

REPORT TO THE NORTHERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	18 July 2012		
Application Number	N/12/001105/FUL		
Site Address	Folly Lane, Lacock, Wiltshire SN15 2LP		
Proposal	Change of Use to Agricultural Machinery & Plant Hire Yard, Erection of Workshop/Store Building and Associated Works		
Applicant	SW Machinery Hire Ltd		
Town/Parish Council	Lacock Parish Council		
Electoral Division	Corsham Without & Box Hill	Unitary Member	Cllr Dick Tonge
Grid Ref	391195 168223		
Type of application	Full		
Case Officer	Chris Marsh	01249 706657	chris.marsh@wiltshire.gov.uk

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The application has been called to Committee by Cllr Tonge in order to consider the business need and economic impacts of the proposal.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the above application and to recommend that planning permission be REFUSED.

2. Main Issues

The main issues for consideration are:

- Impact on the openness of the countryside;
- Impact on the highway network; and
- Economic impact of the proposal

3. Site Description

The site comprises a small parcel of land, with an allocated private access drive, located in undesignated open countryside to the West of the village of Lacock. The land forms part of a former farming enterprise, which has subsequently diversified in part to other uses including a plant nurseries and a small caravan park, associated with a single detached dwelling; 'Piccadilly'. It is understood that an agricultural field shelter existed previously toward the North of what is now the storage yard, the remains of which can still be seen.

Folly Lane is a narrow road accessed directly from the A350 main road between Melksham and Chippenham and linking to the village of Gastard to the West. A former farm track bounded by a steel gate has been resurfaced in loose stone, providing sufficiently wide access to the site, which is located some 150m South of Folly Lane. This track lies outside the land ownership within which the remainder of the site falls.

Some works have already been undertaken to facilitate the current use of the site for the storage and routine maintenance of agricultural plant and machinery. A shipping container is stationed at the centre of the plot and is used for storage and basic office functions. Some tarmac surfacing

works have also been undertaken at the Northeast corner, alongside a row of trees that afford the site some degree of screening from the main road. Most of the works already undertaken on site are understood to have taken place in 2009, when the business moved to the site from a nearby farm.

The remainder of the site is surfaced in loose stone and used for the general storage of machinery and parts associated with its maintenance. At the current scale of the business operation, there is adequate informal staff car parking space available on site.

4. Relevant Planning History		
Application Number	Proposal	Decision
N/07/00899/FUL	Erection of General Purpose Agricultural Building	Permitted
N/06/02581/OUT	Demolition of Glass House And Change of Use of Lane to Storage of Caravans	Permitted
N/05/02533/COU	Change of Use of Horticultural Land to Use for Stationing of Tents and Caravans – Re-submission of 99/02485/COU	Permitted
N/03/03177/COU	Change of Use of Former Nursery Building to B8 Storage with Associated Office Space	Permitted
N/03/02318/FUL	Change of Use of Former Nursery Building to Storage (B8)	Withdrawn
N/99/02485/COU	Change of use of Land from Horticultural to Form Extension to Existing Caravan Park (Touring)	Permitted

5. Proposal

The scope of the application is effectively threefold; namely the erection of a new workshop, part-retrospective engineering works and a retrospective change of use from agricultural to industrial/storage. The access from Folly Lane is to remain unchanged.

The proposed workshop building is to be sited toward the North of the site, occupying a similar footprint to the shipping container, which is to be removed from the site. The building is predominantly agricultural in form, and is proposed to be constructed around a simple steel frame. A box-profile metal sheeting is to be used for the external walls, with a shallow pitched roof to be made from a mixture of corrugated fibre cement and Perspex sheeting. Large double doors are to be installed on the Southern elevation, providing access onto a new cobbled area approximately 230m² in footprint and adjoining the Southern end of the existing tarmac hardstanding.

