



Proposed Go-Kart Track
For Roy Johnson Development
A5, Watling Street, Cannock

Proposed new Go Kart track Development

Djogs Landscape Architects

Pre committee Summary

19/10/2020

SUMMARY - KEY ELEMENTS

REASONS FOR SITE SELECTION (SCOPING SUMMARY)

- ✓ Significant international standard outdoor venue within west midlands green belt requiring large land area to provide the necessary track size and supporting infrastructure
- ✓ Centrally placed within UK and within an area with no equivalent venue (nearest is in Lincolnshire)
- ✓ Adjacent to strategic road network (A5) and near to M6Toll and M6 motorway junctions providing linkage to national road network
- ✓ Low sensitivity landscape due to historical use and neighbouring land usage.
- ✓ Low grade agricultural land
- ✓ Previous approval for similar scheme on the same site

ACOUSTICS

Bund provided to remove/reduce impact on local residents.
 Remaining technical objection from EHO regarding calculations and house boats
 Objection from Walsall MBC due to Brownhills West
 Both rebuked by Mike Randall

DRAINAGE

Scheme approved by NE (objection withdrawn)
 Landscape officer still objecting regarding both drainage to canal and to Wyrley Common SBI. Both addressed by latest YTS drainage scheme

PUBLIC RIGHTS-OF-WAY

PRoW diverted and improved
 No objection from Ramblers association
 Remaining objection from CCDC Landscape officer regarding 'dark tunnel' passed bund



ECOLOGY

Protected Species

Bats – low activity recorded
Badgers – no setts within the site or within 100m
Great Crested Newts - 2 surveys done none found
Reptiles – survey found marginal habitat and no reptiles
Floating water-plantain – in CEC SAC unaffected no objection from Natural England
 Habitat creation provides net gain for biodiversity

LIGHTING

No lighting included in the application.
 This queried due to operating hours.
 Lighting has potential impact on bats, nesting birds and landscape

HIGHWAYS

No objection from HE for junction or strategic road network
 Entrance road through protected site (SBI) objection from Landscape officer and ecologist
 Mitigation provided

LANDSCAPE

Bund – objection from landscape officer not enough detail and shading of PRoW
 Queries regarding land forming levels etc
 Queries regarding habitat creation

GREEN BELT

Objections states inappropriate development
 CT Planning states appropriate and not inappropriate for outdoor sport
 Provides increased and improved access to greenbelt

PROTECTED SITES

Cannock Extension Canal SAC/SSSI – fully protected via drainage scheme (approved by NE) remaining objection from landscape officer
Watling St Grassland SBI – loss of woodland mitigated; restored grassland – objection from landscape officer and ecologist argument over classification of woodland and habitat stability
Wyrley Common SBI – objections regarding drainage into it from water treatment plant and false claim that the site is partially within the designated common land



Key

- Boundary
- New Buildings
- Road
- Parking
- Overflow parking
- Main pathway
- Drainage
- Bund
- Tree buffer
- New water bodies
- Track
- Fence
- Heathland
- New Hedgerow
- Tree planting

	DJGS	CLIENT	DATE 17/05/2015	PROJECT	DRAWING	SCALE
	Landscape Architect	Mr Roy Johnson	DRAWN BY	Wyrley Common Go-Kart Track	Masterplan	Tel 01922 442665
	Danielle Jaynes M.A. info@djgs.co.uk		Danielle Jaynes			07812640015
			Dwg. No. 189.3			PAPER SIZE A1

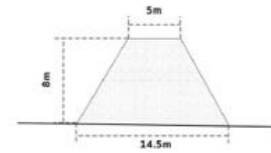
SIDE ELEVATION: FROM WEST (PELSALL ROAD BRIDGE)



The public right-of-way will be diverted to a new accessible track along the retained mature field boundary. The new recreational space will be accessed by paths around the pools and from Lime Lane, Cannock Extension Canal and the right-of-way from Watling Street.

New landscaping between the west bund and Lime Lane will include new pools and woodland. This will include a section of native woodland with Oak, Alder, Birch and Wild Cherry. Two new pools will provide a focus for recreation, additional habitat and visual amenity. The newly created pools will be gravity fed by water from site. The pools will provide filtration and settlement services for the incoming water through planted reed beds before releasing back into the local drainage system which feeds into the Cannock Extension Canal. All planting within and around the pools will be native, creating a natural looking amenity which is attractive to both people and wildlife.

Access points at either end of the north bund provide an alternative route for walkers with extensive views of the surrounding fields and landscape. The new woodland and pools will connect in the landscape with Wyrley Common wood creating a seamless transition into this important local habitat.



BUND PROFILE
The bund constructed to provide an acoustic and visual barrier between the new go-kart track and the farmland to the north and canal basin to the west.

ELEVATED VIEW FROM SOUTH WEST (LIME LANE)



VIEWS OF THE BUND

The bund is open to use by the public for recreation. Views of the track, new lakes and surrounding countryside are available from the top of the bund which includes a 5m wide plateau.
View A shows people enjoying the elevated views from the bund towards the track. Equally there are views to the west with Cannock Extension Canal and the farmland of Little Wyrley visible from the top as well as sunsets on the horizon. The bund overlooks the newly created native woodland and pools.
View B shows the western face of the bund clothed in gorse and other native heathland plants and the new woodland created on the land between the bund and Lime Lane. Beyond the trees new retention pools provide additional amenity and wildlife value.

Views C and D look along the northern section of the bund from the west. C shows the top of the bund and D looks along the north side of the bund.
View C shows the new hedge and fence boundary treatment and the created dry heathland of heathers and grasses. This section will provide a new alternative footpath for right-of-way users giving elevated views of Wyrley Common wood and beyond.
View D shows the public right-of-way running between the field boundary hedge and woodland planting on the face of the bund. The planting will include native plants and shrubs including bluebell, sweet woodruff, hart's tongue fern, honeysuckle and traveller's jay.

