

Statement of support in respect of application 20/01480/FUL at Glenvale Nurseries from Applicants (Helen and Duncan Varley) and Agent (Sophie Berry of Reading Agricultural Consultants) to be read to Planning Committee on 28th October 2020.

Glenvale Nurseries has traded in this rural location for over 40 years. The applicants have owned Glenvale Nurseries for over 16 years and have experienced a considerable decline in turnover over the last 7 years, and even more so during the current pandemic. There is an obvious need to diversify the existing business through more efficient use of the application site. You will be aware of previous unsuccessful applications which sought a solution through housing. The loss of a rural business was previously resisted by the committee and this encouraged the applicants, who are determined for their business to survive, to proceed with the current proposal to diversify the existing use.

The current proposal for the creation of units for rental will not only supplement the income of Glenvale Nurseries but it will meet an evidenced demand for the shortfall of such units in the area, whilst giving the rural economy a much needed boost during this uncertain time. Such diversification is supported by both national and local policy.

Gabrielle Mancini, West Berkshire Council Economic Development Officer, has been supportive of the proposal and encouraged use of the Thames Valley Hub, who has provided days of expertise to assist the applicants in developing their proposal. They have also been successful in attracting the support of the Rural Payments Agency, who encourage diversification of rural businesses in this area through the creation of units, such as those proposed, through the allocation of European funds. The ultimate success of the funding application relies on whether planning permission is granted today and, with the UK leaving the EU, this is the last round of funding available.

Previously, it was considered that a house in the car park would be too prominent. The current proposal therefore logically seeks to replace buildings that are present already on the site which, through more efficient use of land, means Glenvale Nurseries is able to continue trading.

Every effort has been made to be respectful to the surrounding area and neighbours and all requests made by the Council, including removing B1, adjusting the building position, hours of operation and changes to the vehicle access have all been met positively.

Prospective tenants, complement the existing operation and include landscapers, gardeners, and a beauty product business. Currently trades using Glenvale, load vehicles daily from the polytunnels on an unrestricted basis. Any permission granted will be restricted to ensure no adverse harm to neighbouring amenity.

The committee wished to avoid the loss of the existing business and the applicants are hopeful that members will therefore recognise the need to diversify in this way, especially in the current economic climate, where rural businesses are struggling to survive, and give the applicants and their prospective tenants a chance to adapt to current circumstances and thrive.