

48/10/0026

MR M CAVILL

**CHANGE OF USE OF PART OF A DUTCH BARN AND SECTIONS OF FIELDS TO SUPPORT AN ECO TOURISM YURT SITE AT HILL FARM, WEST MONKTON**

Grid Reference: 324811.129487

Full Planning Permission

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**RECOMMENDATION AND REASON(S)**

Recommended Decision:

The proposal is considered to support the economic viability of the existing farm enterprise and provide tourist accommodation in close proximity to Hestercombe House and Gardens, recognised Heritage Assets and the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in compliance with Taunton Deane Local Plan policy EC8 and EC24, in addition the proposals are not to have a detrimental impact upon wildlife, visual or residential amenity and is therefore considered acceptable and, accordingly, does not conflict with Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 (General Requirements) and S2 (Design) and PPS9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

**RECOMMENDED CONDITION(S) (if applicable)**

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun within three years of the date of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the provisions of Section 91 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

Drg no 231/10/001A Rev A

Drg no 231/10/002A Rev A

Drg no 231/10/003A Rev A

Drg no 231/10/004A Rev A

Applicants Drg no 1 titled Detailed Proposed Yurt Locations submitted on 24th June 2010.

3. Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning. Only those materials and colours specified in the designated access statement shall be used in the development unless an alternative is first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To minimise the visual and environmental impact of the

development on the area in accordance with Policies S1 and S2 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan and Planning Policy Statement 9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

4. (i) Before any part of the permitted development is commenced, a landscaping scheme, which shall include details of the species, siting and numbers to be planted, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- (ii) The scheme shall be completely carried out within the first available planting season from the date of commencement of the development, or as otherwise extended with the agreement in writing of the Local Planning Authority.
- (iii) For a period of five years after the completion of each landscaping scheme, the trees and shrubs shall be protected and maintained in a healthy weed free condition and any trees or shrubs that cease to grow shall be replaced by trees or shrubs of similar size and species, or the appropriate trees or shrubs as may be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the proposed development makes a satisfactory contribution to the preservation and enhancement of the local character and distinctiveness of the area in accordance with Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 and S2.

5. Prior to their erection on site full details of the proposed lighting shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Only the lighting hereby permitted shall be installed on site and thereafter maintained. No other lighting shall be erected on the site at any time without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order to protect the wildlife interests of the site and local area and to reduce the landscape impact of the proposal in accordance with Taunton Deane Local Plan policies S1, S2 and Planning Policy Statement 9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

6. The Yurts, connecting paths and car parking shall be constructed/installed in complete compliance with the details contained within the Design and Access Statement unless a variation is first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the proposal does not have a detrimental impact on the wildlife or landscape of the area in accordance with Taunton Deane Local Plan policies S1, S2 and PPS9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

7. Prior to the commencement of works on site a scheme for the provision and maintenance of new bird boxes is first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and the provision of the bird boxes, resting places and related accesses have been fully implemented. Thereafter the resting places and bird boxes shall be permanently maintained in accordance with the approved details. Prior to the occupation of the Yurts

the applicant shall undertake all of the recommendations contained within the submitted Bird and Bat survey by George Bamment dated 2009 and Neil Hassine's wildlife survey dated may 2010. The works shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and timings unless a variation is first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect and enhance facilities for bats and breeding birds in accordance with the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

#### Notes for compliance

1. The landscaping scheme should reflect the proposals as outlined in the submitted Design and Access Statement.
2. The condition relating to wildlife requires a mitigation proposal that will maintain a favourable status for these species that rare affected by this development proposal.  
It should also be noted that the protection afforded to wildlife under UK and EU legislation is irrespective of the planning system and any activity undertaken on the tree(s) must comply with the appropriate wildlife legislation.

#### **PROPOSAL**

The proposal is for the erection of 10 Mongolian Yurts for use as tourist accommodation to support the existing farm enterprise at Hill Farm, West Monkton. The proposal would also convert 1 bay of an existing 3 bay farm building to provide toilets, washing facilities and a communal rest/dining area.

The proposal would be installed in a phased manner comprising the toilet, kitchen and 4 Yurts in phase 1; 2 more Yurts in phase 2 and the final 4 Yurts and rest area in phases 3 and 4. The access to the site is via the existing farm entrance lane.

The application is being reported to the Planning Committee as the applicant is related to an elected member.

Letters of support have been submitted with the application raising the following points:- the proposal will support the main farming enterprise and aid the economic health of the area; there is a strong environmental element that may prove to be a beacon for other sustainable tourism enterprises; the attraction of more visitors will bring benefits to the wider Taunton area;

A letter of support was also provided by the former Tourism Officer and Agricultural Development Officer in January 2010 this type of development fits into the sustainable tourism agenda of the new TDBC Economic Development Strategy. It would be unique in its offer in the Deane and would provide visitors with a high quality eco holiday and as such would raise the profile of the Taunton Deane area. The project also addresses the following:- part of the Somerset Community Strategy and Somerset LAA, which focuses on economic development and enterprise through

a more competitive Somerset economy; parts of the South West of England Sustainable Farming and Food Delivery Plan 2008-2011 in i) Objective 1- Achievement of a profitable and efficient farming enterprise and food industry by promotion of sustainable farming diversification opportunities ii) Objective 2 Enhancement of the regions environmental assets through low carbon initiatives, business opportunities to protect the environment and the reduction of environmental costs by supply chains

## **SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY**

Hill Farm is situated in the open countryside 260m to the north of Monkton Heathfield and 730m from the limit of Taunton (measured via the road network). It is 120m to the east of the northern boundary of Hestercombe Gardens, a Garden of Special Historic Interest and a European Special Area of Conservation(SAC) due to a colony of Lesser Horseshoe Bats.

