
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 October 2025

by **D M Love BA(Hons) PGCert MRTPI PISEP**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/25/3366600

Alton Forest Lodge, Dimmingsdale, Alton ST10 3AS

- 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. Leon Mailey against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
 - The application Ref is SMD/2020/0679.
 - The development proposed is siting of two woodland holiday cabins.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the siting of two woodland holiday cabins at Alton Forest Lodge, Dimmingsdale, Alton ST10 3AS in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref SMD/2020/0679, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Preliminary Matters

2. The planning application form notes the site address post code as ST10 3AH. However, the decision notice, appellant's appeal form and the Council's questionnaire all list it as ST10 3AS. For the sake of clarity, I have used the latter.

Main Issues

3. The main issues associated with this appeal are:
 - whether the location of the log cabins is consistent with the Council's spatial strategy towards tourist accommodation;
 - how the proposal integrates with the character and appearance of the wider area; and
 - what effect the proposal might have on the ancient woodland.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is in the same woodland area as an existing converted youth hostel used for short term holiday accommodation. According to the evidence the existing accommodation provides for twelve persons, whilst the appeal proposal would add an additional four persons. The former youth hostel catered for twenty persons.

Spatial Strategy

5. Policies SS10, SS11 and E4 of the 2020 adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (SMLP) along with the Churnet Valley Masterplan Supplementary Planning

Document (SPD) sets out the Council's position with respect to tourist accommodation in the area. The site lies within the Churnet Valley which is an area identified for sustainable tourism via SMLP Policies SS10 and SS11. SMLP Policy E4 is generally supportive of tourism development but seeks to ensure that new tourism proposals outside of settlement boundaries are in sustainable locations. These policies specifically support short and long stay visitor accommodation so long as it is consistent with the SPD. The SPD recognises an overall lack of tourist accommodation in the area and seeks to support the sustainable expansion of existing facilities. It also details that development outside of Alton Towers Resort should be minimal.

6. Policies SS10 and SS11 are generally supportive of complementing existing tourist facilities. The proposal seeks to complement an existing tourist accommodation offering and is close to the Staffordshire Way and Churnet Valley Railway walking routes. The appellant details that the site provides access to a nearby café and facilities of Oakamoor and Alton via foot, albeit some distance away and with the route unlikely to be lit therefore access on foot or by bicycle would generally be restricted to day-light hours. However, private vehicular use would be inevitable to access the existing facility. Furthermore, there is already accommodation at the wider site, and the accommodation provided by the two cabins would together still be less than that of the former youth hostel. Overall, therefore, the proposal has good connectivity with other tourist destinations and amenities. I find the proposal meets the first part of Policy E4.
7. The second part of this policy also needs to be satisfied. This supports proposals that expand existing visitor facilities where there is an unmet local demand. The evidence from the Council's officer report and the supporting text for Policy SS11 advises that there is a lack of overnight tourist accommodation and the area is dominated by day visitors. The proposal meets this element of the policy given it is expanding an existing tourist offering in an area identified as having an unmet demand.
8. Policy T1 of the SMLP promotes proposals that would reduce reliance on the private car and reduces the need to travel generally. Furthermore, the policy requires proposals to be satisfactorily accommodated in the existing highway network and seeks to ensure, where appropriate, sustainable transport solutions for new development. Visiting most attractions in the area, such as Alton Towers, would require trips by private car. The proposal would not significantly add to the pressures of private car use in the area by virtue of the size of accommodation on offer. The appellant has detailed appropriate levels of car parking as confirmed by the Council's Transport Officer.
9. The SPD supports minimal development outside Alton Towers. The proposal represents an increase on the existing provision by four persons. However, the total combined would be accommodation for up to 16 persons and still below that provided by the former youth hostel. Although the Council does not provide a definition of minimal, given the physical small-scale footprint of the cabins and relatively small increase in accommodation I find that the proposal would provide a minimal level of development.
10. Policies of the SMLP requires proposals to be of an appropriate quality, scale and character compatible with the local area. This matter is addressed below under 'Character and Appearance'.

11. I find that the location of the log cabins is consistent with the Council's spatial strategy towards tourist accommodation. The proposal therefore accords with the terms of SMLP Policies SS10, SS11, E4 and T1 and the SPD.

Character and Appearance

12. The proposal consists of two one bed log cabins of an 'A'-frame appearance. They would be installed in an existing clearing with no damage to trees expected as a result. They would be adjacent to existing footpaths but would be seen in context and relationship with the existing former youth hostel building.
13. Policies SS10, DC3 and E4 of the SMLP require tourist accommodation proposals to be of a suitable design and respect the character and appearance of the immediate area. The Council considers that the proposal would lead to a cluster of buildings that would undermine the openness of the woodland. However, I find that the cabins would be positioned such as to form a loose grouping with the extant buildings without undermining the openness of the woodland. Existing vegetation would screen the development from most public viewpoints, even in winter. In this regard I conclude that the proposal is consistent with the character and appearance of the area and would not cause undue harm and therefore accords with Policies SS10, DC3 and E4 of the SMLP.

Impact on Ancient Woodland

14. The proposal makes use of extant clearings to avoid disruption to trees and the character of the woodland.
15. The appeal site lies adjacent to Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW). The Council's Tree Officer states that the appeal proposal lies 15m out with the ASNW and there were no objections from consultees to the final submitted plans. The 15m buffer distance is considered the minimum necessary to ensure no adverse impacts on the woodland. The Council's Tree Officer confirmed that the proposal would not cause any additional disturbance to the woodland and raised no objections.
16. Considering no objective evidence to the contrary has been provided the proposals, although increasing the numbers of visitors to the woodland, would not result in a further impact, including from noise and on the sense of tranquillity beyond that already created by the existing accommodation. The siting of the two log cabins in themselves outside of the ASNW woodland would not present an overly intrusive level of works into the area. Consequently, the proposals would not harm the ancient woodland, and are therefore consistent with Policies SS10, DC3, E4 and NE1 of the SMLP in this regard and paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Other Matters

17. The issue of foul drainage has been raised. However, the appellant is proposing to install a package treatment plant, and this has been agreed by consultees who confirm that it would not have an adverse effect on the receiving environment or the woodland.
18. Comments have been submitted with respect to the adequacy of the ecology surveys. There have been no objections from consultees including the Council's

ecologist and the local Wildlife Trust. I have no clear evidence before me to suggest that the information is not accurate.

19. Interested parties have raised a variety of concerns relating to anti-social behaviour including littering, the building of mountain bike trails, the use of mountain bikes and dirt bikes in the woodland including competitions and the compatibility of these uses with the footpaths. Further concern has also been raised about the potential of extant unauthorised developments including a stone and timber circular structure and the siting of a converted bus on hardstanding used for accommodation. These issues are not within the remit of this appeal which only seeks to resolve the matter of the proposed holiday cabins.

Conditions

20. The Council has provided a list of conditions, which have been seen by the appellant. I have amended the wording of some of these conditions without altering their fundamental aims. I have included some pre-commencement conditions to ensure that the relevant details are acceptable and compliance with their requirements at a later time could result in unacceptable harm
21. In addition to the standard timescale of the permission and works to be completed in accordance with the approved plans I have attached conditions relating to occupancy to prevent the units being occupied on a full-time basis. Conditions for landscaping, tree planting, surface and foul water drainage and ecology are also included to reflect the visual and ecological value of the site and the mitigation measures identified in the supporting documentation. Finally, conditions relating to construction timing and method, including soil management and contamination, are also included to ensure suitable working of the site.

Conclusion

22. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

D M Love

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
2. The development hereby permitted, including building materials specified, shall be carried out in complete accordance with the submitted amended plans and specifications as follows:-
 - R0112 002 P0 dated 24.6.22 Amended Site Plan
 - Plans and Elevations received July 2022
3. Each building on the application site hereby permitted shall not be occupied by more than two persons at any one time and no person(s) shall occupy any of the buildings on the application site for a period of longer than 2 calendar months and no person(s) who has occupied any of the buildings shall occupy any of the buildings on site again at any time within six months of the day of the last occupation of the building.
4. Before the commencement of development, a landscaping scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. It shall include a minimum of 6 new native trees to the west side of the approved cabins, together with reinforcement understorey/shrub planting to the east side of the cabins, wildflower areas, plants rich in a pollen source, bat-friendly planting and shall comprise only native species appropriate to and characteristic of the surrounding woodland. Details shall include all hard surfacing materials and locations. Additionally, all soft landscape details shall include:
 - a) Planting plans
 - b) Written specifications (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment)
 - c) Schedules of plants, noting species, planting sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate
 - d) Implementation timetables

The approved landscaping scheme shall be implemented in the first available season following the completion of the development hereby permitted.
5. The implemented planting scheme shall be subsequently maintained in accordance with good horticultural practice to include that any plants which are removed, die, become diseased or otherwise fail to establish within 5 years of planting shall be replaced during the next available planting season and the replacements themselves shall then be maintained in accordance with good horticultural practice.
6. Before the commencement of development (including any site clearance, stripping, preparation or establishment) details of the proposed specification and construction method of foundation support for the cabins hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such details shall be designed to have the minimum number and size of support points, minimal disturbance of or intrusion into existing ground, and avoid wider

excavation or building-up of existing ground levels. The development shall then be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

7. No trees or shrubs or ground vegetation shall be removed unless directly required to accommodate the approved development. There shall be no removal of any trees or shrubs during the bird nesting season (nominally March to August inclusive), unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority and in this case only following careful inspection by a competent person immediately prior to removal in order to establish that such trees, shrubs or hedgerow are not in active use by nesting wild birds.
8. The first action on commencement of development, prior to any further action (including any site clearance, stripping, preparation or establishment) shall be the erection of temporary tree protection barriers and advisory notices for the protection of the existing trees to be retained, in the vicinity of the cabins hereby permitted and any vehicle access routes between the cabin positions and the existing site access track, in accordance with guidance in British Standard 5837:2012 *Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations*, and as set out in the Arboricultural Survey Report & Method Statement dated September 2020 submitted in support of the application hereby approved, and these shall be retained in position for the construction period. Within the fenced areas there shall be no excavation, changes in ground levels, installation of underground services, provision of hard surfacing, passage of vehicles, storage of materials, equipment or site huts, tipping of chemicals, waste or cement, or lighting of fires.
9. Before the commencement of development, details of foul and surface water drainage/disposal shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and the approved drainage/ disposal shall be implemented before the development is first brought into use and retained thereafter.
10. The development shall be undertaken in accordance with the measures set out in section 5.3 of the Elite Ecology Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated July 2023.
11. Ecological enhancement measures shall be provided before the development is first brought into use in accordance with section 5.4 of the Elite Ecology Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated July 2023 and shall include bat boxes, bird boxes, hedgehog nesting boxes, a bug hotel, reptile log piles, hibernacula measures and bumblebee boxes in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These shall be maintained for the lifetime of the development.
12. Before the commencement of the development hereby approved, construction method statements outlining protection and mitigation measures for badgers, great crested newts, bats and birds shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and the measures approved shall be undertaken in the construction of the development and any mitigation measures identified shall be provided and maintained for the duration of the construction period.
13. The construction works, including deliveries hereby approved shall be carried out between 9am-6pm Monday to Friday and between 9am-1pm Saturdays and at no

time on Sundays or Bank Holidays without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

14. In the event that contamination is found at any time when carrying out the approved development it must be reported in writing immediately to the Local Planning Authority. Development should not resume until an initial investigation and risk assessment has been completed in accordance with a scheme to be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority to assess the nature and extent of any contamination on the site. If the initial investigation and risk assessment indicates that potential risks exists to any identified receptors, development shall not re-commence until a detailed remediation scheme to bring the site to a condition suitable for the intended use by removing unacceptable risks to human health, buildings and other property, and the natural and historical environment has been submitted to approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Following completion of measures identified in the approved remediation scheme and prior to bringing the development into first use, a verification report that demonstrates the effectiveness of the remediation carried out must be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

15. No topsoil or fill material is to be imported to the site until it has been tested for contamination and assessed for its suitability for the development hereby permitted, a suitable methodology for testing this material should be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the soils being imported onto site. The methodology should include the sampling frequency, testing schedules, criteria against which the analytical results will be assessed (as determined by the risk assessment) and source material information. The analysis shall then be carried out and validity evidence submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
16. No artificial lighting shall be installed at the site, unless details of all lighting including location, manufacturing details and luminance levels, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Lighting shall be installed in accordance with the approved details.
17. Before the development is first brought into use, separate waste collection bins shall be provided for each of the buildings.

End Of Schedule