

**PROPOSED USE OF LAND FOR THE STATIONING OF 4  
HOLIDAY LETTING LOG CABINS IN CONNECTION WITH  
ESTABLISHED PUBLIC HOUSE. SUBSTITUTION OF  
EXISTING APPROVED BUILDINGS/**

**Site: Land adjacent to the Car Park**

**Wenlock Edge Inn**

**Hilltop**

**Much Wenlock**

**TF13 6DJ**

## **THE PROPOSAL**

The proposal is a variation of an extant planning permission and seeks to substitute 4 timber chalets in place of, and on the same site approximately as the two larger buildings granted a planning permission on appeal at the Wenlock Edge Inn to provide holiday accommodation.

That previous permission was implemented in that a start was made and the planning conditions discharged but the development has been delayed and effectively mothballed for the last 3years pending resolution of development proposals on the sister public house the Longville Arms at Longville.

## **BACKGROUND**

The applicant company acquired the public house in 2014 following its closure in 2013. It was the intention to reopen the public house at that time to serve the local community and as a facility for visitors and tourists providing beverages, food, accommodation, and a meeting room with the potential for a small shop.

Related to those proposals was a proposed development application to provide two related buildings arranged in an 'L' shape on the northeast side of the Pub Car Park. The larger unit would have accommodated three double/twin guest bedrooms en-suite with a two-story section which accommodates a meeting room facility. The smaller second building, all single storeys would accommodate four double /twin guest bedrooms en-suite.

Associated works involve Surfacing and Setting out the existing car park including additional landscaping.

Presently the Wenlock Edge Inn comprises at ground floor a bar; lounge; dining room conservatory (providing 50 covers); customer toilets and kitchen with adjoining servery. At first floor there are five en-suite guest bedrooms and a storeroom.

Outbuildings comprise a two story structure converted to provide a residence for the manager; a smaller single story building used as an office; a second single storey building providing an additional unit of accommodation; and a larger pre-fabricated timber building which was previously used as a function room but which does not appear to have been use for some time. There is a large Customer car park on the opposite side of the B4371 public highway.

### **SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION**

The site proposed for the development is a parcel of land of some 6,938 square metres, set directly opposite the Wenlock Edge Inn on the western side of the B4371 (Church Stretton to Much Wenlock road). This road runs along the top of the limestone escarpment known as Wenlock Edge and is a strong feature of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The escarpment accommodates industrial, mineral quarrying and tourist related facilities at various points along its length, between the Wenlock Edge Inn and the town of Much Wenlock.

The application land is fairly flat and comprises the existing hard surfaced gravelled car park and surrounding open grassland enclosed by lightweight fencing. There are several pasture fields that surround the application site at approximately the same topographical level. Some local landscaping/tree planting has taken place around the existing car park area and there is strong mature tree planting beyond the immediate surrounding pasture fields.

This area of land has been an integral and functional part of the Public House premises since the grant of a planning permission in 1962 for use of the land as a

car park. In 1996 a planning permission was granted for the conversion of the former function room located opposite to provide 6 bedrooms with en-suites and a meeting room. This aspect of the permission was never implemented. However, the approved plans indicated an extension to the existing car park on the western side of the road opposite the Wenlock Edge Inn.

## **RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY**

Shropshire Council Core Strategy

- Policy CS1 Strategic Approach
- Policy CS5 Countryside and Green Belt
- Policy CS6 Sustainable Design and Development Principles
- Policy CS8 Facilities Services and Infrastructure Provision
- Policy CS13 Economic Development, enterprise and Employment
- Policy CS 16 Tourism Culture and Leisure
- Policy CS 17 Environmental Networks

Shropshire Council SAMDev Plan 2015

Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan.

Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan

## **POLICY DISCUSSION**

Overall, around 36% of the population of Shropshire live in rural areas. More than 20% of the land area, some 80,000 hectares, is part of the formal AONB designation. The remote communities of this area have traditionally relied upon agriculture as their main economic support. The importance of this area and the need to promote rural diversification of the economy in order to bring diversified sustained employment opportunities, as well as to provide economic support to maintain the AONB landscape is given significant weight in the Development Plan as well as Central Government Policy.

Shropshire Core Strategy policy CS5 is supportive of development proposals in the Countryside which maintain and enhance countryside vitality and character and where they improve the sustainability of rural communities by bringing local, economic and community benefits. It seeks to facilitate the retention and appropriate expansion of existing established businesses, unless relocation to a suitable site within a settlement would be more appropriate. This proposal as with the extant permission allowed on appeal would be a further diversification of the existing community and recreational enterprise established here that was accepted as being beneficial by the Secretary of States inspector on appeal who noted at paragraph 14 of his decision that:

*“there is no dispute between the appellants and the Council that the proposed tourist accommodation is necessary to the future business viability of the Wenlock edge Inn, which is intended to reopen in conjunction with the development now proposed”.*

CS5 makes specific reference to sustainable rural tourism and leisure and recreation proposals which require a countryside location in accordance with Policies CS16 and CS17.

Policies CS16 is specific to tourism culture and leisure, requiring such developments to be appropriate to their location, and to enhance and protect the existing offer within Shropshire. With respect to visitor accommodation, it states

*“Development of high quality visitor accommodation in accessible locations served by a range of services and facilities, which enhances the role of Shropshire as a tourist destination to stay. In rural areas, proposals must be of an appropriate scale and character for their surroundings, be close to or within settlements, or an established and viable tourism enterprise where accommodation is required. Where possible, existing buildings should be re-used (development must also accord with Policy CS5).”*

The form of accommodation proposed will comply with the SAMDev Plan Policy MD11 which contains a section on visitor accommodation in rural areas. At point 8

the policy advises that such accommodation should be provided either through the conversion of existing buildings or by structures that conform to the legal definition of a Caravan. This is the case with this proposal.

### **THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The NPPF emphasises that planning should support economic growth in rural areas by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. Rural tourism and leisure developments should be supported provided they respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitors facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres.

Great emphasis is placed on the benefits of tourism to the national and local economy, and the social and environmental wellbeing of the whole country. The particular value of these benefits to the AONB is noted and: -

“In Statutorily designated areas proposals as a matter of principle, should seek to conserve and enhance the qualities and features that justified the designation.”

The NPPF itself is supportive of sustainable economic development (including agricultural and rural development in appropriate locations) whilst at the same time emphasising that the desirability of economic development must always be balanced against other environmental considerations. In the case before us we have to weigh any adverse impacts on the landscape which is designated in part as being of National importance.

The Framework states that the Government is committed to securing economic growth and that the planning system should support and encourage sustainable economic growth. The NPPF introduced an overarching presumption in favour of sustainable development unless their impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies as a whole.

The NPPF is supportive of a prosperous rural economy, including supporting the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas (including well designed new buildings) and promoting the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based business. In parallel with this objective, the need to conserve and enhance the natural environment is stressed

### **SITING, DESIGN AND MATERIALS CONSIDERATIONS.**

The proposed development has been designed with the paramount need to satisfy these objectives of policy. The use of careful landscaping will add to the wooded nature of Wenlock Edge a characteristic noted in the AONB Management Plan. The low profile of the building's design is intended to reduce their prominence. The professional Council officer's view in respect of the previous application is that the buildings would not adversely harm the rural character of the area or the special qualities of the AONB. They are sited close to long established tourist related facilities and are not isolated or remote from established development.

Committee members expressed some concern about the design of the buildings that were eventually approved. This scheme will submit a detailed timber design to a specification that conforms to the legal definition of a caravan.

This revised scheme relates to a built area similar to that allowed on appeal in broadly a similar location and is a small-scale development that accords with the basic aims of policy in this respect. The scale and modelling of each unit accords with the dimensions of a caravan but the external finish will be timber providing a more sympathetic external cladding material for this rural location.

The land use where the siting was proposed for the accommodation blocks is long established as commercial land with express permission for car parking in support of the public house premises. The modified proposal before in this application moves

the exact siting of the units so as to make additional space for substantial landscaping on the north-western boundary in order to soften and screen the units.

In connection with the appeal approved development all conditions were discharged including those relating to drainage; landscaping and hard-surfacing and materials and were taken into account in the installation of the footings of the buildings. This is all recorded of the Councils files.

### **COMMUNITY FACILITY / SOCIAL AMENITY**

The Wenlock Edge Inn Public House has long been a noted landmark building and hostelry of great character. It has been an attractive rural social facility but as with many such rural public house facilities it is stressing to survive commercially. It was abruptly closed in 2014 and has remained closed since. Most rural land use planning work concerns public houses finding alternative uses because of a lack of commercial viability.

Public house premises in rural areas, in my experience, that continue to succeed are those that invest in broadening the base and facilities of the business to provide restaurant food and accommodation. Modern accessible facilities are needed which facilitate access for the disabled and the elderly as well as guests who walk the countryside.

In this proposal there is an opportunity to support the applicant in his endeavours to create a business that has greater diversification and by introducing new elements to the business that not only will bring in new revenue but will support the other existing aspects of the business in terms of food and beverage.



The progress and completion of this development together with the reopening of the Wenlock Edge has regrettably been delayed owing to the reluctance of the LPA to accept that the Longville Arms had no future potential. The Secretary of State was convinced of that and allowed the appeal against the refusal to permit its closure. That decision has now created the opportunity for the community to reopen this public house and restaurant. Recent extensions have taken place to provide additional space for additional restaurant covers demonstrating the applicant's commitment to restoring the fortunes and benefits of the premises to the Community.

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposal is a small-scale tourist related development that revises the form of accommodation from that approved on appeal by the Secretary of States Inspector but maintains the basic small scale of the proposal. It will give significant and decisive economic support to a noted long-established hostelry at an important visitor destination. Small scale proposals such as this are fully supported by both National and Local Plan policy.

The proposal is designed to be a low profile, unobtrusive development set along with existing commercial land. The units are clad in traditional vernacular timber.

The scheme provides an opportunity for the premises to reopen on a more diversified basis with the firm prospect of a viable long-term future following its closure for since 2013. It will offer a high standard of additional self-contained accommodation with access for the disabled and safe access for all.