

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2022/0448
Valid 08/08/2022

VISITOR CENTRE
RUDYARD LAKE LAKE
ROAD
RUDYARD

INSTALLATION OF CRADLE
AND SITING OF FORMER TRIP
BOAT TO PROVIDE A
SEATING AND
INTERPRETATION AREA

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

Whether or not the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and if so, whether or not there are any very special circumstances

The principle of the development

The impact on the character and appearance of a Conservation Area

The impact on residential amenity

The impact on highway safety

The impact on flood risk

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site is in the countryside and comprises part of the Rudyard Lake Visitor Centre which is on the west bank of the lake at its southern tip, a short distance to the north-east of Rudyard village. It is reached via an access road off Lake Road, a residential dead-end street to the south-west of the lake, which leads into the middle of the village to the south. The site itself comprises part of the west bank, marked by a concrete blockwork retaining wall and is directly opposite the front elevation of the main visitor centre building a short distance to the west. The site also includes the access road up to the junction with Lake Road. The site is in a Conservation Area and is also in the Green Belt.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application to install a former lake trip boat onto the lake edge to use as a seating and “interpretation” area for the Rudyard Visitor Centre. It would be placed on a steel cradle and frame structure (1.75m in height), bolted onto a concrete base attached to the lake bed, which at low tide is visible next to the bank. The boat is 2.5m wide and 7.5m long with canopy-type roof. The concrete base and cradle structure would have similar footprint dimensions.

A Heritage Statement and Planning Statement has also been submitted which explains the following:

The development will comprise of the installation of a steel cradle sat upon a cast concrete slab base, that is located within the lake itself. Upon the cradle will sit the former trip boat used on the lake, which is named ‘Honey’. The trip

boat was retired from service a number of years ago, as rot had been identified within her hull and the repairs required to enable her to continue in service as a trip boat were exorbitant. She currently rests under tarpaulin in the southwest corner of the car park. 'Honey' has some historic interest as she previously served as a captains launch on HMS Obdurate that operated as part of the Arctic Convoys during World War II, and which also participated in the Battle of the Barents Sea in 1942. Having been retired by the Navy, Honey went on to be used as a trip boat on Rudyard Lake between the years of 2004 – 2019.

The proposed cradle upon which Honey will sit be an open framed structure that will be a maximum of 2 metres wide, 5.6m in length and 1.8 metres in height. The cradle is to be constructed from steel and sat upon a concrete slab constructed beneath the waterline. The former trip boat 'Honey' will be bolted to the cradle and repurposed to provide a seating and interpretation area, with display panels and interactive media to portray her own naval history as well as the history of the Lake. Four solar panels will be positioned on her roof to provide a renewable source of power for the attraction, with batteries within the boat enabling the energy generated to be stored.

The tarmacking of the whole of the existing road is also applied for.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffs Moorlands Local Plan (adopted September 2020)

SS10 – Other Rural Areas Strategy
SS11 – Churnet Valley Strategy
E4 – Tourism and Cultural Development
DC1 – Design Considerations
DC2 – The Historic Environment

NPPF (Revised July 2021)

Sections 6 (Economy), 12 (Design) and 16 (Historic Environment).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None relevant to this particular proposal.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 27/9/22.
Neighbour consultation period ends: 27/9/22.
Press Advert: 13/9/22

Public Comments

One letter of support has been received from a local resident.

Town / Parish Comments

“Support”.

Local Highways Authority

No objection. The proposal will release spaces in the car park where the boat is currently kept and will not impact on current levels of trip generation.

Conservation Officer

No objections.

SCC Flood Team

Originally requested further information and on receipt of this, raised no objection subject to a condition requiring that flood risk is not increased during temporary works and water quality is managed.

Environment Agency

Having checked the constraints and development proposals, the application appears to fall outside of our checklist for consulting the Environment Agency. We would therefore not wish to provide any bespoke comments on the proposal, and refer you to our standing advice. However, it is noted that the proposal falls within a reservoir inundation zone, we therefore advise that you take into consideration reservoir risk.

Severn Trent Water

No objection.

Canal & River Trust

No objection.

Peak & Northern Footpaths

Adjacent footpaths should be left clear. No objection to any temporary diversion as long as it is safe.

