North York Moors National Park Authority

Ryedale District
Parish: Cold Kirby

App No. NYM/2018/0076/R3

Proposal: Application under Regulation 3 (Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992) for alterations and single storey extensions to Visitor Centre including the installation of solar PV together with modifications to existing car parking areas, creation of additional car parking areas, proposed paths and erection of a dark skies viewing/bird hide building

Location: Sutton Bank Visitor Centre

Applicant: North York Moors National Park Authority, fao: Mr Michael Graham, The Old Vicarage, Bondgate, Helmsley, York, YO62 5BP

Agent: Cass Associates, fao: Mr Darren Muir, Studio 204B, The Tea Factory, 82 Wood Street, Liverpool, L1 4DQ

Date for Decision: 11 April 2018

Grid Ref: SE 451621 483061

Director of Planning’s Recommendation

Approval subject to the following conditions:

1. TIME01 Standard Three Year Commencement Date
2. PLAN01 Strict Accordance With the Documentation Submitted or Minor Variations - Document No’s Specified
3. GACS07 External Lighting – Submit Details
4. MATS04 Stonework and Roofing Tiles to Match
5. MATS28 Timber Cladding Samples
6. LNDS02A Landscaping Scheme to be Implemented – Large Scale Development/General Development
7. MISC00 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the Habitat Improvement Recommendations set out in Section 4.6 of the submitted Breeding Bird Survey by Wold Ecology dated 2017.
8. MISC00 No work shall commence to clear the site in preparation for the development hereby permitted until a Management Plan detailing measures to maintain and enhance the habitats about the Visitor Centre, including conditions for their dependent species, and measures to be incorporated into the buildings to encourage bat roosting and bird nesting, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The work shall not be carried out otherwise than in accordance with the details so approved.
Consultations

Highways –

Environmental Health –

Historic England –

Natural England – No objection but make the following comments:
  • The documents submitted with the application do not appear to include a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. We advise that such an assessment is carried out in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment in order to determine the impacts of the proposal on the special qualities and purposes of designation of the North York Moors National Park.
  • The proposed improvements in favour of Turtle Dove are supported. This application may provide other opportunities to incorporate features into the design which are beneficial to wildlife, such as the incorporation of roosting opportunities for bats or the installation of bird nest boxes. The Authority should consider securing measures to enhance the biodiversity of the site from the applicant, if it is minded to grant permission for this application.

Police (Designing Out Crime) – No objection and comment that access and movement around the site is appropriate in terms of making it difficult for offenders to move around without being conspicuous and not challenged; that there are clear views and no dark hiding places around the building so as to provide surveillance of the site; and that appropriate security measures are already in use at the site.

Fire Officer –

Police (Traffic) –

Whitby Scarborough and Ryedale Disability Action Group –

Ministry of Defence –

Site Notice Expiry Date – 26 March 2018

Background

This application relates to the Sutton Bank National Park Visitor Centre and forms the first phase of the latest programme of redevelopment of the site comprising a variety of outdoor activities including cycle tracks and improvements to the rights of way network, increased car parking provision and improved visitor facilities. The application comprises three elements: alterations and extensions to the main Visitor Centre building; the provision of additional car parking; and the creation of a dark sky observatory/bird hide and walled viewing enclosure in the Cliff Wood Plantation to the northwest of the Visitor Centre.

The existing Visitor Centre building is a configuration of linear sections around a courtyard, constructed in stone with areas of full height glazing under a slate roof. The proposed alterations and extensions will provide an enlarged café kitchen and additional stores to the north and west elevations; a cycle workshop, staff kitchen and office, and store room to the south elevation; and an enlarged café dining space on the east side into the existing
Background continued

courtyard along with improved toilet facilities. The extensions will be constructed in a mix of materials (timber cladding and stone under either a slate roof or dark grey coloured roof membrane) to complement the host building. The extension to the cafe dining area into the existing courtyard will be semi-circular in shape with dark grey aluminium framed glazed walling and bi-fold doors.

The dark sky observatory / bird hide would be a timber clad structure under a mono-pitch living roof located in a slightly remoter location just beyond the overflow car park on the edge of Cliff Plantation. Access would be gained from this existing overflow car park via a self-binding gravel footpath. To the front or south of the pavilion would be a dry stone wall (or Gabion baskets structure filled with local stone) and timber bench seating to provide an outdoor viewing enclosure.

There is a lengthy planning history relating to the site but of most recent relevance is the planning permission granted in 2017 for the redevelopment of the existing car park to the front of the main Visitor Centre building for which work has yet to commence. This comprises the reorganisation of the existing car park layout with extensions to both ends, in order to create an additional 84 car parking spaces, including 11 disabled spaces and 13 oversized van spaces, along with the realignment of the cycle path and the repositioning of the bus stop.

In support of the application the Assistant Director of Park Services advises:

The rationale for the development is that investing in the rights of way network and outdoor activities such as cycling, dark sky viewing (which is becoming increasingly popular and supported by the National Park’s two week long Dark Sky Festival) and creating bird watching opportunities will attract more visitors into the vicinity using the Visitor Centre as a base. As a result of these activities which will be supported by an improved Visitor Centre, Cafe, bike shop and toilets, visitor numbers are projected to increase by up to 40% by year 3 after completion. The additional car parking will be needed to accommodate the demand especially at peak periods of school and bank holidays. However it is not currently proposed to construct the west car park extension until such a time as the demand is great enough to warrant this.

The application is accompanied by a Baseline Ecological Assessment along with a Breeding Bird Survey.

As the Authority is the applicant, the proposal has been referred to the Planning Committee under the current scheme of delegation which requires this and specifically advertised under Regulation 3 of the Planning Regulations.

Main Issues

Policy

Of direct relevance to this application are Core Policy A (Delivering National Park Purposes), Core Policy C (Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Geodiversity), Core Policy H (Rural Economy), Development Policy 1 (Environmental protection), Development Policy 3 (Design), Development Policy 14 (Tourism and Recreation) and Development Policy 23 (New Development and Transport).

Core Policy A seeks to ensure that new development conserves and enhances the Park’s special qualities with priority being given to providing a scale of development and level of activity that will not have an unacceptable impact on the wider landscape or the quiet
Main Issues continued

enjoyment, peace and tranquillity of the Park, nor detract from the quality of life of local residents or the experience of visitor.

Core Policy C seeks to conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of the Park’s natural environment; maintain and improve conditions for biodiversity, and protect important geodiversity assets.

Core Policy H seeks to strengthen and support the rural economy and encourages sustainable tourism based on recreation activities and tourism development related to the understanding and enjoyment of the Park.

Development Policy 1 seeks to ensure that the special qualities of the National Park are conserved and enhanced, and consequently seeks to only permit development where, amongst other criteria, it will not generate unacceptable levels of noise, vibration, activity or light pollution.

Development Policy 3 seeks to maintain and enhance the distinctive character of the National Park by ensuring that a high standard of design detailing is used whether traditional or contemporary which reflects or complements that of the local vernacular.

Development Policy 14 supports new tourism development or the expansion of existing tourism businesses which will provide opportunities for visitors to increase their understanding, awareness and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park. It also requires that the development can be satisfactorily accessed from the road network or by other sustainable modes of transport; that it will not generate an increased level of activity which would detract from the experience of visitors or the quality of life of local residents; and that any new buildings do not have an adverse impact on the character of the local area.

Development Policy 23 seeks to effectively minimise the overall need for journeys and reduce the environmental impacts of traffic on the National Park by permitting development where its location is capable of being accessed by public transport, walking or cycling; there are existing public rights of way; and the adjacent road network has the capacity to serve without detriment to highway safety.

Principle

The Sutton Bank National Park Visitor Centre is a popular base for visitors to the National Park and the proposed development would improve and expand on the educational and leisure facilities available to visitors sometimes described as a ‘Honeypot’ in rural planning terms. This expansion of an existing tourist facility helping visitors to increase their understanding, awareness and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park and as such is supported in principle by Core Policy H and Development Policy 14.

Whilst the proposed development will increase activity about the site with the improved facilities, this is an existing hub of activity and it is considered that the scale of development and level of activity generated will not have an unacceptable impact on the wider landscape or the quiet enjoyment, peace and tranquillity of the Park, nor detract from the quality of life of local residents or the experience of visitor in accordance with Core Policy A and Development Policy 14.
Design

The proposed extensions to the Visitor Centre have been designed so as to complement the form and character of the existing building. They are relatively modest in size and scale so as not to dominate the host building whilst providing much needed additional space to enhance the facilities on offer at the Visitor Centre. The proposed mix of materials (timber cladding and stone under either a slate roof or dark grey coloured roof membrane) will complement that of the host building and the extension to the cafe dining area into the existing courtyard with the curved dark grey aluminium framed glazing and bi-fold doors will make an attractive and contemporary feature in the courtyard.

The dark sky observatory / bird hide will be a simple timber clad building under a mono-pitch living roof. It has been designed to serve a dual purpose – a building where talks can be held and equipment stored but also with an outlook to the north and west so it can also be used as a bird hide and used in connection with star gazing. This is considered to be appropriate for a woodland structure that needs to be visually in keeping with its immediate surroundings.

As such it is considered that the proposed alterations and extensions along with the new dark sky observatory / bird hide include a high standard of design detailing that complement the existing building in accordance with development Policy 3.

Landscape Impact

The proposed extension to the existing car park and the additional car park proposed to the northwest of the Visitor Centre building would be well-related to the existing parking areas. The loss of the trees along the edge of the Cliff Wood to provide the new car park is regrettable however it is understood that the loss of trees will be kept to a minimum and that some tree cover will be retained so as to ensure that the car park does not have an adverse impact on the wider landscape. This “fringe” of young pine and birch forms a 20m wide strip alongside the road verge before the heathland vegetation of cliff wood plantation proper starts. As such it is considered that the proposed expansion of the car park just beyond the road verge will not be unduly prominent in the wider landscape, will not extend into the quieter heathland habitat and will be viewed in the context of existing development at the Sutton Bank National Park Visitor Centre.

The proposed alterations and extension to the main Visitor Centre building will be in keeping with its form and character, as described above and as such it is not considered that it will be any more prominent in the landscape than it currently is. With regard to the dark sky observatory / bird hide this will be well screened within Cliff Wood. There are no tall or unduly large buildings being proposed and as such it is not considered necessary to request a formal ‘Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment’ as recommended by Natural England.

As such the proposal is considered to comply with Core Policy A of the Core Strategy and Development Policies Document.

Transport

Currently at peak periods, the existing car park at the Sutton Bank National Park Visitor Centre is full which leads to on-street and verge side parking causing a restriction to the through flow of traffic on the local roads and some nuisance to local residents. The proposed increase in outdoor activities available to visitors and the improved facilities is likely to increase demand for car parking and as such the proposed extension to the existing car park and the new car park as supported under Development Policy 23. It is understood that these
Main Issues continued

will only be provided however when demand is great enough to warrant the work to be undertaken.

Ecology

The application is accompanied by a Baseline Ecological Assessment along with a Breeding Bird Survey, which the Authority’s Ecological Specialists consider represent a fair assessment of the current flora and fauna on site. They comment that the habitats present around the Visitor Centre represent remarkably good, if small, examples of what visitors to this area a hundred years ago would have found widespread on top of Sutton Bank. Agricultural improvement and afforestation have changed the landscape significantly, so these fragments have educational as well as ecological value.

The proposals will affect habitats on the site; the regenerating heathland and scrub mosaic at Cliff Wood and the triangle of grassland west of the Visitor Centre buildings.

The fringe of heathland and scrub on the edge of Cliff Wood to be lost to the proposed new car park is of relatively low botanical value and, being so close to the road, is less likely to be favoured by the various animals and birds mentioned in the reports that use other parts of the site. It is considered that the proposed new car park has been designed so as to minimise the impact on the heathland vegetation and further work is to be carried out to maintain and enhance the heathland and its flora and fauna. It is proposed that the car park would be surfaced with grid and gravel seeded with a Turtle Dove friendly seed mix and an area rich in perennial flowers will be created where extra car parking is added to help improve the area for Turtle Doves (a red listed species seasonally present in the area).

With regard to the extension to the west car park this would utilise the least valuable part of the species rich grassland however it will still represent permanent loss of habitats and could make what remains more vulnerable to edge effects and disturbance.

The provision of the dark sky observatory / bird hide will require some existing dense birch and conifer scrub to be cleared and consequently some loss of habitat however the proposals include an area sowed with Turtle Dove friendly seed mix in the viewing zone and the creation of small wet areas to add to the attractiveness of the site which is otherwise generally a dry area.

These latest proposals are in addition to the previously approved applications for alterations to the car parking layout, also intended to encourage and make provision for more visitors to the Visitor Centre, which involved some loss and disturbance to the habitats present around the site. However it is considered that this application does fully recognise the value of the habitats at the Sutton Bank National Park Visitor Centre and the species they support. The various habitat management and creation proposals are all welcomed, as is the commitment to retain Cliff Wood as a quiet area as a matter of principle. In addition the Authority’s Ecological Specialists recommend that there are also measures incorporated into the buildings to encourage bat roosting and bird nesting. In view of these comments it is recommended that condition be imposed requiring the submission of a management plan detailing how the habitats about the Visitor Centre will be maintained and enhanced in the long term.

As such it is considered that the proposals will, overall conserve the quality and diversity of the Park’s natural environment and maintain conditions for biodiversity in accordance with Core Policy C.
Conclusion

It is considered that this proposal to expand an existing tourist facility will help visitors to increase their understanding, awareness and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park without having an adverse impact on the wider landscape or the quiet enjoyment, peace and tranquillity of the Park in accordance with Core Policies A, C and H and Development Policies 1, 3, 14 and 23 of the Core Strategy and Development Policies Document.

Contribution to Management Plan Objectives

Approval is considered likely to help meet Policy B4 which seeks to improve the quality and variety of tourism and recreation facilities.

Explanation of how the Authority has Worked Positively with the Applicant/Agent

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively in determining this application by assessing the scheme against the Development Plan and other material considerations and subsequently granting planning permission in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework.