

BRIEFING NOTE

4/06/2013/OF1

CHANGE OF USE TO PROVIDE HOLIDAY PARK AND ERECTION OF ASSOCIATED BUILDING COMPLEX

County Council Objection

Cumbria County Council has raised a strategic objection; technical issues including highways, ecology and archaeology have been resolved. Their objections are as follows (with a response in bold italics):

1. The proposal does not lie within either a Key Service Centre as designated by the Structure Plan or a Local Service Centre as identified in the Copeland Local Plan and as a consequence the development fails to satisfy Joint Structure Plan (JSP) Policies ST3 and ST5.

The site is allocated in the Copeland Local Plan as a Tourism Opportunity Site (Policy TSM 2) and Local Plan policies take precedence over Structure Plan policies.

2. The development lies in open countryside where Policy ST7 states that development should only be permitted in exceptional cases. Whilst caravan sites have generally been located either on the edge of settlements or in the open countryside, the County Council considers that the scale of this development makes it unacceptable as an exception to Policy ST7.

The site is allocated in the Copeland Local Plan as a Tourism Opportunity Site (Policy TSM 2) and Local Plan Policies take precedence over Structure Plan policies.

3. The site lies within the Immediate Coastal Zone in a stretch of undeveloped coast, comprising large tracts of open land providing valuable habitats, important recreation and leisure resources, with much also in use for agriculture. Protection of its open nature, beauty and tranquillity is important. Policy C41 prescribes that development in the undeveloped coast will be permitted where it requires a coastal location and cannot be reasonably located in the developed coast, provided that it is not detrimental to the landscape character and there is no evidence that a coastal location is required. The County Council considers that this development would be unacceptable under Policy C41.

The coastal stretch in this area is not covered by any formal landscape designation or protection policy. The development site is adjacent to the wind turbines.

4. The scale and type of development proposed in this application would harm landscape character, and would therefore be contrary to Policy EM15.

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5. Policy EM16 directs new tourism facilities to Key Service Centres and to locations that enable the economic and physical regeneration of an area, where they bring benefit to the local community. It is noted that in rural areas, tourism uses can assist in the diversification of existing businesses and encourage rural regeneration, but proposals will only be supported where their scale can be accommodated without adverse effects on the character and amenity of the local area.

Copeland Local Plan Policy TSM identifies the site as a Tourism Opportunity Site.

The government's advice note Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism, recognises the importance of tourism as a contributor to the local economy and employment and expects local plan policies generally to be aimed at facilitating good quality tourism development.

6. Policy E37 requires that any development or land use change should be compatible with the distinctive characteristics and features of Cumbria's landscape types and sub types. The majority of the proposal lies within Landscape Character Type 5a (Lowland – ridge and valley), with a small part of the site lying within character Type 5d (Lowland – urban fringe). Overall the County considers that the proposal would be out of scale and character with the surrounding landscape and would cause significant harm to the landscape character of the area and would therefore not be in accordance with JSP Policy E37. In so doing the development would fail to satisfy JSP Policies ST3, C41, EM15 and EM16.

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Copeland Council's consideration of the application

This is a complex application and was the subject of a series of consultations and considerable additional information was requested from the applicant as consideration of the application progressed.

The issues in considering this proposal were summarised as:

1. The principle of development on this site
2. The scale of the development and the impact on the village
3. Traffic and road safety issues
4. Technical matters
5. Economic benefits to the local area

All of the objections received (under 1 and 2 above) were reported to the Planning Panel.

Technical issues (3 and 4 above) involving highways, ecology, archaeology, drainage, sewage etc were resolved through amendments negotiated.

Members were then asked to balance the county's strategic objection against the very significant economic benefits to the area.

- The Copeland Local Plan states that the aim is to continue to increase visitors to West Cumbria by 5% a year, representing in Copeland another 500 jobs over the next ten years.
- Short to medium leisure breaks combine to provide 78% of tourism trade in Cumbria.
- The estimated cost of the development is £80 to £90 million.
- During construction the developer will utilise, wherever possible, local contractors and local labour. It is anticipated that about 50 jobs will be created during the main construction phase programmed over 3 years. There will be significant beneficial impact on the local economy in providing construction jobs and through local supply of building materials.
- When the complex is complete and in the high season (April to September) it is estimated that about 120 to 130 persons will be employed across various sectors including leisure, catering, administration and maintenance. This workforce will be supplemented by about 50 part time staff who will be required on change over days.
- It is estimated that between 40,000 and 55,000 visitors will visit the site each year with an anticipated medium stay of 4 to 7 days with some longer stays. With an average tourist spend of £57.50 (STEAM 2003) per staying night, the value to the local economy is of the order of £9 million to £20 million per annum. Guests at the development will support the local and regional tourist trade ie visitor attractions and catering. Non tourism businesses will also benefit through the local supply chain and general retail trade.

Conclusion

The balance which has been sought has been to welcome the economic benefits to the area whilst attempting to minimise the impacts of the development on the local community. Through consultations with a number of technical bodies and by seeking further information from the applicant, many of the concerns have been addressed and additional controls imposed by planning conditions.