CASE OFFICER'S REPORT

PL/2023/07415

Proposed building that will securely house the National Trust Stourhead mobility equipment and access aids and accommodate the associated personnel to staff and administer the mobility equipment demonstration and free hire.

Stourhead Visitor Centre, Stourton, Wiltshire, BA12 6QF

Date of Inspection: **15/9/23**
Date site notice posted: **15/9/23**
Advert, publicity and site notice expiry **6/10/23**

POLICIES

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and NPPG

Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS):
Core Policy 1: Settlement Strategy
Core Policy 2: Delivery Strategy
Core Policy 50: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
Core policy 51: Landscape
Core Policy 57: Ensuring high quality design and place shaping
Core Policy 58: Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
Sections 66 and 72

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010,
EC Habitats Directive when as prescribed by Regulation 3(4) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended).
Circular 06/2005

AONB Management Plan

Main Planning Issues:

1. Principle of the development
2. Layout, siting, scale, design and impact on the settings of designated heritage assets and the AONB.
3. Trees and Archaeology
4. Neighbouring amenity
5. Lighting

REPRESENTATIONS :

Conservation – No objection
Archaeology – No objection subject to conditions
Historic England – no comment

Parish Council – no objection

Stourton with Gasper Parish Council has no objection to the proposed building of a mobility and access aids store with the condition that this is retained for this use only and does not permit the sale of hot food from the unit in the future due to risk of cooking smell adversely affecting the residents of the neighbouring Old

School House. The Parish Council also request that a condition is applied to retain the tree screening from the Old School House in order to protect the residents.

Neighbours – none received

SITE HISTORY: Please refer to full site history. None relevant to this part of the site.

ASSESSMENT:

The proposal affects an area of grass to the north of the visitor centre building. The area is enclosed by trees and shrubs on two sides, with an open face towards the visitor building and car park. To the north, and separated by the trees, is the garden for The Old School Cottage.

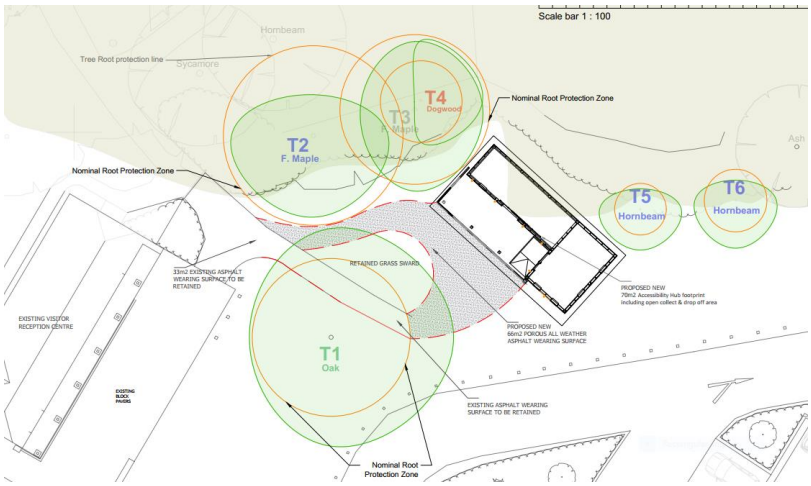
The site lies within the Conservation Area and outside the listed park and garden. The application site lies within the AONB and Flood Zone 1.

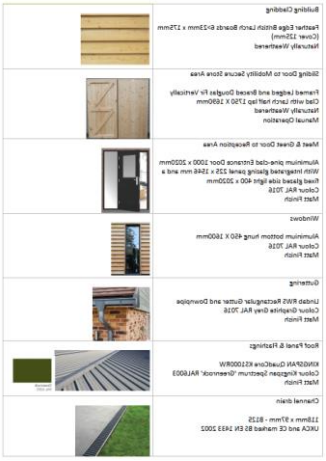




Proposals:

The applicant is seeking to erect a single storey timber clad building to house mobility equipment.





Materials

The Accessibility Hub aims to provide visitors with mobility restrictions and disabilities with a welcoming environment to collect, utilise and return a range of mountain trikes, wheelchairs, and trampers, ensuring equal access to the features of Stourhead are available for visitors who do not have the means to bring their own mobility equipment and access aids. An all weather porous surface would connect the building to the visitor centre exit to enable guests to access and return equipment.



The amenity lawn area within the site is not considered to be of any significant ecological value. Whilst there are a number of trees along the edges of the site, the proposed building is located outside their root protection areas. One low quality Dogwood tree is proposed for removal.

The applicant considers:

The proposed development should be viewed as an ancillary addition to the existing visitor centre facilities and main car park. The site is currently a level grassed area with no heritage value and incorporates an unused section of the tarmac path with a dead end. By utilising the current path and erecting a new building of quality design and materials, it is considered that the development represents an enhancement of this part of the Conservation Area. The new building will also provide significant public benefits through the increased provision of mobility vehicles and a dedicated reception area for mobility users.

The proposed location has been selected for its ease of access along the current visitor entry and exit flow to avoid tree root zone interference and utilise as much existing wearing surface as possible.

MAIN PLANNING ISSUES

The application must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. (Section 70(2) of the Town and Country planning Act and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compensation Act 2004).

The NPPF confirms in para 11 that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable. For decision making, that means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.

Principle of the development

The National Planning Policy Framework supports a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The Conservation policies of the local plan and the NPPF seek to ensure that the existing character of the listed building and the settings of nearby listed buildings would not be harmed and the existing character of the Conservation Area would be preserved or enhanced. The NPPF states:

Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting.

Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

Core Policy 58 aims to ensure that Wiltshire's important monuments, sites and landscapes and areas of historic and built heritage significance are protected and enhanced in order that they continue to make an important contribution to Wiltshire's environment and quality of life. Heritage assets include Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

Wiltshire Core Strategy Core Policy 51 states that *Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures.*

The National Planning Policy Framework states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes which include AONBs. Furthermore it should be recognised that the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' does not automatically apply within AONBs, as confirmed by paragraph 11 footnote 7, due to other policies relating to AONBs elsewhere within the Framework. It also states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in these areas.

The proposals submitted are for improvements to the existing visitor facilities for the National Trust and the site lies within the existing visitor reception and car park area. The development is acceptable in *principle*, subject to the detailed requirements of these policies, as discussed below.

2. Layout, siting, scale, design and impact on the setting of designated heritage assets and the AONB.

Heritage:

The NPPF and CP58 seek to ensure that the significance of heritage assets, including their settings, are not harmed by development. The development is not considered to harm the setting of the Conservation Area or the listed Park and Garden. The development would be likely to improve the operation and accessibility of the visitor attraction. The Conservation officer has raised no objection:

The proposed building would be modest in scale and sited next to the existing visitor centre and carpark. I do not consider the proposals would adversely affect the setting of any designated heritage assets (LBs) and would have a neutral impact on the Stourton CA. The site is outside the RPG garden but would not adversely affect its setting. Nevertheless, I recommend HE are consulted. I recommend a condition to require approval of materials unless they are willing to provide a schedule upfront. As such, I consider the proposals are in accordance with Sections 66 and 72 of the PLBCA Act, Chapter 16 of the NPPF and core policy 58.

Historic England have made no comment in response to the application. A materials schedule has been provided and illustrates the proposed natural weatherboarding for the walls and the matt green metal roof. The proposed materials are acceptable and can be conditioned.

Landscape impact:

The NPPF, CP51, CP57 and the AONB Management Plan set out the design and landscape considerations for the development. Great weight is attached to the importance of the AONB and its setting in this

determination.

The siting of the single storey building coupled with the sensitive use of timber feather edged boarding for the walls and a green metal roof is considered to result in a development that would be appropriate within its natural setting. The building would be suitably located within the group of trees close to the visitor centre and connected by a new path. No landscape objection is raised, in accordance with CP51 and CP57.

In conclusion, it is considered that the proposal would comply with Core Policy 58 and would not harm the significance or settings of designated heritage assets. The proposal is considered to *protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character* and would not *have a harmful impact upon landscape character.* The proposals would therefore be in accordance with Wiltshire Core Strategy Core Policy 58, 57, 51 and NPPF para 11.

