LAND SOUTH OF THORNCLIFFE ROAD, LEEK

PLANNING REF: SMD/2017/0434

FURTHER INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF SUBMITTED TRANSPORT DOCUMENTATION

APRIL 2018

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Vectos have been appointed on behalf of residents to review highways and transport matters relating to an outline planning application for a proposed residential development on land south of Thorncliffe Road, Leek.

1.2 Vectos is a transport planning, infrastructure design, flood risk, hydrology and sustainable drainage consultancy specialising in the property development sector.

1.3 The application (planning ref: SMD/2017/0434) is supported by a Transport Assessment (TA) produced by Encon Associates Limited.

1.4 We have previously undertaken a review of the submitted transport documentation, the results of which were presented in a Technical Note dated November 2017. In summary, our key concerns were as follows:

- The accuracy of the operational assessment of the A53/Thorncliffe Road priority junction. Particularly the manner in which visibility from the minor arm and the left turn lane into Thorncliffe Road have been accounted for;
- Operational and safety issues potentially created by vehicles backing up onto the A53;
- Lack of/poor pedestrian links, particularly on Thorncliffe Road;
- Absence of cycle infrastructure in the vicinity of the site;
- Limited connections to public transport, including bus and rail; and
- The sites relative lack of proximity to residential, employment and leisure opportunities.

1.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides guidance for planning authorities. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. We did not consider that the proposed development site represented a 'sustainable' location.

1.6 Since this review, Staffordshire County Council, in their capacity as Local Highway Authority, have recommended the planning application for refusal on a range of transport related issues in a letter dated 30th January 2018. In response to this recommendation, the applicant has provided an updated Transport Assessment dated 16th March 2018 which was accompanied by a supporting letter dated 7th March 2018 which was prepared by AAH Planning Consultants.

1.7 This Technical Note presents the results of further review of the updated Transport Assessment and accompanying letter.

2 A53/ THORNCLIFFE ROAD PRIORITY JUNCTION

2.1 In our previous review of the submitted transport documentation we raised particular concerns in relation to the manner in which the operational assessment of A53/ Thorncliffe Road priority T-junction had been undertaken. Our review concluded that the model used to undertake the capacity assessment of the A53 / Thorncliffe Road did not accurately reflect conditions on the ground and the results of the assessment should not be accepted.

2.2 The updated TA document still does not provide any detailed information on the TRICS assessment undertaken for the development site. As a result, it is not possible to independently verify whether the selection parameters used in the assessment are representative of the proposed development site. As discussed later in this note, the unsustainable location of the site is likely to lead to high vehicle trip rates due to the lack of alternatives. Therefore, we need to be satisfied that the TRICS sites selected are representative. If the TRICS surveys selected are unrepresentative then the trip rate for the site could be higher than that used in the assessment. Our concern in relation to this aspect of the assessment is upheld.

2.3 In our previous review we considered the parameters used to model the A53 / Thorncliffe Road junction and held concerns in relation to the inputs used in the assessment. We also referred to the guidance included within the Junctions user guide which indicates that the visibility of a minor arm should be taken 10 metres back from the give way line. This requirement is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

