

APPLICATION REPORT – 16/00451/FULMAJ

Validation Date: 13 May 2016

Ward: Lostock

Type of Application: Major Full Planning

Proposal: Change of use of field to caravan park for the siting of 94 static holiday caravans and associated hard standings and access roads (accessed through existing caravan site).

Location: Royal Umpire Caravan Park Southport Road Ulnes Walton Leyland PR26 9JB

Case Officer: Caron Taylor

Applicant: Harrison Leisure UK Ltd

Agent: CW Planning Solutions Ltd

Consultation expiry: 15 June 2016

Decision due by: 19 September 2016

RECOMMENDATION

1. The application is recommended for refusal.

SITE DESCRIPTION

2. Royal Umpire Caravan Park is an established holiday park operated by Harrison Leisure UK Ltd, offering touring caravan pitches and camping. It is located on Southport Road, Croston close to Wyevale Garden Centre, The Highfield Public House and the former Mill Hotel site. It is accessed from Southport Road and the proposed development would be accessed through the existing site.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3. Change of use of field to caravan park for the siting of 94 static holiday caravans and associated hard standings and access roads (accessed through existing caravan site).

RELEVANT HISTORY OF THE SITE

4. The site has an extensive planning history. The original permission for the site (ref: 80/00972/FUL) was granted on appeal in January 1982 and permitted a touring caravan site with reception, toilets, washing facilities and shop.
5. There have been numerous subsequent applications regarding amendments of conditions, extension to the site and a managers bungalow etc. Its current status is a touring caravan site. No statics have been approved on the site other than for the occupation of employees. The site is allowed to be used year round (permission ref: 95/00822/FUL) subject to a S106 legal agreement that no static caravans are allowed (except the ones used by employees), no caravans to remain on site for an aggregate period exceeding 35 weeks in any one calendar year and no person to reside at the site (except employees) for an aggregate period exceeding 35 weeks in any one calendar year.

REPRESENTATIONS

6. **Ulnes Walton Parish Council** object to the application on the grounds that the application represents inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

7. The proposal does not meet any of the exceptions set out in paras 89 and 90 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The Framework states inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. These 'very special circumstances' 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. The Parish Council contends the very special circumstances have not been demonstrated.
8. The siting of 94 static caravans will, most certainly, impact adversely on the visual character of the landscape.
9. The entrance to the premises is located within a 40mph speed limit and is in close proximity to the junction of Southport Road and Highfield Road. Concerns have been expressed regarding road safety on Southport Road and have been taken up as a priority by the Western Parishes Neighbourhood Area Meeting.
10. From the application it is not clear whether lighting is intended. If this is the case the Parish Council would add the potential for light pollution in a Green Belt location to the objections.
11. Local residents attending a meeting of the Parish Council have raised concerns regarding noise nuisance from the existing facilities and also concerns regarding drainage and flooding issues which would be exacerbated by the development.
12. **Croston Parish Council** objects to the above application on the grounds that the application represents inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
13. The siting of 94 static caravans will impact adversely on the visual character of the landscape.
14. The existing access is located within a 40mph speed limit and is in close proximity to the junction of Southport Road and Highfield Road. The Parish Council is concerned the additional vehicle movements will increase existing road safety issues on Southport Road, which are one of the Western Parishes Neighbourhood Area Meeting priorities.
15. **Five objections have been received on the following grounds:**
 - It will result in noise on summer evenings;
 - The site is in the Green Belt. It is inappropriate and would damage the amenity of the Green Belt;
 - It will produce a similar impact to 94 detached dwellings beside a well-developed and used caravan park, in effect it creates another village;
 - The occasional use of the field for caravan rallies seems appropriate in the Green Belt, but what is proposed does not;
 - Has a traffic assessment been carried out? The proposal will result in increased traffic and there is little public transport that passes the site. The visibility splays are not good, it is in a 40mph area close to a corner with a terrible accident rate;
 - The existing site entrance does not even have a footway from the site to the road;
 - Flooding in Croston – the rapid run off of surface water from the development will certainly worsen the situation on the River Lostock;
 - Where would surface and waste water go?;
 - It will create a precedent if granted;
 - The proposal is not in keeping with the prize winning village atmosphere;
 - Has a professional assessment been undertaken to assess the impact on wildlife been undertaken;
 - There have been nuisance problems in the past of loud music;
 - The proposal is too big for the location;
 - It will eventually be a housing estate that will be occupied for the majority of the year;
 - Once established it will never revert to farm land again;
 - The infrastructure is overstretched in the area;

- It would contribute little to the economy, merely adding additional strain to services;
- The construction and servicing of the site would cause disruption and traffic problems;
- The lighting of the site would impact on nearby residents and wildlife;
- The date of the traffic survey was flawed, it should have been done during the summer;
- There is already noise pollution, anti-social behaviour, swearing, drinking and shouting from the site as the rules are not enforced;
- It would change the character of the immediate and wider area detrimentally forever;
- There is insufficient information to determine how big the caravans would be and how many people would occupy them;
- Are there plans for any recreational facilities to entertain the residents and visitors?;
- It will cover the site with hard standing/concrete and roadways.

16. CONSULTATIONS

Consultee	Summary of Comments received
Council's Conservation Officer	<p>They consider the proposed development will preserve the setting of the adjacent grade II listed building, Gradwell's Farm, and sustain the significance of this designated heritage asset.</p> <p>The proposed development site is located to the north of Gradwell's Farm, which is a grade II listed building. A separation distance of approximately 60 metres between the nearest caravan and the listed building is proposed. There is already an existing caravan park to the north east of the listed building where the separation distance to the nearest caravan is approximately 40 metres.</p> <p>The site is currently grassed and is used for touring caravan/tent pitches.</p> <p>There is quite a strong boundary of mature trees and shrubs such that it is only possible to obtain glimpses of the listed building from a very limited number of vantage points within the site.</p> <p>Given the low height of any proposed development, small single storey static caravans, the separation distance of approximately 60 metres to the nearest proposed caravan pitch and the presence of a strong boundary treatment of trees and shrubs it is considered that the proposed development will only have a very minimal impact upon the setting of the listed building and that therefore consequently the significance of this designated heritage asset will be sustained.</p> <p>As such it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with S.66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the following paragraphs from The Framework and the stated local planning policies.</p>
Environment Agency	See body of report
United Utilities	Have no objection to the development subject to conditions that foul and surface water shall be drained on separate systems; a surface water drainage scheme to be submitted and management and maintenance of any sustainable drainage system.
Ecology	See body of report.
LCC Highways	See body of report.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Principal of the Development

17. The application site is in the Green Belt.

Is it inappropriate development?

18. The National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework) at paragraph 89 sets out when new buildings are not inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The proposal is not for new buildings but rather for the use of land for the siting of static holiday caravans. Paragraph 90 sets out certain other forms of development that are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt.

19. The proposal does not fall within one of the listed categories and the proposal is, therefore, inappropriate development in the Green Belt by definition. The agent acknowledges the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

20. In accordance with The Framework inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' 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.

21. Therefore an assessment needs to be made as to if there is 'any other harm' caused by the development that needs to be added to the harm caused by its inappropriateness.

Is there any other harm?

Visual impact

22. There is a gentle slope across the site from south to north as the land gradually descends to the River Lostock separated by fields to the north and a lesser slope from west to east.

23. Although the field the subject of the application is used by tents at present this is under the 28 day rule and therefore limited in its impact. Also static caravans and their associated development would have a much greater impact on visual amenity than how the field is currently used.

24. Given the number of static caravans and size of the site it is considered the site would have a strong visual presence, but this would be greater from certain directions than others. To the south the site would be contained by the former Mill Hotel site. The hotel has been demolished and there is outline permission to build houses on the site. To the east the site would be contained by the existing Royal Umpire Caravan Park. While this has some ancillary buildings, hardstanding and access roads it is for touring caravans so its visual containment from this side will to some degree be dependent on how many touring caravans are present, though it has a clear boundary from the adjacent fields. To the north, immediately adjacent to the site are some farm type buildings set out in a linear arrangement orientated east-west. The site is open to the west and a Public Right of Way (number 11 Ulnes Walton) runs within the site along the west boundary.

25. The main views of the site would be from the west particularly from the public footpath that runs along the west boundary and views from afar from the north. Although some landscaping is indicated on the proposed site layout plan it is considered a more comprehensive landscaping scheme could be secured via a condition that could reduce visual impact further from afar. Therefore it is considered the visual impact of the proposal would be limited.

