
15. FULL PLANNING APPLICATION – ALTERATION OF AND EXISTING AGRICULTURAL ACCESS AND FORMATION OF A NEW TRACK AT MILLMOORHEAD WOOD, LEEK ROAD, LONGNOR (NP/SM/0217/0148), P2263, 16/02/2017, 408147/364463/TS

APPLICANT: PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Site and Surroundings

The site is a part of Millmoorhead Wood, a managed woodland with an area of approximately 10 hectares that is part of the Authority's Warslow Moors Estate. The site lies to the northern side of Leek Road and approximately 600 metres to the south west of Longnor Village. The woodland is undergoing a programme of tree thinning for biodiversity and amenity purposes. As such, there is a need to remove significant amounts of timber from the site. There is an existing gate and narrow wood chip surfaced access track that leads to an area of hardstanding for vehicles that is used for forestry purposes.

Proposal

The application seeks full planning consent for alteration of the existing access and formation of a new track.

The proposal involves widening the existing gate from Leek Road to 4.5 metres and the existing informal track between the gate and the existing hard surfaced area would be widened to 4.5 metres and surfaced with compacted hardcore with a sandstone top dressing. A surfaced splay would be provided on the verge between the highway and the gate in order to provide improved visibility.

Millmoorhead is a predominantly conifer woodland that was planted for commercial purposes by former owners of the estate. In line with the Authority's policy for woodland management, the intention is to gradually thin the existing conifers and replace with native broadleaved trees. Rather than felling all of the trees at once, which would have a significant landscape impact, it is intended to carry out a gradual management project.

The widened access point and track are required to allow the significant amount of timber that has already been felled and will continue to be felled to be removed from the site. This involves large transporter lorries so the 4.5 metre wide gateway is necessary for this type of vehicle. The existing wood chip surfaced track is not adequate to take large vehicles in wet weather and is in a poor condition. As such, a hard surfaced track is required.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

- 1. 3 year implementation time limit.**
- 2. Development to be carried out in accordance with the submitted plans and details.**

Key Issues

1. Whether the proposed works would harm landscape character and visual amenity.
2. Whether the proposal would be detrimental to highway safety
3. Whether the proposal would be harmful to trees and ecology

History

The existing wood chip-covered access track and the vehicle hardstanding area were deemed to be permitted development under application NP/GDO/0814/0930.

Consultations

Staffordshire County Council Highways – No comments received

Heathylee Parish Council – No comments received.

Representations

During the consultation period, the Authority has not received any letters of representation.

Main Policies

Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1, GSP2, GSP3

Relevant Local Plan policies: LC4, LC13, LC20 and LT18

The most relevant policies in the Authority's Development Plan are saved Local Plan policies LC4, LC13, LC20 and LT18.

Saved Local Plan Policy LC4 requires that the detailed design of a development is to a high standard.

LC13 sets out criteria to assess applications for agricultural or forestry operational development and establishes that new forestry development will be permitted provided that it is close to the main group of buildings wherever possible and in all cases relate well to and make best use of existing buildings, trees, walls and other landscape features; respects the design, scale, mass and colouring of existing buildings and building traditions characteristic of the area; avoids harm to the area's valued characteristics including important local views, making use of the least obtrusive or otherwise damaging possible location; does not require obtrusive access tracks, roads or services. These should be designed with particular respect for the landscape and its historic patterns of land use and movement, and any landscape change likely to result from forestry practices.

LC20 relates to protection of trees and woodlands and establishes that planning applications should provide sufficient information to enable their impact on trees, woodlands and other landscape features to be properly considered. Where development that involves risk of damage to trees, woodlands or other landscape features is acceptable, adequate space must be left for their replacement with appropriate species of trees and shrubs or local materials. Appropriate maintenance that respects wildlife interests will be required.

LT18 establishes that the highest standards of environmental design and materials should be used in transport infrastructure to conserve and enhance the valued characteristics of the area. All traffic management measures and new development will be designed to allow for access by emergency vehicles. Individual schemes and developments will be the subject of consultation with the emergency services. The provision of safe access arrangements will be a prerequisite of any development. Where the provision of safe access would damage the valued characteristics of the area, the National Park Authority will consider refusing planning consent.

Paragraph 115 of the Framework states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks along with the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage, which is consistent with the aims and objectives of policies GSP1 and GSP2 the Core Strategy. Similarly, GSP3 of the Core Strategy and LC4 of the Local Plan are consistent with core planning principles in the Framework that require all development in the National Park to be of a high standard of design that is sensitive to the locally distinctive character of its landscape setting.

Assessment

Principle of Development

The proposed widened access point and new track are required for the on-going management of the woodland. The existing track and gate are not considered to be adequate for the type of vehicle required for forestry purposes and the development is therefore considered to be reasonably necessary. The development is considered to be acceptable in principle.

Issue 1: impact on Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

From Leek Road, the visual impact of the development would be limited to the appearance of the widened gateway. The new access track would also be visible but only from limited vantage points as it would be largely screened by the existing stone boundary wall. The surfaced splay on the road side of the gates would be visible but would have a minor impact overall.

The access track itself would be relatively short with a length of approximately 22 metres between the gate and the existing hard surfaced area. Whilst the stone surfacing of the new track would have a more permanent appearance than the existing wood chip surfaced track, it is considered that it would not have a harmful impact on the landscape character or visual amenity of the locality.

It is considered that the proposed development relates well to and make best use of existing buildings, trees, walls and other landscape features; respects the design, scale, mass and colouring of existing buildings and building traditions characteristic of the area, avoids harm to the area's valued characteristics including important local views. The access track would not be visually obtrusive. Furthermore, the development would not become obtrusive or visually unacceptable in the future as a result of on-going forestry practices.

The development would be in accordance with Core Strategy policy L3 and Local Plan policies LC4 and LC20 and the guidance contained within the relevant sections of The Framework.

Issue 2: Impact on Highways Safety

The development would provide an improved access and better visibility for vehicles egressing the woods onto Leek Road. Furthermore, it is not anticipated that the development would significantly intensify existing levels of vehicle movements in and around the site. It is therefore considered that the proposal would not be detrimental to highway safety or efficiency and is in accordance with policy LT18.

Issue 3: Impact on Trees and Ecology

Widening the existing access point would not impact on any trees within the woods as the nearest trees are several metres away from the proposed widened access point. Furthermore, there is a clearing either side of the existing access track that is to be widened and resurfaced to provide the proposed new track. As such, it is considered that the proposed track would not be harmful to the root systems of the trees within the woodland.

Furthermore, given that the development is required for the ongoing management of the woodland, it is considered that overall the proposal would have a positive impact on the on-going health and integrity of the woodland as a whole. This would therefore also be in the interest of biodiversity and ecology. The development is considered to accord with policy LC20.

Conclusion

It is considered that the proposal is in accordance with the Development Plan, because the proposed development would not be harmful to landscape character or visual amenity, would not be detrimental to highway safety and would assist in delivering proper forestry practices that are necessary to achieve the management of the woodland. There are no further material considerations which indicate that a contrary decision should be made, therefore the proposal is recommended for conditional approval.

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil