

7 DCCW2004/4212/F - ERECTION OF 2.590 HA OF SPANISH POLYTUNNELS FOR USE IN SOFT FRUIT GROWING (TABLE TOP METHOD) AT LAND ADJACENT TO BRICK HOUSE, BUSH BANK, HEREFORD, HR4 8PH

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

Date Received: 8th December 2004 Ward: Wormsley Ridge Grid Ref: 45252, 50572

Expiry Date: 2nd February 2005

Local Member: Councillor J.C. Mayson

Members will recall that this proposal was deferred from the last meeting to enable discussions to take place with the applicant to remove two tunnels on the existing polytunnel site adjacent to Canon Pyon House.

The applicant has confirmed that he is prepared to move these tunnels alongside the new tunnels he is now proposing. However he would wish to delay this move until 1st July 2006 to enable the crops already planted to be harvested.

Re-consultation with the Parish Council and Canon Pyon House has been undertaken and a verbal report will be made at the meeting.

1. Site Description and Proposal

- 1.1 Brick House Farm is located on the western side of the A4110 Hereford to Leintwardine Road at Bush Bank, Canon Pyon.
- 1.2 The application seeks permission to develop 2.590 hectares (6.4 acres) with a series of 28 Spanish polytunnels. The tunnels themselves will cover an area of 2.228 hectares with the remainder of the site comprising of headlands surrounding the structures. The polytunnels comprise of metal legs which are 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 7 months per year 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, will be utilised to 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 ripe fruit to be picked which 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 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

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 (Revised Deposit Draft):

- Policy E13 - Agricultural and Forestry Development

3. Planning History

Adjacent

- DCCW2003/2321/F Erection of 1.62 ha of Spanish polytunnels (23 tunnels in total) retrospective - table top method of growing. Approved 29th October 2003.

4. Consultation Summary

Statutory Consultations

- 4.1 None.

Internal Council Advice

- 4.2 The Traffic Manager - no objection provided no intensification.
- 4.3 Environmental Health and Trading Standards - no objection.
- 4.4 Conservation Manager advises I have had a number of meetings on site with the applicant and his agent and have fully discussed the proposals with them prior to this application.

The applicant has previously voluntarily provided acceptable mitigation and screening in relation to the voluntary code of practice for other polytunnels that do not form part of this application and for previous application. Some of these measures also provide partial screening for the present proposals.

I accept the need for the additional polytunnels required under this application and I do not object to the extent or layout of them.

The applicant's proposals for screening the development are acceptable in principal but we will require more detail on a drawing. This should state that the new hedges are to be planted in a double staggered row at 400mm centres, rows 300mm apart, protected by rabbit guards and within a cultivated bed, 600mm width with 50mm depth of medium grade bark mulch. The existing hedge along the southern boundary should be gapped up wherever there is space as well as the areas indicated on the submitted plan. We will also require additional tree planting along both this hedge and the proposed hedge. Trees should be planted as standard oaks, protected with rabbit guards and planted within the hedge plants at 10 – 15 metre spacing.

The existing hedges allowed to grow up should be cut at an A profile and also gapped up as necessary.

The red alder require enhanced maintenance in order to maximise their growth potential. An area of 500mm diameter should be kept weed and grass free around the base of each tree and should be dressed with well rotted manure and granular fertilizer.”

5. Representations

5.1 Canon Pyon Parish Council – “The Parish Council discussed the above at a meeting on 4th January 2005, and comments are as follows:

The Parish Council is in a difficult position. With no national guidelines on polytunnels and a county policy which could have been designed to promote local ill-feeling in which, at least, it has been markedly successful, the county is in danger of irreparably damaging its greatest asset - tourism.

The Parish Council, however, welcomes Mr. Powell's assurances that further expansion of the polytunnels is ruled out.

Should the application succeed the Parish Council would request the following:

1. Two rows of tunnels be removed from the original development nearest Pyon House and relocated on the new site, thus providing a buffer for the house.
2. Specimen native deciduous trees to be planted individually to break up the landscape of screening and tunnels. These to be planted in the pasture buffer zones to the south and east of the subject area.
3. A stoned passing place to be inserted along the lane to Pyon House.
4. The Highway Authority to consider the inherently unsafe access points.”

5.2 Arrow Valley Residents' Association – “Although not in the Arrow Valley area we consider this development would affect the residents we represent in Ivington, Newtown, Aulden, Birley and district as the spread of polytunnels in this area is insidious and this particular application will only add to the polythene blight on the countryside now evident on whichever route is taken to Hereford.

How will this application comply with the voluntary code so recently agreed to by local growers?

It is appreciated that this comparatively small area now applied for will not warrant an environmental impact assessment but my committee would urge the planning committee to consider the cumulative impact of this plastic menace.”

5.3 Six letters of objection have been received from V. O'Neill, Canon Pyon House, Canon Pyon, Hereford; Pam Johnson, Lower Park Cottage, Ivington, Leominster; R.R.A. Leech, Pyon House, Canon Pyon, Herefordshire (2); Aubrey Greene, Ivington Park, Leominster and R.W.K. Parlby, MBE, Stable Cottage, Ivington Court.
The main points raised:

1. The tunnels are adjacent to the driveway to Canon Pyon House and not Brick House.
2. Tunnels are 1.5 metres away from the garden fence on the east side of Canon Pyon House and further tunnels on the south of the driveway will impact further on residential amenity.
3. Landscaping of the existing site despite 3 years in the ground if sparsely planted and less than 1 metre tall.
4. The planting along the driveway of alder is completely ineffectual because it is deciduous and secondly because of its power growth of less than 30cm. per year. This means it will not reach the height of the tunnels in the life of the tunnels.
5. There are no passing places on the drive and with the alder planted so close together these new tunnels visibility will be very poor or non-existent.
6. Our amenity will be blighted by these hideous tunnels.
7. Table top crops in polytunnels can be grown on an industrial estate. They do not need farm land. This is industry not farming.
8. The proposal will increase the noise, activity and security risk from the staff employed at the site
9. The agreement put forward that they will remove existing tunnels erected under the voluntary code is spurious in that they would have been removed in 2005 and then the land left free for two years whereas this is for 6 years.
10. We are concerned regarding the chemicals that are being sprayed by people in 'moon-suits'.
11. The hint that other crops may be grown concerns us as they will not have been considered.
12. The polytunnels are not part of the traditional agricultural landscape designated as an AGLV.
13. The tunnels will be easily seen from the Hereford - Knighton road.

14. The route from Ivington to Hereford will be impaired whichever road is taken with polytunnels at Brierley and Marden. The alternative route is through Bush Bank!
- 5.4 13 letters of support have been received, the main points raised are:
1. This is a business decision taken by Mr. Powell to keep the farm viable and produce the quality product that the customer/consumer demands.
 2. The extensive hedge and tree planting being done reduces the impact of the tunnels.
 3. Retains employment in the countryside and contributes to the local economy.
 4. The level of polytunnels is not overly intrusive and appropriate to the local area.
 5. Chamfering of the tunnels to lengths of 30 metres through 60 metres and then 100 metres would reduce their impact further.
 6. The remainder of the field should be protected and landscaped and other fields in Mr. Powell's control protected against polytunnel development without due planning considerations.

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 polytunnels in this area, the impact of the tunnels on the landscape and impact on adjoining residential properties.
- 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 agriculture. 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 northern 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.
- 6.4 It is acknowledged that the access drive to Canon Pyon House will have polytunnels either side if this application is approved, however they are set back from the drive which has been planted with alder. Therefore, although there maybe an impact upon the driveway the amenity on Canon Pyon House is not considered sufficient to warrant refusal of the application.

- 6.5 In terms of impact on the surrounding landscape this site is lower than the existing site to the north and would be visible from properties to the west at some distance. However the fact that they can be seen is not in itself a reason for refusal and Officers conclude that the additional tunnels are not detrimental to the landscape quality of the area.
- 6.6 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.
- 6.7 Finally the applicant has stated that the tunnels erected under the voluntary code and where the crop has failed will be used on this site. This therefore will reduce the amount of polytunnels within the landscape. He has also indicated that no other polytunnels will be erected in the near future and a condition to this affect is recommended.

RECOMMENDATION

That 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 9th February 2011 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 scheme).**

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).**

Reason: To safeguard the amenity of the area.

- 6. G01 (Details of boundary treatments).**

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and to ensure dwellings have satisfactory privacy.

7. G04 (Landscaping scheme (general)).

Reason: In order to protect the visual amenities of the area.

8. GO5 (Implementation of landscaping scheme (general)).

Reason: In order to protect the visual amenities of the area.

9. Prior to the use hereby approved commencing details of a passing bay along the driveway to Canon Pyon House shall be submitted for approval in writing of the local planning authority and the passing bay installed in accordance with those details prior to use of the polytunnels.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

10. The new tunnels shall be set back 15 metres from the driveway to Canon Pyon House.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

11. No polytunnels shall be erected on the land owned or rented by the applicant without the express written consent of the local planning authority.

Reason: In order to protect the landscape and residential amenity.

12. Prior to the 1st July 2006 the two tunnels located adjacent to the eastern boundary of Canon Pyon House and approved under CW2003/2321/F shall be removed unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: In order to clarify the terms of this permission and enhance residential amenity.

Informative:

1. N15 - Reason(s) for the Grant of PP/LBC/CAC.

Decision:

Notes:

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Background Papers

Internal departmental consultation replies.