3. Trees and archaeology

Trees

The site is within the Conservation Area and the trees are protected by this status. A semi-mature to early-mature Oak (T1), with a low, broad crown is the feature tree in the lawn between the visitor's centre and the exit drive from the car park. North of the Oak is an informal belt of Dogwood shrubs (S7) which include 2 early-mature Field Maples (T2 & T3) affording a verdant backdrop to the proposal. A poor-quality, suppressed Dogwood (T4) of negligible merit grows adjacent to the Field Maple T3. To the east of the proposed accessibility hub are 2 young Hornbeams (T5 & T6) with good potential. An AIA, Tree Survey and Arb Method Statement have been submitted. The report summarises:





•One low quality Dogwood tree (T4), is proposed for removal. Whilst not essential to facilitate the construction of the accessibility hub, it is a weak, suppressed tree, barely visible and of negligible merit. Its removal will improve the crown development of the adjacent Field Maple (T3). The footprint of the proposed accessibility hub encroaches into the informal belt of Dogwood shrubs. A small section of this shrub mass (S7 - as shown in red on the Tree Protection Plan) is to be grubbed out to facilitate construction but will have negligible impact following construction of the hub.
•Light crown lifting of T1 (secondary and tertiary branches only) over the proposed new asphalt wearing surface.
• Light selective reduction of lateral branches on T3 to reduce load on a weak branch and provide clearance from the proposed hub.
• Light crown lifting of T5 to enable erection of protective barriers.
• The layout has been designed to ensure that the footprint of the proposed accessibility hub, hardstanding and new asphalt wearing surface are all outside of the RPAs of retained trees. With temporary protective barriers and ground protection panels installed prior to construction, there shall be no encroachment or harm or any significance to the rooting environment of these trees.
• There shall be no alterations to the ground levels within the RPAs of any retained tree. Underground services (electricity & telecoms) can all be routed to the proposed accessibility hub either from the west or the south without any requirement for excavation within the RPA of retained trees. Stormwater from the roof of the accessibility hub can all be drained without any requirement for excavation within the RPA of retained trees. If a soakaway is required, there is ample space for its excavation and installation to the south-

east or south-west of the accessibility hub.

In conclusion, adherence to the principles embodied within the Arboricultural Method Statement should ensure that no harm would be caused to the retained trees and their rooting environments. Provided the recommendations in this report are followed, the arboricultural impact of this development on existing trees is expected to be minimal and acceptable.

Archaeology

Core Policy 58 aims to ensure that Wiltshire's important monuments, sites and landscapes and areas of historic and built heritage significance are protected and enhanced in order that they continue to make an important contribution to Wiltshire's environment and quality of life.
Heritage assets include Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. The Archaeologist commented:

This application is accompanied by an 'Archaeological Statement' (Talits, 24 August 2023) that sets out the archaeological potential of the location of the proposed new building at Stourhead. The Statement notes the discovery of a concentration of struck flint of Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic date (5,000 – 3,000 BC) within the area of the adjacent car park. The Statement concludes that it is likely that further pieces of prehistoric struck flint will be present within the footprint of this proposed new building, which may be lost during its construction. The Design and Access Statement (H-B Designs) therefore goes on to note (p. 4, third para.) that a written scheme of investigation (WSI) for an archaeological watching brief is being prepared to support this application.

Although no WSI accompanies this application and this is a modest development proposal, I agree that it would be precautionary to provide for an archaeological watching brief should this scheme be permitted. This is in view of the archaeological potential of the site set out in the 'Archaeological Statement'. This mitigation measure can be secured by an appropriately worded condition and the following is recommended.

4. Neighbouring amenity.

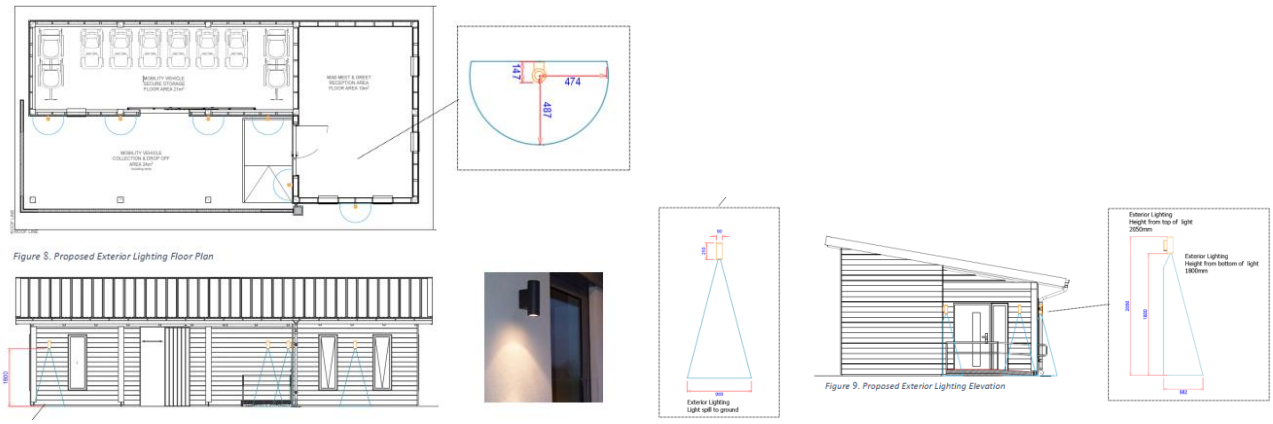
Core Policy 57 also states:

