

Area West Committee – 20<sup>th</sup> February 2013

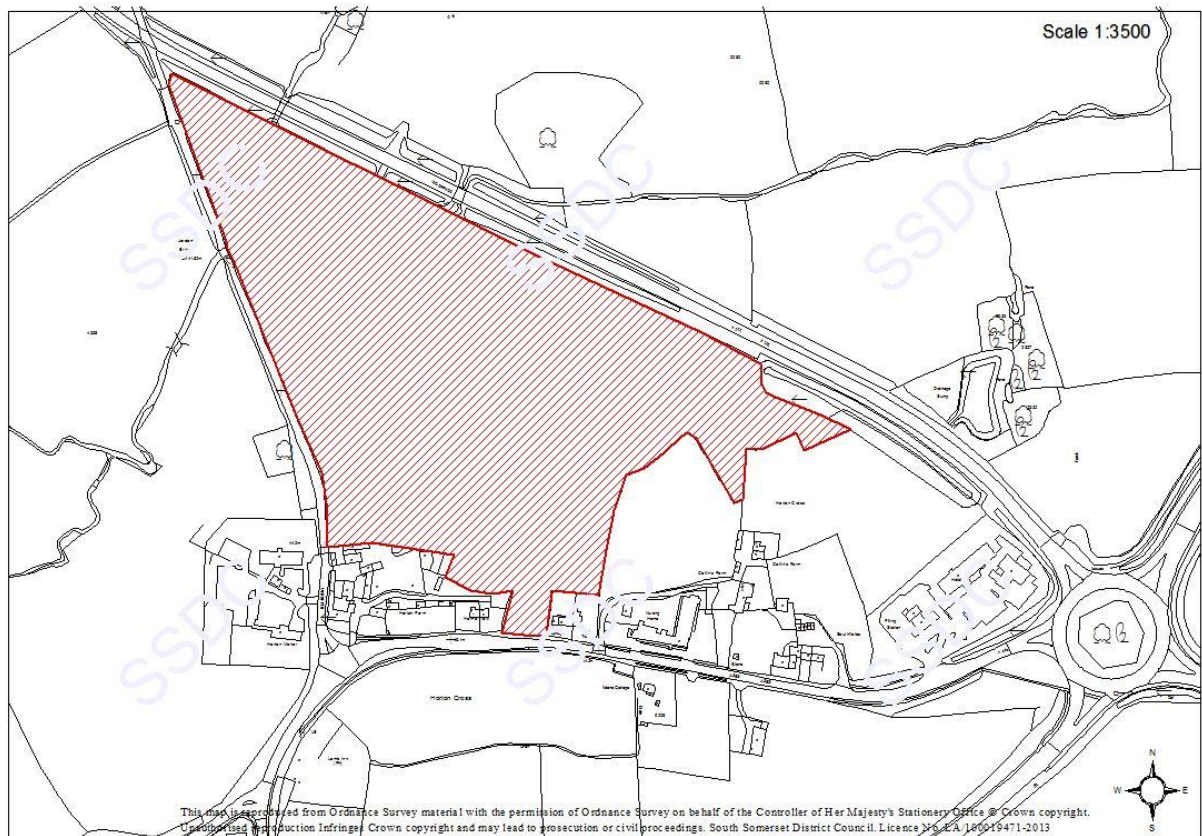
**Officer Report On Planning Application: 12/04763/FUL**

<b>Proposal :</b>	Alterations and change of use of land and buildings to create animal farm park, including the erection of a visitor centre, the creation of parking and associated works. (GR 333653/115348)
<b>Site Address:</b>	Horton Cross Farm Old A358 Horton
<b>Parish:</b>	Horton
<b>NEROCHE Ward (SSDC Member)</b>	Cllr L P Vijeh
<b>Recommending Case Officer:</b>	Andrew Gunn Tel: (01935) 462192 Email: andrew.gunn@southsomerset.gov.uk
<b>Target date :</b>	15th March 2013
<b>Applicant :</b>	Montpellier Enterprises Ltd
<b>Agent: (no agent if blank)</b>	Michael Williams Sanderley Studio Kennel Lane, Langport, Somerset, TA10 9SB
<b>Application Type :</b>	Major Other f/space 1,000 sq.m or 1 ha+

**REASON(S) FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE**

The application is classed as a ‘major-major’, extending to over 10 hectares in area. Under the council’s scheme of delegation, as the recommendation is to approve, the application must be referred to the Area West Committee.

**SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL**



The site is located in countryside on the east of the former A358 road which is now a no through road, and which extends to the north of the current A358 (Chard road). Monks Yard is located to the south along with several residential properties and a nursing home. To the east and west are fields with the A358 (Taunton road) running along the northern boundary of the site. Ilminster is located approximately 2 km to the east with Chard 7 km to the south.

The application site largely comprises 2 grassed fields along with a number of redundant modern farm buildings. The farm buildings are located immediately to the north of a number of traditionally designed and mostly converted former farm buildings known as Monks Yard. These buildings are used for a mix of uses comprising a conference centre, café and business networking centre. A number of the buildings in Monks Yard are listed for their special architectural and historic interest.

The application seeks consent for the change of use of the buildings and associated land to be used as a farm park. The submitted Planning Statement outlines that the development will be based on countryside activities and the keeping of rare breeds, with the aim to provide a high quality, nationally recognised, major tourist attraction. Moreover, that the applicants will enter into a franchise agreement with the Cotswold Farm Park Ltd, which is a leading centre for the conservation of rare breeds.

