

35/09/0006

MR K OYSTON

**ERECTION OF 2 POLYTUNNELS AT LAND AT BULLOCK FIELD HILL,
STAWLEY**

307149.122991

Full Planning Permission

PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission for the erection of two polytunnels. The polytunnels would both measure 9m x 27m and would be sited to the south east of the existing building, lower down the field. As originally submitted, the northern most polytunnel was proposed to be 0.5m higher than the southern one. Following the landscape officer's comments, this higher polytunnel is now proposed at the same height as the lower one. The polytunnels would be dug-in such that they were between 0.2m at the lowest point and 2m at the highest point below the natural ground level.

A new tree and hedgerow is proposed along the south eastern boundary, with additional hedge planting indicated along the south western boundary, adjacent to the polytunnels.

The unauthorised caravan is indicated on the layout plan, but this does not form part of the application.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The site, in the open countryside, is situated towards the top of a hill, which falls away to the south and east. The top of the hill is just beyond the site to the northwest, where the site borders the highway, lined by trees. There is an existing timber clad agricultural building and associated landscaping on the site, which was permitted by application 35/08/0003.

The north western site boundary is formed of a hedge and mature trees, and separates the site from an agricultural field. The southern boundaries are generally formed by post and wire fences, which give way to further agricultural land that falls away steeply. Accordingly, the site is prominently located when viewed from the south. That said, views from the closest public footpaths and highways are limited to various gaps within the hedgerows, mainly from the Stawley to Kittisford road.

Application 35/09/0002 sought planning permission for the erection of 3 polytunnels and the stationing of a mobile home for an agricultural worker. That application was withdrawn after planning officers expressed concern about the functional need for the caravan and the visual impact of the polytunnels.

In November 2009, Planning Committee authorised the service of an Enforcement Notice against the unauthorised residential occupation of the caravan. The notice has not yet been served as the applicants had advised of their intention to submit a revised application for the dwelling. That application has now been submitted and remains under consideration.

CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATION RESPONSES

Consultees

SCC - TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT GROUP - No observations to make.

STAWLEY PARISH COUNCIL - Objects to the granting of permission for the following reasons:

- It is not possible for the application to be considered separately from the subsequent application for the siting of a temporary agricultural worker's dwelling. It is clearly the applicants' intention for them to be considered together as the attachments to the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) are clearly marked as 'proposed siting for agricultural worker's mobile home; the plan submitted with the application has the same project title and includes the 'caravan' in the plan; the Parish Council understands that an Enforcement Notice against the presence of the caravan has been issued but has not been served. Clearly the Borough Council considers the current arrangement for the caravan to be unacceptable.
- In the LVIA, the 'mobile poultry ark' positioned in the location of the polytunnels does not facilitate consideration of the visual impact. The ark is significantly smaller than the polytunnels and of a natural colour, rather than the white plastic of a polytunnel. Further, it is not the height of the tunnels (as maintained in the LVIA) that will cause the greatest visual impact, so digging in of the polytunnels will have minimal to no effect in reducing the visual impact. It is the overall dimensions and the material from which they are fabricated which will cause the impact on the landscape.
- The angle of photograph 1 in the LVIA does not give a true picture of what may or may not be visible from the highway. It is believed that there will be a clear line of site down the east side of the site from the highway and the end of the polytunnels will be visible.
- Similarly, the other photographs in the LVIA cannot show the true impact that the 2 polytunnels are likely to have, due to the materials and dimensions proposed.
- The sites of the photographs do not take into account how the polytunnels will be seen from Greenham, the road leading from Greenham to Thorne St. Margaret and other locations within the Parish and its neighbouring parishes, from which two large white scars will be seen on the side of the valley. The site is in a prominent location and is clearly visible from much of the surrounding area.
- Any planting of additional trees and hedging in the field to the southwest of the proposed site and the proposed new hedgerows and earthworks will have minimal impact for at least 5 years.

The Parish Council are also concerned about the financial viability of the whole enterprise and the potential despoliation of the countryside for no economic gain.

SENIOR ENFORCEMENT OFFICER -

HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE OFFICER – The lower of the two polytunnels should be acceptable in terms of landscape impact but I am concerned that the higher one

will be visible and have a landscape impact.

Subsequent to these comments, the application was amended as described above. The Landscape Officer has now confirmed that he considers that the proposal to be acceptable and, within 5 years, the proposed landscaping will significantly reduce the visual impact.

Representations

11 OBJECTIONS have been received in respect of this application raising the following issues:

- The tunnels are in a prominent position in an area of beautiful countryside.
- The tunnels can be seen from many locations in the Parish and Surrounding parishes.
- The proposed screening could do no more than be partially effective without compromising the production in the tunnels. The Council should seek an expert opinion on this matter.
- Such structures are an eyesore and not in keeping with surrounding traditional agricultural buildings.
- The proposed earthworks are similarly an incongruous intrusion into the surrounding area.
- Granting permission will set a precedent for other undesirable structures in the area.
- Poly tunnels require a vast amount of water, increasing demand of this resource and leading to supply and drainage issues.
- The site does not have the appropriate infrastructure to support this form of intensive agriculture.
- Intensive use requires access by larger vehicles – the visibility splays and narrow road network cannot support this.
- Visibility improvements can only be made by the destruction of the hedgerow.

