

Application No:	3/30/20/004
Parish	Skilgate
Application Type	Full Planning Permission
Case Officer:	Chris Mitchell
Grid Ref	Easting: 299493 Northing: 127450
Applicant	Mr Barber
Proposal	Erection of 2 No. luxury canvas holiday lodges (resubmission of 3/30/20/002)
Location	Little Haddon Farm, Skilgate to Little Haddon Farm, Skilgate, TA4 2DE

Recommendation

Recommended decision: Refuse

Reasons for refusal:

- 1 The proposal by reason of its siting in an isolated countryside location and without sufficient information to demonstrate that such a new build proposal ought to be allowed as an exception to Policy OC1 in order to benefit existing employment activity already established in the area, would be harmful to the aims of delivering sustainable development contrary to policies OC1, EC9 and EC11 of the adopted West Somerset Local Plan to 2032.

Informative notes to applicant

- 1 In accordance with paragraph 38 of the National Planning Policy Framework the Council has worked in a positive and pro-active way with the applicant and has looked for solutions to enable the grant of planning permission. However in this case the applicant was unable to satisfy the key policy test and as such the application has been refused.

1. Proposal

The proposal is for the placement of two luxury canvas holiday lodges (safari style tents) that would cater for persons with disabilities (including wheelchair users) that will be sited on land to the east of the main farmhouse with associate parking and the planting of hedges to the west of each tent. The tents would be fixed to a timber

base with water proof canvas structure finished in natural colours so as to blend in with the surrounding landscape. They would measure 5.5m wide by 11m in length and be in cruciform design, some 50 sq.m, with a maximum height of 3.5m. Each lodge will provide an open plan living/dining/kitchen area with wood burning stove, 2 wetrooms and WC's and 2 bedrooms with decked areas to the front and rear. Off road parking is shown, with access into the site as existing off an unnamed road which splits from the B3190. The parking area would be finished with a Hoggin permeable surface an access track that would also run along the northern boundary of the site with a single parking space to each of the lodges would be a grass matting. Along the southern boundary would be strengthened with additional planting of 2 Acer campestres, 1 Sorbus aria, Amelanchier lamarckii and 1 Prunus avium. Acer campestre is Field Maple. It's a native tree, often found in hedgerows. It is mid-sized. Sorbus aria is Whitebeam, which is native to many parts of the UK. and a mid-sized tree. Amelanchier lamarckii is Snowy Mespil, an attractive flowering tree which is not a native tree, but is quite commonly planted in gardens. Prunus avium is Wild Cherry, a native tree, potentially quite a large tree.

This application is a resubmission of application 3/30/20/002 which sought permission for 3 luxury canvas holiday lodges, but was refused by decision notice dated 9th October 2020.

Site Description

Little Haddon Farm is located within the open countryside, to the east of the small village of Skilgate, near to the boundary of Exmoor National Park which lies to the west. There is a watercourse running through the site north-south with the land sloping up on either side. From the main entrance to the site, the land slopes gently up to the north with the north part of the site affording attractive long range views to the south. The nearest neighbour is a dwelling house beyond the northern boundary of the site. The site comprises a detached farm house and various outbuildings set within 18 acres of pastureland. The site is separated into seven distinct areas as follows:

1. The Farm Yard - currently accommodating the existing farm house (the applicant's home), site of the former Dairy (partially demolished) and a number of other outbuildings
2. The Orchard - proposed to accommodate the kitchen garden and free range chicken area
3. Linney-Piece - 6 acre field, intended to be used for grazing sheep and horses.
4. Cross-Piece - 5 acre field, intended to be used for grazing sheep and horses
5. Great Meadow - 3 acre meadow
6. Park - 1 acre paddock to accommodate 2 x safari lodge, (subject of this application)
7. Homefield - 1 acre paddock used for grazing.

The site falls within Flood Zone 1. There are no listed buildings or other heritage assets on, or nearby, the site.

Relevant Planning History

3/30/20/002 – Erection of 3 No. luxury canvas holiday lodges set within two private paddocks at Little Haddon Farm – Refused by decision notice dated 9th October 2020, for two reasons -

(1). The proposal by reason of its siting in an isolated countryside location and without sufficient information to demonstrate that such a new build proposal ought to be exceptionally allowed as required by Policy OC1 to benefit existing employment activity already established in the area, would be harmful to the aims of delivering sustainable development contrary to policy OC1 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032

(2) When considered cumulatively, the proposed lodges by reason of their overall size, scale, residential appearance, decking areas and associated paraphernalia would result in incongruous and discordant features in the open countryside location and would be conspicuous as having an urbanising effect on this open area of land which would change the landscape character to a more urban form, introducing development into an area where the landscape dominates which would be detrimental to and adversely affect the visual amenity of the area. The proposal would cause harm to the landscape character and appearance of this open countryside area, failing to conserve and make a positive contribution to the character of the open countryside. As such the proposed development would be contrary to policies OC1, EC9 and NH13 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032

A pre-application enquiry for the conversion of an old building at the site into accommodation was considered under reference **Pre/30/19/001**. The case officer concluded that the original building was largely dilapidated and not capable of conversion without substantial structural rebuild. Therefore, it would not, in policy terms, come under the accepted view of a conversion of an existing, traditionally constructed building.

Consultation Responses

Skilgate Parish Council -

Stated that they are broadly supportive of this application and had not received any adverse comment..

Highways Development Control -

The proposed site lies off a classified unnamed road in a derestricted area. Access would be via an existing field gate where it is presumed would still be used by agricultural vehicles for internal maintenance purposes. In terms of vehicle impact on the local highway network considering the proposal would be seasonal, likely to be outside the daily peak times and modest in terms of daily vehicle movements when in use, the Highway Authority do not view this application as likely to have a severe impact on the local highway network. The proposal would see a material increase in vehicle movements from the access. However the applicant states the

proposed access has unrestricted visibility although this has not been clarified or demonstrated through a suitable scaled drawing that this has been considered in line with appropriate design guidance.

Manual For Streets would be appropriate. There would appear scope to provide improved visibility splays if required. The applicant firstly demonstrates suitable visibility splays can be achieved from the access proposed onto both the immediate and secondary road (given the proximity of the access) and in line with Manual For Streets that can then be secured through condition.

Landscape -

Original comments dated 11/02/2020 -

I have four main concerns which are:

- The access and car parking needs to be carefully considered so as not to impact on the rural character of the area. I recommend keeping the cars as close to the entrance as possible rather than adjacent to the tents, and using a hoggin type permeable surface to reduce run-off and wider visual impacts.
- The existing hedgerow is thin in several places and needs thickening with local native species where required. I would also recommend a hedgerow management condition to ensure that the hedgerow is managed and maintained to provide at least 2.5m height with trees singled out within the hedgerow to provide longer term screening and to help integrate the proposals into the local area.
- The tents are likely to be most visible during the winter months so I would recommend them be limited from March to end of October.
- Any further 'domestic' type features such as washing lines and decking should be limited and if possible controlled through planning condition.

Subject to the above I consider that the two tents would meet the requirements of relevant landscape policies in maintaining the landscape character of the area.

Further comments dated 17/05/21 -

The landscape plan is wrong when it says scale 1:5000. I recommend only locally native trees in this area so I recommend that the Amelanchier is replaced with Acer campestre and the Sorbus aria with Sorbus aucuparia.

Given the importance of the hedgerow in providing shelter and screening to the site it is important that a hedgerow management plan showing how the existing hedgerows will be managed over the next 20 years is produced. I suggest that this can be done by condition such as:

The native species boundary hedges provide both ecological and landscape benefits that are essential for the scheme to meet the requirements of Policy CP8. To maintain those benefits the applicants will undertake an assessment of the existing hedgerow and from that assessment produce a 20 year management plan that encourages greater diversity of species along with favouring larger growing tree

species as maiden trees. The plan will show how through management and maintenance the hedgerow can provide longer term visual screening of the proposed development as well as increasing its biodiversity interest. The landscape and ecological management plan will be produced and approved before development commences on site and recommendations within it implemented in a timely fashion.

Wessex Water Authority -
No comments received

Tree Officer -
No comments received

SCC - Ecologist -
No comments received

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Not Applicable.

Representations Received

Original proposal -

There have been 5 letters of support to the application stating the following:

- This proposal will provide people with disabilities to have holiday within the countryside;
- This accommodation will provide economic benefit for the local area supporting local pub and other small business within the area;
- It will have no negative impact upon neighbours;
- Traffic impact and highway safety is negligible.

