

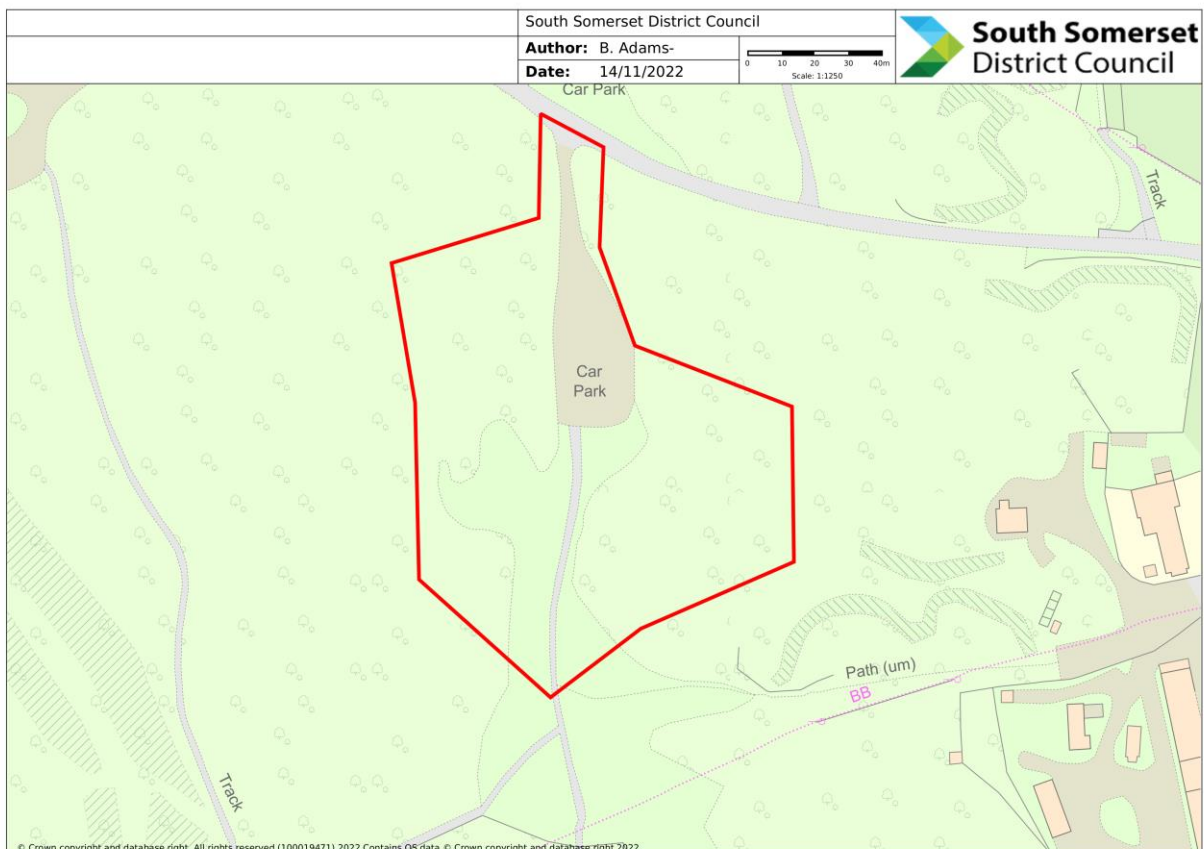
Officer Report On Planning Application: 22/02539/FUL