- The site is bordered by farmland where organic farming and environmental husbandry are underlying values of the community.
- This proposal will have a negative social and environmental impact on the local area.
- The lack of consultation with the local community indicates no long term interest in the area.
- Local residents wish to be involved in discussions early on to express their views to the applicant.
- There is no evidence of the economic viability of the enterprise.
- The enterprise cannot be economically viable due to the small area of land. This poses the question of what the real motive is.
- Question how much thought has been put into the environmental impact of the poly tunnels, let alone the economic viability and the poor aesthetics.
- It is not known what will be grown in the poly tunnels.
- This application is the next step to securing permission for a dwelling before selling it on. This will also set a precedent for further dwellings.
- If the poly tunnels were lit they would cause a horrendous eyesore and light pollution across the valley.
- If this is becoming a nursery business there will be traffic and entry problems.

- There is no evidence to support the claims in the application that the applicant

has considerable experience in farming.

- The stated use is agriculture, but it is in fact a caravan site.
- The activities include heavy horses, but they are not an agricultural animal and would not be required to assist with the polytunnels.
- Polytunnels have already been sited on the land.
- The ancient stone faced hedge bank has been removed to improve visibility, which will open up the beautiful tree-lined vista.

PLANNING POLICIES

S1 - TDBCLP - General Requirements,

S2 - TDBCLP - Design,

S7 - TDBCLP - Outside Settlement,

STR1 - Sustainable Development,

STR6 - Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages,

PPS7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas,

DETERMINING ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The application site is in the open countryside, where additional agricultural development is acceptable in principle. The Highway Authority have confirmed that they do not wish to make any comments on the proposal and it is, therefore, considered that there will not be an unacceptable impact on the highway network. The amenities of neighbouring properties are unlikely to be adversely affected, so the main issue in the consideration of this application is the visual impact.

It cannot be denied that the site is in a prominent location being close to the top of a hill. However, as noted above, the number of places that the site can be viewed from in close proximity is fairly limited, generally restricted to gaps within field boundaries along the Appley to Stawley road and Appley to Kittisford road. Arguably the greatest visual impact is from a point on the Kittisford Road almost due south of the site, where the site is viewed in front as the road descends steeply. The application proposes a significant amount of new landscaping, including the planting of a new second hedge along the eastern site boundary, inside the existing and the provision of a new hedge along the southern site boundaries. It cannot be denied that the proposal will be visible, certainly over the first 5 years whilst the proposed landscaping is allowed to establish. However, once established, it is considered that the extent to which the polytunnels will be dug in, together with the proposed hedgerows will provide sufficient landscaping to acceptably assimilate the development into the surrounding area. Agricultural development is appropriate in the rural area and the siting proposed is considered to be the most suitable on this small block of land. I therefore consider the visual impact to be acceptable.

From further afield, the site may well be visible from many places due to its position and elevation. However, from these distances, it is considered that it will be viewed as a small component within a generally open landscape, which includes isolated farms and buildings. It is not considered, therefore, that the visual impact on the wider area could warrant refusal of the application.

It is clear that there is considerable local opposition to the proposal, both the current application and the potential long term intentions of the applicants. Both the planning history and the current application for a temporary dwelling indicate that the applicant does intend to live on the site. However, the assessment of that

application and concerns about the functional need for the dwelling are not material to the consideration of this proposal. Concern has been raised that visibility splays will require the loss of the hedgebank and trees at the access. However, the Highway Authority do not require any alterations to the access. Objection has also been raised on the basis that there has been no consultation with the local community by the applicant. However, this is not a requirement of the planning system, and cannot really be expected for a small-scale agricultural proposal such as this. Likewise, the applicants own credentials, agricultural methods and practices are not material to the considerations and the application must be determined on its own merits.

With regard to these matters, it is considered that the impact of the development will be acceptable and it is, therefore, recommended that planning permission is granted.

RECOMMENDATION AND REASON(S)

Recommended Decision: Conditional Approval

The proposed development is acceptably located for the purposes of agriculture intended. The extensive landscaping proposed will, over time, ensure that the visual impact of the proposal is reduced such that it will acceptably assimilate into the surrounding countryside. It is, therefore, in accordance with Policies S1, S2 and S7 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan and guidance contained in Planning Policy Statement 1.

RECOMMENDED CONDITION(S) (if applicable)

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun within three years of the date of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the provisions of Section 91 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

2.
 - (i) Before any part of the permitted development is commenced, a landscaping scheme, which shall include details of the species, siting and numbers to be planted, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
 - (ii) The scheme shall be completely carried out within the first available planting season from the date of commencement of the development, or as otherwise extended with the agreement in writing of the Local Planning Authority.
 - (iii) For a period of five years after the completion of each landscaping scheme, the trees and shrubs shall be protected and maintained in a healthy weed free condition and any trees or shrubs that cease to grow shall be replaced by trees or shrubs of similar size and species, or the appropriate trees or shrubs as may be approved in writing by

the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the proposed development makes a satisfactory contribution to the preservation and enhancement of the local character and distinctiveness of the area in accordance with Taunton Deane Local Plan Policy S2.

3. No lighting shall be installed in the polytunnels hereby permitted without the further grant of planning permission.

Reason: To ensure that the polytunnels are not unduly prominent in the landscape, particularly at night, to ensure an acceptable visual impact in accordance with Policy S1(E) of the Taunton Deane Local Plan.

Notes for compliance

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1988.

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