

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Planning Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 5 June 2024 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor G Richardson (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Atkinson, A Bell (Vice-Chair), D Boyes, J Elmer, J Higgins, P Jopling, C Martin, K Shaw, A Simpson, S Zair and J Cosslett

Also Present:

Councillor J Cosslett

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Savory and Wilson.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5a) DM/23/00757/FPA - Acrum Lodge, Staindrop Road, West Auckland

The Committee considered a report of the Principal Planning Officer regarding an application to change the use of the land to allow the siting of 104 holiday chalets, 63 pitches for touring caravans and the creation of a new amenity building with reception, cafe and shop; re-clad the existing Acrum Stud stables at Acrum Lodge, Staindrop Road, West Auckland, DL14 9PB (for copy see file of minutes).

G Blakey, Principal Planning Officer, gave a detailed presentation which included a site location plan, aerial photographs, site photographs, proposed site layout and visual representation of proposed buildings. A site visit had taken place prior to the meeting.

Mr Hesmondhalgh, Planning Consultant addressed the Committee. He advised that it was not often that an application was submitted and received support from the Parish Council and Officers. The initial comments from landscape Officers had led to a reduced and amended proposal with a smaller footprint and improved landscape. There had been additional support from Visit County Durham due to the shortage of visitor accommodation in the County. He referred to ongoing improvements to Bishop Auckland due to government funding and private investment.

He continued, advising that the application had a genuine prospect of being delivered, it would generate £6m per year into the local economy and create direct and indirect jobs.

Councillor Simpson asked for further details on the proposed entrance road as it was clear that it was not wide enough for caravans. The Principal Planning Officer referred to the site photograph and explained that a new access road would be created at an alternative point of entry, which would achieve visibility splays over 200m as well as two way traffic. The current access was for agricultural purposes and would not be suitable.

P Harrison, Highway Development Manager confirmed that the proposed access met all technical standards required.

In response to a question from Councillor Atkinson, the Highway Development Manager confirmed that he had considered accident statistics and whilst there had been a recent fatality, the cause of the accident had also been considered. The accident history was not significant, it was not considered a blackspot and he was confident that the new access would not create one. In response to a comment from the Chair, the Highway Development Manager advised that the Planning Practice Guidance issued by Government only required developers to consider accident statistics for the previous three years or five years if the site was deemed an accident blackspot. Accidents in the vicinity of this site had been considered within these periods as part of the application.

In response to a question from Councillor Boyes, the Principal Planning Officer confirmed that the site would be open for 12 months of the year, however a condition was proposed relating to the way lodges were occupied, limited to 11 months in a calendar year to prevent permanent residential use.

Councillor Jopling suggested that units that were purchased would be limited to weekend use and if the Committee approved the application on the basis that it would bring visitors to the County, it was important to ensure restrictions were monitored. The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that the purpose of the condition was to prevent permanent occupancy and the Applicant would be required to keep a register which included main home addresses and could be provided to the local authority on request.

Councillor Cosslett was in attendance as Local Member and advised that he had supported the proposal from the outset.

Councillor Atkinson confirmed that this was a positive application with only a few objections and the benefits outweighed any harm. It would benefit the economy, generate income and provide 167 jobs and he moved the recommendation to approve the application.

Councillor Boyes confirmed that initial concerns regarding accommodation and occupancy had been answered appropriately. With regards to highway safety, he advised that Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee had done work to improve road safety, that incidents were not local people but motorcyclists and that serious accidents and fatalities had reduced over the years. He reiterated the benefits to the economy and employment and seconded the recommendation.

Councillor J Elmer had attended the site visit which had been useful to appreciate the landscape. He referred to the positive aspects including biodiversity net gain, the retained edges and additional planting. It was a shame to lose agricultural land, but it was not high quality land. He considered the comments from the landscape team, that the application had moderate impact and appreciated that the proposed planting would take 15-20 years to develop, however as it did, the impact would gradually be reduced. This was a major scale development which would have significant beneficial impact. It was important to find suitable locations for this type of development and this was the place to do it as alternatives would have much higher significant impact in areas with more landscape value. He supported the application.

Councillor Bell had attended the site visit. He referred to the jobs and benefits to the economy. It was a good application with planning authority approval and recognised that Durham was open for business. He also supported the application.

The Chair reiterated his concerns regarding highway safety and whilst they had been addressed, this was a fast and busy road and any loss of life was one too many. In response to the agricultural grading of the land, he observed that it could be tidied up for food, particularly in the current climate.

Resolved

That the application be APPROVED subject to the conditions outlined in the report and the completion of a Section 39 Legal Agreement to secure the following:

- Biodiversity net gain on site in accordance with a Biodiversity Management and Monitoring Plan for 30 years.