

Parish:	Northwold	
Proposal:	Change of use of land to outdoor wedding venue, to include siting of tipis, tents, shepherds huts, mobile toilets and car parking	
Location:	Wellington Lodge Farm Thetford Road Northwold Thetford	
Applicant:	Plumridge, Moss And Moss	
Case No:	20/00852/F (Full Application)	
Case Officer:	Mrs C Dorgan	Date for Determination: 31 August 2020 Extension of Time Expiry Date: 9 October 2020

Reason for Referral to Planning Committee – Parish Council comments are contrary to the Officer Recommendation

Neighbourhood Plan: No

Case Summary

The application seeks full planning consent for the use of land at Wellington Lodge Farm from agriculture (in the form of pastureland) to an outdoor wedding venue to include the siting of tipis, tents, shepherds' huts, mobile toilets and car parking.

The site is located in the countryside approximately 1.25 miles to the south west of the village of Northwold, and south of the A134.

The site has been utilised for a limited number of weddings to date.

Key Issues

- * Principle of Development
- * Highways/ Access
- * Impact on countryside
- * Neighbour Amenity
- * Other material considerations.

Recommendation

APPROVE

THE APPLICATION

The application seeks full planning consent for the use of land at Wellington Lodge Farm from agriculture (in the form of pastureland) to an outdoor wedding venue to include the siting of tipis, tents, shepherds huts, mobile toilets and car parking.

The site is located in the countryside approximately 1.25 miles to the south west of the village of Northwold, and south of the A134.

The site has been utilised for a small number of weddings to date, and currently comprises:

- 3 giant hat tipis to provide a single space (approx. 270m²) (that accommodates the wedding celebrations);
- land for the siting of tents and shepherds huts (accommodation);
- land for the siting of portable toilets;
- a former Horse Walker space (that accommodates the wedding service); and
- an area of grassland for car parking.

The shelters/ structures are currently brought onto the site and erected for the summer period and then stored on site during the winter months. The siting of bell tents for overnight accommodation are available at request for wedding guests. In terms of physical changes to the land on site, an area has been fenced off (with a low post and rail fence) for the parking area and then the site is predominantly laid to grass with some areas of planted meadow/ wild flowers.

To date, the applicants have held up to 10 weddings per year under permitted development rights, and due to demand and limitations on events this year, they are seeking planning consent to ensure they can establish their business and be able to host an additional number of weddings next year.

Aside from the wedding business, the rural enterprise includes holiday accommodation (Forest Cottage), and the applicant has an extant consent for five holiday lodges, a swimming pool and managers office (2/00/0863/F). They also have consent for an anaerobic digester plant and associated infrastructure (16/01151/FM) but the applicant is still considering whether to pursue this development.

SUPPORTING CASE

The application seeks consent to enable a successful outdoor wedding venue to operate for a greater number of days per year. The venue has been hosting up to 10 weddings per year and has therefore been operating under permitted development legislation, which allows temporary alternative uses of land for up to 28 days per year.

However, the wedding venue has proven to be popular and, with a flourishing reputation, demand has significantly increased. In addition, and significantly, the current restrictions in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that many of the weddings booked at the venue in 2020 have been postponed.

In approving the current planning application the committee will help to enable the venue to meet the needs of couples waiting to get married, will enable the applicants to meet their ambitions for the venue and will realise significant local economic benefits including increasing local employment opportunities and supporting local providers of services to the venue, such as local taxi firms, accommodation providers and caterers. Such support for the

local economy is particularly important during the uncertain times we currently find ourselves in.

The application has received a good level of support from local residents and local service providers. Nonetheless, it is noted that concern has been expressed regarding an increase in traffic flow to a junction with restricted visibility. In response, the applicant would clarify that the proposal seeks to increase the days per year over which the venue operates, it does not propose an increase in the size of the weddings to be accommodated. It is evident therefore that the proposal will not result in an increase in traffic flow over that which has previously been experienced, it only increases the number of days over which the venue operates. We are not aware of any highway safety issues arising from the operation of the venue to date and, significantly, the Highway Authority is satisfied that no highway safety issues will arise as a result of the current proposal. It is recognised that the Highway Authority has stated that access visibility has been impaired by vegetation over growing the fence and verge. In response the applicant can confirm that the hedgerow is cut twice yearly to ensure that any encroachment of vegetation is cleared, thereby ensuring that an acceptable level of vision is achieved and retained. Unfortunately, over growing did take place this year due to an exceptional delay in hedgerow cutting, a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In summary, no adverse impacts have arisen from the operation of the wedding venue to date and none are therefore anticipated to arise as a result of permitting this application and enabling the venue to operate over a greater number of days per year. It is considered evident that the only significant impacts likely to arise as a result of the proposal are the local economic benefits previously identified.

To conclude, we believe that the proposed development fully accords with the Development Plan and no unacceptable adverse impacts have been identified as arising from the proposal. Given the extraordinary times we are living in, with the need to support and strengthen the local economy never more necessary, we commend this proposal to members and respectfully request that it is looked upon favourably.

PLANNING HISTORY

19/01592/F: Application Permitted – Delegated Decision: 14/10/19 - REMOVAL OR VARIATION OF CONDITION 9 & 10 OF PLANNING PERMISSION

16/01151/FM: Permitted – Delegated Decision: Installation of an anaerobic digester (AD) plant and associated infrastructure - Wellington Lodge Farm

16/01151/FM: Application Permitted – Delegated Decision: 17/10/16 - Installation of an anaerobic digester (AD) plant and associated infrastructure - Wellington Lodge Farm

13/01317/FM: Application Refused – Delegated Decision : 04/04/14 - Proposed change of use to 50 touring caravan site , 50 pitch camping site, new shop / office / function room / toilets and shower building with associated roads and parking etc - Wellington Lodge Farm

2/03/0277/F: Application Permitted – Delegated Decision: 13/08/03 - Construction of management offices swimming pool and guest accommodation - Wellington Lodge Farm

07/02101/FM: Application Permitted – Delegated Decision: 11/12/07 - Construction of equine indoor ride and stables with associated extension to access. (Residential use) - Land South Of Wellington Lodge

2/00/0863/F: Application Permitted – Committee Decision: 25/04/01 - Construction of 5 holiday lodges and swimming pool/management offices - Wellington Lodge Farm

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

Parish Council: OBJECTION.

This will increase the traffic flow to a junction with restricted vision. This could cause/generate the possibility of accidents.

Highways Authority: NO OBJECTION.

Low numbers of patrons are expected to stay on the site and most of the trips associated with visiting the site would be via cars (which are easier to pass on the narrower sections of highway leading to this site) and that bookings are unlikely to be daily. On balance, I am of the view that we would not recommend an objection. At the time of my visit I did observe that access visibility has been impaired by vegetation over growing the fence and verge. The applicant will need to clear any encroachment so an acceptable level of vision is achieved.

Environment Agency: NO COMMENTS.

We have reviewed the information submitted and have no comment to make on this application.

Community Safety and Neighbour Nuisance (CSNN): NO OBJECTION.

(Verbal response) No objection to the proposal. Satisfied that the hours of operation are controlled by the premises licence. No complaints/ concerns raised regarding the site to date. Request that an informative is attached to the consent re statutory nuisance.

Environmental Health & Housing – Environmental Quality: NO OBJECTION.

The NPPF states that the planning system should prevent both new and existing development from contributing to or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of land or air pollution.

Contaminated Land - Based on the information supplied, I have no objections to make regarding contaminated land.

Air Quality - The development includes the addition of 60 new parking spaces. This is not deemed significant in line with EPUK and IAQM Planning for Air Quality Guidance. Additionally, background concentrations of both nitrogen dioxide (7.49g/m³) and particulate matter (13.97g/m³) are well below the national air quality objective. Therefore, we have no objection to the development with regards to air quality.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue: NO OBJECTION.

I confirm that I have no observations to make regarding this matter. I acknowledge receipt of the above application and I do not propose to raise any objections providing the proposal meets the necessary requirements of the current Building Regulations 2010 – Approved Document B (volume 2 – 2019 edition) as administered by the Building Control Authority.

Planning Committee
5 October 2020

Natural England: NO OBJECTION.

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on designated sites and has no objection.

REPRESENTATIONS: FOUR letters of SUPPORT received raising the following issues:

- Boost local economy
- Eco and environmentally sustainable business
- Benefit local businesses (catering, events, taxis, B&Bs and hotels etc)
- Generate employment
- Unlikely to have a detrimental impact

LDF CORE STRATEGY POLICIES

CS01 - Spatial Strategy

CS06 - Development in Rural Areas

CS08 - Sustainable Development

CS10 - The Economy

CS11 – Transport

SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES PLAN 2016

DM1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

DM2 – Development Boundaries

DM15 – Environment, Design and Amenity

DM17 - Parking Provision in New Development

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
National Design Guide 2019

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The issues for consideration include:

- Principle of Development
- Highways/ Access
- Impact on countryside
- Neighbour Amenity
- Other material considerations.

Planning Committee
5 October 2020

Principle of Development

The NPPF identifies the need to place significant weight on supporting economic growth and productivity (paragraph 80). It goes on to say that 'decisions should enable; the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas...; the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses; and sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.' (paragraph 83).

Policy CS06 of the Core Strategy (2011) outlines the strategy for development in rural areas and includes the need to 'ensure strong, diverse economic activity' and to protect the countryside for its intrinsic character and beauty. It is also supportive of farm diversification schemes providing it is a sustainable form of development; consistent in scale with the location; is beneficial to local economic and social needs; and does not adversely affect the area or detract from neighbour amenity. Policy CS10 sets out the Council's intentions to support the local economy.

While the application site is not in the most sustainable location, it is a form of rural diversification and the nature of the proposal means the use is well suited to this type of site. It is also appropriate in terms of scale within the locality, while also respecting the local character.

The application site is an existing rural enterprise which has been successful to date. The planning consent would enable the applicant to increase the number of events held each year, further establishing their business. The proposal will generate local employment on site. There are currently 4 full-time equivalents employed and this would increase to 7, as additional part time staff are required. There are also wider benefits to the local economy as the venue will bring visitors using local accommodation and taxis, as well as the use of local caterers, equipment hire etc.

In summary, the principle of development is acceptable. The application seeks to support and enhance an existing local enterprise in this rural location and is in line with the NPPF and Policies CS06, CS08 and CS10 of the adopted Core Strategy (2011).

Highways / Access

The Local Highway Authority has raised no objections to the proposed scheme due to the low numbers of patrons and the fact that most trips will be by car, which are easier to pass on narrower parts of the highway. The Parish Council has objected however, on the grounds that the proposal would generate additional traffic utilising a junction with restricted vision which may then lead to accidents. The Local Highway Authority does not share these concerns and has not identified any highways safety issues with the application. They consider that there are a number of options in terms of which route people may take to the site. Also, the vehicle movements will be at off peak hours and ad hoc in terms of the frequency of weddings. Furthermore, signage has been improved indicating the approach to the junction.

The change of use of the land is considered to be acceptable in terms of access, vehicle numbers, parking etc and is line with Policy CS11 of the Core Strategy. DM15 and DM17 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan (2016).

Impact on countryside

The site is in a rural location, within a landscape dominated by woodland. The application site itself is part of a larger landholding, and by its nature is well screened by this woodland. There are no views of the application site from public vantage points and therefore in terms of landscape character the development would not be detrimental to the locality.

In terms of the impact of the proposal on the countryside, while the visitors will have to be reliant on the private car these numbers will be limited. The application seeks the change of use of the land only and so when events are not being held the tipis, tents etc will be removed and the land is largely restored to its previous form. There are no ecology issues raised on the site and the proposal would not impact on any designations or protected sites. As a result, there will be limited detrimental impact on the countryside as a result of the proposed application in line with Policies CS06, CS08 and CS12 of the Core Strategy and DM15 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan 2016.

Neighbour Amenity

The applicant lives in Wellington Lodge Farm house immediately to the north east of the application site, and this enables the applicant to carefully manage the events. The proximity of the dwelling may give rise to some amenity issues however this is within the control of the applicant to manage this relationship.

The isolated nature of the site means that there are no other dwellings close by, the nearest being approximately 700m away (as the crow flies) the other side of a belt of woodland. CSNN have had no complaints as a result of the weddings held to date, and CSNN does not object to the application. Their view is that their premises licence will be sufficient to limit any potential noise issues. The premises licence states that live /recorded music should finish by midnight, and that the sale of alcohol will also cease at midnight. The licence application also states that the events will finish by 00.30. There have been no objections received from local residents to this application.

It is considered unlikely that the proposed application would have a detrimental impact on neighbouring residential amenity and is therefore in line with Policy DM15 of the SADMPP 2016.

Other material considerations

Representations –

The Environment Agency, Environmental Quality and Norfolk Fire and Rescue all have no objections to the scheme.

There have been four letters of support received from local residents, stating the benefits of the proposal to the local economy.

CONCLUSION

The principle of development is considered to be acceptable. The proposal is in line with the NPPF and adopted Local Plan as will support an existing rural enterprise; creating jobs and contributing to the wider economy while respecting the rural character of the locality.

The Parish Council has objected to the application for highway safety reasons, however the Local Highway Authority does not share this view. The Local Highway Authority has not objected to the proposal and thereby considers that it meets policy requirements.

The nature of the locality and of the scheme proposed would result in little impact on the countryside as a result of the development. There are also unlikely to be any neighbour amenity issues given the isolated nature of the site.

The application is recommended for approval for the reasons stated above.

RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE subject to the imposition of the following condition(s):

- 1 Condition: The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
- 1 Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990, as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004.
- 2 Condition: The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans (Drawing Nos PL01A and PL02A).
- 2 Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.
- 3 Condition: The land outlined in red on Drawing No. PL02 A will be solely used as an outdoor wedding venue including the siting of tipis, tents, shepherds huts and mobile toilets, and associated car parking area. The land shall at no time be used for any other business or commercial purpose.
- 3 Reason: In order that the Local Planning Authority may retain control over the development in the interests of the amenities of the locality in accordance with the NPPF.
- 4 Condition: The land (outlined in red on Drawing No. PL02 A) shall only be used as a wedding venue including the siting of tipis, tents, shepherds huts, mobile toilets and associated car parking between the 1st April and 30th September (inclusive) in any calendar year unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- 4 Reason: In order that the Local Planning Authority may retain control over the development in the interests of the amenities of the locality in accordance with the NPPF.