

**Parish:** EAST BERGHOLT

**Location:** The Grange Caravan Park, Straight Road

**Proposal:** Variation of Condition 02 attached to planning permission B/02/01313 to allow an additional 27no. caravans to be stationed on site, and to reduce the number of touring caravans/camping pitches during the period 1<sup>st</sup> February to 2<sup>nd</sup> January, together with internal road. Alterations and reoccupation of the relinquished first floor manager's flat for the use by the Groundsman (use of the static pitch as accommodation for full-time Groundsman to be relinquished).

**Applicant:** Mr D Arnold

**Case Officer:** Chris Tivey

**Date for Determination:** 23 June 2009

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### THE SITE

1. The application site comprises 4.25 hectares of land known as The Grange Caravan Park and situated to the north of Straight Road.
2. The site is situated within the open countryside where rural policies of restraint apply. A Special Landscape Area abuts the north east and eastern boundaries of the site and a public footpath runs along the north west and western boundaries. The roadside verge situated between the site boundary fence and the highway is designated as a Roadside Nature Reserve and a County Wildlife Site. This front boundary has recently been reinforced through additional hedge planting with the other boundaries being largely screened by a combination of fencing and mature trees/hedging.
3. The application site has an extensive history but has been used as a camping and caravan site in excess of 50 years.
4. The caravan park includes a number of facilities including a swimming pool, recreation building, bar, restaurant and games room and shop.

### THE PROPOSAL

5. As described above the proposal is to vary Condition 02 of planning permission B/02/01313 to allow an additional 27 static caravans to be stationed on the site and to reduce the number of touring caravans/camping pitches to 25 (a reduction in touring/camping pitches by 47); giving rise to a total of 155 caravan/camping pitches to be used during the period 1<sup>st</sup> February to 2<sup>nd</sup> January.
6. As set out within the Design and Access Statement the application seeks to reduce the total number of caravan and camping pitches from 175no. to 155no. which would comprise 130 static caravan pitches and the aforementioned 25 touring/camping pitches.
7. The additional static pitches would occupy the centre of the front field which currently has static pitches around the outside and a small field currently used for tourers behind the swimming pool building.

8. The proposal also includes the reoccupation of the relinquished (previously put to storage use associated with the operation of the caravan site - B/04/00312/FUL) first floor flat over the recreation room building for use by the Groundsman and the relinquishment of the static caravan pitch towards the western side of the park which is currently occupied by him. A new enclosure and garden would be created for the recreation building with two parcels of land being retained to its front for touring visitors.
9. Included in the application are landscape proposals for new boundary hedge planting on the northern extremity of the park and within the northern side of the roadside boundary hedge.
10. New access roads would be constructed in impervious concrete to match all other internal access roads and surface water would be directed to a continuous edge soakaway, ensuring that no surface water runoff leaves the site. In terms of foul water drainage, the caravan park is on the main sewerage system.
11. Within the Design and Access Statement the applicants set out present business trends of the caravan site and state that in June 2002 an exercise was undertaken to assess the percentage use of available touring/camping pitches. This exercise demonstrated that even in August the take-up was only approximately 5% of the available pitches and there has been a steady decline in the touring visitors to the park over the recent years as the nature of the park evolves towards a situation where users of the park are predominantly middle aged or more elderly visitors with few families with young children visiting.
12. They state that in the 1970s and 1980s the park attracted more families with children and the large open air swimming pool was a key attraction, however, this pool is more than 30 years old, is tired and dated and is too expensive to maintain at a comfortable temperature.
13. Touring pitches were reduced in 2002 to make better use of the site and touring visitors have continued to decline. They set out receipts (gross) from touring visitors including café, shop, bar and restaurant receipts:
  - 2003 - £37,000.00
  - 2004 - £19,000.00
  - 2005 - £12,000.00
  - 2006 - £7,290.00
  - 2007 - £819.00
  - 2008 - £520.00
14. They state that in 2006 this reached a breaking point where the management encountered severe behavioural problems, vandalism and numerous complaints and the management had to accept an incompatibility between camping visitors and clients wishing to use the static caravans. As a result the policy was altered and no touring visitors with children were accepted for 2007 and 2008 seasons. They state that a future reverse of this policy may be possible once severance is achieved with the visitor profile the park had unfortunately attracted.

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

15. There is an extensive history to this site going as far back as 1955, however, those of most relevance (and most recent) are highlighted below:

W/1234/7/FUL – Use land as caravan site for 20 touring caravans – Granted 02.10.72

W/1324/8/FUL – Use land for caravan park, camping site, toilet block and shop – Granted 29.09.72

W/2571/10/FUL – Use land as caravan site for 1 caravan for site warden and wife – Granted 28.08.73

B/1098/78/FUL – Permanent retention of caravan and camping park and increase the number of pitches to 200 – Granted 03.07.79

B/90/01272/FUL – Variation of Condition 3 attached to planning permission B/78/1098 to allow an additional 21 static caravans to be stationed on site with the corresponding reduction in the number of touring caravans/camping pitches and use of a total of 180 caravan/camping pitches during the period 1<sup>st</sup> February to 2<sup>nd</sup> January. Extension of internal road system and use of one addition static caravan as permanent residence for grounds man. – Granted 09.11.90

B/02/01313/FUL – Variation of Condition 02 attached to planning permission B/90/01272/FUL to allow an additional 28no. static caravans to be stationed on site and to reduce the number of touring caravans/camping pitches to 72no. and use a total of 175 caravan/camping pitches during the period 1<sup>st</sup> February to 2<sup>nd</sup> January, alterations to internal road system – Granted 20.11.02

B/04/00321/FUL – Elevational alterations and conversion of toilet block to reception building and site manager's living accommodation. Existing site manager's first floor flat to be converted to storage associated with operation of caravan site – Granted 31.03.04

## **NATIONAL GUIDANCE**

16. **PPS1** (Delivering Sustainable Development)
17. **PPS7** (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas)
18. **PPS9** (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation)
19. **PPS13** (Transport)
20. **PPG21** (Tourism)

## **PLANNING POLICIES**

21. The Development Plan comprises the East of England Plan, adopted 2008, saved policies in the Suffolk Structure Plan, adopted 2001, and the Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No. 2) adopted 2006. The following policies are relevant to this proposal:

### **East of England Plan 2008**

- **ENV2** Landscape Conservation

### **Suffolk Structure Plan**

- **ECON14** Tourism

### **Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No.2) 2006**

- **EN02** County Wildlife Sites
- **EN15** Surface Water Runoff
- **EN18** Sewerage and Sewage Disposal
- **EN22** Light Pollution – Outdoor Lighting
- **HS04** Protecting the Countryside
- **CR01** Landscaping Quality

- **CR07** Landscaping Schemes
- **RE12** Camping/Caravanning Touring Sites

**The relevant documents can be viewed via the internet. Please see Page 4 for details.**

## **CONSULTATIONS**

22. PC – Object on the grounds of an unacceptable reduction in casual recreation facilities, detrimental visual impact, increased light pollution, over development of the site.
23. LHA – Do not wish to restrict the grant of planning permission.
24. Anglian Water – Raise no objection to the proposed development.
25. SCC Archaeological Service – Raise no objection to the proposed development.
26. SCC PRoW – Raise no objection to the proposed development.
27. Landscape/Countryside Officer – No detrimental landscape impact.

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

28. A local resident states that their concern lies not with the additional 27 caravans per se, but with the access. They state that many years ago under previous ownership, there were problems at Edward Lodge with regard to vans cutting up the entrance verges. At this time it was agreed that it would be more appropriate for large static vans to enter the original gateway half way along the roadside boundary. However, about three years ago the current owners stopped using this with resultant issues when delivering new vans to the site. They add that they have no objection to the additional 27 vans, but comment that whatever vans go on site, will at some point eventually have to come out because of their age and the need to update them. They conclude that it is a well run and very clean site.

## **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

29. Policy RE12 in the Babergh Local Plan indicates that touring and caravan sites will only be permitted where there is good access to main roads. Development proposals must also be acceptable in highway safety and residential amenity terms, and not cause harm to the landscape character of the area, biodiversity, or cultural heritage. Policy ECON14, which is one of the saved policies in the Suffolk Structure Plan, is also supportive of proposals involving the provision of tourist accommodation in the countryside.
30. This application has been submitted to allow additional static caravans onto a well established holiday park. As the use of the site for camping and caravanning purposes is not at issue there is no obvious conflict with the provisions of the planning policies identified above.
31. The key issue in the determination of this application is the impact that it would have upon the surrounding landscape. Comments have been raised by a local resident with regards to the nature of the access and the stopping up of the central access approximately three years ago. This access has been replanted with appropriate hedge species as a result of the landscaping scheme required by the grant of planning permission B/02/01313/FUL.

32. The roadside verge is identified as a Nature Reserve and as a County Wildlife Site and the additional planting along this boundary will, over time, not only enhance the biodiversity of the site, but also mitigate any visual impact of the caravan park.
33. Members will note from the site photographs that a number of the pitches just inside of the roadside hedge, whilst laid out, do not currently have static caravans stationed on them. By virtue of the fact that these hardstandings have been laid means that B/02/01313/FUL has been implemented and once these vans are in place the additional visual impact of those now proposed will not be materially greater due to the fact that they will be largely screened. As highlighted by the local resident, the site is in a tidy state and is well screened from all public vantage points with only casual glimpses into the site from the public footpath which runs along the north west and western boundary. Therefore the landscape impact would be limited.
34. It is clear that there is a changing market in terms of the demand for static caravan pitches and the use of these on a casual basis will encourage their regular use with the resultant benefits to the local economy. It is noted that no objection has been raised by the Highway Authority, and whilst the comments from the local resident with respect to the delivery of new static units are noted, movements will be relatively low due to the fact that these will each be present at the site for many years to come.
35. Contrary to the Parish Council's comments, there would not be an overdevelopment of the site and whilst they raise concern with respect to the reduction of casual recreation facilities there are no planning policy grounds on which to substantiate this objection. A limited number (25) of touring pitches would remain available for use if the proposal went ahead.
36. The Parish Council's comments with respect to increased light pollution can be covered by condition so that any proposals to provide external illumination to the site are not commenced without the prior written approval of the local planning authority.
37. The proposal also includes the relinquishment of the Groundsman's static caravan and the reoccupation of the first floor manager's flat over the recreation building. Officers are of the view that as planning permission exists for permanent occupation by the full time Groundsman on the site, the reuse of the first floor of the recreation building is acceptable.
38. The reduction in the size of the swimming pool is not objectionable and forms part and parcel of the evolving management of the site.

### **REASONS FOR APPROVAL**

39. The proposal to allow an additional 27no. static caravans to be stationed on the site in addition to the reoccupation of the first floor manager's flat for use by the Groundsman is an acceptable form of development that would have limited visual impact upon the character of the countryside within which the site is situated and would protect residential amenity and biodiversity interests. The proposal would therefore comply with Policy ENV2 of the East of England Plan 2008, Policy ECON14 of the Suffolk Structure Plan 2001, and Policies EN02, EN15, EN18, EN22, HS04, CR01, CR07 and RE12 of the Babergh District Local Plan Alteration No. 2 2006.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

(1) That planning permission be granted subject to conditions covering the following:

- Standard Time Limit
- Landscaping Scheme
- Use of static caravan for full time Groundsman to be relinquished
- First floor flat to only be occupied by full time Groundsman and dependents
- No external lighting without prior approval of the local planning authority