

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
CASTLE MORPETH LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Castle Morpeth Local Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber - County Hall on Monday, 12 June 2023 at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT

J Beynon (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

L Darwin
R Dodd
M Murphy
D Towns

S Dickinson
J Foster
G Sanderson
R Wearmouth

OFFICERS

T Crowe
R Laughton
L Little
R Murfin
E Sinnamon
R Soulsby
A Wall

Solicitor
Senior Planning Officer
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Director of Housing & Planning
Planning Manager
Planning Officer
Environmental Health Officer

Around 31 members of the press and public were present.

1 MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED that the Membership and Terms of Reference for the Castle Morpeth Local Area Committee as agreed by Council at the meeting on 17 May 2023 be noted.

2 PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED AT PLANNING MEETINGS

Councillor J Foster, Vice-Chair Planning in the Chair advised of the procedure to be followed during the planning part of the meeting. It was confirmed that Members have viewed the site visit videos in advance of the meeting.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bawn, Dunn and Jones.

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4 **DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The report requested the Committee to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications.

5 **22/04089/FUL** **Erection of 2x detached two bed bungalows** **56 Station Road, Stannington, Northumberland, NE61 6NH**

An introduction to the report was provided by R Soulsby with the aid of a power point presentation.

Councillor Tolson addressed the Committee speaking on behalf of Stannington Parish Council (SPC) in objection to the Committee. His comments included the following:-

- Objective 5 of the Stannington Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) was to ensure each settlement in the Plan area maintained its identity with a recognition in the Plan of the differences between the settlements and the need to reflect local character in design. This remained the true representation of SPC and residents.
- Policy 10, design and character development proposals would be expected, where relevant, to demonstrate how they would respect the context of the site and its surroundings, rural character, historic setting and context.
- The proposed development was a continued and unwelcome urbanisation of the settlement.
- SNP also stated that Stannington Station had a different character to Stannington Village. It had open views across to the countryside and these were very important to people in the area to retain the agricultural feel of the settlement. The rural context was a very important factor to consider in any future development proposals with Stannington Station within the Green Belt.
- Whilst the development was within the inset boundary it would block open views of the countryside and whilst not directly in the Green Belt impinges upon it and was considered harmful.
- The current sewerage system was failing and was not acceptable however it was recognised that the applicant does address and mitigate this.
- Stannington Station was fast becoming a village and if development continued local facilities and services would not be able to sustain the growth.
- Policies QOP1 and QOP2 of the Northumberland Local Plan in relation to design principles and good design and amenity had not been applied.
- Development had been supported in the past however further development would spoil the rurality of the area and this had not been taken into account.

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L Coleman, applicant, addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. Her comments included the following:-

- The application was for a private development to build a bungalow for herself and her husband and a second bungalow for her daughter and family and was not a commercial venture.
- The majority of objections were from people who were new to the area and were themselves living in recent new build properties on Station Road.
- There were issues with the drainage and sewage infrastructure on the road however their land had already in place a sustainable drainage system which meant that all of their sewage, household and storm water went into a treatment plant with the clean water fed into a well-established wildlife pond and then gradually fed into the burn at the south of their land. This was completely separate from the main sewerage system and would service the new bungalows.
- The recent SNP was consulted on and agreed by residents. An inset boundary line was drawn around Station Road to prevent urban sprawl, protect Green Belt but also to allow limited development and therefore promoting growth.
- The bungalows would not be visible from Station Road and therefore would not impact the views over the Green Belt and countryside in keeping with the character and rural feel of the area and also in line with the SNP.
- They had lived on Station Road for 20 years with their grandchildren attending the village school. They support all local amenities and were passionate about protecting the environment and wildlife and had planted over 1000 trees and native hedging.
- The project was not for financial gain but to realise their dream of returning their horses to the land, tidy up the site and enjoy their retirement surrounded by family.

It was clarified that a number of previous appeal decisions referenced the rural character of the area and the inset boundary supported that. The area was surrounded by Green Belt, however this development did not impact on it as it was screened by existing development on Station Road. It was also a previously developed site.

Councillor Wearmouth proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application as outlined in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Dodd.

In debating the application, Members stated that whilst they felt that Stannington Station was losing some of its character and becoming overdeveloped that they had no justifiable planning reasons to refuse the application. A vote was taken to approve the application in line with the recommendation in the report as follows: FOR 8; AGAINST 0; ABSTAIN 1.

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report.

**Proposal for widening and surfacing of access track
Land East Of The Retreat, Cresswell, Northumberland**

An introduction to the report was provided by R Soulsby, Senior Planning Officer with the aid of a power point presentation.

Councillor D Laing, addressed the Committee speaking on behalf of Cresswell Parish Council (CPC). His comments included the following information:-

- The application was for the widening of the 18th Century carriageway previously used by the Hall and now used as a footpath for residents and holiday makers. There was no need for it to be upgraded for use by HGVs unless there was an alternative motive i.e. to get caravans on the area.
- He emphasised that residents were against this development with in excess of 100 people saying no to it and asked Members to look at it again.
- The application purported to be to allow improved vehicular access for emergency vehicles to the Pele Tower, this was not needed as they would access it by the Village Green and not the caravan site.
- CPC did not understand why Park Resorts would wish to carry this work out unless there was an ulterior motive.
- The trees shielded the caravans from the village and formed a natural barriers and there was no reason for HGVs to access this area.

J Bailey addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application on behalf of the applicant. His comments included the following:-

- The proposal was to widen the carriageway from 1.7m to 3.7m utilising a new system which would match the existing and retain the woodland.
- No lighting would be provided, no caravans were to be sited and no trees felled in order for the track to be widened. The Woodland Arborist had recommended some trees for removal for good management of the area.
- In relation to the heritage impact on the boundary wall and the Pele Tower, the character of the area would remain and Historic England had no objection. The Building Conservation Officer had advised that there would be less than substantial harm and the biodiversity of the site would be improved as the woodland was in poor condition and lacked diversity.
- The additional planting to provide additional screening and woodland management plan would add biodiversity and ensure that the woodland was maintained and protected for 30 years should the application be approved.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:-

- The application was for the widening of an existing track from 1.7m to 3.7m. Officers did not look at why the track was required and there was no accompanying information. A comprehensive woodland management plan was conditioned as part of the proposed recommendation and the site would be protected by this Plan. If a future application was received for the site then the woodland management plan would be a material

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consideration and appropriate weight would be given to it. The application before Members at this time was only to widen a track and protect woodland.

- If a further application was received then this would be assessed against all current policy along with any site constraints, the significant woodland designation, ecology etc and would also be considered. The Local Planning Authority (LPA) could not prevent further applications being received.
- The reason for the application itself was not known and was not required to be known. Applications must be assessed against up to date policies.
- Due to the significant public interest and objections from the Parish Council the application had been referred to the Director of Planning and Chair to decide if the application should be brought to Committee.
- It was clarified that whilst the woodland was of importance it was not classed as ancient woodland.
- The 2018 application for the track with parking and hardstanding was withdrawn before a decision had been made. The 2002 application was refused and other applications in 2020 had been withdrawn.
- Ecology had advised that the habitat was of importance but was of poor condition, they welcomed the woodland management plan which could be conditioned and good mitigation to be provided as part of the application as it was recognised that some areas were now in a neglected state. Consultation had also been carried out with the Conservation Officer as the site was adjacent to listed assets and they had advised that this caused some harm. A decision was required on whether the public benefit offset the harm and it was Officers view that it did due to woodland management plan bringing public benefit however it was for Members to decide if they agreed with this view.
- The application was only to widen the track and the applicant did not need to explain why this was required and therefore Officers did not have that detail. This was not material to the decision and Members should look at the facts and base their decision on those.
- A woodland management plan could be entered into without the benefit of a planning application, however if granted this would be part of a planning consent condition and it would be enforceable.
- The LPA would have a statutory duty to consider a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) if an application was submitted.

Councillor Wearmouth proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application as outlined in the report which was seconded by Councillor Dodd.

Members in debating the application recognised that whilst they were looking at the application in front of them some felt that this would be a precursor to a further application and they questioned if the benefits would outweigh the harm. In summing up Councillor Wearmouth advised that the application was for a path in a woodland which was sympathetic to its environment. It would allow for better woodland within the space which would be correctly maintained which would be beneficial in preventing further development. The potential of refusing the application and its impact on biodiversity on a suspicion of what might happen in the future was highlighted along with the subsequent probable appeal whereby the Council could incur costs.

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A vote was taken as follows: FOR 3; AGAINST 3; ABSTAIN 3. The Solicitor advised that the Chair would have the casting vote and provided clarification that a Councillor could not change their vote at this stage. As the Chair had abstained from the vote she was hesitant to use her casting vote. Further advice was provided that an alternative solution would be for Councillor Wearmouth to withdraw his proposal and Councillor Dodd agree to this in order for a new motion to be put forward as the vote had not been completed. Councillors Wearmouth and Dodd agreed to withdraw the original proposal.

Councillor Sanderson then proposed acceptance of the recommendation in the report to approve the application which was seconded by Councillor Wearmouth. A vote was taken on this proposal as follows: FOR 4; AGAINST 3; ABSTAIN 2.

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report.

7 **22/03226/COU**

Change of use of land adjacent to N1 Golf Centre for up to 20No plots to be used for the siting of accommodation (micro holiday cabins) in association with the existing business.

**Morpeth Archers Site, Tranwell Woods, Morpeth, Northumberland
NE61 6AQ**

R Laughton, Senior Planning Officer provided an introduction to the report with the aid of a power point presentation. Late representations had been received and the following summary was provided:-

- Objectors were still disappointed that amenity and ecology issues had not been added as refusal reasons;
- The submitted petition had 75 signatures, not 63;
- Morpeth Town Council had submitted an objection to the scheme stating the application was contrary to NLP Policy ENC 15d as the pods were not temporary structures; there should be equal weight given to the policies in the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan and Policy Set1; there was no evidence for demand for such a development; and there were Human Rights Implications as the scheme would interfere with an individual's enjoyment of their property.
- The agent had submitted a representation in which it was highlighted that this was not the originally chosen site with the preferred location nearer the entrance of N1 Golf. The current application resulted from discussions with the Council. There was a delicate balancing act regarding the impact to the Green Belt and the economic and business benefits. The applicant would be willing to undertake the necessary surface and foul water drainage assessments if members were willing to support the application.

S Geoghegan addressed the Committee speaking in objection to the application on behalf of 37 households and highlighting the 75 signature petition. Her comments included the following:-

- The applicant had for over 9 months failed to mention residents in the application, engage with the local community or provide requested documents to the Planning Officers.
- Residents encased the application site on the southern and eastern boundary where the site could be openly seen for 7 months of the year. It was a uniquely peaceful private area of 45 houses, had incredible biodiversity, was within the Green Belt surrounded by 3 separate old plantations which were protected under a blanket TPO. There were open boundaries to allow for the free movement of wildlife across properties assisting the wildlife corridor entering from Tranwell Woods local wildlife site and into the applicant's land.
- The ecologist had done numerous ecology and bat reports and identified the presence of priority and protected species and advised that the proposals would effectively disconnect the wildlife corridor and that even with mitigation there could be no justification for the development.
- There was now an ecology crisis point in Tranwell Woods. Saltwick Plantation was now used as a dog walking route by the residents of St Mary's causing the wildlife to leave and go into Gubeon Plantation adjacent to the application site. This was the site for the applicant's previous application which residents also objected to. It would have destroyed the plantation and ecology in and around it and as an HPI was given priority for conservation.
- In summer there was an explosion of small frogs and toads on the water logged and boggy land, which Morpeth Archers, previous users of the site, had confirmed. The site would need to be heavily drained and with cabins having to be placed on hard surfaces the site would never be capable of being returned back to its previous ecological state.
- The application had the potential for 120 holiday makers plus dogs which would significantly affect residents amenity, health and quality of life. Holiday makers would use Tranwell Woods and the surrounding plantations for walks which would add to the spill and stretch of the development and the ruin of the area.
- The proposed transport route from the golf complex to the holiday park was in direct line of the driving range with balls frequently going over this route into a residential garden with that family also being disturbed by trespassing party goers from the applicant's 10 bed roomed air bnb. This was currently being investigated by Enforcement Officers.
- The NPPF took precedent over all other planning policies and stated that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The applicant and Officer agree that non have been met. Tourism, economic and business benefit were not listed for consideration as very special circumstances.
- The Council's Leisure & Tourism advised that they would only support the application if it met planning legislation, which it did not. No evidence of need had been submitted and the economic assessment could not be taken into consideration as it was out of date and stated that it related to the previous application only.
- This was a stand-alone development in the wrong location and could be placed anywhere with Members asked to refuse the application in accordance with the recommendation.

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Councillor M Sharp addressed the Committee speaking on behalf of Mitford Parish Council (MPC) as their Vice-Chair. His comments included the following:-

- MPC strongly objected to the application of up to 20 micro holiday cabins within the Green Belt, in an open field and adjacent to protected woodland with a rich diversity of flora and fauna. It was completely inappropriate development for this location with the application stating it did not fully accord with an exception to inappropriate development but then claimed very special circumstances to justify the development.
- The hamlet of Tranwell Woods had no pedestrian footpaths, no retail amenities and a narrow 60 mph through road. There were few streetlights and highway visibility could be poor. There were no footpaths or cycleways connecting with the applicant's business and there was no public transport.
- The design statement referred to 2 person chalets, however the floor plans supplied indicated that up to 6 people could be accommodated which would mean up to 120 people on site. This was nearly double the population of Tranwell Woods and would have a significant and damaging impact on the rich variety of wildlife, ecology and biodiversity of the rural setting. Installing a few bat and bird boxes and planting a few new trees did not constitute a commitment to conserve and enhance the natural aspect of the area in line with both the NPPF and Northumberland Local Plan. This development would seriously diminish nature not enhance it.
- The application failed to explain how the cabins would be heated, how the access track would be lit at night, how urgent security concerns would be dealt with, how emergency vehicles would gain access or how refuse or foul sewage would be removed. These were all critical issues given their potential impact on the environment and residents.
- No real evidence had been provided to prove that the proposed development was essential to the operation of the current business and the claim that it would generate new jobs was challenged. Visit Northumberland estimated summer occupancy rates for holiday accommodation was around 55% and was higher at the coast but fell rapidly with distance. This accorded with anecdotal location information and building more supply did not increase demand. The proposed cabins described in the application as similar to the size of a domestic shed did not provide a wow factor to attract additional visitors. A nearby glamping site already had low occupation rates and could possibly close with the loss of 2 full time jobs if this application was approved.
- The promotion of tourism and increasing spend in the local economy were recognised as a priority but investment must be in the right location, should safeguard the countryside from encroachment and could not be to the detriment of the local habitat.
- MPC believed that on numerous levels the application afforded more harm than benefit to the Green Belt and was not considered to be sustainable development. This was the wrong development in the wrong place and the recommendation to refuse the application was supported.

C Ross, Agent on behalf of the applicant addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following:-

- Since the purchase of the golf centre the applicant had invested into the facility and transformed it to a destination for a family day out. The next

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step was to secure additional accommodation in the form of short term holiday lets on a wildlife route and close to Morpeth.

- The LPA had recognised this as a suitable site following a previous application, which had no objections and which had been well related to the Club House had been turned down. This new application now had received objections.
- The applicant would have preferred the first site, however they had offered to carry out drainage work on this site before the application was permitted thereby removing reasons 2 and 3 from the refusal.
- Development within the Green Belt was a balancing act and the development of the business and further development of the facility and situation tips in favour of the very special circumstances required.
- If Members were minded to refuse this application, he hoped that they would show their support for the previous application site.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:-

- It was accepted that any development within the Green Belt was inappropriate and would need to demonstrate very special circumstances, i.e. public or site specific benefit. Compelling evidence would be required to demonstrate that the very special circumstances had been met and in this instance it was Officers' judgement that no very special circumstances existed.
- Discussions undertaken could have the potential to resolve reasons 2 and 3 for refusal if the applicant provided information to demonstrate how these would be met.

Councillor Stewart proposed acceptance of the recommendation to refuse the application as outlined in the report, which was seconded by Councillor Darwin.

In debating the application, Members felt that whilst the rural economy needed investment, the location of the application site was not appropriate for this type of development due to it being within the Green Belt, its close proximity to dwellings and potential for increased noise with visitors using outdoor space along with the lack of local facilities. Whilst recognising the existing good facilities provided on part of the site it was considered that there would be no local benefit with this application.

A vote was taken on the proposal to refuse the application for the reasons outlined in the report was taken and it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the application be **REFUSED** permission for the following reasons:-

1. The application site lies within the Northumberland Green Belt. The proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt that would, by definition, be harmful to the Green Belt. The proposal would result in harm to the openness of the Green Belt and would be contrary to the purposes of including the land within it. Very special circumstances which outweigh harm to the Green Belt have not been demonstrated the proposed development was therefore considered to be contrary to

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Northumberland Local Plan Policies STP 1, STP 8 and ECN 16 and Chapter 13 of the NPPF.

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- 2. The application fails to demonstrate how surface water and flood risk would be appropriately mitigated on site. The application therefore conflicts with policies WAT 3 and WAT 4 of the Northumberland Local Plan, Policy Inf1 of the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 3. The application fails to demonstrate how foul sewage will be appropriately disposed of at the site. The application therefore conflicts with policies WAT 3 and WAT 4 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

8 APPEALS UPDATE

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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