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Our ref: RW/JF

Date: 22nd September 2020

Northumberland National Park Authority  
Development Management  
East Burn  
South Park  
Hexham  
Northumberland  
NE46 1BS

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████████████████████  
By Email Only

Dear Sir/Madam

**Application for change of use of the Byre from holiday cottage to residential dwelling with principle residency condition attached.**  
**Scotchcoulthard, Haltwhistle, Northumberland, NE49 9NH**

This letter is submitted as part of the above planning application which seeks consent for the change of use of the Byre at Scotchcoulthard, Haltwhistle from its current consented use as a holiday property to a residential dwelling restricted to principle residence only. This application is made in order to regularise an existing situation whereby the Byre is not currently being used as a holiday property and, in this respect, it is necessary to make an application for the change of use to the property to allow its occupation in the manner described. The site is currently the subject of an enforcement notice issued on 11 September 2018 in relation to the use of the Byre in a manner not consistent with the original grant of planning permission for the property as holiday accommodation under planning application 90/E/520. This enforcement notice is required to be complied with by 4th October 2020, at which point the requirements of the notice will come into effect. Following discussion with Mrs Susannah Buylla regarding the matter, it was agreed that the most appropriate way in which to resolve this would be to submit a new change of use application for the unit in question.

The Byre is part of a range of properties located at Scotchcoulthard which are formed from a former farm steading. The grouping consists of the main farmhouse with an addition a range of converted buildings which were granted consent as holiday accommodation under permission 90/E/520. Within the grouping, as developed, there were 5 holiday properties consisting of the Byre, which could accommodate 4 people, Hawthorn which can provide accommodation for 4 people, High Tipalt which sleeps 6 and Hope Sike which sleeps 2. In addition, there is also twin bed and breakfast room which is known as Roy's. The site occupies a rural position to the north of the Military Road and for a number of years has been actively marketed as holiday accommodation. The holiday accommodation has been widely marketed and continues to be so within various formats including the applicant's own webpage at [www.scotchcoulthard.co.uk/cottages](http://www.scotchcoulthard.co.uk/cottages).

In recent years the letting demand for all of the cottages has not been at a high or consistent level and this also coincided with the applicants seeking to be able to allow

occupation of the Byre by a dependent family member, as a separate residential dwelling. The applicants took the view that due to the relatively limited contribution that the Byre made to the holiday accommodation business, particularly as Hawthorn was of a similar size and met the demand for 4 person accommodation, it was appropriate to use the byre as the additional dwelling they needed. This is the circumstances which led to the current enforcement notice. In the context of a continuing limited demand for the range and number of holiday properties available on site, coupled with the applicants continuing demand for the accommodation as a dwelling, it is considered appropriate to therefore seek to regularise the current position so that the Byre can continue now and in the future to be used permanently as a separate residential dwelling. To this end, the application is being made in line with the new revised Northumberland National Park Local Plan on the basis that any consent will form a dwelling with a principle residence occupancy restriction attached.

A review of the newly adopted revised local plan shows that there is primarily one relevant policy which provides the context for the assessment of the application. Although policy ST5: *New Housing* may at first reading appear applicable to this application. A review of the policy demonstrates however that policy ST5 is very specifically concerned with new build development in relation to establishing the principle of a dwelling and the associated operational development of a new build dwelling. This is evident with reference to either entirely new housing, as set out within section 3a and 3b of the policy or in relation to replacement of existing dwellings within section 3c. It is therefore considered that policy ST5 and its criteria are not directly relevant in this case, where the application in question is for a change of use of an existing converted building to which no alterations or building works are proposed.

In the context of the change of use now being brought forward, it is in fact the case that Policy DM6: *Conversion of Buildings* is the most relevant. The policy contains 4 elements (1-4), the first of which relating to conversion of buildings within settlements, is not applicable given the open countryside location of Scotchcoulthard. Section 2 of the policy addresses proposals for conversion of buildings in open countryside and is therefore of relevance to this site. The policy contains 6 criteria (a-f) and of these a) to e) are specifically concerned with the physical attributes of the building in question and its ability to acceptably be converted in relation to its visual impact and the practical ability of the building to be converted. In this respect, these elements of the policy are also not relevant in this case, given that this is a long since converted building which is already habitable accommodation, and which is suitable also as permanent residential accommodation. Requirement f) of the policy that the context of policy DM14 is complied with in relation heritage assets is also not relevant in this case.

