Planning Potential

Planning Statement - Land at Lowgate, Fleet

Full application for additional log cabins for holiday use



London



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Report Reference:
22/6469

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1. Introduction

1.1. This Planning Support Note has been prepared by Planning Potential on behalf of the Larkfleet Group (the applicant). The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of 38 log cabins for holiday / leisure use together with landscaping and all associated works at land at Lowgate, Fleet, Spalding (uplift of 14 no. units compared to the existing consent).

1.2. The principle of development for log cabins on site is established through the planning history, including in 2018 when permission was granted for 24 log cabins, under ref: H05-0773-17. More recently still, in May 2022, an NMA was approved, under ref H05-0507-22, to create a phased approach to ensure the delivery of 10 cabins on site for delivery this Summer season. This new application seeks to secure an additional 14 log cabins on the balance on the site, to take the overall no. from 24 to 38 cabins. Because the existing permission refers to unit numbers in the description of development, full planning is applied for as opposed to S73, as dictated by the Finney Case. In doing so, and in the interests of completeness and robustness, the application is supported by an updated flood risk assessment, landscape visual assessment, highways note and ecology report to demonstrate the acceptability of these latest proposals. A key feature of this application also is revisions to the cabins as a result of a move towards modern methods of construction (MMC) and a lower roof pitch, resulting in them sitting up to 300 mm lower compared to the previously approved plans, therefore minimising their impact on the character of the countryside compared to the existing approval.

1.3. Land at Lowgate is located circa 500m of Fleet Hargate and circa 3km from Holbeach. It is located in the countryside and comprises a broadly regular (rectangular) parcel of land and is largely flat & featureless save for three fishing lakes in connection with the previous recreational fishing facility on site.

1.4. The proposal secures the delivery of an important facility which is recognised as supporting the rural economy and rural diversification, without having an unacceptable impact on wider planning and material considerations, including its location within the countryside.

1.5. This Planning Support Note details the current proposals and demonstrates how the development accords with the latest national and local planning policy framework.

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2. Application Site

2.1. The site is located to the south-west of the junction between Lowgate and Roman Bank, to the north of the A17 at Fleet Bank. Its southern boundary abuts existing frontage properties along Lowgate. To the east and west there are arable fields. To the north is Roman Bank and beyond Hovenden House which is a Victorian Built, Grade II listed small country house now used as a Leonard Cheshire Residential Care Home. It is set within mature park land and landscaped gardens which are now used as a Golf Course (Hovenden Golf Club) with associated buildings including a club house.

Image 2.1 – Application Site



Source: Google Maps

2.2. Historically, the site has been used for agriculture and was granted permission for two fishing lakes prior to 2011, followed by a third in October 2011 for solely recreational fishing. The land is no longer used for agriculture and the fishing lakes, as well as new landscaping are established.

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3. Planning History

3.1. Relevant planning application in connection with the site are outlined below.

- H05-0507-22. Non-Material Amendment (NMA) application to amend the location of the already approved cabins in the first phase and update Condition 2 (approved plans) of planning permission H05-0773-17. Approved May 2022.
- H05-0379-22. Non-Material Amendment (NMA) application to add a phasing condition and update Condition 2 (approved plans) of planning permission H05-0773-17. Approved May 2022.
- H05-0773-17. Erection of 24 (in total) log cabins for holiday/leisure use including 6 No. additional log cabins; 6 No. cabins granted under planning permission reference H05-0699-16 and 12 No. cabins granted permission under H05-0114-15. Approved July 2018.
- H05-0669-16. Construct 6 log cabins for holiday/leisure use. Approved September 2016.
- H04-0114-15. Construction of 12 log cabins for holiday/leisure use. Approved September 2015.

3.2. The planning history confirms the principle of development for log cabins for holiday uses in the countryside location. In coming to the decision to grant the previous approvals on site, SHDC have assessed the proposal against all relevant material planning considerations and have and have given weight to the proposals to assist in safeguarding the delivery of a development of economic benefit.

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4. Planning Policy

4.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) states that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2. The Development Plan for South Holland District Council is produced jointly with Boston Borough Council and Lincolnshire County Council. The South East Lincolnshire Local Plan was adopted in March 2019 and is the main document against which planning application are assessed. Policies applicable to the proposals are set out below.

- Policy 1 'Spatial Strategy'
- Policy 3 'Design of New Development'
- Policy 4 'Approach to Flood Risk'
- Policy 9 'Promoting a Stronger Visitor Economy'
- Policy 28 'The Natural Environment'
- Policy 31 'Climate Change and Renewable and Low Carbon Energy'

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (July 2021)

4.3. At a national level, the revised NPPF sets out the government's planning policies and how these are expected to be applied. Planning law requires application to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- Paragraph 8 establishes three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.
- Paragraph 11 states that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development, including approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.
- Paragraph 38 states that 'local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way' and encourages working proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area.
- Paragraph 84 supports the rural economy. It states policies and decisions should enable growth of businesses in rural areas and support rural tourism which respect the character of the countryside.
- Paragraph 119 advocate's the effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses.

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5. Proposed Development

5.1. This planning application seeks permission for the erection of 38 log cabins for holiday / leisure use together with landscaping and all associated works at land at Lowgate, Fleet, Spalding. This represents an up lift of 14 no. of log cabins compared to the previous approval and is proposed to support development viability in the medium to long-term following the approval of NMA's in May and June 2022 to enable the delivery of the first 10 no. of log cabins in the short term.

5.2. The proposals have been developed following a critical review of the existing permission and responds to wider character & setting of the area to ensure all material considerations are addressed satisfactorily. The Larkfleet Group have taken on-board expert advice from independent consultants on site specific considerations including, flooding & drainage, layout & design and landscape visual impact.

Image 5.1 – Proposed Layout



Source: drw no. L188/SITE/01 Rev E

Highways & Access

5.3. Vehicular access into and out of the site will be via the new purpose-built access points to/ from Lowgate which has previously been interrogated and approved by officers. Lowgate is an established two-way carriageway with a pedestrian pavement along its west border. The road connects with the A17 and Fleet Hargate to the south, and Roman Bank to the north.

5.4. The proposed uplift application does not seek to alter this arrangement nor the internal road layout which will continue to serve all proposed cabins and designated parking.

Site Layout and Design

5.5. The layout of the development and its surroundings have been informed by the physical characteristics of the site and the existing permission. The proposal retains the fundamental principles established by the existing permissions in that the three lakes remain the focal point of the development, with the log cabins located around these, all accessed via an internal spine road which broadly splits the site into two phases – 1a to towards the northeast corner and 1b for the remainder of the site.

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5.6. All proposed cabins are afforded with open plan lounge and dining areas which benefit from glazed doors opening onto raised balconies with views over the [respective] existing lakes. By virtue of the layout and the physical features on site, there are no instances whereby the cabins leisure spaces directly look onto one another.

5.7. Details regarding the height, design, materials and massing of the holiday cabins are contained within the supporting Design and Access Statement. The key points to note are that the scale and massing of the cabins are broadly consistent with those that have previously been approved on site. Positively however, all cabins will sit ~300mm lower than those previously approved on site owing to a revised (reduced) roof pitch, therefore reducing any perceived impact on views across and to/ from the site.

Appearance

5.8. The cabins are finished in a mix of high quality and durable cladding and sidings, with a sympathetic palette of colours adopted through the site to create visual interest whilst not dominating the landscape. The roofs are finished in lightweight metal roof tiles (titanium grey) with the exception of one lodge which is finished in pantile roof tiles (terracotta).

5.9. The cabins are complemented by a mix of surface material consistent with the original permission, including managed open space.

Landscaping

5.10. Advice on the most appropriate and effective landscaping scheme has been taken from the appointed ecologist and landscapers.

5.11. To improve the environmental quality of the site and its contribution to the wider area, hard and soft landscaping works are proposed in and around the site. Native planting will encourage biodiversity and will be supplemented by exotic species to provide all year-round screening.

Amenity

5.12. The proposed cabins are modest in scale and have minimal impact on the wider landscape. Proposed and existing landscaping will help assimilate the development into its landscape and create an attractive development with no impact on the nearest sensitive uses, in this instance the residential properties along Lowgate. The setting and appearance of the log cabins will have a neutral impact on the visual aesthetics of the site itself and surroundings.

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6. Planning Assessment

6.1. The planning issues highlighted by the policy review and planning history are:

- Principle of holiday cabins in countryside location
- Quantum of development
- Landscape and Visual Amenity
- Ecology & Landscaping
- Flooding & Drainage
- Residential amenity
- Highways safety

Principle of holiday cabins in countryside location

6.2. The principle of development is established by the previous permissions on site, most recently in May 2022 when NMA's were granted in connection with the 2017 permission for 24 holiday cabins on site. The proposals for additional log cabin on site is also supported by the thrust of Local Policy 9 which supports tourism and visitor developments which benefit of the local economy provided there is no conflict with neighbouring land uses, are in keeping with the local character & setting and are linked to existing rural attractions. In this instance, the proposals for additional units on the already approved site demonstrate compliance with all the relevant criteria.

6.3. Further, Local Policy 1 confirms that in the Countryside (land outside the defined settlement boundaries) development will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that it meets sustainable development needs of an area in terms of economic, community or environmental benefits. The economic benefits are already accepted and the uplift bolsters these through a modest uplift in the site's capacity, which in turn has the propensity to increase expenditure in the nearby centres and facilities. In terms of environmental benefits, the new application also secures a series of sustainable technologies and construction methods, above & beyond what the existing permission secures. This is in detailed in section 7 of this report but includes commitments to electric vehicles charging points (EVCPs), PV solar panels and wind panels, alongside enhanced landscaping.

6.4. Finally, Local Plan supporting text 3.2.15 recognises the role South East Lincolnshire's countryside plays as a precious resource for (inter-alia) recreation, and it is recognised that tourism can meet the broad sustainable objectives of the Local Plan.

Quantum of development

6.5. The number of log cabins permitted on the site has always been capped by the planning permission, and considered on merit, as opposed to being guided by planning policy. Whether the quantum of development is considered appropriate is therefore an exercise for the decision maker based on the justification provided. When considering proposals for 38 no. units on the site, it is salient to note that the fundamental layout remains unchanged from what has previously been approved.

6.6. All the proposed cabins remain located principally around the perimeter of the site, set around the three lakes which remain the focal point and integral to the proposals. The uplift itself is achieved through a sensitive reworking of the existing layout and introduction of additional cabins around the perimeter and, along the east flank of the internal spine road. Importantly however, none of the proposed cabins encroach the three lakes, and the permitter boundary treatment remains unaffected by the proposals, including the significant tree lined boundary along the site's southern boundary.

6.7. The proposed layout maintains an acceptable amount of amenity space within the site and protects the amenity of neighbouring properties. The increase in overall units is not considered to have a material impact on the character and appearance of the area due to the proposed location of the [additional] cabins within the site – this point is expanded on within the below section ('Landscape and Visual Amenity').

Landscape and Visual Amenity

6.8. A Landscape Visual Assessment prepared by enplan accompanies the planning application. The report finds that the application site is relatively well self-contained within its local setting and little visibility from publicly accessible viewpoints. The Impact Assessment is

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based upon analysis of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) at 20 identified representative viewpoints. Undertaken in Spring 2022, it should be recognised that an assessment in summer months would likely yield less effect. Assessed as a whole, the effects of the proposed development at both year 1 and year 15 will be not considered as identified against the relevant methodology.