The key aims of the enterprise are to:

- Promote British farming and locally produced products
- Educate and entertain visitors
- Conserve rare breeds
- Create sustainable local employment
- Deliver a high quality experience for visitors
- Respect the local environment and minimise impact

The current buildings will be used for a number of different activities including an interaction area where children will be able to learn about and have contact with a range of different animals. There will also be a demonstration area which will have different activities throughout the year including milking, shearing, lambing along with lectures and talks to schools and adults. There will also be an educational play area along with an outside play area and adventure playground.

The current agricultural land to the north and north east of the buildings will be used for the display of a wide variety of rare and traditional livestock breeds. This land will be divided into fenced paddocks to which the public will have access over trackways by either foot or tractor rides. Within this area, there will be mobile wooden structures to act as rain/animal shelters, along with permanent toilets and a snack shed.

To the east of the existing buildings, a new single storey visitor centre will be erected which, with a floor area of 527 square metres within which shall include a shop, café, toilets, and a ticket office. The visitor centre will be constructed in a traditional agricultural manner with a simple rectangular shape and gabled roof. It will be constructed using featheredged boarding with external roofing using grey steel sheeting.

The Planning Statement states that a condition restricting the sale of products to park farm visitors only will be acceptable- indeed the site layout will prevent access to the shop by the general public.

The site will be accessed from the adjoining no through road to the west of the site with the southernmost section of the existing southernmost building being demolished to provide a widened access. This access point and first section of the widened internal

access road will be shared with Monks Yard. Vehicles will then head through the buildings to the eastern end of the site where the car and coach parking spaces are to be provided. This area will be consolidated and provide for 200 cars. Further to the east will be an overflow car park. This will only be used during extremely busy periods and will not be consolidated but remain as permanent pasture. To the north of the overflow car park will be a second external play area as part of the rare breeds display. A pedestrian route will be provided into the site from the AE358 to the south, to the east of Spring Cottage. In addition, the application is supported by a Travel Plan that will encourage walking and the use of other modes of transport to access the site.

A landscaping scheme has been submitted with the application with the key aims to help identify the different areas of use on the site and in particular, proving buffers and screening to the parking and paddock areas, plus tree planting in and around the play and car park areas, planting along the access road and buffer planting between the car/coach parks and Monks Yard/Herne View.

It is proposed that the farm park will be open from 1000 to 1700 hours each day from March to October. The aim is to achieve 70,000 visitors per year and to employ up to 33 people (8 full time and 25 part time/seasonal).

The application is supported by a Combined Planning Statement, Heritage Impact Statement and Design and Access Statement, a separate Ecological Survey, Travel Plan, Transport Assessment, Flood Risk Assessment and Economic and Tourism Assessment.

## **HISTORY**

No relevant planning history associated with this site.

## **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 decision 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 (adopted April 2000)

STR1- Sustainable Development

STR6 – Development outside Towns, rural centres and villages

Policy 1 – Nature Conservation

Policy 5 – Landscape Character

Policy 9 – Built Historic Environment

Policy 23 – Tourism in the Countryside

Policy 38 – Sport and Recreation in the countryside

Policy 49 – Transport Requirements of New Development

South Somerset Local Plan (adopted April 2006)

ST3 – Development in the Countryside

ST5 – Principles of Development

ST6 – Quality of Development

EC3 – Landscape Character

EH5 – Development proposals affecting listed buildings

EH7 – Conversion of buildings in the countryside

TP2 – Travel Plans  
 TP3 – Cycle Parking  
 TP6 – Non residential parking provision.  
 ME5 – Farm Diversification.

National Planning Policy Framework:  
 Chapter 1 – Building a Strong competitive economy  
 Chapter 3 – Supporting a prosperous rural economy  
 Chapter 7- Requiring good design  
 Chapter 11 Conserving and Enhancing the natural environment  
 Chapter 12 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

## **CONSULTATIONS**

### **Parish Council:**

No comments received.

### **Highway Authority:**

The proposed development site lies outside any development boundary limits and is therefore distant from services and facilities, whilst public transport services are infrequent. As a consequence, visitors to the new development are likely to be dependent on their private vehicles. Such fostering of growth in the need to travel would be contrary to government advice given in NPPF and RPG10, and to the provisions of policies STR1 and STR6 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review (adopted Apr 00) and Policy TP4 of the South Somerset District Local Plan (adopted Apr 06) and would normally receive a recommendation of refusal from the Highway Authority as a result.

However, it is noted that the application is for a tourism use and as such the proposed development must be viewed in conjunction with other policies as set out in National, Regional, County and Local policies. It is therefore a matter for the Local Planning Authority to decide whether the development is appropriate in these terms.

The application includes a Transport Assessment prepared by the applicant's Transport Consultants. This seeks to show that the traffic generated by this development is unlikely to have a significant impact on the capacity at nearby junctions, chiefly the A303/A358 roundabout. For likely traffic generation the typical numbers for a similar farm park in Gloucester have been used and this is considered acceptable. The likely distribution is entirely sensible and it is accepted that most of the visitor traffic to the site is unlikely to be at peak hours. The Highway Authority accepts the conclusions of the Transport Assessment that the impact on the highway network will be minimal.

The applicant has submitted a Measures Only Travel Plan which is appropriate for this type of development. It is sufficiently well written to do as much as is possible and reasonable to encourage sustainable travel to and from the site. The provision of secure cycle parking for staff and making available information about walking and cycling routes to the site are sensible measures. Including suggestions for sustainable travel modes in their marketing, both on line and in other media will help to generate as many non-car visitors as possible. It is difficult with this kind of tourist attraction to take further actions to reduce car trips to the site without inordinate expense and little chance of success. It is therefore agreed that this is a reasonable approach.

The development will gain its access from a lane which is an unclassified road and is

now gated at the north east end. This effectively creates a cul-de-sac in which the site lies. The junction of this lane with the A358 is satisfactory and there is no reason why this junction will become unsafe as a result of the traffic generated by the development. The site is very close to the junction and speeds at the site are unlikely to be high. There are no safety concerns about the site access therefore.

Sufficient parking is proposed to serve the development and the parking spaces are of sufficient size. The parking is laid out in such a way that vehicles will be able to enter and leave the site in forward gear.

As a result, the Highway Authority raises no objection to this application subject to the following conditions:-

The area allocated for parking on the submitted plan, drawing number 221001 S1, shall be kept clear of obstruction at all times and shall not be used other than for the parking of vehicles in connection with the development hereby permitted.

The provisions of the Measures Only Travel Plan shall be implemented as described and reviewed at regular intervals to assess its effectiveness.

#### **Highways Agency:**

We are content that the proposals will not have any detrimental impact on the Strategic Road Network. On this basis, we offer no objections to the application.

#### **Landscape Officer:**

I have reviewed the above application that seeks to establish a farm park at the above site. I have previously had some pre-application discussion on this proposal, and I am familiar with the site and its context.

The site is located immediately alongside the Horton Cross Farm/Monks Yard complex, and lays between the A358 (Ilminster-Taunton) and the A303 (Ilminster-Honiton) roads, and west of the Southfields roundabout. In that respect, it is well related to built form, and enclosed by the engineered form of - and activity associated with - the major roadways. Whilst the land opens to the west, tree lines associated with the watercourse, and a gentle rise in the level of the land also provides a level of enclosure. Hence I see no landscape issue with the principle of a park farm development in this location.

Turning to the layout, I note that an additional (visitor centre) building is planned to the east of the current farm building group, and a large parking area to its east, and north of Herne View Cottage. The arrangement appears logical, again the building proposal is well-related to the existing farm buildings, whilst the parking area displaces unmanaged pasture, and a former slurry lagoon. Whilst the scale of this part of the layout is larger than its surrounds, I note that the height of the building is restrained, and the expanse of the parking area is broken up with specimen tree planting, with peripheral hedge and shrub mix planting around its sides offering containment, along with an existing hedgerow along its east boundary. Consequently I am satisfied that there is no undue landscape impact with these major works.

I note that the pastures to the north of the buildings are to be divided into pens for rare breeds, with additional visitor facilities. Such an arrangement is not inappropriate for a farmed context, and as noted above, the pasture has a low visual profile. Again I do not foresee undue landscape impact.



A landscape masterplan (drawing SPP 1762.1L) and planting detail (drawing SPP 1762.2) has been submitted, to counter the anticipated impacts of the proposed works, and to provide a framework for the layout. I am satisfied that it intends commensurate landscape treatment, should you be inclined to recommend this for approval, then please condition these landscape works to be implemented in the first planting season following completion of the works.

### **Ecology:**

I've considered this application and the applicant commissioned ecological survey report, and have the following comments.

#### **Otters**

There are records (Somerset Environmental Records Centre) of otter on the River Ding in close proximity to the site and it's very likely that otters do use the part of this river that passes through the north west corner of the site.

Otters typically have a 'home range' of some 2km of watercourse. Given the limited length of river within the site, the fact that it is within an area marked as 'wildlife and conservation area' on the site layout plan, and the nocturnal nature of otters, I conclude there's unlikely to be any significant impacts on otters.

However, given the increase in public presence, and the potential for some disturbance to occur (e.g. if/when an otter uses a 'lying up' spot within the site), I recommend the water courses are subject to some sort of buffering or protecting to minimise the risks of disturbance.

#### **Reptiles**

Marginal habitats at the site have been assessed as having potential to support reptiles (e.g. slow worm, grass snake). It's unlikely that the proposals would have significant impacts due to the limited extent of suitable habitat, but there is potential for harm to reptiles if they are present and development activities aren't undertaken in a sensitive way on parts of the site with greater potential.

All reptile species are protected against 'reckless' killing or injury (such as could occur through development construction) by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). I recommend measures to further assess presence, the risks, and avoidance/mitigation are required by condition.

#### **Dormice**

Hedges and woodland around the perimeters offer suitable habitat for dormice, and although it is unknown whether they are present on the site, the presence of dormice in other similar habitat in the wider area in the west of this district gives a reasonable likelihood of their presence on this site.

The nature of the development is such that provided the majority of dormouse habitat is retained (as would appear to be proposed), impacts are likely to be minimal.

However, given the reliance of this species on a well connected network of habitat, and their high conservation status, I recommend a condition requiring further details regarding management of their habitat and measures to minimise risk, unless further surveys confirm their absence, should be submitted for approval.

## Conclusion

Whilst due to the nature of the development, the impacts to protected species are likely to be low, I don't regard the risks to be negligible but do regard them to be minimal provided further details to ensure risks are minimised are worked up and submitted for approval by condition. I recommend these could be dealt with by a single condition requiring a mitigation plan for all the protected species that could be affected:

### Suggested condition

The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced (including any site clearance) until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a 'Protected Species Mitigation Plan'. Unless further surveys (also to be submitted and approved) suggest their absence, the Mitigation Plan shall detail measures for the protection, mitigation, habitat management and/or compensation of legally protected species, specifically including dormouse, otter, and reptiles.

The works shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and timing of the Mitigation Plan, unless otherwise approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: For the conservation and protection of legally protected species of recognised nature conservation importance in accordance with Policy EC8 of the South Somerset Local Plan, and to ensure compliance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

### **Economic Development:**

We have given careful consideration to this application on the basis of the documents submitted. We have consulted with the applicant; their consultant Mr Clarke; Development Control; SSDC's Tourism Service; Somerset County Council Economic Development Officers; former management of the Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership's Workspace Programme and established local businesses immediately affected by this proposal.

### Overview.

The Economic Development Service welcomes the potential to extend employment opportunities in the area, particularly where it might improve the tourism 'offer' of the District. In this respect we want to support this form of investment.

We would also like a development of this type to offer synergy and co-operation with businesses in the vicinity, especially where thoughtful design can prove to be effective and complimentary.

In its current form, ED recommends this application be refused. We would wish to emphasise that our objection primarily relates to design and the need to co-operate. We feel that some basic modifications at this stage could result in a perfectly acceptable and well supported application.

### Our Concerns:

We appreciate that the timescales involved in reaching a decision on this application are tight given the pre-conditions of DEFRA funding under the Rural Economy Grant. However, we feel that insufficient time has been allowed to consider this significant application received on the 10th December. The following matters need to be

addressed:

1. Business Plan not submitted

The submitted documents make reference to a business plan for the proposed Somerset Farm Park. This is a key piece of evidence in determining the viability of a proposed venture. To date no such plan for this farm diversification has been received by Economic Development for consideration. Whilst we have no wish to challenge either the ambition or the attractiveness of the scheme, on the limited evidence we have it is impossible to give a firm view on the need to diversify, market testing, scheme viability or strategy. This is particularly relevant given the likely scale and local impact of this first franchise agreement with Cotswold Farm Park and their aim to become a 'nationally recognised, major tourist attraction'.

2. Safeguard existing local employment at neighbouring premises

The application does raise a real concern in terms of the car parking and site access arrangements. Specifically we are worried that the proposed car park design neither optimises the space available to the applicant nor takes into consideration the parking needs of an established and successful neighbouring business. Sound design of the car park and its access should be a carefully considered feature of the application.

Adjacent to the proposed application is the established business known as 'The Monk's Yard'. This venture was originally supported with a £91,000 investment from the Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership. They have been trading successfully for 5 years and already employ a similar number of staff to that proposed in the applicant's new farm venture. The core business of the Monk's Yard is a café, venue and conference facilities.

The owners of the Monk's Yard have made clear that the parking arrangements proposed in the application will impinge significantly on their own current visitor parking arrangements and directly undermine their ability to operate.

If this planning application is approved in its current form, there is a distinct possibility of placing 18 existing jobs and a landmark enterprise at risk.

We highlight the responsibility of ensuring that the application does not impact unnecessarily on the operation of an existing successful business, particularly where that business is largely complimentary and where relatively straightforward design modifications might resolve the concern.

The need to maintain the jobs we have is made very clear in the SSDC Council Plan 2012-2015 (2012). SSDC's Economic Development Strategy (Dec, 2012) also builds on this requirement. It underlines the need to do all we can to support existing enterprises by:

- 1) Help existing businesses survive and grow
- 2) Helping ensure that businesses are able to operate in a vibrant local economic environment that enables existing businesses to thrive and prosper

### 2.1 Parking Design

The application proposes the use of a parking area currently used by the Monk's Yard as parking for their conference delegates. The loss of this parking area would severely limit the Monk's Yard's ability to stage conferences – the main focus of their business. At



present up to 350 delegates a day make use of the 5 conference rooms at the Monk's Yard. The application as proposed would remove 80+ additional spaces currently used by the Monk's Yard leaving them with only 44 spaces in their main parking area. It is our view that with fairly modest amendments to the design plans, the 80 spaces used by the Monk's Yard can be preserved by relocating the applicant's coach parking to:

- 1) The area marked as 'Occasional Overflow Car Parking' (east of the proposed car park), or
- 2) The north-east corner of the proposed car park currently indicated as minimally landscaped.

These options ought to have been explored already as the issues and the impact must have been known to the applicant.

## 2.2 Restricted Shared Access

The access to the proposed site is shared with the Monk's Yard and is very restricted. The proposed scheme envisages this single lane entrance as the main access point for 70,000 annual visitors – many arriving in coaches.

Access to the proposed car park passes between the large listed building currently used as the main Monk's Yard conferencing venue and the proposed Barn redevelopment. Further to increased levels of vehicular noise (inc. coaches) and a possible access bottle neck in the busiest times, it will curtail the current easy access to/from the existing Monk's Yard. We note this issue has been raised in the Statement of Community Involvement.

We are informed that constructive negotiation is taking place between the applicant and the owners of the Monk's Yard but we highlight our concern that satisfactory access and parking design amendments are made before a decision is made.

If time is a severe constraint then approval should be conditioned to include modified parking arrangements that suit both businesses.

## Traffic and Transport

The scheme might eventually generate 70,000 visitors per year (and 500 per day at peak times). The peaks and troughs of visitor flows are notoriously unpredictable but are usually concentrated around school and public holidays and particularly around weekends and periods of sunny weather. These are invariably days where our major highways are already under existing and major pressure.

Whilst it is the remit of the Highways authority to provide an informed and definitive view, we are bound to point out that additional transport pressure will become a reality of this scheme. The submitted TA suggests an overall increase in traffic of 2.1% to 2.3% on the Iminster A358/A303 roundabout with a 7.7% to 8.3% increase on the A358 South junction.

There are local issues for consideration e.g. access to Horton Cross Nursing Home is already difficult given the volume (and speed) of traffic using the A358 and it is noted traffic does back up from the roundabout beyond the applicant's proposed access. The requirement for emergency vehicles to be given uninterrupted access is a concern of both the Director and Operations Manager of the Nursing Home.

The Travel Plan submitted for the applicant by Peter Evans Partnership makes very clear

that this site is not directly served by public transport.

Both of the latter points may have workable solutions through dialogue with local bus companies (changed routes in the summer) or the Highways Agency (hatched road access markings), but both points raise the need for wider consultation if the application moves forward from outline to full-application stage.

#### Summary

##### Concerns:

No sight of business plan. This makes it very difficult to provide informed opinion on the robustness of the proposed farm diversification. In principle however, the idea is certainly one we would like to be able to support.

Increased traffic volume is an inevitable feature of tourism development. Local issues can be addressed as the application moves from outline to full stage planning.

##### Objection:

On car parking and access grounds since the current plans present a direct challenge to existing employment. However, we feel that both of these can be resolved through dialogue and modification to design.

#### **Conservation Officer:**

The site is within the context of the listed farm house and outbuildings. The entrance to the site is very important, as it presents a vista which is read with the front buildings.

I had concerns over this on site, and having looked at the drawings in detail for this section, C adjacent to the public highway, with Robert Archer. We are of the view that more detail is required at this stage. Our concerns relate to the height of the fence which at 2.4m seems excessive, and the maintenance of a natural feel to the new boundary along the road side. We would ask for much more detail at this stage, this should also include the boundary treatment between B and C.

The other area of fencing that needs detailing is that C adjacent to the gravel yard, which again is a vista. I do not think it is appropriate to use the planting D to close off the access to the yard for the partially collapsed buildings. There needs to be a vehicular access maintained into these.

#### **Natural England:**

Protected sites: no objection

The site is in the vicinity of SSSIs such as West Moor that forms part of the extensive grazing marsh grasslands and ditch systems of the Somerset Levels & Moors. We understand the site is drained by the River Ding into the River Isle. Although Natural England does not object to the proposal we would expect that the foul water from the proposed toilet block(s) to be dealt with by a septic tank drainage system under licence from the Environment Agency or via mains drainage.

Protected Species

Natural England Standing Advice is available on our website to help local planning authorities better understand the impact of development on protected or BAP species should they be identified as an issue at particular developments. This also sets out

when, following receipt of survey information, the authority should undertake further consultation with Natural England. A bat survey of the buildings has been undertaken and no bat roosts were identified but it is not clear from the information given if the building that has to be demolished to create an access has been surveyed. We advise it should be before this application is determined.

#### Landscape

This proposal does not appear to be either located within, or within the setting of, any nationally designated landscape. All proposals however should complement and where possible enhance local distinctiveness and be guided by your Authority's landscape character assessment where available, and the policies protecting landscape character in your local plan or development framework.

#### Biodiversity Enhancements

This proposal presents the opportunity to incorporate features into the design which are beneficial to wildlife such as the incorporation of roosting opportunities for bats, the installation of bird nest boxes or the use of native species in the landscape planting. We recommend that should the Council be minded to grant planning permission, measures to enhance the biodiversity of the site are secured from the applicant. This is in accordance with Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) which states that 'Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. Section 40(3) also states that 'conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat'. Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services and Making Space for Nature (2010) also provide strong drivers for the inclusion of biodiversity enhancements through the planning process.

In accordance with Section 4 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Natural England expects to be consulted on any additional matters, as determined by your council that may arise as a result of, or are related to, the present proposal. This includes alterations to the application that could affect its impact on the natural environment. Natural England retains its statutory discretion to modify its present advice or opinion in view of any and all such additional matters or any additional information related to this consultation that may come to our attention.

#### **Climate Change Officer:**

The rationale behind this application appears to be the creation of a sustainable tourist destination with increased employment and as such should be welcomed.

Much is made in the DAS of the sustainability of the application and – on the whole – this is successfully justified within the text.

To further justify the sustainability of this development, I would like to have seen explicit mention of renewable energy to provide (over the course of a year) some or all of the site requirement for electricity and heat. This could easily be achieved at this site to the financial benefit of the developers.

The main buildings have large unshaded south facing roof space with steel sheet roofing that would be very suitable for installation of large photovoltaic arrays. Rectangular arrays would fit well aesthetically with the roofing material. The arrays could even be suitable as a weather barrier. Current prices and feed in tariff rates give around an 8% return on investment.

A single wood chip boiler or manually fed log boiler could supply a heat main for the whole site. Given the location, the wood fuel could be significantly cheaper than the alternatives. The renewable heat incentive supporting such installations is generous and investment in wood heat over the medium to long term is considerably more financially attractive than oil or gas (especially for new rather than retrofit installations).

#### **Tourism Officer/Business Development:**

A high-profile family attraction based around farm animals and the outdoors is entirely in keeping with our marketing of South Somerset as a destination offering enjoyment of the countryside and nature as the principal feature.

The “feel” of the project – providing contact with animals and opportunities to learn and “experience” is also contemporary with Visit England marketing themes.

The involvement of Adam Henson will be highly beneficial to the marketing with his high profile through Countryfile. He is presenting the Somerset Tourism Awards in the spring.

There is no similar attraction close-by. Nearest are Court Farm - west of the M5 and Farmer Giles at Teffont, Wiltshire.

At present the offer for families with young children in South Somerset is sparse, often weather-dependent and seasonal.

Both Tourist Information Centres receive frequent requests for places to visit with children, especially venues that offer wet weather facilities.

Many customers stopping at Cartgate TIC and travelling west, are looking for stopping-off points for an activity break with children.

Cartgate would be a key marketing location for the business.

The situation is well-placed for local visitors and highly accessible for visitors travelling A303 and M5.

Ilminster is an attractive town for visitors with excellent small shops, historic Dyers, minster church, choice of eating places in and around town, arts centre etc. There are several quality-assured accommodation businesses in and around the town.

Is it feasible for there to be any coach parking made available for coaches dropping off to Ilminster town? This would benefit the town and could also be used to incentivise future visits to the Farm Park.

Some concerns:

Access in the summer with congestion on the Ilminster roundabout already a huge source of frustration for visitors

The practicality of shared access with the adjacent Monks Yard and how this will affect both businesses. I understand there are also parking issues to be resolved

#### **Environmental Health Officer:**

Should planning permission be granted I would like to see the following conditions attached in relation to no burning, no public address etc., details of external lighting, and

an informative about any external lighting and food safety.

**Environment Agency:**

No objection subject to conditions and informatives in relation to surface water drainage.

**Council Engineer:**

The submitted FRA satisfactorily addresses issues I raised at pre-application stage.

**REPRESENTATIONS**

3 letters/emails have been received raising the following concerns:

- The additional traffic will have a considerable impact on the road outside of the nursing home
- Traffic backs up during peak times well past the proposed access – concern about access for emergency vehicles.
- There should be a separate entry and exit point
- Will be looking into the overflow car park and associated noise/pollution
- Proposal will have a critical impact on the Monks Yard business due to loss of parking area and the ability to expand.
- The proposed road access will have a detrimental impact on delegates using the ‘My Place’ conference room.
- Business disruption during construction work
- Important to ensure that our business is not undermined by sale of food and drink – need to ensure those facilities only used by paying park farm customers.
- Request equal representation on signage for Monks Yard and the new farm park.
- Impact of outdoor play areas
- Monks yard is a successful business and community facility employing 18 people, with 5 conference rooms and a capacity of up to 350 delegates. Whilst not objecting to the idea of the park farm, there is strong concern about the loss of parking and thus threatening the viability of Monks Yard.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Principle of the proposed Development**

The site is located in the countryside where there is a strict control on development in order to protect the intrinsic beauty of the countryside. However, both national and local policies exist to allow tourist development to occur in the countryside provided that it is of an appropriate form and does not harm the character of the countryside.

In particular, the NPPF clearly supports economic growth in the countryside and especially the promotion of sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. Moreover, the NPPF supports the ‘provision of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres’ (para 28, NPPF). As the starting point for assessing this application, it is considered that the principle of the proposed development is acceptable and is supported by both national and local policies.



## Highways issues

The supporting documents state that up to 70,000 visitors will visit this new development once it is fully established. Whilst it is expected that it will take a few seasons to reach this target, the highways impact of the proposal has to be assessed with that number in mind. Vehicular access will be gained off the old A358 road which is now a no through road and which itself leads off from the current A358 to the south of the site. The access will be shared with the Monks Yard facility, which itself generates up to 60,000 visitors per year. The Transport Assessment undertaken for this development concluded that the development would have limited impact on the local and strategic road network in the weekday morning and evening commuter peak hours. The TA states that the peak traffic period would be a Saturday mid-morning and afternoon during the summer period.

Moreover, the TA further concludes that detailed junction capacity testing at the A303 roundabout junction with the A358 demonstrates that the development would not have a material impact on the operation of the junction. Both the Highway Authority and Highways Agency do not raise an objection to the application.

The scheme will provide 200 parking spaces and a coach park with a further area designated for overspill parking if and when required. It is considered that the levels of parking are appropriate for this development.

One parking issue that has been raised by the operator of Monks Yard is that this proposal will involve the loss of informal parking areas currently used up to twice a week by those visiting Monks Yard. Moreover, that this proposal would remove the possibility of expanding the number of parking spaces for Monks Yard in the future. The concern is that the loss of these parking spaces will seriously undermine the viability of Monks Yard.

From a planning point of view, the position is that 44 spaces were approved as part of the Monks Yard development. These spaces will not be affected by the current proposal. However, Monks Yard has been very successful and clearly requires more spaces than approved and thus an informal arrangement has been reached with the owner to use some of the barns and spaces around them to the north of Monks Yard, as overspill parking. It is understood that up to the equivalent of 80 spaces may be used in this respect, which is clearly a significant number. However, it is important to note that there is no planning permission for this additional parking. Therefore, whilst the current proposal does not affect the planning approval for Monks Yard, it does impact on an informal parking arrangement.

