

MEMORANDUM

To : MR A PRIOR, PRINCIPAL PLANNING OFFICER
From : MANDY NEILL, SENIOR LANDSCAPE OFFICER
Tel : 01432 260150 My Ref :
Date : 5 JULY 2012 Your Ref : DMS/110773/F – RESIDENTIAL
DMS/120982/F - TRACK

LANDSCAPE CONSULTATION RESPONSE

SITE: LAND AT DORSTONE PRENTRE LANE, DORSTONE, HR3 6AU

PROPOSAL: TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION, NEW ACCESS TRACK AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE

The site was visited 8 June 2012. It is noted that the track, two caravans and yurts and WET system are already on site.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The site is located approx. 1km north west from the village of Dorstone. It is open countryside, elevated above the village on Dorstone Hill. This ridge runs north west to south east, parallel to the River Wye on the northern side. There are no public footpaths crossing the site, however both the Herefordshire Trail and Three Rivers ride long distance trails pass close to the site. Other sensitive landscape features nearby include Arthur's Stone burial Chamber and Moccas Park National Nature Reserve. Dorstone Hill Wood to the south of the site is designated ancient woodland. The landscape character of the site is wooded hills and farmlands, with enclosed moors and commons to the north (on the ridge top). The site is typical of the key landscape characteristics, being medium to large scale upstanding wooded landscapes with a sloping topography and well defined character.

LANDSCAPE IMPACT

Temporary residential use – The introduction of caravans and associated residential paraphernalia can have significant negative impacts on the landscape character. The presence of living vehicles/caravans, cars, storage structures, toilets, vegetable plots and other domestic items have changed the character of the site - from open pastoral fields, which were wholly agricultural in character to domestic. There are occasional glimpsed views of the site through hedgerows and across the sloping topography, particularly from gateways in close proximity to the site, of this development that is domestic, not agricultural, in character. The WET system and levelling works that have been carried out are rather permanent alterations to this naturally sloping site, not in-keeping with the temporary planning permission that is sought. It is agreed that the lowest corner of the land holding has been chosen to locate this development and that this does reduce the landscape impact. Overall, however, the fundamental change to the appearance and character of the countryside is contrary to UDP policy LA2.

Access track – The access track constructed on site is rather intrusive in the landscape as a new, engineered feature cutting across the open field. It would have been preferable for a lighter construction to be used, such as just two tyre tracks, and minimal level area for turning. It is acknowledged, however, that it does follow the natural topography, without cutting into the land and that there has been an attempt to establish grass down the centre. Together with sensitive tree planting, this will help to soften the impact of the track in the long run. This development does not significantly alter the wider landscape.

It is noted that the transport officer has concerns about highway safety if there is an intensive business use of the site. To meet visibility requirements a significant length of hedgerow would need to be removed. This amount of hedgerow loss would result in a major change to the landscape character of the rural lane. This is not something that conservation could support, and although replacement hedgerow could be planted on a new alignment, the lane would be permanently altered. It would require a survey of its habitat value to determine whether it qualifies as important under the Hedgerow Regulations. If this increased visibility splay is to form part of the development, then the details should be provided as part of the application, not follow later as a condition, because the loss of hedgerow would be contrary to landscape and nature conservation policies within the UDP.

Other activities – Both of these planning applications refer to a range of different activities that are planned for the site. All of these will have an impact on altering the landscape. It includes proposals for new forestry (garden, shrubs, broadleaf, fruit trees and coppice), managed open space, woodland nature reserve, keeping livestock (sheep, horses, cattle, wild fowl), growing fruit and vegetables, bee keeping, pond creation (already a WET system installed), possible hydro-electric power, camping (Go Lightly Yurts), employee accommodation (2 caravans), a parent and child group (through the summer) and 'skill sharing courses' (rural crafts). All this on a 23 acre site.

The submitted Landscape Plan is quite detailed and thorough. If the whole scheme is well done and the management timelines work out (which cover years 0-15+), it could be a very good conservation business and sustainable use of the land. This is an unusual application and difficult to assess the changes in planning terms, particularly from an enforcement point of view.

Woodland creation is one of the major features of the proposed changes to the site. This is subject to a Forestry Commission (FC) grant funding bid and the council will be consulted as part of that process. It is understood that details of the woodland planting have changed from that submitted with the planning application, following a meeting between the applicant and the FC Woodland Officer. Ideally any tree planting proposals should work in tandem with any planning conditions. The overall principal is of new woodland planting that will be all native trees and shrubs and the future management will be a mixture of pure coppice plots, coppice with standards or pure high forest broadleaf woodland. This would be suitable to the landscape character of the area and meet the management guidelines of restoring the balance of woodland cover.

Cumulative impact – The landscape effects of each of these planning applications individually may be judged of relatively low significance, but when taken together with the effects of other activities proposed for the site, the effects become more significant. The effects on the overall character of the landscape will change, both visually and physically and in the perceptual attributes of the site and its use. All or parts of these changes could have both negative and positive impacts. Some of the development proposed for the site is outside of the planning system, other aspects are long term proposals, the success of which can not necessarily be predicted.

CONCLUSION

There is no landscape objection to the track application as it stands, provided that no additional hedgerow clearance is required for a visibility splay.

The residential use application is contrary to UDP Policy LA2. The negative landscape impacts of residential use need to be weighed against the need for seasonal workers for the business requirements of Pen-y-Bwr Farm and Go Lightly Yurts Ltd. It is noted that no change of use for camping / tourism has been applied for.