There is no relevant planning history.

## **CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATION RESPONSES**

### **Consultees**

*SCC - TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT GROUP* - Object. The proposed development lies in a non sustainable locations but as the application is for a tourism use the development must also be viewed in line with other policies as set out in National, Regional, County and Local Policies. It is therefore a matter for the Local Planning Authority to decide if the development is appropriate in these terms. In detail, the applicant has set out a transport management scheme in the design and access statement. This includes providing taxi service to the railway station, town centre, bicycles for use and hire and storage for visitors cycles. These proposals are to be commended but I am concerned that in practice these proposals might not work and visitors would use the car. The highways to the site consist of single track roads which are poorly aligned and have limited passing places. The roads do not provide sufficient footways and I have concerns that this proposal would lead to pedestrian/vehicle conflict and I raise objection to these proposals.

*WEST MONKTON PARISH COUNCIL* - Support this local rural business initiative

*LANDSCAPE OFFICER* Subject to landscaping proposals as described in the Design and Access Statement it should be possible to mitigate any local landscape impacts. I recommend setting down the Yurts both to soften any Landscape impacts and to improve ease of access and Health and Safety.

*NATURE CONSERVATION AND RESERVES OFFICER* no objection subject to conditions.

### **Representations**

None received in response to neighbour notification and statutory publicity

## **PLANNING POLICIES**

EN12 - TDBCLP - Landscape Character Areas,

EN6 - TDBCLP -Protection of Trees, Woodlands, Orchards & Hedgerows,  
EN20 - TDBCLP - Parks & Gardens of Special Historic Interest,

## **DETERMINING ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS**

This proposal is for the provision of a tourism linked accommodation that would enable the farm to diversify in order to support the economic viability of the farm and as such Policy EC8 and EC24 are relevant.

The farm has been placed in a nitrogen vulnerable zone and the animal stocking levels will have to be reduced. The applicant has submitted a business plan that indicates that the Yurt enterprise would financially support the existing farm. In addition the proposal is considered to be compatible with the agricultural operations on the farm and will utilise part of the existing barn to provide linked facilities. This is in accordance with the requirements of policy EC8.

The proposed Yurts would be retained on site available to provide accommodation for tourists all year round, and for this reason are comparable to static caravans or chalets. Policy EC24, for the provision of static caravan and holiday chalets, requires proposals to be adequately screened and not harm the landscape; provide for access and turning by transporter lorries (not relevant in this case as the units, like tents, are erected at the site); have good access to the highway network and are not in a flood plain or at risk of flooding.

In this case, due top the local topography there would only be limited points where the yurts would be seen. The proposals for the development include screening proposals that are considered to adequately screen the proposal as required by the policy. Unlike caravans the Yurts are erected like tents and would be able to be transported to the site on smaller lorries so that the need for space for transporter lorries access and turning is not required. The County Highway Officer has objected to the proposal as he considers that the local highway network consists of single width roads which are poorly aligned, limited passing places and do not have sufficient footways for pedestrians to walk along the road without causing a conflict with vehicular traffic. The applicant has submitted a green travel plan which includes offering lifts to and from the railway station to enable visitors who do not use the car, providing bicycles for use by visitors to reduce the need for all trips to be undertaken by car; to have details of bike hire available for cycling enthusiast; provision of walking and biking maps to local shops and amenities and providing secure storage for visitors own bikes. The applicants have also provided photographs to illustrate that when the verges are cut they can be used a s safe refuges for pedestrians. The proposed site is on a plateau near the top of the hills and is not at the risk of flooding or in a floodplain.

Government Guidance on Economic and Tourism development in the open countryside is equally split on the guidance between farm diversification and tourism accommodation. Policy EC6.2(f) in Planning policy statement 4 supports farm diversification and policy EC7.1 sets out requirements for the provision of tourist accommodation and accepts that proposals may be a key element in rural and farm diversification. Generally the policy advice focuses provision of new accommodation to sites in or adjacent to villages. In this case Hill farm does not comply with that but National Policy EC7.1(e) requires Local Authorities to recognise that area statutorily designated for their natural or cultural heritage qualities will have scope for tourist and leisure related developments. In this case Hill Farm is immediately adjacent to

Hestercombe Garden, a heritage asset and is in the foothills 0.1km to the south of the Quantock Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The fields are located in close proximity to the Lesser Horseshoe Bats at Hestercombe and the proposal has had to ensure that this is taken into account. A bat and bird survey was submitted with the application and the mitigation measures that are recommended have been supported by the Nature conservation and Reserves Officer

In my opinion the proposed Yurts will provide economic support for the farming enterprise and that has to be weighed against the concerns in terms of highway safety and the rural location. In my opinion the proposed travel plan will enable a level of use that is not wholly dependant on the car and the close proximity to Hestercombe, the Heritage Asset, AONB and local footpaths support the provision of the Yurts in this location and I consider the proposal to be acceptable in this case.

**In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1988.**

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