

Planning Officer's Report - LDCA JANUARY 2021

APPLICATION	2019/80 – Retention of the Widening of the Existing Road
PERMISSION SOUGHT	Permission in Full
REGISTERED	6 June 2019
APPLICANT	St Helena Government
PARCEL	FP0237
SIZE	N/A
LAND OWNER	Private
LOCALITY	Barren Hill, Alarm Forest
ZONE	Green Heartland
CONSERVATION AREA	None
CURRENT USE	Vacant open space
PUBLICITY	The application was advertised as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Independent Newspaper on 13 September 2019▪ A site notice displayed in accordance with Regulations.
EXPIRY	27 September 2019
OBJECTION RECEIVED	None
DECISION ROUTE	Delegated / LDCA / EXCO

A. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

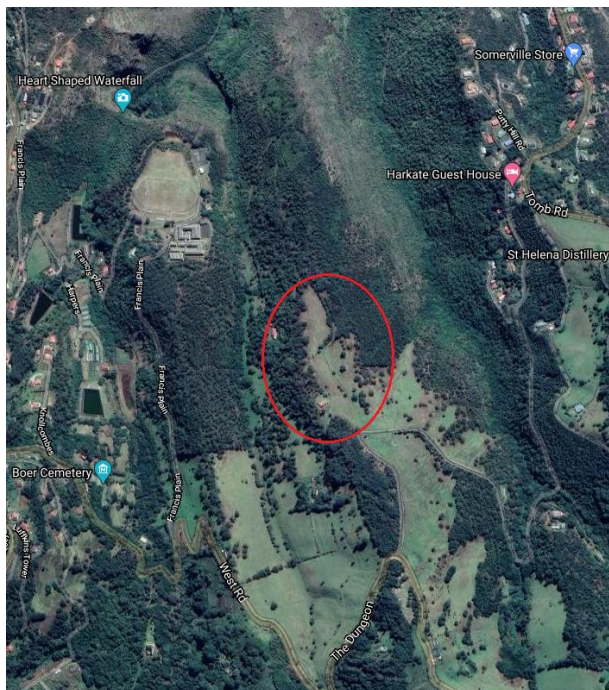
1. Water Division	No Objection
2. Sewage Division	Not Consulted
3. Energy Division	Not Consulted
4. Fire & Rescue	Not Consulted
5. Roads Section	No Objection:
6. Property Division	No Response
7. Heritage	No Response
8. Environmental Management	No Objection
9. Public Health	No Objection

10. Agriculture & Natural Resources	No Objection
11. St Helena Police Services	Not Consulted
12. Aerodrome Safe Guarding	No Response
13. Enterprise St Helena (ESH)	No Objection
14. National Trust	No Response

B. PLANNING OFFICER'S APPRAISAL

Location and Orientation: The application site is a private road off Gordon's Post Road and runs northwards across an open plain for a distance of around 270m and then for a distance of around 250m through a tree lined corridor with a number of sharp bends to the listed building referred to as Woodcot. The listed building is a private residential property. The junction of this road with Gordon's Post Road is on a sharp bend, in the area known as Barren Hill.

Diagram 1: Location Plan



Zones & Restrictions: The application site falls within the Green Heartland Zone with restrictions on built development in general, controlled extensions to existing buildings and other forms of development which do not involve built structures which will be judged on individual merit with the aim of preserving the Green Heartland.

Development Proposals: The Applicant has already widened and reconstructed this private road from its junction with Gordon's Post Road for over the length of the original road. It is unclear exactly when the reconstruction and widening took place during the summer 2019. When this unauthorised development came to the attention

of the Planning officers, they have tried to establish the details of the works undertaken and advised the owners to submit a development application for the retention of the road widening and reconstruction and with the application to provide information on original appearance and condition of the road before the works were undertaken and a justification for this development that has taken place.

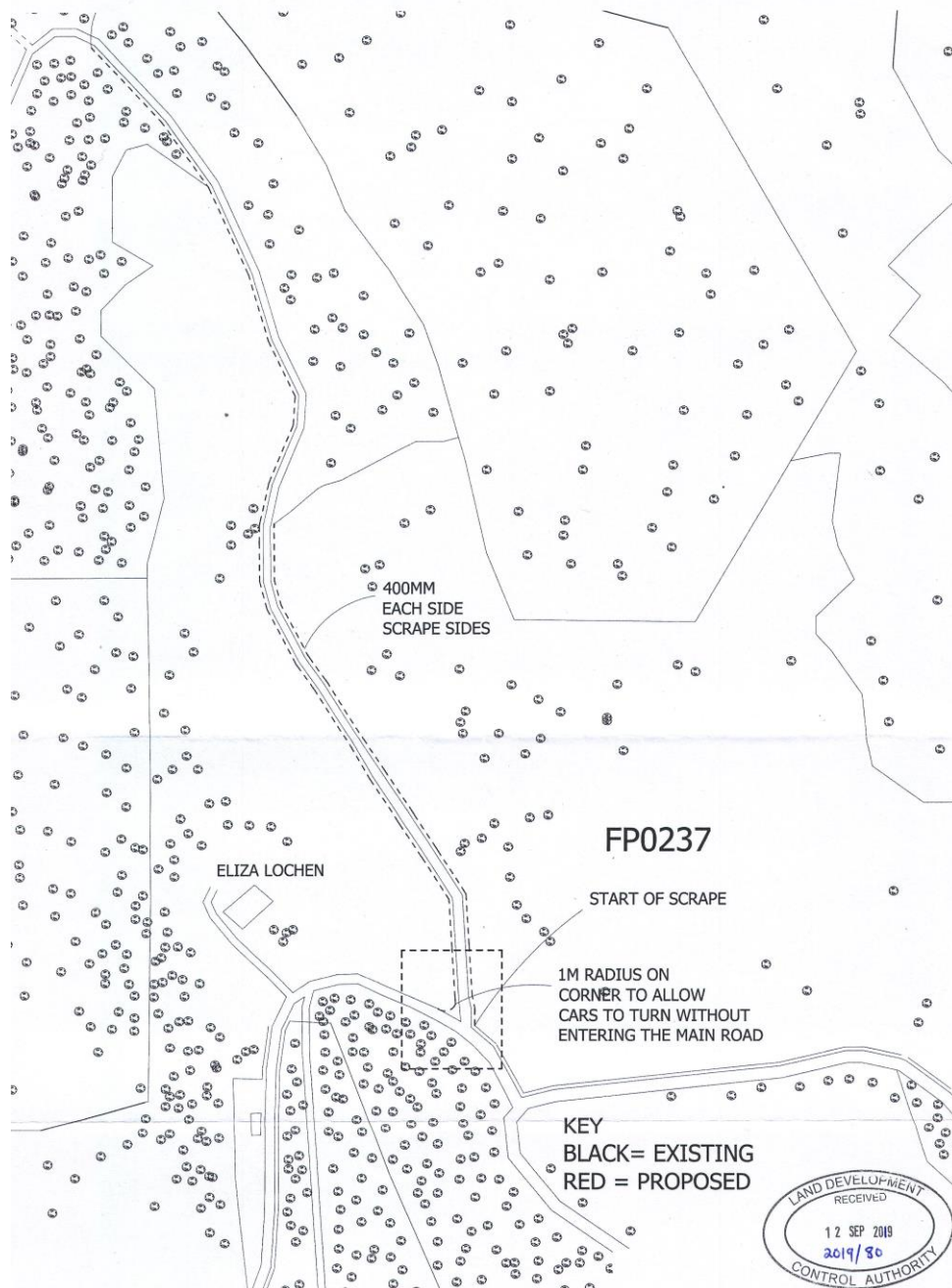
Diagram 2: The Site Plan



As the aerial photograph of the area show that this is open countryside within Green Heartland Zone with isolated homesteads probably developed long time ago. This upgraded road serves the property referred to as Woodcot, which is a Grade I listed building, built in early 19th century. It is therefore likely to have had an access track (road) from that period, however it is likely to be very rural in its appearance and not of a tarmac surface finish. However the years, it may have been repaired and upgraded many times over but it is likely to have remained narrow in its width and not very prominent in the landscape. Unfortunately the applicant has not been able to

provide any evidence of the access track (road) condition or its appearance. Similarly, there has been no justification provided for the need to widen the road. Given that it is a private road serving a single property on land that is privately owned, there is unlikely to have much vehicular traffic along its length and a single narrow track would seem to be sufficient.

Diagram 3: Site Layout and Extent of widening



At the time the upgraded road came to the attention of the planning officers, there was a development application seeking permission to upgrade listed building. Whilst the applicant has failed to provide any evidence on the appearance and condition of the road, there are two photographs included in the development application reference 2019/81 showing the area of the road closer to the property. The road in the photo

even in this location appears to have been upgraded before the development application for proposed work to the house was made. It would appear from the photograph that upgrade of this access road was part of the project to upgraded the estate. Also of concerning is the level of tree clearance that appears to have been undertaken.

Diagram 4: Appearance of an access track off the upgraded road (October 2017)



The photograph in Diagram 4 dated around 2017 shows the appearance of another access road which is off the upgraded road about 10m from the Gordon's Post Road. It is likely that the appearance of the application road was similar in its appearance.

Diagram 5: Tree Clearance in the vicinity of Woodcot



The photograph in Diagram 5 shows the level of clearance (cutting down of trees) closer to the house. However, there is no information provided in this respect by the applicant. Whilst this work may be considered as permitted development and would not require development permission, however, the extent of the tree clearance is a concern and issue to consider is whether these work affect the setting of the Grade I

listed Building. If it does then these work would have required a development permission before the works are undertaken.

Diagram 6 Upgraded Access Road



Similarly Diagram 6 shows the extent of the clearance undertaken to widen the access track. Whilst, within this wooded area, due to the coverage of the tree, visual impact on the wider landscape is not so apparent, however the road is much more of a dominant feature in the rural setting of the Green Heartland.

Diagram 7: Aerial Image of the Access Road (October 2017)



Within the open countryside, the aerial photograph in Diagram 7 shows that access track appearance within landscape, it is considered not to be a dominant feature in the landscape. In the bottom left hand side of the photograph is the aerial view of the access track in Diagram 4.

C. POLICY CONSIDERATION

The proposed development is assessed against the LDCP Policies set out below:

- Green Heartland Zone: Policy GH1 and element of Implementation Policies
- Road and Transport: Policies RT.1(a), RT.4

Green Heartland Zone: Principle policy states; that within the Green Heartland Zone, there will be a presumption in favour of retaining the undeveloped nature of the Green Heartland and its natural ecology; and subsequent policies state; that development permission will however be considered for developments that meet the following criteria:

- a) for the conservation, interpretation, study and appreciation of the natural ecology of the area (e.g. Walk-ways, interpretation centre, etc.)
- b) tourism-related development within established forest areas in the form of eco-lodges that will, as an element of the development proposal, remain forested sufficient to conceal the development from any viewpoint within the Diana's Peak National Park or visible in any view towards the National Park from a public road or public place
- c) development that does not include the creation of sleeping or catering facilities or new dwellings except for the extension of existing buildings,
- d) designed to comply with the aims of the primary policy (i.e. retaining the undeveloped nature of the Green Heartland and its natural ecology)
- e) development will be subject to the requirement to landscape the site sufficient to conceal the development or blend it in to the landscape, including a proportion of indigenous species appropriate to the scale and nature of the development.
- f) identifying, protecting and promoting established footpaths that may fall within the development's foot print or nearby.

In view of this, it is considered that visual impact of this upgraded access track in the landscape is considerable and therefore contrary to the general principle of the Green Heartland Zone protection objectives and policy GHZ1. and be permissible within this zone, Policies GH2 (a) and (b), for instance, are in favour of (a) 'development required for the conservation, interpretation, study and appreciation of the natural ecology of the area (e.g. walkways or foot paths)' and (b) 'tourism-related development within established forest areas.....that will remain forested sufficient to conceal the development from any viewpoint within the Diana's Peak National Park or visible

in any view towards the National Park from a public road or public place'. The development is also not in compliance with this policy, however the upgraded track would not have any impact on the latter part of the policy.

Road and Transport Principle policy states; that development permission will be granted for the construction of new roads and the upgrading of existing roads appropriate to the Island's development needs (and utilising excavated waste and other secondary construction materials) provided that, in the design and layout of the roads to achieve safe conditions, speed and free flow of traffic shall be of lower priority than that of minimizing the impact upon the natural and built heritage of the island.

Unfortunately, there are no specific policies that can be applied for the determination of the development proposal in respect of the development that has already been carried for the widening and upgrade of this access track within area that is required to be protected from development and enhanced unless the proposed development meet these criterion for development. For the development that has taken place there appears to be no policy support. In view of the fact that development has already taken place and the applicant having provided no supporting evidence and/or justification for the need for the level upgrade work undertaken or preconstruction photographic record it is difficult to make any objective assessment of the development undertaken against the LDCP policies to access the impact.

D. STAKEHOLDE CONSULATAION AND REPRESENTATION

There is no issues raised by the stakeholder to the development. Similarly there has been no representation received from general public and other consultees.

E. PLANNING OFFICER'S STATEMENT & RECOMMENDATION

The development undertaken does not accord with the Green Heartland Zone and related Policies in terms of the nature of development and its impact on the landscape. The general appearance and entrance of the upgraded road at the junction with Gordon's Post Road is now appears very prominent in the streetscene, to the extent that what was previously an access track is now more prominent the secondary classified road through the area. Whilst there are no photographic evidence to show the appearance and condition of the road, it is considered that this access track was very similar in appearance to the access track that is off this upgraded access track some 10m from the Gordon's Post Road junction serving another property in the area.

As the development has been completed before the submission of a development application, the options open to the Authority are limited and agreeing to grant development to retain the development as undertaken would now considered to be

least disruptive on the landscape. Given the open nature of the large section of the upgraded access track is open countryside requirement of additional landscaping is not considered to be appropriate in this location.

Similarly, if the Members are of the view, the development as undertaken is so harmful to the landscape of Green Heartland Zone, then there is the option to refuse development permission and instruct the owners to return the appearance of this access track to its original condition. The issue here is that the applicant has not provided any evidence of the pre-construction appearance and if the applicant fails to do so that Enforcement action would need to be instigated by the authority. If development permission is refused that applicant has the right to appeal against the Authority's Decision