

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2026/0026
Valid 03/02/2026

**TITTESWORTH VISITORS
CENTRE , BLACKSHAW
LANE , MEERBROOK ,
LEEK , STAFFORDSHIRE ,
ST13 8SW**

**CHANGE OF USE OF LAND TO
OVERSPILL CAR PARK
WITHIN THE GROUNDS OF
TITTESWORTH WATER
VISITOR CENTRE**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- The principle of the development
- The impact on the character and appearance of the area
- Ecology

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site is in the countryside a few miles to the north of Leek but is not in the Green Belt. It comprises part of a Severn Trent Water visitor centre and is adjacent to Tittesworth Reservoir which lies to the west.

The site is to the north of the visitor centre buildings and is a small grassed open clearing bounded by trees and hedges. It is reached by a track off the main access road. The site is used as an informal overspill car parking area.

The site is in the Churnet Valley Masterplan Boundary, within the Countryside and within the extent of Leekfrith Neighbourhood Plan Development area.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for the change of use of the existing informal overspill car parking area to be used as a formal overspill car parking area, within the grounds of Tittesworth Water Visitor Centre.

The development will comprise of the following elements:

- 202 car parking spaces on grass reinforcement mat 'Glassprotecta' laid on existing and newly seeded grass
- Wildflower planting
- Self-righting reflective flexible traffic bollards (will have a base that can be secured in/on the surface then easily removed)

It is proposed to upgrade the existing, informal overspill car park using grass reinforcement mat 'Glassprotecta' laid on existing and newly seeded grass and self-righting reflective flexible traffic bollards to create approx. 202 parking spaces.

Cut and fill will be required in a small area to the south and western parts of the site altering the land by 5cm and raising areas on the ridge along the eastern half of the site by 20cm and 59cm.



The formalised overspill carpark will be utilised from Mid-March until end of October, with it in full use from Mid-July to second week of September.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan

SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy

SS11 Churnet Valley Strategy

E4 Tourism and Cultural Development

DC1 – Design Considerations

Other

Leekfrith Neighbourhood Plan

National Planning Policy Framework

Sections 6 (Building a strong, competitive economy) and 12 (Achieving well-designed places)

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2025/0341 - Installation of 1no. storage barn – Approved

SMD/2021/0534 Installation of 2 No. Cabins – Approved

SMD/2021/0372 2 x freestanding entrance signs – Approved

SMD/2012/1186 Signs – Approved

SMD/2009/0465 Replacement toilet block – Approved

SMD/2006/0987 Landscaping – Approved

SMD/1999/1144 Extension to visitor centre – Approved

SMD/1985/0155 Extension to form toilet for the disabled – Approved

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date:02/04/2026

Neighbour consultation period ends: 26/02/2026

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None received

Town / Parish Comments

Part of the justification is to relieve parking pressures on the village on busy days when the car park is full, suggest ST review their car parking charges as persons park in the village even on days when the car park is not full.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Condition reasonable avoidance measures for species listed in the PEA and secure landscaping implemented as per the BNG recommendations

Trees SMDC

No objections. The submission includes a tree survey and arboricultural impact assessment by ADAS (ref 1053416). The survey/AIA includes proposed tree protection measures in accordance with BS5837-2012. The implementation and retention of these measures should be secured via a suitably worded pre-commencement condition.

Archaeology

I have reviewed the proposals against the information included in the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record (SHER) and the desk-based assessment (DBA) submitted in support of the application. Whilst there is limited historic environment

interest within the wider area, I can confirm that I do not wish to raise any archaeological issues with the application.

I am happy to defer to your Conservation Officer colleague with regards to the potential impact of the proposals on the Grade II listed building located approximately 80m to the north of the proposed site, as this is not considered within the scope of the DBA.

Severn Trent

Informative recommended relating to assets. Suggested condition relating to drainage plan for the disposal of foul and surface water flows. No hardstanding is proposed and as such this condition is not considered reasonable or necessary.

LLFA

The use of matting means the surface remains permeable; the site is not in a high risk location for flooding. No comments to make but recommend that the drainage plan listed be uploaded to the web site.

Highways

No highway objections

OFFICER COMMENTS

Need for Development

The application seeks to formalise the existing informal overspill car parking area associated with the Tittesworth Water Visitor Centre, which is operated by Severn Trent Water.

The current overspill area is used on an ad-hoc basis during periods of high visitor demand. However, its informal nature limits accessibility and usability, particularly during periods of wet weather when the ground conditions prevent effective use. Formalising the area will enable more consistent year-round operation while retaining a natural surface appropriate to the rural setting.

Tittesworth Water Visitor Centre attracts approximately 300,000 visitors annually, resulting in significant parking demand during peak periods and at events held throughout the year. The provision of a formalised overspill parking area will assist in accommodating this demand in a safe and controlled manner.

The development is also intended to reduce the incidence of visitor parking within the nearby village during busy periods, thereby helping to minimise disruption to local residents. In addition, the proposal will enable improved management of visitor numbers, support the operation of events at the site, and contribute to the efficient operation of the visitor facility.

Principle of Development

Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the Development Plan

unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For the purposes of this Act, the development Plan relevant to this proposal comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Local Plan 2014 – 2033 (Adopted September 2020).

With regard to the principle of the development, Policy E4 encourages tourism-related development, which can include development to assist with the running of a visitor centre which would attract tourists, particularly in the Churnet Valley, providing this would not lead to any harm to the character and appearance of the area or generate significant traffic or harm the natural or historic environment in general. The site is currently used as an overspill car parking area, and the proposed development seeks to formalise this arrangement. The provision of a formalised overspill car park will support the continued operation of an established rural leisure and tourism destination.

Tittesworth Water forms part of a well-established visitor attraction within the Churnet Valley and attracts significant visitor numbers throughout the year. The proposed works will improve the management of visitor parking and help ensure the facility can operate effectively during periods of peak demand.

The development is appropriate supporting infrastructure for an existing tourism use within the countryside. The proposal to lay matting allowing grass to grow through and level some of the ground to improve the parking experience is therefore considered to accord with Policies SS1 (Development Principles), SS2 (Settlement Hierarchy), SS10 (Other Rural Areas Strategy), SS11 (Churnet Valley Strategy), E4 (Tourism and Cultural Development) and DC3 (Landscape and Settlement Setting) of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (September 2020), together with the objectives of the Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD (March 2014).

Design/Amenity

The proposed overspill car park will be located to the north of the Tittesworth Water Visitor Centre. The development has been designed to respect the character of the site and its wider rural surroundings, and the existing area used as overspill parking is already considered to be appropriate in this countryside location.

It is considered that there will be no landscape harm, with mature landscaping screening any vehicles currently parked on site, the vegetation will be retained, and it is proposed just to change the surfacing, with the ground area levelled.

A sloping area of the site will be levelled through cut and fill, once completed the visual appearance of the site will remain similar to the existing grassed field, with the benefit of a more durable and better-managed surface that avoids the current issues of muddy and churned ground during periods of use.

The nearest residential property is Marsh Farmhouse approximately 100m north of the proposal, which is not visible from the site. Given the existing use as a car park and the separation distance between the site area and the nearest residential property, it is not considered that there would be any adverse impacts to amenity. Therefore, the proposals are in line with Policy DC 1: Design Considerations and the NPPF.

On this basis, the proposal to formalise the overspill car parking area is considered to accord with Policies SS1 (Development Principles), DC1 (Design Considerations) and DC3 (Landscape and Settlement Setting) of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2014–2033).

Arb/Ecology

Ecological reports submitted in support of the application, including a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment and Biodiversity Enhancement Plan and a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), considers the ecological context of the site and identifies habitats and species that are present, or have the potential to be present, together with the potential effects of the proposed development during construction and operation of the formalised overspill car parking area. The reports set out appropriate mitigation measures and recommendations to ensure that the development does not result in adverse effects on local ecology, while also identifying opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.

Precautionary measures are recommended in relation to protected and notable species including badger, hedgehog, brown hare, harvest mouse, reptiles and amphibians. In addition, vegetation clearance will be minimised where possible and works will avoid the bird nesting season where practicable. The recommendations contained within the PEA will be adhered to as part of the development.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), requirements require development to deliver a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development baseline. The submitted Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment confirms that the proposal will deliver a net gain of +33.54% in area habitat units and +46.56% in linear hedgerow units, exceeding the mandatory 10% requirement. This will be achieved through on-site habitat enhancements including the improvement of modified grassland and enhancement of existing hedgerow features.

The proposed habitat creation comprises the enhancement of modified grassland to modified grassland in improved condition, rather than the creation of other neutral grassland (ONG).

As such:

- The habitat is not classified as a 'significant on-site habitat' under the Biodiversity Gain Regulations
- There is no requirement for soil nutrient testing (which would otherwise be necessary to demonstrate suitability for achieving ONG in moderate or higher condition)
- The development is not required to demonstrate 30 years of management and monitoring specifically on the basis of significant on-site habitat delivery

However a proportionate LEMP or HMMP is still required to demonstrate how the proposed condition uplift in modified grassland will be achieved and maintained. The management measures should be aligned with the approved Biodiversity Net Gain Plan, including the timeframe secured through that mechanism.

