

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

PLANNING AND BUILDING STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1 MARCH 2021

APPLICATION FOR PLANNING PERMISSION

ITEM:	REFERENCE NUMBER: 20/01282/FUL
OFFICER:	Mr Paul Duncan
WARD:	East Berwickshire
PROPOSAL:	Erection of 2 No glamping pods
SITE:	Land South Of The Visitor Centre Northfield Farm, St Abbs
APPLICANT:	Mrs A Seed and Cllr C Hamilton
AGENT:	Alisdair Hamilton

PLANNING PROCESSING AGREEMENT (PPA): A PPA is in place which seeks determination at the Planning and Building Standards Committee on 1 March 2021.

BACKGROUND

This application is brought before the Planning and Building Standards Committee as an applicant is an Elected Member. There have been no objections to the application.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Northfield Farm sits around 350m west of the Berwickshire fishing village of St Abbs. It comprises a mix of traditional slate-roofed and more modern metal roofed farm buildings and a pantile-roofed former blacksmith's. The latter is prominent from the main road to St Abbs (the B6438) and was previously converted to a coffee shop (owned by the applicants), art gallery, stores and a National Trust for Scotland (NTS) visitor centre with public toilets.

The proposed site forms part of a larger triangular parcel of open land that is bound by hedging and the B6438 to the south, and by the long row of single-storey former blacksmith's buildings to the north. This area is currently used by the applicant's coffee shop and is partly occupied by picnic tables. A small caravan site is located further to the east, beyond a recently upgraded vehicular access.

Land to the west comprises a large visitor car park operated by the NTS which is separated from the proposed site by mature trees. A footpath connects the car park to the visitor centre and proposed site. An unclassified public road is located further west of the NTS car park and serves the St Abbs Head National Nature Reserve.

On the south side of the B6438 lies open arable farmland which affords panoramic views across the surrounding coastal landscape, contributing to the setting of St Abbs and its C listed St Abbs Church.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Permission is sought for the erection of two 'glamping' pods. The pods would have a standard design for this type of development with familiar curved timber clad roof/walls. They would each measure 5m by 3m in footprint with a maximum height of 2.6m. The pods would arrive pre-assembled.

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no recent planning application history at the proposed site. It has been used by the coffee shop since 1987, including a period occupied by play equipment.

A number of applications were submitted previously for new build or farm conversion housing at Northfield Farm. All have either lapsed or were withdrawn.

In 2019, planning permission (reference 19/00238/FUL) was granted for infrastructure works to the east of the coffee shop, in association with a 5 berth caravan site.

REPRESENTATION SUMMARY

At the time of writing no third party representations have been received.

Any comments received will be made available in full on Public Access.

APPLICANTS' SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- Supporting Statement/ Business Case
- Glamping Pod Design Statement
- Elevation Drawings

DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES:

Scottish Borders Council Local Development Plan 2016

PMD1: Sustainability

PMD2: Quality Standards for New Development

ED7: Business, Tourism and Leisure Development in the Countryside

ED8: Caravan and Camping Sites

ED10: Protection of Prime Quality Agricultural Land and Carbon Rich Soils

HD3: Protection of Residential Amenity

EP1: International Conservation Sites and Protected Species

EP2: National Nature Conservation Sites and Protected Species

EP3: Local Biodiversity

EP5: Special Landscape Areas

EP7: Listed Buildings

EP8: Archaeology

EP9: Conservation Areas

EP13: Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

EP14: Coastline

IS5: Protection of Access Routes

IS7: Parking Provision and Standards

IS9: Waste Water Treatments Standards and Sustainable Urban Drainage

IS13: Contaminated Land

OTHER PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS:

Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Guidance 2005
Landscape and Development Supplementary Planning Guidance 2008
Placemaking and Design Supplementary Planning Guidance 2010
Trees and Development Supplementary Planning Guidance 2008
Waste Management Supplementary Planning Guidance 2015
Scottish Planning Policy 2014
Scottish Borders Tourism Strategy 2013-2020
Scottish Borders Tourism Action Plan

CONSULTATION RESPONSES:

Scottish Borders Council Consultees

Access Officer: No response received at the time of writing.

Contaminated Land: No objection. There appears to be a possible historic use of land as a blacksmiths within the vicinity of this application. It is understood the pods will be sited upon an existing base. The requirement for a full site assessment and potential remediation may not be practical or proportionate given the nature of the application and it is recommended that the applicant is advised of potential land contamination issues by way of an Informative Note.

