

6 DCCW2006/1148/F - CONSTRUCTION OF HOSTEL TO ACCOMMODATE UP TO 56 SEASONAL WORKERS EMPLOYED BY THE TILLINGTON FRUIT FARMS AT FORMER FROMINGTON NURSERY, BURMARSH, HEREFORDSHIRE

**For: The Co-operative Group (CWS) Ltd. per Savills,
Wytham Court, 11 Westway, Botley, Oxford, OX2 0QL**

Date Received: 3rd April, 2006 Ward: Sutton Walls Grid Ref: 53260, 47236
Expiry Date: 29th May, 2006
BVPI Expiry Date: 3rd July, 2006
Local Member: Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie

Introduction

This application was deferred at the meeting of the Central Area Planning Sub-Committee on the 28th June, 2006 in order to carry out a Members' site visit. The visit took place on the 11th July, 2006.

1. Site Description and Proposal

- 1.1 The application site is located in Fromington on the east side of the unclassified road between Franklands Gate and Hawkersland Cross in the Parish of Marden. It is located behind a group of dwellings, Franklands Cottages and occupies part of an existing concrete hardstanding together with part of the orchard that surrounds the north, east and south of the site.
- 1.2 The proposal is to erect a contemporary style hostel measuring approximately 29.5 metres by 14.4 metres with a maximum height of 6.5 metres. One part of the building is two storey whilst the majority is single storey. Two mono pitch roof covings are proposed. External materials are facing brickwork and red cedar boarding on the ground floor elevations and red cedar boarding with metal standing seam cladding to the first floor elevations, all under a metal standing seam roof.
- 1.3 The accommodation will comprise seven bedrooms on the ground floor containing two bunk beds in each room together with male and female washrooms, storage area, communal kitchen, dining area and living room. The first floor accommodation comprises seven bedrooms, the same total as the ground floor.
- 1.4 An outdoor amenity area constructed of paving slabs is proposed at the rear (east) of the hostel comprising an area of 10 metres by 27 metres.
- 1.5 Parking for cars and minibus is proposed at the front (west) of the building.
- 1.6 The accommodation is required to house the applicant's workforce who harvest the fruit, do ground work and tend trees.

2. Policies

2.1 National:

- PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Development
- PPS7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

2.2 Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan:

- Policy H16A - Housing in Rural Areas
- Policy H20 - Housing in Rural Areas
- Policy CTC9 - Development Requirements
- Policy A1 - Agriculture
- Policy A4 - Agricultural Dwellings

2.3 South Herefordshire District Local Plan:

- Policy GD1 - General Development Criteria
- Policy C1 - Development Within Open Countryside
- Policy S11 - Housing in the Countryside
- Policy SH17 - Agricultural Workers' Dwellings
- Policy SH18 - Imposition of Agricultural Occupancy Condition

2.4 Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (Revised Deposit Draft):

- Policy S2 - Development Requirement
- Policy DR1 - Design
- Policy DR2 - Land Use and Activity
- Policy DR3 - Movement
- Policy DR14 - Lighting
- Policy H7 - Housing in the Countryside Outside Settlements
- Policy H8 - Agricultural and Forestry Dwellings and Dwellings Associated with Rural Businesses
- Policy E13 - Agricultural and Forestry Development
- Policy T11 - Parking Provision
- Policy LA6 - Landscaping Schemes

3. Planning History

- 3.1 DCCW2005/3164/F Construction of hostel to accommodate 56 seasonal workers employed by Tillington Fruit Farm. Withdrawn 5th January, 2006.

4. Consultation Summary

Statutory Consultations

- 4.1 Environment Agency: Confirm that foul drainage treatment plant will need to be further assessed.
- 4.2 Welsh Water: No objection provided no connection to the public sewerage system.

Internal Council Advice

- 4.3 Traffic Manager: Some concern about travel options for shopping and recreation. Consider provision of cycle and suitable storage and conditions for improvements to the access.
- 4.4 Conservation Manager: Confirms that provided that there are no other alternative sites that the building sited in an area designated as "Principal Settled Farmlands" would only have a moderate adverse impact on the rural landscape. In addition a survey report needs to be conditioned to cover the potential of slow worms and any necessary mitigation works.
- 4.5 County Land Agent: Confirms in my opinion for the efficient running of the farms the one site accommodation of the labour force will be an improvement. The number of workers stipulated is justified.

