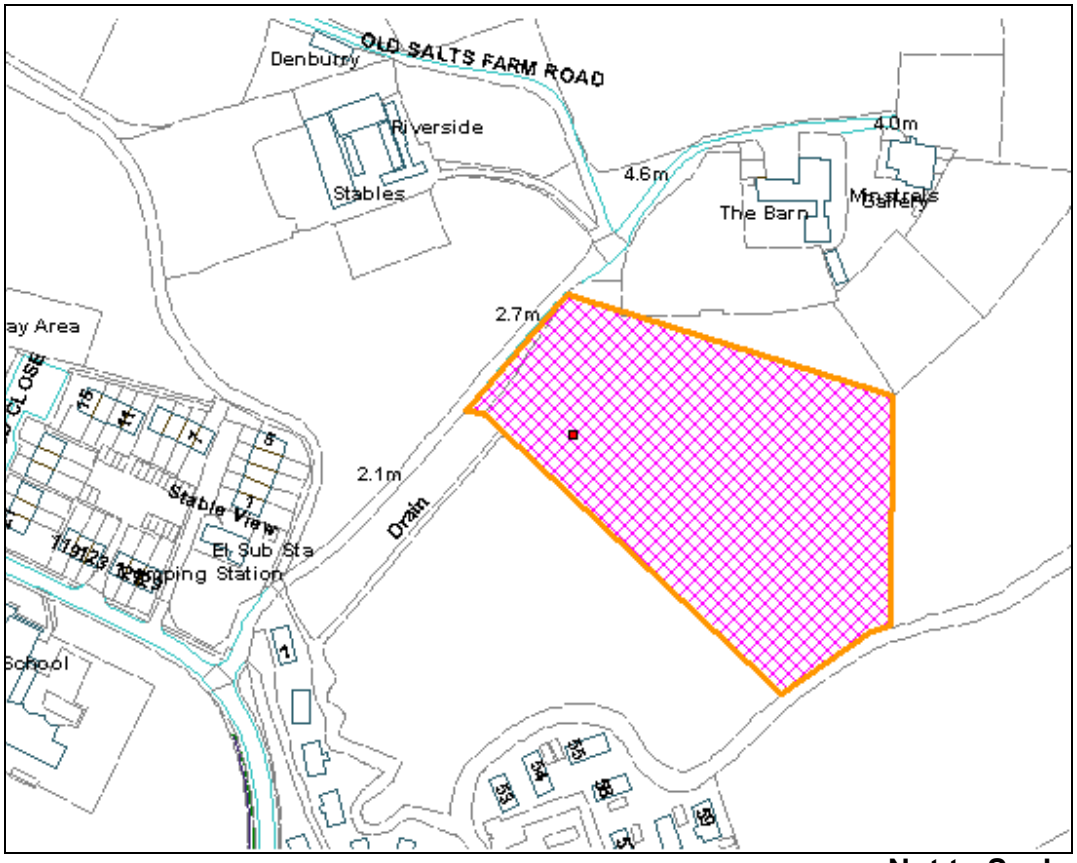
Application Number: AWDM/1170/15 **Recommendation – APPROVE**

Site: **The Barn Caravan Park, Old Salts Farm Road Lancing, West Sussex, BN15 8JG**

Proposal: **Permanent mobile home for use of the camp site owner with occupation limited to between 1st March to 31st October**

Applicant: Mr Joby Pannell Ward: Widewater
Case Officer: Peter Barnett



Not to Scale

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Proposal, Site and Surroundings

This touring caravan and camping site is located to the east of the built-up area of Lancing, within the remaining open area of flat coastal plain. It lies on the south-east side of a narrow private lane (which has a tarmac surface in poor condition). It is

situated 100m along the lane, before reaching the dwellinghouse 'Beechlands' (formerly 'The Barn') and the listed 'Minstrels Gallery' (formerly Old Salts Farmhouse) beyond. On the opposite side of the lane are paddocks and livery stables. To the south, beyond a watercourse and within the built up area, is a large residential mobile home site (Willowbrook Park).

