

APPLICATION NO.	P07/W0827/O
APPLICATION TYPE	OUTLINE
REGISTERED	23.07.2007
PARISH	CROWMARSH GIFFORD
WARD MEMBER(S)	Mr Nicholas Odd
APPLICANT	Lister Wilder Ltd
SITE	Land at Betts Farm Old Reading Road Crowmarsh Gifford
PROPOSAL	The erection of an agricultural machinery and workshop building with ancillary offices, parts store (including trade counter) and showroom, with external yard area for storage and display of agricultural machinery. New access to A4074.
AMENDMENTS	As amended by Drawing Nos. 01B, 02B, 006A and 007A received 14 September 2007.
GRID REFERENCE	461868/188704
OFFICER	Miss J.E.Randle

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The application has been referred to the Committee at the discretion of the Development manager.

The application

1.2 This application follows the withdrawal of application P07/W0266/0. The previous application was withdrawn following advice from officers that the scheme was unacceptable for a number of reasons. Some amendments have been made to the proposal to address the concerns raised. The application seeks outline planning permission for the relocation of the Lister Wilder Wallingford depot from its existing site at Crowmarsh to land at Betts Farm off the Old Reading Road. The proposal comprises the erection of an agricultural machinery workshop building with ancillary offices, parts store including trade counter and showroom with an external yard area for the storage and display of agricultural machinery (B2 general industrial use). The application includes a new access onto the A4074 Portway, which would be the site entrance, where an agricultural field gate currently exists. Pedestrian and cycle access is to be provided into the site from the Old Reading Road. Vehicle parking is proposed for 30 cars in front of the building. As this is an outline application, landscaping details and design of the building remain to be considered although some elevational details are provided on Drawing 05. The proposed building comprises 1504 m² (16194 sq ft) gross external floorspace over two floors with a ridge height of 9.65 metres. The building is to be constructed in metal cladding with some wooden panelling for the showroom.

1.3 The application has been advertised as a departure from the development plan as it conflicts with development plan policies.

2.0 THE SITE

2.1 The site is 1.73 hectares and is part of an existing agricultural enterprise at Betts farm. A group of redundant farm buildings 745m² exist on the site which will be demolished for this proposal (see photo). As shown on the location plan Drawing 02a the site is centrally positioned within an agricultural field with the buildings at Newnham Manor farm to the south. The site lies approximately 0.5 kilometres to the south of Crowmarsh Gifford and about 1.5 kilometres from Wallingford town centre. The site lies within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Part of the site lies within a 'parkland and estate farmland within the Central Vale fringe character area identified in the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment. Supporting information includes a planning statement dated March 2007 and amended in July outlining changes in resubmission – summary **attached**; flood risk assessment; a highway access statement and road safety audit; Green travel plan. A letter dated 27 September from the agent Dreweatt and Neate sets out the applicant's case for locating in this part of the District (**copy attached**).

3.0 CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

- 3.1 OCC (Highways) Holding objection s/t visibility splays for junction being under control of applicant. Suggest conditions
- Amended plans –holding objection dropped as appropriate visibility splays can be achieved and secured by condition.
- Environment Agency. No objection s/t a sustainable drainage scheme condition.
- Monson Details of surface water drainage to be submitted : nearest public sewer is 200m on private land.
- Oxfordshire County Council as Structure Plan Authority Objects - it is an unsustainably located development beyond the built up area of Wallingford contrary to Structure Plan policies G1 E1 E3. SODC best placed to assess whether applicants case as a local business outweigh policy objection.
- Landscape consultant Objection - site is a sensitive gateway location to Crowmarsh where urbanising feature will fundamentally affect this part of AONB ie highway lighting, access changes. Concern about outline nature of scheme and that some of details have not been thought through.
- Crowmarsh Parish Council Refuse - not in Structure Plan, significant change to use of this site to commercial use in AONB, remaining agricultural land will become unviable and allow scope for further development. Access arrangements are unsuitable as slow moving vehicles from north will have to move all along around Mongewell roundabout to turn into the site. Precedent for further development in area.(copy attached).
- No objection

Thames Water	
Neighbour Objectors (1)	Concern about new site and its access onto Parkway. Increased large heavy vehicles slowing down traffic and obstructing Cox's lane.
CPRE	Objection, contrary to PPS7 as in AONB and would encourage others to make applications to fill the eastern side of old Reading road
Sustainable Development Manager	Some of sustainable measures listed in supporting statement would be excellent if delivered. An option would be to seek external accreditation ie Breeam excellent certification.
	No rights of way cross site but would be concerned if access for vehicles were to use the route to south of New manor farm and Old Reading road.
County Footpaths	Style and construction of existing agricultural buildings does not offer any potential for protected species and no evidence found. Hedgerow along A4074 has little ecological interest. Overall little ecological impact from this proposal.
Countryside officer	

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 Previous application P07/W0266/0 was withdrawn in May for a building of 1530 m² on this site. The applicants were advised that officers would not support the application as major commercial development is not appropriate in the AONB and it is not a sustainable location for commercial development. There was also a technical highway objection.

An application P05/W0802 for a building 1858m² was proposed at Frogs Island Brightwell on the donkey sanctuary site in 2005 and was subsequently withdrawn. The applicants were advised that the site is an unsustainable location for commercial development and that the most appropriate location for the business in planning terms is at Hithercroft in Wallingford.

5.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE

5.1 Adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan Policies (OSP):

G1 – General policies for development, G2-improving the quality and design of development, G5 Development outside settlements, G6 Energy and resource

conservation, EN1 Landscape character, EN2 Environmental measures, E1 Employment development, E3 Restrain employment outside main towns, T1 T2 Sustainable travel, T8

Adopted SOLP Policies:

G2 – Protection of District’s resources, G6 – Quality of design and local distinctiveness, C1 – Landscape character C2 – Conserve and enhance Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, C4 –Landscape setting of settlement, EP5 – Flood risk impact, EP6 - Surface water drainage requirements, D1 – Principles of good design, D2 – Parking for vehicles and cycles, D8 – Conservation and efficient design, D9 – Renewable energy, D10 – Management of waste, E4- Restraint on employment generating development, E5 –Constraint on employment E8 Reuse of rural buildings.

South Oxfordshire Design Guide

South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment

PPS1 – Delivering sustainable development

PPS7 – Sustainable development in rural areas

PPG13 – Transport

PPS 25 – Development and Flood risk.

6.0 RELEVANT BACKGROUND

- 6.1
- Lister Wilder Ltd (LW) currently has an agricultural machinery premises at Crowmarsh Gifford which is allocated for residential development in the adopted SOLP (Policy RUR 13). In 2005 the Council resolved to approve a residential scheme on the Crowmarsh site. The company has been looking for an alternative site for some years. An application was submitted for a site at Frogs Island, Brightwell but was withdrawn following advice that officers would not support the proposal. Officers advised that the company should investigate land at Hithercroft adjacent to existing industrial land rather than isolated farm sites which were being looked at. Lister Wilder has indicated that as a well established local company for operational reasons it needs to locate in the Wallingford area. In a supporting statement they say that they have rejected surplus land at Hithercroft industrial estate on financial grounds. They say that Betts farm is the only other site within the Wallingford area that is suitable and available. This is discussed later in the report under ‘alternative sites’ at paragraph 7.11.

7.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 The main issues in this case are;

- Principle

- Impact on AONB and landscape setting
- Highway and sustainable transport issues
- Sustainable design
- Alternative sites/operational need

- **Principle**

7.2

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This application is for major development in the AONB beyond the built up area of Wallingford and Crowmarsh where new development should be resisted. Structure and Local plan policies encourage employment generating uses to be sited in sustainable locations in towns close to the labour force where there is existing transport infrastructure and to protect the countryside (**OSP G1 E1 E3 SOLP G1 G4 E4 E5**). As such there is an objection in principle to this major commercial development in this location beyond the built up limits of Wallingford and Crowmarsh. The main consideration to be weighed in the balance is whether the operational requirements of LW are sufficiently weighty to override these policies and whether there is a lack of available alternative sites which meet their operational requirements.

- **Impact on AONB and landscape setting**

7.3

The site lies within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). AONB's have the highest status of protection in relation to their landscape and scenic beauty being of national significance and Government advice in PPS7 indicates that such areas should given considerable weight in development control decisions. The agents supporting statement fails to recognise this designation. The SOLP indicates that major development will not normally be permitted in the AONB as this would be inconsistent with its designation and development which would be damaging to the beauty or distinctive character of the area will be resisted (PolicyEN1 OSP/ C2 SOLP). In assessing a proposal regard is had to the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment which is supplementary planning guidance and identifies the landscape character of the District. The site falls within the character zone 'Parkland and estate farmland' landscape type within the Central Vale fringes which is identified as being '**particularly sensitive to change and**

7.4 **least able to accommodate new development**'.

The erection of a substantial building in this open countryside location together with an expanse of car parking and a new access on to A4074 would fail to conserve the character and appearance of the AONB contrary to Policy EN1 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan and Policy C2 of the adopted SOLP. Furthermore the proposed development would also detract from the landscape setting of Crowmarsh contrary to Policy C4 of the adopted SOLP. Whilst it is accepted that the existing derelict buildings are not aesthetically pleasing, they are low profile agricultural buildings which one would expect to see in the countryside. A single new building of 1500m² which is considerably higher than the existing buildings at 9.65m high together with external storage of agricultural machinery and a new

7.5 access across the field would have a considerably greater impact on this site.

Landscaping is a reserved matter and only indicative planting is shown. The Council's landscape consultant has advised that any planting needs to be under the applicant's control i.e. within the application site and needs to be structure planting at 10-15m width around the building and along the access track. This is not proposed as part of this submission and as such does little to effectively ameliorate the impact of this development on open countryside. Furthermore there will be pressure for lighting, in particular security lighting at the site, and this will exacerbate the urbanising impact of this development on the area. The proposed highway works required to facilitate safe access for vehicles to this site from the A4074 will have a significant urbanising impact on this rural area. The highway works involve replacing an agricultural field gate with a 18 metre wide junction with a kerbed splitter island to prevent right turning into the site and a seven metre wide access road across the site for twenty metres to the new building. The visibility requirements and deceleration lane involve the removal of several metres of hedgerow and at least three trees along the A4074.

7.6

- **Highway and sustainable transport issues**

7.7 Policy T1 of the adopted SOLP requires that safe and convenient access is provided to the highway network and that developments which generate significant private vehicular transport are accessible by public transport. Following discussions with the Highway Authority (HA) amendments have been made to the main site access from A4074 Reading road following withdrawal of the previous application. The proposal involves a left in left out junction arrangement where an agricultural access already exists onto A4074 at a point where there is a 60mph speed limit. The Highway authority had indicated a holding objection pending alterations to visibility splays at the junction with the A4074 which need to be 215 metres x 4.5 metres in both directions. An amended plan 14048/GE/007A now secures appropriate visibility splays and OCC as Highway Authority raise no objection to the development. As such the proposal is in accordance with Policy T1 of the adopted SOLP as the junction arrangements are generally acceptable in highway terms.

7.8 The HA considers there is some marginal benefit in the relocation of the business from Crowmarsh to this site where at least vehicular traffic will be direct onto major roads. The daily two way vehicle flows likely to be generated at the site are 176 vehicle movements which is about 1% of the daily flow on this 60mph road. However, as the Parish Council has indicated the junction arrangements require large vehicles from the Oxford direction to pass the site and return via the Mongewell roundabout along the A4074 to access the site thereby increasing slow vehicular movements along this main busy road.

Sustainable transport

Accessibility is a key consideration in a development decisions (PPS7 and PPG13) and a core principle of sustainable development. Access to public transport, cycling and walking should be taken into account when new development is considered. Policy G3 of the adopted SOLP and Policy G1 of the Structure Plan seek to ensure that new development is located close to services and facilities and where it can be served by public transport. The policies confirm that this means that new development should not generally be permitted in isolated rural locations but should be sited in towns and larger villages where such facilities are available. The application includes a Green Travel Plan which is intended to enhance the sustainability of this site. The Plan aims to create a modal shift from the private car to alternative means of transport, in particular cycling and sets a target of three years to reduce the single occupancy car journeys to the site by 20%. Failure to meet the target incurs a financial penalty which incurs a payment to OCC towards transport measures and is secured by a Section 106 agreement. The Plan also involves appointing a Travel coordinator on site, the promotion of a car share scheme, the provision of secure cycle parking and showers for staff and a cycle/footpath link onto the Old Reading Road

7.9

However, the proposed site is less sustainable than the Company's existing site in Crowmarsh and whilst the Green travel plan proposals are welcomed, this is not a sustainable location for such commercial development. Walking and cycling to this isolated site involves travel along an unlit rural lane (Old Reading Road). The agents supporting statement indicates that the only bus to pass the site entrance is the number 133 which does one journey on a Friday. The nearest bus stops for regular services are along The Street about 500metres from the pedestrian entrance to the site. PPG 13 confirms at paragraph 89 that unacceptable development should never be permitted because of the existence of a Green Travel Plan.

7.10

- **Sustainable design**

Policy D8 requires that all new buildings are energy, water and materials efficient in their overall design and Policy D9 encourages the use of renewable technologies provided they do not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Although this is an outline application with the design of the building being reserved for subsequent approval, the agent confirms that it is intended to seek BREEAM excellent certification for the building. If planning permission is granted an appropriate condition is suggested. The agent has confirmed that a sustainable urban drainage system will be used if this is acceptable to the Environment

7.11

Agency.

- **Alternative sites/operational need**

The supporting statement advises that Lister Wilder is a successful agricultural, ground care and arboricultural business which operates throughout Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Surrey and employs 105 people at its six locations. The head office is at Crowmarsh where thirty five staff are employed. The 27 September letter from Dreweatt and Neate sets out the operational need for LW to be located in this part of the District. LW has been searching for an alternative site for a number of years. Your officers have advised that the most appropriate site for this type of use in planning terms is adjacent to existing industrial land to the west of Hithercroft as indicated on the site location plan. Although this land is not allocated for employment purposes in the current Local Plan, officers have advised that in principle the use of this land for this local firm would be supported. Previously in the 1990 Local plan this land was identified for the relocation of existing local firms but was subsequently removed as there was no outstanding requirement. The existing site at Crowmarsh is still owned and occupied by Lister Wilder who wish to redevelop their current site at Crowmarsh for housing following a resolution to approve application P04/W0733 for residential development subject to a Section 106 planning obligation. The 7.12 planning obligation seeks amongst other matters to ensure that the employment provided by LW is relocated within the District. However no specific alternative site was identified by LW during processing of that application. The agents statement indicates that despite being a well run business, the profitability of LW is not sufficient to fund the acquisition or occupation of standard industrial/warehousing premises and cannot therefore afford to relocate to land at Hithercroft. No evidence has however been provided to support the financial case. However your officers advise that as the site at Hithercroft is not allocated in the Local Plan, and therefore any planning permission would be an exception to policy, the site should not attract a full commercial value. Furthermore officers consider that, with the prospect of the business moving, this cost should be factored into the sale of the current site.

Operational need

With regard to the specific operational need to be located in this part of the District, the agent has indicated that Wallingford is at the centre of its established client base within the surrounding rural hinterland and could not be effectively be serviced from their Reading or Cirencester depot. They say that the business is based on being able to service clients within a fifteen mile radius of the service depot. Your officers accept that the business has an operational need to be in this part of the District but that fifteen miles is a fairly extensive site search area. However an alternative site is available which is preferable in planning terms to this unsustainable site in a vulnerable part of the AONB.

8.0 CONCLUSION

8.1 There is an objection in principle to this major commercial development in this location beyond the built up limits of Wallingford and Crowmarsh. The erection of a substantial building 1504m² and 9.65m high together with open agricultural storage and car parking would be damaging to the character and appearance of the AONB and the landscape setting of Wallingford and Crowmarsh. This site in a vulnerable prominent position at the gateway to Crowmarsh where commercial development together with the requisite junction works from the A4074 to facilitate safe access into the site will have a significant urbanising impact detracting from the rural approach to Crowmarsh which lies in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

8.2 This is not a sustainable location for commercial development as it is a relatively isolated rural location where there is limited access to public transport and facilities and is less sustainable than the Company's existing site. The Green Travel Plan confirms that nearly half the workforce travel over six miles to get to Crowmarsh and that less than five staff live locally. As such the operational need to be sited in the vicinity of Crowmarsh as far as the workforce is concerned is not compelling.

8.3 Whilst the applicants rural customer base indicates that a site in the Wallingford Crowmarsh area is appropriate, the applicant's case as a local business to locate on this particular site is not sufficiently overriding to outweigh the presumption against this major commercial development in a rural location outside the settlements of Wallingford and Crowmarsh within a vulnerable part of the AONB.

8.4 Officers appreciate that this is a local firm and would expect local support. However Crowmarsh Parish Council do not support the application expressing particular concern that the junction arrangements require large vehicles from the Oxford direction to pass the site and return via Mongewell roundabout along the A4074 to access the site thereby increasing slow vehicular movements and congestion on this main road.

8.5 In planning terms the most appropriate site for this type of use is adjacent to existing industrial land on the western side of Hithercroft in Wallingford as indicated on the site location plan. Although this land has no specific allocation in the current Local Plan, officers have indicated they would support this business relocating to this land. As such there is a site which is available, would serve the rural catchment area of the business and is more appropriate in planning terms than this site.

8.6

As such the application is recommended for refusal for the following reasons

9.0 RECOMMENDATION

9.1 That planning permission be refused for the following reasons:-

- 1. The proposal is for major development within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The erection of a substantial commercial building with open storage car parking and highway works would fail to conserve the special landscape quality of the Chilterns AONB and damage the landscape setting at this sensitive gateway location into Crowmarsh. As such the proposal would be contrary to Policies EN1 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 and Policies G2 G4, C2, C4 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan and advice in PPS7.**
- 2. The proposal is for commercial development exceeding 500 m² in size in a rural location outside the built up area of Crowmarsh and Wallingford where employment generating development is not encouraged being contrary to sustainable objectives. The proposal would be contrary to employment Policies E1, E3 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 and Policies E3 and E4 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan.**
- 3. The site is in an isolated unsustainable location outside any settlement where access to public transport is limited and services and facilities are not available. As such the site is not an accessible location for the relocation of this local business use and will increase the need to travel by private car. The proposal is contrary to Policies G1, G2 and T1 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 and Policies G3 and T1 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan. The applicants need to relocate on this site is not sufficiently overriding to set aside the planning policy presumption against this development.**

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