

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0420
Valid 12/07/2021

THE WOODHOUSE
HOSPITAL LOCKWOOD
ROAD
CHEADLE

PROPOSED ADDITIONAL CAR
PARKING AREA,
ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPING
AND EXTERNAL LIGHTING.

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

The principle of the development
The impact on the character and appearance of the area.
The impact on residential amenity
The impact on highway safety.
The impact on ground stability

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is in the countryside to the north-east of Cheadle but is not in the Green Belt. It comprises an area of open land within the grounds of a hospital specialising in neurological care. The site is to the east of the current car park and to the south of the hospital buildings. It is reached via an access road to the west of the current car park and this leads to Lockwood Road which is to the east of the site. The site is in a High Risk Coal Mining zone.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for the eastward extension of the hospital car park to provide 32 additional parking spaces as there is current parking congestion. The accompany letter explains the following numbers of staff and visitors at the hospital:

- 61 clinical day staff on shift at any one time;
- 51 clinical night staff on shift at any one time;
- 28 administration and senior staff;
- Up to 15 support services staff, including cleaning and maintenance (working in shifts though not on site at all times);
- Up to 16 visitors on a typical busy day (pre-Covid).

The current car parking comprises a 51-space car park to the front of the hospital buildings and a smaller 18-space to the rear (north) of the hospital buildings served by a different access further to the north along Lockwood Road. This rear car park is a staff overspill car park with all visitors directed to the main car park proposed to be extended.

The letter explains that at any one time, during a typical day there are more than 100 staff and visitors on site and therefore there is an under-provision as there are currently 69 spaces in total.

The letter continues:

Movement across the site at shift change / handover time is challenging as day staff leave and night staff start to arrive who need to find somewhere to park. Attempts by Elysium to mitigate this critical period of movement within the site and stagger start time for the clinical team are unfeasible due to staffing requirements. The resultant effect is that invariably vehicles are not parked in designated bays, often leading to opportunistic double parking, partly on footways, along key access routes and generally causing an obstruction and impediment to the day-to-day running of the site and on occasions vehicles left on the highway causing a clear highways safety concern. Elysium confirm that they typically receive multiple complaints from visitors and external professionals who are not able to park their cars safely.

The extended car park is required to meet existing staffing requirement at the site and ease current parking pressures, and it is not the intention that the extra parking will equate to additional staff requirements.

The original plans were for a car park with 41 spaces. However amended plans were received which reduced the size of the car park and which now provides 32 spaces. The reason for the reduction in size was to avoid development on a particular high risk area of land instability caused by historical coal mining and where there is the presence of a shaft. The amendment followed a comments from the Coal Authority consulted on the application.

A further amended site plan was received on 1st October 2021 showing the addition of a native hedgerow and new trees planted mainly to the east and south sides of the proposed car park to screen the car park from views from the east and south.

A Coal Mining Report and Geotechnical Report were submitted with the application. An updated Coal Mining Assessment Report was later submitted.

On 14th October, the application was advertised as affecting a Public Right of Way (the main access road off Lockwood Road) and local residents and SCC Footpaths team were reconsulted. The location plan was amended to show the access road included within the red line application site and revised application forms were submitted as the access road is not within the ownership of the hospital. The applicants could not trace the owner of the access road despite checking with the Land Registry and therefore have completed Certificate D as required in these circumstances.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffs Moorlands Local Plan (adopted September 2020)

SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy
C1 – Community Facilities

DC1 – Design Considerations
SD1 – Sustainable use of resources

NPPF (Revised July 2021)

Sections 8 (Community Facilities) and 12 (Design).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2019/0599: New car park with 28 spaces. Pending.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 1.9.21
Neighbour consultation period ends: 1.9.21
Press Advert: 13.10.21

Public Comments

Three letters of objection has been received from local residents and a resident of Cheadle who consider the proposal would increase traffic on the access road off Lockwood Road towards the site which would make it more dangerous for pedestrians as this is also a public right of way.

No further letters were received in response to the re-consultation on 14th October.

Town / Parish Comments

No objections.

Local Highways Authority

No objection. In response to the further information regarding the Public right of Way going along the private access road, the following comments were provided:

“The applicant has now submitted further information (001 Site Location Plan Rev E) that includes Cherry Lane (private road) within the red outline boundary plan connecting to the adopted highway. It is considered the proposal is unlikely to have an impact on the adopted highway.”

Environmental Health

No objection subject to standard conditions

Severn Trent Water

No objection subject to a standard condition.

The Coal Authority

An objection was originally received due to concerns over part of the car park being close to a disused mining shaft. In response to amended plans which showed the reduction in size of the car park, no objection was received.

Trees/Landscape Officer

The officer commented on a plan which added a hedgerow around part of the car park and did consider the species (mainly privet) to be appropriate in this location. The planting plans were amended to show a native species hedge in line with the advice of the Tree Officer.

SCC Public Rights of Way Team:

“The site boundary now appears to have been updated to include the private road to the south of the proposed site. As noted in a previous response, Public Footpath No. 48 Cheadle runs along this road. The applicant needs to be reminded that although the road is private, the fact that the route is a public highway (footpath) takes precedence. The use by private vehicles is subject, and subordinate to, the public’s right. In other words pedestrians have a public right and vehicles need to give way to them not the other way around. It should be noted that since the previous response, a phone call has been received from a member of the public stating that the road can be dangerous for pedestrians as the road is narrow, particularly for 2 cars passing. They are concerned this could be made worse if extra cars are travelling along the road to use the proposed car park.”

OFFICER COMMENTS

This application follows discussions with the Council on an alternative site within the hospital estate which was deemed unsuitable for car parking for various reasons (Application Reference SMD/2019/0599).

The principle of a new car park in this location was deemed to be acceptable under the former Policy SS6c of the Core Strategy, which at the time was the strategic planning policy for countryside and although this has been replaced by Policy SS10 of the Local Plan (adopted September 2020), there are no changes in the policy which would now deem the general principle of a car park expansion as being unacceptable. This remains subject to the impacts on the surrounding area such as the visual impact on the landscape and impacts on the amenities of the area as well as traffic creation and highway safety issues.

Policy SS10 aims to protect the countryside and therefore there should be some justification for the development in such rural location. With regard to the justification of need for the proposal, The applicant claims there is significant parking congestion at the site and that at any one time there as many as 100 staff and visitors at the hospital and therefore the current provision of 69 is deemed insufficient. From the breakdown of staff numbers per day and night shift and the estimated number of visitors it would appear a new car park of 32 additional spaces would be justified,

especially considering the overlap scenario between night shift workers who are likely to arrive slightly before day workers are due to leave. The proposal is not linked to any expansion of the hospital or increase in staff.

The new amended proposal would result in just four more additional spaces than the previous 2019 proposal for a 28-space car park to the north of the buildings, using different accesses which appears to have been dropped in favour of this new proposal. The new scheme would provide a car park closer to the main entrance to the hospital and therefore could be deemed to be more convenient and perhaps alleviate the need for obstructive parking on access roads. The previous scheme was also adjacent to Lockwood Road which would have caused more highway safety issues in situations of excess parking.

During my site visit around the middle of a weekday, parking congestion at the hospital was evident.

I consider a need for additional parking spaces has been demonstrated and that the proposal and scope of development is acceptable in principle in this location.

With regard to the impact on the character and appearance of the countryside, the current car park is very well screened from views from the north and west by tree belts and existing buildings. It is also well screened from Lockwood Road to the south and east by continuous and robust high hedge screening along the west edge of the road. The proposed car park would be closer to the road but as it would be two-dimensional in nature and on land which slopes only gradually downwards towards the road, it can easily be screened from the road and open landscape further to the east by a perimeter hedge. The amended landscaping scheme is for a native hedgerow that would be in keeping with the character of the surrounding landscape and is in line with the advice given by the Council's Tree and Landscape Officer. The proposed car park would also be less visually prominent than the previous proposed car park which would have been adjacent to Lockwood Road further to the north and also two existing accesses off this road which would have opened up further glimpses of the car park.

The points raised in the letters of objection are noted. However, the car park extension is to tackle current obstructive parking problems i.e. there are insufficient parking space numbers and is not linked to accommodating increased staff or visitor numbers. The proposal would therefore not give rise to increased vehicle movements along the access road to the hospital. All visitors are directed to the main car park along the access road which is shared with the Public Right of Way (PROW) and this is signed from Lockwood Road, whereas the sign at the north access states it is access for deliveries. All visitors currently use the south route along the PROW as the main access to the hospital in any case so therefore the proposed expansion would not lead to any encouragement for a greater number of visitors to use the access. If anything, the proposed car park could improve the situation with vehicle and pedestrian conflict along the main access road. It is accepted that cars would not be able to park on the access road itself as it is too narrow of parking and leaving enough space for cars to pass. However, where the road widens closer to the hospital, particularly at the turn off to the right when approaching the hospital, there would be less need for parking congestion which

could lead to unsafe manoeuvres, if more parking spaces were provided. The SCC Public Rights of Way Team were consulted on the application but did not object but reminded the applicants of their duty to abide with the PROW legislation.

The Council accepts that the current main access which is used for all visitors is not ideal due to it being narrow and also being on a Public Right of Way. The Council asked the applicants to consider an alternative access for visitors, such as the use of the north access but extended to the east of the buildings to loop round to the current main car parks which are located closer to the main entrance into the hospital buildings than the car park to the north. The response from the applicant is as follows:

“This proposal is in response to the issues raised by the Council on a previous application submitted by SH Wilkinson Architects in 2019. Specific concerns were raised regarding the unsuitability of the other site for 42 parking spaces in respect of the impact on the landscape and appearance of the area. The Council asked that Elysium consider alternative locations within their ownership that would overcome these concerns. This alternative site location (the subject of this application) was discussed in principle with officers before submission.

Due to the nature of the hospital it is not feasible to introduce a vehicle ‘through route’ within the site that would connect the two existing car parks. There are both operational and physical barriers in place that would mean this is not a viable option. Resident and Occupational Therapy accommodation is located centrally within the site and it would not be appropriate to introduce vehicle movements through the hospital. The land falls away relatively steeply down to the residents grassed amenity area and sports pitch and for this reason it would not be feasible to extend the northern access road around the eastern side of the buildings.”

The Council accepts the difficulties in providing an alternative access route. However, as the proposal would not lead to an increase in traffic along the narrow main access and SCC PROW team and Highway Officer have not objected to the proposal, it does not have any grounds to refuse the application on this basis. Instead an informative would be added requesting that passing bays be provided to the side of the access road which is within the ownership of the hospital site.

With regard to residential amenity, the proposed car park would be further away from the nearest dwellings, which lie further to the west, than the current car park and therefore would not introduce any increased vehicle movement noise closer to local residents.

Finally, with regard to the impact on ground stability, the whole car park site, including the amended scope of the car park is within a High Risk zone where land is relatively unstable due to historical coal mining. The Coal Authority objected to the original plans as they were deemed to involve spaces too close to a former mine entry shaft and that the construction of the car park was deemed to affect land stability compromising safety of cars and users of the car park. The amended plans remove 9 spaces closest to the shaft and together with the amended Geotech Report assessing coal mining land stability impacts, has met with the satisfaction of

the Coal Authority. The amended proposal is therefore not considered to compromise ground stability.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The amended proposal is acceptable in principle in this rural location. The justification of need for an enlarged car park at the hospital has been sufficiently demonstrated. It is considered this amounts to an improvement on the previous car park expansion scheme in terms of the impact on the rural landscape. It would also not affect traffic or highway safety as the number of vehicles using the main access road would not increase as a result of the car park expansion as all visitors use this access currently as directed from the road and in fact by providing more spaces alleviates the incidences of cars being parked on parts of the access or other areas around the hospital that could endanger pedestrian safety. The main access is along a private road and although a PROW runs along it the conflict between vehicle and pedestrian usage is covered under separate legislation and the highway authority and SCC Public Rights of Way Team has not objected to the proposal. The proposal would not lead to any other harmful environmental impacts such as harm to residential amenity or the stability of the ground. The proposal would therefore comply with the Local Plan and the government planning guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston

Recommendation Date: 10.11.21

X 

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council