
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 October 2025

by A Oyebade MSc FCILT

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/25/3363988

Findon Court, Findon Road, Findon, West Sussex BN14 0RA

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Matthew Geal against South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref is SDNP/24/04096/FUL.
 - The development proposed is change of use of redundant agricultural land to glamping site.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matter and main issue

2. The Council did not issue a formal decision on the proposal. However, it has provided an appeal statement and identified the development plan policies it considers most relevant. The appellant has had the opportunity to comment on this material. I have determined the appeal based on the submitted evidence.
3. Having regard to the above, the main issue is whether the proposed development is appropriate for a countryside location and compatible with the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

4. Findon Court is situated within the South Downs National Park, an area recognised for its distinctive landscape character and high scenic value. The immediate surroundings comprise established residential development, typically constructed in traditional flint and brick, set within mature landscaping and adjoining open countryside that contributes to a strong sense of rural enclosure. According to Part A.23 of the South Downs Landscape Character Assessment (Adopted September 2020), characteristic building materials in this locality include flint, red brick, clay tiles and Welsh slate, with some modern materials, such as concrete, corrugated iron and asbestos, appearing in agricultural structures. Flint is a defining feature of local barns and boundary walls. The appeal site occupies a visually sensitive edge-of-village position, where the built form transitions rapidly to open fields, public rights of way, and the wider downland landscape.
5. Policy SD25 of the South Downs Local Plan (Adopted July 2019) provides that development outside settlement boundaries will only be supported where one of the following applies:

- the site is allocated for the proposed development or safeguarded for that purpose within the Development Plan;
 - the proposal involves the appropriate reuse of previously developed land (excluding residential gardens) and conserves and enhances the special qualities of the National Park; or
 - there is an essential need for the development to be in the countryside.
6. The two statutory purposes of the National Park designation as legislated for the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949 are:
- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas (Purpose 1); and
 - To promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of their areas (Purpose 2).
7. Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995 states that where there is a conflict between the National Park purposes, greater weight must be given to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the National Park. Accordingly, decision-making should give precedence to Purpose 1.
8. Section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 provides that, in exercising any functions relating to land within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a relevant authority must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of that area.
9. The appeal site lies within an open countryside setting characterised by mature trees and dense vegetation. Approaching from Findon Road, it is preceded by a wide expanse of open green field extending from the gated entrance of the courtyard to the appeal site, much of which is used as horse-grazed pasture. There is also a public right of way near the site.
10. The proposal under appeal comprises the installation of four single-storey, timber-framed detached units finished in redwood cladding with dark grey asphalt-shingle roofs. Associated car and cycle parking would be provided. The units would be dispersed across a substantial portion of the woodland. Each structure would be set on a timber floor fixed to the ground, giving it a non-permanent form of construction, and would be intended to accommodate visitors to the National Park. Access to the site would be facilitated by the formation of a new track across the adjoining field.
11. The appellant argues that, as the glamping site would be located within an existing woodland area, the surrounding tree cover, being characteristic of the natural landscape, would ensure that the cabins are not visible from nearby dwellings, the wider landscape, or from Findon Road. However, the presence of woodland does not demonstrate that the development would be without visual impact or that it would integrate successfully into its rural surroundings. Even though the setting of the woodland may provide some benefits in terms of visual impact, this would be outweighed by the overall effect on landscape.
12. Policy SD25 of the South Downs Local Plan allows, in exceptional circumstances, for development of this nature outside settlement boundaries. However, any such proposal must demonstrate full compliance with the relevant policies of the Local

Plan and must appropriately reflect the context of the broad area in which it is located. The scheme would extend built form beyond the defined settlement boundary and would appear incongruous when read against the established linear pattern of development in the locality. Consequently, it would erode the rural qualities of the surrounding countryside and undermine the area's overall character. The development would occupy and dominate an area that is presently open, resulting in a marked reduction in its spaciousness and altering the balance between built form and landscape that contributes to the site's distinctive rural setting.

13. Furthermore, the introduction of a motorised access route would encroach into the adjoining open field, diminishing its rural qualities. The proposed track, flanked by new tree planting, would create an engineered and uncharacteristic feature that would subdivide the fields and formalise an entrance at odds with the site's rural character. The historic field pattern and boundary structure would be adversely affected, and the evidence before me does not demonstrate that these impacts could be satisfactorily mitigated. The current configuration of the car park appears inadequate to allow vehicles to manoeuvre safely and efficiently. It is likely that additional space would be required to facilitate turning movements, and any such expansion would risk further encroachment into the root protection areas of adjacent trees, thereby compromising their integrity. Accordingly, the proposal would not conserve or enhance the character of the landscape.
14. The layout and form of the proposed units would not reflect, reinforce, or enhance the distinctiveness of the established pattern of development in the surrounding area. While the accommodation would provide opportunities for visitors to experience and enjoy the National Park, thereby contributing to Purpose 2 of a National Park, this does not outweigh the requirement to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the National Park. In accordance with Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995, greater weight must be afforded to Purpose 1 where conflict arises. In this case, the proposal would not meet the primary purpose.
15. The proposal introduces car parking areas, built structures, and cleared surfaces finished with stone chippings. These elements are not characteristic of a woodland environment and would erode its semi-natural qualities. The cabins themselves, finished in redwood timber cladding with dark grey asphalt shingle roofs, would present the appearance of small rural outbuildings. In this context, the development would read as an incongruous intervention within the woodland setting. The associated activity and disturbance would diminish the experiential and amenity value of the landscape, including for users of the adjacent public right of way.
16. The regimented layout, uniform design, and formal arrangement of the lodges around a central communal space and pathway would further conflict with the informal, organic character of the surrounding woodland. The perceptual qualities of the site would be materially altered by the operational requirements of the lodges, including access routes, parking areas, and external lighting. Collectively, these factors would introduce a level of domestication and formality that is at odds with the prevailing woodland character and would undermine the site's natural qualities.
17. I further note the South Downs National Park Authority's (SDNPA) position that the appeal scheme would neither conserve nor enhance the landscape character, and

that it would result in harm to the established field pattern as well as to the condition of the historic field boundary. I find the SDNPA's assessment to be consistent with my findings set out above.

Other considerations and planning balance

18. The development is expected to generate social and economic benefits, including increased visitor spending and the creation of employment opportunities that would support the rural economy both during construction and once the site is occupied. However, paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework ("the Framework") makes clear that great weight must be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, which hold the highest level of protection in this regard.
19. In the circumstances of this case, I find that the proposed development would cause lasting harm to the countryside and the character and appearance of the area. When assessed against the policies of the Framework as a whole, the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Therefore, the proposed development would not be in accordance with the spatial strategy and design principles set out in Policies SD4, SD23, SD25 and SD45 of the adopted South Downs Local Plan, the First Purpose of a National Park and Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (July 2022).

Conclusion

20. Having considered all other material factors relevant to the proposal, I conclude that the development would not be appropriate within a countryside location, nor would it be compatible with the character and appearance of the surrounding area. For these reasons, and those set out above, the appeal should therefore be dismissed.

A Oyebade

INSPECTOR