

Agenda Item	A7
Application Number	25/01140/FUL
Proposal	Installation of Air Source Heat Pumps and associated enclosure, removal of redundant plant, construction of new enclosure to house packaged plant and new air handling unit, installation of a new heat pump gantry enclosure and upgrades to the Building Energy Management Systems and associated development.
Application site	Ashton Memorial and Butterfly House Williamson Park Quernmore Road Lancaster Lancashire LA1 1UX
Applicant	Lancaster City Council (Property)
Agent	Cleo Jefferies
Case Officer	Mr Anthony Foster
Departure	No
Summary of Recommendation	Approve with conditions

(i) Procedural Matters

This form of development would normally be dealt with under the Scheme of Delegation. However, the application site is owned by Lancaster City Council, and as such the application must be determined by the Planning Committee.

1.0 Application Site and Setting

- 1.1 Williamson Park is a Grade II listed park and garden (List Entry Number: 1000942) located to the east of Lancaster city centre on steeply sloping landscape, overlooking Lancaster and Morecambe Bay. It is a formal park established in the late 19th century, which originated from a sandstone quarry. Today, the Park is one of the top attractions in Lancaster and stretches across 54 acres of parkland with woodland walks, play areas and views to the Fylde Coast, Morecambe Bay and the Lake District fells and mountains.
- 1.2 The Ashton Memorial is a Grade I listed structure (List Entry Number: 1288429) built between 1906-09 in memory of Lord Ashton's former wife and it was designed to emphasize Lord Ashton's wealth and importance at the time. The Memorial is a popular visitor attraction and event space housing community events, concerts, and educational programs, as well as weddings and private events, and offering extensive views of the surrounding area.
- 1.3 The Butterfly House (former Palm House), which is adjacent to the Memorial, is a Grade II listed building (List Entry Number: 1195061) built early 20th century as part of further improvement works in the park funded by Lord Ashton. Over the years, it has served as an educational facility, helping

to engage visitors with the natural world. The building currently serves as an indoor exhibit featuring a variety of butterfly species, Koi carp, tortoises etc in a tropical environment and is a popular attraction for family visits, school trips, and events.

1.4 The site is located within the Williamson Park Conservation Area. The site is designated (by the Local Plan) under the Williamson Park Local Landscape Designation and an area of designated Open Space, Recreation and Leisure.

1.5 The site is located within the defined Urban Area boundary.

2.0 Proposal

2.1 The application is for the construction of a compound housing seven air source heat pumps (ASHPs). The installation would be sited in an area with existing heavy planting and adjacent hedgerow on land which is slightly lower than an existing nearby footpath. A trench linking pipework would be dug to a new Air Handling Unit (AHU) enclosure above an existing stone wall and faced in fretted Corten steel constructed on the east side of the Butterfly House. This would replace existing poor quality annexes structures used for staff and plant. The installation would link to the Ashton Memorial using existing pipework, where proposed new radiators are replacing existing. The slab floor of the Butterfly House would be lifted and re-laid following repair of replacement of ducting for the hot-air blowers which heat the building.

2.2 The proposed works are as follows:

- Removal of an existing small lean to extension and redundant plant on the rear of the Butterfly House.
- A new enclosure to the rear of the Butterfly House to host a packaged plant system and new air handling unit.
- A new heat pump gantry enclosure positioned behind the existing hedge opposite the Butterfly House.
- Replacement of the below ground pipework connecting the two buildings.

3.0 Site History

3.1 A number of relevant applications relating to this site have previously been received by the Local Planning Authority. These include:

Application Number	Proposal	Decision
25/01441/LB	Listed building application for the installation of Air Source Heat Pumps and associated enclosure, removal of redundant plant, construction of new enclosure to house packaged plant and new air handling unit, installation of a new heat pump gantry enclosure, installation of new radiators, emitters, replacement of the existing pipework distributions, upgrades to the Building Energy Management Systems.	Pending consideration
25/01181/LB	Listed building application for a replacement platform lift and replacement of lift railing with glazed balustrade.	Pending consideration
24/01046/PRENG2	Pre application advice on decarbonisation works to include removal of boilers, installation of air source heat pumps.	Advice Given

4.0 Consultation Responses

4.1 The following responses have been received from statutory and internal consultees:

Consultee	Response
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Conservation Team	No objection - Conclude that there would be minor harm to the setting of the listed buildings and to the Registered Park and Garden caused by the new enclosure. This harm would be mitigated by the location within existing planting and behind a mature hedge. The new AHU enclosure is more impactful and would cause minor harm to the Grade II Butterfly House, but this is lessened as it is sensitively designed and replaces poor quality existing buildings. The new radiators are considered to be appropriate and would cause no harm to the Grade I Ashton Memorial. This harm is likely to be justified by the public benefits of providing a more sustainable, low energy heating system for these listed buildings, which are for the use and enjoyment of the wider community.
Environmental Health	No response at the time of compiling this report.
Property Services	No response at the time of compiling this report.
Climate Change Team	No response at the time of compiling this report.
The Gardens Trust	Objection - We have concerns about the siting and buildability of the Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) gantry and enclosure in the proposed position near the summit and in the setting of the Ashton Memorial and Butterfly House. However we support the Council's overall objective in securing more sustainable energy solutions
Historic England	No objection
County Archaeology	No objection - Recommend that a planning condition requiring all ground disturbance works are accompanied by an appropriate scheme of archaeological monitoring and recording, with a contingency plan in place in case of the unexpected discovery of significant remains.
Tree Protection Officer	No objection - if the trees are to be felled there would be a duty to replant. If works are to take place within the root protection areas, this must be carried out in line with the latest NJUG guidelines.

4.2 The following responses have been received from members of the public:

- No responses received

5.0 Analysis

5.1 The key considerations in the assessment of this application are:

- Principle of development
- Design and impact on designated heritage assets
- Noise and Residential Amenity
- Open Space
- Trees

5.2 **Principle of Development** National Planning Policy Framework section 2 (Achieving sustainable development) Strategic Policies and Land Allocations DPD Policy SP1 (Presumption in favour of sustainable development); Development Management DPD Policies DM14 (Proposals involving employment land and premises); DM30a (Sustainable Design and Construction), DMCCCH1 (Retrofit of buildings of traditional construction for energy efficiency), DMCCCH2 (Micro-renewables in the setting of heritage assets) and DM53 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation).

5.2.1 In seeking to address climate change and the promotion of renewable and low carbon energy the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states at paragraph 161 that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate. Paragraph 167 of the NPPF requires local planning authorities to give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic (including through installation of heat pumps where these do not already benefit from permitted development rights). Where the proposals would affect conservation areas, listed buildings or other relevant designated heritage assets, local planning authorities should also apply the policies set out in section 16 of the NPPF.

- 5.2.2 Lancaster City Council declared a climate change emergency in January 2019 and is committed to reducing its own carbon emissions to net zero by 2030, while supporting the district in reaching net zero by 2050. The Council Plan for 2024-2027 sets out the council's priorities and ambitions and a strategic vision for its services with the climate change emergency being one of four key themes. Lancaster City Council has been recognised as the best performing district council in the country for climate action. As part of the overarching Council ambition to reach net zero targets a partial review of the Local Plan was undertaken and adopted 22 January 2025. The new climate emergency policies in the updated local plan put an emphasis on development both mitigating and adapting to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- 5.2.3 As set out in policies DM30a and DM53, the Council is committed to supporting the transition to a lower carbon future and will seek to maximise the renewable and low carbon energy generated in the district where this energy generation is compatible with other sustainability objectives. Accordingly, the Council (as local planning authority) will support proposals for renewable and low carbon energy schemes, including ancillary development, where the direct, indirect, individual and cumulative impacts are, or will be made, acceptable with particular reference to the criteria I. – IV. (scale, siting, design, biodiversity, heritage and noise matters) set out in Policy DM53. Policy DMCCCH1 refers specifically to the retrofit of buildings of traditional construction for energy efficiency and policy DMCCCH2 refers to micro-renewables in the setting of heritage assets and advocates that harm should be avoided to the significance of the asset via its setting, through sensitive design.
- 5.2.4 Emissions are released as a direct result of the Council's activities, which includes the use combustible fuel for heating and electricity. The Council has secured external funding for major corporate decarbonisation and renewable energy projects. In 2022 the Council developed a Building Energy Decarbonisation Plan (BEDP) detailing what appropriate measures would be needed to decarbonise each of its buildings. The Council's Plan and the BEDP are material planning considerations in the determination of this application despite holding no planning policy weight. The BEDP analysed 18 buildings within the Council stock, with one being The Storey which is assessed as being the third most polluting council building regarding carbon emissions. The local planning authority has supported a number of the Council's climate adaptation and emission reduction projects where planning permission has been required, including Salt Ayre Leisure Centre (SALC), CityLab and Burrow Beck Solar Farm.
- 5.2.5 The submission sets out that the Council secured £1.89M from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) following a successful bid in 2024. The funding will contribute towards the costs of decarbonising the heating systems at Williamson Park and two other sites (City Lab and The Storey), with completion required by March 2026. The gas boilers have reached end of life.
- 5.2.6 The proposed ASHPs which are part of a package of measures proposed for Williamson Park, will contribute to the decarbonisation of the building and to both local and national climate mitigation targets and clearly supports the Council's climate change agenda. The principle of the development is therefore considered to be acceptable. However, there are a number of specific matters that also need to be taken into consideration. These are discussed in the sections below.
- 5.3 **Design and impact on designated heritage assets** National Planning Policy Framework Chapter 2 (Achieving sustainable development), Chapter 16 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment); Strategic Policies and Land Allocations DPD Policy SP7 (Maintaining Lancaster District's Unique Heritage), Development Management DPD Policies DM29 (Key Design Principles), DM30a (Sustainable Design and Construction), DM37 (Development affecting Listed Buildings), DM38 (Development affecting Conservation Areas), DM39 (The Setting of Designated Heritage Assets) DM53 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation), DMCCCH1 (Retrofit of buildings of traditional construction for energy efficiency) and DMCCCH2 (Micro-renewables in the setting of heritage assets)
- 5.3.1 In accordance with the Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act, when considering any application that affects a Listed Building, a Conservation Area or their setting, the local planning authority must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the heritage asset or its setting. This is reiterated by the heritage policies of the Local Plan and the Framework.

At a local level policy SP7 seek to protect and enhance Lancaster's Listed Buildings and historic environment. Policy DM37 sets out that proposals affecting Listed Buildings should conserve and, where appropriate enhance those elements which contribute to its significance. Policy DM37 also advises that the Council will support proposals that seek to reduce the carbon footprint of a Listed Building provided that it does not harm elements that contribute towards the significance of the Listed Building. Policy DM38 sets out that development within Conservation Areas will only be permitted where it has been demonstrated that proposals respect the character of the surrounding built form and its wider setting in terms of design, siting, scale, massing, height and the materials used. Policy DM38 also seeks to ensure that proposals will not result in the loss or alteration of features which contribute to the special character of the building and area. Policy DM39 expects new development to preserve or enhance the setting of heritage assets.

5.3.2 Policy DMCC2 gives consideration to micro-renewables in the setting of heritage assets and offers support where such proposals demonstrate they are consistent with the energy hierarchy by firstly reducing energy demand in the building, secondly increasing energy efficiency, and finally looking to generate renewable energy. Such proposals should avoid harm to the significance of the asset via its setting, through sensitive design including appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures.

5.3.3 Policy DM37 states that the Council will support proposals that seek to reduce the carbon footprint of a Listed Building provided that it does not harm elements that contribute towards the significance of the Listed building. Proposals involving the installation of renewable energy equipment on a Listed Building will be permitted where it conserves those elements which contribute to its significance and that all of the following criteria have been addressed as part of the design and access statement / heritage statement:

- V. The energy efficiency of the Listed Building itself has first been appraised and suitable measures, which will not affect its significance, have already been undertaken;
- VI. Locations other than on a Listed building have been considered and dismissed as being impracticable;
- VII. There is no irreversible damage to the historic fabric;
- VIII. The locations of the equipment on the Listed building would not detract from elements that contribute towards its significance, either when viewed in close proximity or from a distance; and
- IX. The impact is minimised through design, choice of material and colours.

5.3.4 Taking each of the criterion in turn:

- V. Both Ashton Memorial and Butterfly House have been appraised as part of the Building Energy Decarbonisation Plan, and a series of measures are recommended for the buildings including variable speed pumps, increasing the size of radiators to accommodate lower flow temperatures and replacing the boiler with either air source heat pumps. Overall, the Building Energy Decarbonisation Plan provides a comprehensive package of measures to reduce energy use at Williamson Park which is in line with the guidance from Historic England.
- VI. As the proposed decarbonisation relates directly to Listed Buildings the location of the measures proposed has been carefully considered. The ASHPs will be located away from both the Butterfly House and the Ashton Memorial and screened by hedging in line with pre-application discussions. While the new AHU plant enclosures would be larger than existing structures, the scale is still lower than the listed building's masonry east wall and the fretted Corten panels would provide a simple yet welcome decorative element.

There would be minor harm to the setting of the listed buildings and to the Registered Park and Garden cause by the new enclosure. This harm would be mitigated by the location within existing planting and behind a mature hedge.

- VII. The external plant room has been designed to use existing openings, where possible. The submission states that the ASHPs could be removed when no longer required. However, whilst they may be time limited by the longevity of their technology, no indication as to the likely lifespan of the units or possible timescale for their removal is given. In practical terms, it is likely that the ASHPs would be in place for a number of years.

A condition is recommended which requires the removal of the ASHPs when they cease to be operational. This helps limit any potential long term harm to the existing historic fabric of the identified heritage assets.

VIII. The siting of the proposed equipment has been carefully considered to ensure that the potential impact upon the more significant elements of the heritage asset are not compromised. For example locating the ASHPs away from the listed structures and the provision of suitable screening to elements which are located directly adjacent to the listed structures.

IX. The application proposes to remove the existing unsympathetic lean-to structures to the Butterfly House and its replacement with a new AHU enclosure all ductwork connecting into the existing openings on the back-of-house elevation of the Butterfly House. The outer skin of the screening enclosure outer is proposed to be made of Corten metal panels with a fretted pattern. The pattern is inspired by the Park's benefactor Lord Ashton's association with linoleum and linoleum patterns and draws inspiration from the Memorial and Butterfly House plan layout.

It is also proposed for the stone wall section to match the height of the adjacent wall, to provide visual consistency. The existing stone coping is to be removed and replaced at the new level. The enclosure height is designed to conceal the existing high level building aperture utilised for Extract. Although the height of the proposed enclosure is greater than the existing lean-tos to be replaced, making use of the existing aperture and therefore negating the need for additional penetrations into the historic fabric will overall have a lesser negative impact on the heritage asset.

5.3.5 Policy DM38 states that any development proposals and / or alterations to buildings, features and open spaces in Conservation Areas should preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas. Strengthening the criteria detailed above in policy DM37.

5.3.6 Overall, it is considered that there would be minor harm to the setting of the listed buildings and to the Registered Park and Garden caused by the new enclosure. This harm would be mitigated by the location within existing planting and behind a mature hedge. The new AHU enclosure is more impactful and would cause minor harm to the Grade II Butterfly House, but this is lessened as it is sensitively designed and replaces poor quality existing buildings. The identified harm is likely to be justified by the public benefits of providing a more sustainable, low energy heating system for these listed buildings, which are for the use and enjoyment of the wider community.

5.3.7 With regard to impacts on buried archaeology, the potential for the ASHP compound to impact upon buried remains has been mitigated through the use of screw piling. The erection of a security fence around the compound, the excavation of a service trench from the compound to the rear of the Butterfly House, and the excavation of a service trench from the new GMT to the Ashton Memorial all have potential to disturb archaeological remains (dependent upon their depth). Conversely, the new works to the rear of the Butterfly House are in an area which has already been disturbed by existing structures so do not have the same potential for early remains.

5.3.8 A planning condition is recommended requiring all ground disturbance works to be accompanied by an appropriate scheme of archaeological monitoring and recording, with a contingency plan in place in case of the unexpected discovery of significant remains.

5.3.9 Given the above the scheme is considered to be in accordance with the wider aspirations of Policies SP7, DM37, DM38 and DMCCH2.

5.4 **Noise and residential amenity** National Planning Policy Framework Section 8 (Promoting healthy and safe communities); Development Management DPD Policy DM29 (Key Design Principles)

5.4.1 Paragraph 200 of the NPPF sets out that planning decisions should ensure that new development can be integrated effectively with existing surrounding businesses to ensure that appropriate standards of amenity can be achieved for surrounding uses and occupants. Likewise, existing

businesses and facilities should not have unreasonable restrictions placed on them as a result of development permitted after they were established. This is known as the 'agent of change' principle.

5.4.2 The proposed ASHPs will produce noise whilst in operation. The ASHPs are to be located sufficiently enough away from any adjoining occupiers to ensure that any potential impact upon neighbouring amenity is minimised.

5.4.3 A noise assessment has been undertaken which has established existing background noise levels and has assessed the resultant perceived impact of the ASHPs. The submitted assessment concludes that there is no requirement for noise attenuation measures. There is no evidence before officers to disagree with the conclusions of the assessment. Accordingly, the proposal is considered to comply with the Framework and local planning policies in this regard.

5.5 **Open Space National Planning Policy Framework Section 2 (Achieving sustainable development) and Section 8 (Promoting healthy and safe communities); Strategic Policies and Land Allocations DPD Policies SP1 (Presumption in favour of sustainable development) and SC3 (Open Space, Recreation and Leisure); Development Management DPD Policies DM27 (Open Spaces, Sports and Recreational Facilities) and DM29 (Key Design Principles).**

5.5.1 The site is located within an area of Open Space (Parks and Recreation typology), which policies SC3 and DM27 seek to protect. The site is open to the public and is also used to host outdoor events and wedding ceremonies.

5.5.2 Policy SC3 states that existing open space identified for recreation, environmental and/or amenity value will be protected from inappropriate development. Policy DM27 resists the loss of Open Space unless:

- I. An assessment has been undertaken to demonstrate that it is surplus to requirements;
- II. An assessment has been undertaken to demonstrate that it no longer has an economic, environmental or community value, which shall be evidenced based and include consultation with key stakeholders and the local community;
- III. An assessment of the environmental, climate mitigation and climate adaptation value has taken place;
- IV. The loss resulting from development would be replaced by equivalent or better, high quality provision in a suitable location;
- V. The development is for alternative open space, sports and recreation provision, the benefits of which clear outweigh the loss.

Policy DM27 goes on to say that '*development proposals that are adjacent to designated open spaces, sports and recreational facilities will be required to incorporate design measures that ensure that there are no negative impacts on amenity, landscape value, ecological value and functionality of the space. The Council will only permit development that has identified negative impacts on open space, sports and recreational facilities where appropriate mitigation measures or compensation measures have been provided*'.

5.5.3 The submission includes an Open Space Assessment which acknowledges that the proposal would result in the reduction of the area of gardens to accommodate the ASHP's. The Assessment also acknowledges that the local value of the site will be reduced and that the lost Open Space would not be replaced. This does amount to a conflict with policies SC3 and DM27.

5.5.4 However, it is considered that the installation and planting (for mitigation) would impact only a very small portion of the open space when taken in context with the wider open space allocation. Nor would the replacement hedgerow planting detract from the character and appearance of the designated Open Space. Given the installation will support the operation and function of facilities within the park itself, the loss of a very small part of the park would not outweigh the benefits arising from the proposal or give rise to significant harm.

5.6 **Trees (National Planning Policy Framework Section 15 (Conserving and enhancing the natural environment); Strategic Policies and Land Allocations DPD SP8 (Protecting the Natural**

- 5.6.1 The effect to trees and hedgerows within a development site is considered principally under DM DPD Policy 45. The Council will support the protection and incorporation of existing of trees and hedgerows which includes other natural features and encourage new planting of new trees, hedgerows and woodlands. The protection of existing trees, woodland and hedgerows will be where they positively contribute either as individual specimens or as part of a wider group to the visual amenity, landscape character and / or environmental value of the location. It is stated that new development should positively incorporate existing trees and hedgerows which is further echoed throughout the SPLA and DM DPDs.
- 5.6.2 No ancient woodlands or priority habitats were identified within the site. The submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) identifies 2no. trees and a small run of hedgerow to be removed to facilitate part of the development. The AIA also provides details for the protection of existing trees which are adjacent to the proposed scheme.
- 5.6.3 There are opportunities to provide replacement tree planting for a minimum of 6no. trees within the vicinity of the site and the wider Williamson Park. This is to be controlled by an appropriate condition.
- 5.6.4 While the proposed location of the substation and cable routing does not form part of the description of the development, the site location plan outlines the proposed location of these features. The submitted AIA does not consider the routing of these cables therefore is considered prudent to condition that an updated AIA is provided prior to any works relating to the connection of the units to the wider grid/substation, to be completed under permitted development.
- 5.6.5 Subject to the suggested conditions above, the Arboricultural Officer raises no objection to the scheme. As such, it is considered that the scheme is in accordance with policies SP8, DM44 and DM45 of the Local Plan.

6.0 Conclusion and Planning Balance

- 6.1 The proposed development will result in a low level of less than substantial harm to the character and significance of Ashton Memorial & The Butterfly House, Williamson Park. However, it is considered subject to conditions as outlined below that this identified harm is outweighed by the public benefits that the scheme entails.

Recommendation

That Planning Permission BE GRANTED subject to the following conditions:

Condition no.	Description	Type
1	Time limit	Control
2	Approved plans	Control
3	Samples of Materials to be submitted	Prior to Installation
4	Development in accordance with ASHP details set out within Noise Assessment	Control
5	Development in accordance with AIA	Control
6	Addendum AIA for proposed cabling to Sub-station	Prior to Breaking Ground
7	Archaeological Watching Brief	Prior to Breaking Ground
8	Scheme for 6no Replacement Trees	Prior to first Use
9	Removal of Units upon cessation of use.	Control

Article 35, Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015

Lancaster City Council has made the decision in a positive and proactive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development, working proactively with the applicant to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. The decision has been taken having had regard to the impact of development, and in particular to the relevant policies contained in the Development Plan, as presented in full in the officer report, and to all relevant material planning considerations, including the National Planning Policy Framework, National Planning Practice Guidance and relevant Supplementary Planning Documents/ Guidance.

Background Papers

None