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# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 January 2023

**by J Reid BA(Hons) BArch(Hons) RIBA**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 30 January 2023**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/D3830/W/22/3295292**

**Stonerocks Farm, Cross Colwood Lane, Bolney RH17 5RY**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
  - The appeal is made by Mr J Lea against the decision of Mid Sussex District Council.
  - The application Ref DM/21/2688, dated 13 July 2021, was refused by notice dated 17 January 2022.
  - The development proposed is siting of three luxury glamping pods together with associated landscaping and car parking.
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## Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

## Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect that the proposed development would have on the character of the surrounding countryside, most of which is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## Reasons

3. Stonerocks Farm is situated in the countryside and includes land on both sides of the narrow sinuous Cross Colwood Lane. The land on the roughly north side of the lane is within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which has the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The nearby lane and nearby land on its roughly south side are within its setting.
4. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024 (AMP) explains that the High Weald is one of the best surviving Medieval landscapes in North West Europe. Its rural landscape includes ridges and valleys clothed with an intricate mosaic of small fields interspersed with farmsteads and surrounded by hedges and abundant woods, all arranged around a network of historic routeways, which is cherished for its scenery, tranquillity and wildlife.
5. The appeal site includes the access to the farm on the north side of the lane, a small building in the group of farm buildings near the access, the roughly west part of the hard standing by the buildings, concrete, part concrete and grass tracks, and a plot for each pod well away from the buildings in 3 fields by the prominent crest in the landform, which rises to roughly north east. The nearby land includes irregular shaped mainly open pastoral fields edged by hedges and fences, and woodland blocks, parts of which are ancient woodland. A bridleway runs roughly north south through the adjoining land controlled by the appellant some distance away to roughly east. The few nearby buildings, including the

dwelling at The Yards, next door, are sparsely scattered near the lane, so most of the site has an undeveloped verdant character, which contributes positively to the rural character of the countryside and to the natural beauty of the landscape.

6. Plot 1 would be sited near the crest in the landform to south west of the far end of the part concrete track, with Plot 2 to roughly east and Plot 3 to roughly north east. Plot 1 and the adjoining grass track would be as deep as the existing block of remnant orchard and would take up most of the remaining width of the field. Plot 2 would be nearly as deep and nearly as wide, and whilst the shape of Plot 3 would differ, it would be similar in scale. The pods would be relatively small, but they would be sited within mainly open fields on substantial plots by the top of the crest, and Plots 1 and 2 would have wide views over the surrounding landscape.
7. The proposal was informed by the appellant's landscape and visual appraisal, and it aims for the timber finished pods to harmonise with the woodland edges. However, because the pods would be sited well away from those edges, their man-made forms would contrast starkly with the mainly open fields. The plots would be seeded for wildflowers and planted with native trees that would partly screen the pods, but the scale of the plots would be substantial. In time, camping paraphernalia, including picnic tables, barbecues, drying lines, lanterns and so on, which could not be controlled by condition, could spread across the plots, to the detriment of their present rural character.
8. Whether or not the plots were to be edged by hedgerows and the proposed wildflower meadows were to endure, the character of the land within the plots would differ from the agricultural fields from which the plots would be taken. The native trees within the plots would also blur the distinction between the woodland and the fields. So, the scale and pattern of the existing agricultural fields, which are important to the rural character, would be harmfully eroded. The change in character of the land within the plots, and the subdivision of substantial parts of the existing fields would also unacceptably disrupt the intricate mosaic of small fields surrounded by hedges and abundant woods that are important to the landscape and its scenic beauty.
9. Because the pods and their plots would be sited by the prominent undeveloped crest in the landform, well above and well away from the lane, their siting would fail to respect the development pattern, where most sporadic development is thinly dispersed along historic routeways, which now include the lanes. So, due to its substantial scale, expansive layout and incongruous siting, the proposal would harm the rural and landscape character of the countryside, and it would unacceptably erode its scenic beauty.
10. The proposal would be within the wider setting of the roughly C17 listed building at Chatesgrove, which can be seen from parts of the surrounding landscape including the plot of Pod 1. Due to its distance from the site, as the surroundings of heritage assets change over time, and as there is little to show that the site is important to its significance, its setting would be preserved.
11. The Old Flower Field was an existing campsite where the proposed pods would replace a greater number of tent pitches, so it differs from the proposal before me, and little information about the development at Chiddinglye Farm has been put to me, so they provide little support for this damaging proposal. The proposal would barely be seen in public views, and whilst the possible

replanting of the remnant orchard outside the site attracts little weight, the proposed planting within the site could enhance biodiversity. However, all of the benefits, including the likely social and economic gains, would not outweigh the harm that the proposal would cause. The appellant's concerns about the Council's handling of the application are not relevant to my findings. It is also a well-established principle that the advice of its officers cannot bind the decision of the Council.

12. Therefore, I consider that the proposed development would harm the character of the surrounding countryside, and that it would fail to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It would be contrary to Policy DP12 of the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (LP) which aims to protect the countryside in recognition of its intrinsic character and beauty, LP Policy DP16 which aims to only permit development where it conserves or enhances natural beauty, Policy BOLBB1 of the Bolney Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2031 (NP) which seeks to maintain or where possible enhance the quality of the rural landscape character of the parish, NP Policy BOLE2 which aims for development to not have an unacceptable impact on the landscape, the AMP, and the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) which recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

### **Conclusion**

13. I have found that the proposed development would be contrary to the Development Plan when taken as a whole. The other considerations in this case, including the Framework, do not outweigh that conflict.
14. For the reasons given, the appeal should be dismissed.

*J Reid*

INSPECTOR