



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 June 2025

by **O Marigold BSc DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 June 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/24/3357243

Dorset Hideaway, Bridge Farm, Cards Mill Lane, Whitchurch Canonorum, Dorset DT6 6RW

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr M Wood against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref is P/FUL/2023/06928.
 - The development proposed is described as 'additional hard standings and glamping pods (part retrospective).'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters and Background

2. The appeal site consists of what was once solely a farm, which has now diversified to include a caravan and camping business. I have taken the description of development above from the application form, but the application plans show much more extensive development. This includes additional caravan and camping pitches within an area beyond the landscaped boundary of a previous planning permission¹ (the 2018 consent).
3. The appeal application includes the construction of a pond and landscaping works, as well as the glamping pods and gravelled tracks, which have already been installed. These are in addition to the pitches and buildings within the original site, which are and would be occupied more intensively than was previously approved. The site has spa treatment rooms, fishing ponds, a laundry, changing and shower facilities. However, only limited plans of the 2018 consent are before me.
4. The application plans before me differ from each other, for example in the position of some of the pitches. Much of the development shown on the plans has already taken place, but some elements have not. The appellant's documentation considers the whole development, rather than just what is described in the application form. The Council has taken the same approach, as shall I, with my decision being based on the submitted plans.
5. Since the decision of the Council to refuse planning permission, a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been published. The main parties have had the opportunity to comment on this, and I have determined the appeal based on the current planning policy position.

¹ LPA reference WD/D/17/002060, approved February 2018.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are:

- the effect of the appeal development on the character and appearance of the area, which lies within the Dorset National Landscape, also referred to as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and
- whether the location is appropriate for the appeal development, having regard to the impacts and risks of flooding.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

7. Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 as amended (the Act) requires that I seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. The site lies within the Marshwood Vale Clay Vale Landscape Character Area (LCA), as identified in the Council's Landscape Character Assessment. The area is a traditional, largely undeveloped pastoral clay vale, in a broad bowl with surrounding summits. It has a strong landscape pattern and sense of rural tranquillity, and so is highly susceptible to change.
8. One of the guidelines of the LCA assessment is to limit the impact of camping and caravanning sites, and to restrict the expansion of sites in areas where impacts are already significant, including cumulative effects. It seeks to control new 'glamping' facilities, based on landscape and visual sensitivities. The LCA encourages appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures, and conditions to control noise and light pollution.
9. The submission includes a strategy of landscape mitigation, some of which has already taken place. This includes bands of native planting to divide the site and break-up the block of camping vehicles. Additional boundary hedgerows and trees, to screen and fragment views of the new pitches, form part of the mitigation. The appeal development would be concentrated on one established site, rather than in smaller but more scattered locations. The appellant maintains that the previously agreed landscape mitigation has not been breached.
10. Even so, the appeal development involves the spread of pitches beyond the previously approved boundary and into what was an undeveloped, open field. It also intensifies the previously approved site, resulting in a large increase in the number of pitches. The addition of tents and white-coloured caravans, with their functional appearance, conflicts with the soft, pastoral nature of the site and its surroundings. As such, despite the existing and proposed landscaping, it has and would have an intrusive and domesticating impact.
11. I understand that the field expanded into is still used occasionally for silage, and for grazing in the winter. Nevertheless, the creation of hardstanding areas and electricity connection points has added to the urbanising effects of the development, as does the manicured appearance of the land. The use does and would result in a notable increase in the number of people and vehicles, adding to the domestic appearance and diminishing the tranquillity of this part of the National Landscape.

12. Dark Sky status is sought by the appellant, and lighting is minimised. Nonetheless, some additional light effects are inherent to the appeal development, for example from additional vehicles and use of the caravans in the evenings. For the reasons given above, the appeal development and its characteristics would conflict with the landscape and its character, rather than being sympathetic to it.
13. A Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA), with photography dated September 2022, was submitted with the appeal application. This assessed the site from a range of viewpoints. From wider, elevated locations, such as Coppet Hill, Hardown Hill, and Lamberts Castle, the LVIA found that the appeal development would initially have moderate adverse visual impacts, albeit becoming slight or negligible over time as the landscaping matures.
14. Additional photography has been provided in a Landscape Appeal Statement (LAS). This supplements the LVIA, with photography being taken in late October 2024 when vegetation provided less screening, but when site occupation was lower. On this basis, from public rights of way on Coppet Hill, Hardown Hill, and Lamberts Castle, the magnitude of change was found to be negligible. I see little reason to disagree with the LVIA and LAS assessments. Nevertheless, together they identify a small degree of visual harm from wider locations, particularly in early years, when occupation is high in summer months.
15. Moreover, from public footpaths close to the site, such as LVIA viewpoints Two and Three, it found visual impacts of moderate to substantial adverse effects, at least for the initial years of operation. Accordingly, I conclude that the appeal development would have adverse landscape character and visual impacts which, taken in the round, would be moderate in scale.
16. As the adverse effects on the National Landscape would not be significant, the appeal development would not constitute 'major development', as defined by Framework Paragraph 190. Policy ECON7 of the West Dorset Weymouth and Portland Local Plan (the Local Plan), adopted October 2015, recognises the importance of tourism to the local economy, and allows for extensions to existing camping and caravanning sites in specific circumstances.
17. Despite the partially retrospective nature of the application, a long-term management plan to improve the quality and appearance of the accommodation, has been provided within the submissions. As I have found that the landscape harm would be below 'significant' adverse in magnitude, Local Plan policy ECON7 provides a degree of support for the appeal development. That said, it applies to the whole plan area rather than just to the National Landscape.
18. In light of my findings above, the appeal development does and would cause some landscape harm and thus would fail to conserve or enhance the scenic beauty of the National Landscape. It would therefore harm the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, the appeal development would conflict with Local Plan policies ENV1 and ENV10. These require a positive contribution to local distinctiveness, and state that development which harms the natural beauty of the AONB will not be permitted.
19. The Neighbourhood Plan (NP), made December 2019, broadly supports farm diversification projects, and local businesses more generally, to prevent Marshwood Vale becoming a dormitory. Nevertheless, NP Policy UMV4 requires development to enhance local landscape character, including rural tranquillity,

character and dark skies. Given my findings, the appeal development would not accord with this or the similar objectives of the Dorset AONB Management Plan.

20. Given the more recent adoption of NP policy UMV4, and that policy ENV1 gives guidance specifically for the National Landscape/AONB, I give the conflict with these policies greater weight than the support provided by Local Plan policy ECON7. It follows that the presumption in favour of development contained in Local Plan policy INT1 does not apply, and so the effect of this policy is neutral.
21. I give the harm to the National Landscape great negative weight, in accordance with what is now Framework paragraph 189. For the same reasons as given above, the appeal development would conflict with the statutory test under the Act.

Flooding

22. A small section of the expanded site is within high-risk Flood Zones 2 and 3. Two seasonal tent pitches are within this section, shown within raised areas. The pitches and their site levels may not restrict the flow of water across the site and, if flooding is threatened, occupiers could be warned and the tents removed. Nevertheless, camping sites are identified by the Framework as a 'more vulnerable' use, and one to which the sequential test applies, having regard to Framework paragraph 176, footnote 62.
23. The Framework makes clear that a sequential risk-based approach should be taken to applications within high-risk flood zones, to steer new development to areas with the lowest risk. This includes those with land raising or other potentially vulnerable elements. It states that development should not be permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for it in areas with a lower risk of flooding.
24. On the basis that an alternative location for only two pitches is required, there is no dispute that land within the control of the appellant is available for them, which is at lower risk of flooding. Consequently, the sequential test is not passed and so the exception test does not apply. The appellant has suggested that the two pitches could be removed from the application. However, no amended plans showing this change are before me, and I must base my decision on the plans considered by the Council and third parties.
25. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the location of the appeal development is not appropriate, having regard to the impacts and risks of flooding. It would therefore conflict with Local Plan Policy ENV5, which seeks to steer development towards areas of lowest risk, avoiding higher risk flood zones. For the same reasons, it conflicts with the Framework in respect of flooding. I give this harm significant weight.

Other Considerations

26. The site already provides support for a wide range of local businesses and community facilities. I give significant weight to the need to support economic growth and productivity, and intensification of the business would undoubtedly have further economic and social benefits. At paragraph 88, the Framework seeks to encourage sustainable rural tourism and leisure development. However, it does so only where this respects the character of the countryside, which I have found would not be the case here.

27. Ecological benefits are currently underway to offset biodiversity losses, to which I give additional positive weight, having regard to Framework paragraph 189. Nevertheless, I conclude that the advantages of the appeal development would not outweigh the harm that I identify above.
28. There may well be a fallback available to the appellant, in respect of permitted development rights for caravans and similar uses for a temporary period each year. That said, I have few substantive details of the effects of such a fallback, including in terms of the landscape, flooding and other matters, when compared to the appeal development before me. As such, I am not convinced that the harm from any fallback would be worse than the appeal development, sufficient to justify it.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

29. For the reasons given, I have found conflict with the Development Plan as a whole. The material considerations in this case, and the weight I give to them, do not indicate a decision other than in accordance with the Development Plan. This leads me to conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

O Marigold

INSPECTOR