

7. FULL PLANNING APPLICATION: CHANGE OF USE FROM CAMPSITE TO ALLOW THE SITING OF 6 STATIC CARAVANS, 2 PODS AND 4 TENTS ANCILLARY TO THE WIDER USE OF THE EXISTING HOLIDAY PARK; RETENTION OF EXISTING ACCESS ROAD, CONSTRUCTION OF PARKING SPACES, HARDSTANDING BASES AND ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPING, PLANTING AND DECKING at LONGNOR WOOD HOLIDAY PARK, NEWTOWN, LONGNOR, (NP/SM/0717/0699 P.2146 407103/363993 14/07/2017/TS)

APPLICANT: Mr and Mrs O’Neill

Site and Surroundings

The site is an area within the boundary of Longnor Wood Holiday Park. The site lies to the southern part of the wider holiday park area and is presently used as a campsite for tents. The remainder of the site contains wooden lodges, static caravans, pitches for touring caravans and facilities buildings

The site lies in open countryside approximately 1.7 kilometres to the south west of Longnor village. The site is situated on high ground and is well screened from views to the north and west by mature trees within Longnor Wood.

Proposal

The application proposes a change of use of an area of the holiday park that is currently used for tents to allow the siting of 6 static caravans and 2 wooden camping pods. 4 tent pitches would also be retained.

The proposal also includes operational development in the form of the construction of parking spaces and hardstanding bases for the proposed pitches as well as decking and additional landscaping.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be APPROVED subject to the following conditions / modifications:

- 1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun within three years of the date of the permission.**
- 2. The development shall not be carried out other than in complete accordance with the submitted plans subject to the following conditions / modifications:**
- 3. No external lighting without the Authority’s prior written consent.**
- 4. Landscaping to be implemented within first planting season**
- 5. Holiday occupancy restrictions**

Key Issues

- The principle of development
- Whether the visual and landscape impact of the development is acceptable.
- Economic Benefits
- Amenity considerations
- Highways Issues

History

March 2017: Application NP/DM/0217/0189 for the change of the camp site to allow the siting of 12 static caravans was refused for the following reason:

“The application proposes a form of development that is contrary to policy RT3 and would fail to achieve the National Park purpose to promote understanding and enjoyment. The proposal would therefore not represent sustainable recreation and tourism development within the National Park and is contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1 and RT3 and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.”

In consideration of the above application, it was acknowledged that the proposal would not have an adverse landscape impact given the screening that is provided by establishes woodland and the mature planting to the site boundaries. However, it was considered that replacing camping provision with static caravans would not be compatible with the National Park purpose to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the national park by the public.

After the refusal of the previous application, the applicant engaged in pre-application discussions regarding an alternative scheme for the existing camp site area. As a result of these discussions, the current scheme for a mix of static caravans, camping pods and tent pitches has been prepared and the applicant was advised that the revised scheme is considered to be acceptable in principle by officers.

Consultations

Staffordshire County Council Highways - No objections.

Fawfieldhead Parish Council – No comments received

Representations

The Authority has not received any letters of representation during the consultation period.

Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Paragraph 115 in the Framework 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.

Paragraph 17 of the Framework sets out core planning principles including supporting sustainable economic development and high standards of design taking into account the roles and character of different areas, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty within the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities.

Paragraph 28 in the Framework says that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas and should take a positive approach to sustainable new development. Planning policies should support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres.

Core Strategy and Local Plan

GSP1 seeks that any development proposal will comply with core policies so that any development in the National Park must satisfy the statutory purposes of national park designation.

GSP3 states the overarching principles for development management to be considered in all circumstances and requires that all development must respect, conserve and enhance all valued characteristics of the site and buildings that are subject to the development proposal.

L1 says that all development must conserve and where possible enhance the landscape character of the National Park, as identified by the Authority's Landscape Strategy and Action Plan.

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

RT3 discusses the principle that caravan and camping sites must conform to in order to be considered acceptable. RT3 states that Static caravans, chalets or lodges will not be permitted.

LC4 established that developments should respect, conserve and where possible enhance the landscape, built environment and other valued characteristics of the area.

Assessment

Key issue 1 and 2: Principle of Development and Landscape Impact

The proposal seeks a change of use to allow the siting of 6 timber clad static caravans, 2 wooden camping pods and the retention of four tent pitches, along with the construction of parking spaces and hardstanding bases and additional landscaping, in an area within the boundary of the existing holiday park but that is currently used for camping in tents and is distinct from the other areas of the park that are used for static caravans and touring caravans in this respect.

Policy RT3 of the Core Strategy specifically excludes the provision of new permanent static caravans, chalets and lodges within the National Park. Wooden camping pods are considered to fall within the same category of development. The proposal would therefore be contrary to policy RT3. It is acknowledged that the supporting text for policy RT3 does establish that, in exceptional circumstances, static caravans (and therefore also camping pods) may be acceptable in locations where they are not intrusive in the landscape.

In this case, it is considered that the static caravans and camping pods would have a minimal impact on the landscape given the screening that is provided by the woodland and the other mature planting to the site boundaries. The topography of the site also helps to ensure that it is not visible from distant vantage points. Additional planting is also proposed to give further screening to the static caravans. It is also noted that the static caravans would be positioned to the northern part of the site, with the tents retained to the southern side nearest the wider holiday park boundary. It is therefore acknowledged that the proposed static caravans and pods would

not be intrusive in the landscape and there is no direct conflict with policies L1 and LC4 in this respect.

However, it must be stressed that the absence of landscape harm does not automatically mean that it is appropriate to make an exception to policy RT3. In assessing whether or not it is appropriate to make an exception to policy RT3, it is important to also consider the proposal in the context of the wider development plan objectives and the National Park statutory purposes to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the national park by the public.

The previous application, which proposed replacing all the tent camping on this part of the holiday park with static caravans, was considered to be unacceptable as it was deemed to not be compatible with the National Park purpose to promote understanding and enjoyment and would conflict with the wider development plan objectives. The previous proposal would have resulted in all the existing low-key facilities that encourage contact with nature on the application site (i.e. the camp site) being replaced with a much more formal type of accommodation and a high number of static caravans. This would have involved a regimented and formal site layout. As the previous proposal would have represented a move away from the lower key, more informal expectations that the development plan seeks to achieve and a move towards the holiday park model that it seeks to avoid, there was a conflict with the aims of the development plan beyond just landscape impact.

The amended scheme now seeks a mix of static caravans, wooden pods and tent pitches. The number of static caravan pitches has been reduced from 12 to 6. Moreover, the static caravans would be sited closest to the main body of the existing holiday park, where the existing static caravans are, and the tent pitches would remain in the most remote part of the site closest to its boundaries. It is considered that there is now an appropriate mix of type of accommodation and the retention of the tent pitches, which would be separated from the additional static caravans by new planting, is welcomed. Whilst there is still an element of replacing the most basic type of holiday accommodation provision in the form tent pitches with the more formal static caravans, it is considered that the proposal now strikes a fair compromise between the growth of the holiday park business (as discussed further below) and the protection of National Park Purposes. It is considered that the proposal now justifies an exception to policy RT3 and is acceptable in principle.

Key Issues 3: Economic Benefits

The proposal would deliver economic growth in a rural area and this carries weight in favour of proposal and is supported by the NPPF. The applicant has submitted information relating to the local businesses that are both directly and indirectly supported by the holiday park. It is acknowledged that the park is important to the local economy.

Furthermore, the supporting information establishes that replacing some of the existing tent camping with static caravans and camping pods would extend the season of use for this area of the holiday park. At present, the camping areas are typically used for 5 months between May and September, whereas the existing statics operate between March and January. The replacement of some of the existing tent camping with static caravans and camping pods would therefore clearly be of financial benefit to the holiday park business but this would also be likely to have knock-on benefits for other businesses within the National Park that rely on tourism. The proposal would also create two new part-time jobs at the holiday park.

It is therefore considered that the proposal would contribute to economic growth and this carries weight in favour of the proposal. It is acknowledged that these benefits would not necessarily outweigh other materials considerations, as was the case with the previously refused application.

However, as established above, the previous concerns in respect of conflict with National Park purposes are now considered to have been overcome.

Key Issue 4: Amenity considerations

The nearest third party properties are around 300 metres from the application site. Given this, along with the established mature planting that screens the site, it is considered that there would be no harm to the amenity of any nearby occupiers or users. Given the elevated position of the site, a condition to control outdoor lighting is recommended. Subject to such a condition, it is considered that there would be no conflict with policy LC4 in this respect.

Key Issues 5: Highway Issues

The holiday park has an established access road and this would be utilised to provide vehicular access to the application site. A new internal roadway would be created with parking for each of the pitches.

The Highway Authority has raised no concerns with the scheme. As such, whilst there may be some degree of intensification in existing levels of traffic associated with the site, this would not be to an extent that would result in harm to highway safety or efficiency. The proposal is considered to accord with policy LT18.

Conclusion

It is therefore concluded that although the proposal is contrary to policy RT3 as it includes new static caravans and lodges, there would be no landscape harm or conflict with National Park purposes in this instance for the reasons set out above. As such, it is considered that an exception to policy RT3 is justified in this instance. There are no other material considerations that would justify refusal of the application. The application is therefore recommended for approval.

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