Economic Development: No response received at the time of writing.

Environmental Health (final response): No objection, subject to a suitably worded condition to secure provision of toilets for the development at all times whilst the glamping pods are in use. The utilisation of a public water supply via the coffee shop's mains water supply and an existing connecting pipe to the pods area is agreeable. The development will require a license which will seek to ensure welfare/ sanitary provisions are met, including provision of showers, the applicant should check this.

Roads Planning Service: No objection. The exiting access is capable of accommodating the small increase in traffic associated with this proposal and ample parking is available on site.

Statutory Consultees

Community Council: No response received at the time of writing.

KEY PLANNING ISSUES:

The key determining issues are:

- whether the proposed development would amount to an appropriate tourism related development for a countryside location in accordance with the Scottish Borders Tourism Strategy and Action Plan;
- whether the proposed development would benefit from safe vehicular access and egress without adversely impacting road safety; and
- whether the proposed development would safeguard the landscape quality of the Berwickshire Coast Special Landscape Area.

ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATION:

Planning policy

The application site is located a short distance from St Abbs. As the site is not located within a designated settlement, the proposed development meets the description of a rural tourism development to be assessed against Local Development Plan policy ED7 (Business, Tourism and Leisure Development in the Countryside). Furthermore, the glamping pods could technically meet the definition of a caravan under the Caravan Sites Act 1968, so the provisions of LDP policy ED8 (Caravan and Camping Sites) are also relevant.

The siting requirements of Policy ED8 are generally more restrictive than Policy ED7. Policy ED8 favours developments within or immediately out with settlements that can support local shops and services over countryside locations.

The proposed site is within walking distance of St Abbs and benefits from safe pedestrian access via segregated footpath to the outskirts of the village. St Abbs is host to various services including a newsagent and café. The development is likely to support these local businesses. The proximity and accessibility of the proposed site to St Abbs is considered to satisfy the stricter siting objectives of Policy ED8.

Unlike Policy ED8, Policy ED7 does not seek to secure regeneration benefits. The policy instead places a greater emphasis on supporting employment generating development that accords with the Scottish Borders Tourism Strategy and Action Plan.

A Supporting Statement/ Business Case was provided with the application. This details how the development would help diversify the existing coffee shop business, providing a further income stream. The glamping pods and coffee shop are likely to be mutually beneficial, as the coffee shop would be a useful amenity for users of the proposed development. The coffee shop is employment generating.

The Statement also sets out the applicant's market research. Coffee shop customers were encouraged to complete a questionnaire. The results indicate that most visitors were drawn from around the UK, primarily to visit local attractions and enjoy the local scenery. Local attractions include St Abbs harbour, Coldingham Bay, the nature reserve at St Abbs Head and the Berwickshire Coastal Path which connects them. All would be easily accessible from the proposed development. The survey found visitors use a range of accommodation types including small and large caravan and camping sites and holiday lets, most staying for between 1-7 days.

It is considered that the application adequately demonstrates accordance with the Scottish Borders Tourism Strategy, primarily by meeting known demand for tourism accommodation in this area.

Policy ED7 lists further criteria for consideration. Tourism developments should be compatible with neighbouring uses. The NTS visitor centre would be located in close proximity to the development but is largely unmanned. The proposed development is unlikely to disturb this facility. The proximity of the visitor centre, coffee shop and art gallery will reduce the privacy afforded to guests. The applicants have previously planted hedging to the roadside and along the boundary with the NTS visitor centre which will mature over time and will provide enclosure for the development. In addition, trellising would be erected between the two pods. This should improve privacy sufficiently, and a condition can secure control over these points.

A further criterion for consideration is whether, where a new building is proposed, an existing building or brownfield site is available locally. The proposed site hosts an existing hard surface and meets the definition of a brownfield site. It is not within an area designated as Prime Quality Agricultural Land, so there is also no conflict with related Policy ED10.

In summary, it is concluded that the proposed development meets the policy principle requirements of policies ED7 and ED8, and ED10 in more general terms.

Vehicular Access, Road Safety and Parking

Policy PMD2 requires developments to have no adverse impact on road safety and adequate vehicular access. Policy IS7 requires car parking to meet the Council's standards.

The Roads Planning Service (RPS) have no objection to this proposal. An upgraded vehicular access was provided to the east of the proposed site in the last two years. The Service consider the existing access arrangements to be acceptable for a development of this scale. The public road continues to St Abbs, where it ends. The local road network is considered capable of accommodating the small increase in traffic that would be associated with this development. The coffee shop benefits from an existing private car park located off the newly upgraded vehicular access and the RPS have confirmed their satisfaction with the level of parking available at this location.

Landscape and Visual Impact

The proposed site is located within the Berwickshire Coast Special Landscape Area (SLA). Policy EP5 (Special Landscape Areas) of the Local Development Plan seeks to safeguard the landscape quality of Special Landscape Areas. Policies PMD1 (Sustainability) and PMD2 (Quality Standards) set out more general provisions for the assessment of landscape and visual impacts.

The proposed pods would be small in scale. The timber clad, curved roof/ walls of glamping pods produce a simple, clean appearance. This type of development normally relates well to an undulating landscape and is less visually intrusive compared to static caravans for example. The proposed site benefits from recently planted hedging to the roadside which would help screen the development and provide some privacy. A condition is recommended to ensure the hedging is maintained until the hedge becomes well established and retained thereafter. Mature trees on the car park side of the site would screen views from the west. Views from the east would be more open. However, the timber cladding would recede visually against the backdrop of the mature trees without any significant detrimental landscape or visual impact arising.

The proposed development satisfies LDP policies PMD1, PMD2 and EP5 as regards landscape and visual impacts.

Trees

Policy EP13 of the Local Development Plan seeks to protect trees from development.

As noted, a copse of mature trees separates the proposed site, the NTS visitor centre and the coffee shop from the nearby NTS public car park. The trees hold amenity value. They help screen the car park from sensitive views and would provide enclosure and setting to the proposed development.

No trees require to be felled to accommodate the proposed development. The pods would be sited on the existing hard surface and the development would be 'no dig', avoiding direct disturbance to the tree roots. A planning condition is recommended to secure control over the manner of construction.

Siting heavy loads within the tree RPAs can be harmful to trees. It is not clear whether the pods would be located within this area. Heavy play equipment was sited in this area historically without any apparent adverse effects. The precise siting of the pods can be discussed further to minimise any low risk of harm arising. This can be achieved by condition, which would also be used to secure a more accurate site plan.

Cultural Heritage

Impact on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas

LDP Policy EP7 seeks to preserve protect and enhance the setting of Listed Buildings. Policy EP9 requires that developments within or adjacent to a Conservation Area are designed to preserve their special architectural or historic character.

There are no listed buildings at Northfield Farm and it is well out with St Abbs Conservation Area. The setting of the C listed St Abbs Church includes the expansive open landscape to its west, but this modestly scaled development would not give rise to any setting impacts. Similarly, the development is too small scale and distant from St Abbs Conservation Area to impact on its setting. The proposed development complies with Policies EP7 and EP9.

Impact on Archaeology

Policy EP8 (Archaeology) aims to protect Scheduled Monuments and any other archaeological assets from potentially damaging forms of developments.

The nearest Scheduled Monuments are located roughly half a mile to the north (Mire Loch Fort) and south-west (Priory Cottage settlement) of the proposed site. They would not be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed development.

The agent for the application has confirmed in writing that there would be no below ground works required to facilitate this development. Accordingly, there is no risk of disturbing any archaeological remains should any be present below the ground. The proposals therefore satisfy Policy EP8.

Residential Amenity

The nearest dwellinghouses to the site are Millrace, around 100m to the north, and 1-7 Northfield Farm Cottages, around 200m to the north. These dwellings are separated from the proposed site by mature trees and buildings. Several are thought to be used for self-catering holiday accommodation. Further dwellinghouses are located further to the north of these properties, and to the east of the proposed site at St Abbs at a distance of around 400m or more.

Given the distances involved, there are no significant residential amenity concerns arising from this development. Whilst impacts such as noise nuisance can extend across wide areas, there is no reason to believe this should be a significant issue for this development, and the intervening buildings and trees would be expected to impede the travel of noise. Should significant issues arise, this would be a matter for Environmental Health to consider pursuant of under their statutory nuisance powers.

Ecology

Ecological assets are protected by Policies EP1-EP3 of the Local Development Plan covering a range of sites and species from international to local interest.

The application site is not located within any locally, nationally or internationally protected ecological sites. Elsewhere, the Berwickshire Coast is thrice designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The scale and nature of this development would not give rise to any risk of impacting these designated sites. Nor would the development impact the St Abbs Head National Nature Reserve (NNR).

In terms of protected species, the construction process associated with this development would be low impact. The pods would be sited on an existing hard surface. Given the nature and modest scale of the proposed development there is unlikely to be any impact upon protected species arising from construction process. Operationally, the development would also be expected to be low impact.

Flooding

Policy IS8 of the Local Development Plan seeks to prevent developments at significant risk of flooding or which would materially increase the probability of flooding elsewhere. The nearest watercourse is the Starney Burn which passes Northfield Farm around 170m to the north-west. The site is not located within or near any area identified by SEPA's national flood risk map as being at risk of flooding. The site slopes down gently towards the owners' land to the east. There are no known flood risk concerns and accordingly the proposed development is considered to satisfy Policy IS8.

Occupancy

The development would be used to provide holiday accommodation. Members will be aware that it is common practice to control occupancy of holiday accommodation by planning condition and will be familiar with the different approaches that can be taken to achieve this.

In this instance, the nature of the proposed accommodation is such that lengthy periods of occupancy are unlikely to arise; there is little risk of the accommodation being used for permanent accommodation, for example. Furthermore, it is noted that the applicants intend to focus on the short term accommodation market.

It is considered that a condition that limits the occupancy of the proposed accommodation to individual periods not exceeding four weeks in total within any consecutive period of 13 weeks would be appropriate here. This would not impose any significant operational constraint and would provide further planning control over the development for the Planning Authority in the unlikely event this was required.

Access Rights

The proposed site is well placed to access a network of public paths and walks. These include: the Right of Way to the west of the site which follows the single track private road from the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) car park to St Abbs Head; the Berwickshire Coastal Path which follows the coast and passes through St Abbs to the east; and a formal path (Reference SABB/PP/4) between the two which passes between the proposed site and the NTS visitor centre and extends through the field from Northfield Farm towards St Abbs.

LDP policy IS5 (Protection of Access Routes) states that development that would have an adverse impact on a public access route will not be permitted unless a suitable diversion or appropriate alternative route is provided by the developer.

The proposed site is located within close proximity of the path SABB/PP/4 which follows the footpath in front of the NTS visitor centre. A hedge has been planted which separates the proposed site from the footpath. The proposed development would not obstruct or directly impact the footpath.

Contaminated Land

Policy IS13 aims to allow development of land with known or suspected contamination in a manner that ensures redevelopment does not give cause for unacceptable risks to human health or the wider environment.

The application has been reviewed by the Council's Contaminated Land Officer whose assessment has identified the possible historic presence of a blacksmiths in the vicinity of the proposed site. There are potential contaminated implications arising from this. However, on account of a range of factors including the existing use of the site and the scale of the development, formal mitigation is not considered necessary and Policy IS13 is met. An informative note is listed at the end of this report to advise the developer of the Contaminated Land Officer's findings.

Servicing

Policy IS9 seeks to ensure that developments adequately deal with foul water and surface water.

The applicants are understood to be in discussions with the National Trust for Scotland to buy the public toilets. The toilets would then be made available for guests. In the event the purchase could not be completed, the applicants would convert an existing store room within the coffee shop premises into a wet room. This space is separate from the coffee shop's day to day operations and toilet facilities would be provided exclusively for guests. Environmental Health are satisfied by these arrangements, provided suitable control is secured by a suitably worded planning condition.

There is ample open land around the site to ensure surface water runoff drains freely to ground in a sustainable fashion.

The proposed development would be served by the public water mains, using an existing connection via the coffee shop. Environmental Health are satisfied with this. A condition is recommended to ensure the supply is operational prior to occupation.

Waste and recycling would be managed by the coffee shop.

CONCLUSION

Subject to compliance with the schedule of conditions, the development will accord with the relevant provisions of the Local Development Plan 2016 and there are no material considerations that would justify a departure from these provisions.

