

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0056
Valid 02/02/2024

PEAK WILDLIFE PARK
ELLASTONE ROAD
WINKHILL

CONSTRUCTION OF
PROPOSED ANIMAL FEED
STORAGE BARN AND
ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPING.

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

The principle of the development in this rural location
The impact on the character and appearance of the area and the rural landscape
The impact on residential amenity

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site lies within Peak Wildlife Park in the open countryside to the west of Ellastone Road and south of A523 and within a mile to the west of Winkhill village. The site itself is on the northern edge of the park and there is an existing gates access track off Ellastone Road (to the east), to the north of the main park entrance. A public footpath passes close to the site to the north, starting from Ellastone Road and passing the northern boundary of the park as it continues west. It comprises a rectangular plot of scrubby grass to the north of the track which continues west to the edges of the animal enclosures. The site is largely surrounded by open land although a storage tank and animal enclosures lie to the south of the track. There are also some small temporary structures and a yard area to the east.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for an animal feed storage barn which has the form and appearance of a metal sheeted storage building with low pitch roof and roller shutter doors and a rectangular footprint with dimensions of 30.5 x 13.7 metres and a ridge height of 7 metres (5m to the eaves). The site plan shows 40 new trees to be planted immediately to the rear (north) and either side of the building to provide some screening and which would be predicted to grow to a max height of around 6 metres. An email from the agent gives further details and justification for the proposal as follows:

“The park added three polar bears to their collection in July of 2023. The bears have certainly been a welcome addition, but their arrival has put pressure on the park's animal feed storage facilities. Initially the plan was to keep the feed close to the bears housing, but after trying this, it became apparent that all food would have to be stored away from their habitat. This is because the presence of food close to their house caused them to exhibit anticipatory behaviour. After gathering feedback from a number of different zoological collections, the decision was made to create a purpose-built

food storage and preparation facility to the east of their reserve and most importantly away from their house.

To add some context as to the quantities of feed the park's bears consume, and why this food can't be kept in the park's main stores long term:

They currently eat just shy of 300kgs of vegetables a week. They also consume 70kgs of meat, 60kgs of fish, 50kg of pellet, 42kg of lard and over 60 eggs. Currently, all of their food is split across numerous locations, with six domestic fridges being used (this is all that space permits), two domestic freezers and one commercial walk in freezer. Each unit is full, to the point where they are having to request more deliveries, which is not just a greater cost to the business, but also increases their carbon footprint. The disjointed nature of the operation also makes biosecurity much more difficult to maintain whilst also adding time onto what is already a busy day for the park's keepers.

A purpose-built storage and preparation facility away from the bears housing, really is the only solution.”

An existing access off Ellastone Road would be used to access the proposed building.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffs Moorlands Local Plan (adopted September 2020)

SS10 – Other Rural Areas Strategy
SS11 – Churnet Valley Strategy
E4 – Tourism and Cultural Development
DC1 – Design Considerations
DC3 – Landscape and Settlement Setting

NPPF (Revised December 2023)

Section 5 (Economy) and 12 (Design).

Other

-Churnet Valley Masterplan (March 2014)
-SMDC Tourism Strategy (2022-2027)

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

There are no previous applications relating to the actual application site but there have been a number of applications relating to the wildlife park. The most recent applications are:

SMD/2023/0211: Three animal enclosures and associated buildings and landscaping. Approved.

SMD/2021/0241: PROPOSED MARQUEE FOR EDUCATIONAL VISITS, RELOCATED SNACK SHACK, COVERED EATING AREA & PROPOSED AGRICULTURAL BUILDING INCLUDING ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPE WORKS. Approved.

SMD/2020/0711: Biomass building. Approved and built.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 26.3.24

Neighbour consultation period ends: 26.3.24

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None.

Town / Parish Comments

Support.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to standard conditions and includes a condition restricting machinery noise and external lighting.

OFFICER COMMENTS

With regard to the principle of the development, Peak Wildlife Park is recognised as a tourist attraction and an “Opportunity Site” in the Churnet Valley Masterplan and the following policies would apply:

Policy SS10, the strategy for the rural areas, aims to sustain the rural economy by, amongst other things, enabling the limited expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified and enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside by ensuring renewable energy schemes are of an appropriate scale, type and location. It also aims to enhance tourist opportunities by supporting sustainable tourism developments and measures in the Churnet Valley in accordance with Policy SS 11 and the Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD.

Policy SS11, the Churnet Valley Strategy encourages the expansion of existing tourist attractions and facilities. The wildlife park is also recognised as a key tourist attraction in the Churnet Valley Masterplan and encouragement is given to appropriate development at the wildlife attraction.

Policy E4, ‘Tourism and Cultural Development’ encourages development in areas specifically identified for tourism development in the Churnet Valley Masterplan or

other relevant documents and states 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.

The proposal is required in connection with the operation of the wildlife park. I consider that adequate justification has been given by the applicant for the need for the building. The polar bears are the most recent addition to the wildlife park's attractions and planning permission was granted last year for the enclosures and associated works. The reasons for siting additional food storage for the bears away from the enclosures (which in any case are not a considerable distance away to the east) rather than adjacent to them is understandable and the additional storage space would also potentially lead to less frequent food deliveries by vehicles which has sustainability advantages. The proposal would contribute to the convenient operation of the wildlife park. The principle of the development is acceptable and subject to impacts on the visual and residential amenities of the area and the environment in general, the proposal would comply with the Local Plan and the NPPF.

With regard to the impact on the character and appearance of the area, the building would be located closer to A523 (to the north) and Ellastone Road (to the east) and the public rights of way than other buildings of similar size at the wildlife park but it would appear there would be no more suitable or available locations within the wildlife park further away from the roads and public footpaths that are in line with the particular requirements of the applicant (the applicant has demonstrated that the food storage for polar bears cannot be kept adjacent to the enclosures). The building would not be larger or higher than the previous approved food storage barn in the more central part of the site (approved for the other animals existing at the time of approval in 2021 and long before the arrival of the polar bears) and would also not exceed in height the traditional stone buildings (some of which are listed) at the visitor centre part of the park and which are in any case a considerable distance to the south and the proposed building would not interfere with views of those buildings from roads or paths. A tree belt with 40 trees (growing higher than the eaves height of the building) would be provided around the building to the north, west and east to help screen it from views from A523, Ellastone Road and from the paths to the north and east.

The form, design and materials is similar to the previous approved storage barn and would not be out of keeping with the wildlife park or wider area where similar typical metal-sheeted storage buildings are visible at nearby farms. The agent has expressed an intention for a black colour for the building to give consistency and coherence with other approved buildings at the park including the recently built biomass storage building. It is debatable if this would lead it to be less prominent and more recessive than the dark green metal typically seen on storage buildings in what is a rural area. However, I am satisfied that the choice of colour would not lead the building to be harmfully prominent in the landscape due to the distance of it from roads and the amount of tree screening provided, although a matt black finish would be needed.

The building would be at least 170m from the nearest residential properties and so the residential amenities of the area would not be affected by the noise of the freezers, chillers and other machinery required for food storage although the Environmental Health Section of the Council do consider that a noise restriction on machinery should be imposed as a condition and I consider this would be reasonable.

CONCLUSION AND PLANNING BALANCE

The principle of the proposal in this location is acceptable due to the support in the Churnet Valley Masterplan to improve Peak Wildlife Park as a visitor attraction in the interests of the local economy. It is considered the proposal would bring significant economic and social benefits but without leading to any landscape harm or any other significant environmental harms (with the safeguard of conditions) or any traffic problems and in this respect the development complies with the Council's Local Plan and the government planning guidance contained in the NPPF.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston
Recommendation Date: 28.3.24

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council