



SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

The site is located on the north side of the Parrett Works Road (Pitway Hill). It is immediately east of an existing caravan park site, and has open countryside to the north and east, although there are farm buildings at the southern end of the eastern boundary. Also at the southern end of the site, on the western boundary, is an existing bungalow, originally part of the caravan park site but now independently occupied.

Across the road to the south-west is the Parrett Works, formerly an ironworks and rope manufacturing site, now a mixed use site, with several listed buildings. Immediately south of the site, and across the road, are two detached dwellinghouses.

Permission is sought for an extension of the existing caravan park onto the site, including change of use of the land to accommodate caravan and camping activities; storage of caravans; erection of various structures, including a pavilion and two toilet blocks; and creation of a new access.

Revised Plans

The application was submitted including the following:

- Design and Access Statement
- Flood Statement
- Detailed site layout and building plans for new structures

In response to concerns raised by the Environment Agency and the Council's Drainage Engineer, the layout was revised, and revised plans were circulated for consultation.

HISTORY

No relevant recent history on the application site. On the adjacent, caravan park site there is an extensive history, including permissions relating to:

- scrap yard use, 1955
- storage and repair of caravans, 1969

Further relevant applications:

781273 Use of land as touring park for caravans and caravan storage - permitted 1978
 862942 - The use of land as a site for touring caravans, tents and dormobiles for seasonal holiday use and construction of associated roads and site works - permitted 1987; the seasonal use of the site was amended by application 872965 (Approved 1988)

Various permissions also cover the use of the site for a shop, restaurant and maintenance of caravans.

The bungalow on site was permitted to be sold separately from the caravan park in 2003.

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 repeats the duty imposed under S54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and requires that decisions must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan Documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of determining current applications the local planning authority considers that the relevant development plan comprises the saved policies of the South Somerset Local Plan.

The policies of most relevance to the proposal are:

Saved policies of the South Somerset Local Plan (April 2006):

ST3 - Development Areas
 ST5 - General Principles of Development
 ST6 - The Quality of Development
 EC3 - Landscape Character
 EC8 - Protected Species
 EH5 - Setting of Listed Buildings
 EP3 - Light Pollution
 EU1 - Renewable Energy
 EU3 - Non-mains Sewerage
 EU4 - Water Services
 EU5 - Flooding
 EU6 - Culverting
 ME4 - Expansion of Existing Businesses in the Countryside
 ME10 - Tourist Accommodation

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012):

1. Building a strong, competitive economy
3. Supporting a prosperous rural economy
4. Promoting sustainable transport
7. Requiring good design

- 8. Promoting healthy communities
- 10. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 11. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- 12. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Policy-related Material Considerations

South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy

- Goal 1 - Safe and Inclusive
- Goal 2 - Healthy and Active
- Goal 3 - Healthy Environments
- Goal 5 - High Performance Local Economy
- Goal 7 - Distinctiveness
- Goal 8 - Quality Development
- Goal 10 - Energy
- Goal 11 - Environment

Somerset County Council Parking Strategy, March 2012 and September 2013.
Somerset County Council Highways Standing Advice, June 2013.

CONSULTATIONS

Parish Council: Recommends refusal. In an email of 31 January the following reasons were offered:

1. The proposed development by reason of its size, density, the height of the toilet block and the proposed screening would have an unacceptably adverse impact on the amenities of the properties immediately adjacent and opposite to the site and the surrounding area by reason of overlooking, loss of privacy, visually overbearing impact, increased traffic on the narrow access road and excessive noise.
2. The site access proposals are not in accordance with acceptable standards and would lead to potential safety hazards on a road that already experiences regular road traffic incidents. Visibility from the proposed new vehicle exit is not adequate to allow through traffic to stop safely should they encounter vehicles exiting the site, bearing in mind that this road has a 60 mph speed limit. This problem would be exacerbated by the huge increase in traffic density and the large size of the vehicles that would result from this development. The road system is not able to accommodate this increase.
3. The proposed screening around the enclosed bungalow and along the road edge would create an unacceptable loss of sunlight to neighbouring properties.
4. The development is clearly partially located in the flood plain area, which is completely inappropriate for use as camping site spaces.
5. The package treatment facility is located in the flood zone. In the likely event that flooding will occur, this would result in foul waste being deposited onto the site and into the water course, which is very close by.
6. The road at this location regularly floods in heavy rain, even in the summer, creating a danger to users of the site and meaning that it would at times be inaccessible.

In response to revised plans no comments have been received at the time of writing.

Highways Authority: No objection, subject to conditions.

SSDC Area Engineer: Initial concerns were raised about the layout of the site in relation to areas within the higher flood zones. These concerns have been addressed in the re-design, and no objection is now raised.

SSDC Landscape Officer: No landscape objection is raised, in principle, although issue has been taken with the storage facility and the details of buildings and their placement. In response to the latest amended plan the following comment is offered:

The amendments show some minor improvements, in better concentrating built form together. Whilst the pavilion still lays divorced from the main built footprint, I can acknowledge that with an appropriate landscape treatment, it has some capacity to be relatively unobtrusive. I am still not convinced by the extent of caravan storage, though again landscape mitigation - as inferred by the plan - will help to mitigate the visual impact if not the extent of footprint.

Whilst I still have concerns over the proposal, I do not consider the overall landscape impact as so adverse as to generate an over-riding landscape objection. If you are minded to approve, please condition a fully detailed landscape proposal to ensure mitigation of built form impacts.

SSDC Conservation Officer: *Provided landscaping is provided at the south end of the site, and there is sufficient screening to the east, I would have no objections in relation to the setting of the listed buildings.*

SSDC Ecologist: It is considered unlikely that the proposal would give rise to any significant ecological impacts. No objection.

SSDC Economic Development *From a purely Economic Development perspective, I applaud any business who having survived the deepest recession for many years is looking to expand and employ additional staff. Somerset's tourism economy will be under strain following the horrific flooding in the last few months and for certain, there will be an enormous promotion of the county to inform that we remain open for business. 'The Boscastle' effect could be that unprecedented levels of visitors could visit Somerset over the coming years to see for themselves villages such as Thorney, Muchelney etc which now have national acclaim. I support this application.*

SSDC Tourism Officer: *This is a well-established caravan park, offering good facilities including quite an extensive shop. The site is marketed through a website and listed on a number of camping / caravanning websites.*

I understand from the owners that the on-site servicing and maintenance section of the business is important and in demand.

The park is convenient for visitors travelling on the A303 and looking for a stopping-off point and also a good location for people wanting to enjoy a stay in the countryside but within reach of town/village shops and facilities.

It is also well-placed for people attending popular local events such as RNAS Yeovilton Airday and Yandles woodworking and craft shows, for visiting the local National Trust properties and for walking the River Parrett Trail. The closest TIC is at Cartgate where staff receive frequent enquiries during high season (i.e. several times a day) about camping/caravan sites and regular enquiries during the rest of the year. The nearest caravan sites of similar or larger size are at Lopen, Muchelney and Sparkford.

Extension of the site with more - and larger - pitches and new shower block will be in line with visitor expectations of finding high standard facilities and space to accommodate larger vehicles.

The proposal includes a one-way route across the site with a new exit point. This would

seem to be safer on the site. However I do have some concerns about access onto and off the site for large vehicles, likely to be driven by people who do not know the area well, as this can be quite a fast road.

SSDC Environmental Protection Unit: No objection.

County Archaeologist: No objection.

Environment Agency: In response to the originally submitted application, it was noted that there was no objection to the principle of the development. but the EA objected to the proposal with detailed suggestions on issues to be addressed. At the time of writing, no final comments have been received in response to the amended plans. These will be updated at the meeting.

Wessex Water: No objection.

REPRESENTATIONS

Twenty-two letters of objection have been received, raising the following main issues:

- The road system and proposed new access are inadequate and there would be a harmful impact on highway safety. There are various concerns: increased traffic volumes on a restricted road network; poor visibility for access points to site; inadequate pedestrian and cycle ways; poor road geometry in the area; poor accident record; the road floods in winter.
- There is a flood risk: The river overflows on occasion, putting visitors and future occupants at risk; surface water flooding is also a concern;
- the development will increase water flowing into the existing land drains and lead to exacerbation of flooding;
- Placement of the sewage treatment plant is inappropriate and too close to the potentially flooded area;
- development would harm the existing ecology, and that it is inadequately supported by an ecological or wildlife survey;
- there would be an increase in noise and other pollution,
- jet washing of caravans leads to water pollution;
- emergency access is an issue;
- the character and appearance of the locality and landscape would be harmed;
- there would be a harmful impact on the historic character of works site and the area;
- views would be harmed;
- the numbers of employees and future employees is questioned;
- there would be overlooking and amenity harm to neighbouring properties;
- the demand for additional facilities is disputed;
- the site will cause light pollution;
- the proposal will harm property values;
- there has been no engagement with local residents by the applicant;
- there will be future applications to enlarge the facility.

Eight letters of support have been received, raising the following issues;

- the proposal will enhance tourism in the area, encouraging visitors and providing welcome accommodation;
- there will be a positive impact on the local economy;
- the current operators of the site provide an excellent service, which is valued by users;

- the proposal enhances the facilities currently provided

One general observation has been submitted in relation to the existing site and an access close to the cottages known as Parrett Cottages, as well as the effectiveness of screen planting, which is not considered to be great.

CONSIDERATIONS

Principle of Development

The site is in open countryside, where development is required to be justified for economic development purposes, maintain the environment and not foster growth in the need to travel. On the basis of a well-conceived tourist facility, as part of a successful existing business, the principle of development is accepted, subject to the assessment of and mitigation for any identified harm.

Business Case

The application seeks to enlarge and improve an existing successful business. The proposal is well supported by both the NPPF and the Local Plan, in that it seeks to provide additional tourist accommodation and improve economic activity in a rural area. The scale of the proposal has been criticised and questioned. By its nature, this sort of accommodation does require significant areas of land, and the doubling of the size of the site is somewhat mitigated by the low level of built form, and the possibility of screening in this relatively flat landscape. The proposal for an increase in this successful business is considered to comply with the general aims of sustainable development, and is supported by both the Economic Development and Tourism Officers.

The scale of employment has been raised as an issue. The park operates with minimal permanent and part-time staff (in a revised submission, the applicant has stated that 2 full-time staff are employed and 2 part-time members). This is of a small order of direct employment, but it is not considered to be particularly relevant to the case for this business. The important aspect of the business - and the resulting impact on the local economy - is its contribution to the tourist industry in the area. It would provide holiday accommodation for up to 30 additional pitches and storage space for out-of-season storage, with obvious implications for all sorts of local businesses.

Storage Component

A fairly large part of the site is to be dedicated to storage of caravans, which is clearly an increasing need in the way caravan holidays are now organised. Increasing numbers of people now choose to store their caravans away from home and in appropriate localities ready for holiday use. Whilst this is a storage use, it is clearly also closely tied to the tourism accommodation, and is therefore not regarded as a simple B8 use which might lead to other concerns. Subject to appropriate conditions, it is not considered that such a use in this locality is unacceptable or inappropriate.

Visual and Landscape Impact

Numerous objections have been received in relation to the visual and landscape impact. The Council's Landscape Officer is concerned at the distance of the storage area away from built development. However, given the flat nature of the site, it is quite clearly possible to ensure adequate screening, and whilst the northernwards extension does appear, on plan, to extend built form disproportionately, it is adjacent to existing buildings and contained within a very clear perimeter layout, which can be controlled. It is not

considered that, with adequate mitigation planting, this proposal represents sufficient landscape of visual harm to warrant refusal of the application.

