

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0240
Valid 16/05/2025

**TITTESWORTH FLY
FISHING LODGE
MEERBROOK ROAD
LEEK**

**RENEWAL OF TEMPORARY
PLANNING PERMISSION FOR
SITING OF PORTACABINS**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Whether or not the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt
- The impact on the character and appearance of the area
- the impact on highway safety

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is within the Green Belt and lies on the western side of Tittesworth Reservoir. It is accessed via a road/track connected to Meerbrook Road to the west. It comprises buildings used by Tittesworth Water Sports Ltd, an outdoor activities company. One of the buildings is a single-storey stone-built activities building/classroom with pitched roof and which was formerly a fly fishing lodge. There is a flat-roofed dark-timber clad building attached to the south side elevation of this building which is used as water sports equipment storage. There is also a car park. The site is surrounded by open land to the north, west and south.

PROPOSAL

This is a full application to retain four timber clad flat-roofed portacabins used by the water sports activity company. These were first approved under permission SMD/2018/0148 which had a condition requiring their removal within five years of the decision date (i.e. by 24th May 2023). A renewal application was granted in 2023 (SMD/2023/0145) but with a condition requiring their removal within two years. The site is currently leased from the owners, Severn Trent Water and the applicant was operating under a nine year lease which expires in 2025, hence the reason for the two year approval (to co-incide with the expiry of the lease). The condition attached to the 2023 permission requires the removal of the four portacabins by 17th May 2025. This new application to further renew the permission was submitted and validated on 16th May 2025. The applicants wish to continue to use the buildings for their purposes and wish to effectively extend the permission by another five years. The applicant is in the process of trying to obtain a new nine year lease with Severn Trent Water and as of 10.7.25 this has not been completed but according to the agent they are on an "interim monthly rolling lease" until the nine year lease is formally agreed.

There have been no changes to the centre since the previous approval. A Facilities Brief has been submitted which outlines details of the company, the service and

sports and activities on offer. This includes archery and other activities as well as a range of water sports. This is much the same as the one submitted with the 2023 application and the only notable change is that visiting groups range in size from 6 to 120 as opposed to between 6 and 60 as stated in 2023.

The cabins comprise two used as changing rooms, one is a toilet block and the other is a classroom for water sports tuition. Also approved under the previous applications was the change of use of part of a site to a storage compound associated with the water sports use. However, the decision notices did not require the use of the land as a storage compound to cease and therefore this application does not seek consent for this. The approved drawings also showed perimeter 2.4m high paladin fence for security purposes, painted green, although green mesh type fencing of a similar height has instead been installed on the perimeter and this has been supplemented with timber hit and miss fencing of the same approximate height as green fencing, placed on the inside of it to provide additional security. Timber fencing connecting the existing stone building and existing flat-roofed timber storage building to the closest portacabin and also short sections of the same fences connecting all four portacabins and the addition of steps up to the external doors of each portacabin, as shown on the drawings, have also been provided.

A Design and Access Statement submitted with the 2023 application explains the following:

The application is a response to a growth in the number of users of the site. The applicant provides a variety of water-borne activities and has expanded into non-water activities including archery and countryside walking. These buildings will free up the existing stone building for use for indoor activities.

An updated Design and Access Statement has been submitted with this new application and is similar in content to the previous.

The Facilities Brief elaborates on this with the following:

Over the past year we have had a footfall of over 6000 people through the centre and anticipate that this will grow significantly as our reputation for quality instruction and equipment provision spreads. We attract clients nationally whilst offering local people activities on a regular basis. We are a major provider for the National Citizenship Scheme in the area and are a British Canoeing Accredited Centre.

At peak operating times, in addition to myself, we employ 6 seasonal instructors, along with a full time centre manager and deputy centre manager. We also utilise a pool of 10 freelance instructors.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (Adopted September 2020)

SS10 – Other Rural Areas Strategy
SS11 – Churnet Valley Area Strategy
DC1 – Design Considerations
DC3 – Landscape and Settlement Setting

C2 – Sport Recreation and Open Space

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

Sections 5 (Rural Economy), 12 (Design) and 13 (Green Belts).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2018/0148: Siting of portacabins and change of use of land to storage compound. Approved on 24.5.18.

SMD/2023/0145: Siting of portacabins and change of use of land to storage compound (renewal of the above). Approved on 17.5.23.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 10.7.25
Neighbour notification expiry date: 10.7.25
Press advert: N/A

Public Comments

None.

Parish/Town Council comments

None.

Highways Authority

No objection.

Environmental Health

No objection.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Although new buildings are generally resisted in the Green Belt, facilities of outdoor sport and recreation are not considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as set out in para 154 of the NPPF and therefore by definition are not deemed to be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt. The two original buildings on site (the stone building and the flat-roofed timber storage building) are being used to their full potential and the new cabins were needed to allow the expansion of the operation and therefore enhanced outdoor recreational activities and opportunities. There is general support for this in policies SS10, SS11 (in line with promoting tourist and visitor attractions and facilities in the Churnet Valley) and C2 of the Local Plan.

Portacabins are not in keeping with the character and appearance of the countryside and in particular this rural part of the District close to the Peak District boundary. They are also be visible from the other side of the reservoir where a visitor centre exists but would not be particularly visible from the nearest roads. They were required temporarily and conditions added to the previous permissions required them to be clad in dark stained vertical timber boarding which would be a significant enhancement. The boarding has been applied but the agent has stated they have weathered over time and no longer have a dark-stain. The cladding would help the buildings match the existing flat-roofed storage building attached to the stone building. It was considered on balance in 2018 and 2023 that the benefit of enhancing the facilities at the centre would outweigh the impact on the appearance of the area. The external doors have a coloured finishing material e.g. red and green, which together with the light colour of the timber increases their visual prominence and makes them less in keeping with the traditional rural qualities of the area. The condition required the whole elevations to have a dark stained timber, including the coloured doors.

The agent explained the following regarding the red and green doors:

It is accepted that these are still red and green this is because the applicant was informed by Portakabin that the red doors were required due to building regulations that they work to. They stated that the red doors were required to allow those who are partially sighted to distinguish better between a wall and the door hence are a contrasting colour. We also work heavily with SEND groups, who often require basic information to carry out tasks. We therefore signpost them to the toilets via the description of the red doors which works well with this cohort of our client base.

I accept the reasoning behind the door colours. I would also add the green doors are also not too prominent, a light colour which blends in better with the rural surroundings.

On balance I consider that the additional facilities which support an outdoor recreation are a benefit to overall sport and leisure and visitor facilities/tourism in line with the Churnet Valley Masterplan/Policy SS11 and in the interests of the local rural economy and that this factor would outweigh the impacts of the portacabins on the character and appearance of the area. The structures are small and “low key” and of limited height (helped perhaps by their flat roofed form).

I consider that the proposed retention of the portacabins is therefore acceptable and with a condition added requiring a continual dark stain to be added to the existing timber cladding on the walls.

The fencing and steps added as part of the previous application (2023) have a minimal additional visual impact and are acceptable.

The storage compound area is relatively well screened from the west, north and south by existing vegetation and is not be harmfully prominent when viewed across the reservoir. The green fencing helps the appearance of this blend in with the surroundings. The new timber fencing added for extra security of equipment in the

compound has been placed inside the green fencing but is still visible although does not significantly harm the appearance of the area and helps screen items stored within the compound.

There have been no changes within the site in the surrounding area which would result in the development from leading to any visual or residential amenity harms or conflict with surrounding land uses.

Although at the time of this report, a nine year lease extension was still pending. However, as discussed above, the benefits of the new watersport centre facilities in contributing to sport, recreation, tourism and the local economy in the District are considered to outweigh the harm to the appearance of the area due to the portacabins being out of keeping with the area although it is also noted that these are small and low-key structures and not significantly visually intrusive in the landscape and can be improved through a new finish to help them harmonise more with the rural backdrop. The replacement with more solid buildings of a form and materials which are more in keeping with the historical and rural nature of the area (such as the existing stone building with tiled pitched roof on site) would in any case not be realistic as the land is leased from Severn Trent Water and is not in control of the applicant.

The Planning Practice Guidance states:

It will rarely be justifiable to grant a second temporary permission (except in cases where changing circumstances provide a clear rationale, such as temporary classrooms and other school facilities). Further permissions can normally be granted permanently or refused if there is clear justification for doing so.

Given the benefits of the development, I therefore consider that it would be appropriate to approve the application but with a condition requiring the cabins be removed when the current use of the site ceases rather than a time restriction condition requiring further “renewal” applications to be submitted periodically.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The application would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and with the safeguard of appropriate conditions would not lead to significant harm the character and appearance of the area. In this respect, the proposal would comply with the Council's Local Plan and the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston

Recommendation Date: 10.7.25

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council