RECOMMENDATION BY CHIEF PLANNING AND HOUSING OFFICER:

I recommend the application is approved subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall not be carried out otherwise than in complete accordance with the plans and specifications approved by the Planning Authority.
Reason: To ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved details.
2. Prior to the commencement of a development, a revised site plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. Unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority, the revised site plan shall incorporate revised siting of the approved glamping pods away from the root protection areas of neighbouring mature trees. Thereafter the development shall be carried out wholly in accordance with the approved site plan.
Reason: to secure adequate control over the development hereby approved and to minimise any risk of harming neighbouring mature trees.
3. No development shall commence until details of toilet facility provision have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. Thereafter, the development hereby approved shall only be occupied whilst the agreed in writing toilet facility is functional and available for the use of guests.
Reason: To ensure that the development affords adequate provision of toilet facilities, in the interests of public health.
4. Prior to the commencement of development, a Scheme for Privacy and Boundary Planting shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Planning Authority. The scheme shall include: further details of the recently existing boundary hedging; details of privacy trellising and/ or hedging between the two pods; a timetable for delivery and details of maintenance. Thereafter the agreed Scheme for Privacy and Boundary Planting shall be delivered in strict accordance with the agreed details and so maintained and retained thereafter, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.
Reason: to secure adequate privacy for guests and ensure the existing boundary hedging is retained and maintained, to help screen the development.
5. Prior to the commencement of development, precise details of timber cladding and any other external materials/ colours of the glamping pods hereby approved shall be submitted to the Planning Authority for approval. Thereafter the development shall be carried out wholly in accordance with the agreed details.
Reason: to secure control over the approved materials in the interests of landscape and visual amenity.
6. The development hereby approved shall be carried out without any below ground excavations, and no adjacent trees shall be felled, lopped or harmed during the course of construction, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.
Reason: to secure control over the manner of construction and ensure no harm to any potential archaeological resource or to neighbouring mature trees.
7. Prior to the occupation of the development hereby approved, the development shall be connected to the public mains water supply, unless otherwise agreed in

writing by the Planning Authority. Thereafter, the development shall only be occupied whilst an approved water supply is functional and made available for the use of guests.

Reason: To ensure the development is adequately serviced.

8. The occupation of the development hereby approved shall be restricted to genuine holidaymakers for individual periods not exceeding 4 weeks in total within any consecutive period of 13 weeks. A register of holidaymakers occupying the accommodation shall be kept and made available for inspection by an authorised officer of the Council at all reasonable times.

Reason: to ensure the development is not used as a permanent residency.

Informatives

1. The former use of the site is potentially contaminative and may have resulted in land contamination. The land is not currently identified as contaminated land and the Council is not aware of any information which indicates the level of risk the potential contamination presents. The historic use of the site is recorded within a Council database. This database is used to prioritise land for inspection within the Council's Contaminated Land duties. Should the applicant wish to discuss these duties their enquiry should be directed to Environmental Health.

DRAWING NUMBERS

Plan Description	Reference	Received Date
Location Plan	P2BUK/524295/710259	02.02.21
Site Plan		02.02.21
Elevations	GLAMPING POD PLANS	26.10.21

Approved by

Name	Designation	Signature
Ian Aikman	Chief Planning and Housing Officer	

The original version of this report has been signed by the Chief Planning and Housing Officer and the signed copy has been retained by the Council.

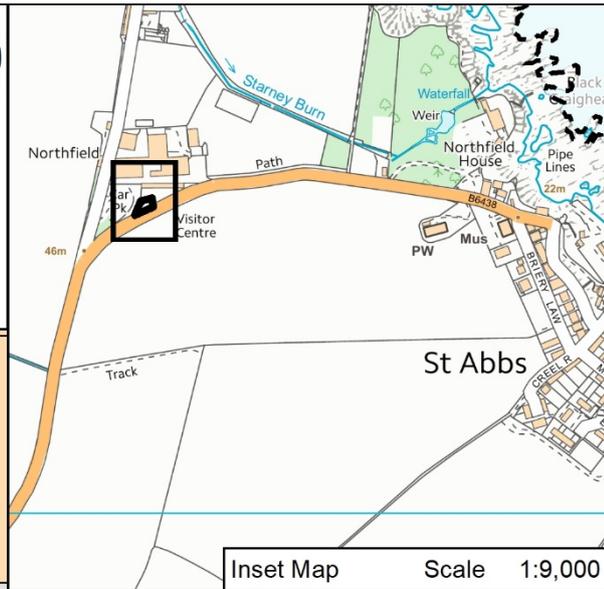
Author(s)

Name	Designation
Paul Duncan	Assistant Planning Officer



20/01282/FUL

Land South Of The Visitor Centre
Northfield Farm
St Abbs



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PCs Visitor Centre

Scale 1:500