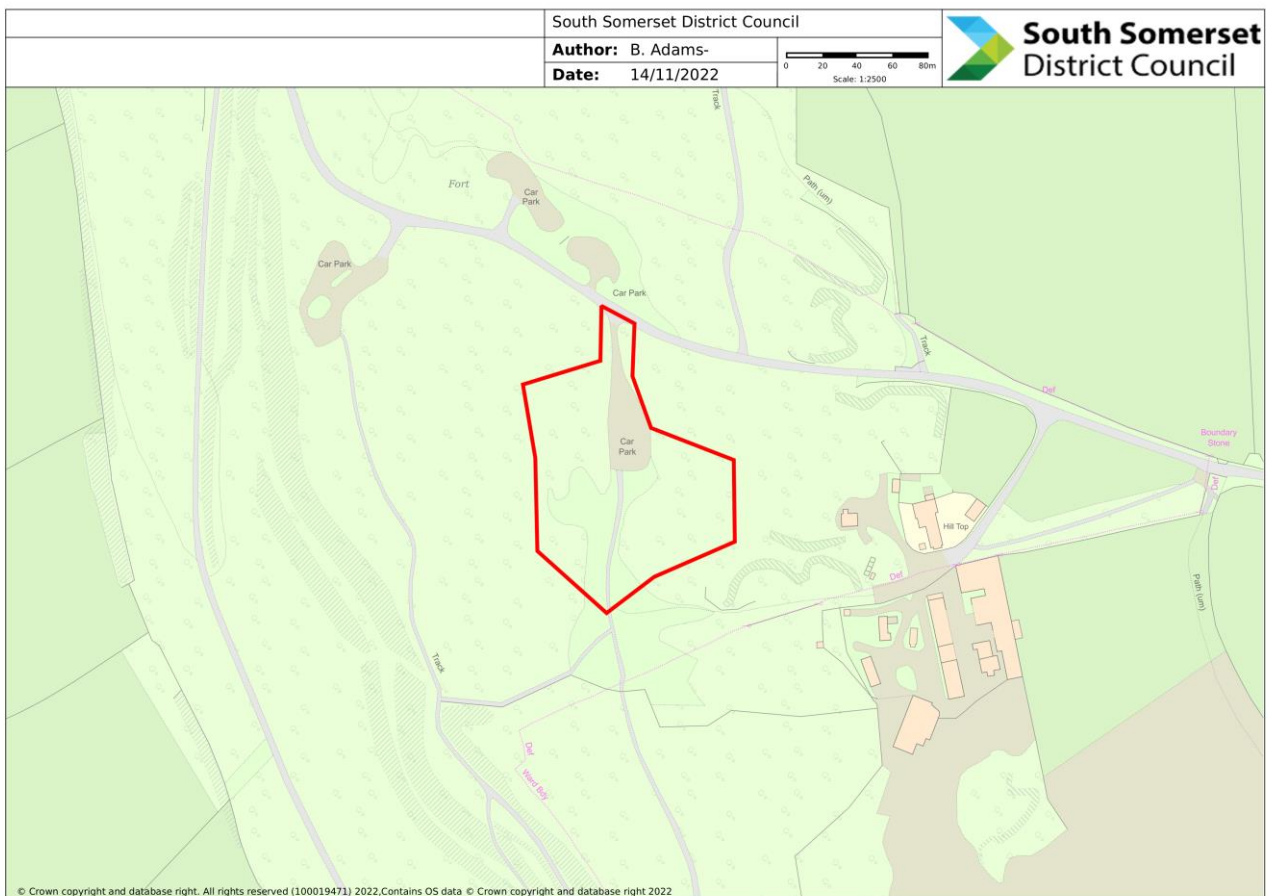
Proposal :	Construction of Visitor Centre and associated bin store, with provision of services and drainage works, and associated car park and highway improvements
Site Address:	Land At Ham Hill, South Of Lime Kiln Car Park, Ham Hill, Stoke Sub Hamdon, Somerset, TA14 6RW
Parish:	Norton Sub Hamdon
HAMDON Ward (SSDC Member)	Cllr Mike Hewitson
Recommending Case Officer:	Colin Begeman (Principal Specialist) Tel: 01935 462476 Email: colin.begeman@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	9th November 2022
Applicant :	Ms Katy Menday
Agent: (no agent if blank)	
Application Type :	Minor Other less than 1,000 sq.m or 1ha

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

This is an application by South Somerset District Council and as such, under the Scheme of Delegation, this application falls to be decided by the Area North Committee.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL





The site is located within Ham Hill Country Park accessed from and to the southwest of Lime Kiln Car Park on a recent historical site of a car park. This historical car park is now covered in short grass and scrub and is of low ecological value. It is located 100m away from the nearest section of the Hill Fort ramparts.

This site has been carefully selected in conjunction with Historic England following intrusive site investigations to ascertain suitability.

It is proposed to erect a semi-circular timber-clad single storey building to house a visitor centre which would enable SSDC staff to engage with visitors more effectively than is currently possible, leading to positive changes in usage of the site, as visitors start to feel a sense of 'ownership' of Ham Hill.

The Visitor Centre will function as a 'hub' for those coming to the Country Park, offering a café, interpretation, a small shop, and both temporary and permanent exhibitions. The ground floor area measures approximately 235m² and the building would be positioned so that it would be partially visible from the car park, but far enough away, and on slightly elevated ground, to enjoy its own landscape setting. A Blue Badge parking area would be positioned at the south end of the car park, nearest the Visitor Centre, and cycle parking and a bin store area would be located between the car park and the proposed building. Electric Vehicle charging points are also included in the new layout for the car park.

The application includes a 5 Year Management Plan on how the Country Park will be managed and enhanced going forward.

- Improvements to paths and bridleways, to encourage exploration, and stabilise and protect the historic ramparts;
- Better interpretation, site signage and way-finding, to give confidence to first-time visitors and highlight some of the site's key features such as the Deep Quarry;
- Improvements to Ham Hill Road which can represent a barrier to movement, and to the car parks alongside it, to reduce traffic speeds and create safer crossing points;
- Habitat improvements which will include restoration of the dry stone walls marking field boundaries;
- An enhanced setting for a new Visitor Centre, and
- Selective tree and scrub clearance of the ramparts alongside grazing and mechanical vegetation management .

Many of the details shown do not require planning permission and can be carried out under Permitted Development Rights set out Schedule 2 Part 12 of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended 31/07/2021)

The application initially included the proposal to reduce the speed limit of the main road through the Country Park to 40mph. This would require a Traffic Regulation Order that is subject to external consultation of which the outcome cannot be assured. County Highways have agreed, in consultation with the applicant, that the proposed development's acceptability does not depend on the speed reduction and that this is not required to be part of the planning application.

It is still the applicants wish to apply for a Traffic Regulation Order to reduce the speed to 40mph and will do this outside of the remit of this planning application.

PLANNING HISTORY

No relevant history

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), and Paragraphs 2, 11, and 12 of the NPPF indicate it is a matter of law that applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of determining current applications the local planning authority considers that the adopted development plan comprises the policies of the South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 (adopted March 2015).

SD1 - Sustainable Development

SS1 - Settlement Strategy

SS2 - Development in Rural Settlements

EP8 - New and Enhanced Tourist Facilities

TA1 - Low Carbon Travel

TA5 - Transport Impact of New Development

TA6 - Parking Standards
EQ1 - Addressing Climate Change in South Somerset
EQ2 - General Development
EQ3 - Historic Environment
EQ4 - Biodiversity

National Planning Policy Framework 2021

Chapter 2 Achieving Sustainable Development
Chapter 6 Building a strong, competitive economy
Chapter 9 Promoting Sustainable Transport
Chapter 12 Achieving Well-Designed Places
Chapter 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
Chapter 16 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Planning Policy Guidance

Somerset County Council Parking Strategy (March 2012)

REPRESENTATIONS

This is a summary of representations received and are available in full on the Council's application website.

36 letters of support:

- Much needed facility to help better understand Ham Hill
- Improves access for all
- Will enable greater use for cultural events and activities, including outdoor performances and events, that will improve health and well being for residents and visitors
- Adding an extra cafe and parking spaces would add an extra dimension and would certainly compliment what is already an amazing natural area
- Providing a visitors centre at Ham Hill would encourage more people to come and provide an area that can display important information regarding the site, teaching generations of people the importance of the area
- This is a beautiful park and the visitor experience will be much enhanced by this centre.
- Ham Hill and the surrounding areas are a fantastic asset to this part of our glorious County and we should use it to our best advantage; offering a new, purpose built visitors centre would I have no doubt do exactly that.
- Long overdue
- The Ham Hill country park is an amazing space and will benefit and prosper with any additional facilities that can be placed there. That particular car park is far enough from the Prince of Wales and other parking to allow development without compromising parking and countryside.
- As a Scout Leader at West Coker Scout Group we would very much support the new visitor centre, not only as a place to meet, parents to wait and socialise whilst we are doing activities but as an educational centre for our scouts to learn, experience nature and support the wide variety of high adventure activities that we do.
- Having visited Ham Hill since a young child, it's such an amazing outdoor space but it is

severely lacking in facilities. A new Ranger centre, tourist hub and cafe facilities will provide a valuable income to reinvest in the park for everyone to benefit.

- Having this facility will make it possible for people of all ages from anywhere to visit the site and enjoy all it can offer.
- It's genius that they've managed to find a spot for the centre which is easily accessible, and no doubt will be greatly used, yet does not spoil the beauty of Ham Hill Country Park.
- I live in Stoke sub Hamdon just below the Country Park and have always felt that a site with such strong historical, archaeological and ecological qualities deserved to be enhanced and brought to the attention of the wider public.
- The Jurassic Coast Trust strongly support the proposal for improved visitor facilities and access at Ham Hill Country Park. The nationally important geology of Ham Hill is protected as a SSSI and underpins much of the rich history of the area as it fundamentally defines the relationship people have had with the site for thousands of years.
- A new visitors centre and overall improvements to the visitor experience proposed in this application would provide more effective interpretation of the exceptional geology of Ham Hill and its links to landscape, people and the wider world. It deserves to be celebrated properly.
- Writing in my professional capacity of Heritage Co-Ordinator, I have enjoyed the privilege to be part of hugely beneficial community projects with Countryside colleagues at Ham Hill. The thoughtfulness of the plan with the new facility, increased access while consideration given to the natural environment offers an inspiring vision for the future.
- Creating a heritage venue and making the Countryside Park more official with better wayfinding and road signage will no doubt improve respect for the sites use and access to this precious monument
- Living Options Devon is a user led charity which runs a range of initiatives to enable people with disabilities and Deaf people who use British Sign Language to live the life they choose, state their support for the inclusion of a number of aspects which are focused on making the experience accessible.
- The proposed visitor centre will make good use of already disturbed ground, and in so doing avoid interference with existing sensitive habitats. The investment in new facilities will help the Ranger and Volunteer teams in their work monitoring, informing and explaining, while new and improved paths and car parks will improve accessibility for all while also helping to tackle existing parking issues.

2 letters commenting:

Somerset Wildlife Trust

We have noted the above mentioned Planning Application as well as the supporting Environmental Impact Assessment provided by Clarkson and Woods. Due to the location of the development within the Ham Hill SSSI and LWS, this is an extremely sensitive proposal. It is therefore essential that all of the proposals for Mitigation and Enhancement as outlined in Section 3 are included in the Planning Conditions if it is decided to grant Planning Permission.

Speaking on behalf of Stoke sub Hamdon parish council I do not understand why we have not been consulted during the planning process as the majority of visitors to ham hill access through the village and the site is right on the parish border. In a recent survey on traffic many villagers expressed concerns at the volume of traffic & as the plans includes a coach turning circle can we expect an increase in large vehicles including the HGV's associated with the building

process?

6 letters objecting:

- It will encourage the wrong sort of people into the area that been a Haven for Wild life.
- This is absolutely ridiculous as its a Country Park and there is already a Pub the Prince of Wales that's been trading for many many years.
- Loss of trees
- Destroying a place of Beauty
- What provision has been made for the extra traffic expected to pass through Stoke Sub Hamdon to access this amenity? The existing road system already struggles to cope with the increase in traffic seen over the last few years.
- In principle it will be brilliant, but, I am having trouble coming to terms with the already increased traffic going through Stoke sub Hamdon.
- The centre of Stoke sub Hamdon is very busy at the best of times. Cars go through at speed also the pavement is very narrow.
- The amount of traffic currently along Ham Hill Road can be excessive, even though it is a 30 the speeds vehicles travel is mostly excessive, from the National speed limit
- A cafe will also be detrimental to local businesses including the Prince Of Wales and Priory House Café
- It will create minimal new employment and the rubbish created will also be detrimental to the surroundings.
- I do not like objecting to such a positive project, but feel that this project must consider the implications of traffic increase through Stoke sub Hamdon more carefully before it goes ahead.
- There has been NO CONSULTATION with the community of Stoke Sub Hamdon
- The building materials will have to be transported to the site, this will mean large lorries, traffic lights or road closures.

CONSULTATIONS

Norton Sub Hamdon Parish Council:

No response

Adjoining Parish Stoke sub Hamdon

No response

Highway Authority:

No objection subject to conditions.

All works which affect routes shown on the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way must be agreed with Somerset County Council's PROW Team.

Whilst Ham Hill Lane is not a major road, the use of it by visitors to the Country Park has been a long-standing matter of fact. The collision data held by this Authority does not show any which imply the width of the route to be inherently dangerous. The proposal may lead to intensification in use of the route but this is not considered to be severe, and the mitigation package is considered appropriate to accommodate the additional traffic.

On the basis that SSDC and SSC will be a single unitary authority prior to works starting a Memorandum of Understanding shall be entered into instead of a s106 Agreement to secure

the following mitigation matters:

- New boundary 'gateway' features - prior to occupation
- Improved access to car parks - prior to occupation
- New footways and informal crossing points - prior to occupation
- New crossing points, and works to the existing Public Rights of Way - prior to occupation

The Memorandum of Understanding will be signed both by Leisure & Recreation, and the Highway Authority which:

- Summarises why the MoU is necessary
- Describes the process which will be worked through
- Initial Notification
- Project Development Phases
- Design and Build for different sizes of scheme
- Corporate Property Actions
- Highway Authority Actions
- Approved Contractor Actions
- After the official signature boxes there are then two annexes:
- 1 - The technical details required, and procedural matters
- 2 - Details of why planning conditions may be requested, and what they are aiming to secure/achieve

It is also noted that additional works to improve facilities are proposed:

- Limekiln Car Park works - surfacing, laying out, security gate, electric vehicle charging points, blue badge spaces, and cycle parking
- Improved visibility splays throughout
- Notwithstanding the details shown in the submitted information, where works are to be constructed within the highway, either roads or public rights of way, the materials used shall be agreed with this Authority via the technical approval phase of the aforementioned Memorandum of Understanding.
- Conditions:
- In the event of permission being granted, I would recommend that the following conditions are imposed: -
- Before the new development is brought into use, the new pedestrian and cycle arrangements to include cycling and walking access across the site shall be laid out, constructed and drained in accordance with a detailed scheme to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, once constructed they shall remain in perpetuity.
- Prior to first occupation of the visitors' centre hereby permitted the proposed car park accesses over at least the first 6 metres of their lengths, as measured from the edge of the adjoining highway, shall be properly consolidated and surfaced (not loose stone or gravel) and drainage installed in accordance with details which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Once constructed the access shall thereafter be maintained in that condition in perpetuity. NOTE: As approval of the construction either on or directly adjacent to the highway will require an Agreement or Licence with this Authority, no discharge of this condition will be agreed until either technical approval or the licence has been granted.

For Norton Car Park

- There shall be no obstruction to visibility greater than 600 millimetres above adjoining road level in advance of lines drawn 2.4 metres back from the carriageway edge on the centre line of the access and extending to points on the nearside carriageway edge 33 metres either side of the access. Such visibility shall be fully provided before the development hereby permitted is occupied and shall thereafter be maintained in perpetuity.
- For Twin Car Park West, Twin Car Park East, and Limekiln Car Park
- There shall be no obstruction to visibility greater than 600 millimetres above adjoining road level in advance of lines drawn 2.4 metres back from the carriageway edge on the centre line of the access and extending to points on the nearside carriageway edge 43 metres either side of the access. Such visibility shall be fully provided before the development hereby permitted is occupied and shall thereafter be maintained in perpetuity.
- For Limekiln Car Park, prior to occupation the parking spaces including the electric vehicle charging infrastructure is provided in accordance with the submitted plan and retained as such in perpetuity
- The Development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until the parking spaces for the Limekiln Car Park have been provided, marked out and surfaced within the site in accordance with details shown in the submitted plans. Such parking spaces shall be kept clear of obstruction in perpetuity and shall not be used other than for the parking and turning of vehicles in connection with the development hereby permitted.
- Any entrance gates erected shall be hung to open inwards, shall be set back a minimum distance of 9 metres from the highway edge and shall thereafter be maintained in that condition in perpetuity.
- No works to the Visitors' Centre shall take place until a construction management plan or construction method statement has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved plan/statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The plan/statement shall provide for:
 - 24 hour emergency contact number;
 - Hours of operation;
 - Parking of vehicle of site operatives and visitors (including measures taken to ensure satisfactory access and movement for existing occupiers of neighbouring properties during construction);
 - Routes for construction traffic;
 - Locations for loading/unloading and storage of plant, waste and construction materials;
 - Method of preventing mud being carried onto the highway;
 - Measures to protect vulnerable road users (cyclists and pedestrians)
 - Any necessary temporary traffic management measures;
 - Arrangements for turning vehicles;
 - Arrangements to receive abnormal loads or unusually large vehicles;
 - Methods of communicating the Construction Management Plan to staff, visitors and neighbouring residents and businesses.

Crime Prevention Design Adviser

I have reviewed this application and I have no objections to make on behalf of Avon and Somerset Police.

Historic England

We have previously provided pre application advice to South Somerset Council regarding the proposals for a new visitor centre at Ham Hill, Somerset. Hamdon Hill Camp known locally as Ham Hill is a scheduled monument and one of the largest hillforts in England (NHLE 1003678). The current facilities are inadequate and the aspiration at Ham Hill is to move the ranger base and toilets and build a purpose-built staff/volunteer building with visitor facilities. Through the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) funded project "Uncovering Ham Hill's Past for its Future" the proposed visitor centre will contribute to enhance the visitor experience with the added benefit of improving the wildlife habitat, conserve and repair archaeological features as well as increase volunteer and staff numbers and on this nationally important scheduled site, Ham Hill.

Historic England has no objection in principle to the proposal, providing it can be achieved in a way that avoids or minimises loss and harm to the significance of Ham Hill. Historic England is supportive of the aims and objectives of a project that will support the long term sustainable public access to the land and management of this outstanding site. We understand that the project funding will support landscape management and wildlife enhancement as well as specific heritage conservation projects such as vegetation clearance on the ramparts and restoration of the historic lime kiln.

We consider that the application meets the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph numbers 199, 200, 202. Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us. Please advise us of the decision in due course.

SSDC Tourism

This project will result in a much-improved level of facilities, including those for disabled visitors (the Changing Place would be a superb addition, as locally they are sparse), it will offer new employment opportunities and be an excellent addition to the current tourism offer for the district.

Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society

On this occasion we have no observations to make and welcome the concept of a new visitor centre for the Country Park and trust that this will include information on the geology, quarrying, and limeburning.

Ecology

The submitted Ecology Impact Assessment has been independently reviewed by Ecus an external ecology company instructed by the Council. The review found the EIA to be sound and raised no objections.

Phosphates:

Further to discussions with Natural England, the proposed application, with associated low levels of Phosphate production, is unlikely to add significantly to nutrient loading on the

Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site; therefore, a Likely Significant Effect under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (and as amended by The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019) can be ruled out.

Natural England

Ham Hill SSSI is located within the redline boundary of the proposal This site is designated due to its unique geology, restricted area of exposed Ham Hill stone and associated important assemblage of fossils, originating from the early Jurassic period.

With regards to potential impacts on the SSSI, due to the nature of the development and the designation being for geological features, we do not have concerns that the integrity of the site and it's features would be damaged by the proposal.

Other Biodiversity Interests

We note from the Ecological Impact Assessment that an area of unimproved calcareous grassland will be directly lost, as a result of the proposed works. We would encourage compensation of this habitat on site and support the proposed habitat creation/enhancement measures suggested in the Ecology report.

Wessex Water

Wessex Water has no objections to this application.

South West Heritage Trust

The site lies within the Scheduled Monument (SM) of Ham Hill, a very large multivallate Iron Age hillfort with Roman and later occupation of considerable archaeological value and significance. The proposed new visitor centre has been carefully sited to ensure minimum impact on the setting of the designated asset and early engagement has taken place with both Historic England and the SWHT to ensure that the centre has as little impact on buried archaeology as possible. The applicant has carried out archaeological assessment, both desk-based and a field evaluation in line with the requirements of the NPPF paragraph 194. This assessment has resulted in a full understanding of the significance of the buried remains, the impacts on the archaeology and the impacts on the setting of the monument.