It is not considered reasonable to refuse this current application on the basis that it would result in the loss of informal parking spaces in relation to an adjacent business. However, the point being made by the adjacent business and supported by the Economic Development team is acknowledged. Thus, after having met with and discussed this issue with both parties, and following a separate meeting between the two parties, it was agreed that a planning application would be submitted to seek consent for an extended parking area to the east of the current Monks Yard car park.

Clearly, this would need to be assessed on its own merits but it would appear that an amicable solution in terms of the parking situation may be reached.

It is important to state that the car park application does not form part of the current application and therefore the current application has to be assessed on its merits as submitted.

A further point raised by the manager of Monks Yard is that the internal access road

which will be widened as part of this proposal, runs immediately to the north of one of the main conference buildings known as 'My Place'. Concern is therefore raised that the noise from cars and coaches driving along this road will have a detrimental impact on users of this facility. During discussion with both parties, it was suggested that a row of wooden bollards could be installed to the north of 'My Place' to push vehicles away from the building. It would also provide a safe pedestrian area along the northern side of the building towards the front entrance. During discussion with the manager of Monks Yard, this was acknowledged as an acceptable solution.

### **Landscape issues**

Policies that support tourist development in the countryside make it clear that the character and appearance of the countryside should be protected. The proposal involves over 10 hectares of land and therefore its landscape impact has to be carefully assessed. The Landscape Officer has raised no objection to the park farm in this location concluding that the scheme will be well related to built form given its proximity to the Monks Yard complex and lays between major A roads. Moreover, the new visitor centre building is well related to existing farm buildings and is of an appropriate scale. Also, the expanse of the parking area is broken up with specimen tree planting along with new hedge and shrub planting. The land on the northern side within which pens will be located to accommodate a range of different animals is appropriate for a farmed context and thus there is no harmful landscape impact. The landscape plan submitted with the application will help mitigate the development and will form an important part of any approved scheme.

### **Conservation**

Monks Yard is adjacent to the proposed development and contains a number of listed buildings, many of which have now been converted for conferencing and associated facilities. As the entrance and buildings to be converted are located to the north of the listed buildings, the treatment around the entrance and the requirement to preserve the vista along the old A358 is important. The Conservation Officer has raised a concern about the proposed erection of a fence along the bank adjacent to the road. This would enclose the service area. It was discussed with the agent and was suggest that the existing hedgerow to the north should be extended southwards with a fence on the inside. This would provide a more appropriate boundary treatment. The landscaping alongside the redundant buildings to the south of the site will also be amended to ensure access is maintained to the buildings. Details are awaited and an oral update will be provided at committee.

### **Economic Development**

The Economic Development team support the principle of the development and welcome the potential to extend employment opportunities in the area. However, an objection is raised due to the concern over the parking and access issues that have been outlined above. However, as outlined earlier in the report, it would appear that a satisfactory solution can be found for the overspill parking issue at Monks Yard. Moreover, that the impact of the access road will be mitigated as outlined above. Comment was made that no business plan has been submitted. This has been requested and an oral update will be given in respect of any comments arising. However, it is clear that the submitted Economic and Tourism Assessment goes into details about the need for the park and how it will benefit the local economy and area generally.

## Tourism

The tourism officers support the principle of the park farm development. It would meet the Council's marketing objective as a destination offering enjoyment of the countryside. It would also meet the aims of 'Visit England' in terms of providing contact with animals along with opportunities to learn about a range of different animals including rare breeds. Importantly, there are no similar types of tourist attraction in the area and thus it would clearly meet the NPPF policy of providing a tourist and visitor facility where such a facility is lacking.

Other issues

A construction management condition will be imposed as part of any consent to control the impact of construction on Monks Yard and other neighbouring occupiers. However, the development will not involve any significant new building work so it is not expected that construction works should be unduly harmful to adjacent occupiers.

A condition will also be imposed to state that only paying visitors to the farm park can purchase food and drink from the shop. As outlined above, the layout of the scheme will assist with this aim.

In terms of signage for the new development, in particular any advance signs, the LPA are willing to discuss the needs of both parties.

With regard to the impact of the children's play areas on adjacent occupiers, it is considered that these are located a sufficient distance away from the conference facilities and residential properties to avoid giving rise to noise related issues.

## SECTION 106 PLANNING OBLIGATION/UNILATERAL UNDERTAKING

Not applicable to this application.

## RECOMMENDATION

Subject to satisfactory plans being received in relation to the boundary treatment along the western boundary of the site, the application is recommended for approval.

01. The application by reason of its scale, design, layout and materials will not harm the amenity of adjacent occupiers, will not harm the character and appearance of the adjacent listed buildings, nor the character and appearance of the countryside, will provide an acceptable tourist attraction and provide employment opportunities, will provide a safe means of vehicular and pedestrian access and will provide an appropriate level of car parking. The development is therefore in accordance with policies ST3, ST5, ST6, EC3, EH5, EH7, TP2, TP3, TP6, ME5, of the South Somerset Local Plan and Chapters 1, 3, 7, 11 and 12 of the NPPF.

## SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

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

Reason: To accord with the provisions of section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

02. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until particulars of the materials (including the provision of samples where appropriate) to be used for

external walls and roofs have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the character and appearance of the area in accordance with Policy ST5 and ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

03. The landscaping scheme as shown on plans Drawing no. SPP1762.1L and drawing no. SPP 1762.2, shall be implemented in the first planting and seeding season following the completion and occupation of the development hereby approved. Any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: To protect the character and appearance of the area to accord with Policy ST5 and ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

04. The area allocated for parking on the submitted plan, drawing number 221001 S1, shall be kept clear of obstruction at all times and shall not be used other than for the parking of vehicles in connection with the development hereby permitted.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety to accord with Policy 49 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review.

05. The provisions of the Measures Only Travel Plan shall be implemented as described and reviewed at regular intervals to assess its effectiveness.

Reason: In order to promote alternative modes of travel to and from the development to accord with TP2 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

06. No development shall commence until a surface water drainage scheme for the site, based on sustainable drainage principles and an assessment of the hydrological and hydrogeological context of the development, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall subsequently be implemented in accordance with the approved details before the development is completed.

The scheme shall also include:

Details of how the scheme shall be maintained and managed after completion.

Reason: To prevent the increased risk of flooding, to improve and protect water quality, improve habitat and amenity, and ensure future maintenance of the surface water drainage system.

07. No system of public address, loudspeaker, amplifier, relay or other equipment shall be operated in any building or otherwise on any part of the subject land.

Reason: To protect the amenity of adjacent occupiers to accord with Policy ST5 and ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

08. There shall be no burning of any produce or material whatsoever on the site.

Reason: To protect the amenities of the area to accord with Policy ST5 and ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

09. No external lighting shall be installed until details have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local Planning Authority. The external lighting shall be installed in accordance with the approved details and thereby retained as such unless a variation is subsequently submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the amenities of the area to accord with Policy ST5 and ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

10. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced (including any site clearance) until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a 'Protected Species Mitigation Plan'. Unless further surveys (also to be submitted and approved) suggest their absence, the Mitigation Plan shall detail measures for the protection, mitigation, habitat management and/or compensation of legally protected species, specifically including dormouse, otter, and reptiles.

The works shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and timing of the Mitigation Plan, unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: For the conservation and protection of legally protected species of recognised nature conservation importance in accordance with Policy EC8 of the South Somerset Local Plan, and to ensure compliance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

11. The sale of products from the visitors shop shall be limited only to visitors to the farm park and not the general public.

Reason: The visitors shop is only granted in connection with the farm park development hereby approved.

12. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:  
Drawing numbers: 221001 S2, SPP.1762.1L, 221001 S2, 221001,S9, 221001 S7, SPP.1762.2, 221001 S4, 221001 S3, 221001 S5, 221001 S6.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt as to the development authorised and in the interests of proper planning.

### **Informatives:**

01. The Environment Agency have advised the following:

We would expect to see the following details when discharging condition 6:

- A clearly labelled drainage layout plan showing the pipe networks and any attenuation ponds, soakaways and drainage storage tanks. This plan should show any pipe node numbers referred to in the drainage calculations and the invert and cover levels of manholes.
- A manhole schedule
- Model runs to demonstrate that the critical storm duration is being used.
- Confirmation of the agreed discharge rate, with any flow control devices indicated on the plan with the rate of discharge stated.



- Calculations showing the volume of attenuation provided, demonstrating how the system operates during a 1 in 100 critical duration storm event. If overland flooding occurs, a plan should also be submitted detailing the location of overland flow paths and the likely depths of flooding. A 30% allowance for climate change should be incorporated into the scheme in accordance with Table 5 of the Technical Guidance to the NPPF.
- Where infiltration forms part of the proposed stormwater system such as infiltration trenches and soakaways, soakage test results and test locations are to be submitted in accordance with BRE digest 365.

The applicant proposes to direct all surface water to soakaways. This is the preferred option, providing ground conditions permit and percolation tests demonstrate that they are appropriate.

The surface water soakaways may require the approval of the Local Authority's Building Control Department and should be constructed in accordance with the BRE Digest No 365 or CIRIA Report 156 "Infiltration Drainage, Manual of Good Practice".

Only clean, uncontaminated surface water should be discharged to soakaway

There must be no interruption to the surface water drainage system of the surrounding land as a result of the operations on the site. Provisions must be made to ensure that all existing drainage systems continue to operate effectively and that riparian owners upstream and downstream of the site are not adversely affected.

Any work or structures affecting ordinary watercourses, such as any modifications to the existing surface water outfall from the site, may require Land Drainage Consent from the Lead Local Flood Authority (Somerset County Council). Please contact Glyn Parry at Somerset County Council for further guidance on how to apply - tel. 01823 355418, email: gparry@somerset.gov.uk.

Under the Water Resources Act 1991 and The Land Drainage Act 1991 both the Agency and Local Authority have permissive powers to maintain watercourses. Their jurisdiction depends on the watercourse designation as 'Main River' or 'Ordinary Watercourse'. However, responsibility for general maintenance of the watercourses and their banks, rest with riparian owners (i.e. the owner of the bed and / or bank of river).

The use of a package treatment plant for foul waste may require a Waste Exemption or Environmental Permit from the Environment Agency. The applicant is advised to contact our National Permitting Centre on 03708 506506 to clarify this matter. Further information can be found on the following weblink <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/water/110593.aspx>

02. In relation to condition 9, the applicant is advised that the details of external lighting required by the condition above should comply with the recommendations of the Institute of Lighting Engineers (ILE) `Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Light Pollution (2005) for Zone E2.

It is also recommended that the applicant consults the Local Planning Authority Environmental Health Team with regard to Food Safety and Health and Safety matters prior to any development taking place.