the North (EotN) to the north and east of the link and facilitates traffic and pedestrian permeability from the A530 to the proposed development areas. It also assists the accessibility of the Bentley Motors masterplan for expansion. The location of the western section of this link road and roundabout has been designed to avoid a historical landfill site and an ecological constraint located to the south of the road as well as a flood plain associated with Leighton Brook.

Flowers Lane Link

This is a new link to accommodate future traffic flows, which would overwhelm the existing traffic signal junction at Eardswick Lane. It also provides for NMU access to the proposed development proposals. It consists of the realignment of Flowers Lane including a new roundabout junction connecting with the A530 Middlewich Road. The northern section of Flowers Lane would be realigned by approximately 150 m south of the existing A530 Middlewich Road and Eardswick Lane junction and linked by a new roundabout. The new Flowers Lane Link connects to A530 Middlewich Road via A530-Flowers Lane roundabout. The existing northern section of Flowers Lane would be closed to through traffic, however kept open for NMUs.

Minor amendments were made to this proposal during the life of the application in response to a neighbours comment about access to their field off the current Flowers Lane. The amendment allows access from the closed section of Flowers Lane before a section which is closed off no motorised traffic.

Minshull New Road

In addition, to the four main sections describes in the previous paragraphs, traffic measures would be introduced along Minshull New Road to reduce the number of vehicles using the road and to improve road safety outside of Leighton Academy. This would be achieved by closing the road to through traffic in front of the school and providing suitable vehicle turning points at the severed ends of the road.

In addition to the above there are a number of measures to improve footways and cycleways alongside the road, and to provide linkages to the Hospital and the Local Plan development sites in the future.

A number of very minor changes have been made to the application since its submission, which have necessitated (again minor) changes to the red line boundary to accommodate: amendments to sluice gates on Leighton Brook; works adjacent to the bridge on Minshull New Road; removal of a splitter island on the Barrows Green roundabout; and the turning heads on Minshull New Road. An ES addendum was also issued picking up the changes for completeness. None of these changes are considered significant or require re-advertisement and are considered in this report.

SCHEME DEVELOPMENT

Initially, the concept was developed for a north-south Spine Road connecting Smithy Lane, in the north and near Leighton Hospital, to Minshull New Road at the south near Rolls Avenue. Additionally, there was an East to West Link Road that connected A530 Middlewich Road near Leighton Hall Farm to the proposed Spine Road.

Numerous alignment options were considered for both the Spine Road and the Link Road and a final consideration of options on June 2016 led to two preferred options for the roads solution, each of which was subject to cost, engineering and environmental assessments in 2016.

Option 1 featured a Spine Road, which forms a continuous and uninterrupted alignment from Minshull New Road to Smithy Lane running approximately centrally through the Strategic site of Leighton West (LPS4) and enabling residential development on each side of the road. A roundabout connected the Spine Road to the existing highway network at each end.

The Link Road was envisaged to run to the north of a historic landfill site commencing at the A530 Middlewich Road, in the proximity of Leighton Hall Farm, and tying into the Spine Road with a roundabout junction approximately 150 m from the Minshull New Road junction.

Option 2 featured a different alignment for the Spine Road, which would form a dis-continuous route, commencing at Minshull New Road and terminating at Smithy Lane as Option 1, but with the principal difference being that the alignment has a 90-degree change of direction at the southern end approximately 150 m from the Minshull New Road junction facilitated by a roundabout. Residential development would only be enabled to the east of the Spine Road.

Option 1 performed better economically and was more suitable to achieving CEC's aspiration to develop the Leighton West site further (and achieve their objectives). Option 1 was therefore taken forward as the preferred route option for further design and development in advance of applying for planning permission.

Additionally, the proposals for North West Crewe also encompasses the realignment of Flowers Lane and Smithy Lane. Remodelling works are planned on these roads and junctions to serve the Leighton and Strategic Leighton West sites as well as serve the Leighton Hospital.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

There are numerous applications affecting the site in question, but of particular relevance concerning the road scheme are recent developments at Bentley Motors including most recently:

17/4011N Hybrid Planning Application for - Outline planning application (with all matters reserved except for means of access and layout for Production and Manufacturing Facility 2) for the erection of 2 no. production and manufacturing facilities; two covered links connecting one of the production and manufacturing facilities with Bentley's existing manufacturing facility; an engine test bed facility together with associated car parking, landscaping and associated infrastructure. Full planning application for the erection of a gatehouse, security fencing, pedestrian turnstile and associated turning facilities to the west of the existing Bentley Motors site on Pyms Lane; the erection of a gatehouse, security fence, pedestrian turnstile, bin store, reconfiguration of visitor parking and associated turning facilities to the east of the existing Bentley Motors site on Pyms Lane; the erection of a gatehouse, security fence, cycle store, pedestrian turnstile and associated turning facilities together with a further gate on Sunnybank Road. - Bentley Motors Ltd, PYMS LANE, CREWE - APPROVED

18/0228N Construction of two 7,200sqm, 4 storey office blocks and related external works - Bentley Motors Ltd, PYMS LANE, CREWE - APPROVED

In addition land to the north (part of LPS 5 referred to as the Fairfield site) has been granted consent:

16/2373N Outline application for the construction of up to 400 dwellings with garaging; parking; public open space; landscaping; new vehicle and pedestrian accesses; highway works, foul and surface water drainage infrastructure and all ancillary works. - Land At, Flowers Lane, Leighton APPROVED

Importantly this application has a Section 106 Agreement which requires the applicant to build a new roundabout access onto Flowers Lane, or if the road proposals (i.e. this application) comes first to allow the Council to construct it in advance of the development. The roundabout is proposed in a slightly different position to that approved under the residential scheme and as such the Section 106 Agreement will need to accommodate this change. A separate report on this agenda seeks Members resolution to amend this agreement.

18/5438N Creation of an agricultural access for land to the east of Flowers Lane.- Land At, Flowers Lane, Leighton APPROVED

Finally there are numerous approvals at Leighton Hospital, but nothing of direct relevance to the application being considered here.

POLICIES

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – 2010-2030

- PG6 – Open Countryside
 - SD1 - Sustainable Development in Cheshire East
 - SD2 - Sustainable Development Principles
 - SE 1 - Design
 - SE 2 - Efficient Use of Land
 - SE3 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity
 - SE 4 - The Landscape
 - SE 5 - Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland
 - SE 13 - Flood Risk and Water Management
 - SE 6 – Green Infrastructure
 - IN1 – Infrastructure
 - CO1 – Sustainable Travel and Transport
 - CO2 – Enabling Business Growth Through Transport Infrastructure
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- LPS4 – Leighton West
 - LPS5 – Leighton

Crewe and Nantwich Local Plan (Saved policies)

- NE5: Nature Conservation and Habitats
- NE9: Protected Species
- NE10: New woodland planting and landscaping

NE17: Pollution Control
NE20: Flood Prevention
NE21: New Development and Landfill Sites
BE1: Amenity
BE4: Drainage, Utilities and resources
TRANS3: Pedestrians
TRANS6: Provision for cyclists
RT9: Footpaths & Bridleways

Neighbourhood Plans:

Neither Crewe or Minshull Vernon has progressed towards making a Neighbourhood Plan.

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Practice Guidance
Cheshire East Infrastructure Delivery Plan

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Environment Agency: No objection in principle subject to conditions covering the following matters:

- The development shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved Flood Risk Assessment including the provision of flood relief pipes or similar, within the embankment of Minshull New Road to the north side of Leighton Brook.
- Submission of a remediation strategy to deal with the risks associated with contamination of the site.
- Measures to deal with unexpected contamination
- No infiltration of surface water drainage into the ground where adverse concentrations of contamination are known or suspected to be present.
- No piling without consent.
- Contaminated land verification report
- Scheme to remove suspended solids from surface water run-off during construction works.

Natural England: No objections are raised, but they highlight some inaccuracies in the ES in relation to Sandbach Flashes SSSI.

“However based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not damage or destroy the interest features for which the site has been notified and has no objection.”

United Utilities: No objections are raised, but as there are a number of “assets” in the area, they recommend that an on-going dialogue is maintained so the scheme can be delivered sustainably and in line with delivery targets.

Cadent Gas: There is apparatus in the vicinity of the application for which they encourage early dialogue.

Health & Safety Executive: The proposed development site does not currently lie within the consultation distance (CD) of a major hazard site or major accident hazard pipeline; therefore at present HSE does not need to be consulted on any developments on this site.

Cheshire Brine: As the proposed development does not appear to include foundations the board would not normally make any comments.

CEC Head of Strategic Infrastructure: No objections, but their comments are set out in detail below.

CEC Public Rights of Way: The development, if granted consent, would affect Public Footpaths Nos. 3 & 6 in the Parish of Leighton and No. 20 in the Town of Crewe. Leighton FP 2 is affected however the new road proposals do not directly affect this path. No objections subject to conditions/informatives.

CEC Environmental Health: No objections raised in relation to Air Quality and Contaminated Land. Comments on noise are awaited.

CEC Flood Risk Manager: Some initial comments have been received, asking for clarification on a number of matters but formal comments will be reported in any update report.

Archaeology: During pre-application discussions the applicant's archaeological consultants at Jacobs recommended that the line of the new road should be subject to a geophysical survey, with a subsequent phase of trial trenching in order to explore areas of potential archaeological interest. This work was carried out in 2018 by Headland Archaeology, in association with Jacobs, and the results are presented in two reports which appear as appendices to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that has been prepared in support of the application. These reports make clear that, although features of interest were identified by the geophysical survey, trenching showed that they were of recent origin. In particular, a possible 'pit alignment' proved to be a modern intrusion. No further work is required on these features.

These results are summarised in Volume 2 (Chapter 8) of the EIA, where a wider consideration of the impact of the scheme on the historic environment is also presented. This is based on a consideration of material held in the Cheshire Historic Environment Record, evidence gathered from an examination of historic mapping and aerial photographs, a rapid walkover survey, and an examination of readily-available secondary sources. This study has identified only a limited number of archaeological sites which will be affected by the scheme. These consist two historic township boundaries (Sites 6 and 8), where it is recommended that formal sections are cut through the features in order to record their form and, if possible, obtain dating evidence. In addition it is advised that consideration should be given, where possible, to designing earthworks in such a way that they do not needlessly alter the present landscape pattern, which is a product of development over many centuries. The study also draws attention to two World War II crash sites within the study area (Sites 10 and 24). Both of these appear to lie outside the road easement and associated works but it should be noted that, if any crash remains are located during construction, the Protection of Military Remains Act (1986) requires that a licence is obtained from the Ministry of Defence. It is suggested that, if this happens, the matter is dealt with by the archaeological contractor carrying out the other mitigation works described above.

It is advised that the above proposals, which will also necessitate a programme of post-excavation analysis and reporting represents an appropriate scheme of mitigation. The work may be secured by condition.

VIEWS OF THE TOWN/PARISH COUNCILS

Minshull Vernon and District Parish Council:

“At its meeting held on 28 January 2019, the Minshull Vernon and District Parish Council resolved that whilst the Council gives overall support for the layout, there are the following observations:

- The proposed roundabout at the junction of the A530 and Flowers Lane is not supported as it will lead to an increase in congestion, the re-alignment of Flowers Lane will cut-off an area of the field unnecessarily and increase the environmental impact of the proposals. It is recommended that the roundabout is placed at the existing junction which will alleviate all of the concerns identified above.
- Minshull New Road should remain open, initially on a trial basis if necessary to review throughput, as there is now no requirement to close it as the school is relocating;
- Six bus stops, lay-bys and shelters be provided on the new Spine Road with footpaths to the adjacent housing, to increase transport accessibility for local residents; and
- The protection of all mature trees and hedgerows on the full length of Minshull New Road, except for where the new junctions will be installed.

Crewe Town Council: Consideration of this application was deferred until the January meeting of the Committee. Any comments received will be reported in an update report.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

Cllr Bebbington (Ward Member) writes:

“Though I generally support this application, I do have grave concerns regarding the proposed roundabout at Bradfield Green A530 and Flowers Lane realignment. With the proposed siting of the new round-about within close proximity to the Eardswick Lane junction and proposed new configuration of the traffic lights, this will only lead to greater congestion at these junctions. I would suggest that the round-about is re-sited at the existing Flowers Lane A530, Eardswick lane Junction, as this would remove the possibility of congestion and introduce a free flow of traffic. This would also be more cost effective as you would utilise an existing junction.

As the proposal is to close Minshull New Road and this would lead to loss of 6 bus stops, I would therefore request that these are replaced with shelters on the new spine road and in the vicinity of the new round-about. On Minshull New Road, I would also request a number of waste bin are provided on the new spine road.”

Five individual residents have commented on the application, none specifically objecting to the scheme in general, but raising the following points:

- Concern is expressed about the partial closure of Minshull New Road as this will cause traffic issues at school times and lead to longer journeys for residents locally.
- Concern about the positioning of the southern most roundabout on Minshull New Road as it will sit higher than the houses, change their outlook and lead to amenity issues especially with car headlights. It should be re-positioned.
- Will concentrate all the traffic at the northern side of the area on Flowers Lane leading to traffic congestion there.
- The wider traffic impacts do not appear to have been properly considered, including planned new housing developments and therefore there is a concern it will have knock on impacts.

- Has air quality and noise been fully considered in the ES?
- The footway/cycle way needs to be continued up the A530 from the Connect 2 link from Nantwich to the Rising Sun linking into the hospital.
- Does the ES fully consider the building materials needed to build the road and the transport movements associated with it?

Finally a land management company has written in on behalf of their client who owns land at Flowers Lane/Moss Lane to request additional information, and to formally object on the following grounds:

- A roundabout at the A530/Flowers Lane/Eardswick Lane junction would appear to offer a better solution that does not seem to have been considered. The proposed scheme will restrict access to their clients land.
- It is unclear from the plans how the proposed junction will now operate
- The plans do not show a recently approved agricultural access off Flowers Lane
- It is unclear how the proposals sit with the Local Plan Strategy

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principal of Development

The majority of the site falls within Local Plan Site LPS 5 Leighton, Crewe which under the policy wording for the allocated uses etc. states at bullet 2:

“Further road improvements to upgrade access to Leighton Hospital for emergency vehicles and suitable footpath and cycle lanes”.

All the elements of the proposals link to Leighton Hospital and as such would be supported by this policy.

Only the northern most link (referred to as the Flowers Lane Link) falls outside this allocation and as such is in open countryside. Policy PG6 Open Countryside is therefore applicable here, and at bullet 2 the policy states:

“Within the Open Countryside only development that is essential for the purposes of... *public infrastructure*, essential works undertaken by public service authorities or statutory undertakers, or for other uses appropriate to a rural area will be permitted.”

As a result, on condition the works are essential, then this link would be acceptable in principle. Highways have confirmed that they have no objections to the proposals on the basis they are designed to accommodate local plan growth with associated growth in traffic levels. In addition the proposals allow for improvements to pedestrian and cycle access, together with improvements to bus travel all of which are considered to essential improvements to the network.

In conclusion then all elements of the proposed road scheme, which essentially are there to support the local plan allocations LPS4 & 5 are acceptable in principle.

Environmental Impacts

Noise

Comments awaited and will be reported in the update report to Members.

Air Quality

Policy SE12 of the Local Plan states that the Council will seek to ensure all development is located and designed so as not to result in a harmful or cumulative impact upon air quality. This is in accordance with paragraph 181 of the NPPF and the Government's Air Quality Strategy.

When assessing the impact of a development on Local Air Quality, regard is given to (amongst other things) the Council's Air Quality Strategy, the Air Quality Action Plan, Local Monitoring Data and the EPUK Guidance "Land Use Planning & Development Control: Planning for Air Quality January 2017)

This is a proposal for the construction of a series of highway infrastructures. Air quality impacts have been considered within the air quality assessment submitted in support of the application by Jacobs dated December 2018. The report considers whether the development will result in increased exposure to airborne pollutants, particularly as a result of additional traffic and changes to traffic flows. The assessment uses ADMS Roads to model NO₂ and PM₁₀ impacts from additional traffic associated with this development and the cumulative impact of committed development within the area.

A number of modelled scenarios have been considered within the assessment. These were:

- Baseline 2015
- Do Minimum (DM) 2021
- Do Something (DS) 2021

The assessment selected 83 receptors in total, with eleven of these being predicted receptors based on future development around the highway infrastructure. Of these 83 receptors chosen, 58 are predicted to see an increase in NO₂ and 67 in PM₁₀ as a result of the development. For PM₁₀, the 67 receptors predicted to see an increase are all mainly imperceptible ones with only thirteen being small increase. The increases in NO₂ range from imperceptible and small to seven medium and two large increases, although it should be noted that 5 of the medium and the two large increases are in areas where the concentrations are already low. However, two of the medium increase receptors are situated within the Nantwich Road AQMA which causes some concern over as any increase in concentrations within an AQMA is considered significant as it is directly converse to the Council's local air quality management objectives, the NPPF and the Council's Air Quality Action Plan. One of the receptors, R078, is located within the Earle Street AQMA and it is predicted that the development will cause the concentration of NO₂ to rise above the threshold of 40 µg/m³.

Having fully reviewed the baseline data used in the assessment, Officers believe that some receptor increases are being over-predicted with high verification factors, of which R078 is one. Current monitoring of the Earle Street AQMA shows that the concentrations in 2015 were below the threshold, where as the model is predicting a baseline figure of 48.98 µg/m³. This evidence would suggest that the assessment is very much a worst case scenario and that the figures predicted in the future, with or without the development, will in fact be lower. Given the distance the development is from the AQMAs, the uncertainty in the traffic data being used will be higher.

As a consequence of the above, Officers requested that an updated assessment be conducted having taken into account current data and trends for these receptors. This updated assessment shows that

there are now no scenarios where the development will create a new exceedance of the air quality objective for NO₂. There are still predicted to be exceedances at some of the receptors, although these are predicted to be in place with or without the development taking place.

It's worth noting that this development is part of a larger package and mitigation measures attached to the other associated developments will offset some of these increases. Therefore, no further objections are noted in regard to this development.

Contaminated Land

The Contaminated Land team has no objection to the above application.

The Jacobs Preliminary Risk Assessment report (October 2018) and Jacobs Geo-environmental Assessment Report (November 2018) have been submitted in support of the above application. The Phase II report proposes several remedial measures including the removal of slurry beds, the removal of burial pits, the reuse of soil onsite, a watching brief during the development. A potential gas risk is noted at the southern end of the site, adjacent to the former landfill site near Leighton Brook. A Remediation Strategy is therefore required defining the proposed remedial and verification procedures for the development.

As such, and in accordance with the NPPF, Environmental Protection recommends conditions, reasons and notes be attached should planning permission be granted:

Residential amenity

Lighting is considered below under the landscape section, however a resident has raised the issue of car headlights in relation to the southern roundabout on Minshull New Road. The applicant however has confirmed, that as shown in the design, there is an earthwork mound with landscaping that will provide adequate screening for residents. The planting species will be subject to condition but will need to address this issue.

Whilst there are a number of properties that will be in the vicinity to these highways proposals, including properties off Minshull New Road, Flowers Lane and a few individual properties elsewhere, none are impacted directly and few will be in close proximity to major works and the proposals mitigate for any harmful impacts.

Highway Implications

Sustainable access

Pedestrian and cycle facilities are to be provided in conjunction with the new road infrastructure:

- Foot and cycle facilities will be provided alongside the new north south link with crossing points included. However formal crossing facilities will be provided when future development comes forward. Particular attention will need to be given to the future pedestrian crossing point of the realigned Smithy Lane so as to achieve a balance between vehicular traffic flow and ease of use/access for pedestrians and cyclists.
- A new shared footway/cycleway on the northern side of the East-West Link Road.

- Footway and cycle facilities will be provided east-west serving Leighton Hospital in the vicinity of Smithy Lane mainly along the redundant carriageway of Smithy Lane following its realignment.
- A continuous cycleway/footway along Flowers Lane is not being provided by the applicant as it is envisaged it will come forward as part of future residential developments in this location. This is seen as acceptable on the basis that any new ped/cycle links provided are implemented in such a way that prevent users from inadvertently being deposited on to the carriageway.

These links will enhance connectivity to the Connect2 extension scheme linking Leighton with Nantwich and markedly improving active travel facilities to and from Leighton Hospital particularly from Crewe.

Bus stops are being provided which will allow future bus services to serve the new residential development.

Safe and suitable access

The proposed junctions have been subject to a Road Safety Audit stage 1 along with a designer's response which has confirmed the proposed preliminary highway design is acceptable.

Network Capacity (trip rates/distribution/jn modelling etc)

To assess the impact of the proposed NWCHP on the highway network, a SATURN and VISSIM model were utilised. Future developments and committed highway schemes were incorporated into the models following discussions with the applicant's highway consultant using agreed vehicular trip rates and background growth datasets. Traffic demand was distributed across the network and both models were found to successfully meet the convergence and validation criteria and therefore are considered to be acceptable for traffic modelling use.

The North Crewe VISSIM model, used to inform the allocation of strategic sites as part of the local plan, was utilised by providing flows for use in the junction capacity assessments at the critical Monday to Friday AM and PM peaks.

Included within the modelling analysis was the closure of Minshull New Road to through vehicular traffic and the reassignment of traffic that would result.

Furthermore following the approval of the Bentley planning application (ref: 17/4011) in 2017 the model was amended to reflect the changes to the existing highway network brought about by this development namely the restriction of Pym's Lane and Sunnybank Road to through traffic.

Capacity analysis was also undertaken at key junctions not included within the VISSIM model area, but would be effected by the Bentley planning application proposals.

The new junctions and links proposed under the NWCHP, to serve identified Local Plan growth, have been shown to be designed with appropriate capacity to accommodate the forecast future traffic volume at the design year of 2030. In addition the impact of the scheme on the operation of existing junctions was found to be within acceptable capacity thresholds at the design year of 2030.

Additional junction capacity analysis was also undertaken using ARCADY and LinSig software and the operation of these junctions was also found to be at or above the threshold of acceptability.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, the proposed scheme is deemed to be acceptable in accommodating the predicted traffic from the proposed local plan residential allocations and background increases in traffic growth. The proposal includes infrastructure provision for facilitating sustainable modes of transport in the form of foot and cycle-ways; individual crossings and bus stops will be provided as part of the development of the future residential sites.

There are no highway objections raised to application subject to conditions/informatives.

A number of representations have been received on highways matters, which the applicant's agent has formally responded to, and whilst Highways have confirmed that the proposals as submitted are acceptable and will address the matters raised, one matter, that of an alternate junction option for the A530/Flowers Lane/Eardswick Lane needs further explanation.

The applicant looked at a roundabout in this location, but it was discounted, and the roundabout moved to the more southerly location for the following reasons:

- The realignment of Eardswick Lane would likely not conform to the horizontal geometrical requirements of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB). Failure to adhere to the standards could create unsafe driving conditions;
- The location of the roundabout means that forward visibility on the approach to the roundabout from both the NW and SE would be compromised;
- The layout would likely prevent appropriate access to adjacent existing properties/land and require land take from properties including the garden centre.
- The proposals would impact on a large amount of existing utility infrastructure;
- The proposals would be difficult to construct without closing the A530 to traffic; and
- The closure of the Flowers Lane will allow segregated non-vehicular access to the proposed new school from the A530.
- Potential impact on the grade 2 listed Minshull Vernon cum Leighton War Memorial, which would thus affect the historical setting of this heritage asset.

Public Rights of Way/Cycle routes:

Crewe FP 20: It is proposed to divert a length of the footpath to the south of the East-West link as it will be directly affected by the road and Engine of the North roundabout. The proposed new route should be offset from the carriageway. Specific details are required regarding this proposal including under what legislation this is going to be achieved, i.e. Side Roads Order under the Highways Act or s.257 of the Town and Country planning Act 1990. Details of widths and surfacing would also need to be provided; a detailed plan showing this information and the extent of offset would be required. If the diversion is to be done by s.257, an early approach to the PROW team should be made. It should also be noted that applications for the diversion of public rights of way under these powers can be made prior to the granting of planning permission.

Leighton FP 6: This path will be bisected by proposed East-West link. Under a Side Roads Order this would often be extinguished where the path is affected between highway boundaries however under s.

257 this wouldn't be required as it is merely one class of Highway subsisting over a lesser class. Provision for pedestrians to cross the road by means of traffic islands with the potential for future Toucan crossings would be welcomed.

Leighton FP 3: This path will be bisected by the Primary Hospital link road and the same comments apply as stated above for FP 6.

If it is intended to undertake a Side Roads Order for this scheme, the PROW team would require sight of the Draft proposals at an early stage. A scheme of arrangements for temporary closures of affected PROW during construction will need to be agreed in advance, with advertising and application fees covered by the project. Alternative routes should be provided wherever possible. The PROW team would also wish to be involved in the design of signage and furniture on the affected PROW and refer to their policy on structures. The applicant has discussed these matters with the PROW team and will address them at the appropriate stages of the development.

Landscape

Topography

This application proposes changes to levels to accommodate a network of new highways. These level changes are generally lesser over the north of this network, which is naturally flatter land, and greater over the south of it, where contours are tighter as the land drops down to Leighton Brook. The proposed Flowers Lane section has generally very limited level changes of under 0.5m. Greater level changes are proposed near Leighton Hall Farm but some of these sections are cut below existing ground level rather than raised. The western side of the proposed Engine of the North roundabout appears to have the largest level change with an embankment of 1.715m.

