



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 April 2025

by **R Lawrence BSc (Hons), PGDip (TP), MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 May 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/24/3354576

Petersfield Golf Course, Steep Marsh, Steep, East Hampshire, GU33 7QY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Petersfield Golf Club against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref is SDNP/21/04092/OUT.
 - The development proposed is described as “the erection of 20 holiday lodges. The lodges proposed fall under the legal definition of static caravans. The proposal will include access road and onsite roads and footpaths, recreational space and will also include a management office/reception and accommodation and landscaping”.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The planning application was submitted in outline form, and the matters to be determined were amended during the application, to be limited to access and layout. I have assessed the appeal on this basis.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether or not the proposal would conserve or enhance the landscape or scenic beauty of the South Downs National Park (the National Park), and
 - whether or not the development would be in a suitable location having regard to sustainable transport options.

Reasons

Landscape

4. National Parks are a landscape designation of national importance. The statutory purposes of National Parks are to conserve and enhance their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of those areas by the public. Section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 amends the duty on relevant authorities in respect of their functions which affect land in National Parks, who now must “seek to further” their statutory purposes.
5. The appeal site is located within the South Downs National Park, wherein its special qualities are recognised to include diverse, inspirational landscapes, well

conserved historical features, tranquil and unspoilt places and great opportunities for recreational activities and learning experiences.

6. Policies SD1, SD4 and SD5 of the South Downs Local Plan 2019 (SDLP), taken together, advise that development proposals will only be permitted where they conserve and enhance landscape character by demonstrating that, amongst other things, the design, layout and scale conserves and enhances existing landscape character features which contribute to the distinctive character, pattern and evolution of the landscape.
7. Policy SD23 of the SDLP sets out, amongst other things, that proposals for visitor accommodation and recreation facilities will be permitted where it is demonstrated that, outside of settlements, proposals would positively contribute to the natural beauty of the National Park.
8. The appeal site comprises a grassed field located between the edge of the golf course and the A3 trunk road. The field is underused and bordered by a mixture of hedgerows and trees. The land slopes down from the boundary with the golf course towards the A3, resulting in a partially elevated topography. Due to its proximity to the A3, the site lacks a strong sense of tranquillity, particularly in the lower areas.
9. The appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) identifies that the site lies within Landscape Character Type L – Mixed Farmland and Woodland Vale, specifically Subtype L1 – Rother Valley Mixed Farmland and Vales. Relevant characteristics include gently undulating terrain, dense hedgerows and woodland providing partial enclosure, and a pattern of irregular shaped fields.
10. The surrounding landscape, which is characterised by the folded nature of the hills and field-boundary vegetation, restricts long distance views of the appeal site. Similarly, the site's topography and ridge-line vegetation limit visibility from the adjacent golf course. However, short distance views are possible from Shipwrights Way, where the site has a natural and undeveloped appearance.
11. Land adjacent to the A3 within this part of the National Park is largely free from development, creating a visual buffer between the road and the surrounding hills. The proposed introduction of holiday lodges and a car park would disrupt this pattern, introducing built form into an otherwise generally undeveloped corridor.
12. The lodges are proposed in elevated positions and would occupy a considerable portion of the site. Unlike the sparse built development pattern in the surrounding area, the number and distribution of the lodges stretches across this section of the countryside and would appear visually prominent, leaving minimal space for meaningful landscape mitigation or enhancements.
13. Although scale and appearance are reserved matters, the proposed layout indicates a uniform, regimented arrangement of lodges with similar footprints. This reasonably repetitive configuration, combined with the number of units, would result in a large scale, urbanising development that would be inconsistent with the rural character of the area. While the layout loosely follows the site contours, this would not mitigate for the visual impact arising from its density and uniformity, and the form of a lodge type development would not be sympathetic to the best features and character of local development within this part of the National Park.

14. Although situated on lower ground near Tankerdale Lane, the proposed communal car park would have a considerable impact on the area. Its placement within an undeveloped field would contribute to the site's urbanisation, while associated vehicle and pedestrian activity, lighting - likely required for safety - and noise would further diminish the site's rural qualities.
15. While landscaping is a reserved matter, indicative proposals include strengthening boundary hedgerows, planting new copses, and establishing species-rich grassland. However, these measures are, in my view, not tailored to the current layout, limiting the weight they can carry. Nonetheless, they provide a useful indication of potential enhancement and mitigation, with the reinforcement of history field boundaries and biodiversity improvements representing positive aspects of the scheme.
16. Overtime, the landscaping, as indicatively shown or an alternative scheme, may help to reduce the visual impact of the lodges and car park. However, due to the extent of development and the lodges' elevated positions, I consider that with any scheme of proposed planting it is unlikely to fully mitigate the harm to the protected landscape.
17. Although visibility of the site is limited and few people would be affected, increased vehicle and pedestrian activity would alter the perception and understanding of the site's character. The perception would shift from a natural, open landscape to one dominated by tourist accommodation.
18. The proposed use would generate fairly significant vehicle movements. The cumulative effect of this, together with the built form of the lodges and their use would significantly alter the appreciation of this verdant and undeveloped site, shifting it from a relatively undeveloped, open landscape to one dominated by tourism infrastructure.
19. While the landscape harm is somewhat limited by the site's restricted visibility and modest existing value, the proposal would nevertheless result in harm to the landscape character and appearance of the site and detract from its positive contribution to the appearance of this part of the National Park. By consequence, it would fail to meet the requirement to positively contribute to the natural beauty of the National Park, therefore conflicting with Policies SD1, SD4, SD5 and SD23 of the SDLP, the requirements of which are set out above.
20. The proposed development would also fail to accord with the Framework, insofar as it seeks to ensure proposals are sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. Although the effects I have identified would be minor, in line with the Framework, I attribute great weight to them and they weigh heavily against the proposal.

Sustainable travel

21. SD23 requires that the design and location of the development minimises the need for travel by private car and encourages access and/or subsequent travel by sustainable means, including public transport, walking, cycling or horse riding. This is also reflected in outcome 5 of the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) which relates to improving accessibility and encouraging sustainable transport.

22. The Framework recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. Nevertheless, it requires development proposals to take appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes having regard to location, and to give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements.
23. Vehicular access to the site is via Tankerdale Lane and the A3, providing convenient highway access. On-site car parking is proposed and there are no nearby public transport links. In my view, the site is remote from any major settlements or services.
24. The site adjoins Shipwrights Way, part of National Cycle Network Route 22, which links London to Portsmouth and connects to Liss and its mainline railway station. While this offers some potential for cycle access, the site's isolated location limits its suitability for regular use.
25. Private vehicles are likely to dominate transport movements, as there are no convenient or attractive walking or cycling routes to nearby settlements or attractions beyond the adjacent clubhouse. The existing pedestrian and cycle routes are unlikely to support meaningful exploration of the wider National Park.
26. Although the proposal includes some sustainable travel features—such as electric vehicle charging points, a cycle hire scheme, storage facilities, and route information—these measures fall short of delivering meaningful support for sustainable travel options. Crucially, there is minimal evidence of effective connectivity to other destinations within the National Park, limiting the practicality of sustainable travel for guests.
27. The nearby golf club may offer limited opportunities for combined trips, such as dining or recreational use, but this does little to offset the broader lack of integrated transport options. The absence of coordinated links to local attractions, public transport hubs, or walking and cycling networks suggests that guests would remain heavily reliant on travelling off-site by private vehicles.
28. The layout includes a communal car park near the entrance, with pedestrian paths to individual lodges. While this may reduce internal vehicle movement, this would be a very minor benefit, and it is unlikely to significantly promote sustainable travel beyond the site.
29. Overall, I find that the proposal would be highly dependent on the private car, and that the location of the site would fail to encourage or support alternative modes of transport. The proposal would therefore conflict with policy SD23 1(b) and the requirements of the Framework relating to sustainable travel.

Other Matters

30. Reference has been made to a previously allowed appeal at land near the Buriton Interchange, Petersfield¹. That scheme involved a large-scale redevelopment, including a rapid electric vehicle (EV) charging centre, up to 60 eco-lodges and an earth sheltered building. While both proposals involve tourist accommodation and are located near to the A3 within the South Downs National Park, the similarities are limited.

¹ APP/Y9507/W/22/3308885 - Land north of the A3 junction, The Causeway, Buriton - A3 Buriton Interchange, Petersfield, dated 29 March 2023.

31. The Buriton scheme was significantly larger in scale and included an EV charging facility that addressed a clearly identified regional need, contributing to climate change objectives. In contrast, the EV charging points proposed in the current scheme are intended primarily for guest and staff use rather than to serve a broader public function. Therefore, they do not justify the site's location in the same way.
32. There is insufficient information before me to enable a detailed landscape comparison between the two sites. However, while the Buriton development was also found to cause landscape harm, it was approved due to a substantial and site-specific package of public benefits that outweighed that harm. Given the differences in scale, purpose, and context, the current proposal has been assessed on its own merits and specific circumstances. The Buriton scheme therefore is afforded limited weight in support of the appeal proposal.
33. The appellant has raised concerns regards the NPA's handing of the application, citing delays, inconsistent advice, and poor communication. These procedural matters are issues between the main parties and do not affect the planning merits of the proposal before me. As such, these matters have not been determinative.
34. Interested parties have identified several additional benefits of the proposal which lie outside of the main planning issues. These include potential improvements to the financial stability and long-term viability of the adjacent golf club, support for junior development programmes, the provision of additional tourist accommodation, and increased local spending. It is also noted that club staff are mindful of environmental considerations.
35. The need for additional tourist accommodation within the South Downs National Park is recognised by both the main and interested parties. The proposed 20 lodges would make a modest contribution toward meeting this need in a location with direct access to the A3. Tourism is a vital part of the National Park's economy, and there is an imbalance between day visitors and overnight stays. While the National Park Authority (NPA) has questioned whether this specific site is appropriate—particularly in light of recent approvals such as the Buriton scheme—the contribution remains a clear benefit.
36. However, the tourism benefits of the proposal are likely to be limited by the site's isolated setting and weak connectivity to other attractions or facilities within the Park. Furthermore, its position between a formally laid-out golf course and the A3 restricts opportunities for visitors to meaningfully engage with or appreciate the surrounding landscape.
37. The proposal's close association with the golf club presents opportunities for mutual benefit, including increased visitor spending and potential financial support for the club. Interested parties have suggested that this could enhance the club's operations and support initiatives such as junior programmes. However, there is no evidence to confirm that profits from the development would be reinvested in the club, nor is there clear evidence on the likely level of additional spending. These uncertainties reduce the weight that can be given to this benefit, though it remains a positive factor in the overall planning balance.
38. The adjacent clubhouse, a local rural business, is reported to have a reputation for using locally sourced food and drink. While it may benefit from the proposed development, it lies outside the application site boundary, and there is no

substantive evidence to suggest its operations are reliant on the proposal before me.

39. References have also been made to similar developments at other golf clubs across the country. However, in the absence of detailed information—particularly regarding site-specific constraints such as landscape designations—these examples carry limited weight in the assessment of the current proposal.

Planning Balance

40. The proposal would result in demonstrable harm to the landscape character and appearance of the site and its setting within the National Park. Critically, it fails to positively contribute to the Park's natural beauty and directly undermines the first statutory purpose of National Parks - conserving and enhancing natural beauty and wildlife. Although the harm is modest and localised, the Framework requires that this harm is given great weight. Furthermore, the proposal's location does not support sustainable travel options, compounding the environmental impact. Taken together, these harms represent a significant and overarching conflict with the development plan as a whole, and amount to a clear failure to meet the environmental objectives of the Framework.
41. Set against these concerns, the proposal does offer some tangible benefits. The introduction of lodges would make a modest but meaningful contribution to meeting the growing demand for tourist accommodation within the National Park. This, in turn, would stimulate the local economy through the creation of a new rural enterprise, job opportunities, and increased visitor spending. The scheme would also provide a boost to the adjacent golf club and other local businesses, supporting the second statutory purpose of National Parks: to promote opportunities for the public to understand and enjoy their special qualities.
42. However, it is important to recognise that where conflict arises between the two statutory purposes, the purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty takes precedence. Moreover, the benefits of the scheme are constrained by the site's remote location and limited connectivity, which restrict its potential to deliver wider economic or social benefits. As such, while the benefits are acknowledged, they can only be afforded moderate weight in the overall planning balance.
43. The proposal is acceptable in terms of highway safety, biodiversity, drainage, flood risk, and impact on trees, with no objections from the NPA or statutory consultees subject to appropriate planning conditions. However, compliance with these requirements is neutral in the planning balance.
44. Overall, while the scheme offers moderate benefits, they do not outweigh the identified harm to the landscape and scenic beauty of the National Park—an area afforded the highest level of protection—together with the failure for guests and staff to benefit from sustainable travel options.

Conclusion

45. The scheme conflicts with the development plan when considered as a whole and the material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan.
46. Therefore, for the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

R Lawrence

INSPECTOR