

Agenda Item 105.

Development Management Ref No	No weeks on day of committee	Parish	Ward	Listed by:
153434	11/13	Finchampstead	Finchampstead South	Major

Applicant	Mr and Mrs S Slavchev – EU Plants	Postcode	RG40 3TL
Location	Manor Farm, Finchampstead		
Proposal	Full application for the proposed erection of 3no agricultural cold store buildings.		
Type	Major development		
PS Category	6		
Officer	Graham Vaughan		

FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Planning Committee on 2 nd March 2016
REPORT PREPARED BY	Head of Development Management and Regulatory Services

SUMMARY

The application site is in designated countryside and is part of a larger farm located in Finchampstead. It is bordered by four roads and is currently well used as a propagation business. The most visible part of this use is the poly tunnels on the site however other buildings are located around the farm. The siting of the proposed buildings is in an area where an existing cold store and irrigation building is already located. The proposed buildings would be used for cold storage and would extend the existing buildings maintaining their height, width and colour. An area of hard standing to the east of the buildings is also proposed.

The proposal would provide further agricultural buildings on a working farm utilising part of the farm that is already occupied by buildings. A demonstrated need has been established for these due to the expansion of the propagation business and the specific requirements of the propagation process. As such, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in principle. The buildings would be of a large scale but would be for an agricultural use on a farm and existing as well as proposed planting would help to mitigate this. Subject to conditions, no harmful impacts are identified and therefore the application is recommended for approval.

PLANNING STATUS

- Countryside
- Wind turbine safeguarding zone
- Farnborough Aerodrome consultation zone
- Sand and gravel extraction
- Minerals consultation zone
- South East Water supply area
- Non EA water courses
- Contaminated land consultation zone
- Permissive paths
- Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area – 5 and 7 km
- Archaeological Sites
- Tree Preservation Order

RECOMMENDATION

That the committee authorise the GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION subject to the following:

A. Conditions and informatives:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
Reason: In pursuance of s.91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by s.51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
2. This permission is in respect of the submitted application plans and drawings numbered 'ENQ-1579-05', 'ENQ-1579-06', 'ENQ-1579-07', 'ENQ-1579-08', 'ENQ-1579-09' and 'ENQ-1579-10' received by the local planning authority on 22nd May 2015 and the revised plans on 23rd December 2015. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.
3. Except where stated otherwise on the approved drawings, the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the extension hereby permitted shall be of similar appearance to those used in the existing building, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
Reason: To ensure that the external appearance of the building is satisfactory. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3
4. Prior to the commencement of the development there shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority a scheme of landscaping, which shall specify species, planting sizes, spacing and numbers of trees/shrubs to be planted, and any existing trees or shrubs to be retained. Any hedging shall be planted 1 metre from the fence.
Planting shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the building(s). Any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from the date of the planting (or within a period of 5 years of the occupation of the buildings in the case of retained trees and shrubs) die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species or otherwise as approved in writing by the local planning authority.
Reason: To ensure adequate planting in the interests of visual amenity. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21
5. The development hereby permitted shall not be carried out unless in accordance with the drainage details contained in the letter dated 16th February 2016 from Davenport Consultancy. The details shall be implemented as stated and maintained thereafter unless agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: To ensure surface water drainage would not be increased as a result of the development. Relevant Policy: Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC10

6. No trees, shrubs or hedges within the site which are shown as being retained on the approved plans shall be felled, uprooted wilfully damaged or destroyed, cut back in any way or removed without previous written consent of the local planning authority; any trees, shrubs or hedges removed without consent or dying or being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within 5 years from the completion of the development hereby permitted shall be replaced with trees, shrubs or hedge plants of similar size and species unless the local planning authority gives written consent to any variation. *To secure the protection throughout the time that development is being carried out, of trees, shrubs and hedges growing within the site which are of amenity value to the are. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21*

PLANNING HISTORY

- **AG/2010/1446** - Application for agricultural prior determination for the erection of an open fronted portal frame agricultural barn – **No objection** 19th July 2010.
- **AG/2011/2110** - Application for agricultural prior determination for proposed irrigation reservoir – **No objection** 28th October 2011.
- **AG/2011/2616** - Application for agricultural prior determination for the proposed erection of an irrigation shed – **NO OBJECTION** 13th January 2012.
- **F/2011/2620** – Proposed erection of polytunnels, formation of as ditch and laying of hardstanding – **Approved on** 22nd May 2012
- **CLP/2012/0189** – Application for a Certificate of Lawful Proposed Development for the erection of polytunnels – **refused on** 25th April 2012
- **F/2012/0039** - Proposed use of agricultural barn for the stationing of 2 no. caravans to provide accommodation for seasonal agricultural workers and installation of sewage treatment plant (Part Retrospective) – **Conditionally approved** 3rd October 2012
- **152683** - Application to vary conditions 1 and 2 of planning permission F/2012/0039 for the use of a barn for the stationing of 2 caravans to provide accommodation for seasonal agricultural workers and installation of sewage treatment plant (part retrospective). Condition 1 requires the use to cease on 2 October 2015. It is proposed to remove this condition. Condition 2 restricts the permission to three years and only whilst the premises are occupied by EU Plants. It is proposed to vary this condition to read: The use hereby permitted shall be carried on only by EU Plants Ltd whilst the premises are occupied by EU Plants Ltd – **Conditionally approved** on 26th November 2015

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Berkshire Archaeology	No objection
Highways	No objection
Biodiversity	No objection
Tree and Landscape	No objection subject to conditions
Environmental Health	No objection
Drainage	No objection
Finchampstead Parish Council	No comments received
Local Members	No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

- 3 Letters of objection received with regards to the following:
- Site is like a factory

- Polytunnels have been erected without permission (Officer Note: Not a material consideration to this application)
- Noise from vehicle movements and compressors
- Lorries cause damage to local roads
- Detrimental impact on character
- Further traffic problems will arise
- Cold stores are unnecessary

One letter of comment received with regards to the following:

- The public are using the private land of the farm for dog walking and looking into properties (Officer Note: Not a material consideration)

APPLICANTS POINTS

- The site lends itself well for propagation
- The cold store is an acceptable use in the countryside
- EU Plants is an expanding business

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
Adopted Core Strategy DPD 2010	CP1	Sustainable Development
	CP3	General Principles for Development
	CP6	Managing Travel Demand
	CP7	Biodiversity
	CP8	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area
	CP11	Proposals outside development limits (including countryside)
Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014	CC01	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
	CC02	Development Limits
	CC03	Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping
	CC04	Sustainable Design and Construction
	CC06	Noise
	CC09	Development and Flood Risk
	CC10	Sustainable Drainage
	TB21	Landscape Character
	TB25	Archaeology
Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)	BDG	Borough Design Guide

PLANNING ISSUES

Description of Development:

1. The proposal is for the erection of three cold stores for storing plants as part of the propagation business that is run on the site. Two buildings are already present on this part of the site as a result of agricultural permitted development

and the application proposes extensions to both of these in order to accommodate the new cold stores. The additions to the existing cold store building would each measure 21 metres in length, 21.25 metres in width and have an eaves and ridge height to match the building. The addition to the existing irrigation shed would be 18 metres in length, 9 metres in width and have an eaves and ridge height to match the building. An area of hard standing is also proposed to the east of the new building.

Principle of Development:

2. The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
3. With regards to rural economies, the NPPF states planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. In particular, plans should support the growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas as well as promote the diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses.
4. The site is located outside any defined settlement area and therefore the principle of development is subject to policy CP11 of the Core Strategy. Policy CP11 states that proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where, *inter alia*, it contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough and does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original building. With regards to sustainable rural enterprises, the proposal is for the addition of a further cold store which will facilitate the propagation of plants and in this respect could be considered to come under this exception criterion.
5. An Agricultural Justification has been submitted which details the reasoning for the application. The applicant (EU Plants) operates a propagation business providing fruit plants for customers in both European and American markets. This involves the initial growing of the fruit plant before harvesting it, storing it and transporting it to customers so they can then grow the plant to full maturity. Since starting in 2005, EU Plants has grown to be one of the largest soft fruit propagator businesses in the UK. In 2011, Manor Farm was acquired with a view to establishing the business and a long term plan has been envisioned as a result. The applicant has advised that the cold store units subject to this application are a key component of the propagation process and are the next step in the plan for the business.
6. The units allow for precise chilling of the plants so that they can be stored prior to being dispatched which in turn allows for additional plants to then be grown. Each unit would be operated at different temperatures and as a result of the large scale of plants required, there is a requirement for three additional units. The plants have a significant monetary value and the cold store units are vital in ensuring the business remains viable. As a result, it is considered the units are

clearly for the purposes of agriculture.

7. In 2015, following expansion of the business, over 3 million canes or plants were produced with a value of approximately £1.8 million. Plants such as these are then transported to commercial growers who have specific lead in times ranging from one to eight months. The plants need to be kept chilled to meet this demand and can be kept up to the eight month limit. The existing chiller units cannot meet the demand for plants and as such, additional storage space is required. Without it, the farm will not be able to operate efficiently and potentially lose business as a result.
8. Overall, there is considered to be a recognised need for the buildings, particularly as it would help ensure the continuing of the business which contributes to the local economy. As such, this is considered to comply with the NPPF and policy CP11 as it would contribute to a rural enterprise and is therefore acceptable in principle.

Character of the Area:

9. The site is at a low point in a valley and is bordered by a number of roads: Jubilee Road, Dell Road, Lower Sandhurst Road and Cricket Hill. The majority of this area is used by the farm and since the approval of application F/2012/0039, the south east corner in particular is covered by poly tunnels. Nonetheless the area is rural in character and appearance with Jubilee Road and Dell Road allowing for long range views across the landscape. The majority of views in and around the site are to wooded areas interspersed with residential dwellings and in particular the properties on Dell Road due to them being at a higher level.
10. The siting of the buildings is a result of the existing units but also due to being the least visible section of the site – in relative terms. Due to the layout of the land and the bank produced by the irrigation ponds, the location of the buildings is relatively well obscured from views. However, it is acknowledged that the buildings proposed would be of a large size and would occupy a large footprint as well as adding to existing built form. Nonetheless, they would match the appearance of the existing buildings and would not be any higher. They would also appear as typical agricultural buildings and their size and scale relates partly to the requirement of having enough storage capacity on the site. Whilst it is noted that the buildings surrounding the site are residential, the farm has been well established and it is not unreasonable to expect agricultural buildings on a farm. Indeed criterion 2 of policy CP11 requires that proposals do not result in excessive encroachment on the countryside and although the proposed buildings are of a large size, they would suitably extend existing buildings and contain the built form to a relatively small area. In this respect, the site area is already used for farm activities associated with the propagation business and therefore the proposal is not considered to result in an excessive encroachment in countryside.
11. Weight should be given to the impact on the countryside as a result of the additional built form but this is considered to be outweighed partly by the benefits of ensuring an agricultural use remains on the site, and the economic benefits this would bring; but also as it would be in keeping with the character of the area. Additionally, mitigation of the impact of the proposal would be provided through landscaping which over time would help it integrate into the landscape. This has

occurred partially prior to the application being submitted (as a result of the poly tunnel development) and in particular this has resulted in a bank of trees running north west to south east across the site which is protected by a Tree Preservation Order. However, it is acknowledged that further work could be completed to provide greater tree coverage on the site and in particular to obscure views from Lower Sandhurst Road. As such, the Tree and Landscape Officer has requested that additional planting be carried out through a landscaping plan which can be conditioned. On balance therefore, the proposal is considered to have an acceptable impact on the countryside.

Residential Amenities:

12. Due to the significant separation distances to any neighbouring properties which are located over 100 metres away, no harmful impact on residential amenity is considered to occur.

Highways and Access:

13. Access to the farm for transporting plants is achieved primarily from the south west corner at the junction of Dell Road and Lower Sandhurst Road. This would not be altered as a result of the proposal and would not lead to a significant intensification of this access. In any case, with the current storage capacity being reached, plants are being transported off the site which is creating additional traffic movements as a result. The proposal would potentially allow for fewer traffic movements due to increased storage on the site. As such, the Highways Officer does not object to the proposal.

Flooding and Drainage:

14. Whilst it is acknowledged the roof form of the buildings would be large and therefore would increase surface run-off, it is proposed to discharge this into the existing irrigation lakes on the site. The Drainage Officer has requested further information regarding how the roof run-off would be directed to the lake and how much this is likely to be and following receipt of this, raises no objection to the application subject to a condition that this is carried out.

Environmental Health:

15. The site is a working farm and the proposal would be an extension of this. In this respect there is already an impact in terms of environmental health. Although the cold store units would result in some noise, the Environmental Health Officer is satisfied that the separation distance to neighbouring properties would mitigate any harmful impact in terms of noise.

Biodiversity:

16. The site is not known to have any significant ecological interest or provide habitats for protected species. Given that the proposal would extend existing buildings, the Ecology Officer has not raised any objection to the proposal.

Community Infrastructure Levy:

17. As the proposal is not for new residential or retail floor space, the proposal is not CIL liable.

Employment Opportunities:

18. Whilst the proposal is a major application and Policy TB12 of the MDD states these should be accompanied by an Employment and Skills Plan, the opportunities provided by the scheme are considered to be limited and not of a type that would suit an employment skills plan. As such, it is considered there is no identified harm in not requiring a plan to be submitted.

Archaeological Impact:

19. Due to the size and scale of the proposal, the Council's archaeological advisor has stated there is unlikely to be any harmful impact in terms of archaeological potential on the site. As such, no harmful impact is identified.

CONCLUSION

The proposal is for an acceptable use in the countryside and due to additional landscaping, no harmful impact on the character of the area would occur. Subject to appropriate conditions. Furthermore, the site is located a sufficient distance from residential properties in order to not have a harmful impact on residential amenity. As such, the proposal accords with the development plan and is recommended for conditional approval.

CONTACT DETAILS

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