



SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING ASSESSMENT

To: Jennie Townsend, Bury Planning

From: Planning Insight

Date: June 2024

Re: Planning Reference: 70697 - Pilsworth Lake, Moss Hall Rd, Heywood, OL10 2RF

Supplementary Planning Assessment: Pilsworth Lake, Heywood

Introduction

This Supplementary Planning Assessment relates to the current planning application at Pilsworth Lake. The application is currently under assessment and the LPA has requested further assessment in relation to the Green Belt, namely regarding Very Special Circumstances.

Pilsworth Lake Very Special Circumstances

(i) The Existing Site and Consented Scheme

The existing site is an angling facility which serves a limited clientele. At present there is no toilet or appropriate car parking. At present it is not an attractive proposition for anglers and their families. Diversification to ensure that the fishery continues to be visited and can draw in people who want a café to visit is considered integral to modern facilities.

Previously a structure was approved (council ref: 54304) that included a series of facilities the ground floor area of the consented scheme was 130sqm (GEA), and the proposed structure is 150sqm (GEA), as such this is a 13% increase compared to the previous position. The previously approved scheme was in the Green Belt and was at a higher position and more prominent in terms of topography, it was a single-storey with roof accommodation, it was double height as both the ground and first floor were usable floor space. Including the floor space on the upper floor which would equate to 190sqm GIA. Overall, there would be a reduction in floorspace compared to the previous scheme.

It is acknowledged that there would be an increase in volume compared to the consented position, however, the proposed building location would be lower in the site and thus would be less harmful in Green Belt spatial terms. Compared to the consented position, the proposal would preserve the Green Belt. The previous scheme was low quality in terms of design, the subject scheme is landscape-led which is a significant enhancement in every aspect of the proposal. The scheme would include an appropriate level of parking, landscaping and biodiversity net gain, as such these are material benefits arising from the scheme.

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The Manchester Evening News & the Bury Times described the proposed scheme as “Spectacular”. For a scheme to be viable it must be located next to the lake so that it can benefit from vistas and a deck, these are integral to the success of the building to offer a wider appeal and for it to be commercially successful.

Paragraph 154 permits new buildings in the Green Belt, as expressed in the policy response the proposed café would be connected to the existing use. As set out in the planning documents a larger café that can facilitate 7 covers internally with some 3 smaller covers is deemed appropriate. It would be located in a lower position compared to the previously consented scheme that was in the Green Belt. For these reasons, it is not considered that the scheme diverges from the original permission and is a better resultant position in terms of the Green Belt.

(ii) Necessary Facilities

Cafes and facilities attached to fishing lakes are present at most sites. They are key facilities for diversifying fishing lakes and encourage broader visits to these sites, an example is provided in Appendix 1. Fishing lakes require 24-hour supervision and the Pilsworth site is extensive, maintenance of the land is an ongoing cost to facilitate access to the site all year round which has increased significantly in recent years.

The Angling Times reports that the EA received 30,000 less rod licenses in 2024, fishing is in decline as a sport. According to a report by the Environment Agency on freshwater fishing based on surveys undertaken in 2005 and 2015, the total number of freshwater fishing days spent in England in 2015 fell by 22% in that interval and fishing on all water types became less frequent.

Pilsworth Lake could be a popular angling location however it lacks basic facilities. Many fishing lakes have modern cafes that facilitate wider use of the site. To ensure the longevity of the site and that it is viable, a high-quality building that provides facilities for anglers, and makes it an attractive location all year round is a necessity. Compared to the previously approved scheme a larger proportion of the floorplate at ground floor level would be provided to the café use, this is so that additional visitors can be accommodated on the site. A small café is generally regarded as between 50sqm – 92sqm, the café in GIA terms amounts to 80sqm, it is therefore small in the context of industry standards. A café of this size is required to serve existing anglers and a portion of other visitors to the site. Ensuring the long-term viability of the site to deliver angling services is a VSC.

(iii) Access to Sports and Community Benefits.

Paragraph 98 of the NPPF recognises that access to a network of opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities. In this regard, the benefits of physical activity and sport as a way of meeting people and as a powerful community cohesion tool are well documented.

A study carried out by Angling Direct and Anglia Ruskin University established the links between fishing and improved mental and physical health. It surveyed approximately 1,900 UK adults online. It found that, of those people who said they participated in recreational fishing, significantly fewer stated that they suffered from an anxiety disorder (16.5% versus 26.4%). To strengthen this location for anglers and ensure the long-term viability of the site a proportionate facility that encourages wider use of the site for both anglers is required. It has been rigorously demonstrated that there is a tangible benefit to mental health attached to angling.

The scheme would provide a location and facilities that would allow for wider engagement and encourage participation in the sport of angling. The lack of an indoor facility where community groups who may wish to



engage in angling limits the ability of the site to provide key benefits in this regard. A place to warm up in a pleasant setting are crucial to encourage other visitors to Pilsworth Lake. As such, the proposed café would support the site as an angling use by providing a modern facility and a basis for other people and groups to engage in the sport. The applicant is involved in the community and intends on creating a hub for community use. Enabling wider participation in angling and delivering an appropriate facility that would result in improved access to sport that has demonstrable physical and mental health benefits is considered a VSC.

(iv) Sustainable Drainage and Long-Term Ecological Benefits

The scheme includes a sustainable drainage system to manage surface water, evidence of the scheme is submitted with the planning application. There is a sewage treatment plant located a short distance from the site, parking is carried out on an ad-hoc basis and there are no formal sanitation facilities for visitors to the site all these factors contribute to the potential deterioration of the lakes and habitat in the absence of a surface water strategy.

The surface water drainage scheme would manage potential pollutants entering the lakes, the wider landscape scheme would allow for effective management, thus reducing risk to the water body. The site is in Pilsworth Site of Biological Interest (SBI) as designated by Manchester Greater Authority (see Ecology Statement for full details), it was designated because of the lakes and habitat. This application proposes landscaping and biodiversity net gain improvements which would enhance the SBI. The scheme will achieve 14.3% improvement in terms of watercourse units directly enhancing the bodies of water on the site, evidence is contained of this in the ecological statement.

The project will provide long-term sustainable benefits by enhancing the site's usability with a small commercial operation that will support the management of the lakes. The development is accompanied by landscaping, ecological enhancements, and improved & safe access all of which contribute to restoring the natural environment processes on the site. The drainage strategy will manage generated runoff for both the current and future predictions in terms of climate change increases reducing surface water risk to the lakes. In this regard, the scheme will secure sustainable drainage for the site which is critical to ensuring the long-term health of the lakes. Swales, rain gardens and reed beds are included as shown on the drainage scheme which are nature-based solutions for water management.

The above benefits form part of the application and the construction of the proposed cafe is required to ensure that such benefits are delivered. The costings of the drainage and required ground works (carried out by a third party RICS Surveyor) are more than £200k, they are only deliverable with a diversified income that would be provided by the small commercial operation proposed, improved access and facilities provided to the anglers required in a modern facility. Achieving enhancements to the surface water of the site and ensuring long-term protection from pollutants is considered a VSC of significant weight.

(v) Heywood Industrial Allocation

The wider area has been designated as a significant industrial allocation; it will be subject to considerable change. The scheme would ensure the long-term viability of the site which is directly encouraged by the policies contained Places for Everyone (as cited by the council in the assessment of this proposal). In this regard, the site will become an important location for relief and a place where future workers can visit and engage in angling, which as detailed above has health benefits. Contributing toward the wider site allocation and strengthening the site for the long-term is considered a VSC.

