

Draft Arnside and Silverdale AONB Development Plan Document Consultation

The previous draft plan listed at B33 an area of land at Hall More, Hale, Milnthorpe, LA7 7BP as a potential small scale development site for holiday lodges around the existing trout lake at Hall More Caravan Site. Despite there being no objections from members of the public or official organisations such as Natural England, Arnside and Silverdale AONB, Beetham Parish Council etc., in the current draft, this potential site is missing.

Hall More Caravan Site has been in existence for around 50 years. It was started by the current owner's father in the 1950's as a diversification of his farm business which still operates. It has been sensitively developed over the years into a very attractive, quiet site suitable for couples and families. There are static holiday and touring caravans on site with a small number of camping pods and a camping area. The site is self contained and hardly visible from the only road in the area. There is a public footpath near the site but this is rarely used except by holidaymakers who tend to use it for exercising their dogs.

The site owner has a vision to complete the development of Hall More which includes the re-establishment of the two fishing lakes on site, one of which is a trout lake for fly fishing and the other a coarse fishing lake. Although there are still fish in the lakes, the numbers have dropped substantially due to cormorants and herons. However, following a weed clearance and fishing pier reconstruction programme, it is proposed to open up the fishing facility for the benefit of holidaymakers and day ticket holders. The facility will be managed by a dedicated fishery manager who will reside in the caravan near the side of the lakes and for which planning permission was obtained.

A development of the fishing facility was the establishment of a number of high quality timber lodges in natural colours which would blend into the countryside particularly after appropriate landscaping in native trees and shrubs are planted and become established. This would be the final 'piece in the jigsaw' and, when taken with the existing development, would provide a perfect mix of static caravans, touring caravans, camping pods, tents and holiday lodges. The lodges would be designed to appeal to fishermen in particular and would not be to dissimilar to developments such as Redwell Fisheries, Cleveley Mere etc.

It is fully appreciated that the two Councils are not in favour of caravans at all in the AONB. However, the plan is still draft and this consultation response is also an objection to policy AS12 which is felt to be far too restrictive on current operators of tourism initiatives, of which there are only a few, in the area. It is therefore suggested that in AS12 (i) the words "or the expansion of existing sites" be changed to "or the large scale expansion of existing sites". This will allow current owners who have, for very good reasons, plans to carry out modest expansions, to do this to complete their projects. Discussions have been held with planning officers from South Lakeland District Council who have agreed in principal that the fishery site be completed subject to the landscaping with native species along the southern site boundary.

You will be well aware of National Planning Practice Guidance 3(28) which states that planning policies should **support** economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote a strong rural local economy, local neighbourhood plans should:

- Support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings;
- Promote the development and diversification of agriculture and other land-based rural businesses;
- Support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres.

Rural Tourism Action Plan published by the English Tourist Board goes on to say that tourism in rural areas creates employment and opportunities for business growth where other opportunities may be limited, as well as maintaining and protecting existing jobs, micro businesses and those self employed in rural areas. You will be fully aware that with the Arnside and Silverdale AONB such employment opportunities are limited, particularly now that the main industry, quarrying, is in severe decline. The AONB is what it says, a place of outstanding natural beauty. People want to visit the area particularly as it is being promoted by a very comprehensive web site covering the delights of the area. The ETB would definitely like 'day visits to be converted to overnight stays'. By restricting sensitive tourism opportunities it would be difficult to expand the number of overnight or better still weekend/weekly stays.

The opportunities outlined in the report include the fact that "Rural tourism provides an escape for the urban population and a range of distinct leisure time activities. It provides recreation and tranquillity and the interweaving of nature with local architecture, food, culture and community. This could be a potential message to develop and help target growth in business tourism in rural areas".

"Developing rural tourism products and experiences for visitors that are based on natural assets, for example wildlife, provides a potential business opportunity". The owner of the site is extremely keen on conservation and has achieved the David Bellamy Gold Award for Conservation. He is also in discussion with Natural England and the Butterfly Conservation Trust in relation to the provision of a nature reserve with a special focus on birds, butterflies, mammals, invertebrates and flora on a large area of grassland and adjoining woodland which will be accessible from Hall More. The aim of this being to encourage a number of 'at risk' species to become established in the area and the creation of woodland walks, cleared 'rides' within the woodlands to encourage native plants and flowers and thus butterflies, information boards, bird, bat and bee boxes etc.

The action plan does point to the fact that planning constraints can be a major barrier to the expansion and diversification of the rural tourism project and this must be facilitated in the National Planning Framework. Such growth must NOT be stifled by a very well meaning and professionally produced development plan which is far too restrictive in its content.

The action plan also suggests partners in developing rural tourism projects. These include AONB's, Local Authorities, National Trust, Natural England, RSPB etc. These organisations will all concede that there cannot be zero development in an AONB. There has to be

employment opportunities. Public transport is extremely poor in the area but people still live within. The creation of employment opportunities enables employees to work near to where they live without driving fairly long distances or attempting to get to Lancaster, Morecambe and Kendal by public transport.

Policy AS12 ONLY seeks to protect the AONB from insensitive and inappropriate tourist accommodation development whilst recognising the importance of the tourism economy to the area and encouraging lower impact accommodation that supports the AONB management plan objectives. Whilst agreeing that there should be some form of control, the types of accommodation permitted cannot be stated absolutely. That is too restrictive and hinders good business. Potential developments should be able to be discussed between applicants and planning officers and those which are felt to 'sensitively fit in' with the overall policy ideals should be permitted, this being in line with national planning policy. AS12 refers to pods, yurts and shepherd's huts. These are all fine but not everybody wants these type of basic facilities. It is very rare these days for people, especially ones who may appreciate the delights of the AONB to want to stay in accommodation with no private facilities. The owner does provide a number of pods but they are still not as popular as caravans and lodges.

In conclusion, by amending the wording in AS12 as suggested and permitting local planning officers to objectively discuss proposals for small scale expansions of existing developments, it will allow your objective to support rural employment and livelihoods and sustainable tourism.