Impact on neighbours

26. The nearest residential properties to the site would be Gradwell's Farm to the south and the properties on Moor Road to the southwest. Gradwell's Farm is shown within the 'blue edge' of the applications so is within the control of the applicants. The properties on Moor Road are separated from the site by an area of land and a mature tree boundary. It is considered that

noise and disturbance from the site should be limited and given the location of the site some distance from the nearest residential property it is considered the living conditions of the occupants of these properties would not be adversely affected.

Highways

27. A Transport Assessment has been submitted with the application which has been considered by Lancashire County Council as the Highway Authority for the borough. The proposal would utilise the existing access onto Southport Road.
28. They state they consider the applicant's assessment of the existing site, baseline transport data, public transport, walking and cycling, local highway and traffic data acceptable. They have also noted the proposed footway along the north side of Southport Road to the bus stops east of the site access. While the proposed footway will assist in promoting sustainable travel, they do not consider this length of footway alone is adequate to improve accessibility and safety for walking as an alternative mode of travel to the car. For this improvement to be delivered, an additional length of footway would be required on the north side of both Southport Road and Moor Road extending from the site to the bus stops west of the site access. Given the extent of the applicant's wider site boundary, provision of this section of footway will not involve third party land. One reason for the Transport Assessment is to enable critical locations on the road network with poor accident records to be identified and measures proposed to ameliorate such accidents. The applicant's accident analysis shows significant highway issues at Southport Road/Moor Road/Highfield Road. The analysis shows that in addition to a single slight accident near the junction, there have been three serious accidents (personal injury accidents) in the past five years at the junction. Despite these accidents, the applicant concluded that there was no cause for concern and that mitigation would not be necessary.
29. LCC Highway's engineer disagrees with the applicant's assertion, as they consider occurrence of three personal injury accidents within five years at the same junction is of highway concern. Therefore, while they have no highway objections in principle to the proposed caravans, as the expanded caravan park will exacerbate the existing accident problems at Southport Road/Moor Road/Highfield Road, unless the applicant can provide two lengths of 2.0m wide footways to the bus stops east and west of the site access for improved accessibility and safety, to alleviate the accident problems, they would not recommend approval of the application.
30. The applicant has confirmed through their agent that they are willing to carry out these works as part of any planning permission, therefore the application is considered acceptable in this respect subject to these being secured.

Ecology and trees

31. An ecology report has been submitted with the application which has been reviewed by the Council's ecology adviser. The site falls within one of Natural England's Impact Risk Zones which indicates there may be impacts on either UK or Internationally designated sites by any application in a rural/agricultural landscape. In this particular instance given the current usage of the site and its high level of all year round human disturbance the council's ecology adviser considers that its value to the adjacent Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the birds that these sites are designated for is extremely low and not a material consideration in the determination of the proposal and that a Habitats Regulations Assessment is not required in this case. However, they advise that the council should ensure that Natural England are satisfied that on this occasion no assessment under the Habitats Regulations is required. A consultation request has been sent to Natural England and this matter will be updated on the addendum.
32. The ecology adviser recommends that clarification should be sought from the applicant regarding the retention of suitable amphibian terrestrial habitat to the southern boundary of the site, as if this is not to be retained suitable survey and/or avoidance measures will need to be considered. The applicant through their agent has confirmed that this will be retained and the application is therefore considered acceptable in this respect.

33. The ecology advisor states that the other matters suggested in the ecology report submitted with the application in relation to protection of biodiversity features and biodiversity improvement measures could be secured via conditions, including an appropriate lighting scheme to ensure light spillage does not impact on foraging bats.
34. In relation to trees there is an Oak tree on the site (identified as tree TN1 in the ecology report submitted with the application) that provides potential tree roosts for bats. This would be retained as part of the proposal and is therefore considered acceptable.
35. There are three existing trees towards the centre of the site that are not shown on the proposed layout plan, there are Crack Willow and Common Alder. The size of these trees is limited and one is multi-stemmed from the base so it is not considered that they would warrant protection by a Tree Preservation Order. A condition ensuring their removal outside the bird breeding season could be imposed on any permission.
36. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in relation to ecology subject to conditions and Natural England confirming that an assessment is not required under the Habitats Regulation.

Public Rights Of Way

37. Public Right of Way no. 11 Ulnes Walton runs along the west boundary within the site for approximately 200m. Its route is clear as it has a stone surface across the field and has a stone surface across the field. The siting of the static caravans would not interfere with the route of the footpath. The proposal is considered acceptable in relation to the footpath.

Impact on a designated heritage asset

38. Gradwell's Farm is a Grade II listed building located approximately 60m to the southeast of the nearest proposed caravan. The existing caravan park is nearer than the site now proposed to the listed building and there is a mature tree line between them. The council's Conservation Officer has reviewed the application and advises that they consider the proposed development to be acceptable as it will preserve the setting of the adjacent listed building and sustain the significance of the designated heritage asset. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in relation to Policy BNE8.

Drainage

39. United Utilities have no objection to the application subject to conditions.
40. The Environment Agency have objected to the application because the application form states it will involve the use of a non-mains foul drainage system in a publicly sewered area but no justification has been provided for this method of foul sewage disposal and advise it should be refused on these grounds. They have advised the agent that there are proposed extensions to the sewer system which they consider make connection to public foul sewer feasible. Connection to public foul sewer should be thoroughly investigated before installation of private sewerage treatment facilities is considered.
41. The applicant, through their agent has agreed to investigate connection to the public foul sewer and final details of foul drainage along with the steps/investigation under taken to justify the scheme could be secured via a planning condition.
42. Subject to foul drainage being approved under a condition the proposal is considered acceptable in this respect.
43. Surface water is proposed to be via a sustainable drainage system which is the preferred method in the hierarchy of drainage options set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance. Conditions securing full details of the surface water scheme could be secured applied.
44. Subject to conditions the application is considered acceptable in relation to drainage.

Lighting

45. It would be expected for a holiday park site to be lit at night and therefore there is potential for light pollution, however it is considered that an acceptable low level lighting scheme could be secured via a condition, both to minimise the visual impact of the site at and also to ensure it does not impact on foraging bats.

Other harm to the Green Belt

46. It is not however considered there is additional harm from technical matters that could not be overcome via the imposition of appropriate conditions.

47. There therefore needs to be very special circumstances sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt caused by its inappropriateness.

Applicant's Case for Very Special Circumstances

48. The applicant has put forward a case for very special circumstances.

49. Any material consideration can be considered to weigh in favour of a development but a judgment must then be made as to whether they are very special and secondly whether they are sufficient to outweigh the harm caused by inappropriateness and any other harm to the Green Belt.

Are there any material considerations in favour of the development?

50. The agent has put forward a case for very special circumstances with the application based on the economic and tourism benefits it will bring. Some of this is included below, but it also includes a number of appeal decisions and a report by R. Tym & Partners on the Economic Impact Assessment of the Holiday Park Industry in Wales that considers the benefits of the rural tourism on the rural economy:

51. *Paragraph 28 states that LPA's should "Support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres;*

52. *In this respect the proposal is an extension to an existing rural tourism and leisure development that has existed for a number of years. The benefits of an expansion of the rural tourism and leisure should not be underestimated. The best available source for estimating the benefits of rural tourism on the rural economy are to be found in the 2011 Roger Tymes assessment of the economic benefits of the tourism industry in Wales. The figures from that are as follows:*

Table 7.2 Expenditure & GVA by Accommodation Type per annum

Accommodation Type	Park spend per unit		
	Owned Static Unit	Rented Static Unit	Touring Pitch
	£3,625	£5,900	£200
Visitor expenditure per unit	£3,900	£9,400	£2,600
Total spend per unit per annum	£7,525	£15,300	£2,800
Total GVA per unit per annum	£3,390	£6,900	£1,340

53. *They suggests that expenditure (and thus GVA) is greatest for rented static units at more than twice the rate for owned static units, with touring pitches counting for the least. This result is not surprising given the expenditure by parks on rented static units such as marketing, cleaning, additional maintenance and more frequent replacement of units than is the case with owned units. The higher visitor expenditure per unit is due to the higher occupancy rates of rented units.*

