

COMMITTEE REPORT

APPLICATION DETAILS

APPLICATION NO:	3/2011/0378
FULL APPLICATION DESCRIPTION:	Redevelopment and extension of existing caravan site, relocation of access and associated drainage.
NAME OF APPLICANT:	Mr David Anderson
ADDRESS:	Struthers Caravan Site, Struthers Farm, Edmundbyers
ELECTORAL DIVISION:	Weardale
CASE OFFICER:	Colin Harding colin.harding@durham.gov.uk 03000263945

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND PROPOSALS

The site

1. Struthers Caravan Site lies outside of the defined development limits of Edmundbyers and just outside of, although immediately adjacent to, Edmundbyers Conservation Area. The site is located wholly within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Edmundbyers is a small rural village of around 30no. residential properties. The adjacent Youth Hostel is a Grade II Listed Building.
2. The existing site has 14 static caravans, but was granted permission for 30no. caravans. There is also a small utility building and a timber structure on the site.
3. There is another caravan site within Edmundbyers (Village Green Site), located to the north of the application site, which currently has approximately 24 caravans, but an extant permission permits up to 79 caravans.
4. Access to the site is currently taken from the B6278 at a point adjacent to the Youth Hostel.
5. With regards to topography, the north and east of the site are relatively flat, however the southern part of site slopes sharply towards Burhope Burn, which forms the southern boundary of the site.
6. A Public Right of Way passes through the site from north to south.

The Proposal

7. The application seeks planning permission for the rearrangement of the existing site with an extension of the site into the agricultural field to the north east. It is proposed to utilise the existing site mainly for tents and touring pitches (11 large tent and touring pitches) with a new office and amenity block, as well as a small play area. The proposed extension into the field would incorporate all 31 static caravans and an additional 6 large tent and touring pitches arranged around a new internal access road. A new vehicular access would be created to the west of the existing access.
8. It is proposed that the development would be implemented in a phased manner with all planting, infrastructure, facilities, tent/touring pitches and the most westerly/southerly static pitches being implemented initially, with the further static pitches to the east being developed once the proposed landscaping has had the opportunity to establish and begins to mature.

PLANNING HISTORY

9. CA/56226 – Increase in the number of caravans from 15 – 30 and provision of toilet facilities – Approved 20/07/1974

PLANNING POLICY

NATIONAL POLICY:

10. On March 27th 2012 the Government published the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF). The framework is based on the policy of sustainable development and establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Three main dimensions to sustainable development are described as economic, social and environmental factors. The presumption is detailed as being a golden thread running through both the plan making and decision-taking process. This means that where local plans are not up-to date, or not a clear basis for decisions, development should be allowed. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Proposed development that accords with an up-to-date Local Plan should be approved and proposed development that conflicts should be refused, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance Notes are cancelled as a result of the NPPF coming into force.
11. The NPPF states that local authorities should support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres.
12. It also states that local planning authorities should seek to protect and enhance valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils and that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National

Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.

13. Furthermore, the NPPF states that local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness and that when considering applications that may affect heritage assets, that any possible harm is weighed against potential public benefits.
14. The Dept for Communities and Local Government published a Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism, which replaced PPG21 and is not one of the documents cancelled by the NPPF. It therefore remains a material consideration. This publication recognises the value of tourism as a vital component in the national economy. It specifically notes that tourism can be a key element in farm diversification, helping to revitalize towns and villages and supporting rural services and facilities.
15. It also highlights that tourism proposals should seek to preserve and enhance the special features of designated areas, such as AONBs. Furthermore, local planning authorities should weigh up whether proposals protect and enhance the visual quality of the site and its surroundings, ensure that the development fits in well with its environs and that it respects the historic interest of the surrounding buildings and areas and ensuring that proposals do not adversely affect the historic environment that people value.

REGIONAL PLANNING POLICY

16. *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.
17. In July 2010 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 now be attached to this intention. The following policies are nevertheless considered relevant;
18. *Policy 1 North East Renaissance* states that strategies, plans and programmes should support a renaissance throughout the North East
19. *Policy 2 Sustainable Development* seeks to embed sustainable criteria throughout the development process and influence the way in which people take about where to live and work; how to travel; how to dispose of waste; and how to use energy and other natural resources efficiently.
20. *Policy 3 Climate Change* states that the RSS recognises that climate change is the single most significant issue that affects global society in the 21st century. Policy 3 will seek to ensure that the location of development, encouraging sustainable forms of transport, encouraging and supporting use of renewable energy sources, and waste management all aids in the reduction of climate change

21. *Policy 11 Rural Areas* is concerned with the development of a vibrant economy. It encourages a positive framework for the diversification of agriculture, culture, leisure and tourism.
22. *Policy 16 Culture and Tourism* seeks to ensure that the development of culture, sports, leisure, recreation and tourist facilities and attractions protects, invests in and enhances and maintains the Region's natural, built and heritage environment, whilst encouraging developments that benefit the local economy, people and environment without diminishing the attractiveness of the place visited.
23. *Policy 31 Landscape Character* states that development proposals should be appropriate to the special qualities and statutory purposes of the North Pennines AONB
24. *Policy 32 Historic Environment* states that development proposals should seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment of the Region.

LOCAL PLAN POLICY:

25. The following policies of the Wear Valley District Local Plan as amended by Saved and Expired Policies September 2007 are considered relevant in the determination of this application:
26. *Policy GD1 (General Development Criteria):*
All new development and redevelopment within the District should be designed and built to a high standard and should contribute to the quality and built environment of the surrounding area.
27. *Policy ENV1 (Protection of the Countryside):*
The District Council will seek to protect and enhance the countryside of Wear Valley.
28. *Policy ENV2 (The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty):* Priority will be given to the protection and enhancement of the landscape qualities of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Development which adversely affects the special scenic quality and the nature conservation interest of the AONB will not be permitted.
29. *Policy BE1 (Protection of Historic Heritage):*
The District Council will seek to conserve the historic heritage of the District by the maintenance, protection and enhancement of features and areas of particular historic, architectural or archaeological interest.
 - i) provide adequate access to the developments;
 - ii) not exceed the capacity of the local road network; and
 - iii) be capable of access by public transport networks.
30. *Policy BE4 (Setting of a Listed Building):*
Development which impacts upon the setting of a listed building and adversely affects its special architectural, historical or landscape character will not be allowed.
31. *Policy BE5 (Conservation Areas):*
The character of each Conservation Area will be protected from inappropriate development.

32. *Policy BE8 (Setting of a Conservation Area):*

Development which impacts upon the setting of a Conservation Area and which adversely affects its townscape qualities, landscape or historical character will not be allowed.

33. *Policy BE21 (Farm Diversification):*

Proposals for farm diversification will be permitted provided they fulfil the following criteria. The proposal should:

- i) remain ancillary to the main agricultural function;
- ii) utilise, where possible, existing farm buildings. Where new buildings are required they should be in keeping with the traditional form and character of the farm group and be well related to existing buildings; and
- iii) satisfy the General Development criteria, Policy GD1.

34. *Policy TM1 (Criteria for Tourist Proposals):*

The Council will give encouragement to schemes which provide tourism facilities in the District provided they accord with criteria set out in the local plan.

35. *Policy TM2 (Tourism within the AONB):*

Tourism development proposals within the AONB will be allowed only if they fulfil the criteria set out in the local plan.

The above represents a summary of those policies considered most relevant in the Development Plan the full text, criteria, and justifications of each may be accessed at <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/government/en/1020432881271.html> for national policies; <http://content.durham.gov.uk/PDFRepository/WearValleyDistricLocalPlanMarch1997.pdf> for Teesdale District Local Plan as amended by Saved and Expired Policies September 2007.

CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY RESPONSES

STATUTORY RESPONSES:

36. *Edmundbyers Parish Meeting* object to the proposals and raise issues regarding the prominence of the site from the A68 and also the Muggleswick Road to the south, that in comparison the other caravan park in Edmundbyers is well screened, that the extension of the existing site would be sprawling and affect the scenic quality of the AONB, that the proposed landscape would block the open aspect of the entrance to the village, that Edmundbyers already hosts a significant number of caravans in comparison to its size and number of residents, that the size of the existing farm operation is such that it does not require diversification, that the proposal would be to the detriment to highway safety and that landscape simply cannot absorb a development of this scale.

37. The *County Highway Authority* raise no objections to the proposal, noting that the relocation of this existing access would be a necessary part of the expansion of the site and would afford a significant improvement in sight visibility of and for the B6278 traffic.

38. The existing footpath route to the village from the site would remain available for caravan site patrons to utilise in walking to/from the village, however, in order to encourage pedestrians to use it and not walk to the village on the B6278 verge, a condition is recommended requiring a minimum of two pedestrian signs to be erected within the site pointing patrons in the direction of the public footpath. It is

also recommended that the existing metal gated vehicular access to the B6278 is replaced with a “kissing” type pedestrian gate. A smaller gate to the side could be installed for disabled and pushchair access. Lastly, it is recommended that the surface of the public footpath route between the facilities/office block and the B6278 be improved in order to encourage its use.

39. The proposed 6m junction entrance radii are relatively small at a caravan site leading from a de-restricted B road. They are however acceptable if the first section of access road is widened to 6m.
40. *Natural England* have commented that the proposal should not have significant effect on the nearby European sites of the North Pennines Moors Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), or indeed any of Muggleswick, Stanhope & Edmundbyers or Blanchland Moors & Burnhope Burn SSSIs. With regards to protected species *Natural England* direct the Local Planning Authority to the advice of their own ecologists. However, with regards to the landscape impact of the proposal on the AONB, *Natural England* have raised concerns over the impact of the development, particularly from the B6278 and Muggleswick Road.
41. The *Environment Agency* have no objection to the proposals.
42. *Northumbrian Water* have raised no objections subject to a condition being attached in order to secure the diversion of their equipment within the site that is situated under the proposed building.

INTERNAL CONSULTEE RESPONSES:

43. The *County Ecologist* has raised no objections to the proposals.
44. The *Design and Conservation Team* object to the proposals, raising concerns over the impact of the development upon views into the conservation area and on a Grade II Listed Building, with the open views surrounding the village being considered to form an important part of the setting of the conservation area.
45. The Council's *Landscape Section* have commented several times with regards to this application following discussions with the applicant and the receipt of amended plans. Despite this, the Landscape Section continue to object to the proposals. They acknowledge that the proposed planting to the north of the site, within a few years would provide good screening. The planting to the east, they consider, would provide effective screening within 10 years, however they consider that the phasing of this part of the site should be reconsidered as the screening would not be sufficiently substantial when the static caravans are introduced. It is with regards to views from the south that the most concern is raised where it is acknowledged that the slope of the site makes it difficult to screen the site. The concern raised is that even after 10 years that the static caravans would still be very visible and the impact of the site as a whole would be a significant negative one upon the special scenic quality of the AONB.
46. *North Pennines AONB Partnership* raise concerns over the level of screening to the site from the south and the subsequent landscape impact.

PUBLIC RESPONSES:

47. The application has been advertised in the press, a site notice was displayed at the site and letters were sent to neighbours.
48. *Campaign to Protect Rural England* object to the proposals stating that whilst they acknowledge that tourism is important to the economy of the AONB, it should not mean development at any cost. They note that the proposal is for touring caravans as well as static caravans, that it is visible from a number of locations, including the A68, has an impact upon the setting of the village, it's tranquillity and lighting and that potential prominence should be carefully considered.
49. 38 letters of objection have been received from properties within Edmundbyers.
50. The concerns of local residents relate to a number of issues including: the impact of the proposals upon the landscape quality of the AONB; its impact upon the character of the settlement; its impact upon Edmundbyers Conservation Area and it's setting; the potential for the proposal to increase traffic and cause highway safety issues; the level of noise generated by occupants of the site; that existing services such as sewers within the village could not cope with the additional demand; that the design of the office/amenity block is inappropriate and would appear as excessively prominent; that the village is already oversupplied with caravans beyond what might be reasonably expected; that neither the current site or Village Green Site do not run at capacity as it is; the length of time that it will take for screening measures to become effective; that the development would lead to unacceptable levels of light pollution; that the existing site is an eyesore and no efforts have been made to improve it's appearance; that the proposal will lead to an increase in dog mess and litter within the village; that the proposal would not lead to the claimed economic benefit to the village; that insufficient staff would be employed to adequately manage the site that the proposal would lead to an increase in crime within the village; that the proposed tents would represent a fire risk; that the applicant's farm business is of such a scale that it does not need to diversify and that it would impact upon possible ridge and furrow evident within the application site.
51. There has been 1no. letter of support received noting that the proposals would lead to increased trade to the village shop and pub.

APPLICANT'S STATEMENT:

52. The applicant has not provided a statement, but the following is a summary from the design and access statement.
53. The proposed development will ensure the viability of the caravan site, improve facilities available to its users, and improve the range of camping available on the site and within the area. The improvement of business will also help sustain and diversify the agricultural business owned by the applicant. The application fully addresses drainage and hydrology and will not harm any ecological interests.
54. The proposal has been sensitively approached to ensure minimal harm to the landscape or the character or appearance of the area. The landscaping scheme has been considered centrally to the design of the development.

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 Spennymoor Council Offices..

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

55. Having regard to the requirements of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the relevant Development Plan policies, relevant guidance and all other material planning considerations, including representations received, it is considered that the main planning issues in this instance relate to the principle of the development, the impact upon of the development upon the AONB, Conservation Area and other heritage assets, the impact of the development upon highway safety and other issues.

Principle of development.

56. There is general support throughout national, regional and local planning guidance for sustainable economic development in rural areas, and it is recognised that tourism forms a significant element of the rural economy, particularly in Weardale. Accordingly, some additional provision of additional tourist accommodation in various locations should be realistically expected.

57. Historically, Policy TL7 of the Wear Valley District Local Plan sought to restrict further caravan site development west of the A68, a point raised in many of the representations made on this proposal. It should be noted however that Policy TL7 was not saved in the 2007 review of the Local Plan and it is therefore considered that no weight can be attached to it. Rather each proposal must be considered on its own merits under the current relevant policies.

58. Having regards to sustainability, it is considered that Edmundbyers is a village that is in such a location that it could be considered suitable to host additional tourist accommodation. It is conveniently located not far from the A68 and provides a gateway to Weardale, with Stanhope, Wolsingham, Frosterley within a convenient and scenic drive. Additionally, convenient access to Consett, Corbridge and Hexham is also possible to the north. It is recognised that both existing caravan sites along with the Youth Hostel provide an income source for both the local pub and shop.

59. Local concern has been expressed that the development would lead to local services being overwhelmed. Whilst the holiday season is now year round, it is considered unlikely that all of the caravans and pitches would be occupied all year round at full capacity. In addition, the site already has permission to increase the number of caravans to 30. Officers therefore consider that the proposal would not lead to a situation whereby the character of the village and it's amenities would be overwhelmed.

60. This proposal would expand and improve the quality of the caravan site and hence would have a positive impact on the range and quality of tourist accommodation in the area. In this respect, the principle of development would meet the aims of national, regional and local policies to support the rural economy and tourism.

61. However, whilst in principle it may therefore be that Edmundbyers could be considered as an appropriate location for this type of development, planning policies TM1 and TM2, as well as national and regional guidance identify that such development must not be at any cost and will only be acceptable in sensitive areas, such as AONBs, providing it can be successfully absorbed into the landscape and complies with the other relevant policies.

