

APPLICATION NO:	21/00466/FUL
LOCATION:	Daresbury Laboratory Keckwick Lane Daresbury
PROPOSAL:	Proposed construction of a supercomputing centre providing 3,070 sqm of floor space (Use Class E1) with formation of new access, landscaping and associated infrastructure
WARD:	Daresbury
PARISH:	Daresbury
AGENT(S) / APPLICANT(S):	Agent: Edward Flood Applicant: DSIC
DEVELOPMENT PLAN ALLOCATION: National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Halton Unitary Development Plan (2005) Halton Core Strategy (2013) Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan (2013)	Allocated Employment Site (CS11)
DEPARTURE	No
REPRESENTATIONS:	1 objection received from Peel in relation to the Bridgewater Canal
KEY ISSUES:	Site suitability, scale, ecology, LLFA issues, access, impact on Bridge Water Canal, ground contamination, parking and highway issues.
RECOMMENDATION:	Grant planning permission subject to conditions.



1. APPLICATION SITE

1.1 The Site

The site subject of the application is an undeveloped green field site located adjacent to the Bridge Water Canal (BWC) and the Daresbury Firs. Its location within the wider context is accurately depicted in the red line plan above.

The Local Plan land allocation for the application site is set by the Core Strategy, specifically Figure 12 of Core Strategy Policy 11 'East Runcorn'.

The development proposal is situated on land within the ownership of DSIC, whilst undeveloped still forms part of the existing Daresbury Science and Innovation Campus (DSIC).

1.2 Development Site Access

The site is currently inaccessible by car. The development proposal details new access arrangements within the red edge of the location plan. This will allow vehicular access to be taken from within the existing DSIC campus via its own internal private road network. Access to DSIC campus is taken from Keckwick Lane via the Innovation Way round a bout.

The proposed access arrangement will result in an extension to the internal DSIC private road network and provide vehicular and pedestrian access via a shared surface with markings.

1.3 Relevant Site Planning History

None.

2. THE APPLICATION

2.1 The Proposal

The application proposes the following description of development '*Proposed construction of a supercomputing centre providing 3,070 sqm of floor space (Use Class E1) with formation of new access, landscaping and associated infrastructure*'.

The application results from a DSIC aspiration to develop a new supercomputer laboratory that will be used to undertake computational laboratory based experiments on behalf of DSIC. The proposed single storey building will provide 3070 SQM of floor space that will primarily be used as a data hall with supporting, offices, loading areas, ancillary facilities, covered plant spaces and external plant. The proposed development is expected to replace an existing supercomputing centre at DSIC that is no longer fit for modern day purposes.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

Members are reminded that planning law requires for development proposals to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The application site features within the Runcorn East Key Area of Change (Fig11 Pg79 Halton Core Strategy). The Land allocation of Figure 12 in CS11 supersedes the allocation set by the UDP Proposals Map. Prior to this allocation the application site was allocated by the Halton Unitary Development Plan (Site 250) as a regional investment site.

Notwithstanding the land allocation of Policy CS11 there remain relevant UDP policies for the determination of future scheme impact and the justification of conditions. Such matters are discussed in detail below.

Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (2005)

The relevant UDP policies are:

- BE1 General requirements for development;
- BE2 Quality of design;
- PR16 Development and flood risk;
- TP6 Cycle Provision as Part of New Development;
- TP12 Car parking;
- TP14 Transport assessments;
- TP15 Accessibility to new development
- TP16 Green travel plans
- TP17 Safe travel for all

4.1 Halton Core Strategy (2013)

The following policies, contained within the Core Strategy are of particular relevance:

- CS2 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development;
- CS4 Employment Land Supply and Locational Priorities;
- CS11 East Runcorn;
- CS15 Sustainable Transport;
- CS18 High Quality Design;
- CS19 Sustainable Development and Climate Change;
- CS20 Natural and Historic Environment
- CS23 Managing Pollution and Risk.

4.2 MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.3 Below are material considerations relevant to the determination of this planning application.

4.4 National Planning Policy Framework

4.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in July 2021 to set out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied.

4.6 Paragraph 47 states that planning law requires for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decisions on application should be made as quickly as possible and within statutory timescale unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing.

4.7 Paragraph 11 and paragraph 38 state that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development and that local planning authorities should work in a positive and creative way, working pro-actively with applicants to secure developments that will improve economic, social and environmental conditions of their areas."

4.8 Paragraphs 81 states planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

4.9 National Planning Policy for Waste

4.10 The National Planning Policy for Waste sets ambitious aims to work towards a more sustainable and efficient approach to resource use and management through positive planning in delivering sustainable development and resource efficiency including through the provision of modern infrastructure and by driving waste management up the waste hierarchy and by securing the re-use, recovery or disposal of waste without endangering human health or harming the environment.

4.11 Other Considerations

4.12 The application has been considered having regard to Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Human Rights Act 1998, which sets out a person's rights to the peaceful enjoyment of property and Article 8 of the Convention of the same Act which sets out his/her rights in respect for private and family life and for the home. Officers consider that the proposed development would not be contrary to the provisions of the above Articles in respect of the human rights of surrounding residents/occupiers.

4.13 Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan (2013)

The following policies, contained within the Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan are of relevance:

- WM8 Waste Prevention and Resource Management;
- WM9 Sustainable Waste Management Design and Layout for New Development.

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 The application was advertised by way of a site notice posted near to the site, press notice dated 1/04/2021, letters to surrounding properties and the Council website.

5.2 The following consultees and organisations were consulted and any comments received have been summarised below in the assessment section of the report:

5.3 INTERNAL CONSULTEE RESPONSES

Highways and Transportation Development Control

No objection.

Ground Contamination

No objection.

Ecology

The Applicant has submitted the following ecology reports to date:

- Preliminary ecological appraisal
- Badger, Water Vole and Otter Survey and Preliminary Roost Assessment Survey
- Bat Survey Report

The bat report is currently under the consideration of the Council's ecological advisor. All other reported matters have been assessed without objection subject to the use of appropriate conditions.

An update on the bat survey will be provided to Committee Members orally.

Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)

No objection. Standard drainage conditions to be attached to any approval requiring the submission of a surface water drainage scheme.

Environmental Protection

No objection subject to use of a condition regarding plant machinery noise protections.

Open Spaces

No objection.

Archaeology

No objection.

Landscape Architect
No response.

5.4 EXTERNAL RESPONSES

United Utilities
No objection, subject to conditions.

Peel Holdings
Response states that Peel does not object in principle of this development, but requests a holding objection. A number of observations and concerns are raised in correspondence.

- Development is within 2m of the Canal at its closest point. Concern about adverse loading on canal wall.
- Site subject to a change in land levels adjacent to the canal wall.
- Removal of trees closely located to the canal wall.
- Replacement tree planting should be planted in tree pits to restrict root growth toward canal wall.
- Construction machinery and practices in close proximity to the canal wall
- Concern over operation of proposed drainage soakaway and the impact it will have on canal.

The Council considers the above concerns to be private matters between the Applicant and Peel as adjoining land owners. There are no policy based concerns expressed by Peel. Whilst the concerns are of merit they are matters to be explored between Peel and the Applicant. For the avoidance of doubt the LLFA have considered the proposed drainage strategy and raise no objections.

Bridgewater Trust
No response.

Environment Agency
No response.

Natural England
No objection.

Cheshire Police
No objection. The designing out crime officer has provided detailed comments concerning site security of a developed site. These have been forwarded to the agent advising the Applicant.

6. REPRESENTATIONS

6.1 None

7. ASSESSMENT

7.1 Design and layout

Documentation submitted with the application provides an overview of elevations, site plans and artist concepts as to the final appearance of the scheme within its surroundings.

The proposed development is to be comprised of purpose built materials that are in keeping with a modern employment site, complimenting the material set of the wider modernisation of the DSIC campus.

The proposed single storey unit will be of steel frame construction with modern commercial prefabricated tiled exterior. A limited section of elevation will form a glazed atrium, this feature faces toward the DSIC campus. The materials indicated on the proposed elevations and artist impressions provide sufficient comfort that the scheme is a high quality design that will benefit from a modern material finish that is consistent with the campus surroundings.

Whilst described as a single storey building it has a greater physical mass with the ground floor being 5 metres in height with an additional area of roof mounted plant space above. Above this area of roof mounted plant the Applicant proposes the installation of a solar array.

The total height of the roof mounted equipment adds a further 5m in height to the proposed building.

Roof mounted plant is common throughout the DSIC campus, particularly the latest developments undertaken on site. Extensive plant equipment is required to ensure the building's internal environment is maintained at a specific laboratory grade environment. The gross internal area of the unit will be 3070sqm.

The building fits within the existing DSIC campus. It will rely upon the existing DSIC infrastructure for access and parking. Notwithstanding four parking spaces are provided within the proposed redline. It is expected that this is to be used for providing disabled spaces and servicing.

A landscape plan has been included that details mature tree standards to be planted to replace the existing trees that will be lost as a result of the construction phase.

The proposed development will form an extension to the existing DSIC campus including adaptations and extensions to the private DSIC internal roadway.

7.2 Landscape Impact

The application site is allocated for development in the Core Strategy (CS11). There is an expectation that a degree of landscape impact will result from such allocation. Existing structures on site are predominantly 3-storeys in height, increasing in height away from the canal. It is considered that it will produce minimal impact to the surrounding landscape. A detailed landscape plan has been submitted that demonstrates careful thought and consideration of the scheme designers into the long term appearance of the development within its immediate landscape. A conscious decision has been taken to propose a blank elevation to the canal avoiding an urbanised appearance. It is considered that over time the landscaping scheme will soften the impact of the development within its setting.

The Council's Landscape Architect has been consulted and offers no objection to the development proposal.

7.3 Highway Considerations

No objection. The Highways Authority have assessed the proposed development and determined that there will be no significant or severe impacts on the existing highway network.

The planning application is supported by a transport note that details means of access, parking, cycle provision and a wider approach to sustainable modes of travel to work.

No infrastructure requirements are expected of this development site (Core Strategy allocation policy CS11) as it is considered that they have been secured already by the Council's approval of planning permission ref: 16/00495/OUTEIA.

7.4 Flood Risk and Drainage

The Lead Local Flood Authority has confirmed that they raise no objection subject to the following conditions being attached to a planning approval:

- No development shall be occupied until a verification report confirming that the SUDS system and treatment system has been constructed in accordance with the approved design drawings and in accordance with best practice has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority. This shall include:
 - Evidence that the treatment plant and SuDS have been signed off by an appropriate, qualified, indemnified engineer and are explained to prospective owners & maintainers plus information that SuDS are entered into the land deeds of the property.

- A maintenance management plan.
- An agreement that maintenance is in place over the lifetime of the development in accordance with submitted maintenance plan; and/or evidence that the treatment plant and the SuDS will be adopted by third party.
- Submission of 'As-built drawings and specification sheets for materials used in the construction, plus a copy of Final Completion Certificate.

7.5 Trees and Ecology

The application site is open bound by the BWC to the west and Daresbury Firs to the east. DSIC campus lies to the North, and the remainder of the DSIC land holding to the South. The site consists almost entirely of poor semi-improved grassland, previously arable farmland bordered by hedgerow, scattered trees and scrub. There are no immediate tree constraints as in preservation orders and the site is not within a conservation area. Daresbury Firs to the East provides a boundary which is a Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site.

Tree loss associated to the development appears minimal, which is predominantly for the construction of vehicle access and road network around the facility. Within the red edge a total of 10 individual specimens and two groups of trees will be removed. These are to be compensated for by the planting of 11 heavy standard trees. The loss of trees and the replacement planting has been assessed by the Council's Open Spaces Division and confirmed as acceptable.

The Ecological Appraisal considers the development proposals will not result in any adverse ecological impact if the recommended procedures set out in the applications documentation are followed. All permitted work shall be carried out strictly as described in the submitted documentation and in accordance with British Standard 3998:2010 "Recommendations for Tree Work" to safeguard the health and visual amenity of the trees. Work shall not be carried out between April and July if it would result in disturbance to nesting birds to ensure no damage to wildlife.

The Council's retained ecology advisor has considered the documentation submitted to date and raised no objection subject to the use of appropriately worded conditions to achieve the aims set out below.

It should be noted that the Council is awaiting comments from its retained advisor regarding the bat survey which was late being submitted. An update will be presented to Committee Members on this.

Matters recommended by ecology advisor to be secured by condition:

- Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) detailing following requirements:
 - Protection measures for the woodland areas to the east (Daresbury Firs LNR/LWS) and north-east, and any associated buffer habitats located at the eastern site boundary.
 - Protection measure for the Bridgewater Canal to the west, to include a minimum buffer along the watercourse of 5 metres.
 - Pollution control measures to prevent runoff and other potential pollutants entering the woodland area to the east or the canal to the west.
 - Avoidance measures for protected/priority species including badger and hedgehog.
 - Timing restrictions in respect of clearance of potential bird nesting habitat.
 - Invasive species control method statements (Himalayan balsam).

7.6 Assessment

As noted above the development proposed is of a single storey building providing 3070SQM of proposed employment floor space. DSIC intends this floor space to be used as a supercomputing site. The proposed development would enable DSIC to remain a leading innovator in large scale computing in the UK.

The development site is allocated for employment use by policy CS11, specifically B1 science and high tech research and development. This allocation expects a floor space target of 47,383SQM (Table 7. Core Strategy). It is considered that such a target is an editing mistake of the Core Strategy, as it is unlikely the Council intended to expect the greatest quantum of commercial floor space development upon the smallest area of land in the CS11 land allocation.

The Core Strategy employment delivery expectations of Daresbury Labs is a sum total of 96,883SQM. This is to be delivered across three distinct areas of land as shown in figure 12 of the Core Strategy. They are, the 'Gateway sites' along innovation way, 'Expansion lands' to the West of the BWC and 'Site to the South of existing DSIC campus'. The application site forms part of the latter.

Since the adoption of the Core Strategy, the Daresbury Labs campus has delivered 38,418SQM of employment floor space at the Gateway Sites. Using this as built density across the expansion lands, there is sufficient land available for Daresbury Labs to achieve the Core Strategy sum total of floor space between the Gateway Sites and Expansions lands whilst allowing a 3000SQM development to take place on the application site.

Table 7 of the Core Strategy sets out two infrastructure requirements that this development site is expected to contribute towards. Junction improvement works at A56 and improvements to Delph Lane Canal Bridge. These expectations have been met by planning permission ref: 17/00407/OUTEIA and its subsequent amendment permission 20/00487/S73 that were both granted to Redrow Homes in 2018 and 2021 respectively. Development works have begun on site and the improvements works to the A56 junction are expected to commence in the new year. Improvements to the existing canal bridge are expected to be delivered in later phases of Redrows development which will see Delph Lane become part of the Council's greenway network.

It is considered that the proposed development accords with the land use policy associated with the land use designation for the application site.

With regard to materials and design of the development in the context of its site and situation the following points are of note. The building design and material choice is designed to be as sympathetic to its surroundings as possible. The building is a single storey to minimise visual impact and preserve views to the Daresbury Firs. The proposed building materials are dark in nature so as not to distract wider fields of view. Finally, a landscaping plan detailing the planting of mature native species will soften the impact of the proposed development on the local landscape. Whilst it is inevitable that there will be a degree of impact on a development site, particularly a greenfield site, it is considered that the Applicant has taken all steps available to lessen any inevitable impact as a result of the Local Plan land use allocation.

Off-site impacts have been assessed by the Council's Highways Department and the Council's Environmental Health Department. No objection has been received from the Highway Officer advising the Council's decision, environmental health officers have advised the use of a condition to any planning approval regarding plant machinery noise in the interests of protecting the amenity of nearby residents.

Matters of drainage, flood risk, contaminated land and ecological impacts have been assessed by the Council's advisors. No objections have been received subject to the attachment of relevant conditions to ensure compliance with Local Plan policies.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The principle of the development is acceptable and is considered to be in compliance with the aspirations of the Local Plan, specifically Policy CS11 of the Halton Core Strategy.

Wider impacts have been assessed by the Council's retained advisors with no objection been received subject to the use of planning conditions.

Approval of the application will facilitate the delivery of a new investment at the DSIC campus and bring quality employment opportunities within a site that is growing in its importance both locally and regionally within the science and innovation industry.

On this basis the proposal is acceptable and accords with the Local Plan

9. RECOMMENDATION

Approve subject to the list of conditions detailed below.

Conditions

1. Condition setting out standard time limits (Section 92 the Act)
2. Development to be carried out in accordance with approved plans (BE1).
3. Details regarding a construction and environmental management plan detailing the following:
 - Protection measures for the woodland areas to the east (Daresbury Firs LNR/LWS) and north-east, and any associated buffer habitats located at the eastern site boundary.
 - Protection measure for the Bridgewater Canal to the west, to include a minimum buffer along the watercourse of 5 metres.
 - Pollution control measures to prevent runoff and other potential pollutants entering the woodland area to the east or the canal to the west.
 - Avoidance measures for protected/priority species including badger and hedgehog.
 - Timing restrictions in respect of clearance of potential bird nesting habitat.
 - Invasive species control method statements (Himalayan balsam).
4. Requirement concerning a verification report demonstrating the approved surface water drainage scheme has been implemented (NPPF).
5. Details concerning external plant equipment noise protections (PR2).
6. The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until details of bird boxes to include number, type and location on an appropriately scaled plan as well as timing of installation, has been provided for approval and implemented in accordance with those details.(BE1 and GE21).

7. Details concerning the submission of a construction waste audit (WM8).
8. Details requiring the installation of a lighting scheme to prevent excessive light from affecting the canal corridor and Daresbury Firs (BE1 and GE21).
9. Details for a scheme demonstrating the number and location of Bat boxes (BE1 and GE21).
10. Condition requiring the installation of any boundary treatment the Applicant shall submit details concerning measures to implement a hedgehog highway (BE1 and GE21).
11. A Landscape and Ecology Maintenance Plan shall be submitted and agreed in writing. It shall address the following points
 - Creation, establishment and management of wildflower areas;
 - Planting, establishment and management of hedgerows;
 - Tree management;
 - Pond management;
 - Management of areas containing bluebell;
 - Locations of hedgehog highways in boundary fences;
 - Bat and bird box types and locations. This should be informed by the updated bat activity and breeding bird surveys completed in 2021.
12. Details requiring submission and agreement of site levels and finished floor levels (BE1)

Informative

1. United Utilities Informative.
2. Environment Agency standing advice
3. Informative about requirement for biodiversity net gain post enactment of the Environment Act 2021.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The submitted planning applications are background papers to the report. Other background papers specifically mentioned and listed within the report are open to inspection at the Council's premises at Municipal Building, Kingsway, Widnes, WA8 7QF in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

As required by:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (2021);
- The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015; and

- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2015.

This statement confirms that the local planning authority has worked proactively with the applicant to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of Halton.