

Report to be read in conjunction with the Decision Notice.

Application Ref:	3/2016/0833	 Ribble Valley Borough Council www.ribblevalley.gov.uk
Date Inspected:	13/09/2016	
Officer:	AB	
DELEGATED ITEM FILE REPORT:		REFUSAL

Development Description:	Change of use of agricultural land to camping facility for eight camping pods and associated car park and landscaping
Site Address/Location:	Land at Moorgate Farm Kenyon Lane Langho BB6 8AN

CONSULTATIONS:	Parish/Town Council
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CONSULTATIONS:	Highways/Water Authority/Other Bodies
RVBC Environmental Health:	
No objection subject to conditions.	
LCC Highways:	
No objection.	
LLFA:	
None received.	

CONSULTATIONS:	Additional Representations.
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Letters of objection have been received from 22 individual properties and refer to the following:

- Drainage, electricity and water have already been installed.
- Eight pods would result in 40 additional people.
- No mention of lighting in the application – any lighting would cause pollution.
- No facility for storage or disposal of waste.
- Site is near existing watercourses.
- Would result in significant visual harm to the landscape.
- No local amenities to attract visitors to Dinckley and users would have to travel for supplies or for entertainment.
- Increase in traffic on country roads.
- The pods would be visible from surrounding footpaths.
- This application is the start of a larger development.
- The S-bend near the entrance to the site is dangerous.
- Significant noise from music and barbeques would disturb inhabitants and local wildlife.
- The applicants no longer farm their land and the application cannot be considered diversification.
- Many other sites in the area with full amenities.
- The Wigwam business proposed is a franchise.
- Would harm the privacy and amenities of the closest property.
- The minimal accommodation encourages outdoor activities.
- Perimeter screening is very limited and will offer little protection in winter.
- The proposal is not well related to an existing settlement.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

3/2014/0390 - The erection of a building for the storage and drying of wood for biomass; tractor storage; a secure workshop and office and welfare facility to be used alongside an existing agricultural contracting business. Approved.

3/2015/0004 - Part retrospective application for the construction of a farm track. Approved.

RELEVANT POLICIES:**Ribble Valley Core Strategy:**

Key Statement DS1 – Development Strategy

Key Statement DS2 – Sustainable Development

Key Statement EN2 – Landscape

Key Statement EC1 – Business and Employment Development

Key Statement EC3 – Visitor Economy

Policy DMG1 – General Considerations

Policy DMG2 – Strategic Considerations

Policy DMG3 – Transport and Mobility

Policy DME2 – Landscape and Townscape Protection

Policy DME3 – Site and Species Protection and Conservation

Policy DMB1 – Supporting Business Growth and the Local Economy

Policy DMB3 – Recreation and Tourism Development

National Planning Policy Framework**ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT:****Proposed Development for which consent is sought:**

Planning consent is sought for the change of use of 0.55 hectares of agricultural land to a camping facility for eight camping pods with associated parking and landscaping at Moorgate Farm, Kenyon Lane, Langho. The application site is situated in an open field location approximately 230m north of the farm complex at Moorgate Farm and would be accessed by an existing field track. The site is within the Open Countryside and around 1.5km south of the Forest of Bowland AONB. The area is surrounded by countryside and the field is open and rural in character, comprising largely grassland. There is a hedge with frequent gaps traversing the southern site boundary and some mature trees to the north of the site that are outside the applicant's ownership. Some 150m to the west of the site is Kenyon Lane which also serves as a public footpath and the River Ribble is 400m northwards. The wider area is characterised by its openness with individual farmsteads and dwellings and small clusters of built development.

The proposal is for the erection of eight timber clad arch-shaped camping pods in a crescent arrangement. Each pod would measure 3.5m x 6.5m and would stand to a height of 3.2m and would have a bathroom which comprises a shower, WC and sink, and a kitchen and living area. The pods would be supported on paving slabs and would be connected to a water supply and electricity. There would be a sewage treatment plant installed to the south west of the site that each pod would be connected to. A hardstanding area would be created for the car park with footpaths leading from the car park to each pod. The car parking would accommodate up to 12 vehicles in a linear arrangement and there would be a 1.8m high close boarded timber bin store provided adjacent to the parking area.

Observations/Consideration of Matters Raised/Conclusion:

The matters to be considered in the determination of this application relate to the principle of the development, the impact of the proposed development upon surrounding landscape and the effects of the proposal upon the amenities of nearby residents, ecology and trees and highway safety.

Principle of Development

Core Strategy Key Statement EC3 relates specifically to the visitor economy stating that proposals that contribute to and strengthen the visitor economy of Ribble Valley will be

encouraged and that significant new attractions will be supported in circumstances where they will deliver overall improvements to the environment and benefits to local communities and employment opportunities. The proposed development would contribute to the tourism economy and accords with Key Statement EC3. Key Statement EC1 'Business and Employment Development states that *"Developments that contribute to farm diversification, strengthening of the wider rural and village economies or that promote town centre vitality and viability will be supported in principle"*.

The application site is located in the Open Countryside. Core Strategy Policy DMG2 requires development outside of defined settlement areas to meet at least one of six considerations one of which are the following:

4. The development is for small scale tourism or recreational developments appropriate to a rural area.

In my opinion the proposal is for a small scale tourism development of a type that is appropriate to a rural area. Policy DMB3 relates specifically to recreation and tourism development. Tourism and visitor attractions are generally supported subject to the following criteria being met:

1. *The proposal must not conflict with other policies of this plan;*
2. *The proposal must be physically well related to an existing main settlement or village or to an existing group of buildings, except where the proposed facilities are required in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction and there are no suitable existing buildings or developed sites available;*
3. *The development should not undermine the character, quality or visual amenities of the plan area by virtue of its scale, siting, materials or design;*
4. *The proposals should be well related to the existing highway network. It should not generate additional traffic movements of a scale and type likely to cause undue problems or disturbance. Where possible the proposals should be well related to the public transport network;*
5. *The site should be large enough to accommodate the necessary car parking, service areas and appropriate landscaped areas; and*
6. *The proposal must take into account any nature conservation impacts using suitable survey information and where possible seek to incorporate any important existing associations within the development. Failing this then adequate mitigation will be sought.*

In the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty the following criteria will also apply:

1. *The proposal should display a high standard of design appropriate to the area.*
2. *The site should not introduce built development into an area largely devoid of structures (other than those directly related to agriculture or forestry uses).*

These are therefore the detailed considerations that are relevant to this application and that will be discussed under appropriate headings below.

Effects Upon the Landscape/Visual Amenity

Policy DMB3 'Recreation and Tourism Development' requires development of the sort proposed to *"be physically well related to an existing main settlement or village or to an existing group of buildings, except where the proposed facilities are required in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction and there are no suitable existing buildings or developed sites available"*. The proposed development is not physically well-related to an existing main settlement or village. Additionally, it is detached from the existing farm buildings at Moorgate Farm by a distance of 230m across an open field and is not considered to be well-related to the existing group of buildings. It is therefore considered that the proposal fails to meet this consideration of Policy DMB3. In making this judgement, consideration has been given to the agent's letter dated 24th October 2016. This letter does

not dispute the fact that the proposed development site is poorly related to an existing group of buildings, however; it states that the countryside itself should be considered as 'a particular countryside attraction' as required by Policy DMB3 and that people who want to camp in the countryside do not want to be next to a range of farm buildings. In my opinion, the countryside itself cannot be considered as an attraction as this would render the locational requirements of Policy DMB3 meaningless and the use of the word "particular", meaning 'of or relating to single or specific thing', makes it clear that the Policy is referring to specific tourism attractions.

The Policy DMG2 states that 'within the open countryside development will be required to be in-keeping with the character of the landscape and acknowledge the special qualities of the area by virtue of its size, design, use of materials, the landscaping and siting'. Policy DMG2 is clear that in considering development proposals the most important consideration will be the protection, conservation and enhancement of the landscape and character of the area avoiding where possible habitat fragmentation. Key Statement EN2 states that "*the landscape and character of those areas that contribute to the setting and character of the Forest of Bowland AONB will be protected and conserved and wherever possible enhanced...As a principle the Council will expect development to be in keeping with the character of the landscape, reflecting local distinctiveness, vernacular style, scale, features and building materials*". The Borough comprises extensive areas of open countryside much of which has an intrinsic value that contributes to the quality of the landscape in the Borough and it is important to ensure development proposals do not serve to undermine the inherent quality of the landscape.

