

Hearing 13 Other Development Management Policies
Tourism Issue (refs 166, 2303)

Introduction

HLL Humberts Leisure represent Park Resorts Ltd and Mr Bob Muston. Park Resorts own 37 holiday parks throughout the country is the largest operator of holiday parks in the UK. Within the Dover District, they own and operate the St Margaret's Holiday Park which is located to the east of the village of St Margaret's on Cliff. Mr Muston owns and operates Capel Court Park a caravan park at the village of Capel-le-Ferne.

Both my clients are faced by a growing demand for higher quality static holiday caravans and holiday lodges. To respond to this demand each client is seeking to improve and expand their caravan park.

As a coastal area with popular heritage and sporting attractions, Dover District is a popular tourist destination. It accommodates 1.38 million staying visitor nights each year and 3.26 million day visitors. These visitors spend £167 million in the economy each yearⁱ.

National Policy in the Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism (GPGPT) which local planning authorities should have regard to the document in preparing development plans (see paragraph 1.2) states that in those locations where the future development of tourism is a key issue for the local authority, it will be appropriate for the Core Strategy to cover tourism issues together with any objectives relevant to tourism (see paragraph 3.13). PPS7 states that in popular holiday areas local authorities should set out policies in LDDs on the provision of new holiday and touring caravan sites and chalet developments (e.g. holiday lodges) and on the expansion and improvement of existing sitesⁱⁱ.

Core Strategy and Tourism - It is clear therefore, that in a popular holiday area such as Dover, there should be policy within the Core Strategy to guide future tourism development. However, there are no policies whatsoever to encourage, guide and facilitate tourism development in rural areas. Tourism is a key sector to the district's economy, yet the only policies which do exist seek to generally constrain development in such areas, other than for agriculture needs and for the re-use and conversion of Rural Buildings. The Core Strategy seeks to consolidate tourism uses to the Dover Waterfront, however such a strategy ignores the role of tourism in rural areas to the detriment of the rural economy. Therefore, the Core Strategy cannot be sound as it does not conform with national policy.

My clients would prefer to see policy specifically to guide local tourism development in the Core Strategy. In the absence of any such policy my clients are faced by existing policies which seek to control development in rural areas. We have suggested amendments to proposed Core Strategy policies DM3, DM15 and DM16 to make these policies in closer accordance with national policy to guide tourism development.

9. Should Policies DM3, DM15, and DM16 include specific reference to tourism or tourism enterprises?

Policy DM 3 which deals with Commercial Buildings in the Rural Area needs to be amended to allow for that the expansion of existing rural tourism businesses located outside of Rural Service Centre Settlement boundaries (e.g. holiday parks).

The policy needs to reflect advice in Annexe A of the GPGPT which provides strong support for sites that are close to existing settlements and other services as they will generally be more sustainable as local services may be accessed by means other than by car.

St Margaret's Bay Holiday Park is located outside of a boundary of a 'village' as defined with in the Settlement Hierarchy. The site lies in a sustainable location with Sandwich railway station located 1.9 miles

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from the Holiday Park. The village of St Margaret's on Cliffe has a shop, three public houses; a hotel and adjoining pub. Bus Service No 15 gives access to and from St Margaret's to Dover, Deal and Canterbury and these services run hourly.

Capel Court Park is located outside a 'Local Centre' as defined with in the Settlement Hierarchy. The site lies in a sustainable location by virtue of public houses, a MOT garage, a village hall, a primary school and Battle of Britain memorial - all within close proximity to our client's site.

Both sites are therefore well located and appropriate for development in terms of sustainability, but we are concerned that the strict application of DM3 could prevent any further tourism development at either site due them being outside defined settlement boundaries. Indeed, this has been the response of the Council to pre-application enquiries by, and on behalf of, Mr Muston.

My detailed objections submitted on behalf of each client in response to the consultation draft deals with Policy DM3 in more detail. In each objection I ask for the policy to be amended as follows:-

'Commercial Buildings in the Rural Area

Permission for new commercial development or the expansion of an existing business, including tourism enterprises, in the rural area will be given provided that:-

- i) It is located within, adjacent or close to a Rural Service Centre, a Local Centre or a village as designated in the Settlement Hierarchy;*
- ii) It is consistent with the scale and setting of the settlement'.*

Policy DM15 deals with the protection of the countryside. Paragraph 1.51 explains that policy seeks to protect the countryside from development beyond that needed to implement its proposals and to sustain the rural area's communities or economy. Holiday parks provide strong support to local economies through increased tourism spending at local shops, pubs and restaurants and through the servicing of the accommodation. However the policy does not make allowance tourism development proposals in countryside locations to support local rural economies. The policy is therefore unsound as being inconsistent with national policy.

My detailed objections submitted on behalf of each client in response to the consultation draft deals with Policy DM15 in more detail. In each objection I ask for the policy to be amended as follows:-

'Protection of the Countryside

Development which would result in the loss of or adversely affect the character or appearance, of the countryside will only be permitted if it is:

- i) in accordance with allocations made in Development Plan Documents, or*
- ii) Justified by the needs of agriculture, forestry or rural diversification including tourism or other small scale business development; and*
- iii) Which will support rural economies and communities through the creation of jobs and retention of local services*

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Provided that measures are incorporated to reduce, as far as practicable. Any harmful effects on the countryside character.

Policy DM16 deals with Landscape Character. PPS7 states that '*even in areas designated for their landscape, nature conservation or historic qualities, there will be scope for tourist related developments, subject to appropriate control over their number, form and location to ensure the particular qualities or features that justified the designation are conserved*' (para. 34/ii). Policy DM16 makes no allowance for tourism development proposals in areas designated for landscape protection. The policy is therefore unsound as being inconsistent with national policy.

My detailed objections submitted on behalf of each client in response to the consultation draft deals with Policy DM16 in more detail. In each objection I ask for the policy to be amended as follows:-

Landscape Character

Development that would harm the character of the landscape, as identified through the process of landscape character assessment will not be permitted unless it can be sited to avoid or reduce the harm and/or design measures employed to mitigate the impacts to the acceptable level. The character of the landscape will be determined by reference to the District Landscape Character Assessment 2006 and the Kent Historic Landscape Assessment 2001 and any assessment of impacts with a nationally recognised methodology.

The requirement for the protection of landscapes will be balanced with the need to nurture and enhance existing businesses, particularly tourism enterprises, by virtue of providing support for other rural services.'

Conclusion

The Core Strategy is currently unsound, on the basis that it is not compliant with National Planning Policy. There is a clearly identified and local need for tourism facilities and the Core Strategy must reflect this in order to be sound.

National planning guidance in PPS7 and the GPGPT states that in popular holiday areas local authorities should set out policies in their Core Strategy to deal with tourism issues, including holiday caravan sites. There are no policies in the Core Strategy to guide tourism development in rural areas. Therefore the strategy is inconsistent with national policy and cannot be sound.

In the absence of such local policies my clients are faced by restrictive countryside policies that do not acknowledge the role of tourism in support of local rural economies and do not provide any guidance for new tourism development. In objections, I have therefore provided suggested amendments to policies DM3, DM15 and DM16 to address this inadequacy by including specific reference to tourism or tourism enterprises in Policies DM3, DM15, and DM16 in an attempt to make the Strategy sound.

¹ Cambridge Model Report for Dover 2006 – see www.whitecliffscountry.org.uk/local_industry/research.aspx

ⁱⁱ Paragraph 39 (ii) of Planning Policy Statement 7 (2004)