

**5. The erection of a single storey ranger centre to include office/kitchen/workshop/storage/education/meeting room/tea room and public toilet (GR 355471/115423)**

<b>Proposal :</b>	The erection of a single storey ranger centre to include office/kitchen/workshop/storage/education/meeting room/tea room and public toilet (GR 355471/115423)
<b>Site Address:</b>	Land Adjoining Car Park Brunswick Street Yeovil
<b>Parish:</b>	Yeovil
<b>Yeovil (Central) Ward (SSDC Member)</b>	Mr J Vincent Chainey (Cllr) Mr A Kendall (Cllr) Mr P G Gubbins (Cllr)
<b>Recommending Case Officer:</b>	Andy Cato Tel: (01935) 462015 Email: andy.cato@southsomerset.gov.uk
<b>Target date :</b>	6th July 2010
<b>Applicant :</b>	South Somerset District Council
<b>Agent: (no agent if blank)</b>	
<b>Application Type :</b>	Non PS1 and PS2 return applications

**Reason for Referral to Committee**

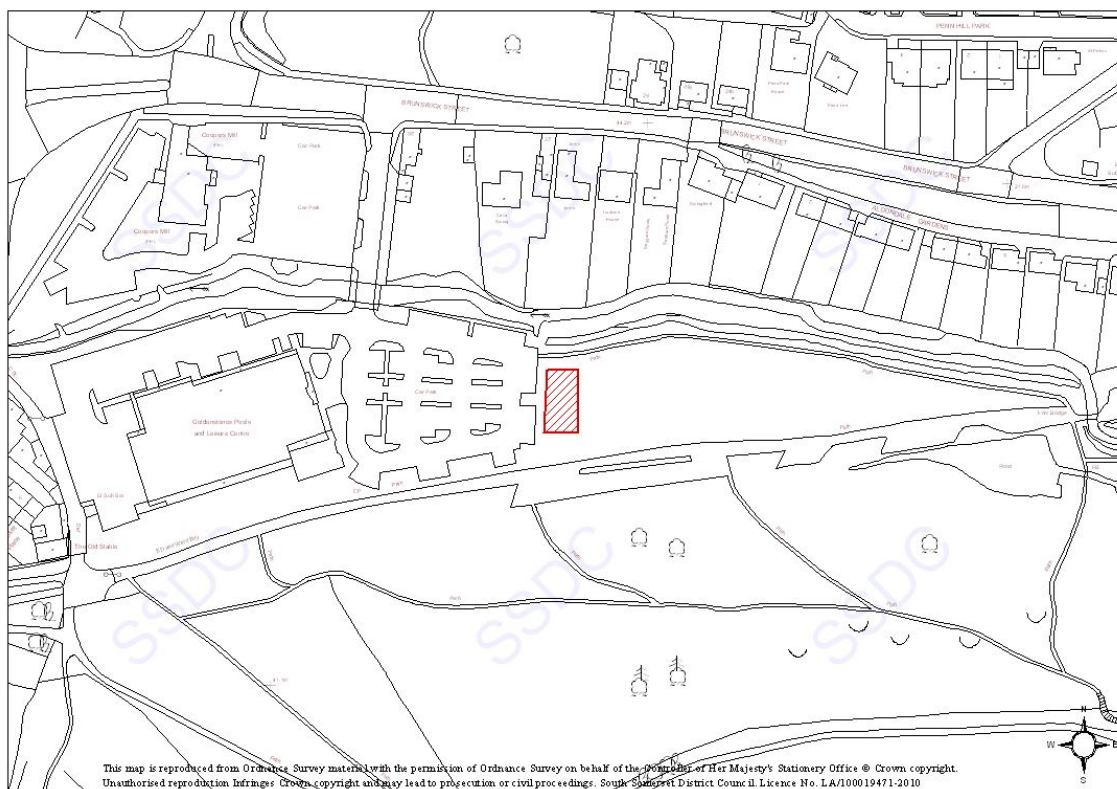
The application was considered by Area South at its meeting of 7 July 2010 (draft minute attached as Appendix A). Area South were supportive of the application, although expressed some concern over potential noise disturbance for the proposed air source heat pump. Members requested that the views of the council's Environmental Protection Unit and Climate Change officer were sought and presented to the Regulation Committee in respect of the particular heat pump that was to be used. If necessary, Members would like the Regulation Committee to consider the imposition of a condition to control the noise from the heat pump.

The Environmental Protection Unit will undertake a site visit to assess the impact of the proposed air source heat pump. The conclusions of this assessment will be given in the form of an oral report to the Regulation Committee. In addition, the Climate Change Officer will also provide information on air source heat pumps to the Regulation Committee. These officers will be attending the Regulation Committee to answer any questions.

**Reason for Initial Referral to Committee**

In this case the District Council are the applicants and the application has generated considerable public interest and a number of objections have been raised. The application is accordingly first to be reported for the consideration of the Members of the Area South Committee and for a determination by the Members of the Regulation Committee.

## Site Description and Proposal



The application site falls within land forming part of the Yeovil Country Park within the area of Ninesprings. It lies immediately adjacent to the eastern end of the existing public car park adjoining Goldenstones Pool and Leisure Centre.

The application seeks a Full planning permission for the erection of a ranger centre building. In more detail a single storey building is proposed with associated external hard and soft landscaping. The building will comprise an entrance foyer, a meeting room primarily intended for use during public events at the Country Park as an education facility for visiting schools and the general public, a rangers office, a restroom with kitchen area, washing and showering facilities for the rangers, public toilet facilities, a workshop with integral secure storage, a tea room with refreshments serving area and an external over-spill for public use.

The building is designed to be energy efficient with the walls constructed with a prefabricated straw bale panel finished with lime washed render and timber cladding. The roof is to be finished with plain clay roof tiles.

The development, including hard and soft landscaping, will result in an overall 250sqm area; the proposed building will provide a total 160sqm internal floorspace which will comprise:

- Entrance Foyer 6.50sqm
- Visitors Tea Room 30 sqm
- Kitchen and Servery 6.50 sqm
- Rangers Office 7 sqm
- Staff Rest Area 13.5 sqm
- Cloakroom 2.50 sqm

- Meeting Room 21 sqm
- Kitchenette 8.50 sqm
- Staff Facilities 6.50 sqm
- Rangers Workshop 41 sqm
- Public Toilet Area 17 sqm
- The building will measure:
- Height - 5.4 metres
- Width - 9.9 metres
- Length - 20.7 metres

The application is accompanied by a Tree Risk Survey Report and a Design & Access Statement (D&A) which explains:-

Ninesprings Country Park extends over an area of some 127 acres, and whilst Yeovil's premier open-space it lacks facilities for its visitors for staff and volunteers.

The application is based upon the needs identified following extensive public consultation and will meet objectives including the appointment of a grant funded Community Ranger, an increase in volunteering and training opportunities, generation of a small but dependable income stream a clear focal point for the parks activities and an increase in visitor numbers though varied events and informal education opportunities. The key findings resulting from robust visitor surveys conducted at the Country Park, identify a need for the provision of public toilets, refreshment facilities and an improved Rangers presence by means of a permanent Rangers Base. The absence of a permanent facility has resulted in the need to hire temporary conveniences and refreshment facilities for any special event held at the park. Currently there is no obvious information point, no waterproof information area and no dedicated indoor area for park visitors, including those of an educational nature.

The current facilities for the Rangers consist entirely of one single large steel container unit with a cold-tap connection. There is no obvious first aid post, no toilet or washing facilities, no suitable storage facilities, no office or suitable IT equipment, no space for training, no adequate indoor space and inadequate heating. The Rangers utilise two shared Landrovers, which will remain to be stored off-site and all vehicle servicing and repairs will also continue to be carried out off-site (at the SSDC Lufton Depot).

The site selected for the proposed Rangers building will occupy an area of spacious and predominately amenity grassland immediately adjoining the public car park and within close walking distance of the most popular area of the Country Park. Mature trees are to be retained and some smaller, less established trees, are to be removed to be replanted elsewhere in the Country Park.

In addition and in response to questions raised by the Planning case officer, the applicant has advised;

- "I can confirm that the current provision of car parking is under used. I have been managing the country park for 6 years now and I can honestly say that only once was there an issue with over crowding of vehicles; when a massive children's cross country event over subscribed us at rush hour, so traffic flow on to the highway was causing a bottle neck. Even at peak use time for the country park e.g. may fayre day and Saturday or Sunday events there is no problem. The close proximity of Maltravers car park and the traffic free route through Penn Hill to the site also always gives overflow parking for peak event dates. Our visitor surveys show that the majority of visitors to the country park walk, keeping parking requirements low. I would assume that these people would

become regular users of the proposed facility, without increasing parking requirements. So the balance of new visitors would be met by current under use".

- "The Countryside Rangers are confident that the activities of their team and the leisure centre function are not compatible.

Goldenstones already operates at capacity, fully utilising all the space they have.

Although they offer toilet facilities many park users are not comfortable using them as they need to enter a building which is alien to the country park. The mix of muddy boots and dogs with the sterile pool environment is not comfortable. The need to store and maintain muddy and dirty equipment, along with some chemicals and fuel plus provide facilities for rangers and staff, particularly in the dirty winter months would cause significant management issues. The Country Park and Goldenstones are two very separate leisure providers and should be recognised as such".

## **HISTORY**

90/02880/R3D - Construction of swimming pool complex and car park - Approved July 1990.

As a background to this proposal, detailed pre-application discussions have been held with the Councils Planning Landscape Architect, Economic Development and Planning Officers and Members. The Councils Countryside Team have also carried-out a number of consultations and surveys with users and visitors to the site. In this connection the D&A states, "Extensive public and community consultation has established the need for this proposed development. Community involvement at the earliest stages has both influenced and informed the many requirements of the design and have essentially directed the key design decisions made during the projects development. "

## **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 decision must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan Documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The development plan comprises the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review, and the South Somerset Local Plan (adopted April 2006).

The policies of most relevance to the proposal are:

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (adopted April 2000):

STR1 - Sustainable Development

STR2 - Towns

STR4 - Development in Towns

Policy 1 - Nature Conservation

Policy 42 - Walking

Policy 44 - Cycling

Policy 48 - Access and Parking

Policy 49 - Transport Requirements of New Development

South Somerset Local Plan (adopted April 2006):

ST3 - Development Areas

ST5 - General Principles of Development

ST6 - The Quality of Development

ST7 - Public Space  
ST9 - Crime Prevention  
EH11 - Archaeology  
EC3 - Landscape Character  
EU4 - Drainage  
TP1 - New Development and Pedestrian Movement  
TP6 - Car Parking

#### National Guidance

Statements on Government planning policy and associated guidance can provide material considerations in the determination of a development proposal. This can be particularly relevant where the adopted development plan document pre-dates the most up to date Government policy. In this case the following policy documents are relevant:

PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Communities (2005) and the accompanying policy document "The Planning System - General Principles."

PPS1 sets-out the overarching planning policies for sustainable development through the plan-led planning system, and advocates:

- Good planning ensures the right development in the right place at the right time and makes a positive difference for all in delivering jobs etc whilst protecting and enhancing the environment and conserving the countryside and open spaces that are vital resources for everyone.

PPS4 - "Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth".

PPS4 defines economic development to include public and community use and covers retail development, leisure facilities, offices and cultural and tourism development and advocates:

- An assessment should identify the need for the proposal, and, in effect, why a town centre location is not available/suitable.
- Planning authorities should support the provision and expansion of tourist and visitors facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities carefully weighing the objective of the needs against the need to protect the landscape and environmentally sensitive sites.

PPS7 - "Sustainable Development in Rural Areas".

States that planning policies should provide a positive framework for facilitating sustainable development that supports traditional land-based activities and makes the most of new leisure and recreational opportunities that require a countryside location. It continues by stating that when preparing policies and determining planning applications for development in the countryside, local planning authorities should support countryside-based enterprises and activities which contribute to rural economies, and/or promote recreation in and the enjoyment of the countryside. With regard to the countryside around urban areas PPS7 adds that authorities should maximise a range of beneficial uses by facilitating the provision of appropriate sport and recreation facilities. The re-use of existing buildings is supported under the criteria set at paragraph 17.

PPG16: "Archaeology and Planning".

PPG17 "Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation".

Supports high quality and well managed open spaces and recreational facilities which act as a focal point for community activities and provide opportunities for people for social interaction. Such facilities should be easily accessible. Development of open space may provide an opportunity for local authorities to remedy deficiencies with an aim to achieve qualitative improvements. Planning authorities "may wish to allow small-scale structures where these would support the existing recreational use (for example, interpretation centres, toilets and refreshment facilities).....They should seek to ensure that the proposed development takes account of and is sensitive to the local context."



