

## North York Moors National Park Authority

Borough: Scarborough Borough Council (North)  
Parish: Aislaby

Application No. NYM/2017/0347/FL

Proposal: erection of a wildlife tower

Location: Coachmans Cottage, Aislaby

Decision Date: 02 August 2017

### Consultations

Parish - No objection.

Site Notice Expiry Date - 13 July 2017.

### Director of Planning's Recommendation

Refusal for the following reason:

1. The Local Planning Authority does not consider there is a genuine overriding need for an isolated structure to support wildlife in this location or for any other reason in the public interest. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development however the proposed masonry tower, whether for providing shelter for wildlife or any other use is not considered to be a necessity for this secluded location. The proposed tower does not respect local building tradition or design and in combination with its scale and isolated position, if permitted would have an unacceptably harmful impact on the character and setting of this part of the National Park landscape which is not characterised by isolated field barns/structures. As such, the Authority considers there is insufficient justification to outweigh the harm from isolated structures such as this and to prevent the incremental spread of inappropriate development in the National Park. The development is not considered to be a sustainable development in line with the National Planning Policy Framework and is not deemed to be in accordance with Core Policy A of the NYM Local Development Framework.

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**Background**

The application site comprises part of an agricultural field which is laid to grass although, has recently been planted with young trees. The site is associated with Coachman's Cottage, an extended detached property set in a large plot lying immediately south of the application site. In the broader context, Coachman's Cottage lies approximately half a kilometre south of the settlement of Ailsaby in a rural context comprising of mainly arable and pasture agricultural land which is punctuated by defined farmsteads.

This application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a stone built wildlife tower in the field to the north of Coachman's Cottage and garden. The tower is proposed to be sited approximately 40 metres north of the dwellinghouse and 65 metres from the field access from the road. The design has been developed by The Barn Owl Trust and comprises a two storey, 2 metre by 2 metre square tower measuring 3.8 metres to eaves and an overall ridge height of 5 metres. It is proposed to be constructed of natural stone with concrete block inner skin. The roof is a simple ridge and gable to be covered with natural slate with a generous eaves overhang. The east facing elevation is characterised by 1no. ground and 1no. first floor vertical boarded timber door with a barn owl access and perch in the roof apex. The remaining elevations are relatively simple with various small access points designed with a range of avian, mammalian and invertebrate species in mind.

Although the application has not been supported with any justification of need, the applicant has explained in the development description that it is a small building that provides nesting and hibernation opportunities for a huge range of wildlife. It has a proven design including lots of spaces thoughtfully designed to offer habitat for as many different wildlife creatures as possible. The plans have been provided by the Barn Owl Trust and the design has proven credentials with barn owls and kestrel nesting simultaneously with little owls and bats visiting. In order to be long lasting, the building will have a concrete foundation and natural stone walls.

**Policy Context**

The relevant policy contained within the NYM Core Strategy and Development Policies Document to consider with this application is Core Policy A (Delivering National Park Purposes and Sustainable Development) together with paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework which states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.

Core Policy A of the Local Development Framework seeks to further the National Park purposes and duty by encouraging a more sustainable future for the park and its communities whilst conserving and enhancing the Park's special qualities. Priority will be given to development that will not have an unacceptable impact on the wider landscape, quiet enjoyment of the Park or quality of life of residents or visitors; development in locations and of a scale which supports the character and function of settlements; maintaining and enhancing the natural environment; conserving and enhancing the landscape, settlement,

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building features and historic assets of landscape character areas; applying sustainable design and energy use; provision of a choice of housing; strengthening and diversifying the rural economy and enabling access to services, facilities, jobs whilst minimising environmental impacts of transport.

**Main Issues**

The main issues relevant to this application are considered to be whether the proposed building is appropriate in terms of function, position and design in this location.

**Site Location**

The application site is deep within open countryside which is primarily in agricultural use varying between arable production and pasture land. The field in question is served by a galvanised metal field gate from the highway and whilst the field is not split by a physical boundary, the submitted plans indicate that only the lower part of the field is within the applicant's ownership with the majority of the land extending to the north, being in separate ownership and which would appear to have recently been planted with trees.

The application site shares a boundary with the applicant's domestic curtilage and this is defined by a native hedge which is supplemented by mature trees. The character of the area is undoubtedly rural, defined mainly by open fields divided by hedgerows with pockets of riparian woodland to the south, close to the River Esk. Farmsteads tend to be neatly defined without any isolated field barns or shelters.

The Authority seeks to resist proposals for new buildings in isolated locations in the open countryside unless there are special circumstances pertaining to its use. Whilst the conservation of wildlife is a consideration and is specifically mentioned in local and national planning policy, the conservation of landscape quality in the National Park is afforded great weight and the conservation of local distinctiveness is paramount. On the basis this National Park is not characterised by isolated field barns or other shelter structures, Officers consider that the proposal represents an atypical feature which would be at odds with the general character of the area.

**Form and Function**

The proposed building takes the form of a two storey tower with a relatively small footprint. Despite the fact it is proposed to be constructed of stone and slate (which are commonplace in the National Park's built heritage), its design and form would be highly unusual and fail to respect the typical built form of the National Park.

The scheme has been discussed with the Authority's Senior Ecologist who has no objections from an ecological point of view, but she does recognise that it would be a substantial feature in the landscape. Whilst supporting wildlife (Barn Owls in particular) is a priority, there are no known formal conservation projects in operation in the vicinity and it has been suggested that smaller scale installations (i.e. poles/raptor roosts, pole mounted nest boxes or nest boxes installed on existing buildings) are also effective in supporting barn owls and

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other birds of prey and will have significantly less landscape impact, some of which may not require planning permission.

The application has not been supported with any survey work or evidence to justify an isolated and permanent feature in open countryside. Officers are not aware of any specific projects in the locality aimed at supporting or promoting the wildlife species mentioned in the application nor is it convinced that the application has demonstrable need which would weigh in the balance to justify setting the normal Policy requirements aside.

The application is therefore considered to be speculative development which, in landscape terms, would fail to respect the special qualities of the National Park and would not represent a sustainable form of development in this open countryside location.

**Summary**

With little evidence to justify the intended purpose of a multi-species wildlife tower or enough evidence to demonstrate that this is the most effective and sustainable solution to the intended goal of supporting wildlife populations in this location, currently, there does not appear to be a justifiable need or wider public benefit for an isolated building, which otherwise is considered to harm the special natural landscape, contrary to the aims of Core Policy A of the NYM Core Strategy and Development Policy Document together with Paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Although the Parish Council has registered no objection to the proposal, no other representations have been made. Consequently, in view of the above planning considerations and absence of explicit support, refusal is recommended under the Authority's scheme of delegation.

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

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by identifying matters of concern with the proposal and determining the application within a timely manner, clearly setting out the reason for refusal, allowing the Applicant the opportunity to consider the harm caused and whether or not it can be remedied by a revision to the proposal. The Local Planning Authority is willing to provide pre-application advice in respect of any future application.

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