

MEMORANDUM



From: Infrastructure and Planning Manager

To: Chief Planning Officer

Our Ref: JP/2010/0568

Your Ref: P/2010/0568

Date: 08 November 2010

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990.

Location: O. S Grid Ref: E 330104 N 339480 Chirk Park Adjacent to A5/A483 and Green Lane, Halton, Chirk, Wrexham

Development: Cultural and Visitor Centre with Central Feature Tower Topped with a Sculpture of the Welsh Dragon

Introduction

I refer to your consultation letter dated 2 August 2010 in respect of the above.

The application is for a cultural and visitor centre incorporating a viewing tower, set in landscaped grounds with associated coach and car parking.

The site is immediately to the east of the A5/A483 Trunk Road and would be accessed from the A5/A483 Halton Roundabout via the C238 Old Black Park Road/Chirk Park roundabout. The road leading from this roundabout is an adopted unclassified highway, presently terminating in a cul-de-sac.

The site would be accessed from a new road leading from this cul-de-sac. A minor modification to the highway would be required to enable the proposed site access to be constructed.

The proposed site layout incorporates vehicle turning facilities, coach parking, and car parking comprising 20 mobility standard spaces, 12 parent and child spaces, a main car park with 101 spaces and an overspill car park of 84 spaces.

Transport Assessment

The application is accompanied by a detailed Transport Assessment (dated 30 June 2010) prepared by Gifford. The Transport Assessment sets out the development proposals, transport policy context, accessibility and sustainability impact; and the impact of the development on road capacity and accidents.

The Transport Assessment has been evaluated by officers of the Council and given the impact of the development on the Trunk Road by officers of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Following submission of the planning application and scrutiny of the Transport Assessment, issues of concern and points requiring clarification were raised with Gifford. As a consequence, an addendum to the Transport Assessment has been issued (dated 7 October 2010).

The following paragraphs provide a summary of the key issues arising from the Transport Assessment.

Traffic Generation and Network Flows

Visitor numbers have been estimated on behalf of the applicant by PHT consultants. Visitor numbers have been estimated on the basis of the current traffic levels passing the site. The assumptions made to derive visitor numbers suggest at best the numbers are very approximate. They have concluded that visitor numbers are estimated to be 200,000 in the year of opening and 230,000 in subsequent years.

Gifford have adopted these visitor number figures to develop traffic flows. In addition, and in the light of the difficulty in predicting visitor numbers, Gifford have also carried out an extreme sensitivity test assuming visitor numbers reach 300,000 per annum.

In the initial Transport Assessment, Gifford assumed that all visitors accessing the site would create a new trip on the road network.

PHT's research for their study considered visitor numbers at a range of tourist attractions across North Wales. Looking at a selection of these attractions, visitor numbers were as follows:

Anglesey Sea Zoo - 85,000
Beaumaris Castle - 67,329
Bodnant Garden – 138,313
Chirk Castle – 94,647
Conwy Castle – 163,668
Electric Mountain – 220,000
Ffestiniog Railway – 115,985

With the exception of Electric Mountain, it can be seen that 230,000 visitors looks optimistic and 300,000 very optimistic. Using these visitor numbers together with the assumption that all trips are new to network provides a very conservative assessment of traffic impact.

In the addendum to the Transport Assessment, Gifford have developed their assessment further to include an evaluation of visitor trips that are already using the road network. This is a sensible approach given that visitors are likely to link their journey to other tourist attractions in the area.

Assessments have been carried out for the following cases:

Year	2011	2021	2021
Annual visitor numbers	200,000 visitors	230,000 visitors	300,000 visitors
Friday normal month	√	√	√
Friday peak month	√	√	√
Sunday peak month	√	√	√

Existing traffic flows were established from traffic counts at the A5/A483 and the A5/B5070 roundabouts, carried out on Friday 19th March 2010 (normal Friday), Friday 2nd April 2010 (Good Friday) Sunday 4th April 2010 (Easter Sunday).

Operational Assessments

Operational capacity assessments of the two roundabouts on the trunk road network close to the proposed development have been carried out.

The operational assessment of the A5/B5070 roundabout indicates that it will operate with adequate reserve capacity for all assessment cases.

The operational assessment of the A5/A483 roundabout demonstrates that there is satisfactory capacity at the roundabout for the normal Friday and Peak Friday assessment cases. However, the assessment shows that there is inadequate capacity with existing traffic flows for the Peak Sunday assessment.

Gifford have therefore considered the percentage impact of the development for the Sunday assessment cases. Their analysis indicates that with the exception of the 300,000 visitor number scenario when impact could reach 6%, the percentage impact is less than 5%, i.e. within the normal expected daily variation in traffic flows.

Knowing that delays already occur on the A483 and A5 (south) approach to Halton roundabout, considerable discussion has taken place regarding the accuracy of the capacity modelling carried out by Gifford.

Further video surveys of the roundabout approaches have been carried out by Gifford and viewed by officers of the Council and Welsh Assembly Government. It is apparent that whilst vehicles approaching the roundabout tend to travel in slow moving groups (or platoons) of vehicles, the actual queue (of stationary) vehicles at the roundabout give way line is typically 2 or 3 vehicles in those circumstances. In light of this evidence and following further discussion with Gifford, their capacity model has been accepted as reflecting the actual operating conditions at the roundabout.

Mitigation

No physical mitigation measures have been proposed by the applicant. In light of uncertainty over forecasting visitor numbers to the development, a Memorandum of

Understanding has been drafted which would commit the applicant to carrying out an annual assessment of vehicle trips. Should the annual number of new vehicle trips exceed the trigger of 83,233 per annum, then the applicant is committed to enter into discussions with the Council and the Welsh Assembly Government to identify suitable trip reduction and/or highway improvement measures. The Memorandum will include a means of dealing with disputes and include a financial penalty for non compliance.

The commitment should be secured through a Section 106 obligation or Grampian type condition.

Road Safety

Gifford have examined the accident record for the A5/A483 corridor from Ruabon to Gobowen roundabout. The injury accident rate for the section of road is low (0.13 accidents/million vehicle kilometres compared to a UK average for this type of road of 0.21 accidents/million vehicle kilometres). The increase in vehicle flows as a result of the development will have a negligible impact on the accident rate.

Gifford have also considered the potential impact of the tower on accidents as a result of driver distraction. Drawing on experience of large structures in proximity to highways elsewhere in the UK and given that the structure will be visible for some distance (estimated at 5km); they have concluded that the proposal will not cause any undue impact on road safety through driver distraction.

Public Transport

Whilst not particularly well located for current public transport services (the nearest bus stop is 700m away and Chirk Railway Station is some 3.5km distant), discussions have taken place with the Council's transport coordinator to establish the potential to improve the public transport connections to the development.

The proposed site layout incorporates a bus stop at the entrance to the visitor centre. The bus stop will be equipped with a shelter, raised kerbs for low floor buses and timetable information.

Provision has been made for 4 coach parking spaces.

The Transport Assessment commits the developer to providing information to visitors on how to access the development by modes other than the private motor car. Ongoing discussions will be held with the Council about linking this information to other tourist attractions in the area.

Conclusions

On the proviso that a mechanism is secured that requires the applicant to develop and implement mitigation measures if new vehicle trips on the network generated by the development exceed 83,233 per annum, I see no reason to recommend refusal of the application on highway grounds.

Conditions

I recommend any permission includes the following conditions:

1. No development shall commence until a Memorandum of Understanding has been prepared and approved by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Local Highway Authority which:
 - Sets out the timing and methodology of surveys to establish the annual number of new vehicle trips generated by the development.
 - Provides a binding obligation to develop and implement mitigation measures in consultation with the Local Highway Authority and Welsh Assembly Government should new vehicle trips generated by the development exceed 83,233 per annum.
 - Incorporates a dispute resolution mechanism.
 - Provides a financial penalty in the event of non-compliance by the applicant.
2. Vehicle parking and turning facilities shall be provided within the curtilage of the site in accordance with details to be submitted for the further approval of the Local Planning Authority. Such facilities shall be laid out and constructed before the use is first commenced.
3. Cycle parking facilities shall be provided within the curtilage of the site in accordance with details to be submitted for the further approval of the Local Planning Authority. Such facilities shall be made available prior to implementation of the use(s) hereby permitted and shall thereafter be retained.
4. No water of any kind generated by the proposed development shall be permitted to flow from any part of the site on to the highway or into the highway drainage system or be allowed to accumulate in such a way as to affect the highway surface or structure.
5. A proposed signing strategy, providing direction to the development shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The approved signage strategy shall be implemented in accordance with a timetable to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

Reasons

1. In the interest of the free and safe movement of traffic on the adjacent highway and to ensure the formation of a safe and satisfactory access.
2. In the interest of the free and safe movement of traffic on the adjacent highway.
3. To provide for the safe and secure parking of bicycles.

4. In the interest of the free and safe movement of traffic on the adjacent highway.
5. In the interest of the free and safe movement of traffic on the adjacent highway.

Notes

HIGHWAY SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

Your attention is drawn to Highway Supplementary Notes Numbered 1, 3, 4 and 5 on the enclosed "Applicants' Rights and General Information".

WORKS WITHIN THE HIGHWAY

The separate written consent of the Local Highway Authority must be obtained before any work is carried out within the confines of the highway. You are advised that the Highway Authority will require such works to be completed to their satisfaction before they will formally adopt the relevant Highway works for public use and to be maintained at public expense. This will include the provision of a bond to cover the estimated value of such works. The appropriate fees will become due to the Council when the Highways Authority approve the proposed works to be carried out



Infrastructure and Planning Manager