5. Representations

- 5.1 Marden Parish Council: "At the meeting of Marden Parish Council, it was resolved to make the following comments on the above application:

The Parish Council was concerned about the impact of another 56 workers on the community when added to the existing large seasonal workforce at S. & A. Produce. It was felt the extra workers houses in the parish would place an additional strain on roads, public transport and local amenities. There was also concern about road safety issues. The road through Burmarsh is in a very poor state of repair, it is narrow, and there are no footpaths along most of its length. The road is subject to the National Speed Limit, and since the residents of the hostel are not to be allowed cars, the provision of minibus transport to local shops would increase road traffic in the area. There would also be dangers to residents if they chose to walk from the site via local roads.

It was agreed that the applicants should consider siting the hostel at their Tillington farm, as Tillington has much better road access than Marden and the hostel could be sited without being obtrusive to other dwellings in the area. The use of the road through Burmarsh via Franklands Corner would be dangerous for minibuses because of the narrow and winding nature of the road.

It was agreed that the proposed building is not in keeping with the area, and would be obtrusive in an area of small houses.

It was noted that concerns about drainage from the site raised by a local resident have not been addressed.

It was agreed that the Parish Council is therefore opposed to the application.

It was agreed to ask for the application to be referred to the Central Area Planning Sub-Committee."

- 5.2 Seven letters of objection have been received from:

Mr. & Mrs. A. Skyrme, Frankland Villa, Sutton St. Nicholas.
Mr. R. McColl, Orchard View, Burmamrsh, Hereford.

W. & M. Keown-Boyd, Wayside Cottage, Sutton St. Nicholas.
 George Rizzardini, Summerfields, Burmarsh, Sutton St. Nicholas.
 Mr. & Mrs. Hodges, 17 Burmarsh Cottages, Burmarsh, Hereford.
 Michael Dudley, Fromington Cottage, Burmarsh, Sutton St. Nicholas, Hereford.
 Mrs. J. Potts, Little Fromington, Burmarsh, Sutton St. Nicholas, Herefordshire.

5.3 The main planning reasons:

1. There are currently 40 residents in Burmarsh and the infrastructure is not sufficient to accommodate the increase in population.
2. Insufficient parking facilities at the site.
3. No pavements for pedestrian traffic.
4. The proposed building is huge and unsightly and not in keeping with this rural setting.
5. Traffic would increase making it dangerous to walk along the single track lanes.
6. This is a greenbelt area where local residents have been refused permission to build so why should it be any different in this site.
7. There are already a number of seasonal workers in the area and unsocial behaviour has been increased and we do not want it on our doorstep.
8. Concerns over the discharge of water and whether existing culverts can accommodate the increase.
9. Increase of noise, especially from amenity area.
10. The orchards are mechanically harvested carried out by local people.
11. The entrance is on a bad bend and will be a danger to highway safety.
12. They should be accommodated at Tillington.

5.4 The applicant's agent has submitted a full Planning Statement which supports their client's case. The following of which are extracts. The full report is available for Members' inspection.

"Farming Operation

6.4 Farmcare has an extensive and long established fruit growing enterprise in Herefordshire which is based around a 780 acre estate. Their business is principally focussed upon the production of apples.

6.5 Their estate has 3 operational centres located at Tillington, Fromington and Ledbury. These farms operate collectively as The Tillington Fruit Farms. The division of land between the holdings is as follows:

| Location | Size of Holding |
|------------|-----------------|
| Tillington | 355 acres |

| | |
|---------|-----------|
| Marden | 172 acres |
| Ledbury | 220 acres |

6.6 Both Tillington and Fromington are owned by the Co-operative Group. Hill Top Farm at Ledbury is rented on a long term farm business tenancy which has a minimum of 18 years to run on with an option to extend for a further 15 years.

6.7 A range of fruit is produced by the Tillington Fruit Farms including apples, strawberries, cherries and blackcurrants. The production of soft fruits is however ancillary to the production of apples. The agricultural holding is cropped as follows:

- 580 acres of apple trees in production
- 20 acres of strawberries in production
- 20 acres of cherries in production
- 20 acres of black currants in production

6.8 The Tillington Fruit Farm produces 7,000 tonnes of apples and 60 tonnes of soft fruit each year. Apple trees are at all locations. The fruit is used in the Co-op's cider and is also sold in UK supermarkets.

6.9 There are approximately 80,000 apple trees within the estate which range from newly planted orchards to trees that are 40 to 50 years old. Routine maintenance of the Orchards includes an ongoing programme of grubbing out old trees and replanting, as well as annual pruning in order to maximise productive life and income.

6.10 The apple enterprise produces some 3,000 tonnes of desert apples which are all hand picked. They are packed and processed at Wye Fruits near Ledbury. A further 4,000 tonnes of apples go for cider production and this fruit is harvested mechanically.

6.11 The 60 acres of soft fruit complement the apple growing and allows for the effective use of labour. Polytunnels are not used for the production of strawberries. All of the soft fruit is hand picked to add value.

Staff Requirements

6.12 Tillington Fruit Farms employ 9 permanent staff: a farm manager, 3 foremen and 5 other permanent employees. Casual labour is also utilised throughout the year to undertake ground works, tend trees and harvest fruit as follows:

- December to January - winter pruning and groundwork.
- January to May - tree and fruit planting;
- June to December - harvesting;

6.13 Farmcare has a requirement for a core of 40 to 60 casual workers. The core workforce is recruited from a Government backed employment agency for overseas employees, the majority of which are east European.

6.14 During harvesting Farmcare's requirement for casual labour increases, to between 80 and 120 employees. Between 60 and 80 additional workers are therefore required between June and December. In recent years, Farmcare has

managed to make up the shortfall in labour by employing families and couples taking a working holiday. The pickers are usually UK residents who bring their own caravans. They are all based on an established caravan site at Hilltop Farm, Ledbury.

7.0 Need for Workers Accommodation

7.1 The Tillington Fruit Farms are clearly a thriving and expanding business that relies upon a large casual workforce, which is required throughout the year. For reasons of efficiency and sustainability the workforce needs to be accommodated within a reasonable distance of the farmed areas.

7.2 Currently Farmcare accommodate their core seasonal staff in 4 cottages. Multiple occupation of these properties by 8 or more employees does not comply with current fire or health and safety regulations. Discussions with the Fire Brigade have confirmed that the cottages cannot be improved to meet the regulations without being substantially altered and extended. Given the current size and location of the cottages, this is not a practical or appropriate solution.

7.3 As a consequence of these circumstances there is a need to provide alternative accommodation for Farmcare's core workforce of between 40 and 60 employees. The following section explains the process that has been followed in order to arrive at the proposed development solution.

8.0 Approach to Provision of Workers Accommodation

8.1 It is widely acknowledged within the agricultural industry that casual labour is becoming more difficult to find. Up until the late 1990's local labour made up the majority of the workers employed by Tillington Fruit Farms. Since then, Farmcare has found it increasingly difficult to meet their labour requirements in this way.

8.2 A key issue for Farmcare is therefore the recruitment of good quality staff. The implications of not having a large enough workforce are very serious. In 2005, for example, Farmcare was unable to pick 400 tonnes of apples because of a shortage of seasonal workers. This has resulted in the loss of 70,000 worth of crop. It also means that some 55 hectares of the holding is not currently in fruit production as there is insufficient labour to replant. This is limiting the ability of the business to grow.

8.3 In order to be able to reliably attract sufficient numbers of staff, Farmcare must provide good quality accommodation for their seasonal workers. This means modern, well equipped living quarters that meet workers expectations and the requirements of health and fire regulations, as well as guidelines relating to shared accommodation.

8.4 Farmcare has considered the following options for providing accommodation for the core casual workforce employed at The Tillington Fruit Farm. These are:

- Use of caravans;
- Multiple occupation of houses;
- Conversion and reuse of redundant buildings; and
- a purpose built hostel.

8.5 The Co-op has farms throughout the United Kingdom and their seasonal workers are accommodated in a variety of different ways. At Blairgowrie in Scotland, where only soft fruit is grown, seasonal workers are housed in caravans during the summer months. At Stourton in Leicestershire, which is an arable and vegetable unit, where there is already a purpose built hostel. As explained earlier, in Herefordshire workers are housed in farm cottages.

8.6 The Co-op therefore has direct experience of the issues associated with various types of workers accommodation. The decision to provide accommodation in the form of a permanent hostel is therefore well informed, it has been influenced by the following factors.

Caravans

8.7 Providing accommodation in caravans is a potential solution but is far from ideal and does not meet the Co-op's objectives. Caravans provide a very basic standard of accommodation and are only really suitable for occupation for short periods of time. Farmcare utilise casual labour throughout the year, their requirements are as follows:

- January to May - Tree and Fruit Planting
- June to December - Harvesting
- December to January - Winter pruning and ground work.

8.8 During the winter months caravans do not provide the standard of accommodation required. In order to make caravans suitable for occupation over prolonged periods and during the colder and wetter months it is essential for supporting infrastructure, such as hardstandings, roads and services to be provided. As is the case elsewhere in Herefordshire, washing and WC facilities would also have to be provided in permanent buildings and external lighting would be required. The associated development and external lighting would become a permanent feature of the landscape. The caravans and associated facilities would have a much greater effect on local visual amenities than the proposed hostel. This has been confirmed by the landscape officer's response to planning application DCCW2005/3614/F.

8.9 The need to remove and store caravans when they are not in use is also an issue that is relevant to the determination of this planning application. The large number of lorry movements required to bring caravans to the site and then remove them when they are vacant would in large part negate the traffic and travel benefits achieved by locating the workforce in a central location. Moreover, storage of unoccupied caravans either at the site or elsewhere on the Estate would inevitably have a negative visual impact.

Multiple Occupation of Houses

8.10 Traditionally, the Co-op has accommodated seasonal workers in houses. These properties were not designed for this purpose and therefore perform poorly as units of multiple occupation.

8.11 In total the Co-op owns 21 properties in Herefordshire: 10 at Tillington and 11 at Marden. Their size and type varies considerably. In summary:

- 8 properties are occupied by permanent staff;

- 5 properties are occupied by retired employees or their dependants;
- 4 are reserved for occupation by seasonal workers; and
- 4 properties are let on Assured Shorthold Tenancies.

8.12 Six of the properties have agricultural ties. Of these 4 are occupied by permanently employed agricultural workers or ex-agricultural employees who are protected under the Rent (agricultural) Act 1976.

8.13 In order to meet fire regulations, health and safety guidelines and comply with recommended standards for occupation, the 4 properties currently occupied by seasonal workers would need significant adaptation and extension. Given the size and location of the properties involved this is not practical or desirable.

8.14 In addition, the number of workers accommodated in each property would need to be reduced, which in turn will require a greater number of houses to be used as accommodation for seasonal workers. This could not be achieved without displacing permanently employed staff which is also not practical or desirable. Using greater numbers of properties as workers accommodation would also create management and logistical problems as well as raising supervision and welfare issues. It would also lead to a greater number of vehicle movements.

8.15 For these reasons, Farmcare has concluded that the use of existing farm cottages is no longer acceptable.

Conversion of Redundant Buildings

8.16 Farmcare has given careful consideration to whether the accommodation required could be delivered through the conversion and reuse of redundant buildings. This approach has been discounted on the grounds that there are not sufficient buildings to provide the number of bed spaces required and because it would not achieve the operational and sustainability advantages of having workers living in one location.

Permanent Hostel

8.17 The proposed hostel will allow Farmcare to fulfil their obligation to guarantee the well-being and welfare of their employees. It is the best way for the Farmcare to provide the standard of accommodation that is required for employees that work outside throughout the year.

8.18 The new hostel will consolidate the workforce into a single location and this will have a number of operational advantages. It will:

- make it easier for Farmcare to supervise their employees;
- allow staff resources to be managed more efficiently;
- allow Farmcare to accommodate their staff in a way that complies with health and safety and fire standards; and
- improve standards of welfare for their employees.

8.19 A permanent hostel is also the solution that is most compatible with the character and setting of Burmarsh and the surrounding countryside.

8.20 For these reasons Farmcare has decided that a permanent hostel is the most appropriate solution in this instance.

9.0 Location, Layout, Design and External Appearance

9.1 The location and design of the proposed hostel responds to recommendations made by the Council's officers during pre-application discussions. During pre-application meetings Kevin Bishop has confirmed that the simple utilitarian structure proposed represents an appropriate solution.

Location

9.2 A number of factors have led to the former Fromington Nurseries being identified as the preferred location for the new workers hostel.

9.3 Hilltop Farm at Ledbury is leased to the Co-op. It is not therefore viable for them to invest in excess of half a million pounds in the construction of a new hostel on land that they do not own. In addition, Hilltop Farm is remote from the main fruit growing areas at Tillington and Marden. It is not therefore logistically practical or desirable to accommodate the majority of the workforce there.

9.4 Tillington is located on the western edge of The Tillington Fruit Farms. Should the workforce be located there workers would have to travel the longest distance to reach Hilltop Farm. A journey from Marden to Ledbury can however be achieved more easily.

9.5 For these reasons it has been concluded that the Burmarsh holding represents the only appropriate location for the new workers hostel. It is located at the centre of the Co-op's main fruit growing areas and performs best from an operational point of view. A hostel at the former Fromington Nurseries site will generate the fewest vehicle movements and is therefore the most sustainable location.

Layout

9.6 The hostel will be located to the rear of Fromington Nursery Cottages, all of which are owned by the Co-op. The application site is far enough away from the cottages so that their residential amenities will not be effected. Development in this location will relate well to the existing pattern of development without encroaching a significant distance into the countryside.

9.7 The hostel has been orientated so that its principle elevations face north and south. By doing this overlooking of the rear gardens of the cottages is avoided. A small amount of amenity space will be provided for use by residents. Landscaping will be used to screen this area from view and afford privacy.

9.8 The Council's car parking standards are not directly applicable to the application proposals. A condition of occupation of the hostel will be that workers will not be allowed to keep a car. On this basis and given that Farmcare already provides a minibus service for their workers, only 5 car parking spaces and 1 minibus space have been incorporated into the layout. The car parking spaces will be for use by visiting members of staff or visitors such as doctors.

9.9 The existing access to the site located between 1 and 3 Fromington Cottages will be utilised. The application drawings show that visibility splays at the access can be provided in accordance with the Highway Authorities requirements.

Design and External Appearance

9.9 The hostel has a utilitarian appearance that reflects its intended use. Sleeping accommodation is provided on 2 floors at the southern end of the building. The washing cooking and communal areas are all at ground floor level.

9.10 Single pitch roofs cover the single and 2 storey elements of the building. This approach reduces the mass and bulk of the building without creating a potential maintenance liability as would have been the case if flat roofs had been used.

9.11 A statement prepared by Angus Jamieson Associates explains in greater detail the design rationale for the new hostel.

10.0 Operation of the Hostel

10.1 Farmcare has a requirement for casual labour throughout the year. The hostel will therefore be open year round. The foreman in charge of casual staff already lives in Fromington, the new hostel will therefore be closely supervised.

10.2 The hostel will provide accommodation for male and female workers, with separate bedrooms, bathrooms and WC's provided for each sex. The remainder of the accommodation will be communal with large kitchen, living and dining areas provided. Fridges and cupboards for food storage will be provided in a large pantry next to the kitchen. Clothes washing facilities will be provided in a utility room located between bathrooms on the ground floor.

10.3 Sleeping accommodation will be in the form of 14 rooms, seven on each floor of the hostel. Each room will sleep up to 4 people in bunk beds. Lockers and clothes storage space will be provided within each room. The 56 bed spaces to be provided is capable of meeting Farmcare's requirement to house a core of 40 to 60 casual workers throughout the year.

10.4 The standards applied to the accommodation provided within the Hostel have been discussed with and agreed by Greg Warwick of Herefordshire Council's Social Care and Strategic Housing Directorate. A summary of the how they have been applied is contained in the design statement in Appendix 4.

10.5 Responses to the Co-op's previous planning application from local residents suggested that workers living in the hostel might have to walk to local shops. Farmcare will however continue to provide a minibus service to local shops (for example the village shop in Marden) and supermarkets on a regular basis and as a consequence employees will not need to leave the site on foot to purchase provisions.

10.6 Farmcare find it difficult to meet their labour requirements each year. There is therefore sufficient work on the Tillington Fruit Farms to keep their seasonal workers occupied on a full time basis. Workers will therefore not have time to seek or undertake second jobs.

11.0 Conclusion

11.1 The Co-op has been producing fruit crops from farms in their ownership at Tillington, Fromington and Ledbury for many years. The Tillington Fruit Farm is therefore a mature and financially stable business that makes a significant contribution to the local and regional economy.

11.2 The assessment above demonstrates that there is an identified need for the proposed hostel. It also shows that the hostel has been sited and designed so that its impact on the character and appearance of the locality and the residential amenities of the adjacent cottages has been minimised.

11.3 It is essential for the proper functioning of Tillington Fruit Farms to have casual labour available throughout the year. As this requirement cannot be wholly met by local labour it is necessary for Farmcare to employ seasonal workers through a Government sponsored employment agency. Although Farmcare can provide accommodation for some of these workers within the community, multiple occupation of farm cottages no longer represents a viable solution for both operational and employee welfare reasons.

