

Planning, Access & Design Statement



**Development of a Tube Slide and
Associated Infrastructure**

Heaton Park, Manchester.



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Introduction

This Planning, Design and Access Statement (PDAS) has been prepared by Zip World Limited to describe the proposal for a Tube Slide to be constructed at Heaton Park, Manchester. Zip World is excited to be promoting this new activity that will supplement their existing tree-top and nets adventures.

The proposed development will add an entertaining new attraction at Heaton Park that will encourage existing users to broaden the range of their activities that they enjoy. It will also attract new visitors to the Park who are likely to explore other activities and to spend more time in the Park to enjoy its many other attractions and facilities. Importantly, it has been designed to be fully enclosed within Zip World's existing site and to respect the setting of the Listed Park designation of Heaton Park.

A fundamental aspect of the design process has been the incorporation of existing structures associated with Zip World's current operations to reduce the amount of supporting infrastructure required to construct and operate the tube slide. This approach reduces the impact of the development on existing features, minimises ecological effects, and respects the historical significance of the Park.

The following information is submitted in support of the planning application;

- An overview of Zip World
- Planning History
- Site Description
- Description of Development
- Planning Policy
- Key Planning Considerations.

In total, the application consists of:

- This Statement (Planning, Design & Access Statement).
- The planning application forms, including appropriate certificates.
- Cover letter
- Extended Ecological Assessment & Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment.
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement
- Tree Inspection Report
- Zip World Manchester (Heaton Park) Tree Map & Full Site Key
- Heritage Statement; and
- Appropriate Plans.



Zip World Overview

Zip World commenced trading in 2013, and the Company has since established itself as a leading adventure operator in the UK, with a recognisable brand in the leisure market. Zip World won international acclaim in 2013 when it opened Velocity in North Wales, the fastest zip line in the world. Since then, Zip World has brought new meaning to adventure tourism throughout the UK with the innovation of 33 products spread across nine operational sites, employing approximately 500 people.

Zip World's vision is to be a world leader in adventure tourism by creating truly innovative products with mass-market appeal. Zip World continues to grow at pace with several new sites and new product developments in the planning and build phases.

In 2022, Zip World set out its strategic plan to pivot the entire business toward a more sustainable & responsible model. Zip World is unique in that, unlike any other company in this space, it is able to provide the design, construction, inspection, maintenance and operation of many types of adventure activities, including zip wires.

Zip World's principles that are applied to the creation and expansion of any site to support our delivery strategy are summarised as:

- Place – Enhance the destination physical attributes, infrastructure and aesthetics – create an appealing and well-maintained environment that attracts visitors and supports their needs. Zip World with its specialist design team will be investing some £250,000 in the expansion of activities at Heaton Park.
- People – Focus on visitor satisfaction by providing excellent customer service, ensuring safety and offering authentic experience. Zip World will continue its experiences of customer experience at Heaton Park and continue to employ a high calibre team focused clearly on visitor experience and customer excellence.
- Product – Continuously develop and diversify the offering to cater to different visitor profiles. Having recently secured a long-term lease extension for its operations in the Park, Zip World wants to increase its presence and the number of visitors to the site.



Site Description

Zip World has operated the site in Heaton Park since 2022. Its operations include a tree top trekking course, a mini trekking course and a tree top netting course. In total these activities welcomed 50,000 participants to the site in 2023. The site employs 10 FTE (full time equivalent staff), with various roles including management, instruction, reception and maintenance.

The proposed investment by Zip World at Heaton Park is a recognition of the continuing commitment that the Company has to the location and to the attractiveness of Heaton Park as a leisure destination for the people of Manchester and the northwest of England.

The existing Zip World operation is located within the northwestern corner of Heaton Park, in close proximity to the Heaton Park Reservoir to the north, a car park to the east, Heaton Park Bowling Club to the west and woodland to the south.

The total operational area extends to some 0.6 hectares of predominantly woodland, defined by perimeter fencing (concrete post and wire mesh). The site includes the buildings and apparatus required to operate the existing Zip World facility, including:

- The reception and office building,
- The “Dutch Barn” that acts as a kitting up and briefing space; and
- A range of aerial walkways, nets and other fittings, generally made of wood, netting and ropes that form the basis of the Treetop Trek attractions.

The land slopes downwards from the eastern boundary at 105m AOD to the western boundary (85m AOD), and a small water feature is located just outside of the western boundary, that acts as an outfall for the reservoir.

The application site is located within the northwestern section of the Heaton Park Registered Park and Garden which extends to some 240ha. and was designated as Grade II by Historic England in February 1986. The registry entry number is 1000854 and provides a summary of the designation:

“A park and pleasure grounds retaining elements of schemes probably designed by William Emes and John Webb”.

The Zip World site is enclosed entirely within Heaton Park and is not accessed by the public highway. Service vehicles access the site using the internal road that links the



western entrance of the Park at St. Margaret's Road, Prestwich with Heaton Hall and Heaton Park Farm in the centre of the Park.

Zip World customers access the site by foot from surrounding residential areas, via public transport (metrolink and bus connections) and from the various car parks within Heaton Park. The closest car park to the Zip World site is the Hall Car Park, a pay and display car park with 252 spaces.

Heaton Park contains several Listed Buildings; however, due to the park's topography, vegetation, and size, they are not relevant to the application site.

Planning History

The tree-tops course at Heaton Park was originally built in 2016 and was initially operated by Tree Tops Limited.

Zip World acquired the operator and operations at Heaton Park in 2022. In summary, the key planning activity at the site has been the original permission for the tree tops attraction, and the recent (2024) permission for improved fencing around the site, which is yet to be implemented. The full schedule of planning applications and Listed Building Consent is set out below:

Application ref	Application description	Outcome & date
137852/VO/2023	City Council Development to replace the existing fence around the perimeter of the Zip World facility with new green mesh fencing to a maximum height of 4 metres	Permission granted 22/3/2024
113933/LO/2016	LISTED BUILDING CONSENT for the creation of Treetop Trek Site to include two Treetop Trek course, a net course, reception and storage building (Class D2).	Consent granted 27/10/2016
113932/FO/2016	Creation of Treetop Trek Site to include two Treetop Trek course, a net course, reception and storage building (Class D2)	Permission granted 27/10/2016



Proposed Development

The proposed development is for a new adventure activity within Zip World's current operational site within Heaton Park. The proposed development is to create a tubing experience that caters to a wide range of participants from families to thrill seekers with the opportunity to attract between some 25,000 visitors annually. The proposed development would operate in conjunction with the other three adventures offered at the site (tree top nets, full trek and mini trek) throughout the year.

In that respect this planning application does not include any new administration or support facilities. The current arrangements do not need to be expanded or remodelled to accommodate users of the tubing experience.

Customers will continue to be checked in at the reception building and will then be briefed and provided with any kit required within the "Dutch barn". From there, customers using the tube will walk to the start of the ride, as shown on Drawing **D927-DEW-A-XX-XX-DR-010-PROPOSED SITE PLAN-P08**

The proposed development will consist of a starting platform that will allow customers to use gravity to make their way down the slide using a circular 'donut' style tube that participants will sit on. The ride will consist of three different slide routes that use the natural topography to achieve the speeds required to propel customers to the bottom of the ride, using gravity only

The slide element consists of a simple timber structure that sits slightly above the ground (approx. 500mm) and is supported by a number of foundations. The layout and position of the proposed structure is set out in the following:

- **D927-DEW-A-XX-XX-DR-010-PROPOSED SITE PLAN-P08**
- **D927-DEW-A-XX-XX-DR-011-PROPOSED FOUNDATIONS PLAN-P05**
- **D927-DEW-A-XX-XX-DR-015-PROPOSED SECTIONS 1 OF 2-P01**
- **D927-DEW-A-XX-XX-DR-016-PROPOSED SECTIONS 2 OF 2-P01**

From the starting platform, three linear slides are proposed, two of which are straight at approximately **80m** and end with a 4m high raised slope that acts to slow down and stop the rider. A third slide curves around to one side at approximately **100m** and ends with a similar 4m high slope. At the bottom of each ride, the participants will be met by a Zip World staff member, who will then direct them onto the moving walkway



that will take them back to the top of the ride for a repeat trip, or to finish the experience

The footprint and alignment of the development has been selected to minimise the impact on the immediate surroundings of the tube ride, including trees and any ecological features, the effective operations of existing attractions within the site, and the impact on the wider park.

The critical elements of design of this development have been the need to use the topography of the site to achieve the necessary fall of the ride and also its placement within the existing woodland. Most of the mature trees within the southern part of the site have attachments that support the tree top trek infrastructure, and all of these will be retained. A document is submitted with the application illustrating the relationship between the existing trees used for existing infrastructure (see document Zip World Manchester (Heaton Park) Tree Map & Full Site Key).

This means that the overall appearance and wooded nature of the site will not be compromised by the development. The alignment will require the clearance of areas of bramble and invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam, which will result in an enhancement to the appearance and biodiversity of the application site.

In summary, the development has been designed to be in keeping with its environment, and to work with the landscape of the proposed development. The design of the attraction has incorporated the surrounding landscape's natural colour palette of green and brown. The ride itself is raised from the ground to have minimal impact on the wildlife and ecology of the area, and the layout has been carefully designed to navigate around trees to mitigate the need to remove trees.



Planning Policy

Introduction

The planning policy for this location is framed by National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) and the Manchester Local Plan formed of the Core Strategy 2012-2027 and extant Unitary Development Plan Policies, relevant development plans and supplementary planning guidance documents.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Achieving Sustainable Development

Paragraph 11 of NPPF states that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.

The proposed development complies with relevant Local Plan policies relating to the principle of development within Heaton Park and including those applicable to registered heritage assets.

Paragraph 8 states that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives (economic, social and environmental), which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. The proposed development will be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable taking into account the economic benefits, additional opportunities created for tourism and leisure, and by causing minimum harm to heritage and environmental features within the Park.

Building a Strong, Competitive Economy

Paragraph 85 states: "Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development."



The proposed development is supported through this policy, that will enable the existing business to expand and adapt, in the interests of economic growth and to the benefit of the wider local economy.

Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

The Heritage Statement that accompanies this application includes (at Appendix 1) a comprehensive review of the NPPF policies as they relate to this proposed development. In assessing the policy implications, paras 5.21 to 5.25 of the Heritage Statement concludes that:

“the extension of the outdoor facility and associated works can sustain the significance of the Heaton Park Registered Park and Garden. This is subject to ensuring a contextual colour palette for the proposed materials and structures”.

Manchester Local Plan

The Manchester Local Plan is formed of the Core Strategy 2012 to 2027 and extent Unitary Development Plan (UDP) policies and relevant development plans and supplementary planning documents. The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document was adopted in March 2024.

In respect of Heaton Park the critical planning policies that apply are included in the Core Strategy at Policy EN13 (Greenbelt) and in the UDP at Policy BM 13 (Leisure Improvement).

In respect of Policy EN13 the Core Strategy confirms the extent and significance of the Green Belt: Heaton Park lies within the identified boundary. The proposed development is within an already developed curtilage and will not compromise the objectives of the Green Belt.

Policy BM13 is a saved policy from the UDP:

BM13 The Council proposes to provide for an increased range of recreation and leisure-based activities at Heaton Park in a manner which is compatible with the special character of the park and which respects the amenity of adjoining residential communities. In particular, any scheme must:-

- a) take account of Policy E2.1 which relates to development in the Green Belt;*



- b) *preserve and enhance the architectural integrity and educational and cultural value of Heaton Hall and its associated features, including the historic character of the landscape.*

Heaton Park is a major strategic recreational opportunity not only for people living in Manchester but also for people in Salford, Bury, Rochdale and from further afield. The Council wishes to see a substantial improvement in the quality and range of facilities provided in the Park and also in Heaton Hall (a Grade 1 listed building). The process of revitalising the Park, and of ensuring that it achieves its full recreational potential, is likely to take many years and to involve considerable sums in both capital and revenue expenditure.

The key projects are likely to include:

- i. upgrading the golf course and introducing appropriate supporting facilities;*
- ii. restoring and bringing into beneficial use all of Heaton Hall;*
- iii. renewing and improving the landscape in each of the Park's zones;*
- iv. bringing further attractions and events to the Park that are compatible with its status;*

Heaton Park also forms the southern tip of an extensive area of open land which prevents the merging together of Whitefield, Prestwich, Middleton and North Manchester. As a result of the role it plays in this context the area is designated Green Belt. This means that only limited types of development are acceptable. The developments the Council wishes to promote will be consistent with the Park's role as Green Belt.

In respect of the Green Belt, Policy E2.1 has been superseded. The general principles of the development have been prepared to respect the Green Belt, and to ensure that the merging of the settlements in North Manchester is not compromised. In this respect the development complies with Policy BM13.

The Heritage Statement that accompanies this application has demonstrated that the location, design, arrangement and massing of the scheme does not have any adverse impacts on the integrity, cultural value or setting of Heaton Hall or the characteristics of the protected landscape.

In identifying the strategic recreational opportunity that Heaton Park brings to this part of Manchester and the wider City, the proposed Zip World development within



the context of its existing operations presents the perfect opportunity to enhance the recreational opportunities within the Park, and to bring forward a further attraction that is appropriate in its setting, in accordance with Policy BM13.

In respect of more specific heritage policies, the Heritage Statement sets out a local planning policy review. It concludes that the proposed development will preserve the special interest and significance of the Heaton Park Registered Park and Garden. It will retain the distinctive characteristics of the area including important views, general design and layout, the relationship between buildings, structures, trees and open spaces and character. The conclusion is reached that the proposed development complies with Policy EN3 of the Core Strategy.

Similarly, the Heritage Statement concludes that the proposed development conserves Heaton Park Registered Park and Garden Area and thereby Greater Manchester's distinctive identity and sense of place. The proposals have been proportionately assessed in this Heritage Statement and addresses the requirements set out in the Places for Everyone Policy JP-P2.

The overall conclusion is reached that in a policy context, the design, location and operation of the proposed development is appropriate within the setting of Heaton Park and meets the strategic intention of increasing the recreational opportunities within this part of Manchester.



Key Planning Considerations

Introduction

The design layout and operational requirements of the proposed tube slide development has been subject to an iterative process that has taken account of a series of factors relevant to this particular area of Heaton Park. Critical amongst these is the heritage context of the site and the wider Park area, the heavily wooded landscape within which it sits and also the associated ecology that can be found at this site.

In designing the scheme and finalising the arrangement these matters have been critical, and the conclusion has been reached by Zip World that in undertaking this process the outcome as set out in this planning application is the most appropriate way in which a development can be achieved that adds interest to the site, supports the economic and recreational strategies and planning policies of Manchester City Council yet which respects the historical setting within which the development is proposed.

The following section sets out in summary the key findings of the assessments that have been undertaken and also addresses other matters including transport, general sustainability considerations, construction and operational environmental management and ground conditions.



Heritage

The Heritage Statement for this application, prepared by Adapt Heritage, identifies relevant heritage assets within Heaton Park that could be affected by the proposed development. It provides an overview of the site's history, assesses the significance of the assets, and evaluates the impact of the development in line with national and local planning policies.

The assessment is based on published information, archival research, historic maps, and site visits conducted in summer 2024. The report follows best practice guidance from Historic England.

The statement suggests that the current site contributes towards the significance and special interest of the Heaton Park Registered Park and Garden. Suggesting that the Proposed Development presents a positive opportunity to improve this part of the designated area. Which has been deemed to not have a detrimental impact on the general character and appearance of the registered park and garden, with minimal visual impact.

Based on the above and supported by the assessment, the conclusion is reached that the associated works can sustain the significance of the Heaton Park Registered Park & Garden subject to ensuring a contextual colour palette for the proposed materials and structures.

Please refer to the full document for Adapt Heritage's for a detailed position.



Ecology & Biodiversity

An Extended Ecological Assessment and Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has been prepared for this application, prepared by Dave Bentley Ecology, identifies the ecological features within the proposed development site that could be affected by the project. It provides an overview of the site's ecological context, assesses the significance of the habitats and species present, and evaluates the potential impacts of the development in line with national and local environmental policies.

The assessment is based on existing ecological data, field surveys conducted in June 2024, and consultations with relevant stakeholders. The report follows best practice guidance from the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

In summary, the assessment identified that the development area has been identified by Natural England as a Priority Habitat which requires conservation. Zip World have completed a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment using the suggested tool Joe's Blooms. A planning condition has been suggested in relation to the clearing of any vegetation, logs and tree bases in respect for nesting birds and hedgehogs.

Please refer to the full document for Dave Bentley Ecology for a detailed position.



Trees

The proposed slide is located within a heavily wooded area within the northern part of Heaton Park, known as The Dell. The mature trees that contribute to the local setting are important in their own right, but also significant for the part they play in enabling the existing Zip World operations including a tree trek and netting to operate successfully.

The scheme permitted in 2016 and still operated at the site is based on attaching these features to the existing mature trees, and therefore safeguarding them and protecting them from other forms of development is critical to the success of Zip World's operations.

In determining the location and arrangement of the slide this existing arrangement has been critical. The area within the western part of the Dell has been identified in part because of the topographic arrangement which secures an appropriate gradient on the proposed development, but also because it has a less dense mature tree coverage associated with the existing facility. This has resulted in a design that can be constructed and operated from the upper part of the site to the lower area without the need to remove any of the mature trees that provide support to the tree trek.

The conclusion is reached in the ecology and heritage reports that these do not have a biodiversity of heritage significance.



Transport

Heaton Park is a major leisure attraction in Manchester and attracts many visitors from the north-west of England. In 2021 it recorded some 2.5 million visitors.

The Park is well-served by public transport. Tram stops at Bowker Vale (approx. 550m walk to Heaton park entrance) and at Heaton Park (less than 50m walk) provide a direct link with Bury to the north and is connected to the rest of the tram network (Manchester, Stockport, Rochdale etc) to the south and east.

There are a number of bus services that serve the Park, including the X35, 59, 90, 135, 149, 156, 164 and 484 buses.

The Park is well connected to the major highway network and to urban and suburban roads. The five car parks within the Park provide a total of some 730 permanent parking spaces, with an additional 1500 seasonal overflow spaces available primarily at the Lake Car park.

The Zip World site itself is not accessible directly by car, with the closest car park being Hall Car Park separated from the site by an internal service road and a landscape belt of trees.

Zip World does not hold records of the percentage of visitors that visit their site by particular modes of transport, but the understanding is that a large proportion of visitors to the Park walk from local residential areas, or use the tram or bus routes.

The anticipated number of customers to the slides will cause a significant uplift in the total number of visitors to the Park, and therefore will not place any additional pressure on the road network, car parking availability, or the public transport network.

As a result, no further measures are proposed to alter the current transport arrangements at the site.



Environmental Management

Zip World prides itself on its approach to responsible tourism, and this is reflected in the construction and operation of its attractions and sites.

A Construction Environmental Management Plan will be prepared in advance of construction commencing, to include bespoke and day-to-day measures for the effective environmental controls that are appropriate to the site and the particular development. The designers of the slide, and the principal contractors will provide a suite of information that can be used by the local planning authority, the Park Management, and by Zip World, to ensure that the development is undertaken in accordance with best practice and respecting the environmental and heritage context of the site.

Zip World is certified as a B-Corp company that enshrines environmental and sustainability measures within its operations, as well as social value contribution to local host communities.

The operation of all Zip World facilities is characterised by effective management within designated locations, in this case a Registered Park & Garden. Any deviation from this approach is detrimental to Zip World's landlords (in this case Manchester City Council) and to Zip World's operational reputation. On this basis, the company imposes strict operational controls on all of its sites, that ensure effective maintenance and management of its rides and their settings. This has been demonstrated at Heaton Park and this will continue to be the case.

Please see the Construction Management Plan and the Construction and Environment Management Plan.