

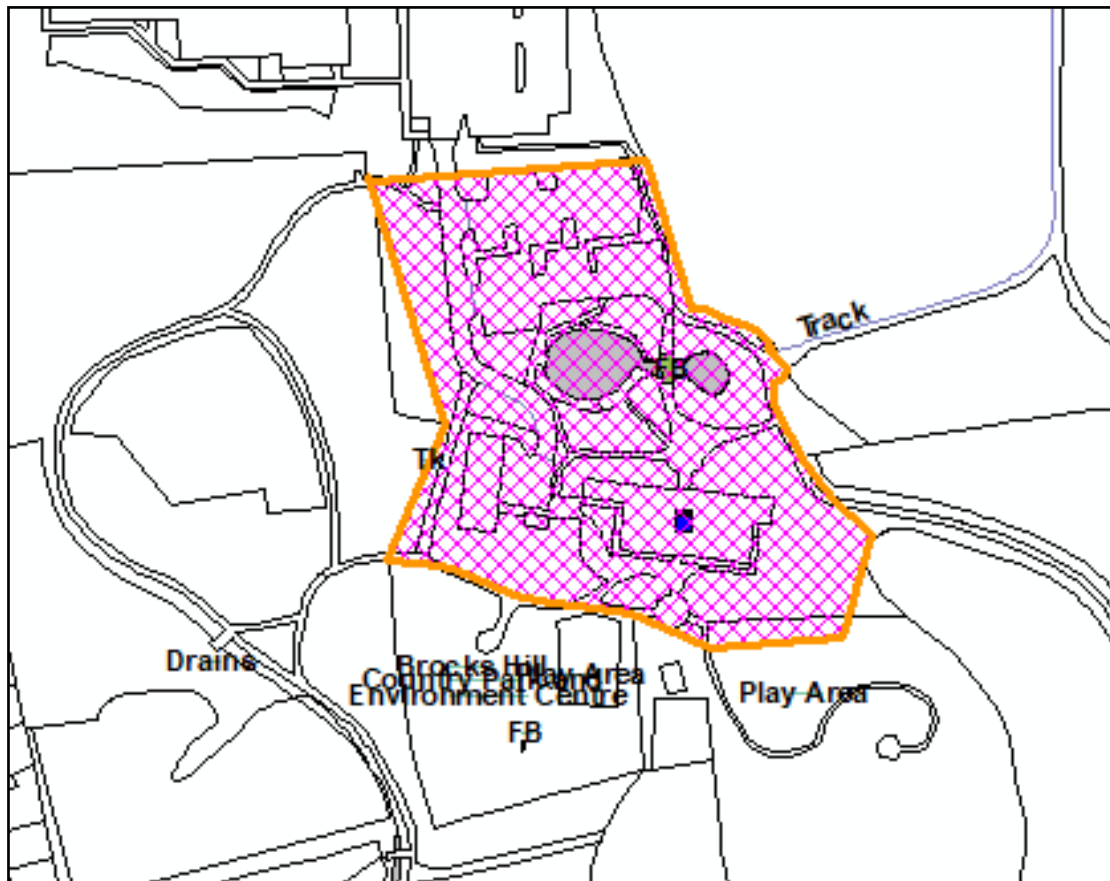
Application Number

Address

Report Items

- a. **22/00037/R3FUL** Brocks Hill Visitor Centre And Country Park
Washbrook Lane
Oadby
Leicestershire
LE2 5JJ

a.	22/00037/R3FUL	Brocks Hill Visitor Centre And Country Park Washbrook Lane Oadby Leicestershire LE2 5JJ
	7 February 2022	Construction of two storey and single storey side extensions, dormer window and internal mezzanine floor area. Installation and replacement of solar panels, creation of external plant compound and change of use to a mixed use for offices and café use falling within Use Class E, meeting use falling within Use Class F1 and Local Government Office use.
	Case Officer	Mrs Tracey Carey



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Site and Location

The site is located on land within the Brocks Hill Country Park which is situated between the settlements of Oadby and Wigston and forms part of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge. The existing building is surrounded by over 30 hectares of green spaces for informal leisure and wildlife use by the general public.

The main vehicular access to the park is via an existing traffic light controlled junction on Wigston Road (B582) sited to the north and along Washbrook Lane.

Within the site curtilage is Parklands Leisure Centre located to the north of the Brocks Hill Visitor Centre and which shares the access road. There are extensive car parks available for use by patrons of the leisure centre, users of the Country Park and the existing building.

To the west and east of the park are residential properties with Glenmere Primary School also sited to the west. To the south is open farmland and further north is Oadby Town Football Club which has its own separate access and parking provision.

There are various streams and watercourses that run across the site, and to the north east is an area designated as Lucas Marsh.

Currently, the building is utilised as a mixed use centre with café, training and office space, an area of flexible space with a part mezzanine first floor.

The Country Park has a variety of other buildings within its curtilage, which include a storage barn and compounds for services/storage.

Description of proposal

The application is for the construction of two storey and single storey side extensions, a dormer window and internal mezzanine floor area. Installation and replacement of solar panels, creation of external plant compound and change of use to a mixed use for offices and café use falling within Use Class E, meeting use falling within Use Class F1 and Local Government Office use.

The proposed conversion will accommodate approx. 30 people with a provision for 'hotel desking' for occasional visiting employees and flexibility of use of the first floor area, new mezzanine and introduction of new private office spaces. It also includes provision for a Council Chamber for Members and at least 10 public visitors which will also be utilised as a meeting space.

The details of the application as originally submitted are as follows:

The two storey extension is sited to the east of the building and measures 4m x 4.8m (approx.) x 8.5m high and will provide a new internal escape staircase. This will be constructed in brick and tiles to match the existing.

A single storey extension is proposed to the south-west, adjacent to the existing café area which measures 9.9m x 8.12m wide with a twin pitched roof approx. 4.8m high. This will provide unisex WC's and an accessible WC for café users, an extension to the existing café area and the main entrance to the café. This café extension is fully glazed with rooflights with the remainder being constructed in brown natural treated timber wall cladding to match the existing wooden effect window frames. It is proposed to refurbish the existing café, change the layout and refit the kitchen to include a new servery area. (Please note the amendments below, which include amendments to the toilet facilities to 1 male, 1 female and 1 unisex).

A dormer window type extension is proposed on the south elevation to infill the existing balcony area to create additional work space. This measures 11m x 3.2m with a flat roof.

An external plant compound is proposed to the south-east of the existing building which measures approx. 8.5m x 4m. This is enclosed with timber hit and miss fencing with vegetation and planting to be included in front of the fencing.

The existing entrance to the building on the northern elevation is to be removed and replaced with a window and a new main entrance to the building created in the southern elevation.

Solar panels are proposed to the roof of the existing building on the north elevation as well as on the south facing roof slope of the two storey extension, the café roof and the existing plant room. The existing solar panels on the south facing pitched roof are to be replaced.

6 new roof lights are proposed to the north elevation.

An internal mezzanine area measuring around 15m x 7.5m is proposed above the open plan flexible space which incorporates an IT workroom.

The existing open plan flexible space at ground floor will continue to be a flexible space for use for meeting rooms and the Council Chamber (as and when required).

The operating hours of the Class E use is Monday to Friday, between 07:00hrs and 18:00hrs, Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays between 09:00 and 16:00.

The Class F use is proposed to operate between 07:00-22:00 Monday to Friday.

It should be noted however that amendments have been submitted in respect of the proposal and these are listed below:

- Revised description of development;
- Revised café toilet facilities to 1 male, 1 female and 1 unisex;
- Alteration to external main cafe door, two new external doors added to south elevation of café extension plus additional transom/mullion frames and removal of roof lantern in café extension, door from entrance lobby to café amended to single door with glazed screen;
- Internal alterations to meeting rooms, reprographics room, corridors, first floor additional workspace internal openings, stair landing and increase in light shaft in flexible office space B;
- Change in roof fall on dormer extension and revised glazing arrangement;
- Existing and proposed cycle provision and dedicated access door included;
- Vegetation bunds and external paving areas and materials added.

The statutory determination period for this application expires on 31 May 2022 and it is intended to issue a decision as soon as practicably possible after the committee meeting.

