

LOCAL REVIEW BODY – 13/009/LRB

REFUSAL OF PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THE VARIATION OF CONDITIONS 4 & 5 (LAYOUT & MATERIAL FINISH) RELATIVE TO PLANNING PERMISSION REF: 08/00165/COU (CHANGE OF USE FROM AGRICULTURAL SITE TO CARAVAN SITE) ELDERBERRY, KEIL CROFTS, BENDERLOCH, OBAN, ARGYLL PA36 1QS PLANNING APPLICATION REF: 12/02293/PP

COMMENTS BY MR & MRS STRATHERN ON ARGYLL & BUTE COUNCILS STATEMENT OF CASE

DESCRIPTION OF SITE: *The North side of Keil has several fields visible from the road, but also has a fair amount of vegetation. Describing it as 'open' is a play on wording.*

CONDITIONS: *The condition regarding the requirement for only timber chalets was added after the PPSL committee that we attended. The intention of the committee, we understood was that caravans could be installed and changed in time to either chalets or be clad in timber. To insist that all vans be timber immediately is onerous in the extreme both in landscape and financial terms and that is why we have re-applied for permission for a mix of caravans and chalets. This reflects the general appearance of the Keil road.*

DEFINE OUTCOME ON THE GROUND 1) CARAVAN LAYOUT OR 2) LANDSCAPING.

Layout has been commented on the fact that the caravans are well spaced apart unlike the claustrophobic clutter that some caravan parks employ. Families especially enjoy the fact that the kids can freely play in open surrounding where parents can watch over them or landscaping was to be phased over a five year period and is currently still ongoing. The trees planted are establishing themselves with more to follow.

So called regimental design was recommended and approved by your own Planning Officer after several layouts had been offered. As the site is set in a square field and uses rectangular objects i.e. caravans, then the structure of the site is lending itself to a tastefully designed layout, again regimented is an unfair and inaccurate play on words.

The landscaping and planting is still ongoing. Native species are by their very nature are slow growing. We are unable to plant fast growing species such as Leylandii – though these appear to be acceptable as they are growing fast on our neighbour's croft.

In any event we have been in correspondence with the Local Planning Department who seemed last year to accept that the landscaping condition is being complied with.

SCA letter dated 12.7.12 to Planning Department:

"Condition 6 – The planting regime was started in the winter planting season 2010/09 and has continued each winter since. Some plants were lost and those will be replaced along with additional planting in this winter's planting season."

Reply from Planning Department received 30.7.12:

"I note your comments in relation to condition 6."

Planting on the boundaries was the first phase of landscaping carried out over three years ago. Trees are establishing well. The Hawthorn Restaurant does not have

screening, is set in a planning clutter of regimental nature and has a cream colour caravan and a chalet previous a dark receive timber, that has now been changed to white and is clearly visible from the Keil road with no screening, where is the planning consistency?

The 2008 application was for 9 caravans/chalets, in addition to the 3 caravans already on site that had been for 30+ years under the crofters 3 caravan rule. We have no intention of adding any more caravans without permission and to suggest that we have any intension of adding 3 more caravans anywhere else on the site under the 3 caravan rule is disingenuous and is not relevant to this application.

If tourists thought that our site had a negative visual impact or that metal caravans that are light coloured to match our Croft house and every other croft house and caravan in the area, then we assume that we would have no bookings and certainly no re-bookings. This is not the case and the responses we have been given by our guests confirm that they are more than happy with the caravans, the site and the area. They are particularly happy with the open site that allows them to play games, give their children freedom and have contact with farm animals in a safe environment.

Not appealing the conditions: We made a pre-application enquiry and met the planner at the time on site. She was very positive about our diversification plans. We originally applied for planning permission in January 2008; the process took 15 months to reach a conclusion including a public hearing that turned out to be incorrect, meetings with Crofters commission an SCRIPID, having an ACE carried out by the planners who had originally failed to do this, writing a bio-diversity plan, preparing a croft plan and financial projections, suds scheme etc., before the matter was eventually set before the PPSL committee who expressed their surprise at the elongated process that we had been put through.

We have missed a whole year's business and were exhausted by the process, especially my wife who is a senior nurse who works at night in the Lorn and the Isles hospital and also cares for our 3 your boys. We had to devote our energies to developing the site and attracting guests. We had expected to phase the development but took the opportunity to install 6 caravans and a timber chalet in one phase. We now attract an average of 6 families to the area every week between Easter and the October holidays. While our caravans have not been clad in timber their impact on the economic development of both our croft and all the surrounding businesses is considerable.

We are one of only two crofters who actually croft – we have cattle – much admired by our guests. We run a Motorcycle MOT station and engine repair workshop. We also run a successful home improvement business with a neighbour. We employ local people in all of these ventures. Our sons are as keen to keep the croft as a working croft as I was when my father ran it. Therefore we have responsibility to them to ensure that it is a viable venture both now and for their futures.

The financial implications of replacing all the caravans with timber chalets would be substantial and outwith our budget. It would also increase the cost of holidays for our guests. As an alternative to timber chalets can we suggest that a timber trellis is located in front of the first row of caravans to soften any possible visual impact? This could be carried out at the end of this season.

We hope that the LRB will find in our favour and allow a successful local business to continue.