

DELEGATED REPORT FORM

REFERENCE NUMBER

F/TH/20/0320

OFFICER INITIALS

EF

SITE

East Northdown Nursery, George Hill Road Margate Kent

PROPOSAL

Change of use and subdivision of existing agricultural buildings (Blocks A and C) to create 6no. units (Block A) and 10no. units (Block C) in light industrial use (use class E(g)), with alterations to materials

REPRESENTATIONS

Neighbouring occupiers have been notified and a site notice posted. No letters of objection have been received, and 29no. letters of support have been received. The letters of support are from a combination of existing tenants and hopeful future occupiers, all of which support the farm strategy and the need for these units.

CONSULTATIONS

KCC Highways -

(Final Comment)

Thank you for your consultation in relation to the above change of use application. Further to consultation with the applicant and with our own reference to the TRICS database, it is apparent that the proposed units are unlikely to represent a significant impact on the local highway network. The Transport Statement details how the design and specification, as well as marketing strategy, make these units more suitable for storage for small businesses in the area, which will attract fewer vehicle movements than typically expected for use class E(g), including the network peaks. Even considering the whole development as light industrial, the number of vehicle movements above the existing approved use would not be significant enough to warrant a refusal on highway grounds. I therefore confirm that subject to safeguarding conditions, I would raise no further objection on behalf of the local highway authority.

(Initial Comment)

The applications are seeking approval for E(g) use, or light industrial, although the Statement asserts that the site is unlikely to attract tenants that are comparable to this use. Obviously if permission was given we would have no control over how the applicant will market these units and could easily seek new tenants that would attract much higher trip rates without recourse to further planning. We would need to see a 'worst case scenario' in terms of trip generation, based on the proposed use class, around which we could then make an informed assessment of impact on the local network.

Conservation Officer - Following a review of the proposed application I would consider there to be a limited implication to the nearby conservation area or any nearby listed properties. As such I do not object to the application proposed and believe it will be perceived as functional farmland of which it is.

Environmental Health - No objections

ANALYSIS

Principle

The site is located within the urban confines, in an area with no designations in the local plan other than being a conservation area. The site forms part of East Northdown Farm and Nursery. Within the overall site there are agricultural buildings, a retail and cafe unit, and existing buildings in light industrial use. This application seeks to change the use of two existing agricultural buildings, and sub-divide them to create 6no. small units (Block A) and 10no. small units (Block C) in light industrial use (use class Eg).

Policy SP04 of the Thanet Local Plan, which supports economic development, states that 'development is supported that enhances the rural economy subject to protecting the character, quality and function of Thanet's rural settlements and natural environments'. Whilst the application site itself does not fall within the countryside, a number of large fields associated with the farm do fall outside of the urban confines, and as such the proposal would have an impact upon the rural economy. The development is supported by this policy subject to the impact upon the character of the area being considered acceptable.

Policy E15 of the Thanet Local Plan, on farm diversification, states that 'proposals to diversify the range of economic activities on a farm will be permitted if all the following criteria are met:

- 1) The proposal is compatible with the agricultural operations on the farm, and is operated as part of the farm holding.
- 2) The loss of best and most versatile agricultural land is minimised.
- 3) The likely traffic generation could be safely accommodated on the local highway network. Proposals should, where possible, utilise available existing farm buildings.

The proposal involves the change of use of existing farm buildings, and given the site's location within the urban area there will be no loss of best and most versatile land, as the site and adjacent land predominantly accommodates storage/agricultural buildings associated with the nursery, existing light industrial buildings, and the cafe/retail unit. Whilst there is some growing of plants, these are within polytunnels on the site rather than within the ground. The proposed use would be compatible with the current operations on the site, which already includes some light industrial and storage use. Subject to the impact upon highway safety being considered acceptable, the principle of the development is considered to comply with Policy E15 of the Thanet Local Plan.

Character and Appearance

The site lies within the conservation area, and therefore consideration is given to Policy HE02 of the Thanet Local Plan, as well as general design policies QD02 of the Thanet Local Plan, and BSP9 of the Broadstairs Neighbourhood Plan.

The existing buildings have been in situ for a number of years. They were originally polytunnel style structures with a polythene covering. Some refurbishment to the units has since taken place, and this application seeks to regularise the alterations made to the buildings, whilst altering the roof structure and amending the cladding materials used for the structures.

The submitted plan (as amended) shows a curved roof design, with green profile cladding for the walls and grey or green steel profile roof sheets, in keeping with the materials used on a number of other units within the farm site.

Whilst the units are closer to the road than other units on the site, they are still setback by 19m to unit C, and 7m to unit A, with a low ridge level of only 4.5m. Views of them from the road will be screened through the presence of a well established hedge boundary. The units will be viewed in the context of existing units within the farm complex, and are characteristic of the farm/industrial use.

The Conservation Officer has been consulted and has commented that she has no objections, and considers there to be a limited implication to the nearby conservation area or any nearby listed properties as it will be perceived as functional farmland of which it is.

Overall the impact upon the surrounding conservation area, and character and appearance of the area, is considered to be acceptable, and in accordance with Policies HE02 and QD02 of the Thanet Local Plan.

Living Conditions

The application building is a distance of at least 70m to the nearest neighbouring property. Whilst the change of use will result in some increased noise and disturbance, with part of the agricultural building changed to a light industrial use, the proposed light industrial use E(g) is defined as a use which can be carried out in a residential area without detriment to its amenity, and as such there is limited concern regarding the impact upon neighbouring living conditions.

Environmental Health has been consulted and advise that they raise no objections given the distance to the nearest neighbouring properties, and that safeguarding conditions are not required.

Given the type of use proposed, and the distance to the nearest neighbouring property, it is considered that the impact upon neighbouring living conditions is acceptable, and in accordance with Policy QD03 of the Thanet Local Plan.

Highway Safety

The submitted plan shows communal parking areas either side of Units A and C. Access into the site is via an existing vehicular access onto George Hill Road. A further vehicular access onto George Hill Road has received planning permission and is an extant consent.

KCC Highways have been consulted and have advised that they require details to be submitted of a 'worst case scenario' in terms of trip generation in order to determine the impact of the proposed use on the local highway network.

A transport statement has been submitted, which advises that the site has good access by local and national public transport systems as well as by cycle and on foot, which is reflected in the reported high proportion of existing customers, visitors to the café, business tenants and their staff who come by non-car means.

The report concludes that the proposed development, in combination with those already permitted, but yet to be implemented, will result in low additional motor traffic movements which will have no significant impact on highway traffic flows, and as such there is no transport reason why the proposed developments should not be permitted.

KCC Highways have queried elements of the transport statement and requested further assessments be submitted covering trip generation.

A supplementary transport statement has been submitted, which considers further the trip generation, and concludes that the existing horticultural and small business developments and operations within the farm site generate very low traffic movements, most of which is likely to be outside of the conventional weekday traffic peak periods. Heavy goods vehicle traffic is negligible, and traffic flows on the surrounding highway network are generally moderate with no congestion, with no traffic accidents identified. The new access onto George Hill Road will have good visibility. The report continues to conclude that the proposal will result in low additional motor traffic movements, which will have no significant impact on highway traffic flows and conditions locally or further afield.

KCC Highways has been further consulted, and advise that using their own TRICS database, it is apparent that the proposed units are unlikely to represent a significant impact on the local highway network. The Transport Statement details how the design and specification, as well as marketing strategy, make these units more suitable for storage for small businesses in the area, which will attract fewer vehicle movements than typically expected for use class E(g), including the network peaks. Even if the whole development were considered under a E(g) use, the number of vehicle movements above the existing approved use would not be significant enough to warrant a refusal on highway grounds. KCC therefore advise that subject to safeguarding conditions, they raise no objections.

Adequate parking is provided, a safe access into the site can be achieved, and the submitted transport statement provides evidence to prove that the proposed use is unlikely to result in a severe impact upon the highway network. The proposal is therefore considered to have an acceptable impact upon highway safety, and is considered to be in accordance with Policies TP01 and TP06 of the Thanet Local Plan.

Conclusion

Overall the proposed alteration to the building and change of use would not result in harm to the conservation area, highways safety or the residential amenities of those in the vicinity of the site, with the principle of development considered to be acceptable. Therefore permission should be granted.