

25/2007/023

LEE MORGAN

**CHANGE OF USE FROM STORES TO HOLIDAY UNITS AT WICK HOUSE,  
NORTON FITZWARREN**

318435/126066

FULL

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**PROPOSAL**

Permission is sought for the conversion of a redundant dairy outbuilding, constructed of blockwork, to provide three self contained holiday units. The units provide a simple bed-sit form of 25 sq m floor space. The business plan is that the units would provide transit accommodation for tourists travelling through the area. The proposed physical changes to the building would be to render the external elevations to match the host dwelling and provide a slate roof.

**CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS**

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY on the basis that this is the re-use of an existing building it maybe considered unreasonable to raise a highway objection to the proposal. Visibility at the access to the main road is good, however it would appear not commensurate with the speed of the traffic, further visibility improvements should be imposed condition and a plan to show parking provision should the Local Planning Authority be minded to approve the scheme. WESSEX WATER the development is located within a foul sewerred area. The developer is proposing to dispose of foul water to a septic tank. However, the first presumption for any new development must always to provide a system of foul drainage discharging into a public sewer. Only where it is shown that connection to a public sewer is not feasible or practicable should a sewage treatment package plant be provided. Your council should satisfy themselves regarding disposal of water to soakaways. There is mains water supply. (Planning Officer Comment - The applicant has confirmed that drainage would be to the mains and not the provision of a septic tank)

LANDSCAPE OFFICER it should be possible to provide a boundary hedgerow and tree planning to provide a setting for the holiday units. Please note the embankment, within the blue line given is a new engineered feature which looks artificial in the landscape and does not comply with Policy EN13. NATURE CONSERVATION OFFICER a site visit revealed light levels in the roof to be quite high. Bats prefer sheltered dark places. The roof comprised corrugated roof sheeting with metal beams. There were no gaps or crevices in the walls. Because of these site conditions and the lack of bird or bat droppings, I conclude it is unlikely that bats or nesting birds are present in the building. Therefore, a wildlife survey is not a reasonable requirement in this instance. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER no objections subject to the imposition of condition and notes. DRAINAGE OFFICER I note that a septic tank is to be used to dispose of foul sewage. Percolation tests should be carried out to ascertain the required lengths of sub-surface irrigation drainage. The Environment Agency's Consent to discharge to an underground strata

is also required. With regards to the use of soakaways to dispose of surface water - these should be constructed in accordance with BRG365 (Sep 91) and made a condition.

PARISH COUNCIL have the following concerns to the proposal. 1. The form states there will be no alteration or extension but in our opinion the building is being altered and/or extended. 2. The increase of traffic which will exit onto a very dangerous stretch of main road. 3. The safety of children staying at the proposed holiday units which will be in close proximity to the main road.

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

RPG 10-South West

PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Development, PPS7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, PPS9 - Biodiversity and Geological Conservation, PPG13- Transport.

Somerset & Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policies STR1 (Sustainable Development), ST6 (Development Outside Rural Centres & Villages), Policy 5 (Landscape Character), Policy 23 (Tourism Development in the Countryside), Policy 49 (Transport Requirements of new Development).

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 (General Requirements), S2 (Design), S7 (Outside Settlements), EC6 (Conversion of Rural Buildings), M4 (Residential Parking Requirements), EN4 (Wildlife in Buildings to be Converted or Demolished), EN5 (Protected Species) and EN12 (Landscape Character Areas).

Material Considerations - 'Static Caravan and Holiday Chalet Tourist Accommodation in Rural Areas' (Strategic Planning Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel - 11 April 2007)

## **ASSESSMENT**

Guidance on national planning policy in relation to development in rural areas is set out in Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (PPS7). Whilst recognising the importance of tourism to the rural economy PPS7 emphasises the importance of strictly controlling new building development to protect the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, and ensuring that development is in accordance with sustainable development principles. It highlights the particular importance of supporting farm diversification proposals, and the need to give preference to proposals that involve the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings for economic development purposes.

There is growing concern regarding market saturation within the Borough. The focus is on whether there is an economic justification for the number of schemes being proposed in the Deane, given that the reason for permitting them as exceptions to the strict control of development in the countryside (as set out in Structure Plan Policy STR6 and Local Plan policy S7) is to assist the rural economy generally and farm diversification in particular (as provided for by Structure Plan Policy 23 and Local Plan Policy S7).

Information provided by the Economic Development Officer (EDO) has identified serious concerns regarding possible market saturation of self-catering accommodation. He has stated that there is an increasing body of evidence to indicate that there is significant unused capacity within the existing stock of self-catering accommodation in Somerset. In 2004/04 (the latest year when full year figures are available) the take-up of high season lets was running at less than 80% of capacity. In the low (winter) season it fell to some 40%. Furthermore, indications from the latest figures available from Visit England for 2005/06 suggest that occupancy levels in Somerset had fallen again, which would be the third year in a row.

These figures and trends represent strong evidence of a saturated market. The EDO feels there is some doubt about the business sustainability of the existing self-catering capacity, and that the Council should therefore be very cautious about permitting applications for further accommodation. If proposals are based on unrealistic assumptions about the level of occupation when compared to prevailing market conditions, there is a danger that they will make little profit and fail financially.

This could result in a situation where holiday accommodation businesses are failing the owners may seek to secure planning permission for use of the accommodation as permanent dwellings, as a means of 'cutting their losses'. This would create pressure for the introduction of dwellings in unsustainable locations that would not be acceptable under Structure Plan Policy STR6 and Local Plan Policy S7, thus undermining the objectives of countryside protection and the delivery of sustainable patterns of development.

The assessment of the submitted business plan is therefore a vital component in determining the application. It is accepted that the use of existing buildings for holiday accommodation will almost always be preferable in planning terms to the introduction of new ones into the landscape.

On the basis that the proposal would be a conversion and given there is no objection from the tourism officer it is considered the proposal is acceptable.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of time limit, materials, landscape, walls and fences, timber windows and doors, no extensions, meter boxes, parking, drainage, holiday occupancy condition and contaminated land. Notes re soakaways, landscape, wildlife and contamination land.

**REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION:-** The proposed development is considered sympathetic and will not harm the integrity and character of the barn or harm the visual or residential amenities of the area. The proposal does therefore not conflict with Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1, S2 nor EC6 and material considerations do not indicate otherwise.

**In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.**

**CONTACT OFFICER: 356586 MR A PICK**

NOTES: