
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 August 2025

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

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22nd of September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/L2250/W/25/3364156

Hoad Meadow, Swingfield, Kent CT15 7HS

- 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 Daniel Bond against the decision of Folkestone and Hythe District Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/0124/FH.
 - The development proposed is the use of land as a camping and alpaca site.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background and Preliminary Matters

2. The appellant has requested an amendment to the description of development, specifically to omit the use of the site as an alpaca facility from the appeal scheme. However, this change would materially alter the nature of the proposal. The submitted plans clearly show the keeping of animals, including alpacas, as a fundamental component of the mixed-use development.
3. It is well established that the proposal considered at appeal should be essentially the same as that assessed by the Local Planning Authority. In this case, the proposed amendment would result in a materially different scheme that is not reflected in the submitted plans or supporting documentation.
4. Moreover, allowing such a change at this stage could lead to procedural unfairness, as interested parties and statutory consultees have not had the opportunity to comment on the revised proposal. For these reasons, I have adopted the description of development as set out in the original planning application form, subject to the removal of any wording that is superfluous or does not constitute development.
5. The appeal is retrospective in nature, with the development already in place at the time of my site visit. There are some discrepancies between the location of certain elements on the ground and those shown on the submitted plans. For example, the glamping tents were positioned at the far north-eastern end of the site, rather than more centrally as indicated on the plans. For the avoidance of doubt, where such inconsistencies exist, I have assessed the proposal based on the submitted plans, which form the basis of the appeal.
6. I have been provided with a copy of an Enforcement Notice issued in relation to the current use of the site, amongst other uses, which has been upheld on appeal¹.

¹ Appeal decision refs APP/L2250/C/23/3321005 & 3321006

While this is a material consideration, the enforcement process is a separate matter and falls outside the scope of my assessment. My focus is solely on the planning merits of the appeal proposal.

7. The camping element of the proposal operates seasonally, between March and September, and comprises three glamping tents along with fifteen tent pitches. For the remainder of the year, the land is used exclusively for animal grazing.
8. Associated facilities include a portable toilet block with composting toilets, a single shower unit, and a pizza food trailer. The supporting information indicates that these temporary structures are capable of being removed from the site outside the camping season.
9. The appellant has drawn my attention to permitted development rights introduced in July 2023 under Class BC of Part 4, Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), which allow the use of land for recreational camping for up to 60 days per calendar year. In accordance with paragraph BC.2(b) of the GPDO, the Local Planning Authority must be notified in writing prior to the commencement of development, and provided with a site plan, details of toilet and waste disposal facilities, and the intended dates of use.
10. There is no evidence before me to confirm that such a notification has been submitted. Furthermore, given that an enforcement notice has been served in relation to the camping use, it is uncertain whether the appeal site could lawfully benefit from these permitted development rights. Even if they were applicable, the camping season before me exceeds the 60-day limit set out in the GPDO.
11. As such, I am not satisfied that a fallback position has been established. Nonetheless, the introduction of these permitted development rights does lend some support to the principle of seasonal recreational camping, including within designated National Landscapes such as the appeal site. Accordingly, I have attributed limited weight to these rights as a material consideration, and I return to their relevance later in my decision.
12. The appellant referred to a nearby approved campsite, understood to be Blandred Farm on Reece Lane. Although limited details were provided, the scheme—approved on 21 November 2024—involved changing agricultural land to a seasonal 45-pitch campsite, along with the construction of toilet and shower blocks and a new vehicular access². I viewed the site externally during my visit and, where relevant, have drawn comparisons with this scheme in reaching my decision.

Main Issues

13. The main issues relevant to this appeal are:
 - the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL);
 - the impact on the supply of the best and most versatile agricultural land;
 - whether the development is in a suitable location, particularly in relation to sustainable transport options; and

² Planning application ref 24/0240/FH

- the effect of the development on highway safety, with particular regard to the arrangements for parking, bin storage and waste collection.

Reasons

Landscape character

14. The site lies within the KDNL. The statutory purpose of National Landscapes is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended) now includes the duty on relevant authorities that they must seek to further this purpose when exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty (now National Landscapes).
15. The KDNL is valued for its open and exposed landscape, limited settlement, a network of isolated farmsteads, and its remote and tranquil qualities. It is predominantly a farmed landscape³. While the tranquillity of the appeal site is somewhat compromised by the audible presence of the nearby A260 Canterbury Road, I observed that the site nonetheless retains a remote and rural character. Surrounding development is limited, generally low in density and profile. The site itself lies on relatively flat terrain and is partially enclosed by mature boundary hedgerows, which restrict views to and from the wider landscape. In this context, the site makes a modest positive contribution to the character of the KDNL.
16. The proposal introduces seasonal camping and a range of ancillary structures, alongside the keeping of animals. I acknowledge that both camping and livestock keeping are broadly compatible with a countryside location, and that similar tourism uses exist nearby, including the campsite at Blandred Farm. However, the nature and extent of the development before me raises concerns.
17. There are limited details on the plans before me regarding the structures that are retained to support the camping use. Although I was able to observe a number of existing structures during my site visit, some fall outside the scope of this proposal and may be subject to separate applications. Nonetheless, it is inevitable that a number of structures are required to support the camping use, and in the absence of more detailed information, I have had close regard to those currently present on site.
18. The array of structures, including a converted prison van repurposed for housing chickens, are individually modest in scale and low in profile. However, many are utilitarian in appearance and do not reflect the tranquil and rural characteristics of this part of the KDNL. While I recognise that these structures could be removed outside the camping season, their presence during operational months contributes to a noticeable change in the site's character. Their siting—primarily in the northern portion of the site—does help to limit their visual impact, but the cumulative presence of tents, glamping tents, and ancillary structures results in a visually cluttered and fragmented appearance. This undermines the simplicity and openness that are characteristic of the KDNL's landscape.
19. Although the site benefits from a degree of screening from hedgerows and adjacent tree lines, and visibility from surrounding public vantage points is limited, I cannot

³ Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Draft Management Plan 2021-2026.

rule out the potential for longer-distance views. The site is also visible from residential properties to the west. As such, some visual harm nonetheless occurs.

20. In contrast, the nearby campsite at Blandred Farm, as far as I was able to observe during my site visit, appeared to be closely focused around the site boundaries, with structures that were more sensitively integrated into the surrounding landscape. The development there involved a limited spread across the site, helping to preserve the dominance of the agricultural landscape and maintain the area's remote and tranquil qualities. As such, I find that the impact of the Blandred Farm scheme on the KDNL was markedly different and less harmful than the proposal before me.
21. I recognise that camping is generally a low-impact activity, especially given the limited number of tents proposed. The additional comings and goings associated with camping are expected to be modest. Considering the existing background noise from the A260 and other nearby uses, I am satisfied that the proposal would not significantly increase noise levels. Overall, I consider that the area's remote character and sense of peace would be broadly retained, insofar as these qualities currently exist.
22. The proposal does not include new hardstanding beyond what has already been approved, and the extent of existing hardstanding is limited. This could be further controlled by condition, if the appeal were to be allowed.
23. Festoon lighting is low-level and seasonal. Given the summer-only operation of the campsite, the need for additional lighting would be minimal. I note that the Council is satisfied that lighting could be controlled through condition, and I agree that this is appropriate to avoid harm to the area's tranquillity.
24. While I do not consider the proposal results in significant or widespread harm to the KDNL, or to the character and appearance of the area more generally, the statutory requirement to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the KDNL sets a very high benchmark. In my view, the proposal involves a degree of visual and character change that fails to positively conserve or enhance the area's natural beauty. The cumulative impact of the seasonal camping use and associated structures—some of which are utilitarian in appearance and contribute to a cluttered site layout—results in some harm to the character and appearance of the KDNL. This harm is limited in extent due to the site's screening and low-profile development, but nonetheless tangible. As such, I find the proposal to be in conflict with Policy CSD4 of the Folkestone & Hythe Core Strategy Review 2022 (CS), Policy NE3 of the Places and Policies Local Plan 2020 (LP), and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Taken together and insofar as relevant, these require that development proposals respect the special qualities of the KDNL—including its tranquillity, remoteness, and farmed character—and must conserve and enhance its natural beauty.

Supply of agricultural land

25. The appeal site measures just over 1.5 hectares and is classified as Grade 2 agricultural land, with Grade 1 representing the highest quality. Prior to its current use, I understand that the site previously functioned as a meadow.
26. The proposal seeks a mixed use of agriculture (animal grazing) and seasonal camping. The tents and ancillary structures are temporary and mobile, capable of

being relocated or removed outside the camping season. Nonetheless, their presence during operational months limits the land available for agriculture and reduce the likelihood of its use out of season. Although the loss only affects part of the site and only seasonally, some agricultural land loss has occurred.

27. The site is self-contained and physically isolated from surrounding agricultural holdings. Its small size and surrounding residential development raise doubts about its suitability for modern farm machinery or significant agricultural activity. Its isolation also limits any potential integration with neighbouring farmland.
28. The appellant suggests that the camping use supports agricultural activity, but no substantive evidence has been provided to demonstrate this relationship or to show that the retained agricultural use is dependent on the camping operation. It remains uncertain as to whether animal grazing could continue without the camping use, and no evidence that the site is likely to be used for other agricultural purposes or as part of a wider holding. Additionally, there is no information on how the seasonal loss of this site might affect the broader supply of best and most versatile land in the Borough.
29. While permitted development rights for recreational camping do not appear to apply here, they indicate that temporary camping on agricultural land is acceptable in principle, and such land is not excluded from these rights.
30. The appellant has referred to the nearby campsite at Blandred Farm, which I understand was demonstrated to constitute a farm diversification scheme, with the camping activity in that case clearly supporting the agricultural use. There is a lack of evidence that the same applies in this case.
31. Given the nature of the camping use, there is no evidence to suggest that it permanently prevents future agricultural use if the camping ceases. However, I cannot disregard the seasonal but recurring loss of agricultural land that results. Although the extent of harm is modest, in the absence of compelling evidence that the retained agricultural activity is dependent on or meaningfully supported by the camping use—or any other clear justification—I find that the proposal conflicts with Policy HW3, which seeks to protect the best and most versatile land from such loss.