PPG21 "Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism".

Supports well designed, safe and accessible tourism development that, inter alia results in the more efficient use of land, provides a supportative framework for economic growth and successful business and protects and enhances the natural and built environment.

Reference should also be had to the South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy aims:

Goal 3 - Develop Healthy Environments

Goal 4 - Develop Quality Services and Facilities

Goal 7 - Developments that attract and retain visitors, consumers and high quality sustainable businesses.

Goal 8 - Develop High Quality Built Development and Public Spaces.

Goal 11 - Protect and Enhance the Natural Environment

Goal 12 - Environmental Education

## **CONSULTATIONS**

Yeovil Town Council: Recommend refusal on the grounds of the size and siting of the building which will intrude into unspoilt countryside. The YTC considered that other locations should be considered further.

SCC Archaeologist: No objections.

SCC Highways: Advise that the "site is located outside of the town centre cordon where car free development should be resisted. However in this instance the applicant can use the adjoining car park in connection with the proposal. Based on the floor area to be created a maximum of 6 car parking spaces would be required. This proposal will result in the loss of 2 existing car parking spaces. On the basis that the District Council are satisfied that the loss of the 2 spaces and an increased demand for parking will have no impact on the viability of any of the adjoining uses it may be considered unreasonable to raise an objection to the proposal".

SSDC Engineer; No comments (no objections).

SSDC Town Centre Manager: "As Yeovil Town Centre Manager for South Somerset District Council I am in full support of the project and application.

It will create opportunities for education, exercise, recreation and access for all of the community. The Ranger base will also bring additional visitors into the town centre, helping to support the local economy.

This project can only enhance the close relationship between the town centre, the country park and countryside beyond".

SSDC Landscape Officer: No landscape issues; "the proposal is well related in scale and location to the current development surround."

SSDC Ecologist: "This proposal, due to its location, is likely to have negligible impact on biodiversity (i.e. to neither priority habitats nor priority species identified for action in local, regional or national Biodiversity Action Plans, nor habitats and species listed in Section 41 of the NERC Act as being of principal importance). I therefore have no objection".

SSDC Rights of Way: No public rights of way crossing or abutting the site.

SSDC Economic Development: Observations awaited.

SSDC Environmental Protection Unit; No comments (no objections).

SSDC Area South Development Team: "The proposed Ranger base with community facilities is a welcome proposal and is in line with a number of Area South Development and Yeovil Vision Objectives. Indeed the Yeovil Vision Board has approved part funding for this project.

The centre will provide a much needed public amenity within the park providing an indoor venue for educational purposes, public toilets, and a cafe which will create a meeting point for the local community and visitors to the country park and Goldenstones.

Local schools will benefit greatly from this facility.

The centre will provide a focal point where visitors will be able to obtain information about the park, including the opportunities for volunteering, which is consistent with SSDC's policy to increase the capacity of the voluntary sector.

The Yeovil Vision refers to 'the creation of a 'promenade' through the country park to act as a strong positive interface between the town and country'. The establishment of a visitor centre in this location is consistent with this concept and will encourage more people who live and work in the town to use the country park".

Environment Agency: Have no comments to make on the application (no objection).

Neighbours: The application has been advertised and eight neighbouring households have been notified and invited to comment on the application. This has resulted in the receipt of 122 letters; 29 in support and 93 against the proposal.

Points raised in SUPPORT of the proposal:

1. Makes good and constructive use of the park area.
2. The existing container use is sub standard.
3. The facilities will greatly enhance the use of the Country Park by residents and local schools.
4. The proposal is well thought out and site selected is in exactly the right place.
5. The comprehensive report with the application gives every justification for the proposal.
6. Will be an asset but questions how it will be funded as a "non essential service" which are currently subject of cuts.
7. It is just the facility the site needs.
8. The new build is environmentally sensitive.
9. Being next to a car park it is unlikely to cause any traffic problems.
10. We should be grabbing this opportunity with both hands, particularly as it would be funded externally
11. It is adjacent to a developed area and will not detract from the greenspace.
12. It is located in an area of heavy footfall, placing it elsewhere such as the ski centre will result in an underused development.
13. It is necessary to have the toilets next to the Rangers office so they can be monitored.
14. The toilet facilities at Goldenstones are barely adequate for the purpose of those using it as it is.
15. The site is not too invasive to neighbours.

I know of no other Country Park or Nature Reserve of equal size and quality that does not have a visitor centre near its entrance.

Points made AGAINST the proposal:

- The proposal will contravene 11 planning rules. The context of this application site is historic gardens and parkland, and a building incursion in this area is contrary both to the historic plan, and local landscape character. In particular, there are clear landscape reasons to oppose this application, particularly regarding rules ST5 and ST6.

From Planning Policy ST5

1. The proposal does not make efficient use of land and give priority to the use of recycled land and other appropriate sites within urban areas first.
2. The proposal does not conserve biodiversity and environmental assets, particularly this nationally designated area, and the historic heritage of the district.

3. The proposal does not respect the form, character and setting of the locality.
4. The proposal does not make provision for a satisfactory means of access into and within the site and traffic resulting from this development cannot be accommodated on the local transport network.
5. The proposal does not avoid placing people at risk from flooding, contaminated land, pollution or hazardous substances.

From Planning Policy ST6

6. The architectural and landscape design does not satisfactorily respect the form, character and setting of the settlement or local environment.
  7. The proposal does not preserve and compliment the key characteristics of the location, to maintain it's local distinctiveness.
  8. The proposal would result in the unavoidable loss of open spaces (including gaps and frontages) with visual or environmental value.
  9. The proposals cause unavoidable harm to the natural and built environment of the locality and the broader landscape.
  10. The proposals through its density, form, scale, mass, height and proportions do not respect or relate to the character of its surroundings.
  11. The proposals unacceptably harm the residential amenity of occupiers of adjacent properties by disturbing, interfering with or overlooking these properties.
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1. A cafe use is not needed.
  2. Council have a hidden agenda to remove Goldenstones and build houses.
  3. Goldenstones would make an excellent visitors centre.
  4. A cafe use could be reintroduced at Goldenstones.
  5. The leisured feel of the area will change.
  6. A thoughtless and unsightly design.
  7. Residents will look down on a flat roof.
  8. When Goldenstones was built residents told nothing else would be built here.
  9. This is not the most suitable site.
  10. Understand need for Rangers facilities but a much smaller scale and less intrusive location necessary.
  11. This is a waste of money.
  12. The area in question is enjoyed by thousands if not tens of thousands of people throughout the year seeking a quite and tranquil area close to the city centre. How many people will benefit from this building.
  13. Some neighbour letters do not give respondents details and contravene the Freedom of Information Act.
  14. Public toilets needed at the Ninesprings Play Area - not here.
  15. The Ski - Centre is in real need of improvement - it is derelict and overgrown - the Rangers Centre should be put at the Ski - Centre which is at the gateway to the Country Park.
  16. The public owns SSDC and therefore the land. The majority consider this a green field site with its use restricted to leisure activity.
  17. This is the only flat area away from young childrens play area.
  18. Assured that this was to be kept as a green wedge. Meanwhile a swimming pool and car park have been built - where is it going to stop.
  19. The industrial type building will be detrimental to the characteristics of the location.
  20. There has been a deficiency of public consultation.
  21. Approval will set a precedent for further development.
  22. Given other extremely large building projects for housing of paramount importance to retain existing green open recreational areas.



23. The enormous building will primarily be used for workshop facilities to carry out servicing and maintenance of council vehicles and clearly will not be restricted to machinery used only at Ninesprings.
24. Small tea rooms, toilets and rooms for the Rangers could be useful but a light industrial unit would be completely inappropriate for the area.
25. The context of this application site is a historic gardens and parklands and a building intrusion is contrary to the historic plan and the local landscape character.
26. HRH Prince William is encouraging the nation to protect their recreational spaces - the planners don't fully appreciate just how this precise recreational area is used throughout the day, every day of the year.
27. The local community were not given the opportunity to tell you what they value and want to conserve.
28. The Rangers welfare/work base requirements have been overtaken by a large scale development idea, most of which is not directly related to the Rangers personal work station needs.
29. Two portakabins could be placed on the unused land adjacent to Goldenstones.
30. Why does the Ranger need her own shower room
31. Why do the Rangers have their own kitchen area
32. Why do the Rangers need a staff room when they work outside
33. Why do the Rangers require a 41sqm light industrial workshop.
34. Why does a 21 person meeting room need to be provided when the 30 person tea room would only be open for a limited period in season and closed for the winter.
35. There is no comparison to the Ham Hill Centre.

In addition to the individual letters and emails six petitions have been received signed by a total of 522 people objecting on the basis that the proposal is contrary to policy ST5 \_ ST6 of the Local Plan, namely:

- The proposal does not conserve biodiversity and environmental assets, particularly this
- nationally designated area, and the historic heritage of the district.
- The proposal does not respect the form, character and setting of the locality.
- The proposal does not make provision for a satisfactory means of access into and within the site and traffic resulting from this development cannot be accommodated on the local transport network.
- The proposal does not avoid placing people at risk from flooding, contaminated land, pollution or hazardous substances.
- The architectural and landscape design does not satisfactorily respect the form, character and setting of the settlement or local environment.
- The proposal does not preserve and compliment the key characteristics of the location, to maintain it's local distinctiveness.
- The proposal would result in the unavoidable loss of open spaces (including gaps and frontages) with visual or environmental value.
- The proposals cause unavoidable harm to the natural and built environment of the locality and the broader landscape.
- The proposals through its density, form, scale, mass, height and proportions do not respect or relate to the character of its surroundings.
- The proposals unacceptably harm the residential amenity of occupiers of adjacent properties by disturbing, interfering with or overlooking these properties.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

The eastern edge of the Goldenstones public car park marks the designated development limits for this part of Yeovil. Consequently in terms of the development plan

the proposed building occupies land immediately adjoining but outside of the development limits.

A number of issues both for and against this proposal have been raised and, in the case of this particular proposal, the main planning considerations can be summarised as follows:

#### HAS A FUNCTION NEED BEEN ESTABLISHED FOR THIS PROPOSAL

A full and detailed Design \_ Access Statement (D\_ A) accompanies the planning application and this clearly sets out a need case argument for the proposed new building which was initially founded on an essential requirement to provide a base of operations for the Park Rangers due to the total inadequacies of their existing facilities (a steel container unit). Prior to submitting a planning application in the matter however the Countryside Team considered that it would prove both expedient and beneficial to carry out consultations and a full assessment in order to ensure the delivery of a development that would meet all necessary functional requirements and needs. In this connection the D\_ A Statement advises - "Extensive public and community consultation has established the need for this proposed development. The key findings highlighted by the statistically robust visitor surveys conducted at Yeovil Country Park in 2005 and 2009, reflect the requirements for the provision of public conveniences, refreshment facilities and an improved Ranger presence in the Park by means of a permanent Ranger Base."

Accepting that an essential need applies:

#### IS THE BUILDINGS SIZE, FORM AND LOCATION APPROPRIATE

The building is to be sited immediately adjacent to a large and accessible public car park and within a vicinity served by well trodden amenity pathways which link with the Country park and the town centre. In addition the D\_ A Statement advises the proposed siting is within close proximity of the Victorian valley gardens, lake, ponds, meadows and woodlands - the most popular and most visited areas of the Country park. Also the D\_ A points out that currently visitors arriving at the public car park are not aware of any focal point for activities in the Park that information is not readily available that Rangers are not easily located to assist with emergencies and enquiries and that, if approved, the new base would become the dedicated First Aid post for the Country Park.

A need for pedestrian and vehicular access does not apply nor does a need to develop further land to provide car parking and vehicular manoeuvring space.

The proposed building has a relatively small footprint for the range of facilities to be provided and will stand at a height of 5.4 metres only. The secure workshop area will provide space for the storage of the Rangers tools and equipment to include a mobile sawmill and a "Mule" utility vehicle. All vehicle servicing and repairs are to continue to take place from the Councils Lufton Depot (not from the application site).

The applicant advises: " Whilst size has related to accommodation requirements, the proposed small-scale building is of a significant enough scale to hold its own in the site context of Yeovil Country Park and is big enough to impact as an important public space without being inappropriate in relation to its surroundings. The proposed internal spaces are modest in size, but if used efficiently, the building should operate successfully on this limited footprint. The spaces have been sized based on anticipated usage levels and on information gained from a similar Ranger development at Ham Hill.

Accepting that the buildings size, form and location is acceptable:

## IS THE BUILDINGS DESIGN AND FINISH APPROPRIATE

The proposed building stands in isolation and at a distance from existing buildings - the swimming pool building stands some 70m to the west and the back of the nearest dwelling off Brunswick Street is some 55m to the north.

The proposed single storey building has a traditional pitched roof to be clad in clay plain tiles; both roof slopes contain "conservation" type (small) roof lights. The walls are constructed from a prefabricated straw bale panel system to be finished externally using timber cladding with smaller sections of lime render. Hardwood timber frame doors and windows are fitted to all elevations other than the north wall which presents a solid timber clad gable end wall (facing towards the dwellings off Brunswick Street). The D\_ A advises " The building has been designed to be aesthetically appropriate and sympathetic to the surrounding parkland countryside context. Its massing is of an intentionally reduced single storey height to limit obtrusive visual impact of the site. The external materials selected are traditional in appearance and include clay plain tiles of a suitable colour and timber cladding that will remain natural in colour and which will gradually weather to blend subtly into the surrounding landscape. The lime render finish to the prefabricated straw bale panel construction will also remain in its natural shade, which will compliment the timber cladding and surrounding context. The exaggerated roof overhangs add depth and character to the overall build whilst offering protection to the underlying straw bale construction and external finishes. The timber posts at the entrance and timber doors and window frames positively enhance the overall traditional appearance and uphold the green credentials of the design."

Accepting that the buildings design and finish is acceptable:

## WILL THIS PROPOSAL HAVE A SATISFACTORY IMPACT AND RELATIONSHIP ON THE LANDSCAPE SETTING AND THE WIDER LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

The application site forms a very small part of an extensive tract of spacious ground comprising grass, hedging and trees. Housing to the north is generally finished in red brick with a scattering of properties of stone or render finish. Goldenstones is faced in reconstructed ham stone and the roof is largely metal clad.

The building has been designed for all public access towards its southern end; the north wall contains no windows or doors. Level access is provided at the main entrance off the public car park and minimal changes in the existing ground levels are to be carried out.

Three small Silver Birch trees and a Norway Maple together with an element of shrub planting will be removed to make way for the building, larger mature trees are to be retained. The trees set for removal are to be replanted. A tree survey accompanying the application details the health of trees on the site, their height and spread and any work deemed necessary. Hedgerows are to be retained and strengthened where possible and new planting carried out to provide a continued visual presence of hedgerow and planting within the new development.

New paved access pathways are to be laid on the public side of the building and against the southern gable end to link with the existing tarmac foot and cyclepath (additional bicycle hoops are to be provided to the south of the building giving a total of 14 hoops). The overall built development, including immediate external hard and soft landscaping totals some 250 sqm.

The D\_ A Statement advises "To put this proposed development into perspective, the overall Yeovil Country Park site area is a substantial 127 acres (513.951 sqm)...a development totalling 250sqm does not seem unreasonable and will cover a very small proportion of the total land area. As a percentage, the proposed development will occupy 0.12% of the total area of Ninesprings and 0.049% of the entire Yeovil Country Park".

The D\_ A further states " The overall site has a high ecological value and through the proposed development, the protection and enhancement of important features and the

longer term maintenance and management has been addressed. Biodiversity preservation and enhancements has been naturally considered as part of the proposed development. Proposed planting areas will provide for the creation of new habitats to replace those existing areas that will have been removed during development".

## LETTERS OF OBJECTION AND THE PETITIONS

A large number of letters and emails and six separate petitions objecting to this development have been received. The Town Council also raised objections to the proposal. The majority of the letters and emails received refer to a non compliance with policy ST5 \_ ST6 of the Local Plan:

### Policy ST5

Proposals for development will be considered against the following criteria:

1. The proposal promotes of a pattern of land use and transport, which reduces the need to travel, minimises the length of journeys and provides accessibility by a choice of means of transport;
2. The proposal makes efficient use of land and give priority to the use of recycled land and other appropriate sites within urban areas first;
3. The proposal conserves the biodiversity and environmental assets, particularly nationally and internationally designated areas, and the historic heritage of the district;
4. The proposal respects the form, character and setting of the locality;
5. The proposal makes provision for a satisfactory means of access into and within the site and traffic resulting from development can be accommodated on the local transport network;
6. The proposal avoids placing people and property at risk from flooding, ground instability, contaminated land, pollution or hazardous substances; and
7. The proposal makes provision for the infrastructure necessary to service the development.
8. When considering development proposals, regard will be had to any associated mitigation or compensatory measures that satisfactorily address impacts arising from the development.

