

Planning and development statement

Use of land adjacent to licensed caravan site for siting a single Shepherd Hut for tourism Sky Cottage Top Road Biddulph Moor

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1.0 Site description

1.1 The site lies adjacent to Top Road in an elevated position which affords views over vast tracts of Staffordshire Moorlands. To the North and adjoining the site lies an established licensed caravan site which has hard standings for 5 caravans and their towing cars and which has accordingly (because of its hard standing) a long annual usage. To the South of the site lies a range of farm buildings and farmyard.

1.2 The site is some 40 metres or so set back from Top Road.

1.3 Access to the site would be from a link with the adjacent hard surfaced certified site. The application site would be connected to the existing chemical waste disposal point and site drains and water supply on the licensed caravan site.

1.4 The site is within the Green Belt

2.0 What is sought ?

2.1 The applicant seeks planning permission to change the use of the small site (100 sq m) to allow it to be used to site a Shepherd Hut similar to that indicated in the attached details. The site will; like the adjacent caravan site, have a long season and will have a hard surfaced area for the parking of a car.

2.2 The hut will be self-contained (including a toilet, shower, wash basin). It will be insulated for use all year round. A secure 4 space cycle rack will be attached to the Shepherd Hut.

2.3 At present the colour of the Hut is yet to be determined. The hut is likely to be supplied by Lincoln Shepherd huts a supplier of premium units. (see attached).

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3.0 Need for the development

3.1 The applicant seeks to link with and offer a complementary tourism offer to that offered by the adjacent caravan site. There are considered to be 3 main customer types for the proposed Shepherd Hut.

- * Tourists who are friends or family of a family using the adjoining caravan site but who may not have their own caravan or indeed car.
- * Tourists who may seek out glamping type sites because they have no car or have an electric car for which there is no foreseeable prospect of having sufficient battery power or duration to tow a caravan.
- * Tourists seeking a different holiday experience to a traditional caravan.

3.2 The UK camping Alliance released a report in February 2019 (attached) which set out some of the economic benefits of camping to the economy. The report was pre to the Covid pandemic and by common acceptance the findings in the report are now likely to be amplified.

3.3 The report identifies the following:

- * Visitors who stayed in rented and touring accommodation spent on average, £68 (on eating/drinking in surrounding area), £18 (on recreation/entertainment in surrounding area) and £16 (visitor attractions).

NB Based on this, if the shepherd's hut at Sky View was occupied for 300 days of the year, this could potentially bring approx £30,600 in tourism spend in the local Staffordshire Moorlands economy, per year.

Page 23, Table 5.5: 'Visitor Spend Per Visit'

3.4 And it continues:

- * *The UK holiday park and campsite sector makes a substantial contribution to the UK tourism economy, generating £9.3bn in visitor expenditure, equivalent to £5.3bn GVA and supporting 171,448 FTE jobs.*
- * *The UK holiday park and campsite sector accounted for 8% of the tourism sector's GVA.*

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* *Visitors to UK holiday parks and campsites stayed up to 74% longer and spent up to 60% more than the national tourism average.*

Page 1, 'Executive Summary

3.5 The report also notes health and well being effects as follows:

"Glamping operators support local communities health and wellbeing – by promoting wider community health and fitness with cycle and walking routes, making the most of nature.

Health and wellbeing was also improved with visitors reporting doing more exercise and feeling more relaxed when staying on a holiday park or campsite. This is supported by holiday park/campsite operators who support a range of health and wellbeing activities for their visitors."

Page 18, Section 4.13 'Health and Wellbeing'

3.6 The report continues:

The opportunities for the UK tourism sector:

- *market/product gaps; shorter breaks, experience holidays*
- *increasing the number of the younger generation – utilising innovation, high end products and glamping as attractors*
- *extending the season – weather proofing – manufacturing of product – extends usage all year*
- *wellbeing tourism – meeting people, connecting to outdoors, mental and physical benefits*
- *diversification – including the growth of 'glamping', agricultural diversification for new income streams; digital detox*
- *improving facilities/activities, including greater use of technology and accessibility improvements*
- *combatting negative perceptions – promotion [outdoor] lifestyle and wellness advantages*
- *post-Brexit [and post-covid] staycation – affordability and weakness of pound/low interest rates*
- *utilising collaborative platforms – opening up new opportunities*
- *collaboration – growing the size of the cake through working with community partners*

Page 7, Section 3.2 'SWOT Analysis'

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4.0 Site planning/development History

4.1 The adjoining land has the benefit of being an established certified location (CL) which allows the use of the land for the siting of 5 caravans/motorhomes and their associated cars. The certificate allows 5 caravans and is bound by the following normal conditions:

CONDITIONS

- *The Certificated Location is the area approved in writing by the Caravan and Motorhome Club.*
- *Only members of the Caravan and Motorhome Club on producing their membership cards may be accommodated on the Certificated Location and only for the purposes of recreation. Club members have caravans, motorhomes or trailer tents.*
- *No more than 5 pitches are to be occupied on the Certificated Location at any time.*
- *No caravan, motorhome or trailer tent is allowed to stay for more than 28 consecutive days.*
- *No tent camping is allowed on site (only a small single-berth pup tent ancillary to the main outfit can be accepted).*

4.2 The applicant obtained a further planning permission (SMD/2020/0646) in February of this year in respect of this CL site to form a new vehicular access and hardstandings for touring caravans, and conversion and extension of existing outbuildings to create one holiday let and toilet facilities.

4.3 The officer report noted

It is not considered that the proposal would conflict with any of the other 5 purposes of Green Belt. Namely: 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

This was also the view taken for similar works to a 5-caravan site further along Lask Edge to the South under application SMD/2015/0222. The policy stance regarding such works in the Green Belt has not changed since the above 2015 decision.

4.4 The officers report continues:

Turning to actual visual and landscape impact, the site is fairly exposed so wherever caravans are placed, there would be some visibility of them reaching considerable distances.

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However, the hardstanding pitches would be placed alongside the rear boundary, furthest from the main road. The nearest roads or public footpaths to the East are a considerable distance away and up to five touring caravans would not be harmfully prominent when viewed from this direction.

4.5 And finally the report concludes:

The proposed development would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would not harm its openness. The works would be limited to the conversion of buildings which compliment the tourist/visitor accommodation use of the site and improve its facilities which is acceptable in this location in principle and is supported by Policy E4 and also hard-surfacing works associated with the creation of a new access, driveway and hard-standings. All of the materials for the works would be appropriate in this traditional rural and exposed location and overall the visual amenities of the area would not be harmed by this scheme. It would also lead to an improvement to highway safety. With the safeguard of conditions, the proposal is acceptable and complies with both the Local Plan and the government planning guidance contained in the NPPF.

5.0 Main planning policy provisions

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

5.2 Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020)

5.3 Policy SS10

5.4 This relates to the 'Other Rural Areas Strategy' . It 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 also places considerable emphasis on tourism. This is identified in the spatial strategy and the Sustainable Community Strategy as a major opportunity to sustain the rural economy and strengthen the role of the District within the region and North Staffordshire.

5.5 The policy goes on to state that these objectives will be achieved by, amongst others:

- * Allowing extensions or additional domestic outbuildings to existing dwellings provided they are appropriate in scale and design and do not have a detrimental impact on the existing dwelling and the character of the rural area
- * Enabling the limited expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified
- * Allowing for small-scale tourism developments in other areas (in accordance with policy E4);

5.5 The application is compliant with this policy in that it is small in scale and is a justified rural use.

5.6 Policy E4

5.7 This relates to 'Tourism and Cultural Development' and states that new tourism and cultural development which complements the distinctive character and quality of the District will be supported having regard to the Area Strategies in Policies SS5 to SS10. In addition:

1. New tourist, visitor and cultural accommodation, attractions and facilities should be developed in locations that offer, or are capable of offering either:

A) good connectivity with other tourist destinations and amenities, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling; or

B) in locations in or close to settlements where local services, facilities and public transport are available; or

C) C) in areas specifically identified for tourism development in the Churnet Valley Masterplan or other relevant documents.

5.8 Policy E4 goes on to state that new accommodation, attractions and facilities should support the provision and expansion of tourist, visitor and cultural facilities in the rural areas where needs are not met by existing facilities, and that all development shall be of an appropriate quality, scale and character compatible with the local area, protect the residential amenity of the area, enhance the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area and shall not harm interests of acknowledged importance

5.9 The site adjoins an existing tourist site and therefore it has excellent connectivity. In addition the site is relatively close to local services, shops and pubs and will be able to bring economic benefit to these small local business. Local business likely to benefit include:

Activities / Shops

- Biddulph Moor Post Office (0.6 miles)
- The Beauty Retreat Salon (0.6 miles)
- Butterlands Farm Equestrian Centre (0.8 miles)
- National Trust: Biddulph Grange Gardens (2.4 miles)

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- The Retreat Spa (6 miles)

Pubs & Eateries

- The Fox Hound (0.5 miles)
- The Rose & Crown (0.6 miles)
- Shippon Tea Rooms (0.9 miles)
- The Talbot (1.9 miles)
- Ego @ The Hollybush (4.9 miles)

5.10 Taken together these features mean that the proposal does indeed comply with policy E4.

5.11 NPPF (framework) February 1999

5.12 The framework places sustainable development at the heart of national planning policy. It says:

7. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

5.13 It continues by confirming the 3 objectives of sustainable planning as follows:

- a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;*
- b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and*
- c) an environmental objective—to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution,*

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and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

5.14 The framework promotes a prosperous rural economy. It says at paragraph 83 the following:

83. Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) Sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.*

5.15 The framework includes specific policy on rural businesses and addressing sustainability. Paragraph 84 says:

84. Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

5.16 Chapter 8 deals the promotion of healthy and safe communities.

5.17 The framework addresses in some detail the Green Belt including both how to protect it and support appropriate development within it. The framework especially says at paragraph 145 that limited infilling within villages is appropriate.

5.18 At paragraph 146 there is a list other forms of development that are considered appropriate providing that they '*preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it*'. These are:

- 'a) mineral extraction;*
- b) engineering operations;*
- c) local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;*
- d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;*
- e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and*
- f) development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.'*

5.19 The proposal complies with the broad thrust of the framework in that it supports the rural economy, promotes a health life and living, complies with all sustainable development objectives. Whilst there could be considered too be conflict with Green Belt policy set out in the framework it is contested that very special circumstances apply in this case. Accordingly the proposal when weighed against the framework is considered compliant.

5.20 Govt policy announcements after start of Covid 19 pandemic

5.21 There is no doubt that the Covid19 pandemic is having and will have a very significant impact on all aspects of life and including health and well-being, the economy and especially tourism.

5.22 Some of the main trends and features emerging include.

- Unprecedented national debt will mean challenging national economic conditions for many years to come
- Greater awareness of the mental and physical health benefits of being outdoors.
- The increased protection from airborne diseases resultant from being outside.

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5.23 Granting planning permission for the development would accord with a national economic response to the Covid19 derived recession and which by common consent will be the worst in living memory and leaves the country with a forecast £300 billion hole in its finances. Positive local economic benefit to pay for the economic damage wrought by Covid 19 is a significant material consideration very much in support of this planning application.

5.24 The Housing Secretary Rt Hon Jenrick Robert MP statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 13 May 2020 simply says:

"A vibrant housing market means more than buying and selling homes. We need to get back to building again and Britain needs that."

5.25 The sentiments can and do apply to UK based tourism. It to be noted to that the Prime Minister constantly talks of the need to *"build, build, build"*.

6.0 Other material considerations

6.1 The council commissioned a study (attached) in recent years (report undated) into tourism into Staffordshire Moorlands. It identified the following strengths and weaknesses of tourism within the district.

6.1 In summary, the district is seen to have key strengths and opportunities:

- *The two tourism brands of genuine national significance – Alton Towers and the Peak District*
- *A range of more modest, but nevertheless important, attractors including the pleasant market town of Leek, the industrial and natural history interest of the Churnet Valley, the Churnet Valley heritage railway and the Caldon canal*
- *A very large catchment population within 2 hours travel time*
- *Development opportunities (sites) for further accommodation (e.g. high quality hotel, multiple units and self-catering) and mixed use sites including retail.*

But the District has the following weaknesses:

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- *Staffordshire Moorlands District does not operate as a significant tourism destination or brand*
- *There are no large well-known towns to act as a focus and provide national profile (e.g. an equivalent to Buxton or Bakewell)*
- *Parts of the District (and the Churnet valley area in particular) are not easily reached by road and public transport.*

6.2 The study sets out how the tourist accommodation offer within the district can be improved. It says on page 45....

8.5 Enhanced accommodation stock

There are a number of plans in place for new accommodation at the various sites across the District, including Bolton Copperworks, Moneystone Quarry, Consall Hall Gardens, Alton Towers and Cornhill in Leek (see above).

Existing markets are unlikely to support major expansions of accommodation stock. While, there will always be scope for well run quality businesses in the right locations, further accommodation development is likely to result in some displacement from existing businesses. However, the development of further accommodation is desirable in certain instances and locations. For example:

- *Further small serviced and self catering accommodation of varying qualities/price located particularly in the Churnet Valley*
- *Budget hotel accommodation in Leek and possibly in Cheadle*
- *More moorings on the Caldon canal.*

However, the issues around accommodation are not so much about quantity, but rather about the type, standard and quality of the offer. There are some general principles which should be observed in the development of accommodation:

- *Specialisation can be a way of broadening the appeal to a wider audience by focusing on the particular requirements of different markets. VisitBritain outlines opportunities for becoming specialised through a number of schemes, for example:*
 - o *National Accessible Scheme (NAS)*
 - o *Welcome Pets*
 - o *Welcome Families*

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o Welcome Cyclists

o Welcome Walkers

- *There are a number of opportunities for new product development for camping and caravan sites in particular which relate to the trend of 'glamping' and the popularity of alternative camping accommodation such as yurts, pods and tipis. These are often successfully combined with more traditional types of accommodation such as tented camping, caravanning, self-catering units or B&B. This broadens the appeal to a range of tastes, generations and budgets and enhanced facilities such as this can help extend the season into autumn and winter.*
- *Product differentiated by locality will have significant appeal – for example, places to eat should use primarily locally sourced food and drink. If a shop is part of the offer then this should stock locally sourced food, produce, craft etc., and new builds for accommodation should consider the local architectural vernacular.*
- *For the older, ageing generation (i.e. 75+), accommodation providers may need to tailor their facilities to ensure that they are accessible (i.e. accommodation on one level or ground floor, showers instead of baths etc.).*
- *Flexible accommodation will be required which allows for different groups to stay together. This may include single parents, families of different generations (e.g. grandparents spending time with their grandchildren) and groups of friends.*
- *Flexible costing which can accommodate different family groups without supplements will be more important.*
- *Self-catering accommodation in particular can allow for flexibility in terms of groups sizes and requirements and is a growth area.*
- *Consumers will increasingly expect value for money and value to be added to the services and products they buy. This is relevant at whatever price bracket, and accommodation providers should aim at visitors going away feeling that their experience has exceeded their expectations. There are a number of awards which will distinguish accommodation providers on the quality of what is on offer and this should be encouraged by strategic organisations such as destination management organisations. Affiliation with a quality assurance scheme (e.g. that offered by VisitBritain) will raise the credibility of the individual provider and the destination in general. More information*

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can be found on the Tourism Trade Website <http://www.qualityintourism.com/asp/letsgetassessed.asp>.

6.3 Of special note is the benefit of glamping accommodation because it *'broadens the appeal to a range of tastes, generations and budgets and enhanced facilities such as this can help extend the season into autumn and winter.*

6.4 It is contested to that there are significant additional sustainable benefits from a Shepherd Hut because it can be used by electric car drivers or those who do have a car all. It has the potential to be the most sustainable form of tourism offer.

7.0 Planning propositions

7.1 It is considered that planning policy requires the following main propositions to be addressed before planning permission can be granted.

7.2 Is the development in accord with Green Belt Planning policy?

7.3 Use for tourist accommodation on camping and caravanning sites strangely is not specifically cited in the framework as an appropriate use in the Green Belt. Whilst it is understandable why this might be applicable to buildings which would cause permanent harm to openness it is rather harder to understand why a use of land for siting a caravan or Shepherd Hut on is not appropriate as it it does not cause permanent harm to openness and could be considered akin to a 'recreational' use of land.

7.4 If the council consider that the development does not accord with national Green Belt policy are there very special circumstances that apply in this case that balance the determination in favour of the application.

7.5 Should the LPA come to the view that the use of this site is inappropriate they should only grant planning permission if there are very special circumstances (VSC) that apply. Case

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law establishes that such VSC should be applicable only to the proposed development and the site it lies upon. In this case there are a number of VSC including the following main ones:

A The site adjoins and is complementary to an established 5 unit caravan site. The CL site can operate under its certificate and without the need for a specific planning permission. This is a long established exemption from planning control. There can be no doubt that if the Government considered that such CL sites posed a threat to the Green Belt it would have removed the exception. It can only be concluded that these small CL sites are not considered to threaten the functions or features of the Green Belt.

Moreover in this case to resist the siting of a single and attractive Shepherd Hut next to 5 licensed white caravans/motorhomes would have little demonstrative impact on openness or other features of the Green Belt in this location and indeed would be more attractive than the spreading farm yard and farm implements on the adjoining farmland.

B The siting of the Shepherd Hit would cause no permanent harm to openness and the hut could simply be removed after the use had ceased to be economically viable. Indeed to support that contention the applicant is prepared to accept a 5 year temporary planning permission which would require the use to cease if the application was not renewed within 5 years.

C The Shepherd hut could be finished in a sensitive pastel shade so as not to jar. This cannot be said of the certificated site it adjoins.

D The use of the site will not require any additional service provision. The site can use the adjacent water and electricity that supplies the CL site along with the same Elsan point (chemical toilet) and approved shower block.

E The site lies between a lawful caravan site and a expanse of farm buildings and farm storage. In this respect it constitutes an 'infill' between existing features which is less damaging to openness than either an isolated or ribbon form of site.

F The use of the site would allow for a more sustainable form of camping holiday because a Shepherd Hut can be used by an electric car user or anyone who has no access to a car. This cannot be said of users of caravan sites who require large engined and high powered petrol or diesel cars to deliver their caravans to a site and theatre to drive them around the sights and landscape they have come to see.

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7.6 Does the development address sustainable development benefits?

7.7 Having regard to the social, economic and environmental benefits of sustainable development as set out in the framework this development can provide the following:

- * Camping experience suitable for electric car users and those without a car
 - * Offer of UK holiday as attractive alternative to flying and the high carbon use and damaging global impact caused by it.
 - * Significant contribution to local economy
 - * Boost to tourism within Staffordshire Moorlands
 - * More camping diversity adding to sustainable attractiveness
 - * Insulated Shepherd Hut to higher standard than caravanning reducing need for auxiliary heating (carbon use).
-
- * Non invasive and can be removed without out any permanent landscape scarring
 - * More attractive form of recreational accommodation than white caravans.

7.8 Taken together the above are clear and certain sustainable benefits resultant from the proposal.

7.9 There are some who indicate that such camping uses should be within or adjacent to villages. This shows ignorance of the camping and back to nature experience that most campers seek. Campers seek to holiday in the countryside and to immerse themselves within it. It is critical that council's within Staffordshire, which increasingly relies upon tourism, understand and accept this as they hope to expand the tourism accommodation offer.

7.10 This is a highly sustainable form of tourism and it is growing in popularity. A Shepherd Hut is inherently significantly more sustainable than a caravan and being attractive and popular offers the best chance of tempting holidaymakers off high carbon producing aircraft.

7.11 Does the proposal comply with the council's Tourism study?

7.12 The study sets out the need to promote visitors to stay over and also notes the growing popularity of glamping holidays. As such this proposal complies fully with the findings of the council's own tourism study

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7.13 Does the proposal respond to the Covid pandemic positively

7.14 This matter is certainly a material planning consideration and it will be for many years to come. Many consider the ramifications will change behaviour positively and permanently. The following are positive responses brought by this proposal:

- * Reduces the need to travel to other countries and risking importing illness now and in the future.
- * Promotes health outdoor living.
- * Bring economic growth and benefit.
- * Helps friend and family to holiday safely together.

7.15 As such this proposal accords fully with the “*build back better*’ and ‘*build, build, build*’ aspirations of Government as it sets out policies to develop in the future.

8.00 Conclusion

8.1 The council may consider that this use is not appropriate in the Green Belt despite the use inherently being non permeant or invasive and being essentially for recreational holiday use. If they do take this view there are a number of clear and strong material planning considerations set out in this statement that constitute very special circumstances to weigh against any perceived harm to the Green Belt. These include:

- Complementary and sustainable addition to adjoining and lawful long season caravan (CL) site
- Compliant with policy E4 and national planning policy for support the rural economy
- ‘Safe’ form of outdoor based UK holiday
- Sensible and reasonable infill situation
- Attractive and visually enhancing style of rural accommodation
- Non invasive and non permanent form of development

8.2 For these reasons it is suggested that a conditional planning permission can be granted.

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