VIEW A



VIEW B



VIEW C

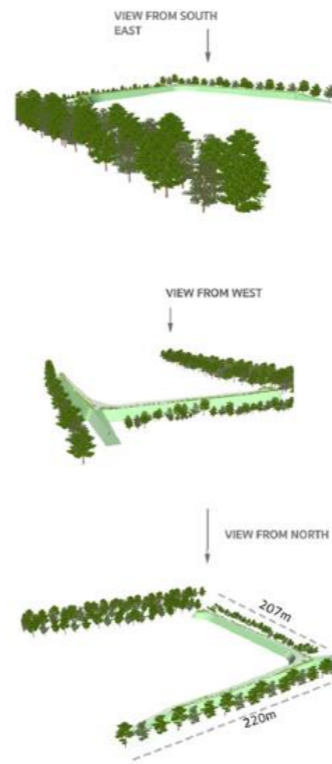


VIEW D

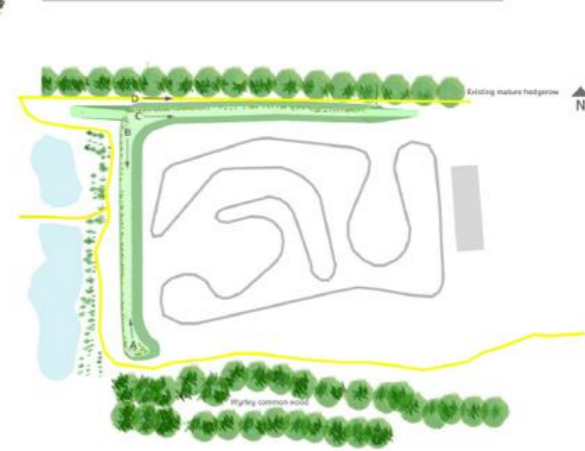


BUND PLANTING

- Wild flower meadows will be seeded into the lower slopes of south, east and west facing slopes.
- Gorse hedging used along the top of the bund to provide enclosure providing nesting for song birds including Whitethroat, Linnet and Yellowhammer.
- A mix of Ling, Bell Heather and Western Gorse to match similar habitats locally e.g. Chasewater Country Park.
- Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) characteristic of the local landscape used extensively on bunds and around site.
- Gorse used as hedging, and for stabilization provides habitat for wildlife.
- Native grasses such as Wavy hair-grass help stabilize banks and provide habitat and food for wildlife.
- Wildflowers such as Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*) provide a rich nectar source for butterflies and bees.
- The north bank will provide shady habitat for woodland plants including Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Traveller's jay (*Camassia sibirica*) native ferns and Wood Melick (*Milicia uniflora*).



PLAN OF BUND WITH GO KART TRACK AND VIEW POINTS



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NOTES:

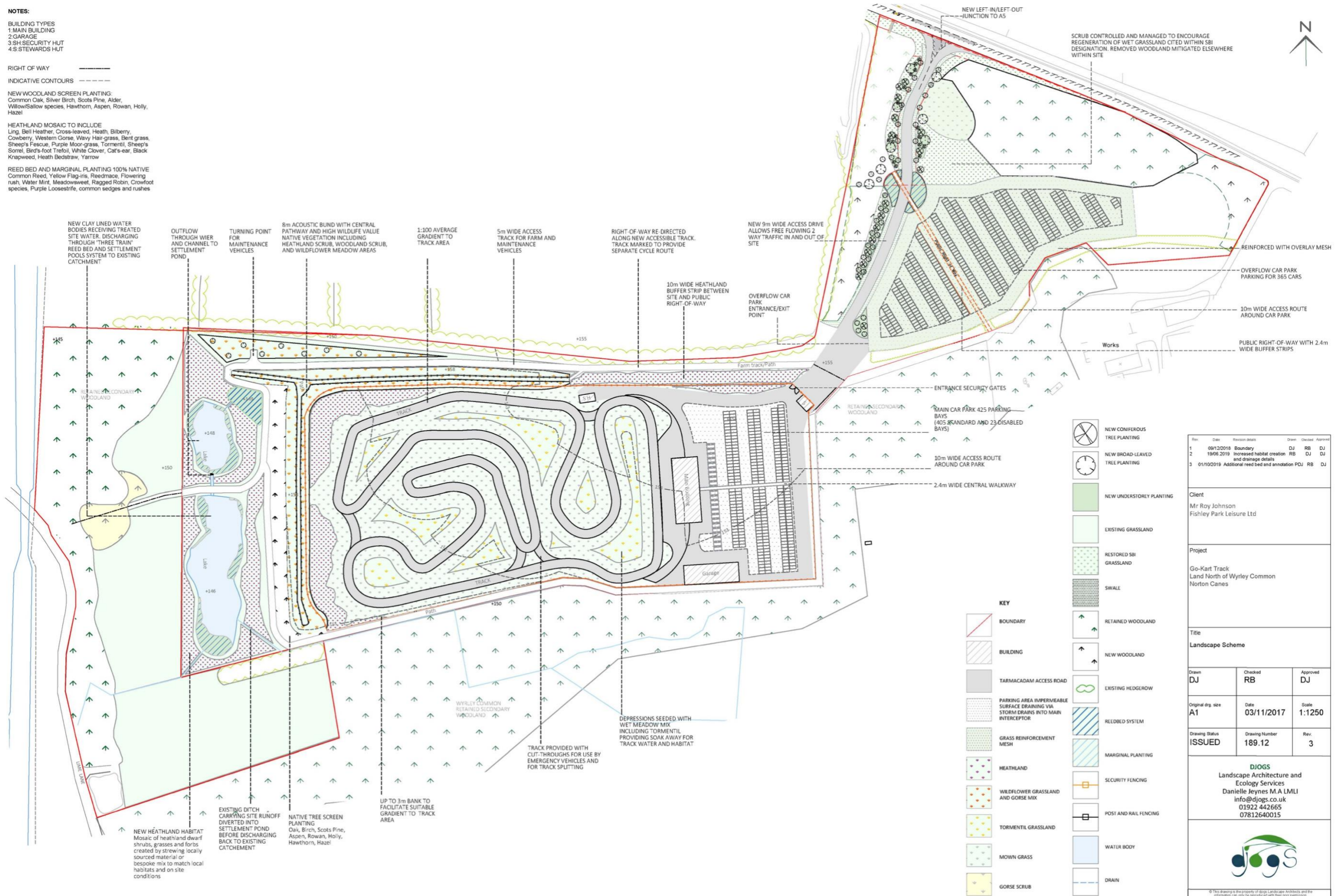
BUILDING TYPES
 1. MAIN BUILDING
 2. GARAGE
 3. SH-SECURITY HUT
 4. S-STEWARDS HUT

RIGHT OF WAY ————
INDICATIVE CONTOURS - - - - -

NEW WOODLAND SCREEN PLANTING:
 Common Oak, Silver Birch, Scots Pine, Alder, Willow/Sallow species, Hawthorn, Aspen, Rowan, Holly, Hazel

HEATHLAND MOSAIC TO INCLUDE
 Ling, Bell Heather, Cross-leaved Heath, Bilberry, Cowberry, Western Gorse, Wavy Hair-grass, Bent grass, Sheep's Fescue, Purple Moor-grass, Tormentil, Sheep's Sorex, Bird's-foot Trefoil, White Clover, Cat's-ear, Black Knapweed, Heath Bedstraw, Yarrow

REED BED AND MARGINAL PLANTING 100% NATIVE
 Common Reed, Yellow Flag-iris, Reed-rhaze, Flowering rush, Water Mint, Meadowsweet, Ragged Robin, Crowfoot species, Purple Loosestrife, common sedges and rushes



- NEW CONIFEROUS TREE PLANTING
- NEW BROAD-LEAVED TREE PLANTING
- NEW UNDERSTOREY PLANTING
- EXISTING GRASSLAND
- RESTORED SBI GRASSLAND
- SWALE
- RETAINED WOODLAND
- NEW WOODLAND
- EXISTING HEDGEROW
- REEDBED SYSTEM
- MARGINAL PLANTING
- SECURITY FENCING
- POST AND RAIL FENCING
- WATER BODY
- DRAIN

- KEY**
- BOUNDARY
 - BUILDING
 - TARMACADAM ACCESS ROAD
 - PARKING AREA IMPERMEABLE SURFACE DRAINING VIA STORM DRAINS INTO MAIN INTERCEPTOR
 - GRASS REINFORCEMENT MESH
 - HEATHLAND
 - WILDFLOWER GRASSLAND AND GORSE MIX
 - TORMENTIL GRASSLAND
 - MOWN GRASS
 - GORSE SCRUB

Rev	Date	Revision details	Drawn	Checked	Approved
1	09/12/2018	Boundary	DJ	RB	DJ
2	19/09/2019	Increased habitat creation and drainage details	RB	DJ	DJ
3	01/10/2019	Additional reed bed and annotation	PDJ	RB	DJ

Client
 Mr Roy Johnson
 Fishley Park Leisure Ltd

Project
 Go-Kart Track
 Land North of Wryley Common
 Norton Canes

Title
 Landscape Scheme

Drawn	Checked	Approved
DJ	RB	DJ

Original dwg. size	Date	Scale
A1	03/11/2017	1:1250

Drawing Status	Drawing Number	Rev.
ISSUED	189.12	3

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GREEN BELT

Reason for Refusal:

1. The site is situated within the West Midlands Green Belt wherein there is a presumption against inappropriate development which should not be approved except in 'very special circumstances'. Paragraph 144 of the National Planning Policy Framework makes it clear that 'very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The proposal would involve a range of engineering and other operations including: -

(i) 1.2km track

(ii) a formal car park comprising 107 marked car parking bays (measuring 2.5 by 5m) and a further 23 large parking bays (measuring 5m by 10m).

(iii) an area measuring 90m by 55m adjacent to the formal car park that could be used for the parking of vehicles (iv) a 6m high earth bund to the west of the proposed track

(v) a new seven metre wide access through the frontage copse to the A5.

(vi) 2m high mesh fence and the erection of external lighting.

(vi) toilet block and security kiosk.

(vii) introduction of lighting

The above engineering works and other operations and the use of the land as a go-kart track, along with all ancillary uses that would entail, would fail, to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt and as such the proposal would constitute inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

Can we prove very special circumstances? There is a trade-off between the enclosure of the track area and creation of car parking etc with the creation of additional open access green space to the west of the site and the inclusive nature of the diverted PRow which will be surfaced to enable access for all. There will also be a cycle route through the site joining the CEC towpath with the A5 cycleway. Encouraging and enabling access to the greenbelt is part of the aims of greenbelt policy. The CCDC Local Plan shows there is a shortage of greenspace within Norton Canes which is exacerbated by the additional housing being built

2. The harm to the Green Belt, to the character and form of this rural location through urbanisation, the loss of agricultural land, loss of open access/common land, and to the ecological value of the woodland Site of Biological Interest within the site would not be clearly outweighed by matters arising from the previous application, the undemonstrated need for the facility and the asserted absence of other similar facilities, job opportunities and economic benefits and to the proposed 'ecological improvements'. As such the harm to the Green Belt and harm to the above acknowledged interests is not clearly outweighed by other considerations such that very special circumstances exist that would justify approval of the application.

The landscape character assessment has assessed the local landscape as of low sensitivity reducing the weight of this argument. The local plan also allocates land adjacent to the north and east boundaries of the site for development as employment sites. As these are also greenbelt and in similar agricultural use it is a hypocritical of CCDC particularly as over half of our site will be used for habitat creation or remains green.

CT Planning Green Belt Statement (17 December 2018)

Conclusions

3.32 It is submitted the proposed development relates to a form of development that is appropriate to a rural area and not inappropriate to the Green Belt.

Karting is an outdoor sport and recreation activity and therefore not inappropriate in the Green Belt; it is a form of development that could not be easily undertaken within an urban area. The site is well screened from all directions and only limited views of the activities will be possible. The proposed development would not harm the fundamental policy which is to keep the land open. It will not materially harm the visual amenity of the Green Belt or the purposes of including land within it.

3.33 Were the Planning Authority to find that the proposals amounted to inappropriate development then it is submitted that there are very special circumstances to warrant the grant of planning permission for the development of the application site as a kart racing circuit. The proposed development will assist the Planning Authority in meeting its objectives for the Green Belt (see paragraph 141 of the Framework) in terms of enhancing the beneficial use of the Green Belt by providing access to and opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, the retention and enhancement of landscapes, visual amenity and increasing bio-diversity.

The proposed development can take place without causing harm to the natural, built and historic environment.

The development will secure economic, social and environmental benefits which clearly outweigh the limited harm to the Green Belt. They thus constitute very special circumstances that outweigh any potential harm to the Green Belt Statement Green Belt, as well as any other harm. In these circumstances, the Planning Authority is requested to grant planning permission accordingly.

