

**STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE**

9 September 2021

Application No:	SMD/2021/0272	
Location	Sky Cottage, Top Road, Biddulph Moor, ST8 7JR	
Proposal	Use of land for siting a tourist Shepherd Hut	
Applicant	Mr R Whiston	
Agent	Gez Willard, WW Planning	
Parish/ward	Biddulph	Date registered: 9 th June 2021
If you have a question about this report please contact: Chris Johnston email: Christopher.johnston@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk		

REFERRAL

This application has been called to committee at the request of Councillor John Jones to assess the impact on local tourist facilities.

1. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

2.1 The application site is in the open countryside about half a kilometre to the north-east of Biddulph Moor village and comprises part of a small caravan site on the east side of Top Road and also next to the Rudyard Road junction. It has five pitches in a row for touring caravans (with adjacent hard-standings for the cars) close to the eastern edge (the back edge) of the property and is located between the end pitch and the south boundary of the site. There is an existing vehicular access off Top Road which leads to the five pitches and the application site. Sky Cottage (a dwelling) lies immediately to the north of the caravan site and there are also two outbuildings, one of which has an approval to be used as a facilities/toilets block for the caravans and the other has an approval to be used as a holiday let unit. The field in front of the caravan pitches, towards the road, appears to be in continued agricultural use with sheep present.

2.2 The area surrounding the property comprises open fields to the east and north and a farm with farmhouse and farm buildings a short distance to the south. To the other side of Top Road to the west is a field then a dwelling which is approx. 60m from the road. The land at the property is on a gentle slope heading upwards from the road towards the east but then drops to the other side of the site further towards the east. The land drops downwards towards the village to the west from the road.

2.3 The site is in the Green Belt but is not affected by any other formal allocations or designations.

3. THE APPLICATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

3.1 This is a full planning application for the use of part of the caravan site for the siting of a mobile “shepherd hut” type holiday let. Floor plans of the hut have been provided which show it would be of similar size to a standard touring caravan and would have a bedroom, living/kitchen area and shower room. The application forms state there would be 15 sq.m of accommodation. Details of the design and colour are not yet determined. It would be placed at the end of the existing row of five caravan pitches.

3.2 The application includes a Planning Statement which states the following:

“The application site would be connected to the existing chemical waste disposal point and site drains and water supply on the licensed caravan site.”

“The applicant seeks to link with and offer a complementary tourism offer to that offered by the adjacent caravan site. There are considered to be 3 main customer types for the proposed Shepherd Hut:

-Tourists who are friends or family of a family using the adjoining caravan site but who may not have their own caravan or indeed car.

-Tourists who may seek out glamping type sites because they have no car or have an electric car for which there is no foreseeable prospect of having sufficient battery power or duration to tow a caravan.

-Tourists seeking a different holiday experience to a traditional caravan.”

“The UK camping Alliance released a report in February 2019 which set out some of the economic benefits of camping to the economy. The report was pre to the Covid pandemic and by common acceptance the findings in the report are now likely to be amplified. The report identifies the following:

-Visitors who stayed in rented and touring accommodation spent on average, £68 (on eating/drinking in surrounding area), £18 (on recreation/entertainment in surrounding area) and £16 (visitor attractions).

NB Based on this, if the shepherd's hut at Sky View was occupied for 300 days of the year, this could potentially bring approx £30,600 in tourism spend in the local Staffordshire Moorlands economy, per year.

-The UK holiday park and campsite sector makes a substantial contribution to the UK tourism economy, generating £9.3bn in visitor expenditure, equivalent to £5.3bn GVA and supporting 171,448 FTE jobs.

-The UK holiday park and campsite sector accounted for 8% of the tourism sector's

GVA.

-Visitors to UK holiday parks and campsites stayed up to 74% longer and spent up to 60% more than the national tourism average."

"The report also notes health and well being effects as follows:

-Glamping operators support local communities health and wellbeing – by promoting wider community health and fitness with cycle and walking routes, making the most of nature.

-Health and wellbeing was also improved with visitors reporting doing more exercise and feeling more relaxed when staying on a holiday park or campsite. This is supported by holiday park/campsite operators who or support a range of health and wellbeing activities for their visitors."

3.3 The application file including the plans and consultation responses can be found on the following Council weblink:

<http://publicaccess.staffs Moorlands.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=147745>

4. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

SMD/2020/0646: Formation of new vehicular access and hardstandings for touring caravans, and conversion and extension of existing outbuildings to create 1no. holiday let and toilet facilities. Approved 04.02.21.

SMD/2021/0327: Formation of a pond (between the caravan pitches and the road). Pending.

5. PLANNING POLICIES RELEVANT TO THE DECISION

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted Sept 2020)

5.1 The Development Plan comprises the Local Plan Development Document (adopted September 2020).

5.2 The following Local Plan policies are relevant to the application:

- SS1 Development Principles
- SS10 Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
- E4 Tourism and Cultural Development
- DC1 Design Considerations
- DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Revised (July 2021)

5.3 The following sections of the NPPF (2021) are particularly relevant to this application:

- 2: Achieving sustainable development
- 4: Decision making

- 6: Building a Strong Competitive Economy
- 12: Achieving well-designed places
- 13: Protecting Green Belt Land

6. CONSULTATIONS

Neighbour letters	Expiry date for comments: 16/07/2021
Site Notice Posted	25/06/2021
Press Notice	N/A

Public response to consultation

6.1 No letters received.

Biddulph Town Council

6.2 Support the proposal.

Local Highways Authority (Staffordshire County Council)

6.3 No objection.

SMDC Environmental Health

6.4 No objection subject to standard conditions

Severn Trent Water

6.5 No objection.

SMDC Waste Collection Service

6.6 No issues regarding waste collections

7. OFFICER COMMENT AND PLANNING BALANCE

7.1 The main issues relate to:

- Whether or not the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- The principle of the proposal in terms of whether or not it amounts to sustainable development.
- The Impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- The Impact on residential amenity.
- The impact on highway safety.

The principle of the proposal in terms of the Green Belt

7.2 The application site is deemed to be in the countryside as it is outside of the development boundaries of the District, drawn around towns and large villages, as shown in the Local Plan. The site is also in the Green Belt. Policy SS10 outlines the Local Plan strategy for the countryside and states there will be strict control over inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Paragraphs 149 and 150 of the NPPF outline the exceptional forms of development which are deemed to not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Paragraph 149 relates to buildings but the shepherd hut is not deemed to be a “building” as it is a mobile structure that is not significantly fixed to the ground, so this paragraph would not apply. Paragraph 150 sets out that “certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it” and lists “material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds)”. Therefore, the proposal would be deemed to not be inappropriate providing the openness of the Green Belt is preserved.

7.3 The application site is completely open, comprising part of a field next to caravan pitches for touring caravans and hard-standings for associated towing cars. It is considered the placing in part of an open field a shepherd hut structure of similar scale, dimensions and height as a caravan would reduce the openness of the Green Belt and therefore the proposal is deemed to be inappropriate development which by definition in the NPPF, is harmful to the Green Belt.

7.4 It is acknowledged that some level of harm to the openness of the Green Belt has been caused by the presence of touring caravans on an adjacent area of the same field. However, it must also be pointed out that planning permission is not required for the use of land for up to five touring caravans providing a licence from the Caravan Club has been obtained, which is the case with the caravan site within the applicant’s ownership. Furthermore, the proposed shepherd hut is considered to lead to a greater level of harm than the caravans due to the more permanent nature of the shepherd hut which appears would be in place all year whereas touring caravans would be of a more transient nature, stationed on the site temporarily, their presence fluctuating with the seasons.

7.5 The impact of a proposed shepherd hut on a completely open piece of land in the Green Belt in the District has been tested at the planning appeal stage recently. A similar proposed shepherd hut on an open piece of land adjacent to Station Road in Rushton Spencer was the subject of an appeal which was dismissed on 17th February 2021 due to the harm to the openness of the Green Belt (reference SMD/2020/0249). The Inspector commented *“although relatively modest in size, the shepherd’s hut would be a solid man-made structure, and it would be visible from the adjacent road and public footpath. As a result of its scale and mass the openness of the Green Belt would be reduced. The site at present is free from buildings and other structures and so compared to the site at present, the proposal would reduce the openness of the Green Belt.”*

7.6 Although it is accepted that each proposal should be judged on its own individual merits, there are significant similarities with the current proposal and the one dismissed at appeal in that they both involve a structure of similar size and form placed on an open area of land visible from the road. The Council’s assessment that

the current proposal would be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt and is therefore inappropriate development is consistent with the appeal decision.

