

Planning Department
High Peak Borough Council
Buxton Town Hall
Market Place
Buxton
SK17 6EL

Dear Sir / Madam,

Re: Retrospective Planning Application for Erection of Staff Welfare Block and Car Parking / Machinery Storage Area at The University of Sheffield's Research Facility at Harpur Hill, Buxton, SK17 9NL

This supporting letter has been prepared by DLP Planning Ltd, on behalf of the University of Sheffield (the "Applicant"), in support of a full planning application which seeks planning permission retrospectively for the erection of a staff welfare block and car parking / machinery storage area at the University of Sheffield's research facility at Harpur Hill.

This letter should be read alongside the completed application forms and architectural drawings that have also been submitted as part of the application package.

Site Context and Planning History

The Applicant's overall landholding at the Harpur Hill research facility comprises of several bunkers, an inspection chamber, an electricity substation, and a welfare block and parking area (the subject of this planning application). Storage containers formerly occupied the area where the welfare block and parking area has been located.

The work undertaken at the facility includes explosive testing and preparation works, which includes the operation of heavy equipment and plant. The testing is undertaken in relation to the strength and resilience of a range of materials including metals, sands and sapphire glass, and the results are filmed at high speed. The explosive testing takes place both indoors and outdoors, and there is a procedure in place to ensure that all people on site are accounted for and in a safe location prior to the initiation of the charge. Further to this, there is a large warning horn to notify people on site that testing taking place is imminent. Work takes place between 09.00 and 17.00 Monday – Friday, and no work can take place outside of those times without prior notice because a member of staff must be present when any work takes place.

The facility is accessed via a lane that runs south from the Health and Safety Laboratory. Access to the facility is not possible unless it has been granted by the security team at the Laboratory. The adopted highway to the south, and the Public Right of Way footpaths (titled Hartington Middle Quarter FP3 and Hartington Upper Quarter FP117) to the east, do not provide access to the facility.

The location of the facility / the Applicant's overall landholding is indicated by the blue line boundary on the map extract in Figure 1. The red line boundary of the application site is also indicated.

From a review of the Local Planning Authority's public access records, the planning history associated with the Applicant's overall landholding for their Harpur Hill facility (listed below) is somewhat limited and predominantly historic.

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- HPK/0002/9929 – Electrical sub station and adjoining meter room – Approved 22nd November 1990
- HPK/0003/0438 – Construction of research bunker – Approved 7th May 1991
- HPK/0003/1196 – Installation of two tonne lpg tank for research activities – Approved 4th February 1992
- HPK/0003/2819 – Erection of flame test rig lpg storage tanks and associated equipment – Approved 18th November 1993
- HPK/0003/5178 – Amendment
- DET/2022/0005 (Prior approval) – Proposed demolition of bunker 8088 and bunker 8093 – Approved 1st June 2022

The Local Planning Authority also have a historic environment record for the Applicant's overall landholding, under reference MDR15718, for standing concrete structures of bomb dumps.



Figure 1: Aerial view of the site (Source: Google Maps)

The Applicant's overall landholding at the Harpur Hill facility is located entirely within Flood Zone 1. Also, it is not located within or in close proximity to a Conservation Area, and there are no listed buildings or scheduled monuments within the landholding or in close proximity.

Proposed Development

The development proposal comprises of a welfare block and a car parking / machinery storage area.

The welfare block provides a kitchen, toilets (including an accessible toilet), lockers, a changing / shower room, a meeting room, and desk spaces in an open plan office area. The facilities in the block are used by staff, researchers and visitors. The external material of the block is plastisol-coated galvanised steel sheet.

The car parking / machinery storage area is surfaced with type 1 aggregate and has capacity for up to 6 vehicles to use at any time. The area is an informal, unmarked space. Staff, researchers and visitors do not park their personal vehicles in this area.

Planning Policy Context and Assessment

The relevant planning policy context for the site comprises of the National Planning Policy Framework (last revised September 2023) and the High Peak Local Plan (adopted April 2016).

It is understood that the Buxton Neighbourhood Plan Area was designated 24th February 2021.

However, the site is not included within that boundary.

The National Planning Policy Framework (the “Framework”) sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how they should be applied. At the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 10). Paragraph 11 states that the presumption means the following for decision-taking:

- *Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or*
- *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:*
 - *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*
 - *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.*

Paragraph 38 then states that “*local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way*” and that “*decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible*”. Also, paragraphs 2 and 47 confirm that planning law (i.e. Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the adopted Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Further to the above, paragraph 81 stipulates that “*planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt*” and “*significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development*”.

Lastly, paragraph 130 sets out a range of good design principles for developments to achieve, including (inter alia): it will function well; it will be visually attractive; and it will be sympathetic to local character (including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting).

The site is located within an Area of Countryside on the High Peak Local Plan Policies Map, as indicated on the map extract in Figure 2.



Figure 2: High Peak Local Plan Policies Map Extract

Policy S2 (Settlement Hierarchy) stipulates that in all areas outside of settlement boundaries, such

as Countryside, development will be strictly limited to that which has an essential need to be located in the countryside or which comprises affordable housing.

In an Area of Countryside the policies of particular relevance to a proposal for development are E1 (New Employment Development), EQ2 (Landscape Character) and EQ3 (Rural Development).

Policy E1 sets out that new business and industrial developments in sustainable locations - which contribute towards the creation and retention of a wide range of jobs, education and training opportunities - will be supported. This will be achieved in a number of ways, including supporting business development within the countryside that accords with Local Plan Policy EQ3.

Policy EQ2 stipulates that the Council will seek to protect, enhance and restore the landscape character of the Plan area for its own intrinsic beauty, and for its benefit to the economic, environmental and social well-being of the Plan area. This will be achieved in a number of ways, including (inter alia): requiring development to have regard to maintaining the aesthetic and biodiversity qualities of features within the landscape; requiring development to protect and / or enhance the character, appearance and local distinctiveness of the landscape and landscape setting of the Peak District National Park; and resisting development that would harm or be detrimental to the character of the local and wider landscape, or to the setting of a settlement as identified in the Landscape Impact Assessment.

Policy EQ3 sets out that, outside of the settlement boundaries and the sites which are allocated for development, the Council will seek to ensure that new development is strictly controlled in order to protect the landscape's intrinsic character and distinctiveness – including the character, appearance and integrity of the historic and cultural environment, and the setting of the Peak District National Park – whilst also facilitating sustainable rural community needs, tourism and economic development. This will be achieved in a number of ways including (inter alia): ensuring that development is of a high quality design and protects or enhances landscape character and the setting of the Peak District National Park.

The Applicant's research facility at Harpur Hill is long established in this Countryside policy area, and the provision of welfare facilities on-site is an essential need. Also, this development proposal rationalises the use of the site for the Applicant because they previously had to use portacabins to the north of the site to accommodate their welfare facilities. The welfare facilities being located within the facility area, in close proximity to where work is taking place, allows for productivity to be maximised because staff and any researchers / visitors do not need to go off-site whenever they need to access essential facilities such as toilets.

Given the size and location of the Harpur Hill facility within the landscape, and given there are several existing bunkers in proximity to the application site, from public vantage points any distant views of the new welfare block and car parking / machinery storage area would be limited to views from the Public Right of Way to the east. Further to this, the neutral colour of the welfare block's external elevations assists in minimising the visual impact of the development within the landscape.

The Local Planning Authority have themselves declared the adopted Local Plan partially out of date, and early engagement in relation to a review of the Plan took place in January – March 2023. Notwithstanding this, the only policies they have declared as out of date are S3 (Strategic Housing Development), S4 (Maintaining and Enhancing an Economic Base), and H4 (Affordable Housing).

Commentary Regarding Supplementary Planning Documents ("SPDs")

No overnight accommodation is proposed so there are no impacts in relation to nutrient neutrality.

The site is not within the Core Protection Area, or the Extended Protection Area, set out in the Water in Buxton SPD as adopted in December 2021. In any event, the welfare facilities will not require excavation greater than 600mm as controlled by the SPD (section 5.1.8).

The Landscape Character of Derbyshire Assessment carried out by Derbyshire County Council (2003) includes the site as part of the Limestone Moorland Area containing land near and to the south of Harpur Hill. The Landscape SPD recognises that the industrial land at Harpur Hill is uncharacteristically high on the moorland.

Conclusion

In summary, the proposal is in accordance with national and local planning policies. As such, the development proposal should be granted planning permission without delay. It is not considered any material considerations indicate otherwise.

I trust the content of this letter and the completed applications forms, and the details provided on the architectural drawings, provide sufficient information for you to positively determine the planning application. If you have any queries, or if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

Stella Heeley BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI
Senior Planner