ECOLOGY

5. The proposal, by virtue of the creation of the access road to the A5 would have a direct impact on a Site of Biological Importance which is considered important due to the presence of wet woodland of a stand type (National Vegetation Classification W4) which is scarce in a Staffordshire context. This impact could potentially be exacerbated by the changes in hydrology as a result of the road construction and pollution from road runoff.

There will be a loss of area of the derelict wet grassland cited for the SBI however the proposed scheme shows a restored grassland (county significance). The W4 woodland (also would be county significance) currently suggested to be present by the council ecologist is a short lived transitional habitat between the cited purple moor-grass/sphagnum moss wet grassland and poor quality secondary woodland with shaded out ground-flora that is establishing as the area dries out due to scrubbing over rather than the implied stable habitat. The main cause of changes in hydrology is drying out due to the scrubbing over of wet grassland which is currently occurring and overflow from the pond at the southern end due to a blocked outflow from the adjacent pond. The proposed scheme will ensure the retention of the remaining wet grassland, extension of wetland habitats through the creation of swales and reedbeds and the mitigation of lost woodland through the planting of mixed native woodland on less sensitive ley grassland.

There is also the potential for contaminated water to enter the Wyrley Common SBI from the discharge of the proposed septic tanks and runoff from hard standings. However, insufficient information has been submitted to allow the Local Planning Authority to undertake a proper assessment of the full impacts on the Wyrley Common SBI.

Sufficient information has been provided. A revised drainage scheme shows the further treatment of the outflow from the treatment plant through a reed bed before entering a water course which passes through the wood towards engine Lane. The secondary woodland within Wyrley common is of low sensitivity in comparison to other habitats. In all the level of treatment; low sensitivity of the habitat and the outflow flowing through and out of the SBI results in an insignificant impact. The treatment plant can be specified to suit any reasonable specified maximum nutrient load.

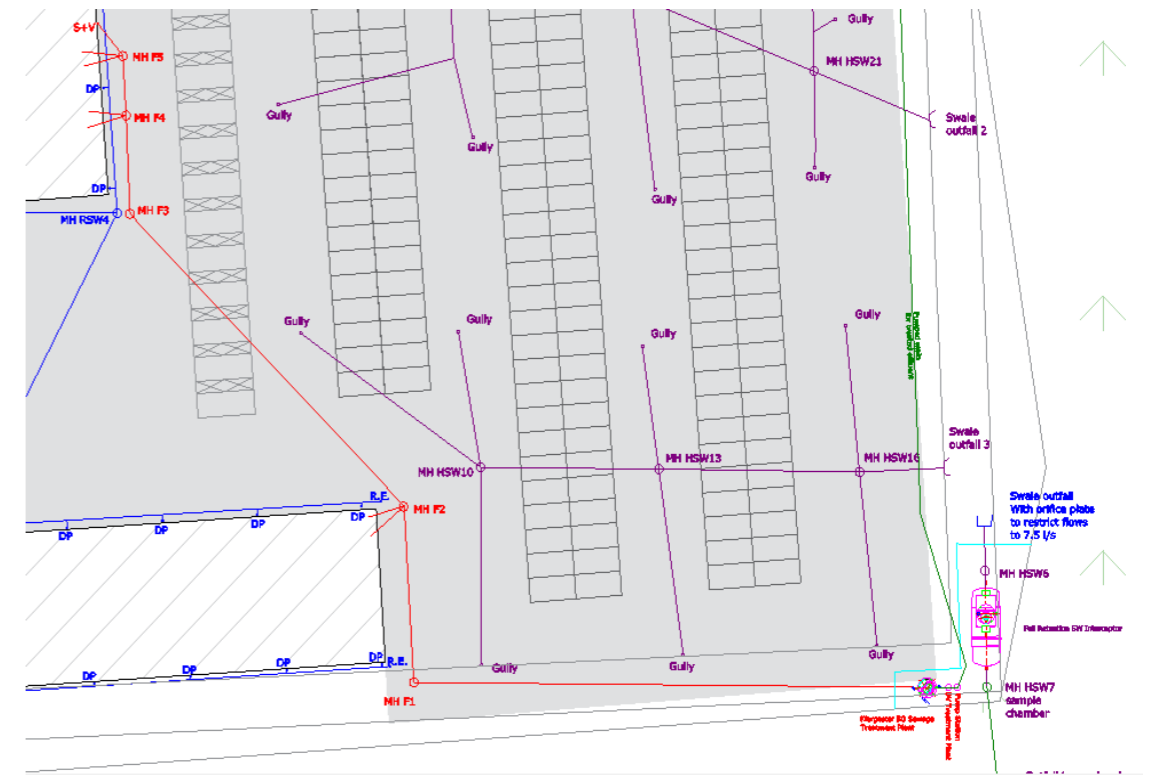
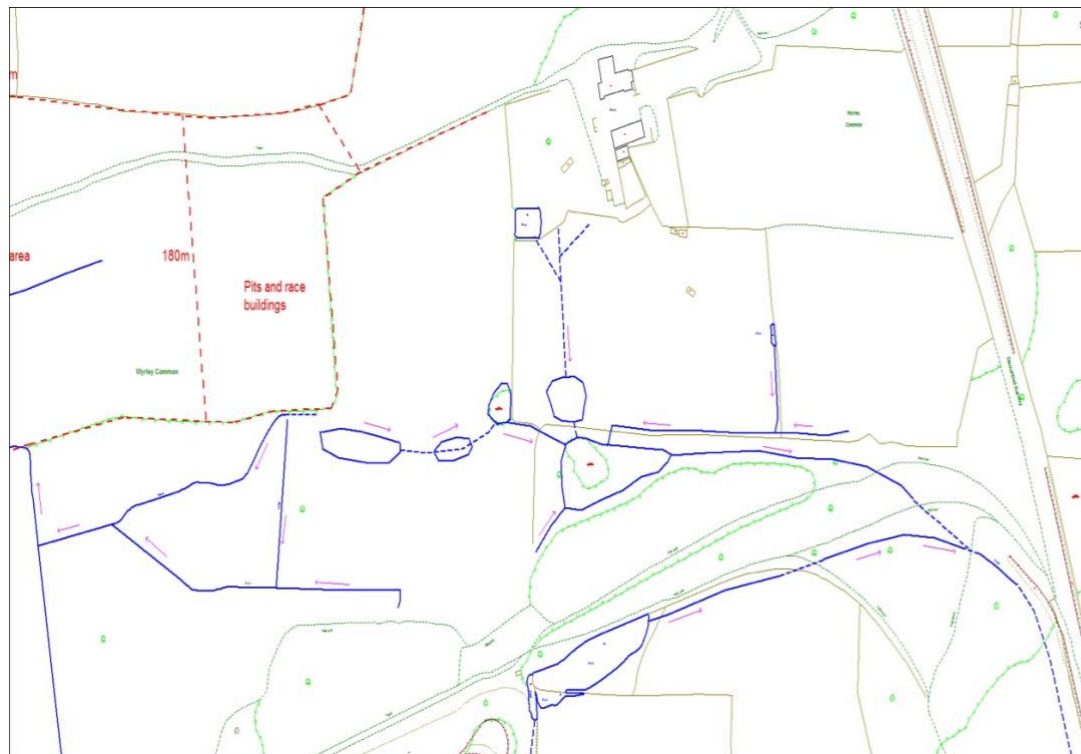
Policy CP12 of the Cannock Chase Local Plan states that planning permission should be refused for developments that result in adverse impacts on a locally designated site unless

