

NEWTON ON THE MOOR AND SWARLAND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

PERCY WOOD HOLIDAY RETREAT - SWARLAND BUFFER BACKGROUND PAPER

1. Introduction

1.1 The Neighbourhood Plan includes at Policy 2 a Swarland Buffer:

“To protect the amenity of residents in Swarland, and existing and future occupiers at the Percy Wood Holiday Park, an area along the western boundary of Swarland is identified as a buffer. Development within this area will not be supported where it will lead to the merging of Swarland and the caravan park, either physically, or result in intervisibility between the two.”

2. Issue for the Village

2.1 Percy Wood Holiday Park and its relationship with Swarland village was the most talked about subject at the Swarland events run by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. In the responses to the questionnaire delivered to all homes in the Neighbourhood Area 84% of the homes that responded said that they did not want to see more caravans within the Neighbourhood Area.

2.2 The people living in the village of Swarland have, over the years, become concerned that the number of units in the caravan park was increasing and becoming larger than the number of houses in the village. People living in properties adjacent to the western boundary of Swarland Village have seen the woodland cut back to make room for caravans and their view that is that it has substantially affected the setting of their properties and the life they had previously to enjoyed in the village.

2.3 The residents of Swarland are concerned about the pressure that the caravan park places on the village in terms of traffic; noise; lack of paths; drainage and the fact that apart from Nelson's cafe in Vyner Park, there are no facilities in Swarland. There have had to be interventions from time to time with regard to the noise and other anti social behaviour³. History and Ownership from groups in the caravan park having celebrations and loud music being played.

3. History and Ownership

3.1 The land where Percy Wood Holiday Park and also the golf course and Bari Bar are located, was part of the land within the title to Swarland Hall. The land was wooded but where the golf course is located now, it was farmland. In fact, it has been open land for over 200 years and has been part of the green fabric of Swarland from the time that Swarland village came into existence in the 1930s. It is part of what makes Swarland a special place to live.

3.2 An early concept for the caravan park was that it provided accommodation for people wishing to use the golf course. Before becoming a golf course, the land was part of the Percy Wood area and was previously a private hunting and fishing preserve owned by Mr. Isaac Merriman in the early 1900s. It was still meadowland within a farm in the early 1960s. The golf course was developed in 1963, with assistance from Geoffrey Cornish. Percy Wood Golf & Country Club (now Percy Wood Holiday Park) was established in 1993.

3.3 The land meets the village of Swarland at the western settlement edge and is visible from numerous viewpoints. The topography of the land upon which the golf course is laid out provides a screen between the village of Swarland and Percy Wood Holiday Park.

- 3.4 The golf course links up with the land owned by Forestry England known as Swarland Wood which is an extensive area of woodland and there are public footpaths that run between Percy Wood Holiday Park and Swarland Woods. Villagers regularly walk on these footpaths.
- 3.5 Percy Wood was originally a 40 touring bay caravan site for which the Forestry Commission obtained consent from the then Alnwick District Council in 1975 (ref 75/4/100). It was then sold to Mr Del-Greco who in 1989 (ref A/89/A/0163) successfully applied for permission for a further 40 units, an office and toilet block. Another permission was granted subsequently (ref A/89/A/490) for a dwelling house and office.
- 3.6 Over the years various planning applications were made and the size of the caravan park expanded. By 2017 when an application was made for a further 216 caravans (ref 17/00194) (subsequently withdrawn), the statement submitted in support revealed that there were approximately 400 caravans on site. There does not seem to have been any specific permission for the increase in the number of caravans per se but in the record for the planning consent re A/89/A/163 related matters are shown that record 459 related matters comprising mainly individual units along roads within Percy Wood Holiday Park. The record can be seen in **Annex A**.
- 3.7 Then in 2004, the site Alnwick District Council granted to Northumbrian Leisure Resorts Limited a site licence for 500 units. That licence was amended (by hand) to show the change of ownership to Harrison Leisure UK Limited in December 2017. A copy of the site licence and the plan approved at that time are at **Annex B**. It can be seen that the layout still keeps the caravans within the woodland at the north of the site.
- 3.8 In 2024 Harrison Leisure UK Limited cleared a beech wood in the south east corner of the land to make room for extra the caravans to meet the permission for 500 units. They have left some screening but the caravans in that location are visible particularly from Springwood.
- 3.9 An inspection of the Ordinance Survey Map of Swarland shows the relationship of the existing caravan park to Swarland Village. It is notable that the caravan park is on a convex hill. Consequently, until the further units were added in 2024, the caravan park was not visible from Swarland Village save at the entrance on Leamington Lane, where there are no houses overlooking it, and at various points in the Forestry Commission managed woodland. In the main, however, the site still remains hidden. The reason for this lies in the distance of the units from the village houses, the topology of the site and the forestry that screens it from Swarland Village.
- 3.10 An application in 2019 (ref:19/01687/FUL) to site 60 caravans on the golf driving range, if successful, would have been the first time that the western boundary of Swarland would have had any substantial view of the caravans. The application was refused and went to appeal. This is dealt with below.

4. Other Planning Considerations

- 4.1 The Percy Wood site owned by Harrison Leisure UK Limited also includes a golf course and the Bari Bar which was the original golf clubhouse.
- 4.2 The application by Harrison Leisure UK Limited to site 60 units on the driving range (ref 19/01687/FUL) and the subsequent appeal (ref APP/P2935/W/22/3299391), followed 86 objections from residents.
- 4.3 The Planning Inspector's decision is at **Annex C** (see separate document). Importantly, the Inspector makes the following comments:

“Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

...

Reasons

8. The Percy Wood Golf and Country Retreat (the PWGCR) comprises around 384 static caravans and an 18 hole golf course in a woodland and parkland setting at the edge of the rural village of Swarland. The appeal site, which lies between the golf course and the settlement, comprises around 2.5ha of open grassland, used as a golf driving range, with tree planting and the metal frame remains of the former driving range building. Access is from Leamington Lane via the internal roads and tracks that serve the holiday complex.

9. The PWGCR extends along much of the western edge of Swarland between Leamington Lane in the north and Springwood in the south. However, the densely developed static caravan park is not a prominent feature, being largely contained within and well-screened by the mature woodland that extends from the edge of the village along Leamington Lane. The golf course and the appeal site lie to the south of this woodland, with further mature woodland to the south and west. The managed grassland fairways and the driving range are interspersed with tree and shrub planting. Consequently, while the PWGCR covers a large area of land and it includes a large caravan park, the defining characteristics along the western edge of Swarland are the extensive mature woodlands and the open parkland landscape.

10. Swarland is a heavily wooded albeit relatively young settlement, having been developed originally in 1936 on open farmland as a philanthropic project by the Vyner family of Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal to help disadvantaged men and boys from deprived areas of Tyneside. The golf course and the driving range are of more recent origin, having been created in the 1990s. However, the aerial photographs and maps illustrate that they were developed on land that was historically open and at least some of the historic field boundaries appear to have been incorporated as landscape features in the golf course. While some of the early open enclosures have been planted to woodland, the layout of the leisure complex and the golf course respects the historic landscape character and field pattern. Irrespective of the age of the village and the golf course, and that neither settlement nor landscape are designated, they have well established, mature and locally distinctive character and appearance.

11. The proposal would include internal access roads and hardstanding to accommodate 60 static caravans and 120 vehicles, and cycle and bin stores. The caravans would be closely spaced and linearly arranged with parking for 2 vehicles to the side of each. The existing ditch along the eastern boundary would be widened and there would be new landscape planting.

12. While the proposal would be visually similar to the existing caravan park, in that it would be closely spaced rows of caravans, it would not be a natural extension to it. By virtue of its wide separation and the dense intervening woodland, the proposal would be a somewhat discrete development that would be physically and visually poorly related to the caravan park. It would not be assimilated into its surroundings by the existing caravans.

13. The proposal would be physically closer to the settlement than to the caravan park, particularly once the adjacent field has been developed for 9 dwellings (ref 17/00500/OUT).

However, the ranks of caravans arranged around an internal access track would be markedly dissimilar to and out of character with the neighbouring residential built form of low density detached dwellings set in mature plots with boundary treatments. The proposal would be similarly visually poorly related to the adjacent open landscape and mature woodland. Consequently, the proposal would be an incongruous and discordant form of development that would not be sympathetic to the surrounding built environment or landscape setting. It would not add to the overall quality of the area and it would diminish the strong sense of place and local distinctiveness.

14. There is no open access to the appeal site by way of public highway or public right of way (footpath) and the footpath along the western edge of the golf course does not afford close views towards the site. The proposal would be screened from long views in the wider landscape by the woodlands, trees and settlement. However, it would be visible in closer views from the settlement including Coast View, Springwood and The Old Tweedmill. While some of the existing views might be obscured once the intervening residential development is complete, these would be replaced by views of the proposal from the new residential development. The proposal would also be visible to users of the main track between the club house and the existing caravan site and from paths crossing the golf course.

15. The landscape plan illustrates that the established planting along the western edge of the appeal site would be retained and bolstered by new understorey planting to screen and protect the proposal from the golf course. Taking into account the depth of the woodland screen and the fall of the land, the proposal would not be overly prominent or conspicuous from the majority of the golf course. Indeed, the plans suggest that the proposal would be better screened from the golf course than it would from the settlement. The western boundary treatment would be significantly more substantial than the eastern boundary with its relatively narrow linear band of evergreen planting set 3m from the top of the ditch bank and along part of the boundary only. The drainage plans suggest that the existing eastern boundary trees would need to be removed.

16. In the absence of effective landscape screening along the entire eastern boundary, there would be unobstructed views of the overly close relationship between the proposal and the neighbouring residential development. Moreover, by virtue of the change in ground levels across the site, the caravans furthest from the settlement edge would be elevated several metres above the caravans closer to the eastern boundary, creating a somewhat solid visual expanse of rising caravans and a prominent and visually obtrusive form of development. The proposal would also be conspicuous and discordant overnight due to the extent and pattern of lighting from caravans and car headlights.

17. The defining characteristic of the western edge of Swarland would no longer be the long-standing relatively tranquil open countryside, parkland and mature woodland. Instead, it would be a large and densely developed caravan park with up to 120 vehicles and associated paraphernalia. While caravans may be mobile and temporary, the development would be permanent and it would permanently erode the strong established character at the edge of the settlement. Irrespective that the proposal would be screened from more distant views in the landscape, there would be significant adverse visual impacts in this location. Taking into account the scale, layout and design of the proposal, the change in levels across the site and its close proximity to the settlement, the harm would not be adequately mitigated by the incomplete and narrow band of planting along the eastern boundary. Moreover, as the layout could not demonstrably accommodate additional planting to adequately screen the proposal from the settlement, I am not satisfied that this is a matter that could be addressed by planning condition.

18. While the proposal would effectively extend caravan development across the entire western edge of Swarland, the greater part of the existing caravan park is screened from the settlement and from the appeal site. Therefore, as the existing caravans would not be seen in close juxtaposition with the proposal, there would not be significant cumulative visual impacts. Irrespective, the increase in the extent and scale of caravan development across the edge of the settlement would negatively impact the setting of the village.

19. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area including the landscape setting of Swarland. It would conflict with LP Policies STP1, QOP1, ENV1 and ENV3. These require, among other things, that proposals make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, respecting and enhancing the natural, developed and historic environment, conserving and enhancing important elements of landscape character, and ensuring that new development on the edge of settlements does not harm landscape character and setting. It would also conflict with the design aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in relation to the creation of high quality and beautiful places that add to the overall quality of the area, that are sympathetic to local character and history including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, and that establish or maintain a strong sense of place.”

4.4 The reasons given by the Inspector reflect the views of the residents of Swarland who have no desire for the gap between the village and the caravans to be breached.

4.5 Harrison Leisure UK Limited obtained an outline planning consent to demolish the Bari Bar and build 16 dwellings. (Planning ref 19/04108). When they made the reserved matters application, however, they proposed siting mobile home units on the land instead of housing units. Eventually, after a substantial response from the residents and discussion with the planning department, that application was withdrawn and revised plans were submitted on behalf of Harrison Leisure UK Limited and eventually approved with conditions. The consent (Planning ref 23/01695/REM) is for the construction of 14 dwellings. In the original revised proposals, however, there were still the following anomalies and one of the most notable of these was that despite the fact that these were to be residential properties, Harrison Leisure UK Limited were proposing to collect the waste from the properties and deal with this as part of their business at the Holiday Park.

4.6 Harrison Leisure UK Limited clearly see the Bari Bar site as capable of being an extension to the caravan park. Given that it abuts the land to the rear of properties in Park Road, the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group wish to extend the buffer to the rear of those properties for the protection of the village from any activities contemplated by Harrison Leisure UK Limited in this location.

4.7 The planning statements in support of the:

- application for outline consent with regard to this site;
- reserved matters application (withdrawn); and
- revised reserved matters application

are at **Annex D** (see separate document).

ANNEX A

Planning ref A/89/A/0163

“Properties (459)

- [9 The Cedars Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
- [37 Woodside Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
- [38 Woodside Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
- [39 Woodside Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
- [40 Woodside Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
- [1 Percy Drive Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
- [1 Leaf Lane Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
- [15 Leaf Lane Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
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- [31 The Fairways Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
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- [46 The Fairways Swarland Northumberland NE65 9JW](#)
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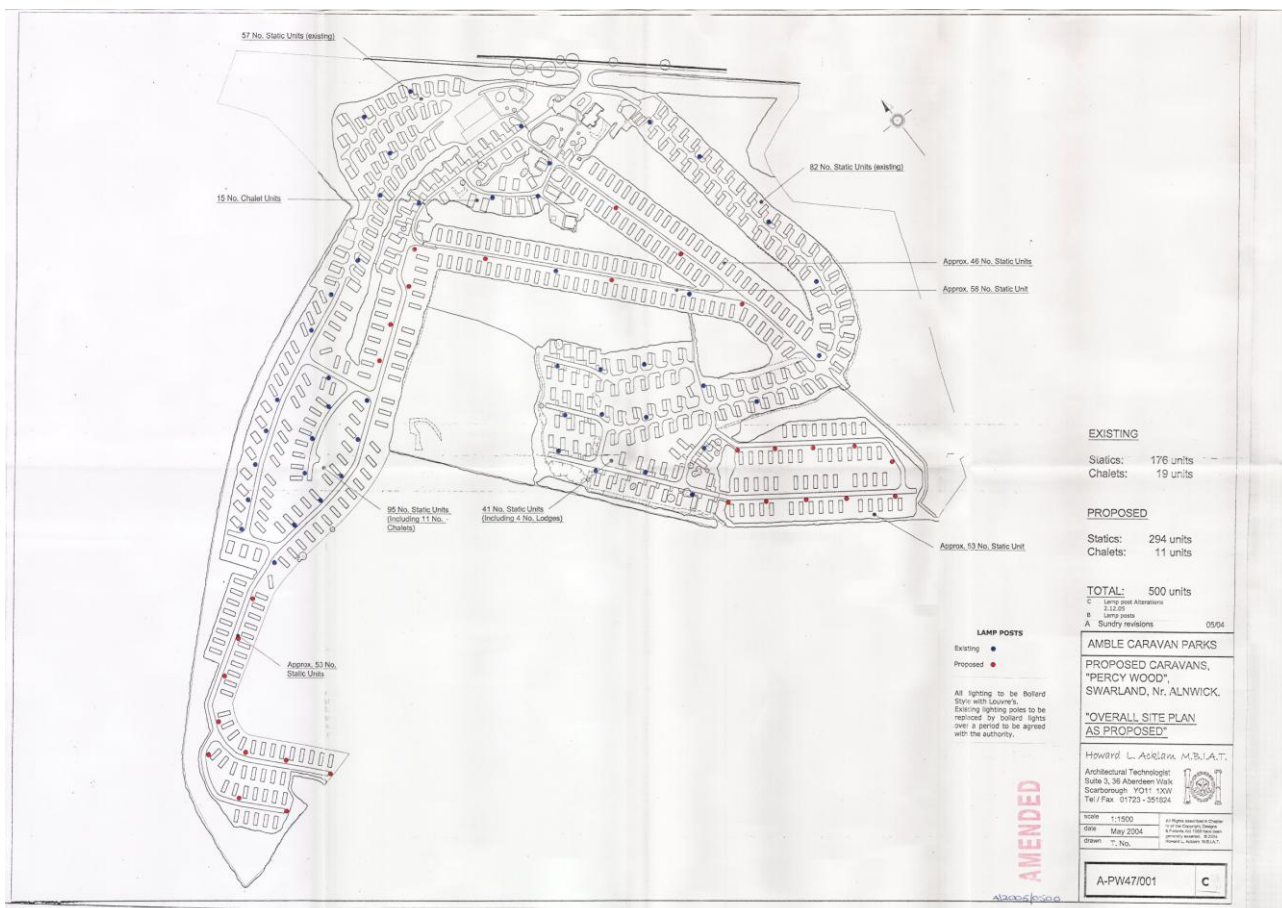
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Taken from Northumberland County Council Planning Portal

ANNEX B
Site licence and plan



*Ref. No. WK/200204081



CARAVAN SITES AND CONTROL OF DEVELOPMENT ACT 1960 Section 3

To ~~Harrison Leisure UK Limited, Riverside Leisure Centre~~
~~Northumbrian Leisure Resorts Ltd, Medina House, 2 Station Avenue, Bridlington,~~
~~East Yorkshire, YO40 4LE~~ Southport New Road, Bank, N2 Southport
Longashire, PR9 3DF

WHEREAS on the 14th June 2004 you applied for a variation to the site Licence in respect of land situate at

~~Northumbrian Leisure Resorts Ltd~~, Percy Wood Caravan Site, Percy Wood,
Swarland, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE65 9JW

(hereinafter called "the said land")

AND WHEREAS you are entitled to the benefit of permission 89/A/163 and Minute 292 for the use of the said land as a caravan site granted under Part III of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, otherwise than by a development order.

NOW THEREFORE the Alnwick District Council

HEREBY GRANT a site licence in respect of the said land pursuant to Section 3 of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960, subject to the following conditions, that is to say

500 Static caravans & (60 Touring caravans until 31st January 2005)
Between the following dates each year: 01/03 to 31/01.

As per attached schedule

* THIS LICENCE shall not expire

18th December 2017
DATED 9th September 2004

Allerburn House
Denwick Lane
Alnwick
Northumberland
NE66 1YY

Signed [Signature]
Environmental Health manager

Tel: 01665 510505
Fax: 01665 605099

