

From:



Subject:

RE: Planning Application Consultation 20NP0104 Land east of Donkleywood, Hexham, Northumberland, NE48 1AQ

Date:

06 July 2021 09:11:00

Application Reference Number : 20NP0104

Proposed Development : Change of use of land for the siting of 4 chalets for holiday accommodation, and associated engineering operations involving the formation of 4 raised platforms and provision of a car parking area at Land east of Donkleywood, Hexham, Northumberland, NE48 1AQ

Dear Adam,

Thank you for consulting me on the above application for proposed development within the National Park. I would like to make the following observations with respect to the landscape, tree and Dark Sky Park implications for the National Park, of the proposals as set out in the applicant's documentation.

Having commented at the pre-app stage for a similar development of this type back in 2015, I can confirm that my observations and considerations have not changed significantly although I note that the number of accommodation units, 'chalets' in the Design and Access statement and 'lodges' in the planning Statement, being sought as part of this development has dropped to just 4. I am also aware that the development plan that the previous response was set against has changed with the adoption of the current Local Plan in 2020.

Having looked at the details provided and attended site I wish to make the following observations with regard to this application.

The proposed development site lies within the Border Moors and Forest National Character area and Rolling Upland Valleys Landscape Character Area as identified in the National Park Authority's Landscape Character Assessment of 2019. The Key characteristics are identified as being:-

- Broad valleys with gently convex valley sides.
- Tributary burns, often well-wooded, carving incised valleys into the hillsides.
- Clearly defined floodplain and mixed farmland on valley floors.
- Consistent pattern of textured rough pastures divided by stone walls on valley sides, with open moorland above.
- Meandering rivers, sometimes marked by alders, but not generally prominent landscape feature.
- Steep, wooded bluffs flanking edges of the floodplain.
- Shelterbelts and clumps of pine or mixed woodland on lower slopes and occasionally on valley floors.
- Historic sandstone villages and dispersed farmsteads on lower slopes.
- Rich archaeology including Roman forts, rig and furrow and fortified bastle houses – heart of reiving country.

The Strategy for this landscape Character Type is identified as being;- “The defining element of this landscape character type is the pattern of land use and enclosure which progresses from mixed farming on the valley floor where fields are enclosed by hedges, to pastures on the valley sides defined by stone walls, to open moorland above. This is overlain with a varied pattern of woodland and a wealth of historic features, giving each valley a unique character. The overall strategy should be to conserve and restore this land use and enclosure pattern and the unique character of each of the valleys.”

The Guidelines for Development in the current Landscape SPD are:

- New built development should avoid creeping up the valley sides and should not form abrupt edges. It should be constructed of appropriate materials - particularly roofs;
- The approach routes, key views [\[1\]](#) and gateways to settlements should be protected from inappropriate development;
- Recreational development on the edges of settlements should not extend urbanising influences or uncharacteristic vegetation patterns into open countryside;
- Man-made vertical structures which detract from the valley landform, create visual clutter or adversely affect the unfettered skylines which form the distinctive setting to these valleys should be avoided and any such existing structures removed where possible;
- Maintain the pattern of stone wall enclosures as part of the wider landscape character of this area;
- Any lighting should be kept to a minimum and installed effectively to protect dark skies.

The location for the proposed accommodation units is set within an area of recently planted (circa 1997) new native broadleaved woodland. As such there are few mature specimen trees that may be affected by the proposals other than a Scots pine located at the bottom of the slope just off to the eastern side of the proposed access track. Most of the trees and shrubs within this woodland have established well with the oak, willow, rowan and hazel generally attaining a height of 5 metres or so, with the birch generally exceeding this. The one exception to this success is the ash that are all showing the symptoms of suffering from Chalara or ash dieback. It remains the case that there is currently no known cure for this disease, and it is highly likely that they will eventually succumb to the disease. The significance of this with respect to this application is that the loss of the ash stands within the wood will open out the wood, create greater areas of open space and potentially result in making the chalets more visible within the landscape as the screening effect of the wood is lessened.

As highlighted in 2015, a development of this nature in this location could quite easily have a significant effect upon the landscape character and views of this part of the National Park if undertaken within an open setting. However, due to the developing woodland that is approximately 24 years old, the individual chalets could, if undertaken sympathetically, be incorporated into the woodland and adequately screened by the trees from receptor sites in the surrounding landscape. Indeed, the applicant in paragraph 5.15 of the Planning Statement accepts that “The existing tree cover will largely screen the lodges from both local and more distant views” but not screen them entirely.

Does this application address the points for consideration that I mentioned in my pre-app response?

- Colour of the individual chalets/lodges? – I can find no specific mention of the colour of

the accommodation units but paragraph 5.16 of the Planning Statement does indicate that the lodges will be located within the woodland and will be finished in appropriate materials to complement the surroundings. Additionally, at the bottom of page 4 of the Design and Access Statement it is stipulated that “The units will be built using timber framed construction with timber clad walls and felt shingle tiles in black.” Again this is somewhat vague when it comes to colour of the chalets/lodges. For the avoidance of doubt, should this development be recommended for approval, I believe that, in order to avoid a situation of where the accommodation units could be visually prominent within the woodland when viewed from receptor sites from across the valley, a condition should be used to stipulate the precise colour that the Authority would deem acceptable in this instance. The worst case scenario would be that they end up being white units within the generally green woodland setting that they are proposed to be located within.

- Proposed scale and nature of the development? – Whilst the nature of the development is essentially the same, the scale has been addressed by the reduction down to four units which is welcomed.
- Likely noise arising from this development – I can find no reference to the level of noise that can be expected to arise from the installation of this development or the occupancy of the development by the guests whilst staying on site. As such, for the avoidance of doubt, should this development be recommended for approval, I would suggest that a condition be stipulated that would restrict the noise arising from the use of this development by prospective clients be limited to a set decibel limit so as not to adversely affect the tranquillity of this part of the National Park.
- Services to the lodges – I understand that no new overhead services are required for these accommodation units and as such the risk of further visual intrusion is avoided and this is welcomed.
- Lighting requirements – Paragraph 5.17 indicates that “Lighting on the lodges will be kept to a minimum and there is no intention of providing lighting on the access routes to the lodges”. This is welcomed but as with all applications such as this, for the avoidance of doubt, should this development be recommended for approval, I believe that a condition recommending that all external lighting associated with this development must first be approved by the planning authority to ensure that it is compliant with the [Northumberland National Park Exterior Lighting Master Plan](#) and [Good Practice Guide for Outside Lighting in Northumberland International Dark Sky Park](#) .
- Impact on trees – In paragraph 5.11 of the Planning Statement the applicant states that “It is not considered that the proposed development will cause any harm to the trees in the locality and it not be necessary to remove any trees to facilitate the proposed development.”. This is welcomed but again, due to the lack of detail within this application, it is not clear to me which access route is to be used to bring the accommodation units on to site and when doing so, will any trees need to be cut or root protection zones need to be driven over to enable this process? Further detail needed please.
- A landscape plan – Paragraph 5.15 of the Planning Statement (PS) indicates that “the

proposed lodges will be sited within an existing clearing in the woodland. The existing tree cover will largely screen the lodges from both local and more distant views". As such a landscape plan is not thought necessary in this instance as the proposed site plan suffices for this need.

- Renewable infrastructure – I note that the accommodation units will be fitted with a solar and battery system, paragraph 3.4 of the PS. From an eco-efficiency perspective this is welcomed and it is also the reason why new overhead services are not thought necessary. The location of the solar panels is not indicated in the diagrams provided but it should be noted that the rooves of the accommodation units face east-west which is not the optimum orientation when considering solar power. From a landscape perspective I am fairly relaxed about the minimal likelihood of solar flare arising from these solar PV units due to their orientation. South facing units would be more problematical as this is where the most prominent views of the site are likely to be experienced as indicated in paragraph 5.16 of the PS.
- Heating of the accommodation units – I could not find any reference to the heating systems to be used for these accommodation units. Without mains electricity I assume it will not be electric heating. That generally leaves gas cylinder or log burning stoves? The latter would make this development more visually prominent with smoke arising from the stoves but this is not considered significant in landscape terms. With respect to the potential source of timber being derived from the woodland itself, further details would be welcomed in the form of a FC approved Woodland management Plan. For the avoidance of doubt, should this development be recommended for approval, I would suggest that a condition be stipulated requiring the production of a woodland management plan in order that any harvesting associated with this development proposal is clearly understood from the onset of the proposed development.
- Access tracks – The applicant indicates that there is an existing access track linking the accommodation unit area to the existing car park. Paragraph 5.17 indicates that there are various access routes to the lodges. Paragraph 5.20 indicates that there will not be any vehicular access to the lodges for guests and therefore implies that the applicant or their staff shall be driving the only vehicles that are to service the accommodation units. Depending on the level of occupancy and frequency of use, it is questionable whether the current green sward that exists on the current informal access routes would be sustainable such as to avoid the loss of vegetation on the track surfaces. No track work is identified as part of this application.
- Protection of trees and the screening effect that they provide – Other than the statement in paragraph 5.11, "It is not considered that the proposed development will cause any harm to the trees in the locality and it not be necessary to remove any trees to facilitate the proposed development", no details are provided as to the future management of the woodland that the proposed development is to sit within. Again, for the avoidance of doubt, should this development be recommended for approval, I would suggest that a condition be stipulated requiring the production of a Forestry Commission approved woodland management plan in order that the applicant's long term woodland management objectives are better understood. In so doing, the ongoing screening of the accommodation units can be better understood as well as how the applicant intends to

deal with the ash trees affected by the ash dieback disease and ensuring the biodiversity and biosecurity of the woodland in not negatively affected by the development proposals in the long term.

Other Matters

As previously mentioned, I would recommend seeking clarification as to the exact nature of the proposed accommodation units being considered in this proposed development. Different documents refer them being timber lodges or chalets, but which are they? Can a photo or manufactures design brochure be supplied to aid clarification? The inference I take from paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the Design and access guide is that the accommodation units will not be fixed structures but structures that are designed for human habitation which are capable of being moved from one place to another, ie a mobile home.

The applicant fails to identify the route by which the accommodation units will be delivered to site? Para 5.11 of the PS stipulates that "It is not considered that the proposed development will cause any harm to the trees in the locality and it not be necessary to remove any trees to facilitate the proposed development" which is welcomed but these are sizeable units and a method statement or at least a plan indicating the route that will be used to get the units to site would be welcomed.

Finally, one aspect that I believe still needs addressing is the screening of the proposed car park area. If four cars are to be parked here I believe that it would benefit from being screened by the establishment of a hedge comprising native species so that the vehicles are less visible from the principle receptor site, namely the Donkleywood road.

In summary, if little or no thought is given to the potential impact of this proposed development on landscape, lighting and trees then this project has every opportunity to have a significant effect on the special qualities of the National Park but with due care and consideration the potential impacts could be alleviated. Unfortunately, the applicant has not directly provided sufficient evidence to alleviate my earlier concerns. For that reason, unless it is appropriate to request the outstanding information as part of a planning condition, as suggested above, please treat this response as a holding objection until a means of providing the outstanding information has been agreed.

The additional information that is required or should be conditioned includes:-

- Greater clarity on the nature of the accommodation units. Are they chalets, lodges, mobile homes or indeed caravans?
- The external colour of accommodation units.
- Details on whether the proposed development or subsequent use of the accommodation units would have an impact upon the tranquillity of this part of the National Park?
- The screening of the proposed car park area with a hedge comprising native species.
- Lighting compliance condition.
- A FC approved Woodland Management Plan to be approved prior to any development commencing,
- A method statement as to how and along which route the accommodation units are to be delivered to site, and finally,
- Use of the standard clause that stipulates that if these accommodation units become redundant for use or un-occupied for a period greater than 18 months then they should be

removed from site so as not to clutter the National Park with redundant infrastructure.

If you have any questions in relation to the above then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

regards

Robert Mayhew

Head of Conservation & Environment
Northumberland National Park Authority

[REDACTED]

From: DC Consultation [REDACTED]

Sent: 10 May 2021 13:05

To: Robert Mayhew <[REDACTED]>

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] Land east of Donkeywood, Hexham,
Northumberland, NE48 1AQ

Please see the attached consultation regarding a planning application which has been received by Northumberland National Park Authority. Full details can be viewed at <http://nnpa.planning-register.co.uk/plaPlanningAppDisplay.aspx?AppNo=20NP0104>

DC Consultation

Development Control Consultation

Phone:

[1] Guidance on identifying important views is available from SNH <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications>

Robert Mayhew

Head of Conservation & Environment

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]