vii. Having regard to the compatibility of adjoining buildings and uses, the impact on the amenities of existing occupants, and ensuring that appropriate levels of amenity are achievable within the development itself, including the consideration of privacy, overshadowing; vibration; and pollution (such as light intrusion, noise, smoke, fumes, effluent, waste or litter)

The closest dwelling, The Old School Cottage, is to the north and separated by the trees. The Parish Council has suggested that the proposed building should be retained for its intended use only and should not be used for the sale of hot food from the unit in the future due to risk of cooking smell adversely affecting the residents of the neighbouring Old School House. The Parish Council also requested a condition to retain the tree screening from the Old School House in order to protect the residents' amenity. These conditions are reasonable and would be applied to ensure that the neighbouring amenities are protected. Other Residential properties are considered to be sufficiently distant from the site not to be disturbed by the development.

5. Lighting

The application is accompanied by a lighting scheme for the building. The proposed six external lights for the Accessibility Hub have been positioned under the roof overhang to ensure minimal light spill pollution. The lights will illuminate the collection and drop-off area, the ramp and the reception doorway. The PIR sensors will ensure they are only on when in use; the switched function allows the lights to be on when the users need them.



The case officer is therefore satisfied that the development would not result in any upward, obtrusive or unnecessary light spill and the downlights would only be lit by the sensors when the building is in use. No objection is raised on amenity or landscape impact grounds.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve

The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans listed in the schedule:

Location Plan ref DR-A-0000 dated 15/8/23
Proposed Site Plan ref DR-A-0002 dated 31/7/23
Accessibility Hub Structure (Plans and Elevations) ref DR-A-0005 dated 31/7/23
Building elevation treatments & materials on page 9 of Design and Access Statement dated August 2023
North East / South West Site Section ref DR-A-0003 dated 31/7/23
South East / North West Site Section ref DR-A-0004 dated 31/7/23
Design and Access Statement dated August 2023
Tree Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Arboricultural Method Statement by Astill Treecare Ltd and Appendices 1-7 REF: ATC/2023/699/B dated 28/8/23
Accessibility Hub Structure Lighting Plan and Specification ref DR-A-0006 dated 31/7/23

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

The materials for the accessibility hub building hereby approved shall be in accordance with the Building elevation treatments & materials on page 9 of Design and Access Statement dated August 2023 and maintained in that condition for the lifetime of the development.

Reason: In the interests of the character of the area and the significance of the setting of the Conservation Area.

Any new external light fixture within the site or on the building shall be installed and operated (by sensor) in accordance with the Accessibility Hub Structure Lighting Plan and Specification ref DR-A-0006 dated 31/7/23.

REASON: In the interests of the amenities of the AONB and its setting, to minimise unnecessary light spillage within the development site. To ensure that the lights are only on when the building is in use.

The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with Arboricutural Impact Assessment, Tree Protection Plan and Method Statement by Astill Treecare Ltd and Appendices 1-7 REF: ATC/2023/699/B dated 28/8/23.

Reason: To protect the root protection areas of retained trees adjacent to the site.

No development shall commence within the area indicated by the red line boundary on H-B Design's location plan, Drawing No. 276NTSH_HB_00_ZZ_DR_A_000, dated 15.08.2023' until:

a) A written programme of archaeological investigation, which should include on-site work and off-site work such as the analysis, publishing and archiving of the results, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority; and

b) The approved programme of archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To enable the recording of any matters of archaeological interest.

The accessibility hub building hereby approved shall not be used for the preparation or sale of hot food and drink.

Reason: In the interests of neighbouring amenity.

INFORMATIVES:

Archaeology

This is in accordance with Paragraph 205 of the NPPF which states that 'Local planning authorities should require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible'.

The watching brief should comprise the archaeological monitoring and recording of any ground works that have the potential to impact on buried archaeological remains. The programme of archaeological work will conclude with the preparation of a report on the results of the exercise.