54. *As such the value to the rural economy for the application is somewhere between £650,000 and £318,660 per annum at 2011 values. The figure would be higher in 2016 and onwards.*

55. *This represents a huge boost to the local economy and represents a very strong economic case for the development as very special circumstances.*

56. *Ten letters have been received from local businesses, including nearby restaurants and public houses that are willing to sign to say that the expansion of the Royal Umpire is something they welcome because they will benefit from the economic trade it would create. In addition, a letter has been provided from a prospective contractor estimating exactly how much worth of works will be involved in creating the expanded site, some £1.4 million points.*

57. *The environmental considerations of the proposal being at worst neutral, the social and economic case for the proposal presents a strong argument in favour of sustainable development. There are potential jobs and a huge boost to the local economy as a result of the proposed scheme. In a borough where uplifting the economy is of prime importance, this in itself provides for very special circumstances and the need to look at the proposal in the context of what the site is adjacent to. The proposed development is an extension to the only caravan park in the borough (apart from a certified five pitch site in Anderton). The proposal represents a logical and reasonable expansion of the existing offer. It is situated to the rear of an existing development site, and away from the road frontage. As such in terms of visual amenity from public vantage points (apart from the public footpath that currently runs through the Mill) the affect on visual amenity will be neutral. The proposal includes proposed planting on the southern, western and northern boundaries, and the eastern boundary links into the existing caravan park.*

58. *The proposal represents a major financial tourist investment into the borough and as such it is argued on balance, having regard to the tests of sustainability, that it represents very special circumstances.*

59. There are clearly economic development benefits associated with the scheme to the local area as an extension of an existing rural business that is a material consideration in determining the planning application.

Are these sufficient to outweigh the harm cause to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness added to any other harm?

60. Policy does aim to encourage economic development and encourage tourism both at a national level in the form of The Framework and at a local level.

61. Paragraph 81 of The Framework advises local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, including looking for opportunities to provide access and to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation.

62. Core Strategy policy 13 covers the Rural Economy and aims to support rural based tourist attractions, visitor facilities, and recreational uses and allow caravan and camping uses on appropriate sites subject to there being a proven demand.

63. There is clearly policy support for the proposal. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development to which there are three dimensions: economic, social and environmental so a judgement has to be made as to whether the benefits outweigh the harm.

64. The benefits put forward clearly have some weight in the planning balance, but it in accordance with The Framework when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. It is considered in this case that the weight afforded to the benefits does not does not outweigh the harm to the Green Belt identified.

Do these factors actually amount to very special circumstances?

65. Even if the above factors were accepted to outweigh the harm, it needs to be considered if the circumstances put forward amount to very special circumstances.

66. A strong national or regional economic benefit can be judged to be a very special circumstance that may override green belt policy, however although it is considered the

proposal would have an economic benefit to the area it is not considered this could be classed as very special. It would not be on a significant large scale and in addition it is an argument that could quite readily be repeated by numerous rural businesses in the borough.

Balancing exercise

67. A careful balancing of material considerations needs to be applied to the application.

68. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. On the other hand The Framework aims to support rural businesses and to increase opportunities for tourism and access to outdoor recreation.

69. The material considerations put forward provide some weight in favour of the proposal. However, in terms of The Framework in this case it is considered the environmental dimension outweighs economic and social benefits of the holiday static caravans development. Very special circumstances do not exist sufficient to clearly outweigh the harm that would be caused by reason of inappropriateness and The Framework requires that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

70. The application would be liable for CIL, but the chargeable rate is £0.

Overall Conclusion

71. The proposed development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore harmful by definition. The factors put forward as very special circumstances are not considered to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of its inappropriateness. The proposal would conflict with The Framework which indicates that development should be restricted and the application is recommended for refusal.

72. RELEVANT POLICIES: In accordance with s.38 (6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), the application is to be determined in accordance with the development plan (the Central Lancashire Core Strategy, the Adopted Chorley Local Plan 2012-2026 and adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance), unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Consideration of the proposal has had regard to guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework) and the development plan. The specific policies/ guidance considerations are contained within the body of the report.

Reason for Refusal

The proposed development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore harmful by definition. The factors put forward as very special circumstances are not considered to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of its inappropriateness. The proposal is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework.