

ITEM

Application Reference	DC/075511
Location:	548 Chester Road Woodford Stockport SK7 1PS
PROPOSAL:	Change of use of land and buildings from a car showroom to a church meeting hall together with elevational alterations to the building, external alterations to the layout of the site, erection of a 1m high timber fence and gates to the frontage and landscaping throughout the site.
Type Of Application:	Full Application
Registration Date:	17.12.2019
Expiry Date:	02.10.2020 (Extension of Time Agreed)
Case Officer:	Rebecca Whitney
Applicant:	Mobberley Development Limited
Agent:	Steven Abbott Associates

DELEGATION/COMMITTEE STATUS

The application was called up to the Area Committee by Cllr Bagnall.

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

The application proposes the change of use of a former car showroom to a Church meeting hall. Externally there would be minor alterations to the fenestration comprising cladding infill panels to reduce the size of the openings, and the installation of new windows.

Layout changes are proposed to the car parking areas around the site, and landscaping enhancements are proposed. The lawful use of the site permits the display of 41 vehicles for sale, whereas the application proposes 24 car parking spaces to be used in association with the church. The existing bollards (posts and spherical markers) to the front boundary are to be replaced with a low picket fence and gates, separated from the footpath with planting.

Church services are proposed as being Sunday – 6am and 3pm, Monday – 6.30pm and Friday – 7am. Each service would last approximately 1 hour to 1.5 hours with between 35 and 45 people attending. The application advises that the proposed place of worship will serve a locally (Woodford) based Christian Church Community and will be utilised for Church services, Church meetings, prayers, Bible readings, gospel sermons and related Church events only. The Church hall will be dedicated as a place of worship and will be used exclusively for those purposes – in particular the building would not be used for other non-secular activities, not associated with acts of prayer and worship.

The application is accompanied by a Planning Statement and a Noise Assessment.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The application site is located on the north side of Chester Road within the Green Belt. The existing building has a single storey only, with two distinct flat roofed elements. Externally the building is finished in silver cladding panels, brickwork and

white render. The site has a large car park to the front of the site which has previously been used for the display of cars for sale. There are existing car parking bays to the rear of the site.

The site is currently enclosed to Chester Road by low bollards (posts and spherical markers), whilst the side and rear boundaries are marked with wire mesh fencing and mature planting. An area to the rear of the site is covered by a Tree Preservation Order.

POLICY BACKGROUND

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (“PCPA 2004”) requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan includes-

- Policies set out in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan Review adopted 31st May 2006 which have been saved by direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
- Policies set out in the Stockport Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document adopted 17th March 2011 &
- Policies set out in the Woodford Neighbourhood Plan adopted in September 2019.

Saved policies of the SUDP Review

LCR1.1 Landscape Character Areas

GBA1.1 Extent of Green Belt

GBA1.2 Control of Development in Green Belt

CTF1.1 Development of Community Services and Facilities

LDF Core Strategy/Development Management policies

SD-1 Creating Sustainable Communities

SD-3 Delivering the Energies Opportunities Plan

SD-6 Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change

AED-6 Employment Sites Outside Protected Employment Areas

AS-2 Improving Indoor Sports, Community and Education Facilities and their Accessibility

CS8 Safeguarding & Improving the Environment

SIE-1 Quality Places

SIE-2 Provision of Recreation and Amenity Open Space in New Developments

SIE-3 Protecting, Safeguarding & Enhancing the Environment

CS9 Transport & Development

T-1 Transport & Development

T-2 Parking in Developments

T-3 Safety & Capacity on the Highway Network

Woodford Neighbourhood Plan

EMP2 Loss of Employment

EMP3 Use of Rural Buildings

ENV3: Protecting Woodford’s natural features

ENV4: Supporting biodiversity

COM1 Provision of New Community Facilities

DEV4 Design of New Development

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) initially published on 27th March 2012, subsequently revised and published in February 2019 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The revised National Planning Policy Framework will be a vital tool in ensuring that we get planning for the right homes built in the right places of the right quality at the same time as protecting our environment.

N.B. In respect of decision-taking the revised NPPF constitutes a "material consideration".

Para.1 "The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied".

Para.2 "Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise".

Para.7 "The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development".

Para.8 "Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

- a) an economic objective
- b) a social objective
- c) an environmental objective"

Para.11 "Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

For decision-taking this means:

c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or

ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole".

Para.12 ".....Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but

only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed”.

Para.38 “Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way..... Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible”.

Para.47 “Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible, and within statutory timescales unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing”.

Para.109 “Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.”

Para.110 “Within this context, applications for development should:

- a) give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport, with layouts that maximise the catchment area for bus or other public transport services, and appropriate facilities that encourage public transport use;
- b) address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport;
- c) create places that are safe, secure and attractive – which minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, avoid unnecessary street clutter, and respond to local character and design standards;
- d) allow for the efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles; and
- e) be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.”

Para.124 “The creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities”.

Para.127 “Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users⁴⁶; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.”

Para.130 “Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development”.

Para.133 “The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. 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”.

Para.134 “Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land”.

Para.141 “Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land”.

Para.143 “Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances”.

Para.144 “When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. “Very special circumstances” will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations”.

Para.146 “Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

d) the reuse of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction

e) material changes in the use of land.

Para.170 “Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.”

Para.180 “Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they should:

- a) mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise from new development – and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life;
- b) identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason; and
- c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.”

Para.213 “existing policies should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted or made prior to the publication of this Framework. Due weight should be given to them, according to their degree of consistency with this Framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)”.

Planning Practice Guidance

The Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) is a web-based resource which brings together planning guidance on various topics into one place (launched in March 2014) and coincided with the cancelling of the majority of Government Circulars which had previously given guidance on many aspects of planning.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Reference: DC/070638; Type: FUL; Address: Chrome, 548 Chester Road, Woodford, Stockport, SK7 1PS, ; Proposal: Erection of a single storey office/waiting area to be associated with the MOT building.; Decision Date: 11-OCT-18; Decision: Granted

Reference: DC/023160; Type: FUL; Address: Former Woodford Service Station, Chester Road, Woodford, Stockport, SK7 1PS; Proposal: Change of use from petrol station for display of motor vehicles with external alterations; Decision Date: 03-AUG-06; Decision: Refused. Appeal reference APP/C4235/A/07/2037292 allowed the development subject to conditions.

NEIGHBOUR'S VIEWS

The receipt of this application has been advertised by way of a site notice. The occupiers of 14 neighbouring properties have also been notified in writing. The consultation responses received are summarised below.

3 objections raise concerns regarding the following:

- Submission does not address neighbourhood plan, protected trees, heritage assets, loss of employment use.
- Inaccuracies in submission.
- Noise and disturbance.
- Existing nearby church.
- Serves limited community.

Further comments welcome recognition of the protected trees, the moving of the gates and additional landscaping. Concerns were raised regarding the submitted noise assessment. Concerns remain regarding car parking.

2 neutral comments were received, which commented as follows:

- Asked that the information in the application form regarding vehicle parking, trees and hedges is considered.
- This application seems to be the similar to one submitted to Cheshire East Council Ref:16/3931M by the same development company. In that application which was declined they had allowed for 100 car parking spaces. How are they going to manage the parking at this location which is much smaller than their proposed site in Mobberley.

2 letters of support were received.

CONSULTEE RESPONSES

Highway Engineer

The application is for the change of use of a car showroom site and buildings for use as a church meeting hall. Information supporting the application advises that the site would support members of a Brethren Church Community which is established in the Woodford and Stockport area. The building/hall would be used exclusively for Christian Worship and congregation and not for secular or other activities. This I note and welcome as I would have concern should the hall be used for other not religious purposes, for reason of poor accessibility, traffic generation and potentially parking demand.

