

REPORT TO THE WESTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	09.11.2011		
Application Number	W/11/02232/FUL		
Site Address	Mayflower Farm New Road Codford Warminster Wiltshire		
Proposal	Construction of a one and a half storey to single storey administration building		
Applicant	Babylon Translations Limited		
Town/Parish Council	Codford		
Electoral Division	Warminster Copheap And Wylve	Unitary Member:	Christopher Newbury
Grid Ref	396207 140261		
Type of application	Full Plan		
Case Officer	Mr Mike Wilmott	01225 770344 Ext 34858 mike.wilmott@wiltshire.gov.uk	

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

Councillor Newbury has requested that this item be determined by Committee if officers are minded to approve it due to:

- * Scale of development
- * Relationship to adjoining properties/amenity of neighbours
- * Visual impact on surrounding areas

and to give effect to comments of Codford Parish Council.

In addition, because of the unusual nature of the proposed development, the Area Development Manager considers that this application should be considered by the Planning Committee, regardless of the recommendation.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the above application and to recommend that planning permission be approved subject to conditions.

Neighbourhood Responses - Letters of objection have been received from sixteen local residents. Four letters of support have been received including two from local businesses

Parish Council Response – Codford Parish Council objects to the proposal.

2. Report Summary

The main issues to consider are:

The principle of the development
 Impact on the landscape of the area of outstanding natural beauty
 Impact on highway matters
 Impact on amenity of existing properties

3. Site Description

The application site forms part of an agricultural holding of 2.5 ha to the north-west of the village of Codford. The site is largely grassed and is served by the same access track that leads to 'The Soundpost, a business use in an extended building at the top of the access track. Whereas 'The Soundpost' is on the left at the end of this track, the new building would be on the right, built at a similar ground level to the existing building. The access track runs from New Road, which serves New Road Service Station, the Vets surgery and several dwellings.

4. Relevant Planning History

There are no relevant planning previous planning applications on the site, although it is relevant to note that the Council has permitted the conversion of an adjacent former agricultural building to business use and permitted the subsequent extension of this building. It has also granted permission for the vets surgery to the rear of New Road, a short distance to the east.

5. Proposal

The proposal is for the erection of an administrative centre for Babylon Translations Limited.

Use

Babylon is a privately owned defence contractor that for ten years has provided translation; language training; cultural advice and training in respect of Afghanistan and other middle east countries, as well as role playing services, to the MOD, Foreign Office and other government organisations. The role playing activity supports the pre-deployment training of UK military personnel. Much of this activity takes place on the Salisbury Plain Training Area. Whilst the majority of the personnel employed in the role playing are accommodated in military accommodation, according to the agent, their management and logistic support has to be undertaken from private sector accommodation and for operational reasons, that accommodation must be located very close to where the personnel are to be accommodated and deployed. This management and logistics activity involves up to 25n supervisory personnel and 10-15 HQ staff and it is these personnel who are proposed to be based in Codford. The 10-15 HQ personnel would be based at Codford permanently (normally during office hours only). The 25 supervisory personnel would use the facilities as their command base while exercises are ongoing, including occasional access out of hours. The agent considers that the proposal is a matter of 'military importance and 'public interest'.

The Building

The proposal envisages the construction of a linear building with the external appearance of a barn-like structure. It would be built of timber and stone with slate roofing. The structure would be single storey with a first floor within part of the roof space. The building would contain an operation room; briefing room; offices; refectory; storage and toilets, with limited sleeping accommodation in a single room in the roof space. The building (including a single storey off-shoot) would be 43 metres in length with a height to the ridge line of 7 metres. As a comparison, it would be similar in length to the adjacent 'Soundpost' building and would be cut into the sloping field to a similar degree. Car parking would be to the side (west) and rear east of the building.

Documents

The proposal is accompanied by a Design and Access Statement; a Visual Impact Assessment and testimonies from service users of the applicant's business. These are all available on the Council's web site. The visual impact assessment concludes that the visual impact would be low due to the setting of the new development in relation to its location, in which it is seen as a component part of the northern fringe of the village from all but a few localised viewpoints around the periphery.