Revised proposal -

There has been 1 letter of support to this application stating the following:

- Support the proposal for a unique holiday opportunity for persons with mobility impairments;
- There are no other accommodation facilities as proposed within Devon and Cornwall.

Cllr Mansell – Ward Member – supports the application

- This is a small specialist glamping site in a secluded part of Little Haddon Farm;
- It will provide seasonal accommodation designed for persons using wheelchairs;
- There will be minimal impact upon the local landscape and highways;

- It is compliant with Policy EC9 (Tourism) on tourism outside settlements and is essential to the business and does not affect neighbouring settlements and compliments existing tourism within the area.

Planning Policy Context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The development plan for the West Somerset planning area comprises the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032, retained saved policies of the West Somerset District Local Plan (2006) Somerset Minerals Local Plan (2015) and Somerset Waste Core Strategy (2013).

Relevant policies of the development plan are listed below.

West Somerset Local Plan to 2032

OC1	Open Countryside development
EC9	Tourism outside settlements
EC11	Agriculture
CF1	Maximising access to recreational facilities
NH13	Securing high standards of design
SC1	Hierarchy of settlements
EC1	Widening and strengthening the local economy
DM/1	Mixed-Use Development
TR2	Reducing reliance on the private car

Retained saved policies of the West Somerset Local Plan (2006)

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T/7 Non-Residential Development Car Parking

Community Infrastructure Levy

The proposal is not liable for CIL.

Determining issues and considerations

Local Plan policy.

The site is a farm located outside of recognised settlement limits so policies OC1 (Open Countryside developments), EC9 (Tourism outside of settlements) and TR2 (Reducing the Reliance on Private Cars) are relevant. The site is within the open countryside which includes all land outside of existing settlements, where development is not generally appropriate. In exceptional circumstances, development may be permitted where this is beneficial for the community and local economy.

Policy OC1 makes clear that development in the open countryside (land not adjacent or in close proximity to the major settlements, primary and secondary villages) will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that either:

- Such a location is essential for a rural worker engaged in eg: Agricultural, Forestry, Horticulture, Equestrian or Hunting employment, or;
- It is provided through the conversion of existing, traditionally constructed buildings in association with employment or tourism purposes as part of a work/live development, or;
- It is new-build to benefit existing employment activity already established in the area that could not be easily accommodated within or adjoining a nearby settlement identified in policy SC1, or;
- It meets an ongoing identified local need for affordable housing in the nearby settlement which cannot be met within or closer to the settlement, or;
- It is an affordable housing exceptions scheme adjacent to, or in close proximity to, a settlement in the open countryside permit.

The proposal does not satisfy any of the criteria under Policy OC1 (as listed above). Bullet points 1, 2, 4 and 5 are not applicable to this proposal. In respect of bullet point 3, the proposal does not benefit existing employment activity already established in the area and no case has been made to demonstrate that the proposal could not be easily accommodated within or adjoining a nearby settlement identified in policy SC1. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy OC1 of the adopted Local Plan.

Policy OC1 has a general presumption against new residential development in open countryside locations, noting that "dispersed development disproportionately increases transport demand which can usually only be fulfilled by use of the private car. The local road network is largely composed of single-lane country roads.

Policy TR2 that seeks to reduce reliance upon the private car. As no public transport options are available to access the site it is considered very likely that any new holiday accommodation would necessitate a reliance on the use of the private car and as such the location is considered to be unsustainable. There is therefore

an in principle conflict with the proposal as per policy OC1.

POLICY EC9 (Tourism outside of settlements), identifies that tourism development outside settlements will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that -

- The proposed location is essential to the business and that it could not be located elsewhere, and;
- It does not adversely affect the vitality and viability of the neighbouring settlements, and;
- It complements existing tourism service and facility provision in neighbouring settlements and surrounding area without generating new unsustainable transport patterns.

Currently the only farming is sheep grazing on pasture land of which the applicants have 18 acres. There are no other farm diversification activities at the site (see above for land uses). The application does not satisfy the criteria of Policy EC9. Being located outside a settlement, it is not essential to the functioning of the remainder of the land. The policy seeks to allow for the provision of additional tourist attractions outside existing settlements subject to environmental and viability safeguards. It is not clear though that this proposal would in anyway complement existing tourism service and facility provision. It is therefore considered that the proposal does not meet the requirements of policy EC9.

Policy EC11 (Agriculture – Farm Diversification) is not relevant to this application because the proposal is not considered to be farm diversification. The farm only operates sheep grazing on 18 acres of land. Whilst there may have been other sites that have approved similar rural tourism, last year Somerset West and Taunton Council declared a ‘Climate Emergency’ with implications ranging across all the Council work areas. In response, Strategic Planning colleagues have produced a Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience (CNCR) Plan which notes that isolated rural locations are highly dependent upon the private motorcar.

Therefore the application fails to comply with policies OC1, TR2, EC9 and EC11 of the Somerset West Local Plan.

Landscape and Visual Impact

This application for 2 lodges consists of a timber base with canvas walls and waterproof canvas roof. It is proposed that they are used seasonally, with the canvas being put away in the off-season, and the base remaining in situ until the following season. The lodges would be placed on the site from March to November each calendar year. The field around each lodge would be used for horse grazing, for parties bringing their horses with them and then revert to grazing land in the off-season. This is claimed by the applicant to have a lower impact than a permanent structure, and it would be capable of being removed quickly. However, it is considered that the proposed lodges are large and appear more permanent. Even though the material remains as canvas, the scale of the structure would provide accommodation for up to 6 people. Also associated with the proposal is an outdoor decking area and a parking area outside each lodge. The site lies in an attractive area of open countryside. While there is development in the surrounding area, this is associated with rural activities, and as such is expected to be

encountered in such a location. It is considered that the impact of the lodges and their associated activities would have an undesirable impact on the landscape.

The revised proposal for only 2 such units, would overcome concerns in the previous application about the urbanisation of the area. The strengthening of the southern boundary with associated planting would address the glimpses of views into the site from the road.

The Landscape Officer has identified that the landscape plan has been submitted to an inaccurate scale and also that native trees should be planted with the Amelanchier replacement with *Acer campestre* and the *Sorbus aria* with *Sorbus aucuparia*. The agent has submitted a revised plan with correct scale and amended the proposed tree planting as recommended by the Landscape Officer. The Landscape Officer also recommends that if approval is granted, a hedgerow management plan should be produced, showing how the existing hedgerows will be managed over the next 20 years. This could be achieved by condition such as:

"Prior to development commencing, a hedgerow management plan shall be produced, detailing the existing hedgerows to be managed over the next 20 years. To maintain those benefits the applicants will undertake an assessment of the existing hedgerow and from that assessment produce a 20 year management plan that encourages greater diversity of species along with favouring larger growing tree species as maiden trees. The plan will show how, through management and maintenance, the hedgerow can provide longer term visual screening of the proposed development, as well as increasing its biodiversity interest. Once agreed the planting as recommended shall be undertaken within the first available planting season and maintained thereafter in accordance with the approved management plan".

The proposed use of grass matting and Hoggin permeable surface would ensure that when the lodges are removed from the land it would turn back to an agricultural field.

All of these factors are considered acceptable and enable the removal of the previous objection on landscape grounds. The previous concerns of officers have now been addressed. Consequently the previous landscape objection is removed. It is recommended that the above referenced condition should be placed on any permission granted.

Highways

The proposed access to all the lodges is via the existing gate. In terms of vehicle impact on the local highway network, given the seasonal use of the lodges, it is unlikely to have a significant harmful impact on local traffic generation. Adequate visibility splays could be provided by condition if approval were to be granted..

Drainage and Utilities

Surface water drainage would be dealt with by way of a soakaway and foul drainage by means of a septic tank.

Conclusions

The application is considered to be in conflict with policy OC1, as it proposes new development in an open countryside location. This would generate unsustainable travel patterns in a remote location with only single lane public highways to access the site. No detailed business case has been provided to support a departure from adopted local plan policies giving reasons for the proposed location. Accordingly it is considered that the proposed development and application cannot be supported in its current form and is recommended for refusal on the basis of policy conflict.

In preparing this report the planning officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

Contact Officer: Mr C Mitchell



