

22/2004/015

M E J, S A, E P WHITE

**CHANGE OF USE OF PIGGERY, OFFICE AND WAREHOUSE TO FOOD DISTRIBUTION OFFICE AND WAREHOUSE AT PIGGERY BUILDING, TOWER FARMS, DEANS CROSS, LYDEARD ST LAWRENCE.**

12159/33309

FULL PERMISSION

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**PROPOSAL**

The proposal comprises the conversion of a piggery unit to a distribution office and warehouse. The existing building is proposed to be clad in agricultural style green sheeting and measures 22.4 m x 4.5 m and 5 m to the eaves of this monopitch building. The unit is accessed from a track that passes through Tower Farm and located to the East of the main Tower Farm buildings within a separate group of existing agricultural buildings.

The premises is proposed to be rented to the non-profit making, Exmoor and Quantock Local Produce Distribution Company, supported by Somerset Food Links. The aim of the project is to collect and deliver local produce so that producers can concentrate on production, cutting down their expensive delivery costs, thus promoting the rural economy and reducing overall delivery miles. The warehouse section of the unit will store ambient temperature, chilled and frozen produce so that delivery can be made immediate to demand.

Supporting information for the proposal from Somerset Feed Linkes accompanies the application as follows:- "When converted, the unit will be rented by the Exmoor and Quantock Local Produce Distribution Company as a base for it's operations. This fledging producers cooperative has searched the surrounding area for existing business units that would be suitable in terms of size, location and facilities and nothing has been appeared. Therefore it is very fortunate for us that Tower Farms are able to work with us to enable this organisation to get going. The new producers co-operative is being set up by local food producers in the Exmoor and Quantock area, with the support of Somerset Food Links, to improve the distribution and marketing of local food and drink. The enterprise will take the produce to outlets in the area such as pubs, shops, restaurants and B&Bs and marketed under the banner of Exmoor and Quantocks. Since it was set up in 1998, Somerset Food Links has gained a lot of experience working with small local food producers. One of the universal issues that small producers face is that distribution of produce can be very difficult and expensive. The cost in terms of vehicles, fuel and time can make this a disproportionately large part of the cost of the business. This issue is why we have worked with the producer businesses to develop this solution. Therefore the primary purpose of this enterprise is to make these small producer businesses more viable. A knock-on effect will be to increase the circulation of money in the local economy as they are able to sell more to local outlets and conversely it is easier for outlets to source locally. The enterprise will, through the marketing of the produce in relation to the landscape, promote the local distinctiveness of the food and

drink. This all fits neatly into the wider economic strategies of Taunton Deane, Somerset and the South-West."

## **CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS**

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY comments awaited. WEST SOMERSET DISTRICT COUNCIL the site is located in open countryside, however the re-use of rural buildings is a material consideration supported by PPS7.

PROMOTION/TOURISM no observations. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH no observations. DRAINAGE OFFICER no objections subject to informative notes relating to foul drainage and surface water.

PARISH COUNCIL Whilst the Council had no objection in principle to the change of use, there were concerns over the increase in traffic that would ensue. It is understood that initially the applicants envisage that one transit van will make 3 deliveries per week thought that if the operation is successful, this will inevitably increase. The lanes around the area are very narrow; access should be restricted to Whitemoor Lane (from the B3224 at Thornbush) only and traffic prevented from using either Binford Lane or Westowe hamlet. The residents of Westowe are of the opinion that the amenity of the area will be spoilt by any increase in traffic. There is a perennial problem at the top of Binford Lane with drainage where a culvert is regularly blocked by runoff. There are concerns that this would be exacerbated by increased hard standing for vehicles.

SIX LETTERS OF OBJECTION have been received on the following grounds:- all lanes leading to the site are farm lanes, narrow, winding with few passing places and unsuitable for lorries; concern that the site will be accessed from Binford Lane and through Westowe with two acute bends, one such bend incorporates a listed wall which would be at danger; increased traffic will be a danger to children riding their ponies, bicycles, joggers, walkers and other users of the surrounding road network; concern that once the business is established it will lead to the further conversion of adjacent to the unit, i.e. setting a precedent; for the project to be viable there would have to be a constant flow of traffic bringing goods in and out; if the project becomes successful the proposed traffic flow will increase; lorries will inevitably deliver to the warehouse; increased traffic would spoil the peace and tranquility of home and surroundings; it would devalue residential properties in the area; the business would be better suited in commercial units in the West Bagborough area; an application for a light industrial unit at Westowe Barns, Westowe was refused due to the inadequacy of the road network (application 22/1996/002); the access onto Binford Road would be used as it is closer to the site than the main Tower Farm access; an additional agricultural building in the field to the south is not mentioned as being owned by the applicants that could also be subject to further similar change of use applications.

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review - STR1 Sustainable Development - Amongst other criteria seeks to develop a pattern of land use and transport which minimizes the length of journeys and the need to travel. STR6 Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages - development should benefit the local, rural economy and reduce the need for travel. Policy 18 Location of Land for Industrial, Warehousing & Business Development . Policy 19 Employment and Community Provision in Rural Areas - supports the diversification of agricultural units. Policy 39 Transport and Development

Taunton Deane Local Plan Revised Deposit - Policy S1 General Requirements. Policy S2 Design. Policy S8 Outside Development Limits - Amongst other criteria, new building should support the vitality and viability of the rural economy in a way which cannot be sited within defined limits of a settlement. Policy EC1a Commercial Expansion on Land Subject to Restrictive Policies. Policy EC3 Conversion of Rural Buildings. Policy EC5 Farm Diversification. Policy M1 Traffic Generation.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The site lies outside defined settlement limits and the current use of the land and existing building is agricultural, the site is therefore not considered "Brownfield" or previously developed land. The principle of the site is however in line with planning policy in that it involves the re-use of an existing building in the countryside and promotes rural sustainability through the reduction of overall produce delivery miles. The proposal is further supported by PPS7 as it proposes to re-use an agricultural building for commercial purposes.

Justification for the location of this commercial activity, outside defined settlement limits is further justified as it is located within the vicinity of an existing commercial premises and that the need to travel would be reduced by relieving the delivery requirement of producers with an overall reduction in food delivery miles. By relieving producers of expensive delivery costs and the associated loss of time taken up by delivering, the proposal supports the local economy as production can be concentrated upon more vigorously resulting in the production of more local produce, distributed to the local area. The promotion of the rural economy is further considered an appropriate justification for the proposal's location outside development limits. The principle of the proposal is therefore considered acceptable.

The design of the proposed conversion is considered appropriate and maintains the appearance of an agricultural building with standard profile metal sheet cladding. The site is well screened from local views due to an abundance of trees on its boundaries and therefore its impact is not considered detrimental to visual amenity.

Objections have been received with regard to associated traffic using lanes through Westowe and Binford Lane, however the proposed access route does not involve the use of these lanes. Access is proposed using the existing Tower Farm access from Whitmoor Lane that links to the B3224. Concern has also been raised that for the project to be viable there would have to be a constant flow of traffic to and from the site. The latter is not considered to be the case in this example due to the nature of the delivery proposed. A van would leave the site and travel on a circuit picking up produce and delivering it as it goes, without the need to travel back to the site on a frequent

basis. Further objections based on highway issues will be addressed and the report updated on the receipt of the County Highway Authority comments.

One representation highlighted a nearby application that was refused permission for light industrial use at Westowe Barns, Westowe, (application 22/1996/002). The latter application was refused due to the inadequacy of the lane to which access was proposed and not based on the roads proposed to be used by this development. The proposal should therefore be assessed on its own merits and the County Highway Authority comments will be reported accordingly. Concern has also been raised that lorries would make deliveries to the site, however this is not proposed and not perceived to be required again due to the nature of the operation only requiring a van.

Concern has been raised that the frequency of traffic will escalate and that a precedent will be set so that other buildings on the site could have their uses changed as well if the project is successful. The applicants however, have indicated on the application form that the proposal does not form part of a larger scheme to change the other existing buildings on the site. Any speculation therefore of any future development is not considered a relevant planning consideration. A precedent would not necessarily be set as if any similar applications are received in the future they would be determined on their own merits.

Concern has also been raised that the proposal will devalue residential property, however this is not considered to be a relevant planning consideration. The applicant also has confirmed the extent of land ownership as shown on the site location plan is correct and no other adjacent land is owned that may contain additional agricultural buildings. Further representation has been received questioning the location of the proposal, however the applicants have indicated during pre-application discussions that the location must be in a rural setting, near the A358 in order to minimize travel distances and that no alternative site could be found.

Although not relevant to the application site or Tower Farm, application 22/1996/002 has been cited as a similar application that was refused. Application 22/1996/002, for the conversion of a redundant barn to light industrial use at Westowe Barns, Westowe, Lydeard St Lawrence, dated 31st May 1996, was refused as "roads leading to the site are narrow and have sinuous alignment and are thereby unsuitable for the type of traffic associated with such development. Furthermore it is considered the type of traffic granted by the proposed development is inappropriate for this rural location by reason of its effect on the character of the area.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Subject to the receipt of no adverse comments from the County Highway Authority, the Development Control Manager in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair be authorised to determine and permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of time limit, materials, parking and any further conditions recommended by the County highway Authority.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION:- The proposal is considered to be compatible with National and Local Planning Policies which encourage sustainable development

and the re-use of rural buildings for commercial purposes and would not adversely affect residential or visual amenity and accordingly does not conflict with Taunton Deane Local Plan Revised Deposit Policies S1, S2, S8, EC1a, EC3, EC5 and M1.

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

**CONTACT OFFICER: 356586 MR R UPTON**

NOTES: