

COMMITTEE REPORT

APPLICATION DETAILS

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| APPLICATION No: | DM/17/04108/FPA |
| FULL APPLICATION DESCRIPTION: | New Glasshouse and Warehouse |
| NAME OF APPLICANT: | Woodthorpe Garden Centre Ltd |
| ADDRESS: | East Durham Garden Centre, South Hetton Road, Easington Village |
| ELECTORAL DIVISION: | Easington |
| CASE OFFICER: | Barry Gavillet, Senior Planning Officer, barry.gavillet@durham.gov.uk 03000 261958 |

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND PROPOSALS

Site:

1. This application site lies outside of the settlement boundary of Easington Village as defined in the District of Easington Local Plan and is therefore classed as being in the countryside. The site is approximately 6.52 hectares and is an existing and well established garden centre located approximately 1 mile to the west of Easington Village across the A19 and 0.6 miles to the east of South Hetton. The garden centre is accessed off the A182 and is surrounded by open countryside on all sides.

Proposal:

2. Planning permission has recently been granted for a significant expansion to the garden centre facilities after being acquired by a new operator who own several other successful garden centres in the country. The approved facilities include an enlarged and resurfaced customer/staff car park, expansion of internal and external retail areas, a playbarn, restaurant, orangery and replacement manager's accommodation. A significant number of jobs will be created by the expansion of the business.
3. This application proposes a large glasshouse and warehouse which would enable further expansion of the garden centre facilities. The buildings would be located to the northern corner of the site and would be screened by a new landscaping scheme. The new single storey glasshouse would measure approximately 38 metres by 40 metres and would be constructed of glass with aluminium framing. It would be used for the propagation of seeds and young plants for future sale in the centre. The warehouse would measure approximately 40 metres by 50 metres and would be 18.2 metres high at its peak. It would be constructed of dark green insulated cladding and would benefit from solar panels on its south western facing roof slopes. The warehouse would be used for the storage of planting materials, aggregates, retail goods and machinery associated with the garden centre business.

4. This application is being reported to County Committee as it is classed as a major application and exceeds the site area set out in the scheme of delegation.

PLANNING HISTORY

5. Between 1998 and 2000 several polytunnels were approved on the site followed by a dwelling, a garden centre in 2005 and tea rooms and farm shop in 2006. In December 2015 a smaller scale extension to the garden centre was approved and has been partly implemented. In 2017 planning permission was granted for a significant expansion of the garden centre.

PLANNING POLICY

NATIONAL POLICY

6. The Government has consolidated all planning policy statements, guidance notes and many circulars into a single policy statement, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), although the majority of supporting Annexes to the planning policy statements are retained. The overriding message is that new development that is sustainable should go ahead without delay. It defines the role of planning in achieving sustainable development under three topic headings – economic, social and environmental, each mutually dependant.
7. The presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF requires local planning authorities to approach development management decisions positively, utilising twelve ‘core planning principles’.
8. In accordance with paragraph 215 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the weight to be attached to relevant saved local plan policy will depend upon the degree of consistency with the NPPF. The greater the consistency, the greater the weight. The relevance of this issue is discussed, where appropriate, in the assessment section of the report below.

The following elements of the NPPF are considered relevant to this proposal;

9. Part 1 - The Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity, building on the country's inherent strengths, and to meeting the twin challenges of global competition and of a low carbon future.
10. Part 3 - 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.
11. Part 4 - Transport policies have an important role to play in facilitating sustainable development but also in contributing to wider sustainability and health objectives. Smarter use of technologies can reduce the need to travel. The transport system needs to be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes, giving people a real choice about how they travel. However, the Government recognises that different policies and measures will be required in different communities and opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary from urban to rural areas.
12. Part 7 - The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment, with good design a key aspect of sustainable development, indivisible from good planning.

13. Part 11 - The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils; recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services; minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures; preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

LOCAL PLAN POLICY:

14. Policy 1 - Due regard will be had to the development plan when determining planning applications. Account will be taken as to whether the proposed development accords with sustainable development principles while benefiting the community and local economy. The location, design and layout will also need to accord with saved policies 3, 7, 14-18, 22 and 35-38.
15. Policy 3 - Development limits are defined on the proposal and the inset maps. Development outside 'settlement limits' will be regarded as development within the countryside. Such development will therefore not be approved unless allowed by other policies.
16. Policy 18 - Development which adversely affects a protected species or its habitat will only be approved where the reasons for development outweigh the value of the species or its habitat.
17. Policy 35 - The design and layout of development should consider energy conservation and efficient use of energy, reflect the scale and character of adjacent buildings, provide adequate open space and have no serious adverse effect on the amenity of neighbouring residents or occupiers.
18. Policy 36 - The design and layout of development should ensure good access and encourage alternative means of travel to the private car.
19. Policy 106 – States that the preferred location of garden centres is within or adjoining settlement boundaries unless it can be demonstrated that suitable sites are not available.

RELEVANT EMERGING POLICY:

The County Durham Plan

20. Paragraph 216 of the NPPF says that decision-takers may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to: the stage of the emerging plan; the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies; and, the degree of consistency of the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the NPPF. The County Durham Plan (CDP) was submitted for Examination in Public and a stage 1 Examination concluded. An Interim Report was issued by an Inspector dated 18 February 2015, however that Report was quashed by the High Court following a successful Judicial Review challenge by the Council. In accordance with the High Court Order, the Council has withdrawn the CDP and a new plan being prepared. In the light of this, policies of the CDP can no longer carry any weight. As the new plan progresses through the stages of preparation it will begin to accrue weight.

CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY RESPONSES

STATUTORY RESPONSES:

21. None received

INTERNAL CONSULTEE RESPONSES:

22. Ecology Officers have no objections to the scheme and note that additional ponds to hold surface water will result in ecological benefit.

23. Landscape Officers had some initial concerns regarding screening to the northern part of the site. However, amended plans have since been received and there are no objections subject to conditions.

24. Drainage Officers have no objections subject to a scheme of surface water drainage being conditioned.

PUBLIC RESPONSES:

25. One letter has been received from a member of the public who has concerns about loss of wildlife.

APPLICANTS STATEMENT:

26. British Garden Centres is a family owned and run independent company, being Charles & Robert Stubbs who are brothers and myself, Phillippa Stubbs, Charles' wife. We began trading in 1990 and since then have built up a portfolio of 10 garden centres based around the country. We now employ circa 600 staff whom are local to the Centres and we run all of our own Cafes/Restaurants. We have very strong family and community values, which we believe are a key factor in our garden centres success....

27. We purchase centres that are in a neglected, declining state and turn them around into thriving garden centres in the heart of communities, we always keep on any existing staff and then very quickly add to this creating jobs within both our restaurants and in the garden centre for people in the local area, together with using local contractors and businesses to supply materials and labour during the redevelopments.

28. We always aim to provide a friendly community based environment for people to come and enjoy with high quality food in the cafes and a good selection of product at fair prices in the garden centres. We enjoy the festive time of year and usually run Santa's grottos and Christmas displays, then in the spring and summer months we like to hold planting events and children's gardening days which help engage the local people and community in what we do.

29. We work closely within the industry with the Horticultural Trade Association (HTA) and Garden Centre Association (GCA) and have been awarded National Garden Centre of the Year with our Brigg and Woodthorpe Centres. We also like to work with local charities raising funds through our centre events.

30. This current proposal for “ancillary service Warehouse and Glasshouse buildings”, to service and sustain the main approved expansion proposal for the East Durham Garden Centre Site, will ensure the extended garden centre will function correctly and sustainably, and will have the appropriate size and level of support buildings to ensure it will create a truly fantastic and vibrant destination and asset for the entire area. As does the Brigg Garden Centre to its area with its appropriately sized ancillary support buildings....This Application will also allow “goods inward” to be moved safely away from road, car park and customers at the front of the site to the rear of the centre, ensuring safe, swift and efficient unloading and then transfer to the shop floor as and when required.
31. In all the communities and areas we have acquired an existing garden centre and expanded it in, we have developed it into a positive attribute for both the immediate community and the wider area too... We ultimately pride ourselves in bringing new vitality and jobs to existing sites and developing them into quality, sustainable and vibrant places people genuinely want to visit, re-visit and are genuinely proud to have in their community and area....This application for ancillary service buildings is ultimately a proposal to ensure the East Durham Garden Centre Expansion Proposal will be a sustainable success...

The above represents a summary of the comments received on this application. The full written text is available for inspection on the application file which can be viewed at <http://82.113.161.89/WAM/showCaseFile.do?action=show&appType=planning&appNumber=10/00955/FPA>

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

32. Having regard to the requirements of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the relevant Development Plan policies, relevant guidance and all other material planning considerations, including representations received, it is considered that the main planning issues in this instance relate to the principle of development, layout and landscape impact.

