

**1 DCCW2003/2321/F - ERECTION OF 1.62 HA OF SPANISH POLYTUNNELS (23 TUNNELS IN TOTAL) RETROSPECTIVE - TABLE TOP METHOD OF GROWING AT LAND ADJACENT TO BRICK HOUSE, BUSH BANK, HEREFORD, HR4 8PH**

**For: Mr. Powell per Miss Foggo, Antony Aspbury Associates, 34 Carlton Business Centre, Carlton, Nottingham, NG4 3AA**

**Date Received: 6th August 2003      Ward: Wormsley Ridge      Grid Ref: 45228, 50708**

**Expiry Date: 1st October 2003**

Local Member: Councillor J.C. Mayson

**1. Site Description and Proposal**

- 1.1 The application site is located to the west of the A4110 Hereford to Canon Pyon road to the south of the settlement of Bush Bank. The application site comprises of land immediately to the east of Canon Pyon House which is in private ownership but adjoins Brick House Farm.
- 1.2 This application seeks retrospective planning permission for a 2.1 hectare (5.26 acre) site on which a series of 23 "Spanish" polytunnels have been erected. The tunnels themselves cover an area of 1.62 hectares (4 acres) with the remainder of the site comprising of headlands surrounding the structures. The polytunnels comprise of metal legs which have been manually driven into the ground and hoops which are connected to the legs making each tunnel approximately 3.6 metres high and 8 metres wide. The polytunnels are covered with polythene for a period of approximately 6-7 months per year depending on the growth rate of fruit between March and September (inclusive). For the remainder of the year the polythene is removed, rolled up and stored between each tunnel, however the metal framework of the tunnel remains intact throughout the whole year.
- 1.3 The polytunnels, the subject of this application, currently protect a strawberry crop which is planted on a "table top" system. The strawberries are planted in growbags which are placed on a metal frame within a tunnel. This frame is also manually driven into the ground. This system of growing allows a reduction in the amount of fertilizers and pesticides that are used on the crop as well as allowing the right fruit to be picked with much greater ease. The applicant has requested that permission be granted for at least a six year period. Given the use of the table top system the crop rotation within the ground is not necessary which allows the structures to remain on site for a much longer period.

**2. Policies**

2.1 Planning Policy Guidance:

PPG1                    -                    General Policy and Principles

PPG7 - The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development

2.2 Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan:

Policy CTC6 - Development and Significant Landscape Features

2.3 Leominster District Local Plan:

Policy A1 - Managing the District's Assets and Resources

Policy A9 - Safeguarding the Rural Landscape

Policy A24 - Scale and Character of Development

2.4 Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan: (Deposit Draft):

Policy E13 - Agricultural and Forestry Development

### 3. Planning History

3.1 There is no record of previous planning applications on the land subject of this application.

### 4. Consultation Summary

Internal Council advice

4.1 Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards has no objection.

4.2 The Chief Conservation Officer states in respect of landscape impact the site is considered to be acceptable subject to conditions.

### 5. Representations

5.1 Canon Pyon Parish Council: The Parish Council is deeply concerned about the closeness of the tunnels to dwelling houses and in this particular case to Pyon House. The Council would ask that if you grant planning permission that it is a condition of approval that the two tunnels closest to Pyon House be removed and sited elsewhere.

The Parish Council have also supplied a copy of a plan where the applicant is intending to place further tunnels which will further surround Pyon House.

5.2 Nineteen letters of representation have been submitted on this application, six of which object to the scheme, ten raise support and three containing mixed views.

5.3 The objections raised to this retrospective application can be summarised as follows.

- The polytunnels would be an eyesore and spoil the general area.
- Damage to wildlife.
- Reflection from plastic roofing material.
- Impact on the locality from migration of labour.

- Does not represent local employment.
- Had the application not been retrospective amendments would have been sought pre-application, removal of two rows on the western end of the field.
- Visual intrusion from main rooms of Pyon House.
- Good landscaping is required to reduce visual impact.
- A SPG – Supplementary Planning Guidance on Polytunnels is required.
- Impact from radios owned by pickers.

The full text of these letters can be inspected at Central Planning Services, Blueschool House, Blueschool Street, Hereford and prior to the Sub-Committee meeting.

## **6. Officers Appraisal**

- 6.1 The main issues in this case are the principle of the polytunnels in this area of open countryside, the impact of the tunnels as erected on adjoining residential properties and the visual and landscape implications of the works.
- 6.2 Brick House Farm lies in an area of open countryside although the area does not have a specific landscape designation in either the Leominster District Local Plan or the emerging Unitary Development Plan. One of the few exceptions for development in open countryside relates to proposals for agricultural. Policy A9 (Safeguarding the Rural Landscape) of the Leominster District Local Plan requires that particular regard should be had to the design, scale, character and location of development proposals to ensure that they do not detract from the quality and visual appearance of the landscape in which they sit. As such, the critical issue in this instance is the assessment of these criteria and not the principle of the development in this case.
- 6.3 As previously noted, the application site adjoins the eastern boundary of Canon Pyon House which is in private ownership but surrounded by land associated with Brick House Farm. Indeed the access drive to Canon Pyon House runs along the entire southern boundary of the application site. When assessing the impact on the living amenity associated with this property, Officers have looked carefully at the siting and orientation of the dwelling and existing landscape features which are contained within the garden of the property. It is considered that whilst close to the boundary of this property the development is well screened by existing dense planting of mature trees within the curtilage of Canon Pyon House. Furthermore, the applicant has already planted a row of alders to screen this area in the future. When viewed from the main road to the east of the site, the applicant has also erected a temporary green mesh windbreak/screen in an attempt to soften the visual impact of the polythene. On balance it is considered that this retrospective application does not have a harmful impact on Canon Pyon House such that would warrant refusal of the application on this issue. When assessed against the impact of other properties in the locality, the polytunnels are clearly visible from properties to the west for some distance having regard to the topography of the land. The fact that a particular development can be seen is not in itself a reason for refusal and Officers conclude that the polytunnels are not detrimental to the amenity of any residential properties in this area. However additional planting to the boundary with Canon Pyon House of heavy/extra heavy nursery stock would provide an additional layer of landscaping which would help to break up the form of the polytunnels.

- 6.4 Many of the comments raised in the objections to this polytunnel application relate to the impact that polytunnels have in the wider landscape. As noted above there is no doubt that these and other polytunnels in the county are clearly visible having regard to the size and scale of the sites in which they occupy and the reflective nature of the polythene which covers the hoped structure. In landscape terms, this site is not considered to be particularly prominent by Officers.
- 6.5 The applicant has indicated that planning permission for a period of six years is necessary to justify the expenditure and to accommodate alternative crops should market demand change. As noted above, the polythene on the structure could be insitu for a period of 6-7 months per year between March and September.
- 6.6 Having carefully considered the issues associated with this retrospective planning application, it is considered that the development is acceptable and permission is recommended subject to the following conditions.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That retrospective planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:**

- 1. The structures hereby permitted shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition on or before 29th October 2009 in accordance with a scheme of work to be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority.**

**Reason: To enable the local planning authority to give further consideration to the acceptability of the development. Permanent permission of this nature would not be appropriate having regard to potential future changes in agricultural production methods.**

- 2. The polythene covering shall only be applied for a period of seven months per calendar year unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.**

**Reason: In the interests of visual amenity having regard to the specific requirements of the growing season.**

- 3. G22 (Tree planting).**

**Reason: To ensure the environment of the development is improved and enhanced.**

- 4. G25 (Scope of tree planting).**

**Reason: In order that the local planning authority may be satisfied that the deposited scheme will meet their requirements.**

- 5. G23 (Replacement of dead trees) (Five years).**

**Reason: To safeguard the amenity of the area.**

Decision: .....

Notes: .....

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**Background Papers**

Internal departmental consultation replies..