



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 August 2025

by A Wright BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22nd August 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/U2235/W/25/3361447

Land At Riverdale, St Helens Lane, West Farleigh, Kent ME15 0LB

- 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 Wildwood Ltd against the decision of Maidstone Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/503988/FULL.
 - The development proposed is the change of use of existing grass land to a glamping site comprising 6no. eco-pods with associated parking, access, cycle and bin stores, and landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The proposed development was originally described on the application form as 'use of existing grass land at Riverdale, west of St Helens Lane to be used as a small scale 'Glamping site', comprising of 6no. eco-pods with parking facilities, access, infrastructure and landscaping'. The appellant agreed to the amended description in the banner above during the application.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this appeal are the effect of the proposal on:
 - the character and appearance of the countryside and the Medway Valley Landscape of Local Value; and
 - the living conditions of the occupiers of Kingfisher View, Heron House, Riverdale and Coot Cottage, with particular regard to disturbance and privacy.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site comprises grassed land and an associated access located in the countryside at the northern end of St Helens Lane. Although there are some belts of trees in the wider area, the site and the paddocks to the west and north have an open aspect, sloping steeply down to the River Medway in the valley below. The land rises on the opposite side of the valley upto and beyond Tonbridge Road. There is residential development to the east along the lane.
5. The site is within the Medway Valley Landscape of Local Value (LLV) where Policy LPRSP9 of the Local Plan Review 2024 (LPR) seeks to conserve and enhance the distinctive landscape character. The LPR indicates that the LLV is characterised

by the wide River Medway and steep valley sides where the valley incises the Greensand, with the area lending itself to much recreational land use including the Medway Valley Walk. As the site is undeveloped land on one side of a steep valley, it positively contributes towards the character of the LLV.

6. The appeal site lies within the Medway Pasture landscape character area which the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2012 recognises is almost undeveloped, with the guideline to conserve the area. Further, the Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study: Sensitivity Assessment 2015 (LCS) indicates that the Medway Valley between Maidstone and Watlingbury has high overall landscape sensitivity and is sensitive to change. The LCS sets out a summary of actions for the area, including conserving the special landscape quality provided by the rural valley location and meandering River Medway.
7. The proposal is for six glamping pods in three rows and includes parking for six cars with an associated vehicle turning area. The pods would be of an energy efficient design and finished in durable, traditional materials. Nevertheless, due to the undeveloped, grassed and open nature of the site, the introduction of glamping pods, together with the hard surfacing and parked cars, would appear as urbanising and discordant features in the landscape.
8. In addition, the proposed pods would be sited on terraces cut into the slope. This would create an engineered and unnatural topography, harmfully at odds with the sloped characteristic of the site and land to the west and north.
9. A condition could control external lighting to some extent and motion sensors could be used. However, the proposal would introduce artificial lighting onto the site, especially within and around the pods and from car movements after dark, further detracting from the undeveloped, unlit countryside.
10. The proposed development would be largely screened in views from St Helens Lane and South Street by existing houses and landscaping. It would also not be visible from Lower Road or Teston Lane. Nonetheless, the appeal scheme would be evident in near views through large gaps in the vegetation along the River Medway path and in longer distance views from Church Lane, Tonbridge Road and a public right of way (PROW) further north. At night, the artificial lighting would be visible in distant views from some roads.
11. The appellant is willing to implement a soft landscaping scheme to provide tree and hedge planting along the boundaries, and hedges in front of the proposed pods. Nevertheless, the introduction of formal landscaping would be incongruous given the open aspect of the sloping land on this side of the valley.
12. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the countryside and the Medway Valley LLV. This would be contrary to Policies LPRSP9, LPRSP14(A), LPRSP15, LPRTL2 and LPRQD4 of the LPR where they seek to conserve rural, landscape and natural character and require holiday accommodation outside settlement boundaries to be unobtrusively located.

Living conditions

13. The appeal site is within a tranquil, rural location. Access to it is via a gravel drive from St Helens Lane which becomes a narrow, grassed track beyond the entrance gate. This runs alongside the grounds of the residential properties Heron House,

Kingfisher View and Riverdale. The rear gardens of the latter two properties lie adjacent to the grassed parcel of land. Coot Cottage is situated nearby.

14. The appellant states that 6-8 movements per day by agricultural vehicles could be expected from the current use of the site as a paddock. However, at the time of my site visit, there was no indication that the site was in active use and little evidence of regular traffic movements to and from it along the grassed access.
15. The proposed parking area would be adjacent to the rear garden at Riverdale, and it is indicated that the proposal would generate a maximum of 12 two-way vehicle movements per day. There would also be comings and goings on foot from those staying on the site accessing the nearby PROWs and other facilities in the area. In addition, users of the proposed site would walk between the parking area and the glamping pods and sit out on the areas of decking. Therefore, the scheme would result in significantly more traffic and pedestrian movements and general site activity than at present, incompatible with the quiet, rural nature of the area.
16. The closest point of access is around 20m from the nearest house. Nevertheless, due to the location of the access and proposed parking area relative to the neighbouring properties, residents of Heron House, Kingfisher View and Riverdale would experience regular noise and disturbance from car doors slamming, running engines, car radios, and vehicle headlights shining into their properties. The occupants of Coot Cottage would also experience disturbance from increased use of the access.
17. It is stated that the users of glamping sites tend to be quiet and respectful and there would be strict rules on bookings, including no party groups and restrictions on the total number of people on site at any one time. The proposed pods would be at least 15m from the nearest residential property. However, even with boundary planting, there would be disturbance to occupiers of the neighbouring properties from people talking and shouting when using the glamping pods and parking area, and when accessing the site on foot. Due to their location next to the garden at Kingfisher View, use of the proposed cycle and bin store areas would also cause nuisance to the occupants of this property. As comings, goings and use of the pods cannot be controlled, disturbance could occur at any time of the day or night, significantly at odds with the existing tranquil environment.
18. Further, the rear outdoor spaces at Heron House and Kingfisher View are relatively open, enclosed only by post and rail fencing and some planting. As such, pedestrians and people in vehicles accessing and egressing the proposed glamping site would have direct views into their gardens, harmfully eroding the privacy of these neighbouring occupants when using their outdoor spaces.
19. The appellant indicates that the proposed facility would be likely to be seasonal in nature, but there is no mechanism before me to secure its operation to certain times of the year. Even if there were, the proposal would cause harmful noise, disturbance and loss of privacy to neighbouring occupiers at times when it was operational.
20. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would harm the living conditions of the occupiers of Kingfisher View, Heron House, Riverdale and Coot Cottage, with particular regard to disturbance and privacy. This would be contrary to Policies LPRSP15 and LPRTL2 of the LPR where they require proposals to respect the amenities of occupiers of neighbouring properties, including ensuring that

proposals do not result in excessive noise, activity or vehicular movements or overlooking to occupiers.

Other Matters

21. Domestic tourism substantially contributes to the UK economy. A 2023 report on the economic impact of tourism in Maidstone indicated a recent increase in visits to visitor attractions, with over £60million spent on overnight trips in that year. National planning policies support sustainable rural tourism developments which respect the character of the countryside. As it is not proposed to expand an existing premises, policy LPRSP11 of the LPR has limited relevance in this case.
22. The proposal would provide a glamping retreat with good access to the PROW network, public transport, facilities and tourist destinations in a borough which currently offers few opportunities for this type of accommodation. Thus, it would make a positive contribution to the local rural economy. The proposed development would also deliver significant biodiversity net gain. Further, a condition could prevent the use of any unit as a permanent encampment. However, the economic and biodiversity benefits of the appeal scheme and restricting permanent occupation would not outweigh the harm to the countryside, LLV and neighbouring living conditions in this case.
23. The Council did not find harm or development plan conflict in relation to several other matters, including highway safety, parking, outlook and light of neighbouring occupiers, flood risk, contamination, minerals safeguarding, and impacts on protected species and heritage assets. However, even if I were to agree with the Council on these points, the absence of harm would be a neutral matter which would not carry weight in favour of the proposed scheme.

Conclusion

24. For the reasons given above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

A Wright

INSPECTOR