

10. FULL APPLICATION - RETROSPECTIVE APPLICATION FOR CHANGE OF USE FROM AGRICULTURAL LAND TO A CARAVAN SITE (10 PITCHES) – GREENCROFT FARM, WEADDOV LANE, MIDDLETON-BY-YOULGRAVE (NP/DDD/0820/0753, TS)

APPLICANT: MR ROBERT WIGGLEY

Summary

1. The application seeks retrospective full planning permission for the use of part of a field to site ten touring caravans. The proposed use of the agricultural field as a caravan site would result in harm to the landscape character of this area of the National Park. The development would also cause harm to the character and significance of the Middleton-by-Youlgrave Conservation Area. The benefits of the application in providing an additional income stream for the farm business and providing additional visitor accommodation do not outweigh the harm that would be caused to the protected landscape and Conservation Area. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

Site and surroundings

2. Greencroft Farm is a working beef farm that lies on the southern side of Middleton-by-Youlgrave village. The farm comprises of a range of modern agricultural buildings and associated land. Planning permission has recently been granted for a new farm worker's dwelling. The application site is the southernmost part of the agricultural field that lies immediately to the south of the farm buildings and the site of the approved new dwelling.
3. The site is within the Middleton Conservation Area and is part of a field that is identified as being important open space within the Conservation Area Appraisal.

Proposal

4. The application seeks full planning permission for change of use of the agricultural field to allow the siting of ten touring caravans. The caravan site has already been brought into use and the proposal therefore seeks retrospective planning permission.
5. The caravan pitches have electricity hook-up points, water supply points and there is a waste water disposal collection tank on site. No toilet or washing facilities are proposed or included in the application.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be REFUSED for the following reason:

1. The proposed development would result in a form of development that would be visually prominent and harmful to the valued landscape character and scenic beauty of the National Park. It would result in significant harm to landscape character contrary to policies L1, RT3, DMR1 and DMC3 and the guidance contained within section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. The proposal would result in the loss of an area of open space that is identified as being of importance to the character and significance of the Conservation Area. The proposal would cause harm to the character and significance of the Conservation Area, contrary to policies L3, DMC3, DMC8 and the guidance within

section 16 of the NPPF/

Key Issues

- The principle of development
- Impact on the landscape character and special qualities of the National Park
- Highways Impacts
- Amenity impacts
- Economic benefits

History

There is no planning history for the site that is directly relevant to the current application.

Consultations

6. **Middleton and Smerrill Parish Council** – *“Council supports this application which gives a working farm an extended income stream to help keep sustainable. It welcomes the provision for native species screening.”*
7. **Derbyshire County Council Highway Authority** – initially requested further information about sightlines from the access/egress point between the caravan site and the public highway and swept path analysis to show that the access point is of suitable width and layout for the proposed use. Subsequently confirmed no objection subject to conditions to maximise visibility and to control arrival times to avoid peak hours.

Representations

8. None received

Main policies

9. Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, DS1, L1, L3, RT3, CC1
10. Relevant Development Management Plan policies: DMC3, DMC8, DMC14, DME2, DMR1, DMT3.

National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance

11. In the National Park the development plan comprises the Authority’s Core Strategy 2011 and the Development Management Policies 2019. Policies in the Development Plan provide a clear starting point consistent with the National Park’s statutory purposes for the determination of this application. It is considered that in this case there is no significant conflict between prevailing policies in the Development Plan and government guidance in the NPPF with regard to the issues that are raised.
12. Paragraph 172 of the NPPF states that *‘Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.’*

Development plan

13. Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP2 and GSP3 together say that all development in the National Park must be consistent with the National Park's legal purposes and duty and that the Sandford Principle will be applied where there is conflict. Opportunities for enhancing the valued characteristics of the National Park will be identified and acted upon and development which would enhance the valued characteristics of the National Park will be permitted. Particular attention will be paid to impact on the character and setting of buildings, siting, landscaping and building materials, design in accordance with the Design Guide and the impact upon living conditions of local communities. Core Strategy policy GSP4 highlights that the National Park Authority will consider using planning conditions or obligations to secure the achievement of its spatial outcomes.
14. Core Strategy policy DS1 outlines the Authority's Development Strategy.
15. Policy L1 identifies that development must conserve and enhance valued landscape character and valued characteristics, and other than in exceptional circumstances, proposals in the Natural Zone will not be permitted.
16. Policy RT3 of the Core Strategy states that small touring camping and caravan sites and backpack camping sites will be permitted, particularly in areas where there are few existing sites, provided that they are well screened, have appropriate access to the road network, and do not adversely affect living conditions.
17. CC1 sets out that developments will be expected to make the most efficient and sustainable use of land, buildings and natural resources.
18. DMC3 states that development will be permitted provided that its detailed treatment is of a high standard that respects, protects and where possible enhances the natural quality and visual amenity of the landscape, including the wildlife and cultural heritage that contribute to the distinctive sense of place.
19. DMC8 requires that applications for development in a Conservation Area, or for development that affects its setting or important views into, out of, across or through the area, should assess and clearly demonstrate how the character or appearance and significance of the Conservation Area will be preserved or enhanced.
20. DMC14 states that development that presents a risk of pollution or disturbance including soil, air, light, water or noise pollution, or odour that could adversely affect any of the following interests will not be permitted unless adequate control measures are put in place to bring the pollution within acceptable limits.
21. Policy DMR1 states that the development of a new touring camping or touring caravan site will not be permitted unless its scale, location, access, landscape setting and impact upon neighbouring uses are acceptable, and it does not dominate its surroundings.
22. Policy DMT3 sets out that development will only be permitted where a safe access that is achievable for all people can be provided in a way that does not detract from the character and appearance of the locality.
23. Policy DME2 states that farm diversification development will be permitted if there is clear evidence that the new business use will remain ancillary to the agricultural operation of the farm business, meaning that the new business use is a subsidiary or secondary use or operation associated with the agricultural unit.

Assessment

Principle

24. Policy RT3 is broadly supportive in principle of small touring caravan development. Policy DMR1 sets out that the development of a new site will not be permitted unless its scale, location, access, landscape setting and impact upon neighbouring uses are acceptable, and it does not dominate its surroundings. The proposal is for a new ten pitch site. Policy RT3 does not define “small” sites but the supporting text clarifies that sites up to 30 pitches are more likely to be acceptable, although this may be too large in many circumstances. The proposal would therefore be within what can reasonably be considered to be a small site. However, such development is only acceptable in principle when it would not have an adverse landscape impact. The impact on the landscape is therefore key to the acceptability of this type of development. The landscape impact is discussed below.

Landscape and Conservation Area Impacts

25. The site lies within a Limestone Village Farmlands area of the White Peak as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment. This is a gently undulating plateau landscape. Villages in the area tend to be strongly nucleated, and this is certainly true of Middleton village, which has a relatively compact form centred on the village square. The Middleton Conservation Area Appraisal notes the compact nature of the village.
26. The application site is within the Middleton Conservation Area, with the southern boundary of the application site also being the boundary of the Conservation Area. The field that the application site is part of is identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal as open space that is of particular townscape importance. The open agricultural character of the field therefore makes an important contribution to the character and significance of the Conservation Area. The field reinforces the agricultural character and history of the village, and also provides an important backdrop to the nucleated and compact form of development within the village.
27. The proposal would result in the encroachment of development into the undeveloped part of the field, and at its most remote part from existing development. There is a gap of about 60m between the existing agricultural buildings and the caravan site. The existing agricultural buildings are very much part of the existing nucleated form of the village. The caravan site protrudes well away from the built-up southern edge of the village, spoiling the important open space and resulting in the loss of the agricultural back drop to the southern edge of the village and blurring the nucleated form of the village.
28. Whilst the proposal does not include any permanent new buildings, the proposed use of the field for touring caravan pitches is likely to mean that caravans and cars are parked on the site for considerable periods of time. Whilst not permanent structures, the caravans would still result in a man-made intrusion into the protected landscape and identified important open space. The stationing of large and often prominently coloured vehicles would completely change the agricultural and undeveloped character of the land. Although the caravans would be removed over the winter months (if a standard condition limiting months of opening was attached to any approval), they would be present during those months of the year when greater numbers of people would be visiting and enjoying the National Park for its natural and scenic beauty.
29. The land level rises from north to south, meaning the level within the site is higher than in the built-up area of the village. This emphasises the importance that the

undeveloped field makes to the setting of the village and to the Conservation Area and landscape setting of the village. Conversely, this also serves to emphasise the harm to the landscape character and character and significance of the Conservation Area that has been caused by the introduction of a caravan site here.

30. The supporting information submitted with the application states that: *“The site is in visual proximity to the main farm buildings of Greencroft Farm which provides a very robust context for the relatively small scale caravans / motorhomes. The new farm house for the applicants will be constructed in the near future and will be a further element if built form in the vicinity of the caravan site.”* We disagree with this statement. The character of the caravan site development is very different to the agricultural nature of the existing farm buildings. The farm buildings are appropriate for this historic agricultural village. The same cannot be said of caravans, for the reasons discussed above. Furthermore, the separation distance between the farm buildings and the caravan site means that the two are not well-related, and the separation of them is emphasised by the rising land levels. Rather than being an appropriate extension to the existing built form, the caravan site has resulted in very unfortunate encroachment of development well away from the built up area of the village and into the identified important open space.
31. A landscape impact statement has also been submitted. This notes that the site is not within the Natural Zone. This is true, but the site is still afforded the highest level of landscape protection by virtue of being within the National Park. The statement goes on to refer to photographs that the statement suggests show that view of the site are generally filtered by trees.
32. In our view, the photographs (and viewing the site in person) shows that the caravans are clearly seen from the centre of the village and from other nearby viewpoints. Photograph no.2 in particular emphasises the harmful impact that the development has. It shows the caravans sitting up above the village, clearly visible and prominent, separate from the existing built edge of the village and completely eroding the undeveloped agricultural character of the identified important open space.
33. Far reaching views of the site are more limited due to the natural topography of the land in the locality. However, this does not mitigate the very clear harm that is caused to the conservation area and landscape character of the site in and around the village.
34. The application proposes new native planting to screen the site. Given the importance of the open nature of the site to both the conservation area and the landscape character of the area, the harm caused by the introduction of caravans here cannot be mitigated by new planting.
35. The development has caused harm the character of the Middleton-by-Youlgrave Conservation Area, and to the landscape character and scenic beauty of the Peak District National Park. It would therefore conflict with Core Strategy Policies RT3 and L1, DMP Policies DMR1, DMC3, DMC7 and Sections 15 and 16 of the NPPF.

Highways Impacts

36. The caravan site is accessed from Weadow Lane. The Highway Authority initially requested additional information relating to visibility from the access/egress point and swept path details to show that the access point is suitable for use by vehicles towing caravans. Additional information has since been provided. Although the visibility for vehicles existing the site onto the public highway is below the standard

for a national speed limit road, the Highways Authority have noted that vehicles speeds on the road are likely to be lower than the maximum speed limit. The Highway Authority went on to note that *“Whilst emerging visibility would appear limited, the applicant is in control of sufficient land either side of the access point and onto Weadow Lane in order to provide improvements that should alleviate highway concerns.”*

37. As such, subject to a condition to ensure that available visibility is maximised through keeping the site frontage clear of obstructions, the visibility is acceptable. The Highway Authority also recommend a condition relating to limiting the arrival and departure times of visitors. Such a condition would be difficult to enforce and is therefore not recommended.
38. Overall, given the absence of objection from the Highway Authority, it is considered that the development would not be significantly harmful to highway safety and the proposal accords with policy DMT3.

Amenity Impacts

39. Given the separation distance between the site and the nearest residential properties, it is considered that caravan site use of the size proposed is unlikely to result in significant harm to residential amenity by way of noise or other associated pollution or disturbance.

Farm Diversification and Economic Benefits

40. Supporting information submitted with the application places great weights on the benefits to the farm business, stressing that the caravan site is a form of farm diversification. The information sets out that the farm business has suffered from a TB outbreak and revenue from the caravan site has been essential to the farm business during this time.
41. We acknowledge that the caravan site is a form of farm diversification. Whilst farm diversification can often be acceptable in principle (and supported by policy DME2), this cannot be at the expense of the special qualities of the National Park. Weight is therefore given to the benefits to the farm business, but this does not outweigh the harm caused for the reasons set out further above.
42. It is also fully acknowledged that the development would also provide a facility that would help to promote the second National Park purpose of promoting understanding and enjoyment of the National Park. However, the first purpose of the National Park is to conserve the environment of the National Park. Where conflict arises between conservation and public enjoyment then greater weight must be given to conservation. The development would be significantly harmful to the natural beauty of the National Park and this harm clearly outweighs the small scale economic and recreation benefits.
43. It must also be acknowledged that although the proposal would provide additional visitor accommodation, it would harm understanding and enjoyment of the National Park by visitors to the village. The proposal would be contrary to National Park purposes and cause harm, in perpetuity, to the nationally designated landscape.
44. The difficulties to rural businesses as a result of the covid-19 pandemic are also acknowledged. Whilst the impact of the pandemic on rural businesses is fully acknowledged, assisting local businesses cannot be at the expense of significant and permanent harm to the landscape character and scenic beauty of the National Park.

45. We are working hard with rural business operators to find ways to support business in ways that are not significantly harmful to the National Park and in more appropriate ways than are proposed in this application.

Conclusion

46. The proposed expansion of the existing caravan site would result in significant harm to the landscape character of this area of the National Park. The economic and tourism benefits of the scheme have been fully considered but do not outweigh this harm. The application is contrary to policies L1, RT3, DMR1 and DMC3 and the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework. The application is recommended for refusal.

Human Rights

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

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil

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