

PLANNING & HERITAGE STATEMENT



CHANGE OF USE OF LAND FOR THE SITING
OF A GLAMPING POD TO THE REAR OF
LETTERBOX HOUSE MORDON TS21 2EY

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Preliminary Matters

1. This Planning & Heritage Statement has been prepared to support an application for the change of use of land to the rear of Letterbox House, Mordon TS21 2EY, for the siting of a Glamping Pod.
2. Letterbox House is a modest cottage (recently extended) in the attractive village of Mordon, which is a Conservation Area. A gate in the back yard wall provides access to a small stone barn and an open grass field some 0.3ha in extent. The location of the glamping pod could be agreed with the Council, but the intention is that the pod should be in an unobtrusive position possibly close to the stone barn.
3. The applicable planning policies and guidance are identified together with the reasons why the scheme will comply appropriately with their relevant provisions.

The Site and Surroundings/ Assessment of the Heritage Asset

4. House is a modest cottage (recently extended) in the attractive village of Mordon. It is the centre of 3 such dwellings on the northern side of the sweeping village greens that flank the minor road through the village; the greens are a characteristic feature of the Conservation Area. A paved yard and outbuildings are immediately behind the cottage, but a gate in the back yard wall provides access to an open grass field that extends to the north and wraps around the cottages to form a green space in the village street. Just to the north of the back yard wall there is a small stone barn. The glamping pod is to be positioned in the grass field in a location that could be agreed with the Council, but the intention is that the pod should be in an unobtrusive position, possibly close to the stone barn.



Letterbox House and its back yard is the middle cottage. The field is to the north and east. The stone barn is evident in the field to the rear of the back yard.



Street view of Letterbox House (in the centre) fronting the village greens



Street view of Mordon and its village greens

5. The field to the north and east of Letterbox House extends to a little over 0.3ha. A track between the back yard of the cottage and the small stone barn provides vehicular access to the field and the barn. Open post and rail fencing form the field boundaries to the north and west and a thick hedge lines the eastern boundary. However, some views into the field from the roadside are partially obscured by a fine ash tree on the western boundary and by an attractive tree beside the small barn. The siting of the glamping pod is intended to utilise the screening effects of those trees and the stone barn, although other locations could be used, as may be agreed with the Council.

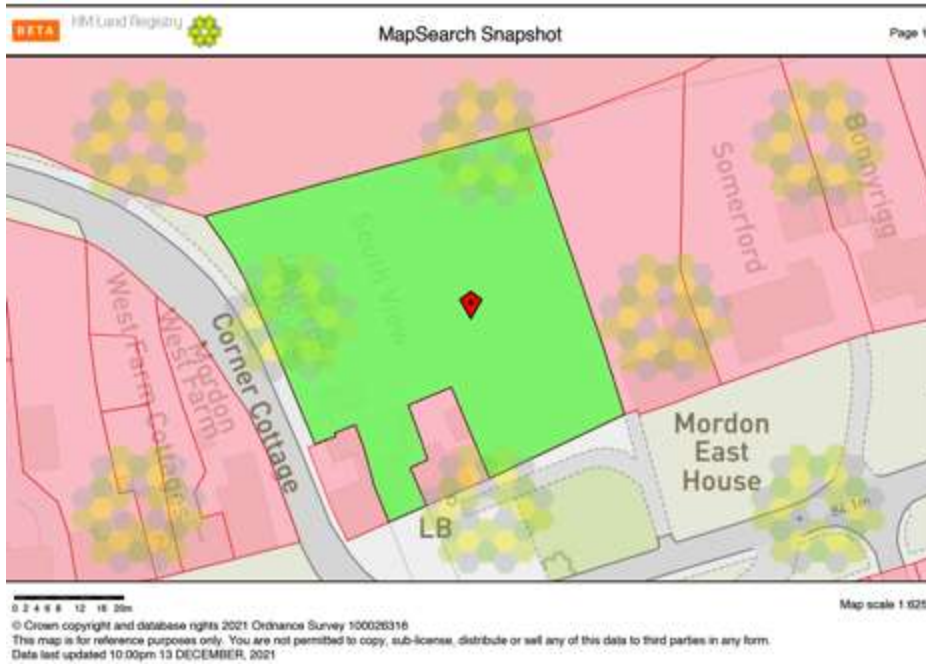


Street view across the western boundary of the field to the north of Letterbox House from the minor road through the village.



Street view of the access to the field and the stone barn behind Letterbox House.

6. The extent of the land holding at Letterbox House is shown in green below.



The land holding at Letterbox House

Site History & Land Use

7. Letter Box House, Mordon, Stockton-on-Tees TS21 2EY:
 - DM/18/00183/FPA: 2-storey rear extension replacing existing single storey rear off-shoot.

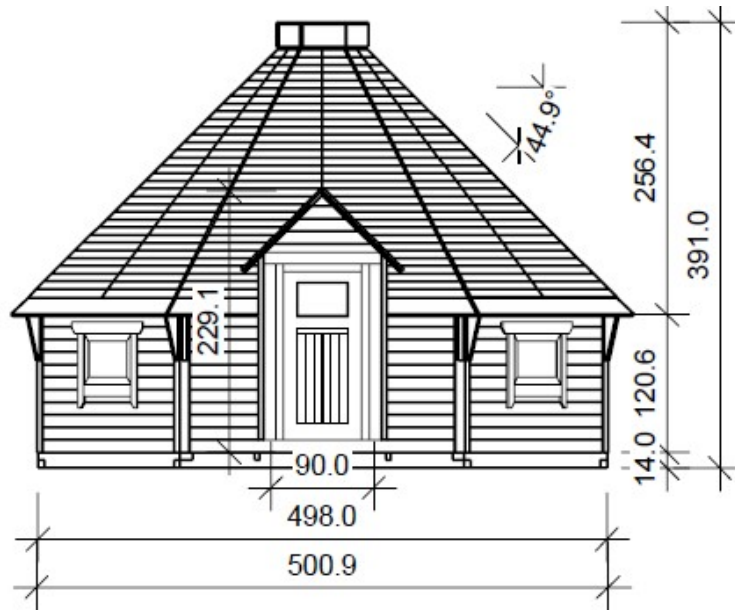
8. Other relevant planning decisions in Mordon over the last decade:
 - DM/19/03951/CPO: Single storey rear extension, Midgeholme, PP
 - DM/19/02411/FPA :Amended access road, change of use of land to form garden, proposed single storey extensions, single storey 4 bay garage block, and detached stable to the south west of the site, South Hallgate, PP
 - DM/19/00008/FPA: Rear roof alterations, including re-roofing of whole roof, single storey rear extension, re-rendering and replacement windows and front door, Wayside Cottage, PP
 - DM/17/01990/FPA: Demolition of existing building, erection of new dwelling and conversion of barn to associated garage and annex, Hall Farm, Aycliffe Lane, PP
 - DM/14/03408/FPA: Erection of porch canopy to front and single storey rear extension, Somerford, PP
 - DM/14/03054/FPA: Erection of 1 dwelling with detached garage, South Hallgate, Aycliffe Lane, PP
 - 7/2013/0382/DM: REPLACEMENT OF SIDE EXTENSION AND RE-ROOFING OF PROPERTY (RESUBMISSION), Manor House Farm, PP

9. In addition to Letterbox House, rear extensions have been permitted at Midgeholme, South Hallgate, Wayside Cottage, Hall Farm and Somerford. The detached stable building at South Hallgate stands by the roadside at the southern entrance to the village on open land similar to the open field behind Letterbox House. It is just 2m from the existing hedge line beside Aycliffe Lane, but sufficiently distant to avoid the roots of the hedgerow. Its modest scale, form and materials reflect its functional use, so that it was deemed

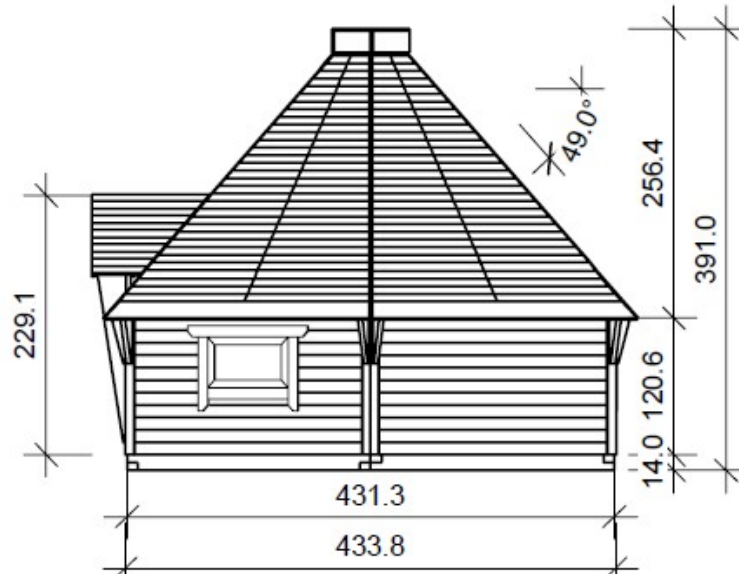
acceptable within the setting of the Conservation Area. Similar considerations might reasonably apply to the proposed glamping pod.