6.9. With the landscape strategy integrated into the development and the existing landscape fabric, temporary impacts leading to a slight magnitude of change, resulting in a moderate effect which would result in a not significant impact, it is concluded the proposed development will be acceptable in terms of the Landscape and Visual Impact.

6.10. Turning attention to Landscape Character Effects, changes to the key perceptual characteristics (i.e. how the development is seen and affects the landscape character) can be correlated to a large degree with the results of the visual impact assessment. This indicates the main visual changes would occur at viewpoints in relatively close proximity to the proposal site. Overall, the magnitude of change on the landscape character in this area is considered to be slight with a minor effect and not significant on completion of the development.

6.11. The proposals satisfy the requirements of Local Plan Policy 30 which exists to protect unacceptable impacts upon a range of criteria including the natural environment and the amenity of the area.

Ecology & Landscaping

6.12. Policy 28 expects all development proposals to provide an overall net gain in biodiversity through a combination of protection, and opportunities for restoration and enhancement of natural habitats and species. Alongside this, The Environment Bill gained Royal Assent in November 2021, which mandates Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as a condition of planning permission. As there is a transitional period until ~early 2023 and currently, the adopted local plan doesn't set a threshold for net gain, any 'gain' is considered acceptable.

6.13. The application is accompanied by an ecological technical note prepared by AAe Ltd. The note provides a comparison between the biodiversity value of the site before and after development. It finds that the proposals result in an overall net gain of 0.23 habitat units, the equivalent increase of 1.10%, and an overall net gain of 2.47 hedgerow units. Further, non-tangible enhancement measures such as the provision of a range of wildlife boxes plus other features, which are not factored in on the DEFRA Metric, will provide additional opportunities and benefits for local wildlife. By returning a net gain, the proposals are demonstrated to be in full compliance with national and local policy.

6.14. The landscape proposals provide a mitigation strategy that will absorb the proposed development into the surrounding landscape. This will achieve an attractive setting and to help absorb and assimilate the proposed development into its surroundings. The accompanying Landscape Strategy identifies the landscape and mitigation proposals for the proposed development.

6.15. The landscape strategy can be summarised as follows:

- New low hedge surrounding located along the eastern boundary
- New low hedge located at the top of the mounding in the southeastern corner
- New planting to fill the gaps in the existing laurel hedge
- New semi mature planting within the development.

Flooding & Drainage

6.16. A Flood Risk Assessment prepared by Millward engineers supports this planning application. The development site is contained predominantly within Flood Zone 3 (High Probability) which in accordance with Table 1 of the NPPF Technical Guidance document, is defined as having greater than a 1 in 100 chance (>1%) of flooding from rivers and 1 in 200 chance (>0.5%) from the sea in any one year (excluding the presence of flood defences). However, the site benefits from the presence of both river and tidal flood defences and the principle of development of holiday log cabins is established through the planning history.

6.17. The assessment confirms a low risk of flooding from all sources of flooding other than from fluvial / tidal which is medium. Mitigation measures required to protect the proposed log cabins from residual risk of flooding is flood resilient construction techniques such as electrical circuits in the ceiling cavity and a minimum finished floor level for all cabins. A finished floor level for all plots of 3.9m AOD ensures all properties remain safe from flooding, even during extreme future events. The internal road layout has its own independent drain with the cross fall to collect surface water run-off from the road on site.

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6.18. The recommended mitigation measures will provide further protection to the development and reduce any residual risk as far as reasonably practicable. It is recommended that compliance with the recommendations contained within the FRA are conditioned as part of any planning permission. With these, the assessment concludes that the site is suitable for development for the proposed use without unacceptable risk of flooding from all sources to the site itself and elsewhere as long as the essential mitigation measures are applied to this development, and is consistent with Local Plan Policy 4 which concerns itself with flood risk.

Highways safety

6.19. The proposals are accompanied by a Transport Note (TN) prepared by Local Transport Projects (LTP). The note considers pertinent factors in relation to the site, such as the predicted trip generation of both the approved development and the proposed uplift, and potential impacts on the wider road network, including the nearby A17/Lowgate junction.

6.20. The report finds that the proposed traffic generation is significantly below the typical threshold for further assessment. As a result, the proposed development is not expected to have a severe impact on the local highway network. The proposals are considered entirely acceptable from a highways perspective with regards to relevant local policy.

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7. Sustainable Technologies

7.1. One of the most clear and obvious material benefits in connection with these proposals are the commitments towards sustainable technologies and construction movements, the inclusion of which is supported by planning policy – most notably Chapter 14 of the NPPF which supports renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. At a local level, this is reinforced through Policy 31 which requires all development proposals to demonstrate the consequences of climate change are addressed, minimised and mitigated.

7.2. The uplift in cabins to provide 38 no. across the application site provides a critical mass that unlocks the use of a number of renewable technologies as being feasible and deliverable on site. This includes the inclusion of PV panels installed on all cabins, 7kw electric vehicle charging points installed at each cabin and the utilisation of wind panels on neighbouring land, connected to the application site via a connection cable. The energy harvested by the wind panels will be stored in an on-site storage battery, which is located in the southwest corner of the application site and suitably screened by additional landscaping. It will be used to support the energy demands from the development, reducing the reliance on the grid.

7.3. The cabins themselves are modular structures and fall within the bracket of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). Modular construction is a form of off-site construction in which a building's components, or modules, are constructed in a factory setting before being transported to site for assembly.

7.4. Off-site construction has a number of benefits, including significant reduction in an appetite for resources, waste generation and time spent on site. Typically, as much as 50% of waste on traditional building sites are avoided by the transition to off-site construction. The factory build process also achieves improved environmental credentials, whereby units are particularly well-sealed and airtight, allowing for a much lower energy requirement.

7.5. Cumulatively, through the introduction of sustainable technologies (PVs, EVCPs and wind power) and construction techniques (modular), the proposals secure a number of initiatives which focus on tackling climate change and a move towards renewable and low carbon energy.

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8. Conclusion

8.1. The application site comprises unallocated greenfield land in a highly sustainable and accessible location on a main road ~500m to the north of Fleet and less than 5km from Holbeach via the A17. The principle of the use of the site for holiday log cabins is established through the planning history and supported by planning policy.

8.2. This new (full) application seeks to update the existing permission so that the site provides 38 no. cabins, which makes more efficient use of the site without conflicting with any relevant material considerations, and in doing so ensures the delivery of a development of economic benefit whilst introducing significant social and environmental benefits, made possible only through the economies of scale associated with the uplift compared to the original approval. As such, it is considered that the proposal is in accord with the provision of National Planning Policy Framework and relevant established Development Plan policies.

8.3. This Statement describes how the proposed development will perform important objectives and will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (NPPF, paragraph 8).

- Economic objective – job creation for local people, significant inward investment, building a strong and competitive local economy.
- Social objective – well designed, beautiful, and safe places, accessible services and opens spaces, support health and wellbeing.
- Environmental objective – improvements to biodiversity, minimising waste and pollution, inclusion of low carbon initiatives and a managed landscape scheme.

8.4. Supported by the application documents and accompanying consultant reports, it has been demonstrated that the development:

- Is acceptable in principle.
- Would not give rise to any unacceptable impacts.
- Complies with local and national policies.

8.5. In summary, the proposal contributes towards sustainable development which should be considered positively in accordance with the NPPF and the Local Plan. It is respectfully requested that permission is granted to facilitate the deliberate and considered application to secure additional no. of units compared to the existing approval to safeguard the delivery of an exemplar tourist & holiday destination at Lowgate, Fleet.

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