

Development Management Planning Application Consultation – Planning Policy comments

To: Development Management
From: Planning Policy
Date: 8th April 2019
Ref: DC/19/0347/FUL
Location: Caravan Site North and South, The Street, Fornham All Saints
Suffolk

Proposal: Planning Application - (i) Change of use of part of golf course to 70no. caravan lodge holiday homes (ii) new access from A1101 and B1106 (iii) construction of access roads, parking spaces and associated infrastructure

The site: The proposal seeks 70 holiday lodge caravans in two parcels, the northern one comprising 40 lodges and the southern one comprising 30 units. The site is recreational open space comprising Fornham Golf and Country Club. The site lies outside of a settlement boundary for Fornham All Saints and outside of, but adjoining to the Fornham All Saints Conservation area.

The site lies in “rolling estate sandlands”, characterised by rolling river terraces and coastal slopes, landscape parklands, sandy and free draining soils with areas of heathland. The River Lark and flood zones two and three are in close proximity to the eastern edges of the site. The proposal will result in the loss of some existing trees. The site is also in a major groundwater vulnerability zone, a recreational pressure buffer caused by protected species and a site of nature conservation interest.

National and Local Policies particularly relevant to this proposal are set out below:

NPPF 2019

Paras 2, & 12: *Applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise... The development plan should be the starting point for decision-making.*

Para 11: *decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development... approving development proposals that accord with an up to date development plan...*

Para 80: *significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity*

Para 83: *Planning policies and decisions should enable:*

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*

d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

Para 84: *planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.*

Para 96: *Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities.*

Para 97: *Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land... should not be built on unless:*

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

Para 98: *planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.*

Para 170: *Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans.*

1.2 Local Planning Policy

The current development plan for the former St Edmundsbury Borough administrative area (now West Suffolk Council) comprises:

- St Edmundsbury Core Strategy 2010
- The Joint Development Management Policies Local Plan Document (Feb 2015) (JDMPD).

St Edmundsbury Core Strategy

Policy CS2 – Sustainable Development – *a high quality environment will be achieved by incorporating measures appropriate to the nature and scale of development.*

- D) Conserving and wherever possible enhancing the character and quality of the local landscapes in a way that recognises their fragility of resources.*
- J) Incorporating sustainable design and construction.*
- N) Making a positive contribution to local distinctiveness.*

Policy CS3 – Design and Local Distinctiveness – *proposals must contribute to a high quality, safe and sustainable environment.*

Policy CS7 – Sustainable Transport – *all proposals will be required to provide for travel by a range of means of transport other than by private car.*

Joint Development Management Policies Document

Policy DM2 - Creating Places – Development Principles and Local Distinctiveness requires proposals for all types of development to address and comply with all the criteria listed in the policy as appropriate to the development being proposed. In this case the proposal should demonstrate how it addresses criteria a), b), c), d), f), g v), h), j) and k).

Policy DM5 – Development in the countryside – the countryside should be protected from unsustainable development.

New buildings are permitted where it is... essential small scale facilities for outdoor sport or recreation or other uses of land which preserve the openness, appearance and character of the countryside, leisure activities, and new tourism facilities;

Proposals for economic growth that recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside will be permitted where:

- *it will not result in the irreversible loss of best and most versatile agricultural land (grade 1,2 and 3a);*
- *there will be no significant detrimental impact on the historic environment, character and visual amenity of the landscape or nature conservation and biodiversity interests; and*
- *there will be no significant impact on the local highway network*

Policy DM6 Flooding and Sustainable Drainage - requires all proposals for new development to submit schemes detailing how on-site drainage will be managed so as not to cause or exacerbate flooding elsewhere, and includes Sustainable Urban drainage Systems (SUDS) as an example.

Policy DM7 expects all development proposals to adhere to broad principles of sustainable design and construction and to optimise energy efficiency through the use of design, layout, orientation, materials, insulation and construction techniques, and to include details in the Design and Access statement (or produce a separate energy statement) of how it is proposed the site will meet the energy standards set out within national Building Regulations.

Policy DM10 – Impact of Development on Sites of Biodiversity and Geodiversity Importance – sets out criteria against which proposals will be assessed in relation to biodiversity. The policy states that *"proposals which would result in significant harm to biodiversity, having appropriate regard to the 'mitigation hierarchy', will not be permitted"*.

The policy states that proposals for development which would adversely affect the integrity of areas of international nature conservation or geological importance, as indicated on the Policies Map, will be determined in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended).

Policy DM13 - Landscape Features permits development where it will not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the character of the landscape, landscape features, wildlife, or amenity value. Individual proposals will be assessed based on their specific landscape and visual impact. The third paragraph states: *"All proposals for development should be informed by, and be sympathetic to, the character of the landscape. Landscape Character Types are identified in the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment."* The policy goes on to say *"All development proposals should demonstrate that their location, scale, design and materials will protect, and where possible enhance the character of the landscape, including the setting of settlements, the significance of gaps between them and the nocturnal character of the landscape."*

Policy DM34 - Tourism Development

Planning applications for new tourism facilities, including overnight visitor accommodation (hotels, bed & breakfast, self-catering, holiday lodges, static and touring caravans and tenting fields), or improvements and extension to existing facilities, will be permitted provided that:

- a. the proposals are connected to and associated with existing facilities or located at a site that relates well to the main urban areas and defined settlements in the area and can be made readily accessible to adequate public transport, cycling and walking links for the benefit of non-car users;*
- b. it would not adversely affect the character, appearance or amenities of the area and the design is of a standard acceptable to the Local Planning Authority;*
- c. vehicle access and on-site vehicle parking would be provided to an appropriate standard.*

The larger urban areas (Market Towns and Key Service Centres), will be the focus for larger scale tourism activities and overnight accommodation in accordance with the requirement to concentrate development at the most sustainable locations.

In rural areas any tourism activity/proposal must, in addition to criteria a., b., and c. above, seek to support the existing local community services and facilities, and:

d. have no significant adverse impact on nature conservation, biodiversity or geodiversity interests, or upon the character or appearance of the landscape and countryside;

e. be of an appropriate scale for their context and/or comprise the conversion of suitable existing rural buildings or limited extension to existing visitor accommodation.

The occupation of any new tourist accommodation will be restricted via condition or legal agreement to ensure a tourist use solely and not permanent residential occupation.

Policy DM42 – Open Space, Sport and Recreation

...Development which will result in the loss of existing amenity, sport or recreation open space or facilities will not be allowed unless:

a. it can be demonstrated that the space or facility is surplus to requirement against the local planning authority's standards for the particular location, and the proposed loss will not result in a likely shortfall during the plan period; or

b. replacement for the space or facilities lost is made available, of at least equivalent quantity and quality, and in a suitable location to meet the needs of users of the existing space or facility.

Any replacement provision should take account of the needs of the settlement where the development is taking place and the current standards of open space and sports facility provision adopted by the local planning authority.

Where necessary to the acceptability of the development, the local planning authority will require developers of new housing, office, retail and other commercial and mixed development to provide open space including play areas, formal sport/recreation areas, amenity areas and where appropriate, indoor sports facilities or to provide land and a financial contribution towards the cost and maintenance of existing or new facilities, as appropriate. These facilities will be secured through the use of conditions and/or planning obligations.

Clubhouses, pavilions, car parking and ancillary facilities must be of a high standard of design and internal layout, and be in accordance with other policies in this Plan. The location of such facilities must be well related and sensitive to the topography, character and uses of the surrounding area, particularly when located in or close to residential areas. Proposals which give rise to intrusive floodlighting will not be permitted.

Policy Analysis

Policy DM2 - Creating Places – Development Principles and Local Distinctiveness

There is no landscape appraisal accompanying the application. The proposal does not demonstrate how it maintains a sense of place, uses key features, landscape character and local distinctiveness. (Policy DM2a and DM2b). The sites will adjoin Fornham All Saints Conservation Area, and the proposal will impact on views into and out of the Conservation Area representing a domestication of a previously open site. It is not considered that the proposal for 70 caravans across two separate holiday parks, will preserve or enhance these views contrary to DM2(c).

Furthermore, the proposal is contrary to policy DM2(d), as the appearance of the holiday lodge caravans and density of development combined with the domestic nature of the parking and access roads are out of character with the existing open golf course which contributes to an important development gap preventing coalescence between Bury and Fornham All Saints. Policy DM2(j) requires proposals to show how they reflect the character, scale, density and massing of the locality. The proposals do not demonstrate this. In addition, the design of the proposal does not demonstrate any proposed sustainability measures contrary to policy DM2(f).

The proposed southern site adjoins an established employment area and will introduce sensitive end-receptors into the proposed holiday accommodation, which is presently a golf course. There is limited ability to mitigate any noise or other nuisances arising from the established uses, which is contrary to the principles within Policy DM2(h).

The application does not demonstrate how the design will encourage forms of sustainable transport; no linkages to established cycleways or footpaths are shown, contrary to DM2(k). There is a footpath to the east of the site which is a recreational route as part of the Lark Valley path and St Edmunds Way, and a bridleway to the west of the site along the length of Pigeon Way.

Policy DM5 – Development in the countryside

The proposal does not comply with the first part of the policy due to its scale. 70 caravan lodges are far in excess of the single new or extended dwellings for which the policy sets out criteria. The proposal needs to demonstrate how it is sustainable development in the countryside by setting out how it meets the criteria of Policy DM5. The proposal is not a small scale facility and therefore Policy DM5(d) regarding an exception for new, small-scale tourism facilities that preserve the openness, appearance and character of the countryside is not applicable.

To be considered as a proposal for economic growth the application should demonstrate how it recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and meets the relevant criteria in the second part of the policy.

The site is on Grade 4 land and so the proposal would not result in the permanent loss of best and versatile land.

The proposal does not provide a landscape appraisal but on the basis that it will introduce 70 caravans and associated paraphernalia to a previously open golf course it is considered that the application will result in a significant detrimental impact on the character and visual amenity of the landscape.

The site is protected as one of nature conservation interest and is in the SPA recreational buffer zone. The views of the Council's Landscape and Ecology officer should be sought in relation to whether nature conservation and biodiversity are effected by the proposals.

The Highway Authority's views on the submitted Transport Assessment should be sought in order to establish if there will be a significant detrimental impact on the local highway network. The TA does not appear to include trip analysis and 70 caravans are likely to generate numerous journeys, which has the potential to harm the highway network.

DM6 - Flooding and Sustainable Drainage

The Flood Risk Assessment submitted shows that the sites are in flood zone 1 although they adjoin flood zone 2 and 3. The Flood Risk Assessment states that the development will be safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere. It states that SUDs will be used on site wherever possible. One plan of the site shows a dry swale. The Environment Agency's and Local Lead Flood Authority's thoughts on the proposed drainage system should be sought.

DM7- Sustainable Design and Construction

This is a full application but no details are included to demonstrate how the principles of sustainable development will be addressed in mitigating the impact of 70 lodges. Description of materials to be used are limited, and there is no indication of energy sources and energy efficiency measures that might be used in construction or occupation.

DM10 - Impact of Development on Sites of Biodiversity and Geodiversity Importance

There is a considerable and continually growing volume of research indicating that there can be adverse effects to heathland Annex I bird species as a result of recreational disturbance. This site is located within 7.5km of the woodland components of Breckland SPA important for woodlark and nightjar and the main concern is that leisure residents/holiday-makers from this site could drive to Breckland Forest SSSI/Breckland SPA for recreation. In order to ensure that the proposed growth will not result in an adverse effect upon European wildlife sites, either directly or indirectly, the development should be assessed for potential impacts, and appropriate measures to counteract the potential effects of increased recreational disturbance incorporated. Policy DM34 d) cites that the impact of the proposal on nature conservation should be considered. The submitted HRA suggests a contribution towards RAMS (Recreation access management and mitigation strategy), to mitigate the proposed lodge park

development. West Suffolk does not have a RAMS. The site is also identified as a Site of Nature Conservation interest. Comments from the Council's Ecology and Landscape Officer should be sought.

DM13- Landscape Features

The proposals do not demonstrate that their location, scale, design and materials will protect, and enhance the character of the landscape, including the setting of settlements, the gaps that separate them, and the nocturnal character of the landscape as required by policy DM13 of the JDMPD. The proposed holiday parks will impact on the setting of Fornham, where the existing golf course provides an important gap in built form between the village and Bury St Edmunds and helps to prevent coalescence of the settlements.

See also the comment under DM2 above on the appearance of the proposal in the landscape. Policy DM13 is supported by NPPF paragraph 83 this states under (c) that sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside should be encouraged. However, the development of a 70 lodge caravan park will have an urbanising effect and fails to respect the open character of the countryside.

DM34: Tourism Development

The policy permits holiday lodges subject to them satisfying certain criterion. It requires proposals to be well related to existing facilities, or that sites are well related to main settlements and are or can be made accessible to public transport. It could be argued that the proposal links to the existing golf course and it would be possible to link the site to established footpaths and cycleways to enhance opportunities for sustainable transport. However, the southern element of the proposal has a poor relationship to the adjacent established employment area.

The complete change in landscape character and visual amenity that would result from this proposal and the loss of the golf course to caravan lodges and associated infrastructure, is considered to adversely affect the character and appearance of the area (criteria b and d of DM34).

In terms of criterion DM34d) development of this nature will lead to an increase in visitor numbers to the area and in turn further pressure on the Breckland SPA. The submitted Habitats Regulations Assessment identifies an impact and should be assessed by the Council's Ecology and Landscape Officer. In addition, the proposals are likely to have an effect on the open character and appearance of the countryside by introducing caravan lodges, with associated roads and parking areas and possible other domestication such as waste disposal areas.

Policy DM34(e) requires that the proposal is appropriately scaled to its context. The application for 70 caravan lodges is large scale and is considered to have a significant impact upon the character and appearance of its surrounds.

The proposal is therefore not considered to comply with Policy DM34(b), (d) and (e). Paragraph 83 of the NPPF gives support to "sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside." It has

been set out above that the proposal does not respect the character of the countryside due to its scale, urbanising effect and loss of openness. It is also in close proximity to an existing holiday lodge park at Fornham Park (61 lodges) and Local Plan allocation RV6 (approx. 100 lodges). The approval of this scheme would cumulatively result in over 200 lodges being located in this area, demonstrably affecting its character.

Policy DM42 – Open Space, Sport and Recreation

This policy sets out that if a proposal results in the loss of recreational open space, it will not be allowed unless either the space is surplus and the loss does not result in a shortfall during the plan period, or replacement open space is made available. Even though replacement facilities are planned, there will be a loss of open space. The application does provide a qualitative statement that describes that the course could continue to operate at a smaller size alongside the proposed holiday caravans. However there is no submitted layout that shows this. It is considered that further evidence should be submitted to prove that the loss of areas of established golf course, will result in benefits that outweigh this loss.

4. Conclusions

- No landscape character assessment has been submitted. The proposal does not demonstrate design, layout and scale will protect, and enhance the character of the landscape, including the setting of the settlements, as required by policy DM13.
- The number and scale of the proposed lodge buildings, car parking, access roads, associated facilities, and the proposed landscaping on the site would have a significant adverse impact on the character and appearance of the existing open, verdant landscape.
- The proposal would diminish a strategically important landscape gap, necessary to separate Fornham All Saints from Bury St Edmunds, contrary to DM2, DM5, DM13 and DM34.
- The proposal may impact on nature conservation and biodiversity interests associated with the river margins in Flood Zones 2 and 3; this is contrary to policies DM34.
- The proposal is likely to have a negative impact on views from local footpaths and recreational routes contrary to DM2, DM13 and DM44.
- The proposal would mean that holiday caravans would be in proximity to an industrial estate to the south of the site. This represents a poor relationship with potential for noise or other forms of pollution and is contrary to Policy DM2(h).
- The application site is designated a site of nature conservation interest, located within the 7.5km recreational buffer zone for the SPA and there are no measures to enhance recreational opportunities in the immediate area to counteract potential in-combination effects, which may be contrary to policy DM10.

On the basis of the above, it is considered from a planning policy perspective this application should be refused.