Proposal

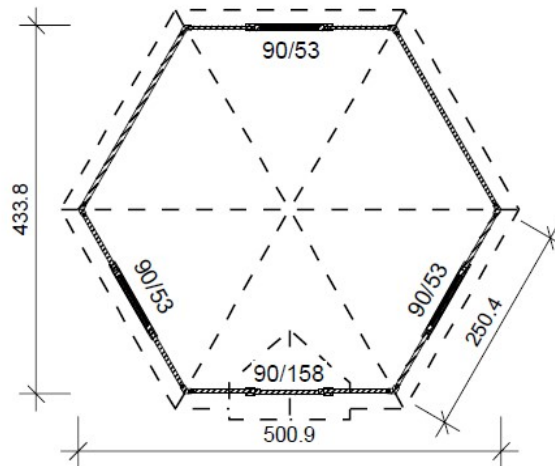
10. The glamping pod is to be positioned in the grass field to the north of Letterbox House. The exact location could be agreed with the Council, but the intention is that the pod should be in an unobtrusive position. Views into the field from the roadside just to the north of the village are partially obscured by a fine ash tree on the western boundary and by an attractive sycamore tree beside the small barn. The proposal also includes a substantial landscaping scheme that would include native field hedge and tree planting to the boundaries of the field and an internal Laurel hedge to provide privacy to the occupants. The location of the glamping pod would utilise the screening effects of the landscaping scheme, the existing trees and the stone barn, although other locations would be possible.



Front elevation of glamping pod



Side elevation of glamping pod



Plan of glamping pod

11. The main part of the glamping pod is a wooden, hexagonal structure with a conical roof. The conical roof reaches to about 3.9m at its highest point. A typical elevation would appear to be about 5m wide. The pod would offer some 17m² of floor space. It is insulated and double-glazed and is described as a luxury base from which to create a pleasant outdoor amenity from a workroom to a honeymoon suite.

12. The pod would be constructed on site. The intention is to build the base on concrete blocks that would be placed on the land. There would no excavation involved. There would be no trees affected by the works.

Main Issue

13. We believe the main issue in this case would be whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Mordon Conservation Area or harm the countryside.

Planning Policy

14. The Development Plan includes the County Durham Plan 2020.



Mordon lies within a designated rural area (shown in green above) and beside an Area of Higher Landscape Value (shown in grey). It also lies within the Mordon Conservation Area designated in 1993 and delineated within the solid line.

15. Designated rural areas are defined under section 157(1) of the Housing Act 1985 and essentially restrict the subsequent disposal of affordable housing. In County Durham the Local Plan requires financial contributions to affordable housing from smaller schemes than elsewhere (providing 6 to 9 units rather 10 or more). But the 'vision' for all rural areas is that they should play a vital role in the county's economy, employment and tourism, so that 'sustainable development' that meets the economic and housing needs of the local community will be permitted (providing that it is appropriate). The role of the County as a visitor and tourist destination is to be strengthened.
16. Even so, Policy 10 seeks to prevent development in the countryside unless it is permitted by specific policies or it is necessary for economic development, infrastructure or involves the use of an existing building. New development in the countryside must comply with the Local Plan and avoid unacceptable harm to the heritage, biodiversity, intrinsic character, beauty or tranquillity of the countryside. Nor must it result in the merging of neighbouring settlements,

in ribbon development, in damage to the setting or townscape of settlements, entail the use of unsustainable modes of transport, impair amenity or increase flood risks.

17. Policy 39 permits development where it would not cause unacceptable harm to the character, quality or distinctiveness of the landscape. In the identified Areas of Higher Landscape Value development must conserve or enhance the special qualities of the landscape, unless there are overriding benefits. Schemes should contribute to the conservation or enhancement of the local landscape.
18. Policy 44 aims to sustain the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets, including any contribution made by their setting. Great weight is to be given to the conservation of all designated assets and their settings, which should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm, although in the latter case the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Within Conservation Areas proposals should demonstrate an understanding of the place and respond positively to the recommendations of any character appraisal or management proposal. However, although the Mordon Conservation Area was designated in 1993, no character appraisal or management plan has emerged. Nevertheless, there is a statutory duty under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing its character or appearance.
19. Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021) supports those local policies. It insists that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Applications affecting such an asset should be supported by a description of the asset's significance and any contribution made by its setting. Great weight should be given to conserving the significance of the asset, whether or not any harm is substantial or less than substantial. But,

where a development would lead to less than substantial harm, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Comments on Main Issue/ Impact on Heritage Asset

20. The key tests are whether this glamping pod positioned in the field to the north of Letterbox House would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Mordon Conservation Area or harm the countryside.
21. In the absence of a character appraisal or a management plan, there is no definitive description of the elements that make the Mordon Conservation Area special. It is clear, however, that an identifying characteristic is created by the sweeping village greens that line the roadside through the village and the neat, modest cottages that overlook them. Those features are not evident in approaching the village from the north. The few cottages seen there stand quite close to the roadside, serving almost as a gateway to the settlement. And, although the open post and rail fencing provides views across the field in which the glamping pod is to be located, the proposed landscaping provided, the tree beside the barn and the barn itself, would serve to obscure parts of the field where the pod could be located from casual observation. Moreover, if seen at all, the glamping pod would be glimpsed against a backdrop of backyards, outbuildings and the rear elevations of the cottages lining the village street; it would be barely noticeable.
22. Although the field to the north of Letterbox House contributes to the setting of Mordon and its Conservation Area, it serves mainly to provide a rural vista to the east of the cottages linking the village greens to the countryside beyond through the open post and rail field fencing. However, that role is not so evident from the roadside to the north of the settlement, nor from a position in front of Letterbox House and the adjoining dwellings. From both locations the field appears divorced from the village greens and separated from the core of the Conservation Area. The detached stable building permitted at South Hallgate stands similarly divorced from the settlement and similar considerations might reasonably apply.

23. If positioned as intended along with the proposed landscaping, the glamping pod would be screened and hardly noticeable. Hence it would preserve the character and appearance of the Mordon Conservation Area, complying with the statutory duty imposed by the Act, the strictures of the NPPF and Policy 44 of the Local Plan.
24. For similar reasons, the scheme would comply with Policy 10 of Local Plan avoiding unacceptable harm to the intrinsic character, beauty or tranquillity of the countryside. It would not contribute to the merging of neighbouring settlements, or ribbon development, nor damage the setting or townscape of Mordon, impair amenity or increase flood risks. On the other hand, the glamping pod might contribute to the 'vision' set out in the Local Plan encouraging activity and tourism in rural areas, albeit in a very minor way.
25. It is evident from the extract of the Local Plan (above) that the field to the north of Letterbox House is not within the Area of Higher Landscape Value. Moreover, due to the lie of the land and the alignment of the road, that field is not readily evident in any view encompassing the Area of Higher Landscape Value. It follows that the glamping pod need not contravene Policy 39 of the Local Plan.
26. Taking all those matters into account, positioning the proposed glamping pod on the field to the north of Letterbox House could preserve the character and appearance of the Mordon Conservation Area, avoid unacceptable harm to the intrinsic character, beauty or tranquillity of the countryside and leave the Area of Higher Landscape Value unaffected, thereby complying with Policies 44, 10 and 39 of the Local Plan.

Conclusion

27. The proposal is to position a wooden hexagonal glamping pod in the grass field to the north of Letterbox House. The exact location could be agreed with the Council, but the intention is that the pod should be in an unobtrusive position, as shown above. If positioned as intended, the scheme could preserve the character and appearance of the Mordon Conservation Area, avoid unacceptable harm to the intrinsic character, beauty or tranquillity of the countryside and leave the Area of Higher Landscape Value unaffected. The proposal could, thereby comply with Policies 44, 10 and 39 of the Local Plan. It would also meet the relevant requirements of the NPPF and the statutory duty imposed by section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.