

Planning Services

COMMITTEE REPORT

APPLICATION DETAILS

APPLICATION NO: 6/2011/0172/DM

FULL APPLICATION Change of use of land for the siting of touring

DESCRIPTION: caravans, static caravans & camping pods, retention of

timber construction building for use as site office, change of use of piggy parlour to amenity block

together with landscaping, access & associated works

NAME OF APPLICANT: Mr Paul Barkes

SITE ADDRESS: Thorpe Farm, Greta Bridge, Barnard Castle

ELECTORAL DIVISION: Barnard Castle West

CASE OFFICER: Steve Teasdale, Planning Officer

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DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND PROPOSALS

Site

1. Land at Thorpe Farm, Greta Bridge, comprising approximately 4.8 hectares of pasture land to the north of the existing farmstead, with existing access tracks and some peripheral tree planting. The overall agricultural holding extends to some 140 hectares of which 60 hectares is arable land farmed by contractors. The remaining 65 hectares of grassland and 15 hectares of woodland are managed by the applicant. Existing agricultural buildings on the site are used by both the applicant and contractors.

The Proposals

- 2. Planning permission is sought for the change of use of the land to allow the siting of static and touring caravans and camping pods, retention of existing timber chalet for site office, change of use of piggy parlour to amenity block, with associated landscaping, access and ancillary engineering operations. The retained building was erected without planning permission, so the application is part retrospective.
- 3. The specific type of static caravan is not described in the application, primarily because they come in different forms, although the planning statement does indicate they would be either finished in a green colour or possibly timber clad. For the purposes of this application, the legal definition of a caravan has been noted, including maximum size limitations of 20 metres length, 6.8 metres width and 3.05 metres internal ceiling height. The precise external appearance of the caravans could be controlled by condition.

- 4. The proposed camping pods are not fully specified either, but they are typically of timber construction, with a semicircular or half-oval shape, mounted on a timber deck to provide a small amenity area to the front. They are usually finished with stained or clear varnish, or left as natural timber. Their maximum size is likely to be around 4 metres long by 3 metres wide, with an overall height of about 3 metres. Again, their details could be reserved by way of condition.
- 5. The application is reported to committee as the proposals constitute major development.

PLANNING HISTORY

- 6. There is a comprehensive planning history associated with Thorpe Farm. Significant applications include: planning permission being granted for the use of woodland and fields to form a chalet development (2010/0108), conversion and new buildings to form 14 holiday cottages (2009/0178), the change of use to a touring caravan park (2008/0484), and the change of use of buildings and erection of new buildings for workshops, farm shop and tea rooms (2008/0453).
- 7. Other planning permissions have been granted for extensions and alterations to buildings, creation of butchers shop and bird of prey centre, antiques centre, and maize maze.

PLANNING POLICY

NATIONAL POLICY

- 8. Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1): Delivering Sustainable Development sets out the Government's overarching planning policies on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning System.
- 9. Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4): Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth sets out planning policies for economic development which should be taken into account alongside other relevant statements of national planning policy.
- 10. Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5): Planning for the Historic Environment sets out planning policies on the conservation of the historic environment.
- 11. Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7): Sustainable Development in Rural Areas sets out the national policies specific to planning in rural areas.
- 12. *Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism*: Sets out the national guidance on applications and documents related to the tourism industry.
- 13. The draft National Planning Policy Framework sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development to encourage economic growth and to achieve sustainable development.

REGIONAL PLANNING POLICY

14. The North East of England Plan - Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 (RSS) July 2008, sets out the broad spatial development strategy for the North East region

for the period of 2004 to 2021. In July 2010, however, the Local Government Secretary signalled his intention to revoke Regional Spatial Strategies with immediate effect, and that this was to be treated as a material consideration in subsequent planning decisions. This was successfully challenged in the High Court in November 2010, thus for the moment reinstating the RSS. However, it remains the Government's intention to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies when Orders have been made under section 109 of the Localism Act 2011, and weight can be attached to this intention.

- 15. The RSS sets out the region's housing provision and the priorities in economic development, retail growth, transport investment, the environment, minerals and waste treatment and disposal. Some policies have an end date of 2021 but the overall vision, strategy, and general policies will guide development over a longer timescale. The following policies are considered relevant:
- 16. *Policy 2 (Sustainable development)* requires new development proposals to meet the aim of promoting sustainable patterns of development.
- 17. Policy 7 (Connectivity and accessibility) planning proposals should seek to improve and enhance the sustainable internal and external connectivity and accessibility of the North East.
- 18. Policy 16 (Culture and Tourism) seeks to ensure that planning proposals promote culture and tourism including improving first impressions gained by visitors arriving and passing through the Region and which benefit the local economy. This includes supporting environmental improvements to gateways, whilst ensuring protection of natural, built and heritage environments, amongst other things to ensure that new tourism facilities benefit the local economy, people and environment without diminishing the attractiveness of the place visited.

LOCAL PLAN POLICY:

- 19. Policy GD1 (General Development Criteria), sets out the general design principles for development.
- 20. Policy TR3 (Camping, caravan and chalet sites in the countryside) sets out the policy considerations for certain types of tourism accommodation.
- 21. Policy ENV1 (Protection of the Countryside) is a general policy to limit development in the countryside.
- 22. Policy ENV3 (Area of High Landscape Value) sets policy out to protect area designated as AHLV and ensure development is suitable.
- 23. Policy ENV8 (Development affecting a protected wildlife species) seeks to ensure development does not adversely impact on protected species.
- 24. Policy ENV14 (Protection of Water Quality) seeks to protect water quality.

CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY RESPONSES

STATUTORY RESPONSES:

- 25. The Highways Agency initially issued a direction to not determine the application until an acceptable trunk road signing strategy had been agreed for the site. That issue has now been resolved to the satisfaction of the agency and planning permission can be granted subject to appropriate conditions as directed by the Highways Agency.
- 26. The Highway Authority has raised no objection to the proposals.
- 27. The Environment Agency has no objections subject to conditions relating to flood risk.

INTERNAL CONSULTEE RESPONSES:

- 28. *Ecology Section* has no objection to the proposals.
- 29. Landscape Section has no objections subject to condition requiring submission of a detailed landscaping scheme

PUBLIC RESPONSES:

30. One objection has been received from the land agent for Rokeby Park on the grounds that the proposal would detract from the appearance and setting of the park and associated conservation area.

APPLICANTS STATEMENT:

- 31. The current application proposals relate to the change of use of land for the siting of touring caravans, static caravans and camping pods, retention of timber construction building for use as site office, change of use of Piggy Parlour to amenity block together with landscaping, access and associated works at Thorpe Farm, Greta Bridge, Barnard Castle.
- 32. The application proposals will result in the provision of a caravan and camping site that will complement the existing and approved range of uses within the wider Thorpe Farm complex to provide a unique tourist destination at this important gateway location, which offers excellent links with Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Teesside and the North East Region as a whole via the strategic road network. The applicant is committed to providing a high quality camping and caravan site, incorporating high specification static units and camping pods, as well as the implementation of a comprehensive landscaping scheme which will ensure that the site is well integrated into the wider landscape setting and will also result in an overall improvement in the biodiversity value of the site, which will help fulfil the expectations of consumers within this sector.

- 33. The proposed development will also support the local economy in terms of direct and indirect job creation and offering support to local businesses. This would include public houses, restaurants, local shops and services, as well as existing tourist attractions and places of interest within the local area. In addition, the proposal may generate additional job opportunities for local people in respect of the day-to-day running of the touring caravan site.
- 34. The extensive woodland planting that is proposed as part of the current application proposals will ensure that the completed development will have a limited number of impacts of a negative nature both in terms of landscape character and visual impact. Indeed, the wider landscape setting is identified as having a well-wooded character and the proposed woodland planting would therefore be complementary to the wider landscape setting and therefore, overall, may result in a positive impact in terms of landscape character and visual amenity and, accordingly, the proposed development will have a positive impact on the character of the AHLV.
- 35. This Planning Statement has also demonstrated that all other planning matters in terms of highways, design, foul and surface water drainage, flood risk and impact on residential amenity have been satisfied and there are no other material considerations that would warrant the refusal of this planning application.

The above represents a summary of the comments received on this application. The full written text is available for inspection on the application file which can be viewed at http://teesdale.planning-register.co.uk/PlanAppDisp.asp?RecNum=20130

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

36. Having regard to the requirements of section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 relevant guidance, development plan policies and all material planning considerations, including representations received, it is considered that the main planning issues in this instance relate to principle, impact upon the surrounding countryside, impact upon residential amenity, access and highway safety, and ecology.

Principle

37. The principle of developing tourist related facilities at Thorpe Farm has been previously established by a series of planning permissions. Some, but not all of those planning permissions have been successfully implemented. Policy TR3 of the Local Plan presumes in favour of caravan, camping and chalet developments in the countryside, provided they don't detract from the character of the area, they are adequately screened by topography and landscape features, they are of appropriate scale and materials, they provide adequate services and access, and would not adversely affect the amenities of neighbouring occupiers. It is clear that the proposal would conform to Policy TR3 subject to these caveats, which are discussed in the following sections of the report.

Impact on the countryside

38. Policies ENV1 and ENV3 of the Local Plan seek to protect and enhance the open countryside within the area. Policy ENV1 in particular supports development in countryside locations for tourism and recreation related activities where the

proposal conforms to other relevant policies in the Local Plan. As the site lies within the designated Area of High Landscape Value the provisions of Policy ENV3 are important considerations and it is recognised that the land has distinctive qualities which are worthy of special recognition. In these areas development will only be permitted where it does not detract from the area's special character. Particular attention must therefore be paid to the context of the site within the landscape, siting and design of buildings and caravans and landscaping enhancement proposals.

- 39. The site is situated within rolling countryside immediately to the north of the A66 trans-Pennine trunk road. The site is well screened from this busy route by not only the local topography, but also a range of buildings associated with Thorpe Farm and Thorpe Grange Farm, and existing mature trees and hedgerows. It is considered that existing topography, landscaping, and spatial relationships between the site and existing buildings all play a part in ensuring that the character of the area would not be adversely affected by the proposed development. The objector's reference to impact upon Rokeby Park is noted, but the edge of the park is some 600 metres to the west of the application site, with Rokeby Hall a further 800 metres to the North West. The nearest conservation area is Greta Bridge, 400 metres away to the south west, beyond the A66 trunk road. The Landscape Section asked for additional photographic representations so that the landscape impact of the development could be properly assessed. It is considered that there would be no significant impact upon the local heritage assets of Rokeby Park and the Greta Bridge Conservation Area.
- 40. As the site develops over time and the number of static caravans increases, additional tree planting within the site would be maturing. An indicative layout plan shows significant tree planting, and suggests 75% native species and 25% Pine, the latter maintaining some screening in the winter months when deciduous trees have shed their leaves. However, on the advice of the Landscape Section, a detailed landscaping scheme would need to be submitted to ensure that an appropriate scheme could be implemented in such a way as to further increase screening over time. This would ideally involve a higher percentage of evergreen trees and shrubs.
- 41. The site features an attractive pond in the centre, where there is a natural depression in the land. Around the eastern side of this pond would be sited fourteen camping pods, with up to 65 static caravans to the west and north. Further to the east and to the south would be 38 pitches for touring caravans. Whilst the touring caravan pitches would have space to park a car, the remainder of the parking capacity would be accommodated by 101 marked out spaces nearer to the farm buildings. This would not be visible from outside the site.
- 42. The proposal also includes the retention of an unauthorised timber chalet type building which appears somewhat out of keeping with its surroundings in its current context. Its retention would be for office use so that the administration of the proposed development would be close at hand. It is recognised that not only would the appearance of the surrounding area change as the site is developed, but the area around the office would be heavily landscaped. This change in visual context would result in the building being harmonised with its surroundings, particularly if its external colouration were to be changed. This could be dealt with by way of condition.

- 43. The existing piggy parlour would be converted to an amenities block without any significant change to its external appearance. Internal access roads would be constructed using porous surface materials to reduce surface water run-off, and lighting would be limited to low level markers only.
- 44. For all these reasons, it is considered that the proposal accords with Policies ENV1 and ENV3 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

Impact upon residential amenity

45. It is recognised that the countryside contains residential uses which require appropriate protection from developments which might give rise to nuisance or disturbance. In this instance however, the site is some distance from the nearest settlement at Greta Bridge, and the nearest individual residential property is Thorpe Grange Cottage, some 350 metres to the south east. The occupiers of this property are very unlikely to be affected by the proposal, particularly in view of the existing noise from the busy A66 trunk Road. In this regard, the proposal would accord with Policy GD1 of the Local Plan.

Access and highway safety

- 46. The Highway Authority has offered no objections to the proposal. The Highways Agency, the highway authority for the A66 Trunk Road, initially directed that no decision be made on the application for 6 months, pending updating of the transport statement, agreement of an updated master plan for the whole Thorpe Farm development, and agreement of a signing strategy in the vicinity of the site. That has been achieved and the Highways Agency now has no objections, but has directed specific conditions to be imposed to ensure that there is no disruption to the trunk road network from vehicles entering and leaving the application site, in the interests of road safety.
- 47. The access arrangements and agreed signing strategy for the trunk road would ensure that highway safety would not be compromised in accordance with Policy GD1 of the Local Plan.

Impact on ecology

- 48. The proposal does not involve development that would damage or destroy wildlife habitat. Previous ecology surveys have been carried out in other parts of the site in relation to earlier proposals, primarily because of bat and barn owl issues with conversion of buildings. No such issues are relevant to the current proposal.
- 49. The principal concern has been that the feature pond in the centre of the site might have potential for colonisation by Great Crested Newts, a protected wildlife species. An appropriate survey report submitted with the planning application concludes that whilst there are a small number of smooth newts and amphibians present, there were no indications that Great Crested Newts have used the pond, and records do not reveal their presence within a 2km radius of the site. A general remark has also been made that existing trees on the site do not have potential for roosting bats.

50. The Ecology Section has confirmed that the risk to Great Crested Newts is low, and it is concluded that the proposal would not be in conflict with Policy ENV8 of the Local Plan or PPS9.

CONCLUSION

- 51. Diversification of Thorpe Farm originally started with a farm shop and tea rooms, but in recent years, many other similar facilities have developed along principal transport routes, not least the A66 trunk road. Supporting information within the planning application demonstrates that visitor numbers to Thorpe Farm are falling, and some previously approved uses on the site, such as the bird of prey centre and butchers shop, have ceased operation. The current proposal constitutes expansion of a previously approved touring caravan site and creation of a static caravan park in order to increase the viability of the business.
- 52. The proposal has been assessed as fulfilling the requirements of Local Plan policies ENV1, ENV3, ENV8, GD1 and TR3, as well as satisfying national planning policy expressed in PPS1, PPS4, PPS7 and the Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism. The proposal is also in line with regional policy on tourism as expressed in Policy 16 of the RSS.

RECOMMENDATION

That the application be **APPROVED** subject to the following conditions;

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission

Reason: By virtue of the provision of Section 91 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

- 2. The development shall be carried out in strict accordance with the following approved plans:
 - Site Location Plan (Dwg. No. P2035/SITE)
 - Proposed Site Plan (Dwg. No. P2035-1002 A)
 - Master Proposed Site Plan (Dwg. No. P2035-1003)
 - Piggy Parlour Proposed Plans and Elevations
 - Proposed Site Office Plans and Elevations
 - Landscaping Plan (P2035-1004 A)

Reason: To define the permission and ensure that a satisfactory form of development is obtained in accordance with Policy GD1 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

3. Prior to the siting of any static caravan, touring caravan or camping pod hereby approved, final details of a surface water drainage scheme for the site, based on sustainable drainage principles and an assessment of the hydrological and hydrogeological context of the development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall subsequently be implemented in accordance with the approved details before the development is

brought into use. The scheme shall also include details of how the scheme shall be maintained and managed for the design life of the site

Reason: To prevent the increased risk of flooding, to improve and protect water quality, improve habitat and amenity and ensure future maintenance of the surface water drainage system in accordance with Policy ENV14 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

4. No development shall commence until a scheme for the provision of foul water drainage works has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The drainage shall thereafter be completed in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: To prevent the increased risk of flooding, to improve and protect water quality, improve habitat and amenity and ensure future maintenance of the surface water drainage system in accordance with Policy ENV14 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

5. The approved static caravan units shall be occupied for holiday purposes only and no static caravan unit on the development site shall be occupied as a person's sole or main place of residence. The operators of the site shall maintain an up-to-date register of the names of all owners and occupiers of individual static caravan units and of their main home addresses, and shall make such information available at all reasonable times to the Local Planning Authority, upon request.

Reason: In order to prevent permanent residential occupancy in accordance with Policy ENV1 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

6. Notwithstanding the submitted details, prior to the commencement of development hereby approved, a detailed scheme of hard and soft landscaping, including the surface materials, plot boundary treatment and planting of trees and shrubs, shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. Such a scheme shall specify materials, species, tree and plant sizes, number and planting densities and the time and implementation of the scheme, including any earthworks required.

Reason: To ensure the site is adequately screened in accordance with Policy TR3 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

7. The landscaping scheme hereby approved shall be retained and maintained for the lifetime of the approved development. Any trees or other planting which dies within a period of five years from the completion of development, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species in accordance with details approved by the Local Planning Authority

Reason: To ensure the site is adequately screened in accordance with Policy TR3 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

8. Prior to the siting of any static caravan unit hereby approved, a plan and method statement detailing the arrangements for the delivery of static caravan units to the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Highways Agency. Thereafter, all static caravans shall be

delivered to the site in strict accordance with the approved plan and method statement.

Reason: To ensure highway safety on the A66 trunk road in accordance with Policy TR3 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

9. Prior to the siting of any static caravan, touring caravan or camping pod hereby approved, details of a signing strategy, as illustrated on Figures 22 and 22 A in Appendix A of the Revised Transport Statement December 2011, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Highways Agency. The proposed works shall be the subject of a Stage 1 (Preliminary Design) and a Stage 2 (Detailed Design) Road Safety Audit. The Audits shall be carried out in accordance with DMRB HD 19/03 and shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Highways Agency.

Reason: To ensure highway safety on the A66 trunk road in accordance with Policy TR3 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

10. Prior to the occupation of any static caravan, touring caravan or camping pod hereby approved, the signing strategy will require a Stage 3 (Completion of Construction) Road Safety Audit. The Audit shall be carried out in accordance with DMRB HD 19/03 and shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Highways Agency.

Reason: To ensure highway safety on the A66 trunk road in accordance with Policy TR3 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

11. Stage 4 (Monitoring) Road Safety Audits shall be carried out using 12 months and 36 months of accident data from the time of the improvement works, the signing strategy, becomes operational. The Audits shall be carried out in accordance with DMRB HD 19/03 and shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Highways Agency.

Reason: To ensure highway safety on the A66 trunk road in accordance with Policy TR3 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

12. Prior to the siting of any static caravan or camping pod hereby approved, details of the dimensions, external appearance and materials to be used in the construction of the static caravan units and camping pods to include specification of colour(s) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and thereafter be retained for the lifetime of the development unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the area and to comply with Policy ENV1 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

13. Prior to the siting of any static caravan, touring caravan or camping pod hereby approved, details of the surfacing treatment to all internal access roads, footpaths and parking areas shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved details shall be implemented in full prior to the first siting of any static caravan, touring caravan or camping pod.

Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the area and to comply with Policy ENV1 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

14. Prior to the siting of any static caravan, touring caravan or camping pod hereby approved, details of lighting to be used in all external areas shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and shall thereafter be retained for the lifetime of the development unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the area and to comply with Policy ENV1 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

15. Prior to the siting of any static caravan, touring caravan or camping pod hereby approved, details of an alternative colour specification for the building shown as 'Office' on the Proposed Site Plan (Dwg. No. P2035-1002 A) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and shall thereafter be implemented before the development is brought into use.

Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the area and to comply with Policy ENV1 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

16. Prior to the siting of any static caravan, touring caravan or camping pod hereby approved, details of the means for the disposal and storage of refuse shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and shall thereafter be retained for the lifetime of the development unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory form of development and to comply with Policy ENV1 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

17. In the event that this planning permission is not implemented within 3 years of the date hereof, the timber office building shown as 'Office' on the Proposed Site Plan (Dwg. No. P2035-1002 A) shall be dismantled and removed from the land within one month of the lapse of the planning permission.

Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the area and to comply with Policy ENV1 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

18. Before the use hereby approved is commenced details of the proposed car parking provision including layout, number of spaces, surface materials and drainage shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local planning authority. The approved scheme shall be implemented as part of the development in accordance with those details. Thereafter the car parking spaces shall be used and maintained in such a manner as to ensure their availability at all times for the parking of private vehicles.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to comply with Policies GD1 and TR3 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.

REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 1. It is considered that the proposal would increase the availability of local tourist facilities without detriment to the countryside or area of special landscape value, and that it would not have an adverse impact upon biodiversity or highway safety. Accordingly, it is considered that the proposal accords with Policies GD1, TR3, ENV1, ENV3, ENV8 and ENV14 of the Teesdale District Local Plan.
- 2. Having assessed all relevant material planning considerations, it is not considered that the objection on behalf of a resident of Rokeby Park overrides the presumption in favour of granting planning permission.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Submitted Application Forms, Plans and supporting documents

Planning Policy Statements PPS1, PPS4, PPS7 and the Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism

North East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 (RSS) July 2008 Teesdale District Local Plan 2002

Responses from Highways Agency, Highway Authority, Ecology Section, Landscape Section

Public consultation response

