

Planning Officer's Report - LDCA NOVEMBER 2023

APPLICATION	2023/48 – Construction of Ramp and Installation of Railings at the Big Rock Recreational Site and Extension of Car Parking Facilities at Scotland
PERMISSION SOUGHT	Full Permission
REGISTERED	14 September 2023
APPLICANT	Myra Young, ENRP Portfolio, SHG
PARCEL	SCOT0648
LOCALITY	Big Rock Recreational Site and Scotland
ZONE	Green Heartland Zone
CONSERVATION AREA	None
CURRENT USE	Forestland/ Recreation
PUBLICITY	The application was advertised as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Independent Newspaper on 14 September 2023▪ A site notice displayed in accordance with Regulations.
EXPIRY	28 September 2023
REPRESENTATIONS	None Received
DECISION ROUTE	Delegated / LDCA / EXCO

A. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

1. Sewage & Water Division	No Objection – Comment
2. Energy Division	No Objection
3. Fire & Rescue	No Response
4. Roads Section	No Response
5. Property Division	No Response
6. Environmental Management	No Response
7. Public Health	No Objection
8. Agriculture & Natural Resources	No Response
9. St Helena Police Services	Not Consulted
10. Aerodrome Safe Guarding	Not Consulted

11. Sustainable Development	No Objection
12. National Trust	No Objection
13. Sure SA Ltd	No Objection
14. Heritage Society	No Response
15. Maritime Authority	Not Applicable

B. PLANNING OFFICER'S APPRAISAL

LOCALITY & ZONING

This plot is located within the forestland of Scotland, where it is designated within the Green Heartland Zone and has no conservation area restrictions.

Diagram 1: Location Plan



PROPOSAL BACKGROUND

The Big Rock recreations site is currently used for the purpose of forest recreation by the public. The area is part of a productive forest and hosts forestry tree species both on the fringes of the area and scattered throughout. The site itself is in its natural state, with just one man-made picnic bench for visitor use. The ground is currently bare, the surface slippery and littered with natural slip, trip and fall hazards, as well as unwanted vegetation. The site is located on top of a rock outcrop that has the edge exposed to a 30-40 foot fall on to the path below.

The car park facilities consist of; an uneven stone surface in one area and the proposed area for extension is covered in grass. The area is informally used for parking of 4x4 vehicles by ENRP staff only.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The primary purpose of this development proposal is to improve the overall visitor experience at the Big Rock recreation site, one of Saint Helena Government's key recreation areas in Plantation National Forest, with a specific focus on low-impact forest recreation, safety, wellbeing and providing accessibility for all members of the community and in particular, those who experience challenges with their mobility.

Although this site is a popular recreation destination, in its current state, lacks basic amenity and safety features such as; secure access and parking facilities. The site in its natural form, whilst attractive to current users, leaves visitors open to safety hazards such as; exposed, unsecured rocky outcrops, uneven, slippery surfaces with natural trip hazards (tree roots, exposed stumps etc.) which can lead to accidents and/ or injury.

The development proposal includes various site improvements, including:

- adequately safe car parking facilities

The current state of the small parking area makes it unfit for purpose as the surface consists of stones and is uneven, making it difficult to walk upon and slippery during the winter months, thus posing a slip, rip and fall hazard to all.

- designated parking bays

At present, there are no designated parking bays, which encourages parking of vehicles by visitors and other users of the area, in wherever spaces allow, causing traffic congestion, impaired vision and increased risk of road traffic collision. It is proposed that designated parking bays will be created through improved layout and design of the existing parking area, accommodating up to 20 vehicles safely and with defined access.

- concrete ramp with timber rails designed for wheelchair access

Wheelchair access will be from the main track to the site/ viewing platform.

- a viewing platform for those with mobility issues

To enable those with mobility issues to experience and enjoy the benefits of our natural environment, as do the able-bodied members of our community.

Further amenities will include:

- improved and increased seating facilities
- waste receptors
- signage and local interpretation
- wooden safety rails around the site perimeter

The development proposal states that; all features, with the exception of the wheelchair access, viewing platform and sign will be made from timber, in keeping with the natural environment. The wheelchair access and viewing platform will be made from concrete to ensure sustainability, durability and confidence in its safety (as opposed to wood). The sign and interpretation board will be made from metal, but with a timber frame.

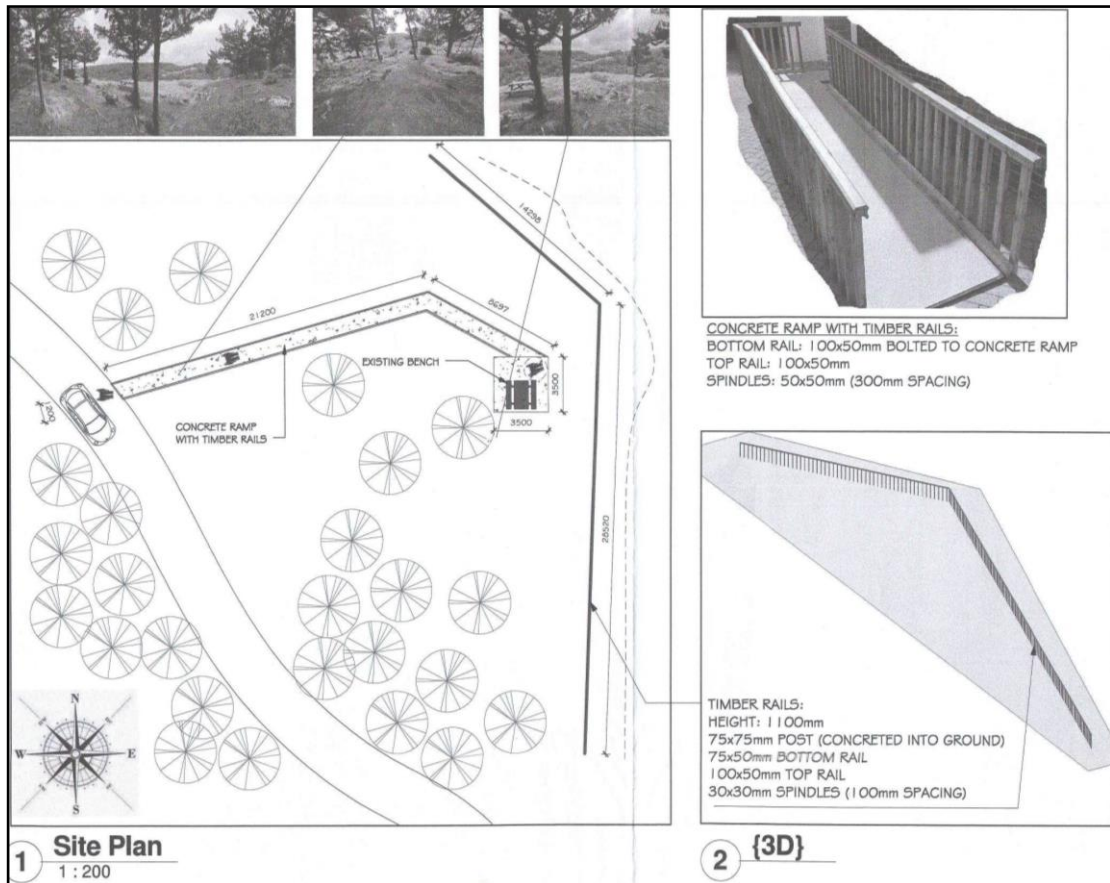
The proposal also states that; construction of the new and improved parking facilities will require minimal preparatory works; cutting and removal of existing grass, scraping of the ground to provide a level surface, placement of barrier mats, topped with a layer of crushed stone. The designated parking areas will be demarcated with the use of kerb stones around the perimeter. Additional seating facilities and waste receptors will also be included at this site.

As part of ENRP's development proposal statement, the benefits for this project were outlined, as per below—

“This proposal seeks to improve the overall visitor experience at the Big Rock recreation site, one of Saint Helena Government’s key recreation areas in Plantation National Forest, through a number of site improvements, supported by adequate and safe car parking facilities. The proposal aims to create an improved environment that supports low impact, individual and family orientated, forest recreation that supports health and wellbeing opportunities for the community as a whole. The proposal seeks to ensure that those with mobility issues can also access green areas of the Island that enables them to experience and enjoy the benefits of our natural environment, as do the able-bodied members of our community”.

“Additional benefits of this proposal includes a positive reputation created by SHG through its investment in and management of a key public area that is of significant importance to the community; demonstrable level of local pride to the community which encourages local ownership of our natural environment and opens avenues for community involvement and policing; greater education and public interest and awareness generated through promotion of the national Forest Estate and its key natural and historical features and a reduction in the occurrence of litter.”

Diagram 3: Proposed Site Plan



STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK & REPRESENTATIONS

No representations were received from any members of the public or stakeholders, however, there were comments made as detailed below.

Connect Water Division

Water mains in area PTD and SV advised before works commence.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

A public consultation for this development proposal was conducted at The Market in Jamestown, on 7 September 2023. From this public drop-in session, a total of 48 members of the general public signed their name in support of the proposal and 1 person expressed that they were not in support of the proposal.

LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The relevant policies of the Land Development Control Plan (LDCP 2012 - 2022) that are applicable in the assessment of the proposed development are set out below:

- Green Heartland [GH.6]
- Social Infrastructure [SI.6, SI.12]

OFFICER'S ASSESSMENT

In assessing the proposal, the Green Heartland Policy GH.6 reads *'In considering any development proposal in the Green Heartland, there shall be a presumption in favour of identifying, protecting and promoting established footpaths; development which fails to do so will not normally be permitted'*. As Big Rock is an established recreational destination already, promoting it for an upgrade to make it an inclusive destination for people of all backgrounds and physical abilities, would be a positive development that is in compliance with this particular policy.

Furthermore, the proposal complies with policies; SI.6 which dictates that; *'Development permission will be granted for development to enhance the facilities at existing community centres and recreation areas and for the creation of new facilities including playgrounds'*, and SI.12 states; *'Development permission will be granted for tourism-related development and new commercial and community development only where satisfactory provision is made in the design of the development for access and usage by people with disabilities...'*. As this forest recreation facility is easily accessible from the main road by vehicle, this would make an ideal destination, especially for visitors and tourists to the Island who experience mobility challenges, making for a suitably adapted place where panoramic views can be enjoyed of Plantation House to the right, set in amongst the green landscape of the higher ground and central belt, contrasted against the Atlantic Ocean as the view pans around to the left.

Overall, the development will have an impact on the Green Heartland, however, given that the principal premise of this proposal *"seeks to ensure that those with mobility issues can also access green areas of the Island, that enables them to experience and enjoy the benefits of our natural environment, as do the able-bodied members of our community"*, merits serious consideration and weighed up against the benefits as outlined above, qualifies the development as a positive action towards the wellbeing and inclusivity of the local community and visitors alike.

The proposed development details how it will endeavour to minimize disruption to the natural environment of the area, which offers confidence in the knowledge that this concern is at the forefront of consideration in the design and will also carry throughout the construction phase.

As outlined above, the development proposal can be supported on the basis that it complies with elements of the Green Heartland and Social Infrastructure policies.