Relevant Planning History

98/00517/8M – Change of use from agricultural to recreation, Visitor Centre, Wind Turbine and Associated Car Parking and Landscaping – Approved.

02/00597/8P – Change of condition of planning permission 98/00517/8M from use of first floor as living accommodation to office use - Approved.

Consultations (on original submission)

Leicestershire County Council (Highways) – Incorporated into the report

Leicestershire County Council (Ecology) - No comments on the proposals. There is no need for any ecology surveys. The building is unlikely to support bats that would be impacted by the proposed changes and extensions.

OWBC Planning Policy – Incorporated into the report

OWBC Environmental Health – I have considered all relevant documentation and do not wish to raise any comments.

OWBC Tree Officer – There are few trees within influencing distance of the proposed development. The nature of the proposal appears to utilise the existing building and footprint and does not extend into any adjacent tree covered area. Furthermore, any potential requirement for small tree removal should be easily mitigated for in replacement planting.

The nature of the building and its surrounding country park are within a 'green wedge' however the treed and wooded areas are not in close proximity to the building itself.

Between the main building and sheds to the west is a small area of young coppiced hazel, this does not appear impacted but could readily be mitigated for if removed by replacement planting.

There is a middle aged weeping ash tree (*Fraxinus excelsior* 'Pendula') north of the existing access door, this tree is showing signs of ash dieback (*Chalara*) and is not expected to survive into maturity. The main access is shown as being removed and changed to a window with planting included where possible. The tree is not considered to be a constraint to the proposed development.

The bund around the northern ground level of the building is set to shrubs and perennial plants and therefore not considered on arboricultural grounds, there may be some impact on the biodiversity net gain metric, this is shown as being retained and reinstated where possible. The existing landscaping and maintenance is expected to roll into the proposed development.

I've no objection on arboricultural terms. There is no requirement for provision of tree protection measures.

Local Lead Flood Authority - Given the nature and parameters of the proposal, the application falls outside of the LLFA's remit for a bespoke response. Refer to the LLFA's standing advice.

Operations and Street Scene – No comments received at the time of writing this report.

Wigston Civic Society - The Society has looked at this application for the Brocks Hill visitor centre which is situated on the designated Green Wedge between Wigston and Oadby. The Society's objections are in relation to the principles on which the concept of the change of use to offices for the Council are based and the proposed changes to the actual building.

The Society OBJECTS to the application on the following basis:

Brocks Hill was built as a visitor centre adjacent to an extensive country park which has been successfully and well developed over the last 25 or so years. The centre was also intended for use as an exhibition and meeting centre for environmental groups and until recently, when its management was transferred to another organisation, was well used as such. While it is

acknowledged that O&WBC wishes to vacate its existing offices because of its maintenance and heating costs, the Society believes it is making a huge mistake in making use of the visitor centre which was intended for public use and which, by its very nature, is cut off from public view and difficult to access for those without their own transport. Furthermore, the Society is of the view that the Council needs to be visible to its residents, business people and those in these groups intending to relocate to the Borough and not be cut off in a non-visible location. The Council has already retreated behind closed doors by recently closing its Customer Service Centre in central Wigston.

Specific comments are:

1. Policy 26: Sustainable Transport states that preference should be given to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users before travel by car. However, the Design and Access statement assumes that staff and visitors will travel by car to Brocks Hill and, since "journeys by private car are not adversely affected ... no Travel Plan is required." And indeed, there is no Travel Plan and, in its absence, the most polluting and unsustainable form of transport is assumed.
2. The current location of the Council Offices at Bushloe House on Station Road, B582, allows easy access by public transport for both staff and visitors living in most parts of Wigston and South Wigston (Oadby residents have no easy access to Bushloe House except by car). Regular bus services every 15 minutes stop immediately outside the current offices. This ease of access will be lost if the Council moves to Brocks Hill and council services will become more remote from residents overall.
3. Brocks Hill is at the far end of Washbrook Lane, off B582, on the outskirts of Oadby and near the edge of Wigston. The #31A bus (half-hourly service) stops on Wigston Road, more than 5 minutes' walk from Brocks Hill.
4. The D & A statement mentions the "regular" #40 bus service: this is an hourly daytime-only service with erratic time-keeping due to its tortuous circular route and frequent traffic hold-ups. It only connects Wigston and Oadby centres and omits South Wigston altogether from where residents will need to use two different services to reach Brocks Hill. Again, it would be more than a 5 minute walk along Washbrook Lane, or through a gap in the hedge on Wigston Road onto a narrow path surfaced with dangerous granite chippings to the Leisure Centre which is unsuitable for wheelchairs, pushchairs and those with poor mobility. In addition, it is not obvious, has a very poor and dangerous surface, is narrow and needs more directional signs.
5. Washbrook Lane is narrow with sharp bends and speed humps and is potentially hazardous for cyclists.
6. There are 6 dedicated parking places for disabled users but they are not adjacent to the main entrance, but are some distance from it.
7. There is no mention of electric charging points for staff cars.
8. With regard to the proposed public toilets our understanding is that public unisex toilets can only be provided if male/female toilets are also provided, In addition unisex toilets are completely unacceptable for public use. Furthermore, there are insufficient cubicles provided.
9. It is good to see that the external additions to the centre are not excessive and do not impact on the existing appearance. Also, that environmentally friendly improvements to the heating system are proposed.
10. It is hoped that office space for the ranger will be provided and that public areas will provide information about the park and activities there for the public.
11. It is proposed that all existing parking spaces will be designated for Council use, therefore, park and café visitors will have to use Parklands parking spaces which does not encourage them to use the facilities.
12. The Customer Services Centre is on the first floor with its entrance at the rear of the building. Again, this is not encouraging and the lift does not appear to be large enough for a mother with a baby buggy or for a wheelchair user, perhaps with a helper.

13. It is to be hoped that there will be adequate footpath facilities to the rear entrance to the building, that are wide enough with a good surface and good lighting for use when there are evening public and council meetings
14. The Green Wedge policy number 42 is quoted in the D&A statement where it states that "with the conversion of the existing building with NO significant change of use or impact on the country Park it is considered that the principle of its use is already set, therefore, the policy is not considered to apply to this application". The Society considers that the proposed change of use IS significant considering that there will be a consistently different use by employed people of the organization occupying the building compared to the current use by members of the public on a casual basis including vehicular use of the approach road.

It is suggested that:

1. Lungfish Architects Ltd should be required to present a Travel Plan in line with Policy 26 of the NPPF on sustainable transport and access to the proposed new location.
2. It is accepted that there are some financial reasons for vacating Bushloe House but Brocks Hill is distant from all three town centres and effectively inaccessible by sustainable transport means from South Wigston and Wigston. The #31A bus serves less than half the area of Oadby.
3. If the council offices are to be relocated at Brocks Hill, considerably more thought and attention needs to be given to its accessibility for both staff and visitors via sustainable transport as follows:
 - I. Negotiate with bus companies for improved public transport between the three town centres (e.g. a bus route from Haymarket via London Road to Oadby centre to B582 - incorporating new bus stops on Wigston Lane and good pedestrian access to Brocks Hill and Parklands - to Wigston Magna centre to B582 to South Wigston to Saffron Road and Lane to Haymarket, to run in both directions at least half-hourly).
 - II. Improvement Washbrook Lane to make it safer for cyclists, with a wider pedestrian footway.
 - III. Provide electric charging points for staff cars.
4. There also needs to be meaningful discussion with staff and unions about the new office arrangements and issues such as hot/hotel-desking, including health and safety issues (adjustable seating, etc.).

The Society has looked at this amended application for the Brocks Hill visitor centre and it OBJECTS to the application for the following reasons:

The revisions do not, with one exception, respond to any of the objections listed in our letter of objection submitted with our email of 21 March. We, therefore, resubmit our original objections as being relevant to this new application.

The one item included in our list of objections that has been amended is the public toilet provision, however the amendment retains the toilets as unisex but with named cubicles in one room. This is completely unacceptable in the application in question which relates to a public park with café and office visitors.

Furthermore we see the proposal as a regressive step as far as sustainable transport is concerned and is contrary to the Council's own policy number 26 in the existing local plan for the reasons stated in our previous submission.

Oadby Civic Society - Oadby Civic Society wishes to register its Objection to this Application.