The development will operate as a neighbourhood meeting hall supporting a small group of locally based households, providing a place of and for regular worship. The principal service on a Sunday morning would typically be in the order of 35-45 persons, in attendance, usually made up from households. I understand there tends to be 4 services per week, two on a Sunday and two midweek.

From time to time, visitor groups from further afield would also be invited to attend shared services although the modest scale of the building limits its ability to be used for larger collective gatherings and services. I note that Brethren Meeting Halls are dedicated as places of worship that are utilised solely and exclusively for services of prayer and worship and I consider that conditional control should be introduced to ensure this remains the case. A condition that states the use of the building shall only be for the purposes of prayer and worship and also prevents the use of the building for any other purpose within planning use class D1 is essential, for reason of the application being assessed on this basis and relative to the traffic generation and parking demand associated with the proposed use.

The latest site layout drawing indicates boundary treatment and gates across the two access points. The boundary treatment (fencing) is set back 1m from the back edge of the footway with low level landscaping forward of the fencing. I am accepting of this as visibility to and for emerging traffic would not be impeded by the treatment of the frontage. The gates are set back to ensure that vehicles can stand clear of the highway whilst the gates are opened and this I accept.

The latest drawing indicates parking to the front and rear of the site with 23/24 spaces shown. Whilst I am supportive in principle of parking all across the site I have reservations about the indication of double parking to the rear of the site as this could discourage use of some spaces as visitors may not want to be blocked in and endure a prolonged and inconvenient period of stay. I also have reservations that the proposed layout to the front of the site is not a proper and effective use of space and the layout could lead to adhoc and informal parking that may inhibit the movement of vehicles through the site. Parking and movement across the front of the site would be better formalised with a bank of 7 or 8 spaces marked to the rear of the new landscaping belt shown between the two access points and this would create a central aisle through the site for better and safer movement. Additional spaces at the front would also offset reservations about double parking to the rear and maximise use of existing hardstanding space. I also note that despite previous requests, no disabled parking or facilities for the charging of electric vehicles are shown on the submission. Two disabled spaces need providing close to the building entrance to the front of the site and two spaces provided with EV charge facilities.

I am satisfied that the marking out of the car parking area with appropriate space design and manoeuvring space can reasonably be controlled by planning condition as sufficient space exists to ensure a suitable layout is delivered. On that basis I am supportive of the application subject to conditions.

Conditions are recommended to require the provision of details of the car parking layout, electric vehicle charging facilities and secure cycle parking; the provision of the means of access shown on the submitted plans and the provision of adequate visibility splays, and to restrict the use of the site for the purpose of prayer and worship.

Environmental Health Officer (Noise)

The noise report advises that noise levels are acceptable, therefore I have no further objections.

Woodford Neighbourhood Forum

Comments received 18th September 2020 are summarised as follows:

- a. The noise assessment has been based on national data which cannot provide detailed information for this specific site. It also fails to note that the adjacent property, The Davenport Arms, is residential and the impact of noise on the occupier has not been assessed. For these reason it cannot be given much weight in assessing the impact on residential amenity.
- b. Protected trees should be protected from any potential root damage. Requests that the SMBC Tree Officer assesses this aspect.
- c. Ambiguity regarding the number of car parking spaces proposed.
- d. The additional proposed planting and details of the fencing provided are welcomed.

Comments received 3rd June 2020 are summarised as follows:

- a. The revised position of the entrance gates is welcomed.
- b. The application does not acknowledge the Protected Trees at the rear and the side of the site, and the impact upon these trees is not assessed.
- c. All other concerns raised in the response submitted on 26th January are unchanged.

Comments submitted on 26th January 2020 are summarised as follows:

We note that the Woodford Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) is not referenced or acknowledged in any of the supporting documents, including the planning statement. The proposal has been assessed against the policies in the WNP and find that some are relevant.

In relation to WNP ENV3 (Protecting Woodford's natural features), works on the site should avoid damage to protected trees or their roots, which are part of the natural features in Woodford.

In relation to WNP ENV4 (Supporting biodiversity) landscaping should aim to enhance biodiversity where possible. The proposals for the introduction of vegetation, including trees and hedges, are welcomed and we recommend the use of native species as much as possible.

In relation to WNP DEV4 (Design of new development) any proposals to improve the current outer appearance of the building and the site are welcomed. However, in our view, the current proposal does not achieve the high standard of design required by our policy. We would prefer a more imaginative approach to produce a design that is more aesthetically pleasing and more in keeping with its setting. Concerns are raised in relation to designated and non-designated heritage assets.

Large areas of this site are currently covered with a non-porous surface, so any reduction of run off due to the introduction of vegetation is welcomed. Comments were made in relation to surface water drainage.

The proposal has also been assessed against the policies of the Stockport Unitary Development Plan 2006 and NPPF

In relation to accessibility and sustainability, the catchment areas are not specific, and could include attendees beyond walking and cycling distance from the site, resulting in travel by car. The proposal is not in a sustainable location, public transport to and from the site is poor.

In relation to the impact on residential amenity, traffic arriving for the early morning service will be using headlights for 7 out of 12 months, producing light disturbance, as well as noise disturbance. It should be noted that there is residential accommodated above the Davenport Arms public house adjacent to the site.

It is noted that previous uses of the site did not have early operating hours on rest days. Concerns are raised regarding the potential for the site to attract greater numbers of users from a wider catchment, impacting upon car parking requirements.

A Travel Plan has not been submitted, as set out in the Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document for Stockport.

ANALYSIS

Principle of the Change of Use

The site is currently vacant, and was formerly in use as a car sales showroom with the display of cars for sale on the forecourt. The site is located within the Green Belt, and the impacts upon the Green Belt are assessed later in this report.

Core Strategy policy AED-6 states that proposals for the change of use or redevelopment of employment sites outside designated employment areas which result in the loss of that use will not normally be permitted unless:

- a. it can be demonstrated that the site is no longer viable as an employment use;
- b. the proposal will not adversely affect the operations of neighbouring premises;
- c. the loss of employment land would not lead to significantly longer journey to work patterns; and
- d. the development does not conflict with other policies.

Woodford Neighbourhood Plan policy EMP2 states that proposals for the change of use of employment land should be supported by evidence that the existing land use is no longer viable.

As noted by the Neighbourhood Forum in its comments, viability information has not been provided in order to demonstrate that the site is no longer viable for an employment use. It is noted that the lawful use of the site as a car showroom does allow for small scale employment, but that this is a sui generis use rather than a traditional employment use such as industrial or office uses. It is also noted that the site has been vacant for a number of months. Due to the relatively small scale nature of the previous employment use, and noting that the somewhat sensitive location of the site would not be appropriate for many other employment uses (for example, industrial or large scale commercial uses, or uses for indoor recreation), Officers are of the view that in this instance it would be difficult to sustain a refusal based upon the loss of this employment site and as such the application can be determined despite the absence of a viability appraisal.

In relation to criterion 'c' of policy AED-6, the low scale employment use of the site is not considered to result in significant adverse impacts in this regard. Criteria 'b' and 'd' are addressed later in this report.

Woodford Neighbourhood Plan policy EMP3 confirms that proposals for the reuse of redundant buildings and the replacement of buildings, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces, will be supported. Such development should not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development. Whilst this policy is not directly relevant to this application (as the proposed use would be different to the existing), it does support the reuse of buildings which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing. Green Belt issues are discussed further below.

Policies in the UDP Review and Core Strategy seek to ensure that community uses are well located to serve the relevant population by sustainable transport modes, provide satisfactory access and parking, have no adverse impact on residential amenity and cause no harm to the openness of the Green Belt (policies CTF1.1 and CDH1.9 of the UDP and AS-2 of the Core Strategy). Woodford Neighbourhood Plan policy COM1 confirms that the provision of new community facilities that respect local character and the amenity of neighbouring

occupiers will be supported. These issues are explored below and subject to no adverse impact the proposed use can be considered acceptable in principle.

Impact on Green Belt and Landscape Character Area

In Green Belt terms, the relevant Development Plan policies are contained within the UDP Review, the Woodford Neighbourhood Plan and the NPPF. Planning law requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The application site is located within the Green Belt and therefore the proposed development is subject to saved policies GBA1.2 and GBA1.6 of the UDP Review together with para 146 of the NPPF. There are no Green Belt policies in the WNP that relate to the development proposed other than policy EMP3 which confirms that proposals for the re-use of redundant buildings, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces, will be supported. Such development should not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

Policy GBA1.2 confirms that within the Green Belt there is a presumption against the construction of new buildings. Certain other forms of development other than new building will not be permitted unless they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

Policy GBA1.6 allows the reuse of buildings in the Green Belt provided that the building:-

- would be used for purposes other than wholly residential
- would maintain openness
- would safeguard and improve the appearance of the rural environment.

In addition the policy states that all buildings must be structurally sound and capable of:-

- accommodating the new use without the need for major rebuilding or extension
- being provided with an adequate curtilage without adverse impact on the Green Belt and
- being satisfactorily serviced and accessed without adverse impacts on the Green Belt.

Para 146 of the NPPF confirms that certain forms of development (other than new buildings) are not inappropriate provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This includes the re-use of buildings of a permanent and substantial construction.

The change of use of the building and forecourt would maintain openness noting that the lawful use of the site had the potential to see a large number of cars permanently parked on the site. A condition was attached to the appeal decision APP/C4235/A/07/2037292 which allowed the display of 41 vehicles for sale on the site, whereas the application proposes the provision of 24 car parking spaces to be used in association with the Church. The proposed landscaping enhancements around the site and reduced car parking (in terms of numbers and permanence) will therefore improve the appearance of and enhance the openness of the Green Belt through the reuse of the site.

Both saved policy GBA1.6 and para 146 confirm that the building to be converted should be of permanent and substantial construction. GBA1.6 also requires that the new use should be accommodated with the need for major rebuilding or

extension. In this respect the application proposes the conversion of the building without the need for any extensions or rebuilding. Internal alterations to the layout are proposed, and the only external alterations would comprise alterations to the size and detailing of the fenestration. The minor alterations to the fenestration will have no impact on openness.

It is therefore considered that the existing building is structurally sound and the new use can be accommodated without the need for major rebuilding or extension. On this basis it is concluded that the proposed development is compliant with saved policy GBA1.6 and para 146 of the NPPF. Whilst the building will not be used for the same purpose as that existing, it will be exactly the same size as that existing (as no extensions are proposed) and there will be a significant reduction in car parking on the site. As such for the purposes of assessing the proposed development upon the openness of the Green Belt, the proposal is compliant with policy EMP3 of the WNP.

Policy LCR1.1 states that development in the countryside will be strictly controlled and will not be permitted unless it protects or enhances the quality and character of the rural area. The policy also requires that proposals protect or improve existing recreational land, not impede public access, protect or enhance the natural environment, conserve or enhance buildings which contribute to the character or history of the area and improve the appearance of the countryside by removing or screening unsightly development.

The application site is in private ownership, does not include any recreational land and does not impede public access. There are no buildings on the site which significantly contribute to the history or character of the area. The existing building is somewhat tired in its appearance, and the site does not positively contribute to the rural character of the area; the proposed external alterations, boundary treatments and landscaping will result in a modest positive impact upon the character and appearance of the site. On this basis the development is considered compliant with policy LCR1.1.

