
From: Steve Massey
Sent: 23 May 2023 17:50
To: Jo Gregory
Cc: Planning Comments (SMDC)
Subject: SMD/2022/0592 - Land at Oakamoor Road, Cheadle

Categories:

Jo,

I have the following comments on this application, seeking outline planning permission (including approval of access details at this stage) for residential development of up to 53 dwellings.

Summary: objection on grounds of impact on existing significant trees; objection on grounds of visual impact.

Existing Trees

Whilst the application is for outline planning permission, with site layout a reserved matter for future consideration, an illustrative layout is submitted to give an indication of how the site might be developed and seeks to demonstrate that a residential development of the amount stated (up to 53 dwellings) could be accommodated. An Arboricultural Impact Assessment report (AIA) accompanies the application, and this considers the potential impact of the proposal based on the illustrative layout.

Existing trees/hedges can generally be considered as 3 main groups:

- (i) Off-site mature trees (and established hedgerow) along the northern boundary, between the application site and Hales Hall Pool (a Local Nature Reserve in SMDC ownership, also designated as a Site of Biological Importance). These trees are considered to be of significant amenity value in terms of their contribution to the local landscape, in addition to biodiversity value as part of the LNR and SBI. The mature Yew trees, in particular, are of notable age, likely to be contemporary with Hales Hall to the west (built 1712). The Yew trees are part of a formal landscape feature flanking the 2 long sides of Hales Hall Pool on a formal axis from the Hall. The Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of the Yews, and other mature trees along the northern boundary of the application site, extend substantially into the application site, as indicated in the AIA. The main site road and some buildings (dwellings at Plots 10, 11 and 53), together with some private drive areas and parking bays, as shown on the illustrative layout would encroach significantly into the RPAs. The AIA acknowledges this, but refers to British Standard 5837 guidance that suggests special measures construction specification for hard surfacing (such as no-dig cellular confinement load support, or a root bridging system) and building foundations (eg pile and beam) can acceptably reduce or mitigate for damage where development encroachment within RPAs is unavoidable (the AIA uses this emphasis), notwithstanding that the starting point of BS 5837 guidance is that all development including hard surfacing should be located outside RPAs. The application details do not explain why development within tree RPAs at this site would be unavoidable, and I would contend that development within RPAs would clearly not be unavoidable. On that basis alone, any proposal for use of "special measures" construction specifications aimed at accommodating development (buildings or hard-surfacing) within RPAs should not be given weight or be considered relevant or acceptable. Furthermore, from discussion with Staffordshire County Council's Highways Project Engineer I understand that a no-dig cellular confinement construction specification would be considered unacceptable for an adopted public highway. In addition, Plots 9 and 10 would have a poor relationship with the trees to the north due to inappropriately close proximity, having restricted outlook and majority of garden area beneath tree canopies, leading to poor quality living environment for occupiers and pressure for felling or substantial pruning of trees to the detriment of their amenity value.

(There would also be encroachment by the dwelling footprint at Plot 9 into the RPA of a Eucalyptus in the rear garden of 4 Rudyard Way, and potentially poor relationship with the crown of this tree; whilst the Eucalyptus is assessed as retention Category C, and therefore of relatively low value/significance, such encroachment and conflict would again be readily avoidable with a different layout).

- (ii) Mature hedgerow and trees along the Oakamoor Road boundary. The proposed new site access position off Oakamoor Road would comfortably avoid the RPA of the only notable individual tree in the hedgerow, and the illustrative layout also indicates the retention of the hedgerow itself other than specifically where removal of a short stretch would be required to accommodate the access. The required highways visibility splay (either as currently proposed or as may otherwise be required as amendment) appears to be possible without removal of additional lengths of the existing hedgerow, although some trimming back would be required where its lateral growth substantially overhangs the verge. There would therefore be minimal impact on trees/hedgerows arising from the proposed new site access/entrance off Oakamoor Road, and this access position itself is therefore considered acceptable in relation to trees and hedges.
- (iii) Marshy scrub woodland/carr around the small pond and marshy meadow area extending across the application site near to its eastern end. This forms a visually significant feature within the site, and also forms an arm of the SBI projecting into the site from the wider “Cheadle Fish Ponds” SBI centred on Hales Hall Pool itself. This woodland is considered to be significant to the setting of the car park and initial arrival character of the LNR. The intention for the retained area around this smaller pond is not clear, although it is noted as an ecological enhancement area, and it may be that some thinning or opening up of the woodland in places may be beneficial, for instance to allow more light to the pond. However, a significant part of the eastern-most end of this scrub woodland would need to be removed in order to accommodate the roadway/turning head and some plots at this end of the site, as indicated on the illustrative layout plan, and this loss would be detrimental to visual amenity of the area. There may also be biodiversity issues arising from the loss of part of the carr scrub woodland, and associated marshy grassland, and also impact on the hydrology of the LNR – Staffordshire Wildlife Trust would be better qualified to comment on this specific point.

The illustrative layout would lead to unacceptable impact on trees, and it fails to demonstrate that the proposed development of up to 53 dwellings could be accommodated without such impact. Whilst there is a significant proportion of the site which could accommodate residential development in principle without harmful impact on existing trees, achieving this would appear to require a redesign of the illustrative layout together with a reduction in the number of dwellings, and as such it is considered inappropriate to approve this application as it stands even at outline stage.

Visual Impact

Views into/across the application site from Oakamoor Road to the east when approaching Cheadle, and from the Hales Hall Pool LNR car park, are very much undeveloped and rural in character. There are distant views to the notable spire of St Giles RC Church and buildings near the town centre on the wooded hillside above (north of) High Street, and the Rudyard Way roofscape adjacent to and facing the site is also visible although very much recessive against its backdrop. Most of eastern Cheadle is screened by topography due to the east-west rise in ground levels within the application from the eastern boundary to the centre of the site. The proposed development would be readily visible in these views, and therefore incongruous and intrusive as a suburban character imposed on a rural scene and unassociated with other urban development, the more so for plots 47 to 53 sandwiched between the LNR car park and the retained ecological enhancement area. Such harmful visual impact would be further exacerbated by the dense and formal layout indicated at this end of the site, although this is to be regarded as illustrative only at this stage. There is also illustrative indication of new hedgerow and tree planting around the currently open/exposed eastern corner of the site, but the layout as indicated would not provide sufficient space for significant structural planting.

On leaving Cheadle heading west on the Oakamoor Road, as soon as the existing property at 45 Oakamoor Road has been passed, the landscape character becomes completely rural and a major residential development would inevitably be out of keeping with this character, most notably when passing the site entrance and in particular in

relation to the dwelling at Plot 12 immediately adjacent to the highway. The dwellings at Plots at Plots 23 and 24 are similarly adjacent to the highway although behind the more substantial section of the existing frontage hedgerow; however, it is noted that their proximity (again albeit illustrative only) would require substantial and reduction cutting back of the hedge due to immediate proximity, which would locally reduce its screening effect.

From within the LNR, there are several open views into the application site. Currently, especially from the eastern-most two-thirds of the perimeter path along the southern bank of Hales Hall Pool immediately adjacent to the application site boundary, existing dwellings at Bala Grove and Rudyard Way are well-screened by dense vegetation and therefore views from here within the LNR and across the application site are entirely rural and undeveloped in character, and the proposed development would therefore be incongruous and visually intrusive. This would also apply to views from the western-most third of this same path, although to a lesser extent as the suburban influence of existing residential development around the western end of Hales Hall Pool is notably more apparent.

The visual impact of the proposed development on views across Hales Hall Pool from its northern bankside path (and from the rear gardens of properties at Bala Grove) would be notably less, due to the screening effect of existing established/mature vegetation not only along the site boundary, but also the southern bank of the Pool.

Overall, the proposed development would even in principle at outline stage have significant adverse visual impact on views from Oakamoor Road, Hales Hall Pool LNR car park and the main body of the LNR itself, and would also have adverse effect on the rural landscape character of the area including the tranquil setting of the historic Hales Hall Pool, and in this regard the application is also considered to be unacceptable.

New Landscaping

Indications of new planting are suggested on the illustrative masterplan although little weight (either way) should be attached to these at this current outline stage. However, it is noted that the indicative layout in its current form would allow little space for meaningful structural planting around the eastern-most corner as already mentioned above, but also at key positions along the northern boundary where elements of the proposed development would be closest to, and most intrusive on views from, Hales Hall Pool LNR. The two circular areas centred on the mine shafts could be interesting landscaped focal points (assuming tree planting etc is not restricted over within these areas – I doubt that it is), although the indicative parking layout at the western shaft is somewhat random and dominant. For the most part, the dwellings are shown very close to their highway frontage boundaries, and where there are gaps in the built frontage it is mainly for parking bays – therefore there would be little opportunity for significant street scene greening planting on plot frontages in the indicative layout submitted.

Steve Massey

Arboricultural Officer / Development Services
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and High Peak Borough Council

Moorlands House, Stockwell Street, Leek, Staffordshire Moorlands ST13 6HQ

www.staffs Moorlands.gov.uk www.highpeak.gov.uk

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