Suggested conditions relate to:

- Either a LEMP or a HMMP to ensure they know what to do to manage the grassland. This should be reviewed alongside the net gain plan as they will need to produce one of these as part of the net gain pre-commencement condition.
- Conditions for RAMs for hedgehog, brown hare, harvest mice, nesting birds, reptiles and amphibians, these to be included in a CEMP but this would need to be in place before any ground or vegetation clearance happens.
- Request post development plan to see what is proposed for the whole site and whether the habitat recommendations have been adhered to.

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment has been prepared, and the assessment identifies that the proposed development may require the removal of one moderate quality Category B Silver Birch (T23) to facilitate ground levelling works, should it not be possible to accommodate the development around it. The loss of this tree will be mitigated through proposed wildflower planting within the centre of the site.

Minor facilitation pruning will also be required to the northern aspect of Group G1 and the southern aspect of Tree T2 in order to provide adequate clearance for access and construction works. These works are not considered likely to adversely affect the long-term health or amenity value of the trees.

Drainage pipe works are anticipated to encroach within the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of Trees T7 and T20. Arboricultural supervision will therefore be required during these works, together with initial and final monitoring visits to ensure the correct implementation and removal of tree protection measures. Should the layout change, the appointed arboricultural consultant will be consulted accordingly.

The proposed development can be undertaken without causing undue harm to retained trees. On this basis, the proposal is considered to accord with Policy SS11 (Churnet Valley Strategy), Policy DC1 (Design Considerations) and Policy DC3 (Landscape and Settlement Setting) of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2014–2033).

Access

Tittesworth Water Visitor Centre is accessed via a vehicular access track, owned by STW, that leads off Blackshaw Lane, Meerbrook. This access is considered suitable for the operation of the site and no amendments are proposed. Visitor traffic associated with the proposal is expected to be at similar levels currently experienced, as such, there will be no adverse impacts on highway. The proposals will not significantly increase traffic to the site as the proposals are to improve existing operations at the site. Therefore, it is considered that the proposed development is compliant with the NPPF.

LHA in the consultation response raise no issues relating to highway safety.

Flood Risk and Drainage

The application site lies within Flood Zone 1, which is defined as having a low probability of flooding from rivers. The site is also identified as having a low risk of surface water flooding.

The proposed development includes cut and fill of part of the site to improve levels, and a drainage strategy shows surface water runoff from the overspill car park will be directed to new perforated drainage pipes located along the northern, eastern and western boundaries of the site. Surface water will then discharge into a stone-filled soakaway pit to be excavated at the location of the existing culvert/pipe inlet.

It is therefore not considered that the development would increase flood risk either on the site itself or elsewhere. The proposed drainage strategy is considered appropriate for managing surface water associated with the development.

Accordingly, the proposal is considered to accord with Policy DC1 (Design Considerations) and Policy SD5 (Flood Risk) of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2014–2033).

Heritage and Archaeology

It is not considered that the proposed development would have a detrimental impact on any designated heritage assets given that the site is currently a car park, and it is proposed to formalise the existing land use which should not generate any additional harm. The nearest statutory heritage asset is Marsh Farmhouse and its attached outbuildings, a Grade II listed building located approximately 100m to the north of the proposed overspill car park.

Due to intervening landform and vegetation, the listed building is not visible from the location of the existing & proposed formalised overspill car parking area. As such, the development is not considered to adversely affect the setting or significance of this heritage asset.

The proposal is therefore considered to accord with Policy DC1 (Design Considerations) and Policy DC2 (Historic Environment) of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (September 2020).

The application is also supported by an Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment. The assessment concludes that there is a low potential for groundworks associated with the proposed development to affect archaeological remains. Any remains that may be present are likely to be of low archaeological significance.

The submitted assessment has been assessed by the County Archaeologist in determining whether any further archaeological investigation or mitigation is required prior to the commencement of development. They have no objection to the proposed development.

CONCLUSION/PLANNING BALANCE

The design approach seeks to ensure that the development will not detract from the character and appearance of the wider landscape, intrude unacceptably into the countryside, or adversely affect views across the site and surrounding area.

The development is associated with improving the running of a visitor centre and the maintenance of the attractive rural surroundings. It is not harming the character and amenities of the area. It complies with the Local Plan and the government planning guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Pet Twigg

Recommendation Date: 20th April 2026

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council