

**SUBJECT**            **DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION REPORTS**            **ITEM 7**  
**REPORT OF**        Head of Planning & Building Control

**APPLICATION NO.**            [P07/W0954](#)  
**APPLICATION TYPE**        FULL  
**REGISTERED**                31.07.2007  
**PARISH**                      STANTON ST JOHN  
**WARD**                        Ms Anne Purse  
**MEMBER(S)**  
**APPLICANT**                Mr & Mrs J Belcher  
**SITE**                         Breach Farm Stanton St John  
**PROPOSAL**                 Erection of livestock buildings comprising of two cattle barns, assoc yard and isolation boxes.  
**AMENDMENTS**            None.  
**GRID REFERENCE**        458550208407  
**OFFICER**                    Miss S Bird

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application has been referred to Planning Committee as the officer recommendation differs from the views of the Parish Council.
- 1.2 This application seeks full planning permission for the erection of two cattle barns, an isolation block and associated hardstanding.
- 1.3 The proposal forms part of a more comprehensive scheme to re-establish a working, self-contained farm at Breach Farm following years of use as set-aside. This application is linked to another current application at Breach Farm which seeks permission for the stationing of a mobile home for occupation by an agricultural worker.
- 1.4 The site lies within the Oxford Green Belt to the south of Stanton St John and to the north of Forest Hill, as shown on the **attached** location plan. The application site lies within a 139 hectare (345 acre) farm dedicated to mixed arable, sheep and cattle, a plan of which is also **attached**. An existing redundant stone built barn and foundations around an existing yard are located nearby.

## 2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 It is proposed to erect two cattle barns measuring 15m by 30m with a ridge height of 5.2m. It is also proposed to erect five isolation boxes in a single block measuring 23m by 5m with a ridge height of 5.3m. The barns would have a utilitarian appearance finished with concrete panels, timber boarding and corrugate roof sheeting in an 'anthracite' colour. The block of isolation boxes has been designed to complement the old stone barn and would be finished externally in natural stone and plain concrete roof tiles. An area of hardstanding would be laid surrounding the isolation boxes and barns. This hardstanding area would be large enough to accommodate a further 2 barns if necessary in the future. Copies of the plans submitted with this application are **attached**.
- 2.2 In support of the application, a report prepared by AJ Marshall, Agricultural Consultants, has been submitted and is **attached**. The Design and Access Statement accompanying the application is also **attached**. The Council commissioned Reading Agricultural Consultants to carry out an independent appraisal of the new enterprise at Breach Farm and any requirement for agricultural workers accommodation. The resulting report is also **attached** for information.

## 3.0 CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

### 3.1 Environment Agency – No objections.

**OCC Highways Officer** – No objections to the proposals subject to conditions securing a suitable hard surface and appropriate visibility splays.

**Monson Engineering Ltd.** – Details of a foul drainage system to serve the proposal should be required by condition.

**OCC Rights of Way Officer** – Nearby footpaths should not be obstructed or damaged.

**Stanton St John Parish Council** – Considers that the application should be refused on the basis of overdevelopment, visual impact associated with the size and materials of the proposed barns, the area of hardstanding and potential failure to see through planting and screening mitigation measures.

**Neighbour Representations (1)** – Generally supportive, given the attempts to site the development within the natural lie of the land and use of materials and colours to minimise the visual impact of the buildings. No objections so long as adequate landscaping.

#### **4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

- 4.1 **P06/W1354/AG** – Erection of an all purpose agricultural building – Agricultural Permitted Development: Application not required 17 January 2007.

This application followed a lengthy consultation period with SODC regarding the siting of a farm complex to serve the holding. A landscape analysis was undertaken to assess alternative locations within Breach Farm. The Council's Landscape Consultants concluded that such development could be sited to reflect landscape features, utilising screening, and did not rule out the potential for development.

The barn erected under this prior notification application is of the same size and materials proposed for the barns in the current planning application.

- 4.2 **P06/W1353** - Use of land for stationing a mobile home for occupation by agricultural worker – Undetermined.

This application is linked with the viability and acceptability of the proposed agricultural buildings which are the subject of this report. The mobile home application has also been referred to Planning Committee.

#### **5.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE**

##### **5.1 Adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011 Policies:**

- G1 – General Strategy
- G2 – Promoting Good Design
- G4 – Development in the Green Belt

##### **Adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 Policies:**

- G2 – Protection and Enhancement of the Environment
- G4 – Development in the Countryside and on the Edge of Settlements
- G6 – Promoting Good Design
- GB2 – New Buildings in the Green Belt
- GB4 – Visual Amenity in the Green Belt
- A1 – Agricultural Buildings

T1 – Transport Requirements for New Developments

D1 – Good Design and Local Distinctiveness

C1 – Landscape Character

EP1 – Prevention of Polluting Emissions

**National Planning Guidance:**

PPG2 – Green Belts

PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.

**6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main issues in this case are:

- i. Whether the proposal is acceptable in principle
- ii. Whether the scale and design of the proposal are acceptable
- iii. Whether the impact on the surrounding landscape would be acceptable
- iv. Whether there would be any highways issues associated with the development, and
- v. Any other issues.

**6.2 Principle**

Government advice in PPG2 and PPS7 and policies G4 and GB2 of the adopted Local Plan indicate that agricultural development is one of the few new forms of development which may be permitted in rural areas and within the Green Belt. This is on the proviso that there is a need for the agricultural building(s) or structure(s) which cannot satisfactorily be met by existing buildings or structures on the farm or nearby.

Until October 2005, Breach Farm and its surrounding lands was owned by New College, Oxford and had been used for set aside for many years. The applicants, as new owners of the site, have introduced sheep and beef cattle on to the land as well as utilising land to grow various crops for animal feed and grazing. There is currently one general purpose barn on the site which is used to store equipment and to provide workshop space and storage space for harvested cereals. The AJ Marshall report submitted with the application states that there is now an urgent need for further buildings to provide proper handling facilities for both the sheep and cattle.

The agricultural consultants engaged by the Council in this matter agree that without further buildings, the intended beef finishing enterprise will not be able to commence. Given the size of the holding, the nature of its new use and the lack of existing agricultural buildings on the holding, the need for further agricultural buildings is therefore accepted in principle.

If, in accordance with Policy A1 of the adopted Local Plan, the buildings are no longer required for agricultural purposes in 10 years time, they should be removed. A condition to achieve this aim is considered appropriate.

### **6.3 Scale and Design**

The proposed agricultural barns will be the same size and design as the existing all purpose building recently erected nearby. Reading Agricultural Consultants' report advises that the size of the barns is appropriate in terms of their use for finishing cattle, reflecting the functional requirements for livestock housing. The proposed barns would be finished to match the existing barn and have a utilitarian design typical of a modern covered stock building. The roofs would be finished in a dull grey 'anthracite' colour to minimise their visual impact and have a low pitched roof to ensure the buildings are no higher than reasonably necessary.

The block of isolation boxes has a more traditional form and has been designed to complement the adjacent old stone barn. The roof utilises a more traditional pitch and the overall building would be finished externally in natural stone and plain concrete roof tiles. Again, the isolation boxes are considered to be of a functional size appropriate to their purpose.

### **6.4 Siting and Landscape Impact**

Breach Farm has been the subject of an earlier landscape analysis in respect of proposals for a farm complex to serve the needs of the holding. Two siting options were put forward; one in the proximity of the site now proposed and one on the edge of Great Stanton Wood, approximately 350m north of the current application site.

Whilst both sites were located within the Oxford Green Belt and involved large scale development in 'open' countryside, siting the complex in the foreground of Great Stanton Wood had the potential to be harmful to the visual amenity value of the woodland, one of the most important landscape features in the area. Stanton Great Wood is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Section 74 Habitat and an Ancient Woodland. Consequently, the Council's Countryside Officer expressed concerns relating to siting a farm complex in proximity to the woodland.

The current application site was considered to be less prominent in the landscape due to its location within a depression in the landform. This is also the probable location of the historic Breach Farm where the stone frame of an existing barn and an access track from the B4027 remains. Consequently, the Council expressed preference for this siting option and this informed the location of the all purpose barn erected last year under agricultural permitted development rights.

The landform generally falls northwards and southwards towards the site, which lies in a shallow fold in the gently rolling landscape. In terms of the current proposal, thickly hedged tracks provide visual containment of the site from the south and from the north-west of the isolation boxes and east of the barns respectively. From the south particularly, the landform and intervening vegetation would restrict views to a silhouetted form of the barns with Stanton Great Wood as a skyline feature beyond. The greatest visual impact associated with the proposal would be to the amenity of the Stanton St John to Forest Hill footpath where it approaches and skirts the site when approaching from the north. There will also be views of the proposed barns from the B4057, which will sit approximately 3.5m higher than the existing all purpose building due to the slope of the land.

It is acknowledged that this is a sensitive Green Belt location in a predominantly open landscape. It is also acknowledged that there will be views of the proposed development from within the surrounding area. However, officers consider that the siting of the proposed complex of buildings utilises the topography and landscape features of the area to minimise its visual intrusion and overall prominence. It is also accepted that this is a form of development which can be acceptable in rural landscapes. Furthermore, opportunities exist to introduce additional boundary planting to further mitigate the visual impact associated with this development. Mitigation measures including the reinforcement of the existing tree belt to the south, tree and hedge planting to the east and north of the isolation boxes and new barns and the re-grading of any cuts or fills to ensure slopes marry in with the existing gradients and contours of the land will be required by condition. The impact on the openness of the Green Belt is acceptable given these circumstances.

## **6.5 Highways Issues**

The access junction with the B4027 which serves the Breach Farm complex is already established, albeit apparently not in frequent use. The Highways Authority has advised that they would not object to any minor intensification in use. The agent acting for the applicants has clarified that most of the animal feed required would be grown on the holding, avoiding transport by public highway. An anticipated weekly stock turnover of livestock would involve 1 lorry load of stock inwards and 1 lorry load of stock outwards by 40ft lorry. On this basis, the Highways Authority has confirmed that they have no objections to the proposals.

Visibility is however considerably below that which the Highways Authority would seek for an access onto a classified road within a derestricted zone, due to a combination of the existing hedgerow and the curvature of the road itself. It is noted that the applicant's site extends along the frontage of the B4027 and therefore scope exists to achieve the required visibility splays. The bellmouth of the access extending 15m back into the track would need to be resurfaced in a bound material to prevent loose materials from being dragged onto the highway by vehicles egressing the site. The gate would also need to be set back into the track to allow large vehicles to pull fully off the carriageway when accessing the site. These details would be secured by condition.

## **6.6 Any Other Issues**

Should this development for agricultural livestock barns and isolation blocks be granted planning permission, there will be a knock-on requirement for the provision of on-site agricultural worker's accommodation. This development will generate a functional need for a key stockman to supervise the livestock and to be readily available at most times in order that the enterprise can function properly.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

7.1 It is recommended that planning permission be granted because the proposal complies with the relevant Development Plan policies. National and local planning guidance allows for the provision of new agricultural development in rural areas and Green Belt locations. There is a functional need for agricultural buildings to serve the needs of the holding now that it is no longer in set-aside. The topography and landscape features of the locality have been used to minimise the visual impact associated with the proposed development as far as possible and mitigation opportunities will be taken to further screen the development. The design and scale of the proposed buildings is considered to be appropriate for their function. It is acknowledged that the development will be visible in the surrounding area, however Officers consider that the proposal would not be unduly harmful to the character or visual amenity of the locality and is appropriate development within the Green Belt.

## **8.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**8.1 That Planning Permission be granted subject to:**

1. **Commencement three years**
2. **Materials as specified – cattle barns**
3. **Samples materials – isolation boxes**
4. **Hard and soft landscaping scheme**
5. **Details of foul drainage system**
6. **Access – visibility splays**
7. **Access – entrance and gate**
8. **Remove building within 10 years of agricultural use ceasing**

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