

PLANNING SERVICES DELEGATED DECISION

Planning Ref: W/14/00521/CU

Proposal: Variation of condition 3 of W/06/00546/PN to increase the number of residential caravans on the site from 99 to 102

Registration Date: 26/03/2014

Advert Expiry: 07/04/2014

8 week date: 21/05/2014

Neighbour Expiry: 06/05/2014

Site Notice Expiry: 07/04/2014

Consultation Responses:

Parish Council:

No comments received by the 07.10.14

Highways:

Discussed with D Pilcher at County Highways who raises no objection to proposed development

District Council Engineers:

None received by the 07.10.14

Natural Heritage Officer:

The ponds to be infilled are divided into 3 tiers. The bottom 2 are surrounded by a raised brick wall and contain no plants which would be suitable for egg laying great crested newts. The top one, which is surrounded by a rockery has vegetation overhanging the edge of the pond. This one would offer some shelter to amphibians. Therefore recommend an ecology report prior to determination of application.

Third Party Comments:

8 objections as follows:

- concerned may be newts in the pond
- will spoil existing 'green' entrance to park
- existing foul drainage system cannot cope with additional caravans
- involves removal of established trees
- concerned about noise disturbance from proposal

Site Constraints :

TPO Tree Preservation Order
FLO1 Flood Zone 1

Planning Site History :

88/01135	Use as a mobile home park for a maximum of 70 pitches
89/00747	Replacement of part of present front boundary fence with brick wall provision of illuminated name signs and alteration
96/00802	Increase mobile homes from 70 to 96

Policies relevant to Decision:

Wychavon District Local Plan June 2006

GD2, SUR1, GD1, ENV1, ENV6, ENV8, ENV18

South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP)

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Planning Practice Guidance

Case Officer Comments:

The application proposes to site 3 residential mobile homes on land currently within the confines of Doverdale Park, a mobile home park originally permitted in 1988 (Ref W/88/01135). A 2006 planning permission (W/06/00546/PN) approved an increase in the number of caravans at the site, from 96 to 99. Condition 3 reading as follows:

'There shall be a maximum of 99 mobile homes on the site.'

Reason: To control the number of mobile homes on the site and to ensure the Protected Trees are not affected as a result of the development.'

This application seeks to vary the wording of Condition 3, to read that there shall be a maximum of 102 caravans at the site.

The main issues for consideration in this application are the principle of the development proposal, landscape issues, highways issues, drainage matters and ecology issues.

To clarify, the use of the site for the siting of additional mobile homes should be assessed in accordance with all policies relating to new housing development (as have previous applications to extend the caravan park, Ref W/12/02543/CU and W/14/00621/CU). Saved policy ECON20 of the Local Plan supports this in paragraph 6.6.8 which states that 'the planning implications of mobile homes (residential caravans) parks and gypsy sites will be considered against the same criteria for housing development.' It is noted that whilst the mobile units themselves have only a limited life span, any permanent permission for their siting would in effect allow permanent residential use of the site. The caravans are liable for Council Tax and they could also be replaced at any time in the future and retained on this site indefinitely, thereby having a permanent landscape presence.

Policy and Principle of Development:

The application site is located outside of any defined settlement boundary as identified in the adopted Wychavon District Local Plan. Given the proposal is outside a development boundary and the proposed caravans are considered to be a residential use, the application has been advertised as a departure from the development plan. The site is outside the defined Green Belt.

Saved policy GD1 of the Local Plan defines development boundaries for settlements within the district. The application site is outside a defined development boundary. Policy GD1 sets out the location strategy for new development within the district and states that most new development will be accommodated within the main built up areas. The policy focuses development on the three main towns in the district and sets out a sequential preference to centrally located brownfield sites, urban greenfield land and then land, but only land at Evesham, adjacent to the development boundary. Therefore, in this regard, development on this site is not supported by saved policy GD1.

There is a high level of consistency between the definitions of sustainable development set out respectively in the Framework and in the Wychavon District Local Plan. As such, even if the relevant policies for the supply of housing cannot be considered up-to-date, the general strategy and the spatial vision that runs with the WDLP as well as the policies unrelated to the supply of housing remain relevant and therefore a material consideration.

One of the key issues in this application proposal is whether the site should be granted planning permission in order to meet the district's housing needs. The Framework conveys a strong imperative in favour of housing delivery. To that end 'to boost significantly the supply of housing (paragraph 47), local planning authorities should identify supply of 'specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide 5 years worth of housing against their housing requirements.'

An update on the position as regards housing land supply in the district was presented at the April 2014 planning committee. The update sets out the Inspector's position and the weight to be attached to his view. The report also sets out information in relation to how the housing needs set out by the Inspector to meet Wychavon District Council's needs will increase given the need to redirect growth following the SWDP's proposed displacement of housing need from Worcester City and Malvern Hills to Wychavon.

At the time of writing this report, the Head of Housing and Planning recommends firmly that the council continue to approve sustainable development proposals to improve the council's housing land supply position further. It is important that the council can demonstrate a deliverable, achievable and realistic housing land position which meets the requirements of the Framework. The Government is intent on accelerating the delivery of new housing. Irrespective of the debate around the actual level of supply that exists, the availability of a 5-year supply of housing land is the minimum requirement and does not mean that otherwise acceptable proposals should be resisted.

The South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) is also a material consideration in the determination of this application. However, in accordance with paragraph 216 of the Framework, only some weight can be given to the plan given its stage of preparation and the number of unresolved objections to some of its proposed policies. In essence, the SWDP seeks to allocate most new development in locations where there is good access to local services and where transport is maximised. The Examination in Public of the SWDP will recommence on 13 March 2014.

Principle of the Development

Consequently, significant weight must be given to the Framework and the need to promote sustainable development. The conformity of the proposed development to the criteria for sustainability is considered below. This report seeks to weigh all the overall benefits of the development against the harm as part of that overall planning judgement.

The site is approximately 400 metres from the defined settlement of Droitwich which is one of the 3 primary towns in Wychavon, although the settlement of Hampton Lovett is only rated as having 'very low' accessibility to local services and facilities in Annex 2 of the Local Plan and as a lower category 4A village in the emerging SWDP.

There is a bus stop positioned close to the entrance to the site. A regular bus serving the local villages as well as Kidderminster and Droitwich passes the site and there is a pavement along the Kidderminster Road for pedestrian access to Droitwich. Given the relatively close proximity of the site to Droitwich, with employment sites at Hampton Lovett and Berry Hill Industrial estates within a mile of the site, it is considered the site can be deemed easily accessible by means other than the private car.

It should be noted that despite the adjoining Windrush site also being outside a defined development boundary, the previous applications for homes on land to the north of this site (Ref W/12/02543/CU and W/14/00621/CU) were not refused on the grounds of principle. It was considered that as the site was only approximately 400 metres from the nearest section of Droitwich's development boundary and is easily accessible by foot and public transport, it constituted a sustainable location.

Some weight also needs to be attached to the fact that this application provides only a small extension to an already established caravan home site and is within the confines of the existing park. The caravan site operates an age restriction to its residents and only accepts those over the age of 50. Permission already exists for 99 permanent residential caravans and this permission seeks to add an additional 3, equalling a 3% increase. Also previous extensions to the numbers of mobile homes have been permitted over the years which allowed an increase from 70 caravans to 96 caravans in 1996 and from 96 caravans to 99 caravans in 2006. Given that previous applications have increased the number of units at the park and a further increase is now proposed, there is clearly a demand for the provision of relatively affordable units for the over 50s in the area. This increase could be seen to be addressing the local needs of the community and contributing to the overall housing mix within the area.

Visual Impact and Amenity

The submitted plans show the proposed caravans will be sited adjacent to the site entrance, alongside the roadside boundary. Given the fact the proposal is within the confines of the existing caravan park and there is existing mature hedging along the roadside boundary, it will not appear prominent in the local landscape.

A distance of approximately 15 metres has been maintained between the proposed development and existing caravans to the east and a distance of approximately 8 metres is shown to caravans to the south. A distance of approximately 5 metres is shown between each of the proposed caravans. This is reflective of the layout of existing caravans elsewhere on the Doverdale Park.

Landscape & Natural Heritage:

No objection has been raised by the Tree Preservation Officer to the proposed development.

Ecology & Wildlife:

Several objectors have expressed concern that the proposal will adversely affect great crested newts in the existing pond within the site. The Natural Heritage Officer has visited the site and has indicated that whilst the bottom 2 ponds at the site are not suitable for great crested newts, the top pond (which is surrounded by a rockery with overhanging vegetation) is suitable for amphibians. The agent has therefore been requested to submit an ecological survey prior to determination of the application.

Since the visit of the Council Natural Heritage Officer the applicant has filled in ponds referred to above. As a result of this work it is now not deemed reasonable to request survey reports as the primary habitat for the newts has been removed.

Based on the above it is considered unlikely that any Great Crested Newts will be adversely effected as a result of this proposal in accordance with saved Local Plan Policy ENV6.

Highways & Traffic Generation:

Vehicular access to the proposal will be via a new service road to the east of the proposed caravans. Given the limited scale of the proposal, it is considered the proposal will not adversely affect highway safety and adequate parking provision is shown on the submitted block plan. No objection is raised by County Highways.

Drainage & Flooding:

The application site is in a low risk flood area and no concerns have been raised from the Land Drainage Officer regarding the drainage of the additional residential caravans.

Conclusion:

In order to make a recommendation it is important to undertake a balancing exercise with regards to the provisions of the development plan, the Framework (especially in terms of housing supply) and the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Significant weight should be given to the need to promote sustainable development in accordance with paragraphs 14 and 7 of the Framework. Paragraph 14 makes reference to the presumption in favour of sustainable development and sets out that development proposals should be granted planning permission unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, or that specific policies indicate that development should be restricted.

This can be tested by reference to the three dimensions to sustainable development as set out in paragraph 7 of the Framework - namely the economic role, social role and environmental role. These roles must not be considered in isolation and should be taken as mutually dependent.

Economic role - it is considered that the proposal with associated infrastructure would provide employment opportunities during the construction works.

Social role - it is considered that the proposed development could help meet the housing needs of over 50s in the present and in the future with regards to the supply of additional units and connectivity to local services within Droitwich

Environmental role - it is considered that the proposed development is in keeping with the existing form of development in the locality. The proposed caravans would be sited within the confines of the existing park and would therefore be viewed in connection with existing, residential caravans. The proposal will therefore be sympathetic to the built environment.

Decision:

Approve - see draft decision notice

Lists of Drawing No/s for Decision:

see draft decision notice

Member Involvement/Consultation: YES - The application was discussed at the delegated panel on 6.5.14 where Cnl Robinson agreed the application can be recommended for approval under the council's scheme of delegation

Case Officer Initials:



Date: 07.10.14

APO/DCM Initials:



Date: 07.10.2014