
APPLICATION NO.	P11/E1772/RET
APPLICATION TYPE	RETROSPECTIVE
REGISTERED	21.11.2011
PARISH	THAME
WARD MEMBER(S)	Mr David Bretherton Mr Michael Welply
APPLICANT	Mr Paul Jeffries
SITE	Plantsource Ltd Moorend Lane Thame, OX9 3HF
PROPOSAL	The laying of hardstandings, erection of an electricity meter box, and temporary siting (for 3 years) of two portable buildings and a caravan for use in connection with a wholesale horticultural activity.
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	471077/206550
OFFICER	Mr R.Cramp

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The application has been submitted following an enforcement investigation (EE11/149) into the alleged stationing of portable buildings for business use without planning permission. The current application seeks retrospective planning permission for the laying of existing hardstandings, the erection of a small electricity meter box, and the temporary siting (for 3 years) of two portable buildings and a caravan for use in connection with a wholesale horticultural activity.

1.2 The application is referred to the planning committee as the recommendation of the officer differs from that of the Town Council.

1.3 The application site covers an area of approximately 4,630 sqm and is situated in the open countryside just outside the built up limits of Thame on its northeastern edge. The land is not the subject of any special designation. Access to the site is off Moorend Lane which runs off the A4129 (Thame Ring Road). The site has frontages to both Moorend Lane and the A4129 and is adjoined to the north and northwest by the Thame sewage works; and to the east (on the opposite side of Moorehead Lane) by agricultural land. On the opposite side of the A4129 (Thame Ring Road) the land is primarily in residential and passive recreational use.

1.4 Moorend Lane which runs adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site is a public bridleway. A public footpath also runs adjacent to the northern and western boundaries of the site. However, the land is well screened by existing hedges and trees along all boundaries. The only unobstructed view into the site is through the access gate off Moorend Lane, which is situated in the northeast corner of the land, adjacent to the sewage works.

1.5 The land is currently used for purposes of horticulture and the wholesale distribution of trees and plants, which is a use not requiring planning permission. To facilitate the use of the land, part of the site has been laid with hardstanding and an electricity meter box has also been erected. Situated in the northwest corner of the site are two small storage sheds which have been present on the land for a considerable period of time (exceeding 4 years) and must therefore be regarded as lawful. More recently,

however, two small portable buildings and a caravan have been deposited on the land which do not benefit from planning permission.

2.0 PROPOSAL

2.1 The current application seeks retrospective planning permission for:

1. the laying of areas of hardstanding;
2. the erection of a small electricity meter box of brick construction;
3. the temporary siting (3 years) of a portable cabins (11m x 3m) as a secure work shed for potting plants and storage of horticultural equipment
4. the temporary siting (3 years) of a portable cabin (5m x 2.5m) containing toilets and wash basins, which drain to an existing septic tank; and
5. the temporary siting (3 years) of a small touring caravan for security, office and cooking facilities ancillary to the horticultural use of the land.

2.2 The applicant has previously applied for the erection of a permanent agricultural building on the site to support the establishment of his horticultural business ([P08/E1065](#)). This application was withdrawn, however, when it failed to gain officer support. The current proposal for the siting of portable structures for a temporary period of 3 years only is with a view to allowing the horticultural business to establish, after which consideration might again be given to the erection of a permanent agricultural-type building.

3.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

3.1 Thame Town Council **Recommend refusal** for the following reasons:

- over-development
- traffic generation and safety
- character of the area
- design and materials

3.2 OCC Countryside Service **No objection** – the proposed buildings do not affect any public rights of way.

3.3 Thame Conservation Area Advisory Committee **Endorse the Town Council comments**

3.4 Neighbour Approve (1) **No objection** – considers the proposal to reasonable

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 The application site has no relevant history of approved planning applications, however, in 2008 a planning application ([P08/E1065](#)) was submitted for the erection of an agricultural type building for the storage of machinery associated with a horticultural business. This application was withdrawn prior to determination when it failed to gain officer support.

4.2 In 2011 an enforcement investigation (EE11/149) was commenced into the stationing of portable buildings without planning permission. The current application now seeks temporary planning permission for the retention of these portable structure for 3 years to support the establishment of the horticultural business.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

- 5.1 South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 policies;
A1 - Erection of agricultural building
C9 - Loss of landscape features
D1 - Principles of good design
E3 - Employment generating development in the countryside
G2 - Protect district from adverse development
G4 - Protection of Countryside
G6 - Appropriateness of development to its site & surroundings

- 5.2 Government Guidance:
PPG18 – Enforcing Planning Control
PPS1 – Delivering Sustainable Development
PPS4 – Planning for Sustainable Economic Development
PPS7 – Sustainable Development In Rural Areas

- 5.3 Supplementary Guidance:
South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2008

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 The main issues to be considered in the assessment of the current application are:
1. whether the design of the development is appropriate to the site, its surroundings and local distinctiveness;
 2. the impact of the development on character and appearance of the countryside;
 3. the economic impacts of the development;
 4. other material considerations.

Design & Local Distinctiveness

- 6.2 Policy G6 states that permission will not be granted for proposals which are not of a high quality design, which fails to protect or reinforce local distinctiveness, or that are of a scale or type that is inappropriate to the site and its surroundings. Policy D1 similarly encourages high-quality design and appropriate materials, which respects local distinctiveness and the character of the existing landscape. Policy A1 provides that new agricultural buildings should not be prominent in the landscape and should be in keeping with their surroundings in terms of their design and use of materials.
- 6.3 In the circumstances of the present case the portable buildings are of a plain and utilitarian appearance, which in terms of design and materials does not reinforce local distinctiveness and is not of a high quality. In terms of scale, however, the structures are relative small compared to the site area. The land is well screened by existing hedges and trees along all boundaries. The only unobstructed view into the site is through the access gate on Moorend Lane in the northeast corner of the land adjacent to the sewage works, which is itself utilitarian in appearance. The portable buildings are discreetly positioned adjacent to the southern boundary of the site, which is the furthest point away from the access gate. A laurel hedge has been planted across the site such that the area occupied by the portable structures will eventually be screened off completely from all outside views.
- 6.4 The portable buildings are not suitable in terms of their design and appearance as permanent features of the site. However, a temporary permission for 3 years only, in order to support the establishment of a small business would be appropriate, having regard to both the circumstances of the site and the current economic climate. At the end of three years consideration could be given to the erection of a permanent replacement building which is more appropriate to the rural character of the area. The character and appearance of the site would be better served if the caravan too was

located adjacent to the southern boundary, where it would be less visible from outside the site. This could be made conditional.

- 6.5 The areas of hardstanding comprising of compacted road chippings are not inappropriate to the site and its surroundings and neither does the small brick utility box situated adjacent to the southern boundary.

The Countryside

- 6.6 G2 of the local plan seeks to protect the districts countryside and settlements from adverse development; policy G4 seeks to protect the countryside for its own sake.
- 6.7 The use of the land for a horticultural business constitutes an agricultural use for which planning permission is not required. The application site is, however, relatively small for a horticultural activity of this nature and for this reason planning officers resisted a previous application for the erection of a permanent agricultural building on the site in connection a horticultural business that is yet to establish. Although the portable structures proposed by the current application are not entirely sympathetic to the countryside setting, a temporary permission for three years will give an opportunity for this small business to establish itself, after which consideration might again be given to the erection of a permanent agricultural building more in keeping with the rural setting.

Economic Impacts

- 6.8 According to PPS4 (Planning for Sustainable Growth), the governments overarching objective is sustainable economic growth. To this end local planning authorities should consider the social, economic and employment impacts of a development when assessing proposal for economic development in rural areas. PPS4 also provides, however, that the achievement of economic growth should be balanced against the achievement of other relevant planning objectives, including the protection of the countryside for the benefit of all.
- 6.9 In the circumstances of the present case it is important to keep in mind that the use of the site for a horticultural business does not of itself require planning permission. The current application for engineering and building operations, however, is required in order to support the viability of a small business that is endeavouring to establish itself.
- 6.10 Although the business is relatively modest in size employing just two people on a part-time basis it nevertheless contributes to the local economy and employment opportunities.
- 6.11 The grant of a temporary permission for the siting of portable building structures on the site for 3 years only, will give reasonable opportunity for this small business to establish itself on the site in accordance with the above government guidance. At the end of the above 3 year period consideration might then be given to the erection of a permanent agricultural building more in keeping with the rural character of the site and its surroundings.

Other Material Considerations

- 6.12 The Thame Town Council has included traffic generation and highway safety concerns among the reasons given in support of their recommendation that the application be refused. The use of the site for purposes of horticulture, however, does not require planning permission and does not form part of the current application. The current application relates to operational development only. Traffic generation, which is a function of the use of the site is therefore not a relevant consideration. Similarly the siting of the buildings on the site has no impact upon highway safety.

6.13 The Thame Conservation Area Advisory Committee has also submitted an objection endorsing the comments of the Town Council. It should be noted, however, that the application site is not within a conservation area and is more than 350m from the Thame conservation area at its nearest point.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

7.1 That the grant of planning permission would help support the viability of a small business, in accordance with government guidance aimed at encouraging economic development and employment in rural areas. Although the portable structures proposed by the current application are not suitable in terms of their design and appearance as permanent features of the site, a temporary permission for 3 years only is considered appropriate, in the circumstances of the case. This is particularly having regard to the limited extent to which these structures are visible from outside the site and the need to support local businesses in the current economic climate.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 **Planning Permission be granted subject to the following conditions:**

1. **Temporary Permissions (3 years)**
2. **Retention of existing hedges**
3. **External Lighting - General**
4. **Portable structure to be located adjacent to southern boundary**

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