

Deadline	14th September 2010		
Application Number:	S/2010/1058		
Site Address:	STONEHENGE CARAVAN AND CAMPING SITE BERWICK ST. JAMES SALISBURY SP3 4TQ		
Proposal:	RETROSPECTIVE APPLICATION TO RETAIN OPERATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH USE OF LAND AS A CARAVAN CLUB SITE AND TENTING/RALLY AREA		
Applicant/ Agent:	MR TONY ALLEN		
Parish:	WINTERBOURNE STOKETILL/WYLYEVALLE		
Grid Reference:	407430.6 140420.5		
Type of Application:	Full		
Conservation Area:	WINTERBOURNE STOKE	LB Grade:	
Case Officer:	Charlie Bruce- White	Contact Number:	01722 434682

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The Southern Area Committee resolved that future applications at this site should be determined by the Committee due to the level of local interest.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the above application and to recommend that planning permission be REFUSED.

Neighbourhood Responses

22 letters of objection/concern were received.

Parish/Town/City Council response

Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council - Object

Berwick St. James Parish Council - Object

2. Main Issues

- Principle of development;
- Character & appearance of the area;
- Highways safety;

- Amenities of the occupiers of nearby property and other recreation users;
- Sewerage & waste water disposal;
- Nature Conservation;
- Archaeology.

3. Site Description

The site relates to 0.3ha of land situated adjacent to the former Wisma Poultry Farm buildings, off Berwick Road, to the south-west of Winterbourne Stoke. The site comprises the eastern end of a former larger field of agricultural pasture, as well as an access track running along the field's northern side. The field gently slopes down from the Berwick Road towards the River Till, and is currently divided into three distinct parts comprising an upper paddock and middle paddock, both of which are outside of the application site, and a levelled lower section closest to the river, part of which comprises the application site.

The application site is currently used as a Certified Location (CL) for Caravan Club members. CLs do not require planning permission and enable up to 5 caravans to be stationed on the land. In this location 5 hard surfaced standings have been formed, designed to be used as pitches for the CL, and various associated facilities have also been provided as detailed within Section 5 below. The hard standings and associated facilities, including access alterations, are currently unauthorised.

The lower part of the field formerly contained a variety of modest agricultural buildings, believed to have been used as pig houses, which have now been substantially demolished. There is direct access from the lower part of the field onto a public footpath which leads into the village of Winterbourne Stoke, some 200 metres to the east. The village includes a modest range of local services including a public house, petrol station and bus stop. The lower section is the closest part of the site to the river, although the land is raised above the flood plain and separated from the river by a 50 metre strip of grass and woodland. The River Till is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation.

The upper paddocks are separated from the lower section by post and rail fencing and are mostly put to grazing for the applicant's horses. The upper paddock, which does not form part of the application site, is referred to by the applicant as the 'rally field' and can be lawfully used for temporary touring and camping events, subject to various limitations. These include, for instance, 5 day meetings held by 'exempted organisations' such as the Caravan Club or the use of land for not more than 28 days in a year for tented camping (as permitted under The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 and the Caravan Sites & Control of Development Act 1960).

The site falls within the Special Landscape Area and is adjacent to the Winterbourne Stoke Conservation Area.

4. Planning History

<i>App. No.</i>	<i>Proposal</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Date</i>
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213	Re-building of shed & piggeries	AC	01.06.50
TP/59	Construction of new access to highway	AC	27.06.51
TP/226	Site chosen for the erection of house or bungalow	AC	12.10.55
10/0007	Change of use of land to touring caravan and camping site, including retention of access, driveway, hardstandings, shower/wc block, chemical toilet disposal area, cess pit and electric hook up points.	R	11.05.10

The most recent application was refused for the following reasons:

The site is situated within a prominent part of the landscape, which is designated as a Special Landscape Area, and lies against the backdrop of the Winterbourne Stoke Conservation Area. The development of the site as a touring caravan and camping site would have a significant and unacceptable visual impact upon the landscape qualities of the area, including the setting of the Conservation Area, and it is not considered that this harm would be outweighed by economic benefits or could be satisfactorily addressed through new landscaping. The development would therefore be contrary to the aims and objectives of the adopted Salisbury District Local Plan, including saved policies G1, G2, C2, C6, CN11 and T9, and the guidance contained within PPS4, PPS5, PPS7 and the Good Practice Guide for Planning & Tourism.

