

Ditchling Parish Council
38 East End Lane
Ditchling
Hassocks
Sussex
BN6 8UP

Our Ref: SDNP/13/04089/PRE
Contact Officer: Richard Ferguson
→ Tel. No.: 01730 234129

13 December 2013

Dear Sirs

RE: Pre-Application Advice: Proposed new car park at Martins Field, Keymer Road, Ditchling

Thank you for your pre-application enquiry in respect of the above. I am pleased to offer the following advice.

Site Description and Proposal

The site is a 0.24ha field of semi improved grassland on the western edge of Ditchling and on the north side of Keymer Road. It lies within an area of countryside which separates Ditchling and Keymer approximately 2km to the west.

There is a tall hedgerow along the southern boundary with the road and a narrow tarmac roadside pavement leading into the village. There is an access onto Keymer Road at the eastern end of this boundary, where there is a 5 bar gate. There is a post and wire fence along the western boundary which separates the site from a larger field to the west. The land rises up to the north boundary where there is a hedgerow and a number of oak trees. A large field beyond continues to slope northwards and there is a public footpath at the top of this field where the site can be seen from.

There is a tall conifer hedge along the majority of the eastern site boundary, which separates the site from the rear garden of a listed dwelling which fronts onto Lodge Hill Lane. The conifer hedge borders a tennis court with its grounds. This dwelling is at the end of a row of dwellings which face onto Lodge Hill Lane. The site is also close to the new museum, church and village green on the opposite side of Lodge Hill Lane.

Ditchling is located within the 'Adur to Ouse Scarp Footslopes' Landscape Character Area, as defined in the South Downs integrated Landscape Character Assessment (SDICLA). Ditchling lies within undulating lowland of irregular sized fields bordered by mature hedgerows and trees, interspersed with woodland.

Proposals

A new public car park for approximately 50 cars is proposed. A layout has been provided which shows three rows of spaces with a new grasscrete surface and indicative planting on the west and north boundaries. The existing access would be used and upgraded with a new tarmac surface. The plan also highlights pruning of the southern boundary hedgerow to improve the visibility from the access.

Relevant Planning History

LW/11/0917/NP: Change of use of land to equestrian and erection of two stables and tack room/store. Approved 01.02.2012.

LW/02/222: Erection of polytunnels, greenhouse and sheds. Withdrawn 19.12.2002.

LW/91/1128: Section 73(a) application for removal of top soil. Refused 27.07.1992.

Policy Context

Applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The statutory development plan in this area is the Lewes District Local Plan (2003). The relevant policies to this application are set out below.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Circular 2010

Government policy relating to National Parks is set out in English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010 and The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was issued and came into effect on 27 March 2012. The Circular and NPPF confirm that National Parks have the highest status of protection and the NPPF states at paragraph 115 that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in the National Parks and that the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations and should also be given great weight in National Parks.

National Park Purposes

The two statutory purposes of the SDNP designation are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas;
- To promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of their areas.

If there is a conflict between these two purposes, conservation takes precedence. There is also a duty to foster the economic and social well being of the local community in pursuit of these purposes.

Relationship of the Development Plan to the NPPF and Circular 2010

The relevant policies have been assessed and are considered to be compliant with the NPPF.

Planning Policy

The following saved policies of the Lewes District Local Plan (2003) are relevant to this application:

CT1: Planning Boundary and key Countryside Policy
 ST3: Design, Form and Setting of Development.
 ST5: Access for People with Limited Mobility.
 ST11: Landscaping of Development.
 H5: Development within or affecting Conservation Areas.
 H7: Traffic in Conservation Areas.
 T10: Pedestrian routes and Traffic Calming.
 T14: Vehicle Parking

The emerging Lewes Joint Core Strategy will undergo an examination in Spring 2014. The following policies are relevant but have limited weight in decision making:

Core Policy 5: The Visitor Economy
 Core Policy 10: Natural Environment and Landscape Character
 Core Policy 13: Sustainable Travel

The following Supplementary Planning Guidance has also been considered:

Ditchling Conservation Area Appraisal.

Planning Assessment

Ditchling is popular with visitors and experiences traffic congestion and parking pressures from limited on street parking and capacity of the public car park at the village hall. Evidence justifying the need for a new car park should however be provided to support any future application. Additionally, this justification should include why this site is the preferred option compared to other possible alternatives.

The proposed site is located within easy walking distance to the museum, church, village green and village centre. It also has the potential to alleviate parking issues on Lodge Hill Lane and reduce traffic entering the village because visitors arriving from the west could use this site. Alleviating the parking issues and congestion could improve the character, appearance and amenities of the conservation area and would be supported by Policy H7.

The site would extend development into countryside between Ditchling and Keymer. Policy CT1 seeks to retain the open character of the countryside particularly where it separates settlements and prevents their coalescence. Its development would physically diminish the gap but the nature and scale of the proposals, as well as retaining and introducing boundary planting, may not significantly erode the openness of the area.

A key consideration is the site lies within an area sensitive to change because of its historic landscape context. The site forms part of a surrounding late medieval and early post medieval field pattern closely related to Ditchling conservation area. Its development will affect this landscape character. The Ditchling Conservation Character Appraisal identifies the views from Keymer Road into the village as the most attractive approach to the conservation area. It also identifies the fields immediately opposite the site are important to the setting of the village. The land on the north side of the road also contributes to the village's setting and its change of use would impact upon this. Whilst the boundary hedgerow along the road screens the site from view, parts may need to be removed or cut back to achieve adequate visibility for the access. These works may detract from views into the conservation area and affect its setting. Any works to the hedgerow should be carefully assessed.

Furthermore, the SDILCA outlines that new land uses on urban fringes should not erode the rural landscape character and, specifically, 'minimise use of excessive lighting, signage and suburban features on the edge of Ditchling.' The development of this site would encroach on the rural setting of Ditchling which the SDILCA refers to. Consequently, it may not conserve or enhance the National Park landscape.

The impact on the surrounding landscape character should be assessed in a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, which would be required with an application. This assessment also should include the impact on views within the vicinity of the site and from surrounding higher ground.

Appropriate surfacing and any new landscaping would be important to minimise the visual impact of the car park. Tarmac would not be acceptable and either the proposed grasscrete or a 'softer' material would be more appropriate. New planting should comprise native species. The indicative layout appears to maximise the land available, but it gives an impression of a formal and urban layout. A 'soft' approach to demarcating the spaces should therefore be proposed. Signage should be kept to a minimum and appropriately designed to minimise any suburbanising effect. No lighting is recommended so as to conserve the tranquillity of the park.

Archaeology

The site is within an area of local archaeological interest. An initial site assessment will be needed to determine any potential archaeology.

Ecology

The site is semi-improved grassland and is not designated for its nature conservation interest. There are no records of protected species on this site but there are records of bats, reptiles and water voles in the area. Advice from the County Council recommends a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal to assess any likely impacts of the proposals. This survey should consider the existing nature conservation value of the site, identify impacts and assess the need for any mitigation and enhancements.

Highways

The Highways Authority is concerned about a lack of visibility looking east from the access. A visibility splay of 215m is required for an access onto a road with a 60mph limit. A speed survey covering 7 consecutive days is recommended to determine actual vehicle speeds for vehicles leaving Ditchling to further assess this issue. The County Council would not require any new line painting on the road by the entrance.

The size of the car parking spaces would need to be a minimum of 2.5m x 5m. A minimum of 6m between each row of spaces would be required for adequate manoeuvring space. The County Council has advised that a Traffic Regulation Order would be required for the car park.

Impact on neighbouring amenities

The site would be next to the tennis court and the western half of the large grounds of Ditchling Court. The site is a good distance from the dwelling and with the conifer hedge along the boundary significant noise and disturbance may not be caused to the amenities of this dwelling.

Conclusion

The site is close to the museum, church and village centre and the pavement along Keymer Road provides reasonably good pedestrian access. It could also help to alleviate parking issues in the village. However, the site forms part of a sensitive landscape where its development could detract from the landscape character and impact on the setting of the village. A Landscape and visual Impact Assessment should examine the potential harm in detail. Concerns regarding the visibility of the access have also been raised by the Highways Authority.

If you pursue a formal planning application please note that the requirements of the South Downs National Park Authority Local Validation List will apply with regard to the information required to be submitted. Further information is available at www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-advice.

It would be advisable to contact the Building Control department at your Local Authority to check if building regulation approval is required.

Please note that the advice contained within this letter constitutes an informal Officers opinion and does not prejudice, nor is binding upon, any future decision taken by the South Downs National Park Authority.

Yours faithfully,

Richard Ferguson
Development Management Officer