The development site is located approximately 1.5km south of the Forest of Bowland AONB and 0.4km from the River Ribble. To the immediate north of the site land levels fall towards the River Ribble by around 40m and, on the north side of the river the land rises again towards the village of Hurst Green. The application site and the surrounding area is identified as Undulating Lowland Farmland (5) in the Lancashire Landscape Character Assessment and is described as a lowland landscape that is traversed by deeply incised, wooded cloughs and gorges. There are also many mixed farm woodlands, copses and hedgerow trees and a patchwork of wood and pasture from raised viewpoints on the fells.

The pods would be erected on paving slabs that in turn would rest on compacted gravel and would be connected to a water supply, electricity and drainage and, for all intents and purposes, would be permanent structures that would operate on a year round basis. The pods timber construction would reduce their prominence in the landscape to some extent although their arched form and design would not be reflective of local vernacular and they would be seen as irregular and alien features that would be at odds with the character of the surrounding area. The use of timber materials for the proposed structures, would fail to prevent them from appearing as intrusive and alien features within a largely open landscape. The application indicates a scheme of tree planting along the site's western boundary however; vegetation, even if standard plants are used, would take some years to become effective and the trees would be bare during winter months. Furthermore, the existing trees to the north/north-west of the development site are outside the applicant's ownership and therefore the applicant has no control over their retention. The proposed parking arrangement exacerbates the schemes visual impact with the potential for a row of up to 12 vehicles in an open field location. The provision of an electricity supply to each pod would elicit concerns regarding internal and external lighting; even light spill from internal lighting in this isolated and unlit location would increase the prominence of the site at night. Taking into account the above I consider that the proposed development would result in harm to the visual appearance and character of this rural area by virtue of the style and design of the camping pods which would be at odds with the inherent characteristics of the surrounding landscape. Furthermore, the siting of the pods in an open field location detached from the main farm complex would be contrary to Policy DMB3 and would have a detrimental impact on the open, rural appearance of the field.

To the south the land is relatively flat and there are no unrestricted views afforded of the site

from Moorgate Lane. Long distance views of the buildings at Moorgate Farm can be seen from the north at Whalley Road (B6234) when approaching the village of Hurst Green from the west, however; the application site itself is screened by a tree belt. There are however more localised views of the site that can be gained from public footpaths that traverse the surrounding fields and the proposals would impact negatively on how walkers experienced the area both visually and aurally. The site is not visible from the footpath to the north. There would be views of the site from the footpath (no.9 and 11) to the east of the site but these are restricted by intervening vegetation. Yet, the site would be considerably more prominent when seen from footpath no.6 which is located approximately 150m to the west of the site and links with the popular Ribble Way footpath to the south. There are unrestricted views of the application site from footpath no.6 which would result in this footpath becoming undeniably less attractive to users contrary to Policy DMB5 of the Core Strategy.

Highways Safety

Policy DMB3 requires recreation and leisure developments to be well related to the existing highway network. The application site is within a reasonable distance of the A59, the primary strategic route, and would be predominantly served by classified roads. The scale and type of development would not result in a significant increase in traffic movement to produce any undue problems or disturbance. The County Highways Surveyor has raised no objections on highway safety grounds and the level of parking to be provided is considered appropriate to serve the development.

Residential Amenity

In terms of its impact on the residential amenity of nearby residents, the nearest property, Fair View, would be located at a distance of around 65m from the development site. There are unhindered views from Fair View towards the proposed development, however; the proposed plans indicate some proposed screen planting along the western site boundary. Any planting would take some time to become established and deciduous trees and shrubs are likely to provide limited screening during the winter months. Nonetheless, it is considered that the intervening distance would be sufficient to avoid any loss of privacy to the occupants of Fair View so as to result in an unacceptable level of residential amenity.

With regards to noise nuisance and disturbance, the Council's Environmental Health Officer is of the opinion that the proposals would not result in a statutory nuisance. However, it is important that the site is managed in order to limit noise levels during certain hours. The location of the site within the open countryside and away from any major transport routes where existing ambient noise levels can be very low means therefore that such activities can greatly impact on surrounding amenity. Should consent be granted, the Council would require the submission of a satisfactory Noise Management Plan so as to be satisfied that the site would be managed accordingly.

Effects Upon Wildlife/Ecology

In terms of its impact on local wildlife and ecology, the site comprises poor semi-improved grassland bound by hedgerows to the north and south. Poor semi-improved grassland has a very low ecological value. There are a number of ponds in the locality but it is considered that they have a low value to amphibians being open and exposed. There are no badger setts or runs on site and no setts would be disturbed as a result of the proposals. The foraging habitat at the site is very poor for bat species and it is not considered there would be a significant degradation of the foraging habitat as a result of the proposal so long as the trees and hedgerows are retained or their loss compensated for.

It is recommended that the roots of hedgerows/trees are adequately protected during development. The application proposes some additional planting of linear trees which would improve the ecological value of the site – should consent be granted, the LPA would require full details of the proposed landscaping prior to the commencement of the development. Further mitigation is recommended in the submitted ecological appraisal to prevent harm to local wildlife and, should consent be granted, the proposals would be built in accordance with the recommended mitigation measures. However, there was no conclusive evidence of

any specifically protected species regularly occurring on the site which would be negatively affected by site development following the appropriate mitigation and the proposals would generally accord with Policy DME3.

Planning Balance

Key Statement DS2 requires the Council to reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. It is noted that the application site is poorly related to existing services and facilities with the nearest Tier 1 Settlement, Langho, located around 3.5km away by road, however; in terms of its economic benefit to the rural area, the proposals are likely to generate some additional business for the nearest public houses, restaurants and shops as visitors would spend some time in the local area. The primary economic benefactor of the proposals would be the applicant who would run the camping pod business alongside the existing agricultural contracting business that operates from the farm complex.

In terms of its impact on the social dimension of sustainability, the proposals would expand the range of visitor accommodation in the Borough, supporting the intentions of Core Strategy Key Statement EC1 and EC3. Nonetheless, the site would not be accessible to all due to its location which relates poorly to existing public transport links. The nearest bus stop is located around 0.75km from the site and operates a 2-hourly service and the roads linking the site are without footpaths and street lighting. Visitors to the site are therefore likely to be highly reliant on the private motor vehicle to arrive at the site.

Thus, the aforementioned economic and public benefits that would arise from the proposed development must be weighed against the environmental impacts of the proposals. As discussed above, it is considered that the introduction of eight camping pods in this open field location would result in an unacceptable level of harm to the appearance and character of the surrounding landscape. The camping pods would be permanently retained on site and their form and design would be incompatible with the local vernacular of the area giving rise to an incongruous and unsympathetic landscape feature. Moreover, the proposals would be seen from surrounding public footpaths and public viewpoints and, whilst the application proposes some additional boundary planting, this would not completely screen the development site and the impacts of landscaping measures are seasonal and cannot be forever controlled by the Council. As such, proposed and existing trees and hedges should not be used to justify a development that would be considered to be harmful to the visual amenity of the Open Countryside.

In this case, significant weight is apportioned to the harm to the surrounding landscape that would arise from the development proposal. In my opinion any gain to the rural economy would not be offset by harm which would occur to the local landscape.

Conclusion

It is considered that the proposed camping pods, as a result of their siting, number and design/appearance, would result in a built form of development that is uncharacteristic within this traditional landscape. The proposed development would have a harmful impact upon the existing visual qualities of the open countryside. The proposal is therefore contrary to Core Strategy Policies DMG1, DME2 and DMB3 and Key Statement EN2.

RECOMMENDATION: That planning consent be refused for the following reasons:

1. The proposed camping pods, by virtue of their siting, number and design, would form over prominent and incongruous features that would appear isolated in the landscape to the detriment of the appearance and character of the Open Countryside. As such, the proposed development would be contrary to Policies DMG1, DME2 and DMB3 and Key Statement EN2 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy.