

CROWLAND CARAVANS PROPOSED RELOCATION OF AND CAMPING

PLANNING STATEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Planning History

Full Planning Permission for a Tourism Centre and a Relocation of Crowland Caravans and Camping was granted on 26 March 2015 under ref: H02-0026-15 and was later approved with modifications, followed by Approval of Conditions under refs: H02-0544-15 and H02-0957-15 respectively. Uncertainty in the economy followed by that Covid pandemic has not allowed for this project to begin on site, and the approvals have therefore lapsed.

1.2. Site Location and Current Situation

The centre of the site is located at TF244088, and is situated directly south of Crowland Town. It is less than 1.5 miles south by road from Crowland centre and its associated attractions and amenities.

The overall site at present is almost 4 Acres in area and is set up as a poultry growing unit of four large buildings, with the adjoining land in arable farming. The poultry element is coming to the end of its life in its present form, owing to changes in legislation and the need for ever-larger units. Poultry production has also tended to gravitate to the north, as well as to Norfolk, nearer to packing plants, because

more widespread units are less economic. To re-vitalise the site at Carrington Drove would require at least a doubling of the number of sheds on site at present. An obvious, unwanted side-effect of such expansion would be the very substantial increase in manure production, with its attendant potential for smell nuisance

The poultry sheds are becoming progressively dilapidated, and would require significant investment if they were to be brought back to pristine condition as well as making necessary alteration to meet current legislation with a view to attracting long-term interest. One shed has now been damaged by weather and has had to be demolished

2. SITE POTENTIAL FOR DIVERSIFICATION

2.1. Brief Analysis

2.1.1. The area from Boston and Spalding in the North, then South to Wisbech and Ely and back to the Wash at Kings Lynn, are recognised to be the Fens. Crowland sits squarely in the western central section of this area, and as such is well placed for access to all parts of the region.
2.1.2. The major as well as the minor road infrastructure is readily available for both private and public travel. Spalding and Peterborough offer access to the rail network and are only a short bus-ride away from Crowland. It is recognised however, that because of the uses on site, most visitors will arrive by road.
2.1.3. The site benefits from being accessed from an existing right turning facility off the A16 specifically provided when the road was built.
2.1.4. Agreement has been reached with LCC for Carrington Drove South to be further improved at the applicant's expense.
2.1.5. It is an existing developed site, and it benefits from an adequate existing electricity and water supply and has broadband connection. On site roadways are adequate for the purpose.
2.1.6. Several planning permissions have been granted on the site including a much larger version of the present application which, due to adverse economic circumstances, sadly did not go ahead. The principle of this type of re-development has therefore been established and all issues and investigations relating to such were examined and resolved at that time.
2.1.7. The government policy and encouragement is to bring un used agricultural buildings into alternative uses including residential and a group of uses, as a change of use, storage, farm shop, retail, café, hotel etc. and current thinking under Class R is found within Schedule 2, Part 3 of the General Permitted Development Order 2015 (as amended) (GPDO), also now allows for change of use from an agricultural building (and land within its curtilage) in England to flexible commercial use – i.e. uses falling within the following use classes:

2.1.7.1. Class B8 (storage or distribution)
2.1.7.2. Class C1 (hotels)
2.1.7.3. Class E (commercial, business or service (Retail)

Whilst there are attendant conditions attaching to this general principle there is nonetheless a broad acceptance of the validity of making proper use of redundant agricultural buildings. Whilst Class E appears initially to be most applicable in this particular case, since it appears to encompass many of the uses already enjoyed by out-of-town Garden Centres. The loss of Wyevale Garden Centre from Postland Road, with the loss of all employment

opportunities, was a thriving business covering many such activities and has yet to be replaced in the area. Crowland's residential expansion in recent years has been quite remarkable, and much of the need for this is doubtless for servicing employment needs of the nearby city of Peterborough. It is important in Planning terms however, to maintain and indeed encourage all employment opportunities within Crowland itself, so as not to risk the effective loss of a community by the creation of a largely dormitory use dependent upon Peterborough for all employment and facilities.

Whilst the core business will continue to be the sale, service and repair of caravans, the sales of canvas products for Camping and Caravanning as well as associated range of accessories and storage of stock products, a refreshment facility / cafe has become essential. Diversification into garden and outdoor products is moving into the market together with the embryo of a farm shop to satisfy customer expectations when visiting the countryside. To thrive in an increasingly competitive market place the business is forced to diversify and cater for customer's expectations. This proposal seeks to replace some of the activities lost to the town and passing public following the demise of Wyvale Garden Centre.

3. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.1. The NPPF currently recognises the validity of supporting a prosperous rural economy in sections 84 and 85 as follows: -

"Supporting a prosperous rural economy

84. *Planning policies and decisions should enable:*

(a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;

(b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;

(c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and

(d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

85. *Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.*

Section 81 is also very relevant as shown below:

81. *Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation 42 , and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential.*

4. SOUTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE LOCAL PLAN

4.1. In Section 4 of the SELLP, it is recognised that there is a case for employment opportunities outside those officially identified and includes the following comment:--

Other Employment Sites New employment
Development/businesses or the extension of an existing business outside the above allocated employment sites will be supported provided that the proposal involves the re-use of previously-developed land or the conversion/re-use of redundant buildings.

5. THE CASE FOR A COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITY IN SUPPORT OF AN ESTABLISHED LEISURE ORIENTATED CROWLAND BUSINESS

5.1. Following a very challenging period for businesses during the recent pandemic, with particular emphasis on leisure and service industries, Crowland Caravans and

Camping, which operated from a unit behind the previous Wyvale Garden Centre premises on the corner site of Postland Road and James Road, has at short notice, had its lease terminated by the current owners. The company was forced from the site it had occupied for over 20 years at short notice, by its landlord, with no alternative available. It transpired that the landlord had alternative plans which became evident with the planning permission granted on the site previously occupied by the company.

5.2. The applicant company has operated very successfully within Crowland for many years and has been a steady employer of local people. It has now therefore, been forced into a position of having to find an alternative site.
The survival of the company depends on finding that alternative home quickly. The continuation of the company depends on utilising an adequate site at an affordable cost. The alternative is the loss of a local business and local jobs. Re-locating the company will allow an established local business to re-launch and continue to employ local people.

5.3. Within the time permitted to vacate the site the only solution was to close the business for trading and to put all stock into storage and condense the business onto an area, in family ownership, which had been used as outdoor display, effectively putting the company into hibernation.

5.4. Development of the adjoining external display site was investigated but with no electricity supply immediately available and no water supply possible together with unaffordable capital costs of providing buildings it proved impossible. Short term use of marquees was examined but proved untenable.

5.5. The company employed 12/14 full time, depending on season, plus others part time. It was, unfortunately, unavoidable that 40% of staff had to be made redundant.

5.6. Other alternative sites were searched for but due to the space required for such a business nothing locally was found, the only options either being too far away or unaffordable. The site subject to application has the space and infrastructure, being in the same overall ownership and an affordable solution.

6. THE PRESENT PROPOSALS IS FOR THE CHANGE OF USE AND CONVERSION OF AN EXISTING AGRICULTURAL BUILDING AND PART OF THE OVERALL SITE FOR CROWLAND CARAVANS AND CAMPING BUSINESS NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

6.1. As mentioned above, it is proposed to relocate the existing business, as originally approved under the Planning Permission ref: H02-0025-15 wherein it formed a part of a wider proposal.

6.2. Utilising an existing building will give the business the opportunity to move into a highly insulated environment which will be required to comply with building regulations which will, in turn, reduce heating costs. Heating will not be fossil fuel based but be from renewable energy. PV panels are to be installed to offset as much electricity consumption as possible. Overall, the business will have a much reduced carbon footprint

6.3. The proposed design of the proposals is largely to maintain the envelope of an existing poultry shed, but to bring the thermal standards up to current Building Regulations requirements. It is also intended to overclad the existing timber envelope with grey profiled metal cladding which will not affect the existing rural character of the building to any great extent, but will provide proper protection from the weather for the foreseeable future.

6.4. It will be necessary to secure the site with a new perimeter fence, but this is intended to be of the green coloured metal mesh material currently used prolifically within the District.

6.5. There will also be a suitably regulated area for external display as part of the overall business.
6.6. In the short term, to avoid further redundancies, staff retained have been utilised renovating residential property owned by the company and can be moved back into their original jobs when the business is able to re-open.
6.7. The site is in the same overall ownership as the applicant company.
6.8. Only a small area of addition agricultural land will be required.
6.9. The proposal is to use one building, adjoining open space and circulation roads.
6.10. At least two Electric Charging points will be included.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1. This proposal is an ideal opportunity, and will be a positive and significant benefit in a number of ways:-

7.1.1. There will be a suitable chance for diversification of an agricultural building, with opportunities for more as the business develops.

7.1.2. The re-use of existing redundant buildings etc for Crowland Caravans and Camping will nurture a valuable business, and this ought to run well alongside the ongoing drive for employment land generally within Crowland, identified as being very necessary by the Economic Development Manager. Reinforcement of existing businesses will contribute to the same overall goal. The proposals will enable Crowland Caravans & Camping to re-locate its present activities onto a new site, whilst at the same time having space to grow, as well as diversifying into other associated activities to create a unique destination. It will make it possible to reduce the overheads of an existing company and assist in retaining its competitiveness as well as enabling it to operate from its own premises.

7.2. It is recognised that the application site lies outside the development boundary of the town, but it is considered that this is nonetheless appropriate in the circumstances described above. The proposal also meshes well with the current requirements of the NPPF and the SLLP. This has been recognised several time over recent years whereby a number of diversification proposals have been approved (An example of which is off the A16 at Butters roundabout near Spalding and the green house development a little further west)
7.3. It is contended that this proposal will be good for the local economy.
7.4. It is contended that this proposal will be good for local employment and has opportunities to grow over time to increase such prospects.
7.5. It will certainly save the loss of a long standing and respected business in Crowland, together with the rescue of endangered jobs