

Officer Report

Case Reference: PL/2026/0188
Location: ASHWORTH VALLEY SCOUT CAMPSITE, ASHWORTH ROAD, HEYWOOD, ROCHDALE, OL11 5UP
Proposal: Installation of 4 no. six berth sleeping pods and roundhouse structure to provide communal space for cooking, eating and socialising.
Recommendation: Approve with Conditions
Officer: Rosalind Gralton

Location

The site relates to the Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite, located to the west of Ashworth Road down an undopted road which provides vehicle and pedestrian access. The site is relatively flat and is comprised of a large area of flat grassland and few buildings, including a two-storey building of stone structure and some single storey, small, timber cladded buildings, which appear to house equipment and warden paraphernalia. A car park is located to the very west at the head of the unadopted road. square of land to the west of Ashworth Road, and the associated unadopted farm track which provides access. The site is flat and is comprised of a rectangle to the north which is covered in hardcore and wooded along its perimeter, and an area of land to the south, which is greenfield and currently devoid of any development or hardstanding. The site is open and rural in character.

The site is located entirely within the Green Belt (G/D/2) and has no other policy designations.

No trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order is located on the site.

The site location plan shows the full extent of the Scout's ownership of the surrounding land in the blue line.

Proposal

The application seeks permission for the erection of 4, 6 berth sleeping pods and an octagonal round house hut.

The proposed sleeping pods measure 4m(W)x 3.4(L), 2.5(H). The sleeping pods would all be timber.

The proposed round house measure 6.53m in width and 5m in height, with capacity for 24 people. The roundhouse would be built with a timber frame, timber panels and green felt to the roof.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Sub-Regional

Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan (PfE)

The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan was adopted and became part of the statutory development plan for each of the 9 authorities covered by the plan on 21st March 2024.

The following policies are relevant:

JP-S1 Sustainable Development

JP-G1 Landscape Character

JP-G8 - A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity

JP-G9 The Green Belt

JP-P1 Sustainable Places

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS):

SO1 – To deliver a more prosperous economy

E6 – Supporting and diversifying the rural economy

SO2 – Creating successful and healthy communities

C8 – Improving community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities

SO3 – Improving Design, image and quality of place

P1 – Improving image

P3 – Improving design of new development

SO4 – Promoting a greener environment

G4 – Protecting Green Belt

SO5 – Improving accessibility and delivering sustainable transport

T2 – Improving accessibility

DM1 – General Development Requirements

Unitary Development Plan (UDP):

G/D/2 – Green Belt

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):

Supplementary Planning Guidance note 'Guidelines and Standards for Residential Development' (June 2016).

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

83/D16079 – Rebuilding Of Emergency Storm Shelter – Grant subject to conditions – 21/02/1984

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Tree Officer

No response received

Ecology

No objections

Env Health - Noise/Odours

No response received

REPRESENTATIONS

The application was publicised by way of neighbour notification and site notice. No responses were received.

ANALYSIS

Principle of Development

The application seeks permission for the erection of 4x 6 berth sleeping pods at the Ashworth Valley Scout campsite. The development includes the erection of 'sleeping pods' which are timber clad insulated structured on a raised platform. The design of the pods are timber, with a door at the front and a small window on the rear to allow for ventilation. The development also proposes an outdoor roundhouse, which is also timber clad with a felted

roof. The proposal does not comprise the change of use of the site or propose any additional hardstanding.

The application site is located within the Green Belt as allocated under the Rochdale Unitary Development Plan Proposals Map. The National Planning Policy Framework, states that '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 permanence'.

Paragraph 154 states that Local Planning Authorities should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt unless it meets one of the listed exceptions;

b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

The application has been presented to the Local Planning Authority as an exception to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, by exception (b) of paragraph 154, as a result of the proposed provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor recreation, as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the green belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The LPA accept the proposed use and associated change of use of the land will provide provision for outdoor facilities. However, the proposal would include the erection of new structures within the Green Belt where there are none currently. While some buildings exist nearby, the application is not supported by any evidence of any former structures on the proposed site.

As such, the proposed facilities must be assessed against how they preserve the openness of the green belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

Impact on openness

As identified above, the presence of the structures does not itself comprise inappropriate development so long as it preserves the openness of the green belt and the purposes of the land within it.

The proposed structures would be 250m away from the adopted highway access point on Ashworth Road and would not be visible from long to mid-range views. It is unlikely anyone would travel down the road unless they were attending the scout facilities. The proposed roundhouse and sleeping pods would be largely screened until at a close range, as a result of its wooded character and flat topography. There are no public rights of way along the site, it is well screened by verdant treescape, and it is not considered the proposed pods would result in any visual harm to the openness of the green belt.

In turning to the spatial element of openness, the physical presence of the roundhouse and sleeping berths would, by definition, result in an impact on the openness of the Green Belt by introducing development to land which is presently open. However, the proposed development is sited near a cluster of similarly designed and utilised scout facilities, nearby a verdant treescape and would not be harmful to the sense of openness. The site

is flat, and accessed via an unadopted, single lane road. The proposed buildings and structures would be small in scale and finished in timber with a green felted roof to the roundhouse. These materials are in keeping with the appearance of the existing scout facilities and are sited close to the existing buildings. While the mere presence of the buildings may cause some spatial harm by definition, the impact on the spatial openness of the green belt is very limited., and therefore, is considered acceptable, and would preserve the sense of openness and not conflict the purposes of land within it. The proposal will therefore not comprise inappropriate development in the green belt and is considered acceptable and in compliance with Policy G4 of the Rochdale Core Strategy, Policy JP-G9 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, and Chapter 13 of the NPPF.

Visual amenity

Paragraph 131 of the NPPF states that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Paragraph 135 goes on to state that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.

The proposal is for 4x sleeping pods, measuring 4m x 3.5m approximately, and a roundhouse which would measure 6.53m x 6.53m in width and length, and measure 5m from ground level to the very top of the conical shaped roof. The buildings would be low level, clad in timber and would be of simple construction and basic in appearance. The roof of the roundhouse would be a felted green roof, which further adds to the temporary, basic appearance of the buildings. The site would have a rural appearance akin to the existing structures on the wider site and would weather with age. The proposed material palette of the building would be considered acceptable.

No details of external lighting are provided as a result of the development and is not stated as required for the operation of the sleeping pods or roundhouse as part of this application. In the instance this would be required in future, additional planning permission would be required.

The proposal is considered to be acceptable, and in accordance with Policy JP-P1 of the PfE Joint Development Plan, policies DM1 and P1, P2 and P3 of the Rochdale Core Strategy and policies contained within the NPPF.

Biodiversity, trees and ecology

Policy G6 establishes that through development, the Council will sustain and enhance a green network to support growth and regeneration in the borough and provide a high-quality environment. Through this we will support new woodland and tree planting in new developments and replace removed trees from a site at a ratio of 2:1 net gain for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is possible. Additionally Core Strategy policy G7 requires that no development should result in a net loss of biodiversity

and geodiversity. Policy JP-G8 of PfE states development will be expected to achieve a net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%.

When determining planning applications paragraph 186 of the NPPF sets out that if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused. Opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should also be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable. The application site is not allocated for nature conservation under local planning policy and nor is the site subject to any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations.

The application is accompanied by a Biodiversity Net Gain Metric, Preliminary Ecological Assessment and Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA). The Greater Manchester Ecology Unit were consulted as part of the application and raised no objection to the proposals on arboriculture or ecology grounds.

The Biodiversity Net Gain Metric submitted suggests a 11.1% increase in on-site net change in biodiversity units. The Greater Manchester Ecological Unit have been consulted as part of the application. have stated the uplift of biodiversity units proposed is acceptable and the statutory biodiversity gain condition is applied.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been submitted. This found the site to comprise modified grassland, trees, tall forbs, and an area of bare ground colonised by Himalayan balsam. No further surveys were recommended, though Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) for commuting bats, nesting birds, badger, hedgehog reptiles, and amphibians were, which are detailed in Section 9 of the PEA. These should be secured via condition. Enhancements are also proposed within the PEA, including bat and bird boxes, which can be secured via condition.

This comprises ancient woodland and Cheesden Brook, which will need to be protected throughout any development. As such, it is recommended that a buffer of 10m from the SBI is maintained, and a CEMP: Biodiversity is secured via condition, which should include details as to how the SBI will be protected from any adverse impacts of the development, such as dust, pollution, and recreational disturbance.

Accordingly, subject to condition, the scheme is considered to be acceptable in accordance with Core Strategy Policy G6, PfE Policy JP-G9 and the NPPF.

A Tree Protection Plan and Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method statement (AIA and AMS) was submitted with the application. The Council's Tree Officer was consulted on the application, and no comments were received. However, following the comments within the GMEU response and case officer review of the report it details majority of the trees in close proximity of the site are of Category C in retention value and no trees are to be removed as part of the application. While no removal is proposed the details contained within the submitted AIA, AMS and tree protection plan is secured via a compliance condition.

Highways

Policy T2 of the Core Strategy requires that development complies with the Council's car parking standards and policy DM1 requires that development provides satisfactory vehicular access with adequate parking, manoeuvring and serving arrangements, taking into account the proposed use and location.

The proposed pods do not affect existing staff levels or opening times and their provision will integrate with the sites existing facilities. It is not considered the provision of these facilities will increase parking demand on the site. There is an existing formalised passing place on the unadopted lane, and it is not considered that additional measures are required to take place.

As such, the proposal is in compliance with Policy T2 of the Core Strategy.

Recommendation: Approve with Conditions

Condition(s) (7)

- 1 The development must be begun not later than three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason: Required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

- 2 The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following list of plans and documents:

- Location Plan
- Proposed Site Plan
- Planning Statement
- Biodiversity Net Gain Metric
- Habitat Condition Assessments
- Ashworth Valley Scout Camp Tree Constraints Plan V2
- Select Item 16
- Design and Access Statement
- Proposed pod layout and elevations
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement
- Proposed roundhouse hut and elevations
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
- BS 5837 Tree Survey Ashworth Valley Scout Camp V2
- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment Feb 2026

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory standard of development in accordance with the policies contained within the

adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, the saved Rochdale Unitary Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 3 The materials used in the construction of the exterior of the development hereby permitted shall be in accordance with those indicated within the application and on the approved plans.

Reason: In order to ensure a satisfactory appearance in the interests of visual amenity in accordance with policies P3 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework

- 4 No part of the development hereby permitted shall be occupied until a scheme of biodiversity enhancements has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such measures shall include, but not limited to, the provision of bird boxes, bird bricks, bat boxes and bat bricks to be integrated to the fabric of the buildings hereby approved, bug hotels, hibernaculum, wildflower seeding and hedgehog habitat (including provision of 'Hedgehog Highways') The duly approved scheme shall be implemented in full prior to final occupation of the phase of development to which the measures relate and retained thereafter.

Reason: In the interests of enhancing biodiversity and habitat provision within the site in accordance with Policy G7 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policy JP-G8 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 5 No development shall take place (including any site clearance, demolition or preparation works) until a reasonable avoidance measures statement for commuting bats, nesting birds, badger, hedgehog reptiles, and amphibians has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved statement thereafter.

Reason: In order to minimise potential risk to protected species and in accordance with Policy G7 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policy JP-G8 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Reason for pre-commencement condition: site clearance poses a potential threat to commuting bats, nesting birds, badger, hedgehog reptiles, and amphibians which are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and protective measures must therefore be agreed in advance.

- 6 No development shall take place until details of measures to protect Cheeseden Brook from fugitive dust and debris both during and after the

construction phase have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The development shall not be carried out otherwise than in accordance with the approved method statement without the prior written permission of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To minimise the detrimental effects to the natural environment through risks of pollution during the construction phase in accordance with Policies DM1, G7 and G9 of the Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 8 No development (including any demolition, site clearance or preparation works) shall take place until the trees that are to be retained within the site has been enclosed with temporary protective fencing and temporary ground protection has been fully installed in full accordance with BS:5837:2012 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction' and with the approved Tree Protection Plan.

The necessary protection measures shall be retained, and the Arboricultural Method Statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction phase of the development and no works, excavation, tipping, or stacking/storage of materials shall take place beyond such protective fencing during the construction period.

Reason: In order to protect the existing trees on the site in the interests of the amenities of the area and in accordance with Policies P3, G1, G6 and G7 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policies JPP1, JP-G6 and JP-G7 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

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The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for development of land in England is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition (biodiversity gain condition) that development may not begin unless:

- (a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority,
- and.
- (b) the planning authority has approved the plan.

The planning authority, for the purposes of determining whether to approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan, if one is required in respect of this permission would be Rochdale Council.

Based on the information available this permission is considered to be one which will require the approval of a biodiversity gain plan before development is begun because none of the statutory exemptions or transitional arrangements listed below are considered to apply.

Statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements in respect of the biodiversity gain condition.

1. The application for planning permission was made before 12 February 2024.
2. The planning permission relates to development to which section 73A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (planning permission for development already carried out) applies.
3. The planning permission was granted on an application made under section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and
 - (i) the original planning permission to which the section 73 planning permission relates* was granted before 12 February 2024; or
 - (ii) the application for the original planning permission* to which the section 73 planning permission relates was made before 12 February 2024.
4. The permission which has been granted is for development which is exempt being:
 - 4.1 Development which is not 'major development' (within the meaning of article 2(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015) where:
 - i) the application for planning permission was made before 2 April 2024;
 - ii) planning permission is granted which has effect before 2 April 2024; or
 - iii) planning permission is granted on an application made under section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 where the original permission to which the section 73 permission relates* was exempt by virtue of (i) or (ii).
 - 4.2 Development below the de minimis threshold, meaning development which:
 - i) does not impact an onsite priority habitat (a habitat specified in a list published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006); and

ii) impacts less than 25 square metres of onsite habitat that has biodiversity value greater than zero and less than 5 metres in length of onsite linear habitat (as defined in the statutory metric).

4.3 Development which is subject of a householder application within the meaning of article 2(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. A "householder application" means an application for planning permission for development for an existing dwellinghouse, or development within the curtilage of such a dwellinghouse for any purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse which is not an application for change of use or an application to change the number of dwellings in a building.

4.4 Development of a biodiversity gain site, meaning development which is undertaken solely or mainly for the purpose of fulfilling, in whole or in part, the Biodiversity Gain Planning condition which applies in relation to another development, (no account is to be taken of any facility for the public to access or to use the site for educational or recreational purposes, if that access or use is permitted without the payment of a fee).

4.5 Self and Custom Build Development, meaning development which:

i) consists of no more than 9 dwellings,

ii) is carried out on a site which has an area no larger than 0.5 hectares; and

iii) consists exclusively of dwellings which are self-build or custom housebuilding (as defined in section 1(A1) of the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015).

4.6 Development forming part of, or ancillary to, the high-speed railway transport network (High Speed 2) comprising connections between all or any of the places or parts of the transport network specified in section 1(2) of the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Act 2013.

*original planning permission means the permission to which the section 73 planning permission relates" means a planning permission which is the first in a sequence of two or more planning permissions, where the second and any subsequent planning permissions are section 73 planning permissions.

For the purposes of paragraph 13 (a) above, a biodiversity gain plan is a plan which:

(a) relates to development for which planning permission is granted,

and.

(b) specifies the matters referred to in sub-paragraph 14(2) below:

The matters are:

(g) information about the steps taken or to be taken to minimise the adverse effect of the development on the biodiversity of the onsite habitat and any other habitat.

(h) the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat,

(i) the post-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat,

(j) any registered offsite biodiversity gain allocated to the development and the biodiversity and the biodiversity value of that gain in relation to the development,

(k) any biodiversity credits purchased for the development; and

(l) any such other matters as the Secretary of State may by regulations specify.