Location of development

32. The appeal site lies outside any defined settlement boundary and is therefore considered to be within the countryside. Policy CSD3 of the CS seeks to focus development within settlements but allows for certain types of development in the countryside. Most relevant to this appeal is criterion (d), which allows for sustainable rural diversification and tourism enterprises, provided: no suitable sites are available within settlements; the scale and impact of the development is proportionate and where the site is accessible by a choice of transport modes.
33. The campsite demonstrates a functional reliance on a rural location, particularly due to its mixed-use nature involving the keeping of livestock and the inherent characteristics of camping, which typically require open, natural settings. While the appellant has not provided evidence of having explored alternative sites within settlements, there is also no indication that suitable alternatives exist.

34. The site benefits from a nearby bus stop with regular services to Folkestone and Canterbury. Although Hoad Road lacks pavements and street lighting, it is reasonably walkable for the short stretch required, given the low level of traffic along it, the grass verges either side and generally good visibility between the site and the A260. The A260 provides a lit, paved route to nearby amenities including the Folkestone Garden Centre and the village of Densole, which offers some limited additional facilities such as a public house.
35. While the campsite inevitably relies on private vehicles for arrivals, departures, and some longer trips, this is not unusual for rural tourism developments. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) acknowledges that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. In this context, the site offers a genuine choice of travel modes, which supports its sustainability credentials.
36. Taking all factors into account, the principle of the camping and alpaca site is acceptable and represents a sustainable form of development in the countryside. It aligns with the strategic objectives of the CS Policies SS1, SS3, and CSD3, as well as Policy E3 of the LP, by supporting rural diversification, enhancing tourism, and offering a reasonable level of accessibility.

Highway safety

37. The submission includes limited detail regarding parking and refuse arrangements. There is an area of hardstanding on site which provides space for car parking and there are also dedicated facilities for waste and recycling. The proposal is retrospective, and the campsite has been in operation on a seasonal basis for a number of years already. It is apparent from the condition of the site that provisions are in place for waste and refuse collection, and there is no evidence before me to indicate that these are not operating successfully. During my site visit, I observed that measures were in place encouraging centralised parking, rather than adjacent to individual pitches or glamping tents. If these arrangements were to be formally secured through an appropriate management plan, they would help to minimise the spread of vehicles across the site, concentrate vehicular activity on areas of hardstanding, and reduce the potential for mud or dirt to be deposited on the highway.
38. No tracking plans have been submitted to show how refuse vehicles manoeuvre to/from the site. However, given the presence of hardstanding, the size of the site and open space within, together with the absence of any identified issues with existing arrangements, I am satisfied that this is a matter that could be addressed through a suitably worded planning condition. It is noteworthy that the Kent County Council Highway & Transport team has raised no objection, although recommending that details are finalised.
39. The site has an existing, well-established access, and there is no evidence of any safety issue connected with its use. Should it be necessary in agreeing suitable details, wheel washing facilities could be secured as part of a management plan in order to avoid debris being dragged onto the highway, as a result of informal parking.
40. Subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions securing management plan(s) and associated details, I am satisfied that the proposal makes appropriate provision for waste, refuse and recycling, so as to facilitate suitable circulation and ease of

movement within the site, to provide appropriate parking in accordance with criterion 2 of policy HB1 of the LP. Furthermore, in line with paragraph 116 of the Framework, subject to conditions the proposal avoids an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

41. Policy T2 of the LP primarily relates to residential parking standards. Given the nature of the proposal, its relevance is limited and has therefore been afforded minimal weight in my assessment.

Other Matters

42. The appellant has cited a nearby wedding venue at Hoad Farm Barn. While its proximity is noted, and it too lies within the countryside and the KDNL, it represents a fundamentally different form of development. In the absence of details regarding its approval, it carries very limited weight in my decision.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

43. The proposal results in some tangible harm to the KDNL, and I have found that the proposal fails to conserve or enhance its natural beauty. The proposal therefore conflicts with paragraph 189 of the Framework which instructs that great weight be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.
44. I have identified some harm in respect of a recurring loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land, although the extent of harm is modest, and given the retention of an agricultural use as part of the proposal, and the limited size of land to be lost, the weight to be attached to this is very modest.
45. Balanced against these harms, the proposal provides some modest benefits. Direct employment from the proposal is very limited, but nonetheless a positive aspect to the scheme. The proposal is also likely to generate additional spending within the area on a seasonal basis, and recreational opportunities within the countryside and the National Landscape are increased because of the proposal. These benefits remain unquantified, and given the scale of the proposal, I consider such benefits are likely to be modest.
46. I have found that in principle, the proposal constitutes an acceptable form of development within the countryside, and further that it is suitably located in terms of providing a choice of transport modes. Matters relating to parking, waste and recycling are capable of being addressed by condition.
47. However, notwithstanding the acceptability in principle, and the identified benefits, the Framework's Policies which protect areas of particular importance provide a strong reason for refusing the development.
48. 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. Therefore, for the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

R Lawrence

INSPECTOR