

MEMORANDUM

From:	Chief Officer, Environment & Technical	To:	Chief Officer Planning & Regulatory
		FAO:	Matthew Phillips
Our Ref:	ET/DC/MM/P/2021/0680	Your Ref:	P/2021/0680
Date:	13 th December 2021		

Land off Westminster Drive, Chester Road, Wrexham LL12 7AU
Outline application for primary school (appearance, landscaping and scale reserved).

Following receipt of a number of objections relating to traffic generation and highway safety, as well as further information from the applicants transport consultant, I comment as follows:-

Traffic Surveys

The objection raised a concern that traffic surveys were undertaken during a Covid-19 lockdown when traffic flows may be suppressed. This is an unavoidable issue that has affected most large developments seeking planning permission since March 2020.

To understand the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on the traffic data collected, the observed flows were compared with a DfT site close to the surveyed junctions. The traffic flows used were then doubled to ensure there was no underestimation. This was combined with a robust methodology to estimate the expected traffic generated by the school. All the issues have been addressed and any small changes to the assumptions would not affect the conclusions previously reported. I am therefore satisfied that a robust traffic assessment has been undertaken.

Parking

It is acknowledged that the parking surveys were also undertaken during Covid-19 restrictions. As the school is in a residential area and there is no evidence that local parking needs and patterns have materially changed or been suppressed by Covid-19 restrictions. I am therefore satisfied that a sufficiently robust parking assessment has been undertaken for this residential area.

Active Travel

The relocated school is in a residential area, providing better access by active travel than its previous location. There is good footway provision and a segregated cycle lane on The Beeches. Although further improvements would be welcomed there is no pressing reason to pursue additional measures as part of any highway mitigation proposals linked to the school's relocation. Active travel has been well considered within the scheme design, with proposals for widening of footways, routes for pedestrians within the site and consideration of offsite mitigation measures. A Travel Plan has also been produced and agreed by the school.

The improvements proposed to assist pedestrians and cyclists include:

- Speed limit reductions to 20mph along Rhosnesni Lane and Westminster Drive;
- Traffic calming measures on Rhosnesni Lane and Westminster Drive;
- Raised pedestrian crossing points on Rhosnesni Lane and Westminster Drive;
- A new dropped kerb crossing of Chester Road south of the junction with Westminster Drive;
- Footway widening at the Chester Road/ Westminster Drive junction;
- New footway proposals linking Rhosnesni Lane to The Beeches and the residential areas to the north

Site Access for Coaches

As previously advised, there is some concern over the design of the coach access/egress as the coaches straddle both sides of the road, especially as the daily coach movements will occur during the traffic peak at the beginning and end of the school day. While this is not expected to create a safety hazard, as drivers will take care to avoid collisions, the risk still remains. The concern remains as these movements would be a daily occurrence whenever the school is open and operating. It is preferable that the design of the access is revised to allow the vehicles to maneuver within their allocated carriageway lane. This could be achieved by a redesign of the junction now or as a condition that the access arrangements need to be finalized through the Reserved Matters.

It is acknowledged that the design of the coach access / egress seeks to balance the bus usage with pedestrian crossing widths, with a much greater demand by pedestrians than coaches. The management of the coach area is expected to result in coaches being let out in a managed fashion and that coaches would not leave if there is a flow of children from another coach.

It is acknowledged that there may have been a misinterpretation relating to the architect's layout, where arrows highlighting the entrance points to the site may have been misinterpreted to be white line islands. The lining is understood to be standard give-way lines.

Junction of Westminster Drive and Park Avenue

A concern has been raised that the junction radii and visibility of the junction of Westminster Drive and Park Avenue are substandard and a potential source of danger.

It is accepted that the key routes towards the site are Chester Road and Rhosnesni Lane, via which the majority of traffic could be expected to travel. Park Avenue provides a relatively direct route from the south eastern areas of Wrexham and some central areas, therefore there would be some desire for parents to use this route during school pick-up / drop-off. As all staff traffic would access the staff car park via Rhosnesni Lane, no staff are expected to use the junction.

The forecast development-generated traffic is approximately 100 inbound and 100 outbound vehicles relating to parents with up to 25% using the Westminster Drive / Park Avenue junction. This would equate to around 25 inbound and 25 outbound vehicles at this location. This is based upon the car parking operating as either two separate car parks or a single car park with two accesses.

If the car parking operates as inbound via Westminster Drive and outbound via Rhosnesni Lane, then at most 50% of the traffic is likely to use Westminster Drive / Park Avenue. This equates to around 50 inbound movements and no outbound movements for both drop-off and pick-up.

In the latter case there would be no additional vehicles exiting Westminster Drive/ Park Avenue (as they would all be turning in) and no assessment of the visibility splay would be required. Whilst a small number of cars may still use the junction, these are likely to be offset by the reduced commuter vehicles using and parking on Westminster Drive.

In both situations, the forecast development-generated traffic at the junction is relatively low (less than 1 car per minute at peak traffic flows times) and therefore this would not materially alter the general pattern of usage or composition of traffic at the junction.

A review of the accident record at this junction, using the national Crashmap database, has revealed one recorded slight accident in the last 22 years of data and this involved an underage driver. I am therefore confident that despite the presence of trees, there is no material accident history at the junction.

A site visit has been undertaken to measure the location of the trees at the junction. Although the trees do have some impact on visibility, the gaps between them allow 30mph visibility splays to the nearside kerb, as well as the 20mph and 25mph to an approaching car, to be achieved. It does not appear that any mitigation would be necessary, but if required in future this could be achieved by removing/pruning the trees immediately adjacent to the junction.

SAB

The highway drainage issues raised are to be addressed in a separate a response form the specialist Drainage Team.

Conclusion

The traffic and parking surveys were by necessity undertaken during Covid-19 restrictions, but the impact of this has been adequately considered, with the traffic flows used increased to avoid underestimation and the assessments are robust.

Active travel has been appropriately considered, with several improvements identified to enhance access to the school by walking and cycling.

The Junction of Westminster Drive and Park Avenue has been reviewed in detail and the trees do not appear to impede visibility sufficiently to make the junction be considered unsafe. Its historic collision record in the last 5 years confirms no collisions have been recorded. However, if required, mitigation is available by removing/pruning the trees immediately adjacent to the junction.

The proposed coach access/ egress provides a balance between pedestrian crossing widths and carriageway space. It is preferable that the access radii are adjusted to improve vehicle movements at the access junction. There is no reason to doubt that an agreeable solution can be achieved within the boundary of the planning application and this could be finalised at a later stage through the Reserved Matters process.

Having considered the issues raised, there are no material highway reasons why planning permission should be refused. However, I would advise that an appropriate condition must be included in respect of the details of the access arrangements to ensure that buses/coaches can exit the school site without needing to cross on to the opposite carriageway.



Chief Officer, Environment & Technical