

APPLICATION: MA/12/2151 Date: 22 November 2012 Received: 27 November 2012

APPLICANT: Leeds Castle Foundation

LOCATION: LEEDS CASTLE, ASHFORD ROAD, HOLLINGBOURNE, MAIDSTONE, KENT, ME17 1PL

PARISH: Broomfield & Kingswood

PROPOSAL: Change of use of land to Glamping site with installation of associated pathways, hard surfacing, fencing and lighting as shown on Drawings 5064/1, 5064/35064/4, 5064/5, 5064/9, 5064/10, 5064/12, 5064/135064/14, 5064/15, 5064/16 and 5064/17, supporting Planning Statement, Heritage Statement, Design and Access statement and Landscaping scheme received on 27 November 2012

AGENDA DATE: 21st February 2013

CASE OFFICER: Laura Gregory

The recommendation for this application is being reported to Committee for decision because:

- it is contrary to views expressed by Broomfield and Kingswood Parish Council.

1. POLICIES

- Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000: ENV6, ENV28, ENV34, ED20
- South East Plan 2009: CC1, CC6, C4, BE6, TSR4, TSR5
- National Planning Policy Framework 2012

2. HISTORY

None relevant to this proposal

3. CONSULTATIONS

3.1 **Broomfield and Kingswood Parish Council** – Wish to see the application REFUSED for the following reasons:

- The development would cause noise and light pollution on the conservation area of Broomfield Village.

- The visibility of the site from the road is such that the tents would cause a distraction to road users at a particularly narrow part of a single track road on a dangerous blind bend.
- The lack of disabled facilities.
- No guarantee that the secondary access point will not be secure enough to prevent additional access and exit at a most dangerous part of Broomfield Road.

3.2 **KCC Highways** – No Objections Raised.

“The application proposes the change of use of a redundant vineyard to a glamping site for 8 tents to be used between April to September. Access and egress is to be made from the Broomfield Gate onto Broomfield Road located approximately 115m from the junction of Broomfield Road and the A20; this access is the main staff, visitor and delivery gate between the 2 lodge gate houses. The glamping guests would use this gate for access and drive within the Estate to the field adjacent to the proposed site via the Golf Course/Estate Office car park and then onto Garden Drive.

The proposal is not likely to lead to any significant increase in traffic from the existing access or along Broomfield Road and adequate parking is provided. In view of this I confirm that I do not wish to raise objection.”

3.3 **MBC Environmental Health Officer** – No Objections Raised.

“This application has only minor EH concern. The siting of the proposal will mean it will have no impact on any external residents, which is important particularly for the lighting proposal. One consideration, however, is in connection with water supply. If there is to be a water supply point for this site, details must be supplied with the position of such source(s).”

3.4 **MBC Conservation Officer** – No Objections Raised.

“The proposed “glamping” site lies within a vineyard planted in the 1980s. This is in a discrete location within the historic park, well away from any of the historic buildings, and is surrounded by hedges grown in association with the modern vineyard. The proposed tents would be screened to some extent by these hedges, which the submitted landscape plan envisages as growing to a taller height to provide even greater screening. In my opinion, the development would

have little impact on the significance of the historic parkland or on the setting of any of the listed buildings.”

3.5 **English Heritage** – No Objections Raised.

“Leeds Castle and park is of medieval origin with a designed landscape of the 19th century, following significant replanting in the early 19th century. The proposed glamping site, currently a redundant vineyard is access via an existing historic service entrance and is set away from the main core of the grade II* registered landscape and grade I listed castle.

With landscaping including the growth of boundary hedging around the glamping site and along Broomfield Road, the proposals are likely to be concealed and therefore are unlikely to impact upon the significance of the parkland, on this basis we do not object to this proposal. However, we suggest the service entrance connected to Broomfield Road should remain modest, simple and uncluttered, so that it continues to be read as subservient to the formal designed park entrance at Broomfield Gate and, therefore does not detract from its significance.

We would stress because the leisure facilities at Leeds Castle are regularly evolving and this is one one is a series of recent proposals for new or enlarged facilities, English Heritage would like to see this and any future applications made with reference to, and determined in accordance with, the conservation management plan for this nationally important collection of heritage assets.”

4. **REPRESENTATIONS**

4.1 Seven letters of representation received raising the following objections:

- Development would cause noise and light pollution which would be detrimental to the rural area and Broomfield conservation area.
- Access should be via the main castle entrance and not Broomfield Gate where crashes and traffic queues occur regularly.
- Proposal would increase the amount of traffic congestion on Broomfield Road which is unsustainable.
- Proposal would set a precedent for other activities of similar nature in the area.

- Proposal would result in intrusion into the neighbouring woodland abutting the site and onto the track leading to Chegworth which would greatly affect the environment of the wildlife.
- Proposal does not consider the effect of development upon the grade II listed parkland.

5. CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Site Description

5.1.1 The application site is located within the historic parkland of Leeds Castle, a grade I listed building and comprises a small redundant vineyard which is located south east of the main castle buildings. The park of Leeds Castle is grade II listed, and is listed within the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. It is defined as open countryside and falls within the Low Weald Special Landscape Area.

5.1.2 The vineyard is one of two vineyards within the estate. The smaller of the two the vineyard was planted in the 1980's. Located over 400m from the main castle, the vineyard forms part of a former farm complex which has been transformed into the main family area for visitors and contains The Maze, the Knights Realm, Falconry Display area and refreshment facilities close by.

5.1.3 The vineyard is visible from Broomfield Road, but this is mainly from a former service entrance to the castle. The site is otherwise obscured by trees and hedgerows which bound the castle grounds with the road. Views of the vineyard are obtainable from the public footpath which is on the other side of the Great Water to the west of the application site, although much of it is screened by the larger vineyard and the buildings associated within the family area.

5.1.4 Access to the vineyard is obtained from within the castle. The former service entrance is not use by the estate and only provides access to Knights Cottage and No. 1 Garden Drive a pair of semi detached estate houses which are immediately north of the application site.

5.2 Proposal

5.2.1 Planning permission is sought to the change of use of land from a vineyard to a campsite or 'Glamping' site and erect eight medieval style tents. The tents would

be made of canvas and would be placed on timber decked bases. Each of these bases would be dug into the ground and together with the tent, would have a height of 3.7 above the ground. The bases would be retained by timber sleeper retaining walls which would measure approximately 800m high on top of which, 1m high bamboo fencing is proposed. It is proposed that the tents would be temporary structures, in use for 6 months of the year from 1st April to 30th September.

5.2.2 Footpaths are proposed between the tents, the adjacent car park and the central barbeque area which is proposed at the top of the site. These footpaths would be constructed using a compacted MOT Type 2 sub base; otherwise known stone scalplings; and would be surfaced with bark chippings. These footpaths would be bounded by 1m, high post and rail fencing which would be installed within LED wayfinding lighting.

5.2.3 It is proposed that, the campers would use facilities provided in Knights Cottage which is to the north of the site. Parking would be provided in the field to the east of the site. Access to the campsite and car park would be obtained via the entrance to the castle at Broomfield Gate

5.3 **Principle of Development**

5.3.1 Development Plan Policy and the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 strictly control new development in the open countryside. However there are exceptions to the general theme of constraint and the provision of, and enhancement of new and existing tourist and leisure attractions in the rural area is listed as one of these exceptions.

5.3.2 Local Plan Policy ED20 allows for the provision of caravan and camping sites in rural locations. This policy is supported by policy TSR5 of the South East Plan and, the National Planning Policy Framework which requires Local Planning Authorities to support sustainable tourism development, including the provision of tourist facilities in appropriate locations. Leeds Castle is one of the Borough's largest tourist attractions. Much of the castle is currently used for tourism purposes and in addition, the castle provides facilities for conferences and weddings. The castle and its estate is thus a sustainable tourist attraction receiving a large number of visitors throughout the year.

- 5.3.3 This proposal would provide a new facility within the castle grounds which would be available to tourists. To my mind this is in accordance with the Development Plan and National Planning Policy Framework. By providing a new attraction with the grounds of Leeds Castle, the development would encourage tourism within the rural area and would make a positive contribution to the future of Leeds Castle as a sustainable tourist destination.
- 5.3.4 The principle of the proposed use of the land therefore clearly accords with the Development Plan and national planning policy and guidance. However, the detail of the scheme must be appropriate and in particular, the impact the proposal would have upon the character and appearance of the listed buildings, the landscape and surrounding countryside, and on the highway, need due consideration.

5.4 **Visual Impact Considerations**

- 5.4.1 Local Plan Policy ED20 states that new campsites will only be permitted if the site is not an intrusive feature in the landscape or detrimental by its siting or appearance to the visual or amenity of the surrounding area.
- 5.4.2 Constructed on timber bases which would be dug into the ground the proposed tents would sit well within the landscape, gradually descending toward the woodland to the south of the site. By respecting the topography of the land the development would not appear intrusive and would not interrupt any medium to long distance views of the countryside. Screened by the boundary hedgerows the retained vineyard to the west and the woodland to the south, the proposed tents would be suitably concealed from the public footpath which is upon the other side of the Great Water to the west and from Broomfield Road to the east. With views of the proposed tents restricted to within the castle grounds, no demonstrable harm of the quality and character of the surrounding landscape would be caused.
- 5.4.3 External lighting is proposed within the site but this would consist of LED Festival style wayfinding lights along the footpaths which would have dusk to dawn sensors. Considering that these lights will low level, I do not consider that they would cause significant visual harm to the surrounding countryside. Two LED floodlights are proposed at the entrance to the proposed car park, however I do

not consider that significant harm will be caused by these lights, given they would not be visible within the wider area.

5.4.4 The proposed boundary treatment of post and wire fencing and post and rail fencing along the footpaths is acceptable and the site would retain an open feel which is appropriate given its rural location.

5.5 **Landscaping**

5.5.1 In terms of the landscaping, negotiations have taken place to ensure a suitable level of landscaping is provided which is in accordance with the Council's adopted landscape character assessment and guidelines.

5.5.2 It is proposed to plant native hedgerows comprising of Hawthorn, Field Maple and Hornbeam next to the timber retaining walls, behind each tent. It is proposed to retain the vines to the south and allow the boundary hedgerows to the east and west of the proposed campsite to grow to a height of 3.5. The applicant has also stated that they would allow the hedgerow along Broomfield Road to grow to a height of 3.5m. Whilst this is outside the application site, it is within the applicant's ownership and control.

5.5.3 The proposed planting within the site would soften the appearance of the proposed tents and decking. By allowing the existing hedgerows on either side of the site to grow, the development would be concealed and the impact of the development upon the landscape would be significantly reduced. The planting of native hedgerows within the development is appropriate and in time would help soften the appearance of the tents and bases. The use of compacted stone scalplings and bark chippings for the surfaces of the proposed pathways is appropriate and acceptable.

5.5.4 The proposed landscaping is therefore considered acceptable and in keeping with the character and appearance of the area. Designed in accordance with the principles of the Council's adopted landscape character assessment, the landscaping scheme would significantly enhance the character of the development by creating a well landscaped and attractive campsite.

5.6 Highways Considerations

- 5.6.1 Local residents have objected to this proposal stating that development would lead to increased traffic using the Broomfield Gate which would increase the risk of accidents and congestion on Broomfield Road, a narrow road with sharp bends.
- 5.6.2 Policy ED20 clearly states that proposal for new campsites should only be permitted where arrangements for access, parking and servicing of the proposed development are adequate and the presence of any similar uses in the locality and the combined effect that any such concentration would have, does not pose a hazard to highway safety.
- 5.6.3 There are no similar uses within the locality of the application site which would lead to concentration that would be detrimental to highway safety. The Highways Officer has been consulted and considers that given the small scale of the development; the proposal would not lead to a significant increase in traffic movements on the Broomfield Gate access which would be detrimental to highway safety.
- 5.6.4 With regard to parking, the area allocated for the parking in the adjacent field is acceptable and would not pose a hazard to highway safety.

5.7 Historic Building and Parkland Considerations

- 5.7.1 With regard to the impact upon the historic parkland and setting of the grade I listed building; because the proposal site is a significant distance from the castle itself, some 480m to the south east of the main castle buildings, the Conservation Officer has no objections to the proposal.
- 5.7.2 As the proposed campsite would not be seen in conjunction with the castle and its historic core, the most important area of its historic landscape, I do not consider any significant harm to the setting of the castle would be caused. English Heritage have been consulted and in view of the fact that the applicant is proposing new landscaping and will allow existing boundary hedging within the estate to grow and conceal the site, they raise no objection.
- 5.7.3 Overall, I do not consider that the proposal would result in significant or unacceptable harm to the historic setting of Leeds Castle and parkland and the

long term conservation of this nationally important collection of heritage assets would continue.

5.8 Residential Amenity Considerations

5.8.1 The nearest residential property outside of the estate is located within Broomfield Conservation Area which is over 100m to the south east of the application site. At this distance I do not consider that any significant or unacceptable harm to the residential amenity of this dwelling would be caused.

