



Active
Travel
England

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Your Ref: 23/00244/OUT
Our Ref: ATE/23/00111/OUT
Date: 06 July 2023

Active Travel England Planning Response Detailed Response to an Application for Planning Permission

From: Planning & Development Division, Active Travel England

To: Melissa Webster, Halton Borough Council

Application Ref: 23/00244/OUT

Site Address: LAND AT CHAPEL LANE, WIDNES

Description of development: Outline planning application (with all matters other than access reserved) for the development of up to 350 dwellings and associated works including landscaping. Site access proposals are situated within Knowsley Borough Council authority area. Full permission for the access arrangements only, via a new junction on Chapel Lane, are to be determined by Knowsley Borough Council only. All other proposals are situated within Halton Borough Council authority area and all other matters are to be determined by Halton Borough Council only at Land At Chapel Lane Widnes Cheshire

Notice is hereby given that Active Travel England's formal recommendation is as follows:

- a. ~~**No Objection:** ATE has undertaken a detailed assessment of this application and is content with the submission.~~
- b. ~~**Conditional approval:** ATE recommends approval of the application, subject to the agreement and implementation of planning conditions and/or obligations as set out in this response.~~
- c. **Deferral:** ATE is not currently in a position to support this application and requests further assessment, evidence, revisions and/or dialogue as set out in this response.
- d. ~~**Refusal:** ATE recommends that the application be refused for the reasons set out in this response.~~

1.0 Background

Active Travel England welcomes the opportunity to comment on this outline application which is submitted with all matters reserved except access. The proposal site is located to the north-west of the Widnes urban area and is situated within the boundary of two separate site allocations for residential development in the adopted Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (2022) under Policy RD1.

The proposed vehicle access to the site would be via a new T-junction on Chapel Lane (to be determined by Knowsley Borough Council) whilst emergency access is proposed via Sandy Lane (to be determined by Halton Borough Council). The remainder of the outline proposals are to be determined by Halton Borough Council.

2.0 Summary

While it is acknowledged that much of this application is currently at outline stage, there remains strong potential for it to contribute more towards Active Travel, in particular by agreeing some key principles at this stage as outlined below. The means by which residents, employees and visitors to the development will access homes, local facilities and their place of work, together with how they undertake internal trips is of key concern. This will have a direct bearing upon the residual impacts of the development, but more importantly the health and lifestyles of future inhabitants of the development and the wider area. Following an assessment of the application, we would recommend that the Local Planning Authority (LPA) takes into account the following points:

3.0 Policy Considerations

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states:

104. Transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of... development proposals, so that:

c) opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued;

110. In assessing... specific applications for development, it should be ensured that:

- a) appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be – or have been – taken up, given the type of development and its location; [and]
- b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users

112. ...applications for development should:

- a) give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas...;
- b) address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport; [and]
- c) create places that... minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles...;

Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20) provides guidance to local authorities on delivering high quality cycle infrastructure.

Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking is the Government's cycling and walking plan for England. This sets the Government's vision for cycling and walking to be the natural first choice for many journeys with half of all journeys in towns and cities being cycled or walked by 2030, while also recognising that that school active travel can play a greater role in preventing obesity and supporting healthier weight. Active Travel England's responsibilities for walking also extend to "wheeling", such as the use of wheelchairs (self-propelled or powered) and mobility scooters.

Inclusive mobility: making transport accessible for passengers and pedestrians provides guidance on designing and improving the accessibility and inclusivity of public transport and pedestrian infrastructure.

Active Design (Sport England, supported by Active Travel England and the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities) sets out how the design of our environments can help people to lead more physically active and healthy lives.

4.0 Opportunities

- It is referenced in the TA / DAS / Planning Statement (para 5.57) that this site is intended to encourage active travel and reduce reliance on the car; this is welcomed
- Sandy Lane crosses the east of the site from north to south and is described as a high-quality active travel link which is subject to a Prohibition of Driving Order. It would however appear to be unlit and currently has no passive surveillance. This proposal presents an excellent opportunity to ensure that new dwellings face Sandy Lane, providing overlooking and passive surveillance and thereby enhancing personal safety. Lighting this route along its length should be considered in order to make it more widely accessible for active travel.
- Existing cycle routes such as Sandy Lane and that which crosses Queensbury Way just to the south of the proposal (Old Upton Lane to Upton Lane) currently appear to have barriers in place that would prevent the use of these by non-standard cycles such as adapted tricycles or cargo bikes, or a standard cycle pulling a trailer, notwithstanding making access awkward for all other cyclists and mobility scooters. These should be removed or replaced in order to ensure that these routes are inclusive and accessible to all cycles (LTN 1/20 8.3)
- Queensbury Way is marked as a shared walking and cycling route and has a shared path running north to south on the eastern edge of the carriageway. This route could be useful to access Widnes rail station and other local amenities. Given that it is apparently intended to increase the use of this route by residents of the proposed development, confirmation is required that this route will meet the requirements of LTN 1/20 (5.5) which states that shared used facilities are not favoured by either pedestrians or cyclists, particularly when flows are high. Shared use facilities may only be appropriate in some situations (LTN 1/20 6.6.5). Confirmation that this important route is considered appropriate is required.
- The proposed new vehicular access point crossing Sandy Lane will ensure that active travel modes have priority; this is welcomed. The detailed design of this must also ensure that those using Sandy Lane are visible to drivers of vehicles crossing it. This should be made clear when drafting planning conditions to accompany any future consent for this site.

- An on-plot cycle space is proposed for each dwelling; this should be secure and appropriate to the size of the dwelling to ensure that all residents are able to accommodate a bicycle in line with the standards set out in the Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan. Accommodation of non-standard cycles should also be considered.
- The Masterplan suggests that there is potential to provide links through to adjoining allocated land and highlights these on the plan; these future links must be provided for wherever possible to ensure good connectivity.
- The Travel Plan states that new residents will be provided with 'access to a transport hub'; further details of what this includes are essential at this stage..
- The Travel Plan mentions a sustainable travel voucher potentially being provided to each household to the first occupiers of each development which could for example be used to by a bus season ticket or towards the purchase of a bicycle or walking equipment. Confirmation of this and the proposed amount would be welcomed.
- The Travel Plan suggests that new residents could take part in a 'Walking Bus' for school children; clarification is required as to who would take responsibility for coordinating it in the first instance.

5.0 Areas for concern

- The application outlines aspirations to encourage active travel and reduce reliance on the car. However, it is considered that the Travel Plan lacks ambition in this respect due to the relatively low targets that are set within it. Walking has a target of 5% mode share at Year 5 (from a baseline of 1%) while cycling has a target of 4% (from a baseline of 1%). Driving is proposed to reduce to 71% mode share from 80%. Given the location of this development and the aspirations stated elsewhere in the application as above, these targets appear to be considerably low.
- It is considered that Chapel Lane presents a particularly hostile environment for walking as a result of its considerably narrow footway, and also cycling in particular due to the nature of the route and the lack of protection from motor traffic, which the TA confirms (from survey data) as travelling regularly above the 30mph speed limit (average speed 34mph). These speeds substantially reduce the ability of a victim of a collision to avoid being seriously hurt, and the presence of a new ghost island junction alone is unlikely to alter driver behaviour in such a way that will make this route attractive for pedestrians and cyclists.
- It is also noted that Chapel Lane is identified as a Community Speedwatch area due to local concerns around this issue. It is therefore requested whether any opportunities for traffic calming been explored by the local authority in order to improve safety and further encourage active travel along this route and what discussions have been held with the applicant in view of the additional movement demands generated by the proposed development.
- ATE considers that it is in this context in which the proposed junction to the development needs to be considered.

6.0 Next Steps

This advice should be provided to the LPA case officer and forwarded to the agent and applicant. ATE would be content to review further submitted information to help address the above identified deficits with a view to providing a further response and recommended wording for planning conditions and obligations.