The application site consists of a field, the north-west part of was formerly certificated by the Camping and Caravanning Club for its use as a touring caravan and camping site by Club members for no more than 5 touring caravans at any one time. Planning permission was granted in 2013 to increase the number of caravan pitches from 5 to 25 over the whole field, including that part which was outside the certificated area. Since then, the site is no longer certificated with the Camping and Caravanning Club due to its increased size.

Permission is sought to site a 3-bed mobile home measuring 12.5m long, 6.7m wide and 4.3m high to ridge on an existing area of hardstanding at the entrance to the site. It would have 3 bedrooms - the intention being that the applicant's family (wife and 2 children) would occupy the mobile home during the season. One of the bedrooms would be used as an office. The application is supported by a Design and Access Statement which states that the owners have run the camp site for over 12 years and would like to have a permanent resident on the site for the purposes of safety and security and to support the growing business and its contribution to the local economy.

The Statement explains that there are an increasing number of local events that bring significant demand for camping. An on-site management presence would enable campers to be properly looked after with any incidents dealt with swiftly. A permanent residence would also improve security, preventing illegal occupation of the land by the travelling community, and providing security for campers leaving their tents or caravans unattended during the day. The caravan park is a growing business and an on-site presence would enable better day-to-day management.

The application is supported by a number of documents, including a security report from Sussex Police which advises that "the site is vulnerable to incidents of campers no paying, visitors of legitimate campers not paying, unauthorized persons using the wash block facilities and anti social behavior to the detriment of legitimate customers. The site also stores ground keeping equipment which is vulnerable to theft. …To improve the security of the site and safety of campers I would recommend that a warden is on site and the entrance gate is controlled by the warden out of hours."

A health and safety assessment has also been carried out which "strongly recommends that a permanent presence of a competent person is on site at all times. This will ensure that all camp site policy is upheld and more so to assist in the case of any uneventful emergency. Where such an event may occur, although mobile phones are commonplace, the area is susceptible to signal loss and could, in the event of assistance being required from the emergency services or the owner, cause severe delay."

This application follows the refusal of a similar application earlier in the year (AWDM/0116/15). The current application has been altered to limit occupation of the mobile home to the camping season only (1 March to 31 October) rather than all year round , as previously proposed.

Relevant Planning History

L/13/01 – siting of residential mobile home – refused
L/119/04 - siting of residential mobile home – refused
ADC/0360/06 - Temporary siting of mobile home (to provide 24 hour on site security/management of licensed touring caravan site) (retrospective) – refused and appeal dismissed
ADC/0173/08- Locate mobile home on land in the sole ownership of a member of the 'gypsy' community – refused and appeal dismissed
AWDM/1089/11 - Shower, toilet and washing-up building for The Barn certified touring caravan site – approved
AWDM/0722/13 - Change of use of rear part of field to enable its inclusion within certified camping and caravan park with associated increase in the number of caravan pitches from 5 to 25 – approved

AWDM/0116/15 - Permanent mobile home for use of the camp site owner and new vehicle and pedestrian entrance gates. Application refused for the following reasons:

1. The site is located within a flood risk area and the application involves a highly vulnerable form of development which would be at unacceptable risk of flooding, contrary to the Technical Guidance to the National Planning Policy Framework

2. The site lies within the 'Strategic Gap'/Local Green Gap of open land between the built-up areas of Shoreham and Lancing and the development conflicts with saved policies AC1, AC4 and AH11 of the Adur District Local Plan and policy 14 of the Proposed Submission Adur Local Plan which seek to prevent development in strategic gaps/Local Green Gaps between built-up areas in order to prevent the coalescence of the settlements and to retain their separate identities

3. The proposed permanent siting of a mobile home constitutes undesirable sporadic development which would be detrimental to, and out of keeping with, the rural character and appearance of the locality, contrary to paragraphs 28 and 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework

Consultations

West Sussex County Council: No objection from a transport/highways aspect. Comments that the addition of a permanent caravan on the site in itself would not materially increase the number of movements to and from the site.

Adur & Worthing Councils: The ***Environmental Health*** officer has no adverse comment.

The ***Engineer*** states that the proposed site lies within flood zone 2 and 3 and appears to be unaffected by surface water flooding - there is no history of the site flooding.

The application is for a raised structure that will allow any flood waters to pass beneath it and therefore it presents no additional risk of increased flooding to surrounding properties. I accept that it is a highly vulnerable form of development, but its scale is such that I would find it hard to object on technical grounds, especially as any occupant would be safer than people within tents camping in the grounds.

Environment Agency: No objection. LPA is advised to consider the emergency planning and rescue implications of allowing this development. The Environment Agency would only deliver flood warnings to occupants covered by their flood warning network.

Lancing Parish Council: To be reported

Representations

4 letters received in support of the application:-

- An on-site warden will reduce the risk of incidents, people making too much noise and also ensures that visitors in and out of the site are controlled.
- Will improve security for neighbours and visitors to the site
- Will help site to be run in a more efficient, safe and effective manner

Relevant Planning Policies and Guidance

Adur District Local Plan 1993-2006 (ADC 1996) (saved policies): AG1, AC1, AC4, AH11
Proposed Submission Adur Local Plan (2014) Policy 14
National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

Relevant Legislation

The Committee should consider the planning application in accordance with:
Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) that provides the application may be granted either unconditionally or subject to relevant conditions, or refused. Regard shall be given to relevant development plan policies, any relevant local finance considerations, and other material considerations; and
Section 38(6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that requires the decision to be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Planning Assessment

Principle

The site lies outside the built-up area and in the 'strategic gap' of countryside separating Lancing from Shoreham. Saved policy AC4, relating specifically to the strategic gaps, is intended to prevent further development in such areas in order to prevent the coalescence of settlements and to ensure that any development maintains and enhances their predominantly open and undeveloped character. Policy AC4 states that development will only be permitted in "compelling circumstances" and that need for development essential for agriculture, horticulture, forestry or the diversification of the rural economy or to take advantage of a valuable opportunity to meet demand for quiet informal recreation may exceptionally be regarded as compelling.

This policy will be replaced with Draft Policy 14 of the Adur Local Plan when adopted which relates to Local Green Gaps, the aims of which are the same as policy AC4.

Saved Policy AH11 of the Local Plan states that the land use policy considerations for mobile homes are the same as for permanent housing.

The NPPF supports the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of businesses and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings (para 28). It also supports sustainable rural tourism that benefit local businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors and which respect the character of the countryside (para 28).

The NPPF also states that "Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances" (para 55).

Visual amenity

The mobile home would be sited on an area of hardstanding at the entrance to the site. At the time of your Officer's site inspection there were a number of caravans being stored in this area, together with several cars and vans. It is understood that the area was being used for parking/storage temporarily during the winter to prevent damage to the grass field of the main campsite. There is a block built 'shed' at the entrance plus a smaller timber shed. There is no record of planning permission having been granted for either structure.

The site is screened to some extent by a hedge along the frontage and the proposed mobile home would be within an area enclosed by hedging to the south and west, not visible from the access road. The mobile home would have a pitched roof and would have a permanent presence, even if it were only to be occupied for 8 months of the year.

This issue has been considered previously at 2 appeals. In 2007, the first Inspector took the view that "*the mobile home, by reason of its colour, presence and height, fails to maintain the local open character although there is some planting that breaks up views of the mobile home from Old Salts Farm Road to a limited extent*."

More recently, in 2009, the Inspector stated that "*Unlike a touring caravan, the mobile home has a year-round presence and has the appearance of residential development, complete with domestic paraphernalia including a wooden shed and a larger "shed" with block walls and a pitched roof*."

He went on to state that "*The mobile home is near the edge of the built-up area and represents an intrusion of development into a gap where the aim is to avoid the coalescence of settlements. In addition, its permanent residential appearance detracts from the rural character of its surroundings, which survives despite a scatter of development, including nearby stables and dwellings*." He concluded that the appearance of the mobile home "*would only be softened, not overcome, by existing and additional planting and, while it should be seen in the context of caravans and tents on the certificated site, these are just short term, changing features on a grassy field*."

These arguments remain valid to some extent. However, a strong case has been put forward by the applicant for a permanent presence, which is discussed in the next section. While the mobile home would constitute a sporadic form of development, it could be argued that the mobile home in itself would not appear unduly intrusive in the landscape, being set within an enclosed area which prevents views of it in the wider landscape.

The applicant considers that are material considerations which outweigh the policy objections and has referred specifically to the need to improve safety and security on the site, particularly since permission was granted to increase the number of caravans that can use the site from 5 to 25. The increased number and scale of local events, and the subsequent increase in visitor numbers (including campers) to the area, is also given as a reason to support the proposal, as is the need to support a local business which contributes to the local economy.

The need to control use of the touring caravan and camping site

The use of the site as a touring caravan and camping site at the time of the previous appeals was small scale, limited solely to members of the Camping and Caravanning Club and the number of touring caravans on the site not exceeding 5 at any time, with no individual caravan present for more than 28 days.

Since then, permission has been granted to increase the number of caravans to 25. There is also no limitation on the number of tents present. This has enabled the site to be more intensively used and the applicant has stated that there is a need for better management and security of the site, which would be more effective with a permanent on-site presence.

In the previous appeal decision concerning this matter in 2009, the Planning Inspector stated "*I am not convinced that the siting of a mobile home is the only means of controlling usage and security of the site*." He went on to state that "*the site is close to dwellings and mobile homes within the built-up area which could, in principle, go some way towards enabling the certificated site's needs to be met*."

It is understood that the applicant lives within 0.5 miles of the site, which was previously considered to be close enough to be able to deal with any safety or security matters which may arise. However, the applicant has since commissioned reports from the Police and a Health and Safety advisor, and has a letter of support from the Camping and Caravan Club, which all strongly recommend that there is a need for a permanent warden presence on the site. These are detailed in the first section of this report.

Members are advised that the security case now put forward by the applicant could be considered strong enough to outweigh the policy objection to new residential development in the strategic gap.

Flood risk

The site lies within an area at risk of flooding (zone 3a) and previous proposals for a permanently sited mobile home on the site have been objected to by the Environment Agency due to the risk to human safety during a flood event.

The current application proposes to limit occupation of the mobile home to between 1st March and 31st October, thereby avoiding the winter months when flood risk is higher. Furthermore, the ground floor of the mobile home would be 300mm above ground level.

With a condition to prevent occupation during the winter months, the Environment Agency has advised that it would not object to the proposal, although they have recommended that a Flood Emergency Evacuation Plan is prepared. This can be secured by condition.

Conclusion

While previous applications have been refused and dismissed at appeal, the current application is considered to have overcome the previous reasons for refusal. The mobile home would not be occupied all year round and, while being a permanent physical presence on the site, there is considered to be reasonable screening to prevent it being unduly prominent in the landscape. The applicant has also put forward a compelling argument for the need for a permanent on-site presence during the camping season, which is considered to justify such development in the Strategic Gap.

It is therefore considered that the application can be supported.

Recommendation

APPROVE, subject to the following conditions:-

1. Standard time limit
2. Occupation of mobile home limited to site warden between 1 March and 31 October in any year. Mobile home to be unoccupied between 1 November and 30 April
3. Flood Emergency Plan to be submitted and approved prior to occupation
4. Approved plans

28th September 2015