

Application Number	17/00713/AS
Location	Civic Centre and Stour Centre Car Park, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent.
Grid Reference	01448/42288
Ward	Victoria (Ashford)
Application Description	Construction of a taxi layby within the South Park Car Park, and replacement parking spaces to offset those removed for the new layby
Applicant	Ashford Borough Council Civic Centre Tannery Lane Ashford Kent TN23 1PL
Agent	Ashford Borough Council Civic Centre Tannery Lane Ashford Kent TN23 1PL
Site Area	0.21 hectares

(a) 29/1R&0S (b) - (c) KH&T X;

Introduction

1. This application is being reported to the Planning Committee because Ashford Borough Council is the applicant and in accordance with the scheme of delegation.
2. The proposals are a result of a wider aspiration to improve the safety and appearance of the domestic railway station forecourt and to improve the links to the Commercial Quarter as well as improving the facilities for taxi drivers whilst waiting for customers.
3. The scheme is set out in the proposals section.

Site and Surroundings

4. The site is located south of existing Stour Centre Car Park close to the entrance to **Station Approach**.



Figure 1 – Site Location

5. The site area is approximately 0.1 hectares (0.25 acres). This site falls partly within the existing surfaced car park and also seeks an extension of the car park into areas of landscaped grass verges. It also immediately adjoins the approved extension to the car park permitted as part of the new office building at the Commercial Quarter.
6. The site is partly already a tarmac access leading to a permeable concrete block car park with the remaining areas generally just grassed. The existing car park features some well established neatly aligned hedges and semi mature trees with generous lighting and some signage, pay and display kiosk machines and litterbins. The area subject to the recent approval for the 180 space car park extension for Commercial Quarter is now partly overgrown and is securely enclosed by temporary 2m high metal security fencing. (See images below)



Figure 2: Site Conditions

7. The site lies in the middle of a flood zone level 2 and 3.
8. The southern edge of the original South Park now forms part of a flood meadow that provides a valuable zone for wildlife and an enjoyable space for people. The Stour Meadows area is set behind a hedge and open timber fencing. When vegetation is in leaf it is very well screened to views from the existing car park.

Proposal

9. The application is for works to relocate the existing taxi waiting layby in Station Approach to the edge of the South Park Car Park closest to the Station Approach entrance. This involves the loss of 15 existing South Park car parking spaces to provide the turning area and a queuing layby space for taxis. An extended car parking area will therefore be provided to replace these 15 parking spaces. These car parking spaces will be provided immediately to north of proposed taxi layby and will tie in with existing rows of the car parking spaces.
10. The taxi layby will include two stacking lanes which filter down to one access point via a splitter island at its exit point. The taxi lay-by will be able to hold a maximum of 16 vehicles. The layby will be distinguished from the carpark running aisle to the north by a pre-cast concrete kerb, which will be laid flush between the running aisle and taxi layby. The splitter island will separate the taxis from the car park running aisle and allows space for a monitoring cabinet. The layby is approximately 60m in length and 6m in width and will result in the loss of 10 existing car parking spaces.
11. A further access route, to allow taxis to join waiting vehicles without travelling around the full circulatory of the car park, is included in the application which results in the loss of a further 4/5 parking spaces. This is to be provided through existing car parking spaces that will be closed, and will be separated from the surrounding parking spaces by a kerbed landscape area.
12. A monitoring system will be provided at this point. The monitor is to be connected to CCTV camera viewing the existing taxi rank shelter outside the domestic railway station entrance. This allows taxi drivers to see when space is available at the layby. There will be a single CCTV unit placed on top of International House. This will be a new camera integrated within the existing CCTV system which already sits on top of International House. It will provide a live feed only to the taxi drivers on the waiting layby, it will be under a 24 hr maintenance agreement via a call from the taxi rank to the monitoring centre. As this is on International House National Rail's agreement would not be required.
13. Adjacent to the taxi layby waiting area is a retained landscaped grass verge which will house a couple of benches. I consider that a litterbin should also be provided but this will be secured by condition. This space will serve as a place for the taxi drivers to socialise and rest as they wait for customers.
14. The taxi waiting layby and extension to the car park will simply tie in with the existing access arrangements within car park although some minor

changes to internal circulation will result. The access point for taxis heading to the station will be via the existing junction from car park which will be 20m north of the proposed new access for the Commercial Quarter car park extension

15. Some basic landscaping is proposed around the accesses and edges of the proposed new parking bays and taxi layby but extra lighting is not required.
16. The relocation of the taxi waiting layby will create space for future pedestrian linkages between the South Car Park and the Commercial Quarter development area. The current proposals include a simple footpath within the site boundary. The pedestrian routes will be the subject of separate planning application.
17. Details of the proposed taxi layby and car park layout changes are set out below.

