

Planning Application Support for development of Associated Developments on part Swallowfield Nursery, Eastergate Lane, Eastergate.

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Introduction

This statement is prepared in support of an application for planning permission for associated developments at Swallowfield Nursery, by the owners, running it as a business producing protected horticulture crops since 1982.

In 2016, Swallowfield Nursery became subject of an Arun DC Horticulture Development Order under Article 38 of the T & C P Order 2015, permitting a range of development works to support Horticulture and in compliance with development parameters or condition, set out in the order.

The application works include:

- A Plant Propagation R & D Unit with trials greenhouse, separate from the nursey cropping area and served by a new, light vehicle only, gravel drive, off Eastergate Lane, to afford it sanitary isolation against potential pest and disease transmission. This unit will support development of new marketable plant products and allow research into better plant propagation techniques.
- Four semi-detached Live/Work Units, replacing two small areas of temporary polythene tunnel structures in order to release capital to fund proposed new nursery propagation facilities. These units will be accessed off the existing nursery drive which will be formalised with junction makings at its bell-mouth.
- Provision of new garden outbuildings linked to the nursery 'tied' dwelling, to replace old pre-fabricated concrete garage and shed, currently used for fuel storage and garden equipment.

Site & Surroundings

Swallowfield Nursery is a Protected Cropping Horticultural Nursey of total area 1.73 hectares. It is used entirely for the seasonal production of container grown garden plants, sold through a locally based marketing organisation with national sales coverage.

The land was first developed from Orchard to Glasshouse Nursery in 1966, under the name of Grinstead Nurseries and it has remained under protected cropping since that time and has been intermittently improved with additional glass and polythene structures. The original glasshouse, built 1966, was seriously impacted by the 1987 'hurricane' and completely replaced in 1988. Additional glass and temporary polythene tunnels were built mostly during 2002, to grow the business.

Refurbishment and additional glass has continued over the years to maintain an effective growing facility of high tech glasshouses, positioned as a single integrated block over its eastern two thirds. The nursery frontage abutting Eastergate Lane provides for staff car parking, a heavy vehicle entrance, a brick built office, a brick built 'tied' dwelling and at its eastern end is a redundant open area, previously used for standing out container shrubs and trees. This latter area is the location for the proposed R & D Unit and is no longer required for the purposes of existing and proposed future plant production regimes.

Site & Surroundings: continued

South of Eastergate Lane and opposite the nursery, is grassland and remnants of old orchard, both screened from open view by tall roadside hedging with trees. Between the nursery and Fontwell Avenue to the west, there are detached private dwellings set back in gardens fronting on to the north side of the lane and both commercial and similar residential properties front on to the south side of the lane.

The western half of the nursery's northern boundary abuts two small pony paddocks and the eastern half abuts a light industrial estate called JBS Ltd. JBS Ltd continues southwards around the full length of the nursery's eastern boundary and is served by an access off Eastergate Lane.

Swallowfield nursery has a tarmac entrance drive off Eastergate Lane, located towards the western side of its southern boundary. Between this drive and the nursery's closest western neighbour, Cedar End, is a small, gravel surfaced area used for staff car parking. It is heavily screened by dense evergreen hedging to south and west and has 2.36m ht walling and screen fencing alongside Cedar End. Two 'low tech' polythene-covered structures, no longer required, extend immediately behind this car park and a much larger polythene structure, still in cropping, lies beyond extending up to the nursery northern boundary.

On the eastern side of the nursery drive, screened behind an earth mound covered with dense shrubbery and set back approximately 20ms from Eastergate Lane, there are two separate brick and tile buildings, an office and dwelling. Both these buildings are served by a gravel car parking area on their northern side. A further tree and shrub planted mound separates this parking area and office from a nursery warehouse building, formed with green cladding. The remaining bulk of the Swallowfield property is occupied by an extensive multi-span glasshouse, set back 40ms from the Eastergate Lane. Visibility into the nursery from Eastergate Lane, is limited to a narrow view northwards from its entrance. The remainder of the nursery frontage is screened by dense road-side and drive-side hedges, trees and mounded shrubberies.

The landscape character of western length of Eastergate Lane, in the vicinity of Swallowfield nursery and falling within the parish of Eastergate, is described by occasional individual residential properties set in large gardens, a range of interspersed commercial properties, small grass fields and remnants of earlier orchards. The commercial properties closest to Swallowfield Nursery are JBS Ltd, Hedgers Racehorse training and Transport, Premier Meats and Orchard Farm. Eastergate Lane retains a rural character being bounded by high hedges with grass verges and is without footpaths.

EASTERGATE LANE TRAFFIC

Eastergate Lane traffic speed is limited by a 40mph speed control zone. A Highway Impact Report has been produced by RJP traffic Consultants of Chichester to advise and support the Swallowfield Nursery application proposals.

RGP HIGHWAY IMPACT REPORT EXTRACTS

2.6 Traffic Survey Data

- 2.6.1 To identify traffic speeds and volumes on Eastergate Lane, RGP commissioned Modal Data to conduct an Auto Traffic Count (ATC) survey in the vicinity of the site accesses. The 7-day survey took place between 24th Nov 2016 and 30th Nov 2016

The survey revealed an average eastbound speed of 34.5mph with an 85th percentile design speed of 40.5mph, and an average westbound of 35.1mph with a design speed of 41.4mph.

The RGP Report recommends the provision of formalised junction markings at the existing nursery entrance and gives design guidance for providing a new and gated light vehicle entrance to serve the R & D unit. Their visibility splay recommendations are based on the 85th percentile design speed recorded in the 7-day ATC Traffic Survey undertaken on Eastergate Lane, during November, 2016.

BUSINESS STRATEGY

Swallowfield Nursery is a relatively small horticultural business

Reasons for this significant fall-off in profitability, since 2011, are many and varied and we, as owners of Swallowfield Nursery recognise that the business must change radically and adopt a sound strategic business plan to meet continuing challenges.

- Ongoing threats to business profitability from uncertainty from Brexit, rising cost of inputs, particularly those imported against a weak pound, and the recent increases to the statutory minimum wage.
- General austerity and low rates of house building have led to increased competition between customers, big chain retailers and garden centres, within a shrinking market.
- Rules and regulations are ever increasing and applied variously by UK government, EU directives and retail customers. The large food chain retailers are taking an increasing share of garden plant sales and applying the same level of producer restrictions to their plant suppliers as to their food producing suppliers.
- Removal of pest and disease control options over recent years has made production of first quality plants more challenging and accidentally imported new pests and diseases, such as fuchsia gall mite, are having an increasing impact, promoted by our warming climate.
- The profile of plant customers is rapidly changing, particularly with the entry of the big food retailers into the market place and competing heavily against traditional garden centres. These changes promote resistance to producer prices rising despite a prevailing climate of rising input costs, non-stop extension of required product innovations and meeting increasing 'sustainability' standards.
- Market place sale are increasing focused on 'new plant' introductions, mostly carrying Plant Breeder Rights Royalties to convey exclusivity, and 'adding value' to plants at point of sale. Inevitably, the demand for the wide ranging 'A-Z' shrub offer, which was the backbone of garden centre sales, has fallen away.

As owners of Swallowfield, we recognise that a long-term successful business plan must pro-actively manage risks, not just financial but also those concerning staffing, sustainability and quality control. To secure essential changes with improvements to our business strategy, efficiency savings and productivity, Swallowfield must release investment capital.

BUSINESS STRATEGY: continued

As well as continuing to balance economies of scale in its plant production and meeting changing horticultural business commitments within an insecure Brexit period, Swallowfield must focus on developing a more 'niche' market approach, introducing plant innovations and modernising propagation techniques to target reducing importation costs of expensive young plant material.

