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## Penderfyniad ar yr Apêl

Ymweliad â safle a wnaed ar 10/08/20

gan Clive Nield BSc(Hon), CEng,  
MICE, MCIWEM, C.WEM

Arolygydd a benodir gan Weinidogion Cymru

Dyddiad: 18.09.2020

## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10/08/20

by Clive Nield BSc(Hon), CEng, MICE,  
MCIWEM, C.WEM

an Inspector appointed by the Welsh Ministers

Date: 18.09.2020

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**Appeal Ref: APP/E6840/A/20/3253639**

**Site address: Land at Lower Cwm Farm, Brynderi Road, Brynderi, Llantilio  
Crossenny, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, NP7 8TG**

**The Welsh Ministers have transferred the authority to decide this appeal to me as the appointed Inspector.**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
  - The appeal is made by Mr Thomas Blencowe of Oakwood Property Management Ltd against the decision of Monmouthshire County Council.
  - The application Ref DM/2019/01296, dated 11 August 2019, was refused by notice dated 11 February 2020.
  - The development proposed is the siting of 3 No. self-contained Nordic-style glamping pods with landscaping, drainage and car parking.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Procedural Matters

2. The application was made in the name of "Blencowe, Oak Property Management Ltd" but it has subsequently been clarified that this refers to Mr Thomas Blencowe of Oakwood Property Management Ltd, in whose name the appeal has been made.
3. There was also some inconsistency in the information provided on the ownership of the field and whether it was part of the farm holding or not. It has been confirmed that the field is part of Lower Cwm Farm and that it is not owned by the Appellant, though a close relationship exists with the landowner. Consequently, I have adopted the site address above rather than the somewhat abbreviated version on the application form, which is not helpful in identifying the land in question.

### Main Issues

4. The main issues in this case are whether the proposals represent a sustainable form of tourism accommodation and their effects on the landscape and the character and appearance of the area.
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## Reasons

5. The proposed glamping pods would be of A-frame construction with pine cladding and aluminium windows and doors. They would have timber decks and be fixed to the ground by a series of short wooden piles. The parties have described various internal floor areas and volumes of space, but for planning purposes I have simply referred to their footprints. Two of the pods would be 12 metres long by 7 metres wide (including a narrow strip of external decking along each side) and with a ridge height of 5.8 metres. The third would be 12 metres long by 5.7 metres wide with a ridge height of 4.9 metres. Two of the pods would be linked by an additional "family room" to enable them to be used by larger groups of visitors.
6. Lower Cwm Farm is reported to be of some 40 acres (16.2 hectares) and used primarily for the pasture of sheep. The appeal site is a single field which it is reported has been used for the last few years for horticultural purposes for the growing of soft fruit and vegetables for sale to local shops and restaurants. However, that use now seems to have been discontinued, as the 3 sizeable polytunnels on part of the site are no longer covered and very little else was being cultivated on the field at the time of my site visit. Only the small polytunnel next to the shed is still in use on a domestic scale.
7. In addition to the 3 pods, which would each have small "cottage gardens", the site would be planted with trees to provide an indigenous area of woodland, which would be attractive to wildlife and, in time, would partially screen the pods from external views.

## Character and Appearance

8. The Appellant has submitted a landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) carried out by a qualified landscape architect in accordance with industry best practice. He submits that use of the field for horticultural purposes over the last few years has given it a completely different character and appearance from the rest of the farm and from its wider surroundings, which are characterised by rolling open countryside with traditional hedges and areas of trees and a mixed arable and pasture land use.
9. The LVIA has concentrated on the visual impacts of the scheme from a series of viewpoints and demonstrates that the site can be readily seen from a public right of way to the north-west and the public highway to the south-east. Its assessment is that the visual impact of the development would range from "neutral" to "minor adverse" without any mitigation but that, with mitigation (tree planting and hedge reinforcement), it would range from "neutral" to "minor/moderate beneficial", the benefits essentially occurring because of the removal of the large polytunnel frames.
10. I do not agree with that assessment as it is based heavily on the perception that polytunnels are a harmful feature of the rural landscape, far more so than glamping pods. I also do not accept the Appellant's assertion that the present appearance of the site is different from normal agricultural use. Horticulture is a type of agriculture, and agriculture covers a wide range of ways of using the land. Thus, there is wide variation in the character and appearance of land used for agriculture, and polytunnels are now an accepted part of many rural landscapes.
11. The proposed glamping pods would be substantial structures, especially the two that would be linked together, and would be alien features in the rural landscape. I consider that the LVIA has underestimated their harmful visual impact on the rural landscape, even when partially screened by the newly planted trees. My conclusion is

that they would be unacceptably harmful visual intrusions into this area of open countryside.

12. The LVIA does little to assess the landscape impact (as opposed to the visual impact), which would be quite marked, changing the land use from agriculture to tourism. So far as the landscape is concerned, the planting of trees on the site would not disguise the change of use, which would significantly change the character of the site. That change would cause significant harm to the character of the landscape. I conclude that the proposal would conflict with LDP policies S13, LC1 and LC5 by introducing significant harm to the character and appearance of the site and the wider landscape.

### ***Sustainability***

13. Turning to the second main issue, LDP Policy S11 provides “in principle” support for sustainable forms of tourism development, subject to other planning considerations, and the Council’s supplementary planning guidance (SPG) document, Sustainable Tourism Accommodation, provides useful advice on glamping accommodation. It sets out the key principles as:
- generate benefits for the local economy;
  - protect and enhance landscape character and the natural/historic environment;
  - scale and design appropriate to the site context;
  - locally adapted;
  - generate minimal car trips;
  - make use of renewable energy resources;
  - capable of being removed without leaving a permanent trace
14. In this case, I have concluded above that the proposed pods would be substantial structures and that the development would be unacceptably harmful to the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding landscape. In terms of scale and design they would be considerably larger than the “typical examples of glamping accommodation” included in the SPG. Whilst I do not agree with the Council’s submissions that this, in its self, would make them more difficult to remove without leaving a permanent trace, it does make them appear more like holiday chalets than glamping pods, and that size contributes towards the detrimental effects on the landscape.
15. The scheme would not make use of renewable energy resources as the site already benefits from mains supplies of water and electricity, and the site is not in a sustainable location, being remote from any other built development, from local services and from non-car transport facilities (except some public footpaths). However, it is common ground that the scheme would generate income for the local economy.
16. Viewed as a whole, whilst some of the key principles would be met, some would not, including the important requirement to protect and enhance the landscape character. My conclusion is that the proposed development would not be supported by LDP Policy S11 for sustainable tourism development.

### **Overall Conclusion**

17. The Appellant has drawn my attention to a planning permission granted by the Council for 3 glamping pods at Spring Farm near Gwehelog (Ref DM/2018/01901) and argues that those proposals are similar to the current appeal scheme and illustrate inconsistency on the part of the Council. The Council says that the circumstances of that site were quite different to the current appeal site and that the pods proposed were less intrusive. I am not familiar with that site or with the details of the development proposed there. I have considered the current appeal proposals on their own merits in the context of the appeal site and its surroundings.
18. My overall conclusion is that the proposed development would be unacceptably harmful to the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding landscape and that this substantially outweighs the local economic benefits. On balance, it would not amount to sustainable tourism development and would conflict with LDP policies S11, S13, LC1 and LC5.
19. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.
20. In reaching my decision, I have taken into account the requirements of sections 3 and 5 of the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. I consider that this decision is in accordance with the Act's sustainable development principle through its contribution towards the Welsh Ministers' well-being objectives of supporting people and businesses to drive prosperity whilst building healthier communities and better environments.

*Clive Nield*

Inspector