

DMC2021-004

APPLICATION FOR PLANNING PERMISSION

Application No: 20NP0104

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

Applicant Name: Mr G Varty

Reason for DMC Decision: The application is brought before Development Management Committee by reason of significant public interest and the recommendation is contrary to representations made by more than three households.

Recommendation: Refusal

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Planning permission is sought to change the use of Land to the East of Donkleywood, for the siting of 4 holiday accommodation chalets with timber decking sited on raised platforms, as well as the provision of a car parking area.
- 1.2 The site lies to the east of the small hamlet of Donkleywood and is located to the north of the narrow C199 road leading to Donkleywood from Lanehead. The wider site consists of a semi-wooded area, covered by native woodland and is described in the application form as managed woodland. The site rises to the north, towards the hill, dipping and rising again to the south to join a second track, and eventually the road. The site itself is mainly grassed, with an existing clearing in the woodland running through the centre where the chalets would be located, flanked by trees. A Public Right of Way leading from Donkleywood to the residential property of Ryeclose passes directly north of the site.
- 1.3 The application involves the provision of 4 chalets for the purpose of holiday accommodation. The chalets would be based on the Falcon Lodge model manufactured by Keops. The chalets would be 15.2m in length, 6.5m in width with a 3m internal height and would accommodate three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a lounge/dining/kitchen. The

overall external ridge height of the chalets would be 4.5 metres from the base. The chalets would be constructed in timber with a felt shingle roof, with double glazed windows and doors.



Figure 1: The application site in its immediate setting

- 1.4 The proposed chalets would be situated in a linear format with two chalets located on each side of the existing rough unsurfaced track which runs through the centre of the clearing. The first chalet to the south would be located at 181m (above sea level) with the remaining three chalets rising in topography through the site to the most northern chalet which would be located at 196m (above sea level).



Figure 2: Proposed location of chalets including car park area.

- 1.5 Due to the steep topography of the site in which the chalets would be located, large level raised platforms (approximately 25 metres by 11 metres) will be created in the surrounding area of each of the four proposed chalets. The agent suggests the platforms will be created through a cut and fill process and would require the construction of a compacted earth base to provide a level surface for the chalets to be sited.
- 1.6 Areas of external decking with balustrades are proposed surrounding each of the four chalets. The balustrades would be constructed in timber at a height of 1.2 metres above the base and both the chalets and external decking would be situated on a level compacted earth base situated on the raised platform.
- 1.7 The site would be served by an existing vehicular entrance which has an area of hardstanding. The area of hardstanding is accessible from the C199 minor road, which is mainly single track with passing places leading to Donkleywood from Lanehead. The proposed car parking area to serve the development would be located some 475m south-west of the proposed chalets.
- 1.8 The applicant has confirmed that a formal track leading from the existing area of hardstanding to the proposed chalets would not be constructed. The planning statement explains guests will use an existing area of hardstanding to park all vehicles and there will be no vehicular access to the lodges for guests. This would be approximately 475 metres in distance.



Typical GA Elevation - West (Lodge 01)
1 : 100



Figure 3: Proposed Elevations of lodges



Figure 4: Application site considered from south to north.



Figure 5: View to the north when considered from the south of the site.

2. Planning Policy & Guidance

2.1 National Policies

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019)
- National Planning Practice Guidance

2.2 Local Policies: Northumberland National Park Local Plan (NNPLP)

Northumberland National Park Local Plan (adopted July 2020)

Policy ST1	<i>Sustainable Development</i>
Policy ST2	<i>General Development Principles</i>
Policy ST4	<i>Spatial Strategy</i>
Policy DM7	<i>Rural Economy and Diversification</i>
Policy DM9	<i>Transport and Accessibility</i>
Policy DM10	<i>Habitats, Biodiversity and Geodiversity</i>
Policy DM11	<i>Landscape, Tranquillity and Dark Night Skies</i>
Policy DM12	<i>Trees, Woodlands and Forests</i>

2.3 Supplementary Planning Guidance

NNPA Building Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (Design Guide SPD)
NNPA Landscape Supplementary Planning Document (Landscape SPD)

3. Relevant Planning History

There is no planning history associated with the site.

4. Consultee Responses

- 4.1 **Tarset and Greystead Parish Council (site is located in this Parish):** Site visit was requested in order to discuss concerns surrounding sewage and water supply. No further comments were received after the explanation that a site visit would not show the sewage and water on site as these have not been installed yet.
- 4.2 **Falstone Parish Council (Parish is adjacent to site): Supports.** They support a local business.

4.3 **NCC Highways: No Objection:** The principle of development is considered acceptable in highway terms subject to appropriately worded conditions. The proposed development is in a rural section of the County that lacks any connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. The development for holiday chalets would usually encourage travel by private vehicle and the holidaymakers would then use the vehicle to travel to sites around the surrounding area. So, whilst this development site is considered unsustainable based on the location, for the type of development it would not warrant a reason for refusal. Details of how the chalets are likely to be delivered to the site will be required, therefore, a Construction Method Statement is required along with a highway condition survey of the C199 around the site access.

4.4 **NNPA Ecologist: Holding Objection:** It is not likely that there would be any impact on designated sites if this proposal was permitted. The nearest site is Thorneyburn meadow SAC/SSSI and this is unlikely to be impacted on as a result of this application.

The ecological report and subsequent reptile survey did not show a lot of reptile activity on the site. The reptile survey was carried out fairly late in the season so we don't know for certain if there are hibernacula present but it was carried out when reptiles would be active. I do think that the proposed mitigation of creating hibernacula on site would be a good idea as biodiversity net gain; they could be some distance from the proposed chalets elsewhere on site to avoid disturbance and potential conflict with users and dogs.

It is stated that no trees are to be removed as part of the proposed application, which is good. The location of the chalets and drainage/treatment plant seem to be positioned far enough away from trees to prevent them being an issue in future and to avoid limbs having to be removed for safety reasons, but I am not certain that the construction of the bases, levelling the positions and getting the chalets on site will be possible without damage. I am concerned that quite a bit of excavation will be needed to level the chalets. This aspect seems not to be discussed in detail or, as far as I can see, what material the bases will be constructed of. Will they be concrete, if so, how are they to be formed? I think this aspect of the application is unclear and may need more discussion/detail. If the chalets are considered 'caravans' and temporary could these bases also be temporary and be able to be removed easily. I think this removal should be a condition if you are minded to grant permission. This element of the proposals does not mention access to machinery.

With regard to the package treatment for foul drainage, on the drainage form they have ticked that there is access within 30m with a vehicle and that it will be emptied at least quarterly and inspected monthly. Is the access suitable for this from the entrance point as it is along the track they have said there will not be any vehicular access? I do not think

that a permanent track would be suitable for this site and route taking into account the slope and green field nature. Also considering this, how are they to locate the lodges in the first place? I suspect that quite a large vehicle will be needed to move them on to site - is the sloping access and track suitable for this without causing damage and run-off/loss of vegetation?

