

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

17 SEPTEMBER 2020

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Members are asked to determine the planning application outlined below:

APPLICATION NO: 20/0680/10 (KL)
APPLICANT: Mr & Mrs Harper
DEVELOPMENT: 6 glamping pods with infrastructure and improvements and repairs to existing barn (additional information rec. 17/08/2020)(amended plan received 25/08/2020)
LOCATION: BLAENNANTYGROES FARM, BLAENNANTYGROES ROAD, CWMBACH, ABERDARE, CF44 0EA
DATE REGISTERED: 14/07/2020
ELECTORAL DIVISION: Cwmbach

RECOMMENDATION: Approve, subject to conditions

REASONS: The proposal for the siting a 6 no. glamping pods and associated works would enable the expansion of an existing holiday-let business within a semi-rural location. The overall use would remain compatible with surrounding land uses and, given the siting, scale, design and overall visual appearance of the proposed glamping pods, it is not considered that they would have an adverse impact upon the character and appearance of the area, the Special Landscape Area, the amenity and privacy of surrounding residential dwellings or upon highway safety in the vicinity of the site.

REASON APPLICATION REPORTED TO COMMITTEE

- The proposal is not covered by determination powers delegated to Service Director Prosperity and Development;
- Three or more letters of objection have been received.

APPLICATION DETAILS

Full planning permission is sought for the siting of 6 no. glamping pods on a parcel of land associated with Blaennantygroes Farm which is located at the most northern end of Blaennantygroes Road in the village of Cwmbach.

The pods would be sited to the south of the main dwelling and existing holiday-let cottages and to the east of the existing access track. They would be arranged in a linear fashion with access being via a new internal track to their north-eastern elevation. The pods and associated track would be accessed via the existing network of tracks within the farm.

Each pod would measure 3.3 metres in width by 6 metres in depth with a curved roof design that would measure a maximum of 3.1 metres from ground level. The pods

would be of a timber construction with timber entrance doors and upvc windows within the north-eastern side and south-eastern rear elevations (total 3 no. windows per pod). Internally, each pod would have a living/sleeping area with basic kitchen facilities for approximately 1-2 people and a small shower room/toilet facility.

An existing barn, which is located to the north of the intended pods, is also intended to be used as a shared kitchen area and bike storage for users of the pods.

A total of 6 parking spaces are proposed between the pods and the existing barn/shared facilities.

The application is accompanied by the following:

- Coal Mining Risk Assessment

SITE APPRAISAL

The site relates to a parcel of land that forms part of Blaennantygroes Farm which is located at the most northern end of Blaennantygroes Road in the village of Cwmbach. It measures approximately 0.09ha and, due to its location on a valley hillside, slopes upwards in a north-easterly direction from Blaennantygroes Road.

Access to the site is via an existing private access track off Blaennantygroes Road. An existing dwelling, 4 existing holiday-let cottages and an associated parking area are located at the top of the track with fields/paddocks being located to north, south and east.

The site is located outside of the defined settlement boundary and therefore considered to be in the open countryside. However, it is noted that there are a number of residential properties situated on the eastern side of Blaennantygroes Road, the nearest of which are approximately 50 metres away from the intended glamping pods.

The site had already been cleared and some groundworks undertaken at the time of the site assessment. The works to the barn had also already commenced.

PLANNING HISTORY

None registered within the last 10 years.

PUBLICITY

The application has been advertised by means of direct neighbour notification, through the erection of 3 site notices in the vicinity of the site and through the publication of a press notice. A total of 3 letters of objection have been received from local residents which are summarised as follows:

Access/traffic

- The road is very narrow and blind and already problematic with very limited footpath;

- There are concerns over the current usage of the road and safety of pedestrians as it stands, without this application being approved;
- Issues raised regarding speed of vehicles travelling along the road;
- The volume of traffic will be increased with usage of the road by people not familiar with the dangers the road currently encompasses;
- There are many pinch points which renders the road to single track which is not suitable for increased volume of traffic;
- There is a local convenience store at the bottom of the road where parking issues cause considerable problems to vehicles trying to access and egress Blaennantgroes Road;
- No means of escape for pedestrians using the pedestrian lane;
- The road becomes almost impassable on match days which in turn makes it difficult for emergency vehicles to progress along the road;
- Residents of dwellings along Blaennantgroes Road park their vehicles at the front of their properties, again rendering the road to single track;
- Some residents have no option other than to park illegally on corners of junctions;
- The area at the top of the road is used as a turning circle by residents however, due to the lack of parking, it is continuously used to park vehicles which results in large vehicles reversing down Blaennantgroes Road or attempting to turn in people's driveways.

Noise

- Noise echoes down the road;
- Campers, especially younger types that would be attracted to glamping, will enjoy themselves in groups;
- We could hear the men working on the groundworks talking;
- Concerns of noise, particularly at night.

Environmental Issues

- Residents have endured heavy plant and tractors using the road to prepare the site in anticipation for the planning application – much of this work has been carried out in the evening and at weekends with mud being left the road being left on occasions and no attempts to clean the road surface;
- Concerns raised with regards to the source of earth, rubble and soil being transported to the site (i.e. contaminated land);

Other

- Issues with water supply. Sub pump half way down supplies top half and is already marginal at times – a further 6 units will have further impacts;
- The supply is dependent on an electricity pumping station to ensure adequate supply of water to existing properties. When the electricity supply to the pumping station cuts out, it renders the water supply to a trickle;
- Raises questions on whether the current sewerage system is adequate to cope with the additional volume required for the proposed development without any new infrastructure being incorporated into the proposed development.

CONSULTATION

Highways – No objection or condition suggested

NRW – No objection or condition suggested

Countryside, Ecology & Landscape – The land has already been cleared of all vegetation and ecological surveys which would ordinarily be required cannot be undertaken.

The Coal Authority – No objection however further more detailed considerations of ground conditions and/or foundation design may be required as part of any building regulations application.

Welsh Water – No objection subject to standard condition and advisory notes

Public Health & Protection – No objection subject to standard conditions

Western Power Distribution – A separate application will need to be made to WPD if a new connection or a service alteration is required.

No other comments have been received.

POLICY CONTEXT

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan

The site lies outside the defined, fixed settlement boundary of Aberdare, within the village of Cwmbach. The land in question falls within a designated Special Landscape Area as well as a coal mineral resource area. Furthermore, the area where the glamping pods are proposed is within a designated Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), whilst the application boundary borders a nationally designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (Caeau Nant y Groes). The following policies are therefore considered to be relevant to this application:

Policy CS1 – The policy emphasis is on building strong, sustainable communities. This will be achieved by encouraging a strong, diverse economy which supports traditional employment and promotes new forms of employment in the leisure and tourism sectors.

Policy AW2 - This policy provides for development in sustainable locations which are defined thus: within the settlement boundary; would not unacceptably conflict with surrounding uses; have good access to services and facilities; and have good accessibility by a range of sustainable transport options.

Policy AW5 - sets out criteria for new development in relation to amenity and accessibility.

Policy AW6 - requires development to involve a high quality design and to make a positive contribution to place making, including landscaping. Additionally proposals must be designed to protect and enhance landscapes and biodiversity.

Policy AW8 – states that development proposals will only be permitted where there would be no unacceptable impact upon features of importance to landscape or nature conservation.

Policy AW10 - states that development proposals will not be permitted where they would cause or result in a risk of unacceptable harm to health and/or local amenity due to noise/light pollution or any other identified risk to the environment, local amenity and public health and safety.

Policy AW 14.4 – The policy stipulates that coal resources, as indicated on the proposals map, will be safeguarded from development that would unnecessarily sterilise the minerals or hinder their extraction.