5.8.2 Whilst two high level lights are proposed, these lights would be concealed from the residents in the conservation area by dense woodland to the south of the site. In terms of noise, considering that only eight tents are proposed in total and their occupation would be seasonal, I do not consider that any significant noise disturbance to residents would be caused. The Environmental Health Officer has been consulted on these issues and raises no objection to the proposal. Nevertheless, to protect the amenity of the nearby residents an occupancy condition should be imposed to ensure no unnecessary or unacceptable harm to the surrounding countryside and the amenity of the residents is caused.

5.8.3 Overall, given the distance between the nearest house outside the estate and the application site and the modest scale of the proposal, I do not consider that any significant unacceptable harm to residential amenity would be caused and the development is in accordance with the Development Plan.

5.9 Other Matters

5.10 The site is a redundant vineyard. With the exception of the woodland to the south, most the land surrounding the site is landscaped. Given that the site is not located within close proximity of waterways or ponds; the Great Water is some 300m away to the west I do not consider that the proposal raises any ecological issues.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 In conclusion, I consider that this is a proposal that would result in limited harm to the surrounding countryside and is one that would make a positive contribution to the future of Leeds Castle, as a sustainable tourist destination.

The proposal would not have a significant impact upon the existing residents of the locality, and would not be to the detriment of highway safety.

- 6.2 I consider that this proposal is acceptable and in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan. With no overriding matters that would otherwise indicate a refusal, I recommend that the application is approved subject to the following conditions.

7. RECOMMENDATION

GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission;

Reason: In accordance with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. No development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a scheme of landscaping, using indigenous species which shall include indications of all existing trees and hedgerows on the land, and details of any to be retained, together with measures for their protection in the course of development and a programme for the approved scheme's implementation and long term management. The scheme shall be designed using the principles established in the Council's adopted Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Guidelines;

Reason: No such details have been submitted in accordance with policies ENV28, ENV34 & ED20 of the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000, policies CC6 and C4 of the South East Plan 2009 and National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

3. All planting, seeding or turfing comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the building(s) or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; and any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation;

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory setting and external appearance to the

development in accordance with policies ENV28, ENV34 and ED20 of the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000, policies CC6 and C4 of the South East Plan 2009 and National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

4. The use hereby permitted shall only take place between 1st April and 30th September (inclusive) each calendar year;

Reason: Unrestricted use of the land would cause demonstrable harm to the character, appearance and functioning of the surrounding area and the enjoyment of their properties by nearby residential occupiers in accordance with policies ENV28 and ED20 of the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000, policies CC6 and C4 of the South East Plan 2009 and National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

5. The camping pitches hereby permitted shall only be used as holiday accommodation and shall not be occupied continuously by any person or persons for a period in excess of 28 days in any one single letting. There shall be no consecutive lettings beyond four weeks to the same person, family or group and a written record of all lettings shall be kept and made available for inspection by the Local Planning Authority at their reasonable request;

Reason: To ensure the use of the building is effectively restricted to tourist accommodation as the introduction of a permanent residential use would be contrary to policies ENV28 of the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000 and central government planning policy and guidance as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

6. No lighting whether permanent or temporary shall be installed on the site without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority;

Reason: To preserve the character and visual amenity of the open countryside and the River Medway Area of Local Landscape Importance and neighbouring amenity in accordance with policies ENV28 and ENV49 of the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000, CC6 and C4 of the South East Plan 2009 and central government policy advice as set out the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

7. No additional hardsurface shall be placed or allowed to remain on the land, unless the prior written approval of the Local Planning Authority has been obtained;

Reason: To preserve the character and visual amenity of the and the River Medway Area of Local Landscape Importance and to prevent flooding elsewhere in accordance with policies ENV28 and ENV46 of the Maidstone Borough-Wide

Local Plan 2000, CC6, NRM4 and C4 of the South East Plan 2009 and central government policy advice set out the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

8. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:
Drawings 5064/35064/4, 5064/5, 5064/9, 5064/10 5064/12, 5064/135064/14, 5064/15, 5064/16 and 5064/17

Reason: To ensure the quality of the development is maintained and to prevent harm to the residential amenity of neighbouring occupiers in accordance with policies ENV28 and ENV34 of the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000, policies CC6 and C4 of the South East Plan 2009 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

The proposed development, subject to the conditions stated, is considered to comply with the policies of the Development Plan (Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000 and the South East Plan 2009) and there are no overriding material considerations to indicate a refusal of planning consent.