6. Planning Policy

National Guidance

PPS 4 and the Ministerial Statement on Planning for Growth (March 2011)

PPG 13

West Wiltshire District Plan - 1st Alteration 2004

C1 The countryside; C2 areas of outstanding natural beauty; C15 Archaeological assessment; C31a Design; C32 Landscaping; C38 Nuisance; E6 employment.

The site lies within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

7. Consultations

Codford Parish Council – Oppose this application for the following reasons:

Site –

This is a Greenfield site on land designated for agriculture outside the village policy limits. The three other buildings in this area (Soundpost/Vets surgery/Mayflower Farm bungalow) were approved only if they were built on the footprint of pre-existing buildings. As we understand planning policy, buildings on footprints on such sites will only be considered if they meet certain strict criteria, namely agriculture/forestry/tourism. Building on other locations on the site is not permitted. If landowners with the remains of either WW1 or farming buildings were allowed to develop anywhere on the site it would set a dangerous precedent and open the floodgates for large scale building on protected agricultural land.

Planning history –

New Road Service Station – the building under construction replaces an old WW1 hut that has been the only village shop for many years. Villagers from Codford and surrounding villages use the shop, post office garage and workshop and the new shop will provide a vital lifeline for at least six communities. Its construction has nothing to do with other development in this area. New Road Parking – the land will ensure that there is space for customer parking to ensure that the forecourt can be used for the workshop, fuel and coach hire. There will be no structure of any kind on this site. The Soundpost – was an existing business in a nearby village that needed more space and was built on a footprint in a small field. The need to expand for warehousing was granted a few years ago. This is a green building with office opening hours that is partly screened and unobtrusive in the landscape. Vet surgery – was a thriving existing business that had outgrown its premises and relocated to a more suitable site. It is an attractive building that was completely built on an existing footprint and provides an important rural service. Its location with land all around is in keeping with the AONB area. Ashdown Farm – an agricultural holding providing firwood locally. The logging element is strictly controlled to protect neighbouring properties from noise nuisance. WRHA houses – were built on an exception site offering rented accommodation to people with local connections.

Development –

The original small footprint is higher up and any building there would be unacceptable in an AONB because it would be visually intrusive. Planning policy is to allow buildings on suitably placed footprints and does not allow development elsewhere if the footprint is unacceptable. To follow such a policy would be to abandon planning rules completely. This is a large commercial building that has nothing to do with the criteria for building on such a site.

Alternative sites –

The Codford site is unsuitable for the same reasons advanced by the applicant for rejecting other sites. There are a number of residential properties in the area and unrestricted hours of use and vehicle movements at night and early morning would adversely affect the residents at these properties. Other businesses at Ashdown Farm, the Soundpost and the Vets surgery have strict planning conditions regarding their hours of use.

Security –

Although not shown on the plan, one would expect security measures such as lights and fencing that would be inappropriate and intrusive. The village has supported light reduction through the night and all night security would be a retrograde step. Leasing military buildings on estate contractors is routine and with the army shrinking, more space is becoming available. A military compound on the edge of Codford would be out of keeping with the surroundings. The Afghan operation is due to end in 2015 and there is limited appetite for further military adventures in the region, so the purpose of the building has a time limit.

The parish council is supportive of the military and admires the work that Babylon Translations is doing. However, we are dealing with a planning issue and even if the footprint of the application site was suitable, there is no justification for this application as it does not meet the planning criteria for

such a site and is neither necessary nor ideal for Codford. On planning grounds, to allow this application would set a precedent county wide that would allow any landowner with a footprint of a farm or wartime building to designate other parts of agricultural green fields for development.

Highways – As the site lies outside of the village policy limits, objects on the grounds of sustainability, as the site is remote from services and unlikely to be well served by public transport. It is therefore contrary to the key aims of PPG 13 which seeks to reduce growth in the length and number of motorised journeys.

Wessex Water - No objections.

Environment Agency - No objections subject to an informative.

