
Case Officer **Gordon Smith**

18/02428/FUL

Date received	Date valid	Overall Expiry	Ward	Parish
19 Dec 2018	11 Feb 2019	08 Aug 2019	Fineshade	Duddington With Fineshade

Applicant **Countrywide Park Homes Ltd**Agent **RPS Group****Location** Land South of Top Lodge, Top Lodge Road, Fineshade
Proposal **Change of use to timber lodge holiday park and the development of ancillary infrastructure and landscaping**

The application is brought before the Planning Management Committee because it is a “major” residential development as defined in legislation and falls outside of the Scheme of Delegation in Part 3.2 of the Council’s Constitution (2019).

1 Summary of Recommendation

- 1.1 To REFUSE permission for the following reasons expanded in section 10 below. The reasons are:
1. Unacceptable countryside development
 2. Adverse visual impact on landscape, and disturbance to local tranquil character
 3. An unacceptable impact on protected species found on the site
 4. Adverse impact on the setting of the Listed Building ‘Top Lodge’ and
 5. A poorly located residential development, resulting in highways safety issues at the A43 junction as well as along the access road.

2 The Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed to develop up to 32 timber-clad lodges at the site, each lodge under the definition of a ‘caravan’ (in Section 29 (1) of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960). Each lodge or caravan would be no larger than 13.5m x 4.3m (45ft x 14ft), clad in natural timber, accompanied by decking, and the provision of one parking space. Typically, the units will be raised 300mm-750mm above ground levels. Detailed materials have not been advanced; this is because the camping units will be installed and may vary as units are periodically replaced. An illustrative plan shows likely layout and appearance. The maximum capacity of each unit is 5 persons.
- 2.2 Vehicular access would be taken from a single point off Top Lodge Road which would continue to be shared with The Forestry Commission Offices and the present Stamford Caravan and Motorhome Club Site. A revised scheme has secured improved access by large vehicles such as low-loaders delivering Caravans. A further pedestrian access is shown further eastwards. No other structures, including toilet blocks, are proposed as they would not be required. Some staffing is likely (2-3 persons plus cleaning staff as required) and the potential for a future management unit has been raised by the applicant.
- 2.3 Single parking spaces (x32) are shown next to each Lodge, plus an additional x 5 spaces for possible staff and visitors (total 37 spaces).
- 2.4 The internal road width in the new site will be 4.1m, the minimum width to enable oncoming

cars to pass one another, and the access from the public road is confirmed to be a minimum width of 5.5m for a minimum of 10 metres within the site.

- 2.5 Internally, a bituminous surface to roads will be provided throughout the site and the site will have new native hedgerows and trees along the northern and eastern boundaries where limited screening currently exists. Overall it will result in 0.3718 ha of hardstanding post development which is 31% of the site area.
(Proposed lodge units = 0.1873 ha; highway / access road = 0.1165 ha; parking = 0.0654 ha; and footpath / cycle access to north of the site = 0.0026).
- 2.6 The proposal is accompanied by:
- an illustrative Site Layout Plan and illustration of typical lodges/caravans,
 - a Heritage Statement,
 - a Transport Statement,
 - a Landscape and Visual impact assessment,
 - a Flood Risk assessment,
 - an Ecology assessment,
 - a Noise Impact assessment , and
 - an Arboricultural impact assessment.
- 2.7 The application site plan has been revised (on 11 June) and additional information was submitted at the same time. This was the subject of re-consultation.

For information

- 2.8 The following is an Officer Note on the nature of the application as caravan sites often raise complex matters relating to planning and other regulatory controls.
- 2.9 The applicant is seeking permission for the use of the land as a caravan park with up to 32 units. Permission is also sought for the principle of building access roads, and landscape work (although it is not yet detailed). By seeking permission for a caravan, a mobile living unit may be placed on the site with maximum dimensions potentially defined by planning condition. Controls on appearance can also be imposed providing there are good planning reasons. Unless any planning permission expressly forbids it, the site could be used in a variety of ways (holiday/seasonal holiday/residential/touring) and providing the “caravans” satisfy planning conditions they may appear in a variety of forms (as touring/static/glamping pods/lodges/park homes).
- 2.10 The density and spacing of homes on the site is controlled by the caravan licence conditions (a system operated by this Council), as are other matters such as foul drainage, electricity and water supply, roads, lighting, waste disposal, fire safety, and flooding. There is a minimum requirement of 6 metres separation distance between caravans. In addition, the site operator must also post site rules to which they and any users of the site must also adhere to. The site rules and licence conditions will be placed on the public register.

3 The Site and Surroundings

Site description

- 3.1 The site is 1.2ha. It slopes down from a high point of 77m AOD in the eastern corner to a low point of approximately 71m AOD on the western boundary. The land within the site comprises pasture and is currently grazed by sheep. There is no other vegetation within the site area. It occupies a prominent position to the east of the common road entrance with Forestry England’s Fineshade Wood.
- 3.2 The site is surrounded by timber post and rail fencing and forms part of a larger area of

farmland which extends to the south-east. The access lane to Top Lodge wraps around the northern boundary. The complex of stone buildings which comprise the Forestry Commission offices, visitor centre and cycle hire lie north of this, with the visitor centre car park and Stamford Caravan and Motorhome Club site immediately north. The present Caravan Club Site is a touring site with 83 pitches.

- 3.3 A dismantled railway line lies to the southwest. The mature trees which have colonised this former transport corridor separate the agricultural land within the site from the wider agricultural landscape to the west, which extends across the A43, approximately 650m to the west. A crescent of 7 residential properties (Nos. 10-16 Top Lodge) lies beside an area of open space, approximately 125m to the east. Mature woodland and conifer plantation within the ownership of the Forestry Commission wraps around the site area to the north, east and south, enclosing and containing the site area.
- 3.4 A public right of way known as the Jurassic Way lies adjacent to the north-east boundary of the site. The path follows the access track in front of the Forestry Commission visitor centre and cycle centre, heading west over the disused railway and then south over arable fields and into Mill Wood. East of the site the footpath follows a track into Mill Wood and continues south. The local area includes several bridleways, cycle ways and woodland trails signposted from the visitor centre and managed for visitor information.
- 3.5 The access from the A43 is single width but with several passing points along its half mile length that leads up to the Forestry England visitor centre. The road widens after crossing a road bridge over the disused rail line. The visitor centre is found in an ancillary group of stone buildings centred on a courtyard, which is connected to Forestry England's office. All the buildings are Grade II listed. The visitor centre comprises a cafe and bike hire facility with outdoor children's play area and car park at the rear.

Designation

- 3.6 The site and its immediate surroundings do not lie within a landscape designated area. Woodland in the surrounding landscape to the north, east and south lies within 'public access land'. The existing caravan park at Top Lodge, the nearby Forestry Commission offices and cycle centre also lie within public access land designated under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act. Parts of Fineshade Wood are 'Ancient Woodland'.

Broader location

- 3.7 The site is located towards the northern perimeter of East Northamptonshire, lying close to the boundaries of Rutland and Peterborough. It lies in a rural location, approximately 1.5 miles north of the village of Kings Cliffe, and just under six miles south of Stamford, the nearest major settlement. It has good connections with the local and national road network with direct access onto the A43. To the west of Fineshade on the opposite side of the A43, lies Wakerley Great Wood, an area of woodland measuring approximately 300Ha.

4 Policy Considerations

4.1 National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2019). This supports, in principle, the development of rural tourism and leisure facilities. It specifically includes tourist accommodation, and where tourist facilities may be appropriately situated.

4.2 Key elements of the NPPF are:

Paragraph 80. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity.

Paragraph 83. Support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.

Paragraph 170. Requires protection and enhancement of valued landscapes, by preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution.

Paragraph 180. Planning policies and decisions should also ensure new development is appropriate for its location considering the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts.

The policy requires:

- protection of tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason, and
- limitation of the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation

North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) (2016)

4.3 Policy 1 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development.

Policy 2 - Historic Environment. Where they impact upon a heritage asset and/or its setting, proposals should complement their historic environment through form, scale, design and materials.

Policy 3 - Landscape Character. Proposals should be located and designed in a way that is sensitive to its landscape setting, retaining and where possible enhancing the distinctive qualities of the landscape character area. Should safeguard and enhance important views and vistas, contribute to maintaining the individual and distinct character, and provide appropriate landscape mitigation.

Policy 4 - Biodiversity and Geodiversity. A net gain in biodiversity will be sought.

Policy 5 - Water Environment, Resources and Flood Risk Management.

Policy 8 - North Northamptonshire Place Shaping Principles.

Policy 11 – Development in rural areas. Limited to that to support a rural economy. Only small-scale infill allowed, either in or on the edge of settlements. Rural diversification supported.

Policy 19 -The Delivery of Green Infrastructure

Policy 21 - Rockingham Forest. Sets out the Forest will be regenerated to increase carbon storage, strengthen biodiversity, landscape character and green infrastructure, support a prosperous rural economy and provide appropriate leisure and recreational opportunities. The Council will support protection or enhancement of tourism and recreation attractions and the supporting of new green infrastructure and heritage attractions of a type and scale that can be accommodated by existing or new infrastructure, striking an appropriate balance between visitor numbers and biodiversity, landscape, local amenity and heritage interests.

Policy 22 - Delivering Economic Prosperity. Proposals will be supported where they expand the tourism industry in sustainable ways.

Policy 25 - Rural Economic Development and Diversification. Sustainable opportunities to develop and diversify the rural economy supported where they are of an appropriate scale for their location and respect the environmental quality/ character of the rural area.

Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (RNOTP) (2011)

4.4 Policy 4. Green Infrastructure. Promote and diversify green infrastructure.

Policy 5. Transport Network. New development of over 0.5 hectares of commercial uses will be required to include attractive and direct walking and cycling routes, connecting into the existing planned network.

Policy 6. Residential Parking Standards.

Policy 9. Buildings of Local Architectural or Historic Interest. Preserve settings of heritage buildings.

Policy 10. Protection of Local Sites of Conservation Interest and Designation of Local

Nature Reserves.

Policy 11. Enhancing Biodiversity. Migration and dispersal of wildlife should be provided for

Neighbourhood Plan. None. *Duddington with Fineshade Parish Council* are at an advanced stage with the first draft of their plan, but it has not been published for consultation.

4.5

Other Documents

4.6 Northamptonshire County Council - Local Highway Authority Standing Advice (2016)

East Northamptonshire Council - Trees and Landscape SPD (2013)

Planning Out Crime in Northamptonshire, 2004

Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document 2015

5 Relevant Planning History

5.1 Open fields at or around the application site.

12/00990/FUL - *Erection of building for agricultural storage*

D Barney. Withdrawn.

14/00195/FUL - *Change of use to lodge camping facility including 30 'glamping' pods, car park, wardens residence, reception, welfare building and associated works.* (overlapping but on larger site than present submission)

Applicant: Donna Barney, Lifestyle Living Group.

Refused 25.09.2014, reasons:

"1. Due to the limited and basic nature of the details submitted, the applicant has failed to adequately demonstrate that the proposal would not have a detrimental impact upon wildlife and biodiversity within the application site or in the surrounding area. As such, a full and proper assessment of the likely impact cannot be undertaken. The applicant has failed to demonstrate that the development would accord with the NPPF (Paragraphs 17, 109 and 118) and the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (Policy 13 criterion O).

2. By virtue of its use, location, scale and layout, the proposal would adversely affect the residential amenity of nearby residents and the application does not demonstrate that the impacts of the proposed development could be satisfactorily mitigated to overcome these concerns. The proposal would therefore fail to accord with NPPF (paragraph 17) and the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (Policy 13, criterion L).

3. Due to the limited and basic nature of the details submitted, the applicant has failed to demonstrate that the proposal would not have a significant detrimental impact upon highway safety, or that the existing access and associated track to the junction with the A43 could accommodate the proposed development. As such, the applicant has failed to demonstrate that the proposed development would be in accordance with the NPPF (Paragraph 32) and the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (Policy 13, Criteria D and N)."

15/00584/FUL - *Change of use to tented camping including associated car parking and a welfare building.* Withdrawn. (slightly smaller site 0.97ha than present application of 1.2ha).

Applicant: as above.

Fineshade Wood

5.2 14/01704/FUL - *Erection of seventy cabins and associated buildings and infrastructure and construction of new access road and provision of mitigation and enhancement area* (revision to withdrawn application 14/01156/FUL). **Refused 12.3.15**

Applicant: Forest Holidays Ltd. Reasons:

"1. The applicant has failed to demonstrate that the development would not have an

adverse impact on biodiversity at the site. In addition, the applicant has also failed to demonstrate that the proposed mitigation area would adequately compensate for any harm caused to biodiversity as a result of the proposed development. As such, the proposal is contrary to policies 5 and 13(o) of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (2008), policy 11 of the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (2011) and paragraphs 109 and 118 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. The proposal, as a result of the welcome centre, dispersed lodges, driveways and ancillary features within the wood, together with the activity arising from lodge residents, car parking and vehicle movements, would be detrimental to the character, appearance and tranquillity of the wood contrary to policy 13(o) of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (2008), paragraphs 17 and 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework and policy 3 of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Pre Submission Plan (January 2015).”

Top Lodge – recent cases only

- 5.3 06/00806/CWN *Change of use to provide office accommodation.* Approved 31.05.2006
- 09/01816/FUL *Installation of Photo Voltaic Panels to roof elevations on visitor centre and office complex.* Approved 19.01.2010
- 5.4 Existing caravan park opposite the site.
05/01734/FUL *Provision of new reception building and thirteen all weather caravan pitches.* Approved 02.11.05

6 Consultations and Representations

- 6.1 All comments are summarised or paraphrased. Original comments may be viewed on the web site.
- 6.2 All adjacent occupiers were consulted by letter (in February 2019), a site notice was placed in 4 separate locations at the site and on local footpaths, and a notice placed in the Nene Valley News (on 22 February 2019). This gave rise to 138 letters from 104 objectors (duplicates and multiple letters accounted for).
- 6.3 Given revised and additional information, those who wrote in were reconsulted on 12 June 2019. 8 additional residents’ comments were received.

Neighbours

- 6.4 1 note of support: I regularly visit the area and will add to the much-needed stock of accommodation.

6.5 Objections.

Broad indication of objection	Times raised	issue	% total
Contrary to planning policies	26		7%
Adverse impact on neighbours' amenity	37		9%
Design poor / adverse visual impact	51		12%
Open space issues	55		13%
Highways concerns	61		15%
Loss of privacy	15		4%
Adverse impact on local facilities	44		11%
Impact on heritage assets	41		10%
Ecology or wildlife concerns	69		17%
Light pollution	5		1%
Contamination issues	5		1%
<i>total</i>	<i>409</i>		<i>100</i>

Precis of all key comments from 104 objectors follows.

6.6 **Nature of proposed business**

- Proposal is too vague, no coherent business plan.
- The applicant company sell static caravans. This is not a holiday site.
- There is no evidence in the application that the site is really planned as holiday park: no holiday infrastructure specified.
- There is no need for new holiday accommodation locally.
- There is already a camp site to meet holiday needs.
- This is a barely disguised application for residential development.
- No management indicated (office, refuse, staff accommodation).
- It will become a permanent residential site and will extend into the neighbouring field in time.
- No local benefit. Ample evidence that any tourism spend currently goes outside the ENC area.
- Oversaturation of holiday parks given Jacks Green at Kings Cliffe and Yarwell.
- Staffing is unclear.

6.7

Impact on character

- Too many units for small site; will look cramped.
- Will harm valued tranquillity.
- Part of the joy of visiting is seeing the open fields to the visitor centre with a transition into the calm forest.
- Installation of electricity pylons will be needed causing visual changes.
- There are presently 17 houses and 31 residents. To permit 32 new dwellings with probably 64 residents would completely change the demographics of this area.
- Presence of static lodges can act as a constraint on encouraging visitors to attend Fineshade Wood.

6.8

Visual harm and impact on countryside appearance

- People visit here to enjoy the scenery and surroundings not to look at statics.

- Big visual impact. Will totally ruin the beauty of this special place. The impact on the landscape and views will be horrendous.
- Loss of vista.
- Views from café harmed.
- Views from Top Lodge harmed.
- Location proposed has no screening, nor possible to screen given topography
- Lighting will spoil night tranquillity and character.
- So many static caravans in a single small location would be an eye sore.
- Visual harm from tarmac parking space to support each caravan.
- Residential park homes are unsuited to this sensitive hillside rural location, with its listed buildings and unspoilt views towards Laxton Hall.

6.9 **Impact on well being**

- On a quiet day I can presently just look and listen.
- Fineshade is a place of 'wellbeing'
- Keep the area special for people to visit and enjoy
- Will result in harm to use of area for outdoor recreation

6.10 **Highways**

- No traffic survey carried out.
- Road access not fit for more use.
- Will become more dangerous given pedestrian and car conflict.
- Horsebox access will be more difficult.
- Parking on access road is common (avoids paying parking fees) so passing places do not work. Lane can readily get blocked.
- A43 junction is in the middle of an open stretch of road where impatient drivers overtake slower moving lorries, near misses result for vehicles waiting in the middle of the road to turn.
- Only 1no. parking space per unit. There will be more cars.
- No parking indicated on site.
- Any vehicle count will be an underestimate. The vehicle counter installed by the Forestry Commission recorded 1,535 vehicle movements in a day. The positioning of this counter excludes all additional movements from Top Lodge residents and visitors who park on the verge or in passing places and gateways.
- Transport Statement not credible. Occupiers will drive not walk to amenities in Kings Cliffe.

6.11 **Listed Building impact**

- Distinctive historical environment of Top Lodge would be ruined
- Will disrupt established field pattern. Breaking relationship with Top Lodge's closest grazing meadow
- The current setting of Top Lodge within the wider valley landscape of modest sized hedgerow enclosed fields maintains a clear readable connection with its former agricultural role and setting.
- The design of the park would contrast too strongly with the existing, sensitively integrated Forestry Commission centre at Top Lodge and the listed Georgian buildings therein. Especially as it would be extremely visible to every single visitor

6.12 Ecology

- Greater pressure on wildlife through human and dog disturbance.
- Loss of wildlife area.
- Site is bordered with Reptiles also the reintroduced Chequered Skipper butterfly, Red Kites, Adders & slow worms.
- No biodiversity gain.
- Adverse impact on Glow Worms.
- Field functions as part of a buffer zone around the wood.
- Would make a mockery of the council's commitment to flagship Natural England 'Back From The Brink' project.
- Will affect the dark environment important to bats.
- Present field isn't managed, it has a regime of spraying and could be managed more sensitively to encourage greater biodiversity.

6.13 Infrastructure

- Low water pressure.
- Electricity substation will have adverse impact on health (considerable detail provided).
- Substation will be needed but not shown.
- No sewerage provision.
- Power lines will add to impact.

6.14 Amenity - noise, odour, disturbance

- Will encourage outdoor living with associated adverse impact
- BBQ smell and activity.
- New residents and activity will cause disturbance.
- Noise nuisance from heating pumps, air cond. units, cars.
- The planning application states no staff yet noise meant to be managed by site manager.

6.15 Lighting impact

- From spotlights, safety lighting

6.16 Other issues

- It will have a high carbon footprint.
- Existing caravan site is screened yet is empty in winter.
- Remote from services for residents.
- Rail bridge already too weak to cope with additional traffic.
- Would be detrimental to Fineshade's appeal as a tourist destination, rather than enhancing it.
- Current facilities perfectly balance convenience and comfort (with the parking and excellent café) with fun (in the form of the playground and children's' trails) with unadulterated nature.
- Present level of activity still allows for safe horse-riding; this will be damaged by increased activity.
- The visitor centre has been assessed as a possible Dark Skies Discovery Site.
- Lighting plan absent.
- Waste plan absent.

- Oversaturation of holiday parks given Jacks Green at Kings Cliffe and Yarwell.

6.17 Local resident representing 'Friends of Fineshade'. Comments received 12.03.19. Objects.

-“The Application Documents are incomplete and contradictory. They fail to present a coherent plan. ..

-The proposal should be rejected in principle, since it provides no evidence that it will be operated as a holiday park for tourists (compare with the existing caravan site that has a warden, is a minimalist facility, and designed to suit the tranquillity of the area)

-The proposal fails to make the case that this would be sustainable development.

-The development does not comply with JCS Policy 3: Landscape Character.

-The development does not comply with JCS Policy 2: Heritage Assets.”

Reconsulted 11.06.19. Objects

Additional Traffic Assessment. It fails to prove there is suitable access to the site. In response to the very high traffic flows recorded during their survey, the applicants have completely changed their argument. Previously they claimed this was a lightly tracked rural lane and that a few extra vehicles could easily be absorbed. Now, having seen that existing traffic flows can be as high as 145 vehicles an hour, they argue that their additional traffic will only produce a relative minor “scarcely noticeable” increase, pointing out that NPPF will only allow traffic objections if there is a “severe” increase. The question, of course, is whether their extra traffic will tip congestion over the cliff-edge of acceptability.

In claiming that the proposed total traffic flow is manageable, the applicants quote obviously outdated research from 1967 based on data collected on single-track lanes in the Scottish Highlands, and on a modelling exercise carried out in 1977. There appears to be no current guidance from the Department of Transport about the capacity of a single-track lanes in general. (Officer note: extensive comment is provided by the objector on the issue).

Track is already at capacity at peak times and we can provide photographic evidence to support this. there comes a point when the camel’s back is broken by the last straw.

6.18 Tom Pursglove MP. Comments received 11 March 2019. Objects.

- Application submission is contradictory, and lacks detail.
- Noise pollution will result
- Adverse impacts of traffic
- No evidence that it will be used for holiday purposes, so will be a residential park. This will put pressure on local services.
- Claims are made that it will be substantiable and will create jobs, yet there will be no real employment generated.
- Ecology surveys are insufficient.
- Fails to comply with JCS Policies 3 (landscape) and 2 (heritage).

6.19 Duddington with Fineshade Parish Council. Comments received 20.03.19. Objects.

a. Documents.

Submission is incomplete, inaccurate, self-contradictory and misleading.

b. Traffic and highways:

- Fineshade Top Lodge is accessed via a single-track road with passing bays. Crossroads have been the scene of numerous accidents (a vehicular activated sign on its approaches warns of hazard).

- Traffic issues arise at weekends, bank holidays and when special events are held at Fineshade. Visitors often have problems when meeting traffic on the single-track road due to inconsiderate parking on the highway verges and in the passing bays. This is a working wood with lorries hauling timber from time to time.
- No indication of the number of visitors these will accommodate nor the number of visitor's vehicles that can be expected.
- Visitors to the site are said to spend their money in the locality, but as there are few facilities within easy walking distance of the site, then this will inevitably lead to more vehicle movements in and out of the access road, often during the hours of dusk and darkness increasing the risk of collision. (*See Economic Issues*)
- Major concerns over the ease of access for emergency vehicles. A high fire risk from barbeques and the consequences of fire appliances being unable to reach the scene of a fire in the middle of the forest require no explanation.
- Adverse effect on the existing visitor centre, car park and caravan site.
- Access road can flood at the bridge over the brook.
- The single-track access road is not salted during winter conditions; becomes impassable.

c. The impact on the small community of Fineshade Top Lodge.

Influx of a potentially large number of additional visitors will have an unacceptable impact on the permanent residents of Top Lodge. While there are large numbers of visitors to the area already, these come at peak times only. The proposed development will result in a population equal to a small housing estate being in the area possibly throughout the year. It should be noted that the potential number of visitors exceeds the permanent population of many of the villages in the locality.

d. Historic and natural Environment.

- Immediately in front of the Grade II listed complex of Top Lodge; would result in harm to the significance of the listed buildings.
- The presence of 32 caravans would present a significant visual intrusion, permanently adversely affecting views of the historic woodland and surrounding farmland.
- The lighting associated with the development and visitors' vehicles will create light pollution that will threaten the area's current dark zone status.

e. Environmental impact.

Very concerned that the developer has not felt it necessary to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment, (EIA).

f. Utilities.

- Foul and surface water drainage has not been adequately covered. There are currently separate systems serving the Forestry Commission complex, caravan facilities and Top Lodge cottages. None of which could accommodate additional loading without major changes even if permission from the respective owners was forthcoming.
- The existing water supply to the area is barely adequate to meet the current demands placed on it and it could not support any additional connections. Again, the applicants do not appear to have addressed this point.

g. Disposal of waste. Not expanded on.

f. Economic issues. +

- “Fineshade’s position on the road network is crucial to an understanding of its socio-economic links, which are mainly across the county boundary into Rutland, north to Stamford and south to Corby. There is no immediate road access with the major towns and villages of East Northamptonshire. The obvious commercial links are with villages such as Barrowden in the Welland Valley, with towns such as Stamford, Uppingham and Corby and with the city of Peterborough. These are the primary areas where Fineshade residents shop and work, and where caravanners who stay at the Top Lodge caravan site spend their money. There is no reason why visitors to the proposed development would behave any differently.
- If a circle of radius 10 miles is drawn around Fineshade, only about 1/5 of the area of the circle lies in East Northamptonshire. Repeat it with a radius of 20 miles or 30 miles and the fraction gets smaller. The nearest local shops are at Kings Cliffe and Barrowden.
- In Rutland, the nearest town and large supermarket are both in Stamford, the nearest petrol station is Morcott in Rutland and nearest major shopping centres are Corby and Peterborough. Not one of these locations is in East Northamptonshire.
- Tourist hotspots where visitors might spend money are mainly out of the county. A past survey among caravanners staying on the Top Lodge Caravan Site has shown that their most frequent day trips entail visits to:
 - Rutland Water (walking, bird watching, fishing, water sports)
 - Stamford (shops and market, historical interest, Burghley House)
 - Peterborough (city centre, cathedral.)
 - Barnsdale Gardens in Rutland

The only tourist attraction mentioned in East Northamptonshire is Kirby Hall.

- Within a 6-mile drive of Top Lodge there are a number of public houses serving meals but only about half of these are in East Northamptonshire. The nearest restaurants and take-away food outlets are all in Stamford.
- It is conceivable that there will be an increase in trade at some of these public houses as a result of this development, but it is unlikely to have a major effect on the economy of the area.

For all these reasons any economic benefit associated with the proposed development is likely to accrue not to East Northamptonshire, and in particular, the immediate area, but rather to the other counties and towns that largely surround Fineshade.”

g. Sustainability.

The proposed development is not sustainable. The loss of wildlife areas, the intrusive nature of the development and the subsequent loss of the character of the area will deny future generations of this historic and very special area.

Reconsulted 02.07.19. No additional comments.

6.20 Collyweston Parish Council. *Comments received 20.03.2019.* Objects.

1. Documents incomplete and contradictory in places.

2. The idea of bringing tourism to the area, is good. The documents do not state clearly enough that the lodges would only be available for 'holiday lets' i.e. 2-3 weeks or days, there is a concern that the lodges could become long term residential accommodation over time. This would be detrimental to the historical beauty of the area and have a major impact on the RSPB reserve.

3. Car parking may well be an issue as only one space per lodge is being suggested. On other sites like this around the country normally 2 spaces per lodge is normal.

4. Is this a sustainable/carbon neutral development? There does not appear to be any consideration for solar energy units, recycling water, considerable increased amount of rubbish being produced.
5. No indication that this would be a sustainable development, and although it appears it will bring economic benefits for jobs and local economy there is no proof that employment will be generated for this site.
6. As these 'caravans' appear to be wooden clad there is even more need for fire prevention measures, will provision of open brick-built barbeques near lodges be provided at a safe distance or a purpose built designated area for communal cooking to prevent holiday makers bringing their own
7. No proper ecological survey has been carried out, especially for the spring/summer months on the agricultural site. (*Officer note: additional work has been done*)
8. There appears no consideration given to the disabled who might wish to use the site, and how they can access local amenities without a car.
9. The crossroads on the A43 are a known local black spot, even though accidents occur, there are the very near misses which of course are never reported.
10. Visitors may wish to visit Corby, Duddington, Collyweston, Easton on the Hill, other villages and of course Stamford, They would need to travel by car, as the A43 is an unsafe route for cycling due to the high volume of HGVs' using it.
11. Finally the local access road has passing places, but locals have experienced problems in the past with visitors not travelling slow enough on the road to avoid problems. Fire engines take up more room than cars, and in an emergency on the site, this could result in delays for them attending potential fires at these lodges. Will there be provision of an emergency telephone, as not everyone uses mobile phones.

Reconsulted 02.07.2019 - no reply

- 6.21 Blatherwick Parish Council. Consulted 20.03.2019. No reply
Reconsulted 02.07.19. No reply
- 6.22 Kings Cliffe Parish Council. Consulted 20.03.2019. No reply
Reconsulted 02.07.19. No reply
- 6.23 Northamptonshire County Council Planning Services- Ecology advice
Comments received 02.07.19. Objects.

Summary: The reptile survey found 'viable breeding populations of all reptile species', i.e. common lizard, grass snake, adder and slow worm. This is a significant species assemblage, and this site clearly exceeds the threshold for Site of Special Scientific Interest selection. It is now a candidate site for designation as a Local Wildlife Site.

This demonstrates that the site is of at least Local Wildlife Site, and potentially SSSI quality for reptiles. Therefore, it is – or is part of – a very high valuable site for the county.

Various criticism is made of the applicant's methodology.

- a) The survey was started too late for a robust assessment of the adder population.
- b) It is claimed that on at least one occasion the refuges were checked in the rain (standard practice is to check refuges in dry conditions).

- c) Receptor sites for any species must be able to receive the translocated individuals. It has not been established the proposed receptor site is suitable. The number of individuals needing translocation is unknown.
- d) The proposed receptor site has considerable shading. This would make the site unsuitable for cold-blooded animals which need sunny basking areas.
- e) The mitigation proposals are superficial.

“Given the high value of this site I cannot see how the proposal could be consistent with Policy 4 of the Joint Core Strategy. I would very much support the council if it is minded to refuse this application.”

6.24 The Wildlife Trust. *Comments received 27.06.19.* Objects

Consider this site to be of significant value. They do not consider the proposed mitigation measures to be adequate. This is due to the significance of the site for reptiles and lack of suitable mitigation.

The reptile survey found evidence of breeding populations of all the four reptile species that are present in the county. In the context of Northamptonshire, the presence of breeding populations of all four reptile species is particularly significant and shows the importance of that area for this group.

The application site meets the criteria to become a Local Wildlife Site for reptiles based on the applicant's single survey.

6.25 Rockingham Forest Project Officer – ‘Back from the Brink’ project.
Comments received 31.03.19 Objects:

Fineshade is a key site within Rockingham Forest where the Back from the Brink project is working to try and restore the fortunes of some of the UK's most threatened species, including Adder and several species of bat. Fineshade is one of the last strongholds of Adders in the Rockingham Forest area and is likely the most significant site for Adder in the East Midlands. Adders are known to occur all around the boundary to the proposed development and it is quite likely that they may be found within the proposed development area. Bats have also been recorded foraging over this area. As no field surveys have been carried out for adders or bats, it is inaccurate for the application to state that ‘there are no protected/ priority species or important habitats either on or near the proposed development that are likely to be affected by it’. I do not believe the Council can assess the impact such a development could have on wildlife and these key species without full ecological surveys having been carried out at appropriate times of year. Fields (such as the one proposed for development) surrounding the core woodland habitat at Fineshade are also vital for their role in creating buffer zones and allowing wildlife to move freely through the landscape. Any development of this area would therefore be likely to have a negative impact on the diverse wildlife that can be found here.

6.26 Natural England
Comments received 21.6.19. No Objection.

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites or landscapes.

6.27 Forestry Commission

Comments received 05.03.2019: Comments.

Information provided to assist in assessing the appropriateness of this application near to *Far Hazlewood*, which is a Plantation on an Ancient Woodland site (PAWS). The proposed timber lodge holiday park proposal is approximately 80 metres from Far Hazlewood, but it is the view of the Forestry Commission, Forest Services, that neither the development itself or access to the proposed park would impact upon the PAWS.

They stated:

'as a Non-Ministerial Government Department, we provide no opinion supporting or objecting to an application. Rather we provide information on the potential impact that a proposed development might have on ancient woodland or PAWS, either directly or where the development is with 500 metres of the perimeter of the woodland.'

Ancient woodlands are irreplaceable. They have great value because they have a long history of woodland cover, with many features remaining undisturbed. This applies both to Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

It is Government policy to refuse development that will result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats including ancient woodland, unless *"there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists"*

The comments above are those of the regulatory team of the Forestry Commission i.e. Forest Services. Far Hazlewood is part of Rockingham Forest North, which is managed by Forestry England, which is another stakeholder also likely to comment.

6.28 Forestry England.

Comments received 25.06.19. Objects:

The presence of the holiday park will make a negative contribution to the setting of Top Lodge, a Grade II Listed building and have an overbearing negative impact on the buildings and on visitors' amenity.

The proposals do not conserve or enhance the heritage significance and setting of Top Lodge given the following:

- Adverse effect on the character of the area, in relation to the visitor centre, Top Lodge offices and gardens,
- An adverse effect on the character of, and therefore amenity of surrounding trails – notably Mill Wood Trail and Smelters Walk. The adverse effects are highlighted by the applicant's LVIA. Mitigation screening planting is predicted to reduce the level of adverse effects however, clear views into the development will be maintained for access.
Proposals do not complement their surroundings in form, scale, design or materials.
- Caravan design and materials used do not reflect local vernacular and are not sympathetic to local setting; they are generic and uniform.
- Caravans appear to be located <10m spacing, limited screening between units. The high density of units is out of character with the local built form.
- The linear development does not respond to local topography or site character.
- Access could be confused with Forestry England (FE) visitor centre, resulting in user conflict.

Sewage: no details relating to wastewater and sewage from the development. The foul drainage system from our visitor centre is a private system and the applicant has made no approach to us.

Parking: provision of car parking is limited, given the likely patterns of use. We therefore are concerned that overflow parking will result on the adjacent public highway and Forestry England (FE) land and potentially cause access restrictions and therefore safety issues.

Reception: no details for any arrival facility for visitor, may result in a backup of vehicles on to the public highway at key change over times and potentially cause access restrictions and therefore safety issues. Additionally, a lack of arrival facility would appear to indicate that the proposal is in fact longer term residential accommodation rather than short term holiday accommodation.

6.29 Northants Bat Group

Comments received 03.03.2019. Objects.

Potential adverse effect on bats. In summary:

1. Desk study is inadequate. Their data-search highlighted records for nine species of bats close to this site. Applicant failed to contact the Northants Bat Group (as suggested by the Northamptonshire Biological Records Centre who they approached for records). We would have been able to inform them that there are only 12 bat species recorded in Northants, and any site with nine species is very rich indeed. No special provision was made for the bat-richness of the site.

2. Roosts on site. The ecologists mention that the trees on or immediately adjacent to the site had no bat roosting. There is doubt about the adequacy of their work.

3. Obstructing flight routes. Although there may be no bat roosting place on the application site the ecologists have overlooked many effects the development may have on the bat roosts close by or immediately adjacent to it. These may include obstructing or interfering with the flight lines and commuting routes the bats take when leaving their nearby roosts to forage over the meadow, in the woods or other habitats beyond. Obstructions may include

- i) physical obstruction such as buildings (e.g. cabins),
- ii) visual barriers at night such as lights (e.g. entrance and track lamps, car headlights, cabin windows and open doors, cabin owners/users at such sites now commonly personalise with flashing coloured lights around cabin entrances. Also movement such as cars, people, children playing, flags flapping over cabins.
- iii) olfactory barriers such as smells and smoke from the campers (eg barbecue smoke, camp fires/fire pits)
- iv) audible barriers such as noise e.g. by vehicles, dogs, music, and cabin residents and their visitors.

4. Disturbance effects on bat species. Disturbance caused by such developments affects different bats species in different ways, some of which are more sensitive to disturbance than others. It is illegal to disturb bats.

5. Foraging potential. The application site may have many insects associated with it that could provide good foraging for the bats, especially those that roost close by. Different bat species forage on different insects found in different habitats. No survey was carried out to determine what bat species and number forage over the site, when they forage, and how they may be affected by the loss of most of the vegetation ground cover of the site.

6. Mitigation. The suggested mitigation for bats in the Ecological Assessment relates to limiting lighting, planting shrubs and erecting bat boxes, but the details are broad and general, and will be difficult to implement to have any positive effect on bats. Other necessary mitigation is missing.

A bat survey is required to determine the species of bats and number that use this site, and how they use it, if any nearby bat roosts would be affected by the development, and how to mitigate properly and robustly for the effect the development would have.

12.6.19 re-consultation: Original objections still stand

6.30 Council for the Protection of Rural England *Comments received 01.03.2019.* Objects.

- Style and character unsuitable for location.
- Open countryside
- Would not be approved even on edge of small village elsewhere
- Present the worst kind of tourist development as presently seen on coastal areas
- Sewage not covered, no shared facilities e.g. for washing.
- No shop, nor manager
- Road too narrow

6.31 Campaign for Dark Skies *Comments received 20.03.2019.* Objects

Top Lodge and Fineshade Woods location are a valued "Dark Sky" environment and we understand that the site has, and continues to be, considered to become a "Dark Sky Discovery Site". Despite the location being relatively close to the urban areas of Corby and Weldon and there being Forestry Commission premises, a few houses and an existing

caravan site and the fact that some of the exterior lighting within these sites are perhaps not the most efficient currently, there is, otherwise, very little existing night time illuminance within the area of the application site, as a result we fully support efforts to make Fineshade Woods and the neighbouring area a Dark Sky Discovery Site.

We consider the whole area to be "Intrinsically Dark" which should afford the protection of Environmental Zone of E1.

We are concerned that this application could become a precedent and a "thin end of a wedge" for, perhaps, future environmentally inappropriate development.

Upon our visit, we were made aware that the site has a long-standing colony of glow worms which are highly sensitive to exterior lighting, this known colony should be an important addition to the flora and fauna identified in the Biodiversity Report dated December 2018.

Has a Biodiversity Report been carried out during the Summer months and after dark?

Recommendations if approved:

- 1) apply planning Conditions
- 2) biodiversity studies be carried out at other times of the year and after dark
- 3) no additional lighting fitted to any Plot or any piece or parcel of the site at any time to protect the local area from unwanted flood or decorative lighting.

Reconsulted 20.6.19

There appears to be little acknowledgement of a known colony of glow-worms within the immediate area and we still have concerns regarding the impact this development could have upon these.

6.32 Northamptonshire Police Community Safety.

Comments received 12.03.19 . Observes.

- "What are the security standards of the Timber Lodges/Caravans.
- Formal surveillance, CCTV, is a requirement and should be able to produce images which will observe/recognise persons during all times of the day.
- It is appreciated that this site cannot be fully secure, however boundary treatment and mature landscaping must restrict all access to designated routes.
- Site vehicular barriers must also be considered as part of the overall measures.
- Although street lighting is not appropriate proposed bollard lighting must be sufficient to illuminate all vulnerable areas and approach routes. Normally I do not recognise bollard light as an effective means of reducing the fear of crime or identifying offenders. This type of illumination does not project sufficient light at the right height to aid facial recognition. However, I feel that this location would not be appropriate to illuminate in more conventional ways and bollard lighting would have to be acceptable for safety and detection purposes in this instance."

6.33 Northamptonshire County Council - Local Highway Authority (LHA)

Initial comments received 21.06.19. Object.

The LHA have serious concerns with any proposal demonstrating intensification of use of Top Lodge Road given the insufficient carriageway width and lack of footway provision. The Transport Assessment included in the submission package does not include existing traffic surveys on Top Lodge Road and therefore the LHA is unable to support the position that the applicant holds that this section of carriageway is lightly trafficked (*Officer Note -see update below*)

Observations on the Limitations of Top Lodge road are provided.

The application states that there will be no staff associated with the proposed development. However, the proposed use suggests that there will be at least some employment related trips related to the site's use.

Observations on numerous issues provided as follows.

- Parking standards for caravans should be applied
- Swept path analysis to show how large vehicles can enter the site
- The location of the western access is so close to the junction of Fineshade Wood car park. The LHA is concerned that the priorities at the junction would be confusing and create a hazard for all users of the junction. We would therefore require the applicant to submit proposals to mitigate this risk. (Proposals may include relocating the access, offsite and on site line marking and/or signage. The applicant may also wish to discuss the operation of this junction with the adjacent landowner/user.)
- Road dimensions tight on approach
- Passing places and visibility. The LHA has concerns that the narrow road width outside the access may result in vehicles obstructing the highway if there is another vehicle attempting to exit the site. The LHA requires the applicant to submit proposals to mitigate the risk of obstruction of the highway and conflict at the junction. Proposals may include widening of the road, realignment or relocation of the access. The eastern access is off a Public Right of Way which is a public bridleway (MX9), therefore vehicles would be unable to reach this access.
- The LHA also wishes to bring the following to the attention of the applicant:
 - a Construction Traffic Management Plan is needed prior to the commencement of any construction work,
 - evidence sought on that the actual speed of the approach road is 30mph or less,
 - the Transport Statement states that there are opportunities for walking and cycling from the site to access local facilities and Fineshade Wood,
 - it is noted that there are currently no pedestrian or cycle facilities on Top Lodge Road. The LHA requires the applicant to propose measures to enhance the cycle and pedestrian facilities between the site and the local facilities.

(Officer note: the applicant has carried out further work including speed surveys)

Revised comments received 05.07.19. Object.

The ATC (Automatic Traffic Count) data confirms the network in this area as heavily trafficked. The LHA still upholds significant road safety concerns with the increased traffic passing through an at-grade junction (the least safe form) onto the A43 which has a history of accidents associated with it.

Whilst the increased number of passing bays suggested would theoretically improve matters along Top Lodge Road, the passing bays will merely be perceived as increased parking facilities for the general public. This will in turn reduce forward visibility along this stretch of carriageway.

With the proposed lodges you would expect to see an increased number of people seeking to walk and cycle along Lodge Road and crossing the A43, both of which do not offer safe facilities to do so.

In summary in the interests of highway safety and given that the existing situation is a concern the LHA cannot support this application. Should you be minded to approve this

application I can confirm that the access and proposed widening are acceptable however the additional passing bays will require a yellow lining scheme at the very least to reduce indiscriminate parking.

6.34 Northamptonshire County Council - archaeological advisor
Comments received 01.04.2019. Observes:

The current proposal for timber lodges is potentially intrusive. The proposed development is within the Rockingham Forest area. A series of short archaeological surveys were undertaken in the late 1990's in the areas surrounding the proposed development area which identified several areas of industrial workings of possible Roman or medieval date. The area around Fineshade has many remains of iron working mainly medieval but some associate this with Iron Age and Roman activity. The nature of the development is generally low impact although the creation of static unit and hardstanding bay, access roads and landscaping will have an impact on any below ground deposits. The proposed development will have a detrimental impact on any archaeological remains present. This does not however represent an over-riding constraint on the development provided that adequate provision is made for the investigation and recording of any remains that are affected.

Advises on a condition to secure investigation.

6.35 NCC - Flood and Water Authority
Comments received 21.02.2019. Objects:

Insufficient information available to comment on the acceptability of the proposed surface water drainage scheme for the proposed development.

Reconsulted 12.07.19 : No objection. Confirms that most of the issues can be resolved with engineering solution and if required we would at your request condition for a detailed design.

6.36 Environment Agency
Comments received 28.02.19. Observes:

We have no objections to the proposed development, as submitted. Provides notes on foul drainage that are for an adjacent site (not in control of this applicant).

Reconsulted 21.06.19. No reply.

6.37 East Northamptonshire – Conservation Officer

“The application site is situated in proximity to Top Lodge Farmhouse and associated barns/outbuildings, a grade II listed building. The site falls within the setting of the building and as such I note the statutory requirements (...) regarding special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings. I also note paragraphs 193 and 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which advises (...) “*great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation*”. It continues, stating that “*significance can be harmed through ...development within its setting*” and that “*any harm should require clear and convincing justification.*” In addition, policy 2 of the North Northants Joint Core Strategy (2011-2031) states that “*proposals should conserve and, where possible, enhance the heritage significance and setting of an asset...*”

The application site comprises an open field/paddock which is located approximately 30 metres due south of the principal elevation of the grade II listed farmhouse. I consider that

the site provides an important agricultural setting to the farmhouse which contributes to its historic significance. I note that views over the application site from the listed building are readily available. A map regression (to first edition OS) shows that the application site is largely unchanged.

The proposal to erect timber lodges on the land would have an impact on the setting of Top Lodge Farmhouse, owing to the presence of built form together with associated infrastructure and residential paraphernalia. I consider that this would cause harm to the setting, and in turn the significance of the listed building. I categorise the level of harm to fall within the less than substantial category, and as such I recognise that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal in accordance with the requirements set out at paragraph 196 of the NPPF. I note that the submitted heritage impact assessment has assessed the level of harm to be negligible; however, I disagree with this assessment as I consider that the level of harm would be greater.

6.38 East Northamptonshire Council - Environmental Protection Officer

Comments received 19.06.19, Updated 10.07.19: Comments:

No objection to the proposal providing a detailed Noise Management Plan is submitted and agreed prior to commencement of the development.

Objection to details of the foul water disposal. The Foul water disposal provision proposed by the applicant would not be considered sufficient nor receive local authority approval under any caravan licence conditions imposed.

6.39 East Northamptonshire Council - Community Development Officer

Comments received 12.06.19:

There has been a Feasibility Study about the benefits of an East-west cycle route which would run through Fineshade Woods to Kings Cliffe. If provision was made for this it would connect through to King's Cliffe, and their ambitions for the old railway route. King's Cliffe Wildplaces have been working towards this being a pedestrian access where cyclists would be permitted at points. If contributions could be made to connect this to King's Cliffe, visitors can travel to this service centre. It would improve the Green Infrastructure and Tourism Economy in the area.

Contributions could be made towards "the provision of green infrastructure to connect this development to the local service centre of King's Cliffe".

6.40 East Northamptonshire Council - Tree Officer

Comments received 21.06.19. No Objection.

The proposals within the submitted report are acceptable and should limit any damage to the adjacent trees. no objections to the proposals so long as conditions on any given permission ensure all the recommendations and methodology described within the report (Ref - JKK10543) are implemented.

6.41 East Northamptonshire Council - Tourism Promotions and Development Officer.

Comments received 12.03.19. Observes.

East Northamptonshire offers an eclectic mix of beautiful unspoilt countryside, historic market towns and attractive villages, together with a diverse range of arts festivals and other cultural events and an area of wildlife reserve in the south of the district which has been recognised internationally via designation as a RAMSAR wetland site for over-wintering birds. The impressive natural setting and architectural style (often described as

the 'hidden Cotswolds') continues up the River Nene and across the former Rockingham Forest area. The Rockingham Forest provides a range of tourism and recreational opportunities largely focussed around green infrastructure and heritage.

Notes: "The development of additional tourism facilities, including the provision of additional accommodation will need to be balanced with the need to protect and enhance environmental assets and ecosystem services"

7 Evaluation

- 7.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, require that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

a. Principle of Development: whether the proposed development is acceptable in broad terms, taking account of its countryside location.

The Applicant's case.

- 7.2 The applicant states the proposal fully accords with the development plan and the NPPF by providing a tourism asset of limited scale in an area which benefits from high quality greenspace and is close to an existing touring caravan site. The modest proposal, they say, strikes a balance between visitor numbers and biodiversity, landscape, and amenity, while taking care to avoid heritage impacts. They also state, whilst users would likely travel to the site by car, it is expected that users would utilise the sites remote location and woodland position to explore the countryside on foot or by bicycle. These points of principle are now reviewed.

Tourism.

- 7.3 The site is adjacent to the Forestry Commission site at Top Lodge, Fineshade, which is well established as an existing tourism hub with extensive facilities. The proposal would involve an intensification of the established leisure and tourism facility at Fineshade. The NPPF also states that LPA's should promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses, including tourist facilities where the location is appropriate. As such, there is support within the NPPF for the proposed development, but this is subject to the satisfaction of all other material planning considerations. One such consideration is whether the proposed development would conserve or enhance the natural environment, which is assessed later in this report. The proposal is found wanting in this respect. Consequently none of the exceptional advantages for rural businesses described in North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Policy 21 (regeneration of the Rockingham Forest) nor Policy 25 (rural economic development) apply – the proposal does not diversify the rural economy in a manner that will outweigh its adverse environmental impact.

Economic growth.

- 7.4 Policy puts significant weight on the need to support economic growth through the planning system; and that LPAs ought to promote the development of land-based rural businesses. The NPPF, at paragraph 83, states that "*plans should support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings*".
- 7.5 The development will result in a new site for possible tourism use, which would provide a contribution to the local economy. An existing tourism facility –can also be found approximately 50m north of the site at the Stamford Caravan and Motorhome Club Site, and there may be a case for building on its success. Importantly this is a touring site that is

active seasonally. It is however concluded that the applicant's claim of economic benefit are found to be overstated given the minimal employment. With the present information, the site is likely to function more like a residential home park, rather than a holiday facility. The observations of the Parish Council in 'economic issues' (see 'consultation' 6.17 above) are relevant to this argument and supported.

Location and rural exceptions.

7.6 The proposal is for a use for the land, with caravans that will periodically be replaced. This presents a use that will have a changing but generally permanent cover with structures. About a third of the site will be covered by roads, caravans and parking areas on a permanent basis. The site, although only 'single storey', thereby has a near identical impact as permanent residential construction.

7.7 Policy 11 and Policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy only allows small scale new development in a rural area where there is an identified need, where it lies adjacent to an existing settlement, and where is well located to services. Further, away from individual settlements, new build residential development is only allowed to support a rural business or is of an innovative or exceptional design. None of these exceptions apply to this site.

7.8

In principle, the development fails to support those national and local policies that enable tourism or rural businesses. Whilst it may be used for holiday purposes, it is also presented as a residential home park. It will have a physical presence near equivalent to a permanent residential development. There is no business plan that shows convincing efforts to reach out to tourist interests. It will have a near permanent residential occupation with the characteristics of a settlement, with a potential maximum population of 160 persons (32 units each with 5 persons, accepting that a normal occupancy will possibly be less). Whilst such residential parks have a place in offering good value accommodation (often to retirement communities), the present location is a poorly located and unsustainable proposal.

b. Landscape issues and impact on the character and appearance of the area

7.9 The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Assessment which examines the likely landscape and visual effects of the project. The applicant's report concludes the caravan park scheme would not result in significant harm to the value of the landscape as there would be no loss of important landscape features or elements, and only minimal loss of the site's open characteristics. The well contained nature of the proposal within a landscape structure provided by trees, extensive tracts of mature woodland, and supplemented by new landscape planting, would limit adverse visual effects. The applicant states the development is low key and will merge the scheme into the wooded landscape.

7.10 The applicant's assertion in 7.9 above is not agreed for reasons as now follow.

7.11 The site lies within the heart of the sensitive Rockingham Forest character area. The specific character of the proposal site and surrounding area is dominated by the woodland and conifer plantations of the Forestry Commission access land and the leisure and tourism activities at Top Lodge which are located within. The applicants have presented a scheme with low height timber-clad lodge units. They have also included a landscaped setting, but this is insufficient as it is limited to the roadside frontage only. The woodland belt to the west of the site would provide a screen, but there will still be filtered views from the adjacent footpaths and roads.

A highly regimented layout has been presented in the style of a stark 'coastal' caravan park, unrelieved by integral landscaping. The visually stark treatment is extended by the applicant's recommendations (in their Noise Report); this advances options for

containment of noise with internal fencing. In itself this will add to the sense of this being a new permanent built environment with consequent adverse impact.

- 7.12 The Rockingham Forest provides a range of tourism and recreational opportunities largely focussed around green infrastructure and heritage. Policy requires the development of additional tourism facilities to be balanced with the need to protect and enhance environmental assets (as addressed here) and ecosystems (addressed below after paragraph 7.19).
- 7.13 It is accepted there will be limited visibility of the proposed development from the publicly accessible locations within the nearby arable farmland, plantation woodland and leisure facilities at Fineshade Wood. It is also agreed that the site is well contained by perimeter trees and vegetation, and the Top Lodge buildings themselves. However, as the applicant's report concludes, significant adverse effects would be experienced *closer* to the site, by walkers using a footpath which lies adjacent to the north and western boundaries of the application site.
- 7.14 The visual effects are both substantial and adverse. The present approach to Fineshade is experienced as a very open rural scene; the value is also evidenced by the substantial local objection. Whilst accepting that there are no designations other than normal countryside constraints that preserve the land as open land, the development would be uncharacteristic of the area. The proposed changes cannot be moderated; and would substantially damage the integrity of a valued and important landscape.
- 7.15 In the applicant's favour, the cluster of development comprising the caravan park, Forestry Commission and Cycling centre and associated car and coach parks at Top Lodge Fineshade Woods has changed the character of this part of the King's Cliffe Hills and Valleys. It is now one focused on leisure and tourism. This does not undermine a key conclusion by officers – that the degree of change advanced by the Lodge scheme is too great to be part of the area's present character and clearly harmful to the visual qualities of the area.
- 7.16 The land has a scenic value and may be valued for its 'perceptual' qualities (i.e. a commonly discerned reality). It exists as a countryside setting to the Fineshade Wood entrance, as well as the historic Top Lodge (Listed building impact is covered below). It is reasoned:
- whilst grassland is not a rare character type, it does here present an extraordinary setting that will be lost by the development,
 - the perception of tranquillity (valued by many objectors to the scheme) will be lost. At busy times, this quality is of course an illusion, but a highly effective one that supports the perceived unique overall calm qualities of this area.

The scenic and tranquil value of the site is one to protect. Perimeter landscape work will not hide or filter the visual impact of 32 lodges, external paraphernalia such as cars and BBQ's, and associated activity.

- 7.17 Development of the site as a caravan park would not introduce street lighting but would include low level bollard style lighting, and light sources within caravan units which would change the night-time character of the site, intensifying the concentration of visible lighting within an unlit rural context. Top Lodge at night is a very dark place; there is no street lighting and the Visitor Centre is being considered as a candidate Dark Skies Discovery Site. The magnitude of change in character will be most significant at night; a matter that objectors have commented on with relevance to the value of 'dark skies', but also

biodiversity issues concerning bat habitats.

- 7.18 In conclusion, the site has no formal recreational value, but it is very visible from adjacent public rights of way and public areas and lies at the centre of a well-managed network of paths and trails. The site is part of a landscape which presently has a great degree of tranquillity even when close to Top Lodge, and even when the area is busy. Retention of the site as open land is an important part of that quality. National policy requires landscapes that are *not* statutorily designated to have attributes of a sufficiently high quality to ensure protection and enhancement as a valued landscape. The site has some very positive landscape elements with an open quality, and considerable wildlife interest, sufficient to elevate this landscape to one that is highly valued. Its development is contrary to paragraph 180 of the NPPF that aims to:
- protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value; and
 - limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation

c. Ecology

- 7.19 Policies clearly promote the protection of existing biodiversity assets. Due to the significance of the site for reptiles and lack of suitable mitigation, clear objections have been received from the Council's key advisers - the County Council and The Wildlife Trust. When determining planning applications, national policy (NPPF 175) requires local planning authorities to apply the following principles: "*...if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused*".
- 7.20 The applicant's reptile survey found evidence of breeding populations of all of the four reptile species that are present in the County so this site is now known to be of significant value. The surveys found juvenile and sub-adult Common Lizards, Grass Snakes, Adders, and Slow Worms –all indicating that breeding populations of each of these species is present. Additional survey work could raise the significance of the site still further. The Wildlife Site Selection Criteria for Northamptonshire (NCC) states that 'sites meeting or exceeding any one of the following thresholds will be considered to be Wildlife Sites in Northamptonshire...a) all sites supporting breeding populations of adder or suitable habitats connecting populations of adders in close proximity to one another'. This site may now be a candidate for listing as a Local Wildlife Site (to be confirmed).
- 7.21 Mitigation has been considered by the applicant (on an adjoining site) but the work done has been superficial and is presently unconvincing.
- 7.22 Objections for this development stem from the potential adverse impact the access, cabins and the use will have on ecology at the site. The impact is on protected species, and mitigation proposals are not satisfactory. The proposal is thereby contrary to those policies that protect existing biodiversity assets, namely:
- a. Policy 4a of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy that requires protection of existing biodiversity and refusing proposals where significant harm to an asset cannot be avoided or mitigated, and
 - b. to the National Planning Policy framework paragraph 175 that states:
"if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately

mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.”

d. Heritage

- 7.23 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the Local Planning Authority to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their setting. A Grade II listed building lies immediately to the north of the site. The accompanying Heritage Statement finds that no designated heritage assets would be physically impacted by any part of the proposed development, and any potential effects would be in the form of loss of significance as a result of change within the setting of the asset.
- 7.24 The applicant's assessment found the proposed development would result in 'less than substantial' harm to the significance of a Grade II listed building, where the assessed level of harm is 'negligible'. As such, they say, the application should be assessed against the balancing process of public benefit. In the applicant's view 'the result means there would be no loss of significance of any Historic Landscape Character type...'
- 7.25 In officers' view, the application site comprises an open field/paddock which is close to and is located only some 30 metres due south of the principal elevation of the Grade II listed former farmhouse. The site provides an important agricultural setting to the farmhouse which contributes to its historic significance. Views over the application site from the listed building are readily available.
- 7.26 The proposal to erect timber lodges on the land would have an impact on the setting of Top Lodge Farmhouse, owing to the presence of built form together with associated infrastructure and residential paraphernalia. This would cause harm to the setting and in turn the significance of the listed building. Harm is judged on a sliding scale - the submitted heritage impact assessment has assessed the level of harm to be 'negligible'. In officer's view, the harm is far greater, falling within the 'less than substantial' category. However, less than substantial harm ranges in importance from the relatively trivial to something approaching destruction. In this case the prospective harm is assessed as falling towards the top end of that range. The harm is likely to be permanent.
- 7.27 This harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal in accordance with the requirements set out at paragraph 196 of the NPPF.
- 7.28 For reasons given elsewhere in this report (in concluding paragraphs 7.3, 7.5, 7.7, 7.18, 7.22 above and 7.39 below) there are no public benefits of a scale that would outweigh the harm that would be caused to the setting of the listed building.

e. Highways and Parking issues.

- 7.29 The proposed access to the site from the A43 would be via a track with seven regularly placed passing bays. The track is maintained by the Local Highway Authority for most of its length. The access track is shared with the Forestry Commission logging vehicles, pedestrians, visitors to the Fineshade Wood visitor centre and residents.
- 7.30 Residents and visitors have strong concerns about the appropriateness of the access and track. In their submitted representations, they note that difficulty with the access is already apparent for the existing vehicles using the wider site. Residents question whether further vehicles should be encouraged along the track, to add to the perceived opportunity for conflict.

- 7.31 The existing junction with the A43 (forming a crossroad junction with the access to the village of Wakerley opposite) is of a more formal standard. However, residents have commented that the positioning of the access, on the brow of a hill, can be problematic. Representations received note that the access is dangerous due to drivers exceeding the speed limit of 60mph on the A43, and that visibility along the road (A43), particularly in an easterly direction, can frequently be inadequate due to excessive vehicle speeds.
- 7.32 Northamptonshire County Council as Local Highway Authority objects. Given so many deficiencies in the initial submission, a considerable amount of additional work was done by the applicants who argue:
- “The results of the analysis demonstrates that the proposed development will not have a severe impact on the local highway network, the proposed development would generate a total of 4 two way vehicle movements as a maximum hourly flow and would generate a total of 43 two way movements throughout the day.
5.15 The NPPF states in paragraph 109:
“Developments should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.”
- The analysis based on the assessment work in this section has demonstrated that the proposed development will not have a ‘severe’, impact on the local road network or an unacceptable impact on highway safety.”
- 7.33 The LHA still have serious concerns with any proposal demonstrating intensification of use of Top Lodge Road given the insufficient carriageway width and lack of footway provision. In revised comments the LHA point out although this area can be heavily trafficked, significant road safety concerns remain with the increased traffic passing through an at-grade junction (the least safe form) onto the A43 which has a history of accidents associated with it.
- 7.34 Whilst the increased number of passing bays suggested would theoretically improve matters along Top Lodge Road, the passing bays will merely be perceived as increased parking facilities for the general public. This will in turn reduce forward visibility along this stretch of carriageway.
- 7.35 With the proposed lodges an increased number of people will walk and cycle along Top Lodge Road and crossing the A43, both of which do not offer safe facilities.
- 7.36 On the matter of pedestrian and cycle access, the proposed site will be located adjacent to Fineshade Wood which provides a cycle and pedestrian network. However, these are of a recreational nature only, and there are no convenient local public transport services that allow this to be a sustainable location in transport terms for a holiday or residential park home site. The proposal fails to meet Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Policy 8, Place Shaping Principles.
- 7.37 It is acknowledged that the site lies alongside a prospective new east-west cycle route which would run through Fineshade Woods to Kings Cliffe (see 6.38 above). This project, once complete, would greatly improve the Green Infrastructure and Tourism Economy in the area. However, it does not yet exist. Even when it does reach completion, this improvement to accessibility does not outweigh the other environmental, heritage and highway issue raised in this report.
- 7.38 In conclusion, safe and convenient access to the site is not possible given the hazards at the present junction of Top Lodge Road and the A47. Serious concerns remain with any

proposal demonstrating intensification of use of Top Lodge Road given the insufficient carriageway width and lack of footway provision. Evidence also shows that the passing bays, with the present use, do not function for their designed purpose at peak times. Consequently, the useable carriageway is limited, and visibility commonly compromised to the detriment of highway safety. There are no local public transport services that can be weighed in the balance to offset the fact that this will be a car based site. The development is thereby contrary to Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Policy 8a that seeks connected places that “Integrate(s) well with existing cycle, pedestrian, public transport and vehicular movement networks and links to these routes in the most direct and legible way possible, to achieve logical routes.” and Policy 8b that requires safe and convenient access to new development.

- 7.39 In reaching this conclusion officers have heeded national advice (NPPF 109) that states refusal on highways grounds should only be considered if the problems are severe. The present problems are observed to be severe, with very real highway safety issues.

f. Residential Amenity

- 7.40 There is a small group of 7 houses about 120m from the site. Concerns were raised by objectors regarding noise pollution and disturbance affecting nearby residents. Further acoustic work was carried out by the applicant to address deliveries (none likely much beyond present use), vehicle movements, heating/plant noise (heating will be electric), and guest noise from people, BBQs, radios, and dogs barking.
- 7.41 The applicant is of the view that levels of amenity currently enjoyed by existing residents in the area will not be unduly harmed by this proposal. The applicant’s noise report concludes that appropriate external and internal noise criteria have been considered to minimise adverse impacts on health and quality of life. The proposed scheme, in the applicant’s view, is not expected to present a significant adverse noise impact and the site is considered by the applicant acceptable for the proposed holiday use.
- 7.42 The use is designed to suit a market for quiet recreation, so will be self-policing to some degree. Additionally, there will be no on-site entertainment facilities. It is reasonable to impose a requirement for a management plan to deal with management of inconsiderate occupiers. There is therefore no objection from the Environmental Protection Officer
- 7.43 However, in planning terms, there will be a noticeable increase in activity far beyond that occasioned by the visitor centre shop, seasonal caravan site opposite, and visitors to Fineshade. This increase in activity will contribute to altering the pleasant quiet character of the area to the detriment of its presently tranquil nature. This will be most noticeable in the evenings and outside the peak season (when background visitor activity dies down).
- 7.44 Noise disturbance associated with the guests and usage of the lodges has the potential for the greatest impact on the existing residents in the area. Use of external areas in the new site will result in some disturbance. A management plan will help but is practically unenforceable, and not likely to result in holiday-makers only, for example, playing ‘quiet’ music. It should be noted in this respect that there is no warden on site (whereas the seasonal site opposite does have a warden).
- 7.45 The applicant’s response to potential management issues connected with control of external behaviour is not convincing. This is given that there is no on-site management presence, and the occupiers of the caravans should be expected to be very noticeable as they will have adopted an ‘outdoor life’. However, the matter is not one that can readily be controlled, and greater harm is found in the other areas of concern noted in this report. A refusal reason is advanced relating to the harm to the area’s character that will arise from

external activity and consequent damage to the area's tranquillity.

- 7.46 Conditions can be expected to limit external lighting, but this is an unlit area and there will still be an adverse light source impact from caravans, cars and bollard style lighting.
- 7.47 Refusal reason No2 below addresses this in the context of harm that will result to the tranquil character of the area.

8 Other Matters

Trees.

- 8.1 There is no objection from the Council's Tree Officer. No trees will be removed. While not a constraint to development, one small area of young vegetation will need to be removed for access arrangements. A suitable buffer has been provided to allow for the root protection areas of these trees to remain unaffected by the lodges and associated parking bays. The access road has also been located to not impact tree roots or crowns, but some tree pruning could be expected.

Surface and Foul Water.

- 8.2 The development is wholly located within the EA's Flood Zone 1 and is therefore considered to have a low risk of fluvial and tidal flooding. In addition, reference to publicly available information indicates the site also has a low risk of flooding from all other sources. At this stage, an indicative drainage layout has been designed for the site. It is anticipated that surface water run-off will pass to a tributary of the River Welland. The acceptable discharge rate to the watercourse will need to be agreed in consultation with the LLFA. The potential to provide surface water attenuation, including the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) has been considered as part of the preliminary design process.
- 8.3 It is proposed to discharge foul water run-off generated by the proposed development to an underground holding tank located in the south west area of the site. The tank will be 8.145 m x 2.7 m and will provide a capacity of up to 40,000 litres. Foul water stored within the tank will be collected by a tanker and removed off site for disposal. The Environmental Protection Officer (see paragraph 6.37 above) has objected to the measures proposed. Local concerns have also raised this as an issue (objectors have indicated that this will mean that a tanker will need to visit on alternate days at peak times of use). This is not a planning matter but one of pollution control to be covered by Caravan Site Licensing.
- 8.4 The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) has been provided with additional information on surface water management. The applicant's updated views, on the Public access system, are that the matter can be addressed by means of planning conditions or the development of a detailed scheme prior to release of permission. This will allow for, amongst other matters, infiltration testing to be carried out and possibly off-site landowner consent for drainage to be secured. The LLFA's comments can be addressed by planning conditions.
- 8.5 Equality Act 2010: It is not considered that the proposal raises any concerns in relation to the Equality Act (2010).

9 Conclusion / Planning Balance

- 9.1 The development fails to support those national and local policies that enable tourism or rural businesses. Whilst it may be used for holiday purposes, it is also presented as a residential home park. It will have a physical presence with a near equivalence to a permanent residential development. There is no business plan that shows convincing efforts to reach out to tourist interests. It is concluded that it will have a near permanent residential occupation with many of the characteristics of a settlement, unsuited to a rural

setting.

- 9.2 The site has no formal recreational value, but it is very visible from adjacent public rights of way and public areas and lies at the centre of a well-managed network of paths and trails. The site is part of a landscape which has a great degree of tranquillity even when close to Top Lodge, and even when the area is busy. The site has some very positive landscape elements with an open quality, and considerable wildlife interest, enough to elevate this landscape to one that is highly valued.
- 9.3 The potential adverse impact to biodiversity is high. The impact is on protected species, and mitigation proposals are not satisfactory. The proposal is thereby contrary to those policies that protect existing biodiversity assets.
- 9.4 The proposal to erect timber lodges on the land would have an impact on the setting of Top Lodge Farmhouse, owing to the presence of built form together with associated infrastructure and residential paraphernalia. This would cause harm to the setting and in turn the significance of the listed building. Harm is judged on a sliding scale - the harm is great falling within the 'less than substantial' category. As such this harm needs to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal in accordance with the requirements set out at paragraph 196 of the NPPF. There are no public benefits of a scale that would outweigh the harm to the setting of the listed building.
- 9.5 Safe and convenient access to the site is not possible given the hazards at the present junction of Top Lodge Road and the A47. Serious concerns remain with any proposal demonstrating intensification of use of Top Lodge Road given the insufficient carriageway width and lack of footway provision. Evidence also shows that the passing bays, with the present use, do not function for their designed purpose at peak times. Consequently, the useable carriageway is limited, and visibility commonly compromised to the detriment of highway safety.
- 9.6 There are no local public transport services that can be weighed in the balance to offset the fact that this will be a car-based site. The development is thereby contrary to policies that seek 'connected places' and that require safe and convenient access to new development.
- 9.7 The applicant's response to potential management issues connected with control of external behaviour is not convincing. This is given that there is no on-site management presence, and the occupiers of the caravans should be expected to be very noticeable to present residents as they will have adopted an 'outdoor life'. Harm will result to the area's character from external activity and consequent damage to the area's tranquillity.

10 Recommendation

- 10.1 REFUSE planning permission.

- 1 The principle of the development. The proposal fails to support those national and local policies that enable tourism or rural businesses. Whilst it may function as a holiday destination, there is no business plan that shows convincing efforts to reach out to tourist interests. It will practically function as a residential home park, with a near permanent residential occupation characteristic of a small settlement. A residential park in the given location is a poorly located and an unsustainable proposal.

It is contrary to Policies 11(2) and 13(2) of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy that only allows residential development in open countryside locations in exceptional circumstances. It fails to meet the requirements of Policy 25 that promotes rural economic development and rural diversification.

The scheme does not meet the requirement set out in paragraph 83 of the National Planning Policy Framework that support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.

- 2 Adverse visual impact on landscape and local tranquil character. The site is very visible from adjacent public rights of way and public areas and lies at the centre of a well-managed network of paths and trails. The site is part of a landscape which has a valued openness and great degree of tranquillity even when close to Top Lodge and associated leisure activities.

National policy requires landscapes that are not statutorily designated to have attributes of a sufficiently high quality to ensure protection and enhancement as a valued landscape. The site has some very positive landscape elements with an open quality and considerable wildlife interest, enough to elevate this landscape to one that is highly valued.

The proposal results in visual harm to this landscape by virtue of the proposed physical structures, and associated paraphernalia. This is contrary to Policy 3 of the Joint Core Strategy that requires new development to respect landscape character, and to be located and designed in a way that is sensitive to its landscape setting, retaining and, where possible, enhancing the distinctive qualities of the landscape character area which it would affect. It neither safeguards nor enhances important views and vistas, nor provides appropriate landscape mitigation or suitable off-site enhancements.

In a related way, it is a tranquil area which – although a popular visitor destination - has remains relatively undisturbed and is valued for this reason.

It is thereby contrary to Policy 25(d) of the Joint Core Strategy that aims to enhance tourism attractions only where they strike an appropriate balance between visitor numbers and biodiversity, landscape, local amenity and heritage interests.

The scheme is also contrary to paragraphs 170 and 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework that states: Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by :

- a. protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, and sites of biodiversity value,
- b. recognising the intrinsic character of the countryside (paragraph 170),
- c. protecting tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value; and
- d. limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation (paragraph 180) .

- 3 Ecology. The proposal will have a detrimental impact on wildlife within the application site. It is thereby contrary to Policy 4a of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core

Strategy that requires protection of existing biodiversity and refusing proposals where significant harm to an asset cannot be avoided or mitigated.

It is also contrary to paragraph 175 of the National Planning Policy framework that states:

“if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.”

- 4 Heritage. The application site comprises an open field/paddock which is located approximately 30 metres due south of the principal elevation of a grade II listed farmhouse (Top Lodge Farmhouse). The site provides an important agricultural setting to Top Lodge Farmhouse which contributes to its historic significance. The proposal to erect caravans/ timber lodges would have an adverse impact on the setting of Top Lodge Farmhouse and in turn the significance of the listed building.

Paragraphs 193 and 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework advise that when considering the impact of a proposal upon the significance of heritage assets, “great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation”. and that “significance can be harmed through ...development within its setting” The level of harm falls within the ‘less than substantial category’, and so this harm is weighed against any public benefits of the proposal in accordance with the requirements set out at paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The public benefits do not outweigh the harm to the setting of the listed building.

The development is thereby also contrary to Policy 2 of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (historic environment) that states:

The distinctive North Northamptonshire historic environment will be protected, preserved and, where appropriate, enhanced. Where a development would impact upon a heritage asset and/or its setting:

- a) Proposals should conserve and, where possible, enhance the heritage significance and setting of an asset or group of heritage assets in a manner commensurate to its significance;
- b) Proposals should complement their surrounding historic environment through the form, scale, design and materials;
- c) Proposals should protect and, where possible, enhance key views and vistas of heritage assets ...’

- 5 Highways and parking. The proposed site will be located adjacent to Fineshade Wood which provides a cycle and pedestrian network. However, these are of a recreational nature only, and there are no convenient local public transport services that allow this to be a sustainable location in transport terms. The proposal thereby fails to meet Policy 8 of the Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, Place Shaping Principles as it is poorly connected for access purposes.

Safe and convenient access to the site is not possible given the hazards at the present junction of Top Lodge Road and the A43. Serious concerns remain with any proposal demonstrating intensification of use of Top Lodge Road given the insufficient carriageway width and lack of footway provision. Evidence also shows that the passing bays, with the present use, do not function for their designed purpose at peak times.

Consequently, the useable carriageway is limited, and visibility commonly compromised to the detriment of highway safety. The addition of further passing bays will not assist. The development is thereby contrary to Policy 8a of the Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy that seeks connected places that “Integrate(s) well with existing cycle,

pedestrian, public transport and vehicular movement networks and links to these routes in the most direct and legible way possible, to achieve logical routes” and Policy 8b of the Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy that requires safe and convenient access to new development.

In reaching this conclusion the Local Planning Authority have heeded national advice (paragraph 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework) that states refusal on highways grounds should only be considered if the problems are severe. The present problems, and the potential effect of the proposal, are observed to be severe with unacceptable impact on highway safety.

12 Informatives

- 1 In reaching this decision this Council has implemented the requirement in paragraph 38 of the National Planning Policy Framework to deliver sustainable development in a proactive and positive way. There has been dialogue with the applicant and their agent to resolve issues and time has been allowed for additional information to be presented. However, the proposal was found to be unacceptable.
2. List of Refused Plans/Documentation:
 - Site Location Plan 1217-0001-04
 - Site Layout Plan 1217-0002-07
 - Cabin Layout Plan- illustrative -1217-0005-01
 - Cabin Layout Plan - illustrative -1217-0005-02

 - Planning Supporting Statement PPS1217 dated December 2018
 - Heritage Statement ref: JAC25129 dated 13.12.2018
 - Landscape and Visual Assessment JSL3184 dated December 2018
 - Transport statement JNY9693-01 dated 17.12.2018
 - Transport assessment and Addendum2 JNY9693-02 dated 10.06.2019
 - Flood Risk Assessment RCEF73028 dated 20 June 2019
 - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated December 32018
 - Ecology Assessment Ref 190607 ECO00477 dated 07.05.2019
 - Noise Impact Assessment ref 2268.190516.NIA2 dated 17.05.2019
 - Arboricultural impact assessment KK10543-FSC-AIA- dated 07.06.2019
- 3 Present proposals for foul water management are not accepted by the Council in its role as a Caravan Licensing Authority. You are advised to contact our Environmental Protection Team.