62. Specifically, Local Plan Policy TM2 states that tourism development in the AONB will only be allowed if among other things, they do not detract from the landscape quality of the AONB. In addition to landscape impact, Local Plan Policy TM1 requires that tourism development is of a scale compatible with its surrounds. Further, Local Plan Policy BE8 states that development which impacts on the setting of a Conservation Area will not be allowed and Policy BE1 seeks to maintain, protect and enhance areas of historic, architectural or archaeological interest. These provisions are also repeated generally in Local Plan Policy GD1. Additionally, the NPPF, in chapter 11, places great weight on conserving landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which is a landscape that has the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. In respect of the impact on heritage features, like a conservation area, listed buildings and archaeology, the NPPF, in chapter 12, again advises that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Significance can be harmed or lost through development within the heritage asset's setting and any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.

63. Therefore, notwithstanding the general support for tourism development, the principle of development is ultimately dependent on the impact of the development on the landscape of the AONB and heritage assets.

Impact upon character of AONB.

64. Local Plan Policy TM2 states that tourism developments in the AONB will only be allowed if among other things, they do not detract from the landscape quality of the AONB and Policy ENV2 gives priority to the protection and enhancement of the landscape quality of the AONB. The emphasis is therefore clearly on the protection of the AONB over tourism and other development. This importance is reaffirmed in the NPPF, which attaches "great weight" to conserving AONBs, recognising that AONBs have the "highest status of protection". In fact, in paragraph 116, the NPPF advises that planning permission should be refused for major developments in designated areas like AONBs, except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. RSS policies 16 and 31, whilst encouraging developments that benefit the local economy, including tourism, requires that they should not diminish the attractiveness of the place visited, particularly the AONB.

65. At all levels of planning policy, the balance is therefore in favour of the protection of the AONB against competing interests, unless the harm can be justified in the wider public interest.

66. It is considered that to date, Edmundbyers has absorbed its existing caravan capacity reasonably well, although at present neither of the 2 sites are developed to their permitted capacity and if done so the impact from further caravan development out to the east could become more acute. The relatively large Village Green Site is generally accepted as being well screened by dense mature trees whilst Struthers Farm site is at present insufficiently screened and in generally fairly poor condition, but its current limited size of just 14 static caravans located close to the village boundary reduces its overall impact upon the settlement.

67. Officers are supportive of the principle of seeking improvements to the appearance of The Struthers Farm site, however, it presents somewhat of a challenge due its position and the general topography. The site sits adjacent to the B6278, the main approach to Edmundbyers, with the road itself forming the northern boundary to the site. Therefore any development has the potential to

appear prominent at the entrance to the village, the conservation area and the wider AONB. Furthermore, the topography of the site slopes severely to the south as the land falls towards the burn, forming a steep sided valley. As a result, views from the Muggleswick road on the opposite shoulder of this valley looking north towards Edmundbyers give a panoramic view of the site and village clinging to the valley side and allow the full appreciation of the site in its setting of the AONB.

68. It is this southern view in particular that presents the greatest challenge with regards to ensuring any proposed development is acceptably absorbed into the landscape.
69. Following the initial submission of the application, lengthy discussions and negotiations have been undertaken with the view to improving upon the initially submitted scheme with regards to its impact upon the landscape and setting of Edmundbyers.
70. Concerns were raised at the start by the Council's Landscape Section, the AONB Partnership and Natural England with regards to the landscape impact on the AONB when viewed from the north and east when approached along the B6278, and also when viewed from the South across the Muggleswick Road. It was suggested that the static caravans should remain within the existing site and only touring and tent pitches should be considered on the field to the east, as they would have less of an impact being more seasonal and this would retain the physical development of the statics closer to the village edge. The proposal was instead amended to retain the proposed statics in the field to the east, but to place a line of tent and touring pitches along the roadside boundary and to further improve the perimeter landscaping.
71. A phasing programme is also now proposed, with all landscaping being carried out in Phase 1, along with the provision of 9 static caravans, the touring/tent pitches, amenity/office block, services and road. Phase 2 would follow after 5 years and would see the introduction of the rest of the static caravans. Photomontages have been provided, as requested, in order to show how the site would appear at Year 0, Year 5 and Year 10, although it should be noted that these photomontages do not show any occupation of the touring pitches, nor tents or cars which would be present during the occupation of the site and the caravan sides would not be dark coloured as they are shown on the images. The images are nevertheless very useful in assessing the potential landscape impact over a period of at least 10 years.
72. Having considered this revised information and having further consulted, it is felt that concerns about the close up impact from the B6278 to the north have been overcome by the removal of static pitches from directly adjacent to the road. Some concerns remain with regards to the appearance of the site from the east, where it is considered that the introduction of static caravans at this part of the site at Year 5 may be too soon in order for the landscaping to have developed sufficiently to provide adequate screening, but an adjustment to the phasing scheme could allow this concern to be overcome.
73. However, it is the key view from the south where primary concerns remain as this is the wider landscape view against which the full impact of the development would be seen within the AONB. Due to the topography sloping down to the valley, any landscaping screening to the south would be of limited benefit. It would probably take more than the lifetime of the development for appropriate

new planting to achieve the height required to start to screen the development to the same extent as the Village Green site further to the north.

74. In its current form, it is considered that the proposal would appear, when viewed from the south, as a substantially sized addition to the east of the village. Placing static caravans in the field to the east, as opposed to tents and touring caravans, would seem to be the wrong way around. Done the other way it would keep the permanent structures of the static caravans closer to the village while the field to the east would most likely only be occupied during the summer period and that could have been controlled by a condition limiting use between certain months. But as proposed, the placing of static caravans in the field to the east would significantly extend the built form of the village into the countryside. Even after having allowed new landscaping to mature over a period of 10 years, the static caravans in particular would not be absorbed into the landscape. In addition, it should be borne in mind that once established caravan owners tend to add features like decking, lighting and domestic paraphernalia, in addition to the presence of parked cars, which all further add to the visual impact of the caravans on the landscape, which in this case is a landscape in which priority is given to its strictest protection. As a result, locating static caravans in the field to the east would appear too prominent and would have an unacceptable impact upon the character of the village as a whole and this part of the AONB. This would be contrary to the provisions of Wear Valley District Local Plan Policies GD1, ENV1, ENV2, TM1 and TM2, NPPF chapter 11 and RSS policies 16 and 31.
75. In considering whether there is a wider public interest to overcome the harm, this site has already had permission for 30 caravans within the confines of the existing site, which brings into question the need for this proposal which in effect, despite more than doubling the size of the site, would only deliver 1 additional static caravan and 17 tent and touring pitches. Even if topography is preventative, it is considered that better use could still have been made of the existing site and there is no justification put forward for the amount of new development proposed. Further, in respect of need for the development, the Village Green Site, which is almost neighbouring, has only implemented 24 of the permitted 79 caravans, so there is already spare capacity which can be provided in a well screened and successfully managed site without having to allow further harmful encroachment into the landscape of the AONB. There is nothing to suggest that there is an overriding shortage of this type of holiday accommodation in the area. The NPPF is clear that the weight to be given to the protection of the AONB against other competing interests is "great" and this emphasis is not repeated in the sections relevant to the rural economy and tourism. This proposal would only provide 1 full time and 1 part time job. On balance, the protection of the AONB is therefore considered to outweigh the tourism benefits of this proposal and there is no wider public interest to outweigh the harm to the AONB. In accordance with paragraph 116 of the NPPF planning permission should therefore be refused for this major development within the AONB.

Impact upon Edmundbyers Conservation Area and other heritage assets.

76. The site lies adjacent to the Edmundbyers conservation area and in addition, the adjacent Youth Hostel is a grade II listed building.
77. In the exercise of planning functions with respect of any buildings or other land in a conservation area, the Local Planning Authority must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area (Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act

1990). In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the Local Planning Authority must pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses (Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

78. The consideration of the impact of the proposal upon the character of Edmundbyers Conservation Area raises many of the same issues as arise during the consideration of the proposal in relation to its landscape impact upon the AONB.
79. Local Plan Policy BE8 states that development which impacts on the setting of a Conservation Area will not be allowed and more generally Policy BE1 seeks to maintain, protect and enhance areas of historic, architectural or archaeological interest, provisions which are repeated generally in Local Plan Policy GD1. NPPF, in chapter 12, gives “great weight” to the conservation of Heritage Assets.
80. Being located on the edge of the settlement, the site by definition provides some of the character of the setting of Edmundbyers Conservation Area. Edmundbyers is somewhat unusual in that its size and position mean that a significant majority of the Conservation Area and its setting can be appreciated in a single view, particularly from the south. The rural approach from the east is an important part of the setting of the conservation area and this character therefore has significance.
81. In this respect it is considered that the inability to effectively screen the site from the south means that the large outward eastern extension to the settlement will be obvious and static caravans by reason of their shape, materials and colour, would be jarring, incongruous features against the otherwise typical rural character and materials of built development in the village. As a result, the character of the settlement and the conservation area as a whole will be detrimentally impacted upon. Again, the NPPF says that the weight to be given to conservation of heritage assets is “great” against other competing issues, which in this case is tourism. The NPPF chapter 12 states that harm or loss to heritage assets should require clear and convincing justification and it has already been identified that there is no demonstrable overriding need for this particular development. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies BE1 and BE8 of the Wear Valley District Local Plan, NPPF chapter 12 and RSS policies 16 and 32 in this respect.
82. Edmundbyers Youth Hostel is a Grade II Listed Building and sits within its own grounds, with the existing caravan site in close proximity. It is considered that although there would be some impact upon this building, that its main setting when viewed from the road would be largely unchanged. Furthermore, the part of the site closest to this building would largely host touring/tent pitches which are of a less permanent and more lightweight nature than the static caravan pitches. It is therefore considered no unreasonable upon the listed building itself would occur as a result of this development.
83. It should be noted, that notwithstanding outstanding concerns with regards to the overall impact of the proposal upon the conservation area, that it is considered that the amenity/office block in itself is considered to be of an acceptable design and in an appropriate location within the site.
84. Concerns were raised at an early stage in the application with regards to the potential presence of rigg and furrow plough markings in the field that forms the

extension to the site. The applicant was requested to provide further information in this regards. This has not been forthcoming, because the applicant felt it appropriate to resolve issues of landscape primarily before commissioning further work to investigate the possibility of rigg and furrow. While not decisive in itself to warrant refusal, the lack of information in this respect adds to the view that the scheme would have an unacceptable impact on heritage assets as a whole.

Highway Issues

85. The comments of local residents with regards to highways safety have been noted and the County Highways Authority were consulted on this application.
86. Although the proposed development would lead to an increase in traffic, it is considered that this would not be so great as to be beyond the capacity of local roads. The application involves the relocation of the existing access to a more appropriate location, which should improve access and egress from the site.
87. A number of suggestions have been made by the County Highways Authority with regards to safeguarding pedestrian safety whilst visitors are walking to and from the village itself. These measures could be secured by condition if Members were minded to approve the application.
88. Having regards to the advice of the County Highways Authority, it is considered that the proposals would not be of unreasonable detriment to highway safety or take local roads beyond reasonable capacity.
89. The application is therefore considered to accord with Policy T1 in this respect and is considered to be acceptable in this regards.

Other Issues

90. Issues of biodiversity are a material consideration, in accordance with Circular 06/05. All public bodies must have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive in the exercise of their functions where there is likely to be a disturbance (etc) to priority or protected species. The requirements of the Habitats Directive were brought into effect by the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 1994 and now the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. These regulations established a regime for dealing with derogations which involved the setting up of a licensing regime administered by Natural England. Under the requirements of the Regulations, it is a criminal offence to kill, injure or disturb the nesting or breeding places of protected species unless it is carried out with the benefit of a licence from Natural England.
91. The County Ecologist, as well as Natural England have been consulted on this proposal with no concerns being raised by either with regards to the potential impact of the development upon protected species or protected sites in the vicinity.
92. Concerns have been raised by a number of residents with regards to the impact of the development upon services within the village. To this end, the site would not be connected to mains sewers and would have its own septic tank and drainage system. It is considered unlikely therefore that the proposals would have an unreasonable impact upon utility services provided to the village.
93. Further concerns relating to loss of amenity from noise have been considered and whilst it is accepted the proposal would potentially lead to an increase in

noise, it is considered that this would be unlikely to be of such a level that it would become unreasonable from the size and type of development proposed, and the site has previously had permission to increase the numbers of caravans to 30. The impact on residential amenity would not be sufficient to justify refusal.

94. It is considered that the concerns raised with regards to potential fire risk are largely unfounded. There is nothing to suggest that the site would be any more susceptible to fire than any other caravan site and the site will have its own fire risk assessment and plan. This matter is also covered by licensing. It would highly be unreasonable to withhold planning permission on this basis.
95. Equally, concerns over increased crime, dog mess and litter are noted however such issues are difficult to predict and quantify. It is considered that the potential risk of these factors being significantly increased to an unreasonable level is low and it would be unreasonable to withhold planning permission on this basis.
96. It is accepted that the existing site is not in the most pristine of conditions, with many of the existing static caravans being of some age. This should not however be reason to suppose that the proposed development would be of similar appearance. It is considered that the current application, notwithstanding concerns that officers have with it, represent the applicant's commitment to improve the appearance of the current site and improve its viability accordingly and this should not be used as a reason to resist the proposal any more than it should be used as reason to support it.
97. With regards to staffing levels, the applicant has indicated that there would be 1no. full time and 1no. part time member of staff at the site. It is considered that there is no suggestion that this will prove insufficient to allow the effective management of the site and if the site is so successful that it requires additional staff, then the applicant could employ additional workers as necessary.

Conclusions

98. Although there is underlying general planning policy support for tourism development, it is clear from these policies that this should not come at an unreasonable cost, especially in sensitive areas such Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and conservation areas to which the greatest weight is given to their protection against other competing interests.
99. Attempts have been made from Officers and the Applicant to reduce the impact of this proposal and additional information has been provided to help consideration of the proposal. However, regrettably, it has not been possible to achieve a scheme that is mutually agreeable and which successfully mitigates against the identified harm to the AONB and setting of the Edmundbyers conservation area.
100. There has been overwhelming amounts of objection to the proposal from both consultees and the general public, including from nearly half of the households in Edmundbyers and the Edmundbyers Parish Meeting for reasons which have been agreed to be relevant.
101. Accordingly, the proposal is considered to be contrary to Wear Valley District Plan Policies GD1, ENV1, ENV2, BE1, BE8, TM1 and TM2, RSS policies 16, 31 and 32, and NPPF chapters 11 and 12.

RECOMMENDATION

That the application be **REFUSED** for the following reasons:

- 1) The proposal, by reason of the location, scale and appearance of static caravans to the east of the existing site and inability to adequately screen this development from the south would result in a development that fails to be absorbed into the landscape and would be to the detriment of the special landscape quality and character of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This is contrary to Policies GD1, ENV1, ENV2, TM1 and TM2 of the Wear Valley District Local Plan as Saved and Amended.

- 2) The proposal by reason of its location, scale, appearance and inadequate screening from the south would appear as an incongruous expansion of the built envelope of Edmundbyers to the detriment of the setting and character of Edmundbyers Conservation Area, thereby harming its significance. This is contrary to Policies GD1, BE1, BE8 and TM1 of the Wear Valley District Local Plan as Saved and Amended.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Submitted Application Forms, Plans and Reports
- Wear Valley District Local Plan as amended by Saved and Expired Policies September 2007
- National Planning Policy Framework.
- Consultation Responses
- Public Consultation Responses
- Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East
- DCLG Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism

