

Rochdale Borough Council
Planning and Development
Number One Riverside
Smith Street
Rochdale OL16 1XU

4th January 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)
RETENTION OF ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING HUB WITH ASSOCIATED WORKS
MOTO BIRCH WESTBOUND, M62 WESTBOUND BETWEEN JUNCTION 18 AND 19, HEYWOOD,
LANCASHIRE OL10 2QH
PLANNING PORTAL REFERENCE: PP-12590063

On behalf of the applicant, The Electric Highway Company Ltd (GRIDSERVE), please find enclosed an application seeking planning permission for the retention of an Electric Vehicle Charging Hub (EV Hub) with associated works at the Moto Birch Westbound Motorway Service Station. In addition to this letter, the application is supported by the following documents:

- Application Form.
- Terra HP 175-350 Charger Data Sheet.
- Site Location Plan 7928_340
- Block Plan and Elevations 7928_341
- General Site Layout ENV2269-100 C
- Setting Out Plan ENV2269-103 C
- Finishes ENV2269-104 C
- Linework ENV2269-105 C
- Details Sheet ENV2269-106 C

Background

GRIDSERVE Sustainable Energy Ltd is a tech-enabled sustainable energy business. GRIDSERVE develop, build, own and operate dependable, low cost, clean energy solutions for critical power infrastructure. To help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible GRIDSERVE deliver net zero carbon solutions for power and transportation which are designed to be better and less expensive than legacy solutions. To facilitate this transition to Electric Vehicles, GRIDSERVE is implementing and building a network of high-power chargers across the country that will provide UK motorists with fast, easy and low carbon charging solutions.

GRIDSERVE is delivering Electric Hubs at strategic locations across the UK and many are now operational. EV Hubs are typically located at existing destinations such as service stations, retail parks and garden

centres allowing customers to use those amenities whilst being able to access dependable charging infrastructure.

In conjunction with the rollout of EV Hubs across the UK, GRIDSERVE has developed the Electric Forecourt® to meet existing and growing infrastructure demands of electric vehicle users, owners and operators. Designed as the new generation of fuel station, the UK's first Electric Forecourt® opened at Braintree, Essex in 2020 followed by a site in Norwich which opened in April 2022. GRIDSERVE's most recent Electric Forecourt® opened at Gatwick Airport in December 2023, while planning permission for several other sites, including those in Plymouth, Gateshead, Basildon, Markham Vale and Stevenage has also been secured.

Local Planning Authorities have a significant role to play in addressing climate change. The RTPI/ TCPA in its latest Climate Crisis Guide (January 2023) confirmed that decision-makers should recognise that energy technologies are rapidly improving and should be prepared to deal positively with the implications of new transport and energy technologies. This includes infrastructure for electric vehicles and the guidance encourages authorities to consider proposals positively.

Site Context

The site forms part of the Birch Westbound Motorway Service Station which is located between Junctions 18 and 19 of the M62. The site is bounded by areas of woodland and open countryside to the east and south, beyond which is the small settlement of Birch. There are two Grade II Listed Buildings in Birch.

The application site itself is located within the existing car park and an area of amenity grassland of the Birch Westbound Motorway Service Station. The main building is located nearby, to the south west of the car park and a Travelodge is located to the south of the car park. Beyond that is a HGV parking area and BP garage. The immediate area surrounding the site is formed of hardstanding and landscaping around the car park.

The Proposal

This application seeks planning permission for the retention of an EV Hub and associated works.

Development work on a new EV Hub at the site commenced in October 2023 in order to meet the Government strategy for charging at motorway service areas and avoid operational delays. As constructed, the EV Hub provides 6no. charging bays, which have been delivered in place of previously existing hardstanding, including 1no. oversized bay which caters for users needing additional space to manoeuvre around their vehicle. The associated equipment comprises 6no. T175/350 high power charging upstands along with power cabinets, substations and communications & meter housing.

The accompanying site layout plan confirms the EV Hub arrangement.

Planning Policy

Under Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, all development decisions should be made in accordance with the relevant development plan policies, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

National Planning Policy

The current national planning policy guidance for making decisions in England is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023).

Paragraph 7 of the NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Paragraph 8 outlines the overarching objectives which contribute to sustainable development. These are:

- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure
- **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

Paragraph 11 further confirms that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Section 9 promotes sustainable transport, and paragraph 114 outlines that development proposals should be assessed as to whether appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes have been taken up; safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users; and any significant impacts on the transport network, or on highway safety, can be mitigated to an acceptable degree.

Paragraph 115 states that development should only be 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. Paragraph 116 states that development should be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.

Section 13 relates to protecting green belt land. Paragraph 152 states that inappropriate development should not be approved within the green belt unless special circumstances exist. Paragraph 155 goes on to state that there are certain forms of developments that are not inappropriate within the green belt providing that its openness is preserved. These include local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a green belt location.

Section 14 concerns meeting the challenge of climate change. Paragraph 157 states that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and should support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

The Government confirmed in its Autumn Statement 2023 that it intends to remove unnecessary planning constraints and consult on amendments to the NPPF to ensure the planning system prioritises the rollout of EV chargepoints, including EV charging hubs.

Local Planning Policy

The application site is located within the administrative boundary of Rochdale Borough Council. The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) was adopted in June 2006 and the Rochdale Local Plan Core Strategy (CS) was adopted in October 2016. The Places for Everyone Development Plan Document, a joint plan covering 9 out of 10 of the Greater Manchester local authority areas, is currently at examination. The Development Plan includes objectives and planning policies that will be used in the determination of planning applications, and which will shape the quality of new development. The policies of most relevance to this application are:

- UDP Policy G/D/2 – Green Belt
- UDP Policy D/5 – Infilling at Major Existing Developed Sites in the Green Belt
- UDP Policy NE/3 – Biodiversity and Development
- UDP Policy NE/8 – Development Affecting Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows
- CS Policy SD1 – Delivering Sustainable Development
- CS Policy P1 – Improving Image
- CS Policy P2 – Protecting and Enhancing Character, Landscape and Heritage
- CS Policy P3 – Improving Design of New Development
- CS Policy G1 – Tackling and Adapting to Climate Change
- CS Policy G4 – Protecting Green Belt
- CS Policy T1 – Delivering Sustainable Transport
- CS Policy T2 – Improving Accessibility
- CS Policy DM1 – General Development Requirements

The Main Modifications Rochdale Places for Everyone Development Plan Document was published in September 2023 with consultation taking place until 6th December 2023. Policies of most relevance to this application are:

- Policy JP-Strat14 – A Sustainable and Integrated Transport Network
- Policy JP-S1 – Sustainable Development
- Policy JP-S2 – Carbon and Energy
- Policy JP-S6 – Clean Air
- Policy JP-C1 – An Integrated Network

Climate Change

Rochdale Borough Council passed a motion declaring a climate emergency in July 2019. The Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan and Climate Change Action Plan were published in April 2022. The Plan commits to achieving net zero by 2038. To achieve this aim there are a number of measures identified. The council is committed to switching to electric vehicles. The Greater Manchester Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2021 aims to increase publicly available chargers from 360 to 3,000 fast and rapid chargers by 2025.

Planning Considerations

The following sections assess the key material considerations for the site and these are discussed in turn.

Principle of Development

The application seeks planning permission for the retention of an EV Hub with associated equipment to meet the immediate charging needs of motorists using the M62. The EV Hub is located within the confines of the existing Motorway Service Station and is predominately within the existing car park. Therefore, the EV Hub does not alter the openness of the green belt and can be considered to be local transport infrastructure that requires a green belt location. Further the development would accord with the circumstances set out in IDP Policy D/5 that allows development within the green belt at Birch Motorway Service Station. In addition, the provision of the EV Hub will help to address climate change and meet local and national objectives.

The development meets with the policy aims of the NPPF set out in paragraphs 114, 152 and 155 and it also accords with IDP Policies G/D/2 (Green Belt) and D/5 (Infilling at Major Existing Developed Sites in the Green Belt) and Core Strategy Policies SD1 (Delivering Sustainable Development), G1 (Tackling and Adapting to Climate Change) and G4 (Protecting Green Belt) as well as emerging planning policy, by providing local transport infrastructure in a highly accessible location, at a major developed site, that helps to facilitate sustainable transport and in turn, reduce carbon emissions to help reduce the impacts of climate change.

Location

The EV Hub is located within the existing main car park. This location has been chosen due to its accessibility to and from the main amenity building.

The location of the EV Hub enables ease of use for those using the facility without impacting on the existing operation of the car park and on the circulation of vehicles. It also allows for convenient 24/7 access to the charging infrastructure and to the amenities provided within the main building of the service area by those using the chargers.

