



SJ Foster Planning

**Application for the extension of RT Mycock & Sons
Concrete onto land to the north, including the
erection of a new building and the change of use of
land to storage yard.**

Harpur Hill Industrial Estate, Buxton

Planning, Design & Access Statement

Augst 2023

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1. Introduction

This Planning, Design & Access Statement supports an application for the extension of the operational area of RT Mycock & Sons Concrete Supplies onto an adjoining field parcel to the north of Unit 1 Harpur Hill Industrial Estate. The application includes building and engineering operations necessary to facilitate the change of use of the field to create a yard ancillary to the concrete plant, and for the erection of a building which will also be ancillary to the main use taking place on the site.

The application is supported by drawings by AJS Architecture, and by a full ecological survey by Dunelm Ecology.

Background

RT Mycock and Sons are a local business supplying concrete products to the building industry. They have been located at the established Harpur Hill Trading Estate for the last 10 years following an extensive search for suitable premises in the local area. The trading estate is an allocated 'primary employment zone' under policy E3 of the High Peak Local Plan 2016. The business relocated to this site after outgrowing their previous premises in an agricultural location in Harpur Hill where access by large vehicles was beginning to cause road safety concerns and amenity issues. Since acquiring the site on the Trading Estate they have made a significant capital investment in plant and machinery that cannot simply and easily be relocated to an alternative site. The Harpur Hill site is a logical location for a company that relies upon stone extraction from quarries. Proximity to the raw materials minimises travel times, vehicle movements and, consequently, carbon emissions.

There are 45 employees who work at the site in various roles. Almost all of these employees are from the Buxton area (with a few travelling from Macclesfield), again ensuring that travel to work times are minimised, reducing impact on the local road network and air quality.

They are a significant employer of local people.

An extended yard area and new building is required for the business to expand its manufacture, storage and distribution of concrete blocks which relies on proximity to the existing core business (i.e. it cannot be located remote from the main site). The existing site has become too constrained to safely store these products and also ensure the concrete distribution vehicles can manoeuvre within the site. An extended site will enable additional employment opportunities as this part of the business can develop further. The proposals

therefore offer significant social and economic benefits on a site that is sustainably located adjacent to an allocated primary employment zone.

2. The Application

The application seeks full permission for the change of use of an area of land extending to 0.75 Hectares immediately north of the existing RT Mycock & Sons' yard. The yard to be levelled by a process of cut and fill would be used for the storage and distribution of manufactured concrete retaining blocks.

The yard would be set at a level circa 3.5m lower than the existing yard area due to local topography. This level difference would necessitate a vehicle ramp down from the upper yard to the new, lower yard. The lower yard would contain HGV parking for 7 vehicles and 5 No. car parking spaces. The only means of access to the lower yard would be via the existing main access to RT Mycock & Sons off Morland Way; no new access to the highway would be created.

A new portal framed building with a floorspace of 30.6m x 12.7m would be erected on the lower yard to manufacture the concrete blocks. The building would also contain offices and site welfare facilities. Once manufactured, the concrete blocks would be stored in the lower yard awaiting distribution.

A bund would be created around the new yard to screen it, particularly in views from Morland Way.

3. Site & Surroundings

Site

The application site is a field currently used for the light grazing of sheep on the northern edge of the Harpur Hill Industrial estate. It is one of a group of fields that are designated as the Ferney Bottom Meadow Local Wildlife Site.

RT Mycock & Sons Concrete lies immediately south of the application site at Unit 1 of the Harpur Hill Trading Estate. The operational area of RT Mycock & Sons lies at a higher level than the field, and there is already some grass covered bunding in place to contain the historic spread of the yard area into the original field boundaries.

To the west, the site is separated from Morland Way and the grass verge alongside it by a post and wire fence. An access point into the field exists through a 5 bar field gate in the north western corner of the field. The northern site boundary is marked by a dilapidated drystone wall. To the east, the boundary is also marked by a post and wire fence.

The local landscape quality around the site is relatively low, with active quarrying and heavy industrial uses forming the backdrop to the site when viewed from Morland Way. The nearest public right of way, aside from Morland Way, is a footpath that runs north east to south west through the industrial estate and along the southern boundary of the RT Mycocks site from the old railway cutting in the south west to the settlement of Harpur Hill in the north east. The application site cannot be viewed directly from this footpath.

The site is in Flood Zone 1, is not in a Conservation Area, and does not form the setting of any listed buildings. The boundary of the Peak District National Park is circa 1500m to the south.

Surroundings

To the south lies the Harpur Hill Trading Estate, due east lies further pasture forming part of the Local Wildlife Site, and to the west is Morland Way with the tufa calcite terraces of Countess Cliff down a steep slope on the western side of the road. The settlement of Harpur Hill lies approximately 1200m to the east.

Planning History

Of greatest relevance to the current application, HPK/2016/0558 was approved in May 2017 and granted permission for the erection of two portal framed plant and storage buildings relating to the concrete block business on the RT Mycocks site to the south.

HPK/2016/0253 was approved in July 2016 for the erection of an office building on the portion of the RT Mycock site closest to the current application site. The office building was never developed and the site is now used in association with the operation of RT Mycocks.

4. Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework

At the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (para 10). Paragraph 11 goes on to say that:

Local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change;

Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs, unless:

- the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area; or
- 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.

For decision-taking this means:

- approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and
- where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed
 - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

In rural areas, paragraph 84 supports the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings. Paragraph 85 recognises that sites to meet local business needs may be outside existing settlements and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development sensitive to its surroundings and does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads. The use of previously developed

land, and sites that are physically well related to existing settlements should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

High Peak Local Plan 2016

Policy S1 relates to sustainable development principles and refers to supporting the local economy and businesses by providing a range of economic development that provides employment opportunities suitable for local people in sustainable locations. It also seeks to minimise the risk of damage to areas of importance for nature conservation and/or landscape value... and ensuring there is a net gain in biodiversity. Policy S1A reiterates the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF.

Under policy S2, settlement hierarchy, Buxton is considered a market town and therefore amongst the most sustainable locations for development with a main focus for housing, employment and service growth.

Policy S4 sets out the Council's commitment to, *inter alia*, supporting the appropriate improvement, enhancement and expansion of existing businesses. Within the Buxton sub-area (policy S7) the growth of local employment opportunities will be encouraged by supporting the needs of local businesses and employers. The application site lies in the Buxton Mineral Water Catchment and Groundwater Source Protection Zone.

Under policy EQ1, the Council will adopt strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Policy EQ2 seeks to protect, enhance and restore the landscape character of the Plan area; resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the character of the local and wider landscape. As the site lies outside of the developed area of Buxton, it is considered to be rural development under policy EQ3. In these locations, rural employment will be supported where a rural location can be justified.

All development should be well designed and of a high quality that responds positively to both its environment and the challenge of climate change. Development should have a satisfactory relationship to adjacent development and not cause unacceptable effects on character or amenity. Similarly, policy EQ10 seeks to protect people and the environment from unsafe, unhealthy and polluted environments.

Policy EQ5 relates to biodiversity in the Borough. This sets out that development proposals should not harm biodiversity interests. Regionally and locally designated sites should be conserved and enhanced. On these sites the Council will not permit any development

proposal that would directly or indirectly result in significant harm to biodiversity interests unless it can be demonstrated that:

- There is no appropriate alternative site available.
- all statutory and regulatory requirements relating to any such proposal have been satisfied; and
- appropriate conservation and mitigation measures are provided, such mitigation measures should ensure as a minimum no net loss and wherever possible net gain for biodiversity;
- or if it is demonstrated that this is not possible;
- the need for, and benefit of, the development is demonstrated to clearly outweigh the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site and compensatory measures are implemented.

Policy EQ8 relates to green infrastructure. It states that networks of Biodiversity and Green infrastructure will be protected and enhanced. This will be achieved by requiring that development will not have a detrimental effect on the amount or function of existing green infrastructure unless replacement provision is made that is considered to be of equal or greater value than that lost through development.

Policy E1 supports new business developments in sustainable locations that contribute towards the creation and retention of a wide range of jobs. As well as supporting the development of allocated sites, it also allows for supporting development outside of allocated sites when it would not create undue harm to the character, appearance or amenity of the area. The Harpur Hill Trading Estate is allocated as a Primary Employment Zone under policy E3.

Policy CF6 seeks to ensure that development can be safely accessed in a sustainable manner. This includes approving developments provided that the capacity and design of the transport network serving the site will reasonably accommodate the anticipated increase in travel without materially harming highway safety or local amenity.

High Peak Housing and Economic Land Needs Assessment 2022

This assessment identified that the industrial sector is performing well in the Borough, with demand for additional sites in Buxton and Glossop. It was noted there is a highlighted need for additional floorspace in the Borough that is cost-effective to develop. Demand outweighs

supply in this sector, and it is anticipated that land required over the next five years will primarily be in the industrial sector.

The rural industrial estates are important within the local economy and have a significant role in ensuring the sustainability of the Borough's villages. Stakeholders stated that the rural industrial estates are particularly attractive to businesses seeking easy-to-access sites (particularly those which use HGVs) which are free from congestion. It was also highlighted that the rural industrial estates offer greater potential for businesses to expand compared to some of the more enclosed and constrained urban estates.

Demand side assessment identifies that High Peak Borough requires between 25ha and 54ha of employment land over the 20 year period to 2041.

5. Analysis

Principle

The NPPF supports sustainable growth of businesses, even when they lie outside of a built-up area. In the case of the application site, it is closely related to an existing, allocated primary employment zone. The employment zone sits outside of the built area boundary for Buxton but is within the Buxton sub-area and is well related to the market town. As identified in the HELNA 2022, this kind of site is attractive to businesses such as RT Mycock who necessarily rely on unimpeded movement of HGVs and who could not easily locate in a more central area – these locational requirements are recognised by Local Plan policy EQ3. The site also allows a natural synergy with related businesses such as Hillend Quarry, ensuring that road movements are minimised on a daily basis and carbon emissions reduced.

The Local Plan is similarly supportive in principle of economic development that provides employment for local people. In the case of RT Mycocks, 45 local people are employed at the existing site and the natural growth of the business that has necessitated the need for additional land for expansion, and which is supported by Local Plan policy S4, will inevitably also require further personnel (Local Plan policy E1).

Whilst most industrial expansion is directed onto allocated sites, the HELNA identifies that there is a need to allocate additional space to meet current demand, particularly around Buxton and Glossop, and that the rural industrial estates have more land around them on which expansion can be facilitated. In advance of additional allocations being officially identified during the Local Plan review process, policy E1 supports development outside of allocated sites where there will not be undue harm to the character, appearance or amenity of the area.

As an existing local business and employer in the Buxton sub-area where a rural location is justified, expansion onto unallocated land, but land adjacent to an allocated employment zone, is acceptable in principle. However, in this case, that land is also subject to a local nature conservation designation and impact on nature conservation interests is a significant material consideration in determining whether or not the proposals should be approved.

Impact on Nature Conservation Interests

The application site is part of the Ferny Bottom Meadows Local Wildlife Site, designated since 1993. At the point of designated as a LWS, the Meadows were described as hosting a

range of unimproved and semi-improved neutral and calcareous grassland species. The field is the only land in the applicant's ownership in the vicinity of RT Mycock. The proposals will require the regrading of the site and will lead to the loss of the majority of existing grassland habitat from the 0.75ha site.

A Primary Ecological Appraisal of the site was undertaken in May 2023. This identified the land as species-poor modified grassland. A more detailed National Vegetation Classification survey was subsequently undertaken. This determined that, given the range of species identified on the site, its ecological importance can be classified as less than local, and it no longer meets LWS selection criteria. Furthermore, it contains no priority habitats, rare or legally protected species.

Policy EQ3 of the Local Plan allows development of locally designated sites subject to several criteria being met. First it must be demonstrated that no appropriate alternative site is available. The foregoing has demonstrated, in this case, why expansion of the current operational area is the only viable option given the level of inward investment in the site over the last 10 years; the locational advantages related to the road network and the quarry; the lack of nearby residential uses; and the pool of employees drawn from the vicinity of the site.

The biodiversity within the field itself has been assessed to be low and the proposals require the whole of the field parcel to be used to facilitate the development. However, there is potential to create some additional, higher quality wildflower grassland on the site, plant 6 new native trees and introduce bat and bird boxes. This will result in a 17% loss of biodiversity on the site itself when compared to the baseline position.

Any net gain for biodiversity will therefore need to take place off site. The applicant is willing to make a commitment to either enter into a 30 year management agreement relating to other land in ownership within a 3km radius of the site, albeit within the Peak District National Park, or to contribute to High Peak's identified Habitat Banks.

The planning balance in this case will be to determine whether the policy support afforded to local businesses and employers for the economic sustainability of the borough outweighs the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site without allowing off-site mitigation. At present, the proposals offer a tangible and quantifiable economic benefit to the borough whilst the nature conservation value of the site is demonstrably low, despite being designated locally. If the site were to be reassessed for designation at present

it would not meet the necessary criteria. As set out above, the applicant is open to several potential ways in which any impact or loss can be mitigated and that a biodiversity net gain can be achieved. In this respect, the application is capable of meeting the requirements of Local Plan policies EQ3 and EQ8 as well as E1.

Landscape Impact

The site lies adjacent to the northern edge of an allocated employment site and in close proximity to a quarry and a range of business and leisure uses. It is also seen within the context of the built up areas around Harpur Hill. Despite its open character, the field's setting is impacted negatively by the development that forms its backdrop. As such, the landscape value of the site is relatively low. Although the development will have an adverse impact on a site of low landscape value, this should be balanced against the economic benefits of allowing the proposed development to proceed. Mitigation is offered in the form of a landscape bund around the site to screen the yard and to be planted with wildflower species. The field is also set at a lower level than the land to the south and will remain less visually intrusive than the established industrial estate and quarry. The harm to landscape character would not be so detrimental to the character of the area that this development should be resisted under Local Plan policies EQ2 or E1.

Impact on Residential Amenity

There are no residential properties in close proximity to the development site and there is unlikely to be any additional noise and disturbance to residents of the nearest dwellings as a result of these proposals. The proposals therefore comply with Local Plan policy EQ10.

Highway Safety

No new access point onto the public highway is proposed as part of this application. It is unlikely that there will be a material increase in vehicular traffic as a result of this proposal when compared to existing vehicle movements occurring across the industrial estate as a whole. Given its location outside of the built-up area of Buxton, there is sufficient capacity on the surrounding road network to accommodate the additional vehicle movements that the proposals may generate. Paragraph 85 of the NPPF recognises that sites to meet local business needs may be outside settlements in locations not well served by public transport.

Overall the proposals do not threaten the safe operation of the highway network and comply with NPPF paragraph 111 and Local plan policy CF6.

6. Conclusion

The proposed development offers significant economic benefits that are supported in principle by Local Plan policy. It will allow the expansion of a long-standing local company who benefit from their Harpur Hill location as part of their core business operations and who have made significant investment in plant and machinery at this site over the last ten years. They also employ a significant number of people drawn from the local area. The key issue in this case is whether those economic benefits are sufficient to outweigh the development of a small part of a locally designated wildlife site. The submitted application has demonstrated that the application site is of low biodiversity and landscape value and that the applicant is willing to commit to an agreed method of mitigating the loss of the field from Ferny Bottom Meadows LWS, and to provide a net increase in biodiversity.

The proposals are unlikely to have any adverse impact upon local amenity or the operation of the local highway network.

As there are no other material considerations to indicate that the proposals are unacceptable, the NPPF suggests at paragraph 11 that the application should be approved without delay.