There will be an area of unimproved grassland lost to the lodges and potentially more during the construction phase as mentioned above. There is however no mitigation or proposals for biodiversity net gain suggested except the construction of the reptile hibernacula in the reptile report. I think perhaps that there should be more suggestions. For example, is it possible for the lodges to have green roofs, could a pond be created, could the lodges incorporate features for bird nesting or could more bird and bat provision be made on site?

- 4.5 **NCC Public Protection: No Objection:** The department is not aware of any previous contaminative land uses on the site which is currently managed woodland. The soil contamination risk to human health from the proposed commercial use can therefore be controlled by condition. The site is within a Coal Authority Low Risk Development Area. The proposed lodges will be sited on a level base and will not be permanently attached to the ground and therefore Public Protection has no objections to the proposal based on risks from ground gas.

The proposed development would be supplied from a private water supply. This supply was risk assessed on 21st January 2021 and a scheme of improvement works are required. (An informative is attached providing further details).

- 4.6 **NNPA Landscape and Forestry Officer: Holding Objection** 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.

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 at the pre-app stage. 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,
- 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.

4.7 **NNPA Farming Officer: No Objection:** I have noted that the access from the car park to the lodges is via existing track/footpaths and the ecological and access statements are based on no improvements to the access paths. If this changes then the impact of upgraded access will need to be assessed.

4.8 **Forestry Commission:** No Response Received

4.9 **A notice was displayed at the site entrance on 18 May 2021.** Two no. neighbour notification letters were sent out. In total 16 letters of support from 14 households have been received. Only 2 of these are from households within the National Park, from Stannersburn and Lanehead. The remainder are from wider parts of Northumberland including Blyth and Bedlington, and some from addresses in Gateshead, Yorkshire and Scotland.

The letters of **support** were summarised as follows:

- Fully support any additional accommodation made available for visitors to the area
- Will provide several jobs and financial benefits to the local community, including pubs, restaurants and sporting activities.
- There is a need for additional accommodation in the Kielder area.
- Any opportunity to bring jobs and enterprise to a rural community should be supported. Improving the holiday accommodation offer will go well to improving local tourism and

visitors to the area. With more of the UK population holidaying in Britain there is never a better time to encourage small businesses to grow.

- Can think of no better location to encourage holiday accommodation.
- Proposal will offer the ability for individuals to spend time in a safe environment.
- Welcomed addition to the area which will ensure individuals have quality accommodation for a pleasurable stay.
- The proposal's design would allow the blending of the cabins into the natural landscape and the unique location of the structures within the space of the private land assures minimal impact on neighbouring properties.
- This modest farm diversification proposal will sit well within this location.
- The proposed design of the development would sustain the visual amenity of the surrounding area without compromising the diversity of the natural environment. It would present a great selling point for promoting the beauty and attraction of the area.

The **objections/general observations** received from local Donkleywood residents of the National Park can be summarised as follows:

- The planning application form states that there are no existing employees, nor will the proposal create any employment, therefore any impact from the development will not benefit the local economy.
- The applicant already offers accommodation on the landholding and there is no need for further development as caravan accommodation is already provided.
- There are already many businesses in the local area providing high quality visitor accommodation e.g. The Boe Rigg, Tarsset Tor, Kielder Waterside, Clear Water Lodge Park
- The area consists of native woodland planting which is a rarity amidst one of the largest man-made coniferous forests in Europe. Its importance to biodiversity and landscape enhancement cannot be over stressed.
- The development will result in the destruction of the grassland habitat of the proposed site itself, damage or destruction of trees immediately adjacent to the site and the proposed access track and permanent disturbance to the wildlife within the priority habitat.
- The claim of keeping 400 sheep, 1000 pheasants and 200 partridges is grossly overstated. The current use of the site is primarily for the use of shooting and motocross activities. As the proposed development is to support the existing businesses on site, it will provide facilities for even longer sessions of incessant noise and pollution – greatly affecting and damaging wildlife, the landscape and destroying the peaceful enjoyment of the National Park by both residents and visitors.
- The proposal will have a direct and deleterious effect on wildlife and habitat, through intensive residential activity causing air pollution, noise pollution and light pollution.

- The proposed density of occupancy will lead to large parties causing noise and disturbance levels day and night. This will in turn lead to the destruction of tranquility for residents and other visitors and does not guarantee the maintenance of quiet enjoyment of the landscape.
- Increased traffic to the Falstone to Lanehead Road would greatly decrease road safety for all users, cause increased damage to the road and significant inconvenience to residents.
- Insufficient space within the car park to accommodate the demand from the development.
- No possibility nor any attempt at providing for disabled access.
- The applicant states there is an existing track to the site. This is not a track at all and hence does not provide a useful, nor practical access to the site.
- The application states that the proposed development will obtain a water supply from a spring 600m north of the hamlet of Donkleywood. This would require the excavation of land for several hundred metres through the woodland to lay the new pipework, with resulting disturbance of wildlife and habitat.
- The application states that there are no other properties using this spring as a water source. This is incorrect. Ryeclose has a supply from this spring, and it is believed that at least one other house in Donkleywood is also serviced by the supply. As there is no residence associated with the applicant's landholding and no other claimed water source, there is no alternative source of water. The proposed water supply has never had to service a number of residential households and 28 people with modern-day water usage.
- The application states that electricity will be supplied by 'solar and batteries'. PV solar panels would not be a realistic option. A south facing ground mounted PV system at the site would not receive sufficient insolation, given the immediacy of surrounding trees. There are no mains electricity supplies to the entire landholding.
- The application states that foul drainage will be managed by a Package Treatment Plant. The applicant states on the Foul Drainage Assessment Form that there is vehicular access for emptying within 30m. The Package Treatment Plant is actually 300m from the nearest road access. The FDA further states "*There are many varieties of PTP and almost all use electricity. PTP... are vulnerable in the event of power failures and require more regular servicing and maintenance*". There is no mains electricity supply to the entire landholding.
- There is no mention of any method of heating the chalets. Inadequate heating combined with inadequate insulation produces very poor energy efficient and significant discomfort.
- It will be impossible to transport building material and earth moving machinery, let alone halves of 3-bedroomed wooden 'mobile homes' to the proposed site without causing significant damage to trees, walls and landscape with a lasting disturbance to wildlife.
- The Caravan Act 1968 states that a twin unit caravan '*is when assembled physically capable of being moved by road from one place to another*' The proposed access to the site is approximately 1.3 to 5 metres wide, winds around mature trees and is soft ground, part of which is described as "waterlogged" in the application's Ecology Report. It would

therefore be impossible to remove the chalets once built, because of problems of size, weight and vehicle access, so failing the test of being a caravan.

5. Assessment

Introduction

5.1 The key material planning considerations are:

- The principle of the development
 - Sustainable development
 - Caravan development
 - Location of development
 - Tourism and rural development;
- Design and landscape
- Impact upon National Park special qualities
 - Amenity and tranquility
 - Ecology;
- Highways and Accessibility;
- Foul drainage
- Electricity supply
- Water Supply
- Other issues

The Principle of the development

Sustainable Development

5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places emphasis on a presumption in favour of sustainable development to guide decision making. Policy ST1 of the Local Plan adopts a similar presumption in favour of sustainable development and defines the qualities and criteria which are deemed to represent 'sustainable development'. Paragraphs b), c), d), e) and h) are particularly relevant to the proposals as they seek to *'reduce the need to travel and encourages sustainable modes of transport'*, *'contribute positively to the built environment by having regard to the site context'*, *'protect or enhance landscape character through the use of high quality design, appropriate landscaping'* *'improve biodiversity by protecting existing habitats'* and *improves public access to and enjoyment of the National Park's special qualities'*. The degree to which the proposals accord with these qualities is discussed throughout the report.

Principle of development – Chalets as caravans

- 5.3 The proposal is described on the planning application form as the change of use of the managed woodland and use for the siting of 4 chalets. The planning statement submitted with the application sets out the justification for the fact that the proposed chalets would fall within the definition of a caravan.
- 5.4 Within the Planning Statement, the applicant suggests that *‘There are no buildings proposed as part of the application, as the lodges fall within the definition of a caravan’*. A twin-unit caravan is defined in planning terms under Section 13 of the Caravan Sites Act as; *‘a structure designed for human habitation which is; (a) composed of not more than two sections separately constructed and designed to be assembled on site by a means of bolts, clamps or other devices and; (b) is, when assembled physically capable of being moved by road from one place to another (whether by being towed, or by being transported by a motor vehicle or trailer), shall not be treated as not being (or as not having being) a caravan within the meaning of Part 1 of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 by reason only that it cannot lawfully be so moved on a highway road when assembled.*
- 5.5 The proposed dimensions of the chalets are within the dimensions set by The Caravan Sites Act 1968 and Social Landlords (Permissible Additional Purposes) (England) Order 2006 (Definition of Caravan) (Amendment) (England) Order 2006. The chalets dimensions of 15.2m in length, 6.5m in width and 3.0001m internal height would fall below the maximum dimensions of a Caravan which are defined as 20m in length, 6.8m in width and 3.05m in height. However, size is not the only consideration.
- 5.6 Officers do not agree with the view that the proposed chalets fall within the definition of a caravan for a number of reasons. In correspondence the agent explained that *‘due to the character of the site it is not considered appropriate to transport the lodges in their finished form, as that would require a low-loader and crane. In such location, the manufacturers of the lodges undertake much of the prefabrication off-site, and transports the components in parts that are capable of being transported to the final location using a tractor and trailer. The final assembly of the lodges is then undertaken on site.*
- 5.7 However officers consider this method of construction on site would contradict their own planning statement where they state that the chalets would be *‘composed of not more than two sections separately constructed and designed to be assembled on site by a means of bolts, clamps or other devices.’*

- 5.8 Furthermore, another reason relates to as previously mentioned, Paragraph 1 (b) of Section 13 of the Caravan Sites Act requires that a structure *'is, when assembled physically capable of being moved by road from one place to another'* to constitute a caravan. Given the agent confirms that these lodges would normally require a low loader and crane to be moved, due to the terrain it would be virtually impossible to move the chalets from their positions by road as required by the Caravan sites act. In addition, the proposed chalets would be constructed on a newly created compacted earth raised platform. This design would present a degree of permanence that when constructed would not be capable of being moved from one place to another and instead would be a permanent feature. Officers consider that the permanence of the proposed chalets and the nature of their anchorage to the site (raised timber decking) would mean the proposal would be regarded as a building for planning purposes irrespective of whether the chalets could be moved from the site. In addition, while the applicant has confirmed that the proposed chalets *'could'* be removed from the site, there is no suggestion that the chalets will be moved at all. As a result of this officers consider that the chalets would constitute buildings due to their permanence on site.



Figure 6: Existing slope on application site

- 5.9 Whether in law these chalets are technically caravans or buildings, the assessment of the proposals of the siting of 4 chalets and construction of raised platforms in this location in the National Park must be made against the relevant policies of the adopted Local Plan.

Principle of Development – Location of Development

- 5.10 Strategic Local Plan policy ST4 seeks to direct new development to a series of settlements named within the policy. As this site near Donkleywood is not located within one of the named settlements, it would be considered to fall within the open countryside. The small hamlet of Donkleywood was not considered large enough to fall as a named settlement when considering the spatial strategy at the recent Local Plan review. Policy ST4 goes on to detail situations where new development would be accepted in the open countryside including *‘where there is an essential need for development to meet the needs of tourism and recreation and other rural enterprise or land management activities’* and *‘where the proposal is supported by other local plan policies’*.
- 5.11 The supporting text for Strategic policy ST4 explains (in paragraph 5.4.5) that the *‘The best location for most development is in or on the edge of settlements that already have a range of services and infrastructure and that are more likely to offer access to public transport.’* The application site is not located in close proximity to any named settlement within the Local Plan and no justification has been provided as to how there are no other suitable and available locations within one of the named settlements of the National Park.
- 5.12 Policy ST4 of the Local Plan ensures *‘development will only be permitted within the Open Countryside where there is an essential need for development to meet the need of farming, forestry, tourism, recreation or other rural enterprise or land management activities.’*
- 5.13 The applicant suggests within the Planning Statement that the site *‘includes a mix of land which is covered by managed woodland and also agricultural land. The agricultural land is currently used for the keeping of livestock, including approximately 400 sheep, 1000 pheasants and 200 partridges’*. Officers accept the site itself is managed woodland, however the additional landholding area appears to be used for a mix of uses. As part of the consultation process local residents have questioned the extent of agricultural use suggested by the applicant, with references to motocross/off road motorcycling use and shooting. The NNPA farming officer also raised doubt over the number of sheep the applicant is said to have within his landholding. This matter has been raised with the applicant. The agent has subsequently confirmed that 1500 pheasants, 200 partridges and 700 ducks are kept on the land. The applicant is the registered farmer of the land and has entered herbage agreement with a neighbouring farmer, and the majority of the livestock on the land belongs to the neighbouring farmer (approximately 380 sheep and 20 cows). The agent confirmed the pheasants, partridges and ducks belong to the applicant. Officers consider, having consideration for planning case law, the keeping of pheasants and

partridges do not fall as a defined agricultural use, but a sporting use as they are bred for shooting.

- 5.14 The applicant has suggested within the Planning Statement that *‘the proposed development is needed to support the applicant’s wider agricultural, forestry and land management activities’*. Despite this, the Planning Statement provides no further details of the essential nature of the development. Officers have requested this information from the planning agent. The agent has subsequently confirmed that at present the applicant is not solely employed in the farming business because it does not generate a sufficient income to provide an income whilst also covering the ongoing business costs, as the agent suggests is common with many such farming operations. The applicant undertakes other work to earn a primary income and to generate sufficient income to support the farming business. The agent suggests that this is not considered a sustainable solution to securing the long-term future of the farming business, as he needs to be self-sufficient.
- 5.15 The planning agent has also explained that the applicant did benefit from a subsidised woodland management scheme, the income from this has now ceased, hence the need for an income to support the long-term future of the farming business. While the applicant has demonstrated that the proposal would result in better financial security for the ongoing business on site, officers do not agree that this would fall within an *‘essential need’* for development as required by this strategic policy. The applicant has failed to demonstrate how the proposal is essential to the sensitive unsustainable location it would be located within. Despite being invited to confirm the applicant’s address, the planning agent has not confirmed that the applicant lives within the immediate area. The applicant has also failed to demonstrate how a proposal of this kind must be situated within this specific open countryside location instead of elsewhere within or nearby a named settlement outlined in Policy ST4 of the Local Plan. Whilst the proposal may support this applicant’s business to some extent, this business involves sporting and other activities that do not currently support the tranquillity of the area. Officers do not agree that the existing activities protect the special qualities of the National Park and the supporting information put forward by the agent are not considered strong enough for officers to consider it would fall within the requirement of the policy that it is essential for these chalets to be located in this specific location and could not be located elsewhere in accordance with the adopted spatial policy. The proposal is considered to conflict with strategic policy ST4 of the Local Plan.
- 5.16 In terms of location of development and the adopted spatial strategy, the applicant has failed to demonstrate an essential need for the holiday accommodation to be located in an unsustainable location. As a result of this, the proposal fails to comply with Strategic Policy

ST4 of the Local Plan and as such the principle of development is not considered appropriate.

Principle of Development – Tourism and Recreation Development

- 5.17 Policy DM7 refers to Rural Economy and Diversification. This is a comprehensive policy which is supportive of proposals for economic development, including tourism, which allow people to increase their awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park in a manner which does not in itself adversely impact the special qualities. The policy also requires new development to consider and reflect the sensitivity of the local landscape and be designed so as not to undermine the quality of life of residents or undermine visitor enjoyment of the National Park special qualities. The extent to which the proposal accords with Local Plan policy DM7 is considered below. As outlined above, whether the chalets are defined technically as caravans or buildings, the resulting structures and associated engineering and building operations will be seen as part of the landscape and so the assessment of them under Policy DM7 is necessary.
- 5.18 Part 1 of policy DM7 refers to development that contributes to the economic and social well being of local communities. Numerous letters of support have been received by the authority regarding the proposal. Many of the letters of support referenced the employment opportunities and jobs that would be created as a result of the proposal. However, the applicant has stated that no employment would be created as a result of the proposals within the application form. There is no reference to employment within the Planning Statement. As a result of this, it is not considered that an argument can be made that the proposal would result in any additional employment. As such the proposal would not be supported by part 1 of Policy DM7.
- 5.19 Parts 4 and 5 of Policy DM7 relate to proposals for tourism and recreational development and are therefore considered relevant for this holiday accommodation proposal.
- 5.20 Part 4 of Policy DM7 lists a set of criteria which proposals for tourism and recreational development must adhere to in order to comply with the policy. The assessment is outlined below:
- A) *They conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, tranquility and cultural heritage of the National Park.* The proposal consists of the siting of 4 sizeable chalets with substantial engineering works to provide sizeable level platforms for their siting. The impact on the special qualities of the National Park are outlined in the relevant sections of the report below.

- B) They provide and protect opportunities for people to increase their awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park in a manner that will not undermine the enjoyment of those qualities by other visitors or the quality of life of residents.* Whilst the provision of holiday accommodation will allow people to visit the National Park and increase their awareness and enjoyment of the Park, officers consider the proposal would result in harm to the special qualities of the National Park (as discussed below). There is an established principle (the Sandford principle) which sets out that when considering applications for new sites or changes to existing sites, where there is an irreconcilable conflict between the two statutory purposes, the Sandford Principle gives supremacy to the first protectionist purpose. The impacts of the development would cause harm to the special qualities of the National Park and the protectionist purpose must take precedent when considering the proposals. As a result, the proposal would fail to comply with this criteria.
- C) They are of a quality, scale and design that takes into account and reflects the sensitivity of the local landscape.* The proposal would result in the creation of an urbanised form of large structures together with significant engineering operations within a rural and isolated landscape. This would fail to reflect the sensitivity of the local landscape. Further details of this are described in the design and landscape section below.
- D) They do not lead to unacceptable harm in terms of noise and activity (including traffic).* Insufficient information has been submitted in terms of the potential noise that would arise from the development although further details could be secured by a planning condition. This is addressed within the amenity section below.

- 5.21 Paragraph 5 of Policy DM7 refers to new buildings for tourism and recreation development. Whilst the agent has suggested this paragraph is not relevant as technically, they are suggesting the chalets are not buildings, the resultant effect of 4 sizeable holiday accommodation structures in the landscape which will have the appearance of buildings is considered relevant and provides an effective means of assessing the proposals.
- 5.22 Officers consider the resulting development as viewed from the immediate vicinity, due to the size and means of being placed on substantial engineered platforms, would mean that they will have the appearance of buildings. This part of policy DM7 refers to the spatial strategy ST4 and the need for new buildings to be suitable from a locational point of view.

- 5.23 Proposals must adhere to one of three criteria in order to comply with Policy DM7. As the proposal is not located within a named settlement or uses an existing building, the first two criteria are not met. The third criteria states that proposals will be permitted where *'it is within the open countryside but in accordance with Policy ST4'*. As outlined above the applicant has failed to demonstrate an essential need for the holiday accommodation to be located in an unsustainable location, contrary to Policy ST4.
- 5.24 To conclude, the proposal would fail to meet with the criteria of Policy DM7 which sets out the criteria to assess proposals of tourism and recreational development. The site is within an unsustainable location, would fail to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the National Park as the quality, scale and design of the proposal does not reflect the sensitivity of the local landscape. As such, the proposal would not be considered to constitute sustainable development contrary to strategic policies ST1 and ST4 and development management policy DM7 of the Northumberland National Park Local Plan.

Design and landscape

- 5.25 Strategic policy ST1 is supportive of development which *'Protects or enhances the landscape character of the National Park...'* with strategic policy ST2 requiring proposals to be of a *'high quality design that will make a positive contribution to the National Park's special qualities'* while also seeking to ensure that *'The proposal will not have an unacceptable adverse impact upon the amenities of occupiers'*.
- 5.26 The proposal consists of the siting of four chalets, in a linear arrangement leading from south to north with two of the chalets to the east and two to the west of the existing woodland clearing. The chalets would be based on the Falcon Lodge model manufactured by Keops. The chalets would be 15.2m in length, 6.5m in width and 3m internal height with a ridge height of 4.5 m above the engineered base. The chalets would be constructed in timber with a felt shingle pitched roof. An area of raised timber decking with balustrading would be located around each of the four chalets on site.
- 5.27 The overall scale and siting of the chalets are considered substantial in size and would mean that they are visible from a landscape perspective. As each chalet is over 12m in length, with an additional area of raised timber decking and balustrading to a height of 1.25m above the platform surrounding the proposal, officers consider the chalets and platforms would result in an incongruous addition to the greenfield undeveloped landscape they would form part of. Furthermore, the engineering operations that would be involved to create raised compacted earth platforms for the chalets to be located on would completely alter the existing natural topography of the site and would result in the chalets appearing



even more prominent, failing to harmonise with their surrounds. The raised platforms required to accommodate the proposed chalets would require substantial engineering works that would not be in keeping with the local character and quality of the landscape and would fail to conserve or enhance the special qualities of the area contrary to part d of Strategic policy ST1.



Figure 7: Location of proposed chalets

- 5.28 The chalets would be constructed in a pitched roof design in a felt shingle and would be accompanied by a raised timber decking and balustrades. This would result in the development creating an urbanised character that would appear as an alien feature within the greenfield undeveloped landscape it would form part of. The felt shingle roof is not considered to be appropriate for this national park area, being more akin to a domestic shed roof. The roof would be sizeable and would be particularly prominent in the locality. Shingle materials are considered inappropriate. This is likely to be because these are off the peg structures designed to meet the caravan definitions rather than considering an appropriate design or scale with appropriate materials for a protected landscape.
- 5.29 The linear arrangement of the large chalets on either side of the existing open area of grassland would create a development that would be more akin to an urbanised setting. It is understood that these unplanted areas were deliberately left unplanted as part of the woodland scheme and to form a linkage between ancient woodland and established mature woodland. The location of the chalets within the existing clearing of the woodland

would mean that the chalets would be visually prominent when considering the site from the south.

- 5.30 Being sited in a National Park there is a statutory protection of this landscape. Government planning policy in the NPPF para 172 states that *“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks ... which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.”*
- 5.31 Policy DM11 of the Local Plan states that *‘The natural beauty and heritage of the National Park will be conserved and enhanced whilst being responsive to landscape change. All proposals will be assessed in terms of their impact on landscape character, views and sensitivity.... Development which would adversely affect the quality and character of the landscape will not be permitted’.*
- 5.32 Policy DM12 of the Local Plan states that *‘In order to maximise the social, economic and environmental opportunities that trees, woodlands, and forests present, support will be given to development proposals which are not detrimental to other semi natural habitats, and which protect and enhance the character and nature conservation of value of native trees and semi natural ancient woodlands’.*
- 5.33 Due to the open nature of the application site (as can be seen in Figure 7) the proposal must be assessed in relation to the proposed impact at a landscape level. NNPA’s Landscape and Forestry Officer has been consulted on the proposals and his views have been included in the assessment below.
- 5.34 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.
 - 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.

- 5.35 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.”
- 5.36 The location for the proposed accommodation units is set within an area of recently planted (circa 1997) new native broadleaved woodland. 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. This would result in the proposed chalets being more visibly prominent in the future. It is considered that a Forestry Commission approved Woodland Management Plan should be submitted prior to any development commencing to show how the woodland would be maintained to provide screening for the proposal.
- 5.37 The landscape and forestry officer has raised concern that, as highlighted when he gave pre-application advice on a similar scheme on the same site, 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. He raises concern that there is no specific mention to the exact colour or finish of the proposed chalets. The Planning Statement (para 5.16) states that the chalets ‘*will be finished in appropriate materials to complement their surroundings*’. In addition, the Design & Access Statement states that ‘*the units will be completed using timber framed construction with timber clad walls and felt shingle tiles in black*’. Both of these descriptions are considered vague with no accurate detail of the proposed finish of the chalets. This presents the potential of the chalets being finished in white materials which would ensure they are clearly visible and detrimental when considered from a landscape level.
- 5.38 As previously mentioned, the applicant fails to demonstrate the exact nature of the proposed accommodation units being considered. Different documents refer to the units as ‘*timber*

lodges or '*chalets*'. The exact nature of the units is considered ambiguous. Neither a manufacturers brochure nor a photograph of an existing chalet has been provided in support of the application. In the absence of this information, officers are concerned that the proposal would result in the creation of inappropriate '*mobile homes*' that would fail to harmonise with their surrounds and would result in alien features in the landscape.

- 5.39 In terms of the proposed impact to trees, the Planning Statement (para 5.5) indicates that *'the proposed lodges will be sited within an existing clearing in the woodland, therefore no trees will be impacted by the proposals'*. However, no details have been provided to explain how the proposed chalets would be transported to the site. It is considered that some trees may potentially have to be cut and root protection zones driven over to facilitate the transportation and construction of the chalets, as well as the construction of the sizeable platforms. The planning agent has subsequently provided additional information regarding the construction phase. A tractor and trailer would transport individually prefabricated parts of the chalet to the application site. While additional information is welcomed, officers are not satisfied that sufficient information is forthcoming to confirm that the proposal would not result in visual degradation to the site or harm to neighbouring wildlife and trees. The existing condition of the narrow unsurfaced access track would mean that the transportation of large, prefabricated parts to the chalet would not be possible without causing significant damage to the surrounding area. A detailed Construction Method Statement would be required to provide accurate details of how the construction process would occur and the mitigatory measures included to reduce any damage caused. This could be achieved through a suitably worded pre-commencement condition requiring the submission of a Construction Method Statement rather the absence of it forming a reason for refusal in itself.
- 5.40 It is noted that the chalets would be fitted and powered by a solar and battery system. From an eco-efficiency perspective this is welcomed by officers and the absence of the need for new overhead services is also welcomed. No details of the location or specifications of the solar panels have been submitted. It is noted that the roofs of the accommodation units face east-west which is not the optimum orientation when considering solar power. South facing units would be problematical as this is where the most prominent views of the site are likely to be experienced. Whilst the agent has confirmed they would accept a condition for submitting such details, at least the provisional details of location of siting would normally be expected to be submitted in an application. However, it is accepted that a condition would be acceptable rather than it forming a reason for refusal.
- 5.41 Pre-application advice was given on a similar scheme on this site in 2015. It was suggested that a landscaping scheme was submitted with any application to show details of access

and parking on site, details of existing trees and other vegetation to be protected, details of connections to new services, any proposed landscaping features and a long-term maintenance plan for the site. While some of these details have been provided as part of the application, no information has been provided regarding trees and their protection measures. The Planning Statement states that *'the proposed lodges will be sited within an existing clearing in the woodland, therefore no trees will be impacted by the proposals'*. Officers do not agree with this assertion due to the tight constraints of the site and the necessity to transport the chalets to this area of the site. However, this information could be submitted as a pre-commencement condition.

- 5.42 An area of hardstanding, located directly to the north of the road leading from Donkleywood to Lanehead, is proposed for use as the car park to serve the chalets. During high season this car park is expected to contain between 6-12 cars depending on the occupancy of the chalets. This car parking area is considered to be within a prominent location and would be clearly visible from a number of key public receptor points. It is considered that the intensification of use of the car park would be detrimental when considered from the landscape level. The glare that would result from the cars alongside the prominent colours of the vehicles would create an alien feature in an area typically characterised by its woodland/greenfield and undeveloped properties. NNPA's Landscape and Forestry Officer considers that the proposed car parking area should be screened by a hedge comprising native species so that the car park would appear less prominent from the key public receptor points of the C199 minor road. This should have been included within a landscaping scheme submitted with the application, however an appropriately worded pre-commencement planning condition would enable consideration of details.
- 5.43 The proposed chalets, timber decking with railings and engineered platforms would be visible from an existing Public Right of Way which runs directly to the north of the application site. As previously mentioned, the proposed application site would present an urbanised character emphasised by the suburban timber decking that would be prominent from the Public Right of Way when facing south. This factor would be further reinforced when considered from the Public Right of Way due to the topographic nature of the site ensuring that users of the footpath would be higher than the application site and hence the vantage point would be clearer.
- 5.44 To summarise, officers consider that little thought has been given to the potential impact of the proposed development in terms of building design, landscape, lighting and trees. As a result of this, the proposal would result in a detrimental impact on the special qualities of the National Park, most notably its setting in the landscape. The applicant has failed to

provide sufficient evidence to alleviate concerns raised by the Landscape and Forestry Officer at the pre-application stage.

- 5.45 It is considered the proposal's scale, siting and setting would not sit comfortably within the natural topography of the site. The raised platforms required to accommodate the proposed lodges would require substantial engineering works that would not be in keeping with the local character and quality of the landscape. As a result of this, the proposal fails to comply with Policies ST2, DM7, DM11, DM12 and the NPPF and would warrant a reason for refusal.

Impact on Special Qualities

Amenity and Tranquillity

- 5.46 Amongst others Policy ST2 ensures *proposals will not have an unacceptable adverse impact upon the amenities of neighbouring occupiers*. Part 4 b) of policy DM7 requires tourism and recreational development to provide opportunities for people to increase their awareness and enjoyment of the National Park in a manner that *'will not undermine the enjoyment of those qualities by other visitors or the quality of life of residents.'*
- 5.47 The application site would be located 370m from the neighbouring property of Ryeclose to the northeast of the site. The Shank is located approximately 480m from the application site. The small hamlet of Donkleywood is located 310m to the south-west. As the application site would be located within an area of mature woodland, the proposal would have a negligible impact in terms of overlooking/loss of daylight/sunlight.
- 5.48 Objection letters have been received raising concerns over the potential increase in noise that would result from the development. In terms of noise pollution, the construction and use of the four chalets would lead to a greater intensification of the use of the site than the current situation. The application site is currently undeveloped and therefore an increase in noise would arise from the proposals. While the application site is located a considerable distance from the nearest neighbouring property, the development still has the potential to lead to an unacceptable increase in noise by groups of people using the chalets and surrounding land. Any potential increase in noise could be controlled through a Noise Management Plan to be secured through a planning condition which would include rules for occupiers of the chalets to adhere to.
- 5.49 Objection letters received in response to this application made reference to ongoing motocross/ off road motorcycling activities on the application site. These matters are part

of an ongoing monitoring investigation and do not form a material part of the assessment of this application.

Dark skies

- 5.50 Policy DM11 of the Local Plan states that *‘Development proposals which conserve or enhance the tranquility and pristine dark skies of the National Park will be supported.’* The application site is located within the Northumberland International Dark Sky Park.
- 5.51 The applicant states within the Planning Statement that *‘Lighting on the lodges will be kept to a minimum and there is no intention of providing lighting on the access route to the lodges’*. At present this site is undeveloped and so any new development would result in an increase in lighting of the immediate area. There would be a glow of lighting from the windows and openings in the chalets. While keeping lighting to a minimum is considered favourable in the interests of the Dark Sky Park, the distance from the car park to the chalets is of considerable distance and in similar circumstances for holiday accommodation, officers have found that lighting was having to be fitted retrospectively for health and safety issues. As the site is intended to be used throughout the year, guests may arrive and exit from the site during hours where visibility may be poor. The provision of some form of external lighting is likely to be required in the interests of health and safety and as such would need to be controlled carefully.
- 5.52 Although no details of external lighting along the unsurfaced access track have been provided as part of the application, should external lighting be needed then the provision of such information can be secured by a planning condition.

Ecology

- 5.53 Policy DM10 of the Local Plan states that *‘The conservation and enhancement of wildlife, habitats and sites of geological interest within Northumberland National Park will be given great weight’* and *‘development should maximise opportunities to strengthen the integrity and resilience of habitats and species within the National Park and provide a net gain in biodiversity where possible’*. This is supported by Strategic Policy ST2 part h) which *‘requires opportunities to be taken to enhance local wildlife and biodiversity, including providing net gain’*.
- 5.54 As the proposal is located within an isolated rural location and would involve development to an area of previously undisturbed land, the proposal has been supported by both a Reptile Survey conducted by E3 Ecology and a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal conducted

by Total Ecology. As a result of this, NNPA's Ecologist has been consulted on the proposals.

- 5.55 In terms of protected species and habitats, NNPA's Ecologist does not consider that there would be any material impact on designated sites within the surrounding area as a result of the proposals. The nearest protected site is Thorneyburn Meadow SAC/SSSI and this is unlikely to be impacted as a result of the proposals. The proposed site is however located close to areas of ancient semi-natural woodland. As the site would be used for the purpose of holiday accommodation, there is concern those users of the site would collect wood from these areas for the use of fires and wood burners. Although this would not warrant a reason for refusal, the removal of wood from the woodland could be restricted by a planning condition. The agent has subsequently confirmed that it is the intention of the applicant to provide information packs from guests which amongst other information would make clear that the collection of firewood from the woodland is prohibited.
- 5.56 The Ecological Report and subsequent Reptile Survey highlighted a lack of reptile activity on the site. The reptile survey was carried out late in the season so the Ecologist suggests there is a lack of certainty over whether there are hibernacula (place where a creature seeks refuge) present. The proposed mitigation measure of creating hibernacula on site would be considered beneficial in order to provide biodiversity net gain on site. Should the principle of development have been considered acceptable, the mitigation measures proposed in the Reptile Survey would have been secured by a planning condition.



Figure 8: Proposed access to lodges

- 5.57 NNPA's Ecologist has raised concerns over the construction of bases and engineering operations to level all four bases and bringing the chalets to the site. Concerns are raised that the formation of a large base and the necessity of large vehicles using the proposed footway to bring the chalets on site would have the potential to cause serious damage to an area of undisturbed grassland. The planning agent has provided additional information as to how the proposed chalets would be constructed. Individual prefabricated parts would be transported to the site via a tractor and trailer. However no specific details have been provided as to how the compacted earth platforms which are of considerable size would be created. NNPA's Ecologist has subsequently confirmed that the site is sloping up to the chalets final locations and it is still likely to be damage to the surface of the existing track which is in fact currently a green driven route. Should the principle of development have been considered acceptable, a requirement would be made to reinstate the green route (i.e. regrading and reseeding if damaged). This could be secured by an appropriately worded condition.
- 5.58 The agent has confirmed that there will inevitably be some disruption to the application site itself as a result of the construction phase, where regrading of the land will be necessary. Whilst they suggest the location of such proposed works would ensure that no damage will be caused to trees or their roots no evidence has been provided to support such a statement. The bases for the lodges will be formed from compacted earth and would not be constructed from concrete.
- 5.59 An area of unimproved grassland will be lost as a result of the development of the engineering operations for the siting of the chalets. In addition to this, areas of grassland would be lost or could be severely damaged as a result of the construction phase of the development. The provision of a large, compacted earth base will still require significant excavation to produce a flat surface. There is however no mitigation or proposals for biodiversity net gain suggested except the provision of hibernacula in the Reptile Report. NNPA's Ecologist suggested that the applicant could provide green roofs for the lodges, the creation of a pond or incorporate features for bird and bat nesting which could be included within the design of the chalets. Should the principle of development have been considered acceptable, the provision of exact examples of biodiversity net gain would be secured by an appropriately worded pre-commencement planning condition.

Highways and Accessibility

- 5.60 Amongst others, policy ST2 is supportive of proposals which *'ensure the proportionate creation of an accessible, safe and secure environment for all potential users with*

appropriate cycling facilities and car parking provision and without compromising highway safety, the local road network or public rights of way'. Policy DM9 provides more detail with part d) which seeks to minimise the overall need for journeys whilst seeking to maximise the proportion of journeys made by public transport, bicycle and walking.

- 5.61 The applicant has highlighted the location of an existing area of hardstanding which would serve as a car park for the four proposed 3-bedroom chalets. The car park would be located approximately 475 metres in distance to the southeast of the lodges. The planning statement explains that users of the chalets would then travel on foot from the car park along an unsurfaced track westward and then northwards to reach the lodges.
- 5.62 Northumberland County Council as Highways Authority has been consulted on the proposals. They advise that the proposed development is in a rural area of the county that lacks any connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. The development for holiday chalets would usually encourage travel by private vehicle and the holidaymakers would then use the vehicle to travel to sites around the area. Whilst the highway response confirms the development site is considered unsustainable based on location, for the type of development in their view they would not recommend refusal from a highway point of view. Nevertheless, given the proposal does not meet with the Authority's spatial strategy and is considered unsustainable as highlighted earlier, officers consider that this would warrant a reason for refusal.
- 5.63 No information was originally submitted to detail how the chalets would be constructed/delivered to the site. Officers requested additional information regarding the construction phase. The agent has since suggested that all materials and equipment would be transported to the site using a tractor and trailer. They suggest that the route to the application site is regularly used by the applicant in relation to their farming and land management activities. The agent has also explained that in terms of the construction of the lodges, due to the character of the site it is not considered appropriate to transport the lodges in their finished form as this would require a low loader and crane. In such a location as this, the agent explains that the manufacturers of the chalets undertake much of the pre-fabrication off site and transport the components in parts that are capable of being transported to the final location using a tractor and trailer. The final assembly of the chalets is then undertaken on site.
- 5.64 Highways Officers have advised that details of how the chalets are likely to be delivered to the site will be required and requested a Construction Method Statement to demonstrate this. Highways engineers have suggested a condition requiring this statement to be submitted prior to development commencing. Ideally, the information outlined in a

construction method statement should have been submitted as part of the application. This is because the development itself may need to be altered if the previously mentioned construction method is not possible. If the proposed Keops Falcon Lodges cannot be safely delivered to the site without causing significant damage or harm to the Highway, then the proposal would need to be altered. Should the principle of development been considered acceptable, a pre-commencement condition requiring the submission of a detailed Construction Method Statement would need to be included in any decision notice to ensure highways safety is not compromised.



Figure 9: Existing area of hard standing to be used for the purpose of a car park.

- 5.65 Highways Officers have confirmed that although individual car parking spaces have not been individually marked, the overall area within the red line boundary earmarked for parking is considered adequate to accommodate the expected number of vehicles associated with the development. However, if the principle of development was considered acceptable, an appropriate condition would be attached requesting a parking layout to ensure adequate parking arrangements can be secured and is retained in perpetuity.
- 5.66 The existing vehicular access which serves the site is currently in an unmade state and will require upgrading in accordance with Northumberland County Council Type A Specification. If the principle of development was considered acceptable, the applicant would be required to enter into a Section 184 agreement with the Local Areas Highways Office to carry out such works.

- 5.67 In terms of access to the site, the applicant has suggested that *‘guests will use an existing area of hardstanding to park all vehicles, there will be no vehicular access to the lodges for guests’*. As parking is not available at the site of the chalets, users would have to travel from the car park to the chalets by foot. This would involve a walk of up to 450m in length including a considerably steep gradient on unsurfaced terrain. It is presumed that users would arrive with considerable luggage as the site would be used for the purpose of holiday accommodation. No formal track would be constructed from the car park to the chalets and the existing terrain consists of grassland and soft ground. Whilst officers welcome the fact that no further development in the form of surfaced tracks/roads are being proposed which would result in further urbanisation of the landscape, the distance is considerable and would mean that the proposed chalets would not be accessible to those less able visitors to the area.
- 5.68 Due to the considerable distance from the lodges to the car park combined with the topography and terrain of the track, it is not considered that the proposal site is of an accessible nature. Policy ST2 paragraph j) requires proposals to *‘ensure the proportionate creation of an accessible, safe and secure environment for all potential users’*, and part f) of Policy DM9 requires proposals to *‘promote good design principles in respect of inclusive access’*. Whilst it is accepted that some activities and development across the National Park may not be appropriate for all potential users, this proposal would be providing four no. family sized (3 bedroom) holiday accommodation units. As such it is considered these should be accessible to all. The access arrangement of the site is not considered to be of an accessible nature and is a further example of why this location is considered unsuitable for this particular proposal. As such the proposal conflicts with the requirements of Policy ST2 and DM9 of the Local Plan which requires an accessible environment for all potential users.

Foul Drainage

- 5.69 The application has been supported by a Drainage Strategy conducted by Bell Munro Consulting. In terms of foul drainage, the strategy proposes the installation a package treatment plant directly to the south of the four chalets at the bottom of the slope. Within the Foul Drainage Assessment which also accompanied the application, the applicant states that *‘The system is to be inspected monthly to ensure that it is operating correctly, this should include a check to ensure it is de-sludging correctly. De-sludging is anticipated to be required quarterly. The Sewage Treatment Plant is to have a complete service by a competent contractor on an annual basis.’*

- 5.70 The applicant also indicates within the Foul Drainage Assessment that there will be a vehicular access within 30m of the Package Treatment Plant. No specific details have been provided regarding where the vehicular access would be located on the site. Officers would raise concern over the creation of an inappropriate formal track through an area of previously undeveloped greenfield land. Should the principle of development have been considered acceptable, a suitably worded planning condition would have been attached to any decision requiring further details of how the proposed package treatment plant would be accessed by service vehicles to ensure its effective use.

Electricity Supply

- 5.71 There is no electricity supply proposed to the lodges. The applicant has indicated within the Planning Statement that *'each of the lodges will be fitted with a solar and battery system to provide the necessary electric, therefore no electricity supply will need to be brought into the site'*. No specific details of the proposed solar panel arrangements have been submitted with the application.
- 5.72 An objection letter was received which highlighted that the solar panels would be considered inappropriate due to the positioning of the chalets in relation to the sun.
- 5.73 When queried, the agent has confirmed that any solar panels would be installed on the roof of the chalets but is reluctant to provide any exact technical details because they suggest it will depend on what is available on the market at the time construction is taking place. The agent has confirmed that battery storage will be contained within the structure of the chalets. The applicant confirms they would be happy to accept a condition requiring the submission of details of the solar and battery system before it is installed on the site. NNPA's Landscape and Forestry Officer confirmed that should the principle of development have been acceptable, a written statement confirming that they will be fitted flat to the roof surface rather than mounted on their own frame that could be oriented to a different direction would be secured by an appropriately worded planning condition.
- 5.74 The proposal involves the creation of four, three-bedroom chalets with both kitchen and washing facilities included within each chalet. Due to the scale of the chalets, it is considered that a significant level of electricity use would be required to facilitate their use, as well as electricity to operate the package treatment plant. Officers consider there is insufficient information provided to show that the level of accommodation and associated activity can be solely supplied through solar PV. Should the principle of development have been considered acceptable, further details would be requested through a condition

demonstrating how the chalets would be powered by the PV units and if this is not possible, details of alternative power supplies.

Water Supply

- 5.75 The applicant has stated within the Planning Statement that *'there is a private water supply within the applicant's land ownership, which will be utilized to serve the proposed lodges'*. The supply is located to the north of the application site.
- 5.76 The application was supported by a private water supply risk assessment carried out by Northumberland County Council Public Protection. The risk assessment highlighted that the current supply risk rating level was *'very high'*. As a result of this, a number of works are required to improve the water supply before the supply comes into use on the site. Northumberland County Council Public Protection were consulted on the proposals and concluded that the site should not be brought into use until the local authority is satisfied by means of a risk assessment and monitoring that the supply is not a risk to health. The applicant would therefore be advised through an informative to contact the Public Protection team prior to the first occupancy of the lodges.

Other Issues

- 5.77 A local resident has suggested that the broadleaf woodland forming the vast majority of the landholding, and including the proposed site, was planted in 2003 with public funds obtained through a Woodland Grant Scheme. They also believe that further public funds were paid annually thereafter to allow the management of the woodland for the stated aims of encouragement of biodiversity and enhancement of the landscape. Forestry Commission who are responsible for the woodland funding were consulted on the application, however no response has been received. The agent has subsequently confirmed that the scheme has now expired.
- 5.78 An objector raised concerns over the proposed use of the chalets. The objector was concerned that the applicant would use one of the chalets as a private residence rather than for the purpose of holiday accommodation. If the principle of development were considered acceptable, a suitably worded planning condition could ensure control of the future use of the chalets.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The site is an undeveloped woodland area of open countryside. The location does not meet with the adopted spatial strategy for the location of new development. For the reasons detailed above, officers consider that the principle of the development is not acceptable. The applicant has failed to demonstrate an essential need for the siting of four chalets and engineering operations in this unsustainable location. As a result of this, the proposal would conflict with the Authority's spatial strategy, fail to constitute sustainable development and would conflict with the requirements of Strategic policies ST1, ST4 and Development Management policy DM7 of the Local Plan.
- 6.2 As assessed above, it is considered that the proposals would cause undue harm to the landscape character and setting of the application site and wider area by virtue of the size, design, materials and location of the chalets together with the significant engineering operations involved to ensure the chalets would be located on an even surface. The impact this would have on the special qualities of the National Park are considered to outweigh any benefits of the scheme, and it is recommended that the application be refused for this reason.
- 6.3 No specific details have been submitted of how users of the lodges would access the site from the proposed car parking area approximately 475m from the application site. Officers consider that a holiday accommodation site providing family sized accommodation should be accessible to all. As the proposal would fail to demonstrate this can be met it is considered that the development would conflict with Policy ST2 & DM9 of the Local Plan. It is recommended that the application is refused for this reason.
- 6.4 As outlined in the report there remain a lot of matters that are unclear and have not been provided as part of the application. These include external lighting, noise management, biodiversity net gain and biodiversity mitigation methods, detailed construction methods (for wildlife, tree and highways reasons), regrading and reseeding the green route, solar panel details, a detailed landscaping scheme, a forestry commission standard woodland management plan, the suitability of the location of the package treatment plant and a full parking plan. However, officers consider these matters could be resolved through suitably worded planning conditions, some of which would need details to be submitted prior to commencement of development on site.

7 Recommendation

7.1 That members **refuse** the application for the following reasons:

1. The proposal fails to accord with the Authority's spatial strategy which requires development within the open countryside to demonstrate an essential need for it to be located in an unsustainable rural open countryside location. As such the proposal would not constitute sustainable development, contrary to policies ST1, ST4 and DM7 of the Northumberland National Park Local Plan.
2. The proposed cabins and associated development by virtue of their scale, siting and setting would not sit comfortably within the natural topography of the site. The engineering platforms required to accommodate the proposed lodges would require substantial engineering works that would not be in keeping with the local character and quality of the landscape. As such the proposal would adversely impact on the special qualities of the National Park contrary to policies ST1, ST2, DM7 and DM11 of the Northumberland National Park Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.
3. The access arrangement to the proposed cabins which are a considerable distance from the proposed car park, combined with the topography and terrain of the unmade track is not considered to be of an accessible nature. As such the proposal conflicts with the requirements of Policies ST2 and DM9 of the Northumberland National Park Local Plan which require an accessible environment for all potential users.

Contact Officer:

For further information contact Adam Ewart on 01434 611552 or e-mail: planning@nnpa.org.uk

Background Papers

Planning Application File: 20NP0104

EIA Screening Report dated 28th June 2021