- (i) There is no alternative site for the proposal; and
- (ii) The need for and the wider sustainability benefits outweigh its adverse impacts taking into account the value of the site and;
- (iii) Appropriate mitigation measures or new benefits can be provided to compensate for the loss. **is this what the biodiversity impact assessment gives?** It has not been demonstrated that there are no other suitable alternative sites which could accommodate this development within the West Midlands area, that there is a demonstrable need for the development or that the loss of the wet woodland would be mitigated, or, compensated for. As such the proposal is contrary to Policy CP12 of the Cannock Chase Local Plan (Part1) and paragraph 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

The site is suitably located on the national road network creating easy access via the A5, M6Toll and M6 which is critical for the site use by national and international competitors. The site is within the designated A5 development corridor (CCDC Local Plan) and as such perfectly placed compared to other sites within the west midlands area. The low sensitivity of the area as assessed within the CCDC Green Belt review and demonstrated by the designation of adjacent green belt land for employment and housing.

Biodiversity Impact Assessment Summary

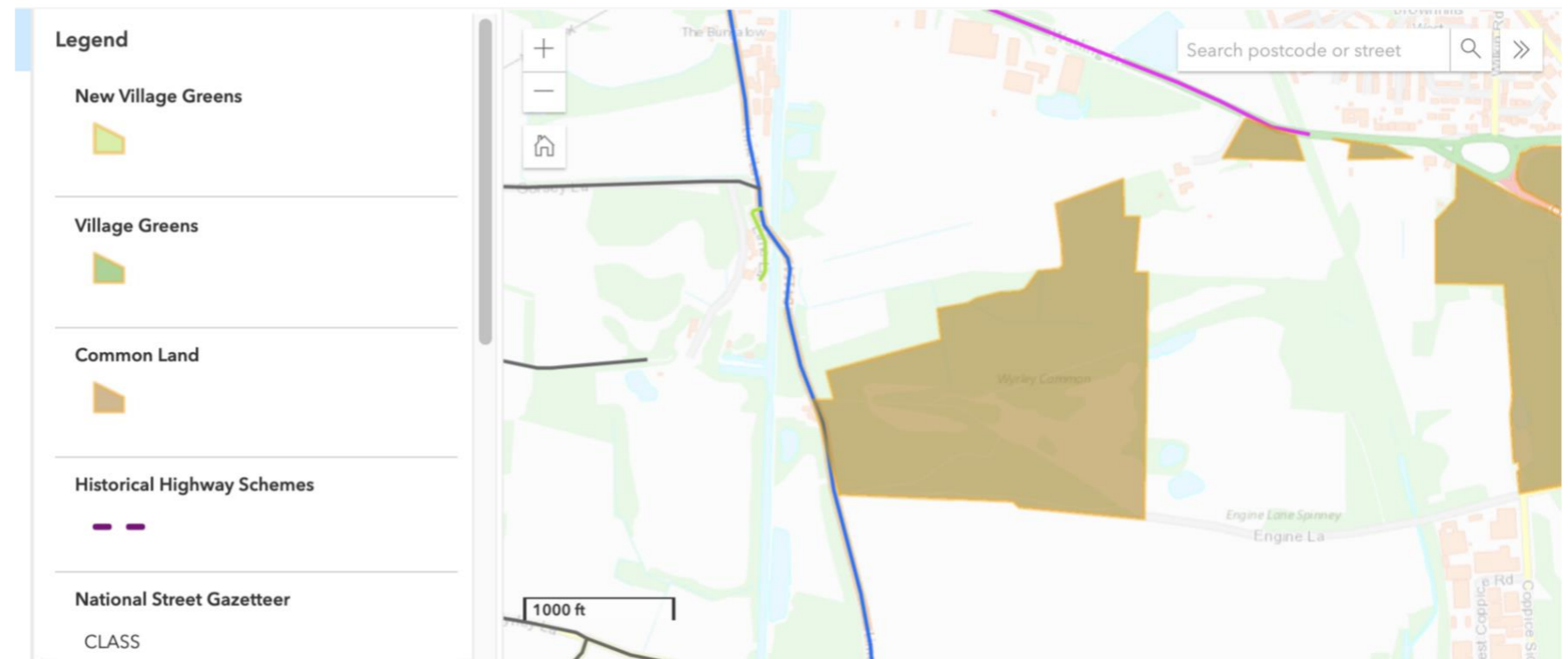
Site name:	Fishley Leisure Go-Kart Track	
Planning reference number:	CH/16/267	
Habitats	Area (ha)	Habitat Biodiversity Value
Total existing area onsite	15.29	68.94
Habitats negatively impacted by development	13.18	54.48
Impact Score		
On site habitat mitigation	Habitat	
Mitigation Score	15.75	60.45
Habitat Biodiversity Impact Score		
If -ve further compensation required		5.97
Percentage of biodiversity impact		
Linear features	Length (km)	Linear Biodiversity Value
Total existing length onsite	1.14	4.68
Linear features negatively impacted by development	0.54	1.08
Linear Impact Score		
On site linear mitigation	Linear	
Mitigation Score	1.80	22.96
Linear Biodiversity Impact Score		
If -ve further compensation required		21.88
Percentage of linear biodiversity impact		



HIGHWAYS, ACCESS AND COMMON LAND

7. The proposal would lead to the loss of part of an area designated as 'open access' common land which provides some degree of recreational value in connection with the wider common/ open access area of Wyrley Common. There will be no loss of open access land as the arable field was not accessible other than the PRowS across it. Wyrley Common (CL123) lies wholly outside the site boundary. The proposed landscape scheme will provide a significantly greater area of accessible land and length and quality of footpath as well as creating a new cycleway. The scheme also provides new destinations from existing and new paths including views of the venue; lakes, heathland and woodland for free access recreational sites. This provision will encourage local residents to access the local greenspace and reduce pressure on local green infrastructure including Chasewater CP and Cannock Chase SAC/AONB. It will therefore be a benefit to the existing green infrastructure and add to the existing offer rather than detract from it

Extent of Wyrley Common according to Staffordshire CC Land Charges Mapping Portal <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Highways/Highway-data/Highway-Records/Land-charges-online-mapping-portal.aspx>



PUBLIC RIGHTS-OF-WAY

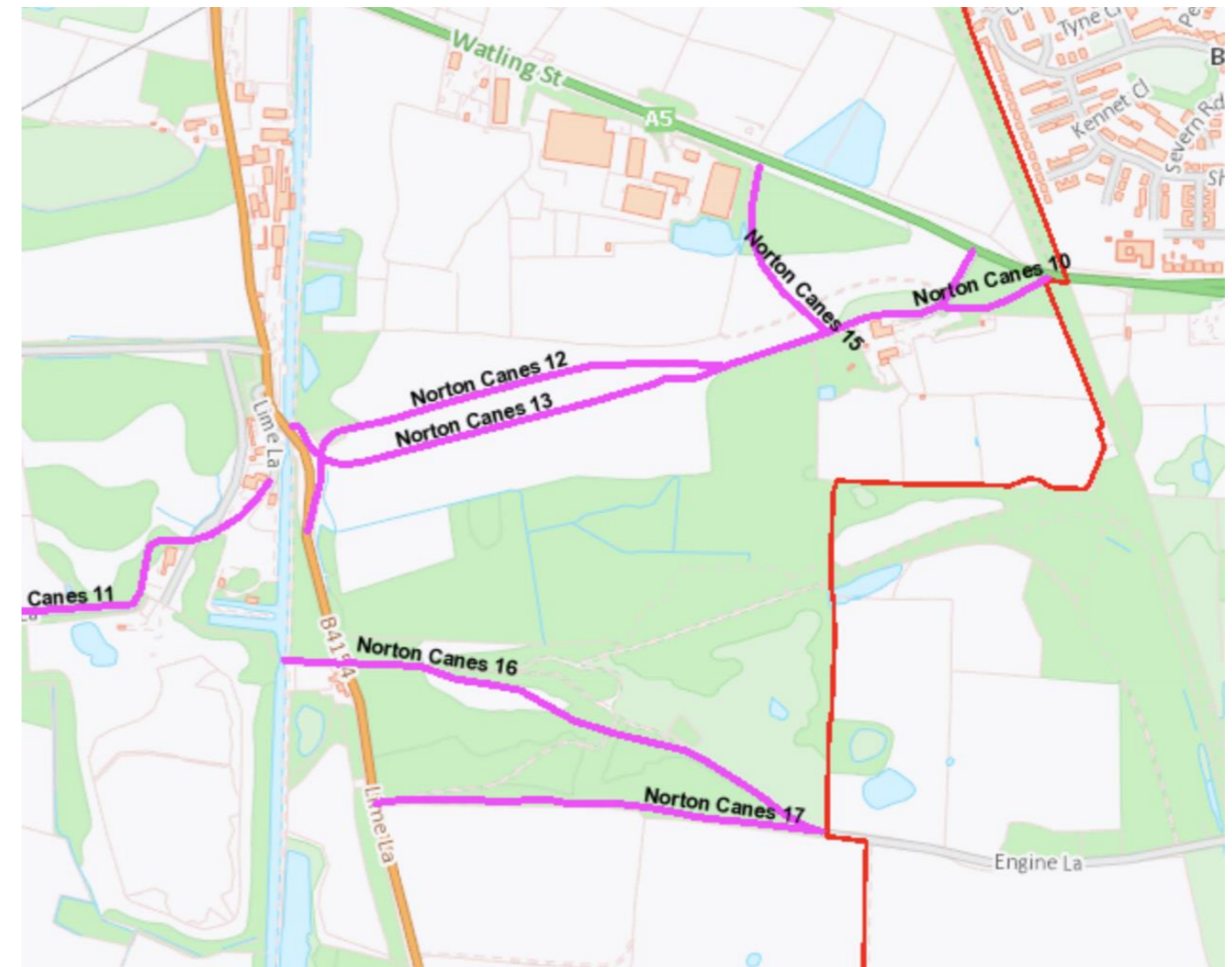
Although not listed as an objection much weight was put on the disruption of the existing rights-of-way particularly the rerouting along the north of the bund. There will be a change in aspect along the <300m of bund however the remainder of the PRow provision is significantly improved. The Rambler's association have no objection to the proposals.

Existing condition:

Norton Canes 12 is open and crosses the arable field along a green way towards Cathedral pit building
Norton Canes 13 is not maintained and is not currently used or passable due to the low numbers of people using the area and those who do using the parallel NC12 greenway. NC13 is functionally redundant
Norton Canes 15 is currently and consistently impassable due to flooding from the adjacent fishing pond.

The proposals provide a significant improvement to the PRow provision including:

- Parallel sections of NC12 and NC13 combined and rerouted to provide a single improved route enabling people with restricted mobility to access the countryside including parking, lakes, woodland and heathland settings. The section along the bund has been designed to provide temperate rain forest planting of ferns, flowers, honeysuckle, small trees and shrubs
- NC15 through the secondary woodland to the north of the site is currently impassable due to flooding and poor surface. The proposals provide an all weather surface for this route.
- A cycle path parallel to sections of NC12 and NC15 is proposed linking the Cannock Extension Canal tow path and the A5 cycle route



LIGHTING AND NOISE

6. The intended use as a go kart track would be for seven days per week between the hours of 09.00 to 18.00 ours. This consequently encompasses more (noise) sensitive periods such Bank Holidays, Public Holidays and weekends (most notably Sundays) when ambient sound levels classically subside rendering any newly introduced sound signatures potentially more invasive. Furthermore, the nature of motorsport activities is typified by an intermittent sound/ noise profile occasioned by a series of events, for example, practice sessions, heats, races and so forth that punctuate the ambient noise profile. The proposal therefore has the potential to result in a poor level of residential amenity for the occupiers nearby dwellings and canal boats. The information supplied by the applicants has not satisfactorily demonstrated that nearby residential dwellings will continue to have a high standard of residential amenity in accordance with Paragraph 127(f) of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy CP3 of the Cannock Chase Local Plan.

There have been a number of acoustics reports demonstrating that the proposed development will not provide a significant nuisance in terms of noise even during weekend events due to the provision of extensive acoustic screening, distance from and low number of neighbouring properties and the significant level of ambient noise from the existing road infrastructure. The EHO comments are totally refuted by two very experienced acoustic specialists. See Mike Randall

In response to the two queries on noise:-

- (i) We have assessed the noise impact for nearest residential properties and shown that there is no adverse noise impact at 260m distance. Just considering an increase to 680m distance reduces the radiated noise by approximately 8dB which suggests there is even less likelihood of an adverse noise impact. In addition the nearest Brownhills residential properties are close to the A5 and M6 toll, suggesting that their background noise level will be higher, further reducing any noise impact. So there would appear to be no technical merit to the issue raised by Walsall MBC.
- (ii) With regard to noise impact on canal boats, these are boats, not houses and technically not covered by any environmental noise standards. My simple assessment applied was to treat a cabin of a boat just like the room of a house where if you have noise entering from outside via an open window BS8233:2014 advises a reduction of 15dBA. The EHO has demanded we research the noise insulation properties of canal boats as their construction is different to that of houses. We are not going to waste lots of time and money researching this subject to pander to the EHO. If you sit inside a canal boat you are inside a mild steel insulated box with a wooden door/hatch and a glass window; if you open the window the noise level difference between outside and in will be very approximately 15dBA due to the window opening area having 0dB noise insulation value in comparison to the cabin envelope which will have a noise insulation value in excess of 20dB meaning once you open the window the cabin construction really has no significant influence on the internal noise created by the noise entering via the open window area. 15dBA is very reasonable assumption and the noise impact on moored canal boats is no an issue, despite the protest of an academic EHO wasting everyone time.

Good luck with the committee meeting, the longer this goes on the higher the background noise level due to road traffic and commercial activity goes and the less noise impact the go-kart track has in comparison, despite COVID 19 the world is getting busier year on year and this includes Cannock, Brownhills and the locality.

Kind regards

Mike

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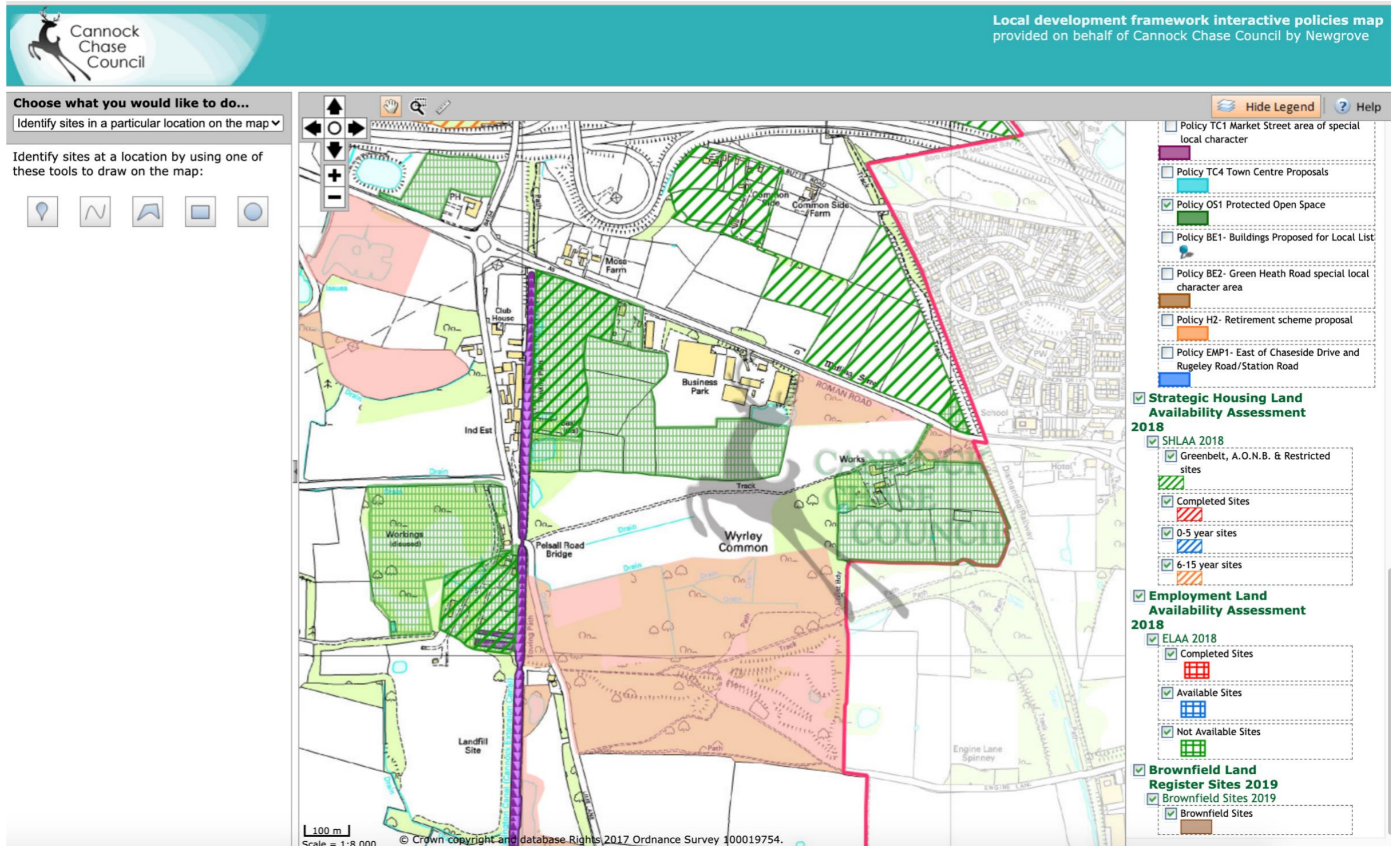
LANDSCAPE

8. The proposal by virtue of its scale and nature would fail to be well-related to its surroundings in terms of its layout, scale and appearance, would not form appropriate development within the Green Belt to a design in keeping with its surroundings or be sympathetic to local character and its rural landscape setting, and therefore would be contrary to Policies CP3 and CP14 of the Cannock Chase Local Plan and paragraph 124 of the NPPF.

The proposed development is of international standard and thus would be very unlikely to conform to any local facility type. However the landscape has been designed to contribute to the local landscape type including SBAP wetland, grassland, heathland and woodland HAPs.

The designation of adjacent land for employment development (see map) demonstrates the low sensitivity of the area and the strategic importance of the site within the national road infrastructure. Nearby land is also listed within SHLAA as restricted site.

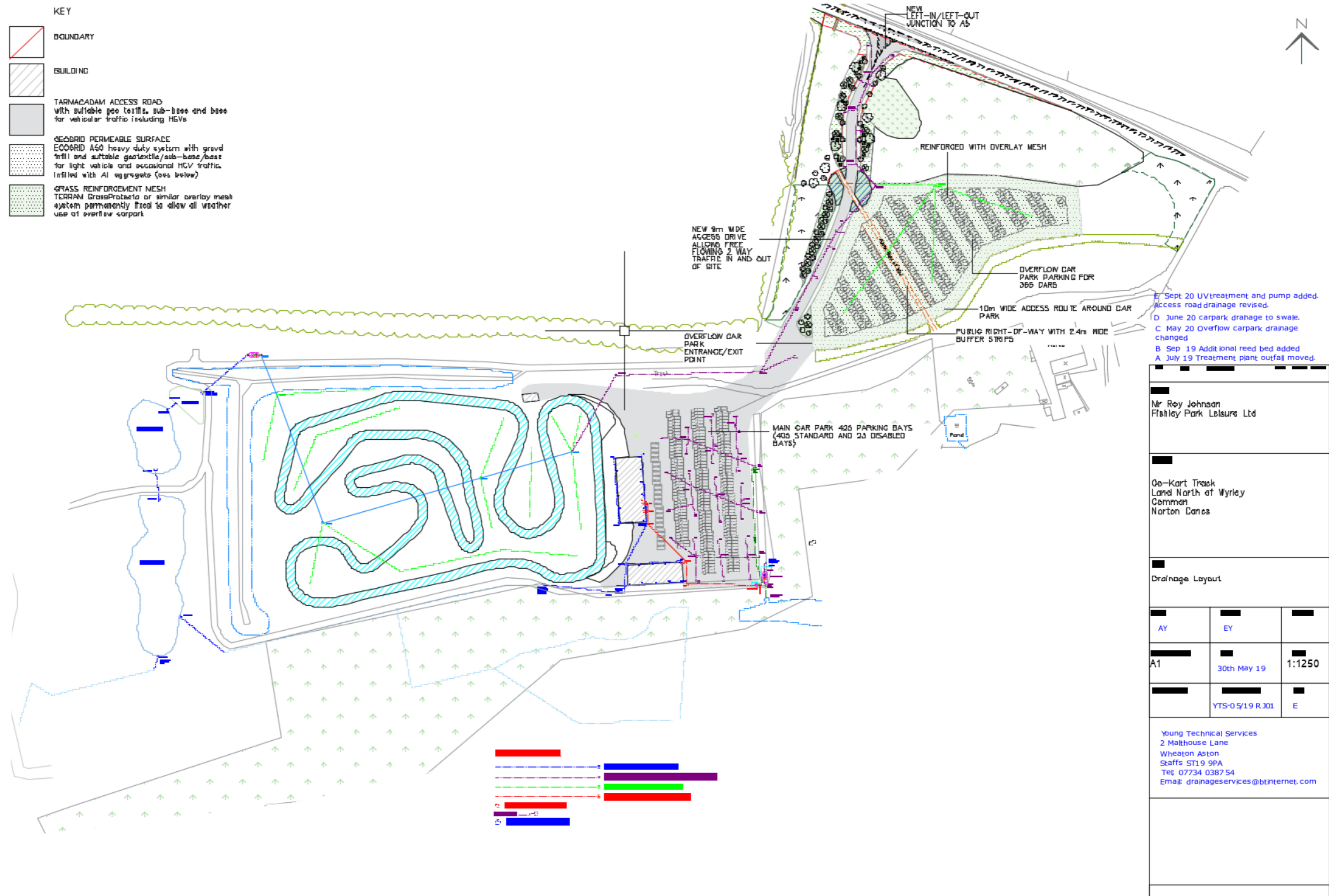
The siting of the development is therefore within national planning guidelines having minimal impact on the greenbelt, road infrastructure and urban environment



DRAINAGE

9. Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that an acceptable drainage strategy and scheme can be developed, managed and maintained to ensure protection of the aquatic environment in accordance with Policy CP12 of the Cannock Chase Local Plan and paragraphs 170 and 175 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

The submitted drainage strategy by YTS has been accepted by Natural England as it demonstrated sufficient robustness and design to protect adjacent and neighbouring sensitive catchments and sites. The continuing objection by the CCDC landscape officer is without grounds



NEXT STEPS - OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEE

ACOUSTICS

Details of acoustic bund secured by condition

DRAINAGE

Details secured by condition including specification for outcome and on-going monitoring

PUBLIC RIGHTS-OF-WAY

Application for diversion of PRoW

HIGHWAYS

Details secured by condition

LANDSCAPE

Conditions to provide:

Civil engineering design for bund including structural and material detail

Detail hard and soft landscape plans including boundary treatments, levels, lake contours and materials

GREEN BELT

Very special circumstances accepted at committee

PROTECTED SITES

Cannock Extension Canal SAC/SSSI – water monitoring conditioned

Watling St Grassland SBI – Loss of secondary woodland fully mitigated and grassland restoration secured by condition

Wyrley Common SBI – water quality monitoring from outflow conditioned

LIGHTING

Variation application to provide lighting within BCT/ILP guidance

ECOLOGY

Protected Species -

Bats – further survey provision of BCT/ILP compliant CEMP and plans

Badgers – survey and CEMP

Great Crested Newts - CEMP

Reptiles – CEMP

Floating water-plantain – watwr monitoring and potential for translocation plan

Habitat creation - ecological monitoring