The SWHT fully supports this proposal as the new visitor facilities offer an enhancement to the site through public engagement to provide better understanding of the site and its historic context. Although development on a SM is a rare occurrence, this proposal will have a positive effect on visitor enjoyment and comprehension of the SM and lead to further projects associated with the site and its environs. Therefore, any impact on archaeology is fully justified in terms of public benefit and is in line with the considerations of the NPPF paragraph 202.

Due to the potential to impact on limited archaeological remains it is advised that a condition is attached to permission to ensure any archaeology is recorded as per the requirements of the NPPF paragraph 205. The applicant will also have to obtain SMC from the DCMS as noted in Historic England's comments.

Therefore I recommend that the developer be required to archaeologically investigate the

heritage asset and provide a report on any discoveries made as indicated in the National Planning Policy Framework (Paragraph 205). This should be secured by the use of the following condition attached to any permission granted.

"Programme of Works in Accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (POW)

Before the commencement of the development hereby permitted the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, shall have secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which has been submitted and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The WSI shall include details of the archaeological investigation, the recording of the heritage asset, the analysis of evidence recovered from the site and publication of the results. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme."

CONSIDERATIONS

PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

South Somerset has a rich and diverse historic environment with evidence of settlement dating back to prehistoric times. There are many Iron Age and Bronze Age sites of which Ham Hill is an outstanding example.

The Local Plan recognises that there is a strong link between the environmental quality and productivity of the area and the success of the local economy, through commerce, recreation, tourism and providing an environment where people want to work and live. The aim of the Local Plan is to ensure these are retained.

Part of South Somerset's Local Plan Strategic Objectives is to create a natural and built environment able to attract and retain visitors, a vibrant tourism industry and encourage inward investment of high-quality sustainable businesses.

Local Plan Policy EP8: New and Enhanced Tourist Facilities states that in order to sustain the vitality and viability of tourism in the district, new and enhanced tourist facilities will be supported where:

- They are of a scale appropriate to the size and function of the settlement within which they are to be located;
- The proposal ensures that the district's tourist assets and facilities are accessible through sustainable modes of travel including cycling and walking;
- They do not harm the district's environmental, cultural or heritage assets;
- They ensure the continued protection and resilience of the district's designated nature conservation features;
- They benefit the local community through access to facilities and services; and
- There is no adverse impact on Natura 2000 and other internationally and nationally designated sites There must be an identified need for tourist facilities in the open countryside, which is not met by existing facilities.

It is considered that the proposal meets these criteria in that:

- It is of an appropriate scale and function for its location
- The site is accessible by alternative means of travel however it is acknowledged that

while public transport is limited the nature of the site and its location reduce the type and frequency of transport available.

- The proposal assists in promoting and protecting the districts environmental, cultural heritage assets
- The proposal ensures the long terms protection of designated conservation features
- The proposal serves the enhance and provide access to facilities for local communities.
- While the site is not located within a settlement the nature of the facility cannot be provided anywhere other than in this location.

Paragraph 85 of the NPPF 2021 states that:

Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport.

At Paragraph 84 - Supporting a prosperous rural economy - relevant to this application is section c) that state planning policies and decisions should enable: sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside;

Paragraph 174 states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)

Paragraph 190 states that plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- d) opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

Policy SD1 of the Local Plan also recognises that, when considering development proposals, the Council will take a proactive approach to reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the NPPF and seek to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions within the District.

Given the support to tourist and heritage related developments as set out in the NPPF, SSDC Local Plan the principle of the proposed development is supported.

APPEARANCE AND DESIGN

The scale of the proposed visitor centre is modest and well located in terms of its impact on the wider setting of the landscape and is not considered to result in harm to the character of the area.

The proposed visitor centre is located immediately to the southwest of Lime Kiln car park within a natural clearing. It is known that the ground was previously incorporated within a once larger car park. The site is well screened by trees and is not visible from Ham Hill Road due to its setback from the highway. The proposed new building will only become visible once inside the car park or from within the clearing when approaching by foot from the south-west or east.

The proposed visitor centre is single storey and circular in form set on piles that minimises excavations and the need to remove spoil from the site. It is subdivided into components which can be operated independently. A shared external terrace and canopy element unifies the components and provides space for outdoor learning events and visitors to gather. A central congregating space within the circle and the roof of the building slopes inwards towards the middle to lessen the mass and bulk. Steps and a ramp incorporated into the circular form, a curved terrace which connects all the building elements and the curved canopy/brise soleil which offers protection from solar gain in the summer months.

It is proposed that the main structure of the building will be laminated timber beams, with locally sourced timber cladding and a zinc roof.

Windows are a mixture of timber to the inner face and aluminium to the outer face.

