

Ms Jane Chase
Planning Officer
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Town Hall, Edward Street
Stockport
SK1 3XE

26th January 2020

Dear Ms Chase

Reference: DC/075511

Proposal: Change of use of land and buildings from a car showroom to a Church meeting hall together with elevational alterations to the building, external alterations to the layout of the site, erection of a 1m high timber fence and gates to the frontage and landscaping throughout the site.
Location: 548 Chester Road, Woodford, Stockport, SK7 1PS

The Woodford Neighbourhood Forum Management Committee has assessed this application against relevant planning policies.

1. Woodford Neighbourhood Plan

Woodford Neighbourhood Plan 2019 is part of the Development Plan for Stockport Council following the completion of the appropriate stages of the Plan. As a recently made Plan, it is fully compliant with current national and borough planning policies and now carries weight in the decision making process on planning applications.

We note that the Woodford Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) is not referenced or acknowledged in any of the supporting documents, including the planning statement. This is disappointing and we feel that local planning agents who are regularly involved in local planning applications should be notified of this change in the Stockport Development Plan.

We have assessed the proposals against the policies in the WNP and find that some are relevant as follows:

1.1. WNP ENV3: Protecting Woodford's natural features

“The protection and/or enhancement of Woodford's natural features, including those identified in the Table below, will be supported.”

Assessment: There is an area of deciduous trees to the rear and one side of the site, which at the time of preparation of the Woodford Landscape and Environment Survey Report, was designated as a Tree Preservation Area. See Figure 1 below and page 90 in the report:

<http://woodfordnf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Woodford-Landscape-and-Environment-Report-Part-1-September-2018.pdf>

Works on the site should avoid damage to these trees or their roots, which are part of the natural features in Woodford.

1.2. WNP ENV4: Supporting biodiversity

“The conservation, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity, including that found in open spaces, trees and hedgerows, in order to promote and support wildlife and other forms of biodiversity will be supported. Development should, where viable and deliverable, achieve net gains in biodiversity.”

Assessment: Landscaping should aim to enhance biodiversity where possible. The proposals for the introduction of vegetation, including trees and hedges, are welcomed and we recommend the use of native species as much as possible.

1.3. WNP DEV4: Design of new development

“All new development in Woodford Neighbourhood Area should achieve a high standard of design. New residential development proposals should demonstrate how they respect and respond to the Neighbourhood Area’s rural character, to its ecology and to its landscape. Where appropriate and viable, the development of sustainable drainage systems, the retention and enhancement of landscape, wildlife and ecological networks and the achievement of high environmental and energy standards will be supported.”

Assessment: Any proposals to improve the current outer appearance of the building and the site are welcomed. However, in our view, the current proposal does not achieve the high standard of design required by our policy. We would prefer a more imaginative approach to produce a design that is more aesthetically pleasing and more in keeping with its setting.

The site is in a sensitive location with regard to design because it is adjacent to The Davenport Arms, which is a non-designated building of local interest with a distinctive design. It is also within sight of Christ Church and the Lychgate, which are Grade II listed buildings.

Increased intensity of rainfall in this area is predicted with climate change, increasing the risk of flooding. Large areas of this site are currently covered with a non-porous surface, so any reduction of run off due to the introduction of vegetation is welcomed.

The WNP included the following notes:

“Further to consultation with the Environment Agency, the Neighbourhood Forum would like to see new development being designed to maximise the retention of surface water on the development site and measures to minimise runoff; for surface water drainage to be considered in liaison with the Local Lead Flood Agency, the public sewerage undertaker and the Environment Agency; and for surface water to be discharged in the following order of priority:

- An adequate soakaway or some other form of infiltration system.
- An attenuated discharge to watercourse or other water body.
- An attenuated discharge to public surface water sewer.
- An attenuated discharge to public combined sewer”

2. Stockport Unitary Development Plan 2006 and NPPF

We have not seen the pre-application advice from Stockport Council, which is referred to in the Planning submission, but not submitted with the application. It is therefore difficult for WNF to have regard to the Council’s position on planning policy matters for this application.

However, we have referred to the Planning Statement with particular regard to accessibility, sustainability and impact on residential amenity.

2.1. Accessibility and Sustainability

The Planning Statement includes the following:

“Although the site is not particularly served well by public transport, it is accessible by walking and cycling. Furthermore, it is the case that the Church meeting hall is proposed to serve a locally based community with members residing in the Woodford area and surrounding hinterland. This previously developed site on the edge of Woodford is well located to the user group who will utilise it for services of worship.”

“5.5 There is also ample parking on the site.”

Assessment: We have the following concerns:

Car parking is to be provided on site, so there is a clear expectation that some attendees will arrive by car. WNF is concerned that the application refers to Woodford and “hinterland” and “environs”. These are very unspecific catchment areas, which could include attendees beyond walking and cycling distance from the site, resulting in travel by car.

The proposal is not in a sustainable location. Public transport to and from the site is poor with only one bus route in operation, to and from Manchester. Buses run every half hour during weekdays, but are much less frequent on Sundays with no buses arriving in Woodford until 10 am. See full timetable on this link:

https://assets.ctfassets.net/nv7y93idf4jq/3SbrzIDiAG0RWQzpVSF37B/aa0d81dbf083700c7033aba87d748800/19-SC-0528_Bus_Times_42B.pdf

The Sunday timetable is shown in Figure 2 in the appendix.

There are currently no bus routes to or from communities in Cheshire at this location. The nearest train stations are Bramhall (2 miles), Poynton (2.1 miles) and Wilmslow (3.3 miles).

2.2. Impact on residential amenity

The Planning Statement includes the following statement:

“There would be no harm to living conditions of neighbouring residents – the active use of the premises proposed is benign in comparison to the current motor sales/servicing/repair activities that are permitted permanently at the site. In comparison the active use proposed will be limited to a few hours per week and will involve solemn acts of worship. The nearest residential properties are located some distance away on the other side of Chester Road”

Assessment: We have the following concerns:

The proposal includes a service starting at 6 am on Sundays. This will mean that people are arriving for the service before sunrise for 7 months of the year. There are no bus services at this time (See Appendix, Figure 2). Therefore, attendees who are not within walking or cycling distance will arrive by car. This is clearly expected because provision of car parking is emphasised in the application.

Traffic arriving for the early morning service will be using headlights for 7 out of 12 months, producing light disturbance, as well as noise disturbance.

It should be noted that the landlady of the Davenport Arms, which is adjacent to the site, lives above the pub premises. Saturday night is a late night for her after closure of the pub, so disturbance very early on a Sunday morning would be a problem.

None of the previous uses of the site involved such an early start on a rest day, which has the potential to disturb residents on Chester Road and Church Lane and along any other inbound routes through Woodford used by attendees.

While attendance may start small and local, it could expand to include larger numbers and a wider catchment area. The application refers to 35 to 45 attendees. Experience in other areas suggests that such churches, particularly in attractive and rural areas such as Woodford, can attract many times more than the 35 -45 suggested. Unless there a mechanism for enforcement of this limit, it could spiral upwards.

This raises the question as to the capacity of the proposed car parking arrangements. No details of car park management are submitted and it would be highly unusual for a church to seek to restrict church attendance from any prospective worshippers. It can be expected that car drivers who cannot find space on the site will park on Chester Road, Old Hall Lane and Church Lane, and may be tempted to use the car park at the Davenport Arms, which is strictly reserved for users of the pub. This could reduce parking spaces for local residents, for example those wishing to attend Christ Church or visiting the village for other reasons.

We can see no reference to a Travel Plan, as set out in the Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document for Stockport.

With regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "E. M. Frearson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Evelyn Frearson
On behalf of the WNF Management Committee

Appendix

Figure 1. The map below was taken from the Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council website and shows the copse behind the car sales forecourt on Chester Road as a Tree Preservation Area Order (green block).



Figure 2

42B Sunday timetable January 2020

Sundays and public holidays (except Christmas and New Year period)

		0854	0954	1054	1154	1754
Manchester, Piccadilly Gardens	1900					
Manchester Royal Infirmary	1912	0904	1004	1104	1206	1806
Rusholme, Platt Lane	1918	0910	1010	1110	1212	1812
Didsbury, School Lane	1931	0924	1024	1124	1226	and 1826
East Didsbury, Parrs Wood	1938	0930	1030	1130	1232	every 1832
Cheadle, Post Office	1943	0936	1036	1136	1238	hour 1838
Cheadle Hulme, Train Station	1952	0945	1045	1145	1247	until 1847
Grove Lane, Pointing Dog	1958	0950	1050	1150	1252	1852
Bramhall, Moss Lane	2003	0956	1056	1156	1258	1858
Woodford, Jenny Lane	2006	1000	1100	1200	1302	1902
Woodford, Church Lane	2008	1002	1102	1202	1304	1904

Sundays and public holidays (except Christmas and New Year period)

		0730	1830	1910
Woodford, Church Lane	1949			
Woodford, Jenny Lane	1950	0731	1831	1911
Bramhall, Moss Lane	1953	0736	1836	1914
Grove Lane, Pointing Dog	1957	0741	and 1841	1918
Cheadle Hulme, Train Station	2002	0747	every 1847	1923
Cheadle, High Street	2011	0756	hour 1856	1931
East Didsbury, Parrs Wood	2016	0802	until 1902	1936
Didsbury, School Lane	2021	0807	1907	
Rusholme, Platt Lane	2037	0823	1923	
Manchester Royal Infirmary	2042	0828	1928	
Manchester, Piccadilly Gardens	2053	0839	1939	

For details of buses during Christmas and New Year, please phone 0161 244 1000

♿ – Journey provided with the financial support of Transport for Greater Manchester

Bus 42B is provided with the financial support of Transport for Greater Manchester between Woodford and Bramhall

♿ – All bus 42B journeys are run using easy access buses. See inside front cover of this leaflet for details