Cranborne Chase and West Wilts Downs AONB Planning Advisor – View the development as an unnecessary proposal outside of a military holding where it would be more appropriately located. Also concerned that in addition, the proposal will introduce extra vehicle movements on a regular basis and at all hours thereby contributing to both a loss of tranquillity and an urbanisation of an intensely rural area. In relation to the landscape and visual impact, the impact will be at least medium. If there is a strong planning case, the current proposal is the 'least worst' option within the land available to the applicants.

County Archaeologist – The maximum archaeological intervention required would be a watching brief, which could be achieved via a planning condition.

8. Publicity

The application was advertised by site notice and neighbour notification. Expiry date: 23 September 2011

Summary of points raised:

Letters of objection have been received from 16 local residents raising the following points:

- The proposal is on a green field site outside of the village policy limits;
- The development will be large and intrusive within the landscape;
- The development will introduce a commercial operation into the area of outstanding natural beauty;
- The development will be disruptive to the village;
- The development will overlook nearby dwellings;
- The building will have no use post 2015 when the current conflict is over;
- The building is not on the footprint of an existing building;
- Traffic noise will disturb local residents at night;
- The development will be unsightly, especially if fences and lights are erected, and will blight the view;
- The proposal is unnecessary as other buildings are available for such a use, or the site should be located within existing military land/buildings;
- The development will result in an unacceptable increase in traffic in New Road;
- The building should be moved from the south-east boundary to allow for more comprehensive landscaping.

Four letters of support, including two from local businesses in Codford have been received, raising the following points:

- The development will create local employment;
- The development will bring additional trade to services, including the recently developed services at New Road;
- The area has a history of military use and this will continue that and will support the ties with the military;
- The visual impact will be minimal;
- The design is well thought out and the building is appropriate in size and materials.

9. Planning Considerations

9.1 Principle of Development

The site is outside of the village policy limits defined for Codford in the District Plan. However, whilst the policy position with regard to new housing development outside of these limits is clear cut (H19 - only justified in connection with the needs of agriculture or forestry), the position regarding employment development is less so.

Policy C1 starts from the proposition that 'development proposals in the open countryside will not be permitted', but adds the caveat 'other than those which encourage diversification of the rural economy' and those where there is 'an overriding justification such as schemes of national importance or overriding benefit to the local economy'.

Policy C2 gives priority to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape, but also states that 'proposals for new development essential to the economic and social well being of the rural community will be permitted'.

Policy E6 permits proposals for the 'establishment of small scale employment enterprises.....on new sites' provided that they are compatible with the rural character of the area, do not create flooding or highway problems and are not detrimental to the amenity of local residents.

In terms of national planning guidance, PPS 4 (policy EC6) advises that the countryside should be protected for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty and that in rural areas, local authorities should strictly control economic development in open countryside away from existing settlements. The more recent ministerial statement on 'Planning for Growth (March 2011) requires local planning authorities to 'consider fully the importance of national planning policies aimed at fostering economic growth and employment' and to give appropriate weight 'to the need to support economic recovery, that applications that secure sustainable growth are treated favourably'.

In short, Members must weigh up whether they consider that the development is compatible with the rural character of the area and whether they consider that it is justified in relation to the economic benefit to the local economy, or even whether it is a scheme of 'national importance'.

9.2 Impact on the Landscape

The proposal is in the countryside on a green field and inevitably there will be an impact on the landscape. The Visual impact Assessment carried out by the consultants engaged by the applicant concludes that the impact is 'low', whilst the AONB Planning Advisor considers it more realistic to assess the impact as 'medium'.

Whilst it is understandable that the parish council refer to new buildings being more likely to be permissible where they occupy the footprint of an existing building, the planning policies do not actually refer directly to this. The better test is simply to assess the overall impact on the landscape from the development. In this respect, by siting the building at the lower point of the slope, close to the existing Soundpost building, and by utilising a sympathetic design, the impact on the landscape has been minimised. The number of buildings already in the vicinity and outside of the village policy limits (eg Soundpost; Vet surgery; New Road Service Station) means that the landscape has already absorbed a number of developments.