This application is designed to facilitate the meeting of changing market place demands for horticultural production by Swallowfield Nursery and effectively continue a vibrant business employing local people, through the releasing of capital for business investment.

APPLICATION PROPOSALS:

There are three proposed developments subject of this planning application:

Ref: Proposed Site Development Layout Drg No: 0790/03, issued 16/08/17

1) **An R & D Propagation building** with trials greenhouse, which, for pest and disease sanitary reasons is without link to the existing crop production area and will be served by a separate new, light vehicle only, gravel drive and entrance near to the eastern side of Swallowfield road frontage.

Ref: R & D Propagation Unit Details Drg No: 0790/04, issued 16/08/17

3) **4 No Live/Work dwellings**, including working and living spaces on the ground floor and two bedrooms above All semi-detached properties with private gardens and generous car parking in between.

Ref: Live/Work Dwellings/Block A Drg: 0790/05, issued 16/08/17

Live/Work Dwellings/Block B Drg: 0790/06, issued 16/08/17

4) **Replacement of old prefabricated concrete garage and shed**, currently used for fuel and garden storage, with brick and tile building suited and linked to the existing nursery dwelling.

Ref: Domestic Garden Room, Fuel Store and Greenhouse Drg No: 0790/06, issued 16/08/17

APPLICATION PROPOSALS IN MORE DETAIL:

1) R & D Propagation building with trials greenhouse

Over the years, just a few new plant varieties have been produced at Swallowfield but difficulties in developing and trialling within the general cropping glasshouses, has meant they have never been adequately managed or exploited. With changing market demands, production of new varieties and improving propagation techniques within a dedicated facility, will assist the business and offer better market opportunities. Undertaking this work separate from the general growing area allows greater efficiency in both sales crop production and in propagation research, particularly helpful in respect of pest and disease management.

Fuchsia Gall mite, a notifiable disease in plant production units, is an increasingly problem, extremely difficult to control and rife in gardens within Arun. Concerning plant breeding, this is on-going with a Swallowfield produced new Hebe Variety being released to the trade this September at the Four Oaks National Horticultural Trade Show.

Separate close-by parking and access by way of a new light vehicle only, gravel drive to the eastern side of Swallowfield road frontage would operationally benefit the new R & D facility and assist its sanitary isolation.

2) 4No Live/Work Dwellings

To release the necessary capital for funding other on-site business developments, Swallowfield proposes constructing the live/work units on an area occupied by old redundant polytunnels. As well as providing the necessary funding to enable the nursery to pursue its business plan, live/work units are much in demand from self-employed people wishing to run small scale businesses from home.

As a long existing commercial site, Swallowfield is an ideal location for providing live/work dwellings and can offer both space and facilities for ample parking including for disabled and vans, and additional services, such as car battery charging points. By being located on the western side of Swallowfield, near to and in line with the adjacent residential property, Cedar End, the Live/Work dwellings would provide a better buffer between the Cedar End dwelling and nursery business activities.

The design of the semi-detached live/work dwellings relates to the 'studio style' of the existing Swallowfield office and building materials would be in keeping with it. Roof lights will be included in the proposed dwellings to enable good light penetration without westward facing windows over-looking the neighbouring Cedar End property. The western boundary is defined by a 400mm ht wall with 1.8m ht lap board fence above and this would remain.

Formalised road junction markings will be provided at the nursery drive entrance, as recommended by RGP Highway consultants.

4) Replacement of old Prefabricated Concrete Garage and Shed.

The existing buildings have been on site since the late 70's and currently are used as wood and garden stores. Immediately adjacent is a small oil tank and broken down timber shed. It is proposed to tidy up this area, covering the oil tank with a roofed structure continuing a roof line from the existing dwelling, open on its northern side, and linking with a new garden room and store, with a domestic greenhouse. The building style and all materials will be consistent with the existing dwelling to give a cohesive building design solution. It should be noted that this area has always been designated as private garden.