

East Devon District Council.
Knowle,
Sidmouth,
Devon,
EX10 8HL

Date: 1 February 2019
Our ref: 04051/61/NT/EB0/17100052v2
Your ref:

Dear Sir or Madam,

East Devon and Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines - Consultation Draft

On behalf of our client, Bourne Leisure Limited (“Bourne Leisure”), please find below representations on the East Devon and Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines Consultation Draft, published for consultation until 4 February 2019.

By way of background, Bourne Leisure operates more than 50 holiday sites in the form of holiday parks, family entertainment resorts and hotels in Great Britain and is therefore a significant contributor to the national tourist economy, as well as local visitor economies. Many of the parks, resorts and hotels are located within sensitive areas and Bourne Leisure comprehensively responds to those areas as part of any development proposals submitted to the local planning authority. Within East Devon, Bourne Leisure operates Devon Cliffs Holiday Park.

Bourne Leisure supports the overall process of a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), which effectively assesses the areas of landscape character within East Devon and Blackdown Hills and reports on the value, quality, sensitivity and capacity for new development in each landscape character type (LCT). The Company notes that this approach is consistent with national guidance on preparing LCAs¹ which states that LCAs can “describe a landscape with reference to the characteristics that combine to make a place distinctive” (page 10).

However, Bourne Leisure considers that this LCA is drafted in such a way that it seeks to create new policy and fails to recognise the wider context of how it would be used as a material consideration in planning decisions alongside the development plan and other material considerations. Such an approach is not consistent with national guidance¹ which states that an LCA can “inform understanding of key characteristics, sense of place, special qualities etc. that can then inform judgements – decision making – regarding, for example development management...” (page 10). Bourne Leisure therefore considers that the LCA should be rephrased so that it provides an evidence base that is limited to an assessment consisting of a

¹ Natural England. *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*. October 2014.

classification and map of LCTs with associated descriptions of their character and identification of key characteristics which can then be used to inform decision-making.

Further, the LCA should also recognise that the assessments therein consider extensive parcels of land comprising the broad landscape. It does not assess in detail the character of specific areas within those parcels. The LCA should be explicit on the limitations of the assessment, such as this one, and how this will affect its use in decision-making.

Further comments are provided on the following elements of the LCA Consultation Draft:

- 1 LCT 1B: Open Coastal Plateaux
 - a Future forces for change (Bullet Point 2);
 - b Landscape Strategy;
 - c Plan (Bullet Point 5);
- 2 LCT 4H: Cliffs
 - a Future forces for change (Bullet Point 2); and,
 - b Plan (Bullet Point 1).

LCT 1B: Open Coastal Plateaux

Future forces for change (Bullet Point 2)

Under the heading “Future forces for change” on page 26, the consultation draft states:

“Potential impacts from Coastal Change Management, including accommodating development at risk from coastal erosion.”

Bourne Leisure welcomes the recognition that there will be a need to accommodate development affected by coastal erosion. This approach is consistent with the 2018 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that *“plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account the long-term implications for flood risk, coastal change, biodiversity and landscapes and the risk of overheating from rising temperatures.”* (paragraph 149).

The impacts of any such development will need to be considered as part of any planning application and balanced judgment reached at the time of any such application based on a consideration of all policies and other material considerations and must not be restricted solely by the LCA.

Landscape Strategy

Under the heading “Landscape Strategy” on page 26, the consultation draft states:

“Retain the Open Coastal Plateaux as a large-scale and undeveloped landscape which forms a positive setting and skyline to the coast, World Heritage Site, South West/England Coast Path and several settlements. Incurion of development onto higher land should be avoided. Habitat diversity should be encouraged, particularly the establishment and linkage of coastal grassland. Archaeological sites and ancient coastal landscapes should be protected.”

Bourne Leisure considers that tourist accommodation comprises an important element of East Devon’s Open Coastal Plateaux LCT and that this type of development can be particularly vulnerable to coastal change by virtue of its location. Tourism development forms an important part of the life of local communities by providing jobs and supporting spending in the local area. Should such development not be supported when

suffering from the effects of coastal change, there would be unacceptable adverse consequences on the local economy and local communities. Whilst the LCA is not a development plan document the strategy should have awareness of the need to respond to the future forces for change and their implications. It should not unduly restrict meeting wider sustainable development objectives.

Bourne Leisure therefore considers that the emerging LCT 1B Landscape Strategy should recognise the presence of significant development on the Plateaux and the need for this development to respond to coastal changes. The Company proposes the following amendment to the draft LCT 1B Landscape Strategy:

“Retain the Open Coastal Plateaux as a large-scale ~~and undeveloped~~ landscape which forms a positive setting and skyline to the coast, World Heritage Site, South West/England Coast Path and several settlements. Incursion of development onto higher land should be avoided. Habitat diversity should be encouraged, particularly the establishment and linkage of coastal grassland. Archaeological sites and ancient coastal landscapes should be protected. Suitable mitigation measures will be promoted to enable the developed coastline to respond to coastal changes.” (proposed amendments underlined and with strikethrough)

Plan (Bullet Point 5)

Under the heading “Plan” on page 27, the consultation draft states:

“Continue to keep inland campsites well screened. Resist expansion of coastal sites which can be seen in coastal views and encourage sites to enhance their landscape settings.”

Whilst Bourne Leisure acknowledges that it is necessary to ensure that development is present in a capacity that is in keeping with the character of the landscape and any national designations, it is also important for the Company to be able to respond to its changing context, whether that is the physical environment or the tourism market. In doing so, Bourne Leisure will continue to make investments at Devon Cliffs which in turn will have significant positive impacts upon the local economy and the hundreds of jobs that it provides.

The LCA must not introduce policies, particularly those that wholly restrict development. Further, decisions on development must be made through a balanced judgment of all planning considerations and not landscape alone. The Company therefore considers that Bullet Point 5 of the emerging LCT 1B “Plan” should be amended to state that the expansion of coastal campsites will need to consider if there would be “unacceptable harm” to the attributes that give the LCT its character when considered as a whole area and not a single parcel within that LCT. There may be opportunities for expansion and reorganisation of sites that result in additional landscaping being introduced which, overall, benefits the wider landscape.

Bourne Leisure proposes the following amendment to draft LCT 1B “Plan” (Bullet Point 5):

“Continue to keep inland campsites well-screened. Resist expansion of coastal sites which ~~can be seen in~~ would result in significant unacceptable harm to the LCT as a whole to coastal views and encourage sites to enhance their landscape settings.” (proposed amendments underlined and with strikethrough)

The Company considers that the proposed amendment would align draft Bullet Point 5 of the LCT 1B “Plan” with national guidance¹ which defines “landscape capacity” as “the degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without unacceptable adverse effects on its character...” (page 54). The proposed amendment would further align Bullet Point 5 with the NPPF which states that “plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account the long-term implications for flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes...”

LCT 4H: Cliffs

Future forces for Change (Bullet Point 2)

Under the heading “Future forces for change” on page 82, the consultation draft states:

“Displacement of property and paths away from the edge of cliffs due to coastal erosion, and a resulting need to accommodate them further inland.”

Earlier in these representations Lichfields has explained the implications of not responding to a changing context. The representations have also explained that the decision-making process for any application must be based upon all planning considerations and not only the landscape impact. Bourne Leisure welcomes the recognition that there is likely to be a displacement of properties from the cliffs due to coastal erosion and that this will result in the need to accommodate them elsewhere. The degree and distance to which development can be accommodated inland will be dictated by availability, suitability and acceptability of that land for the use being displaced. Bourne Leisure therefore considers that Bullet Point 2 should recognise that there may be a need to allow the rollback of holiday accommodation threatened by coastal erosion rather than relocation inland. Consideration will also need to be given to the amount of development to ‘roll back’ and whether it forms part of a more extensive business. In such circumstances, the roll back site will need to be related to the main business.

Bourne Leisure proposes the following amendment to draft LCT 4H “Future forces for change” Bullet Point 2:

“Displacement of property and paths away from the edge of cliffs due to coastal erosion, and a resulting need to accommodate them ~~further inland~~. landward of the eroded cliff edge.” (proposed amendments underlined and with strikethrough)

Plan: Bullet Point 1

Under the heading “Plan” on page 83, the draft consultation document states:

“Maintain the natural qualities of the coastline and resist future coastal development in this LCT or adjacent LCTs (such as caravan site expansion), and enable existing inappropriate development to relocate.”

Once again, the LCA should not be introducing policy and any decisions made on the acceptability of development must be done so in the context of all planning considerations. Further, as drafted, Bullet Point 1 is inconsistent with the NPPF, which at paragraph 168 sets out the appropriate approach, *“Development in Coastal Change Management Areas will be appropriate only where: a) it will be safe over its planned lifetime and not have an unacceptable impact on coastal change; b) the character of the coast including designations is not compromised; c) the development provides wider sustainability benefits; and d) the development does not hinder the creation and maintenance of a continuous signed and managed route around the coast.”*

In the context of the above, and for the social and economic reasons set out elsewhere in these representations, Bourne Leisure considers that the LCT 4H “Plan” should specifically acknowledge that it will be necessary to support the businesses along the developed coast in its response to coastal erosion.

The Company proposes the following amendment to draft LCT 4H “Plan” Bullet Point 1:

“Maintain the natural qualities of the coastline and ~~resist support~~ future coastal development in this LCT or adjacent LCTs (such as caravan site expansion), provided that this would not result in significant unacceptable harm to the attributes that give the LCT its character as a whole, and enable existing inappropriate development to relocate landward where necessary.” (proposed amendments underlined and with strikethrough)

We trust that these representations are clear and will assist in finalising the East Devon and Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines. Please do not hesitate to contact either my colleague Emily Broom or me, should you require any clarification of any of the points made. We would be grateful if you would keep us informed of progress on the development of the Landscape Character Assessment and all other emerging planning documents for East Devon.

Yours faithfully,



Helen Ashby-Ridgway
Associate Director

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Bourne Leisure