Principle of the development

33. A planning application has recently been approved to extend the existing garden centre facility and associated car parking facilities. The redevelopment of the garden centre will significantly upgrade the existing facilities and include an enlarged and resurfaced 448 space customer/staff car park, expansion of internal and external retail areas, a playbarn, restaurant, orangery and replacement managers accommodation. This application seeks to build on the approved proposals to add a large glasshouse and warehouse which would assist in the day to day running of the business.
34. As the planning history reveals, planning permission has been granted for various developments on a number of occasions for polytunnels, a farm shop and the existing garden centre. The garden centre is located between the settlements of Easington Village and South Hetton and close to the A19. It is considered that the proposals are in accordance with saved policy 106 of the District of Easington Local Plan which is specific to garden centre developments. It states that the location of garden centres should be within or adjoining settlement boundaries, or elsewhere if it can be demonstrated that suitable sites are not available. It also requires that the site can be served by a safe access, would not adversely affect amenity and would not undermine the vitality or viability of retail centres or shops. The site is a long established garden centre and the proposals are considered to satisfy these criteria.

In addition to this it is considered that the proposals are in general accordance with parts 1 and 3 of the National Planning Policy Framework which aim to support the economy and support the growth and expansion of business and enterprise in rural areas. Overall, it is considered that the addition of the glasshouse and warehousing at the garden centre would help in the day to day operations of the business which is set to generate significant job creation, estimated by the applicant to be of around 250 to 300 jobs, and would help secure the future of the business. Given the previous approval of the garden centre and its expansion it is considered that the proposals are acceptable in principle.

Layout and landscape impact

35. Saved policy 35 of the District of Easington Local Plan states that the design and layout of development should reflect the scale and character of adjacent buildings and have no serious adverse effect on the amenity of neighbouring residents or occupiers. The applicant has submitted full details of the design, scale and layout for approval and along with the design and access statement, confirms that the scale of the buildings will reflect what is currently on site. The layout shows the additional glasshouse and warehousing located beyond an existing group of buildings to the north eastern corner of the site resulting in a limited additional landscape impact. On this basis it is considered that the proposals would not result in any significant adverse impact on the local landscape that should result in refusal, and therefore are in accordance with saved policy 35 of the District of Easington Local Plan.
36. In addition to the above the landscape officer has stated that the County Durham Landscape Spatial Strategy identifies the site as a location for enhancement. As a result, the site falls within a Landscape Improvement Priority Area. It is therefore considered that this application represents a good opportunity to appropriately enhance the perimeter landscape of the garden centre and be a showcase for the nursery to demonstrate appropriate native planting in the countryside for new developments. A landscaping scheme has been submitted which is acceptable and a condition is attached to this recommendation which requires the scheme to be implemented at an appropriate time.

CONCLUSION

37. This proposal represents an opportunity to add to the development of the existing garden centre business through improvement and expansion and importantly would assist in creating significant employment opportunities, estimated by the applicant as approximately 250 additional full time equivalent employees and 50 part time employees. The garden centre use in this location is well established and therefore acceptable in principle. There are no concerns raised by consultees in terms of drainage, ecology or landscape subject to conditions.
38. On the basis of the above it is considered that this proposal, which would result in significant investment into an established rural enterprise, is in accordance with the relevant local plan policies and the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework and is therefore recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

That the application be **APPROVED** subject to the following conditions/reasons:

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

Reason: Required to be imposed pursuant to Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out only in accordance with the approved plans and specifications contained within:

21 Feb 2018 201501-104 REV B PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT PLAN
21 Dec 2017 201501 - 106 REV A PROPOSED WAREHOUSE PLANS AND ELEVATIONS
20 Dec 2017 201501 - 105 REV A PROPOSED GLASSHOUSE PLANS AND ELEVATIONS
20 Dec 2017 201501 - 100 REV A LOCATION PLAN

Reason: To meet the objectives of saved Policies 1, 35 and 36 of the Easington District Local Plan and parts 1 and 4 of the NPPF.

3. Development shall not commence until a detailed scheme for the disposal of surface water from the development hereby approved has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall take place in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To prevent the increased risk of flooding from any sources in accordance with part 10 of the NPPF.

4. Notwithstanding any details of materials submitted with the application no development shall commence until details of the external walling, roofing materials and hard surfacing have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall be constructed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the area and to comply with saved Policies 1 and 35 of the Easington District Local Plan and part 11 of the NPPF.

5. All planting, seeding or turfing and habitat creation in the approved details of the landscaping scheme shall be carried out in the first available planting season following the practical completion of the development.

No tree shall be felled or hedge removed until the removal/felling is shown to comply with legislation protecting nesting birds and roosting bats.

Any approved replacement tree or hedge planting shall be carried out within 12 months of felling and removals of existing trees and hedges.

Any trees or plants which die, fail to flourish or are removed within a period of 5 years from the substantial completion of the development shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species.

