

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Moorlands House
Stockwell Street
Leek
Staffordshire Moorlands
ST13 6HQ

18 October 2024

LAND OFF LEEK ROAD – ALTERATIONS TO EXISTING ACCESS

This letter is submitted on behalf of Broad Oak Properties and is intended to address a reason for the refusal of Application No. DET/2024/0018, specifically concerning the need to improve the existing access.

Application No. DET/2024/0018 was for the erection of a forestry building under Part 6 prior approval. Due to the access being sited within 25m of the road, the legislation precluded any alterations to it.

This application has now been submitted concurrently with a resubmission of the forestry building prior approval application so that the council can consider them in parallel.

The relevant reason for refusal, which is addressed in this application stated:

*“This is a commercial development which would result in the intensification of the existing vehicular access use. **Intensified use of the access would require improvement of the access to ensure highway safety.** The application is clear that the access will not be altered as part of this proposal and as such the siting of the building and siting and construction of the track are considered to be detrimental to highway safety contrary to Local Plan policy T1 and section 9 ‘Promoting sustainable transport’ of the National Planning Policy Framework, which requires that all developments should secure safe and suitable access to a site.”*

Site context

Historically and still to date, the application site has been used as an access into the fields beyond for large agricultural vehicles (tractors and trailers). This area is comprised of hardstanding and some small timber animal shelters, as shown in the 2023 Google Maps image below.



Figure 1: Application site 2023

The applicant has now removed the shelters, scraped back the undergrowth and refreshed the hardstanding, as shown in the image below.



Figure 2: Existing site

Proposal

Planning permission is sought for proposed alterations to the existing access and provides details of the retrospective upgraded MOT surface.

A small area of new hardstanding (c.18sqm) is also proposed, which will link up to the track proposed under the concurrent prior approval forestry building application, as shown by the red arrow below.

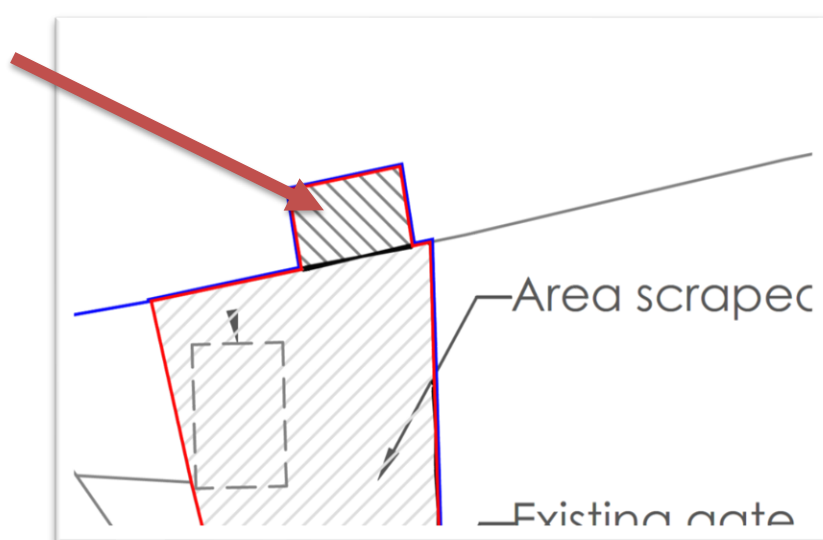


Figure 3: Proposed new hardstanding

It is also proposed that a small section of grass verge outside of the existing access gate will be tarmacked, once planning is obtained the works will be secured under the appropriate Highways Act.

The existing 7-bar access gate adjacent to Leek Road will be removed to ensure vehicles can enter the site without impacting traffic on the road (i.e. no stopping to open the gate will be required).

Additionally a reduction in the height of the hedgerows on either side of the entrance gate along Leek Lane and also along the western boundary of the site to ensure clear visibility of sight lines when exiting the site.

A planning condition can ensure that the hedge height and removal of the access gate remain in place for perpetuity.

The proposed site plan is shown below.