Impact on the Character of the Locality

Policy CS8 welcomes development that is designed and landscaped to a high standard and which makes a positive contribution to a sustainable, attractive, safe and accessible built and natural environment. This position is supported by policy SIE-1 which advises that specific regard should be paid to the use of materials appropriate to the location and the site's context in relation to surrounding buildings.

The NPPF sets out the Government's most up to date position on planning policy and confirms that the Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Planning decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the quality of the area, are visually attractive, are sympathetic to local character and history while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change, establish a strong sense of place, optimise the potential of a site to accommodate appropriate development, and create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.

Policy DEV4 of the WNP requires all new development to achieve a high standard of design and respond to the rural character of the area.

The application site is large and is positioned on Chester Road. The lack of any meaningful boundary treatment, together with the large hardsurfaced parking

area highlights the presence of the site within the streetscene. The building itself is commercial in its appearance, having formerly been in use as a car showroom, and is set back within the site.

The external alterations to the building would comprise alterations to the size and detailing of the fenestration, with smaller windows installed and the resultant gaps being infilled with black or grey cladding panels. The building would remain commercial in its appearance, however the alterations would allow the building to appear more fitting for its proposed use than as existing.

The application will not result in the loss of any trees or hedges on the site but rather proposes a landscaping scheme comprising a low fence to the front boundary screened from Chester Road by new planting, along with planting to the front and side boundaries within the site.

On this basis and subject to the imposition of conditions requiring the approval of materials, landscaping and measures to protect the trees on the site, it is considered that the minor alterations proposed would result in a modest positive impact upon the character and appearance of the area. As such the proposal is considered to be compliant with policies CS8 and SIE1 of the Core Strategy, COM1 and DEV4 of the WNP, and the NPPF.

Impact on Residential Amenity

Core Strategy policy SIE1 confirms that satisfactory levels of amenity and privacy should be maintained for future and existing residents. The NPPF confirms that development should create places that promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users. Regard is also paid to the Council's SPD 'Design of Residential Development' which advises on privacy distances and garden sizes.

It is considered that the change of use from a relatively unrestricted commercial use to a community use which can be subject to conditional control has the potential to enhance the residential amenities of the area. It is understood, however, that the previous users of the site would not have operated early on Sunday mornings, and some concerns have been raised regarding the noise and disturbance impacts associated with the regular 6am service on Sunday mornings. This is of particular concern noting that the site is located in a semi-rural location, in relatively close proximity to the neighbouring residential properties (noting that the residence above the Davenport Arms is approximately 35m south-east of the centre of the forecourt, and the dwellings on the southern side of Chester Road are 40m from the centre of the forecourt).

In response to this concern, the Applicant has submitted a noise assessment which advises that due to unrepresentative acoustic conditions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, noise monitoring was not undertaken at the proposed development site. Baseline noise levels were instead determined using the DEFRA England noise mapping for the area. The Neighbourhood Forum has commented on the noise levels used to make the assessment in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the report has not addressed the residential accommodation at the Davenport Arms. Members are advised that the Council's EHO is satisfied that the baseline data used to inform the assessment is appropriate given the current circumstances. Whilst the report has not specifically addressed the presence of a flat above the adjacent public house, noise levels in the locality early on Sunday mornings are in any event very quiet and relatively unaffected by changes in commuter traffic etc. The noise assessment has provided details of the 'worst case scenario' for the impacts of the congregation

arriving and departing the site by car early on a Sunday morning and considers impacts such as car doors slamming. In this respect the report concludes that noise levels resulting from car door slams would result in internal noise levels below 45 dB LAF max, with open windows, which would be suitable for sleep purposes. Officers have had regard to this in making their assessment, and do not consider the impacts upon the residential accommodation at the Davenport Arms or indeed any other adjacent residential property to be so significant as to warrant refusal of the application.

It is recommended that a compliance condition is attached to any permission granted, to ensure that the use is carried out in accordance with the details submitted. This will ensure that the impact of the development accords with the findings of the noise report.

As noted above, the Highways Engineer has requested that a condition is attached to any permission granted in order to restrict the use of the site for the purpose of prayer and worship. This condition also serves a purpose in relation to residential amenity as other uses associated with a Church (such as community events) and uses within the same Use Class may give rise to significant impacts upon residential amenity and should be assessed on their own merits.

On the basis of the above it is considered that the proposed development will retain an acceptable level of amenity for the existing neighbouring occupiers. The proposal is therefore compliant with the Woodford Neighbourhood Plan policy COM1, Core Strategy policy SIE2 together with the NPPF.

Highway Safety

In assessing the development in relation to highway issues regard has been paid to policies CS9, T1, T2 and T3 of the Stockport Core Strategy DPD. These policies seek to ensure that development is provided in accessible locations, considers the needs of all road users, provides car parking in accordance with the maximum standards and shall be of a safe and practical design. The NPPF confirms that development should only be refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

In terms of accessibility the site benefits from a bus route on Chester Road and is connected to the village centre to the east of the site by footpaths and safe cycling routes. Noting that the former use of the site for car sales would also have attracted visitors to the site, the development is considered acceptable in relation to traffic generation and car parking provision.

The number of car parking spaces proposed has been amended a number of times through the application process and the proposed site plan under consideration shows 24 car parking spaces. The Highway Engineer has concerns that the double parking to the rear of the site could discourage use of some spaces and also has reservations that the proposed layout to the front of the site is not a proper and effective use of space and could lead to further adhoc and informal parking given the size of the forecourt. In this respect it is suggested that a bank of 7 or 8 spaces be marked to the rear of the new landscaping belt shown between the two access points thus creating a central aisle through the site for better and safer movement. This would also negate the need to use the existing tandem parking spaces to the rear of the site which could be replaced by soft landscaped areas. Amended plans showing these revisions have not been

forthcoming and rather than delay the application further it is recommended that this be secured by condition.

In light of the sensitive nature of the site within the Green Belt and due to the potential impact upon the street scene, a condition should also be imposed to ensure that parking is to be restricted to within the marked bays.

The submission of details of electric vehicle charging facilities and secure cycle parking; the provision of the means of access shown on the submitted plans, the provision of adequate visibility splays, and the restriction the use of the site for the purpose of prayer and worship can all be secured by condition.

On this basis the proposed development is considered compliant with Core Strategy policies CS9, T1, T2 and T3 together with advice contained in the NPPF.

Trees and Biodiversity

There are trees to the rear of the site which are protected by a Tree Preservation Order. An assessment of the impact of the proposal on the trees has not been submitted as the proposed works would not include building works or areas of new hardstanding. Notwithstanding this, and as noted in the Woodford Neighbourhood Forum's comments, works on the site should avoid damage to these trees or their roots, which are part of the natural features in Woodford. This is to be controlled by condition.

As noted above, the landscaping scheme is to be agreed by condition.

Heritage Assets

It is noted in the Woodford Neighbourhood Forum's comments that the site is in a sensitive location with regard to design because it is adjacent to The Davenport Arms, and within sight of Christ Church and the Lychgate, which are Grade II listed buildings. The proposed development, which in physical terms only relates to minor elevational alterations, the provision of front boundary fence, landscaping and a significant reduction in parked cars, is not considered to result in adverse impacts upon the setting or significance of the nearby heritage assets.

Other Matters

The Woodford Neighbourhood Forum has raised comments regarding sustainable drainage. The application does not include any new areas of hardstanding or extensions, and therefore it would not be reasonable or necessary to require the submission and implementation of a drainage strategy.

Conclusions

There are no adverse impacts of granting planning permission in terms of the impact on the Green Belt, and nor will there be any other adverse impacts that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits arising when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole. As such the application is recommended for approval for the reasons set out in this report.

RECOMMENDATION GRANT SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS