

Planning statement in support of the Brixworth Country Park Mackintosh Centre, Lapwing rooms change of use planning application

From: Chris Haines Countryside Services Manager Northamptonshire County Council

Date: 05/11/15

Introduction

This planning statement aims to provide background information and rationale regarding an application for the change of use of rooms 34, 28, 29, 30 and 36 totalling 101m² (see BXCP building Plan 2012) which comprise a wing of the Mackintosh Centre at Brixworth Country Park known as the Lapwing Rooms. The application is to change these rooms from their current use as hireable meeting space with supporting stores/kitchen/toilets, into a premises that can be leased in a way that is open to external businesses potentially for any of the following use classes: A1 retail; A2 (some) Professional businesses; B1 Business offices (class II), D1 (Class XV (clinic)), provided the activities of the prospective tenant are subsequently deemed appropriate to the Country Park location: I.e. that they do not have a negative affect on the amenity of the Country Park and ideally add to it.

The proposed change of use represents a small scale and non strategic change with the aim of bringing a currently underused building into productive commercial use either as office and/or retail space of a kind that is appropriate to its Country Park location and to provide rental income to help maintain and provide the park. LGSS Estates officers and Legal Services will be engaged to assist with the lease and procurement of the tenancy to ensure due process.

Background

The building was originally constructed in the late 1990s as a residential centre intended to enable groups to stay in a countryside location and undertake recreational activities. This use was not financially sustainable and change of use planning was obtained on 15/12/10 from the Chief Planning Officer for Northamptonshire County Council to remove this use (planning reference 10/00070/CCD).

The internal layout of the buildings was subsequently changed to the layout shown in the plans accompanying this application and the building hired on the open market to anyone who required a meeting or activity space. The room was subsequently hired to a range of clients for a range of activities; however the main clients have been internal NCC services conducting business meetings. With advice from LGSS Estates Officers, the benefits and management requirements of operating the rooms as hireable meeting space have been reviewed and a more financially beneficial and operationally manageable use would be to lease the space as office and/or retail to an external organisation whose activities (at least) do not detract from the recreational offer of the Country Park and ideally, add value to this offer, such as leisure or wellbeing services, or outdoor leisure related retail etc.

This proposal would not take any park facility or land out of public use. It will not entail any re-modelling, or extension to the external building or its services. The existing services and car parking is capable of supporting large numbers of people and the location of a new business tenant at the park of the scale dictated by the premises would not have a noticeable impact on this.

The West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (Part 1)

This section extracts relevant objectives and policies and provides a rationale as to why this change of use is appropriate relevant to the core strategy.

Objective 13 Rural diversification (4.54 The economy of the rural areas must be supported and rural diversification encouraged)

Objective 9: providing “specialist business development and employment clusters”.

This application accords with Objective 13 by providing employment in a rural area, albeit not in agriculture or land based industry.

The application provides an opportunity (subject to offers) to further Objective 9 by potentially enhancing the outdoor leisure services and retail offer of the park: There is already a cycle shop, repair and hire business at the park along with a cafe and the further development of an outdoor fitness/leisure offer is highly desirable as it builds on the value of the park and Pitsford Water as an outdoor fitness and leisure hub as well as furthering the wider objectives of the Council to improve the health and wellbeing of Northamptonshire.

The application also supports Objective 14 Green Infrastructure as the rental income generated from these rooms will support the provision of the Country Park which has to be a self financing service.

*Policy SA – Presumption in favour of sustainable development (P23)
“Where there are no policies relevant to the application the appropriate council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise.*

Policy S1 P 30 – The distribution of development:

5.13 (P29) In meeting development needs opportunities to re use previously developed land and vacant or underused buildings should be maximised without undermining the quality of the environment

This application accords with Policies SA and S1 as it makes the best use of previously developed land and vacant/underused buildings in the business/leisure context.

This application accords with Policies SA and S1 as it represents a sustainable development which making use of existing buildings and services constructed in accordance with the building regulations of their day (c1997).

Superfast broadband has also been established at the park making the venue suitable for modern businesses.

Policy S2 – the Hierarchy of centres

Policy S9: Distribution of Retail Development

Policy S9 for town centre regeneration

None of these policies would be adversely affected by this application: It does not compromise aim of Policy S9 regarding town centre regeneration because (if a retail offer were presented) only a form of retail activity complimentary to the Country Park location would be permitted. In addition the total floor space is 101m² which is well below the threshold of 1000m² whereby an impact assessment on the vitality and viability of the primary shopping area centres in the catchment is required.

Policy S7 – provision of jobs

This application provides an rare opportunity for leisure and wellbeing business to locate in a major recreation centre taking advantage of the existing park visitor base, activities and facilities including walking, cycling, running and outdoor fitness and leisure. If a suitable tenant were found it could therefore support the provision of non class B jobs include healthcare, retail, leisure, tourism, sport, educational or cultural development.

Policy S10 Sustainable Development Principals

This application would help protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment by providing a rental income that will help pay for the provision of Brixworth Country Park and important Green space receiving in the region of 400,000 visits a year.

Policy S11 Low Carbon and Renewable Energy

This application relates to a building of 101m² which is well below the threshold of 500m² required to achieve a BREAM assessment

Policy E1 – Existing Employment Areas

This application is complimentary to this policy as it changes use from a non employment generating use to an employment generating use and the new commercial floor space provided is of a scale that is commensurate with its function and location.

Policy E2 – New Office Floor Space

This application relates to a building space of 101m² which is well below the threshold of 500m² required to provide an impact assessment on other providers and the scale of office provision is commensurate with its function.

Policy BN2 – Biodiversity

This application will have no direct negative impacts on Biodiversity and some indirect positive impacts by helping to fund the park.

Policy BN7A Water Supply, quality and waste water infrastructure

This application relates to an existing building and services which will remain unchanged.

Policy BN9 Planning for Pollution Control - this application will have no negative effects on. The Council will ensure that the premises is only leased to businesses whose activities will not be of detriment to the amenity of the area - activities that generate noise, light or other pollution etc will not be permitted.

Policy R2 Rural Economy (P209)

Allows for the re-use of farm buildings and the expansion of businesses in their current location depending on the nature of businesses and although not farm buildings the proposal accords with the principle of re-using a rural located building.

Brixworth Country Park Mackintosh Centre Lapwing Rooms Change of Use Planning Application Design and Access Statement

From: Chris Haines Countryside Services Manager Northamptonshire County Council

Date: 05/11/15

This statement is to provide design and access information regarding an application for the change of use of rooms 34, 28, 29, 30 and 36 totalling 101m² (see BXCP building Plan 2012) which comprise a wing of the Mackintosh Centre at Brixworth Country Park known as the Lapwing Rooms. The application is to change these rooms from their current use as hireable meeting space with supporting stores/kitchen/toilets, into a premises that can be leased in a way that is open to external businesses potentially for any of the following use classes: A1 retail; A2 (some) Professional businesses; B1 Business offices (class II), D1 (Class XV (clinic)), provided the activities of the prospective tenant are subsequently deemed appropriate to the Country Park location: I.e. that they do not have a negative affect on the amenity of the Country Park and ideally add to it.

Access to and from the building will be as it is currently.

Parking for the incoming tenants and clients will be the current Country Park car park under any special conditions that may be stipulated in the lease.

There are not expected to be any measurable/significant impacts on the number of car visits to the Country Park which currently receives in the region of 400,000 visits a year.