

03/2007/010

MR & MRS JUNKER

FORMATION OF ACCESS TRACK, ERECTION OF IMPLEMENT STORE AND TWO POLYTUNNELS AT LAND AT HIGHER COBHAY, BATHEALTON

309416/125067

FULL

PROPOSAL

Permission is sought for the formation of a new access track, erection of implement store and the provision of two poly tunnels. The proposed development seeks to establish a small-scale specialist horticultural nursery to produce specialist plants and trees. Surface water is proposed to be drained into a storage area and extracted for irrigation purposes. The site was formerly part of a dairy farm, (Cobhay Farm). The site has been chosen following tests on the soil type. The site has an elevated position in an area of undulating countryside dominated by open fields and woodland.

A previous Agricultural Notification application could not be accepted due to the proximity of the proposed access track to a classified highway. Formal planning permission was withdrawn, planning reference 03/2006/006, following highway safety concerns.

The revised scheme seeks to relocate the entrance to provide increased visibility and access to and from the site. In addition permission is sought for the erection of an implement store, measuring 13.7 m x 9.14 m with a ridge height of 5.46 m, and two polytunnels.

A hedgerow appraisal accompanies the application.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY the proposed development is remote from any urban area and therefore distant from adequate services and facilities, in addition, public transport services are very limited. As a consequence, users of new development are likely to be dependant on private vehicles and such fostering of growth in the need to travel would be contrary to government; Notwithstanding the aforementioned comments it must be a matter for the Local Planning Authority to decide whether this is a suitable location for such a development. Whilst in transport terms the location of the site is unsustainable, given the type of use being proposed, i.e nursery, it is accepted that this type of activity is better suited to a countryside location; The proposal seeks to utilise existing agricultural land for the purpose of a nursery and I was advised during pre-application consultation, that it will be a small-scale specialist established nursery that is essentially mail order and should not be compared to the likes of nearby establishments such as Blackdown or Willowbrook. I would therefore not welcome any retail sales from the site or visits by members of the public and I would urge the LPA, to condition any resulting consent accordingly;

The approach roads leading to the site are narrow and poorly aligned and existing access from/into the site is via an existing field gate that derives access onto/from a classified/unnumbered highway, which is subject to the national speed limit; Visibility at the point of access is currently restricted and it is imperative that visibility splays that are commensurate with vehicle speeds are incorporated, to ensure highway safety for all road users. I would estimate that vehicles speeds are in the region of 40mph therefore splays based on co-ordinates of 2.0m x 120m would be appropriate; I am aware that concern was raised previously and in respect of the current proposal in terms of the access and highway safety. The agricultural use of the land has an existing point of access from/onto the public highway and whilst this is clearly substandard and hazardous for all road users, I understand that it could be used in its current state without any further planning permission being required; Taking this point into consideration, the applicants are endeavouring to create an improved point of access and whilst in terms of visibility it does not meet the required standard (set out above), I consider it will be an improvement over the existing access and therefore it may be considered unreasonable to raise a highway objection; If the LPA is minded to grant consent a number of conditions are recommended.

LANDSCAPE OFFICER although the roadside hedge and banks have to be 'grubbed out' the mitigation proposals should adequately replace the lost amenity over a five year period. The additional hedge and tree planting behind it will provide additional enhancement for the longer term. Given the landscape assessment of the potential impacts of the implement store and polytunnels I consider that the two lengths of additional hedgerow/windbreak planting will be effective in screening/softening any impact. NATURE CONSERVATION OFFICER following the advice from Country Contracts hedgerow survey, July 2007, I advise that consideration must be given to breeding birds (no works between March 1st and July 31st) and that the recommendations for careful removal of the hedge should be conditioned. I suggest that the report recommendations for hedge planting and connectivity could be part of the landscape plan requirement for the site.

PARISH COUNCIL has anyone visited the site? The reused entrance is nearer to a blind bend and further from the brow of the hill on north side obscuring view of traffic from Wiveliscombe. Still query need for such large polytunnels and the already erected bright blue wind break detracts from visual amenity.

THREE LETTERS OF OBJECTION have been received raising the following issues:- impact upon the surrounding countryside; AONB; Special Landscape Area 1992; detrimental and highly visible to surrounding countryside; already area of planted trees is an eyesore; polytunnels have negative impact; previous access tracks refused; access is dangerous; how long until an agricultural workers dwelling is sought; development will affect the stability of adjoining land; extensive discharge of surface water are clearly visible; hazard from mud, trees etc falling onto highway; insufficient provision has been made to obviate the drainage problem.

POLICY CONTEXT

PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment

Taunton Deane Local Plan Revised Deposit Policies S1 (General Requirements) and S2 (Design), and EN16, EN17 (Changes to Listed Buildings).

Policy STR1 (Sustainable Development), Policy 9 (The Built Historic Environment) of the Somerset & Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan 1991-2011.

ASSESSMENT

The primary issues in the determination of the application concern the visual impact of the proposed development on the rural character and appearance of the area, wildlife implications and the revised access arrangements.

The site is located in open countryside and designated Landscape Character Area. As such special consideration should be given to preserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area. Government guidance contained with PPS7 states, inter alia, that all development in rural areas should be well designed, in keeping and scale with its location, and sensitive to the character of the countryside and local distinctiveness. The main issue for consideration is whether the proposed building and development would be visually prominent and intrusive as to harm the rural character and appearance of the area.

The requirements of agricultural needs are changing and priority must be to ensure that any new agricultural building is of a good quality functional building to satisfy modern agricultural practices, whilst ensuring the building is so sited as to minimise impact upon the visual appearance of the countryside. The proposed building would be viewed below the skyline, with the woodland providing a backdrop, which would help to reduce the visual impact.

The proposed building and polytunnels are considered to be acceptable in their siting and design in an agricultural setting. The landscape officer considers that the proposed building and polytunnels (subject to suitable landscaping) can be assimilated into the landscape without being unduly prominent or intrusive in this location.

The applicant has written in to clarify a point made by the Parish Council; the netting is actually green and is strictly temporary as discussed with the Landscape Officer. Their purpose is to speed the establishment of the indigenous shelter belts planted in front of them, so will be removed in due course. In addition, on the northern slope the applicant has recently sprayed a large number of tree planting positions which will shortly manifest themselves as brown 'spots' in the grass. This is to facilitate the planting this coming winter of a large number of further trees to create a woodland on this bank which will provide a natural habitat and provide further screening. It is noted that during a site visit the colour would appear to be a more turquoise blue rather than a darker colour. The netting is less than 2m high and would not require planning permission. However, the applicant has been advised that a dark green or brown colour would be more appropriate.

There is already an existing access which serves the field, however a new access track along the boundary of the field is proposed. At the entrance to the site a new

roadside hedge will be curved and extend along both sides of the visibility splay to prevent a direct sightline. In terms of the technical requirements of the proposed access, it is considered the new access would be an improvement over the existing access and the Highway Authority has raised no objection to the proposal.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of time limit, landscaping, materials, details of access track, compliance with hedgerow survey, access track to be consolidated, visibility, existing access to cease, gradient, any entrance gates to be set back, details of surface water, no retail sales, polytunnels to be removed.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION:- The development is considered acceptable and would have no adverse impact upon the rural character or appearance of the landscape or highway safety. As such the development would accord with Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1, S2, S7 and EN12 and Somerset & Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policy 49.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

CONTACT OFFICER: 356586 MR A PICK