

No.7	APPLICATION NO.	2018/1291/FUL
	LOCATION	Land At The South-Eastern End Of The Campus Edge Hill University St Helens Road Ormskirk Lancashire
	PROPOSAL	Use of land as overflow car parking for c. 500 car parking spaces and provision of new/upgraded access routes within the University campus (retrospective).
	APPLICANT	Edge Hill University
	WARD	Derby
	PARISH	Unparished - Ormskirk
	TARGET DATE	1st February 2019

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is a full application for the permanent use of an area of approximately 3.5 hectares in the north-eastern part of the campus as an overflow car park, the retention of a trim trail as a tarmac vehicular access to the overflow car park along with other resurfaced areas of trim trail and retention of a new bound gravel pedestrian route from the overflow car park to the main campus. By virtue of the loss of openness and conflict with one of the reasons for including land in the Green Belt (encroachment) the proposed development constitutes an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt giving rise to harm to it. This harm must be attributed substantial weight. In addition, the development will give rise to an adverse impact on the character and visual quality of the locality and therefore conflict with Policies GN1, GN3 and EN2 in the West Lancashire Local Plan (WLLP). The Council recognises the economic importance to the local and wider economy of the university and the fact that the overflow car park could legitimately be used on a temporary basis as part of the approved Car Park Management Strategy; however, this does not, in my view, amount to very special circumstances that outweigh the identified harm. On this basis, I consider the scheme to be unacceptable and in conflict with policies GN1, GN3 and EN2 of the Local Plan and the application is therefore recommended for refusal.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: REFUSE

3.0 THE SITE

- 3.1 The application site is a 3.5 hectare parcel of land within the south-east corner of the university campus, adjacent to Scarth Hill Lane. It is currently used as a temporary overspill car park although the land and area immediately to the west predominantly forms the outdoor sporting facilities and associated surface infrastructure and landscaping. To the immediate north lies The Woodlands, a residential property with a meadowland area of the campus and Ruff Lane beyond. To the south lies Delph House, a residential property, along with a small group of other dwellings at the junction of Scarth Hill Lane and St Helens Road. To the east there are six further residential properties along Scarth Hill Lane with open fields beyond. To the west is the main university campus.
- 3.2 The application also includes parts of a trim trail that have been widened and re-surfaced to form a vehicular access to the overspill car park (mainly along the north-eastern edge of the campus alongside Ruff Lane) and retention of a new pedestrian path leading from the car park to the athletics track to connect with existing paths.
- 3.3 The site is located in the Green Belt, which is also allocated as Green Infrastructure/Open Recreational Space and a Mineral Safeguarding Area in the West Lancashire Local Plan (2012-2027). The site straddles two natural area types and the south-eastern limit of the

site is within an area of Landscape History Importance of local significance.

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The proposed development is comprised of four elements:
- 4.2 Retention of the overflow car park adjacent to Scarth Hill Lane, with a capacity of approximately 500 spaces, to be used on a permanent basis. The surfacing comprises of matting and netting for the parking spaces and rubber grass mats for the vehicle routes within the car park. Access to this area is gained from the existing trim trail route but has been widened to 6m and is surfaced with gravel-filled cellular paving on a stone base.
- 4.3 Retention of widened and re-surfaced (tarmac) trim trail around the edge of the campus. This leads off an existing vehicular access track at the northern end of the campus and runs approximately 800m adjacent to Ruff Lane to the overspill car park to the south. It measures approximately 3m wide and also includes a number of passing bays and timber fencing.
- 4.4 Retention of a resurfaced (tarmac) and widened (2.2m) pedestrian path leading from the overspill car park for a further 250m adjacent to St Helens Road before joining up with an existing pedestrian gravel track south of the athletics track.
- 4.5 Retention of a new 1.8m wide bound gravel pedestrian path running between sports pitches from the overspill car park to link up with existing paths adjacent to the sports building.

5.0 PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS

- 5.1 2017/0579/CON – Approval of Details Reserved by Condition 14 of Planning Permission 2013/1325/FUL relating to car park management strategy. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.2 2015/0842/CON – Approval of Details Reserved by Condition No's. 20 and 21 of Planning Permission 2013/1325/FUL relating to a management and maintenance plans and details of indoor and outdoor sports facilities. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.3 2014/1066/FUL – Installation of Underground Drainage System. APPROVED
- 5.4 2014/0815/CON – Approval of Details Reserved by Condition 3 of Planning Permission 2013/1325/FUL relating to material details. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.5 2013/1325/FUL – Variation of Condition No.2 imposed on planning permission 2013/0799/FUL to vary the plans relating to the sports building and consequential variation of Conditions 3,5,6,7,17,20,21,28 and 31 regarding phasing. APPROVED
- 5.6 2013/0799/CON – Variation of Condition No's 2,3,5,6,7,17,20,21,28 and 31 imposed on planning permission 2012/0692/FUL. APPROVED
- 5.7 2013/0840/CON – Approval of Details Reserved by Condition No's. 16, 22 and 30 of planning permission 2012/0692/FUL relating to a delivery, collections and servicing strategy, cycle infrastructure strategy and travel plan. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.8 2012/1093/CON – Approval of Details Reserved by Condition No's. 5,6,7,17,19,20,21,28 and 31 of Planning Permission 2012/0692/FUL relating to landscaping, foul and surface water drainage, archaeology, ground conditions, pitch specification, outdoor sports facilities, sports development programme, community use agreement, biodiversity

management plan and fencing. DETAILS APPROVED

- 5.9 2012/0692/FUL – Variation of condition 2 imposed on planning permission 2011/0504/FUL to vary phasing of development and consequential variation of condition nos. 3,5,17,18,19,20,21,22,28 and 31. Variation of condition nos. 14 (car parking management strategy) and 27 (use of new access) imposed on planning permission 2011/0504/FUL. APPROVED
- 5.10 2012/1010/CON – Approval of Details Reserved by Condition No's. 7 and 28 of Planning Permission 2011/0504/FUL relating to archaeology and biodiversity management plan. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.11 2012/1002/CON – Approval of Details Reserved by Condition No's. 5,17,19,20,21 and 22 of Planning Permission 2011/0504/FUL relating to landscaping scheme, ground condition assessment, pitch specification, indoor and outdoor sport facility details, sports development programme, community use agreement, cycle and cycle route signage. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.12 2012/0683/CON – Approval of Details Reserved by Condition No's. 14, 15 and 26 of planning permission 2011/0504/FUL relating to car park management strategy, construction plan and construction environmental management plan. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.13 2012/0437/CON - Approval of Details Reserved by Condition No. 6 of planning permission 2011/0504/FUL relating to a scheme for the disposal of foul and surface water and for the installation of oil and petrol separators. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.14 2012/0431/CON - Approval of Details Reserved by Condition No. 10 of planning permission 2011/0504/FUL relating to a scheme for the construction of the site access. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.15 2012/0378/CON - Approval of Details Reserved by Condition Nos. 4,5,7 and 14 of planning permission 2011/0504/FUL relating to tree protection method statement, landscaping, archaeology and traffic and parking management strategy 11/12. DETAILS APPROVED
- 5.16 2011/0504/FUL – Provision of new sports and recreation complex incorporating: erection of sports building and outdoor sports facilities, pitches and games courts, associated landscaping, lighting and boundary treatments. Formation of new signal-controlled junction with the A570 St Helens Road and internal access road to serve as the principal entrance to the whole campus. The provision of permanent car parking (708 from temporary to permanent and 230 new permanent spaces) and associated lighting and landscaping. Creation of woodland planting, wetland pond and trim trail. Engineering works to re-profile the site and to facilitate the development. APPROVED

6.0 OBSERVATIONS OF CONSULTEES

- 6.1 DIRECTOR LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT (26/09/19 and 05/07/19) – Following the receipt of a noise assessment and subsequent technical note, raise no objections subject to hours restriction to 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday only.
- 6.2 LEAD LOCAL FLOOD AUTHORITY (25/07/19) – No comments to make.
- 6.3 WLBC DRAINAGE ENGINEER (17/06/19) – Do not anticipate the proposals would result in an unacceptable level of flood risk or drainage problems; however, given the number of

car parking spaces I have reservations regarding the potential contamination of the ground and request further information in this respect.

- 6.4 SPORT ENGLAND (17/04/19) – No objection.
- 6.5 UNITED UTILITIES (23/01/19) – No objection subject to conditions.
- 6.6 LCC HIGHWAYS (09/01/19) – No objections.
- 6.7 CADENT GAS (21/01/19 and 04/01/19)) – High pressure gas main crosses the site, recommend informatives.
- 6.8 HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE (03/01/19) – Do not advise, on safety grounds, against the granting of planning permission.

7.0 OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

- 7.1 12 Letters from neighbouring residents objecting on the grounds of:

Impact on Green Belt

Parking 500 cars weekdays for up to 9 months a year does not preserve the openness of the Green Belt

9 months is not a limited period

Application is based on demand without any justification

Student numbers have decreased 10,433 between 2010/11 and 2017/18

On-site accommodation has increased by 1300 so no need for more spaces

Increased fumes

Increased litter

Increased soil contamination

Loss of wildlife

Impact on plant growth

Harmful impact on this area of landscape history

Increased flooding on Scarth Hill Lane

Car parking is not managed effectively by the university and no evidence that taking Green Belt land will rectify this

No serious research has been undertaken by the University into viable alternatives

Loss of wild flower meadow

Increased traffic chaos in the area

Increased vehicle emissions close to properties

Increased noise

Temporary matting is dangerous in windy weather if not secured and this has already caused an incident

Adjacent pond is devoid of wildlife

Ugly car park

A park and ride scheme should be used

Car park is used at night and weekends and even overnight

Loss of safe and secure area

Eyesore

There are times when nobody uses the car park, so it is not needed on a permanent basis

Noise report is inaccurate

Drainage will be affected by compacting soil

Maximum number of cars parked between February and April never exceeded 300

- 7.2 One letter of support from a neighbouring resident who states that the provision of car parking is necessary to help alleviate other parking problems along St Helens Road. The

car park is not used every day or from June to September and the use of the car park is a sensible strategy as the issue of parking will not go away.

- 7.3 **Lathom South Parish Council** (14/01/19 and 14/06/19) – Objects on the following grounds:
Interferes with the purpose of including the land as Green Belt, separating the settlement of Scarth Hill from Ormskirk.
500 cars results in loss of openness
Screening would not make the development acceptable
Approval of Condition 14 of original permission should not have happened
Number of students has reduced since 2011 and number of campus accommodation has increased so no justification
The university has a record of gaining temporary permission and then having them turned into permanent spaces as soon as possible afterwards
Increased car parking is not essential to the university's success, and there are other ways of controlling demand for spaces or providing spaces without taking Green Belt land
The agent seeks to by-pass the planning process by claiming that to issue a new travel plan constitutes the grant of planning consent without public consultation
Once parked, people are not likely to move their vehicle once an authorised space becomes available
This Green Belt boundary was set in 2013 following detailed discussion between the Inspector and WLBC
Dispute agent's contention that the land is not proper Green Belt land because it is not farmland
Trim trail is supposed to be part of the sports development and for use by the local community and designed to be separated from regular vehicle movements. The current proposals would effectively sentence the trail to obscurity and be-spoil the openness of the Green Belt.
- 7.4 **New Ormskirk Residents Group** (17/08/19, 08/07/19 and 15/01/19) – Object on the following grounds:
Noise report only refers to a 3 hour morning period in March with only 86 cars parked, indicating a lack of demand for the facility
No need for parking in Green Belt when additional storey above or below existing main car park could be provided
Network of roads in the Green Belt created
Many users of the university do not wish to queue for car parks when they have already queued to get to the campus and park on the roadside even though car parks not full
Charging for parking could deter users
Land away from the campus should be used for parking from which a shuttle bus could operate
Loss of a safe pedestrian route through the campus, which discourages fitness
Loss of community facility
More permits issued by the university than spaces so why despoil the Green Belt when there will still not be enough spaces
Too much unauthorised use of existing car parks.
- 7.5 **South Lathom Residents' Association** (04/01/19 and 26/06/19) – Object on the following grounds:
The TPMS Addendum provides for temporary car parking for peak overflow for valid permit holders only. This was approved prior to the 2017 Travel Plan Review, which advised a larger review of the TPMS would be undertaken.
There is a question of what can justifiably be described as temporary, which cannot be attached to use at particular time of the day or up to 9 months of every year.
Application is based on demand with insufficient justification.

Total number of parking spaces justified by students travelling to the campus has reduced by at least 832 spaces since the base year of 2010/11.

The total of 1809 spaces in the 2011 application was considered reasonable, based upon student and staff numbers so it cannot be claimed that car parking should be increased, in spite of the interim reduction in student numbers.

Impact on Green Belt – does not preserve openness.

Loss of green infrastructure and open recreation space

Increased contamination

Loss of grassland and wildflower meadow

Does not maintain the visual quality of this area of landscape history

The very special circumstances put forward could be used by any university so are not special

Dispute contention that this land is not really Green Belt – it is and has been developed for sport. Car parking is not one of the exceptions listed

The university can manipulate demand and further car parking provision would move the demand upwards and create another set of very special circumstances

The main car park was allowed in the then Green Belt and part of the case made was to remove the need for overflow parking on tennis courts, the case for more parking is hard to understand now with fewer students and more on-campus accommodation

The university's encroachment into Green Belt has been progressive with temporary development becoming permanent

Impact on air quality in the area.

8.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

8.1 The application is supported by the following information:

Transport Assessment

Planning Statement

Noise Assessment Report and Acoustic Technical Note

Drainage Strategy

9.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

9.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD (WLLP) provide the policy framework against which the development proposals will be assessed. The site is located within the Green Belt and is allocated as an area of Green Infrastructure/Open Recreation Space, an Area of Landscape History Importance of local significance and a Mineral Safeguarding Area.

9.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Section 2 Achieving sustainable development

Section 4 Decision making

Section 6 Building a strong, competitive economy

Section 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities

Section 9 Promoting sustainable transport

Section 11 Making effective use of land

Section 12 Achieving well-designed places

Section 14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Section 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

9.3 West Lancashire Local Plan (2012-2027) DPD

SP1 – A Sustainable Development Framework for West Lancashire

GN1 – Settlement Boundaries
GN3 – Criteria for Sustainable Development
EC4 – Edge Hill University
IF2 – Enhancing Sustainable Transport Choice
IF3 – Service Accessibility and Infrastructure for Growth
EN2 – Preserving and Enhancing West Lancashire’s Natural Environment
EN3 – Provision of Green Infrastructure and Open Recreation Space

SPD – Design Guide
SPG – Natural Areas of Landscape Character

10.0 OBSERVATIONS OF DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION

Background

- 10.1 Planning permission was granted in February 2012 for a new sport and recreation complex, a new signalised entrance and permanent parking facilities at Edge Hill University (2011/0504/FUL). Various minor amendments were made to the substantive permission as the work on site began as can be seen in Section 5 above. The development has now been implemented in full. However, in 2015 a former field entrance along Scarth Hill Lane was opened up, matting laid on the grass and an area of approximately 50m x 40m used as an overflow car park by the university. This use was initially limited as permitted development for 28 days in any calendar year. However, due to severe highway issues along Scarth Hill Lane, more recent access to the overspill car park has been from the main St Helens Road access, through an existing internal vehicular access road and along the former trim trail previously granted planning permission as part of application 2011/0504/FUL.
- 10.2 This unauthorised use of the trim trail was regularised for temporary use through Approval of Details application 2017/0579/CON (approval of details reserved by condition 14 on planning permission 2013/1325/FUL relating to car parking management strategy). This application was submitted with supporting information from the university that highlighted peak parking demand outnumbered formal on-site provision and to avoid informal and problematic out-spill on to the surrounding roads the information concluded “*The University will utilise “peak period temporary parking” capacity on the arterial service road, the tennis courts, and on temporary surfaces installed on University land to the west of Scarth Hill Lane. The University will deploy resources to manage and control the access to and egress from these temporary facilities using the established campus road network and the existing parking permit system i.e. only valid permit holders will be able to access and park in these areas.*” This application was ratified by the highway authority and subsequently the details were approved by the Council in July 2017.
- 10.3 During 2017 it became apparent that there was a shift in use of the temporary car parking area and, whereas the matting used to provide a suitable surface would generally be in situ for three to four months (Sep – Dec), it started to become a permanent feature. Although it is not used continuously, the area is now available at any time of the year and is subsequently deemed to be beyond the scope of the temporary facility agreed.
- 10.4 Since November 2017 incremental works have been taking place to resurface an upgrade the access road and trim trail by providing a more robust surface (tarmac), widening lengths and providing 13 passing places. In addition, a new length of track has been provided to the south-west of the residential property, The Woodlands, Scarth Hill Lane, to link the parking area and access track; and the parking area itself excavated and back-filled with hardcore and re-matted to provide a better draining sub-base. A further gravel bound pedestrian path has also been created from the access track/trim trail to the north

of the parking area and which passes between sports pitches to link with an existing pedestrian path close to the athletics track.

- 10.5 These works constitute engineering operations requiring planning permission. The Council issued a s330 Notice under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) on the University as a pre-cursor to the serving of an Enforcement Notice under s172 of the Act on 30th November 2018. The University submitted the current application on 6th December 2018 (validated on 7th December 2018) in order to regularise the situation. The serving of an Enforcement Notice has been held in abeyance pending a decision on the current application.

Principle of Development – Green Belt

- 10.6 Policy GN1 in the WLLP states that proposals in the Green Belt will be assessed against national policy and any relevant Local Plan policies. Section 13 of the NPPF sets out the government's policy that great importance is attached to Green Belts. It states the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Paragraph 146(b) of the NPPF advises that engineering operations and paragraph 146(e) material changes in the use of land, are acceptable in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
- 10.7 Although part of the works undertaken substantially overlies existing surface infrastructure, any extension – the increases in width, provision of passing places, new lengths and the formalising works to the parking area - are hard engineering operations that, by virtue of their very presence will give rise to a loss of openness of the Green Belt. Additionally, the more formal and permanent car park provision and upgrade of the access routes result in incongruous elements that, even in the context of the outdoor sport and recreation facilities, will give rise to incremental encroachment that the NPPF seeks to avoid – this is particularly the case when the parking area is used at or close to capacity.
- 10.8 The development therefore fails to comply with the NPPF and results in harm to the Green Belt by virtue of inappropriateness, loss of openness and conflict with one of the reasons for including land within it. In accordance with Paragraph 144 the LPA must attribute substantial weight to the identified harm.
- 10.9 Paragraph 143 requires that planning permission should not be granted for inappropriate development except in very special circumstances. Such circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Very Special Circumstances

- 10.10 The applicant has submitted a case for very special circumstances, although the university considers the development is not inappropriate. This is predicated on their view that the development preserves the openness of the Green Belt (because the use of the car park will be for a limited period of time throughout the year and throughout the day and that access routes already exist which are well screened), and that there will be negligible conflict with the Green Belt purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The applicant states that the development will make a positive contribution to users of the access route as its re-surfacing will ensure the health and safety of users are not compromised and the development encourages the beneficial use of Green Belt land. As such, the applicant considers the development constitutes appropriate development in the Green Belt. In addition, the applicant considers that because the overspill parking area benefits from approval as part of application 2017/0579/CON to be

used as a temporary overspill car park, this effectively already benefits from permission.

- 10.11 Notwithstanding the above, the applicant has put forward a number of special circumstances to justify the development. Firstly, the university state that are proud of their ranking amongst other universities in both student and staff experiences. The operational part of the university, including the ability to park close to or on the campus, plays a role on the overall experience of staff and students. Whilst progress has been made in terms of a commitment by the university to reduce demand for parking such as car sharing, provision of train passes and a parking permit system, demand is still high during peak periods. Therefore, the university claim that the temporary overspill parking area, which has already been approved via a Traffic and Parking Management Strategy in 2017, is still required in order to ensure the operational efficiency and car parking capacity is maintained.
- 10.12 Secondly, it is put forward that the university is one of the biggest employers in the Borough and generates around £100 million across the UK economy, the majority of which is contained in the NW region and particularly West Lancashire. The university state that the overflow car park is essential to maintain efficiency which in turn enhances the student/staff experience and subsequently this sustains the university's strong economic performance. Any operational deficiencies that may compromise this will subsequently have an impact on the university's economic success.
- 10.13 Thirdly, the university considers that without the overflow car park and associated routes, there would be a severe adverse impact on the surrounding highway network and local community whereby staff and students would have little alternative but to park illegally along St Helens Road, Scarth Hill Lane and Ruff Lane. This would pose a risk to the health and safety of road users and local residents. The university states that provision of the overflow car park safeguards the welfare of all campus users through ensuring all vehicular movement does not pose a danger to individuals. It is contended that the overflow parking will alleviate pressure on surrounding roads and as such, the implications of not providing the parking area should be afforded considerable weight as a very special circumstance.
- 10.14 Finally, the university comment that there are no non-Green Belt alternatives options available to them to provide the amount of parking spaces required at peak times. This, they contend, is because the campus is constrained, the main campus is occupied by university buildings and accommodation and the only feasible alternative was to explore land to the east of the campus which is occupied by existing sports pitches and vacant greenfield land and is not of sufficient size to accommodate the parking requirements.

Assessment of Very Special Circumstances

- 10.15 Whilst it is acknowledged that the university is hugely successful and one of the main employers and economic contributors to the local economy, there is no evidence to suggest that staff and students would find their "experience" any less acceptable or operationally deficient should there be no overspill car parking area. Lack of on-site parking may result in staff/students having to use alternative means of accessing the campus, which may be less convenient, but are no different to any other employees of businesses in the town or surrounding areas. The proper management of the permit system, together with reductions in student numbers over the last five years (total number 2013 - 18,493; total number 2017 – 15,220 (University's own website)) and increase in student accommodation on campus over the last five years suggests there is no increased demand for overspill parking except on initial enrolment and prior to placements being allocated for students at the start of the academic year.

- 10.16 The case put forward by the university also includes a scenario that additional traffic safety concerns would arise through not allowing the development as increased pressure would be placed on parking within the surrounding road network. There are already traffic regulation orders on some immediate surrounding roads – double yellow lines, and more could be introduced should parking cause safety concerns. This could mean that parking is merely displaced further from the campus on nearby residential roads, some of which are already subject to residents only parking restrictions as a result of the proximity of the hospital. This may disincentivise the use of the car for travelling to the campus if the nearest parking space is in the town centre, where it would be just as easy to catch the bus or train into the town and walk to campus. The fact that parking may occur illegally is not a reason to justify inappropriate development as this can be dealt with through proper policing and enforcement.
- 10.17 The university state that there is a lack of any feasible alternative; however, little or no evidence has been put forward that any realistic alternatives have been considered. No up to date financial evidence has been submitted to demonstrate why alternatives such as park and ride, underground or sensitively designed two storey parking within the main car park is not feasible. Simply charging for car parking would be an alternative, already used by many universities, which would, in turn raise revenue for additional better located parking. I disagree with the applicant's assertion that there is inadequate public transport network facilitating access to the campus – the train station in Ormskirk has a regular service to Liverpool and Preston with a connecting Edge Link bus between the station and the campus.
- 10.18 Having considered the above case, I remain of the view that the very special circumstances presented are not considered to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, harm to openness and harm due to the failure to safeguard the countryside from encroachment.

Design and Appearance

- 10.19 Policy GN3 of the West Lancashire Local Plan states that proposals for development should be of high quality design and have regard to visual amenity and complement or enhance any attractive attributes and/or local distinctiveness within its surroundings through sensitive design. Section 12 and Paragraph 141 of the NPPF seeks to ensure high standards of design and enhancement of landscape and visual amenity. The alterations and extensions to the existing tracks and the formalisation of the car park introduce a heavier engineered form of development that fails to integrate well into the rural context of the site. Previously, the trim trail was finished in a light gravel and was substantially less engineered as it was not designed to accommodate regular traffic. The upgrades and extension present as a tarmac roadway incorporating a large number of passing places with no attempt to assimilate into context.
- 10.20 The character of the wider site has undoubtedly changed significantly since the development of the sports facilities. However, the south-eastern part of the campus is relatively open and comprises natural grass and meadowland with some tree planting around The Woodlands. The Council's SPG-Natural Areas of Landscape Character type 2D for Ormskirk recognises the need to retain existing semi-natural habitat in and around farmland. The topography of this part of the site means that the car park is extremely visible to the south-east, being on a sloping part of the site that overlooks Ormskirk to the north-west. The presence of a large area of parked cars in an isolated and raised position, without screening, results in an incongruous feature to the detriment of the visual amenity of the Green Belt and fails to maintain or enhance the distinctive character and visual quality of the landscape character area and the area generally, particularly the outlook from properties along Scarth Hill Lane. I therefore consider the proposal fails to

meet policies GN3 and EN2 of the Local Plan and Parts 12 and 13 of the NPPF.

Loss of Green Infrastructure/Open Recreation Space

- 10.21 The site is allocated as an area of Green Infrastructure/Open Recreational Space in the Local Plan. Policy EN3 affords protection to existing open spaces unless specified criteria are met. In this instance, the development fails to meet any of the specified tests for permitting the loss of open space and results in an adverse impact on the open character of the area, in conflict with Policy EN3. Furthermore, the increased use of the former trim trail by vehicles results in the loss of a safe pedestrian/cycle route through the campus, which was used by members of the local community to facilitate active lifestyles. This former well-used and safe trail has become a hazardous roadway with an emphasis on vehicle priority rather than a safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle route, contrary to Policy GN3 and EN3 of the Local Plan.

Impact on Surrounding Land Uses

- 10.22 The overspill car park is located adjacent to The Woodlands, Scarth Hill Lane and Delph House lies in close proximity to the south. Due to the widening of the former trim trail at the entrance to the overspill car park, which is located directly to the rear of The Woodlands, I am concerned that increased noise and disturbance would occur. This would result in loss of amenity for occupiers of surrounding properties, particularly The Woodlands and Delph House. As such, a Noise Report was carried out to predict maximum noise levels. The results of this survey were queried by the Council's Environmental Health Officer and as a consequence, a further technical note was submitted. Whilst the Environmental Health Officer has concerns that intermittent noises such as slamming doors, music, voices, alarms are hard to control, and more likely to give rise to complaints, provided the car park is used during daytime hours only Monday to Friday, no objections are raised.
- 10.23 Due to boundary treatment and some vegetation screening, I consider there would be no loss of privacy as a result of the development and on balance therefore, I consider the scheme accordant with Policy GN3 of the Local Plan, in respect of its impact on residential amenity.

Biodiversity and Landscaping

- 10.24 The location of the car park is in an area that was originally set aside as a landscaped area featuring diverse meadowland planting and ponds, the latter associated with wider management of surface water on the site. The presence of the parking area has depleted the meadowland planting as originally approved. Whilst the principle of a temporary parking area has been approved as part of a discharge of condition application, neither the current scheme for the permanent nature of the overspill parking area nor the upgraded access track provide any replacement planting to offset the loss of meadowland. Whereas the scheme approved as part of the condition application was for a rubber matting car park area, the current development is a more engineered form incorporating a wide tarmac access adjacent to a pond. Paragraph 170 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by *inter alia* minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity. In the absence of mitigation to compensate for the loss of meadowland within the parking and access routes, I consider the scheme to be contrary to Policy EN2 of the Local Plan and Paragraph 170 of the NPPF.

Surface Water, Drainage and Flood Risk

10.25 It is a requirement of Policy GN3 that development does not result in unacceptable flood risk or drainage problems. The site is located within Flood Zone 1, the least susceptible to flood risk. A drainage strategy has been submitted and I am satisfied that details of foul and surface water drainage will not result in additional flood risk on or off the site. However, full details of how contaminants from vehicles will be prevented from entering the surface water system or ground water have yet to be provided. As such, there is insufficient information to demonstrate that the risk from pollutants is minimised, in conflict with Policy GN3 of the Local Plan.

Summary

10.26 By virtue of the loss of openness and conflict with one of the reasons for including land in the Green Belt (encroachment) I consider the proposal constitutes an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt giving rise to harm to it. This harm must be attributed substantial weight. In addition, the development gives rise to an adverse impact on the character and visual quality of the locality and therefore conflicts with Policies GN3 and EN2 in the Local Plan. The development also conflicts with Policy EN2 and Paragraph 170 of the NPPF in that no mitigation is proposed for the loss in meadowland and consequential loss in biodiversity. In addition, the development results in the loss of a safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle route contrary to Policies GN3 and EN3 of the Local Plan. Furthermore, insufficient information has been put forward to demonstrate that the car parking area will not result in pollution to ground water, contrary to Policy GN3 of the Local Plan. Very special circumstances have been put forward; however, in my view these do not outweigh the substantial harm to Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, harm to openness and harm due to the failure to safeguard the countryside from encroachment. As such, I recommend the application is refused.

11.0 RECOMMENDATION

11.1 That planning permission be REFUSED for the following reasons:

Reasons for Refusal

1. The development conflicts with Section 13 of the NPPF and Policy GN1 in the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD in that the proposal constitutes inappropriate development resulting in harm to the openness of the Green Belt and conflicts with one of the purposes of including land in the Green Belt (encroachment). Insufficient very special circumstances have been submitted as part of the application to outweigh the identified harm.
2. The development conflicts with Sections 12 and 13 of the NPPF and Policies GN3 and EN2 in the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD as the development fails to retain or enhance the landscape and open character of the area and results in an urbanised and discordant appearance to the detriment of visual amenity.
3. The development conflicts with Section 15 of the NPPF and Policies GN3, EN2 and EN3 of the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012 - 2027 DPD in that the scheme fails to provide mitigation or compensatory habitat creation for the loss of open space, meadowland and consequential loss in biodiversity on the site.
4. The development conflicts with Sections 8 and 9 of the NPPF and Policies GN3 and IF2 in the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD in that the provision of a vehicular access along a previous trim trail results in the loss of a safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle access around the campus to the detriment of achieving healthy lifestyles.
5. The development conflicts with Section 15 of the NPPF and Policy GN3 of the West Lancashire Local Plan DPD (2012-2027) in that the submission fails to provide adequate evidence to demonstrate that there would be no risk of pollution to ground water.