11.4 Consideration has been given to providing accommodation within mobile homes and through the conversion and reuse of existing buildings. Having done so it has been found that a modest hostel centrally located at the heart of the Tillington Fruit Farms is the most appropriate solution.

11.5 The provision of a permanent hostel will increase the sustainability of The Tillington Fruit Farms business and allow for the planned expansion through improved efficiency. This will further assist the local economy.

11.6 The provision of a high standard of accommodation will allow issues relating to the health and welfare of casual workers to be addressed. This will assist Farmcare to attract and retain the high quality employees that are critical to the success of their business.”

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 There is no specific policy that this proposal sits wholly within. It falls to be considered under a number of policies relating to agricultural workers dwellings. (Policies H16A, H20, A1 and A4 of the Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan, Policies SH11, SH17 and SH18 of the South Herefordshire District Local Plan and Policies H7 and H8 of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (Revised Deposit Draft).
- 6.2 A hostel is not a dwelling in its own right as indicated by the Use Classes Order that defines hostels as a sui generis use and not C3 which is the use class attributed to dwellings.
- 6.3 However, in considering the proposal the following are considered to be the primary issues.
- (a) The Principle of Development
 - (b) The Impact of the Siting, Design and Visual Appearance
 - (c) The Impact on Adjoining Residential Properties

- (d) Access and Highways Issues
- (e) Other Issues
- (f) Conclusions

The Principle of Development

- 6.4 The applicant's case is based upon a need to house 40-60 workers on a year round basis and the County Land Agent has confirmed that the numbers are justified through the standard man days calculations.
- 6.5 The location of the building is a key consideration. The applicants have considered the three sites that they farm and for which the labour is required. The Ledbury site is only rented and is therefore not viable in terms of investing in a new building. Tillington is owned but located to the west of the land holdings and would require greater travel distances to Ledbury. The Fromington site, lying between the two therefore provides a more sustainable location in terms of the applicant's land holdings and is also located near a main village, Marden.
- 6.6 The conversion of buildings has also been investigated but discounted on the grounds that there are not sufficient buildings to provide the number of bed spaces. In addition from the operational perspective of the company, this could well provide for a dispersed workforce and would not be a sustainable option in your Officers' view.
- 6.7 The site chosen, and subject of the planning application nestles behind Franklands Cottages that are owned by the applicant and represents a relatively unobtrusive site in terms of impact on the wider landscape. The next consideration is the form that this accommodation could take. The applicant owns Franklands Cottages in front of the site and is occupied by their workers who include some workers who would be housed in this hostel. However they do not provide sufficient accommodation or the style of accommodation that is required.
- 6.8 Another alternative would be to house the workers in caravans. However whereas these are sufficient for seasonal workers they are not considered appropriate during the winter months. In addition the intrusion into the landscape of a number of caravans would also have to be a key consideration. A condition preventing the use of land in the applicant's ownership and control for seasonal caravans will therefore form part of the recommendation.
- 6.9 On balance your Officers consider that a building of the design proposed would have a more positive impact on the landscape than a group of caravans. It should also be noted that the Conservation Manager does not object to the intrusion of this building within the landscape. It will also be seen as part of the group of buildings at Fromington Cottages which is a locational requirement of policy.

The Impact of Siting, Design and Visual Appearance

- 6.10 The siting of the hostel within the landscape has been fully assessed by the Council's Conservation Manager who considers that the chosen site is the best that can be achieved in order to reduce adverse visual impact and could be further improved with the planting of native trees along the hedgerows. The additional tree planting would be in keeping with the landscape assessment of this area designated as Principal Settled Farmlands. This characterises the landscape as being notably domestic in character, defined chiefly by the scale of the field pattern.

6.11 The design is of a contemporary nature with the use of traditional brick with modern elements of western red cedar with metal standing seam with two mono pitched roofs and in some respects would not be dissimilar to an industrial/agricultural style building. Accordingly with appropriate landscaping the proposal would sit well within the landscape.

The Impact on Adjoining Residential Properties

6.12 The concerns of local residents are noted, however visually it is not considered to be detrimental to the landscape and the nearest residential property not owned by the applicant is over 100 metres away.

6.13 The impact of these workers being located here is noted, however some already reside in the cottages and if the building was not approved in the region of eleven caravans would have to be brought in to accommodate the workers. The site already contains substantial hardsurfacing and this could easily be achieved. Therefore to provide a purpose built unit of accommodation would be more beneficial to the workers and the neighbours as more facilities would be available on site without having to travel. In addition the Farm Manager resides in one of the cottages adjacent and will oversee the management of the hostel.

6.14 Regarding travel, the company would be providing a minibus service.

Access and Highway Issues

6.15 The site is accessed by an existing entrance between Fromington Cottages. This access is substandard, however improvements can be achieved and the Traffic Manager is satisfied that a safe access can be provided.

6.16 The site lies approximately 800 metres from the Marden road which provides two way traffic into the village of Marden.

6.17 In line with guidance and policy promoting sustainable travel options, a Green Travel Plan is requested by condition to ensure ongoing monitoring of the site. This would complement the requirement to provide secure cycle parking.

Other Issues

6.18 Foul drainage is by means of a private treatment plant, details of which the Environment Agency require clarification of, however this represents a technical matter and not considered fundamental to the consideration of the application. The requirements could be covered by condition.

Conclusions

6.19 The provision of a hostel to house the workers is an innovative approach to providing enhanced accommodation and in your Officers' opinion is less intrusive in the landscape than a number of caravans or accommodation pods that have been used elsewhere in the county. The need for the accommodation has been proven and well supported by the County Land Agent.

6.20 Policy allows for exceptional development to be provided in the countryside for agriculture whether it is buildings or dwellings. This proposal is one that fits into both categories and can therefore be justified.

6.21 Finally management of the hostel will be undertaken by the Farm Manager who resides in one of the cottages adjacent to the site and an occupancy condition will be recommended limiting the use to agricultural workers.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:

- 1. A01 (Time limit for commencement (full permission)).**

Reason: Required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

- 2. A06 (Development in accordance with approved plans).**

Reason: To ensure adherence to the approved plans in the interests of a satisfactory form of development.

- 3. B01 (Samples of external materials).**

Reason: To ensure that the materials harmonise with the surroundings.

- 4. The occupation of the hostel shall be limited to a person solely or mainly working in the locality in agriculture.**

Reason: It would be contrary to Development Plan policies to grant planning permission for hostel accommodation in this location except to meet the expressed case of agricultural need.

- 5. F16 (Restriction of hours during construction).**

Reason: To protect the amenity of local residents.

- 6. F18 (Scheme of foul drainage disposal).**

Reason: In order to ensure that satisfactory drainage arrangements are provided.

- 7. F32 (Details of floodlighting/external lighting).**

Reason: To safeguard local amenities.

- 8. G04 (Landscaping scheme (general)).**

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

- 9. G05 (Implementation of landscaping scheme (general)).**

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

10. H03 (Visibility splays).

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

11. H13 (Access, turning area and parking).

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to ensure the free flow of traffic using the adjoining highway.

12. H21 (Wheel washing).

Reason: To ensure that the wheels of vehicles are cleaned before leaving the site in the interests of highway safety.

13. H29 (Secure cycle parking provision).

Reason: To ensure that there is adequate provision for secure cycle accommodation within the application site, encouraging alternative modes of transport in accordance with both local and national planning policy.

14. Prior to the commencement of the development a Travel Plan that contains measures to promote alternative sustainable means of transport for staff and visitors with respect to the development hereby permitted shall be submitted to and be approved in writing by the local planning authority. The Travel Plan shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details. A detailed written record shall be kept of the measures undertaken to promote sustainable transport initiatives and shall be made available for inspection by the local planning authority upon reasonable request.

Reason: In order to ensure that the development is carried out in combination with a scheme aimed at promoting the use of a range of sustainable transport initiatives.

15. G39 (Nature Conservation – site protection).

Reason: To ensure that the nature conservation interest of the site is protected.

16. Prior to the first occupation of the hostel subject of this permission all agricultural workers caravans sited on land in the control or ownership of the applicant shall be removed permanently from the land and no caravans shall be placed on the said land without the consent of the local planning authority.

Reason: The permanent hostel accommodation replaces the need for agricultural workers caravans and the removal of such temporary structures is regarded as an important justification for the hostel, which will bring about an enhancement of the wider landscape.

17. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification, no agricultural workers caravans, as defined within Part 5, Schedule 2 of the Order, shall be sited on any agricultural land within the control or ownership of the applicant.

Reason: The permanent hostel accommodation replaces the need for agricultural workers caravans and the removal of such temporary structures is regarded as an important justification for the hostel, which will bring about an enhancement of the wider landscape.

Informatives:

1. In connection with condition 14, the applicant is advised that advice on its formulation and content can be obtained from the Sustainable Travel Officer, Herefordshire Council Transportation Unit, PO Box 236, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0WZ.

2. N15 - Reason(s) for the Grant of Planning Permission.

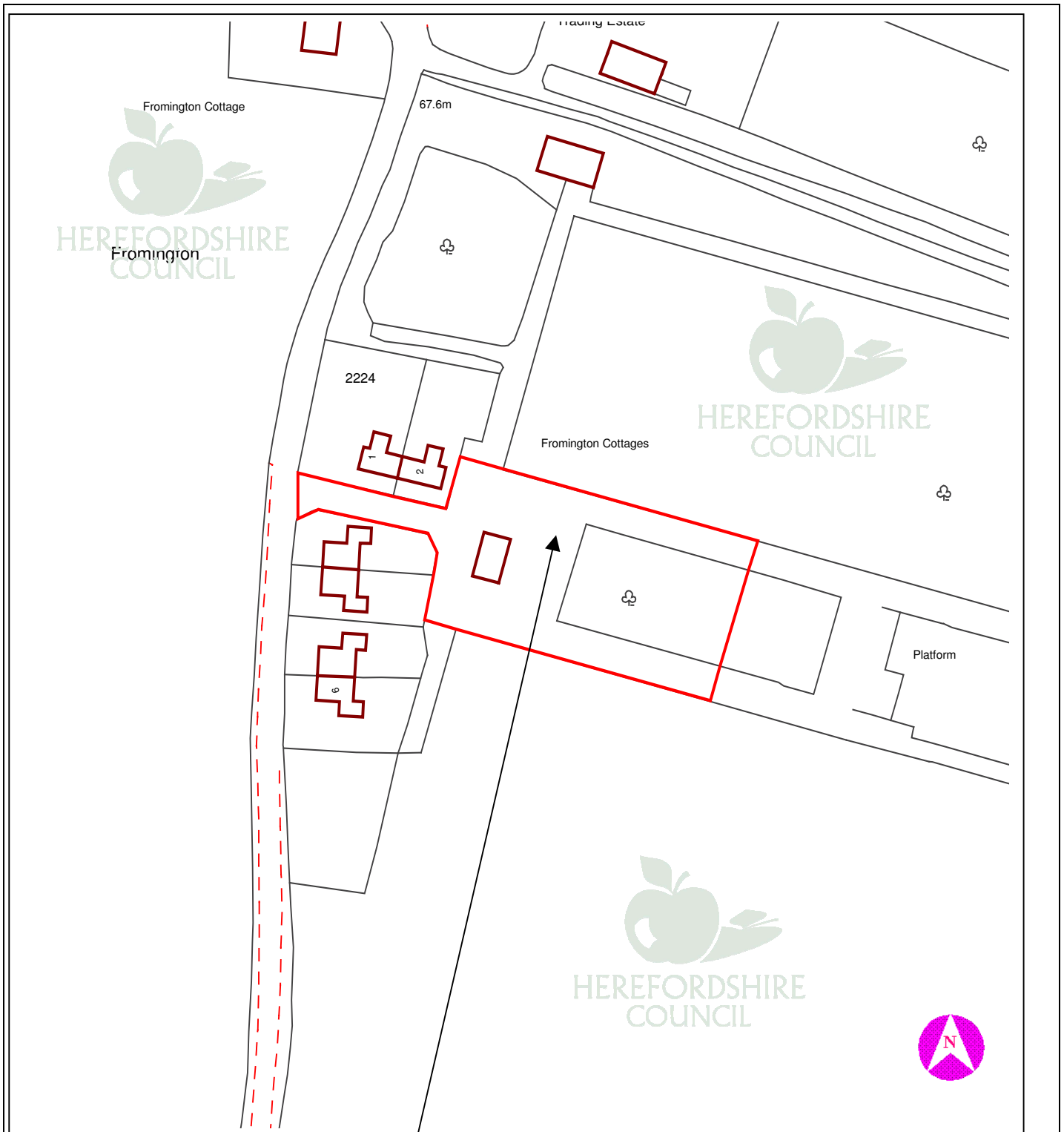
Decision:

Notes:

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Background Papers

Internal departmental consultation replies.



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APPLICATION NO: DCCW2006/1148/F

SCALE : 1 : 1250

SITE ADDRESS : Former Fromington Nursery, Burmarsh, Herefordshire

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