The Brocks Hill Visitor Centre and Park is not a good site to house the Council's Offices because this site does not meet good planning practice by failing to locate such an office in a Town Centre where access is easily provided for all residents of the Borough. The suggestion that access can be afforded to Wigston and South Wigston residents by using the No 40 bus is derisory. The building is set some 500 metres from the bus stops serving Wigston and further for those bus stops serving Oadby on Brabazon Road or Rosemead Drive.

The original approval for the construction of the Brocks Hill Visitor Centre included the provision of a first floor Warden's flat. This was the only accommodation on the first floor and was approved as it was ancillary to the function of the Park.

This first floor accommodation was later changed to office space for use by the Wildlife Trust. There are no records of a planning Change of Use for this alteration, so using the space as an Office would be contrary to Planning Legislation.

When the building was given over to Parklands Leisure Centre for their use, and modifications were made to the building, the first floor space was no longer used as an office. The space has tables and chairs for use as a meeting room, but there are no desks, telephones or computers in the space and no staff are employed to work there.

The use of the space as an Office has lapsed.

It could be considered that the area of the first floor space, currently some 117 sq.m., is ancillary to the main function of the building and therefore falls within the terms defined for buildings within a Green Wedge.

However, enlarging the office space threefold to a total of some 370 sq. m. for 30 staff can no longer be considered as ancillary but a total change of use.

Please note that these figures, taken off the plan drawings, are totally at variance with the figures on the Application Form which appears to refer to the amount of building extension and does not include the conversion of the existing plant room and the inclusion of a mezzanine floor over the exhibition space. The Application Form figures do not give a true picture of the scale of the increase in accommodation planned.

With the first floor no longer used as an office and the proposed tripling of the first floor area, the Society insists that the application does constitute a Change of Use and that an appropriate application should be made.

For the reasons stated above, the application clearly contravenes the Council's Adopted Policy on buildings within Green Wedges and should therefore be Refused.

The Society looks to the Council as the Planning Authority to uphold its own policies. Failure to do so in this instance could well lead to the Council being compromised in the future and unable to control development in the Green Wedges.

The proposal designates all the existing parking spaces in front of the building to be dedicated to the proposed offices. This will cause inconvenience to the public wishing to use the Park and the Café and is a retrograde step.

The Society is aware that there are sensitive species in the vicinity of the building and the Application Form states that Species, Habitats and Geological Features are affected by the proposed development. However, there are no details of assessment or protective measures within the documents in the public domain. We understand that no application can be considered until such time as details are submitted.

The Society has looked at this amended application for the Brocks Hill visitor centre and it **OBJECTS** to the application for the following reasons:

The Revised application describes the proposal as "Construction of two storey and single storey side extensions, dormer window and internal mezzanine floor. Installation and replacement of solar panels, creation of external plant compound and **change of use** to a mixed use of offices and café use falling within Use Class E, meeting use falling within Use Class F1 and Local Government Office Use".

Change of Use to Offices: The revised application clearly recognises that the proposal is a change of use to offices. This proposal is totally unacceptable as placing offices with the existing Green Wedge contravenes the Council's own adopted policy regarding appropriate buildings which can be considered in Green Wedges. It is absolutely vital that the Council rejects this application in order to preserve its adopted policies and to be in a position to protect Green Wedges from inappropriate development in the future without compromise.

Council Offices: The revised description still refers to Council Office use, but as the Design and Access Statement has not been revised, it is not clear if the intention of the proposal is to use the intended offices for Council staff or if they are, as originally stated, to be The Council Office. Apart from the Society's objection to the building being converted to office use, the Society continues to object to the principle of the Council trying to locate its Office on this site because of its inappropriate location for the Borough as a whole as set out in our earlier letter of 18th March 2022, namely that this location is very difficult to access, that the bus service is not good and that Council Offices should be located in Town Centres.

Drawings: The latest drawings need to be carefully listed in any decision notice for the avoidance of ambiguity with the correct prefix and revision letter.

Biodiversity and Geological Conservation: The original application form stated that Biodiversity and Geological Conservation would be affected by the proposed development and the Society is aware that there are sensitive species in the vicinity of the building. However, there are still no details of assessment or protective measures from an appropriate consultant addressing these issues despite the Society bringing this to your attention in our letter of 18th March. Our understanding is that no application can be considered until such time as details are submitted. This would appear to be a lapse in the validation process.

M&E Plant: The revised application has removed the M&E plant screening from the southern side facing onto the Park. This is not acceptable and the Society insists that, should the Council approve the application, the screening is subject to Conditions for approval with details, possibly including removable screening for maintenance purposes. The revised Site Plan now identifies the drawn rectangle to the south-west of the building near the Café entrance as another M&E plant location by the inclusion of a service trench. Again, there are no details for screening for this proposed installation and the Society insists that this area is included in any Conditions for approval.

Parking: The revised Site Plan states there are 40 car spaces plus 5 disabled spaces; this is different to the original application form which stated 39 plus 6. Should the Council approve this application, the Society objects to the area not being designated for visitors to the Community facilities, the Café

and the Park to maintain easy access and benefit of those facilities. If there are to be offices; any staff can use the Parklands overflow parking area.

Representations

Neighbours have been informed and a site notice placed with 29 letters of representation being received in respect of the original description/proposal.

- Seems a further dilution of the Brocks Hill Centre's offering;
- The centre has been in decline for several years as its offer has fallen from public interactive environment centre to that of a poor to average café;
- It is proposed that the use classes will remain unchanged which is misleading as the main specific use is changing (visitor centre to Local Government offices) and the sense in which the visitor centre element is to remain is ambiguous within the application documents and report.
- The Design and Access Statement does not adequately describe the new uses and specifically the extent that the visitor centre functions will be retained or enhanced.
- It would have been helpful if the application material had made specific reference to the future public uses and opportunities.
- The refurbishment and extension of the cafe is welcome, although its future success will be driven largely by the operator. The previous two incumbents only succeeded in reducing the offering to the public, such that patronage and quality fell significantly over the last 5 to 10 years.
- The case officer will no doubt have the detail for their report, but the public also have a right to know the detail as well and as such this renders this representation process somewhat unfairly sided to the applicant.
- I note also that representations will not be acknowledged, which begs the question why anyone would bother to take time to respond in the first place.
- If respondents' comments were seen to be valid in terms of the local plan or planning law/guidance, one hopes that at least these would be considered as material considerations in any determination.
- The council will have sole use of the existing toilets. I am horrified that the toilets will be unisex and so few of them. Historically the toilets were available, during cafe opening hours, for users of the park. The park is used by many people, who require use of the toilets, parents, child minders and nurseries with young children, schools and groups of adults with learning disabilities are just a few. Will these still be able to use the facilities? If there are reduced or no facilities people will be dissuaded from using the park and using the car park and therefore there will not be any revenue for the council.
- The unisex toilets, as on the plan have the sinks outside the cubicles, which will be totally useless if you are trying to supervise groups and youngsters. They are also enclosed by a door that will be a safeguarding issue, even the unisex toilets in the museums have the sinks in the cubicles. I would be very reluctant to use the toilets myself or to allow my grandchildren to use them, certainly independently, as I would want to ensure their safety and there wasn't anyone within the enclosed space that may be a source of danger or cause some trepidation by the youngsters.
- There needs to be separate toilets for males and females. Was an equality impact assessment carried out before deciding if these toilets are appropriate, taking account possible worse conditions for women?
- Under-provision of toilets for women and girls could be illegal under the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) this was introduced to ensure that local authorities and other public providers aim to achieve equality in the provision of goods and services including toilet provisions.
- As well as upsetting many female users / customers, the Council may inadvertently be acting against current guidelines.

