

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0052
Valid 31/01/2025

**ACCESS TO COLLYHOLE
WOOD AND GOG WOOD
CHURCH LANE
IPSTONES**

**RETROSPECTIVE FULL
APPLICATION FOR THE
ALTERATION AND
MAINTENANCE OF PRIVATE
WAYS FOR FULL FORESTRY
USE.**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area
- Impact on woodland ecology and biodiversity

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

Stakebank Wood is in an 'other rural area' of countryside 1km to the northwest of Ipstones. The woodland has a Local Site of Biological Importance designation. The access to the woodland is taken from a roadside gate on the narrow unclassified Church Lane. Access alterations and hard standings have already been constructed creating roadside opening to the woodland edge.

PROPOSAL

Development already carried out. Clearance of a roadside woodland edge to provide alteration and addition to the access arrangement to form expanded parking area and private way access to subdivided woodland plots. The work is constructed with limestone chatter surfacing. Timber boards provide definition and retention to the edges of the hard surfaced areas.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (adopted 9th September 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
SS2 Settlement Hierarchy
SS10 Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

DET/2024/0040 Application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed alteration of private ways for agricultural or forestry use. Prior Not Refused.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 28th March 2025

Neighbour consultation period ends: 28th March 2025

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

One objection has been received with the following comment:

I regularly run that route and cannot see why they need such a big car park. The RSPB carry out forestry work within the area without having to have a car park for their machinery they just have wide access to a forestry track. Forestry machinery is designed to manage and handle on forestry ground, not car parks. My concern is that the applicants are going to use the area for their art business and that the car park will be used for that purpose, the woodland benches that they have already created also make me feel that this is the case. If forest machinery is being used it doesn't need to be parked. I am concerned about mine and other walker/runner safety not to mention the wildlife at the increase in vehicular traffic this will bring, not to mention the carbon footprint.

Town / Parish Comments

Ipstones PC: recommend refusal of the application for the following reasons.

Inappropriate use of the land, should be only for forestry or agricultural purposes

Appears to be against the general covenant applied to the sale from Woodlands.UK

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Site Visit Conducted on: 12-Feb-2025

Conditional

Application is retrospective for a widened access off a rural road for forestry purposes. Church Lane is a quiet rural lane with low volumes of traffic and generally low speeds due the alignment and topography at the location of the access.

There was an existing access which has been widened to facilitate forestry use. This widening will facilitate and intensify use of the access. There is no information on the size or type of vehicle which will access the site - other than the statement of vehicles currently parking in the passing place opposite. The size of the parking and turning area and geometry of approach road will limit the size of vehicle able to access the site. Planning statement does not suggest significant forestry work requiring large vehicles.

As use of the access will be intensified, condition is recommended which will provide support to the edge of carriageway to prevent damage to the carriageway. This could equally be provided by kerbing.

Staffs Wildlife Trust

No objection subject to conditions requiring the provision of a more detailed woodland management plan.

The impact of the development is considered proportionate, and the plan will secure the ongoing appropriate management.

Tree Officer

No objection.

On balance, I consider the visual harm of the vehicle access improvements already carried out is proportionate in the context of the wider site and would be outweighed by the anticipated woodland and biodiversity enhancements proposed under the supporting Woodland Management Plan.

Collyhole Wood, and indeed the wider Stakebank Wood of which it forms part, are not protected by TPO and are not scheduled Ancient Woodland (nearest Ancient Woodland sites are c.700m north-west and c.840m south of the planning application site at the Church Lane frontage of the subject woodland and would not be affected).

Based on Google Streetview images (dated September 2022 prior to recent access/vehicle standing works being carried out) and my observations on site August 2024 following works, it appears that the gateway widening has been in a northerly direction only, from the pre-existing gateway i.e. downhill towards the brook/bridge, as also described in the planning application details, and did not involve any frontage hedgerow removal – as there was no frontage hedgerow along this stretch of the roadside boundary.

Also with reference to Google images, as far as it's possible to tell it appears that the works carried out have not involved the removal of any major/mature trees; at least 1 early-mature Birch is no longer present, presumably removed during/for the works. Google images also confirm that there was already an older stone/hardcore access track and vehicle standing present, extending from the gateway into the site a short distance with a side-spur off to the north into Collyhole Wood subdivision (approximately as shown schematically on the "Site Map -Forestry Access (pre-existing)" plan submitted with the application), with extensive dense undergrowth (scrub and tall ruderal vegetation, potentially some tree or shrub seedlings/saplings too) around the original stoned area and even colonising over it due to low level of use.

The combination of widened (doubled) access gateway width off Church Lane, extensive clearance of undergrowth, substantially enlarged vehicle parking/turning area, and use of new limestone chatter which is extremely fresh/bright in appearance, gives rise to a current stark, incongruous and prominent visual impact which is notably harmful to the character and appearance of the area – although confined to the immediate vicinity only, due to the containing effects of landform and screening vegetation.

With time over a period of years, if retained the limestone will fade/weather to some degree and become intermittently covered with falling leaves/debris (turning to compost); there is also likely to be natural regeneration of vegetation around the hardstanding, and the visual impact could be further reduced by carrying out pro-active new planting (eg hedgerow to site frontage and return into site alongside access, understorey shrub planting in the cleared unmade ground areas surrounding the hardstanding – as schematically indicated in principle on the "Site Map -Forestry

Access (proposed v3)" plan). The current stark visual impact would therefore be anticipated to "tone down" over time.

The work already carried out has evidently involved some ground levels re-grading including excavation into sloping ground within Root Protection Areas of existing retained trees and minor increase of soil levels around the base of some trees; this may have some detrimental impact on the on-going condition of these trees in the medium to long term, but does not appear sufficient to cause immediate decline nor obviously risk tree stability. Whether or not this application is approved, such harm to roots as there is has now happened. There may be a slight risk of incidental minor further harm to roots if the existing hardstanding were to be removed and the ground reinstated to its previous condition and levels, although this is a fairly neutral issue/consideration overall.

The access improvements are stated as being required by the applicant to support woodland management operations at the site (and to improve safety when entering/leaving the site in pursuit of such management). Like many small woodlands, Collyhole Wood and the wider extent of Stakebank Wood (to which the access improvements and supporting Woodland Management Plan relate in combination) has apparently received little or no active management over recent decades. The site is designated as SBI, and appropriate woodland management would benefit its wider biodiversity value. A Woodland Management Plan is submitted with the application, and whilst this is not fully detailed in terms of precise locations/numbers/areas/defined timescales in a specified schedule of operations, it nevertheless demonstrates a considered and appropriate low-key approach. Appendix A of the Woodland Management Plan indicates a range of management operations, many of which being directly linked to biodiversity protection and enhancement objectives. The Plan demonstrates awareness of Forestry Commission Felling Licence controls, and confirms that any felling operations for thinning purposes would be carried out at such rates so as to stay below the threshold at which a Felling Licence would otherwise be required. Appendix B demonstrates recognition that implementation of the Plan will be a long-term, low intensity project. It does not appear that management on any form of commercial forestry basis is planned.

I note that the Woodland Management Plan indicates an intention to site a shipping container at the Church Lane access area of the site for secure tool storage etc, which could significantly increase visual harm; if this is within the scope of planning controls, this or any other storage/amenity building would need to be carefully considered in terms of potential impact and justification.

On balance, I consider that the current very localised visual harm arises from the relatively low key (albeit initially prominent) access improvements and is likely to reduce over time with weathering and natural vegetation regeneration/colonisation which could be accelerated by pro-active new planting around the access area (which could be conditioned in the event of planning permission being granted), and that such visual harm can be considered broadly proportionate and would be outweighed by the anticipated beneficial woodland and biodiversity enhancements across the combined woodland subdivision sites of Stakebank Wood as a whole.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

The site is a roadside woodland edge in an 'other rural area' of countryside, outside of any defined settlement. Here, Local Plan area strategy policy SS10 applies. Policy SS10 states that these areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. This to be achieved by, inter alia, enhancing and conserving the quality of the countryside by encouraging measures which protect and enhance the biodiversity, geological resources and heritage of the District.

The application statement explains that the parking area and private ways are for forestry use. The development would improve access for vehicles and equipment to enable woodland management.

In these circumstances there would be an obvious and essential need for the development to be located in the rural location. Genuine efforts to manage and improve the woodland would enhance the countryside and biodiversity.

Design and Impact on Character and Appearance

The development has caused the clearance of foliage from the edge of the woodland to the roadside and the incursion of hard standings in a rural undeveloped area. There are negative impacts on the character and appearance of the area in those regards.

The tree officer, in particular, advises that the stark white of the chatter will overtime dull and green over in colour and that if a scheme of landscape planting is secured this would help conceal and assimilate the development into the landscape.

Ultimately, any conflict with policies DC1 or DC3 would be minimised in these regards.

Other considerations/Impact on ecology and biodiversity

On the evidence of the consultees – the Council's tree officer and Staffs Wildlife Trust, the impact of the development is not considered to be disproportionate. The delivery of woodland management will enhance ecology and biodiversity and can be secured in the detail of a post permission management plan, and this is a matter that would outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of the woodland edge observed from the roadside. There would be compliance with policy NE1 and NE2 of the SMDC Local Plan in these regards.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The impact of the development on the character and appearance of the area and biodiversity is considered proportionate and will be outweighed by the effective management of the woodland that will deliver ecological and biodiversity enhancements. No conflict with the Local Plan policies listed above.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date: 16/10/2025

X 

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council