

Application Number 07/2017/1545/FUL

Address Land On The East and West Side Of
Watkin Lane
Lostock Hall
Lancashire

Applicant Haygrove Properties Ltd.

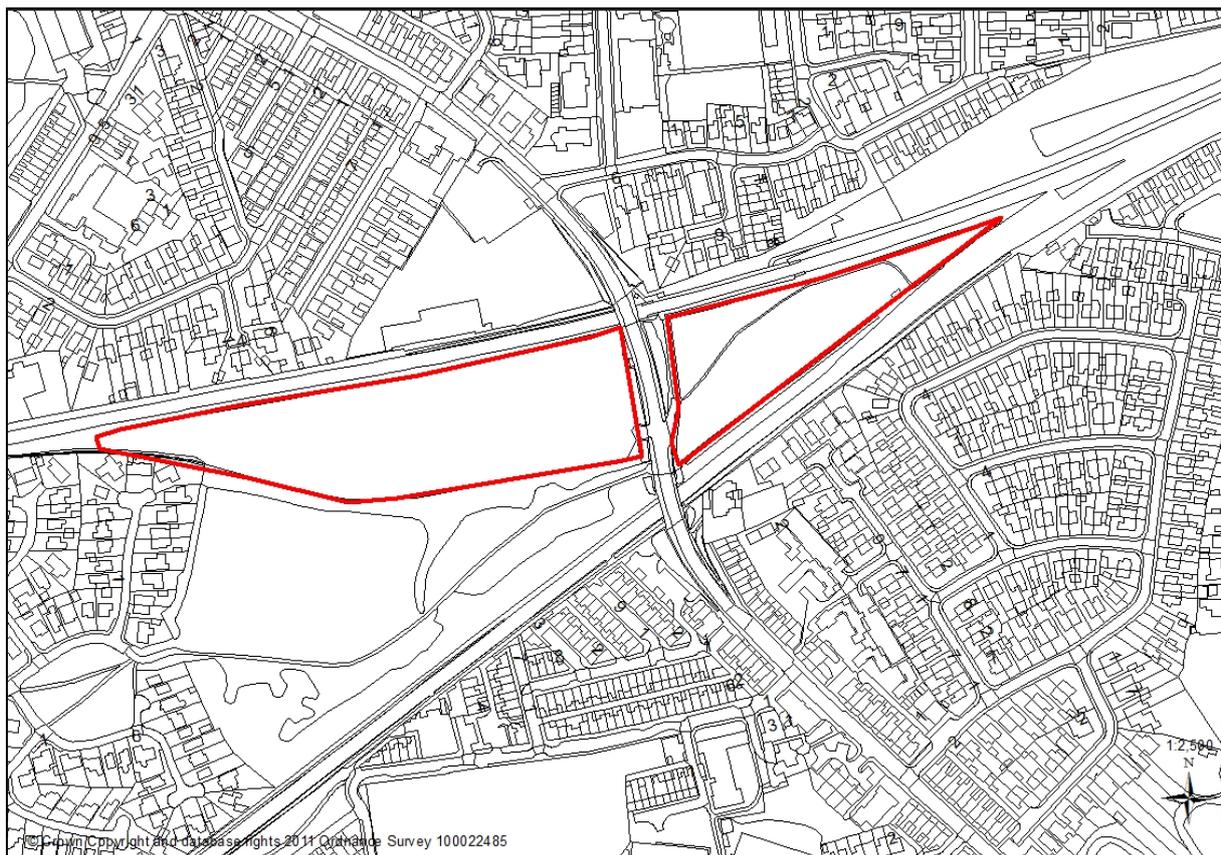
Agent Mr David Shepherd

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Development Change of use of land for storage of caravans
with alterations to access and erection new
fencing to the western site boundary

Officer Recommendation **Approval with Conditions**
Officer Name **Mr Mike Davies**

Date application valid 09.08.2017
Target Determination Date 08.11.2017
Extension of Time 16.11.2017



1. REPORT SUMMARY

1.1 The proposal seeks planning permission to use two sites on either side of Watkin Lane for the storage of caravans manufactured at the nearby Lunar Caravan factory. The sites will act as a storage facility for manufactured caravans to be stored prior to them being delivered to their final destination.

1.2 The two sites are designated as green infrastructure in the Local Plan, but are previously developed land having been used in association with the adjoining railway in the past. Whilst the proposal will have some visual impact on the locality, it is considered to protect green infrastructure and bio-diversity and nature conservation at the site. This should also be balanced with the retention of a long-standing employer in the area where they need to improve their capacity for open storage whilst still being in close proximity to the main centre of manufacturing operations at Sherdley Road and to the greater highway network.

1.3 The proposals will secure an opportunity to implement beneficial measures such as native landscape planting that will safeguard habitats for wildlife such as birds and bats, with the aim of providing a net gain in biodiversity in accordance with the principles of the NPPF, Core Strategy and Local Plan policies. It is therefore considered on balance that the proposal should be supported and it is recommended accordingly that planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

2. APPLICATION SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

2.1 The two sites consist of open land situated on either side of Watkin Lane (B5254), on the south of the humpback bridge adjacent Lostock Hall railway station and the north side of the hump back bridge which crosses the electrified mainline railway. The area of the two sites measures 2.82 hectares.

2.2 The site is divided into eastern and western sections by Watkin Lane. The larger western section formerly supported engine sheds and tracks associated with the adjacent railway, and now supports predominantly self-seeded shrubs and scrub, with areas of hardstanding and colonising unmanaged grass and short perennial vegetation. The eastern section of the site also supports self-seeded shrubs and scrub vegetation, however this vegetation has been established longer than at the western section of the site and numerous semi-mature trees are present.

2.3 The site is allocated as G7 Green Infrastructure on the Local Plan Policies Map and sits adjacent to a designated Wildlife Corridor G16.

2.4 On the northern side of the railway line on the western side is an existing caravan storage area associated with the applicant's business.

3. SITE HISTORY

3.1 There is no relevant planning history in relation to these two sites.

4. PROPOSAL

4.1 The proposal involves the use of land on both the eastern and western sides of Watkin Lane for the storage of caravans. As part of the proposals alterations to the access points on both sites will be undertaken to safeguard highway safety and new fencing will be erected to the western site boundary.

4.2 It is proposed that 200 caravans will be stored on the western site with a further 20 being accommodated on the eastern side of the road. The 5 caravan spaces on the eastern site which were originally located within the designated wildlife corridor have been deleted at officer's request and additional planting will take place to bolster the wildlife corridor in this area.

5. REPRESENTATIONS

5.1 10 representations have been received in relation to the proposal.

5.2 All the objectors raise concerns in relation to highway safety and reference is made to accident on 13 September by one objector which resulted in the police having to attend and direct traffic. There is reference to near misses in the area particularly where vehicles stop to set down or pick up passengers from the station and there is a fear that the introduction of slow moving vehicles being towed in and out of the two sites will exacerbate the perceived danger further.

5.3 Increased congestion around the bridge and station resulting in further delays and interference with the free flow of traffic in the area.

5.4 Concern has been expressed by several people at the loss of trees on the site.

5.5 One objector states that over production of caravans by the applicant is driving the proposal.

5.6 One objector has raised the issue of increased noise pollution resulting from the use of the site.

5.7 Two objectors have expressed concern that if planning permission is granted for the use then the Local Planning Authority will not be able to effectively police the site and the use will expand to cover the whole site in future.

5.8 One objector has raised concern that caravans maybe occupied in future and refers to the site previously being used by travellers and the problems this caused.

6. CONSULTATION REPLIES

6.1 **County Highways** – No objections to the proposals. The Manual for Streets which is a joint Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG) and Department for Transport (DfT) publication advocates sightlines of

6.2 **Arborist** – No objections.

6.3 **Ecology** – The information submitted with the application includes an Ecology Survey and Assessment. This survey has been undertaken by an experienced ecological consultancy whose work is known to the Ecology Unit. Overall the survey found the site to have some potential to support protected species. After further survey work no evidence of protected species being present on site was found. With this in mind and subject to the imposition of conditions relating to protection of bird nesting habitat, invasive species removal, lighting design, biodiversity enhancement there are no objections to the proposals.

6.4 **Network Rail** – No comments received.

7. MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Policy Considerations

7.1 NPPF

7.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework advocates a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In relation to this proposal Core Principle 1 – Building a Strong, Competitive Economy (Paragraphs 18 – 21) and Core Principle 11 – Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment (Paragraphs 109 – 114, 117 – 118).

7.1.2 Paragraphs 18 – 21 of the NPPF make it abundantly clear that the Government is committed to supporting sustainable economic development through the planning system. Planning should operate to encourage growth rather than act as an impediment, therefore significant weight should be placed on the support for economic growth in the planning process.

7.1.3 Paragraphs 109 – 114 states that the planning system should support and enhance the natural environment. Planning policies and decisions should encourage the effective use of land by re-using land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value. It goes on to say that LPA's should set criteria against which to judge proposals affecting landscape areas and make distinctions between their importance so that protection afforded is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.

7.1.4 Paragraph 117 – 118 states that to minimise impacts on bio-diversity and geo-diversity planning policies should identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them. When determining planning applications, LPA's should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by mitigating any significant harm resulting from a development that cannot be avoided. Opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged;

7.2 CORE STRATEGY

7.2.1 Core Strategy Policy 18 promotes managed and improved environmental resources through a Green Infrastructure approach to protect and enhance the natural environment where it already provides economic, social and environmental benefits. Investment in and improvement of the natural environment, particularly where it contributes to the creation of green wedges and the utilisation of other green open spaces that can provide natural extensions into the countryside. Finally, secure mitigation and/or compensatory measures where development would lead to the loss of, or damage to, part of the Green Infrastructure network.

7.2.2 In the case of these two sites, they are brownfield sites that have been abandoned since last used as railway yards. They are *not* used for either sport, leisure or recreation and are, in fact, private lands, although access has obviously been gained to them (the western side more so than the eastern side). The proposal would see the retention of large areas of trees to assist with both screening and to aid bio-diversity at the site.

7.2.3 Core Strategy Policy 22: seeks to conserve, protect and identify opportunities to enhance and manage the biological and geological assets of the area, through promoting the conservation and enhancement of biological diversity, having particular regard to the favourable condition, restoration and re-establishment of priority habitats and species populations; Seeking opportunities to conserve, enhance and expand ecological networks; Safeguarding geological assets that are of strategic and local importance.

7.2.4 The site does not enjoy any statutory protection, just local designation in the local plan. That is not to say that it is not important to consider the change of use proposed and how it

would impact on the site. The submitted Ecological Survey does not identify any protected habitats or species at the site. The proposal does however present an opportunity of bringing about a managed approach to the two sites in respect of their continuing maintenance and realising net gains in bio-diversity at the sites. The large number of trees at the sites would be maintained and would afford a degree of screening to the proposed use. The proposal is not considered to be harmful to this policy objective.

7.3 SOUTH RIBBLE LOCAL PLAN 2012 - 2026

7.3.1 Policy G7 – Development proposals should seek to protect and enhance the existing green infrastructure. Development which would involve the loss of green infrastructure will not be permitted unless alternative provision or similar and/or better facilities for the community will be implemented on another site or within the locality; it can be demonstrated that the retention of the site is not required to satisfy a recreational need in the local area; and the development would not detrimentally affect the amenity value and the nature conversation value of the site.

7.3.2 The application is for a change of use with minimal physical development taking place. The proposal would mean that the land can be managed more effectively (whereas it currently is not) and existing good quality trees (though most are self-seeded sycamores) would be retained and maintained to ensure a degree of screening to the site with additional structured planting also being incorporated as part of the proposal.

7.3.3 The proposed change of use does not result in the loss of Green Infrastructure and would ensure that it was maintained and managed by the applicant. The whole parts of the two sites are *not* being proposed as caravan storage. Trees would be retained to boundaries and to the narrow, pointed ends of the two sites and only the more central areas would be used for storage of caravans. In that sense, the proposal would protect and enhance the site as it would introduce a management regime to the overall care of the sites. There is no recreational use of the site at present and the ecology report concludes that there would be no detriment to the nature conservation value of the site by the proposal. As such, there is not considered to be any conflict with the policy requirements.

7.3.4 Policy G13 seeks to protect existing trees and woodland from inappropriate development and also to mitigate where its loss is unavoidable. In this particular case there will be some loss of mainly self-seeded sycamores, but these will be replaced with native species planting elsewhere on the site to mitigate for this loss which will result in a gain in terms of both site management and bio-diversity. Appropriate management measures will be required to be implemented to protect newly planted and existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows.

7.3.5 Policy G16 is concerned with the borough's Biodiversity and Ecological Network resources and their protection, conservation and enhancement. The level of protection will be commensurate with the site's status and proposals will be assessed having regard to the site's importance and the contribution it makes to wider ecological networks.

7.3.6 In the case of this proposal, the site does not enjoy any statutory protection, just a designation in the local plan. That is not to say that it is not important to consider the change of use proposed and how it would impact on the site. The proposal could be seen as a way of bringing about a managed approach to the two sites in respect of their continuing maintenance and bringing about net gains in bio-diversity at the sites.

7.4 Supplementary Planning Document

7.4.1 Central Lancashire Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Supplementary Planning Document provides more detailed guidance in relation to the interpretation of the above policies and expectations in terms of the quality of submissions and mitigation measures.

7.4.2 The site is allocated as Green Infrastructure as identified above. That said the proposal is for caravan storage only and does not involve any permanent buildings or structures being erected on the site. The nature of the use therefore means that any fauna currently using the site will still be able to do so and use provides an opportunity to better manage the flora on the site and adjacent to create a better habitat for native species, whilst at the same time providing an opportunity to eradicate invasive species from the site.

7.5 Highways

7.5.1 As mentioned previously the two sites are situated between two humpback bridges which cross railway lines. Therefore visibility from the access/egress is of primary importance from a highway point of view and this has been a source of concern raised in the objections received in relation to the proposal. Watkin Lane has a double white centreline marking between the two bridges at this location, prohibiting overtaking.

7.5.2 The applicant envisages that the caravans to be stored on the site would come from the Lunar Caravan Factory on Sherdley Road. The route from the factory to the storage area would therefore be Sherdley Road/ A582 Farrington Road/ Watkin Lane. Caravans being collected from the storage area would use Watkins Lane and leave in either direction on the A582 depending on their ultimate destination.

7.5.3 The delivery and collection of caravans would not use the section of Watkin Lane to the north of the sites. The access/egress point would not accommodate arrival and departure movements of a car/caravan combination to/from the north. The applicant has indicated that he would be prepared to accept a condition if necessary restricting vehicles towing caravans in a northerly direction when leaving the site, however the Highway Authority have not asked for this and enforcing such a condition could be problematic, therefore it is not considered prudent to impose such a condition given the views of the Highway Authority.

7.5.4 As a result of the views expressed by objectors and in light of an alleged accident that occurred after the initial consultation response was received from the County Council Highway Engineer, officers requested that the advice be reviewed in light of representations received. The County Highway Engineer has subsequently reviewed his earlier comments along with the accident data which does not show the alleged incident that took place on 13th September and is satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements for sight visibility laid down in the Manual for Streets.

7.5.5 The western site has an existing access directly onto Watkin Lane. The proposal includes radius improvements on the southern side. Gates will be set back 15 metres from the back of the Watkins Lane footway so that a vehicle and caravan would be able to stop whilst the gates are opened without hindering use of the footway.

7.5.6 The eastern site which has a much smaller capacity would be accessed from the existing access road which also serves the station. No alterations are proposed to the access road junction with Watkin Lane although the gates at the end of the access road would need to be widened to provide easy entry/exit to/from the site.

7.5.7 Visibility splays of 2.4 x 43 metres (suitable for the speed limit of 30mph), is achievable at each access point onto Watkin Lane between the two railway bridges. The bridges themselves would not obstruct the visibility splays. The visibility splays would also be totally within the highways boundary.

7.5.8 Swept path plots of a car and caravan (the largest size manufactured by Lunar Caravans) entering and exiting each site have been submitted as part of the supporting evidence with the application and these indicate that there is adequate manoeuvring space

available to allow a car and caravan to enter/exit the sites in a single movement without hindering the free flow of other traffic along Watkin Lane.

7.5.9 The number of arrivals/departures of car and caravan combinations and towing vehicles will be determined by the maximum production facilities at the factory and how caravans ready for collection will be removed from the storage facility. These activities will be spread over a typical working day and the number in any particular 60 minute period will be so low that there would never be any capacity issue on any section of the route between the factory and storage compounds.

7.6 Ecology

7.6.1 The application was accompanied by a supporting ecology survey and assessment of the site. The results of this found no evidence to suggest that protected species were present on the site after further survey work in relation to the potential for slow worms was undertaken. The survey also makes recommendations for the measures for biodiversity enhancement in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework for bats, birds and landscape planting. These improvements can be secured by way of conditions.

7.6.2 The proposals will have no adverse effect on statutory or non-statutory designated sites. There are no semi-natural or species-rich habitats within the site, and no rare plant species are present. The habitats within the site identified are common and widespread across lowland Britain and are typical of the unmanaged conditions present. No areas qualify as Priority Habitat.

7.6.3 The self-seeded scrub vegetation and trees are of local value as they provide habitat connectivity and structural diversity in an area surrounded by built development. Recommendations for the retention, where possible, of trees and shrubs are presented in the ecology report, and recommendations to ensure that habitat connectivity across the site is not severed by the proposed development are also made.

7.6.4 As vegetation is being removed it is important that this is done in a controlled manner and at a time which does not impact on nesting birds, this issue can be dealt with via condition. Lighting of the site also needs to be carefully considered to ensure it does not impact on bats roosting and feeding sites.

7.6.5 An extensive stand of Japanese Knotweed is present within the eastern section of the site, as well as a single stand of Montbretia. Both are invasive species as listed on Schedule 9 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended). It is an offence to cause the spread of these species in the wild and therefore a condition requiring a remediation strategy to deal with this issue will need to be agreed and implemented this can be done via an appropriate condition.

7.6.6 The site provides suitable habitat for slow-worm, and a record of slow-worm is reported 110 metres to the north-west of the site. The railway line which lies immediately adjacent to the northern site boundary provides suitable connectivity between the site and the known record, however further survey work undertaken did not uncover any further evidence to suggest slow worms were present on either site.

7.6.7 The trees, shrubs and scrub on site and around the periphery provide foraging and nesting habitat for passerine bird species, and also suitable habitat for foraging bats. Recommendations for the protection of nesting birds, and for enhancement of habitats for birds and bats are presented in the ecological report.

7.6.8 The proposal is therefore considered to be feasible and acceptable in accordance with ecological considerations and relevant planning policy. Proposals to store caravans at the site will provide an opportunity to secure ecological enhancement for wildlife.

7.7 Trees and Landscaping

7.7.1 None of the existing trees on the site are subject to a Tree Preservation Order and with many being self-seeded and not worthy of such protection. The Local Authority's Arborist has raised no objections to the proposal. The proposed development would require the removal of some trees, but additional structured planting to provide screening along the western site boundary with the railway line is proposed. This is considered to be acceptable mitigation as it will result in an overall increase in tree cover across the two sites.

7.8 Drainage

7.8.1 There is not proposed to be any change to the surface of the proposed storage areas - they are free draining at present (in effect soaking away in to the existing ground) and the siting of caravans for storage on the lands will not alter this. No new areas of hardstanding(s) are to be laid as part of this proposal.

7.9 Economic Impact

7.9.1 The site is required to provide additional storage capacity for caravans manufactured in the locality by Lunar Caravans. The company act as an important source of local employment employing 400 employees at their site. The caravans will be manufactured and then stored on the two sites until they are dispatched to retailers. The applicant has stated that as a result of the proposal a further 4 full time jobs will be created.

7.9.2 The applicant has indicated that the change of use of the lands concerned, would ensure the retention of the business in the area for the foreseeable future. This would free-up land at Sherdley Road (currently overrun with caravan storage) leading to a more well run business operation that can plan its future more efficiently.

7.9.3 The change of use at the sites as proposed (and with the existing manufacturing operations in Sherdley Road) would ensure job security for existing staff and good potential for new jobs to be created and is considered to assist in the economic role of sustainable development as discussed at paragraph 7 of the NPPF.

7.10 Other Issues

7.10.1 There is to be no security lighting (or columns) and no CCTV installation proposed as part of the scheme although fencing will secure both compounds.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Taking into account all National and Local Policy issues and other material considerations it is felt that on balance the proposal should be supported. The proposal will assist a major local employer in planning for the future and help to safeguard employment in the area. In addition, the proposal also presents an opportunity to deal with invasive species and to make a positive contribution to the bio-diversity of the sites and their surrounding by introducing native species of trees and plants as well as a management regime which currently doesn't exist. Taking these factors into account it is considered that overall the proposal; will have a positive impact in the long term.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approval with Conditions.

RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS:

1. The development hereby permitted must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

REASON: Required to be imposed pursuant to Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. The development, hereby permitted, shall be carried out in accordance with the submitted approved plans Dwg 2816 102 Rev A, 2816 103 Rev A, 2816 104 Rev A

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory standard of development

3. The use hereby permitted shall be for caravan storage only and the caravans shall not be occupied for residential purposes.

REASON: The occupation of the caravans for residential purposes is an unacceptable form of development which is contrary to the objectives of Policy G7 of the South Ribble Local Plan 2012-2026 and Policy 18 of the Central Lancashire Core Strategy.

4. Visibility splays of 2.4 metres by 43 metres at the junction of the site access and Watkins Lane shall be provided and maintained free from vegetation and other obstructions above 600mm in height at all times during the development and thereafter.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety as required by Policy G17 in the South Ribble Local Plan 2012-2026

5. No part of the development shall be occupied or brought into use until the vehicular access hereby approved has been constructed in accordance with the approved plans and is available for vehicular use.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policy G17 in the South Ribble Local Plan 2012-2026

6. Before the amended accesses are used for vehicular purposes, that part of the access extending from the adopted highway boundary for a minimum distance of 15m into the site shall be appropriately paved in tarmacadam, concrete, block pavements, or other approved materials.

REASON: To prevent loose surface material from being carried on to the public highway thus causing a potential source of danger to other road users.

7. No external flood lighting or security lighting shall be installed at the development hereby approved without first obtaining the written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To safeguard the amenity and character of the area and to safeguard the living conditions of nearby residents and to accord with Policy 17 in the Central Lancashire Core Strategy

8. The approved landscaping scheme shall be implemented in the first planting season following completion of the development or first occupation/use, whichever is the soonest, and shall be maintained thereafter for a period of not less than 5 years to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority, in compliance with BS 5837 2012 - Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction - Recommendations. This maintenance shall include the watering, weeding, mulching and adjustment and removal of stakes and support systems, and shall include the replacement of any tree or shrub which is removed, becomes seriously damaged, seriously diseased or dies by the same species. The replacement tree or shrub must be of similar size to that originally planted.

REASON: In the interests of the amenity of the area in accordance with Policy 17 in the Central Lancashire Core Strategy, Policy G13 and Policy G17 in the South Ribble Local Plan 2012-2026

9. The screen fencing shown on the approved plans shall be erected prior to the first occupation of buildings or the commencement of the use and retained thereafter.

REASON: To ensure the provision and retention of adequate screening in the interest of amenity and to accord with Policy 17 of the Central Lancashire Core Strategy and Policy G17 in the South Ribble Local Plan 2012-2026

10. Prior to the commencement of development, a detailed method statement for the removal or long-term management /eradication of invasive plants, as identified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The method statement shall include proposed measures to prevent the spread of invasive plants during any operations such as mowing, strimming or soil movement. It shall also contain measures to ensure that any soils brought to the site are free of the seeds / root / stem of any invasive plant covered under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Development shall proceed in accordance with the approved method statement.

REASON: The spread of invasive plants is prohibited under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Without measures to prevent spread as a result of the development there would be the risk of an offence being committed and avoidable harm to the environment recurs

RELEVANT POLICY

NPPF - National Planning Policy Framework

Core Strategy Policy 18 - Green Infrastructure

Core Strategy Policy 22 - Biodiversity and Geodiversity

South Ribble Local Plan Policy G7 - Green Infrastructure Existing Provision

South Ribble Local Plan Policy G13 - Trees, Woodlands and Development

South Ribble Local Plan Policy G16 - Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

Supplementary Planning Document 6 - Central Lancs Bio-Diversity

Note:

1. Lancashire County Council Crossing Note

The applicant is advised that the new access, will need to be constructed under an appropriate legal agreement. The Highway Authority hereby reserves the right to provide the highway works within the highway associated with this proposal. Provision of the highway works includes design, procurement of the work by contract and supervision of the works. The applicant is advised to contact Lancashire County Council before works begin on site. Further information and advice can be found at www.lancashire.gov.uk

2. Hedgehog informative note

In order to retain habitat connectivity for Species of Principal Importance, such as amphibians and hedgehogs, boundary treatments should be raised from ground level by 0.15 to 0.20 metre or suitably sized gaps should be left at strategic points.
