

By email only

Copy Nigel Wolstenholme

22 February 2021

Lisa Walton
Senior Officer
Planning and Development Management
Isles of Scilly Council
Hugh Town
St Marys



Dear Lisa,

Tregarthen's Hotel – P/20/090/FUL

Application for erection of 5 micro lodges and package treatment works.

Thank you for your letter of 12 February 2021 with request for further information to assist you in processing the application.

I address the points as you raise them.

Rationale/ evidence of demand for Micro Lodges on Scilly

In terms of accommodation trends, there has been a massive increase in unusual and cabin style accommodation across the mainland, often under the generic term “glamping”. This covers cabins, pods, treehouses and lodges, as well as other units like tents and yurts. Some are more “rustic” style accommodation, as well as many units at the very luxury end of the market. There has been an enormous demand for it and it has grown rapidly. This sort of accommodation tends to be sold at a premium, which mirrors accommodation on the Isles of Scilly. It also tends to attract a less traditional market than is usually coming to the Isles of Scilly, so helping to fulfil the objective of reaching a new generation of visitors to the islands.

At Tregarthen's, this new accommodation type will complement the existing hotel accommodation and self-catering cottages, to offer a new type of accommodation. The micro-lodges are effectively a new hybrid type of accommodation, not quite a hotel room yet neither quite a full self-catering offer. The likely length of stay will be shorter meeting the ‘mini-break’ market, perhaps 3 or 4 days average. This is a clear difference to and shorter when compared to a normal self-catering break which is traditionally no less than a week with a fixed changeover day.

The units will be sold through the hotel booking system on the same basis as the hotel rooms, this will allow guests to take as long or short a stay as they want, without dictating length of stay or changeover days. The plan is that these 5 micro lodges will be sold on a bed and breakfast basis, either with breakfast delivered to the unit in a hamper, or breakfast taken in the hotel dining room.

There will be a low level of kitchen facilities in the units (microwave, small hob, fridge and freezer box, tea and coffee making facilities – not too much more than you would find in one of the hotel rooms. There is just enough in terms of facilities for guests to be able to make a very simple meal, but it is not expected that these guests will be fully self-catering – the unit will not have that level of the facilities. This reflects the expected shorter length of stay where full self-catering is less attractive as guests wish to experience the full range of the Islands excellent food offers as part of the 'mini-break' experience. The guests will be encouraged to use the hotel restaurant facilities, as well as other eateries locally.

As you are aware hotel ratings on social media and feedback and reviews through TripAdvisor et cetera will dictate the future use of the micro lodges. It is anticipated the early user reviews will guide future guests to the best use and length of stay advisable in the micro lodges.

Size of Micro Lodges

The unit size is equivalent to a large hotel room or suite. It is quite wrong to compare it to dwelling standards as they are essentially hotel suites. They compare in size to the garden suite rooms at Star Castle Hotel, and the cottage style rooms at Hell Bay on Bryher, but with more in the way of catering facilities to allow more flexible occupation by guests. The success of these types of units at both the above, and elsewhere on the mainland, shows a clear demand for rooms linked to an hotel but with a degree of separation from the main hotel complex. This model has proved particularly useful everywhere as part of the essential adaptive response to the Covid pandemic.

Response to the Covid -Pandemic/ Business Model

Whilst the business model of the Hotel is not a material consideration in the assessment of the micro lodges planning application; I understand that concerns have been raised locally regarding the future of the Hotel. The applicant has made it plain throughout the various applications over the last 5 years that he intends to consolidate and reduce the number of hotel rooms at Tregarthen's into a more boutique style hotel and offer more self-catering accommodation; the micro lodges form an essential part of that plan.

The commercial objective, especially highlighted now by the trading issues that have been caused by the Covid pandemic, remains to present Tregarthen's as a "balanced" business – a mix of hotel rooms, self-catering cottages and micro-lodges, all offering a different experience to a different target audience. This balanced business has more resilience in this competitive and challenging market by having different product offers that extend the season.

Tregarthen's had hoped to invest significantly over this last winter in a complete refurbishment of the restaurant and kitchen, but unavoidable delays, due to Covid, meant that this internal works has been scheduled now for winter 21/22. The restaurant, bar and terrace will remain an integral part of the overall offering, and commercially remain viable.

It should be noted that during the 2020 shortened season, and the vagaries of recruitment, staffing and knowing when they were going to be able to open, the Hotel took the decision to only open the restaurant for breakfast (they worked with another local restaurant to dine all of our dinner inclusive guests, thus supporting other businesses local that appreciated the revenue this brought to them). This was an appropriate and successful response to such extreme global events.

The Hotel find themselves at the start of 2021 season again not knowing when they can open or what level of business, they are going to be able to enjoy. At the time of writing there is no certainty when lockdown restrictions will end. The Hotel are proposing the opening of the restaurant to include breakfast and bar food during the day and evenings if allowed to open in Late Spring/ Summer 2021. The only aspect they will not be offering for the 2021 season is a full-service dinner. It is planned to be open again fully, as normal, for the 2022 season, operating in a refurbished restaurant with a significant investment in new kitchens.

'Trees'

You raise the issue of 'trees' in your letter. It should be noted that there are no trees on the site. The 'trees' are very overgrown Tamarisk shrubs that are regularly pruned, which has stimulated top-growth. These are poor specimens which have no wider amenity value.

The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust have advised that Tamarisk are not native species and whilst not legally considered invasive they would not want this species to escape to the wider countryside. In terms of biodiversity there are more appropriate species that could be secured through an appropriate landscape and planting scheme by condition. Given that previous approvals on this site have secured landscape schemes that have not retained the Tamarisk shrubs and given their limited biodiversity value, it does not seem appropriate that it might now be thought necessary to retain poor quality non-native shrubs, especially as this issue has not been raised in the consideration of previous applications on the site.

Site Waste Management Plan

As highlighted in your letter the applicant has now taken the opportunity to prepare a site waste management plan (SWMP) this shows that 99%+ of the waste material will be re-used on site. This should allow the scheme to progress as shown in the SWMP and avoids the need for a pre-commencement condition.

I hope the above is helpful for completing your report and this is now sufficient information to determine the application, but should you require any further information please let me know.

Yours sincerely



Lisa Jackson MA BSc MRTPI

Enclosed – Site Waste Management Plan