Replacements will be subject to the same conditions.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenity of the area and to comply with Policy 35 of the District of Easington Local Plan and part of the NPPF.

STATEMENT OF PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

The Local Planning Authority in arriving at its decision to approve the application has, without prejudice to a fair and objective assessment of the proposals, issues raised and representations received, sought to work with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner with the objective of delivering high quality sustainable development to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area in accordance with the NPPF. (Statement in accordance with Article 35(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015

BACKGROUND PAPERS

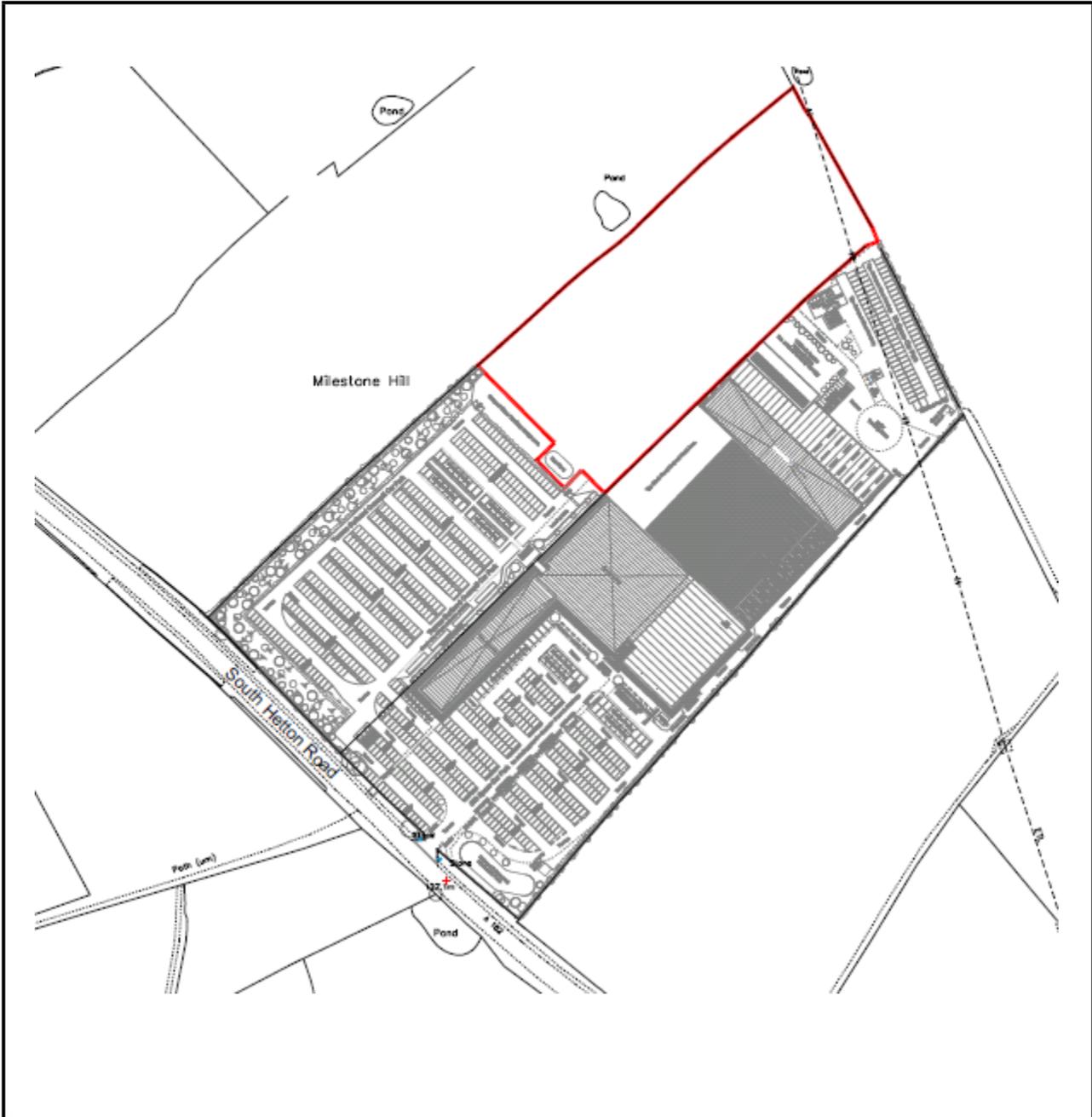
Submitted application form, plans supporting documents and subsequent information provided by the applicant.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2012)

National Planning Practice Guidance Notes

Statutory, internal and public consultation responses

District of Easington Local Plan



Planning Services

**New Glasshouse and Warehouse
East Durham Garden Centre**

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Comments

Date March 2018