

5h 3/12/1196/FP – Refurbishment of hooved animals enclosures, with re-building of Camel house and Tapir house and new Giraffe house, to "Africa World" and construction of elevated observation walkways across the new areas at Paradise Wildlife Park, White Stubbs Lane, Bayford, Broxbourne, Herts, EN10 7QA for Mr P Sampson

Date of Receipt: 16.07.2012

Type: Full – Minor

Parish: BRICKENDON LIBERTY

Ward: HERTFORD HEATH

RECOMMENDATION:

That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. Three Year time limit (1T121)
2. Approved plans (1T102; PWP 501/003B, PWP/12/5300/001, PWP/12/5300/002, PWP/12/5300/003, PWP/12/5302/004 and PWP/12/5300/005)
3. Materials of construction (2E114)

Directive:

1. Other legislation (01OL1)

Summary of Reasons for Decision

The proposal has been considered with regard to the policies of the Development Plan (East of England Plan May 2008, Hertfordshire County Structure Plan, Minerals Local Plan, Waste Local Plan and the saved policies of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007 and in particular policies ENV1, LRC10 and GBC1) and guidance provided in the National Planning Policy Framework. The balance of the considerations having regard to those policies is that permission should be granted.

_____ (119412FP.MC)

1.0 Background:

- 1.1 The application site forms part of Paradise Wildlife Park and is located towards the southern part of the Park in close proximity to the entrance/exit onto White Stubbs Lane as shown on the attached OS extract. The site, and Wildlife Park as a whole, lies within the

Metropolitan Green Belt.

- 1.2 The proposal is to combine a number of individual animal areas and their associated buildings, creating a single area housing zebras, tapirs, camels and giraffes. This would involve clearing the site of the existing buildings and enclosures and erecting three new buildings (one shared by tapirs and zebras, one for camels, and the tallest building for the giraffes) to the south, east and north edges of the site area, respectively.
- 1.3 An elevated walkway is also proposed which would pass through the centre of the shared area, with an observation deck approximately halfway along its length. This would be accessed by stairs next to the camel and zebra/tapir buildings, as well as a wheelchair ramp to run around part of the boundary which would provide level access next to the camel house.
- 1.4 The overall area of the application site would be approximately 3,600m².

2.0 Site History:

- 2.1 There is a lengthy planning history to this site, of which Members may be aware. It is not intended to repeat the full history here, but the following applications are considered to be relevant to this application:
 - 3/10/0981/FP – Erection of elevated walkways to big cat enclosures (part retrospective) – Approved July 2010.
 - 3/11/1637/FP – Retention of elevated pedestrian walkway – Approved December 2011.

3.0 Consultation Responses:

- 3.1 No consultation responses have been received at the time of writing this report. However, any representations received prior to the date of committee will be reported to Members at the meeting.

4.0 Parish Council Representations:

- 4.1 Brickendon Liberty Parish Council had not commented on the application at the time of this report but, again, any representations received prior to the date of committee will be reported to Members at the meeting.

5.0 Other Representations:

- 5.1 The application has been advertised by way of site notice and neighbour

notification.

5.2 No letters of representation have been received at the time of writing this report.

6.0 Policy:

6.1 The relevant 'saved' Local Plan policies in this application include the following:

GBC1 Appropriate Development in the Green Belt
ENV1 Design and Environmental Quality
LRC10 Tourism

6.2 In addition, the guidance on tourism development (Section 3) and development within the Green Belt (Section 9) provided within the National Planning Policy Framework is relevant to the consideration of this application.

7.0 Considerations:

7.1 The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt wherein inappropriate development will not be permitted except in very special circumstances. The proposed development is an inappropriate form of development as it is for buildings/structures required for a purpose which does not fall within the categories defined as appropriate in policy GBC1 of the Local Plan and also in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Members will be aware that, when this is the case, for permission to be granted, the harm to the Green Belt by way of inappropriateness, and any other harm caused by the development, must be clearly outweighed by other material considerations. This approach is set out in policy GBC1 of the Local Plan, and is supported by the NPPF.

7.2 The majority of the development proposed within this application will have limited material impact on the openness of the Green Belt. The tapir/zebra and camel houses would be relatively low-level buildings with mono-pitched roofs rising to approximately six metres in height. These would not be visible beyond their immediate vicinity, and not at all from outside the Park. The buildings would be constructed of metal sheeting of a type to be agreed via a planning condition.

7.3 The fencing to enclose the animal area would be a lightweight mesh, painted green, and 3.6m in height. Adjacent to the animal houses would be timber panels with glazed sections to allow clear sight into the animal area from ground level. This choice of materials is considered to be

acceptable in principle, although the details of materials would require approval, again via a planning condition.

- 7.4 The fence would be visible from the site entrance from White Stubbs Lane. However, it would be viewed through the existing boundary planting and the existing fence, which would limit its visual impact on the rural character and appearance of the area.
- 7.5 The most significant aspect of the development, in terms of visual impact, would be the elevated walkway and observation platform. The floor level of the walkway would be 2.8 metres above ground level. The ridge of the roof over the platform would be 5.9 metres above ground level, and would be located centrally to the animal area. The elevated walkway would be approximately 75 metres long, with the southern end being adjacent to the Park's entrance. The walkway, observation platform and the people using it would thereby be visible from outside the site, and this has the potential to appear as an incongruous feature in this Green Belt location. There is therefore, in Officers opinion, some additional harm to the Green Belt in this respect.
- 7.6 The main issue to consider in the determination of the application then is whether there are very other matters to which such weight can be assigned that the harm by way of inappropriateness, and the other identified harm, is clearly outweighed.
- 7.7 Policy LRC10 of the Local Plan states that the Council will encourage suitable tourism proposals in appropriate locations, and this is in line with guidance in Section 3 of the NPPF. Paradise Wildlife Park has previously been recognised by the Committee as a "major educational attraction that provided local employment" (Development Control Committee minutes for the meeting of 19th November 2008) and in general is considered to be a valuable and beneficial tourism facility.
- 7.8 The redevelopment of this section of the site for an improved animal keeping and observation area would be beneficial to visitors. It would allow them to observe the different animals interacting with one another in a way not possible when they are kept separately.
- 7.9 The elevated walkway and observation platform would, in Officers opinion, result in some harm to the rural character of the Green Belt, intruding on the openness of the surrounding area. However, it would largely be contained within the built-up area of the site, with extensive and mature screening limiting views from outside the site to the southern end of the walkway, adjacent to the entrance to the Park. When viewed in the context of the site entrance and the surrounding Park structures,

officers consider that the overall harm to the Green Belt would be limited.

7.10 Given this, it is felt that the weight that can be assigned to the tourism and educational benefits of the proposal is such that it would outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt in this case.

8.0 Conclusion:

8.1 Given the relatively limited visual impact of the development beyond its immediate locality, its value to the Park's operations and the enhancement it represents to the Park, it is considered that harm in this case is clearly outweighed and that very special circumstances therefore exist to justify the approval of the proposed redevelopment and the creation of the elevated walkway and observation platform.

8.2 It is therefore recommended that planning permission be granted subject to the conditions suggested at the head of this report.