Proposed redevelopment of the Hollingworth Lake Visitor Centre to provide animal welfare centre for the RSPCA, café and community facility.

Planning statement, incorporating access and Green Belt Statements.

January 2021

Introduction;

The current premises for the Rochdale branch of the RSPCA are located on Redcross Street, near Rochdale town centre. Whilst the centre is located near to the town centre footfall is limited which severely restricts the potential for casual visitors wishing to make donations or rehome animals. There are major redevelopment proposals for the current site, along with its larger surroundings.

There is a great need in the borough for an animal welfare centre and the current site provides this facility for domestic animals whilst increasingly providing a similar service for wildlife. Fundraising is an important part of the long-term stability of the branch, and this is something which is becoming increasingly difficult at the current site.

The RSPCA have been working with the Local Authority and other stake holders with regard to redeveloping the existing underutilised visitor centre at Hollingworth Lake in Littleborough. The current building is used by the public, mainly to access the café facility, along with other groups who use the building for meetings and as offices on a day to day basis.

The current café facility is small compared to the number of potential visitors, and the current toilet provision inadequate and outdated. In addition, the meeting room, being devoid of natural light, is somewhat underutilised.

Proposal;

In general, the proposed redevelopment of the visitor centre comprises;

- A re-planning of the internal arrangement to provide animal welfare facilities to enable the RSPCA to continue to provide animal care and rehoming services to the borough of Rochdale and wider area.
- To provide office accommodation at first floor level connected with the animal welfare provision
- To provide new self-contained accommodation to support the existing park rangers to enable additional space within the building to be utilised by the RSPCA.
- Provide a new meeting room with natural light and views over Hollingworth Lake. The meeting room to be available via a booking system to community groups and schools managed from the reception area.
- Provide a new café facility, substantially larger than the existing facility, with good levels of natural light and views over Hollingworth Lake. The increased café capacity will lead to increased revenue.
- Provision of a ‘dog café’ area within the existing building which will provide an area of indoor seating for owners and their dogs with easy access to the café and secure tethering facilities for owner’s dogs. This area will be supervised and managed from the RSPCA reception area.
- Provision of a new public toilet facility fitted out to modern standards, and accessible from outdoors for public and general use.

- Provision of a small number of dog kennels and dog exercise area separated from the general public areas and accessible externally by RSPCA wardens.
- Provision of secure overnight on-site accommodation for limited number of RSPCA staff members within the existing building to tend to animals overnight and provide reception facility for animal cases during the night.
- The provision of an outdoor events/community engagement and educational space with the relocation of approximately 10 car parking spaces.

Design;

The current visitor centre is constructed in natural stone and timber panelled walls, surmounted by a steeply pitched roof finished with natural slate. The building essentially comprises two distinct areas, one comprising the café/public area, the other the meeting room and display area. Both are linked by the reception/entrance area.

We have taken this theme and developed the proposals based on a 'pod' type arrangement, 'visually separate' from the existing building in terms of the form and materials used in the construction of the extensions.

This approach will enable the proposed extensions and additional facilities to be provided based on a modular type building. The benefits of which are;

- Speed of construction.
- Minimal disturbance on site to both public and wildlife.
- Reduction in the need to store materials on site.
- Construction can be phased to enable all parties to maintain their activities with the minimum of disturbance and delays.
- Less wastage of construction materials and a more environmentally friendly construction.

The extensions and separate buildings will be finished in natural materials to reflect/match the materials used on the existing building.

Access;

A glazed entrance canopy is to be provided over the existing ramped/stepped access to the main building. With a little alteration to the current arrangement of steps this will enable suitable access to be maintained for disabled visitors whilst providing covered access to the proposed café.

Footpaths around the buildings will be re-laid and formed to provide ramped access to new and existing doorways where required.

Therefore, the proposals maintain the existing access arrangements, and will provide suitable access arrangements where required which will be suitable for people of varying levels of mobility in accordance with current regulations and legislation.

Green Belt;

The current proposal seeks to enhance the present use of the site by the provision of extended public and community facilities and the consolidation of existing users of the building.

The visitor centre is located in the Hollingworth Lake Country park and provides a focal point for visitors to the park and other visitor attractions. The current building is underutilised, the main focus

of activity is on the café area which due to its size is restricted in the level of services it can provide. Whilst the building nestles within a larger, generally wooded area, there are areas of open land to the north and east which provide general circulation space and car parking. Additional visitor car parking is provided to the north east.

The proposed extensions are to provide additional accommodation as follows;-

- A larger café area
- A new public toilet block – with access from the outside
- A new facility for the park rangers to provide autonomous accommodation.
- A meeting room for education and community group use

These additional facilities are to be provided using modular buildings sited to the north and east, close to the existing building. The proposed buildings will be linked to the existing building where required.

The nature of the proposed buildings, being of modular construction and of modest height along with their location on the site means that they will create very little impact on the openness of the green belt. The intention is that the buildings will be faced in natural materials or be finished in such a way as to further reduce their potential impact. The buildings will therefore harmonise well with their environment and by their nature match similar provisions in country parks around the country.

The general presumption is against development in the green belt, however there can be factors which alone outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and that is a matter of fact and circumstance for each application. This proposal enhances and consolidates an existing use on the site and provides much needed facilities for visitors to the country park and the local community. It secures the long-term use of an existing underutilised building, and the continued existence of a much-needed service to the borough and wider area. The relocation of this service provider releases a key development site in the regeneration of the town centre. Therefore, we take the view that these benefits cumulatively outweigh any potential harm to the green belt and therefore can be deemed to qualify as very special circumstances.

Summary;

The proposed redevelopment of the Hollingworth Lake visitor centre to form the Rochdale RSPCA animal welfare centre will raise the profile of the branch to enable it's continued long term commitment to provide animal welfare facilities in the borough.

The proposed additional meeting room and external events space will enable the continued use of the centre for stake holders and wider community groups and will provide an extended facility for the general public and visitors to the country park.

The proposals reflect the current building on the site but take greater advantage of the sites location to provide an enhanced visitor experience with the potential to increase the use of the buildings and the site for a variety of uses in the future.

In light of this statement, we would therefore hope that the council will be minded to support this proposal which will benefit the borough and its community.