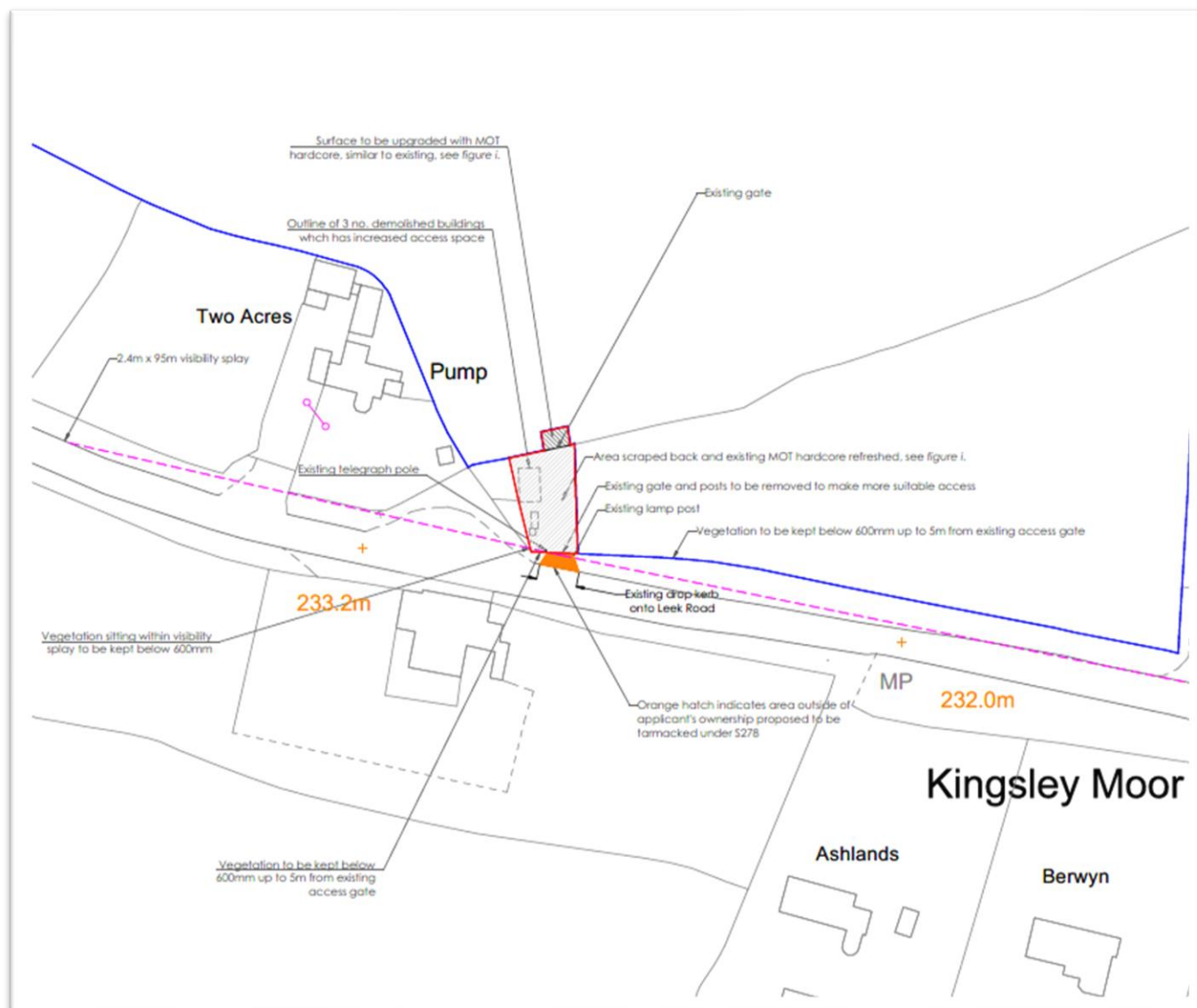


Figure 4: Proposed site plan

Planning Policy

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020

National Planning Policy Framework 2023

Appraisal

Principle – Paragraph 155 of the NPPF details forms of development that are not inappropriate in the green belt, and the relevant exception is:

b) engineering operations

This exception is subject to the proposal preserving openness and not conflicting with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Both of these tests are appraised below.

Openness - Openness is not defined in the Framework. It is, therefore, a matter of planning judgment. However, in determining the nature and extent of any impact on Green Belt openness it is necessary to assess both spatial and visual impacts.

The removal of the timber animal shelters has had positive benefits for the spatial and visual elements of the green belt. These were dilapidated and underutilised structures which were reasonably prominent in the site, and on this basis, their removal has positively impacted upon openness, allowing views into the wider landscape.

Furthermore, the proposed hardstanding is a limited area in connection with an existing form of development. It is therefore part and parcel of an existing form of development in this part of the Green Belt. It is also at ground level, flush with the surrounding grassland and adjacent MOT. Therefore spatial and visual elements are considered minor in the wider landscape. Such hardstanding is a common feature at the entrance to fields within the countryside. On this basis, it is considered that the proposal would not negatively impact Green Belt openness.

Purposes of the Green Belt – The proposal aims to enhance the existing access arrangements without introducing any new access points along Leek Road. As a result, the minor modifications proposed are not expected to adversely affect the purposes of the Green Belt.

The application proposals are considered to be not inappropriate in Green Belt, as they are an engineering operation that would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt.

On the matter of principle, it is considered that the proposal would represent an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt.

Design – The proposed small extension of the track is de minimis in scale and does not have a significant visual impact when viewed from the street scene. The materials selected ensure it integrates unobtrusively with its surroundings. The removal of unused and dilapidated timber animal shelters has also improved the aesthetic and space at the site. There is a neighbouring example of a

tarmacked grass verge beyond the site's boundary visible along Leek Road, approximately 120m due east of the application site, as shown in the image below. The applicant's proposal will harmonise with this, and this will help to prevent mud from tracking onto the road.



Figure 5: Neighbouring tarmacked access

The proposal is therefore in accordance with Policy DC 1 of the Local Plan.

Amenity – The alterations proposed under this scheme are not considered to impact upon residential amenity.

Highways—Reducing the hedges to 600mm seeks to ensure clear visibility sight lines in connection with the vehicles leaving the site. The proposal is, therefore, in accordance with Policy T1 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity Net Gain—The proposed works under this application would result in the loss of 18sqm of grassland habitat, as this area is below the threshold of 25sqm, the de minimis exemption would apply.

Conclusion

The proposed alterations to the existing access do not comprise inappropriate development within the green belt nor give rise to detrimental impacts upon residential amenity or cause highways concerns. The proposal, therefore, accords with the NPPF and policies DC 1 and T1, and it is respectfully requested that the application be approved without delay.

Yours sincerely



Adam Mustafa BSc(Hons) MRTPI
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