

DESIGN STATEMENT

TO ACCOMPANY VARIATION OF CONDITIONS APPLICATION
RELATING TO DECISION DC/2017/00092 AT:

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MONMOUTHSHIRE.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning was granted on 31st July 2017, and has since been partially implemented, for the *“Siting of 4-6 timber camping pods”* at Em Lee Bungalow, Llanddewi Skirrid. On 24th January 2023 my client received correspondence from the Council’s Enforcement Officer indicating that they were considering a breach of planning consent. This has since been confirmed via email as the following;

- The approval was for 2 shepherd huts and 4 timber pods. On site it was noted that four shepherd huts were in situ.
- The winter plan 1702-10 is not being adhered to.
- The pergolas, hot tubs, hardstandings and decking for hot tubs for tourism purposes does not benefit from planning consent.
- A consideration to submit a new landscaping scheme is requested.
- It is advised to submit a S73 planning application.

1.2 This statement is intended to accompany an application for the Removal/Variation of Condition/s (S73) attached to Decision Notice DC/2017/00092 and as follows;

1. Condition 2 – *“The development shall be carried out in accordance with the list of approved plans set out in the table below”*. It is proposed that the following revised drawings numbers are updated the revised drawings being as follows;
 - a. 1702 – 01 – Survey Drawing (as originally approved).
 - b. 1702 – 02.B – Design Proposals (drawing updated to reflect current site layout).
 - c. 1702 – 03 – Cycle store.
 - d. 1702 – 10 – Winter storage plan (drawing to be omitted from register).
 - e. CC – 2187 to be replaced with updated Landscaping Plan 1702 – 04.A.
2. Condition 9 – *“The site shall be closed between October 31st in any one year and March 31st in the following year, the Shepherd's Huts shall be stored in accordance with the drawing 1702-10 Winter Site Plan.”*. We request this condition be varied to read *“The site shall be closed between October 31st in any one year and March 31st in the following year.”*.

It should also be noted that my clients do not intend to install any further units on site. The original consent stated 4-6 huts and it is clear that the site cannot accommodate any more units whilst still providing privacy and amenity for each plot.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 For some background on the scheme please note the following; whilst the planning permission refers to 4-6 timber pods the approved drawing (1702 – 02.A) shows two shepherd huts and four timber pods. The Council’s enforcement note states that approval was granted for 2 shepherd’s huts. As outlined in the approved Design and Access Statement permission was sought for 4-6 units to allow my clients flexibility in terms of the scheme. At the time of applying for permission this type of holiday accommodation was relatively new and so it wasn’t known whether or not the scheme would be a success.

- 2.2 In the first instance my clients implemented a single shepherd hut along with the planting and infrastructure to support the scheme. This hut was positioned to the South East of the site largely in the same position as the most Westerly shepherd's hut on approved Site Layout Plan 1702 – 02.A and is known as Skirrid View. To the West a banked area of native planting was installed along with the hedging and to the East of the shepherd hut a raised area of gravel installed using the no-dig installation method as highlighted on the approved plans.
- 2.3 The shepherd's hut proved to be very successful and a timber pod was purchased as 'phase 2' and sited to the East of Skirrid View. Whilst a deviation in terms of siting of the hut, at the time this wasn't considered a major issue. Following installation, users of both huts complained of privacy issues the planting in its infancy and the huts being positioned relatively close together. These two units eventually became more popular being rented as a pair for families with children. Eventually these were only rented as a pair and the timber hut relocated slightly closer to the shepherd's hut for convenience.
- 2.4 A second shepherd's hut was purchased (known as The Skirrid Bolthole) and installed to the East of the first units. Two issues were highlighted during the first rentals of this unit. These were as follows;
- Privacy; as highlighted by users of the first units due to the lack of established planting there was minimal privacy between units.
 - Drainage issues; the site being at a level approximately 500mm below the first unit and at the lowest point of the site the area suffered from poor drainage the site being water logged even in summer months due to the nearby Mynachcy Brook.
- 2.5 This reduced possible rentals of this unit and my clients implemented the following to alleviate the issues;
- A 1.8m high timber fence was installed on the line of the hedgerow to provide privacy whilst the landscaping grew.
 - Installation of raised decking area to avoid users standing on sodden grass/earth.
- The Council's SPG relating to Sustainable Tourism Accommodation notes that one of the key principles of sustainable tourism is that the site should be "*Capable of being removed without leaving a permanent trace (including any associated supporting infrastructure)*". Bearing this in mind fencing posts and support posts for decking structures have been installed using a demountable system meaning that these can be removed easily if the site reverts back to its original use. It is also intended that the fencing is removed once the planting is established to a point where privacy is provided between plots.
- 2.6 Once the above measures were installed both units became hugely successful with both units being rented for the majority of the seasonal months. A third shepherd's hut was purchased and installed further to the West of the application site the rental known as Finmia. Similar measures to provide privacy and to alleviate drainage issues were installed and again the following year this unit was popular with tourists.

2.7 Following the installation of the first two units it was evident that the site couldn't comfortably accommodate 6 plots and be successful and a maximum of 4 would be installed. It is inevitable that the siting of 4 units would differ to a site accommodating 6 units spreading the units out rather than grouping four together tightly. The Council's enforcement notice suggests that *"The approval was for 2 shepherd huts and 4 timber pods. On site it was noted that four shepherd huts were in situ."* This is incorrect being that 3 shepherd huts and one pod has been installed. We would hope that this, bearing in mind that it is a reduction in visual impact, would be acceptable. In essence one additional shepherd's hut has been installed and three timber pods omitted from the proposals.

3.0 PROPOSALS

3.1 It is recognised, by virtue of the reduced number of units and the temporary installations to alleviate drainage and privacy issues, the site plan and landscaping plan differs from the approved drawings. We have submitted a revised site plan which has been adjusted to suit the current layout as follows;

3.2 The Council's enforcement note refers to areas of *"hardstanding and decking not benefitting from planning consent"*. Please note the following;

- The originally approved site plan allowed 185m² of gravel paths to be laid using a 'no-dig' method. As the number of huts has reduced the path footprint has been reduced to 62m².
- Decking has been installed to two of the plots for the reasons highlighted above. As noted, these are supported on demountable posts and can be easily removed if the site was to ever to revert back to its former use.
- As pointed out in the Background section above, fencing has been installed generally on the line of the previously approved hedges. This is to provide temporary privacy between plots until the planning has been established. My client is happy for this removal to be included in some form on any revised planning approval. It has been highlighted on the drawings to safeguard this.

We would note that the removal of the decking is safeguarded via Condition 3 which states *"When the land ceases to be occupied by those named under the permission, the use hereby permitted shall cease and all accommodation, structures, materials and equipment brought onto the land in connection with the use shall be removed. Within 12 months of that time the land shall be restored in accordance with a scheme previously submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority."*

3.3 The Council's enforcement note also refers to the siting of hot tubs and pergolas. These are structures that are present on site. There were two locations showing hot tubs on the approved Site Plan. We would note that these structures are all surface mounted and can be easily removed. The pergolas are metal collapsible structures providing protection from the weather if poor. These are uncovered when not raining.

- 3.4 Regarding both of the above points we would note that decking, hot tubs and extended areas of hardstanding are elements seen on similar proposals. We draw the Council's attention to nearby application DC/2014/00472 which permitted *"Proposed campsite to provide holiday accommodation in 7 pre-erected tents. Change of use - agricultural to campsite; development would include visitor car park, foul drainage and decked areas on which to place the tents."*. This application was for a different kind of temporary tourism accommodation although refers to the same principles. This scheme allowed large areas of raised decking along with areas of timber fencing and hot tubs. The reversibility of this scheme was again safeguarded via condition stating *"All timber bases and any other structures or equipment above ground level shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition on cessation of the use of the land for the siting of pre-erected tents in accordance with a scheme of work to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority."*.
- 3.5 From a landscaping side the scheme has developed somewhat due to the reduced number of units. The Council's enforcement note suggested that a revised landscaping scheme be submitted and this is included under drawing 1702 – 04 and is intended to replace drawing CC – 2187. This has been enhanced to further screen the units in response to the Council's note stating *"the winter plan 1702-10 is not being adhered to"*.
- 3.6 Regarding the Winter Plan; the original consent permitted four units to remain in their settings through the winter months with the two shepherd huts being moved approximately 10 metres to the North of the site. This was intended to screen the units through the winter by the existing Garage. The Council's delegated report states *"The two shepherds huts being slightly more elevated in both topography and may be visible from vistas towards the Skirrid although will be partially screened once the new Alder trees have fully matured. They may also be viewed briefly through the gate into Ebbw Farm Bungalow. Therefore these would be moved to a more concealed location along the northern boundary of the site."*.
- 3.7 During the first off season measures were put in place to carry out the repositioning of Skirrid View. However, the costs associated with this made the scheme almost financially impractical. Initially it was thought that the units could be towed by a local farmer to the new position but these units are not designed to be manoeuvred in such a fashion and when attempted fixtures and fittings became damaged. Therefore, they would need to be repositioned using a rented crane. The costs related to the hire of mobile crane unit and driver at the end and start of the season to lift the shepherd huts to the winter location were massive. It also requires around a day for each unit to disconnect services for the hut for relocation. Costs aside the repositioning in practice also wasn't practical moving the units only 10 metres north in the site.

3.8 Being that the lower units are in similar positions to the originally sited 4no. huts it is suggested that these would be adequately screened to be retained through the winter months as previously approved. The most westerly site may have brief vistas from outside site and we have implemented the following to provide additional screening hopefully allowing the unit to be retained in place throughout the winter months.

- It is recognised that the originally proposed mature tree has not been planted to the North of the site. This being planted as a semi mature tree would provide instant screening to the plot. This will be implemented accordingly.
- We have proposed that two of the saplings planted to the North-West of this site be carefully lifted and repositioned elsewhere. These will be replaced with semi mature orchard trees to restrict views through the gate. The saplings previously planted would eventually provide screening but the new more mature trees will provide instant foliage to prevent the hut being seen from the roadside.
- The area to the north of the site will be planted with a mix of orchard trees and evergreen trees to provide further screening.
- Landscaping elsewhere has been further enhanced.

The Council's Landscaping Officer's comments are welcomed for the revised scheme.

3.9 We would hope that the above improvements and enhancements would provide adequate screening to enable the units to be retained in place through the winter months. This condition is presumably to reduce visual impact in the winter and the inclusion of evergreen planting will sufficiently screen the most Westerly plot. We would also point out that the site we drew comparison with above has since applied and had approved an application to remove the seasonal nature of the development allowing the units to stay in situ all year round (REF: DC/2015/00955).

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 As with most tourism developments the pandemic was catastrophic. My clients run both this tourism scheme and a walkers café both of which were shut for long periods of time with no income from either source. Once travel was permitted the huts were hugely popular with tourists from more built-up areas providing a safe setting for holidays in the open countryside. The temporary fencing was massively important through the intermediate period where a safe distance needed to be retained. All three plots remain to be popular and have continued to serve tourists as well as benefit the more local community.

4.2 The original Officer's report noted that *"PPW recognises the importance of tourism to economic prosperity and job creation and its ability to act as a catalyst for environmental protection, regeneration and improvement in both urban and rural areas. In rural areas tourism-related development is considered to be an essential element in providing for a healthy, diverse local economy and in contributing to the provision and maintenance of facilities for local communities. However, it also clarifies that such development should be sympathetic in nature and scale to the local environment and to the needs of the visitors and the local community."* We would hope that the submitted revised drawings provide the Council with reassurance that the site is 'reversible' in terms of reinstating the original use and also adequately screened to allow the huts to remain in place during the winter months.



Image of yurt at Winston Court which permitted raised timber decking, hardstanding for seating and hot tubs.



Wider image showing decking/hardstanding areas along with timber boarded privacy fencing.