

SOUTH WEST STORAGE

TEMPORARY CHANGE OF USE OF LAND TO (B8) COMMERCIAL USAGE TO SITE 17 CONTAINER STORAGE UNITS, CULMHEAD BUSINESS PARK, CHURCHSTANTON

Grid Reference: 320857.115169

Full Planning Permission

RECOMMENDATION AND REASON(S)

Recommended Decision: Refusal

- 1 The proposed development site is located in designated Open Countryside within the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, outside the confines of any recognised development boundary limits, remote from services, and public transport and is considered in transport terms, an unsustainable location. The users of the development are likely to be reliant on the private car and there will therefore be an increase on the reliance on the private motor car and such fostering of growth in the need to travel would be contrary to government advice given in Planning Policy Statement - Planning and Climate Change -Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1, Planning Policy Statement 7, Planning Policy Guidance Note 13, and Policies STR1 and STR6 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review and Policy S1 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan.

Notes for compliance

1. The AONB Partnership has prepared an light pollution information sheet for businesses and organisations which is available at <http://www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk/modules/documents/documents/lightpoll-ORG.pdf>
Such advice should be taken into account should the applicant or agent wish to submit further applications.

PROPOSAL

The proposal is to install 17 secure units/containers measuring 6.5m by 2.4m by 2.4m within an existing secure area. A separate customer parking turning area is shown to the east. The application was accompanied by 5 letters of support based on need to expand the number of local businesses.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The site is within the former airfield at Culmhead, which is now the Business Centre with its access from the adjacent main road, which runs past the site. The application site for the storage of 17 containers is within the secure fenced area, the proposed customer parking and turning area is outside the secure area. The whole site is to the north of the gatehouse and is hard surfaced. Two storey office buildings are sited to the southwest of the site.

History - In 2008 an application for two-storey offices was refused on the basis of being outside settlement limits in open countryside where new development is strictly controlled, precedent, in AONB, no proven need and contrary to EN10.

CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATION RESPONSES

Consultees

CHURCHSTANTON PARISH COUNCIL - fully supports the granting of permission with the added provision of natural screening to shield the site from the highway.

SCC - TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT GROUP - The proposed development site is located outside of any development limit and therefore remote from any urban area and is considered in transport terms, an unsustainable location. As a consequence, users of the new development are likely to be dependent on private vehicles and such fostering of growth in the need to travel would be contrary to government advice, and should be refused.

In detail the proposal seeks a change of use of an existing piece of land which does not appear to have any use class in its own right or traffic generation, and be this a temporary or permanent use the sustainability issues are the same. The proposal will clearly result in an increase in traffic over and above what exists in this location currently. It is considered by the Highway Authority that if granted consent a precedent will be set for further development in this unsustainable location.

Whilst it may be a local person applying to have the business in this location, the nature of the business would mean that people will be travelling from outside of the local area to utilise the site, hence the fostering of growth in the need to travel.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned comments, it must be a matter for the Local Planning Authority to decide whether the re-use and/or any other overriding planning need, outweighs the transport policies that seek to reduce reliance on the private car.

In terms of the detail I am satisfied that on site parking and turning can be provided within the site commensurate with the use and if granted a condition should be imposed to ensure it is provided and maintained in perpetuity.

It should be noted that there have been two personal injury accidents with regard to vehicles turning into this site from the adjoining classified/unnumbered highway. This is a fast stretch of highway (national speed limit of 60mph), which does not benefit from a right turn lane to benefit users utilising this development.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - I would be swayed by the views of the main business on Culmhead Business Park, namely Property Consortium UK, who are a prestigious and expanding business, employing around 100 people. The siting of the storage units might be perceived to have a detrimental impact on the setting and view of their property. I note from your file, however, that PCUK has no negative comment to make on the proposal, and would therefore be similarly disposed to not object to the application. If permission is to be granted I would, however, request that the storage units are sited and screened to minimise their visual impact on PCUK and the other businesses in that area.

LANDSCAPE LEAD - limited landscape impact although I would prefer to see containers painted mid/dark grey rather than green.

BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB SERVICE - The location of these containers within the existing fenced area of the business park limits the impact on the AONB and special qualities of the area. Nonetheless, if the planning authority is minded to approve this application the AONB Partnership would like to see the exact siting conditioned as per the plans, i.e. on the part of the application site nearest to the buildings, to prevent visual sprawl. The colour of the containers will also be an important factor. Security lighting is referred to in the application, but no details are indicated. There is already a considerable amount of lighting at Culmhead Business Park, which detracts from the dark skies of the AONB, and further clarification of lighting requirements should be sought. Any additional security lighting should be suitably designed, sited and angled to avoid further light pollution.

STRATEGY LEAD - In principle we would not object to the application as long as the containers are within the area defined in the Local Plan for employment use at the Disused Airfield at Culmhead and adequately screened from the highway. The red line boundary identifies an area outside of this designation for proposed customer parking and turning area. The Strategy Unit would not support the siting of containers or, as shown, customer parking, outside the employment allocation boundary (Local Plan Policy EC5) because this would fall within an AONB.

Representations

Former Ward Councillor John Thorne.

As the Blackdown ward councillor, I support this application. I have met the applicants and discussed their plans and I have also visited the proposed site and toured the wider business park location. Provision of a business support service as proposed by the applicants will help to sustain local businesses who otherwise have to travel some distance to access such storage facilities. This must be beneficial to them in terms of reducing their costs, and also beneficial to the environment of the Blackdown Hills by reducing carbon emissions and vehicular traffic. It should also help local businesses to thrive and perhaps help to create future local employment opportunities as they do so.

The location at the Culmhead Business Park is suitable, as it has adequate road access and is remote from any residential properties, so there are no visual or noise issues to be considered. I'm aware that during some preliminary discussions, the planning department may have intimated to the applicants that the site would not be suitable because of its visual impact on the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. If such a comment was made, then I find that to be a ludicrous statement. The applicants propose to site their storage units inside an existing secure compound, which is entirely surrounded by metal fencing of approximately 15 feet in height and topped with razor wire. Putting storage units inside such a compound cannot possibly create any further visual impact. I understand the applicants are even prepared to attach further screening material to the fencing if it was considered that visitors to the business park may see the container units through the fencing. In any case, when I visited the site, I noted that there are already three similar size container units sited on the ground inside the business park to the rear the compound, and which do not have any screening around them at all. I note that the application is already at this early stage attracting support from local residents and businesses. I trust that the application will be approved.

No representations received as a result of the Local Planning Authority Consultation, but 5 letters in support accompanied the application.

PLANNING POLICIES

PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Development,
PPS 1 SUPP - Planning and Climate Change,
PPS4 - Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth,
PPS7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas,
STR1 - Sustainable Development,
STR6 - Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages,
S1 - TDBCLP - General Requirements,
S2 - TDBCLP - Design,
S7 - TDBCLP - Outside Settlement,
EC7 - TDBCLP - Rural Employment Proposals,
EN10 - TDBCLP - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty,
EN12 - TDBCLP - Landscape Character Areas,
EN21 - TDBCLP - Nationally Important Archaeological Remains,
EN22 - TDBCLP Dev Affecting Sites of County Archaeological Importance,

DETERMINING ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The site is in open countryside in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and whilst it is adjacent to an established employment area, it is removed from all services and amenities. The Policies relating to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation have regard to the priority to preserving and enhancing the natural beauty. The PPS7 objectives include the need to promote more sustainable patterns of development, focusing most development in, or next, to existing towns and villages, and to raise the quality of life and the environment in rural areas through the promotion of good quality, sustainable development that respects the intrinsic qualities of the countryside, and the continued protection of the open countryside for the benefit of all, with the highest level of protection for the most valued landscapes. The Taunton Deane Local Plan Policy EC5 specifically applied to the disused airfield, however this policy was not saved as part of the review of the Local Plan. This policy had included restrictions on uses to exclude B8 (Storage or Distribution) and to avoid outside storage or working, improve vehicular access and public transport, provide screening and landscaping, and having no increase in overall floorspace. Whilst this policy itself has not been saved, the philosophy behind the policy is still considered relevant.

Letters of support submitted with the application comment that extra employment would be generated, the use would not be visually intrusive, the site is well screened, that some containers are already on site as storage for existing businesses and the site is well located for local businesses. It is considered that the potential for additional employment is marginal, the proposal being for one full time and 2 part time employees, the site is some distance from the main road, there is some roadside screening, any existing containers relate to existing businesses' needs. In terms of the 'need' for such service, existing rural buildings/sites such as barns or farmyards could be used for storage purposes, subject to the necessary permission. It is not considered that the limited economic benefit outweighs the issue of the unsustainable location.

The site is within the AONB and usually visual impact is a critical factor and often results in unacceptable proposals, however on this occasion it is not considered that

this proposal will result in an undesirable development due to the nature of this area which is part of the plateau, and views and any visual impact of the site are limited. In regard to the need to consider the economic benefits of the proposal, this is not an expansion of an existing business, it is a use which could be operated within a range of existing outbuildings, unused barns or farm complexes, which are suitable for storage use. It is not considered appropriate to commence storage in containers at this site in designated open countryside.

The proposal to place containers on the existing surfaced area will not have any impact on the County Archaeological Site, and this is not therefore considered an issue in the determination of the application.

The County Highway Authority has identified that the proposal will clearly result in an increase in traffic over and above that which exists in this location currently, and a precedent will be set for further development in this unsustainable location. The application suggests that the containers will be used by local businesses and individuals within a 10 mile radius, however there is no way that this can be guaranteed. Users of the facility will have to use private vehicles to access the site and will have to travel some distance to access the site. It is not considered that the site is appropriate for the storage of 17 containers, having regard to the traffic generation in the designated open countryside. Whilst the actual traffic generation is not given in the application, and may be relatively small, should the proposal be successful then traffic generation could be more significant on a road which the County Highway Authority has identified as having had two personal injury accidents.

Any increase in traffic to a site within the open countryside is contrary to policy, specifically PPS1, PPS7, PPG13, Policies STR1 and STR6 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review and Policy S1 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan.

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

CONTACT OFFICER: Ms K Marlow Tel: 01823 356460