

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0438
Valid 25/09/2024

ALTON TOWERS FARLEY
LANE
FARLEY

CONSTRUCTION OF TWO LOG
CABINS AND ASSOCIATED
PATHWAYS/LANDSCAPING.

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Heritage
- Design and visual impact
- Neighbouring amenity
- Impact to trees

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site relates to a small woodland including three timber built cabins within the established Alton Towers theme park. It lies behind the area known as CBeebies to the north west of the park and staff carparking to the north. The cabins have been used as Santa's grotto during the seasonal period. Outside of the seasonal period of November- December, the area is used for residual storage and restricted to the public. It lies within the Alton and Farley Conservation Area.

The site currently offers no access for members of the public and is used for residual storage. Works have already commenced at the time of visit.

PROPOSAL

The construction of two log cabins (known as Grotto 2 and 5) with associated pathways and landscaping. The position of Grotto 2 will result in a number of trees being removed between existing cabins on site whereas Grotto 5 would sit on existing hardstanding to the south east of the site. They have been designed in the style of Alpine log cabins, distinguished by their wooden facades, characterised by logs stacked horizontally to create wall matching in material, scale and design as those on site.

The log cabins will occupy footprints of a little over 32sq.m each (including front canopy) and stand a maximum height of 3.4m. The log cabins will be accessed via concrete paving similar paths to existing cabins sporadically fanned out to avoid children comprehending the thought of many Santas.

Permission was originally granted for 5 log cabins (SMD/2009/0555). However, only 3 log cabins were built. Grotto 2 under this application will be built in the same position as the approved plans.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Development Plan Document (Adopted 2020)

E 4 Tourism and Cultural Development

DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment
DC3 Landscape Setting
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework

National Planning Policy Guidance

RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2009/0555 Construction of five log cabins, associated pathways and landscaping adjacent to Old Macdonalds Farm Approved

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 11/11/24

Neighbour consultation period ends: 17/10/24

Press Advert: 30/10/24

Public Comments

Parish Council	No objection
Environmental Health	No objection subject to condition relating to construction hours, unexpected contamination, ambient music and soil material importation tests
Staffordshire County Council Highways	No objection
Tree officer	No comments received

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

Policy E 4 supports the sensitive expansion of existing tourist attractions and facilities in the Churnet Valley Area in the Local Plan. It sets out a Development Strategy for the site which recognises the need for the resort to refresh existing themed areas. It also requires all development to consider the impact on views, transport, trees and heritage assets.

It is situated within the established built area of the Alton Towers theme park and therefore, the general principle of development is considered to be acceptable subject to other materials considerations including heritage assets, design and impact on residential amenity.

Design

The application is situated within the Alton and Farley Conservation Area and the Alton Towers registered park and gardens. Policies DC1 and DC2 seek to ensure good quality design in all development and for development proposals to protect and where possible enhance heritage assets.

The log cabins will sit between existing log cabins currently used during the seasonal period. While there will be a loss of trees to the small woodlands, visually, the replacement log cabins would not appear out of keeping with what is already there since its approval for three cabins in 2009. The additional log cabins are considered to blend well with the young pine trees retaining its woodland feel .

Impact on Heritage Assets

The additional log cabins will sit amongst existing built-structures within a confined area of the theme park. It is considered that the proposed buildings pose no issue in terms of heritage impact given that the nearest listed asset known as the Alton Towers Park and Garden is located 100m west of the site. There is no intervisibility of the listed asset nor any Listed buildings/structures or the Registered gardens. As such, it not anticipated to lead to any harmful long term cumulative effects on the significance or setting of heritage assets.

Therefore, the scheme would not cause harm to the significance of the conservation area or the setting of other nearby heritage assets. This is in compliance with Policy DC2 and the NPPF which seeks to protect the historic environment.

Amenity

Paragraph 127(f) of the NPPF (2019) and policy DC1 seeks to secure development that protects amenity, including residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, sunlight, outlook, privacy and soft landscaping.

The buildings are intended to be used as residual storage and a seasonal visitor attraction during November and December. The storage element of the building is considered low key and does not give raise to any neighbour amenity.

Referring to the visitor attraction, much of the impact and disturbance will be caused by the amplified music and visitors. Environmental Health were consulted and raised no objection subject to a number of conditions to manage the nuisance during construction and level of music from the site. At the time of visit (Mid-October), works had already commenced with intention to operate both cabins during the forthcoming Christmas season. The relevant conditions that are deemed appropriate following works are pollution control following works and ensuring that amplified music is controlled to levels that is inaudible at the site boundary. As the attraction is a relatively small scale and immediately surrounded by a number of larger attractions such as CBeebies land, it would be appropriate to make a slight change of wording to be inaudible from within the theme park than boundary.

As such, this application is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy DC1 of the Local plan.

Impact to Trees

Policy DC2 Landscape and Settlement Setting states that the Council must protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlement in the Staffordshire Moorlands. This is achieved by resisting development that would have a detrimental impact on landscape features, qualities and views and ensuring, new

development conserve and enhance the biodiversity quality of any natural or man-made features within the landscape.

There are a number of trees within the site that has been affected by the proposal. An arboricultural report was provided as part of the scheme and identified a number of trees to the north of the site- Norway Spruce, Sitka Spruce and Lawson Cypress. It was noted in the cover letter that 27 trees were felled on site to accommodate the log cabins however, will be compensated with 54 no. Lawson's cypress and Norway Spruce within the site.

The tree officer was consulted however, has made no comments.

While it is disappointing that works had already commenced prior to a decision being made, the case officer's is of the opinion that the trees were not TPOs and the proposed plants will also match those within the site that are part of the theming for the grotto. The additional planting would also equate to more than 10% of the on-site biodiversity lost to the scheme that was not necessary as part of the submission.

A condition will be added to ensure the existing trees are retained and proposed planting is completed within 4 months of a decision being made.

This application is therefore considered to be in accordance Policy D3 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity Net Gain

This application is exempt from BNG requirements as the proposed works have already commenced and pre-commencement conditions under this legislation would be redundant in this instance.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (STW) have been consulted and have requested additional information as they needed clarity on the metric submitted which made it difficult to assess which would inform the conditions prior to works. However as the works had already commenced, this application is exempt from fulfilling the 10% BNG condition and to provide a Habitat Maintenance and Management Plan for 30 years. The STW officer noted that the application is subject to providing a net gain, not a minimum of 10% as per the Local Policy NE1 and therefore, the metric would need to be used to demonstrate this.

Local Policy NE1 does not specify a minimum net gain but expects all development where possible to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. In this instance, the case officer is of the opinion that the net gain of 10% would suffice particularly as the cabins make a small addition to the scale of the site and unfortunately, is not bounded to provide beyond the minimum requirement. As such, the proposal would accord with Local Plan NE1.

Highway Safety

Section 12 of the NPPF states that planning should always seek a high standard of amenity for existing and future users of developments. Policy T1 states that permission will only be granted for development where satisfactory accommodated traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development.

The operation of the development would generate an increase of footfall during the period that it is used as an attraction site however, the scheme is minor scale and low key that it is not expected to impact on the existing traffic generated by the theme park as a whole. County Highways were consulted and raised no objection.

This application is therefore considered to be in accordance with Section 9 of the NPPF and Policy T1 of the Local Plan.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons discussed above the proposal is considered to comply overall with policies in the Development plan and a recommendation of conditional approval is made.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : Approve

Case Officer: Lisa Li

Recommendation Date: 07/02/25

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council