The associated equipment, including communications and meter housing and substations have been installed on the grassed area near to the EV Hub and accessed from an existing area of hardstanding, adjacent to the HGV parking area. This location ensures the efficient and high-powered operation of the chargers. The installation of equipment in this area has had a negligible impact upon the landscaping around the car park.

As such the development is in accordance with Core Strategy Policies SD1 (Delivering Sustainable Development), T1 (Delivering Sustainable Transport), T2 (Improving Accessibility) and DM1 (General Development Requirements) and emerging Policies JP-Strat14 (A Sustainable and Integrated Transport Network), JP-S1 (Sustainable Development) and JP-C1 (An Integrated Network).

Residential Amenity

The EV Hub is located well within the existing Motorway Service Station and would not adversely affect the amenity of residential properties which are located a sufficient distance from the site. As such the proposal is considered to comply with the requirements of Policy DM1 (General Development Requirements) of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

Design and Appearance

The appearance of the chargers and associated infrastructure is detailed within the drawings and product guides provided as part of the application submission. The supporting equipment is required for the type and power of charger provided on site.

The EV Hub and associated equipment has been designed to be functional but unobtrusive and the facility is to be seen in the context of the existing car park and Motorway Service Station. The development is appropriate in terms of scale and is practical for its intended use.

As such the development is in accordance with Policies P1 (Improving Image), P3 (Improving Design of New Development) and DM1 (General Development Requirements) of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

Heritage

The application site is located within the Motorway Service Station car park and is well screened from the wider area by the existing buildings and the landscaping within and on the perimeter of the site. As such the EV Hub does not have an adverse effect on the setting of the Grade II Listed Building in Birch. As such the development is in accordance with Policy P2 (Protecting and Enhancing Character, Landscape and Heritage) of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

Landscape and Ecology

The EV Hub is located within the Motorway Service Station on an area of hardstanding and grass within the car park. A number of trees were cleared prior to GRIDSERVE arriving on site and commencing construction. It is understood these were appropriately cleared outside of bird nesting season.

As the location of the development is predominately previously developed land and maintained grass it is not considered that there will be any ecological impacts. Tree works were undertaken prior to GRIDSERVE starting development of the site. It is considered that these works have had a negligible impact on landscape value and ecology at the Motorway Service Station. As such the proposal is not considered to be contrary to the requirements of UDP Policies NE/3 (Biodiversity and Development) and NE/8 (Development Affecting Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows).

Transport

The EV Hub provides charging facilities for those travelling on the M62 in a convenient location alongside the other amenities at the Motorway Service Station. The development does not generate significant additional trips but supports and promotes the use of a sustainable mode of transport for those already on the road. The EV Hub utilises the existing car park access and there have been no changes to existing access arrangements at the Motorway Service Station.

The charging bays have been designed to ensure that the function and circulation of vehicles within the car park remains unchanged. The size of the bays allows for manoeuvrability around the vehicle to ensure users can access the chargers easily.

There has been no reduction in parking spaces within the car park. Consequently, the EV Hub does not have an unacceptable impact on highway or pedestrian safety and it does not result in unacceptable impacts on the wider highway network in line with paragraph 111 of the NPPF. As such the EV Hub is considered to be in accordance with Policies DM1 (General Development Requirements), T1 (Delivering Sustainable Transport) and T2 (Improving Accessibility) of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

Conclusions

The application seeks planning permission to retain a newly constructed EV Hub with associated equipment within the main car park at the Birch Westbound Motorway Service Station.

The development has been delivered in line with the Government target to provide additional high powered electric vehicle charging facilities at each motorway service station in England by the end of 2023. It supports local and national objectives of facilitating sustainable modes of transport, while making a significant contribution to GRIDSERVE's mission to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible and address climate change. The provision of an EV Hub at this location is fully in conformance with national and local planning policy and accordingly the application should be granted planning permission without delay.

The application (including relevant form, this cover letter and accompanying documentation) has been submitted electronically via the Planning Portal. We look forward to receiving confirmation of the name of the case officer, the planning application reference number and determination timescales shortly. Should any subsequent clarifications or information be required, please do let us know as soon as possible so it can be provided in a timely manner.

Yours faithfully,



Hannah Post
Senior Planner