7.7 The NPPF states that inappropriate development in the Green Belt which harms its openness should be refused unless there are any “very special circumstances” which are considered to outweigh the level of harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

7.8 The application statement outlines the economic benefits of the proposal and main benefits of the scheme are outlined in the details of the proposal part of the report above. It is accepted that the provision of a shepherd hut holiday let would be a benefit to the local economy via spending by visitors/tourists at local shops, pubs/eating establishments, tourist attractions and other local businesses. However, whilst the caravan site owners would also benefit, the proposal does not seem to appear to lead to any extra local employment or any other benefits to the area, economic or other. The shepherd hut would appear to accommodate a maximum of two persons only, whereas touring caravans often accommodate families. In comparison with the existing five caravan pitches and approved holiday let in the converted building on the same caravan site, the local economic benefits of this particular proposal would be considered to be marginal and would not amount to “very special circumstances” which would outweigh the harm identified to the openness of the Green Belt.

7.9 For the above reasons, it is considered the proposal would be deemed to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore harmful to its openness and is therefore contrary to Section 13 of the NPPF which seeks to protect the Green Belt and is also in this respect contrary to Local Plan Policy SS10.

Sustainability

7.10 The application is viewed against Policy SS10 and also Policy E4 relating to tourist-related development. Policy SS10 seeks to enhance tourist opportunities by supporting sustainable tourism developments and measures in the Churnet Valley and allowing for small-scale tourism developments in other areas, in accordance with policy E 4. The site is not in the Churnet Valley but can be deemed to be a “small-scale” tourism development.

7.11 Policy E4 states the following in the first part of the policy:

“New tourist, visitor and cultural accommodation, attractions and facilities should be developed in locations that offer, or are capable of offering either:

A) good connectivity with other tourist destinations and amenities, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling; or

B) in locations in or close to settlements where local services, facilities and public transport are available; or

C) in areas specifically identified for tourism development in the Churnet Valley Masterplan or other relevant documents.”

7.12 With regard to the above, the proposed shepherd hut would be placed within an existing caravan site which also has an approved holiday let within one of the outbuildings, so there is some compliance with criteria A. The site is not in a settlement and although it is half a kilometre from Biddulph Moor where local services (including shops and pubs), facilities and public transport exists, the site is not well connected to the village by means of transport other than the car. There is no footway along Top Road which connects the site to the village and so walking would not be a realistic means of access to the village and there is no public transport link between the site and the village. However, it would appear to be reasonably safe to cycle between the site and the village and the application states that cycle racks would be provided. Criterion C is not applicable to the case.

7.13 The agent states that shepherd hut accommodation is more likely to appeal to those who own electric cars as these cannot tow caravans. Although electric cars are seen as a sustainable mode of transport as they do not produce emissions, the shepherd hut does not appear to be restricted exclusively to guests who arrive via electric cars. The majority of car owners have petrol cars and it is expected a vast majority of the shepherd hut guests would be arriving via cars that produce emissions. This counts against the sustainability credentials of the scheme.

7.14 Overall, despite the site being not very well connected to the nearest services and facilities and public transport, it is considered the proposal broadly complies with the first part of Policy E4 by virtue of its location within an existing tourist facility i.e. a licensed caravan site.

7.15 Part 2 of Policy E4 does not apply to the proposal as it relates to “all other development” that does not fall under Part 1. The final part of Policy applies to all proposed tourist-related development and states the following:

“New accommodation, attractions and facilities should:

A) support the provision and expansion of tourist, visitor and cultural facilities in the rural areas where needs are not met by existing facilities; and

B) all development shall be of an appropriate quality, scale and character compatible with the local area, protect the residential amenity of the area, enhance the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area and shall not harm interests of acknowledged importance.”

7.16 With regard to criterion A, the Council’s Regeneration Section have recently outlined there is a general demand in the District for holiday let accommodation of this type when responding to other recent holiday let proposals. With regard to criterion B, there is nothing in the application that would lead to any enhancement of the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area. In terms of heritage and biodiversity impacts, these would be considered to be neutral given the lack of heritage assets in the area and also that the shepherd hut would be connected to existing means of drainage in an area with no apparent protected species of any real significant biodiversity interest.

7.17 With regard to landscape impact, the caravan site is in an exposed ridge-like location with no significant screening from the road. A scheme of planting along the

road was approved under the previous permission for the holiday let conversion and access works but does not appear to have been carried out and the shepherd hut would not only be visible from the road but would increase the scope of development at the site in conjunction with the touring caravans and extended outbuildings. When the caravans are not present (a likely occurrence during the Winter or “out-of-season” times of year), the shepherd hut would present itself as a permanent structure that is “out on a limb” and detached from the complex of buildings further to the north, comprising the dwelling and two outbuildings. It is considered the proposal would in fact lead to some degree of harm to the landscape for this reason due to the detachment from the existing buildings in an exposed and not well screened location. The proposal is considered to not comply with criterion B of the final part of Policy E4 and therefore, overall, due to the harm to the landscape, compliance with Policy E4 has not been complied with as a whole.

The impact on the character and appearance of the area

7.18 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan states that all development should be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance.

7.19 Policy DC3 seeks to protect the character and appearance of landscapes and settlement settings.

7.20 The application does not include any details of the elevations or materials of the shepherd hut including its colour but layout drawings and total floorspace have been provided which give some idea of its general appearance. For the reasons given above in the previous paragraphs of this report, there is sufficient information given for the Council to consider that the form of structure provided and in the specific siting given that the development would lead to a significantly harmful impact on the character and appearance of the area. There would appear to be no other similar structures in the area and it would be visually prominent from the road with no details of any proposed vegetation planting to assimilate it into the landscape. A proposed siting closer to the more permanent buildings to the north or even within the complex of buildings would have reduced the visual impact but instead, as previously mentioned, it would appear detached from other development and visually exposed particularly when caravans are not present at the site. Furthermore, it would appear the longer elevations would be facing the road due to its orientation, further increasing its prominence from the road. From the east, there are no nearby roads and the public footpaths are a sufficient distance from the site and on lower ground, so the shepherd hut would be less harmfully prominent when viewed from this direction.

7.21 The site is within a “Gritstone Uplands” landscape as defined in the Council’s “Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment” report which describes this area as having an “open, moorland feel with sparse vegetation” and which is also characterised by the long-ranging views. The nature of the surrounding landscape would lead the structure, albeit not a large structure, as being of increased visibility and prominence. As the proposal, due to its siting, is deemed to be harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding rural area and character of the wider

“Gritstone Uplands” landscape, the proposal therefore also does not comply with either Policy DC1 or Policy DC3 of the Local Plan.

The impact on the residential amenities of the area

7.22 Policy DC1 states that all development should protect the amenity of the area, including residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, visual impact, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour and light pollution.

7.23 The nearest dwelling outside of the property would be located 40 metres from the proposed shepherd hut and therefore the occupants would not encounter any light provision or privacy issues. Noise can be an issue from holiday let accommodation, but not in relation to the level of noise expected from a working farm. The next nearest dwelling is 40 metres to the other side of the road and no closer to the shepherd hut than the caravan pitches and approved converted holiday let. The Environmental Health Section do not raise any concerns with the proposal in terms of the impacts on residential amenity in the area with the safeguard of conditions. The proposal would not have any significant greater impact on the living conditions and residential amenities of the nearest residential properties in the area in comparison with the operation of the current caravan site. The proposal would comply with Policy DC1 in this respect.

The impact on highway safety

7.24 It is not considered the addition of a two-person shepherd hut holiday let would lead to a significant increase in vehicle movements on surrounding roads and the current access, although deemed to be more problematic for cars towing caravans, can accommodate the predicted increase in car movements safely. Furthermore, the recent planning permission includes improvements to the access to the caravan park.

Planning Balance & Conclusions

7.25 The proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would by definition, be harmful to its openness. It would also be harmful to the character and appearance of the exposed and open rural location mainly by virtue of its siting, detached from the more permanent buildings clustered together at the property. It is not considered that the local economic benefits brought by this tourist accommodation proposal would outweigh the harms identified. The proposal would not comply with policies SS10, E4, DC1 or DC3 of the Local Plan and would also not be in line with Sections 12 and 13 of the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and therefore the application should be refused.

8. RECOMMENDATION

A That planning permission be REFUSED for the following reasons:

1. The change of use of the site for the siting of a shepherds hut would fail to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The proposal is therefore deemed to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the Council does not consider there are sufficient very special circumstances which outweigh the level of harm identified. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy SS10 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020 and Chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. The proposed shepherd hut holiday let structure, by virtue of its siting, would be harmful to the rural, open and exposed character and appearance of the surrounding area and “Gritstone Upland” landscape. The proposal would therefore not comply with policies SS10, E4, DC1 and DC3 of the Council’s Local Plan (adopted September 2020) and is not in line with Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

B. In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee’s decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions/in formatives/planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Head of Development Services has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Planning Applications Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee’s Decision.

Informative

1. It is considered that the proposals are unsustainable and do not conform with the provisions of the NPPF. It is considered that the applicant is unable to overcome such concerns and thus no amendments to the application were requested.

Site Plan



