
7. FULL APPLICATION – ERECTION OF WOODEN PODS FOR CAMPING AT NETTLEBEDS FARM, TOP HOUSE LANE, WINCLE, (NP/CEC/0816/0804. P4075, 12/9/2016 395031 / 365493/SC)

APPLICANT: MR RICHARD LOMAS

Site and Surroundings

Nettlebeds Farm is a working farm, situated about 1km west of Wincle and extending to around 32 hectares (79 acres), with the applicant renting a further 24 hectares (60 acres) at Swythameley and another 8 hectares (20 acres) at Adlington. It comprises a detached farmhouse with a nearby complex of modern and traditional farm buildings, which nestle into the lower valley slopes to the east of Rookery Wood. Access is via an 880m section of single track lane from Wincle and then via a further 715m long section of private track to the farm complex itself.

A Public Right of Way (PRoW) runs in a north south direction, passing through the farm yard, which then continues westwards down through Rookery/Kiss woods. The nearest neighbouring properties are Broomhill Cottage Farm 375m to the north, and Wincle Grange (Grade II Listed), sited approximately 500m to the east.

Proposal

Permission is being sought to change the use of part of an agricultural field for the erection and installation of 3 camping pods and associated works.

A decision was deferred on this application at the meeting of the Authority's Planning Committee in November, to allow members to visit the site to assess the impact of the proposed development. The report has been revised following the submission of photographic images and an indication that supplementary landscaping would be considered by the applicant. However, notwithstanding this additional information, your Officer's recommendation of refusal remains, for the same reasons.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be REFUSED for the following reasons:

- 1. By virtue of the siting, size and layout of the proposed camping pods and the engineering works required to facilitate the development on this sloping site, the proposed development would appear unduly intrusive, having an unacceptable adverse visual impact on the character of the surrounding landscape and consequently harming the valued characteristics of the National Park. The development would therefore be contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP3, L1 and RT3, saved Local Plan policies LC4 and LR3 and to policies in the National Planning Policy Framework, including the provisions of Paragraph 115 relating to development in National Parks.**

Key Issues

- Principle of development.
- Landscape and visual impact.

Planning History

- 2016 - Prior notification for the erection of an agricultural building – Accepted.

- 2015 - Part barn conversion into dwelling (retrospective application) – Approved.

Consultations

Highway Authority - No Objection

District Council - No response to date

Parish Meeting - Support - Reason: The need for farmers to diversify to maintain income for their property/farmland and to expand tourism in the area.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Paragraph 17 of the NPPF sets out core planning principles including supporting sustainable economic development and high standards of design.

Paragraph 28 states that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas and should take a positive approach to sustainable new development.

Paragraph 115 in the NPPF states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks along with the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage.

Main Development Plan Policies

Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1, 2, 3, DS1, L1, RT3

Relevant Local Plan policies: LC4, LR6, LT18

Core Strategy (CS)

GSP1, GSP2 and GSP3, jointly seek to secure national park legal purposes and duties through the conversion and enhancement of the National Park's landscape and its natural and heritage assets.

DS1 allows for leisure and tourism development in open countryside outside of the National Park's named settlements

RT3 states amongst other things, that static caravans, chalets or lodges will not be permitted.

L1 says that development must conserve and enhance valued landscape character, as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment and other valued characteristics.

Local Plan (LP)

LC4 considers design, layout and landscaping and points out that particular attention will be paid to scale, form, mass and orientation in relation to existing buildings.

LR6 requires, that where self-catering accommodation is permitted outside a settlement limit, its use will be restricted to holiday accommodation.

LT18 states that safe access is a pre-requisite for any development within the National Park.

Relevant Guidance

The Authority's Landscape Strategy and Action Plan offers further relevant guidance on the application of landscape conservation policies in the Development Plan. In this case, the landscape around the application site is characterized as 'Slopes and Valleys with Woodlands'. This is defined as an undulating, in places steeply sloping topography, with an interlocking pattern of fields and blocks of woodland both ancient and secondary. There are patches of semi-improved and acid grasslands on steeper slopes with permanent pasture in small fields.

Assessment

Principle of development

Policies within the National Planning Policy Framework are regarded as material considerations. In particular, paragraph 28 states that policy should support sustainable rural tourism that benefits businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors and which respect the character of the countryside. In this respect, the Framework supports the proposed development in principle provided it would conserve the landscape character and other valued characteristics of National Park. Within the Development Plan, Core Strategy (CS) Policy DS1 allows for leisure and tourism development in open countryside outside of the National Park's named settlements.

CS Policy RT3 relates to Caravans & Camping, setting out an approach which favours small touring camping and caravan sites, provided they are well screened. The explanatory text to the policy explores the wider characteristics of caravan and camping sites and accepts the need to improve the quality of facilities, but only where it is of a scale appropriate to the site and, crucially, the character of the landscape in which it is located. CS policy RT3 (B) is especially relevant to this case, as it confirms that static caravans, chalets or lodges will not be permitted.

The policy is quite clear on statics, chalets and lodges. However, supporting paragraph 10.26 of the Core Strategy refers to exceptions for statics, chalets and lodges and states that they may be acceptable in some locations where they are not intrusive in the landscape and can be accommodated without harm to landscape character and other valued characteristics, then structures such as camping pods could be acceptable. Consequently, there is strong justification for taking a precautionary approach over landscape impact, especially if there is no enhancement proposed.

Landscape and visual impact

The application seeks planning permission for the change of use of the land for the siting of three timber framed camping pods (and associated engineering works), to be occupied as holiday accommodation. These structures are not considered a temporary and transient use, with the camping pods being located permanently on the land and therefore the impact of the proposed change of use would be more comparable to siting static caravans.

As stated in the above text, policy RT3 (B) specifically says, that static caravans will not be permitted, while the supporting text says that, exceptionally, static caravans, chalets or lodges may be acceptable in locations where they are not intrusive in the landscape. In this case, the key issue is whether or not through effective siting, design and landscaping, this can be achieved.

The proposed camping pods and associated engineering operations, would be sited on a sloping area of open field, approximately 120 metres to the north of the main farm complex and 15m from the western margin of the field, which itself is bounded by a ribbon of mature trees. The three pods would be positioned in a line. Starting from a post and wire fence (that splits the field),

the first pod would be sited 10m from the fence, the second 11m from the first pod and the third approximately 14m from the second pod.

The pods themselves are relatively large, measuring approximately 6.8m in length x 3.48m in width x 3.2m to the highest point of the roof. Internally, the pods would incorporate 1 double bed, 1 sofa bed, mini kitchen with table and chairs, toilet, basin and cubicle shower space. In comparison, the largest pods approved at the North Lees Camp Site (NP/DDD/0215/0112), measured 4.7m in length x 2.8m in width x 2.65m to the highest point of the roof. The internal spaces of the pods at North Lees do not require the quantity of amenity space as the campsite has its own separate communal showering and toilet block. Moreover, the existing camping site at North Lees is very well screened from local vantage points and in the wider landscape.

In order to accommodate the pods on a level base, the site would require a broad amount of cutting out of the sloping field. In this case, there is no indication on the submitted plans showing what, if any, foundation/base materials would be required for this operation. Furthermore, no parking or outdoor amenity space has been included with the proposal. Access to the pods would be directly across the field from the main farm gravelled driveway, sited approximately 100m to the east of their proposed location.

One of the key characteristics of this local landscape character (as stated in the Authority's Landscape Strategy and Action Plan) is of an undulating, in places steeply sloping, topography, with an interlocking pattern of fields and blocks of woodland both ancient and secondary and patches of semi-improved and acid grasslands on steeper slopes with permanent pasture in small fields.

From this aspect, there is a PRow that runs in a north-south direction to the east of the application site. In this case, the site chosen for the pods would not be seen from the PRow until approaching the farmyard, where walkers would have a brief sight of them. The area of land the pods would occupy, is visible (at distance) from the PRow (FP3) above Spring Fields Farm, Higher Greasley to the northwest, giving an indication of the impact of the development in this location, which could be further increased through parking of vehicles, access paths and the introduction of domestic paraphernalia, such as temporary outdoor seating and barbeque and cooking areas, which can often be associated with holiday use accommodation.

Since the last committee, the applicants have submitted photo imagery from distance views across the valley in support of their proposal, indicating that the pods and associated works can be assimilated into the landscape without any adverse harm to the special qualities of the area. Additionally, they have verbally indicated they would accept a landscaping scheme to further mitigate any perceived landscape harm, should members be minded to approve the proposal.

Aside from the above, the pods would be sited within 100m of the neighbouring property's field boundary (Broomhill Cottage), where the camping pods and their associated holiday use could potentially create a harmful impact on the quiet enjoyment of their amenity, through added noise.

Other issues

The Highway Authority has raised no objections to the proposed development, as it would not affect the existing farm access/highway. In addition, the application details refer to sewage being disposed of through a septic tank. The Environment Agency's guidance on 'Water supply, wastewater and water quality' is that if connection to a public sewage treatment plant is not feasible, then a package treatment plant should be considered as a viable long-term sewerage option. In this case, should the proposal be considered acceptable in all other respects, this would need to be addressed by a revised submission or a planning condition.

Conclusion

The proposed development would be sited within an open countryside setting, where it would be visible from nearby and wider vantage points. In this location, it is considered the scheme would have a harmful impact upon the character and special qualities of the National Park, contrary to Development Plan Policies and the National Planning Policy Framework, as indicated within the above report.

In this case, your Officers have assessed the proposal against Development Plan policies, the National Planning Policy Framework, and all other material considerations and concluded that it represents a form of development that was not capable of being amended in a way which would make the scheme acceptable within the current application. Notwithstanding this, the applicant had been given the opportunity to withdraw the proposed scheme and re-submit in order to discuss and consider a possible alternative location/scheme. However, this was not forthcoming, so the recommendation for refusal still stands on the grounds set out above.

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil