

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0399
Valid 29/07/2021

PARK HOUSE FARM
BIDDULPH COMMON ROAD
BIDDULPH

APPLICATION FOR USE OF
LAND FOR STATIONING
MOBILE HOME FOR HOLIDAY
USE

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Green Belt
- Tourism
- Ecology
- Highways

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

This 3,000m² (0.3ha) site lies adjoining the north side of the single track Biddulph Common Road (D1086). The site is consistently labelled as a 'quarry' on older OS maps through to the mid 20thC though this use would appear to have been long discontinued. The perimeter bankings especially to the higher north and east sides are well vegetated with semi-natural colonisation by trees and shrubs. The quarry floor is generally level with the entrance from the road and hard surfaced. There are two makeshift 20thC pole-barn style farm storage sheds towards the north and east of the site, one single storey and a larger tin sheet structure filled with baled hay at the time of the LPA visit in 2019. There were two caravans parked as if stored on the site, stored bagged silage, a parked tractor and agricultural attachments.

PROPOSAL

Consent is sought for the stationing of one mobile home for holiday use. The log cabin will measure 12m by 6.3m and will measure approximately 3.5m in height.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan

S01 Spatial Objectives
SS1 Development Principles
SS1a Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
DC1 Design Considerations
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport
E4 Tourism and Cultural Development
SS 10 Other Rural Areas Strategy

NE 1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources

National Planning Policy Framework

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2019/0478- Demolition of existing redundant barn & shed on ex-quarry site & construction of new timber-clad mobile home holiday let- refused

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 16.09.2021
Neighbour consultation period ends:16.09.2021
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None received within consultation period

Town / Parish Comments

Biddulph Town Council agreed to recommend approval of the development as the neighbourhood plan encourages tourism.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Comment as follows:

- Vehicular visibility from the existing access is poor – especially to the south east where it is obstructed by a stone wall and vegetation – see attached photo.
- The submitted block plan PL-01 indicates proposed 2.0 x 43m splays in both directions but no evidence that splays designed for a flat 30mph road would be adequate at this location – Biddulph Common Road is unrestricted (60mph) and has a noticeable gradient.
- Whilst it is accepted that this is an existing farm access, a holiday let is likely to increase trips and visitors would not be familiar with local road conditions.
- The existing stone wall would have to be relocated to achieve the indicated splays.

I would therefore suggest that the applicant addresses this issue by:

- Commissioning a speed survey to determine the actual 85th percentile speed at this location – this would determine if the necessary visibility splays could be achieved; or,
- Considering an alternative access route as I understand that the applicants family controls the parcel of land to the north west of the site.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Objection due to the Wildlife trust considering that an updated PEA is required as the submitted survey was undertaken over 3 years ago and is now out of date. The Wildlife trust also recommended conditions be attached to any subsequent approval.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

Policy E4 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 SS 5 to SS 10 and Churnet Valley Strategy Policy SS 11.

The application site is located outside of the development boundary on Green Belt Land. Both Local and National Policy limit new development in this location. However specific types of development can be supported. Policy E4 supports new tourism development including visitor accommodation, subject to compliance with one of the several criteria. These include that the proposal has good connectivity with other tourist destinations, particularly by public transports, walking or cycling; or is in a location close to settlements where local services, facilities and public transport are available or, is in an area specifically identified for tourism in the Churnet Valley Master Plan.

Criteria 1 and 2.

It is considered that the site is not particularly well served by public transport as there is no nearby train station and the closest bus stop serving the site is approximately 31mins walk on a road without a pavement. If the occupants were to walk from Biddulph it would take approximately 50 mins on a road with sections that does not benefit from a pavement. As such visitors to the proposed holiday home would therefore predominately arrive from outside the area by car. Biddulph is 6 minutes from the site by car and therefore the majority of visitors are likely to depend on their own private car.

Like the distance to the nearest village the application site would not be walkable to other tourist destinations. The applicant's agent makes reference to the site lying close to Biddulph Country Park and the Biddulph Grange Garden (National Trust). The Country Park is approximately 31mins from the site on foot on a road with sections without a pavement. The country park follows the majority of the same route but takes approximately 5 minutes longer on foot. The application also states that Rudyard Lake is readily accessible. However, this tourist destination is approximately 1 hour 20 minutes' walk from the site. The closest village and tourist destinations are accessible by cycle with a reduced travel time. However, the proposal does not make particular provision for secure cycle storage or parking to encourage this type of transport. Both modes of transport would follow routes that are predominately unlit at night and would be unsuitable for parents with young children, wheelchair users or people with restricted mobility. Therefore, it is likely that visitors would rely on their own private car to visit these tourist sites.

Although some visitors may choose to visit the local countryside rather than specific tourist sites and therefore may choose to explore the local area on foot. This does not render the site accessible on foot.

As such given the distance to shops and services and the lack of suitable alternative forms of transport to the private car the proposed development would not be in an accessible location. The proposed would therefore not comply with criterion 1 or 2 of policy E4 of the Local Plan.

Criteria 3

The application site is not located within the Churnet Valley Master Plan area and therefore the development does not comply with this part of the criteria.

Policy E4 states that in other locations may be supported where a rural location can be justified.

New accommodation, attractions and facilities should:

A) support the provision and expansion of tourist, visitor and cultural facilities in the rural areas where needs are not met by existing facilities; and

B) 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.

Chapel croft bed and breakfast accommodation and Little Pines Lodge are existing holiday facilities close to the development site. As such the development would not comply with subsection A.

Overall, it is considered that the site would not have good connectivity with other tourist destinations and amenities and particularly by modes of transport other than the private car. As such the proposal is not considered to be in a suitable location for tourism development. As such it would conflict with Policies E4, SS10 and S11 of the Local Plan and Paragraph 84 of the NPPF.

Green Belt

The application site is located on Green Belt Land. Paragraph 145 states that Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

The applicant's agent considers that the development complies with Paragraph 150

150. Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Specifically, the applicant agent considers that subsection e applies to the development.

- *material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and.*

The proposed development would result in the erection of a mobile home that would be sited on the land for approximately 10 years.

'The mobile home proposed for holiday use is a twin-unit caravan, as defined by statute, as it does not exceed the maximum dimensions set out in section 13 of the Caravans Act 1968 (as amended) and will be brought to site in two parts on the back of a lorry and will be assembled on site by bolting it together. This ensures that does not amount to 'operational development' (as defined in section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) but is a change of use of land'

The LPA considers that the development does not amount to operational development and therefore the development must preserve the openness of the green belt and not conflict with the purposes of including the land within it. The proposed development would involve the removal of redundant agricultural buildings and the planning statement submitted with the development considers that the development will improve the openness of the green belt as it will remove these large agricultural buildings and as such would entail reduction in built form. It is agreed that the removal of these buildings would reduce the overall impact on the openness of the green belt, but it is considered that the development itself (the introduction of a permanent caravan and associated parking and paraphernalia) would harm openness and would conflict with the purpose of including the land within it.

The fundamental aim of green belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, and consequently the most important attribute of green belts is their openness. Agricultural developments are considered an exception when constructing a new building in the Green Belt. As 65.6% of Green Belt land is used for agriculture, agricultural buildings are to be expected and commonly found in rural areas. Replacing these agricultural buildings with a mobile home for tourism use would result in urban sprawl as this type of development is not considered an exception.

Furthermore the NPPF allows for the redevelopment of previously developed sites provided that there is no greater impact on openness. However, agricultural buildings are excluded from the definition of previously developed land in the NPPF. Had it been the intention of the policy makers that replacement of agricultural buildings with other forms of development on the basis of an improvement to openness acceptable in Green Belt terms then they would not have been excluded in this way.

It is therefore concluded that the proposal is inappropriate development and would be harmful to the Green Belt. No very special circumstances have been identified.

Design

As holiday accommodation, a timber log cabin style of development at this site where it does not have to relate to any nearby buildings as the site is set back from the road and set into a hollow in the rising slope of the land, could be considered

acceptable. The low ridge height of 3.7m is notable as minimising potential prominence. There is also ample scope for screening landscaping – to some extent already present.

Amenity

Section 12 Paragraph 130(f) of the NPPF states that development should create places with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.

The two near neighbour dwellings on the opposite side of the road and in the case of nearer one, set down below the road, would not be unduly affected by the proposal at the separation distances involved.

Ecology

The application is supported by a PEA that is considered to be out of date by the Wildlife Trust. As the survey did conclude that the site is suitable habitat for barn owl and reptiles. Therefore, further survey to assess the potential impacts of the proposals on these species is recommended in order to develop a suitably robust package of mitigation measures. Recommendations are outlined in Table 2 below. As the mitigation requires a further survey any changes to the would be discovered within this survey. Therefore the development is considered to have an acceptable impact on biodiversity subject to the recommendations of the survey and conditions.

Highway Safety

Not supported due to poor visibility in the easterly direction in particular. A traffic survey could be submitted as evidence that a compromise from normal required standards may be acceptable. The alternative suggestion of a new access from adjacent land to the north west may be likely – subject to detail – to add further adverse green belt impacts.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt and as such this presents a clear reason for refusing the development to which “substantial weight” should be attached. There would need to be very special circumstances by way of other considerations sufficient to outweigh the in-principle harm and any other harm if the proposal is to be recommended for approval.

Any economic contribution would be likely to be modest. The applicant intends to retire from the farm and sell the remainder of the farm holding and therefore the development would not be considered farm diversification or contribute to the continued viability of the farm.

The site access is not conclusively supported in Highways Terms and presents cause for refusal with the level of information currently submitted.

Overall any possible benefits of the scheme – contribution to tourism and economy and improvement to site appearance – would not offset the substantial weight to be given to the harm by reason of inappropriateness in the Green Belt.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION :

That planning consent be refused.

Case Officer: Rebecca Bowers

Recommendation Date: 26.10.2022

26/10/2022

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

X

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council