

Tourism Technical Guide

Overnight Visitor Accommodation

(Planning Technical Advice Note)



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- 1.1 East Staffordshire Borough has a number of advantages and attractions as a place for overnight stays. Visitors can get away to the countryside, use good road links to local attractions, and enjoy shopping, culture and a thriving night time economy in our towns and villages
- 1.2 Most applications associated with tourism over the last few years have been for overnight accommodation. Planning decisions should direct new overnight visitor accommodation (whether conversions or new build) to locations within existing settlement boundaries in line with policy SP1 of the Local Plan. This is to ensure that accommodation supports the economy of East Staffordshire's towns and villages, and is in walking, cycling and public transport distance of amenities. Lighting and footpaths are important to keep visitors safe when exploring the area.
- 1.3 Despite this, there are some instances when development outside settlement boundaries for overnight visitor accommodation could be compliant with the Development Plan. It is important that these decisions remain consistent, and that applicants are given as much information beforehand as possible. Therefore the Planning Policy team has created this Technical Advice Note on Overnight Visitor Accommodation.

When considering this type of application key policies will include:

- Policy SP1 – East Staffordshire Approach to Sustainable Development
- Policy SP8 – Development outside Settlement Boundaries
- Policy SP15 – Tourism, Culture and Leisure Development

This note applies to:

- 1.4 The re-use of buildings and new development
- 1.5 The types of development it covers are: camping fields, holiday lodges / lets, huts, log cabins, tourist pods etc. These types of development can often be referred to as 'Glamping', which is short for glamorous camping.

Permitted Development Rights:

- 1.6 Applicants should also be aware that some of these uses do not require planning permission if the period the land is to be used in this way is sufficiently temporary. These rules are known as 'permitted development rights'.
- 1.7 Permitted development rights are subject to conditions and limitations to control potential impacts but in general, land can be used temporarily for many different purposes, including camping and as a car park, for up to 28

days a year. This has been extended during 2021 to allow, cumulatively, up to 56 days where the necessary criteria are met.

- 1.8 These rules allow for tent camping and portable buildings for toilets and washing facilities, etc. but do not cover motorhomes or caravans, which are dealt with under separate legislation.

Relevant Applications for development that requires planning permission:

- 1.9 When considering making an application for this type of development outside of settlement boundaries it is likely to be helpful to review determined planning applications of a similar type. Some of these are listed below:

- P/2020/00155 – COU of agricultural land to facilitate siting of 8 holiday lodges at Wootton – officer recommended refusal concluding that the proposal was unnecessary, unsustainable and visually unacceptable development in the countryside.
- P/2019/00866 – 2 Shepherds huts for tourist accommodation at Bull Gap Lane, Stanton – officer recommended refusal concluding that the proposal was unsustainable.
- P/2019/00904 – 6 glamping pods at Dale Lane, Stanton Dale – officer recommended refusal concluding that the proposal was unnecessary, unsustainable and visually unacceptable development in the countryside.
- P/2017/00981 (P/2018/00054, P/2018/01097, P/2019/01464) – 3 log cabins at Scotch Hills Lane, Barton Gate, Barton Under Needwood – officer recommended approval concluding that the development was ‘otherwise appropriate in the countryside’.
- P/2017/01162 (P/2019/00220) – 20 tourist pods at Barton Marina, Barton Turn, Barton Under Needwood – officer recommended approval concluded that the tourism industry was a significant employer in the area, and the council supports tourism growth.
- P/2017/01567 – 5 glamping pods at Barrowhill, Rocester – officer recommended approval concluding that the development was ‘otherwise appropriate in the countryside’.

Relevant Appeals:

- 1.10 Along with the review of previously determined applications, it is useful for prospective applicants to review relevant appeals and the wording used by the inspector in these cases.

Extracts from Appeals (Inspector’s conclusions):

- P/2019/01058 – 3 holiday cabins – dismissed

Policies SP1, SP8 and SP15 of the LP are generally supportive, in principle, of tourist development which support economic growth in rural areas. However, these Policies are clear that tourist accommodation are only supported where they have good accessibility to existing infrastructure and will not have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the countryside. Paragraph 83 of the Framework also recognises that a prosperous rural economy should be supported, however sustainable rural tourism developments should respect the character of the countryside.

The Staffordshire Hotel and Visitor Accommodation Strategy identifies a particular need for accommodation of this nature. I am satisfied that the proposal for tourist accommodation would contribute to the local rural economy. This is a benefit of the scheme however, given the scale of the proposals, this benefit would be minimal.

The appeal site is detached from other settlements by vast areas of countryside. The highway to the site is narrow and does not have footpaths or lighting and therefore accessing the site is not desirable by walking or cycling. There is no evidence before me to suggest that there are any frequent public transport links near to the appeal site. It is most likely that the buildings on the appeal site are accessed primarily by the use of private motor vehicles. The proposal therefore does not encourage the use of public transport. I have also found that the proposals are not of an appropriate scale to the nature of the location and its immediate setting. The small benefits of the proposals would not be outweighed by the reliance on private motor vehicles and the harmful effect the buildings have on the character of the immediate area.

I have had regard to the appellant's statement of case and tourist destinations and services including Alton Towers, Dovedale, the Peak District and the Dog and Partridge Inn. However, with the exception of the Thorswood Nature Reserve, these services are not within close proximity and given the constraints detailed above they would likely be accessed by motor vehicles.

The proposed development would not be in a suitable location. The proposal is contrary to Policies SP1, SP8 and SP15 of the LP and the Framework, which amongst other things, seeks development to encourage the use of public transport and be of an appropriate scale to the nature of its location and setting.

- *P/2019/00416 – conversion of stables to holiday lets – dismissed*

Strategic Policy 8 of the East Staffordshire Local Plan (2015) seeks to restrict new development outside of existing settlement boundaries unless one of a number of criteria are met. One such criterion is the appropriate re-use of rural buildings in accordance with the Re-use of Rural Buildings Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (2010).

Strategic Policy 8 also allows for development outside settlement boundaries that is “otherwise appropriate in the countryside”. However, this is clearly not intended to apply to holiday lets, as this type of development is subject to the requirements of Strategic Policy 15. This policy states that “tourist accommodation should be provided within existing settlements where it can make use of existing infrastructure and facilities. New tourist accommodation outside settlements will only be acceptable where it will have good accessibility to existing infrastructure and will not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the countryside”.

In this regard, the nearest settlements are the small villages of Lower Leigh and Church Lea, which are 1.28 km and 2.2 km away respectively (according to the appellant). These settlements contain few facilities, and the majority of those which do exist are located in the more distant Church Lea. Both are ‘Tier 3’ settlements for the purposes of Strategic Policy 2 of the East Staffordshire Local Plan, which states that such settlements should be regarded as open countryside where development will be permitted only in exceptional circumstances. Moreover, the route to these villages is along narrow unlit country lanes, with no footway, that are subject to national speed limits. It is therefore unlikely that future guests would walk or cycle to these settlements, and to do so after dark would be dangerous. Whilst the proposal would have reasonable access to the A50, overall, I consider that its accessibility would be poor.

For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposal would be an inappropriate form of development in the countryside. It would therefore be contrary to the relevant sections of Strategic Policies 1, 8, and 15 of the East Staffordshire Local Plan (2015), and guidance contained in the Re-use of Rural Buildings Supplementary Planning Document (2010).

Conclusions:

- 1.11 From these appeal decisions it is clear that whether they are for a re-use of an existing building or for a new development, they should primarily be assessed against and comply with Policy SP15.
- 1.12 Accommodation should be provided within existing settlements where it can make use of existing infrastructure and facilities. Where proposals come forward located outside of the settlement, they should only be considered to be acceptable where they have good access to existing infrastructure, and will not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the countryside, features of historic or landscape value, biodiversity, or the amenity of nearby residents.
- 1.13 The economic benefit of the application is unlikely to outweigh the lack of sustainability of an isolated location, or one not well associated with infrastructure and amenities.

1.14 Strategic Policy 8 also allows for development outside settlement boundaries that is “otherwise appropriate in the countryside”. However, this is not intended to apply to tourism, cultural or leisure development, (including overnight visitor accommodation) which should be determined under policy SP15.

Key considerations for planning applications

1.15 All overnight visitor accommodation should be assessed against and compliant with Policy SP15. If the proposal is outside of the settlement, the following issues should be addressed:

Access to existing infrastructure

- What are the roads like? (Narrow, obscured etc.)
- Is there sufficient lighting to accommodating walking and cycling to and from the site?
- Does the site have access to public transport, and does the application encourage its use?
- How far is the nearest settlement and what facilities does the settlement have?
- What is the speed limit along the route?
- Where else are the visitors likely to be travelling to and how are they likely to get there?

Impact on the countryside

- What are the local characteristics of the immediate and wider area?
- How will the proposal impact on the area’s appearance and setting?
- Will increased car parking in the area or the likely use of residential trappings such as outside benches, gazebos, play equipment etc. alter the character of the countryside in this location?
- Is the proposal of an appropriate scale to the nature of the location?
- Will features of historic or landscape value be impacted upon?
- How will it impact on local biodiversity?
- How will the proposal impact on the amenity of local residents?

Other considerations

- Is there an existing tourist or visitor use of the site?
- Is the proposal linked to an existing business e.g. farm or business diversification?

1.16 The economic benefit of the application should be considered against the above considerations as a material consideration. Strong evidence will be required to support the argument that the benefit outweighs the reliance on private motor vehicles and other elements of potential harm detailed above.