Section 3 of policy DM6 sets out four forms of development relating to proposed use of buildings which are considered acceptable. It can be noted that section 3b) makes provision for holiday accommodation through the conversion of buildings and, in this respect, the existing consented use continues to be compatible with current local plan policy. Of particular relevance to this application is section 3c which makes direct provision for and allows the development of, principle residence housing through the conversion of buildings. Three criteria (i-iii) are present within this section. The first of these requires that the building is located within an existing group of buildings that have a close physical and visual relationship to each other and which should include an existing residential unit within that group. It can be seen that the site complies with this requirement given it is an original farm steading based around the original dwelling and

that that dwelling continues to operate as a residential unit within the group. As an integral corner part of the original building group it is clear that the Byre does have a close physical and visual relationship to the other buildings present. The first requirement of section c is therefore met.

Criteria ii) requires that proposals to bring forward principle residence housing demonstrates that the building in question is redundant or disused and that conversion would enhance its immediate setting. The wording of this section of the policy is not directly applicable in this case because it is clear that the test cited has been put in place where the first conversion of that building is being considered in relation to its visual impact. This is evidenced by the reference to the requirement that the building conversion would enhance its immediate setting. Therefore, it is considered that this element of policy is primarily focused on the typical situation where a redundant or disused barn is present which is being proposed for conversion for the first time in its history, rather than necessarily the situation here where the change of use of the previously converted barn is being considered. It is clearly not a relevant requirement for a building which has already been converted, for its change of use to have to enhance its immediate setting. This would be an onerous test which would not be capable of being met, hence the conclusion that this element of the policy is of relatively relevance.

Having stated this it is nevertheless considered appropriate to demonstrate that the Byre is surplus to the holiday letting requirements of the business in respect of showing that a principle residence use of the site is appropriate and would be a valid contribution to the aims and objectives of the local plan. In this context, submitted with this application are account details of the holiday letting business at Scotchcoulthard, which show the letting and profitability levels associated with the business. Also provided is letting information in the form of an occupancy breakdown for the four remaining holiday properties. It can be noted this account information is prepared by the applicants and are used in their own tax returns. Accountants do not prepare these accounts as the applicants are themselves chartered accountants.

As can be seen, notwithstanding the applicant's efforts in respect of the ongoing marketing of the site it remains the case that the occupancy rates, particularly for the more comparable property, Hawthorn, are not high. Across the last 3 accounting years, 2017 to 2020, the occupancy rates have been at a level of 47.1%, 32.3% and most recently 32.88%. It can be noted that Hope Sike, the smallest of the cottages is actually the most successful with the consistently highest letting levels approaching or being above 50%. High Tipalt which is the largest is also more successful on average than the 4-bedroom Hawthorn property, albeit that last year High Tipalt was slightly lower in occupancy rate terms. What the figures show however is even without the Byre available for letting, the site continues to be able to offer a range of property sizes and further that none of these are letting at capacity or levels over and above 50%, in most cases the occupancy levels in 3 of the 4 properties are below 1/3 in the last financial year. In relation to the most comparable property, Hawthorn, this has stood at 32% for the last two accounting years. What this demonstrates is that the level of market demand and occupancy rates do not support or necessitate the maintenance of the Byre on the basis of the economic activity that it generates. In this respect, it can be concluded that the removal of this property as holiday accommodation is consistent with the broad objectives of the policy. In many respects the provision of this property in the long term as a principle residence housing, will be of greater benefit and more

consistent with the aims and objectives of the local plan. The dwelling has the ability to provide accommodation for local people, such as young families or first-time occupiers, in a rural area where other dwellings of this type are not available. It is therefore considered that the proposal is not in conflict with this aspect of policy DM6.

Criteria iii) of section 3 of the policy is that the building should not be in an isolated location. This requirement can be considered in two forms. The first is in relation to an assessment of whether the building is isolated from any other buildings. It is clearly the case that the Byre is not, given that it forms part of a developed steading which contains a permanent residential dwelling and 3 holiday letting properties. In this respect, the proposal would not offend the purpose of the policy which it is envisaged is to avoid an adverse visual impact from standalone isolated dwellings being developed in a manner which significantly changes their visual impact within the local landscape and visual environment.

The second element of the isolated location test relates to the concept of sustainability. In this respect, consideration must be given to whether or not the location is isolated from access to public services and facilities. In this respect, the location of Scotchcoulthard has to be considered in relation to its location in the open countryside relatively remote from local services. Having stated this the location of Scotchcoulthard must be considered in the context of Northumberland National Park and the fact that this is one of the most sparsely populated parts of England. Living in a rural area like this inevitable requires reliance in large part on the private car for access to many services in the larger settlements. It is considered that within the context of the National Park, Scotchcoulthard is not particularly isolated and that the access to services that are available from Scotchcoulthard in relation to travel time and distance, is not materially different from many locations within the National Park including some of the named settlements in which there are no facilities available other than a pub. As an example of this it can be seen that Scotchcoulthard is just 6.5miles/15 minutes' drive from Hatlwhishte. This is a main service centre as defined in the Northumberland Local Plan and provides a full range of facilities and services. This is can be compared to the example of Alwinton which is a named settlement in the Local Plan, which in terms of services only has a public house and therefore relies on Rothbury for keys services such shops, healthcare and education. Alwinton is 10.2miles/20minsutes drive from Rothbury. Its can be seen therefore that even though Alwinton is a named settlement in the local plan, it is actually more isolated from day to day services in terms of travel distance and time, than an example such as Scotchcoulthard. In sustainability terms and reliance on a private car for access to services, this example illustrates that the site should not be considered isolated in respect of the ability to access services. It is instead very typical of many locations in the National park, including some settlements. Therefore whilst the access track to Scotchcoulthard may appear to increase its isolation by virtue of the fact that there is a relatively long farm track to reach the site, it is not considered that this in itself does equate to isolation from services, to a level any greater than other locations in the National Park.

Ultimately, the matter of whether or not the site is isolated is a matter to judgement and whatever the conclusion on the level of isolation, this has to be balanced against the other purposes of the local plan and in particular the desire to promote the development of principle residence housing, because of the housing issues identified within the local plan. It is considered that if a principle residence housing were granted on this site it would be capable of occupation in sustainability terms which would be entirely


comparable to many other locations within the national park by virtue of the diverse geography of the area and the limited services available.

Part d) of section 3 of policy DM6 addresses a separate form of use where that intended is to be incidental to the curtilage of an existing dwelling. In this respect, this element of the policy is not relevant.

Overall, it can be seen from the examination of the policy that the proposal to create a principle residence housing from the Byre is consistent with the overall aims and objectives of the local plan. The provision of a permanent principle residence housing it is considered meets many of the strategic spatial objectives for the local plan including elements such as development which will maintain existing services, infrastructure and community facilities. It is considered that the delivery of a principle residence housing will be more beneficial and consistent with the aims and objectives of the updated National Park Local Plan when compared to the maintenance of a further holiday property for which very limited demand exists. The proposal will therefore help to meet the aims and objectives of providing a wider range of housing choice within the National Park, as identified within the local plan.

In relation to the overall acceptability of the proposal, it is considered that when all material considerations are given appropriate weight, the planning balance is tilted in favour of the proposal. Any limited tension with policy DM6 can be identified to be solely in relation to the question of whether the site is isolated. As shown the dwelling would not be isolated in visual terms and would not be any more remote from facilities than other location in the National park which are considered sustainable and suitable for development. As identified within the local plan, this matter will need to be considered on a case by case basis. This question has to also be considered as part of the planning balance with regard to other positive benefits of the proposal which in this case includes the delivery of a principle residence house without any adverse visual or environmental impact on the National Park. We consider that in line with the guidance of the NPPF that the planning balance is tilted in favour of the proposal and that permission can be appropriately granted for a dwelling with the necessary occupancy condition attached. In the absence of any other material considerations to indicate otherwise, we would therefore request that planning permission be granted on this basis in order to resolve the outstanding enforcement matter on site. We trust if you require any further information or wish to discuss the matter further, you will not hesitate to contact us, and I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours faithfully

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Robin Wood