

**WESTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE
ON 23 JULY 2014**

UPDATE REPORT

Item No: (3) **Application No:** 14/01145/COMIND **Page No.** 23 - 35

Site: Cobbs Farm Shop, Bath Road, Hungerford

Planning Officer Presenting: Isabel Johnson

Member Presenting:

Parish Representative speaking: Charlotte Podger / Margaret Wilson

Objector(s) speaking: N/A

Support(s) speaking: N/A

Applicant/Agent speaking: Mr Tom Newey

Ward Member(s): Councillor P Hewer
Councillor James Podger

Update Information:

Transport Policy Response:

1. This application follows the recently refused application 13/02861/COMIND for which Transport Policy raised an objection.
2. The revised proposals appear to be smaller and more ancillary to the existing business than was previously the case.
3. I note that the Highways Development Control (HDC) officer has raised no highway objection, considering that the existing access onto the A4 is acceptable for the increase in movements and that there no considered detrimental impact on road safety.
4. Despite my previous objection, I did however welcome the intent to provide cycle parking as part of the previous application and I am pleased to see that this commitment is retained in the current application (paragraph 5.2.3 of the Transport Statement). I support the proposed condition made by the HDC relating to

this, namely; HIGH20 – Cycle Storage (YHA41). I would like to see these take the form of “Sheffield” stands as outlined in the Council’s guidance document relating to cycle parking for new development.

5. My previous objection was that the location of the site would be unsustainable in terms of opportunities for access given that customer access would be almost exclusively made by car, and that the opportunities for staff to walk, cycle, or use passenger transport would be very limited. Notwithstanding the smaller, more ancillary nature of the current proposal, the remoteness of the site’s location to the urban area of Hungerford means that in transport sustainability terms relating to access by modes other than the car, this is still the case.
6. However, taking into consideration the more ancillary nature of the current application and the National Planning Policy Framework, I do not feel that this impact will be sufficiently severe enough to object to this proposal on transport sustainability and accessibility grounds.
7. Therefore I have no objections to this application, providing that the cycle parking stands alluded to in the Transport Statement are provided as per paragraph 3.

Planning Policy Response.

Context:

The proposal site lies outside of any settlement boundary and falls within the North Wessex Downs AONB. It is 1km from the edge of Hungerford and 1.9km walking distance from the town centre. The site accommodates a pick your own venture, vineyard, Christmas tree plantation and retail farm shop. The building occupying the farm shop also includes a café with kitchen, preparation and food storage areas, and ancillary storage and office space.

The application seeks a ground floor extension of 160m² to enable an expansion of the existing kitchen, a food preparation area for the kitchen, and additional storage and office space that is presently located within the roofspace.

Within the roofspace, alterations are proposed to accommodate a soft play area (D1 use class) with ancillary toilets and storage. Together this totals 239m² of gross floorspace.

Policy considerations:

(a) Impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the AONB

Local policy requires development to demonstrate high quality and sustainable design that respects, conserves and enhances the character of the area (Core Strategy policy CS19). One of the Core Planning Principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. In the local policy context, development must respect and enhance the character of the area (Core Strategy policy CS14) and conserve and enhance the diversity and local distinctiveness of the natural landscape (Core Strategy policy CS19).

The NPPF is specific on Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty stating at paragraph 115 that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This is echoed in Core Strategy policy ADPP5 which also goes on to state that development should preserve the strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity.

Saved policy ENV.16 restricts against farm diversification proposals if new buildings are of an inappropriate scale and siting to their rural location and fail to maintain and enhance the landscape character of the rural surroundings.

The case officer will need to consider whether the proposed extension would appear harmful (and if so, whether the proposed landscaping is sufficient to mitigate against any harm) to the character of the area and the setting of the AONB, and thus ensure the proposal complies with the aforementioned national and local policies.

(b) Principle of a town centre use in an out of centre location

The proposal is for a main town centre use (leisure). In line with paragraphs 23 and 24 of the NPPF, a sequential test should be applied. When considering edge and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre. This is echoed in Core Strategy policy CS11 (hierarchy of centres), in particular in paragraph 5.70 which states that villages are to be the focus for facilities aimed at supporting sustainable rural communities. No information has been submitted investigating the potential of sites within Hungerford to accommodate the soft play facility.

Local policy (Core Strategy policy ADPP1: spatial strategy) seeks to locate most development within or adjacent to settlements that are included in the settlement hierarchy. In open countryside locations such as the proposal site, only appropriate limited development that is focused on identified needs and supporting a strong rural economy is supported. Local policy also places an emphasis on the need for appropriate sustainable development to support local communities and the rural economy in the AONB (Core Strategy policy ADPP5).

The NPPF (at paragraph 28) supports the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural areas. Saved policy ENV.16 of the Local Plan supports farm diversification proposals which, amongst other criteria, support proposals which include benefits for the local community.

The applicants have undertaken a survey of 114 people with children/grandchildren in Hungerford. Whilst the survey suggests that there is a need for the proposal (92% indicated that there were insufficient soft play facilities in Hungerford), when the population of Hungerford parish is taken into account (5,767 at the 2011 Census), this need attributes to only 2% of the population. Nonetheless, even with some need demonstrated, the applicants have not demonstrated that the proposal cannot be met within a town centre location in line with the NPPF (paragraphs 23 and 24) and Core Strategy policies ADPP1 and CS11.

(c) Promoting sustainable transport

Both national and local policy place great emphasis on sustainable transport. One of the core planning principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 17 is to focus significant development in locations which are (or can be) sustainable and manage growth to make full use of public transport, walking and cycling.

Further to this, paragraph 34 states that decisions should ensure that developments which generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised. Paragraph 35 states that developments should be located and designed where practical to give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements and have access to high quality public transport facilities.

Policy ADPP1 (spatial strategy) of the Core Strategy requires intensive trip generating uses to be located within town centre areas.

Core Strategy policy CS14 (design principles) requires development proposals to make good provision for access by a range of transport modes, and saved Local Plan Policy ENV.16 supports farm diversification proposals whereby there is no significant traffic generation.

The case officer will need to take into account the views of the Council's Transport Policy Team to establish if the proposal complies with the aforementioned policies.

Conclusions:

The proposal would introduce a main town centre use in an out of centre location, and no consideration has been made of sites within Hungerford town centre or within the settlement boundary to locate the soft play facility. In this respect the proposal is contrary to paragraphs 23 and 24 of the NPPF and Core Strategy policies ADPP1 and CS11.

Although national and local policy supports limited development in rural areas (Core Strategy policy ADPP5) and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural areas (paragraph 28 of the NPPF), I question how indicative the applicant's demonstrated need is. The survey that supports the application considered the views of only 2% of residents in Hungerford parish.

The views of the Council's Transport Policy Team will need to be considered in respect of whether the proposal is in a sustainable location or not.

It will be for the case officer to conclude on the impact of the proposal upon the AONB.

There is a policy objection to the proposals.

Comments on Policy consultation response:

The Policy concerns are noted, and in particular, reference to the lack of a sequential test for the soft play use. The assessment of this application has treated the soft play use as one element of the overall development and the whole scheme as a small scale rural development as in para 25 of the NPPF.

Therefore, providing the soft play is maintained as an ancillary use to the main pick your own and farm shop business, it would not be assessed as a separate out of town leisure destination. Please note that the recommendation by officers for approval remains as reported.

DC