

Background and Establishing Need

Burrs Country Park is one of the best loved, most visited parks in Bury. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 made it clear how much the local community wholly relied on Burrs Country Park for recreation, for exercise and for the benefits on their mental health. It is a relatively flat, easily accessible site open for all. However, many visitors have to travel to site by vehicle, having no other means of accessing the facilities on site. During lockdown the car parks were inundated most days of the week. The Ranger had to tow cars off the overspill car park several times over the summer as they had become stuck in the muddy grass, proving the current facility isn't fit for purpose.

The photographs below show the extent of the car parking issue. These photographs were taken in the February half term in 2021. The site is even busier on warmer spring and summer weekend days and summer holidays. The proposed formalising of the overspill car park will create 200 off road car parking spaces and a macadam surfaced pavement along Woodhill Road giving safe pedestrian access into the Park.





The site off Woodhill Road was chosen for the proposed car park for several reasons:

1. It was already used as an overspill car park and had had previous works to the grass surface to reinforce it for such a purpose
2. It is the safest and closest site to existing vehicular access, being just off Woodhill Road. Other open spaces aren't as close to highways meaning greater cost and a greater risk to pedestrian visitors. These additional overspill car parks are used for large events like the Show.
3. The site is shown as open space on historic maps dating back to 1840s meaning the potential to disturb either archaeological remains or contaminated land are minimal.

Relevant National, Regional and Local Planning Policies

The National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF 2019 sets out the Government's planning policies for England; providing a framework within which local plans can be produced. There are several areas of policy which support the proposals at Burrs Country Park:

Building a Strong, Competitive Economy

83. Planning policies and decision should enable:

- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside

Open Space and Recreation

96. Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities.

Protecting Green Belt Land/Proposals affecting the Green Belt

144. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green belt.
146. Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:
 - e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes for use for outdoor sport or recreation).

The proposed car park area is within the Green Belt boundary which encompasses the entire Country Park but the proposals do not constitute 'substantial harm'.

Planning and Flood Risk

163. When determining any planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. Development should only be allowed in areas at risk of flooding where....it can be demonstrated that:

- b) the development is appropriately flood resistant and resilient
- c) it incorporates sustainable drainage systems

Habitats and Biodiversity

175. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

- c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees should be refused unless there are wholly exception reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.

Active Design, Sport England/Public Health England (2015)

Active Design sets out 10 key principles to encourage sport and physical activity through the design and layout of the built environment. The key one affecting this proposal is 'activity for all: making neighbourhoods, facilities and open spaces accessible to all users'.

Local Policies

Bury UDP 1997

'In terms of recreation and tourism, Burrs Country Park is protected for recreation purposes under Policy RT3/1, which safeguards the Borough's most important focal points for informal recreation. Furthermore, Policy RT4/1 on Tourism Development encourages and support proposals for the development of appropriate visitor related attractions and facilities throughout the Borough, particularly in the Upper Irwell Valley, noting that this location is 'an area where preference will be given to locating tourist attractions and facilities' and that 'development proposals will be particularly encouraged where they build on existing strengths, such as the East Lancashire Railway, and places of interest including...Burrs Country Park'.

Bury Green Space Audit and Strategy 2015

This comprehensive strategy produced in 2015 makes specific reference to developing Burrs Country Park:

- PG2: to develop long-term development plans for Burrs Country Park and Philips Park (page 67)

The findings of the Bury West area found that 'very few neighbourhoods in Bury West have problems accessing recreation facilities except in the case of amenity green space site which are beyond 400m of most households'.

Improvements to both car parking and pedestrian access as proposed with this project will support the Green Space Strategy.

Bury Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2018

This strategy has specific priorities, including 'supporting people to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle'; and 'ensuring older people play an active role within their community, tackling the impact of social isolation'.

By providing decent car parking and improved pedestrian access through the site, this project is supporting these strategy aims.

Burrs Country Park Strategy 2015-2029

This document sets out the Council's vision to create a 'destination park' over a 15 year time period, recognising the range of attractions available for visitors.

5.8. Surface car parking at Burrs is free and totals 66 permanent spaces (including 2 disabled). Such a limited provision is adequate for a local country park facility although events add extra pressure. An additional 319 spaces are available during events...one of which has a reinforced 'Fibra-sand' surface adjacent Woodhill Road.

Key Issues/opportunities

The need to enhance the park's infrastructure to facilitate its anticipated increased use and to minimise conflict between different user groups.

6.2 Underpinning this vision are the following principles:

To support and improve the health and wellbeing of visitors to Burrs Country Park by providing accessible facilities for all users including the disabled and those with special needs;

Proffitts have been working alongside BMBC and The Friends of Burrs for several years now, supporting the development of the strategy for Burrs Country Park taking into consideration the entire Park. The proposals for car parking and access put forward in this application support the Country Park Strategy. The map overleaf (figure 4) specifically highlights the site off Woodhill Road as car parking. Improving the car park surface is of paramount importance now the site footfall has increased significantly.

UDP Part 2 Open Land

OL1 Green Belt Policy

"The Council will maintain a Green Belt ensuring that it fulfils the following strategic purposes:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas:
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from further encroachment
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land"

OL1/2 states "construction of new buildings inside the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it is for essential facilities for... outdoor recreation".

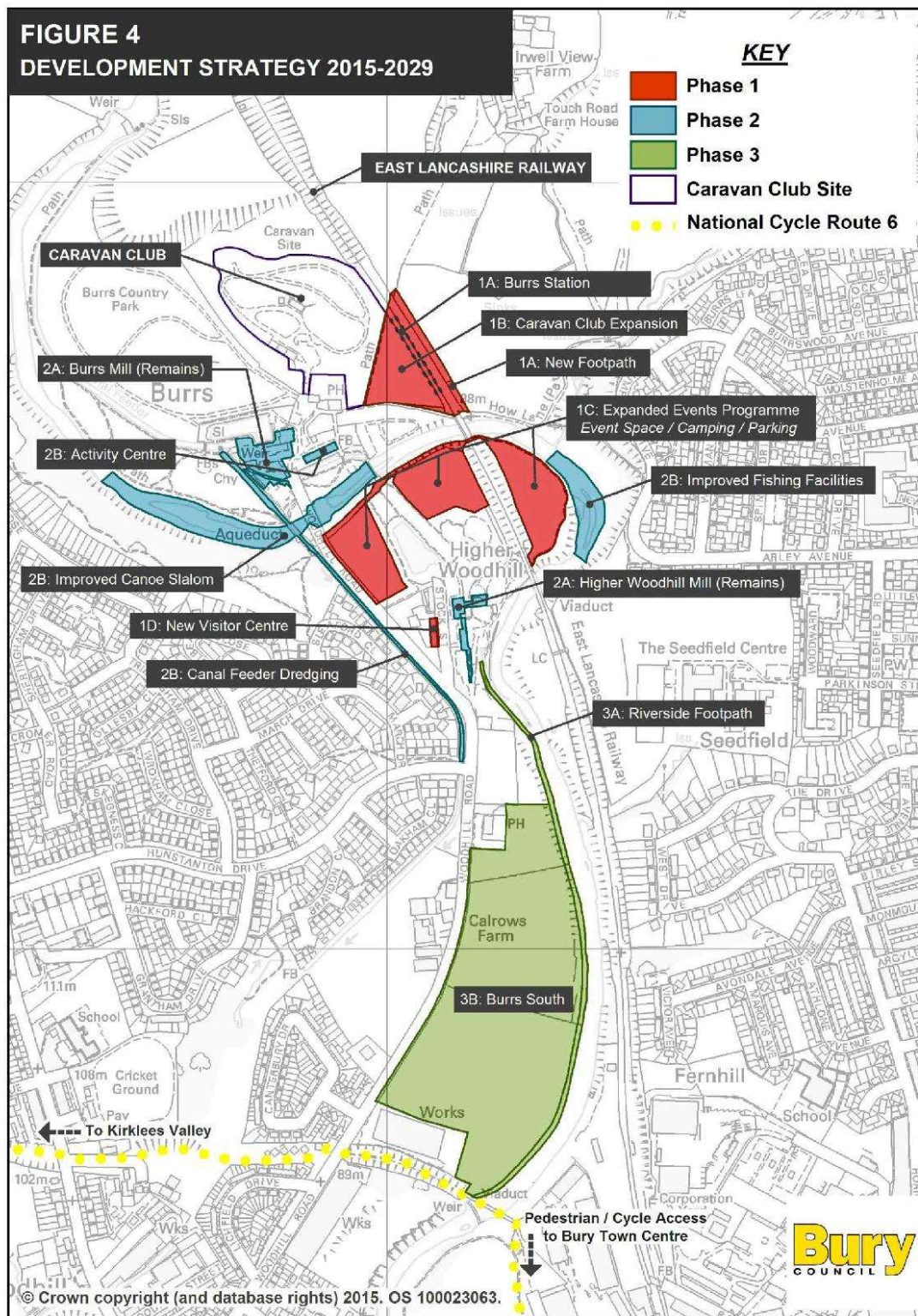
The proposed car park improvements are to upgrade an existing overspill car park to encourage visitors to Burrs Country Park for outdoor recreation. The existing car park has become unusable in bad weather and therefore unsafe.

OL1/5 states "other development in the Green Belt (not including buildings) will be inappropriate unless it maintains openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt"

The proposed car parking facilities will not appear materially different to the existing car park. Materials have been carefully chosen to maintain the overall 'green' appearance. The car park surfacing material is an open geogrid, surfaced with grass and the existing hedgerow to the north and west and

wooded boundaries to the east and south are all being maintained (and improved in part with additional woodland understorey planting and interplanting to sparse areas within the existing hedgerow).

In respect of the above, the proposals are within the guidelines set out in the Green Belt Policy document.



Site Proposals

It is proposed to formalise the existing car park off Woodhill Road in line with Burrs Country Park Strategy and in doing so, improve access to/around the park for all.

The current surface is a 'fibrous sand' which lasted for around 15 years but the summer of 2020 found it inadequate to cope with the increase in visitor numbers and a number of cars had to be towed off the car park when they got stuck in the mud.

The proposals include a 4m wide geogrid road through the site, creating a one way system. Leading off from this will be 'intermediate' roads leading to the car parking spaces, also surfaced in geogrid infilled with buff coloured gravel. The car parking bays themselves will be geogrid but infilled with topsoil and grass seed. Cars will be prevented from overrunning the spaces by timber logs or natural sleepers.

The existing hedgerow along Woodhill Road will be improved and thickened according to advice from the Ecologist. A new pedestrian walkway created from a root protecting geogrid material will be created along the hedgerow with a zebra crossing linking to a new bitmac pavement on the western side of Woodhill Road, and across the bridge.

New standard tree planting will take place within the car park with the existing wooded boundaries being underplanted with understorey shrubs and wildflowers.

Summary

The proposed car park is within the Green Belt boundary which encompasses Burrs Country Park but the development itself isn't contrary to the NPPF guidance on Green Belts as it does not cause harm. It could even be considered that the proposals aren't even a material change of use as the site is already an overspill car park.

The proposals directly support both the Burrs Country Park Strategy and Bury Green Space Audit and Strategy 2015 and are also strongly supported by the direct feedback from residents and visitor consultation.

For more information on this, please see the Statement of Community Involvement.