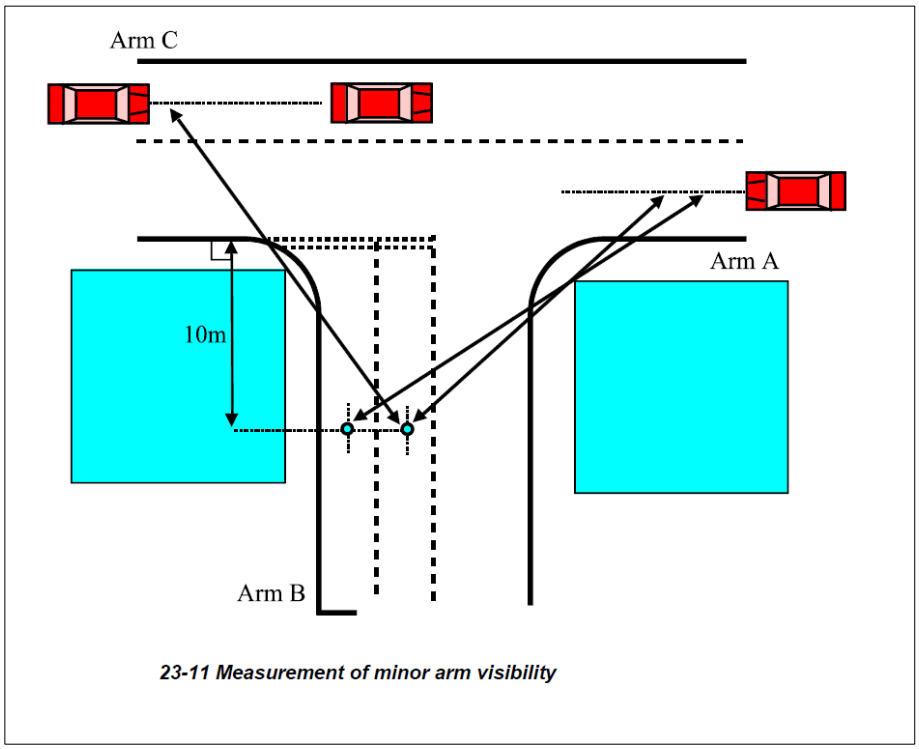

Figure 1: Junctions User Guide – Measurement of Minor Arm Visibility

2.4 We highlighted that the visibility inputs used in the modelling exercise undertaken by the consultant were unrealistic and therefore undermined the accuracy of the results presented. Visibility on Thorncliffe Road is greatly inhibited by an existing building to the north and thick vegetation to the south. It is acknowledged that while the updated TA provides further information on visibility at the junction, the document does not address this issue as an updated assessment has not been presented. An updated assessment would be likely to show a worse operation of this junction and the we maintain that the visibility information presented should be updated in the model to ensure that a more representative appraisal of the junction's operation is considered.

2.5 In our response we also questioned the lack of any consideration of the potential safety and capacity implications of introducing development traffic to the A53/ Thorncliffe Road junction. As stated in our previous review, the existing arrangement at the A53 / Thorncliffe Road junction features a short left turn lane for southbound traffic turning into Thorncliffe Road from the A53 which requires vehicles to give way to traffic on Thorncliffe Road.

2.6 Additional development traffic using the junction would increase the likelihood of traffic turning left into Thorncliffe Road having to give way and block back on to the A53 carriageway. The left turn lane provides stacking space for a single vehicle and as a consequence should multiple vehicles or a longer vehicle such as a car towing a caravan be forced to give way then the storage capacity of this lane would be exceeded, leading to potential safety and capacity issues. This of particular concern to this junction as a number of camp sites are accessed via Thorncliffe Road, increasing the likelihood of caravans and campervans being forced to give way. This potential issue would be most pronounced in the PM peak traffic period where the TA provides a forecast of 55 vehicles turning right into Thorncliffe Road in a single hour. This represents an additional vehicle every minute creating a high risk of conflict at this junction.

2.7 In summary, the updated TA does not address our safety and capacity concerns and we therefore maintain our objection in relation to the lack of information presented on these aspects.

3 ACCESSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

3.1 The updated TA provides details of existing conditions around the site, including information on the accessibility of the site by sustainable modes of travel. While it is acknowledged that some of the concerns raised in our previous review have been addressed, these changes do not fundamentally alter the shortfalls in accessibility by sustainable modes of travel afforded by the sites location.

3.2 The consultant previously included concentric circles in the main body of the TA to illustrate walking and cycling catchments from the proposed development site. This has now been updated to include isochrones, which is a more robust method of representing walking and cycling catchments.

3.3 As shown on the walking isochrone map presented within the TA, even with the use of the maximum recommended walking distance of 2km, much of Leek is outside of this catchment, including major areas of employment and retail to the north west and south west. The pedestrian environment outside the site is not conducive to encouraging trips by this mode. Even with the introduction of a footway on the southern side of the Thorncliffe Road carriageway, the road lacks natural surveillance and is unlit. Further afield , the A53 Buxton Road in proximity to Thorncliffe lack natural surveillance along much of its length which would act as a barrier to many potential pedestrians. As a consequence, many future site users will seek to use private motor vehicles to access much of Leek and the surrounding areas.

3.4 As could be expected the cycling isochrone plan shows a large potential catchment. However, as stated in our previous review, the cycle infrastructure is limited in the vicinity of the site and this will act as a major barrier to the uptake of cycling by future residents.

3.5 In our previous review we highlighted that the timings and frequency of bus services in the vicinity of the site would not be conducive to encouraging trips by this mode. Indeed, we highlighted that only four services operated Monday to Saturday from the stops closest to the site. These services operate well outside the hours required for commuting and as such would not offer a viable means of access for future residents.

3.6 In the updated TA, a summary of bus services is provided. However, a majority of the services included in the table operate from Leek bus station which is around 1.6km from the site and therefore well outside the recommended walking distance of 400m to a bus stop. Therefore, we maintain that the continued inclusion of this information in the TA is misleading and overstates the accessibility of the site by bus.

3.7 On the basis of our further review of the information included within the updated TA, we maintain that the submitted information has provided insufficient evidence that the site is accessible by sustainable modes of travel. Access to and from the site will therefore be dominated by private motor vehicle and the trip rates used to assess the impact of the development should reflect this.

4 PLANNING CONDITIONS

4.1 In their letter dated 7th March 2018, AAH Planning Consultants suggest the following details could be conditioned:

- Detailed survey of point of access;
- Detail of design, at point of access, to accommodate existing drainage;
- Site and developer specific Travel Plan implemented prior to first occupation; and
- Parking provision to be appropriate for location.

4.2 While it is accepted that in some instances delaying the detailed design of an access junction is appropriate, dealing with this aspect of the site design by condition may be problematic in this instance. The Council should be wary of permitting access at this location unless all matters are addressed, and the practicality of a new junction is properly established. As a minimum the opportunity to accommodate existing drainage should be established prior to granting of consent.

4.3 Given the aforementioned deficiencies in sustainable access to and from the site, as minimum a Framework Travel Plan should be submitted to accompany the planning application to assist in the design process. This will provide a 'heads of terms' to be agreed with the Local Highway Authority and establish the principles of a Travel Plan to be submitted prior to occupation.

5 SUMMARY

5.1 In summary, the following principle issues have not been addressed by the applicant in their latest submission.

- The accuracy of the operational assessment of the A53/Thorncliffe Road priority junction. Including the manner in which visibility from the minor arm and the left turn lane into Thorncliffe Road has been accounted for and the trip rates used. Both of these factors are key in establishing whether an accurate appraisal of the impact of the development proposals has been undertaken;
- Operational and safety issues potentially created by vehicles backing up onto the A53;
- Absence of cycle infrastructure and poor quality pedestrian routes in the vicinity of the site increasing the likelihood of private motor vehicle usage amongst future residents;
- Limited connections to public transport, including bus and rail, again increasing the likelihood of private motor vehicle movements and potentially increasing the developments impact on the operation of the highway;
- The sites relative lack of proximity to residential, employment and leisure opportunities;
- A feasible drainage solution has not been fulfilled and should be submitted prior to granting of consent; and
- A Framework Travel Plan should be submitted prior to granting of consent to provide an early opportunity to agree a suitable sustainable access strategy.

5.2 Unless these issues can be adequately satisfied the Local Highway Authority should maintain its recommendation for refusal.