In addition to the building works proposed, the application seeks retrospective permission for the tarmac area and earth bunds formed along the South, West and North boundaries of the site. The bunds are between 300 and 500mm in height and resultant of the original levelling of the site when this took place in 2009. The remaining surface area is to be covered by hardcore, with the exception of the Western bank of the site and an area at the Southern end of the site, approximately 700m², which is to be retained as grass and trees.

In order to regularise the present use of the site, a retrospective change of use from agricultural to B2 (general industrial) and B8(storage and distribution) is also proposed.

6. Consultations

Lacock Parish Council – no objection

Highways – objects on grounds of highway safety at the junction between Folly Lane and the A350, particularly in light of the types of vehicles operated from the site

7. Publicity

The application was advertised by site notice, press advert and neighbour consultation.

No public representations have been received in respect of the proposed development.

8. Policy Context

Policies C3 (Development Control Core Policy), NE15 (The Landscape Character of the Countryside) and BD5 (Rural Business Development) of the adopted North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011 are relevant to this application.

Material weight has also been given to the content of the National Planning Policy Framework, with particular regard to Paragraph 28 (Supporting a prosperous rural economy) and Section 11 (Conserving and enhancing the natural environment).

9. Planning Considerations

Impact on the openness of the countryside

The area surrounding the site is characterised by its openness and whilst the nearby horticultural buildings and caravan park are a departure from the traditional use of the land, their physical presence is as a distinctive grouping to the Northwest of the site. The proposed new building, whilst predominantly agricultural in form, does not eliminate the need for the substantial volume of outside storage required to accommodate the machinery used by the business. This, it is considered, represents a further intrusion into the countryside, which alters the character of the area such that its agricultural context is eroded, to the detriment of the surrounding area.

Impact on the highway network

The proposal has attracted an objection from the Highways Officer on grounds that the type and intensity of the proposed business would have significant implications for the safety of the junction between Folly Lane and the A350, which the large vehicles would inevitably have to use in order to access the site and customers. The business' current operation from the site and junction is immaterial to the assessment of highway safety in this instance, as this use is unauthorised.

A previous appeal decision (N/02/00139/FUL refers) examined the issue of increased use of the same junction, this time in respect of the traffic generated by regular car boot sales taking place on the adjacent landholding. In this instance, the inspector found that the increased intensity of activity on the site was unacceptable in relation to the access arrangements in place, as this would significantly compromise highway safety. The appeal was dismissed.

Economic impact

As it concerns land most recently used for the purposes of agriculture, the proposal could be regarded as a diversification of an existing farm. However, the land immediately adjacent and under the same ownership has already seen new non-agricultural enterprises, including plant nurseries and a small caravan park, implemented successfully with a lesser impact on the highway and surrounding countryside. The plant hire business currently employs one full-time, and intends to recruit an additional part-time, member of staff, and although this is a factor in considering the application, it is considered insufficient to justify the harm otherwise caused by the development.

Conclusion

Irrespective of its current operation, as the proposal amounts to a new B2/B8 business in the open countryside, particular justification should be given as to its location as such. It is considered that the proposed development fails to meet the criteria set out in Policy BD5 of the adopted Local Plan and, as such, amounts to an unwarranted business use that would harm the character of the open countryside, contrary to Policy NE15 of the adopted Local Plan.

Furthermore, the application, if successful, would regularise the increased use of an inadequate junction between Folly Lane and the A350, to the detriment of highway safety. The size and type of the vehicles frequently entering and leaving the site presents an additional danger to road users and this is consistent with the Inspector's previous findings.

Whilst SW Agricultural Machinery & Plant Hire is evidently a successful business, it is considered that there is no overriding justification why it should have to be based in this location while alternative, and more appropriate, sites are available.

10. Recommendation

Planning Permission be refused for the following reasons:

The proposed development amounts to a new business in the open countryside that would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the area; and

The proposed development will incur the increased use of a substandard access such that, owing to the type and frequency of vehicle movements, would act to the detriment of highway safety

Contrary to the provisions of Policies C3, NE15 and BD5 of the adopted North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011.