Policy NSA 25.5 – The policy stipulates that development within the defined special landscape area will be expected to conform to the highest standards of design, siting, layout and materials, appropriate to the character of the area.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Design and Placemaking
Access Circulation and Parking

National Guidance

In the determination of planning applications regard should also be given to the requirements of National Planning Policy which are not duplicated in the Local Development Plan, particularly where National Planning Policy provides a more up to date and comprehensive policy on certain topics.

Planning Policy Wales Edition 10 sets out the Welsh Government's current position on planning policy, which incorporates the objectives of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in to planning.

It is considered that the current proposals meet the seven wellbeing of future generation's goals inasmuch as they relate to the proposed development and the site is being brought forward in a manner consistent with the five ways of working.

It is considered that the proposed development is consistent with the key principles and requirements for placemaking as defined by chapter 2 people and places: Achieving Wellbeing through Placemaking of the policy document and that the proposal is also consistent with the following insofar as they relate to the development proposed –

Chapter 3 Strategic and Spatial Choices
Chapter 5 Productive and Enterprising Places
Chapter 6 Distinctive and Natural Places

Other relevant policy guidance consulted:

PPW Technical Advice Note 6: Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities;
PPW Technical Advice Note 11: Noise;
PPW Technical Advice Note 12: Design;
PPW Technical Advice Note 18: Transport;
Manual for Streets

REASONS FOR REACHING THE RECOMMENDATION

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that, if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Furthermore, applications that are not in accordance with relevant policies in the plan should not be allowed, unless material considerations justify the grant of planning permission.

Main Issues:

The key considerations in the determination of this application are the compatibility of the proposed use of the glamping pods with surrounding land uses, the impact of the development upon the character and appearance of the immediate area, the impact of the development upon the amenity of the neighbouring residential properties, the impact of the development upon highway safety in the vicinity of the site and the potential impact of the development upon the adjacent Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Principle of the proposed development

The proposal relates to the siting of 6 glamping pods on a parcel of land associated with Blaennantgroes Farm. The land extends to approximately 0.09ha and lies to the south of the main farmhouse and existing holiday-let cottages. The application seeks to expand the existing holiday-let business by offering alternative accommodation for smaller groups.

The application site is located outside the defined settlement boundary of Cwmbach and is considered to be in the open countryside. Whilst development in this location would ordinarily be contrary to Policy AW2, national policy does not hold this as a barrier to development, as countryside locations are the types of areas that are typically associated with traditional holiday-let tourism uses. National policy is very supportive of sustainable tourism proposals in appropriate locations, on account of the fact that it contributes to a healthy, diverse economy. National Policy does however caution that proposals need to be sympathetic in nature and scale to the local environment. As such, careful consideration needs to be given to the layout of the proposal and design of the proposed structures so as to ensure that they do not impinge upon the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside, particularly its landscape, biodiversity and amenity value. These matters are considered in greater detail below.

Whilst it is noted that there are a number of existing residential properties along Blaennantgroes Road, the site is already associated with a tourism-related use with a small number of holiday-let cottages available. The proposal to provide 6 glamping pods would therefore not significantly change or intensify the existing use of the wider site and it is considered that the site would remain compatible with surrounding land uses.

Taking the above into consideration, there is no policy objection to the principle of tourism-related development in this location. Despite the application site being outside the defined settlement boundary, both local and national policy recognise the positive role that tourism plays in contributing to a strong and diverse economy.

Impact on the character and appearance of the area

The application site is located within the open countryside and within a Special Landscape Area. It is therefore important to ensure that any development in such locations conform to the highest standards of design, siting, layout and materials appropriate to the character of the area.

The proposed glamping pods are considered to be relatively modest structures with an overall height of 3.1 metres and a floor area of 18 square metres. They would have a curved roof design with elevations clad in timber panelling which are typical of such developments in other countryside locations.

Whilst the siting of the proposed pods would affect the character of the small area of land concerned, the surrounding area would largely be unaffected by the proposal. Furthermore, given their location and the topography of the site, the pods would be largely screened from view of the nearest road and distant views of the site would be largely obscured by existing trees and vegetation to the south, south-east and south-west of the site.

Overall, whilst the structures would form visible features within the immediate context of the site, they would be contained within a relatively small parcel of land that is well screened. The pods would also be constructed using appropriate materials and it is therefore not considered that the design or siting of the proposed pods would result in a visual intrusion in the landscape that would be harmful to the wider countryside setting or indeed the Special Landscape Area. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with Policies AW5, AW6 & NSA25 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

Impact on residential amenity and privacy

The proposed glamping pods would be sited within the open countryside however, it is noted that there are a number of residential properties located along Blaennantgroes Road. It is therefore important to consider the potential impact of the proposal upon the amenity of these properties.

The nearest neighbouring properties to the site are located approximately 50 metres to the west of the proposed glamping pods and given the separation distances involved, combined with the topography of the landscape and the location of existing trees and vegetation, it is unlikely that the pods would give rise to any overshadowing, overbearing or overlooking impact and it is therefore not considered that the proposal would result in any loss of amenity in those regards.

However, it is noted that 3 letters of objection have been received from local residents that raise concerns in relation to noise generated from the use of the pods. The proposal includes the siting of 6 pods which are of a limited scale and only intended

for 1-2 people. Therefore, the pods will accommodate a maximum of 6 small groups or a total of 12 people at full capacity. Whilst it is noted that users of the pods may use the outside space, it is unlikely that the maximum number of people will give rise to significant or unacceptable levels of noise. Furthermore, it is not considered that the noise would be any greater than existing residents using their outdoor amenity spaces.

As such, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of the impact it would have on the amenity and privacy of surrounding residents and the application would therefore comply with Policies AW5 & AW10 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan. .

Access and highway safety

The proposal has been assessed by the Council's Highways and Transportation Department with a view to determining its potential impact upon highway safety in the vicinity of the site. The comments received are summarised below:

Access

The application site is located off Blaennantgroes Road which is a public highway. It is noted that the road is lacking in segregated footways with a virtual footway painted on the carriage as a safe route to school assessment. The carriageway varies in width and has a number of areas reduced to single file traffic due to existing high on-street car parking demand. This, coupled with the lack of footway provision, raises cause for concern.

The private access track off Blaennantgroes Road has a single width of 3 metres only which is sub-standard for two vehicles to pass one-another and offers no space for a pedestrian and a service vehicle to pass one-another which raises cause for concern. It is noted that this could be overcome by providing 2 no. passing bays with the carriageway widened to 4.8 metres for a minimum distance of 12 metres and a condition is recommended accordingly. Following the publication of these comments, the applicant submitted a further plan which included the two required passing bays. Further comments from the Highways and Transportation Department indicate that the amended plans are acceptable and a condition to ensure the provision of the passing bays, as indicated in the plan, is recommended accordingly.

There is satisfactory turning facilities at the access to the existing holiday-let cottages.

Parking

The proposal provides for 1 parking space per pod with secure cycle storage which would promote sustainable modes of travel with less reliance on the private motor vehicle which is acceptable.

Taking the above into consideration, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of the impact it would have on highway safety in the vicinity of the site (subject to conditions) and the application would therefore comply with Policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

Other Issues:

The following other material considerations have been taken into account in considering the application, though were not the key determining factors in reaching the recommendation.

Ecology

A significant proportion of the site is located within a designated Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. The barn is located outside of the SINC however the 6 glamping pods are wholly within it.

Following an assessment of the proposal, the Council's Ecologist initially requested that an ecological assessment of the vegetation and protected species be undertaken. However, it became clear during the officer's site visit that the site had already been cleared of all vegetation and some groundworks had already been undertaken. As such, all ecological impacts have already occurred and there is nothing left to assess.

It is also noted that the site is located adjacent to a Site of Special Scientific Interest. NRW have assessed the information submitted with the application and are satisfied that the site is located outside of the boundary of the SSSI. No objection has therefore been raised.

Other issues raised by objectors

It is noted that concerns have been raised by local residents in relation to the water supply and sewerage capacity in the area. Consultation has been undertaken with Dwr Cymru Welsh Water, Natural Resources Wales and the Council's Flood Risk Management Team and it is noted that no objections have been received in these regards. Indeed, Dwr Cymru Welsh Water have confirmed that there is capacity available at the receiving Cynon Waste Water Treatment Works and that a water supply can be made available to serve the proposed development. In terms of the drainage of the site, the Council's Flood Risk Management Team notes that the proposal includes some surface water drainage details (soakaway). However, given the scale of the construction works, a separate application is required under Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 for sustainable drainage approval prior to works taking place. It is also commented that the applicant will be required to comply with Part H of the Building Regulation. As such, no objection is raised or condition suggested and the need for a sustainable drainage application will be added to any grant of planning consent as an advisory note.

The concerns raised with regards to contaminated soil, rubble and earth are also noted however, there is no evidence to support the claim that the material is contaminated. Furthermore, this is a matter better dealt with by separate Environmental Health legislation.

One objection also raises concern with heavy plant and tractors using the road to prepare the site in anticipation for the planning application, much of which has occurred in the evening and at weekends. It is regrettable that works have already commenced on site and the disruption already experienced by residents is acknowledged. It is considered that the construction period would be for a limited time

only and any disturbance experienced in this regard would therefore be short-lived. However, if Members are minded to approve the application, a condition restricting construction hours for the remainder of the development can be imposed.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Liability

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was introduced in Rhondda Cynon Taf from 31 December 2014.

The application is for development of a kind that is liable for a charge under the CIL Regulations 2010 (as amended) however, the CIL rate for this type of development as set out in the Charging Schedule is £nil and therefore no CIL is payable.

Conclusion

Having taken account of all of the issues discussed above, the proposal to provide 6 no. glamping pods at Blaennantygroes Farm is considered to be acceptable in terms of its compatibility with the rural setting in which it would be sited and with existing residential properties that are located along Blaennantygroes Road. The scale and design of the glamping pods themselves is considered to be acceptable and would have a limited impact upon the character and appearance of the area and upon the amenity and privacy of the nearest residential properties. Furthermore, whilst concerns raised by local residents in relation to highway safety are noted, no objection has been received from the Council's Highways and Transportation Section. The application is therefore considered to comply with the relevant policies of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan and is recommended for approval, subject to the conditions suggested below.

RECOMMENDATION: Grant

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of five years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Sections 91 and 93 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans and documents received by the Local Planning Authority, unless otherwise to be approved and superseded by details required by any other condition attached to this consent:
 - Site Plan (Rec. 15th July 2020);
 - Drawing No. 2692 C 02: Proposed Layout (Block Plan) (Rec. 25th August 2020);
 - Drawing No. 2692 C: Proposed Elevations and Floor Plans (Rec. 15th July 2020)

Reason: To ensure compliance with the approved plans and documents and to clearly define the scope of the permission.

3. The proposed development shall only be occupied as holiday units and no unit shall be occupied by any individual, family or group for more than a continuous period of two months in any calendar year.

Reason: The site is unsuitable for general residential use by reason of its unsustainable location outside of settlement limits, in accordance with Policy AW2 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

4. During the construction phase of the development, the hours of work shall be restricted to the following:

Monday to Friday	08:00 to 18:00 hours
Saturday	08:00 to 13:00 hours
Sunday and Bank Holidays	Not at All

Reason: In the interests of the amenity of existing residential properties, in accordance with Policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

5. Before the development is brought into use, the means of access, together with the passing bays, parking spaces and turning facilities, shall be laid out in accordance with the submitted plan 2692 C 02 Rev B and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The approved details shall be implemented before beneficial use of the first glamping pod

Reason: In the interests of highway and pedestrian safety, in accordance with Policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.