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Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

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Your Ref: 14/00405/FUL
Our Ref: ph_ph_240314_14_00405 Skelton Bank

24 March 2014

Dear Julie

14/00405/FUL Erection of 4 self contained holiday letting yurts, an amenity service building and a rural enterprise dwelling, Skelton Bank Farm, Mardu, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 8NH

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership does not object to or support this application, but we do make some comments below.

Further to the previous outline application which was refused, the applicant has clearly made considerable effort to make the proposed development as low impact as possible. The sunken design of the proposed dwelling would be relatively inconspicuous, although an associated garden could change the character significantly. The yurts themselves and the amenity building are also relatively low key, and the proposed hedge planting, etc would be beneficial. We feel that the visual and landscape impacts on the AONB overall are modest. We note that the waste water disposal aspects and possible impacts on heritage of the proposal have been considered, and recommend that the comments of consultees on these matters are followed closely if the development goes ahead.

The AONB Partnership is supportive of sustainable approaches to tourism, and the proposed enterprise has real potential in this regard. The ethos described of the proposed business and its scale are generally compatible with this approach. The location is particularly isolated, which may provide some challenges, but also perhaps opportunities to enhance sustainability, e.g. if extra efforts are made to assist guests in sourcing local food and in reducing travel by promoting activities very nearby, which may be more likely to be taken up than in more accessible locations. The close proximity of Offa's Dyke Path National Trail also provides an opportunity for a market of long distance walkers seeking accommodation, though this would usually be single night stays and perhaps smaller groups, and so may not be ideally compatible for achieving optimum levels of occupancy of the yurts.

We feel that the decision on this application does not turn on the potential impacts on the AONB, which are modest and arguably balanced by some positive aspects of sustainability, but on the issues of policy regarding development of a house in open countryside, which apply irrespective of the AONB. These are matters for the planning authority to decide, but we make some observations as follows. In order to allow the house under NPPF section 55 as for a rural worker, the applicant's status as a future rural worker would appear to depend on both the granting of planning permission for the tourism enterprise and that business proving to be viable. In respect of viability, the target occupancy levels for the yurts do seem quite optimistic, especially regarding the proposed year-round use in this upland location (we note that the Wye Valley yurt site mentioned operates from April – September). If the business were to fail, the scenario of occupancy of the

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house for out-commuting to a different job would not have satisfied the requirements for giving it permission. This raises questions of whether conditions for removal of the house may be justified against this scenario, but further whether these would be enforced or could indeed provide an unacceptable level of risk to the applicant. Also, the doubtful viability of a year-round tourism enterprise of this kind at this location could call into question the need for a permanent dwelling on the site.

We notice that it is proposed to continue to graze the land around the yurts, but we do not consider the current levels of stocking would be compatible with the tourism uses proposed, and there may be a loss of agricultural productivity from the land to take into account. We also note that the applicant's Rural Planning Advisor report refers to an expected income 'in excess of £50,000 profit' from the tourism enterprise, while the applicant's own business plan sets out profit projections only rising to around £25,000 by year 6.

Yours sincerely

Phil Holden
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Manager