Ramblers Association

There are two nearby footpaths which should be safe for all users.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The site is in the Green Belt and Policy SS10, the strategy for the countryside, requires strict control over inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The NPPF in paras 149 and 150 lists the forms of development which are not inappropriate and therefore by definition not harmful to the openness of the Green Belt. The applicant's agent considers the proposal would be deemed to comprise "Engineering works" and I would agree with that and this is listed as not being inappropriate development in the Green Belt, providing it does not affect openness. However, it is also accepted that there would be some limited degree of impact by virtue of the scale, form and extent of the fixed cradle and frame structure, supporting the boat and which also comprises a concrete base attached to the lake bed. This does have a impact on openness although I consider this to not be substantial impact. Nonetheless, it is still an impact and therefore is contrary to paras 149 and 150 and therefore the works are deemed to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The NPPF makes clear that inappropriate development should not be allowed unless there are "very special circumstances" considered to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the operation of Green Belt policy.

I consider that such circumstances exist which would outweigh the particular level of harm to the openness of the Green Belt. It is clear that the proposal is linked to the improvement of tourist facilities at Rudyard Lake and would increase the appeal of the visitor centre as a tourist or visitor destination and such improvements to tourist facilities are encouraged in both Policy E4 and the strategy for Churnet Valley. Before its time as a tour boat for the lake, "Honey" was used as a "Captains Launch" on one of the HMS boats during the Second World War. It therefore has some significant historical interest. The proposal, in bringing the boat out of redundancy and into some beneficial use, would therefore also provide some significant historical benefits as well as tourism benefits and I consider that cumulatively, these benefits would amount to the very special circumstances which would outweigh the particular level of harm to the openness of the Green Belt, which I have already assessed as not being substantial.

Although the Churnet Valley Masterplan requires "minimal" new tourist development in this part of the Churnet Valley, I consider the small scale nature of what is proposed to not be contrary to this requirement.

As there is no other conflict with the strategic policies in the Local Plan, I therefore consider the principle of the proposal to be acceptable.

The proposal would have heritage benefits but with regard to the actual visual impact on the Conservation Area, the boat itself is certainly not out of keeping with the area which comprises other similar boats on, or on the edge of (in the case of the proposed) a lake. The cradle and frame structure would be more alien to the area and of no architectural merit but when water levels are low, would be seen against the backdrop of a concrete retaining wall of equal height and would otherwise not be harmfully intrusive within the Conservation Area. At a higher water level, it would be mostly or even completely submerged and not visible. The proposed solar panels would be laid flat on the roof of the boat rather than on a slope as they are often positioned and this would help reduce their visual impact and prominence to users of

the lake and visitor centre and users of the two public footpaths crossing the visitor centre. Outside of the visitor centre, the application site is well screened by surrounding trees and is not visible from the road. I consider the panels would also be preferable to further works needed to connect the boat to the grid which may be more visually harmful as well as being less environmentally friendly. The tarmacking of the road would not lead to any significant visual harm as this would amount to resurfacing rather than the expansion of hard-standings into open land.

There are no nearby residential properties and the proposal would not lead to any noise or disturbance creation in relation to the existing tourist facilities at the Visitor Centre which is largely an outdoor attraction. Residential amenity would not be affected.

The proposal would not lead to any highway safety concerns on surrounding roads as the proposed attraction is not of a scale or scope that can be connected to any increase in visitor numbers and therefore no significant increase in vehicle movements or traffic.

Although the site is in Flood Zone 2, the volume take-up of water by the proposed cradle and supporting structure and base is extremely minimal in relation to the total volume of the lake. I note the recommended condition from SCC Flood Team but I do not consider the condition can be imposed as it does not appear necessary or enforceable and is also imprecise. In any case, it would appear unlikely that the minimal scope of the temporary works involved would lead to any detriment to flood risk or water quality.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal, although amounting to inappropriate development in the Green Belt would still be acceptable as the tourism and heritage benefits, as encouraged in the Local Plan, would amount to very special circumstances which are considered to outweigh the limited level of harm to the openness of the Green Belt. There are no other negative impacts as the proposal would not lead to harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area or the amenities and environment of the surrounding area in general and there is no conflict with other Local Plan policies and sections of the NPPF other than those relating to the Green Belt. The application is therefore recommended for approval.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston

Recommendation Date: 13.12.22

X *J. Colley*

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council