

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0723
Valid 30/11/2021

**AREA ADJACENT THE
LORD SHREWSBURY NEW
ROAD
ALTON**

**INSTALLATION OF A STAND
ALONE JACOBS LADDER (BY
SPECIALIST COMPANY) FOR
OUTDOOR ACTIVITY WITHIN
THE SITE'S EXISTING
OUTDOOR ACTIVITY AREA.**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- The Impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area
- Impact on residential amenity

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site is within the development boundary of Alton and lies close to the northern edge of the village. It is in the village Conservation Area. It comprises a small area of woodland to the north of Church Bank, a wide pedestrian path which connects New Road to the west (the main road leading north out of the village towards Alton Towers) and Castle Hill Road to the east. The site is within the same ownership as Alton Castle which is to the north-east, up a wooded slope. A traditional but unlisted building called The Lord Shrewsbury (perhaps a former pub?) lies directly to the south on the other side of the path and is also within the same ownership. This building is used by a church youth centre who are also responsible for the site and other open land and woodland around it. St Peters Church lies to the east on the south side of the path and to the north-east of the site to the north of the path towards the castle is open land, woodland and buildings used by the youth centre. More woodland lies directly to the north and west of the site. The nearest listed buildings to the site are about 80 metres to the east and north of the site comprising the church, the castle and The Priests House. The land slopes downwards towards the west in this area but the site appears to be in a woodland hollow. The site is vacant but was used for outdoor activities and had a number of climbing ropes. There is a gate access into the site from the path, which is separated from site by a high stone boundary wall.

PROPOSAL

This is a full application for a 12m high vertical timber framed "Jacob's Ladder" climbing frame for outdoor activities connected to the youth centre which occupies the Lord Shrewsbury building to the south. It would have a width of 4.7 metres and the top rung/beam would be made of metal. The two side poles would be fixed into the ground but it would also be supported by stay ropes. It would be placed fairly centrally within the site.

A Design, Access and Heritage Statement accompanies the application and explains the following:

The application arises from the applicant's requirement to provide a desirable outdoor challenging team activity, following the discontinued ropes course activity on this site and as such reinstating the significance of the site as an outdoor activity site.

The application site has been operating as an outdoor activity site for the Kenelm Youth Trust for several years (prior to 2013 when Soli opened). Outdoor activities are an important and integral element of the retreat experiences offered by the Youth Trust for young people aged 7 to 25, at Soli (The Lord Shrewsbury) and its sister centre at Alton Castle, further north of the application site.

Planning permission (Ref: SMD/2020/0264) has recently been granted by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council for a low level ropes team challenge course to be installed on the existing camp site located within the grounds of Alton Castle, which allows the Kenelm Youth Trust to promote their efforts to provide a wider range of outdoor activities contributing to the residential retreat experiences for young people.

When Soli first opened up it was situated in Stratford-upon-Avon. It moved to Alton in 2013 and has been operating as a Catholic Youth Retreat centre since then.

The Kenelm Youth Trust wish to enhance and widen their range of outdoor facilities for youth members with the introduction of the Stand Alone Jacobs Ladder which will also reinstate the significance of the site following the discontinued ropes course activity on this site. The Kenelm Youth Trust provides life changing opportunities for young people, helping each person to reflect upon their life and faith. The Trust has been established by the Archdiocese of Birmingham, to oversee and bring together the wide variety of youth work that is undertaken in various settings across the Archdiocese.

There are four different sites that make up the Youth Trust, including the Soli providing a retreat centre. Together they minister to young people aged 7 to 25 and are visited by thousands of young people every year. The Trust offers residential retreat experiences for young people and team building day retreats for all ages. The activities that are on offer at the retreat range include abseiling, archery, team building activities, mountain biking, rock climbing, trekking, survival and crate stacking.

The proposed Stand Alone Jacobs Ladder will provide an engaging activity for participants of all age groups by encouraging them to work as part of a team. It is an effective tool that can be used to promote understanding of teamwork through mutual co-operation, clear communication and trust in others. The participants climbing the ladder rely on their colleagues on the ground to keep them safe and give them the encouragement needed to reach their goal. The fundamentals of trust and responsibility aided by support can be seen to enhance performance. The use of ongoing reviews throughout the activity can bring about a greater awareness of team

work, communication, sharing ideas, listening, mutual respect, empathy and consideration of others, all within a framework of trust and support.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (Adopted September 2020)

DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Section 12 (Design) and 16 (The Historic Environment).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None affecting the particular site.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 25/1/2022
Neighbour consultation period ends: 25/1/2022
Press Advert: 7.12.21

Public Comments

None.

Parish Council Comments

No objection.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The site is bordered by steep wooded slopes on all but the south side where Church Walk runs along the boundary. The structure would be placed within lower ground within the site and would be screened by trees between the structure and the path (and the youth centre building). Although it would have a height of 12 metres, this would not exceed the height of the tallest trees and the wooded slopes would screen the structure from the north, west and east. Glimpses of the structure would be possible from the path but the structure due to its two-dimensional vertical form and timber materials would blend in with other trees and the woodland which would also be seen as a backdrop. There is no visual link between the structure and the nearest listed buildings and it would be difficult to view these from the top of the frame and from the listed buildings the frame would not be prominent. Due to the distance between the listed buildings and frame and the level of screening, the structure would not interfere with the setting of the listed buildings. I do not consider the proposal would lead to any harm to either the setting of the listed buildings or the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

It would also be difficult to view into the nearest residential properties from the top of the structure due to it being at the bottom of wooded slopes. The applicant has been operating outdoor activities for the youth group for several years and was formerly used for rope frame climbing activities so there is therefore no concern over any harmful additional noise creation, particularly given the distance from the nearest residential properties.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and would not harm residential amenity or the environment in general. It would therefore comply with the Council's Local Plan (adopted September 2020) and is in line with the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston
Recommendation Date: 25.1.22

X 

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council