

APPLICATION NO.	P17/S1888/FUL
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL APPLICATION
REGISTERED	31.5.2017
PARISH	HARPSDEN
WARD MEMBERS	Will Hall Paul Harrison
APPLICANT	Culden Faw Ltd
SITE	Land at Sheephouse Farm Reading Road near Henley-on-Thames, RG9 4HF
PROPOSAL	Demolition of existing buildings, alterations to existing vehicular access to Reading Road, construction of new buildings for use by Bremont Watch Company, new access drive, car parking and landscaping.
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	476970/181025
OFFICER	Tom Wyatt

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This application is referred to Committee as the Officers' recommendations conflict with the views of the Parish Council.
- 1.2 The application site (which is shown on the OS extract **attached** as Appendix A) comprises agricultural land adjacent to the A4155, which links the south of Henley with Reading. The site is approximately 300 metres to the south of the built up edge of Henley and forms a significant part of the open space on the east side of the A4155 between the southern extent of the built up area of Henley and the northern edge of the built up area of Lower Shiplake. Much of the remaining part of this open space between these two settlements comprises land in recreational use including the playing fields to the north and the polo centre to the south.
- 1.3 Planning permission was granted earlier this year for the redevelopment of the site to provide a new watch making facility for Bremont. This permission has not yet been implemented.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 The previous planning permission related to the provision of new buildings with a floor space of approximately 1800m² and associated parking and landscaping. The applicants have reviewed their longer term requirements in relation to the significant growth of the business and are now proposing buildings with a floor space of approximately 3400m² along with an associated increase in parking provision.
- 2.2 The design of the development continues the bespoke design of the already permitted scheme with low slung curved and mono-pitched green roofs and extensive timber cladding, stone walling and glazing.
- 2.3 Compared to the previous scheme the buildings would be sited further to the south west by approximately 20 metres. The part of the building comprising the office space would be approximately 0.8 metres higher than the approved scheme whilst the watchmaking part of the facility would be approximately 1.8 metres higher than the approved scheme. The proposed access would remain as previously approved with a

slightly realigned internal access road. The approved scheme provides for 58 parking spaces, which the current scheme seeks to increase to 107 spaces by extending the car parking area to the east. The proposed landscape bund would be extended to the south east in line with the repositioned and extended buildings. As previously proposed a new pedestrian access would be provided onto the A4155 and new pavements are proposed alongside the A4155 to provide links to a new northbound bus stop and the existing southbound bus stop.

2.4 The wider application site to the east and south and would be extensively landscaped with new planting, water features and much of the land would revert to grazing pasture.

2.5 A copy of the plans accompanying the application is **attached** as Appendix B. Other documentation associated with the application can be viewed on the council's website, www.southoxon.gov.uk. A copy of approved plans relating to application P16/S0642/FUL is **attached** as Appendix C.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1 Harpsden Parish Council – Objects as the proposal is a significant increase over the previous scheme and undermines the case for permitting the previous application under special circumstances. Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan provided for commercial development at the former Wyevale garden centre, and this should still be considered.

Henley-on-Thames Town Council – Recommends approval.

Shiplake Parish Council – Objects. The application is a huge increase over the previous. The location is unsuitable for such a big development. Volume of traffic would further exacerbate existing high volume of traffic on the A4155, the entrance and exit would be on the 50mph section and would pose considerable safety risks. There is no provisions for pedestrians and cyclists. Scale and bulk of the buildings would have a detrimental impact on the semi-rural area.

Highway Authority OCC – No objections.

The Henley Society – Objects as the proposal would result in the incursion of industrial use into the surrounding countryside. The former Wyevale Garden Centre site would be suitable for the relocation of Bremont.

County Archaeologist - The site is located in an area of archaeological potential and it is possible that prehistoric deposits could survive on the site. A programme of archaeological investigation will be required as a condition.

Minerals and Waste Team (OCC) – No objections

Drainage Engineer (Monson) - No objections subject to agreement of drainage details.

Environmental Protection Team - No objection subject to condition controlling working hours during construction and demolition.

Contaminated Land Officer – Further details should be agreed through condition to ensure that any land contamination is identified and any risk to the development is mitigated.

Leisure & Economic Development – Recommends approval as there is no suitable alternative site that could accommodate the growing business.

Countryside Officer - Subject to an appropriate mitigation strategy being agreed for the loss of the existing bat roosting sites and the great crested newt habitat the proposals should not result in any unacceptable impacts on protected species. Conditions are recommended.

Forestry Officer - The trees growing internally and shown for removal are of limited arboricultural quality and should not be considered as a constraint to development. The submitted landscape planting information is achievable and will add to the existing screening, and the proposed new internal planting is sufficient to mitigate for the tree loss required for the development. The submitted tree protection information is also acceptable.

Urban Design Officer – This is a well thought out and prepared submission and the proposal has an inspiring design which has sought to respond to and reinforce the unique character of the site, the use of the site and its setting.

Third party representations;

5 letters of support:

- The development will enhance the area with a high quality design
- The development would continue the success of the business
- The proposal would clear up a derelict site
- The proposal would bring economic and social benefits

5 letters of objection:

- The development is unsuitable for a site on agricultural land and is an important area of countryside that separates Henley and Shiplake
- The site is outside of the scope of the Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan
- Access arrangements are dangerous
- There are other suitable sites for the development such as the former Wyevale site
- The scale of the development is unsuitable for the site
- The additional traffic will add to congestion in Henley and have implications for highway safety
- Traffic and safety issues have not been properly considered
- The initial application was used as a way to facilitate this larger proposal
- Exterior lighting will spoil the rural character of the area and allow urban creep

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 [P16/S0642/FUL](#) - Approved (08/02/2017)

Demolition of existing buildings, alterations to existing vehicular access to Reading Road, construction of new buildings for use by Bremont Watch Company, new access drive, car parking and landscaping (as clarified by additional highways information and as amended to reduce bollard lighting and to alter design of west elevation)

[P11/E2116](#) - Approved (06/06/2012)

Construction of replacement polo stables, tack, hay and feed storage and associated permanent workers' accommodation and landscaping. (As clarified by Kernon Countryside Consultants Policy Update dated 16 April 2012).

[P11/E1155](#) - Approved (17/10/2011)

Material change of use of agricultural land to polo training arena and balancing pond with associated landscaping (As clarified by Drawing No: 10051-040 accompanying e-

mail from Water Environment to Machin Bates dated 7 October 2011 and subsequently by Drawing Nos: 100D and D1221 Revision B and associated information accompanying agent's e-mail dated 13 October 2011).

[P11/E0209](#) - Approved (10/05/2011)

Material change of use of agricultural land to polo field and demolition of existing farm shop. (As amended by Drawing Nos: 1105 Revision A, 1120 Revision A, 1150 Revision A, 1151 and SKE-02 Revision A accompanying agent's letter dated 28 March 2011 and the associated response from Land Use Consultants and further clarified by letter from agent dated 21 April 2010 and ecological report dated May 2011)

[P81/S0435](#) - Approved (22/03/1982)

Erection of buildings and facilities for pig breeding and rearing including landscaping scheme. Extraction of hard core from adjoining area for use in concrete areas. Regrade land after extraction.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (SOCS) policies

CS1 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development
CSB1 - Conservation and improvement of biodiversity
CSEM1 - Supporting a successful economy
CSEM2 - The amount and distribution of employment
CSEM4 - Supporting economic development
CSEN1 - Landscape protection
CSHEN1 - The Strategy for Henley-on-Thames
CSI1 - Infrastructure provision
CSM1 - Transport
CSM2 - Transport Assessments and Travel Plans
CSQ2 - Sustainable design and construction
CSQ3 - Design
CSR2 - Employment in rural areas
CSS1 - The Overall Strategy

5.2 South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP) policies;

C3 - Special character of the River Thames
C4 - Landscape setting of settlements
C6 - Maintain & enhance biodiversity
C8 - Adverse affect on protected species
C9 - Loss of landscape features
CON13 - Archaeological investigation recording & publication
D1 - Principles of good design
D2 - Safe and secure parking for vehicles and cycles
D6 - Community safety
D7 - Access for all
D10 - Waste Management
D12 - Public art
E5 - Business, industrial, warehousing and storage proposals
EP1 - Adverse affect on people and environment
EP2 - Adverse affect by noise or vibration
EP3 - Adverse affect by external lighting
EP4 - Impact on water resources
EP6 - Sustainable drainage
EP7 - Impact on ground water resources
EP8 - Contaminated land
G2 - Protect district from adverse development

- G3 - Development well served by facilities and transport
- G4 - Protection of Countryside
- T1 - Safe, convenient and adequate highway network for all users
- T2 - Unloading, turning and parking for all highway users
- T7 - Protection and improvement to footpath and highway network

5.3 Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan (HHNP) policies;

- T1 – Impact on development on transport network
- T2 – Cycling routes
- E1 – Supporting Henley’s economy
- E2 – Former Wyevale garden centre
- EN1 – Biodiversity
- DQS1 – Local character

5.4 South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016

National Planning Policy Framework

National Planning Policy Framework Planning Practice Guidance

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main planning issues in relation to this application are:

1. The principle of the development
2. Impact on the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area
3. Impact on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers
4. Highway considerations
5. Impact on trees and ecology
6. Impact on archaeology
7. Other material considerations

The Principle of the Development

6.2 The application site is located within the open countryside outside of the built up confines of the nearest settlements of Henley, Harpsden and Shiplake, and the proposed development would involve the development of a greenfield site within the open countryside.

6.3 The planning application granted under application P16/S0642/FUL is extant and can be implemented up to February 2020. The council recognised that commercial development on the site would not normally be appropriate having regard to the relevant development plan policies, however, planning permission was previously granted due to Bremont’s specific requirements and key national and local objectives to support economic growth. The council has a strategic objective to build the local economy and this is enshrined within the Corporate Plan. Government guidance contained within the NPPF places a strong emphasis on building the local economy and states at Para. 19 that ‘The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system.’ The NPPF further advises at Para. 21 that ‘Investment in business should not be over-burdened by the combined requirements of planning policy expectations.’

6.4 Comments received in relation to this current application continue to question why the company could not relocate to other existing sites in the local area, particularly the

former Wyevale Garden Centre site, which is allocated for employment uses within the HHNP. The justification for the company to move to the application site was provided, assessed and accepted in relation to the previous application and does not need to be reconsidered under this proposal. The key consideration therefore is not the principle of Bremont relocating to the application site but the planning impacts of a significant enlargement of the floor space of the buildings when compared to the approved scheme.

- 6.5 The HHNP recognises the importance of employment to the local area and included in its vision for the economy is the following statement, 'To create a sustainable economy, providing varied employment opportunities for Henley and Harpsden's resident population.' Para. 6.38 of the HHNP explains that the employment strategy for the area is on intensification and partial redistribution of employment land. Policy CSEM1 of the SOCS seeks to 'provide an environment that positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth'. The NPPF clearly also supports this objective with Para. 20 stating, 'to help achieve economic growth, local planning authorities should plan proactively to meet the development needs of business and support an economy fit for the 21st century.'
- 6.6 Bremont are an important local business and local employer and the company and the town of Henley-on-Thames are a good fit in terms of their international reputation. The company is growing faster than previously anticipated and analysis of the company's growth predicts 10% growth per year over the next 10 years. In light of this the proposal seeks to provide for sufficient space for the anticipated growth of the company rather than build out the approved scheme with the likelihood that extensions to the development would be required in the near future. Having regard to the cohesive design of the development as a whole, which would be difficult to extend and adapt in a satisfactory way at a later date, and the need for local authorities to proactively assess and meet the needs of business I consider that the principle of the development is acceptable subject to the planning issues discussed below.

Impact on the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area

- 6.7 The site does not form part of a nationally or locally designated landscape. In comparison to the approved scheme the current proposal represents a substantial increase in the footprint of development. However, I do not consider that this translates into any additional significant visual impact on the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings. The increase in the size of the development has been effected by repositioning the buildings and increasing their scale. The increase in the proportions of the buildings are relatively minor but cumulatively facilitate the required increase in floor space.
- 6.8 The application site represents a large area of open land, and is contiguous with adjoining open land comprising polo fields to the south. Crucially the current proposal continues the bespoke contemporary design of the approved scheme, and this, along with the modest increase in height over the approved scheme, would ensure that the development would remain sympathetic to its landscape setting, which has the capacity to absorb the increase in scale without visual or landscape harm. The form of the buildings with gently sloping green roofs helps the development to assimilate into its surroundings. The immediate vicinity of the building would be complemented by shallow sloping bunding and a woodland belt to the north, additional planting on the roadside boundary to the west, water features, small copses and individual parkland trees. In my view the development would accord with Policy CSEN1 of the SOCS, which seeks to ensure that the district's distinct landscape character and key features are protected against inappropriate development and where possible enhanced, and

that measures will be sought to integrate development into the landscape character of the area. The Policy also seeks to ensure that the landscapes and waterscapes of the River Thames corridor are maintained and where possible enhanced.

