

MR M JAMES

CHANGE OF USE AND RE-CLADDING OF AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS FOR THE WHOLESALE STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION OF PACKAGING MATERIALS, ALLERFORD FARM, NORTON FITZWARREN.

17920/25080

FULL PERMISSION

PROPOSAL

The proposal provides for the change of use of agricultural buildings at Allerford Farm to wholesale storage and distribution of packaging materials. The buildings are mostly vacant, being used until about 3 years ago for the storage of animal feed and silage. They would be reclad to make them weatherproof and secure. The rear courtyard elevations of some of the buildings are open and the intention would be to make them enclosed with additional cladding and with the provision of loading doors. The floorspace totals 4,402 sq m. The intended occupiers currently operate from premises at Courtlands Industrial Estate at Norton Fitzwarren. Their business as merchants of a wide range of packaging materials involves the storage and selling throughout the south west of often very inexpensive packaging materials such as bubble wrap, loosefil, corrugated paper, cardboard boxes, adhesive tapes, paper, polythene bags, sacks, film, etc. Some of the goods held remains in stock for a year, but on average for about 3 - 4 months. The intended occupiers estimate that they have about 6 deliveries a day from suppliers using a wide range of vehicle sizes, only 1 or 2 being large lorries. Deliveries are made in light vans and 7 a half ton vehicles averaging in total about 5 trips a day. They employ 12 full time and 3 part-time staff and are continuing to grow and have searched the Taunton area to acquire suitable economic storage for many years but have been unsuccessful. They nearly purchased land in Sedgemoor earlier this year, but they are loath to move with their staff out of the Taunton area. Information has been supplied by the applicant, the previous user of the buildings for farming purposes, indicating intensive traffic movements when the site was in full use as a dairy farm. This information indicates traffic movements in the order of 200 trip a day back and forth totaling 400 movements a day.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY the site is accessed via classified unnumbered roads that suffer from extremely substandard widths and alignment, with severely restricted forward visibility on the double bends adjacent to the site. This location is clearly inappropriate for formation of a large-scale commercial use with significant traffic generation, particularly a use generating HGV traffic. Such a use should be located within a purpose built industrial estate with suitable access to the County and National Primary Route network, via appropriately designed approach roads. Regard has to be given to the fact that substantial buildings are already in place on the site, and the present lawful use for agriculture has in the past generated substantial traffic movements, including HGVs. At present these uses have ceased, but an agricultural use, generating similar levels of traffic to the past use, could proceed on the site,

presumably without the need for planning permission. The levels of traffic generation are therefore a relevant issue. In my opinion a comparison must be drawn between the 'existing' or likely traffic generation of an agricultural use of these buildings and the level of traffic generated by the proposed use. Information received from the applicants suggests 'existing', traffic movements in the region of 100 - 200 movements per day. It is considered that this level of traffic generation is unusually high for a dairy farming enterprise of this scale. Investigation of similar scale dairy enterprises suggests that 30 - 40 movements per day may be a more realistic estimate. The proposed use of the site indicates an initial traffic generation of 52 trips per day, although the business is expected to grow. The traffic generation of non-perishable storage and distribution uses tends to be around 1.6 movements per day per 100 m² GFA, (based on figures from the TRICS database) and, using this trip rate, the total traffic generation of this use could be in the region of 70 movements per day. (A general employment use of these buildings could attract between 400 and 900 movements per day.) If there is presumption in favour of reuse of these buildings for a non-agricultural business use, then the current proposal may offer best solution in terms of minimising traffic generation. While the traffic generation of the Kingfisher storage and distribution use is higher than the Highway Authority's estimate of the likely traffic generation of an agricultural enterprise on the site, it is considerably lower than the 'existing' traffic generation put forward by the applicant. Subject to the application of suitable conditions and agreements, regarding personal consent, specific use, routing of vehicles via the classified unnumbered road connecting with the B3227 immediately to the west of Norton Fitzwarren, it may be unreasonable to raise an objection to this application on transport grounds.

11 LETTERS OF OBJECTION Allerford Farm lies along the convergence of four narrow winding country lanes with passing places, often with steeply banked sides and low overhanging trees; all four lanes are subject to periodic inundation from overflow from the River Tone and the Hillfarrance Brook and their tributaries and from run-off from the roadside fields; flooding appears to be occurring more frequently, temporarily isolating the communities and also aggravating the disrepair of the roads; there is already a perception of increasing weight of traffic, particularly HGVs, through Hillfarrance and Pontispool; the lanes are also extensively used for recreational activities, eg cycling, walking, jogging, running, dog exercising, children's ponies, adult horse riding and the narrow high-banked winding section of road between Norton bridge and Allerford provides access to the equestrian centre at Pontispool Farm; the 1999 estimate of 410 traffic movements into and out of the farm during a normal working day is disingenuous, extraordinary and highly improbable, amounting to one arrival or departure every 3 and a half minutes per 24 hours, or every 1 and a half minutes during a 10 hour day, and quite at variance with the visible evidence of activity around the farm at the time; some of the traffic figures show some surprising entries, viz neighbours and visitors for open days and visiting parlour 10 times in and out listed as every day, electric and water meters readers twice daily and seasonal work which it is unfair to extrapolate to daily movements; though the dairy herd has gone, the land belonging to the farm remains in use for stock, silage and arable crops, presumably under contract arrangements, and so there has been no perceptible reduction in the agricultural traffic using the lanes - therefore the use of the buildings for a new business would inevitably mean an increase in road traffic; the volume or intensity of traffic activity (milk, stock or arable produce) generated by a farm is often seasonal and therefore bears little comparison with the activity of a business receiving and dispatching goods along these rural lanes on a

regular basis through each working day; the local lanes are totally unsuitable for large lorries and it would be environmentally unacceptable to upgrade them solely to provide access to an enterprise that would be more appropriately located on a trading estate; if the application were to go ahead, consideration should be given to designating the lane between Allerford and Hillfarrance as unsuitable for HGVs; the local lanes are part of National Cycle Route 3; not aware of Allerford Farm ever being serviced by a regular traffic of vans and lorries in the past; this development could be the thin end of the wedge and could lead to a small industrial estate blighting this lovely rural area; will be an increased risk of accidents; the proposed operators own claims for traffic flows would suggest around 100 trips per day, which would be set to increase as they continue to expand; it is their need to expand cheaply that is the reason for their proposed move and understand that there are other parties interested in moving to Allerford and the potential for serious environmental impact is considerable; if all the buildings are to be used, this is a huge amount of storage; it does not appear that heavy goods vehicles will be able to enter and leave the site in forward gear, to turn an articulated lorry in the adjacent lanes would be very difficult and highly undesirable; applicant's figures cannot be correct as they appear to be having more goods delivered to them than they are sending out; the possibility of a fire on the site is a matter of concern as access through the country lanes, which are subject to flooding could be difficult, if not impossible, for fire appliances, and packaging materials are notoriously inflammable; the buildings at present are not suitable for storing packaging, considerable work needs to be carried out to bring them up to standard; buildings may be leased off to other users, thus doubling or trebling the volume of traffic; undertakings should be sought from the applicant that no unacceptably large vehicles or large numbers of vehicles will use these minor lanes.

PARISH COUNCIL have previously discussed and commented on the proposal and this plan only serves to confirm and strengthen their views. The Parish Council strongly objected to the earlier application on highway grounds. The roads from 4 directions on to the site are totally unsuitable for the vehicles necessary to bring in and dispatch goods for this type of business. It is also on a main cycle route and would be extremely dangerous for cyclists and horse riders.

POLICY CONTEXT

County Structure Plan policy STR1 on sustainable development is relevant. Part of this policy requires the development of a pattern of land use and transport which minimises the length of journeys and the need to travel and maximises the potential for the use of public transport, cycling and walking. Policy STR6 states that development outside towns, rural centres and villages should be strictly controlled and restricted to that which benefits economic activity, maintains or enhances the environment and does not foster growth in the need to travel. Policy 19 of the same plan states that in rural areas provision should be made for development which creates or enhances local employment facilities. Policy WD/IE/1 of the West Deane Local Plan sets out criteria against which employment proposals will be assessed. Policy WD/SP/3 of the same plan is relevant. This policy indicates that change of use of buildings outside defined settlement limits will be allowed provided certain criteria are met. One of these criteria is that there is no harm to highway safety. Policy S1 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan

Revised Deposit includes general requirements for new developments. One of these requirements is that the accessibility of the development by public transport, cycling and pedestrian networks would be consistent with its likely trip generation and minimising the need to use the car. Policy EC3 of the same plan states that outside the defined limits of settlements, the conversion of buildings to small scale business, industrial, warehousing, tourism, recreation, community, commercial or other employment generating use will be permitted provided that certain criteria are met. Again, one of the criteria is that the proposal should not harm highway safety.

ASSESSMENT

The site is located in an area accessed by lanes which have extremely sub-standard widths and alignment, with restricted forward visibility on the double bends adjacent to the site. The County Highway Authority consider that the location is clearly inappropriate for the formation of a large scale commercial use with significant traffic generation, particularly a use generating HGV traffic. Although they consider that it may be unreasonable to raise an objection on transport grounds, I consider that the location is inappropriate for a distribution centre. The claimed number of daily traffic movements to the former dairy farm seem unusually high and I am sceptical that this information is sufficient to warrant approval of the currently proposal on the grounds that it will bring about a reduction in traffic movements to/from the site.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be REFUSED for reasons that the proposed development would not be in the interests of the safety and convenience of road users for reason that the site is accessed via classified unnumbered roads that suffer from extremely substandard widths and alignment, with severely restricted forward visibility on the double bends adjacent to the site . Consequently, the location is considered inappropriate for the formation of a large-scale commercial use with significant traffic generation, particularly a use generating HGV traffic, which should be located within a purpose built industrial estate with suitable access to the County and National Primary Route network via appropriately designed approach roads.

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

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