

Area West Committee - 21st July 2010

Officer Report On Planning Application: 10/01744/FUL

Proposal :	The erection of an agricultural storage building (GR 342412/108141)
Site Address:	Land South of Hewish Lane West Crewkerne
Parish:	West Crewkerne
WINDWHISTLE Ward:	Mr R Munday (Cllr)
Recommending Case Officer:	Linda Hayden Tel: 01935 462534 Email: linda.hayden@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	8th July 2010
Applicant :	Mr Stuart Lee
Agent: (no agent if blank)	Boon Brown Architects FAO Matt Frost Motivo Alvington Yeovil Somerset BA20 2FG
Application Type :	Minor Other less than 1,000 sq.m or 1ha

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

This application is referred to the Committee at the request of the Ward Member with the agreement of the Vice-Chairman to allow the agricultural use issue to be debated by the Committee.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL



The application site forms a two-hectare (5 acres) area of land comprising two fields running north to south Off Hewish Lane in West Crewkerne.

The application proposes the erection of an agricultural storage building to be used by the owner of the land in connection with his proposals to plant an area of pine trees for commercial exploitation along with a small holding.

The site is within the open countryside.

HISTORY

09/00693/FUL The erection of polytunnels and buildings in connection with use of the land as a nursery and the erection of a new vehicular access (Retrospective revised application). Withdrawn 2009.

07/01819/FUL The erection of polytunnels and buildings in connection with use of the land as a nursery (Retrospective application). Withdrawn 2007.

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 repeats the duty imposed under S54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and requires that decisions must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Relevant Development Plan Documents

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review 1991-2011:

Policies:-

- STR1 Sustainable Development
- STR6 Development outside towns, rural centres and villages

South Somerset Local Plan 2006:

Policies:-

- ST3 Development outside development areas
- ST5 General Principles of Development
- ST6 The Quality of Development
- EC3 Landscape Character

CONSULTATIONS

West Crewkerne Parish Council :- No objections.

Agricultural Development Officer - 'As there is no agricultural justification for this proposal, I have no comment to make on this application.'

Landscape Officer - 'I note the application for an agricultural building at the above site, and am familiar with the site from previous applications.

Relative to LP policies, I believe the main landscape considerations to be;

- a) The principle of development (local plan policy ST3) which seeks to control development unless it provides ... environmental benefit from a scheme, and;
- b) The impact upon landscape character (policies ST5 para 4 and EC3) which requires the proposals to respect the form, character and setting of the locality.

Looking at the application with these policies in mind:

- (1) This is not a location characterised by development: To the south of Crewkerne, settlement is characterised by small, scattered hamlets (Hewish, Clapton) the former

of which is circa 0.5 km. distant from this site. There is a general lack of development presence in the locality, other than the very occasional farm-building group sited sporadically alongside the lane network, and traditional farming is the prime land-use. The application site is not related to the settlement pattern, nor characterised by planned development form. As is noted below, small farm sheds are not structures that are characteristic of this part of the upper Axe catchment. The site is visually divorced from development form. Hence I view the proposal to establish a farm building as contrary to local landscape character.

- (2) I earlier commented pre-application on this proposal: I stated that I am wary of any proposal for a new build to serve small-scale holdings, and would question the justification (and judging by the ADO's comments, there is none). Such consents encourage the proliferation of built form in the countryside. In landscape terms, unless the local landscape is characterised historically by a high ratio of single agricultural buildings relative to field numbers within the landscape - which in this case it does not - then such a proposal is at variance with local landscape character considerations, and thus again, contrary to policy EC3.
- (3) Policy ST3 seeks environmental benefit from a scheme: Whilst an intention of this site's management to plant trees is welcome, I would not support crop plantings of conifer species, for these are not characteristic of the local landscape, nor consistent with local biodiversity objectives.

Given the negative landscape impacts arising from this proposal, I would advise grounds for refusal based upon the above policies.'

Area Engineer, Technical Services Department - No comments.

REPRESENTATIONS

None received.

CONSIDERATIONS

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Development (which replaced parts of PPS 7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas) advises at Policy EC6 'Planning for Economic Development in Rural Areas':-

- 'EC6.1 Local planning authorities should ensure that the countryside is protected for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife, the wealth of its natural resources and to ensure it may be enjoyed by all.
- EC6.2 In rural areas, local planning authorities should:-
 - (a) Strictly control economic development in open countryside away from existing settlements, or outside areas allocated for development in development plans.'

Policy ST3 of the Local Plan requires strict control of development in the open countryside, "restricted to that which benefits economic activity, maintains or enhances the environment and does not foster growth in the need to travel".

No evidence has been submitted with the application to demonstrate that the proposal has any relationship to economic activity, there are proposals for possible tree planting on the site but no substantive business plan or definitive proposals have been submitted. It is not considered that there is any justification, on the grounds of benefit to economic activity, for the proposed building. In this respect, the proposal does not comply with the requirements of Policy ST3 of the Local Plan.

The Council's Landscape Architect has clearly dealt with the landscape concerns relating to the proposal. His conclusion is that the proposal can only be justified in landscape terms if

there is a proven necessity for the building in economic or agricultural terms. The proposal fails in terms of the second requirement under Policy ST3, in that it is considered not to maintain or enhance the environment. Subsidiary to this, Policy EC3 of the Local Plan further requires that any development respect the distinctive character and quality of the local landscape. In this respect, also, the Landscape Officer has raised concerns; the application site is not related to the settlement pattern, nor characterised by planned development form. Small farm sheds are not structures that are characteristic of this part of the upper Axe catchment and the site is visually divorced from development form. Hence the Landscape Officer views the proposal to establish a farm building as contrary to local landscape character.

In the supporting statements the agent compares this application to stables allowable under policy CR6. However, policy CR6 adds the proviso that horse related development is only allowable providing that it is closely related to existing settlements or groups of buildings or involves the reuse of existing buildings. There are no existing settlements or groups of buildings within the locality and as such, it is unlikely that an application for stabling would be considered acceptable in this location.

It is considered that the proposal is contrary to the advice contained in PPS4 and the policies in the Local Plan outlined above, and is therefore recommended for refusal.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

1. The proposal represents unjustified development in the open countryside, which fails to respect the character of the local landscape and maintain the environment. No substantive economic or agricultural justification has been provided for the development, and the proposed shed would appear intrusive and incongruous as such structures are not characteristic of this part of the upper Axe catchment. Furthermore, the site is visually divorced from development form and therefore the proposal to establish a farm building is contrary to local landscape character. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies ST3 and EC3 of the South Somerset Local Plan, 2006, and the guidance contained in PPS4.