AMENITY

The site is located a considerable distance from residential properties, the nearest being 500m to the south, and therefore considered that there is no perceived harm relating to privacy, light, outlook or other recognised amenity considerations.

HIGHWAYS

The application is accompanied by a full Transport Statement that has been assessed by the County Highway Authority who is satisfied that the development will not give rise to any harm to highway safety.

The development meets established parking standards and the location of the parking area is acceptable. The provision of cycle stations, EV charging points and security gates at the access are considered by Highways to be acceptable.

There is ample visibility at the entrance to the car parks and with the proposed highway features and parking improvements safety will be further enhanced.

The Highway Authority have suggested a number of conditions to be included in any decision issued.

In light of the fact that before works starts on this project SSDC and SSC will become part of a

new unitary authority entering into a S106 agreement would not be possible. The Highway Authority has suggested that entering into a Memorandum of Understanding is how SSC currently deal with internal departmental agreements and it is suggested that the same procedure should follow in this case.

As mentioned previously the application initially included the proposal to reduce the speed limit of the main road through the Country Park to 40mph, however given the difficulties in assuring the outcome of a Traffic Regulation Order County Highways have agreed, in consultation with the applicant, that this is not required to be part of the planning application.

It is still the applicants wish to apply for a Traffic Regulation Order to reduce the speed to 40mph and will do this outside of the remit of this planning application.

It is therefore considered that the proposal is acceptable in regard to access and highway safety.

ECOLOGY AND BIODIVERSITY

An ecological appraisal has been provided with the application that has been independently assessed by an external ecology company, Ecus, instructed by the Council. Ecus have agreed with the findings of the Ecological Impact Assessment and the recommended mitigation.

The Ecological Impact Assessment concludes that:

Mitigation and enhancement measures have been proposed in accordance with NPPF (2019) and to ensure compliance with local planning policies and strategies. Where implemented, recommended mitigation measures will, as far as possible, minimise impacts resulting from the proposed development and would retain the high value of the habitats and ecological function on Site to ensure residual impacts do not remain. This includes the preparation of Risk Avoidance Method Statements for protected species and the preparation of a Biodiversity Mitigation Enhancement Plan (BMEP) to be implemented during development and beyond. This mitigation strategy will also include full details of the BNG requirements once further surveys have been carried out.

Conditions are to be imposed that take into account the recommendations of the EIA.

The application site is within the Somerset Levels catchment area however tourist facilities such as this development are screened out of the requirement to provide phosphate mitigation and therefore assessment and mitigation with regard to phosphate output is not required.

Having regard to the above, it is considered that the proposed development will not give rise to any significant adverse harm to the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar sites and that a likely significant effect can be ruled out.

HERITAGE

Ham Hill retains a significant amount of its evidence of past use as an Iron Age hill fort and hidden through buried archaeology providing evidence of occupation and use of the site from Iron Age, to Roman, through Medieval to Modern. Ham Hill is also an extremely large Hill Fort, although its past use is not known to many.

In summary Ham Hill is highly significant historically, recognised by its Scheduled Monument status which acknowledges that such large multivallate hillforts are rare.

The visitor centre location has been chosen after extensive thought and discussion on a location previously disturbed by extensive quarrying and which has minimal visual impact. The location also draws visitors away from the 'honey-pot' northern spur area, spreading visitor impact and erosion. The expansion of the Country Park since its beginnings has spread the landholdings to the south and east, with no alteration to the location of toilets and refreshments. The re-focus of the Country Park will improve its management of visitors and impact on the heritage.

The Visitor Centre design is appropriate to the location providing a sensitive and light touch facility that is open and welcoming to visitors. Its use of local and natural materials provides an in-keeping approach that minimises environmental impacts from its construction and use.

The National Lottery Heritage Project is poised to implement a 'step-change' in the management of the Country Park developing a holistic approach to improved management of all of its heritage assets.

CONCLUSION

The proposed Visitor Centre is a much needed asset for the Country Park. At present there is no visitor welcome and orientation point, particularly important for new visitors and those unaccustomed to visiting the countryside. The proposal is respectful and responds appropriately to its natural setting whilst enhancing the visitor appreciation and understanding of Ham Hill Country Park.

It is considered that the application has been justified in regard to the requirements of Policy EP8 New and Enhanced Tourist Facilities of the South Somerset Local Plan Policy EQ3: Historic Environment and policy guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

The development, by virtue of its design, scale and siting will not be materially harmful to its historic setting either visually or physically. There will be no impact on residential amenity in the area and the means of access is considered to be acceptable. The proposals are of high-quality design and will result in an enhancement to local facilities and the character and appearance of the application site.

The development will not give rise to any adverse effect upon the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar sites or with the ecology within the Country Park.

The development is considered to be sustainable and justified is therefore acceptable and recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

GRANT permission for the following reason:

01. The scheme represents a well thought out proposal that will bring significant local benefits. Subject to the use of appropriate conditions there will be no demonstrable harm

to visual amenity, residential amenity, highway safety, biodiversity, heritage assets or archaeology in compliance with Local Plan Policies SD1 Sustainable Development, EP8 New and Enhanced Tourist Facilities, EQ2 General Development, EQ3: Historic Environment, EQ4 Biodiversity and TA5 Transport Impact of New Development and policy guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

01. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To accord with the provisions of section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

02. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

23-010 Location Plan
1326 Structural drawings
23 060 - Cross Section
23 052 - Elevations
23 051 - Elevations
23 040 - Roof Plans
23 030 - Floor Plans
23 050 - Elevations
23 020 - Site Plan
23 070 - Bin Store
BTC20068 - Transport Statement
Amended drawing BTC20068 GA_04 P4
Ecological Impact Assessment - August 2022
Landscape Proposals- July 2022

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

03. A Memorandum of Understanding shall be entered into with the Highway Authority to secure the following mitigation matters are achieved prior to the occupation of the visitor centre:

- o New boundary 'gateway' features
- o Improved access to car parks
- o New footways and informal crossing points
- o New crossing points, and works to the existing Public Rights of Way

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and in accordance with policy TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

04. Before the new development is brought into use, the new pedestrian and cycle arrangements to include cycling and walking access across the site shall be laid out, constructed, and drained in accordance with a detailed scheme to be submitted to and

approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, once constructed they shall remain in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and in accordance with policy TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

05. Prior to first occupation of the visitors' centre hereby permitted the proposed car park accesses over at least the first 6 metres of their lengths, as measured from the edge of the adjoining highway, shall be properly consolidated and surfaced (not loose stone or gravel) and drainage installed in accordance with details which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Once constructed the access shall thereafter be maintained in that condition in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and in accordance with policy TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

06. For Norton Car Park - There shall be no obstruction to visibility greater than 600 millimetres above adjoining road level in advance of lines drawn 2.4 metres back from the carriageway edge on the centre line of the access and extending to points on the nearside carriageway edge 33 metres either side of the access. Such visibility shall be fully provided before the development hereby permitted is occupied and shall thereafter be maintained in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and in accordance with policy TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

07. For Twin Car Park West, Twin Car Park East, and Limekiln Car Park. There shall be no obstruction to visibility greater than 600 millimetres above adjoining road level in advance of lines drawn 2.4 metres back from the carriageway edge on the centre line of the access and extending to points on the nearside carriageway edge 43 metres either side of the access. Such visibility shall be fully provided before the development hereby permitted is occupied and shall thereafter be maintained in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and in accordance with policy TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

08. For Limekiln Car Park, prior to occupation the parking spaces including the electric vehicle charging infrastructure is provided in accordance with the submitted plan and retained as such in perpetuity

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and in accordance with policy TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

09. The Development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until the parking spaces for the Limekiln Car Park have been provided, marked out and surfaced within the site in accordance with details shown in the submitted plans. Such parking spaces shall be kept clear of obstruction in perpetuity and shall not be used other than for the parking and turning of vehicles in connection with the development hereby permitted.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and in accordance with policy TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

10. Any entrance gates erected shall be hung to open inwards, shall be set back a minimum distance of 9 metres from the highway edge and shall thereafter be maintained in that condition in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and in accordance with policy TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

11. No works to the Visitors' Centre shall take place until a construction management plan or construction method statement has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved plan/statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The plan/statement shall provide for:

- 24 hour emergency contact number;
- Hours of operation;
- Parking of vehicle of site operatives and visitors (including measures taken to ensure satisfactory access and movement for existing occupiers of neighbouring properties during construction);
- Routes for construction traffic;
- Locations for loading/unloading and storage of plant, waste and construction materials;
- Method of preventing mud being carried onto the highway;
- Measures to protect vulnerable road users (cyclists and pedestrians)
- Any necessary temporary traffic management measures;
- Arrangements for turning vehicles;
- Arrangements to receive abnormal loads or unusually large vehicles;
- Methods of communicating the Construction Management Plan to staff, visitors and neighbouring residents and businesses.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and in accordance with policy TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

12. The proposals for Mitigation and Enhancement as set out in Clarkson and Woods Ecological Impact Assessment August 2022 shall be implemented prior to occupation of the visitor centre.

Reason: For the conservation and protection of species of biodiversity importance in accordance with NPPF and Policy EQ4 of the South Somerset Local Plan, and to ensure compliance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and The Habitats Regulations 2010.

13. "Programme of Works in Accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (POW) Before the commencement of the development hereby permitted the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, shall have secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which has been submitted and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The WSI shall include details of the archaeological investigation, the recording of the heritage asset, the analysis of evidence recovered from the site and publication of the results. The

development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme."

Reason: In the interests of protecting any buried archaeology

Informatives:

01. Before this development can commence, a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence (under The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 2010) will be required from Natural England. You will need to liaise with your ecological consultant for advice and assistance on the application for this licence. Natural England will normally only accept applications for such a licence after full planning permission has been granted and all relevant (protected species) conditions have been discharged.
-