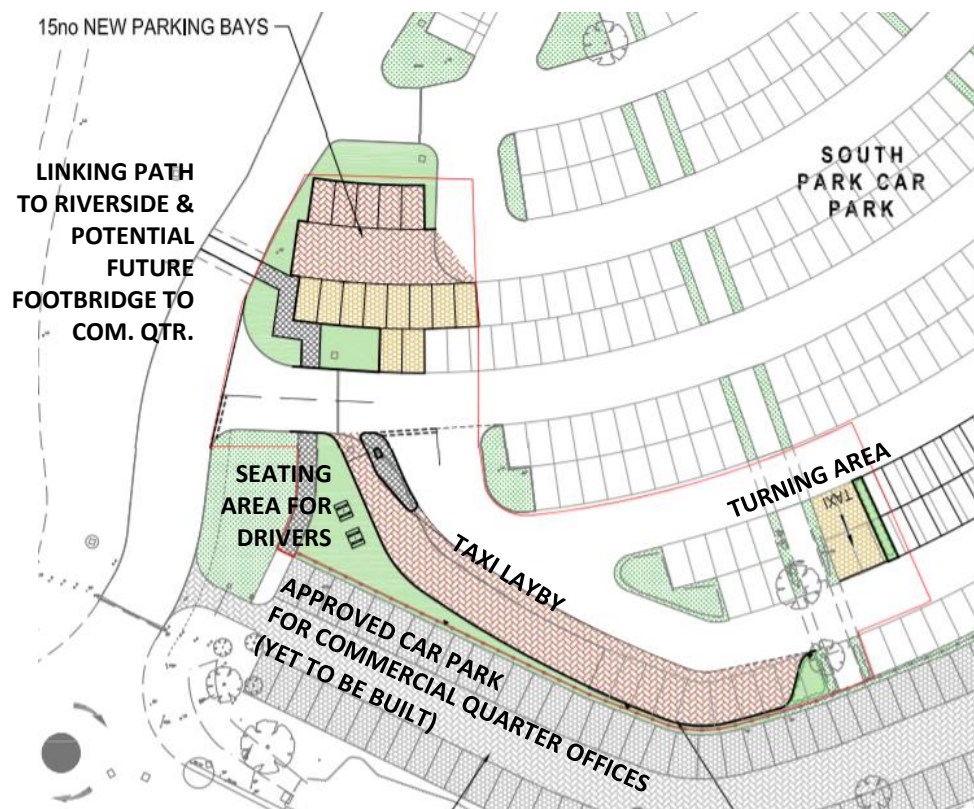


Figure 3: Site Layout Plan

Supporting Documents

18. In support of the application the following documents have been submitted:
19. Design & Access Statement – Sets out the following details;
 - The context of the site and the proposal in relation to its context
 - The consultation process Ashford Borough Council have taken with Southeastern and the taxi drivers. The results of these, along with other relevant consultations are set out in appendix.
 - Sets out the design background layout, landscape, access and movement, lighting, signage, drainage issues.
20. Illustrative Drainage Strategy – The plans show the following areas;
 - Proposed impermeable block paving to parking bay, aisle and taxi lay-by.
 - Proposed permeable paving to new parking bay and access route
21. Surface Water Drainage Design -

The Project Delivery Team within Ashford Borough Council was commissioned by Ashford Borough Council's Health, Parking and Community Safety department to complete a conceptual surface water design to support the planning application for the South Park Taxi waiting lay-by.

The existing site is undeveloped and is considered to be a 'Greenfield' site. The proposed system for both the taxi waiting lay-by and the car park extension area is to be designed to drain and integrate into the existing surface water storage system, which is located beneath the existing car park. The new taxi- waiting lay-by will drain into the existing permeable paved system.

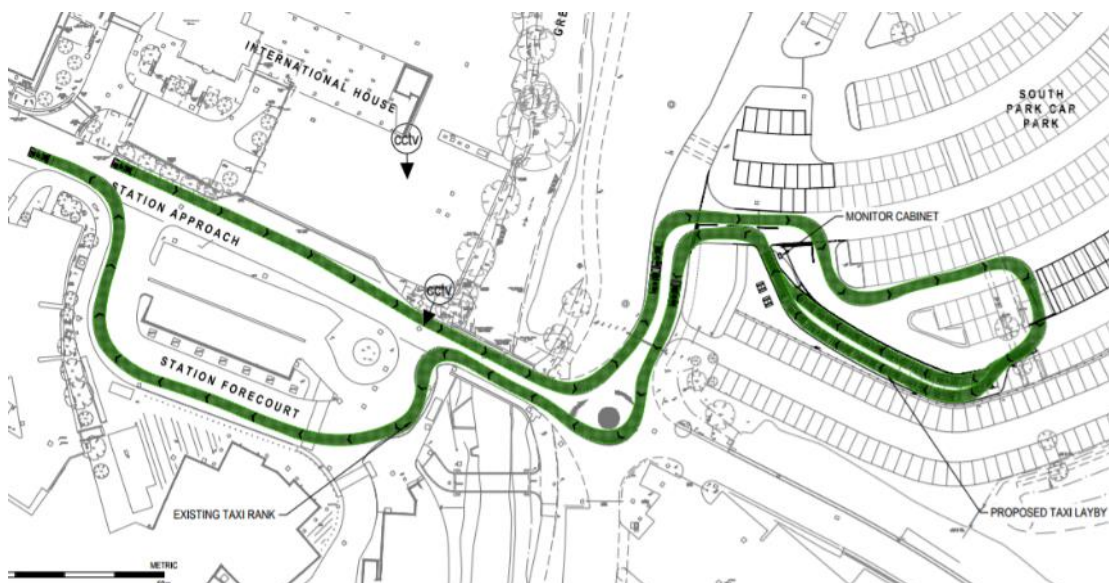
The existing system discharges via a controlled outfall located to the northeast of the site into the River Stour. Attenuation/storage is provided within the granular sub-base beneath the existing car park. Any additional surface water runoff generated from the site is to be stored within the car parks existing attenuation system with additional capacity being provided

within new permeable paving provided to maintain the system's capacity. The proposed system will seek to attenuate up to 12.4m³ of water within the proposed additional car parking being provided as part of the scheme. This has been calculated to be sufficient to offset the loss of Greenfield space and the removal of the permeable paving area within the new taxi waiting layby. The proposed attenuation has been designed and based on the critical storm for the proposed development area and the 'small site rate' of 2l/s as specified within the Ashford Borough Council Sustainable Drainage SPD.

The proposed scheme would drain into the existing permeable paving system. The design life of the taxi layby and car parking proposed is 20 years; as such a 10% CC allowance has been used as defined in NPPF as the upper rate until 2039. To offset the loss of permeable paving and existing green areas an additional 12.4m³ of attenuation will be provided beneath 10 new bays in the car park.

The site is located in Flood Zone 3B and is defined to have a risk as greater than 1 in 20, and the site has flooded historically. As defined within NPPF, this type of development would be considered 'Water Compatible' and 'Essential infrastructure'. The site is considered to pass the 'Exception test' and is designed to remain operational and safe for users in times of flood, result in no net loss of floodplain storage, not impede water flows, not increase flood risk elsewhere.

22. Swept Path Analysis – demonstrates how the taxi vehicles can access the car park and turn via the new access and layby via Station Approach and the station forecourt taxi pick up points. See plan below.



23. Taxi Waiting Area Consultation Survey Report

Background - Discussions about the proposed relocation of the taxi waiting area took place at a number of taxi forums in 2016 and the proposals were refined following feedback. On 6th April 2017, a presentation was delivered to the taxi forum with detailed plans of the proposals, with an explanation about the rationale to reduce congestion on Station Approach and to improve pedestrian access from Dover Place and the college to the station and the Stour Centre car park. Details of the consultation were emailed out to all drivers and operators that the licensing section had contact details for.

24. Taxi drivers and operators were invited to take part in an online consultation, which was launched on 7th April and was open until 26th April. It was placed on the council's website, advertised by social media and sent to people and organisations that may have particular interest in the proposals, such as Southeastern Railway, Stagecoach and tenants of International House. Contact was also made with Ward Members, representatives of the Central Ashford Community Forum and the Mill Court management company.
25. The website included location plans of the proposed taxi waiting area in the Stour Centre car park, detailed plans of the taxi waiting area layout with an indicative vehicle capacity of 17 vehicles, a swept path analysis of proposed vehicle movement, detailed information of the proposals and a link to a Survey Monkey with a number of questions, including an opportunity to add free text. A direct approach was been made to Ashford Access to discuss the proposed changes.
26. The following results were recorded following a survey of 75 taxi drivers and operators, local residents and car park users.
- *Q1 Do you agree with the aims of the proposals to reduce congestion and improve pedestrian access?*
Yes 86.67% (65) NO 13.33% (10)
 - *Q2 Do you think that the location of the proposed taxi waiting area will support these aims?*
YES 68.00% (51) NO 32.00% (24)
 - *Q3 Do you think that the proposed taxi waiting area layout will work in practice?*
YES 54.67.00% (41) NO 45.ss% (34)
 - *Q4 Do you think a CCTV camera based system is the best solution to inform taxi drivers that the taxi rank is empty?*
YES 69.33% (52) NO 30.67% (23)

- Q5. Do you have any other comments you would like to feed back to us regarding this proposal?
No responses contained in report

- Q6. Finally, could you tell us a bit about you?

Taxi driver	22.67%	(17)
Taxi operator	5.33%	(4)
Local resident	21.33%	(16)
Car park user	13.33%	(10)
Other (please specify)	37.33	(28)
Total		(75)

27. Response Analysis - Seventy-five people responded to the consultation, 21 were taxi drivers or operators, 16 were local residents, 10 were car park users and 28 were "other". Over 86% agreed that the aims of the proposals to reduce congestion and improve access. 68% agreed that the location of the proposed taxi waiting area would support these aims. 69% thought that a CCTV system was the best solution to inform taxi drivers that the taxi rank was empty and 54% thought that the proposed taxi waiting area layout would work in practice.
28. There was concern (primarily by taxi drivers and operators) that a two lane waiting area would cause issues when vehicles parked on the inside wanted to leave the waiting area to attend phoned in jobs. It is proposed that a further meeting is held with taxi drivers and operators to determine how the maximum vehicle capacity of the waiting area can be balanced with operational concerns.
29. The importance of a well-designed and properly maintained CCTV system was also raised by a number of respondents, along with the need for a back-up system that would include a call system for disabled vehicles and other specific vehicles to be called to the taxi rank at the front of the station.
30. Other issues raised include concern that customers would need to walk further to hail a taxi (taxi rank is not moving), that the system would be open to abuse by unscrupulous drivers, that changes to the phasing of the traffic lights at the junction with the A2042 would reduce congestion (planned for 2017) and the 17 proposed spaces were insufficient.
31. Three respondents made reference to the issue of flooding and these are addressed in the planning application. 14 positive comments were made including support for the proposed zebra crossing, welcoming the proposed improvements and agreement that the proposals will help reduce congestion.

Planning History

32. **16/00554/AS** - An application was approved in 2016 for a new office building and an extension to the southern edge of the existing Stour Centre car park to provide extra 180 dedicated car parking associated for the phase 1 Commercial Quarter office building (16/00554/AS) This building is currently under construction 250 metres away in Dover Place but the car park is due to be constructed imminently.
33. **12/01352/AS** - Removal of existing raised bank along the river East Stour, reduction of ground level adjacent to river, formation of new bank (to accommodate earth from previous work) between existing skate park and station car park. Fencing and planting to above areas and works within the river to re-profile bank.
34. **03/01659/AS** - Remodelling of the Stour Centre leisure facility to create new leisure water facilities and reception, a refurbished 25m pool and sports hall, changing accommodation and fitness suite, also provided is a new access road off station approach and a new car park on South Park. The original car park extension was constructed in 2003/5 as part of an extension to the Stour Leisure Centre.
35. In 2000 an application to construct the skate park was submitted. In 1991, 1993 and 2002 various small scale car park extensions were approved to the Stour Leisure Centre car park. In the 1980's South Park was used as a sports field with a sports pavilion approved in 1982. It is not clear when this use first started but remained in use until about 2004.

Consultations

Ward Members: No written comments have been received from either of the Ward Members.

KCC Highways and Transportation: The development does not have any implications for the adopted highway and therefore Kent Highways have no comments to make.

ABC Street Scene & Open Spaces, Environmental and Contracts:

No comments have been received but general suitability of landscaping were briefly discussed. It was agreed to deal with this detail via condition.

Neighbours: An objection from a taxi driver representative was received;

- I do not believe that the disabled users have been properly informed of the impact of removing almost every taxi will have to them.

- There has been no proper dialogue with the other users of the station.
- All these groups should have been brought together to discuss this issue.
- The taxis received an ultimatum after it had been discussed in their absence

A single letter of concern was received from a nearby resident in Mill Court. Their concerns and objections included the following points.

- Concern about how an extension of the Stour Centre Car Park and the addition of a taxi rank will affect noise pollution to our property.
- There are problems of ongoing night time anti-social behaviour in the Stour Centre car park which already disrupts residents of Mill Court.
- We have great reservations about the car park being extended, particularly in the direction of our houses.
- Would like to see a barrier controlled car park which is inaccessible to mopeds when the car park has closed for the night.
- As a young family we certainly do not want any further noise disturbances from the car park late at night.
- We would like assurance that the anti social behaviour will be stopped.
- We have no issue with a taxi rank being created, we are against the car park being extended closer to the houses in Mill Court.

Planning Policy

36. The Development Plan comprises the saved policies in the adopted Ashford Borough Local Plan 2000, the adopted LDF Core Strategy 2008, the adopted Ashford Town Centre Action Area Plan 2010, the Tenterden & Rural Sites DPD 2010, the Urban Sites and Infrastructure DPD 2012, the Chilmingdon Green AAP 2013 the Wye Neighbourhood Plan 2015-30 and the Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan 2016 - 30. On 9 June, 2016, the Council approved a consultation version of the Local Plan to 2030. Consultation commenced on 15 June 2016 and closed after 8 weeks. Proposed changes to the draft Local Plan were approved for further consultation by the Council on 15 June 2017 and consultation has now commenced. At present the policies in this emerging plan can be accorded little weight.

37. The relevant policies from the Development Plan relating to this application are as follows:-

38. ***Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008***

CS11 – Biodiversity

CS19- Development & Flood Risk

CS20 – Development & Flood Risk

39. ***Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan 2010***

Policy TC17 Civic Quarter - The existing taxi layby is located within the Civic Quarter, the development of which is Policy TC17 Civic Quarter of the Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan. The plan highlights how the Civic Quarter has a more spacious softer character than much of the busy town centre, heavily influenced by the presence of the river and the protected greenspace around it. It has an attractive sense of place, characterised by a large amount of open space between the converging Great and East Stour rivers. Civic uses set in landscaped green spaces are a noticeable feature of the area and that popular, informal green spaces have an important role to play in encouraging outdoor relaxation and informal recreation uses along the riverside. These serve the existing community and daytime recreational needs of the large and growing local workforce - particularly in the adjoining Commercial Quarter. The green spaces also work as an attractive transition to the established residential communities to the east, and provide attractive routes to the town centre and stations from these areas.

This Plan seeks firstly to retain and enhance this Quarter's more open character around the river corridors. The policies advise that development in this Quarter will need to respect the setting of the Green Corridor and be consistent with policy TC26.

Policy TC26 – Green Corridors in the Town Centre – Sets out a key objective as protecting and enhancing the Green Corridors through the town centre. Other forms of development proposals, including those relating to an existing use within the Corridor, will not be permitted, unless:-

- 1) it would be in accordance with a site specific policy in this Plan, or,
- 2) there are overriding planning benefits, and it can be demonstrated there would be no significant harm to the

environment, biodiversity, visual amenity and functioning
of the Corridor.

Development coming forward on land adjoining the Town Centre Green
Corridors shall make a positive contribution to the biodiversity value,
setting, role, accessibility and amenity value of the Corridors.

40. ***Local Plan to 2030***

SP6 – Promoting High Quality Design (proposed to be slightly amended)

TRA5 - Planning For Pedestrians (proposed to be slightly amended)

ENV1 – Biodiversity (proposed to be slightly amended)

ENV2- The Ashford Green Corridor

ENV6- Flood risk (as previous)

ENV9 – Sustainable Drainage (proposed to be slightly amended)

COM2 Recreation, Sport, Play and Open Areas (proposed to be slightly
amended)

41. ***Local Plan 2000 - Saved Policies (Updated June 2014)***

LE11 Loss of public open space

42. ***Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents***

Sustainable Drainage SPD 2010

Public Green Spaces & Water Environment SPD 2012

SPG1 Green Corridor Action Plan

43. ***Government Advice***

National Planning Policy Framework 2012 - Members should note that the
determination must be made in accordance with the Development Plan
unless material considerations indicate otherwise. A significant material
consideration is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The
NPPF says that less weight should be given to the policies above if they
are in conflict with the NPPF. The NPPF is designed to facilitate positive
growth – making economic, environmental and social progress for this and
future generations and delivering sustainable development without delay.

The policy document holds a 'pro-growth' agenda. Paragraph 21 highlights some crucial points in this respect, including:

- investment in business should not be over-burdened by the combined requirements of planning policy expectations
- policies should be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and allow a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances
- Local plans should identify priority area for economic regeneration, infrastructure provision and environmental enhancement.

Paragraph 23 requires that planning policies should be positive and promote competitive town centre environments. It continues that town centres are at the heart of their communities and that they should provide customer choice

The key theme of the central Government policy is one of promoting sustainable development. The purpose of the planning system is therefore defined as one that contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. There are three dimensions to sustainable development, being economic, social and environmental. One of which is an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.

Central Government policy attaches great importance to the design of the built environment as set out in paragraph 56 of the NPPF. Good design is a key component of sustainable development, 'indivisible from good planning' and contributes positively to making places better for people.

National Planning Policy Guidance

44. Paragraphs 23 – 28 set out those aspects of design that local authorities should consider including the layout and way in which spaces relate to each other; the important detailed smaller elements of spaces and materials
45. Government advice goes on to highlight that the quality of new development can be spoilt by poor attention to detail. It is vital not to view elements in isolation, but also to consider how they come together to form the whole and to examine carefully the 'joins' between different elements of places.

Assessment

46. The main issues for consideration are:

- Impact on open space provision
- Impact on Flooding & Drainage
- Visual impact on green corridor

Several other issues were assessed including disability access issues, the local economy, residential amenity, impact on town centre parking, ecology and highways.

Impact on public open space

47. The proposals include a small increase in the area of hardstanding of approximately 500m². The taxi layby will be wrapped by the approved Commercial Quarter car park. The extended area of car park to provide the 15 extra spaces will be slightly closer to the riverside green space. This small area has minimal effect on the overall setting of the river and green corridor.

48. A small part of the site for the taxi layby and the area for the car park extension is designated as public open space under Local Plan Policy LE11(Loss of Public Open Space) for recreation and leisure. The Borough Council will normally seek the full protection of this public green space. The proposal is also located within the Civic Quarter as set out in TCAAP, which mentions the spacious softer character the area enjoys compared to the rest of the town centre. These policies also highlight the importance of the presence of the river and the protected landscaped greenspace around it and the informal green spaces for informal recreation uses. Policy TC17 points out the need to respect the setting of the Green Corridor.

49. Whilst the conversion of grass verge to hardstanding is not ideal, the impact on the appearance and feel of the green riverside corridor and open space is minimal. The taxi layby will be wrapped by the large car for the Commercial Quarter and the area taken up by the extended car park will be small in area between the access road and the existing car park which it is tight up against.

50. The grass verge area is located on an area of limited importance situated on a strip between the tarmac road and the existing hard standing car park areas as present or as about to be constructed through a separate

approval. Therefore if supported these current proposals will not result in hardstanding encroaching closer to the river than at present.

51. The existing small grassed areas between the access roads and existing car parks is therefore not really usable or valuable public open space being squeezed between these existing areas of hardstanding. There is sufficient amount of green public open space serving the immediate area in North Park, about 150metres away, which I consider to be a highly attractive place. There is also the recently established Stour Meadows less than 100metres away. These existing spaces more than compensate for the minor loss of the grassland amenity. The proposed extension will not result in a material loss of informal amenity space for recreational purposes.
52. I am satisfied that a simple landscape mitigation has been agreed in principle with the applicant to help mitigate the visual impact of more cars in this area and the expanded area of hard landscaping. There is little or no adverse visual impact on the quality of the green corridor setting.
53. This small grass verge area is also of little biodiversity value. Any new trees, hedge or shrub landscaping that form part of a landscaping scheme will be selected to encourage ecology. This will be addressed by condition.
54. I conclude that there is no significant adverse impact on the quality or character of the local green open space or green corridor. Which policies are met and which policies are not met but material considerations override?

Impact on Flooding & SUDs

55. The site is within flood zone 3. A drainage strategy and surface water drainage design have been submitted. The views of Environment Agency and KCC SUDs team have not been sought given the application is a minor proposal with a small site area and nature of the proposals do not involve any new buildings.
56. ABC's drainage SPD requires that surface water drainage from the car park extension or taxi layby does not make local flood conditions worse. The proposals only involve some modest physical changes within the flood plain. These include permeable paving and minor areas of impermeable brick paving to tie in with existing ground levels and kerbing to edges of car park to delineate taxi layby, a cabinet housing monitoring equipment for CCTV link to station. These all include below ground works.
57. Further street furniture maybe be required including two picnic style benches and possibly a litterbin plus some landscaping. Details relating to

levels indicate the ground levels will barely change and will not affect the free flow of drainage or flood water. The proposed system for both the taxi waiting lay-by and the car park extension area is to be designed to drain and integrate into the existing surface water storage system which is located beneath the existing car park. The new taxi- waiting lay-by will drain into the existing permeable paved system.

58. The submitted Drainage Strategy indicates that there will be no increase of flood risk as a result of the proposals will result in no loss of flood storage, no impedance of flood flows and, as a result, no increase of flood risk. The surface water attenuation storage provided within the scheme is sufficient to offset the impact of the scheme based on the Ashford Borough Council Sustainable Drainage SPD small sites discharge rate of 2l/s.
59. The proposed taxi waiting lay-by is in one of the lowest flood risk areas of the site as it sits higher than the majority of the site, therefore this area would be one of the last places within the car parking area to be affected. Nevertheless, in the event of such an event it is expected that this would be managed similarly to a failure of the CCTV. The plan is, where safe to do so, depending on the extremity of the event, ABC's parking team would look to deploy a chief executive officer or other council support officers, to manage the taxi drivers locally between the waiting layby and the rank, or safely manage this on Station Approach and subject to discussions with Network Rail.
60. Further details of the construction of the proposed permeable paving and its future maintenance will be agreed via condition and if necessary ABC's drainage engineer will seek the specialist opinion of either KCC's drainage and flood risk team, the Internal Drainage Board or the Environment Agency.

Visual Impact on Ashford Green Corridor

61. The setting of the Green Corridor is already dominated by access roads, large car parks, a skate park and associated lighting. The structural landscaping is very effective at softening the appearance of this infrastructure. The proposed small addition to hardstanding in the area with further rows of car parking will have minimal effect on the visual amenity of the area.
62. Policy ENV2 of the Ashford Green Corridor seeks to ensure there is no significant harm to the overall environment, biodiversity, visual amenity, movement networks or functioning of the Green Corridor.
63. The proposed landscaping design will respect the style of planting that currently exists to help retain the appearance of a soft environment. The

Council is planning to look at further improvements to provide a new footbridge over the river just 50m to the west of this proposed car park. It is likely then that the alignment of footpath connections to car parks and a wider landscaping is to be considered holistically in time to complement the local environment.

64. The proposed hard surfacing will be designed to match the existing materials of the existing car park which if approved would have a much better appearance than most standard car parks. By avoiding any use of tarmac the look and feel of the car park will remain much softer and landscaping will be sought where possible to enhance its appearance.
65. There is expected to be a minor 'hardening' of the car park boundary with the loss of small area of open space. A simple landscaping scheme is proposed with grass verges. To mitigate the loss ideally a vertical landscape element will be designed into the landscaping scheme and some structured tree planting could help achieve sufficient mitigation. Where possible this will help screen the views of the car park and taxi layby from the west and the footpath and cycle paths along the river. It is the intention that a row of up to four trees or perhaps a simple hedging will possibly be planted where services allow and this will be subject to full ground surveys. It is considered that small trees such as *Malus trilobata*, which is low maintenance, would not require a tree pit owing to its limited vigour (it only grows to 3m width) and may be crown lifted to ensure that visibility is not an issue. By implementing a vertical planting element, an attractive frontage to the car park may be achieved. The landscaping proposals are flexible at this stage to respond to the site conditions. Any new plant or tree species will be selected based on their appropriateness for the green corridor and to complement existing landscaping. The selection of landscaping species will also be based on supporting biodiversity.
66. A short section of footpath is intended to provide access through the application site serving as a link from the 2016 approved private Commercial Quarter car park immediately to the south. This configuration may be liable to change to respond to the alignment of emerging plans for a new footbridge over the river to ensure a safe and most convenient route from the car park towards the Commercial Quarter. This can be subject to condition.
67. The proposed location of the benches and monitoring cabinet is logical and I consider it to be acceptable. The precise siting and full details of the type of monitoring cabinet that will inform the taxi drivers when a passenger is waiting will be agreed via condition alongwith details of siting and type of any proposed benches or litter bins that are required.

- 68. No new lighting is expected to be provided as existing lamp columns will provide sufficient illumination and so the risk of any lighting pollution is avoided.
- 69. I am satisfied that the proposals will not result in any significant harm to the overall environment, biodiversity, visual amenity, movement networks or functioning of the Green Corridor as is in accordance with policy ENV2 of the Ashford Green Corridor.

Other Planning Issues

- 70. **Disability access** - The objection based on harm to the needs of disability is unclear. The two bay taxi rank, with the covered shelter, will remain where it is near the front of the domestic side of the railway station. I do not expect there to be any problems or inconvenience caused for disabled taxi drivers as they will have a safe place to enter or leave their vehicles in a quiet dedicated taxi layby away from the very busy station forecourt. The impact on disabled customers will not change whatsoever, as they will continue to be picked up from the same point as at present. The system used to call up the taxis must be easy to use for disabled customers and passengers and this will be secured by condition.
- 71. **Local Economy** - The relocation of the taxi waiting facilities are considered to have benefits for the jobs, the local economy and the town centre. The proposed feeder layby will be two vehicles wide and have a larger capacity for more taxis to wait. A CCTV camera based system will be installed to relay images of the taxi rank on the Station Forecourt back to a monitor at the front of the taxi waiting layby so that drivers can see when the rank becomes free and drive forward onto it. These better facilities will benefit the taxi business and their employees by making the queuing system safer and the wait more comfortable in a quieter location. The call up system should not cause any noticeable delay to waiting customers.
- 72. Relocating the queue of taxis away from the forecourt will help to partially reduce the congestion in the forecourt and elsewhere. At certain times, the queue of taxi vehicles extends back up Station Approach extending dangerously out into the highway and affects other traffic flows. This has at times restricted the ability for some buses to turn into and out of the Station Forecourt. A new pedestrian crossing is due to be provided in Station Approach behind the existing informal taxi layby. Relocating this layby will therefore ultimately help make crossing the road easier at this point in Station Approach.
- 73. Train passengers arriving by bus or car will find it easier as vehicles will be able to enter and leave the forecourt more efficiently. A smoother

experience for rail passengers, commuters and visitor using the station through the removal of waiting taxi layby from the station forecourt will improve the perception of the immediate area and the overall town.

74. **Residential Amenity** - The nearest properties to the area of extended car park and new taxi layby are over 180metres away in Mill Court. The proposals will not involve any car parking or traffic movement extending closer to these or any other residential properties than the current car parking areas. I am satisfied that the proposed circulation of traffic associated with the car park and taxi layby will not have any detrimental impact on residential amenity.
75. The intention is to keep the nearby barrier at the entrance into the car park from Station Approach open for longer hours to allow taxis to wait for late night rail passengers. Whilst this could mean the lack of closure of the car park barrier makes it harder to prevent access to the car park and therefore increase the likelihood of incidences of anti-social behaviour in the South Park car park at night. However, because of the proposals there is likely to be better surveillance of the Stour Centre South Car Park from waiting taxi drivers. I would expect that this would be more likely to deter any such anti-social activities. The Council also are looking to exercise their new powers under section 59 of The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 to put in place a public places protection order, that make certain activities an offence. This includes specific activities in car parks that they want to see stop, which are focussed around the “boy racers” that have caused problems in the past such as - revving of engine (s); driving carelessly round car park; sounding horns; playing music from car stereos; using threatening, intimidating behaviour towards another person; and causing obstructions.
76. I am satisfied that this matter is being taken seriously under current powers available to the Council that if any anti-social behaviour occurs in the extended car park it will be dealt with swiftly.
77. **Impact on town centre parking** - There will be no impact on the level of car parking provision in the town centre because the proposals will replace the 15 existing removed spaces, further north within the extended part of the car park.
78. **Ecology** - As no existing tree or shrub planting is being removed or altered, no habitat is being lost and I am satisfied that the taxi layby and car park extension will not diminish the ecological value of the area at all. The loss of the small amount of grass verge to create hardstanding will be offset with landscaping and species to enhance biodiversity qualities.

79. **Highways** - The application site is not directly affecting the public highway at all so Kent Highways did not comment on the proposals. In terms of traffic circulation, there will be less congestion around station making it a bit safer for pedestrians and making the circulation of buses in particular a bit easier. The proposals do not affect the disabled parking spaces outside the domestic station which will remain in the same position. Conditions that enable the opportunity to control construction vehicle routes will be recommended.

Whether planning obligations are necessary

80. Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Regulations 2010 says that a planning obligation may only constitute a reason for granting planning permission for a development if the obligation is:
- a) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms,
 - b) directly related to the development; and
 - c) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development
81. I recommend that no planning obligations be provided for a scheme of this nature.

Human Rights Issues

82. I have also taken into account the human rights issues relevant to this application. In my view the “Assessment” section above and the Recommendations below represent an appropriate balance between the interests and rights of the applicant (to enjoy his land subject only to reasonable and proportionate controls by a public authority) and the interests and rights of those potentially affected by the proposal (to respect for private life and the home and peaceful enjoyment of their properties).

Working with the applicant

83. In accordance with paragraphs 186 and 187 of the NPPF Ashford Borough Council (ABC) takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals focused on solutions. ABC works with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner as explained in the note to the applicant included in the recommendation below.

Conclusion

84. The proposed extension of Stour Centre car park would involve a small reduction in the amount of informal open space in this part of the green corridor that the development plan would normally seek to retain. However due to this small area being segregated already and being divided by access roads and other parts of the car park soon to be extended, this grass verge has very limited value as open space. In an expanding town centre, with growing parking pressures, I consider this to be a satisfactory outcome and when bearing in mind the wider improvements expected in the immediate area to connect the forthcoming Commercial Quarter car park to the office building currently under construction in the Commercial Quarter.
85. The development would not have an adverse impact on the green corridor and a landscaping scheme is likely to come forward to help minimise views of the parked cars from the green corridor.
86. The proposals would not worsen the likelihood of localised or downstream flooding.
87. The taxi layby and car park extension would have no adverse impact on wildlife and ecology and with more landscaping there would be scope to increase biodiversity through careful species selection.
88. The development will seek to provide better facilities for taxi drivers through the provision of a small amount of landscaped amenity space with new seating for the drivers to take a rest whilst waiting to pick up customers and will improve the service. It also has knock on benefits for helping to improve the circulation and safety of the station forecourt area. I am satisfied that the risk of anti-social behaviour in the car park will be closely monitored and any incidence will promptly acted upon by the Council should they occur.
89. The development wouldn't have a significantly adverse impact on the character of the area and the public benefits would outweigh any adverse impacts.
90. In respect of matters relating to this scheme the impact on the amount of public open space, visual amenities of the green corridor, flooding and drainage, plus residential amenities, parking, ecology, the local economy, disability access or highways the proposal is not considered harmful to warrant refusal on any of these grounds.
91. The proposals conform with CS11 Biodiversity of the Core Strategy 2008. It also conforms with CS19- Development & Flood Risk as the car park and taxi layby is designed to be compatible with potential flood conditions and would not be at an unacceptable risk of flooding itself. The associated

hardstanding would not result in any increased risk of flooding elsewhere. It conforms with CS20 (Development & Flood Risk) include appropriate sustainable drainage systems (SUDS) for the disposal of surface water, in order to avoid any increase in flood risk or adverse impact on water quality.

92. The proposals are consistent with TC17 and TC26 of the Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan 2010 on the grounds there are overriding planning benefits of providing the taxi layby here and there is no significant harm to the environment, biodiversity, visual amenity and functioning of the Corridor. There is little or no harm to the visual amenity of the area given the dominance of the existing car park areas and the small extension to the existing hardstanding area of the existing car park. The opportunity for some simple landscaping would comfortably mitigate this negligible impact.
93. The proposals are in accordance with Local Plan to 2030 including policy ENV2 (The Ashford Green Corridor) as it protects the green corridor it is compatible with, or ancillary to the existing uses within them, and it has been demonstrated that the proposal would not harm the overall environment, biodiversity, visual amenity, movement networks or functioning of the Green Corridor. It also delivers overriding benefits for the local taxi service. The proposals are also in accordance with ENV6- (Flood risk), ENV9 (Sustainable Drainage) and COM2 (Recreation, Sport, Play and Open Areas)
94. The proposals are in accordance with LE11 of Local Plan 2000 (Saved Policies) given its very small size between the access road and car park and its subsequent lack of practical use as open space in terms of amenity, leisure, environmental or functional, I do not consider there to be a significant impact on the quality or character of the local environment.
95. The scheme is in accordance with all Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents, the NPPF and National Planning Policy Guidance.
96. In light of the above, I broadly consider that the proposed scheme is largely in accordance with the Development Plan. Where the proposals could be are considered to be slightly contrary to the Development Plan where there are some small issues regarding elements of the scheme being contrary to the Development Plan, on grounds of loss of open space in Green Corridor and visual amenity.
97. I am satisfied that the substantial benefits of approving the application significantly outweigh the minor deficiencies of the proposal which in terms of visual amenity can easily be mitigated against. I therefore recommend this application be Permitted.

Recommendation

Permit

Subject to the following conditions and notes:

Implementation Period

1. The development in Stour Centre car park hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this decision.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Phasing

2. Within one month of the first use of the taxi layby, the 15 car parking spaces hereby approved shall be available for use unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of maintaining existing car parking levels in the town centre.

Materials

3. Full details of the permeable and impermeable paving and all kerb materials shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority within 2 months of the start of construction, and shall include all dimensions, materials, colours, specifications and suppliers.

Reason – In the interest of the visual amenity of the local area.

4. Details relating to the need and alignment of a footpath from the adjoining car park to the south shall be agreed in writing within 12 months of the start of construction

Reason – In the interest of the visual amenity of the local area.

5. Full details, of the monitoring cabinet, benches, litter bins, signs bollards, or any other above ground paraphernalia shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority within 3 months of the start of construction, and shall include all dimensions, materials, colours, specifications and suppliers.

Reason – In the interest of the visual amenity of the local area.

Soft Landscaping

6. Within 6 months of the commencement of development full details of a soft landscape works for the area around the taxi layby and car park extension shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The full details of any such soft landscape shall include;
- a) A planting plan
 - b) Details of species and size of any street trees together with any tree infrastructure including tree pits, sub base foundations; grilles and guards;
 - c) Written specifications (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment)
 - d) Schedules of any plants noting species, plant sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate;
 - e) An implementation and planting programme/timetable
 - f) A landscape management plan

The soft landscaping works shall be implemented in full and thereafter maintained in accordance with the details approved by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that adequate details of the landscaping proposals are submitted in the interests of the protection and enhancement of the area.

Drainage

7. The sustainable drainage system for the disposal of the site's surface water shall be built in strict accordance with the approved details provided in the Drainage Strategy drawing 40838/2001/005 Rev A and as set out in the Surface Water Drainage Design/Strategy & Flood Risk Assessment Report containing the flood risk assessment. The system shall be provided in accordance with the approved timetable. The SUDs system shall thereafter be maintained in accordance with the approved details and shall be retained in working order until such time as the development ceases to be in use.

Reason: To ensure that the sustainable drainage system is constructed to reduce the impact of the development on flooding, manage run-off flow

rates, protect water quality and improve biodiversity and the appearance of the development pursuant to Core Strategy Policy CS20 and to ensure ongoing efficacy of the drainage provisions and to protect vulnerable groundwater resources and ensure compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Flood protection

8. The site shall be kept free from future development including any structures or permanent storage which could impede flood flows

Reason: This area is located within the fluvial floodplain and needs to be kept clear to allow for floodplain storage and the movement of flood flows across the site.

Permitted Development

9. Notwithstanding the provisions of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (or any Order revoking or re-enacting that Order) (with or without modification) no development falling within Schedule 2, Part 12 Class A, sections A (a) and (b) of this Order shall be carried out without the prior written approval of the local planning authority.

Reason: In order that the Local Planning Authority can control any further development within the floodplain and to safeguard the character and appearance of the Green Corridor.

Construction

10. Prior to the commencement of development, an outline Construction Management Plan and outline Code of Construction Practice shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved plan and practise shall be implemented during the course of construction.

Reason: To ensure provision of adequate arrangements for construction vehicles and in the interests of highway safety and to protect the local amenity.

11. No construction activities shall take place outside the hours of 0730 to 1800 hours Mondays to Fridays excluding bank and public holidays and no construction activities shall take place at all on Saturdays, Sundays and bank and public holidays unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the amenity of local residents.

12. The removal of the existing entrance car park barrier, sign or any other associated equipment deemed to no longer be required for the use and operation of the taxi bay or car park extension within the next 5 years, shall be removed and the ground made good unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the visual amenities of the local area.

Compliance with approved plans

13. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the plans listed in the section of this decision notice headed Plans/Documents approved by this decision and notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (or any order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification).

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with the approval and to ensure the quality of development indicated on the approved plans is achieved in practice.

14. The development shall be made available for inspection, at a reasonable time, by the local planning authority to ascertain whether a breach of planning control may have occurred on the site (e.g. as a result of departure from the plans hereby approved and/or the terms of this permission).

Reason: In the interests of ensuring the proper planning of the locality and the protection of amenity and the environment, securing high-quality development through adherence to the terms of planning approvals, and ensuring community confidence in the planning system.

Note to Applicant

1. Any development or new tree planting within the 3.5 metres either side of the centreline of a public sewer shall be discussed with Southern Water and all existing infrastructure shall be protected during construction works.
2. Working with the Applicant

In accordance with paragraphs, 186 and 187 of the NPPF Ashford Borough Council (ABC) takes a positive and proactive approach to

development proposals focused on solutions. ABC works with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner by;

- offering a pre-application advice service,
- as appropriate updating applicants/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application
- where possible suggesting solutions to secure a successful outcome,
- informing applicants/agents of any likely recommendation of refusal prior to a decision and,
- by adhering to the requirements of the Development Management Customer Charter.

In this instance;

- The applicant was informed/ advised how the proposal did not accord with the development plan, that no material considerations are apparent to outweigh these matters and provided the opportunity to amend the application or provide further justification in support of it.
- The application was considered by the Planning Committee where the applicant/agent had the opportunity to speak to the committee and promote the application.

Background Papers

All papers referred to in this report are currently published on the Ashford Borough Council web site (www.ashford.gov.uk) . Those papers relating specifically to this application may be found on the [View applications on line](#) pages under planning application reference 17/00713/AS.

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