

Proposed Residential Development For Up to 4 Dwellings, Glebe House, Horsemans Green, Whitchurch, Wrexham

The Whitehouse Partnership has been commissioned by David Parker Planning Associates to respond to the comments of the local highway authority in their memorandum ref. ET/DC/PP//P2021/0234 dated 24th June 2021 addressed to the Chief Officer Planning and Regulatory. This report should be read in conjunction with the earlier report by the Whitehouse Partnership annexed as Appendix A.

Review and Appraisal of Visibility

As previously stated, visibility from the proposed site access, the Y distance, is restricted to some 7.0 m in a south westerly direction by the highway boundary hedge. In a north easterly direction, when looking over the boundary fence of Croft House, which appears to have been erected at a low level specifically to aid visibility from the access to that property, visibility of some 31 m is available. This distance is compliant with the Stopping Site Distance Table 7.1 in Manual for Streets which the local highway authority recognises is appropriate in this case. It is also noteworthy that the measure of forward visibility available to the drivers of vehicles approaching the site access from both directions along Horsemans Green Road is more than double the distance required based upon the MfS parameters for a vehicle speed of 25mph

There are numerous direct accesses onto the highway within Horsemans Green which have visibility for emerging drivers restricted by the proximity of boundaries to the carriageway. It is therefore apparent that the restrictions to visibility apparent at the access serving the site are not unusual in the local context. It was also apparent from the measurements undertaken at the site access that in some respects it benefits from superior visibility than some of its neighbours.

When assessing visibility requirements, MfS considers the ability of a vehicle to stop safely in order to avoid a collision. Paragraph 10.1.4 of MfS2 states: "Stopping site distance (SSD) is the distance drivers need to be able to see ahead and they can stop within from a given speed."

In this particular case, given drivers are afforded good visibility to the left across the frontage of Croft House from the desirable 2.4m X distance, measured from the edge of the carriageway, the driver emerging from the site could check the carriageway is clear in that direction, then take a longer look to the left to check that there was nothing approaching from that direction, before cautiously edging forward to obtain a better view to the right before joining the road.

Highway Safety

In order to review the safety performance of Horsemans Green Road and the wider local highway network the Crashmap database was accessed, which revealed there had been no recorded personal injury accidents recorded in the most recent 5 year period (2015-2020 inclusive) within the vicinity of the site access or indeed Horsemans Green itself. As previously stated, there are accesses which have below desirable levels of visibility and in various instances, comparably worse visibility than is provided at the site access. In this case, the absence of recorded injury accidents

provides empirical evidence that road users travelling along Horsemans Green Road and turning to/from the various accesses/junctions along it, are able to interact with each other safely.

As a result of the foregoing, given the local context and highway alignment in this particular case, the likelihood of either driver failing to see the other vehicle in sufficient time to be able to react and stop safely in order to avoid a collision is so slight as to be considered insignificant, as the forward visibility towards the site access indicates that oncoming traffic would have sufficient time to observe and manoeuvre around a vehicle carefully edging out from the site access without unacceptably compromising highway safety.

In summary, the guidance in MfS2 is clearly related to the ability of drivers passing through accesses and junctions to see emerging, turning and/or oncoming traffic and advocates a flexible, pragmatic and evidence based approach to the issue of visibility.

Based on the excellent safety record along Horsemans Green Road, and the wider area of Horsemans Green, where there are numerous accesses with sub-standard lateral visibility, which in many cases is worse than is provided at the site access, it is apparent that the findings of the MfS2 research with respect to the lack of a relationship between restricted lateral visibility and collisions is robust and directly applicable to the local context of this particular case. Moreover, the Y distance is a function of the speed of traffic and is not affected by the scale of development. In the case of the application in question, the scale of the development will not generate significant movements. The 32-40 movements quoted by the highway authority will not in fact be additional movements as the existing use as an agricultural holding will cease and the type and volume of traffic associated with that use will therefore no longer use the site access.

Taking the foregoing into account, whilst it may not be possible to provide the desirable unobstructed visibility provision, when considering the guidance contained in MfS2 together with its flexibility and guidance regarding local context and an evidence-based approach, it is considered that the existing access to the site would be acceptable and safe to serve the proposed development. It is in fact superior to many of the neighbouring existing accesses that have demonstrably operated safely for at least 5 years.

Conclusion

The local highway authority clearly recognises that Manual for Streets guidance is appropriate in this case. With that in mind its response to the planning application is surprising given that the proposed development would not result in a substantial increase in traffic movements to and from a lightly trafficked road which has an excellent safety record. There would therefore appear to be no sustainable highway objection to the proposed development.

Roger Whitehouse BA, MCIHT
The Whitehouse Partnership
August 2021

Appendix A

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The Whitehouse Partnership has been commissioned by David Parker Planning Associates to offer highway advice on the above planning application and in particular the response of the local highway authority as a statutory consultee. The site was inspected on 7th May 2021.

Existing Highway Conditions

The site is served by a private drive off the Class III road known locally as Horsemans Green Road. The road at this point is some 5.5 m wide with a kerbed footway varying in width between 1.0 m and 1.5 m opposite the private drive entrance. To the south west of the private drive entrance the carriageway is bounded by a narrow grass verge backed by a live hedge. To the north east of the entrance the carriageway is bounded by a grass verge and backed by a brick pier and wooden picket fence.

Horsemans Green Road is not subject to a local speed restriction but the highway authority estimates typical traffic speeds to be of the order of 25 m.p.h. This estimate is not contested. Street lighting is not provided through the village, there are no carriageway markings along the centre of the road and waiting restrictions are not in force

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The private drive is typically around 4.6m in width for a distance of 50m or so from its junction with Horsemans Green Road. It is therefore wide enough to enable the simultaneous entry and exit of vehicles without the need for vehicles to stand on the highway carriageway whilst vehicles exit the private drive.

Visibility from the private drive is severely restricted to around 7.0 m in a south westerly direction by the highway boundary hedge. In a north easterly direction visibility of some 31 m is available although this is obtained over third party land.

Response to highway authority's comments

The highway authority's response to the application appears to be an observation and not a recommendation of refusal. It is accepted that visibility for the drivers of vehicles emerging from the site access onto the Class III road is restricted. However, the site access is conspicuous and there is an adequate stopping sight distance available to the drivers of vehicles approaching the site access from both directions along the Class III road. Moreover, Horsemans Green Road is lightly trafficked and there have been no personal injury accidents in the vicinity of the site.

Whilst the lack of visibility from the private drive is not contested Manual for Streets 2 states, inter alia, “Available guidance is just that, guidance, and cannot be expected to cover the precise conditions and circumstances applying at the site under examination” and “ . . . The informed judgement of trained professionals on site should logically take precedence over guidance”.

As far as the application is concerned, there appears to have been no consideration given, by the highway authority, to the existing use of the site access by vehicles associated with the current use of the site.

As an agricultural holding the site generates the following traffic along the private drive.

Winter – twice daily with tractor or 4 x 4 to tend to stock – feed, clean and check on well-being 2-3 visits daily with telescopic loader to fetch straw stored in shed and transport to main farm

Summer - larger vehicles e.g. tractor and trailer to fill shed with straw at harvest time
tractor and manure spreader to remove manure produced by over wintering of cattle
2 daily visits to tend to stock plus unsociable hours visits during calving season
visits for general farm maintenance and animal husbandry

All Year – used for machinery storage collected when needed
often large vehicles e.g. trailers

In the event of planning permission being granted all of these activities will cease. Assuming two vehicle movements per dwelling during the morning and evening peak hours the development would generate 8 movements per hour and these would tend to be passenger cars. In the context of the nature of Horsemans Green Road such movements would not lead to any capacity issues.

It is considered, therefore, that the development would be unlikely to lead to an unacceptable impact on highway safety and would be beneficial in reducing the type and volume of traffic using the private drive. There would therefore appear to be no reason why the application should be refused on highway grounds given the benefit to be gained by the loss of agricultural traffic using the site access.