- The desegregation of toilets may be in contravention of government guidance given within the British Standards (British Standard BS 6465 Part One on Sanitary installations) and the related Building Regulations which sets out the levels of male/female toilet provision required.
- There needs to be a greater number of toilets.
- If park users are not allowed to use the cafe toilets then separate facilities need to be provided outside the building.
- The location is far from ideal for residents, especially those in South Wigston who do not have own transport. Council Offices should be in a major Town Centre with easy access to all residents.
- The bus service around Oadby and Wigston is very poor. Totally unsuitable area as it is not easily accessed from either Wigston or Oadby unless you have your own transport.
- The establishment of an office in this building (which is within a Green Wedge) is contrary to the adopted Council Policy.
- Local Government Offices are not a use which accords with the Council's Green Wedge Policy.
- Parking would be restricted to outside Parklands only, and its overflow area near Wigston Road. This would be extremely inconvenient for everyone using the park.
- This is a designated green space for people to enjoy safely. We do not want any more vehicles causing congestion, pollution and potential accidents, there are a lot of children, dogs and elderly that visit the park and café.
- What is to stop the Council developing further here or not being able to stop any future development due to their relocation being non-recreational.
- Added traffic congestion.
- Added noise and pollution.
- This is not needed or wanted here.
- The office uses in the existing building are very small and would be classed as ancillary to the main use of the visitor centre. Converting the visitor centre into local government offices at the scale proposed means that the office use is no longer ancillary but becomes the main use. A material change of use will occur and planning permission is needed for this.
- No evidence that a sequential test has been carried out has been presented so no conclusion that there are 'no suitable alternative sites within the town centre' should be made. There are clearly vacant sites in the three town centres which could be brought back into use and revitalise the centres. The former swimming pool in Oadby would bring a site alongside the town centre and adjacent to a bus stop back into use. This Council owned site would be a far better location for local government offices.
- Council services should be located where they are most accessible for people using public transport, walking or cycling. The nearest bus stop is at least 500m away. The proposal therefore fails to provide adequate public transport facilities.
- Staff using the existing car park means that none of the spaces will be available to Visitor Centre users who will have to share other spaces with leisure centre users and others. By not increasing the level of car parking but introducing a very significant new use, car parking provision will be inadequate,
- Insufficient information has been provided to determine whether protected species, important habitats and features of geological conservation importance will be affected by the proposal.
- I guess I am wasting my time in objecting to the proposal. I along with many others have made valid objections in the past (not to mention the decision to implement parking fees) but these objections fall upon deaf ears, so keen are our Council to waste money on ridiculous scheme and take no notice of residents – the people who after all are helping to pay their not inconsiderable salaries and pensions.
- I was under the impression that the Green Wedge was only to be developed as a recreational area – perhaps the Council considers itself a recreation? What is to stop others jumping on the bandwagon and making applications to develop commercially there too?

- There is the thorny question of car parking fees – no doubt some Council snoopers will be lying in wait to slap a fine on anyone who wishes to briefly visit the Council offices but has not purchased a permit – surely visitors are not required to pay £1?
- Why is the building in Bell Street (easy to access and well patronised before the Covid closure) not being used again?
- You want to encourage people into Wigston Magna as since the parking charges have been enforced the village is like a ghost town.
- We belong to the Oadby Bowls Club and apparently building the Swimming Pool, even though that was for the benefit of the people of Oadby, has changed everything and now we have probably got to have houses built on there.
- Whilst the Park and Café and toilets (to be relocated as Unisex) would remain open to the public, the parking would be restricted to that outside Parklands and its overflow area near Wigston Road.
- Contrary to policy and would create an indefensible precedent in the future considerations of applications to develop in a Green Wedge.
- The applicant's claim that the building has a current office use is incorrect. Ever since Parklands took over managing the building, there has not been an office in the building nor office staff employed there.
- The proposal to house Customer Services office on the first floor of this building when served by a single very small lift is not good practice.
- I thought the land was gifted to the Oadby and Wigston Community not to the Council and staff.
- Convert the overflow car park as a staff car park. I use the park twice daily and have been forced to buy a permit and you are now trying to kick us out of our spaces.
- I have not been able to access the website. The Council are seizing a community building and taking it out of community use just for their own convenience and to save themselves money. It is a very busy site and not suited to an increase in vehicle parking if it became an office use.
- I feel it has been rushed and the existing Brocks Hill Park community has not been considered. We would love more café hours and accessible toilets for park users to be integrated into the conversion plans. The Parklands part of the carpark is already busy and awkward to navigate with children, there is no safe path/track to the children's play areas from the left side of the car park. It seems sensible that safest option is for parents to have they access closest to their destination.
- The park is used as a destination for health, recuperation and well-being groups and as a social lifeline for many local people. Please don't spoil the fantastic benefits of this park by putting up obstacles for the park visitors over council office staff.
- Brocks Hill Country Park has been a jewel in Oadby's crown, many people have watched it grow and mature over the years and would like it to remain a destination we can be proud of.
- I am mortified that the visitor centre will be ruined by changing the concept from an educational learning centre for local people and schools, into a hectic workspace when it should be used purely for recreation and education as intended. The addition of approx. 30-40 staff for the purposes of work, plus visitors to the council will totally ruin the ambience of our visitor centre and the area around it. This will take away the enjoyment of those who go for quiet reflection, healthy walks or a fun recreation area for children. This needs to be re-established and the priority of the site considered, not just somewhere convenient for the council to relocate to. Once this facility has been taken away from local people, it will not return.
- There are other options that could be considered more appropriate. There are offices available on The Parade which are in desperate need of renovation with car parking facilities nearby. The potential to extend the Community Centre (the old library) at the end of Sandhurst Street, which also has its own car park, and a small green area that could be considered for extension. Then there are the old swimming baths in Oadby, these have been derelict for approximately 20 years and could be renovated into a purpose built office space.
- We believe that this plan has been insufficiently thought through, to the detriment of local residents.

- The proposal for the existing car park for the centre to become a staff car park would reduce the amount of parking available to the public. We already have people parking on Washbrook Lane and in gateways on the lane on busy weekends. Come the summer these car parks will be heavily used and the less well abled will struggle getting on to Brocks Hill Park. As a side line, will the council staff be charged for parking as are the public who use Brocks Hill car park?
- Why would you brick up the existing main entrance and move the entrance to the other side of the building. This would involve additional distance for the less well abled to walk from Parklands car park.
- It is rumoured that the café toilets will only be for the use of patrons. If this is so the existing issue with people doing their business in the park will probably continue.
- The proposed works will undo a lot of the work the new park ranger has done to improve the park. Have the architects taken into the consideration the damage to wildlife within the development area.
- It would be dreadful if the council built offices at this particular site. It has the potential to have devastating consequences on the wildlife in this area and its landscape, not to mention the inconvenience to people visiting the park.
- What will happen to the current site? Is it to be developed for housing? If it is sold, where would the money go?
- I question the suitability of the building for the Council's headquarters as it seems that major work needs to be carried out to the interior as well as extensions to both sides of the building.
- The park is lovely and unique and having the Council based in the building will totally change the area from what it was originally set up for. How long will it be before employees get fed up of the noise from the children in the play areas or from dogs barking in the park.
- The environment centre used to be used by certain clubs but since covid this has stopped. There are always clubs and other organisations looking to hire space and I am sure the Council could make money from letting out the facility rather than spending so much money on altering the building.
- The planning application had one small notice attached high up on one lighting column in the Brocks Hill car park which most people would not walk by and see.
- I find it strange that the Council can put in a planning application to itself and then approve it!
- Where is all this extra money coming from other than the parking charges.
- There is more important areas the council needs to spend money on than moving from the council office building as they spent money in Wigston Magna to move it all there and have closed it?
- At present there is no face to face contact within South Wigston so it appears that by eroding further the Country Park facility if this proposal goes through its only catering for Oadby residents and with the ageing population a greater proportion of residents require more local contact as the phone service takes forever to answer and not everyone is computer savvy.
- I would like some clarity on your plans for your current building on Station Road, the one on Bell Street and why should an environmental beauty spot be invaded by OWBC staff? This is to the detriment of its original idea. Back in the 1990s all residents were sent letters asking for suggestions as to what they would like in the Borough, and specifically on that land where Parklands and Brocks Hill now stand. I am certain that the provision of council offices was never mentioned in that consultation. I don't want Brocks Hill Park ruined by council staff being there and us as residents being restricted to what we can access, such as car parking spaces nearby to the park, and not as planned, near to Parklands.
- Let's not forget Leicester was designated BRITAIN'S FIRST ENVIRONMENTAL CITY in the 1990s. Seems that these accolades mean nothing to OWBC.
- How do you expect residents to access the council office if they live in South Wigston, are elderly and have no easy access to transport or have no IT skills to access anything on line.
- There is only one bus an hour at best, if it runs at all.
- Insufficient opportunity for service users/stakeholders to raise objections. No public consultation of users on the proposed changes has been undertaken prior to the submission of the

application, which was itself submitted in February whilst notices advising of the proposed changes were not placed in the car park until March.

- The calculation of footfall shows a marked reduction from Table 1 to Table 2, but these seems predicated on the basis that only council employees will be using the building following the proposed changes. If however, it will continue its current uses (F1 and E) and access to both the café and classes will continue, there will be a significant increase in footfall. So will the building continue to be accessible to the public as it currently is, or are you planning to reduce public access?
- The Customer Service Centre – How will this change of site meet the recommendations outlined in the Local Ombudsman’s Principles of Good Administrative Practice at Point 2 – Ensuring people can access services easily, including those needing reasonable adjustments – when there is only one hourly bus serve that passes close to the site, the No.40 bus, which does not serve South Wigston at all?

Eight letters of representation has been received in respect of the amended description/proposal which raise the following issue:

- In the late 1990s a National Lottery grant was awarded to build a visitor centre in Oadby Brockshill Country Park. It opened in 1999, an attractive building which provided useful public facilities. After some years of poor management, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council are now proposing to take it over and convert it into their main office. I object to the proposal on the grounds that it is unjust and possibly illegal. The original Lottery grant was made for the construction of a public amenity, not a council office.
- The addition of unscreened mechanical plant facing onto the Park is unacceptable.
- There is no indication of protection for biodiversity and geological conservation.

The date for the receipt of comments expired on the 13 May 2022.

The application has been brought to the Committee as the Local Authority is the applicant.

Relevant Planning Policies

National Planning Policy Framework

Oadby and Wigston Local Plan

Policy 6 – High Quality Design and Materials

Policy 8 – Green Infrastructure

Policy 26 – Sustainable Transport and Initiatives

Policy 34 – Car Parking

Policy 37 - Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Policy 38 – Climate Change, Flood Risk and Renewable Low Carbon Energy

Policy 39 – Sustainable Drainage and Surface Water

Policy 42 – Green Wedges

Planning Considerations

As previously mentioned, revised details have been submitted and as such the main issues to consider in the determination of this application are as follows:

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) suggests that Local Planning Authorities should give weight to proposals that seek the effective use of previously developed land. This proposal proposes the conversion of an existing building, that would result in the re-use of vacant and underused previously developed land in accordance with Chapter 11 and Pages 70-71 in the glossary of the NPPF.

Paragraph 87 of the NPPF states that:

'Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered.'

Due to the proposed mix of uses it is not considered that the proposal would meet the traditional definition of a main town centre use as set out in the NPPF and therefore paragraph 87 would not apply.

However the following sites have been considered:

East Street and Sandhurst Street car parks in Oadby, Junction Road, Frederick Street and Paddock Street car parks in Wigston: These sites will require 'new build' development which would not be viable for the Council to deliver. In addition, there would be a loss of town centre car parking for public use. Many of these sites are also identified and/or allocated through the town centre masterplans/adopted Local Plan.

Lyn House in Oadby is the only significant purpose built office building. However it is aging and not suitable for the requirements of the Council. Neither is it available – a prior notification application was determined in February 2020 for a change of use from offices (B1) to 40 bedsits (C3).

The former Oadby Swimming Pool site is not a town centre site. Neither does it adjoin the town centre to be considered as edge of centre. Nor does a former swimming pool allow for conversion to a council office. Furthermore, it is allocated for residential use in the adopted Local Plan.

The Council has also considered the possibility of locating to Oadby Depot however, there are significant access constraints to this site that make it unsuitable.

Whilst the proposed use will entail some office accommodation this will replace office accommodation that is already located outside of a town centre (Bushloe House). The building will be used as a back office hub for Council staff. It is not intended that the office will be open to customers other than by exception, by appointment only.

The town centres in the Borough are very constrained and available land and property is scarce. Further, it is not considered that there are any other appropriate or viable sites for the proposed use.

Local Plan (2019)

Local Plan Policy 6: High Quality Design and Materials - high quality design, and the use of high quality materials is paramount in ensuring that new development creates attractive buildings and spaces that are sustainable, well connected, and are in character within the locale they are set. It is

imperative that new development is sustainable and provides buildings and spaces that people enjoy now and in the future.

The existing building is constructed in brick with a tiled/glazed pitched roof. The proposed two storey extension utilises similar materials to match the existing building. The single storey extension to the café is of a dual pitched construction with timber clad walls, full height glazed elevations, to promote an open aspect, and tiled roofs. The introduction of timber cladding complements the existing building and timber effect windows frames.

Local Plan Policy 8: Green Infrastructure - seeks to preserve and enhance open spaces and assets that comprise of the Borough's Green Infrastructure and its network. The Policy goes on to state that:

'Green infrastructure assets will be created, preserved, managed and enhanced by ... not allowing development that compromises the integrity of the overall Green Infrastructure network'

The site it is located within an area of green infrastructure comprising Brocks Hill Country Park, a local open and green asset that provides for public access into an area for exercise and informal recreation.

With the proposal involving alterations to an existing building, minimal extension works, the use of existing access routes and parking provision and some minimal changes to the external surrounds of the building by way of a reinstated hardstanding and the introduction of a small path to the fire escape/air source heat pump enclosure, it is not considered that the proposal will have a material or negative impact upon the Green Infrastructure Network

Local Plan Policy 26: Sustainable Transport and Initiatives - suggests that all new development proposals should be located and designed to reduce the need to travel by private modes of transport, and, enhance safety of pedestrians and other road users.

There are currently 4no. existing cycle hoops located near to the front of the building. Following concerns raised by the Highway Authority the revised details now include additional secure and undercover cycle parking to encourage travel by a sustainable mode of travel.

Local Plan Policy 34: Car Parking - suggests that all new development proposals must provide sufficient car parking and servicing space in accordance with the parking standards as set out in the Leicestershire Highways Design Guide (or equivalent).

There are three car parking areas providing a total of 358 car parking spaces, all immediately adjoining each other, within the parking area in front of Brocks Hill Visitor Centre, the parking area in front of Parklands Leisure Centre and the 'overflow' parking area adjacent to Parklands Leisure Centre.

The proposal includes the retention of existing car parking spaces. Approximately 30 employees are intended to use the site at any one time with 10 visitors. The applicant has confirmed that there is no intention to physically separate any parking for office staff only.

Information provided indicates that there will be more than sufficient parking on site for employees relocated from the existing office and visitors to the Country Park for the following reasons:

- The proposed use will generate only a low volume of trips (as acknowledged by the Highway Authority in its comments relating to Highway Safety)

- The overflow car park provides 130 car parking spaces and opened in circa 2019 (ie after the original uses were granted planning consent). This car park has significantly increased car parking capacity on the campus, such that it is more than sufficient to accommodate employees relocated from the existing office as well as and visitors to the country park.
- The average number of users of the proposed building will be significantly lower (650 users on average per month) than the average number of visitors of the current building (1,734 users on average per month).
- It should be noted that the average number of monthly users of the current building (1,734) does not include staff working on-site.

The Highway Authority have raised no objection on parking grounds.

Local Plan Policy 37: Biodiversity and Geodiversity - supports development proposals that proactively seek a net gain in biodiversity and geodiversity. Further, Policy 37 supports development proposals that conserve, protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity through minimising loss of valued features in the landscape, such as, hedgerows, woodland, trees, ponds and wetland.

There are few trees within influencing distance of the proposed development. The nature of the proposal is to utilise the existing building and footprint and as such does not extend into any adjacent tree covered area. Between the main building and barns to the west is a small area of young coppiced hazel, this does not appear impacted. The bund around the northern ground level of the building is set to shrubs and perennial plants, this is shown as being retained and reinstated where possible. There is also some additional planting proposed around the café extension and external plant compound.

Furthermore, the site is not within proximity to any Swift alert area (as provide by Leicestershire County Council). The County Ecologist has been consulted and has stated that there is not a need for any ecology surveys and it is the Council's Arboriculturist's view that the vast majority of species identified at the country park will not be associated with the building.

There is no direct impact upon the existing woodlands, nature walks, ridge and furrow, open spaces or wildlife areas as a result of the proposed extensions.

Local Plan Policy 38: Climate Change, Flood Risk and Renewable Low Carbon Energy - states that all *'new development proposals in the Borough shall take into account the potential risks and impacts of climate change; and, ensure that the prospect of flood risk is minimised through appropriate mitigation measures'*.

The proposal includes the removal of the existing oil-fired boiler for heating, and the provision of new air source heat pumps with suitable capacity to heat the building utilising electricity. Replacement of the existing solar panels that have been on site since the building was opened in around 2000 is also proposed. The existing double glazed windows are proposed to be matched where new are shown. The existing building has high levels of insulation to the existing cavity walls, which will be matched, or bettered using contemporary insulation products. The existing building is of high-quality design and at the forefront of available sustainable technologies at the time of construction. The proposed scheme sets out to consolidate the use of the existing services that are still fit for purpose, and where elements have failed or nearing the end of their useful life, be updated and replaced with new, adhering to the same principles - (provision of air source heat pumps and replacement of solar panels on the site). Any works will build on and enhance the current services installation, with the sustainable drainage system being extensively serviced and

recommissioned, to bring the building up to current standards. Thermal insulation will also match or better the existing to the new extensions, to further enhance the building's sustainable credentials.

Local Plan Policy 39: Sustainable Drainage and Surface Water - seeks to ensure that development proposals in areas of known high risk of surface water flooding should seek to identify appropriate flood management and mitigation schemes.

The proposed site is not situated within an area of high flood risk although it is noted that the wider sites access road passes through an area that is identified as 'high risk'. The Local Lead Flood Authority have been consulted and as it is not in an area of high flood it does not warrant a formal consultation and as such they have and referred to their Standing Advice.

Local Plan Policy 42: Green Wedges - designates the land upon which this site is located (and wider area) as part of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge.

The Policy seeks to ensure that land within the Green Wedge continues to promote its purposes, which are to Prevent the merging of settlements; Guide development form; provide a 'green lung' between the urban area and the countryside; and Act as a recreational resource. The Green Wedge policy is not to be confused with the policy for Green Belt. There is no presumption against the kind of development that is restricted in the Green Belt. On the contrary, it permits development that is consistent with those and other identified purposes, and the policy must not be read as restricting development to horticulture, allotments, recreation, sporting facilities, forestry or burial grounds provided those purposes are not undermined.

The site was granted planning permission in September 1998 for a Change of use from agricultural to recreation, Visitor Centre, Wind Turbine and Associated Car Parking and Landscaping. However the building has not operated as a visitor centre since 2018 when the shop and exhibition hall were closed. Since then the only parts of the building that have been open to the public are the café and toilet facilities.

With the exception of the boiler room the whole of the upstairs of the building has been in office use since 2002, however it should be noted that the office use was not to provide support to the primary activities or operations of Brocks Hill as a visitor centre.

This application seeks to extend the office use upstairs with the installation of a mezzanine floor, whilst the vast majority of the first floor will be office space, it is not the case that the vast majority of the building as a whole will be used primarily as office space. As such it is not considered that this constitutes a significant change in the use and will be one of a number of uses to do with a local government office that will be similar to the existing mix of uses.

The office element of the building will be to provide a back office hub for Council staff. The office will not be open to the public/customers other than by exception, by appointment only. The Council has fully embraced agile working and the vast majority of staff are working from home. Staff will only access the building when their work necessitates or to meet or collaborate with colleagues. The style of work and how the building will be used further supports the fact that the proposed mix of uses will be similar to the existing mix of uses.

In addition to the list of uses specified as suitable in the Green Wedge the Policy states that *'the Council will support proposals that retain and enhance public access into the Borough's Green Wedges, as well as proposals that retain and enhance the role that the Green Wedge plays in the Borough's Green Infrastructure Network and its biodiversity.'*

The café and toilet facilities provided within the building are essential facilities that support public access into the Brocks Hill Country Park itself and all of the activities that take place in the Park (ie the Green Wedge). The building has not operated as a visitor centre since 2018 when the shop and exhibition hall were closed. Since then, the only parts of the building that have been open to the public are the café and toilet facilities. The café is predicated upon the building remaining viable. Otherwise, the building is currently underused. If the café was to close then the toilet facilities would also need to close (currently these are only open when the café is open).

The Council relocating to this building will ensure that the building is in full use on a daily basis consistent with the Council's main operating hours. It will bring back into use an underutilised building and enhance and support the viability of the café by having staff on site that will make use of this facility on a daily basis. This will be additional to current usage. It will also ensure that the toilet facilities remain open to the public even if for any reason the café was to become non-operational.

As such, converting the building to a Local Government Office will not have any material impact on the Green Wedge and would comply with Green Wedge Policy 42 as the building is not specifically expanding into the Green Wedge, it is not proposing a significant change of use to what is existing, and it will ensure that public access into this part of the Oadby/Green Wedge can be retained and enhanced by bringing back into use a currently underutilised building.

Residential Amenity

The building is sited in excess of 170m from the residential properties the west, 340m to the south, and over 360m to the north and east.

The Class E use is proposed to be open for use Monday to Friday, between 07:00hrs and 18:00hrs and on Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays between 09:00 and 16:00.

The Class F use is proposed 07:00-18:00 Monday to Friday, however on occasion when the Council Chamber is in use, the opening times will vary into the evening up to 22:00 hours.

Although these opening times vary from those currently at the visitor centre (10am – 5pm on weekdays, 10am – 4pm on weekends), they are consistent with the week day opening hours of the adjacent Leisure Centre.

Given the nature of the proposed use being similar to the existing, the distance from residential properties together with the operation of other uses on the site it is not considered that the proposal will significantly impact on the amenities of neighbouring residential properties.

Highways/Access

The Highway Authority made the following comments in respect of the application as originally submitted:

Site Access

Access to the proposed development would be from the Brabazon Road / B582 Wigston Road junction then past Parklands Leisure Centre to the southern part of Washbrook Lane where Brock Hill Visitors Centre is located. There is no dedicated footway/cycleway within the site from the Parklands Leisure Centre to the proposed development site which may put some employees off from walking / cycling to the site, so the applicant may wish to provide one if planning permission is secured.

Notwithstanding the above, given the level and type of development currently served the LHA is satisfied that the access arrangements are suitable to serve the proposed development.

Highway Safety

The applicant has not provided any review of Personal Injury Collision (PIC) data in the area. Therefore the LHA has reviewed its own database within the vicinity of the site for the period between 1 November 2016 and 31 October 2021. The study area covers the B582 between London Road / The Parade to B582 / Shenley Road, Brabazon Road (to Iliffe Avenue) and Rosemead Drive. This shows that there were 8 PICs during period under consideration. The key findings of the LHA review are detailed below:

- Six slight and two serious collisions in the study area during period under consideration; and*
- Two collisions in 2017, four collisions in 2018, and one collision in 2019 and 2020. There have been no PICs up to 31 October 2021.*

Given the low volume of trips associated with the proposed development and the number of PICs over the last five years, the LHA considers that it is unlikely that the proposed development would exacerbate any existing road safety issues.

Highway Impact

Taking into consideration the location of the proposed development, the LHA would usually require the applicant to test the impact of the development at the B582 Wigston Road signalised junction with the redistributed trips and any additional trips generated by the proposed development. The Design and Access Statement has indicated that there will be 30 employees. The applicant should confirm when employees will arrive / leave the site and provide a junction capacity assessment of the B582 Wigston Road / Brabazon Road junction (AM / PM peak hours) if necessary.

Junction Capacity Assessments

If a capacity assessment is required the applicant should assess a base year with traffic counts factored up to the year the application is submitted e.g. 2022, along with a future year scenario of base year + five years i.e. 2027. Further details of the TEMPRO factors used should be submitted as part of the planning application.

Should the applicant need to undertake a junction count as part of the assessment, a permit is required to carry out any traffic count/speed survey on the public highway within Leicestershire. A permit can be obtained by contacting ndi@leics.gov.uk. Alternatively, Leicestershire County Council offer a data collection service including a large traffic count database and do hold recent data for the junction. For details of the services available please contact ndi@leics.gov.uk. It would need to be ensured that Covid-19 uplift factors are applied to any traffic survey undertaken since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and that LCC was permitting surveys on the network at the time. Any uplift factors should be submitted for review.

