

Report to	Planning Committee
Date	8 August 2013
By	Director of Planning
Local Authority	Lewes District Council
Application Number	SDNP/13/00692/FUL
Applicant	Mr J Butcher
Application	Creation of a seasonal campsite for up to 30 pitches and erection of facilities building
Address	Land On The West Side Of Lodge Lane, Ditchling, East Sussex
Purpose of Report	The application is reported to Committee for a decision.

Recommendation: That planning permission be refused for the reason set out in paragraph 10.1 of this report.

Executive Summary

The proposal is to use the site as a seasonal campsite for up to 30 pitches and erect a facilities building. The application is recommended for refusal because the proposal would harm the landscape character of the South Downs National Park. In addition it is considered that given the substandard access routes to the site and wider local highway network, that the traffic generation from the development would have a significant adverse impact on the safety and free flow of the surrounding highway network.

The Highway Authority has raised an objection to the scheme with regard to it having an adverse impact on highway safety. Comments and concerns raised by the community include the lack of need for such permanent sites, adverse impact on the landscape, overdevelopment and highway safety.

This application is reported to committee due to the level of public interest.

I. Site Description

- I.1 The application site is located approximately 1.4 kilometres to the south of Hassocks and is within the designated countryside. The South Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment describes the character area as the Adur to Ouse Scarp Foothills. This landscape area is very sensitive given the public open access land and Public Rights of way on the escarpments. It is a tranquil and rural landscape largely without suburban or modern urbanising characteristics..
- I.2 The overall site area is approximately 5.5 hectares and it is currently an agricultural field, with an existing access from Lodge Lane. Along the southern boundary are well established hedgerow and trees. The eastern boundary is defined by a mixture of trees and hedgerows, between the junction with Underhill Lane and the existing access on Lodge Lane, from the access point there is low level hedging. The northern and western boundaries are defined by post and wire fencing and recently planted trees.
- I.3 The nearest residential property to the application site is Whitelands, which is located approximately 150 metres to the west of the application site directly to the south of the access to the site. A number of residential properties lie to the west of Whitelands along Underhill Lane.

2. Relevant Planning History

2.1 None

3. Proposal

3.1 The proposal is to use the land for seasonal camping for up to 30 tents for tourist accommodation. The layout of the development indicates that the tents could be pitched across the site with 15 pre-erected Bell Tents located across the southern half. There would not be any service hook ups on the site as the facility would be aimed at walkers using the South Downs Way. No audio music would be permitted and no bins/bin store would be provided on site.

3.2 The existing access to the site would be upgraded, the proposal would allow vehicular access onto the site for campers. No specific details have been provided to explain how vehicular access would be managed have been submitted. A shower/toilet block would be located approximately 10 metres to the south west of the upgraded access. The building would be approximately 9.3 metres in width, 5.5 metres in depth and have a maximum ridge height of 4.5 metres. The barn would be constructed of a mix of timber weather boarding for the walls. The roof would be juniper green painted corrugated steel, with rooflights on the rear slope and solar panels on the front slope.

3.3 The application form and drawings are accompanied by a Planning Statement.

4. Consultations

4.1 **Highway Authority:** Objects for the following reasons;

- the surrounding highway network is unsuitable to serve the proposed development due to their narrow width, poor alignment and lack of footways
- Underhill Lane is unsuitable to serve the proposed development due to its substandard layout and visibility at its junction with Beacon Road/Beacon Road South. In addition, this junction is the only access point from inside the boundary of East Sussex, where there have been two serious accidents in the last three years
- the development is poorly located in terms of sustainable transport alternatives to the car

4.2 **West Sussex County Council Highway Authority (Neighbouring Highway Authority):** Objects for the following reasons:

- the site is next to the county boundary, there is concern that surrounding roads are of inadequate width to be able to accommodate the additional traffic
- There has been one accident on the street of the road just within West Sussex, which was due to the narrow width of the road

4.3 **SDNPA Landscape Officer:** Objects for the following reasons:

- The site is in a highly sensitive site located on the footslopes of the scarp, which are highly sensitive to clutter, movement and human activity.
- The proposed campsite would by virtue of human activity, camping paraphernalia and vehicle movements would appear as an intrusion into the rural landscape.

4.4 **Ditchling Parish Council:** Objects for the following reasons:

- Adverse impact on the neighbourhood
- It would have a detrimental visual impact on the surroundings
- There is no strategic need for this site. There are other campsites in the area that have spare capacity
- The narrow road is not suitable for additional traffic.

5. Representations

5.1 **Hassocks Parish Council (neighbouring parish council) –** Objects for the following reasons:

- Adverse impact on the neighbourhood with regard to noise on neighbouring properties
- It would have a detrimental visual impact on the surroundings
- There is no strategic need for this site. There are other campsites in the area that have spare capacity
- The narrow road is not suitable for additional traffic.

5.2 **South Downs Society:** Supports the principle of low key sustainable tourism, however would like measure put in place to manage the site.

5.3 28 letters of objections making the following points:

- Adverse impact on the character of the National Park and the amenity of local residents.
- This is a very rural site with no surrounding businesses or offices which spoil the landscape.
- If this development is allowed it will in time lead to further development.
- There is no perceived need for this application, given the proximity of other camping sites within the area
- The scale of the proposals would have a significant adverse impact on the highway safety of the surrounding highway network
- Adverse impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties with regard to noise, smell and rubbish
- Concern over the publicity of the application with regard to no notification of neighbouring properties

6. Planning Policy Context

6.1 Applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The statutory development plan in this area is the Lewes District Local Plan 2003.

National Park Purposes

6.2 The two statutory purposes of the SDNP designation are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas;
- To promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of their areas.

6.3 If there is a conflict between these two purposes, conservation takes precedence. There is also a duty to foster the economic and social well being of the local community in pursuit of these purposes.

National Planning Policy Framework and Circular 2010

- Government policy relating to National Parks is set out in English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010 and The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which came into effect on 27 March 2012. The Circular and NPPF confirm that National Parks have the highest status of protection and the NPPF states at paragraph 115 that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in the national parks and that the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations and should also be given great weight in National Parks. Paragraph 116 states that planning permission for major developments within National Parks should be refused except in exceptional circumstances

6.4 The development plan policies in the Lewes District Local Plan listed below are considered to be compliant with the NPPF.

7. Development Plan Policies

7.1 The relevant Saved Policies in the Lewes District Local Plan 2003 are (these policies are proposed to be saved by the Lewes District Council Joint Core Strategy):

ST3: Design, form and setting of development

ST5: Access for people with limited mobility

ST11: Landscaping of development

ST3 & ST11: – relate to general development principles such as design, landscaping and impact on the amenity of the area of applications including impact of development on highway safety,

CT1: relates to development in the countryside

ST30: relates to the protection of air & land quality

T13 & T14: relates to transport and access requirements of development

8. Planning Assessment

Principle of development and impact on the character and appearance of the SDNP

8.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) advises in paragraph 116 that major development should not take place in National Parks unless there is clear and compelling justification of need. The site is located within the designated countryside, policy CT1 restricts development unless there is an overriding need for it to be located within the countryside. The development proposal is to provide tourist accommodation primarily aimed at families and couples using the surrounding rights of way network and enjoying the surrounding landscape. It therefore supports the second purpose of the national park designation in principle. In both national policy and development plan policy tourism facilities are considered appropriate in the countryside provided they do not harm protected landscapes and environmentally sensitive areas.

8.2 The main issue is therefore the impact of the proposal on this rural and predominately open landscape character of the scarp footslopes, which are particularly sensitive to change as the site is visible from a number of public vantage points, including from the surrounding roads, Public Rights of Way network and Open Access Land located on the surrounding higher land. In addition the site is isolated and is located in a tranquil part of the National Park, with little other development in the immediate area. The creation of a camping site for up to 30 pitches would result in the introduction of extensive camping paraphernalia, in the form of tents and associated human activity including vehicle movements and the proposed amenity block. It is therefore considered that the proposal by virtue of its size, scale, layout and associated camping paraphernalia would have a significant adverse impact on the appearance and landscape characteristics, within this visually sensitive rural landscape of the South Downs National Park.

Impact on highways

8.3 There are two existing access routes to this site one via Lodge Lane and Underhill Lane, both are subject to the 60 mph national speed restriction. These roads are substandard in terms of layout, width and visibility. In this respect both access routes are unsuitable for any increase in traffic. In addition, further along Underhill Lane at its junction with Beacon Road/Beacon Road South, has substandard layout and visibility at this point. The traffic movements associated with the site at a worst case scenario could have the potential for 30 trips a day. It is considered that given the substandard access routes to the site and wider local highway network, that the traffic generation from the development would have a significant adverse impact on the safety and free flow of the surrounding highway network.

Impact on amenities of neighbouring properties

8.4 The proposed development could have a detrimental impact on the amenities of residents in Whiteways and the houses to the west of this property, through the potential of visitors to cause noise and disturbance unless these activities are carefully managed. The imposition of relevant conditions regarding noise, external lighting and the requirement for an operational management plan to manage arrival times of visitors and how the refuse facility will be managed would mitigate these impacts, if permission were to be granted.

Biodiversity and nature conservation

8.5 The application is accompanied by an Ecological Checklist, which demonstrates that there

will be no adverse impact on biodiversity as the site has been in agricultural use.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The proposal constitutes inappropriate development within open countryside and would not conserve or enhance the highly designated and sensitive landscape character of the South Downs National Park. In addition it is considered that given the substandard access routes to the site and wider local highway network, that the traffic generation from the development would have a significant adverse impact on the safety and free flow of the surrounding highway network.

10. Reason for Recommendation and Conditions

- 10.1 It is recommended that planning permission be refused for the following reasons:
- 1) The proposed development by virtue of its size, scale, layout and associated camping paraphernalia would have a significant adverse impact on the appearance and landscape characteristics within this visually sensitive rural landscape of the South Downs National Park. In this respect the proposal is contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework and policies CT1, ST3 and ST11 of the Lewes District Local Plan 2003.
 - 2) The roads leading to and from the site are of inadequate width to accommodate safely the additional traffic, which the proposed development would generate. Additionally the further traffic created would interfere with the free flow at the junctions of Underhill Lane/Lodge Lane and Underhill Lane and Beacon Road/Beacon Road South by the additional slowing, stopping, turning and reversing traffic which would be created. As such the proposal is likely to have a detrimental impact on highway safety contrary to policies T1 & T14 of the Lewes District Local Plan 2003.

11. Crime and Disorder Implication

- 11.1 It is considered that the proposal does not raise any crime and disorder implications.

12. Human Rights Implications

- 12.1 This planning application has been considered in light of statute and case law and any interference with an individual's human rights is considered to be proportionate to the aims sought to be realised.

13 Equalities Act 2010

- 13.1 Due regard, where relevant, has been taken to the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equalities Act 2010.

14 Proactive Working

- 14.1 In reaching this decision the Local Planning Authority has worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive way, in line with the NPPF. This has included the provision of advice from a SDNPA Development Management Officer during the application and the opportunity to provide additional information to seek clarification on concerns regarding issues over highway safety.

Tim Slaney
Director of Planning
South Downs National Park Authority

Contact Officer:	Lewis Oliver
Tel:	01730 234127
email:	Lewis.oliver@southdowns.gov.uk
Appendices	1. Site Location Map
SDNPA Consultees	Director of Planning & Legal Services

Background Documents

<http://planningpublicaccess.southdowns.gov.uk/online-applications/simpleSearchResults.do;jsessionid=739F7430ABA4C24AD231C4F843FE64EB?action=firstPage>

Observations of Highway Authorities

Observations of Lewes District Council Officers

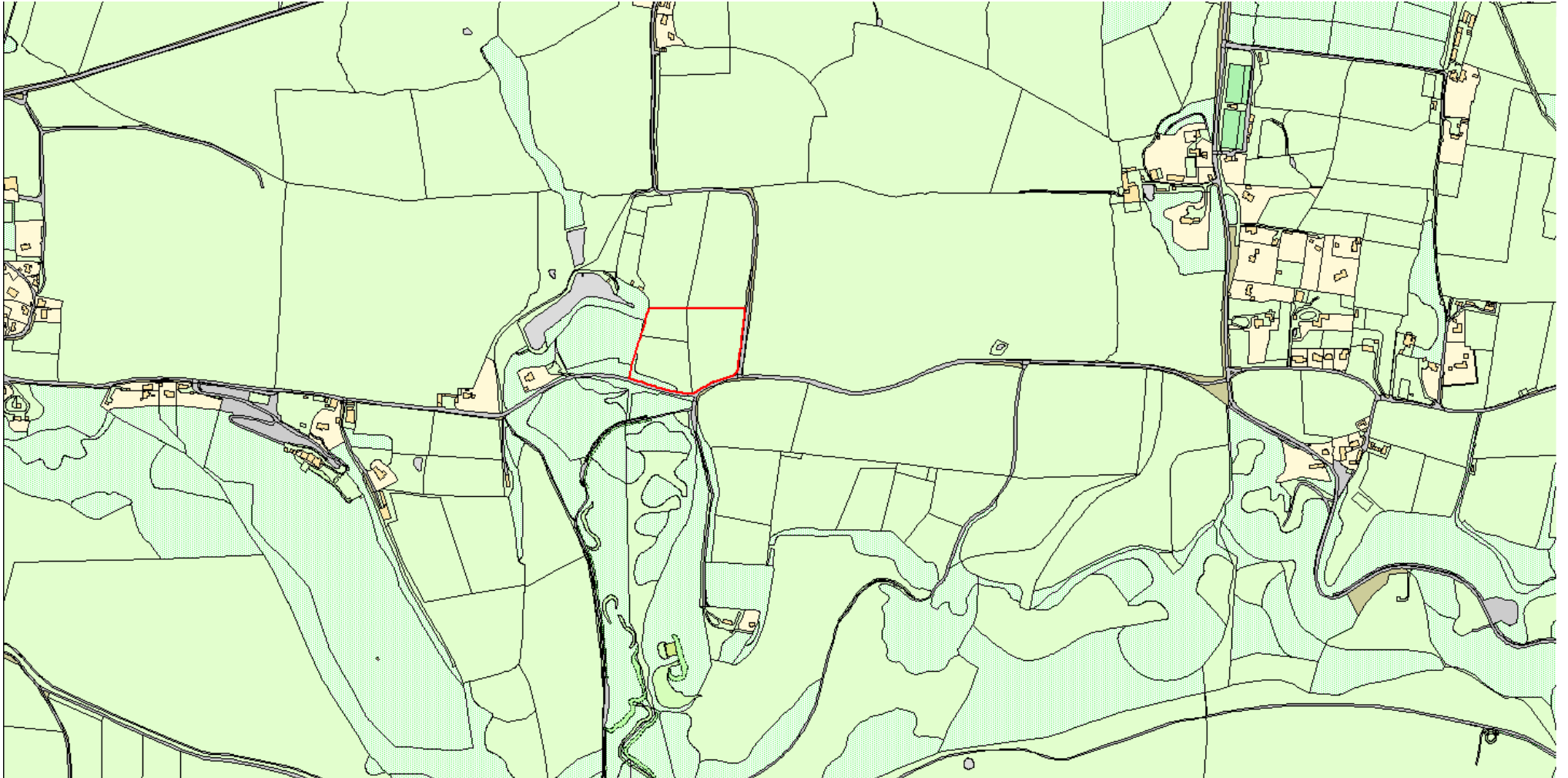
Observations of Ditchling Parish Council, Hassocks Parish Council and members of the public

National Planning Policy Framework

Circular 20/10

Lewes District Local Plan 2003

Agenda Item 8 Report PC67/13- Appendix I Site Location Map



This material has been reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital map data with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (c) Crown Copyright (Not to Scale)