(vi) **Access to Nature**

A key principle of the proposal is to enable wider use of what is a special asset of Bury. Formal access is currently limited to anglers, this is in part because there are no facilities at the site and limited staff. The proposed small commercial use would enable the funding of further staff and would include facilities for visitors. To justify the investment into the site a long-term income source, separate from the angling use is integral to realising this benefit. In the absence of the proposed café of a certain scale and design quality to attract visitors opening the site up more broadly is unachievable. The income stream provided by the café and the shop (for angling purposes) would allow for wider use of the site and the associated cost of maintaining the site.

The proposed café and commercial use would enable wider access to the site and the benefits realised by access to nature. Access to blue spaces has been demonstrated to be positively related to health, wellbeing and happiness. BlueHealth is a pan-European research initiative investigated the links between urban blue spaces, climate and health. Research conducted by the initiative shows that “spending time in and around aquatic environments has consistently been shown to lead to significantly higher benefits, in inducing positive mood and reducing negative mood and stress, than green space does” (See [Guardian](#), 2019).

Access to blue spaces has been demonstrated to have a positive effect on health, indeed as mentioned above this contributes to the benefits in well-being that are linked to angling. The proposed scheme would enable more people to access a significant asset in Bury, facilitated by a “Spectacular” scheme in design terms. At present, there are paths around the site which has a rich heritage, details in terms of the visitor strategy could be secured by a planning condition or provided prior to the determination of the application. This would include improved walking paths, information boards and a hide for bird watching in the boat house which will also be restored as part of the application. The scheme would facilitate walking and access to nature for visitors alongside the angling use. The site is a key location for bird breeding and could be a unique facility for bird watchers to access and enjoy. Facilitating access to a blue space and nature is deemed a VSC.

Summary

The above has set out the Very Special Circumstances for the proposed scheme. What is proposed is a small café and facilities in a scheme of exceptional design quality. In summary the VSC are set out below:

- (i) **The Existing Site and Consented Scheme:** the scheme proposes a marginally bigger floor area than the previously consented scheme in the Green Belt (13%). The scheme would be in a lower position in terms of the topography of the site, overall there would be a floor area reduction and the scheme would be significantly higher quality in design terms.
- (ii) **Equivalent Facilities:** appropriate facilities are commonplace at fisheries to ensure viability, this is the case for Pilsworth Lake. Angling is in decline, a diverse income to preserve the space for angling is necessary for the longevity of the site.
- (iii) **Access to Sports and Community Benefits:** angling improves health outcomes, in the absence of appropriate facilities of a suitable quality that may afford wider engagement in the sport. The café and ancillary facilities would afford an appropriate, safe space so that other more difficult-to-reach groups can engage in angling.
- (iv) **Sustainable Drainage and Long-Term Ecological Benefits:** the scheme includes a sustainable drainage system that will manage surface water including accounting for climate change. The site forms part of an ecological designation, at present there is no sanitary facilities and pollutants can run off, it is in proximity to a sewage works. The scheme would secure significant investment into



- groundworks ensure the lakes and wider estate are effectively managed. The scheme would achieve 10% BNG and 14% improvement in water units benefiting the lakes.
- (v) **Heywood Industrial Allocation:** preserving the site as a location for angling in the context of significant built form will provide a place to rest and relax. Achieving a viable site for the long term with diversified income is integral to this.
 - (vi) **Access to Nature:** the site is at present not accessible to the public. Facilities are required and there costs of maintaining the site has increased, an attractive location with a consistent income is required to deliver this. Access to blue spaces demonstrably has benefits in health and mental wellbeing, the proposal would open the site for this.

The above reasons are unique to the proposal and delivery of a high-quality building adjacent to the lake are integral to the delivery of these benefits which constitute Very Special Circumstances

Appendix 1: Example Facility

Example: Hawkhurst Fish Farm, Hawkhurst Fish Farm, Kent

Hawkhurst Fish Farm comprises angling lakes and an on-site Café. The café is a draw for range of people to enjoy the space.