6.9 Impact on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers

The site lies in the countryside and is well away from dense areas of population, however, there are a small number of residential properties adjoining the site to the north and east. The proposed building would be over 100 metres away from the garden area of the closest of the adjoining properties, Sheephouse Farmhouse with the proposed car parking area being somewhat closer at approximately 50 metres away. The area between the buildings and car park and Sheephouse Farmhouse would be contoured with a shallow bund and extensive planting and this would effectively screen the development from the neighbouring property and the private drive serving it from the A4155.

- 6.10 The proposed development would comprise of separate office and watch making spaces and the nature of the business is unlikely to give rise to any noise or other environmental disturbance. The components used for the watch making are small and not delivered to the site in large quantities. As such, deliveries to the site are very unlikely to be via large commercial vehicles such as HGVs. In any case the access to the site is to the south and space for deliveries is to the west of the building. Therefore, the only activities to the north of the building would be in respect of staff and visitor parking. I do not consider that such activities would give rise to any significant disturbance to neighbouring amenity and as such I do not consider that it is necessary to limit the operating hours of the business.

6.11 Highway considerations

The access to the site off the A4155 would be the same as previously approved via an existing access to the south of the site and thereby via a new drive to the building. This access meets the technical requirements to provide safe access and egress onto the local highway network. The site is not particularly sustainable in transport terms due to its location. However, the proposal seeks to improve the sustainability credentials of the site by providing new footways along the A4155 to link to new and existing bus stops and allow for safe and continuous pedestrian access from the site into Henley.

- 6.12 Due to the site's location it is likely that the majority of transport movements would be via private car, however, cycle parking will be provided and the improvements to pedestrian access would mean that employees and visitors would be able to access the site safely and conveniently by alternative means of transport, such as bus, walking and cycling. The site compares more favourably in sustainable transport terms to the former Wyevale garden centre, which is located approximately 800 metres to the south of the application site and which does not benefit from a footpath network and relative proximity to Henley.

- 6.13 The parking provision meets the applicable parking standards. Compared to the approved scheme, the increase in the floor area of the building and the number of employees would evidently result in an increase in traffic movements. The Highway Authority has made the following comments in this respect.

With regard to the proposed 3,196m² GFA, the respective AM (0800-0900hrs) and PM (1700-1800hrs) peak traffic generation is 60 and 60 two-way movements respectively. The above is based on a 2 shift split working pattern for the Watchmakers of 0700-1500hrs and 1600-0000hrs and 0830-1730 for support staff. Overall, taking into

account modal split, employee holidays and agile working patterns, the proposed site will have the potential to generate 156 two-way vehicle movements per day. In terms of base flows, as of 2017, (based on 2015 survey with Tempro growth factors applied) the A4155 Reading Road has an existing flow rate of 10,600 annual average daily traffic flow (AADT) and therefore this development would add a nominal 0.3% to the AADT flow, which is acceptable.

Further to the above, sensitivity test analysis of the proposed site access has additionally been undertaken, taking into account 2 locally significant sites, which have been identified within the Joint Henley & Harpsden Neighbourhood Development Plan. The 2 sites are the former 13,500m³ GFA (gross floor area) Garden Centre to the south of the development site, to be redeveloped into B1, B2 or D1 use and the former PFA to the north of the application site, proposed to be redeveloped into a 55 unit residential development. Assuming equal split 60 arrivals and departures occurring in each peak period, with 70% of traffic from/to the north, Henley, and 30% to the south, RFC (ratio of flow to capacity) values at the site development access, as detailed in table 8 of the submitted Transport Assessment, indicate values to be considerably below the 0.85 threshold and therefore acceptable.

- 6.14 The Highway Authority has raised no objections to the proposal subject to various conditions and a legal agreement to secure public transport improvements, including the new footways and to ensure that development meets relevant highway standards.

6.15 Impact on trees and ecology

The site is well screened by existing boundary vegetation from the A4155 and the private access road alongside the northern boundary. This vegetation, apart from a minor incursion due to the proposed pedestrian access, would not be affected by the development. There are a few trees within the main body of the site, which would need to be removed to make way for the development, however, these are of low arboricultural quality, particularly having regard to the evergreen trees immediately to the south of the existing buildings. The Forestry Officer has confirmed that he has no objections to the proposal on arboricultural grounds.

- 6.16 The application scheme proposes substantial new planting on the site and this will serve to enhance the overall tree cover on the site and supplement the existing boundary vegetation to further soften and screen the development in public views.

- 6.17 There are no protected or priority habitats present on the site or likely to be indirectly impacted by the proposals. There are a number of low status roosting sites for pipistrelle bats within the existing buildings. In addition, a medium population of great crested newts (GCN) have been found in a pond immediately to the north of the site within Sheephouse Farm and a small population further to the south just beyond Lower Bolney Farm. Outline mitigation proposals have been put forward for both bats and GCN which should ensure that the local conservation status of the species is maintained. In light of this the council's Countryside Officer has no objections to the proposal subject to mitigation measures to provide replacement roosting sites. Overall, having regard to the extensive landscaping proposed and water features, the proposed scheme has the potential to enhance biodiversity within the site in accordance with Policy CSB1 of the SOCS.

Impact on archaeology

- 6.18 The site is located in an area of archaeological potential having regard to its proximity to an unidentified rectilinear enclosure to the north east of the site probably dating to

the later prehistoric period and also wattle lined iron age pits have been found to the south west of the site with bronze age finds also recorded to the north west of the site. As such the site has potential for archaeological features and having regard to the requirements of Policy CON13 of the SOLP the County Archaeologist has requested that a condition is imposed on any planning permission to ensure that the site's archaeology is investigated.

Other material considerations

- 6.19 The development would result in the sterilisation of minerals within the site comprising sand and gravel and would make access to potential workings on adjacent land more difficult. However, the site and the adjacent land to the north and south lie well outside the strategic resource area for the extraction of minerals and as such there are no objections to the proposal with regard to mineral safeguarding.
- 6.20 The proposed development, due to its use, would not be liable for the community infrastructure levy.

Summary

- 6.21 The application submission has demonstrated that the increase in the scale of the development compared with the approved scheme would not result in any significant impact on the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings, the amenity of local residents or highway safety and convenience. There remains justification for permitting this development having regard to the unique circumstances of the proposal, including the relationship between Bremont watches and the land owner, the status of the business and its particular locational requirements and the importance of the business to the local economy.

- 6.22 The development would support the aims of the council's Corporate plan and national planning guidance in relation to Para. 28 of the NPPF, which states:

Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote a strong rural economy local and neighbourhood plans should:

*-support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings **and well designed new buildings** (my emphasis);*

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The application proposal is not in strict accordance with the relevant development plan policies and national planning policy due to the location of the site in open countryside. However, there are overriding reasons of sufficient weight to support the application proposal and, subject to conditions, the development would respect and enhance the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area and would not cause any significant harm to the amenities of neighbouring occupiers. In addition the proposal would not be detrimental to highway safety and would improve the connectivity of the site to public transport provision and the built up area of Henley.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

- 8.1 **That the Head of Planning be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the prior completion of a Section 106 planning obligation to secure financial contributions towards public transport improvements and the following**

conditions:

1. Commencement of development within three years.
2. Development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans.
3. Samples of materials to be submitted and approved prior to the relevant part of the development commencing.
4. Details of finished floor levels for the building and ground levels across the site to be approved prior to the commencement of development.
5. Landscaping scheme including hardsurfacing and boundary treatments to be implemented prior to occupation.
6. Tree protection measures in accordance with the submitted details.
7. No development, including demolition, to commence until a bat licence or mitigation measures have been agreed.
8. No development, including demolition, to commence until a great crested newt licence or mitigation measures have been agreed.
9. Contaminated land investigation and remediation strategy to be agreed.
10. Surface water drainage in accordance with SuDS (sustainable drainage) principles to be approved and implemented prior to first occupation.
11. Foul drainage to be approved and implemented prior to first occupation.
12. Archaeological evaluation to be carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation to be approved prior to the commencement of development.
13. External lighting in accordance with approved plan and no other lighting unless first agreed.
14. Development to meet BREEAM standard.
15. Off site highway works in relation to provision of footways and bus stops as shown on the approved plans to be carried out prior to the occupation of the building.
16. Travel plan to be agreed prior to occupation.
17. Cycle parking and shower facilities to be provided prior to the occupation of the development in accordance with details to be approved.
18. Construction traffic management plan to be maintained in accordance with details to be approved prior to development commencing.
19. Construction method statement to be approved prior to development commencing.
20. Visibility splays and access to be constructed prior to occupation of the development.
21. Parking and turning areas to be provided in accordance with the approved plans prior to occupation of the development.
22. Any gates to be set back at least 12 metres from the edge of the carriageway and to open inwards.
23. Plant noise limits, building envelope specifications, internal and external noise levels as well as alternative means of ventilation to be provided in accordance with recommendations of submitted acoustic report.
24. Noise levels from plant and equipment to not exceed the existing background noise level at the boundary with neighbouring residential properties.
25. Occupation by Bremont only.
26. No change of use unless through the grant of planning permission.

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