In sum, whilst the development would have an impact on the landscape, members must weigh this against the arguments put forward for the benefits of the development and come to a conclusion as to whether the landscape impact from the proposed siting is outweighed by the benefits claimed.

9.3 Impact on highway issues

Although the highways officer has objected to the development on sustainability grounds, it is not considered that this argument is tenable in this location, given the previous approval by the Council of the other developments in the vicinity that are all outside of the village policy limits. Furthermore the site is close to the nearby Service Station and shop and there is an hourly bus service on weekdays from Warminster to Salisbury that passes through Codford. No other highway objections have been raised and it is notable that the site has very easy access to the nearby A36 trunk road without the need to pass through the village.

9.4 Impact on Amenity of nearby properties

There are no dwellings that adjoin the application site, and whilst there are dwelling accessed off of New Road, it is not considered that the use of the site or the access track to it will have any significant adverse impact on the amenity of local residents.

9.5 Conclusion

This application is finely balanced. The building is well designed and is put forward in connection with a local economic activity. The counter argument is that it is in open countryside and that the justification advanced is not sufficient to outweigh the harmful impact on the landscape of this part of the AONB. It is for members to make the call on where the balance of interest lies in this application, as a decision either way could be justified.

However, given the current emphasis by the Government on fostering economic growth; the past history of the Council in allowing local enterprises to develop in this specific area outside of the village policy limits, and the design and siting of the proposed development, in close relationship to an existing building, permission is recommended.

Recommendation: Permission

For the following reason(s):

When assessed against policies C1; C2 and E6 of the Western Wiltshire District Plan (1st Alteration), and national planning guidance in PPS 4 and the ministerial Statement on Planning for Growth, the proposed development would be beneficial to the local economy and because of the design, scale and location of the building, compatible with the rural character of the area. These factors outweigh the limited visual harm that would be created to this part of the area of outstanding natural beauty as a result of the development.

Subject to the following condition(s):

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2 No development shall commence on site until details and samples of the materials to be used for the external walls and roofs have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and the character and appearance of the area.

West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration 2004 - POLICY: C31a.

- 3 No development shall commence on site until a scheme of hard and soft landscaping has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, the details of which shall include
 - * indications of all existing and proposed trees, planting and hedgerows on the land (including full details of any landscaped bunding);
 - * details of any existing trees to be retained, together with measures for their protection in the course of development;
 - * finished levels and contours;
 - * means of enclosure, including the height, position and design of any fencing;

- * car park surfacing;
- * other vehicle and pedestrian access and circulation areas;
- * any external lighting;

REASON: To ensure a satisfactory landscaped setting for the development and the protection of existing important landscape features.

- 4 All soft landscaping comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the first occupation of the building(s) or the completion of the development whichever is the sooner; All shrubs, trees and hedge planting shall be maintained free from weeds and shall be protected from damage by vermin and stock. Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years, die, are removed, or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority. All hard landscaping shall also be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with a programme to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To ensure a satisfactory landscaped setting for the development and the protection of existing important landscape features.

West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration 2004 - POLICY: C31a and C32

- 5 Before the building is first occupied, the existing derelict store shown on drawing no.955/PL2 Revision A shall be demolished and the materials shall be removed from the site.

REASON: To conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the landscape of this part of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

- 6 The first occupier of the building shall be Babylon Translations Limited, for the purposes set out in the Design and Access Statement provided with the planning application. The building shall be used solely for the purposes set out in the Design and Access Statement for the first two years of its use. Thereafter, it shall be used for these purposes or for any other purpose within Class B1 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order as amended in 2005.

REASON: The justification for the building in this location has been provided by the intended specialist use that is of benefit to the local economy. It is therefore appropriate that the initial use should be restricted to that which provides the justification. However, it could have an adverse impact on the local economy if the future use of the building was constrained for an unreasonable length of time.

- 7 The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until the sewerage disposal proposed have been completed in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To ensure that the development is provided with a satisfactory means of drainage.

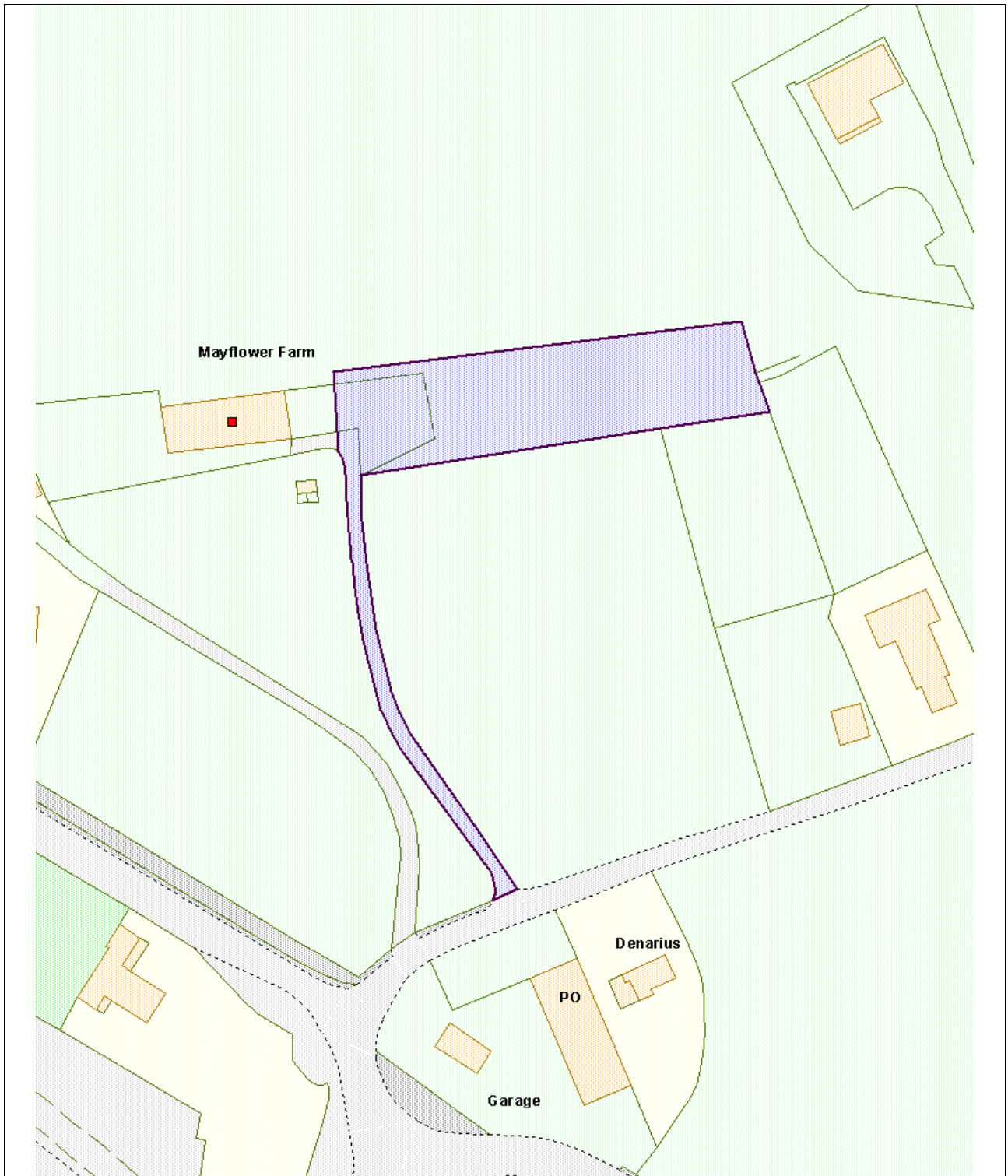
West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration 2004 - POLICY: U1a

- 8 The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans drawing numbers 10.08 - P.01; 02; 03; 04; 05; 06.

REASON: To ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans.

Appendices:	
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**Background Documents
Used in the Preparation of
this Report:**



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