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**2021/1686**

Mr Paul Marsh

Change of use of site for touring caravans and motorhomes

Mapplewell Meadows Farm, Hill End Road, Mapplewell, Barnsley, S75 6DX

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**Councillor comments received**  
**2 neighbour responses received**

### **Introduction**

This application was deferred from the April Planning Board in order that a site visit could be undertaken by Members of the Board.

In addition to the site visit the applicant has confirmed the application site forms part of a piece of land that is used by a pony club for horse riding. The red edge application site only takes up part of this land so the remainder will still be available for this use. The area for the touring caravans can be demarcated by a fence or other boundary treatment to separate it off. The 'pitches' will be in a line down each side of the application site with enough room on each pitch for a caravan, a car and space to the next pitch. Although outside the application red edge area, the applicant has also confirmed that a small wooden unit and one of the containers that face onto the site are to be removed from the land.

In addition to the above, since the deferral from the April Planning Board there has been an additional representation from a local resident. The representations section of the below report has been updated to reflect this but other than that the report remains as Members will have previously seen it.

### **Description**

The application site forms part of an overall area of land known locally as Mapplewell Meadows which is an area of open land and forested areas situated to the South-East of Mapplewell. The application site for the proposed scheme forms a small grassed area of 0.135 ha and is accessed via an informal access track from Hill End Road

The site is privately owned but the applicant has stated that the wider land of Mapplewell Meadows has been used for many years for walkers, horse riding, cross country events and has associated picnic areas and a fishing pond. Mapplewell Meadows also has an existing café and outdoor seating area. The site was formally part of the National Coal Board (Coal Authority) network of mines. Following the cessation of mining activities the land underwent remediation including extensive tree planting. The site mainly consists of either open land or forested areas with paths running through them.

### **Site history**

Whilst there have been no previous applications where the proposed scheme has been proposed there have been the following applications nearby:

**2021/1469** Erection of café/coffee shop and embankment – Approved with conditions

**2019/1347** Erection of coffee shop (retrospective; amended scheme) - Approved with conditions

### **Proposed Development**

The applicant is seeking planning approval for the change of use of the application site for touring caravans and motorhomes as a caravan park. Up to 25 caravans/motorhomes would utilise the area as a touring site. Access would be taken from the main entrance to the site from Hill End Road. There is no hardstanding proposed and the caravans/motorhomes would be situated in an informal arrangement. The site would be open 7 months a year. The applicant is not proposing any permanent structures as part of this application.

### **Policy Context**

The new Local Plan was adopted at the full Council meeting held 3rd January 2019 after it was found to be sound by the appointed Planning Inspector following the examination process.

The site is set within the Green Belt as shown on the Proposals Map of the Adopted Local Plan

### NPPF

In respect of this application, relevant policies include:

Section 13. Protecting Green Belt Land

Paragraph 138 states:

Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Paragraph 149 states:-

A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;

- e) limited infilling in villages;
- f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and
- g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
  - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
  - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

Paragraph 150 states:

Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

- a) mineral extraction;
- b) engineering operations;
- c) local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
- e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
- f) development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

#### Local Plan Policies

The site is in the Green Belt as shown on the adopted Local Plan, where Local Plan Policy GB1 protects land from development in accordance with national Green Belt policy.

Other relevant policies include:

SD1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development  
GD1 General Development  
LG2 The Location of Growth  
E5 Promoting Tourism and Encouraging Cultural Provision  
E6 Rural Economy  
T3 New Development and Sustainable Travel  
T4 New Development and Transport Safety  
D1 High Quality Design and Place Making  
LC1 Landscape Character  
BIO1 Biodiversity and Geodiversity  
GB3 Changes of use in the Green Belt  
CC1 Climate Change  
CC2 Sustainable Design and Construction  
CC3 Flood Risk  
CC4 Sustainable Drainage Systems

CL1 Contaminated and Unstable Land  
Poll1 Pollution Control and Protection

Other relevant guidance

*Barnsley Visitor Economy Strategy 2017-2020*

The Visitor Economy Strategy for Barnsley sets out a broad vision and key priorities for the Council and its Visitor Economy sector partners to address. Coordinating activity across the sector will enable the Borough to realise the benefits from the development and growth of the Visitor Economy sector. The strategy links closely to the Borough's corporate priority of growing a Thriving and Vibrant Economy and to the themes of the approved Jobs and Business Plan.

### **Consultations**

Highways DC – Concerns were raised during the consultation process regarding the site access being gated. Following the submission of revised plans, the following comments were received:

“I am in receipt of plan 20-117-01B which now shows the access gates relocated considerably further into the site and this alleviates my previous concerns regarding the potential for waiting vehicles to block the highway. As such, the proposals are considered acceptable from a highways development control perspective.”

Ecology – Initially sought further clarification/information regarding the area surveyed, the potential for impact on great crested newts, and clarification on off site enhancement proposals. Following clarification from the applicant/agent, the following ecological response was received;

“Based on the information provided, we no longer require further assessment in regards to the presence/absence of great crested newts; however, if planning is to be permitted a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) should be conditioned and would include details on how precautionary measures will be adopted during digging works proposed on site, such as the check of areas prior to works for amphibians by an appropriately qualified ecologist, the provision of a means of escape if trenches are left open overnight (i.e. gently sloping ends to the trench) and the check of any trenches left overnight by an ecologist for amphibians, if necessary”

Forestry Officer – My understanding from the preliminary ecological appraisal is that the site is currently managed grassland bordered with young trees and scrub. The informal nature of the plots and the fact that no alterations are to be made in terms of services or surfacing etc. mean the impacts will be minimal (if any) for the trees providing the usage is restricted to the grassed area and does not encroach into the trees.

Pollution Control – This development is unlikely to have the potential for an adverse impact on health and the quality of life of those living and/or working in the locality, so approval is recommended

Highways Drainage - The details provided are sufficient and I have no further observations to make with respect to land drainage. I am happy for the details to be checked by building control.

SYMAS - The site is in a Coal Authority high risk referral area due to the presence of mine entries along the access track, shallow coal and opencast backfill.

SYMAS records indicate there are no mine entries in the area of the proposed caravan site. As the application is a change of use and no significant ground works are proposed, the application is considered exempt from the coal mining risk assessment requirements. In summary I have no objections to the proposals. If planning permission is granted it is recommended that the Coal Authority standing advice is attached to the decision notice.

Ward Councillors – 2 letters of support from Cllr. Hunt and Cllr. Leech, respectively, who stated that the application should be considered at Planning Regulatory Board and have also provided the following summarised comments:

- a very good application bringing jobs and visitors into our area, the site where this is proposed is the old gawber pit site muck stack so any transformation is welcomed, the area in general is well used by walkers, bird watchers, people who fish, horse riding, and visitors accessing the TPT, and short distance into the town, I would like the Planning board to see the application in full.
- It will provide economic benefits to the area. It supports more tourism in Barnsley which aligns with the council's objectives and jobs will be created.
- The land that the caravan site will be located on is of low ecological value so any harm that is created will be minimal.
- Minimal hard standing, if any, will be created. The caravans are touring ones rather than static. The site footprint is small (significantly less than an acre).
- There are no neighbouring properties impacted as the site is well away from residential dwellings.

## **Representations**

Neighbour notification letters were sent to neighbouring residents and a site notice was placed nearby. 1 letter of comment has been received, the points of which are summarised as follows:

- Mapplewell Meadows currently used for a variety of uses including horse riders, walkers, people going to fish, and use of the café
- No houses will be affected
- No protected species identified in ecology survey
- Openness not affected as is part of a larger field
- Believed benefits arising towards tourism and economy, increasing leisure activity, and employment should be considered special circumstances.
- No highways objections.
- Asked why the application was notified to St Helen's Ward Members and not Darton East Members

A further letter from a local resident has been received which raises the following concerns:

- The access to the site is not safe. The road is not fit for purpose especially with large vehicles with caravans

- Setting a precedent in the Green Belt

## **Assessment**

### Principle of development

The site is allocated as within the Green Belt. In terms of principle and the impact on the Green Belt the main issues are:

- Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and its effect on the openness of the Green Belt and whether they would conflict with the purposes of including land within it; and
- If the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify it.

The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of the Green Belt are their openness and permanence. The applicant has indicated in their submission that they are not proposing any built structures at this stage so the assessment is in relation to the changes of use of the land. Paragraph 150 of the NPPF does state that material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds) would not be considered inappropriate development. However, this would be on the proviso that they preserve openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

The first aspect to consider is whether a site for caravan/motorhomes could be classed as for outdoor sport and recreation. It could be considered that such a use would fall within the category of tourism development rather than outdoor sport and recreation. However, this is an area open to interpretation so even if it was accepted to be an appropriate material change of use it would still need to preserve the openness and not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

The NPPF sets out that openness is an essential characteristic of Green Belts. It has both a spatial and visual aspect. Matters relevant to openness are a matter of planning judgement. The application site and its immediate surroundings are characterised by open land and forested areas with little in terms of built structures. The introduction of up to 25 caravans/motorhomes into this area would have a significant impact on the openness of the site putting it at odds with the general character of the area.

The combined scale and massing of the caravans/motorhomes, combined with the illumination at night and activity associated with it, would have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the open grassed area. This would therefore cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

Furthermore, the combination of domestic style caravans/motorhomes, paraphernalia such as attached tents, chairs, tables etc, illumination and activity would result in encroachment into the countryside. Therefore, it would undermine the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF.

In addition, whilst the applicant has not indicated any significant works needed to the site there will likely need to be signage to direct people into the site, lighting to direct them in at night, and some type of boundary treatment to demarcate the site. Whilst

no structures are proposed at this stage, if the site is successful there is also the likelihood that applications will be needed for buildings such as shower/toilet blocks, reception area etc. These aspects will all impact on the character and openness of the Green Belt

For the aforementioned reasons the scheme is not considered to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and conflicts with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. It would therefore be considered as inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

The applicant has suggested that there are very special circumstances that can be taken into account and has provided the following list:

- 1/ Continued investment into a recreational area.
- 2/ Employment
- 3/ Tourism (to visit the new town centre and local attractions i.e. wig field farm/ cannon hall just to mention two )
- 4/ Local Economy (restaurants, bars, shops)
- 5/ To promote Barnsley and surrounding villages
- 6/ Continued support to local groups
- 7/ Encouraging rewilding in areas
- 8/ opening up areas of land for public
- 9/ Attracting wildlife
- 10/ Health and wellbeing

It is acknowledged that there will be some tourism benefits from the proposal in providing a new site for caravans/motorhomes in the borough. There may also be some benefit to local businesses from tourists visiting the locality although walking in to Mapplewell from the site would not be straight forward given the lack of well-lit footways into the main centre of Mapplewell. The job opportunities directly associated with the proposal would be limited as there are no proposal for facilities for workers on site so at most this is likely to be only one or two jobs. In terms of the use of the existing site as a recreational area and promoting health and well-being, the site already provides opportunities for this and it is not considered that the granting of this proposal is a necessity to this continuing. The inclusion of a caravan park in this location would also appear to be at odds with the suggested encouraging rewilding, attracting wildlife and opening up areas of land for the public, as the proposed uses would impede these to some extent through taking out an area that local people or wildlife could utilise.

It is the opinion of the Local Planning Authority that, following consideration of the above, there are considered to be no very special circumstances to outweigh the harm caused by inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

#### Impact on Trees

There are no trees within the application boundary however, there are trees and shrubland surrounding the site. Demarcation of the camping site would be required to avoid damage to existing vegetation but given the informal nature of the plots and the fact that no alterations are to be made in terms of services or surfacing etc. means the impacts will be minimal (if any) for the trees providing the usage is restricted to the grassed area and does not encroach into the trees.

#### Highway Safety

Highways comments were received regarding the suitability of the access into site with the gated access. Access into the site has now been changed as part of this application with the lane via Hill End Road still being utilised. Revised plans have been received which show the gated access moved considerably into the site which would then allow caravans and motorhomes to pull into the site without blocking the highway. The proposal is to serve existing users of the site along with the additional caravan bookings. It is therefore anticipated that there may be a slight increase in traffic using Hill End Road. Highways DC have been consulted on the scheme and have raised no objections to the revised proposal. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in terms of Highway Safety.

### Ecology/Biodiversity

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been submitted as part of the supporting information. A walkover survey was undertaken to assess the site and its wider surroundings for the presence of protected and non-protected species and plants. The area that lies within the red line of the proposed development is entirely improved grassland. This is grassland that is managed by regular cutting and the area is also used by the local pony club and dog training club, who take vehicles including horse trailers onto this area. The red line boundary does not provide value for foraging bats, however the surrounding scrub and woodland habitats do, as is the case for nesting birds. Due to the level of high disturbance, there is limited potential for reptiles. The Planning Ecologist requested clarification and further information on several comments made within the report. On receiving this information, further advice was provided regarding need for a condition for a CEMP (Construction Environmental Management Plan) if planning permission was to be granted

In terms of biodiversity net loss/gain the appraisal states the following:

There will be no overall net loss of biodiversity on the site, however some enhancements will be made to a grass verge along the existing access route to the new caravan camping pitches by the sowing of some wildflower seeds. It is recommended that an area of at least 75m<sup>2</sup> (equivalent to 50m x 1.5m) is enhanced to achieve the net gain. This will enhance part of a grass verge that is currently 'modified grassland' in 'fairly poor' condition to 'neutral grassland' in 'moderate' condition and will result in an 8.75% net gain.

Overall, subject to conditions securing the above, the proposal would not be considered to have a detrimental impact on biodiversity.

### Residential Amenity.

The nearest residential dwellings are located on Hill End Road over 200m from the proposed caravan site. There have been no objections raised by any neighbouring property with regards to the proposed change of use. It is not anticipated that this proposal would result in loss of residential amenity given its location and therefore it is considered to be in compliance with Local Plan Policy GD1: General Development.

### Visual Amenity

The proposed site is entirely within allocated Green Belt within the Local Plan. The character of the site consists of either open land or forested areas with paths running through them which is typical of Green Belt. The existing uses of the site do not impact upon the character of the land, with many users enjoying the site due to its openness and easy accessibility on foot. The introduction of up to 25 caravans and

vehicles into the landscape will appear alien and out of keeping with the rural character of the area being seen as an urban encroachment into the Green Belt land, being at odds with the predominant character of the area. There would be a resulting loss of openness and would be contrary to the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

The NPPF requires that local planning authorities should plan positively to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity within Green Belts. There is a clear visual aspect to openness, not just a spatial one, and it is maintained that the proposal will impact detrimentally on openness as a result of its impact on visual amenity.

The proposed use would not be visible from existing properties but would be visible from a number of areas within the site, including public footpaths, and from the neighbouring urban settlements. Therefore the proposal is considered to be contrary to Local Plan Policy D1 High Quality Design and Place Making.

### Other Matters

The application site and access into it fall within the St Helen's Ward and that is why those Members in that Ward were consulted.

### Conclusion

Policy GB1 of the Local Plan requires protection of the Green Belt from inappropriate development in accordance with national policy. As per the NPPF, inappropriate development in the Green Belt should not be permitted except in very special circumstances, which will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations

It is considered that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which would, by definition, be harmful, as it would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would conflict with one of the purposes of including land within it. Paragraph 148 of the NPPF requires substantial weight to be given to any harm to the Green Belt. The totality of identified harm to the Green Belt carries significant weight. On the other hand, the other considerations that the applicant has identified as merits to the site and the locality from his scheme are considered to be of limited weight in favour of the proposal

Therefore, the harm to the Green Belt is not clearly outweighed by the other considerations identified and the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. As such, the proposal is contrary to Policy GB1 of the Local Plan and the Framework

### **Recommendation**

Refuse for the following reason:

1. The site lies within the Green Belt on the approved Barnsley Local Plan, where, in accordance with Policy GB1 and Paragraph 150 of the National Planning Policy Framework, material changes in use of the land will only be considered appropriate where they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the

appearance of up to 25 motorhomes/caravans in this location would be at odds with the predominant character and would impact on the open/green nature of the site and its surroundings. It would therefore appear more as an urban encroachment into the countryside and as such would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would be contrary to the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. As there are considered to be no very special circumstances to outweigh the harm, it would be considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt contrary to local and national policy. In addition the proposed use would be likely to result in pressure for buildings such as reception kiosks and shower blocks which in themselves would impact on the openness and character of the Green Belt.

PA Reference:- 2021/1686

