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Response to Planning application from Hertfordshire County Council (T and CP GDP Order 2015)

Director of Planning

North Hertfordshire Council
Council Offices
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire
SG6 3JF

District ref: 24/01920/FP
HCC ref: NH/22506/2024
HCC received: 1 October 2024
Area manager: Manjinder Sehmi
Case officer: Senober Khan

Location

Land To The East Of, Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 0SA

Application type

Full Application

Proposal

Full Planning Permission : Altered vehicular access to facilitate the use of land as a community car park together with the installation of new gates and fencing and associated landscaping

Recommendation

Notice is given under article 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 that Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority recommends that permission be refused for the following reasons:

Until the above information and clarification is provided, the HA is not in a position to determine the suitability or otherwise of the development.

Brief description in support of proposed development made by the applicant:

The site is located at the southern end of Ickleford on the green space that separates Ickleford from the town of Hitchin. The site is currently an undeveloped field and access is currently via a vehicle crossover adjacent to the access that serves the allotments to the southeast of the application site.

A planning application (ref: 23/01652/FP) for the "change of use of agricultural land to community car park together with road scalping tar macadam surfacing, new gates and associated tree planting and landscaping" was submitted to North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) in July 2023 but was withdrawn in September 2023.

Prior to withdrawal of the application, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), as local highway authority provided a highways consultation response recommending that planning permission be refused stating that “the application has failed to provide detailed information for the HA to make an informed decision.”

It is now proposed to reduce the proposed quantum of car parking at the site to include for up to 30 spaces with improved access arrangements. This Transport Statement (TS) is submitted in support of an amended planning application with additional information, as appropriate.

Old Hale Way / Arlesey Road is subject to a 30mph speed limit and is lit along its entire length.

A review of HCC’s online Public Rights of Way (PROW) map identifies that there are no PROWs through the site.

Footpath HITCHIN 026 extends in a north-south direction to the east of the application site connecting Icknield Way in Ickleford with Cauldwell Lane in Hitchin. Footpath ICKLEFORD 017 is located north of the application site and also connects with Icknield Way. There are no other PROWs in close proximity to the site.

Personal Injury Collision (PIC) data has been obtained from the Crashmap website for the highway network in the vicinity of the application site for the most recent five-year period available (2018 – 2022). There have been no collisions recorded in the vicinity of where the existing vehicle crossover that serves the application site meets Old Hale Way.

Traffic surveys were undertaken along Old Hale Way / Arlesey Road over the seven-day period from Thursday 16 May 2024 until Wednesday 22 May 2024. These surveys were undertaken in the form of Automatic Traffic Counts (ATC) and primarily conducted to determine visibility splay requirements at the proposed access to serve the application site.

The traffic flows identified the local weekday AM peak hour as 07:00 – 08:00 and the PM peak hour as 16:00 – 17:00. The Saturday peak hour was identified as occurring between 11:00 and 12:00.

Old Hale Way / Arlesey Road forms the eastern north-south link between Ickleford in the north and Hitchin to the south.

Manual for Streets (MfS) states that walkable neighbourhoods are typically characterised as having a range of facilities within ten minutes walking distance (around 800m). It is stated, however, that this is not an upper limit, and that walking offers the greatest potential to replace short car trips, particularly those under 2km.

North and southbound bus stops are located approximately 190m and 360m walking distance south of the application site along Old Hale Way, respectively. Both of these bus stops are provided with a layby, flagpole and bus timetables.

Outline planning permission (ref: 17/01955/1) for the redevelopment of Ickleford Mill, Arlesey Road, Ickleford for the erection of “up to 71 dwellings and associated access, car parking, garages, landscaping and open space including demolition and removal of all existing structures, buildings and hardstanding (all matters reserved except means of access)” was granted in March 2024.

A zebra crossing on Arlesey Road, as required by Condition 14, to be located approx. 10m south of its junction with Ickleford Bury.

It is proposed to develop the site for up to 30 car parking spaces including provision for disabled car parking and cycle parking.

Access to the application site is proposed via a new access that will also serve the barn at the eastern end of the site.

As such, the intention of the car park is to provide additional car parking for the allotment users and for dog walkers who wish to access the local surrounds including footpath HITCHIN 026, which extends in a north-south direction to the east of the application site adjacent to River Purwell.

In addition to the above, the parking area will be used to accommodate farmer's markets / car boot sales for a limited number of dates each year. As the application site is within comfortable walking distance of local facilities, it is also intended that it will operate as overflow parking for Ickleford.

It is proposed that the car park will accommodate 30 car parking spaces as follows:

- 2no. disabled car parking spaces (5.5m x 2.9m)
- 4no. car parking spaces with electric vehicle charging points (5m x 2.8m)
- 24no. standard car parking spaces (5m x 2.5m)

It is also proposed to provide 4no. Sheffield standards at the car park that can accommodate up to eight bicycles.

In order to accommodate an access to serve the car parking area, it is proposed to provide a new junction to the north of the existing vehicle crossover serving the allotment access track. This new junction will provide access to the proposed car parking area and the existing barn to the east of the application site replacing the existing vehicle crossover that serves the access track to the barn.

The new access will comprise a 5.5m wide bellmouth junction with 6m junction radii.

Based upon these recorded 85th percentile vehicle speeds, and in accordance with HCC's highway design guidance, visibility splays of 2.4m x 51m are required at the proposed site access in both directions.

The location of the proposed site access such that these visibility splays are achievable to the north and south within the extent of the adopted highway. Some minor trimming of the existing bank / earth bund to the north of the proposed site access will be required to accommodate the visibility splay in full.

The proposed access is able to accommodate this vehicle for all manoeuvres. Whilst it is not anticipated that the car parking area will need to accommodate a 10m rigid truck, the access will need to accommodate this vehicle such that it is still able to access the barn at the eastern extremity of the site.

The development proposals include for the provision of a short length of footpath at the northwestern end of the car parking area to connect with the existing unsurfaced footpath. This will provide connectivity between the car parking area and Ickleford to the north.

A Stage 1 Road Safety Audit of the proposed access arrangements was undertaken by Tutum Consulting supported by a site visit on 22 July 2024. The audit did not identify any 'problems'.

When considering the use of the car park, it is unlikely that it will operate during the weekday peak hours when the local highway network is considered to be at its busiest.

It is also unlikely that the car park will ever be fully occupied unless used as overflow parking for a local event.

The adhoc use of the car park to accommodate visitors to the allotments or dog walkers would not result in a significant number of vehicle movements.

As stated previously, there is also potential for the car park to be used to accommodate farmer's markets / car boot sales for a limited number of dates each year. This means that only vehicles associated with the sales would be permitted on site at the start of these infrequent events.

As such, a maximum of 30 vehicles would be attracted to the site for one of these events prior to its starting with the 30 vehicles departing again at the end.

Visitors to the farmer's market / car boot sales would be encouraged to walk, cycle or travel by bus. As part of a planning permission for the proposed car park, it is considered that a Traffic Management Plan be Conditioned to address any potential discriminate parking that may be associated with these events.

In conclusion, it is considered that the proposed development is acceptable in transport and traffic terms and meets the policy requirements as set out in paragraph 114 of the NPPF.

Highways comments:

The applicant has submitted a Transport Statement (TS) along with a RSA1 in response to the HA's comments dated 14 August 2023 for the withdrawn application ref.no. 23/01652/FP.

The application involves altering the vehicular access to facilitate the use of land as a community car park together with the installation of new gates and fencing and associated landscaping (resubmission of application ref. 23/01652/FP withdrawn 11/09/2023).

The proposed car parking provision is the responsibility of the LPA to determine the level and suitability of the car parking proposals, however, it is essential that it is operated in efficient and safe manner to minimise the impact on the local highway network which is the responsibility of the HCC HA.

The applicant has stated that the proposal involves the formation of a small community car park to a) serve those wishing to use the land, b) provide a small amount of additional overflow parking to serve Ickleford, which struggles for sufficient parking provision, and c) provide an area for occasional farmers markets, car boot sales and the like.

It is unclear why the covering letter and TS make no mention that the application involves change of use, nevertheless the application involves the change of use from agricultural land to a gated small community car park consisting of 30 car parking spaces, reduced from 75 spaces under the previous submission.

The HA has reviewed the TS and would acknowledge based on 30 car parking spaces and the use being for users of the land, the proposal is not expected to have any significant/detrimental impact on the operation of the local highway network and the new vehicle access achieves the required visibility splays (supported by the RSA1) and provisions.

However, as stated in the previous HA's comments car parking is ancillary to a class of use (e.g. for staff or customers at office, industrial or shop premises) so the car park use falls within the main use class, in this case sui generis (unless advised otherwise by the case officer) and so the parking should be related to the type of use.

The applicant has stated that the car park will be for those wishing to use the land ie visitors to the allotments, dog walkers and footpath users, additional overflow parking to serve Ickleford and an occasional farmers market, car boot sales and the like.

The HA would have no objection for the change of use to a car park for those wishing to use the land ie visitors to the allotments, dog walkers and footpath users.

The applicant has not substantiated that Ickleford struggles for sufficient parking and demonstrate how and why this distant car park would be suitable as an additional overflow parking. Furthermore, footway along Arlesey Road is not continuous between the site and Ickleford town centre, where it meets the river Purwell the footways end either side of the bridge whereby pedestrians have to walk along the carriageway where the carriageway also narrows. The applicant has not addressed this concern given the TS states to encourage greater walking to and from the site.

The HA has serious concerns regarding the occasional farmers markets/boot sales and the like, as stated in the TS which has not provided any clarity on these use's, depending on size and popularity such markets have potential to attract relatively significant numbers of visitors/car trips to the site ie more than 30 spaces which would result in overspill car parking taking place along uncontrolled Arlesey Road.

In the TS it states the following:

Visitors to the farmer's market / car boot sales would be encouraged to walk, cycle or travel by bus. As part of a planning permission for the proposed car park, it is considered that a Traffic Management Plan be Conditioned to address any potential discriminate parking that may be associated with these events.

The above has not been substantiated in any detail to demonstrate that the level of parking demand will not exceed the provision on site. No detailed information has been provided on the sizes, how often (could potentially be on a regular weekly basis) and the potential impact from such use would have on the car park and the highway network which increases the likelihood of highway safety issues and nuisance parking.

Overspill car parking creates stress and nuisance to local users parking demand, and likely to lead to inconsiderate and illegal parking on the roads within the vicinity of the sites access which could be prejudicial to highway safety.

Any substandard parking provision leading to potential overspill and displacement of parking onto the public highway, would not be supported by the HA, particularly given the nearby roads have no parking controls.

The HA would raise no objections for the application subject to the use being for the users of the land ie dog walkers, footpath users, etc. if greater consideration was given to improving and facilitating pedestrian safe access over River Purwell then subject to the details needed, the use as an overspill for town centre car parking may also be acceptable.

However, for the above reasons the HA would not support the “occasional farmers market, car boot sales and the like” use on the site.

Recommendation:

Until the above information and clarification is provided, the HA is not in a position to determine the suitability or otherwise of the development.

Signed

Senober Khan

22 October 2024