Drainage

Drainage is proposed into adopted sewer systems at Highway junctions, into Leighton Brook and into the un-named ditch along Smithy Lane.

Soils

Soils are protected under National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 which states in paragraph 170 that Local Planning Authorities should make decisions that contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting landscapes, geology, and soils. The NPPF also states that despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land should be remediated and mitigated where appropriate.

This application proposes the removal of existing site-soils and their replacement with soils to be sourced, stripped and transported from other locations. This is not a sustainable plan for soils management. Removal of site-soils creates storage, transport and re-use issues which can lead to loss of quantity of soils and loss of quality of soils due to detrimental changes in composition and structure. The requirement for imported soils caused by the removal of site-soils also creates indirect adverse landscape effects through the stripping/excavating of other sites and through the noise, atmospheric pollution, energy use and visual impact of lorry-movements. Alternative soil-sources, transport routes and distances have not been specified. This application states that its soil-displacement proposal would require 12,427 HGV-loads, an average of 22 HGV journeys per day for 20 months. This matter has been discussed with the applicant and it is agreed that a soil management plan will be submitted and approved to address these matters.

This site is classified as Grade 3 Good to Moderate Agricultural Land which should include soils very capable of supporting trees and shrubs, as the existing trees and hedgerows prove. Excavated sub-soils can be graded on-site and allocated at different depths for different plant species. Any poorer top-soils can be ameliorated if necessary, and/or utilised for less nutrient-demanding habitats, such as scrub, heathland or grassland.

Surfaces

The majority of hard surfaces proposed in this application will be governed by Highways' specifications. Any non-Highway hard surfaces should be designed to be porous and should be sustainably-sourced and utilise re-cycled materials where possible.

Vegetation

This application shows a great deal of consideration has gone into mitigating vegetation loss through the provision of new planting to encourage natural succession of wetland, grassland, hedgerow and woodland habitats. Some of the losses are however considered avoidable and some adjustments are advisable to ensure appropriateness of species and longevity of new planting. This can be conditioned.

Visual Effects

This 22.5ha proposal comprises a net of linear development which straddles part of Landscape Character Area (LCA) '4d Wimboldsley' of the Landscape Character Type 'Cheshire Plain East' in the May 2018 revision of Cheshire East Council's landscape character assessment and strategy. (The 'Upper Weaver Valley', LCA 10f, neighbours the site along the west boundary of Leighton Hospital).

The applicant has made a Visual Impact Assessment of the scheme using a 750m Zone of Theoretical Visibility (distance from which the development may be seen) which has been customised to account for topography and/or existing built structures and uses an anticipated 8-10m height for new-planted trees after 15 years.

One of the Key Characteristics of this Wimboldsley LCA is the perception of a well-wooded landscape due to hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees, and small copses and coverts of a mix of broadleaved- and coniferous-woodland. It is therefore considered that the retention of existing trees and hedgerows is particularly important in this location as this not only retains key characteristics but also retains some sense of historic depth and should help mitigate the visual impact of proposed new traffic movements across this landscape. Amendments to the planting proposals were proposed.

It is noted that the applicant has considered the adverse impact of light pollution and states that the extent of lit sections have been minimised and lamps will be fitted with programmable dimming equipment to reduce excessive light in off-peak hours.

Conclusion

As the applicant has agreed to the amendments and pre-commencement conditions this application is considered acceptable in landscape terms.

Trees

An Arboriculture Impact Assessment dated November 2018 has been prepared in accordance with BS5837 (2012) and submitted by Jacobs. The report identifies individual trees, groups of trees, woodlands and hedges that are within 15m of the development edge (i.e. highway development

corridors within the wider site. The report identifies that 17 out of 33 Category A and B trees will be felled; 18 out of 49 groups will be wholly or partially felled; 4 hedges will be removed and 18 partially removed out of 29 hedges. The one existing woodland will be “encroached”, but felling is not required. It is recommended that where development encroaches on root protection areas (RPA) the work on site should be supervised by an arboriculturalist. The report assesses the overall impact on trees as being moderate. The submitted drawings show tree categorisation in accordance with BS5837, crown spread, RPAs and trees/hedges to be removed; they do not show tree protection measures.

The layout of roads within the North West Crewe Package (NWCP) is significantly constrained by the necessary connections to the existing road network. Most if not all of the tree losses are unavoidable without an unacceptable contortion of road alignment. Given the substantial proposals for replanting of trees and hedges it is accepted that the loss of trees caused by this development is suitably mitigated.

Conditions are requested relating to tree protection and a submission of a detailed tree felling / pruning specification.

Ecology

Habitat Regulations

The proposed development is located within 10km of the West Midlands Mosses Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Midland land Meres and Mosses Phase 1 and Phase 2 Ramsar sites. The application site is also located within close proximity to the Sandbach Flashes SSSI.

It is noted that Natural England have advised that the proposed development is not likely to have an adverse impact upon the interest features for which the Sandbach Flashes SSSI was designated and raise no objection to the application.

The applicant has submitted an ‘Assessment of Likely Significant effects’ in respect of the SAC and Ramsar sites. The assessment concludes that the proposed development is not likely to have a significant impact upon the features for which the statutory site was designated. Consequently, a more detailed Appropriate Assessment is not required.

Great Crested Newts

No evidence of this protected species was recorded during the surveys undertaken to inform the ES. It is advised that this species is unlikely to be affected by the proposed development.

Common Toad

This priority species was previously recorded from pond 1 and 2. The proposed development will result in the loss of connectivity between these ponds and the loss of terrestrial habitat. Replacement hedgerow and landscape planting will to a large extent compensate for the loss of terrestrial habitat and the provision of the proposed wildlife tunnels will provide some connectivity for toads under the road.

It is advised that additional tunnels are required to increase connectivity under the road to fully mitigate the severance effects of the scheme on this species.

However no additional tunnels have been proposed by the applicants as they state that these would be difficult to deliver with the scheme being at grade.

Badger

A main badger sett is present on site. The sett will not be directly affected by the proposed scheme, however the scheme may result in some disturbance of the sett during the construction phase and increased mortality is likely to occur as a result of road traffic collisions once the scheme is operational.

The applicant has provided a method statement of precautionary measures to reduce disturbance during the construction phase. Two badger tunnels and appropriate fencing is also proposed as a means of reducing road traffic collisions.

It is advised that, subject to the submission of a plan showing the location of the sett, the proposed mitigation is acceptable. However as the status of badgers can change on site a condition should be attached requiring an updated badger survey report and mitigation strategy to be submitted prior to the commencement of development.

Lesser silver diving beetle/mud snail

No evidence of these protected/priority species was recorded during the submitted survey. It is advised that these species are not reasonably likely to be affected by the proposed development.

Breeding Birds

A number of breeding bird species were recorded during the submitted surveys including three widespread species which are considered to be a priority for nature conservation. The proposed development will result in the loss of habitat for these species. It is advised that the proposed replacement hedgerows and tree planting would reduce the potential impacts of the proposed development upon these species.

If planning consent is granted a condition is required to safeguard nesting birds.

Peregrine Falcon

The ES states that this bird species may be breeding at the hospital site a short distance from the application site. Further communications with the hospital however suggest that this has not been the case for 6 years. It is advised that this species is therefore unlikely to be affected by the proposed scheme.

Loss of hedgerows

Native Hedgerows are a priority habitat and hence a material consideration. The proposed development will result in the loss of a total of 2,541m of existing hedgerows, which includes losses from a number of hedgerows considered to be Important under the Hedgerow Regulations. It is advised that this loss of hedgerow would result in a significant loss of biodiversity.

To compensate for the loss of existing hedgerows over 6,000m of new hedgerow planting is proposed.

Bats Roosts

Minor bat roosts were recorded at a number of buildings located adjacent to the scheme.

No evidence of roosting bats was recorded at any trees surveyed. All moderate and high potential trees identified on site were subject to a dusk/dawn survey, with the exception of a single tree assessed as part of the addendum ES. The potential bat roost feature associated with this tree was however found to support a bird's nest and no evidence of roosting bats was recorded. On balance it is advised that roosting bats are not likely to be directly affected by the proposed development.

Bat Activity Surveys

It is advised that the assemblage of bat species recorded includes a sufficient number of species to qualify as a Local Wildlife Site, which would be considered to be of County Importance. The number of bat species recorded does however to a large extent reflect the extensive nature of the area surveyed.

In the absence of mitigation the proposed development is likely to have an adverse impact on bats as a result of the loss of hedgerows and trees and the installation of additional lighting. The lighting contour plan shows light spill of 1 lux or greater occurring over much of the landscaping and habitat creation associated with the road. It is advised that this is likely to be detrimental to the use of the site by foraging and commuting bats. This impact would be significant in the context of the bat assemblage present on site, so an impact of roughly local context, but would be unlikely to affect the conservation status of the individual species concerned.

It is likely that the submitted lighting scheme could be improved to reduce its effects on foraging bats. Therefore in the event that planning permission is granted it is recommend that a condition be attached which requires the submission of a detailed lighting scheme for the site that has been designed to minimise its effects on bats.

In order to mitigate the effects of the scheme on bats a number of bat hop overs will be provided on site together with replacement hedgerows and trees and a number of bat boxes.

Barn owls (buildings)

Evidence of barn owl activity was recorded at a building is located centrally within the scheme and is over 50m from the route.

Barn owls occurring on site will be subject to a high risk of mortality from road traffic collisions during operation of the scheme. This risk would be reduced through the provision of high hedgerows and trees along the route of the road to encourage barn owls to fly at height over the road. Grassland immediately adjacent to the road would be kept short to reduce the risk of barn owls being attracted to the roadside.

Japanese Knotweed

The applicant should be aware that Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) is present on the proposed development site. Under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981 it is an offence to cause Japanese Knotweed to grow in the wild. Japanese knotweed may be spread simply by means of disturbance of its rhizome system, which extends for several meters around the visible parts of the plant and new growth can arise from even the smallest fragment of rhizome left in the soil as well as from cutting taken from the plant.

Disturbance of soil on the site may result in increased growth of Japanese Knotweed on the site. If the applicant intends to move any soil or waste off site, under the terms of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 any part of the plant or any material contaminated with Japanese Knotweed must be disposed of at a landfill site licensed to accept it and the operator should be made aware of the nature of the waste.

Biodiversity metric calculations

A biodiversity metric calculation has been submitted in support of the application. Whilst there is some difference in professional opinion between the Councils ecologist and the applicant's ecologist on the

potential distinctiveness (value) of the habitats that would be created as part of the scheme, there is agreement that the scheme would deliver an overall gain for biodiversity.

The ability of the proposed habitats to achieve their target condition, and the scheme to deliver a net gain for biodiversity in accordance with Local Plan Policy SE3 is however dependant upon the long term management of the newly created habitats being secured through the planning process. It is recommend that if consent is granted a condition should be attached requiring the submission and implementation of a 25 year habitat management plan.

Built Heritage/Structures

There are no conservation Areas in the vicinity of the proposed highway works, and the only Listed Building (or Structure) in the vicinity of the site is the Minshull Vernon Cum Leighton War Memorial (which is Grade II Listed) which is located on a grassed area on the northern side of Eardswick Lane close to the junction with the Middlewich Road (A530) and Flowers Lane at Bradfield Green. No works are proposed immediately adjacent to this feature and the works located closest to it – the roundabout on the new link from Flowers Lane to the A530 is some 200 metres away. It is not considered there will be any harm to its setting.

The applicant's agent writes;

“There will be potential impacts that have been identified for eight cultural heritage assets (out of 44 assessed) during construction and/or operation of the proposed NWCP.

The following mitigation is proposed:

- Targeted archaeological excavation of two cultural heritage assets (historical township boundaries - Assets 6 and 8);
- Photographic survey of five cultural heritage assets (Assets 12, 13, 22, 23 and 31);
- Historic Landscape recording of three cultural heritage assets (Assets 6, 8 and 33).”

Overall, it was concluded that there are no significant residual impacts identified after mitigation measures have been implemented. This is accepted.

There are no substantial structures (such as bridges) proposed as part of these proposals, although there are numerous features including water storage ponds/tanks, crossing points (for people/animals). None however are of significance and all are considered acceptable. The roundabouts on the southern part of the scheme will involve level changes to the topography and as such will be more visually prominent than on level ground. That said, subject to the amenity issue addressed above, there are no significant issues raised.

Flood Risk/Drainage

Comments are awaited from the Flood Risk Team, but they have been heavily involved in the design of the scheme so it is not anticipated there will be any significant issues raised. The Environment Agency have raised no objections subject to a number of conditions.

CONCLUSIONS

Cheshire East Council is proposing the construction of a series of highways and junction improvements in the area of Leighton, located to the north west of Crewe. The highways scheme encompassing these improvements is known as the North West Crewe Package, herein referred to as 'the proposed NWCP'.

The proposed NWCP would include the construction of a new roads linking Smithy Lane with Minshull New Road and Middlewich Road (A530). It would also include the realignment of Smithy Lane, Flowers Lane and improvements to other road junctions associated with the scheme. Minshull New Road, outside of the Leighton Academy, would be closed off to vehicular traffic.

The proposed scheme will create a total of 2.9 km of new roads with street lighting and a 30mph speed limit on these new roads. Dual use footways & cycleways will be provided along the scheme with appropriate crossing points to ensure safe crossing facilities.

The proposed NWCP forms a key part of the Local Plan Strategy (LPS) infrastructure programme for Crewe, which will deliver an improved highway network for the town. The benefits of the proposed NWCP also extend to unlocking a number of housing and employment LPS sites by improving wider traffic movements and transport links in the locality. These improvements will also reduce congestion and improve access to Leighton Hospital and the Bentley Motors proposals.

The proposals will have some landscape and ecological impacts, but both can be readily mitigated. The scheme will have neutral effects on most other matters with the benefits set out above.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE with conditions

- 1. Three year start date**
- 2. Approved plans/reports**
- 3. Detailed landscaping scheme, taking on board the landscape officers comments, to be submitted and approved**
- 4. Landscape maintenance for 5 years**
- 5. Landscape and ecological management for 25 years and agree details of agreements on 3rd party land**
- 6. Prior to the commencement of development a Tree Protection Scheme is to be submitted and approved**
- 7. Detailed tree felling/pruning specification to be agreed**
- 8. Soil management**
- 9. Prior to the commencement of development a Construction Environment Management Plan (including Construction Traffic) is to be submitted and approved – to include dust suppression measures.**
- 10. Phasing plan detailing the implementation timeframe of the NWCHP**
- 11. Bird nesting season**
- 12. Updated badger survey**
- 13. Detailed lighting scheme to be submitted**
- 14. Development to accord with the FRA**
- 15. Contaminated land remediation strategy to be submitted.**
- 16. Scheme to deal with unexpected contaminated land**

- 17.No infiltration of surface water drainage into the ground where adverse concentrations of contamination are known or suspected**
- 18.No piling without express consent**
- 19.Verification report for contaminated land.**
- 20.Scheme to treat and remove suspended solids from surface water run-off during construction works**
- 21.No drainage into the public sewers**
- 22.Method statement to be submitted to protect UU assets.**
- 23.Management of the PROW**
- 24.Implementation of a programme of archaeological work**

Informatives;

- **Public Rights of Way**
- **Highways**
- **Environment Agency advisories**
- **Contaminated Land**

In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee'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 has 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 Committee's decision.