Internal Layout

The LHA has checked the parking provision for the proposed development and whilst the applicant has outlined how much parking there currently is on the site there will be no additional parking for the proposed development.

Whilst this may be acceptable the applicant has not provided any evidence about how many parking spaces are occupied by visitors to the Country Park (which the applicant confirms attracts 150,000 visitors per year) and the Leisure Centre. This information is needed so the LHA can be confident that there will sufficient parking on site for employees relocated from the existing office and visitors to the country park.

Transport Sustainability

Given the built up nature around Brocks Hill Visitor Centre there are good walking / cycling facilities for employees to utilise for commuter trips or leisure purposes at lunchtime. Furthermore, the site is located close to several bus stops on the B582 Wigston Road, Brabazon Road and Rosemead Drive, although the proposed development is located approximately 500m from the junction with the B582 Wigston Road. To encourage travel by a sustainable mode of travel, the applicant may wish to provide some more secure and undercover cycle parking.

The applicant has provided responses to these concerns.

With regards to the highway impact issues raised the applicant has confirmed that it has in place an agile working policy. The agile working policy and the design and layout of the local government offices are such that staff will work from home unless they have a specific purpose in which to come into the office. As such, staff are not required to arrive by a certain time or leave at a certain time of day and the times at which staff do arrive and leave the office will be dictated by the purpose that they need to attend the office, rather than their workday start time and finish time. On this basis (and given the proposed use will generate only a low volume of trips (as acknowledged by the Highway Authority in its comments relating to Highway Safety) a junction capacity assessment of the B582 Wigston Road / Brabazon Road junction (AM / PM peak hours) is not considered necessary.

It is also worth reiterating that the evidence presented within the submitted Design Access Statement does set out that the average number of users of the proposed building will be significantly lower (650 users on average per month) than the average number of visitors of the current building (1,734 users on average per month – not including staff working on-site).

The Highway Authority have been reconsulted on the applicant's response and have confirmed that based on the additional evidence the Highway Authority is satisfied that the impacts of the development on highway safety would not be unacceptable. Furthermore when considered cumulatively with other developments, the impacts on the road network would not be severe subject to conditions requiring a Construction Method Statement to be submitted for approval prior to commencement and secure cycle parking provision to be provided in accordance with details first submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

In order to address these conditions a Construction Management Plan has been submitted for approval and forwarded to the Highway Authority for consideration. The revised plans submitted also now include an area for secure undercover cycle parking. The Highway Authority have made the following comments in respect of the information provided:

Construction Method Statement

The LHA has reviewed the Construction Method Statement (CMS) and offers further comments on highway related issues below.

Vehicle Parking Facilities

The applicant has indicated that site parking will be provided for a limited number of site operatives and visitors within the site compound. Additional parking will be available in the overflow car parks to the north of the leisure centre. The LHA welcomes this approach and does not believe there will be any overspill parking on the public highway.

The applicant has confirmed that site working hours will be Monday to Friday, 07.30 to 17.30 hrs. Deliveries will be through the visitors car park and larger deliveries will be booked in advance and managed on site. Given the location of the proposed development towards the southern end of

the site, the LHA considers this to be a matter for the construction site manager to manage and has no further comments on this subject.

Routing of Construction Traffic

The applicant has not indicated the routes that construction vehicles will use to access/egress the site but the site is located off the B582 Wigston Road and links to the A563 Outer Ring Road and A6 Harborough Road. Therefore the LHA is satisfied that the construction vehicles will remain on the main classified roads and will not have an adverse impact on local residents.

Wheel Washing Facilities

The CMS confirms that temporary access routes will be established around the works using suitable hardcore materials. The access road to the site has also been tarmacked which will help avoid vehicles carrying muck out into the car parks and the highway.

Notwithstanding the above the applicant has confirmed that if required, a jet wash will be used to clean the vehicle wheels before they leave site. A road sweeper will also attend site at suitable intervals to ensure the car park and highway are kept clean. Lastly the applicant has confirmed that all car parks and roads will be checked on a daily basis for cleanliness and damage. The LHA welcomes the applicant's approach but would remind the applicant that it is an offence under Section 148 and Section 151 of the Highways Act 1980 to deposit mud on the public highway and therefore they should make every effort to prevent this occurring.

Timetable for Construction Works

The applicant has indicated that construction works are planned to start on site in early June 2022 and finish by Christmas 2022. The LHA would advise the applicant to contact Leicestershire County Council's Network Management team at the earliest opportunity to discuss any additional requirements to carry out the works e.g. delivery of large plant / machinery for the proposed development. The team can be contacted at: networkmanagement@leics.gov.uk

The LHA is satisfied that the contents of the CMS are acceptable. Furthermore, after a review of the revised drawings, including the updated proposed site plan that identifies an area for car parking and cycle parking, there will not be an additional impact on the highway. Therefore the LHA continues to advise the proposed development is acceptable subject to the conditions that the development is implemented in accordance with the approved details and that the cycle parking is provided prior to the occupation of the building and maintained in perpetuity.

Trees

The Council's Arboriculturist has been consulted and raises no objection subject to hard and soft landscaping being provided to include provision for new tree and shrub planting.

Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

The planning application relates only to the existing building, There will be no impact upon protected species, designated sites, important habitats and features of geological conservation importance.

Other matters in relation to representations received

Concerns have been raised regarding the relocation of Council Services as it is considered that Brocks Hill is less accessible by bus and footpath and cycle access to Brocks Hill is unsuitable and

the lift to customer services located on the first floor is not large enough to accommodate wheelchairs/pushchairs.

As previously mentioned it is not intended that the office will be open to customers other than by appointment only. In this event, meeting rooms are provided downstairs.

The Local Highway Authority has not required a Travel Plan in relation to this application and has commented *'given the built up nature around Brocks Hill Visitor Centre there are good walking/cycling facilities for employees to utilise for commuter trips' and 'the site is located close to several bus stops on the B582 Wigston Road, Brabazon Road and Rosemead Drive'.*

There is footpath and cycle access from Wigston Road via Washbrook Lane which is lit and has a pavement on one side.

With regards to the issue of the proposed toilet facilities raised in the objections these will continue to be public facilities available for all park users and open when the café is open (as the current situation). The Architect has confirmed that with the provision of four unisex WC's, with one being a wheelchair accessible WC, the design meets the requirements of British Standard BS 6465-1 and that based upon these requirements, the level of provision is sufficient. The plans have also been revised to provide separate male/female/unisex self-contained toilets including wash hand basins.

It has been indicated that *'The office uses in the existing building are very small and would be classed as ancillary to the main use of the visitor centre. Converting the visitor centre into local government offices at the scale proposed means that the office use is no longer ancillary but becomes the main use. A material change of use will occur and planning permission is needed for this'.*

The planning application accepts that there is a change of use of the building therefore permission is sought for a change of use to local government offices along with a change of use to a mixed use for office and café use falling with Use Class E and a meeting use falling within Class F1 together with other extensions and internal/external works.

The comment that the 'the existing office use has lapsed' is incorrect as there is an extant office use within the building.

Concerns have been raised regarding the calculation of footfall and that *'the calculation shows a marked reduction from Table 1 to Table 2, but these seems predicated on the basis that only council employees will be using the building following the proposed changes. If however, it will continue its current uses (F1 and E) and access to both the café and classes will continue, there will be a significant increase in footfall. So will the building continue to be accessible to the public as it currently is, or are you planning to reduce public access?'*

It should be noted that public access to the Café will continue. The classes that are currently run from the building would be relocated elsewhere. The tables included in the Design and Access Statement evidence that there would not be an increase in footfall as a result of the proposed use.

The question has also been asked *as to 'How will this change of site meet the recommendations outlined in the Local Ombudsman's Principles of Good Administrative Practice at Point 2 – Ensuring people can access services easily, including those needing reasonable adjustments – when there is only one hourly bus that passes close to the site, the No.40 bus, which does not serve South Wigston at all?'*

Bushloe House has been closed to the public for a number of years. The Council's Customer Service Centre (which relocated to Bell Street) closed in June 2020 and since that time has operated virtually. There are no plans as part of moving to Brocks Hill to change the way in which the Council Customer Services are provided. The Council's back office and meeting rooms will be moving to Brocks Hill and the office element will be to provide a back office hub for the Council's staff.

It is correct that the building was partially funded by a grant from the Big Lottery Fund. That grant was protected by a restriction on the Land Registry requiring the written consent of the Big Lottery Fund before any disposition of the land could be registered. That restriction expired on 23 November 2017 and therefore there is nothing to prevent the application for the change of use.

The drawn rectangle to the south-west of the building near the Café entrance as another M&E plant location referenced in the Oadby Civic Society's revised comments relates to an existing timber screened plant compound.

Conclusion

In summary, the development has been carefully designed to retain and enhance the existing character of the site with minimal impact on existing features, no direct impact upon the existing woodlands, nature walks, ridge and furrow, open spaces or wildlife areas and with minor impact to the existing buildings use. Nor will it materially harm the Green Wedge. The development will make use of what is an underused building. The extensions are intended to compliment the current architecture and will use similar materials. It is intended that the proposal will future proof this valuable community asset and extend the working life of a currently underutilised building for the next 25-30 years. The use is sustainable. It can be accessed conveniently by members of the public, including by public transport.

The proposal conforms with all relevant national and local planning policy, as set out above and as such the application is recommended for approval subject to the conditions set out in the report.

Implications Statement

Health	No Significant implications
Environment	No Significant implications
Community Safety	No Significant implications
Human Rights	The rights of the applicant to develop his property has to be balanced against the rights of neighbours.
Equal Opportunities	No Significant implications
Risk Assessment	No Significant implications
Value for Money	No Significant implications
Equalities	No Significant implications
Legal	No Significant implications

Recommendation

For the reasons set out in the above report then **Permit** subject to the following conditions:

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
Reason: To conform with Section 91 (1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be completed in accordance with the materials specified on the approved plans unless otherwise first agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: To safeguard the character and appearance of the building and its surroundings and in accordance with the aims and objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, Policies 6 and 44 of the Oadby and Wigston Local Plan.
- 3 The new low level planting proposed in front of the cafe extension and around the new plant compound together with the making good of the existing hard and soft landscaping and the areas disturbed by the site compound along with the car park and any temporary access, shall be completed prior to the first use of the building hereby granted permission.
Reason: To ensure that adequate landscaping is provided and to safeguard the visual amenities of the area in accordance with the aims and objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policies 6 and 44 of the Oadby and Wigston Local Plan.
- 4 The secure cycle and car parking provision shown on the approved plans shall be provided prior to the first occupation of the building and unless otherwise first agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority maintained as such for the life of the development.
Reason: To ensure that adequate off-street parking provision is made to reduce the possibility of the proposed development leading to on-street parking problems and to promote travel by sustainable modes in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).
- 5 The use of the building hereby permitted shall not operate outside the following times:
Monday to Friday 07:00hrs and 22:00hrs,
Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays between 09:00 and 16:00.
Reason: In the interests of the amenities of local residents and the locality in general in compliance with Policies 6 and 44 of the Oadby and Wigston Local Plan.
- 6 Construction traffic management arrangements shall be implemented in accordance with the 'Construction Method Statement', Revision A, dated April 2022 prepared by Kier Construction and submitted to the Local Planning Authority on 29 April 2022 and 11 May 2022.
Reason: To reduce the possibility of deleterious material (mud, stones etc.) being deposited in the highway and becoming a hazard for road users, to ensure that construction traffic does not use unsatisfactory roads and lead to on-street parking problems in the area.
- 7 Unless otherwise first approved in writing (by means of a Non-material Amendment/Minor Material Amendment or a new Planning Permission) by the Local Planning Authority the development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans and particulars listed in the schedule below:
Location Plan received by the Local Planning Authority on 8 February 2022
Block Plan received by the Local Planning Authority on 8 February 2022
Proposed Site Plan, Drg No. OBH-LFA-XX-YY-DR-A-0102 S2 P05 received by the Local Planning Authority on 20 April 2022
Proposed Floor Plans, Drg No. OBH-LFA-XX-ZZ-DR-A-0250 S2 P06 received by the Local Planning Authority on 19 April 2022
Proposed Roof Plan, Drg No. OBH-LFA-XX-ZZ-DR-A-0251 S2 P04 received by the Local Planning Authority on 19 April 2022
Proposed Elevations, Drg No. OBH-LFA-XX-ZZ-DR-A-0350 S2 P05 received by the Local Planning Authority on 20 April 2022

Proposed Sections, Drg No. OBH-LFA-XX-ZZ-DR-A-0450 S2 P03 received by the Local Planning Authority on 19 April 2022

Proposed 3D Axonometric Views, Drg No. OBH-LFA-XX-ZZ-DR-A-0850 S2 P03 received by the Local Planning Authority on 19 April 2022

Construction Management Plan (April 2022) received by the Local Planning Authority on 29 April 2022 and associated documents received on 11 May 2022.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt as to what is permitted by this permission and in the interests of proper planning.

Note(s) to Applicant :

- 1 You are advised that this proposal may require separate consent under the Building Regulations and that no works should be undertaken until all necessary consents have been obtained. Advice on the requirements of the Building Regulations can be obtained from the Building Control Section.
- 2 For the avoidance of doubt this permission does not authorise any development outside the application site including any foundation, footings, fascias, eaves, soffits, verges or guttering.
- 3 You are advised that any amendments to the approved plans will require either a Non-Material amendment application, a Minor Material Amendment application or a new planning application. If this is the case then you should allow at least 8 weeks before the intended start date to gain approval for such amendments. Further advice can be obtained by contacting the Planning Section of the Council on any amendments (internal or external).
- 4 The applicant is encouraged to provide additional tree planting as part of the new landscaping to offset some of the carbon footprint of the build and for the biodiversity net gain metric.
- 5 The applicant is reminded that it is an offence under Section 148 and Section 151 of the Highways Act 1980 to deposit mud on the public highway and therefore they should make every effort to prevent this occurring.
- 6 The Leicestershire Highway Authority would advise the applicant to contact Leicestershire County Council's Network Management team at the earliest opportunity to discuss any additional requirements to carry out the works e.g. delivery of large plant / machinery for the proposed development. The team can be contacted at:
networkmanagement@leics.gov.uk
- 7 The Application as submitted was considered to be acceptable and therefore discussion with the applicant to seek an acceptable solution was not considered necessary in making this decision. The Local Planning Authority has therefore acted pro-actively to secure a sustainable form of development in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

Appeals to the Secretary of State

If you are aggrieved by the decision of your local planning authority to refuse permission for the proposed development or to grant it subject to conditions, then you can appeal to the Secretary of State under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

If you want to appeal against your local planning authority's decision then you must do so within 6 months of the date of this notice.

Appeals can be made online at: <https://www.gov.uk/planning-inspectorate>.

If you are unable to access the online appeal form, please contact the Planning Inspectorate to obtain a paper copy of the appeal form on tel: 0303 444 5000.

The Secretary of State can allow a longer period for giving notice of an appeal but will not normally be prepared to use this power unless there are special circumstances which excuse the delay in giving notice of appeal.

The Secretary of State need not consider an appeal if it seems to the Secretary of State that the local planning authority could not have granted planning permission for the proposed development or could not have granted it without the conditions they imposed, having regard to the statutory requirements, to the provisions of any development order and to any directions given under a development order.

If you intend to submit an appeal that you would like examined by inquiry then you must notify the Local Planning Authority and Planning Inspectorate (inquiryappeals@planninginspectorate.gov.uk) at least 10 days before submitting the appeal. Further details are on GOV.UK.

Purchase Notices

If either the local planning authority or the Secretary of State refuses permission to develop land or grants it subject to conditions, the owner may claim that he can neither put the land to a reasonably beneficial use in its existing state nor render the land capable of a reasonably beneficial use by the carrying out of any development which has been or would be permitted.

In these circumstances, the owner may serve a purchase notice on the Council (District Council, London Borough Council or Common Council of the City of London) in whose area the land is situated. This notice will require the Council to purchase his interest in the land in accordance with the provisions of Part VI of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

a. **22/00037/R3FUL**