

Planning Statement

Introduction

This Planning Statement has been prepared to accompany a Full Planning Application for the siting of 36 20ft by 8ft and 12 10ft by 8ft self storage shipping containers and associated works for a period of 10 years providing 624 sqm of container-based storage. The proposed site has been derelict for a period of more than 20 years and is suitable for a site of this nature and design.

The proposal would enable diversification from farming and support the existing agricultural business with a reliable source of income to allow for reinvestment across the holding.

The Site

The proposed 0.3-acre site is set off Ducks Hill Road (A4180) in the Watertower field at Ducks Hill Farm. Ducks Hill Farm is a Class 3b DEFRA registered agricultural holding in Northwood comprising 154 acres, the majority of which is used to graze cattle and other livestock as well as the production of hay. The farm currently comprises several agricultural buildings and dwellings.

The site has been derelict for the past 20 years as evidenced by the satellite photography shown in Appendix A. The reason it has not been used for agriculture is due to the previous uses of the site which make the site unsuitable. The satellite photos evidence that the rest of the field has been grazed and used for haylage over this period.

The farm was purchased by my great-grandfather almost 60 years ago and we would like it to remain in our family for the foreseeable future. For this to happen the business needs to continue to adapt and diversify in order to be sustainable. Policy DME 7 of the Local Plan Part 2 states: the Council will support farm diversification schemes including those related to the provision of renewable energy, provided that they minimise visual, traffic and environmental impacts and do not:

- have an adverse impact on the open character of the countryside and landscape quality;
- contribute to visual “clutter”;
- significantly increase road traffic or congestion on rural roads and junctions;
- erode environmental quality, nature conservation value or limit public access to the countryside; and
- have an adverse environmental impact on nearby residential areas or other sensitive receptors by virtue of noise, vibration, smoke, odour or emissions.

The development aims to take into account these impacts and stop them as set out below.

The income from this diversification will enable sustainable growth of the business through the regeneration of existing assets, the purchase of new equipment, machinery and livestock as well as being able to hire more employees. Part 7 of the NPPF encourages sustainable development that meets “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Farming is a capital-intensive industry which without sufficient and sustainable financial backing makes many businesses uncompetitive and loss-making. Through this development the business will be able to continue sustainably into the future.

Previous Use

The site was used as an anti-aircraft gun site during World War II, for stabling during the 1960s which were subsequently moved to the main collection of farm buildings and for tyre storage during the 1990s. However, the foundations from the first two developments were left on site. As a result, the surface and substrate are made up of masonry, concrete and metal. This is evidenced by the photos in Appendix D which only show the impact at the surface. This means its use is limited as the conditions for growing hay are unsuitable. For similar reasons it cannot be grazed. While land used for anti-aircraft sites are not classed as brownfield land, its previous use as stabling and tyre storage would be. Part 6.18 of the Hillingdon local plan states that development in the greenbelt is not inappropriate if it is for the “limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt”.

Storage

Container self-storage has been in increasing demand for several years both from individuals and businesses. Given the increase in sites across the UK and especially London, it is a service which is highly sought after in the local area. The development meets this need while the rent per area is much lower than other sites, making the development more competitive and cheaper for locals to store goods if necessary.

The Application

The application seeks to gain full planning for a temporary change of use to B8 storage on the site for a period of ten years.

Design and Appearance

The site has been designed to minimise its visual impact on the surrounding area, reduce the physical impact on the existing site, provide good access and security, reduce its permanence and make it environmentally friendly.

Visual Impact

The 20ft containers will be of steel construction as in Appendix B and will offer permanent, dry and secure storage which are used across the country. The containers will be dark green and all the containers at the east end of the site will be clad in Yorkshire boarding (similar to the recently constructed barn next to the site in 5907/APP/2018/1439) to minimise any visual impact their siting will have on the surrounding area. At 8ft 6in high their physical appearance from the A4180 and neighbouring properties, given the boarding, will be limited. Figure 1 shows the existing view of the site from the road. The existing fencing and vegetation will also minimise any visual impact so that the whole development will be screened off from the public. The telecom pole to the West of the site at 20m high is the most imposing visual impact on the area followed by the recently constructed barn which is 4.2m high, 1.7m higher than the proposed site. The site is also enclosed on the North and West side by vegetation. Due to these measures and the surrounding area, the visual impact of the development is not significant to neighbouring properties or from the A4180.



Figure 1: View of the site from A4180.

Environmental Impact

The accessways and parking bays shall be constructed using permeable paving grids (Appendix C). These grids are 100% recycled, porous allowing for easy drainage and can take the weight of heavy goods vehicles if necessary. As the site will be in relatively infrequent use in comparison to a car park or road, this environmentally friendly alternative is preferable due to its lack of permanence and permeability (they are easy to install and remove). Given the site has never had any problems with drainage, standing water or flooding, it is deemed unnecessary to install a drainage system at the site. As the containers can be set on the existing ground, there shall be no work needed to site them. This will reduce the site's permanence, so it can be easily removed in future.

Traffic

The increase in traffic to the local area will be negligible. Each container will have one or two visits initially to fill them and then once per month on average. Every container will not be filled initially, and it's expected that two will be filled per week until they are all full half a year on from complete construction of the site. If this is accurate, it is anticipated that 1.5 visits per day will be made to the site which, given the high traffic flow on the A4180, would not have a significant impact to traffic. This estimate is derived from the Self Storage Association UK annual industry report 2017 (<https://www.ssauk.com/media/1888/ssaukannualsurvey2017.pdf>, page 45) which surveyed 2,127 customers. It found that 75% of respondents use their facility once per month or less. Due to the

infrequency of visits to the site and the fact that most users will drive up to their container, there are only two parking spaces of 2.5m by 6m.

The impact on traffic during construction can be mitigated by delivering units before 7am. This possibility has been confirmed by several haulage firms.

Access

The water tower field benefits from existing road access from the A4180 and no new access from the road is needed or proposed. The site will have an entrance on the south side from the road through the water tower field with wooden gates. The use of separate gates at the entrance to the site will ensure it is separate from the rest of the field and enable membership of the self storage association, so an insurance service can be provided for all occupants.

As per the conditions of application 5907/APP/2018/1439 the applicant will agree to pay any costs associated with damage to the accessway during construction of the site.

Access within the site has been designed that each customer will be able to drive up to their unit, be able to access it and manoeuvre within the site to exit.

Flooding

The Environment Agency's Flood Risk Map for the area has been checked and there is no risk from flooding on the site.

Noise

Use on the site will be allowed between the hours of 6:30am and 11pm in the evening to reduce the amount of noise that could be created to the neighbouring property of Ducks Hill Grange. This will be implemented with the use of electronically timed gates restricting access outside of these hours. As the use on site is predicted to be infrequent (1.5 times per day) and the nearest property (Ducks Hill Grange) is 70m away the impact of any noise should not exceed the noise emitted by the A4180. There shall be no staff employed directly on site and no one shall be there on a permanent basis. The site will be monitored and run by the existing farm business.

Security

The development proposes to erect a 6ft high wooden close board fence on the North, East and South sides of the development. The existing fence line on the East side of the development provides adequate security. The use of wooden fencing is in keeping with a rural setting and will reduce its visual impact while still providing a boundary. It is also necessary in order to secure membership with the self-storage association (SSA). CCTV will be installed on the agricultural building overlooking the site using the existing electrical connection.

Green Belt

The site is located within the green belt. Part 143 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that "inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances". DMEI 4 of the Local Plan reaffirms this view that development should not be approved unless there are very special circumstances. The "very special circumstances" test is used to determine whether "the potential harm to the Green Belt..... is clearly outweighed by other considerations" (Part 144 of NPPF).

The site in question was previously used for activities other than agriculture, and this use has meant the site can no longer be used for agriculture without substantial remedial work to filter the

substrate. Part 118 of the NPPF supports the “development of under-utilised land and buildings”. For these reasons, the site is in a perfect location to be able to diversify the business and encourage growth. Part 83 of the NPPF supports a prosperous rural economy which should enable “the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses”. Policy DME 7 of the local plan also supports diversification for schemes which do not have the impacts set out in the above bullet points. Through the design and location of the development none of these impacts will apply to this development.

Application 60901/APP/2016/691 for a telecoms mast, which is 15m from the site and rises to a height of 27.5m was approved in July 2016. The officer report says that it would have a “minimal visual impact on its surroundings and would be largely screened from any major residential areas. Tree screening around the site and the Water Tower Field, would reduce the visual impact the proposal would have on the wider Countryside Conservation Area. It is considered that the applicant has demonstrated an appropriate case of very special circumstances to justify the enlargement of the mast in this Green Belt location.” The original development in 2006 (60901/APP/2006/167) was approved because its “location behind a row of mature trees, and general low visual impact, and there being no other suitable sites within the surrounding area provided sufficient reasons to justify an exception to Green Belt policy”. The visual impact of the development will be less than that caused by the telecoms mast due to their differing heights.

Due to the positive impacts this development will have on the farm over the coming years, the development is not inappropriate for this reason and part 145 of the NPPF states that exceptions for inappropriateness include buildings for agriculture and forestry. While not directly being used for agriculture, the development will be supporting its function.

The green belt, as per part 134 of the NPPF, should be used –

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The development’s purpose is to encourage these points, not be intrusive or encroaching and offering a sustainable solution to a long term problem without long term impacts. The development is, by its design and nature, easily removable after 10 years with little or no lasting impact to the site or local area. Its aim is to diversify the business while providing use of land which has remained unused for a long period of time. Part 9 of the NPPF aims policies and decisions to be guided towards sustainable solutions while taking into account local circumstances “to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area”. The development encompasses all these aspects. Due to all these points, the development is considered appropriate as its harm to the green belt is outweighed by the positive impact the development will have on the local area and the agricultural business.

Planning History

Application 5907/APP/2018/1439, which is adjacent to the site, was approved in July 2018 for a 4m high, 7m x 12m general purpose agricultural building and a 17.5m x 16m area of hard standing. No objections were raised in relation to this development.

Application 60901/APP/2016/691 for a telecoms mast, which is 10m from the site and rises to a height of 27.5m was approved in July 2016.

Appendix A



October 2016



June 2015



July 2013



March 2012



February 2011



June 2010



December 2006



December 2003



December 1999

Appendix B



Appendix C