5. The Proposal

The applicant describes the proposal as follows:

“Retrospective application to retain operational development associated with use of land as a caravan club site and tenting/rally area”.

A more accurate description in Officers’ opinion would be:

“Retrospective application to retain operational development associated with use of land as a Caravan Club Certified Location and temporary tenting/rally area as permitted under the GPDO”.

In Officers’ opinion the operational development within the application site covers the following:

- Alterations to the field access and access track (including widening, resurfacing and landscaping);
- The formation of the earth bund and fencing to the left (north) of the access;
- 5 hard standings for use as caravan pitches;
- 3 electric hook-up points;

- WC/shower block and attached lean-to dish wash up area with associated hardstanding;
- Chemical toilet disposal area;
- Cess pit.

The application differs from the previous application in that no change of use is proposed to enable additional caravan/camping activities beyond that which can be carried out as permitted development. Therefore this application is only considering the affects of the physical works undertaken (i.e. the operation development), rather than the affects of caravans and tents which could be sited here in any instance (subject to the appropriate limitations).

6. Planning Policy

The following development plan policies and national planning guidance are considered relevant to this proposal:

- Local Plan policies G1, G2, G5, CN11, CN22, C2, C6, C18, C19, T9
- PPS1, PPS4, PPS5, PPS7, PPS9, PPG13

Other material guidance includes:

- Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism
- Planning Circular 03/99 (Non-Mains Sewerage in New Development)
- Salisbury District Landscape Character Assessment
- South Wiltshire Tourism Strategy

Emerging policy:

- South Wiltshire Core Strategy

7. Consultations

Highways Officer

No objection in highway safety terms. Recommend that the first 5.0 metres of the access is surfaced in a consolidated surface and that the edge of the highway is defined by in-dropped kerbs or granite sets.

Highways Agency

No objection to affect upon the A303 trunk road.

Wessex Water

The site is not within a Wessex Water sewered area.

Environment Agency

Advise that guidance within Circular 03/99 is adhered to.

Landscape Officer

Comments that the bunds along the western boundary of the site remain as a negative feature in relation to the local landscape character. Recommend that they be reduced in height.

Agrees with the applicant's submitted landscape appraisal that the proposed planting plan will have a marked improvement on the visibility of the (CL) site in the medium to long term.

If approved, recommend conditions requiring the proposed landscaping mitigation to be fully implemented and that the land be reinstated to its original landscape condition should the site's CL status cease.

Ecologist

Has previously concluded that the proposal is unlikely to have a significant effect on the River Avon SAC, subject to controls on the number of pitches, the appropriate disposal of waste water and sewerage, and controls on external lighting.

Archaeologist

Note that site is close to the remains of the medieval settlement of Winterbourne Stoke. An archaeological watching brief should have been undertaken during those works which resulted in ground disturbance. Any further works must involve archaeological monitoring or investigation in line with an agreed written scheme of investigation.

Conservation Officer

The site borders the western edge of the Winterbourne Stoke Conservation Area, however the boundary is heavily wooded and the proposal would appear to have little impact on its character or setting, and I therefore raise no objection.

Tourism Officer

Has previously commented that there is a need for additional capacity for touring vans during the main summer season, and especially during the school holidays.

Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council

Object on the following grounds: proposed works are excessive for a Certified Location; the means of sewerage disposal presents problems; archaeological damage has occurred; harmful landscape impact.

Berwick St. James Parish Council

Object on the following grounds: impact upon SSSI and Conservation Area; pollution; traffic; harmful landscape impact; proposed works are excessive for a Certified Location.

8. Publicity

The application was advertised by neighbour notification and site notice.

22 letters of objection/concern were received, raising the following:

- Does not address previous reasons for refusal;
- Harmful impact upon AONB landscape;
- Landscaping and bunding are inappropriate;
- Facilities are excessive for a CL;
- Potential impact upon nature conservation and river system;
- Use of site generates disturbance, light pollution and traffic;
- The retrospective works are unlawful;
- The applicant does not abide by the rules of CLs and temporary tenting/rallies;
- Approval of the application would be a precursor to further harmful expansion of the site.

9. Planning Considerations

9.1 Principle of development

Policy T9 of the Local Plan deals with the establishment of new sites for touring caravans and tents which are outside of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The policy states that such sites will be permitted where they are located within, or adjacent to, settlements or adjacent to the main holiday routes (such as the A303), and subject to criteria concerning landscape impact, nature conservation, highways safety and affects upon neighbouring residents.

PPS4 is the Government's planning statement on economic development, and states that planning authorities should support 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, carefully weighing the objective of providing adequate facilities or enhancing visitors' enjoyment or improving the financial viability of the facility with the need to protect landscapes and environmentally sensitive sites. The guidance goes on to state that planning authorities should ensure that new or expanded holiday and

touring caravan sites are not prominent in the landscape and that any visual intrusion is minimised by effective, high-quality screening.

The Good Practice Guide for Planning Tourism recognises the contribution that touring and camping accommodation can make towards the economy, and echoes the advice contained within Local Plan policy T9 and PPS4 with regards to siting such facilities close to existing settlements and protecting landscapes and environmentally sensitive sites.

9.2 Character and appearance of the area

Before considering the visual impacts of the development it is important to establish the 'fallback' position, i.e. what the applicant could undertake even if the application is refused and the site is required to be reinstated to its former condition. The site's CL status is not dependent upon the operational development proposed and therefore the applicant could still utilise the site for the stationing of up to five caravans subject the Caravan Club guidelines. In Officers' opinion it would therefore be unreasonable to consider the visual implications of the caravans themselves. Rather, the visual impacts should be focussed upon the operational development, i.e. the access alterations, bunding, hardstandings, buildings, etc. These are considered as follows:

9.2.1 Access alterations and adjacent bunding

There is some conflict between the applicant and a number of local residents over the former state and appearance of the access prior to the new works being carried out. Evidence suggests, however, that there was a field access in the general position of the proposed one and that some form of track, albeit possibly unmade or with any underlying surface having been substantially overgrown with vegetation, lead down to the former agricultural buildings towards the lower section of the site.

The most significant and visible alteration made to the access comprises its formalisation through its widening and resurfacing with crushed stone, together with the creation of earth banks and new fencing along the road frontage. The widening and resurfacing of the access point has created a reasonably large expanse of hardstanding, although such accesses are not untypical of those serving agricultural fields in rural areas, and the proposed crushed stone finish is not considered to be obtrusive.

However, the Council Landscape Officer has commented that the adjacent earth bunds and fencing are not in keeping with the local landscape character, being out of scale and inappropriate on the flat valley bottom. This is acknowledged even within the applicant's own landscape appraisal. Unlike much of the other operational development proposed, the bunds are highly visible within the landscape, situated close to the road and being sizeable in scale. Little justification has been provided for the necessity of the bunds, or of their advantages in terms of screening the site over natural planting. It is therefore considered that the bunding and fencing would fail to comply with planning policies which seek to preserve the character of the countryside. For the purposes of considering this planning application, only the bunding to the left (north) of the access is included within the application site. However, even notwithstanding the section of bunding outside of the application site, it is considered that this smaller section of bunding included within the application is unacceptable in visual terms.

9.2.2 Access track and hard standings

The access track also has a crushed stone finish and would run along the northern edge of the field to the lower section of the application site, where it turns at right angles providing direct access onto 5 separate pitches which are finished in contrasting limestone chippings. From outside of the application site, the topography of the land prevents any significant views of the track and hardstandings, which are therefore considered to have little impact upon the landscape.

9.2.3 WC/Shower block and attached dish wash up area

This is situated at the lower section of the application site, and comprises a portable type structure, containing the shower and WC facilities, with attached timber clad lean-to containing the dish washing facility. The structure is visible or partially visible from the main public vantage points from outside of the site, although given its low height, dark green colour and timber finish, and siting adjacent to several tall conifer trees, its visual impact is not considered to be significant. The proposed planting plan would also further screen the building once established.

9.2.4 Other paraphernalia

This includes 3 electric hook-up points and a chemical toilet disposal area. There is also a cesspit although its externally visible elements are limited to a man-hole cover and modest venting pipe. Overall these elements are of modest size and visual impact, and are not considered to have an adverse impact upon the character of the area.

9.3 Highways safety

It is noted that concern has been expressed over the highways implications of the development, including the safety of using the access onto the Berwick Road, the safety of its junction with the A303, and the potential for increased traffic and congestion. However, the professional advice given by the Council Highways Officers and the Highways Agency is that the development would not have an adverse affect upon highways safety on either the Berwick Road or the A303. This is subject to the consolidation of the surface to the first 5 metres of the access, which could be secured by condition. Consequently it is not considered that this planning authority could substantiate a reasonable objection on highways safety grounds.

9.4 Amenities of the occupiers of nearby property and other recreation users

Previous objections on residential amenity grounds have predominantly related to the implications of the proposed use of the site as a caravan and camping site. However, as already stated within this report, the caravan use does not require planning permission and it is only the operational development that can be considered. The neighbouring dwellings are considered to be a satisfactory distance from the proposals, with intervening landscaping, so as not to be significantly affected.

9.5 Sewerage & waste water disposal

Wessex Water have confirmed that the site is not within a sewered area, and the applicant's assertion that connection to the mains is not practical is accepted by Officers. A cesspit has been provided on the site to collect sewerage and grey water from the WC/toilet block, attached dish wash up area, and chemical toilet disposal area into a sealed 7000 litre unit. Advice within Circular 03/99 is therefore applicable to the development, which provides guidance on the use of non-mains sewerage systems. On the use of cesspits, this guidance states:

Whilst this Circular primarily deals with septic tank drainage systems, the attention of developers and local planning authorities is drawn to the implications of the use of cesspools. In principle, a properly constructed and maintained cesspool, being essentially a holding tank with no discharges, should not lead to environmental, amenity or public health problems. However, in practice, it is known that such problems occur as a result of frequent overflows due to poor maintenance, irregular emptying, lack of suitable vehicular access for emptying and even through inadequate capacity. These problems can be exacerbated by unsuitable conditions, such as some of those listed in paragraph 6 above. When considering a scheme proposing the use of cesspools, therefore, the local planning authority may wish to adopt the same process of considering the possibility of significant problems arising as described in paragraph 6 above, and whether these problems can be overcome by the attachment of suitable conditions to a planning permission.

It is not considered that the site is subject to unsuitable conditions, such as flooding, which could result in problems from using such a system. However, the risks of overflow events is acknowledged, which could be particularly harmful given the topography and proximity of the site to the River Till. The applicant confirms that a contract has been entered into which will ensure the regular emptying of the cesspit. The proposed arrangements are considered acceptable, subject to the installation of an alarm to provide adequate warning against overflow.

9.6 Nature Conservation

The site itself is of limited potential for wildlife habitat, being well kept grassland/pasture. The adjacent riverside habitat, outside of the application site, is of more significance, particularly the River Till SSSI and SAC. The proposed development would not encroach directly upon this, and suitable controls on the disposal of potential sewerage and grey water run-off can be appropriately secured, as detailed above.

At the scale of development proposed the Council's Ecologist is satisfied that there will be no significant affects upon the River Till SSSI or SAC, and appropriate consideration has been given to the Habitats Regulations. New planting undertaken and proposed by the applicant also has the opportunity to enhance wildlife habitat within the site. Lighting within the site could potentially be controlled through conditions to minimise harmful light spill in the interests of wildlife associated with the nearby riverside habitat.

9.7 Archaeology

The site is outside of the World Heritage Site but within an area designated for its high archaeological potential. The Council Archaeologist notes that an archaeological

watching brief should have been undertaken for the retrospective operational development which resulted in ground disturbance. Since such investigation cannot be undertaken retrospectively, and no additional works are proposed within the application, there is little that the Council can do to rectify this matter. However, the applicant has been informed of the requirement for archaeological investigations for any future such works, and has provided a scheme of investigation that would be followed in such an event.

10. Conclusion

The majority of the operational development proposed within the application is considered acceptable, with the exception of the earth bund and fencing atop to the left (north) of the access, which would not be in keeping with the local landscape character, being out of scale and inappropriate on the flat valley bottom. The proposal would therefore fail to accord with the aims and objectives of the development plan and other Government planning guidance which seeks to preserve the character of the countryside.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that planning permission is REFUSED for the following reasons:

The proposed earth bund and fencing to the north of the access, by virtue of their excessive height and prominent location, would harmfully contrast with the surrounding open landscape, to the detriment of the character and appearance of the area. The development would therefore fail to accord with the aims and objectives of the development plan and Government planning policy, having regard to policies G1, G2, C2, C6 and T9 of the Salisbury District Local Plan and guidance contained within PPS4 and PPS7.

Appendices:

None

Background documents used in the preparation of this report:

None