

**12 DCSE2005/0042/F - RELOCATION AND EXTENSION OF RESIDENTIAL SITE FOR SEASONAL AND CASUAL WORKERS TOGETHER WITH LAND AREAS TO BE RE-PROFILED AT COLERAINE FARM, COUGHTON, ROSS-ON-WYE, HEREFORDSHIRE, HR9 5SG****For: Cobrey Farms per Paul Dunham Associates, 19 Townsend, Soham, Cambridgeshire, CB7 5DD****Date Received: 6th January 2005      Ward: Kerne Bridge      Grid Ref: 61305, 21738****Expiry Date: 3rd March 2005**

Local Member:    Councillor Mrs R.F. Lincoln

**1. Site Description and Proposal**

- 1.1 The application site adjoins the large modern farm complex at Coleraine Buildings. this agricultural enterprise has planted a large area of asparagus (about 135 ha) which will begin to produce substantial crops this coming year. A new grading and packing building at Coleraine Buildings for asparagus was granted planning permission in November 2004. This would be sited at the rear of the large potato store and adjoining the brook. A new access road is required which leads off the existing drive. The proposed caravan site (68 caravans) would be immediately to the south-west of that building and access road, extending over an area of about 0.2 ha.
- 1.2 The intention is to undertake substantial re-grading, primarily to reduce the level of the caravans and the spoil would be used to raise the height of the adjoining field to the south-west. Along the south-eastern boundary of the application site and bank would be formed which it is intended to plant. The south-western boundary is formed by the brook. The caravan site is divided by overhead power lines below which an open recreation area would be formed and the site of a future reception centre is also shown although it is not part of the current application.
- 1.3 The caravan site would house student workers (up to about 330 by 2007) during the asparagus season (March-July) and a smaller number for grading and harvesting new potatoes (July-October). About 30 caravans would be required this year and these are now on site. This requirement would rise to an estimated 66 by 2007. Siting of caravans for agricultural use is permitted development but only whilst occupied for this purpose. The proposal is to retain the caravans all year round and permission is therefore required.

**2. Policies****2.1 Planning Policy Guidance**

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|-------|---|--|
| PPS.1 | - | Delivering Sustainable Development     |
| PPS.7 | - | Sustainable Development in Rural Areas |

**2.2 Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan**

Policy A4	-	Agricultural Dwellings
Policy H20	-	Housing in Rural Areas
Policy CTC2	-	Area of Great Landscape Value
Policy CTC6	-	Development and Significant Landscape Features
Policy CTC9	-	Development Criteria
Policy RC2	-	Residential Caravan Sites

**2.3 South Herefordshire District Local Plan**

Policy C1	-	Development Within Open Countryside
Policy C8	-	Development Within Area of Great Landscape Value
Policy SH11	-	Housing in the Countryside
Policy SH26	-	Residential Caravans/Mobile Homes
Policy ED5	-	Expansion of existing Businesses
Policy ED6	-	Employment in the Countryside
Policy ED9	-	New Agricultural Buildings
GD1	-	General Development Criteria
Policy C44	-	Flooding
Policy C47	-	Pollution

**2.4 Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (Revised Deposit Draft)**

Policy E13	-	Agricultural and Forestry Development
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**3. Planning History**

3.1	SE2004/3102/F	Asparagus grading and packing facility with lorry parking, staff amenities, access roads and hardstandings.	-	Approved 17.11.04
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**4. Consultation Summary**Statutory Consultations

- 4.1 Environment Agency objects to the development as part of the site lies within Flood Zone 3 (1% annual probability of flooding) of a watercourse. The Flood Risk Assessment submitted only relates to flooding issues associated with the asparagus packing facility and cannot be extended to evaluate flooding at adjacent sites. In addition it is unclear how foul water would be disposed as details have not been submitted.

Further details are to be submitted and the reponse of the Environment Agency will be reported at the Committee meeting.

Internal Council Advice

- 4.2 Forestry Commission have no comment to make as no woodland is affected.
- 4.3 Traffic Manager recommends that conditions be imposed regarding access to the site.
- 4.4 Head of Environmental Health has no comments on the proposal.

- 4.5 Head of Conservation recommends that a condition be imposed to ensure an archaeological watching brief during the development.

## 5. Representations

- 5.1 The applicant's agent's explanation of this proposal is included as an appendix to this report.

- 5.2 Parish Council's observations are as follows:

There was a unanimous vote to object to this application. The Parish Council thinks that the residential caravans will have a severe adverse visual impact on the landscape of the Coughton valley both from the road and from the surrounding hills. The Council will comment further on receipt of the promised statement of background information and need.

- 5.3 Weston under Penyard Parish Council's (adjoining) observations are as follows:

Following a site visit the council's observations are as follows: The need for 60 residential caravans accommodating approximately 240 workers is only required for the asparagus season from April to June, thereafter only 40 workers will be required for potato harvesting therefore appropriate residential occupation restrictions need applying.

An effective on-site Biotech apparatus is required to cope with the waste disposal for 240 residents.

The safety of the workers in walking along the narrow lanes to and from Walford and Ross needs to be addressed to prevent road traffic accidents.

Effective screening and landscaping will be essential to merge the caravans into this picturesque valley.

- 5.4 Three letters have been received which, in summary, make the following objections:

1. Although of benefit to this agricultural business, with some permanent jobs there would be overall significant disbenefits to the local economy and to the community.
2. The major disbenefit is harm to tourism - some polythene and caravan sites can be absorbed into landscape but limits now reached and area will lose its reputation (based on anecdotal evidence) as a lovely area of the country.
3. Income from tourism worth more to local economy than that from such enterprises with low pay and temporary jobs and much of income 'repatriated' outside the local economy.
4. Serious visual intrusion and damaging to Wye Valley AONB - caravans already brought onto site and clearly visible from nearby highway which is at a higher level, an unsightly/ugly caravan park; also visible from higher land to north with footpaths.
5. Nearly 70 caravans must raise questions about infrastructure necessary to support this residential use and impact on local rural environment.

6. The highway ('C' class road) is narrow, with dangerous blind corners and have been 'several consequential accident situations' - proposals for considerable expansion for growing and packing and increasing heavy traffic and plus vehicles of workers will lead to traffic hazards, congestion and serious casualties.
7. Light, steep soils, serious erosion and increasing potential for pollution of Castle Brook and light pollution - has EIA been carried out?
8. Flooding - flood risk assessment is questioned as there is considerable potential for flooding and pollution in this steep valley.
9. Further time should be allowed for local comment - raises issues that area of national importance Surrey Waverley/Tuesley Farm inquiry and S & A Davies (Brierley) appeals are referred to - proposal very similar to latter as caravans already on site : has permission be granted already?

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

## **6. Officers Appraisal**

- 6.1 There are no specific policies in the current Development Plan or the emerging Unitary Development Plan which relate to developments of this type. Policy C1 allows in principle development for agricultural purposes in the countryside, although agricultural workers dwellings must be shown to be necessary to the business. Policy RC2 of Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan states that 'residential caravan sites should be subject to similar locational requirements as permanent residential development'. These would seem to be the most relevant policies relating to the principle of development of this type. PPS7 encourages farmers to adapt to new and changing markets, diversity into new agricultural opportunities and broaden their operations to 'add value' to their primary produce (paragraph 27). As farmers seek to respond to the radical changes in the agricultural economy there will inevitably be pressures for change in the countryside. It is not for the local planning authority to decide what agricultural activities should be undertaken: these decisions can only be taken by farmers. However it should be noted that this innovative enterprise has received the backing of grant aid through the Rural Development Programme.
- 6.2 It is considered therefore that this residential caravan site could be acceptable provided it is necessary and the environmental and other consequences (effect on landscape, flood risk, pollution problems, highway considerations etc.) are not so serious as to make this location acceptable.
- 6.3 It is generally understood that there are serious problems in recruiting short-term agricultural workers. The difficulties have been reduced in this case as the asparagus season coincides 'cox and box' with the requirements of potato growing, which has been undertaken by the applicants for the past 10 decades or more. Nevertheless it is accepted that there will be a need for short-term workers which cannot be met from the local labour force. Asparagus is very labour intensive during the growing season (late March to July). The standard labour requirement is stated to be about 2.5 workers per ha, hence the size of the caravan site (68). Considerable investment would be undertaken with the erection of a grading and packing building.

- 6.4 In terms of location the site is next to an existing large farm complex at which packing and grading would take place. The site is not elevated, being next to the brook, but even with extensive re-grading and tree planting it would not be possible to screen the site as it is overlooked from higher land to both north and south as well as from the nearby highway. Nevertheless it is at the centre of asparagus growing extending east and west along this valley and there would not appear to be a more suitable and less intrusive location. On balance it is considered that the proposal is not so harmful that this outweighs the need of the agricultural enterprise for seasonal labour.
- 6.5 This new business venture will take some years before it is fully established. Once maximum cropping is reached it will be possible to calculate accurately the number of workers required and hence the number of caravans. It may also be clearer whether this venture will be profitable in the longer term and so require a caravan site for the foreseeable future. In these circumstances it is considered that it would be appropriate to initially grant permission for a limited period and 5 years seems appropriate.

## RECOMMENDATION

**That subject to being satisfied regarding flooding the officers named in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers be authorised to issue planning permission subject to the following conditions and any additional conditions considered necessary by officers:**

**1 E21 (Temporary permission and reinstatement of land)**

**Reason: To enable the local planning authority to give further consideration to the acceptability of the proposed use after the temporary period has expired and to ensure the land is restored to its former agricultural use.**

**2 G04 (Landscaping scheme (general))**

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

**3 G05 (Implementation of landscaping scheme (general))**

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

**4 G07 (Details of earth works)**

**Reason: To protect the visual amenities of the area.**

**5 The occupation of the caravan site hereby permitted shall be limited to persons employed in agriculture at the farm related to Coleraine Buildings, Coughton, only and not those working away from the farm site.**

**Reason: The caravan site is only acceptable for this purpose.**

**6 No more than 68 caravans shall be sited within the approved application site. Details of the siting and positioning of the caravan units and any new shower/toilet facilities shall be submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.**

**Reason: To define the terms of the permission and to protect the visual amenities of the area.**

- 7 A Green Transport Plan containing measures to promote sustainable travel patterns and the efficient movement of the seasonal workers both in the operation of Brook Farm and for social trips/activities including a schedule for its implementation shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority within three months of the date of this decision. A detailed record shall be kept of measures taken to promote green transport initiatives and shall be made available for inspection by the local planning authority upon request.

Reason: To ensure the most efficient and sustainable modes of transport are promoted and used in accordance with the sustainable objectives of Herefordshire Council and Central Government.

- 8 The applicant or his agent or successors in title shall ensure that a professional archaeological contractor undertakes an archaeological watching brief during any development to the current archaeological standards of and to the satisfaction of the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure that the archaeological interest of the site is investigated.

**Informative:**

- 1 The applicant should ensure the siting of caravans and services on the approved application site should be in accordance with the standards set out in "Model Standards 1989 : Holiday Caravan Sites" published by the Department of the Environment.

**2 N15 – Reasons for the Grant of Planning Permission**

Decision: .....

Notes: .....

**Background Papers**

Internal departmental consultation replies.