### Policy ST6

Proposals for new development, otherwise acceptable in principle, will be permitted where the following design criteria are met:

1. The architectural and landscape design satisfactorily respects the form, character and setting of the settlement or local environment.
2. They preserve and complement the key characteristics of the location, to maintain its local distinctiveness.
3. They do not result in the unavoidable loss of open spaces (including gaps and frontages) with visual or environmental value.
4. They do not cause unavoidable harm to the natural and built environment of the locality and the broader landscape.
5. Their density, form, scale, mass, height and proportions respect and relate to the character of their surroundings.
6. They do not unacceptably harm the residential amenity of occupiers of adjacent properties by disturbing, interfering with or overlooking such properties. Where necessary, the district council may impose conditions on any permission regarding hours of opening, operation and servicing.
7. They will not adversely affect, either directly or indirectly, land stability in or around the location.

8. They retain and integrate and/or enhance, where desirable, attractive site features and natural characteristics within the scheme.

The Town Council object on the grounds of the size and siting of the building and that it will intrude into unspoilt countryside. They are of the opinion that other locations should be considered.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The planning application is the result of evolution through a design and function process that has involved both users of the Country Park and Council Officers. Inevitably, there will be those who like the concept and/or the design of the proposed building and those that do not; in this case a large volume of people clearly object to this proposal.

This is an important site that has a very positive contribution to the character and appearance of Yeovils urban fringe; it is an area that deserves full protection from undesirable, unwanted and poorly thoughtout proposals. Notwithstanding any other issue, it is important that a new building here fits its context both in terms of scale, height and materials and design. In this connection it will be noted that the Councils Landscape Architect advises that no landscape issues are raised and that, importantly, the proposal is well related in scale and location to the current development surround.

The application submissions set out a clear case of a need for a building here and, notwithstanding the essential need for the Rangers, the development, as proposed, will act as a focal point to draw and welcome visitors to the Country Park.

The positioning of the building and its internal layout has been carefully thought out and arranged to ensure compatibility with the existing planting and no adverse impact upon neighbours.

It is considered that this is a well designed building that is well related to its surroundings. It will provide a positive contribution to the Country Park, will meet an identified need and is appropriately located. As such there are no planning objections to this proposal.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the decision to approve the application be referred to the Regulation Committee, subject to conditions that will include:

01. Notwithstanding the comments made by local residents and the Town Council the proposal is of a scale, nature, design and form which respects the character and appearance of the area, creates a new public frontage for the Country Park, makes the most efficient use of land and develops the site in a way that safeguards residential amenity. As such the proposal is therefore in accordance with the advice and guidance contained within Planning Policy Statements 1 - Delivering Sustainable Development, PPS4 - Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth, PPS7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, PPG17 - Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, PPG21 - Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism, policies STR1, STR2, 1, 42, 44,48 and 49 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (Adopted 2000) and policies ST3, ST5, ST6, ST7, EC3 and TP1 of the saved policies of the South Somerset Local Plan (Adopted April 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 plans, drawing numbers:  
YCP/1135/01.2010/02,YCP/1135/01.2010/04,YCP/1135/01.2010/05,YCP/1135/01.2010/06,YCP/1135/01.2010/07,YCP/1135/01.2010/08 and YCP/1135/01.2010/09.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure the development is carried out as approved.

03. The scheme of landscaping, hereby approved, shall be carried out in full during the first available planting season, following the commencement of development. For a period of five years after the completion of the planting scheme, the trees and shrubs shall be protected and maintained in a healthy weed free condition to the satisfaction of The Local Planning Authority and any trees or shrubs that cease to grow shall be replaced by trees or shrubs of similar size and species, or the appropriate trees or shrubs as may be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the proposed development makes a satisfactory contribution to the preservation and enhancement of the local character and distinctiveness of the area in accordance with saved policy ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

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