Highway Safety

Numerous references have made reference to concerns about highway safety. The proposal has been assessed by the Highways Authority, which is of the view that there is no sustainable reason for refusal of the application on highway safety grounds. In particular, the visibility provided at the new access point is considered acceptable, and should be secured and maintained in perpetuity. It is noted, and the suggestion is regarded as a good one, that a condition should be included to ensure that the route through the site, from the existing access to the exit at the new access, should operate as a one-way system. This will reduce possible conflicts at the existing access, which has other uses associated with it, and make for safer operation by holidaymakers.

Impact on Residential Amenity

The neighbouring bungalow, which was initially a part of the caravan park site, is located close to the western boundary at its southern end. The layout has sought to avoid placing development immediately adjacent to this part of the boundary. The nearest caravan pitch is the same distance away from the bungalow as the existing static caravans on the main site. There is no development in the area immediately adjacent to the bungalow, and the exit road is taken away from this boundary to exit at the extreme east of the southern boundary. There is scope for screen planting in the affected area. The toilet block has been moved further north in the revised layout, and is now 45m from the bungalow. It has been reduced in height, and windows removed from the south-west elevation. It is not considered that any overlooking, overshadowing or other harmful amenity impact on the adjacent bungalow is represented by the proposal.

Residents of dwellings across the road have also suggested that there would be harm to their residential amenity. Whilst the presence of an extended caravan park will be noticeable, there is not considered to be any demonstrable harm resulting from the proposal to these dwellings, with the nearest caravan being 60m distant, and separated from the dwellings by a public highway.

The issue of noise is raised. Whilst it is accepted that some sound is produced by this activity, it cannot be assumed that it would automatically be of the scale of a noise nuisance that would harm residential amenity and require action to be taken. It is not considered that this concern would warrant a refusal of the application. Any noise nuisance either by the existing caravan park or this extension is subject to the normal provisions of the appropriate legislation.

Impact on Heritage Assets

The site is physically well separated from the listed buildings on the Parrett Works site, and on the western side of the caravan park. Neither the conservation officer nor the County Archaeologist has raised any objection to the application. It is not considered that the proposal would have any negative impact on the setting of listed buildings or other heritage assets.

Impact on Ecology and Wildlife

The SSDC Ecologist is satisfied that there is no ecological or wildlife reason for refusal of the application.

Impact on Views and Property Values

Perceived impacts on private views and property values are not planning considerations.

Flooding Issues

At the time of writing the report, only verbal comment had been received from the Environment Agency in response to the amended site layout. In principle, no objection was raised. However, the Committee will be updated at the meeting.

Comments of the Parish Council

The issues raised have been largely dealt with in the body of the report. However, it should be noted that the concern about the location of the sewage treatment facility has been addressed in a revised layout, removing it from the areas of potential flooding. Whilst surface water flooding of the road is noted as being a seasonal issue, it has not precluded the safe and successful operation of the caravan park in this locality over the years, and it is not considered a reason to refuse an application to improve and enlarge this facility.

Comments by Local Residents and Others

These issues have largely been covered in the report. However, points not dealt with include:

- the sewage treatment plant has been moved to a position now agreed by the SSDC Engineer and the EA;
- pollution is subject to control under other legislation; however, no likelihood of extreme water, air or noise pollution has been raised by any consultees, and it is not considered to represent a reason for refusal of this application;
- potential light pollution can be controlled by condition, limiting outdoor lighting to what is proposed in the revised plan;
- whilst the lack of contact between the applicant and local residents is to be regretted, it is not considered to provide any reason to refuse the application;
- perceived future intentions of the owner are not a planning consideration.

EIA Regulations

The proposal has been screened under the Environmental Impact Regulations, and is not considered to require an Environmental Impact Assessment.

Conclusion

The proposal represents a justified extension of a successful existing business in a rural locality, providing high quality tourist accommodation and making a positive contribution to rural economic activity. No ecological, landscape or amenity harm has been identified that would warrant refusal of the proposal; flooding issues have been dealt with to the satisfaction of the Council's engineers, and the EA. The Highways Authority raises no objections. The proposal is considered to represent sustainable development in line with the general principles and policies outlined in the NPPF and is accordingly recommended for approval.

S.106 AGREEMENT

Not relevant.

RECOMMENDATION

Grant permission.

01. The proposal represents a sustainable development in the countryside that would make a significant contribution to the provision of tourist accommodation and support economic growth. The impacts of the development can be suitably mitigated and no demonstrable harm to the setting, landscape or residential amenity would result, in accordance with the aims and objectives of the NPPF and Policies ST3, ST5, ST6, EH5, EC3 and ME10 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006.

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

01. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To accord with the provisions of section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

02. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved details and plans: the drawings ref. 1565-PL-02 Rev A; 1565-PL-03 and 1565-PL-04, and the details set out in the email received on 18 February 2014.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

03. The subject land including any buildings thereon shall be used for a caravan park and camping site, and for no other purpose (including any other purpose in any Class of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification).

Reason: To safeguard the character, appearance and general amenity of the area in accordance with the aims of the NPPF and Policies ST5, ST6 and EC3 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006.

04. The proposed access shall have a minimum width of 5.0metres, incorporating radii of not less than 4.5metres, and shall not be steeper than 1 in 10. Once established, the access shall comply with these requirements in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to accord with Policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006.

05. Prior to commencement of development hereby permitted the proposed access over at least the first 10.0metres of its length, as measured from the edge of the adjoining carriageway, shall be properly consolidated and surfaced (not loose stone or gravel) in accordance with details which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Once constructed the access shall thereafter be maintained in that condition at all times.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to accord with Policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006.

06. There shall be no obstruction to visibility greater than 900millimetres above adjoining road level in advance of lines drawn 2.4metres back from the carriageway edge on the centre line of the access and extending to points on the

nearside carriageway edge 43metres either side of the access. Such visibility shall be fully provided before the development hereby permitted is brought into use and shall thereafter be maintained at all times.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to accord with Policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006.

07. No development hereby permitted shall be commenced unless details of a scheme of internal traffic movement within the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall seek to ensure that traffic using the access point created by this permission only exits the site at this point, and that entrance into the site is taken via the adjacent existing caravan park site edged blue on the submitted plan ref. 1565-PL-01. The scheme shall include appropriate signage to be placed at suitable points within the site and at the points of access/egress. Once approved, the scheme, including the approved signage, shall be fully implemented and thereafter retained and maintained.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to accord with Policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006.

08. Any entrance gates/physical barrier erected shall be hung to open inwards, shall be set back a minimum distance of 10.0metres from the carriageway edge and shall thereafter be maintained in that condition at all times.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to accord with Policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006.

09. No development hereby permitted shall be commenced unless details of the internal ground floor levels of the buildings to be erected on site have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard the character and appearance of the area, and to accord with Policy ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006

10. No external lighting shall be installed or erected on the site other than that indicated on the submission plan ref. 1565-PL-02 unless as part of a scheme, details of which have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such scheme of lighting should seek to minimise external lighting and avoid spotlights particularly any visible from the public highway. Once approved, such lighting shall only be erected and used in accordance with such scheme unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard the character of the area and in the interests of preventing light pollution in accordance with Policies ST6 and EP3 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006.

11. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a scheme of landscaping, which shall include indications of all existing trees and hedgerows on the land, and details of any to be retained, together with measures for their protection in the course of the development, as well as details of any changes proposed in existing ground levels. All planting, seeding, turfing or earth moulding comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the commencement of the development, and any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall

be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation. The scheme of landscaping shall including details of all hedges and boundary treatments as well as other planting indicated on the submitted site plan ref. 1565-PL-02 Rev A.

Reason: To safeguard the character and appearance of the area, and to accord with the NPPF and Policies ST5, ST6, EC3 and EH5 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006.

Informatives:

01. Having regard to the powers of the Highway Authority under the Highways Act 1980 the applicant is advised that the creation of the new access will require a Section 184 Permit. This must be obtained from the Highway Service Manager for the South Somerset Area at The Highways Depot, Mead Avenue, Houndstone Business Park, Yeovil, Yeovil, Tel No 0845 345 9155. Application for such a permit should be made at least four weeks before access works are intended to commence.
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