

PLANNING STATEMENT

**SKY COTTAGE
BIDDULPH MOOR**

MAY 2021

Site Address:

Sky Cottage, Top Road, Biddulph Moor, Staffordshire, ST8 7JR

Applicant:

Mr. R. Whiston

Proposal:

Formation of Pond

Planning Statement:

Date Issued: 12th May 2021

Job Reference: RDP/2021/096

Report Prepared By:

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. R. Whiston to seek planning permission for the creation of a pond on land to the south of Sky Cottage, Top Road, Biddulph Moor.
- 1.2 The pond will be located to the west of a row of touring caravan pitches that operate from this site as a Certified Location under the Caravan and Motorhome Club. A new vehicular access and hardstanding pitches for the caravans are currently undergoing construction, pursuant to approved application SMD/2020/0646.
- 1.3 The pond will have a surface area of 1320 square metres and is intended for wildlife purposes only. No commercial use is proposed. A new Holly Hedge is to be planted along the western site boundary, set behind the visibility splays associated with the new vehicular access approved under SMD/2020/0646.
- 1.4 Some regrading of the land is proposed as part of the works to create an embankment at the southern end of the pond, and to provide a flatter area across this very gently sloping site. The extent of the alterations to land levels are shown on the section drawings accompanying the application. No retaining structures are required to facilitate the development.

2 Site Location

- 2.1 The application site lies on the eastern side of Top Road, Biddulph Moor, close to its junction with the Rudyard Road which feeds off in a southwesterly direction. The site is generally flat in nature with a very modest increase in gradient running from north to south and is seeded to grass. The landscape drops away in an easterly direction from the site, affording impressive views across the valley. The site is located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt.
- 2.2 The applicant's existing property (Sky Cottage) is located to the north of the site, with the large complex of buildings associated with Rails Farm located to the south. The carriageway of Top Road encloses the western boundary of the site. Access to the site is taken off Top Road, with consent recently granted to create a new access to serve the existing Certified Caravan site that operates from the land. To the northeast of the site are two outbuildings which have been granted consent for extensions to create a toilet block along with a holiday let (SMD/2020/0646 refers).

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application. The Development Plan for this area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) of which the following policies are considered to be of relevance:

3.2 Policy SS10 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Other Rural Areas Strategy' and states that these areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. The policy goes on to state that these objectives will be achieved by, amongst others:

- Giving priority to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requiring all development proposals to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape
- Encouraging measures which protect and enhance the biodiversity, geological resources and heritage of the District

3.3 Policy SS10 goes on to confirm that strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

3.1 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Design Considerations' and states that all development shall be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and

heritage of the area in line with the Council's Design Guide SPD. In particular, new development should (amongst other requirements):

- be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area
- be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance
- protect the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, visual impact, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour and light pollution

3.4 Policy DC3 of the Local Plan relates to 'Landscape and Settlement Setting' and states that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by:

1. Resisting development which would lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character or the setting of a settlement or important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence
2. Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character, and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence

3. Supporting developments which conserve or enhance the biodiversity qualities of any natural or man-made features within the landscape, such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows, walls, watercourses or ponds
4. Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape
5. Ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the Peak District National Park.

3.5 Policy NE1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Biodiversity and Geological Resources' and states that the biodiversity and geological resources of the District and neighbouring areas will be conserved and enhanced by positive management and strict control of development by (amongst other measures):

- Expecting all development where possible seeks to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. In circumstances where adverse impacts are demonstrated to be unavoidable, developers will be required to ensure that impacts are appropriately mitigated, with suitable compensation measures towards loss of habitat used only as a last resort where there is no alternative. Where any mitigation and compensation measures are required, they should be appropriately scheduled and managed according to the nature, size and scale of the development so as to minimise impacts that may disturb protected or important habitats and species

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019)

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out policies, *inter-alia*, in respect of safeguarding the Green Belt, and securing a net gain in biodiversity. The content of the NPPF has been taken into account in the preparation of this Planning Statement and is referred to in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

Planning for Landscape Change SPG (2000)

- 4.2 The Planning for Landscape Change SPG is a County Wide assessment of landscape character and confirms the site to be located within the Gritstone Uplands character area. The content of the SPG is a material consideration in the determination of this application and is referred to in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

5 Planning Assessment

Impact on the Green Belt

- 5.1 The application seeks planning consent for the formation of a wildlife pond on a regularly mowed field that forms part of the applicant's Certificated Caravan Site under the Caravan and Motorhomes Club. The site is located within the Green Belt.
- 5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) seeks to protect the Green Belt and seeks to restrict new development unless it falls into one a limited number of explicit categories. Paragraph 146 of the NPPF lists some of those categories of development, confirming that engineering operations are not inappropriate in the Green Belt, provided that they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
- 5.3 Paragraph 134 of the NPPF confirms that the Green Belt serves five purposes, as follows:
- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
 - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
 - c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
 - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 5.4 The proposed wildlife pond does not result in any conflict with the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt, as it does not entail any form of built development in the form of buildings or hardstandings. Some regrading works are proposed within the site, along with excavation works to

form the pond itself, but the resultant changes in land level across the site will be modest, and will be graded into the existing landscape, thereby avoiding a need for any retaining structures.

5.5 Consequently, the proposed development will not derive any harm to the openness of the Green Belt or give rise to any conflict with the five purposes of including land within it. The proposed wildlife pond will therefore constitute an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 146(b) of the National Planning Policy Framework and policy SS10 of the Local Plan.

5.6 In support of these conclusions, I draw attention to the Local Authority's grant of consent for a wildlife pond on land at New House Farm, Bagnall (SMD/2019/0408). I draw favourable comparisons between that scheme and the submitted proposal, in that both involved the formation of ponds on land within the Green Belt, and in the case of the New House Farm application, the pond was nearly double the size of the submitted proposal at some 2,500 square metres (1320 square metres proposed). In approving that application, it was concluded by the Local Authority that:

"The development certainly constitutes an engineering operation. Although there are changes in land levels, with parts being raised, these are not dramatic and will blend and merge with the existing general land profiles so that it may reasonably be concluded that openness will be preserved".

5.7 In light of the similarities between the two schemes and the planning policy constraints that they share, I submit that the approval of application SMD/2019/0408 supports the contention that the submitted proposal amounts to an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt.

Impact on the Landscape

- 5.8 The application site forms part of the Gritstone Uplands Character Area as defined within the Planning for Landscape Change SPG. The SPG identifies the characteristic landscape features of the character area as comprising of:

“Upland ridge landform with small steep side valleys; extensive areas of broadleaved woodland; small steep sunken lanes; gritstone walls and stone dwellings; pasture farming; hedgerows and hedgerow trees; extensive views; large farms; many individual residential properties”.

- 5.9 The SPG also identifies a number of incongruous landscape features, which comprise of:

“Introduction of fencing for stock control. Large farm buildings. Inappropriate urbanisation of commuter dwellings”

- 5.10 The SPG goes on to discuss the factors which are critical to landscape character and quality, which include:

“the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (i.e. ancient woodland, heathland and semi-natural grasslands) and, to a slightly lesser extent, the loss of characteristic landscape features and the poor condition of those that remain”.

- 5.11 The proposed wildlife pond does not constitute one of the incongruous landscape features listed within the SPG, and furthermore does not involve the loss of any characteristic landscape features. Indeed, the proposal can be considered to improve the character of the landscape by virtue of the new

indigenous hedgerow that is proposed to be planted along the western site boundary. Such planting will serve to reinforce one of the key landscape characteristics as defined in the Planning for Landscape Change SPG.

- 5.12 On approach to the site along Top Road the development will not appear strident or incongruous and will be softened by the planting of the new Holly hedgerow along the western site boundary. The development will therefore not derive any adverse harm to the character and appearance of the area. By resultant effect the submitted proposal is considered to accord with the provisions of policies DC1 and DC3 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity Enhancement

- 5.13 The proposed wildlife pond is to be created within a field that is regularly mown by the applicant and consequently it has no notable biodiversity value. The submitted proposal will secure a net gain to biodiversity by virtue of the new Holly hedge that is to be planted along the western boundary of the site and will also present opportunities for the planting of submerged plants, emergent planting and marginal planting to further enhance local biodiversity. In doing so the proposed development will accord with the objectives of policy NE1 of the Local Plan and paragraph 175 of the NPPF.

6 Conclusion

6.1 It is concluded that the submitted proposal constitutes a sustainable form of development that accords with the Development Plan having regard to the following conclusions:

- The proposal involves engineering operations that will not give rise to harm to the openness of the Green Belt or the five purposes of including land within it, and therefore amounts to an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt.
- The proposal does not give rise to the loss of any characteristic landscape features, nor does it comprise an incongruous landscape feature in itself. The proposal furthermore presents opportunities to improve the character of the landscape in line with the objectives of the Planning for Landscape Change SPG.
- The proposal will not give rise to any harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- The proposal will secure a net gain to biodiversity on the site as a consequence of the new hedgerow to be planted on the site, and the opportunities that are afforded for natural planting around and within the pond.

6.2 For these reasons the proposal is considered to accord with the provisions of policies SS10, DC1, DC3 and NE1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan, and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning for Landscape Change SPG.