

Campsite at Northdown Farm, Sutton Poyntz Summary of Article 4 Case

A new campsite is being set up just under the Osmington White Horse, using the 28-day “Permitted Development” which allows other uses for land for up to 28 days per year, without the need for planning permission. The site is in the Dorset AONB, and (as shown in the photograph below) is right in the iconic view of the White Horse seen by visitors arriving in Weymouth along the A353. The 2000 Countryside & Rights of Way Act defines how the natural beauty of AONB’s should be protected and enjoyed, but makes quite clear that if there is a conflict between protection and enjoyment, protection is given preference. This legal obligation is mirrored in the Dorset AONB Management Plan, and in the Weymouth & Portland Borough Local Plan. The law and policy are robust in stating how they require Planning Authorities to protect the beauty of our AONB’s. Local policy also makes strong statements about the creeping impact of visitor-based land use.

In the case of this particular site, there are additional concerns to do with safety, particularly as access to the site is from a main road with a 60 mph limit, at a point with limited visibility. The Police have already officially expressed their concerns about the ability of the Emergency Services to respond to emergencies on the site.

In order to protect this beautiful site, it is possible for the Planning Authority to rescind the 28-day right, through what is called an Article 4 Direction. This does not automatically prevent camping, but makes it subject to the normal process of planning application and hearing – this ensures that the Planning Authority can carefully consider the rival needs of economic development and conservation, and the rival rights of the landowner, the AONB and people living near the site. A government Circular on the subject specifically suggests that developments that undermine visual amenity, as we believe is clearly the case here, can be appropriate for Article 4 Direction.

A detailed Case has been prepared by the Sutton Poyntz Society and Osmington Society, local amenity Societies established to protect the villages that this farm is nearest to. The Case sets out the legal obligations of Planning Authorities in respect of AONB’s, and the specific safety concerns associated with this site, and concludes that there are strong reasons why an Article 4 Direction should be imposed. The Case has been submitted to Weymouth & Portland Borough Council for their consideration.



View of White Horse from A353, showing part of campsite area