

03/2006/006

MR & MRS N JUNKER

FORMATION OF ACCESS TRACK, ERECTION OF TIMBER IMPLEMENT STORE AND TWO POLYTUNNELS AT LAND AT HIGHER COBHAY, MILVERTON, AS AMENDED BY PLAN RECEIVED 19TH JANUARY, 2007

309416/125067

FULL

PROPOSAL

Permission is sought for the formation of a new access track, erection of a timber 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. The 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, part of 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. As such express planning permission is now sought.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY the proposed development is unsustainable given its isolated location in transport terms. In addition a formal objection is raised to the inadequate visibility of the proposed modified access. If permission were to be granted it is recommended that no retail sales or public visits are permissible

LANDSCAPE OFFICER subject to details of hedge species, size, etc and bank details of the hedgerow and shelter belts it should be possible to integrate the proposals within the local landscape within five years.

PARISH COUNCIL no objection in principle. The Parish Council raise questions regarding the necessity of such a large polytunnel; the assessment of the soil conditions; highway safety – works should be carried out prior to commencement; if local people employed a water supply and foul drainage should be included. The Parish Council also confirm the amended location plan is now correct.

ONE LETTER OF OBJECTION has been received raising the following issues:- the location plan is misleading as shows are outside of applicants ownership included (the location plan has subsequently been amended); woodland is a sanctuary for wildlife; woodland would be adversely affected by the access track; requirement for planting of trees/hedges; ditch excavated could prejudice stability of woodland; danger of mud, fallen trees etc onto the adjacent highway; area shown for parking of vehicles etc could further impact upon environmental impact to the woodland.

POLICY CONTEXT

RPG10 (Regional Planning Guidance for the South West), 2001.

PPS1 – Delivering Sustainable Development.

PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.

PPS9 – Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

Somerset & Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policies STR1 (Sustainable Development), STR6 (Development Outside Rural Centres & Villages), EN3 (Wildlife Site) and Policy 5 (Landscape Character).

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 (General Requirements), S2 (Design), S7 (Outside Settlements), and EN12 (Landscape Character Areas).

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 have limited 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 main elevation of the building that would be seen would be finished in traditional timber boarding. 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. In addressing the concerns of local residents with regard to wildlife the views of the Council's Nature Conservation Officer have been sought and will be relayed to Members on the update sheet.

There is already an existing access which serves the field, however a new access track along the boundary of the field is proposed. The access would be constructed of recycled crushed stone from re-development at Cobhay Farm. 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.

The proposal seeks to utilize an existing agricultural field gateway. However, the proposed development would lead to an intensification of this access. The approach roads leading to the site are narrow and poorly aligned and access from/into the site is from a classified highway, 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. The Highway Authority estimate that vehicle speeds are in the region of 40 mph and recommend splays based on 2.0 m x 120 m would be appropriate. The land to the north west of the access is outside of the applicant's ownership; hence it would appear the required splays cannot be achieved. As such the Highway Authority has raised a formal objection to the proposed development.

As such it is recommended the application be refused for the reason outlined below.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be REFUSED for the reason that the proposed development would lead to an intensification of an existing access and as such the modified access to the site does not incorporate the necessary visibility splays, which are essential in the interests of highway safety. As such the proposal would be contrary to Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Policy 49.

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

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NOTES: